

**PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT IN THE
'NETWORK SOCIETY':
Perspectives for socially minded, computer skilled scholars
and readers of the Bible¹**

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to stimulate the theme and field of the Bible and computers which had been initiated by the Association Internationale Bible et Informatique over the last two decades. The author argues that in the context of Africa and the Third World this theme and field should lead socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible to concern themselves with the issue of development. Following the distinction between the three publics of theology (the university, the community of faith and society at large) in current hermeneutical and public theological debates, it is proposed that the active involvement by this group must be understood essentially in terms of the mode and sphere of the third public. Beyond the emphasis on the formal terrain of public policy-making, it is argued that the idea and political world of the new social movements (peace, human rights, women, environment, democracy, culture, people-centred development, etc.) is particularly relevant here. This identification of the new social movements leads the author to emphasise the analytic and strategic framework presented by the new communication perspective in the social sciences. It is indicated how writers of this perspective present a social theoretical understanding that can be taken as most appropriate (authentic) in terms of the dynamics that determine contemporary global society, and a strategic development mobilisation around the new social movements and a new civil society in embryo. A dynamics and strategic mobilisation which the author finds most appropriately defined in Manuel Castells' conceptualisation of the 'Network Society', the article concludes by proposing six modes of involvement which ought to give important guidance to socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible in their endeavour to promote development in this society.

1. Introduction

The 6th International Conference on Bible and Computers of the *Association Internationale Bible et Informatique*² marked an important event in more than one way. It would be another opportunity for the international community of Biblical scholars to advance the theme and field of computerised Biblical scholarship and studies. Yet, with this event this association for the first time also assembled outside its European and North American base³. More specifically, scholars engaging in the activity of this association found themselves on the shores of Africa, a society which (collectively speaking) has been

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1. This article is an adapted version of a paper which was presented at the 6th International Conference on the Bible and Computers of the *Association Internationale Bible et Informatique* (AIBI).
 2. Held at the University of Stellenbosch from 17-21 July 2000.
 3. The overwhelming majority of participants in the activities of AIBI to date have been scholars from Europe and North America. The first five AIBI conferences took place in Louvain-la-neuve, Belgium (1985), Jerusalem (1988), Tübingen (1991), Amsterdam (1994), Aix-en-Provence, France (1997).

bypassed by the luxuries and benefits of the new information society to a great extent. It seemed a fitting occasion therefore to introduce a perspective on development to the general and broad theme of the Bible and computers⁴. This contribution does so by having the development contribution of a double, but overlapping, audience in mind: the scholars participating in the activities of the *Association Internationale Bible et Informatique* as well as socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible in general.

2. Problematising and broadening the modes of involvement

In this article the imperative of being concerned with the issue of development, is motivated by the following introspection:

It is asked whether the audience of biblical scholars and readers addressed here, do not in fact belong to what Barbara Welling Hall (1994: 118) identified as communities of *egocentrism* in her article on the significance of the new information technologies for promoting sustainable development. Welling Hall's concern has been with the question whether access to computer networks today is enhancing 'the global human capacity for discourse by expanding the number of... [their] potential partners'. Her answer to this question was that electronic technologies are indeed creating 'communities of sorts, but not necessarily communities based on altruism or many-sided relationships'. Rather than building inclusive communities, there is the real possibility that the computer has been instrumental in creating new communities of enhanced egocentrism. Welling Hall concluded that this warning seemed credible '(s)o long as 'community' may be literally plugged in or turned off at will by the privileged user while remaining inaccessible either accidentally or deliberately to the vast majority of the world's population'.

Through her statement on egocentrism, Welling Hall thus points out that the issue of the Bible and computers cannot be taken as a neutral affair. Without addressing the question of development, computerised biblical scholarship and studies could be accused of being apathetic towards the socio-economic inequalities and disempowerment brought about and sustained by the dynamics of the new information society. In terms of Welling Hall's analysis, *development has come to assume the achievement of far greater inclusivity in the new information society and the participation of the hitherto excluded in the creative processes of communication and discourse* (cf. also Alvarez and Calas 1996; Dawson and Bellamy Foster 1996; Hamelink 1994; McChesney 1996; Roche and Blaine 1996).

Indeed, and specifically from the perspective of biblical hermeneutics, one may go on to argue that the absence of a development concern in the new information society would draw a line through those contextual, 'right side' readings (cf. Lategan 1997) of the Bible and modes of textual interpretation which view the Bible from the perspective of the poor and oppressed - i.e. the social group whom West (1994: 18) designates as 'those who are socially, politically, economically or culturally marginalised and exploited'. Consequently, to neglect the issue of development (in the sense spelled out by Welling Hall) thus draws a line through those readings and modes of interpretation which, as Boerma (1979: 29) indicates, stimulate 'our critical sense' and inspire us to engage in the practical fight against poverty. It (i.e. neglecting the issue of development) leaves a clear division whereby computerised biblical scholarship and studies are done by a privileged few who are by and large preoccupied with the 'left side' of the hermeneutical spectrum (cf. Lategan 1997), separated from their fellow readers and colleagues who engage in the 'other enterprise' of

4. The author of this article was specifically invited by the president of AIBI, Prof Johann Cook of the University of Stellenbosch, to address the issue of development in a conference paper.

'right side' readings and actions. In so far as computerised biblical scholarship and studies would be concerned with the 'right side' of the hermeneutical spectrum, it appears that this, at the most, involves the ideological and faith presuppositions of the individual privileged scholar or reader (see e.g. Claassen 1990: 4-6).

In view of the above critical introspection and observations, the question can then be asked: What should be the nature of the development involvement by computer skilled, socially minded readers of the Bible in the new information society? What should be the modes of involvement?

We may begin answering this question by proposing that the development involvement might entail working towards widening the circle of computerised biblical scholarship and studies to also include those scholars, colleagues and faithful readers from the less privileged academic institutions and faith communities. For the *Association Internationale Bible et Informatique*, for instance, it might entail the broadening of its base of representatives to include far more participants from the so-called Third World and the South. Related to this goal, it might entail the conscious efforts by this association and other representatives from the sector of privileged biblical scholarship to promote access to quality information and computer infrastructure for the sector of less privileged biblical scholarship. Not the least, the development involvement might entail utilising and applying the new computerised Bible information systems (cf. Claassen 1990) to especially promote those themes and subject areas that are more often prioritised in biblical scholarship and studies representing the 'right side' of the hermeneutical spectrum.

Yet, while these suggestions may all be considered worthwhile and very necessary development contributions, something different is proposed in this article. The perspective which is developed here, goes along the line of the new emphasis in the current hermeneutical and public theological debates to take the *third public* seriously (see Lategan 1997: 120-121; 1995). In accordance with this line of thinking, the basic premise is that *it cannot be regarded as sufficient for socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible today, however important it may be, to be active only in the first two publics of the university and the believing community. By implication, it can therefore also not be regarded as sufficient for such scholars and readers to remain exclusively preoccupied with economic, political, social and cultural meanings which are generated through the various modes of textual interpretation (i.e. modes across the hermeneutical spectrum but especially the mode of interpretation on the 'right side' of the hermeneutical spectrum which emphasises the participation and perspectives of the poor, oppressed, marginalised and ordinary people - cf. West 1994).*

Beyond and in addition to such locations (i.e. the first two publics) and modes of engagement (i.e. the preoccupation with the various modes of textual interpretation), *it is proposed, in line with the new emphasis on the third public, that socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible - who in the context and purpose of this article are also skilled in the new information and especially computerised information technologies - today have the inescapable responsibility to become actively involved in larger society, more particularly in the task of strengthening and building civil society (cf. Lategan 1997: 120-121; 1995).* Indeed, in the context of the university (first public) this involvement cannot solely be the responsibility of the colleagues from the other disciplines in the faculties of theology and the humanities; and, in the context of the community of faith (second public), it cannot solely be the task of a committed few dedicating themselves to the task of development and other public issues.

Positively phrased, socially and ideologically critical scholars and readers of the Bible have much to offer to a new civil society dynamics on the basis of their ability to engage in

critical ethical and moral discourse. On the basis of their commitment to particular values, they could make an important contribution to promoting the political and solidarity agendas of civil society actors. On the basis of their (in many cases) location in contexts of economic strength, their own economic strength, and their skills in mastering the new technologies, they could make an important contribution to generate financial and infrastructural support needed by civil society actors, as well as to enhance the skills levels of such actors.

These perspectives on the contribution of socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible to strengthen civil society, brings us back to the information society and the possible development role of this group. An important further part of this article is to *present an extract from the growing corpus of social science literature in which the centrality of the terrain of communication and the new information technologies (especially the new computerised information technologies) to the cause of civil society and development, is highlighted*. Moreover, it is pointed out in this extract *how such new technologies are already utilised to great emancipatory effect by civil society and development actors*. The ultimate argument is that a number of concrete development challenges for socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible, particularly those who are skilled in the new information and computerised information technologies, could be derived from this particular social analysis (i.e. challenges which could take them beyond the somewhat general perspectives on their participation in civil society and development to something which is very specific and through which they might excel).

3. Engaging in the third public

At this stage it is necessary to probe somewhat deeper into the meaning of the third public. Here we will specifically draw on the contribution of the distinguished South African New Testament scholar, Bernard C Lategan, who applied the American theologian David Tracy's distinction between the three publics of theology (the academy, the church/fait community and society at large) to the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

It can be said that Lategan's basic concern has been with the question of how to revitalise theology's influence on civil society and by implication on the shaping of a new public ethos in post-apartheid South Africa in view of the apparent inability of this sector 'to participate meaningfully and effectively in the public arena' in the new political dispensation (Lategan 1995: 218; see also 1997: 120-121). Keeping a balanced view, Lategan emphasised that his proposal for innovation meant '*neither* the replacement of existing modes of... [theological] discourse by a 'superior' form, *nor* the devaluation of alternative modes'. The activities in the first two publics (the university and the community of faith) fully have their place and 'the different modes of discourse play a *supporting* role in relation to each other'. Hence the verdict that '(i)ntra-textual analysis, rediscovery of the tradition, reformulation and re-affirmation of dogma, describing the world of the text in its own terms, narrating the story of Biblical texts for their own sake, explaining and defending the truth claims of theology, prophetic resistance and confrontation, uncompromising witnessing, and apologetics of a more subtle or a more aggressive kind, all have their validity and function' (Lategan 1995: 225).

Yet, Lategan stressed that the need still existed for theology to engage in a *different* type of discourse to respond adequately to the challenge of developing a new value system in South Africa. This discourse defines the mode of involvement in the third public and requires theology 'to move beyond its preoccupation with itself, beyond being concerned primarily with the validity of its own truth claims, beyond its defensive attitude, beyond its experience of marginalisation and its resignation of not being able to influence civil

society' (Lategan 1995: 225-226). It is furthermore important that meaningful involvement in the third public requires theology to *adopt a new mode of anonymous, secular or camouflaged discourse, which is no longer formulated in recognisable theological language and effectively translates theological concepts in a public discourse accessible to participants from other discourses, in a form that is genuinely public* (Lategan 1995: 229). In essence:

The plea is, therefore, to move beyond what is conventionally understood as theological discourse and to explore the possibilities of a form of language that is not primarily interested in preserving the integrity of theology, but to serve a wider cause. The leading question for this purpose is not, How do we defend Christian truth claims? but What contribution can theology make to the process of developing and establishing a new public ethos?

What is proposed here, comes close to what Gustafson... calls 'policy discourse' - a discourse 'which seeks to recommend or prescribe quite particular courses of action about quite specific issues'. As we have already seen, it is a discourse conducted in the public arena with the focus on concrete issues, within the constraints of the possible. It has the added dimension of taking responsibility for what is proposed in this discourse, and therefore demands accountability. (Lategan 1995: 226)

It would be possible, then, to relate Lategan's perspective of the third public, to what has been identified in the people-centred development debate of the last decade or so as *fourth generation development strategies*. However, beyond the importance of becoming actively involved in the formal arena of public policy, *the relevance of the idea and political world of the new social movements (peace, human rights, women, environment, democracy, culture, people-centred development, etc.) has come to be stressed to civil society actors in the fourth generation development perspective* (see Korten 1990: 123-128). In their local and global manifestations these movements represent a 'politics of ideas', a 'movement politics' and a 'politics of connections' which transcend set places, spaces and institutions (see Swart 1997: 14-15; Walker 1994: 699-700). They represent a value dynamics which cannot be restricted and marginalised by the institutional processes of policy-making within the confined boundaries of the nation state (cf. Swart 2000: 7-9). They represent the cutting edge of a new civil society in embryo (Castells 1997: 362). In the words of Richard Falk (1987: 175), 'the new social movements seem at present to embody our best hopes for challenging established and oppressive political, economic, and cultural arrangements at levels of social complexity, from the interpersonal to the international'. Through their activities the notion of development is transformed into new value and political meanings (Falk 1987: 191).

The point of view sustained in this article (cf. Elliot 1987; Falk 1988; 1987: 185-187; Korten 1990: 168-169, 189-191), is that *it is on the level of the new social movement idea and value politics that religious actors (scholars, lay people, institutions, movements of religion, etc.) could make their most valuable development contribution. In terms of the hermeneutical perspective directing the argument, it is on this level that religious actors should focus their involvement in the third public*. While it should not omit the challenge to influence and engage in the formal and technical aspects of policy discourse, they can thrive on this level. In this sphere they would find much in common with the new social movements and their supporting actors (most notably non-governmental organisations (NGOs)), who are driven forward by similar ideals, ideas and values on the issues of peace, human rights, women, environment, democracy, culture, people-centred development, and so on. In the *unlimited* space of the new social movements they would be able to fulfill

what they can do best, namely appeal to and change the attitudes and consciousness of people across boundaries and cultures. In this space their general, but sometimes also specific ethical teachings, would appeal to a considerable civil society audience which overlaps with their own constituency. In this sphere they would also find a new appraisal for their contribution to promote (but also resist) the implementation of particular values (e.g. peace and reconciliation) viewed as the precondition and foundation for meaningful development (Swart 2000: 9-10). In the appropriate words of Ulrich Duchrow, which suggest that the new social movement activities and discourses would also represent the most authentic terrain of third public activity for those religious actors whom we have come to refer to in this article as socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible:

All over the world, many people have actually got together in new social, environmental and democratic movements: women's movements, homeless movements, farmers' movements, indigenous movements, environmental movements, peace movements and so on. Some have already formed international networks... Working in cooperation with social movements - *as was the case with the prophets and the (peasant) farmers' movements [in the biblical tradition]* - churches and communities must convince their members of the need for this political struggle on the basis of their faith. If they expressed dissent, symbolic difference and a clear identification with the social movements, churches and congregations would gain credibility, and so enjoy untold opportunities to prophetically challenge the power structures... Only when the churches participate in a double strategy, and go about it seriously, by saying 'no' where necessary and offering alternatives, thus participating in the creation of social counterforces, can their 'dialogues' take on a limited meaning within the strategy as a whole. (Duchrow 1995: 281, 282-283; italics added)

4. The new communication perspective⁵

We shall now proceed to draw on perspectives from what has been indicated earlier in the discussion as the growing corpus of literature in the social sciences in which the importance of the terrain of communication and the new information technologies to the cause of civil society and development is highlighted. To begin with, it can be noted how writers of this group are not to a lesser extent than the perspective in the previous section, favouring the new social movements as central actors of development and a global civil society in embryo. Yet, their angle or approach to the civil society and new social movements debate would be somewhat different. *They present a social theoretical understanding that can be taken as most appropriate (authentic) in terms of the dynamics that determine contemporary global society, and a strategic development mobilisation around the new social movements and a global civil society in embryo.* The contribution of this group is highlighted by means of the following points:

4.1 The 'Network Society'

In the new communication perspective, writers have come to emphasise the need to understand society in a new way. It is due to this new understanding of society, both in view of its actual nature and in view of effective strategic mobilisation by development and alternative political actors in this society, that someone like Manuel Castells (1996) came to

5. This section as a whole constitutes a reworked and shortened version of 6.4 of the present author's doctoral dissertation, *The Churches and the Development Debate: the Promise of a Fourth Generation Approach* (see Bibliography below).

label the new society as *the 'Network Society'* in his recent profound social analysis. Thus, the vital point of Castells' analysis, would be that traditional statist and modernist readings have become obsolete in understanding contemporary society sufficiently. Modern society has undergone a far-reaching paradigm change from industrial society to *informational society*⁶ (Castells 1996: 13-22).

As Castells and other writers have pointed out, the new informational society, in essence, represents the consolidation of the capitalist mode of production in reconstructed form (Castells 1996: 18-20; Dawson and Bellamy Foster 1996: 42-54; McChesney 1996: 2-7). As a result of its merging with the new information technology, it now becomes possible for the capitalist mode of production to, for the first time in history, shape 'social relationships over the entire planet' (Castells 1996: 471). It is a brand of capitalism that is profoundly different from its historical predecessors in two ways: it is global and structured largely around *a network of financial flows* (ibid). In this global network capital operates within a cycle of investment and profit extraction, which, in turn, is reverted back to the meta-network of financial flows, 'where all capital is equalized in the commodified democracy of profit-making' (Castells 1996: 472). Characterised, furthermore, by its utterly arbitrary character, in the sense of the constant change of winners and losers in the economic cycle, *this mode of capitalism greatly relies on knowledge and information generated and enhanced by information technology* (ibid). In turn, as communication becomes the heart of global capitalism (McChesney 1996: 5), there is what Dawson and Bellamy Foster (1996: 51) have called the 'scramble for control of the new communication system'. In the words of Hamelink (1994: 58), the communication industry takes on 'economic significance' and consolidates itself through mega-merging in the global capitalist market (Hamelink 1994: 80-92; see also Dawson and Bellamy Foster 1996: 44; McChesney 1996: 2-7). A relationship of *interdependence* and *mutual reinforcement* between capital and new high-technology exists (Castells 1996: 472-473).

4.2 The open and dynamic nature of the 'Network Society'

In the new communication perspective it is emphasised that politics and its actors have to find themselves anew in the world of information capitalism. It does not mean the end of politics, but the restructuring of politics in accordance to the dynamics of the information capitalist system (see Castells 1997: 310-312). Castells concluded that in the new informational society power still rules society; it still shapes and dominates people. Yet, power is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state), organisations (capitalist firms), or symbolic controllers (corporate media, churches). *'It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information, and images, which circulate and transmute in a system of variable geometry and dematerialized geography.'* (Castells 1997: 359; italics added)

It is exactly this diffused character of the new global society that captures its infinitely complex nature. As Castells (1996: 470-471) has pointed out, networks are *open* structures, able to expand infinitely through shared communication codes (e.g. values or performance goals). As the new structural formation of society, they capture 'a highly dynamic open system, susceptible to innovating without threatening its balance'. They are appropriate instruments for a capitalist economy based on innovation, globalisation and decentralised concentration, and also constitute the 'new material basis for the performance throughout the social structure' (cf. Alvarez and Calas 1996).

6. In his analysis Castells has given preference to the term 'informational society' above 'information society' (see Castells 1996: 21-22, footnote 33).

Continuing with Castells' analysis (1996: 476, 355), this open, dynamic and infinite nature of global 'Network Society' leads us to recognise that processes of social transformation in this society 'go beyond the sphere of social and technical relationships of production'. It is undoubtedly, first of all, the world of global capital and the actors buying into it (states, a global elite, etc.). It is a world which at first sight is 'exclusively made of markets, networks, individuals, and strategic organizations, apparently governed by patterns of 'rational expectations' (the new, influential economic theory)'.

Yet, the new 'Network Society' is a world that also 'triggers its own challenges' in the form of what Castells (1997: 359, see also 6-12) calls communal *resistance identities* and *project identities*. While the '(n)ew information technologies are integrating the world in global networks of instrumentality' (Castells 1996: 22), its reverse side is a new 'identity politics' by different collectivities that challenges the contemporary movement towards globalisation and cosmopolitanism, as well as the democratic principle upheld by the modern nation-state, on behalf of cultural self-expression and people's control over their lives and environment (Castells 1997: 2). Being multiple, highly diversified in nature as they follow the particularities of each culture, and of historical sources of information of each identity, these expressions include, in Castells' identification, two categories. They are, firstly, the new *proactive movements* (i.e. 'project identities') such as feminism and environmentalism, whose aim is the transformation of human relationships at their most fundamental level. They, secondly, also include a whole range of *reactive movements* (i.e. 'resistance identities'), that under the combined assault of techno-economic forces and transformative social movements, build communities of resistance on behalf of God, nation, ethnicity, family and locality (ibid).

Important, then, is to point out the ambivalent relation of these identity projects (the new social movements) to the new information technology. Particularly in the case of 'resistance identities', they compensate for their exclusion by the dominant institutions and ideologies by constructing meaning without the global, instrumental reference provided by the informational society (see Castells 1997: 9, 25). But as Castells also concluded, *more often than not, new powerful technological media, such as worldwide, interactive communication networks, are used by 'resistance' and 'project identities' to sharpen their struggle and vision of a transformed society*. He, in this case, points to international environmentalists, but also 'resistance identities' such as the Mexican Zapatistas, as foremost examples of alternative political actors who have come to use the Internet to challenge the dominant system on their own terms (Castells 1997: 2). In the case of the Zapatistas, they might be called 'the first information guerrilla movement' (Castells 1997: 79). They did not merely resist, but used the media and modern communication technology to *communicate* with the outside world, and by doing so, captured 'the imagination of people and of intellectuals... [and] propelled a local, weak insurgent group to the forefront of world politics' (ibid):

Essential in this strategy was the *Zapatistas'* use of telecommunications, videos, and of computer-mediated communication, both to diffuse their message from Chiapas to the world... and to organize a worldwide network of solidarity groups that literally encircled the repressive intentions of the Mexican government... Extensive use of the Internet allowed the *Zapatistas* to diffuse information and their call throughout the world instantly, and to create a network of support groups which helped to produce an international public opinion movement that made it literally impossible for the Mexican government to use repression on a large scale. Images and information from and around the *Zapatistas* acted powerfully on the Mexican economy and politics. (Castells 1997: 80)

A similar case in point would, for Castells, be the *environmental movement's* use of the modern communication system to further their aims. Viewed by him as one of the most successful social movements of our time (Castells 1997: 110), much of the success of the environmentalists came, according to Castells (1997: 128-129), from the fact that they have been able to, more than any other social force in recent history, 'best adapt to the conditions of communication and mobilization in the new technological paradigm'. They have been especially successful in using the media to 'reach a much broader audience than their direct constituency', which has also 'lent them a legitimacy higher than that of any other cause'. Indeed, they have been 'at the cutting edge of new communication technologies, particularly the use of the Internet'. They have, in a sophisticated way, come to utilise the Internet to coordinate actions and information across boundaries and groups.

Akin to 'resistance identities', a proactive group such as the environmental movement displays '*an ambiguous, deep connection with science and technology*' (italics added). Its ascendancy coincided 'with the information technology revolution, and with the extraordinary development of biological knowledge through computer modelling, that took place in the aftermath'. Science and technology thus play a fundamental, albeit contradictory role, in this movement. While criticising the domination of life by science, ecologists also 'use science to oppose science on behalf of life'. As a movement, environmentalists largely rely 'on gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and diffusing scientific information about the interaction between man-made artifacts and the environment, sometimes with a high degree of sophistication' (Castells 1997: 123). They respond to the imperative set by Castells (1997: 361) for 'alternative' actors, namely to act on the culture of real virtuality that frames communication in the 'Network Society', and to subvert this culture on behalf of alternative values by introducing codes that emerge from their autonomous projects.

4.3 The imperative of a communication strategy

It follows from the preceding analysis that the reality of the global information society brings writers from the intellectual group discussed here, to emphasise the necessity of not merely conceptualising a civil society/global civil society approach to transformation, but *a civil society/global civil society approach in terms of the new information and communication dynamics that shape contemporary society*.

It is an emphasis that is, for some, based on the perception that current trends in world communication are in fact forcefully converging 'towards the disempowerment of people' and are contributing 'to the establishment of a new world order which is inegalitarian, exclusive and elite-oriented' (Hamelink 1994: 121). They therefore call upon all social movements and their supporting actors *to make the issue of media and communication an integral aspect of their agenda, notwithstanding what their first issue of concern may be* (McChesney 1996: 16; see also Hamelink 1994: 147; Waterman 1996: 25). They call upon all these actors to mobilise themselves into a global civil initiative that not only reactively challenges the world of global information capitalism, but *proactively* (see Hamelink 1994: 147) generates and compels new democratic and independent spaces through which people may assert themselves socially, culturally and politically on the basis of their access to the resources of modern communication (see Cassani 1995: 217-218, 220-221; Hamelink 1994: 145-149; McChesney 1996: 16-20).

However, the emphasis on a civil society/global civil society mobilisation in terms of the new information and communication dynamics, takes on a still deeper meaning here. As other discussions suggest, it is an emphasis that is not merely born out of necessity due to the disempowering nature of world communication, but also out of a recognition (as

pointed out in 4.2) of the *emancipatory potential* of the new information technology for the new social movements. It is recognised that the new communication technology potentially constitutes a medium of great opportunity for strategic mobilisation within civil society. In the words of Raymond Williams, this technology and the new system as a whole 'offer opportunities for new cultural relationships, which the older systems could not'. These new technologies could make 'a significant improvement *in the practicability of every kind of voluntary association*: the fibers of civil society as distinct from both the market and the state' (Williams quoted in Dawson and Bellamy Foster 1996: 55; italics added).

From a somewhat different angle, Waterman (1996a: 50-51) pointed out that the new information society could be seen as *the sphere most appropriate to the own nature and dynamics of the new social movements*. These movements are in large part 'communication internationalisms' and (as we have also seen in 4.2) are making increasing use of 'computer-mediated communications' to promote their own 'data, ideas, values, images, theories and cultures'. Through this and other communication media 'they can reveal... what is globally concealed... or suggest... new meanings for what is globally revealed'. 'That this sphere is created and dominated by the logic of capital' can, according to Waterman (forthcoming), 'not conceal its contradictory nature'. It is 'a non-territorial sphere, meaning one increasingly capable of expanding growth, flexibility and democratisation that the capitalism of industry and the nation-state has promised/denied'. In this sphere it becomes possible to generate space for the co-existence of what Waterman describes as 'our networks' as opposed to 'their networks' (see also Alvarez and Calas 1996: 34-36, 41-42; Welling Hall 1994: 119-121). Moreover, in this sphere the position of local actors and communities is redefined. Through the communication networks generated by this sphere, grassroots groups around the world are now suddenly enabled 'to act globally, at the level where main problems are created' (Castells 1997: 129). It enables them to occupy multiple positions, to be simultaneously self-isolated (within civil society, from other movements) and incorporated (into reform strategies or intermediating roles promoted by capital or the state, into new global solidarity initiatives) (Waterman, forthcoming).

5. An appropriate development challenge: concluding perspectives

In this article it has been argued that the new social movement activities and value discourses can be regarded as the appropriate terrain for socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible in their quest for an own meaningful development involvement. On the basis of the analysis in the preceding section, it may furthermore be argued that the terrain of communication and the new information technologies should be seen by this audience as *the very important and appropriate extension of such a development involvement* (cf. Hamelink 1994: 147). As the discussion above should have made clear, the new communication and especially the new computerised information technologies have become crucial to the cause of the new social movements and of civil society as a whole. *In the 'Network Society' today these technologies indeed stand at the centre of the battles over ideas, values, political participation and human rights* (cf. Castells 1997: 310-312; Hamelink 1994; 1994a). *They therefore should not be seen as to a lesser extent relevant for a distinct group such as socially minded scholars and readers of the Bible, who themselves specialise in the world of ideas, values and (at times) politics, assumably share and prioritise the value and political interests of the new social movements* (cf. Jayaweera 1980: 18), and who might well command considerable skills in the integrated field of communication, information and the computer.

This article does not allow us the space to reflect in detail on the possible, more concrete development roles which socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible can play in the area of communication, information and development in the 'Network Society'. At the same time the present author is not an expert as far as the technical aspects and jargon of communication technology in general and computerised information technology in particular are concerned. He does not pretend to be able to present the ultimate creative, concrete and detailed framework of action for the audience addressed in this article. Nevertheless, it is proposed, in conclusion, on the basis of the social analytic and hermeneutical framework presented in this article, that the following six challenges ought to give important guidance to socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible in their endeavour to promote development in the 'Network Society':

1. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to become part of, and strengthen the world-wide voluntary movement.* At the very basis of their involvement in development, ought to be the voluntary principle which, as Korten (1990: 124) has pointed out, can be taken as the outstanding feature of the new social movements. Thus, the development involvement of such scholars and readers is, in accordance with this voluntary principle, not motivated by financial and political gain, but by their commitment to the values and vision of a better world that are driving the new social movements. They give further impetus to what Korten (1990: 125) identifies as the 'dynamic network of dedicated volunteers' who foster the new social movement activities through offering 'mutual inspiration, political support, and exchange of experience and technology'. Consequently, their commitment is *not* restricted to the first two publics of respectively the university and the community of faith, but *is extended to the third public of society at large*. They play a distinct role in also committing the communities of the first two publics towards serving in the third public.
2. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to contribute to the creation of conditions under which people will become competent to deal with communication and meaningfully participate in the 'Network Society'* (cf. Hamelink 1975: 130). Whether as initiatives originating in the first public (universities), the second public (faith communities) or the third public (secular non-governmental organisations, etc.), one is thinking here of projects and programmes at the very grassroots of society which will address what Griffin and McKinley (1994: 23) have pointed out to be the highly unequal 'global distribution of technological capabilities'. The task here is to engage in initiatives of education, training and conscientisation that will enable ordinary and poor people to acquire what The People's Communication Charter⁷ stipulates in its 5th article as the 'skills necessary to participate fully in public communication': literacy in reading, writing, story-telling, critical media awareness, computer skills and education about the role of communication in society. They are enabling initiatives which, firstly in terms of Griffin and McKinley's (1994: 24-25) perspective on human development, follow the principles of 'learning-by-applying', 'learning-by-doing' and 'learning-by-using', secondly take place outside the realm of expensive and more advanced formal education or 'learning-through-training', and thirdly include a more explicit effort to help the participants understand the technology embodied in a product or machine - the 'know-why' of technology and the basic principles of operation.

7. A copy of the Charter was obtained from Cees Hamelink at the Centre of Communication and Human Rights in Amsterdam by e-mail on 18 July 1996: hamelink@antenna.nl.

3. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to become involved in the NGO (non-governmental organisation) sector and help strengthen it towards fourth generation strategic development involvement.* While this sector is often at the forefront of activities which promote the new social movements and strengthen civil society in the 'Network Society' (see Korten 1990: 127-128, 198-202, 214-216; Murphy 1994; Starkey 1998; Welling Hall 1994: 119-123), NGOs also frequently fail in their attempts towards networking and in making an impact on the idea and value level because of a limited support base and lack of resources, leadership, skills and infrastructure - especially skills in, and access to modern communication systems and technology (cf. Friedmann 1995: 14; Melkote 1991: 231-233; Starkey 1998: 21-30). Besides sustained participation in their activities, NGOs today need volunteers from the first two publics of the university and faith communities to render to them the kind of communication, training and support services that an institution such as the Southern African Non-governmental Organisation Network (SANGONeT) is rendering in the Southern African context to civil society organisations and individuals: providing them with computer software, setting up e-mail gateways, introductory Internet training, training in the various aspects of HTML and Web Publishing, mailing list management, using the Internet as a research tool and doing advocacy, lobbying and campaigning on the Internet (see SANGONeT web page). Formulated in a different way, one may say that the need here is for what Clement, Robinson and Wagner (1996: 201-202) have come to identify as volunteers who act as 'local experts' - people... who help others in the work setting with their computer use. They assist in answering questions, customizing applications, dealing with breakdowns of various kinds, suggesting improved methods and otherwise resolving difficulties in the use of computerized information systems.'
4. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to become actively involved in the social movement communication networks on a discourse, advocacy, lobbying and campaigning level.* In a South African context a good example of this category of communication networks is the South African New Economics (SANE) Network. An organisation that exerts itself for 'the creation of a humane, just, sustainable and culturally appropriate economic system in South Africa', it matches the profile of electronic development networks sketched by Paul Starkey (1998: 17): It brings people of different backgrounds together in e-mail discussion groups and electronic workshops on particular issues - in the case of SANE Network on new economic values, policies and systems. 'The participants share information and interact with other people of similar interests.' The outcome of this is also that members of networks and discussion groups arrange other activities and face-to-face discussion from time to time. In the case of SANE Network, these 'other activities' involve the active participation of this organisation and its members in advocacy, lobbying and campaigning events to change economic values, policies and systems (e.g. participation in the People's Summit, Jubilee 2000 campaign, the SA NGO Coalition Poverty Hearings) (see e.g. SANE Society Newsletter 1998, Vol. 2, No. 1 and 2).
5. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to contribute to the transformation of reactive 'resistance identities' into proactive 'project identities' in the 'Network Society'.* As Castells (1997: 12) points out, religious fundamentalism 'is a most important source of constructing identity in the network society'. It gives shape to defensive communal identities (Castells 1997: 11) and undermines the open nature of the development dynamics in the 'Network Society' defined in this article. It has negative consequences regarding the prospective

participation of especially faith communities (the second public) in the domain of the third public (cf. Lategan 1995: 218). The challenge here, then, is the transformation of 'resistance identities' into 'project identities', in Castells' (1997: 10) words, the building of identity that leads to 'a project of a different life, perhaps on the basis of an oppressed identity, but expanding toward the transformation of society as the prolongation of this project of identity, as in the... example of a post-patriarchal society, liberating women, men, and children, through the realization of women's identity'. It follows that socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible have a particularly important transformative role to play here, by influencing the communities of faith through ideologically enlightened and socially conscious readings of the Bible; hence, readings of the Bible that would lead to the kind of third public, fourth generation development involvement proposed in this article.

6. *Socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible are challenged to strengthen and identify with the new global communication solidarities initiated by civil society collectivities and individuals.* While this includes the networking activities discussed under point 4 above, the reference is here particularly to new global initiatives such as *The People's Communication Charter* and a *proposed Civil Society Development Fund* which aim to (i) counteract the disempowering, monopolising, exploitive and exclusive trends in world communication (see Charter) and (ii) meet the information and communications infrastructure needs of local and global civil society actors in a comprehensive way (see Cassani 1995). The Communication Charter has been launched as an ongoing initiative by a number of organisations⁸ and seeks to inspire political action around an integrated communication and human rights perspective. In the concluding words of Hamelink (1994: 148), it is an initiative which 'could provide the common framework for all those who share the belief that people should be active and critical participants in their social reality and capable of governing themselves'. Its aim is 'to bring to cultural policy-making a set of standards that represent rights and responsibilities to be observed in all democratic countries and in international law' (Charter). It is based on the recognition that 'communication is basic to the life of all individuals' (Charter) and contains 18 standards that aim to protect people's rights and dignity in the area of communication and democratise world communication on behalf of ordinary people.

To conclude this article on a provocative note, it is suggested that the initiatives *around The People's Communication Charter* represent a most worthwhile and appropriate challenge, not only to socially minded, computer skilled scholars and readers of the Bible in the collective settings of academic and faith communities (such as theological and biblical working societies, local, national and global councils of churches), but also to the *Association Internationale Bible et Informatique*. Indeed, in terms of the argument developed in this article, this association would not to a lesser extent have the obligation to extend its focus to some sort of involvement in and concern with the third public. A body which draws on a considerable pool of knowledge and expertise in the field of information and the computer and has a global reach in terms of its membership and activities, it is well placed to (on the part of the broad field of the biblical, theological and religious disciplines) make a meaningful contribution to the area of development and world communication. Linking itself to *The People's Communication Charter*, could be seen as the obvious step in such a direction and in fulfilling its duty to also take the third public seriously.

8. Centre for Communication and Human Rights (The Netherlands), Third World Network (Malaysia), AMARC-World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (Peru/Canada), Cultural Environment Movement (USA).

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