The Fellowship of the Net[1]

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Abstract

The article revisits the tradition of religious socialism as a potential resource for the information age. It begins with a detailed exposition and defence of the ideas of network society theorist Manuel Castells. However, the article questions Castells' reliance on contemporary social movements as a response to what he calls the bipolar opposition between the net and the self. Arguing for a more universal and ontological solution, it seeks to reappropriate the nineteenth-century Christian socialism of Maurice, Ludlow and Kingsley, specifically their powerful doctrine of mere brotherhood. Updated as the fellowship of the net, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind under the fatherhood of God turns into an attractive and plausible twenty-first century ideal.

Introduction

The world is undergoing a fundamental socio-technical transition from industrial societies to a global information society. A central feature of the new dispensation is the popularity of computerized social networks, especially Facebook,[2] evidence that individuals are welcoming the latest digital means of expressing a capacity for sociality. At a deeper level, these networks contribute to the growing sense that human solidarity has become again a desirable and achievable aim. Brand Facebook may one day suffer the fate of precursors Friendster and MySpace, but the striving for greater 'connectedness' that it represents is unlikely to fade. Unfortunately, another, equally palpable but entirely antithetical characteristic of the information age is a countervailing trend towards disconnectedness and dissociation. Disliking is as common as liking; indeed, the world sometimes appears more fractured than ever. So network society presents a paradox, and a worldwide social problem.

To some extent this was scripted by social scientist and futurist Daniel Bell in his epoch-defining work, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*.[3] Bell anticipated networks becoming an important mode of working, and modern life turning increasingly integrated and interpersonal, a metamorphosis in which he assigned computer-telecommunications a central role. He also discerned problems, what he would famously call 'the cultural contradictions of capitalism'.[4] However, it is to a second-generation information society theorist, Manuel Castells, that the task has fallen of sharpening the definition of the new social form and of explicating its underlying logic. The axial structure of the information age for Castells is indeed the network, and across all realms of human activity. However, Castells is also acutely

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[2] According to the company, Facebook had 1.86 billion 'monthly active users' as of 31 December 2016 (http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/ accessed 25 February 2017). This is roughly a quarter of the world's population.
[3] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999 [1973]).
[4] Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1996 [1976]).

aware that informatization throws into relief the condition of persons, communities and nations excluded from dominant networks. The ensuing conflict, as Castells frames it, and a potential solution, are the subject of the present inquiry.

The article begins with a systematic exposition of Castells' position, indicating key ways in which he has moved the needle forwards as regards our understanding of the post-industrial era. It then argues that while Castells' diagnosis of the network society's condition is persuasive, his prescription is not. The millennium, it will claim, demands a broader human platform for connectivity than the progressive social movements upon which Castells pins his hopes. To that end, the article argues for a reinstatement of the largely forgotten doctrine of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God; suitably updated, such an ideal can help to counter the threat, and redeem the promise, of network society. The article is thus offered as an exercise in what information society theorist and public theologian[5] David Lyon terms the 'hermeneutic of retrieval'.[6]

Manuel Castells: the information society as (anti-)network society

'The information technology revolution', Castells asserts at the start of *The Rise of the Network Society*, the first volume of his influential trilogy *The Information Age*, 'because of its pervasiveness throughout the whole realm of human activity, will be my entry point in analyzing the complexity of the new economy, society, and culture in the making'.[7] He is quick to add that he is no technological determinist, not only because, as per textbook social science, technological and societal factors operate reciprocally, but also because, in an

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[5] I define 'public theologians' broadly as scholars, of any disciplinary or interdisciplinary orientation and any faith, who apply their convictions explicitly to public affairs. Having had the privilege of making his acquaintance not long before his death, I feel sure that Duncan Forrester (1933-2016), at least, would have heartily concurred. A more sophisticated account can be found in, for example, Eneida Jacobsen, 'Models of Public Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 6:1 (2012), 7-22.

[6] David Lyon, in Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Liquid Surveillance: A Conversation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 146.

[7] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age, Vol. 1: The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 5.

unusual twist, 'technology *is* society', in the sense that 'society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools'.[8] Thus, the 'new technological paradigm', mainly 'constituted' in the United States, and in Silicon Valley in particular, both caused and was caused by the 'fundamental process of restructuring of the capitalist system from the 1980s onwards'.[9] The outcome of these interactions is nothing less than a new 'techno-economic paradigm'.[10]

Castells does not overlook Bell's firm analytical distinction between levels of technological development and types of economic system;[11] in principle, the information revolution still offers a free choice between 'capitalism and statism'. However, commenting approximately a quarter of a century after *Coming*, Castells feels driven to register neoliberalism's global near-hegemony in the information age. Hence, the 'new social structure is associated with the emergence of a new mode of development, informationalism, historically shaped by the restructuring of the capitalist mode of production towards the end of the twentieth century'.[12]

Castells also advances beyond the Bellian benchmark by bringing to the fore and making definitive an aspect of post-industrialism upon which his precursor could only touch. The new economy, Castells writes, 'is *networked* because, under the new historical conditions, productivity is generated through and competition is played out in a global network of interaction between business networks'. And not just the economy: networks have become the standard 'organizational form'.[13] As its title indicates, *Rise of the Network Society* is devoted to an elucidation of this 'new organizational logic',[14] a logic that embraces,

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[8] Ibid., p. 4.
[9] Ibid., pp. 4, 13.
[10] Ibid., p. 4.
[11] Bell, *Coming*, p. 114.
[12] Castells, *Network Society*, p. 14.
[13] Ibid., p. 77.
[14] Ibid., p. 164.

inter alia, network enterprises, inter-firm networking, transnational corporations, television networks, virtual networks, and, of course, the internet itself. Network society supersedes the massive structures—mass production, mass media, 'the masses' of leftist rhetoric—of industrial society. It is characterized instead by affiliation, interactivity, horizontal as opposed to vertical communications, flows not fixtures, and instantaneity rather than linear time. The essential point is that the network society is about connectivity: 'all the ways', in Trevor Haywood's plainer words, 'that we communicate and transact and all the environments, real and virtual, that we construct to do these things'.[15] The treatise concludes as magisterially as it began:

> Networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the diffusion of networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in processes of production, experience, power, and culture. While the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure.[16]

There is a problem, however. Although networks are typically 'open', 'dynamic' and 'expanding',[17] they are not necessarily inclusive, and in any case not everyone wants to belong to the dominant systems. On the contrary, indeed, Castells writes, 'the new social order, the network society, increasingly appears to most people as a meta-social disorder'.[18] This basic theme, of a major disconnect between function-system and meaning-experience, is the central message of the whole trilogy. 'Global networks of instrumental exchanges', according to the prologue, 'selectively switch on and off individuals, groups, regions, and

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[15] Trevor Haywood, *Only Connect: Shaping Networks and Knowledge for the New Millennium* (London: Bowker-Saur, 1999), p. xiv.
[16] Castells, *Network Society*, p. 500.
[17] Ibid., p. 501.
[18] Ibid., p. 508.

even countries, according to their relevance in fulfilling the goals processed in the network, in a relentless flow of strategic decisions'. 'There follows', the theorist continues, 'a fundamental split between abstract, universal instrumentalism, and historically rooted, particularistic identities. Our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self'.[19]

The second volume, *The Power of Identity*, starts by restating the issue. 'Networks of wealth, information, and power' are currently 'programmed' by certain 'values and interests', those of 'capitalist globalization', the end-result being 'domination'.[20] Sadly, this is 'the one-dimensional logic that dominates the network society in the first stage of its constitution'. However, dominant networks do not have everything their own way. Over-against them, we find 'resistance' carried on by numerous 'social movements', representing forms of 'cultural identity'.[21] The rise of the network society, as Castells grandly puts it, has prompted 'the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment'.[22] These movements, as various as religious fundamentalism, nationalist insurgencies and human-rights and environmentalist activism, provide a shared sense of meaning. Their antagonistic relationship with the system is the heart of Castells' theory in *The Information Age* and related works.[23]

Castells' account of identity specifies three types: legitimizing, resistance and project. The first is our official identity. It is 'introduced by the dominant institutions of society to

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[19] Ibid., p. 3.

[20] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age, Vol. 2: The Power of Identity*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. xv-xvii.

[21] Ibid., pp. xv-xvi.

[22] Ibid., p. 2.

[23] See, for example, Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen, *The Information Society and the Welfare State: The Finnish Model* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

extend and rationalize their domination'.[24] Originated at state level, this form of identity operates through the institutions of civil society, democratic citizenship being a prime example. Resistance identity, by contrast, is 'generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination'. Reacting defensively, it leads to the 'formation of communes, or communities' that 'revers[e] the [negative] value judgement while reinforcing the boundary' between insiders and outsiders on the network.[25] Examples include communities based on ethnicity, such as nationalist movements, and others predicated on religion, such as Islamism. Project identity, the third and putatively final type, appears 'when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of the overall social structure'.[26] Feminism, with its bid to overthrow patriarchal hierarchy, is one of Castells' favourite manifestations of project identity, as is the environmental movement.

Castells contends that social institutions, including the state, are now caught between the global networks and these contrarian movements, to the extent of being 'shaken in their foundations and challenged in their legitimacy'.[27] In short, legitimizing identity is losing out to resistance and project identities. And the future belongs to the latter, Castells believes—much as Marx believed it lay with the industrial proletariat and Bell with a new knowledge class. 'I would argue', he writes, 'that, given the structural crisis of civil society and the nation-state, this [project identity] may be the main potential source of social change in the network society'.[28] Castells is persuaded that his extensive fieldwork outside the corridors, or rather networks, of power, has furnished genuine grounds for optimism. 'It is in these back

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[24] Castells, *Power of Identity*, p. 8.
[25] Ibid., p. 9
[26] Ibid., p. 10.
[27] Ibid., p. xv.
[28] Ibid., p. 70.

alleys of society', he enthuses at the end of volume two, after referencing environmentalism and feminism, 'whether in alternative electronic networks or in grassrooted networks of communal resistance, that I have sensed the embryos of a new society, labored in the fields of history by the power of identity'.[29]

Volume three, *End of Millennium*, has been much less visible in the vast literature citing *The Information Age*, but it is theoretically and even politically important for its exposure of the 'fourth world', a tragic dimension of the new reality unleashed by network society. This social realism is another quality that makes Castells' work an advance on *Coming*. To be fair, Bell had ended his venture in social forecasting with a mild warning that 'the politics of the future will not be the quarrels between functional economic-interest groups for distributive shares of the national product, but the concerns of a communal society, particularly the inclusion of disadvantaged groups'.[30] However, Castells makes the plight of the oppressed *central* to post-industrialism. The 'rise of informationalism at the turn of the millennium', he reports, 'is intertwined with rising inequality and social exclusion throughout the world'. He proceeds:

> The processing of capitalist restructuring, with its hardened logic of economic competitiveness, has much to do with it. But new technological and organizational conditions of the Information Age, as analyzed in this book, provide a new, powerful twist to the old pattern of profit-seeking taking over soul-searching.[31]

'Inequality, polarization, poverty, and misery', alongside 'individualization of work, over-exploitation of workers, social exclusion, and perverse integration': these are all social evils which have 'systemic relationships'—the former in the domain of consumption, the

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[29] Ibid., p. 428.
[30] Bell, *Coming*, pp. 366-7.
[31] Manuel Castells, *The Information Age, Vol. 3: End of Millennium*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 69.

latter in production—with information capitalism. [32] Castells explains Africa's *de facto* excommunication from the global system as a function of its lagging-behind in information technology. He interprets the spread, particularly in Asia, of the exploitation of children, as an example of network society's perverted accommodation of criminal networks. However, his focus is not just the soft target of third-world countries. Castells also foregrounds the predicament of people inside the developed world, not least the inner-city ghettos of 'informational America'.[33] All such, *pace* the information society's apologists, are part of a 'new world, the Fourth World, [that] has emerged, made up of multiple black holes of social exclusion throughout the planet'.[34]

It is perhaps too early to endorse the judgement of those who rushed to compare Castells to the nineteenth-century masters of social theory.[35] However, the scope of his work is certainly comparable. [36] If some of his specific propositions and their relations lack mathematical precision, to have even attempted a synoptic view is laudable. Moreover, the thrust of the analysis is highly plausible. Castells has grasped that information technology, and the ubiquitous telecommunications infrastructure that it has afforded, is a *bona fide* game-changer which in combination with other factors is revolutionizing the economies, cultures and to some extent polities of the twenty-first century, not just for the rich nations trumpeted by Bell and his generation, but globally. *The Information Age* presents a dramatic, almost eschatological and yet also instantly familiar image of a wired world in the throes of a multiform normative crisis. Its author evidently has his finger on the post-industrial pulse, deducing therefrom the sociocultural contradictions between the net, that is, the restricted

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[32] Ibid., p. 70.
[33] Ibid., p. 136.
[34] Ibid., p. 169.
[35] See, for example, Anthony Giddens, 'Out of Place', *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 13 December (1996), 18.
[36] For detailed studies of the network society, see David Barney, *The Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Felix Stalder, *Manuel Castells: The Theory of the Network Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Jan Van Dijk, *The Network Society*, 3rd edn (London: Sage, 2012).

circuitry of an informatized money/power elite, and the peripheralized identities of the ordinary self.

However, while Castells is fully sensitive to the crisis, he is unable to provide a solution. Like Bell and many other heralds of the information age, he politely dismisses the working class as an obsolete product of the industrial revolution, no longer positioned to serve as principal agent of change. In its stead, in the world's backstreets, as noted, Castells claims to have spotted the 'embryos' of a better society, lurking among the 'grassroots' in alternative digital networks and communities. However, his hopes of salvation, vested in project identities that happen to be close to his own heart, are too narrowly- and subjectively-based. On inspection, in fact, his philosophical sociology can be seen pivoting unsustainably on a binary, and simplistic, deontic logic: environmentalism good, capitalism bad; feminism good, religion bad; and so on. Notwithstanding the industrious empirical effort undergirding it, *The Information Age* looks normatively like nothing so much as a snapshot of the world from a Berkeley seminar room *circa* 1968.

Recent work by Castells does not materially change this picture. For example, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, a commentary on the Arab Spring, Occupy and related phenomena, concludes with the optimistic, but vague, assertion that 'the legacy of [these] networked social movements will have been to raise the possibility of re-learning how to live together'.[37] But the question is *how*, given that most people were, are, and forever shall be outside such organizations, which in some cases are themselves profoundly divided, can such a reconciliation really be achieved—a togetherness, to adopt 1960s language, of the *whole* society? By what motive power can network society actually be propelled to a higher stage of its 'constitution'?

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[37] Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p. 246.

The situation calls for something far more fundamental than identity projects. A reliance on social movements cannot avail, because, as has been pointed out in another context, such an approach 'encourages instead the perception that fraternity is an inherently sectarian, exclusive value, intelligible only in relation to particularized communities whose members derive a sense of identity and common cause from belonging to them'.[38] So what a contemporary mission for a progressive information society demands is the wider, firmer platform of a *universal* ideal of connectivity. The major theorist of the network society does not appear to offer anything of the kind. However, if one looks closely enough, the clue is actually lying right there in the entrails of the text. 'If', speculates the very last page of *End of Millennium*, 'humankind feels the solidarity of the species throughout the globe...'[39] That is the crux of the problem: we need to find cultural resources that might promote the connectedness of the entire human race. We must therefore locate a *fourth* species of identity that can perform a normative function for the network society as a totality. I will argue next that such a resource is already available in the form of a *spiritual* identity anchored in the *ontological* reality of human siblinghood.

Christian socialism: the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God

This section seeks to resurrect a little-known school of nineteenth-century thought. Essays in retrieval are not unusual in information society studies, as illustrated by uses of Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon' as a benchmark for the critique of surveillance[40] or citations of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim in an analysis of the process of mediation.[41] As regards

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[38] Colin Bird, 'Fraternity', in Michael T. Gibbons, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 1368–70 at p. 1369.
[39] Castells, *End of Millennium*, p. 396.
[40] See, for example, Sami Coll, 'Power, Knowledge, and the Subjects of Privacy: Understanding Privacy as the Ally of Surveillance', *Information, Communication and Society*, 17:10 (2014), 1250-63; David Lyon, ed., *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 1996); Eric Stoddart, *Theological Perspectives on a Surveillance Society: Watching and Being Watched* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
[41] Ralph Schroeder and Rich Ling, 'Durkheim and Weber on the Social Implications of New Information and Communication Technologies', *New Media and Society*, 16:5 (2014), 789-805.

normative political philosophies, while there has been occasional work on other schools, most of the focus has been on Marxism. Given the scale of Karl Marx's influence this was predictable, and some neo-Marxian applications are duly noticed below. However, I wish to make the case instead for listening to another Victorian voice, one that might have been stiller and smaller but which was nevertheless highly resonant in its day, namely, Christian socialism. My hypothesis, counter-intuitive though it may initially feel, is that from that obscure quarter can be extracted normative resources—one in particular—of the first importance for the Castellsian information age.

The Christian socialist movement has been ably chronicled elsewhere,[42] but the essentials are as follows. Formed in London in 1848, it had three founders: John Ludlow, a Franco-British lawyer who had witnessed that year's popular insurrection in Paris; Frederick Denison Maurice, an Anglican clergyman and emerging theologian; and Charles Kingsley the novelist, also a cleric. They were soon joined by Thomas Hughes, barrister, novelist and member of parliament, and Edward Vansittart Neale, a landed aristocrat who largely funded the movement. What united these individuals was a conviction that orthodox Christian faith contained latent socialist values, and that the church should therefore offer practical support to fledgling popular causes. Their ideas found expression in a range of genres, notably newspapers *Politics for the People* (1848) and *The Christian Socialist* (1850-1), and a series of pamphlets, *Tracts on Christian Socialism* (1850). Also influential in the long run was their didactic fiction, especially Kingsley's *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet* (1850) and Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). Significant mature works included Ludlow and Henry Jones' *Progress of the Working Class* (1867), Hughes and Neale's *Ethics and Economics of the Co-operative Movement* (1879) and Ludlow's *Autobiography of a Christian Socialist* (1899). It is

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[42] See, especially, Philip N. Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation in Victorian England: Edward Vansittart Neale and the Co-operative Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1974); Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848-54* (Aarhus: Unversitetsforlaget i Aarhus, 1962); Edward Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

an impressive corpus, parts of which found their way into the canon of British democratic-socialist thought.[43]

The principal source, however, of Christian socialism is an earlier work by Maurice, the movement's spiritual leader. His *Kingdom of Christ* originated in 1834 as a series of dialogues with a Quaker, before developing in its second edition (1842) into a comprehensive theologico-political treatise. It is easy to see why a clergyman with left-wing sympathies might have found Quakerism inspiring. The denomination was internationalist, eschewing imperialism and war, as well as egalitarian as regards women and minorities. Moreover, in a pre-democratic age it had already rejected the principle of autocracy: it had no pope, no clergy, no central structure. Its only problem, for Maurice as for most Christians then and now, was its implausible claim that the 'Society of Friends', as Quakers styled themselves, was co-extensive with the kingdom of God on earth. Dismissing such narrowness, Maurice contended that such a kingdom long predated the organization set up by '[Charles] Fox, the shoemaker of the 17th century'.[44] It was none other than the catholic—with a small 'c'—church, the global community that Jesus Christ had inaugurated nearly two millennia previously. Maurice lays out in minute detail evidence for its lineage as a cohesive entity, in the form of widely-shared doctrinal creeds, notably the Nicene Creed, as well as common institutions pertaining to communion, worship, ordained ministry and so on. Such, he argues, are the 'signs of a spiritual society'.[45] 'There is', the treatise maintains, 'a spiritual and universal society in the world', namely, 'the Kingdom of Christ'.[46]

However, while ecclesiastical—and herein lies the surprise political significance of the book—this kingdom is also a home for the whole of humanity. Persons, Maurice reasoned,

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[43] David Reisman, ed., *Democratic Socialism in Britain: Classic Texts in Economic and Political Thought 1825-1952, Vol. 2: Frederick Denison Maurice, Charles Kingsley and John Malcolm Ludlow, the Christian Socialists* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1996).

[44] Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, Vol. 1. (London: J.M. Dent, 1842), pp. 59-60.

[45] Ibid., p. 260.

[46] Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, Vol. 2, p. 277.

naturally live together, as signalled by the cultural ubiquity of the family unit. We also congregate naturally in the larger whole of nations. Both of these types of community are healthy and needful. However, there is also 'the cry for a universal body, in which men shall be regarded as human beings and not merely as the members of a local society', of which cry secular social movements such as Chartism, Owenism and French socialism represented powerful recent expressions.[47] 'But', in Maurice's view,

> each of these is chiefly remarkable as the shrine of a feeling which it cannot satisfy, and of a conviction which it labours to stifle—the feeling, I mean, that a universal society is needful to man; the conviction that if there be such a society, the treatment of man as a voluntary or a spiritual being must be the characteristic distinction of it.[48]

'It is equally impossible', he explains, 'for men to be content with a spiritual society which is not universal, and with a universal society which is not spiritual'. 'The spiritual and universal society', Maurice is then able to conclude, 'must be involved in the very idea of our human constitution, say rather, must be that constitution, by virtue of which we realise that there is a humanity, that we form a kind'.[49]

Maurice was well aware that most people do not believe a word of this. 'It is a fact', as he put it, 'that men are living anomalously'.[50] Nevertheless, the Christian community exists to model what life together would be like if they were not; it gives us a template. 'The Church', he recapitulated in *Theological Essays*, 'is human society in its normal state; the World that same society irregular and abnormal'.[51] The church shows how we ought to behave towards one another, as children of the same progenitor, and thus as siblings, a

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[47] Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, *Vol. 1*, p. 209.
[48] Ibid., p. 203.
[49] Ibid., p. 223.
[50] Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, *Vol. 2*, p. 2.
[51] Quoted in Ellen K. Wondra, ed., *Reconstructing Christian Ethics, Selected Writings: F.D. Maurice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. xvii.

brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. Like it or not, this is the 'Divine constitution for man' and the 'unity which lies beneath all other unity'.[52] 'As Maurice suggests', comments a recent exegete, 'the headship of Jesus Christ means [that] the theological imagination runs as broad and deep as humanity itself'.[53]

It is this majestic spiritual-cum-political vision that the Christian socialists would zealously pick up in 1848. 'Politics', *Politics for the People* declared, 'cannot be separated from Religion. They must start from Atheism, or from the acknowledgement that a Living and Righteous God is ruling in human society not less than in the natural world'.[54] However, not all politics met theological requirements: only popular politics did so; more particularly, socialist politics. *The Christian Socialist*, as its title might suggest, was geared to making this link explicit. The first issue could not have been clearer:

> A new idea has gone abroad into the world. That Socialism, the latest-born of the forces now at work in modern society, and Christianity, the eldest-born of those forces, are in their nature not hostile, but akin to each other; or rather, that the one is but the development, outgrowth, the manifestation of the other...That Christianity, however feeble and torpid it may seem to many just now, is truly but as an eagle at moult; that Socialism is but its livery of the nineteenth century, which it is even now putting on, to spread ere long its wings for a broader and heavenlier flight.[55]

The Christian religion had of course already been around for two millennia, but the idea here is that it was not until the arrival of socialism upon the world scene that

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[52] Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, *Vol. 2*, pp. 137, 291.

[53] P.D. Jones, 'Jesus Christ and the Transformation of English Society: the "Subversive Conservatism" of Frederick Denison Maurice', *Harvard Theological Review* 96: 2 (2003), 205-28 at 228.

[54] *Politics for the People,* 'Prospectus', 6 May (1848), 1-2.

[55] *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 'The New Idea', 2 November (1850), 1.

Christianity's *political* potential could begin to be understood and appropriated. Christian socialism was thus a special discovery of the nineteenth century.

The principal element in the new fusion was the ideal of brotherhood. The first article in *Politics*, authored by Maurice, was headlined 'Fraternity'.[56] Reversing the usual sequence in the axiological trinity promulgated by the French Revolution, it portrayed universal fraternity as the basis of both liberty and equality.[57] In itself this was and is entirely concordant with the priorities of the political left as a whole. For example, the German Marxist Karl Leibknecht would later confirm that 'the concept of general human solidarity is the highest cultural and moral concept; to turn it into reality is the task of socialism'.[58] However, the Christian socialist position differed profoundly in the way that it justified human solidarity. Non-Christian socialists were mistaken in their assumption that true brotherhood could be based just on self-interest or sectarian objectives in a class war. The Christian socialists had the real explanation:

> But because they have not found the secret, is it impossible that we should? We profess that we have found it long ago. We pretend to think that an Everlasting Father has revealed Himself to men in an elder Brother, one with him and with us, who died for all. We may believe this to be true or false. We believe it to be true, therefore we can feel to each other as brothers; we can look upon all of you whom we address in this paper, nobles, shopkeepers, labourers, mechanics, beggars, aristocrats, democrats, people of every class and party, as brothers.[59]

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[56] For a lucid exposition of the role of fellowship in Christian socialism, see Jeremy Morris, *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 148-9.

[57] *Politics for the People*, 'Fraternity', 6 May (1848), 2-5.

[58] Quoted in Max Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity: Discourse Theory in Ethics and Politics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 7. For a neutral opinion, see S.I. Benn and R.S. Peters, *Social Principles and the Democratic State* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 163.

[59] *Politics for the People*, 'Fraternity', 6 May (1848), 2-5 at 3.

They are of course not making here a Wittgensteinian point about a shared father being part of the grammar of the concept of brotherhood. Rather, they are making the substantive claim that there is another world at hand, an immanent reality of true fellowship, into which workers, activists, indeed everyone, could and should enter—and that such is the ultimate foundation of socialism. As Ludlow put it in his contemporaneous tract on the working associations of Paris, 'the idea—the Church idea, of universal brotherhood haunts these men [the Paris *ouvriers*]'.[60] What the revolution was missing was this *virtual* dimension, the ontological connection that binds us all together in an indefeasible familial network.

In such a way, the Christian socialists sought to 'Christianize socialism' and 'socialize Christianity'.[61] Socialism would be saved from the materialistic and sectarian tendencies it was displaying, especially on the Continent, and Christianity from the pietism and individualism to which it had been reduced. However, while they were convinced that their new synthesis was definitive, the Christian socialists were not so cultish as to insist that progressive efforts as a whole should be suspended until the general adoption of their worldview. They preached their message to all, as any believer would, but at the same time they readily worked with Fourierists, Owenites and other well-meaning groups on the left, of all religious persuasions and none. They sought to gather together as many people as possible through what 'Parson Lot', that is, Charles Kingsley, called 'the power of mere brotherhood'.[62] Theirs was thus an 'ethico-inclusive solidarity',[63] a fraternal message framed in explicit moral language, and aimed at everyone. If few knew the secret—that the

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[60] John Milbank, 'Were the "Christian Socialists" Socialists?', in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), pp. 63-74 at p. 68.

[61] Quoted in Christensen, *Christian Socialism*, p. 137.

[62] Parson Lot [Charles Kingsley], 'The Long Game: or a Few Words to the Workmen of England on the Present Crisis', *The Christian Socialist: A Journal of Association*, 29 November (1851), 337-9 at 337.

[63] Lawrence Wilde, 'Three Forms of Nineteenth Century Working Class Solidarity and their Current Relevance', in Scott H. Boyd and Mary A. Walter, eds, *Cultural Difference and Social Solidarity: Solidarities and Social Function* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 14-29 at p. 14. See also Lawrence Wilde, *Global Solidarity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

brotherhood of man can be traced back to the fatherhood of God, the 'All-father',[64] and that socialism is, therefore, in its final analysis, *ordained*—that was regrettable but not fatal. In the language of analytical political philosophy, we might now say that brotherhood can be deployed standalone as a 'thin' concept, while being ultimately supported by a 'thick' structure of metaphysics.

The Christian socialists not only propagated an original and highly attractive doctrine of brotherhood, they also tested its feasibility in organizational forms, specifically, worker co-operatives. While co-operation had been pioneered in the previous generation by Robert Owen and others, the Christian socialists were largely responsible for its revival in the 1850s and 1860s. They conceived of it in black-and-white terms, as the antithesis of the competitiveness at the heart of industrial capitalism. 'Anyone', Maurice asserted, 'who recognises the principle of co-operation as a stronger and truer principle than that of competition has a right to the honour or the disgrace of being called a Socialist'.[65] The Christian socialists accordingly set up a Society for Promoting Working Men's Associations, which registered and funded a network of small co-operatives, in trades such as needlework, tailoring and baking. This alternative approach, the Christian socialists believed, 'creates new ties between man and man, [and] suggests new forms of fellowship…[whereby] there is literally evolved a new type of working man'.[66] Co-operation's intrinsic ethical and economic advantages were supposedly so self-evident that it would become an unstoppable grassroots movement. 'Growing', as Hughes and Neale's retrospective cast it, 'over against the present

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[64] Charles Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1888 [1850]), p. 270.

[65] Frederick Denison Maurice, *Dialogue between Somebody (a person of respectability) and Nobody (the writer)* (Tracts on Christian Socialism, No. 1) (London: George Bell, 1850), p. 1.

[66] John Malcolm Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Class 1832-1867* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1867), p. 143.

state as the Church did of old, only now under its shelter instead of in conflict with it', it would eventually 'create a new social state'.[67]

Needless to say, the co-operative commonwealth did not materialize; none of the associations even survived. For their critics, this was to be expected. 'From the first', wrote the astute Beatrice Webb, 'they ignored exactly those facts which Robert Owen realized; they overlooked the fundamental changes brought about by the industrial revolution'.[68] The new mode of production was about large-scale operations, expert management and collectivist organization. Instead, busying themselves at the microlevel with merry little bands of tailors and the like, the Christian socialists blinded themselves to 'the significant fact that genuine associations of producers, owning the capital and controlling the enterprise of their establishment, exist only in those trades untransformed by the industrial revolution'.[69] It was a fair criticism. A century's hindsight would confirm that 'what was lacking [in the Christian socialists' position] was a philosophy of history and an outline of the method to be used for the realization of the new order'.[70] Or as a more recent commentator puts it, the Christian socialists of 1848 'did not show any awareness of the macroeconomic issues involved when discussing the unequal distribution of wealth and power'.[71]

However, several points may be offered in their defence. They were the first to intuit the affinity between Christianity and socialism. They were also, I am suggesting, persuasive in their case for brotherhood as God's will for human relations, not just in Christendom but the entire world. To be sure, they were naive about the viability of worker co-operatives as a practical expression of such, but they learned their lesson and eventually switched to

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[67] Thomas Hughes and Edward V. Neale, eds, *Foundations: A Study in the Ethics and Economics of the Co-operative Movement,* 2nd edn (Manchester: The Co-operative Union, 1916 [1879]), p. 102.
[68] Beatrice Webb, *The Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, 2nd edn (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1904), p. 167.
[69] Ibid., p. 168.
[70] G.K. Lewis, 'The Ideas of the Christian Socialists of 1848', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 4:3 (1951), 397-429 at 416.
[71] Jones, 'Jesus Christ and the Transformation', 224.

consumer co-operatives, taking prominent roles in the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Co-operative Congress.[72] That kind of 'co-op' was of course phenomenally successful, and is still a major and growing presence across the globe. The Christian socialists also incarnated 'mere brotherhood' in trade unions, another permanent pillar of the social infrastructure, not to mention their founding of the Working Men's College in London, the world's first adult education college and again still going. Moreover, the Christian socialists of 1848 inspired later generations of Christian socialists who *did* understand the industrial revolution—the very term was coined by a Christian socialist, Arnold Toynbee[73]—and who therefore saw clearly the need for more collectivism.[74] By the middle of the twentieth century, indeed, Christian socialists such as R.H. Tawney were fighting campaigns for redistributive taxation, nationalized utilities and other mainstays of modern macroeconomic policy, and still doing so under the sign of 'socialism as fellowship'.[75]

The crucial point in all this is that the Christian socialists' mission was primarily spiritual, in the special sense of disseminating without restriction the spirit of brotherhood. They differed themselves over formats, what the era called 'machinery', but were at one on their end, namely, the transformation of society along ecclesial lines. Edward Norman, their most distinguished modern critic, is thus accurate when he notes that their approach was at bottom 'non-ideological',[76] where ideology is understood as a mode of purely political belief. The Christian socialists essentially functioned on a higher plane. It does not really matter that they sometimes drew incorrect institutional conclusions from their political theology. What they succeeded in demonstrating was that the ideal of the brotherhood of man under the

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[72] Backstrom, *Christian Socialism and Co-operation*, passim.
[73] Bell, *Coming*, p. xii.
[74] Peter D'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877–1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[75] Ross Terrill, *R.H. Tawney and his Times: Socialism as Fellowship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973).
[76] Norman, *Victorian Christian Socialists*, p. 183.

fatherhood of God could unite people and stimulate genuine reform. The issue was not techniques but the primacy of fellowship, still surely the hallmark of any desirable socialism. In this basic sense, then, the new social state that the Christian socialists wanted is never, *pace* Webb and other agnostics, 'past praying for'.[77]

Towards a normative reconstitution of network society

The major premise of this article has been Castells' account of the rise of network society as the prevalent social form of the information epoch, including his claim about the problematic consequences for an excluded periphery. It argued that Castells fails to show how the potential of the new 'logic' of networking can be harnessed as a social force for good. Whatever the merits of the grassroots networks to which he has commendably devoted much of his career, most people do not belong to them, mainly because they are too busy earning an honest living to partake in such causes. Thus, a realistic approach to the conflict identified by Castells requires an appeal to something lying beyond the limited and divergent horizons of particularistic identities. This final section contains a solution built on the theological tradition just presented.

At one level, the problem seems to throw up an obvious solution: network society requires a new brand of human connectivity generated by and for itself. Moreover, just such a mode, namely 'network sociality', has already emerged, as Andreas Wittel has shown. Typified by the far-flung contacts that young professionals often construct, network sociality tends to be ephemeral rather than permanent, and dynamic rather than static; its communications are more informational than narrational, brief updates rather than deep conversations. Wittel sees this form of (tele)connectivity replacing the physical bonding of

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[77] Webb, *Co-operative Movement*, p. 167.

the industrial era, and broadly welcomes it.[78] However, while network sociality represents a useful start, it is hardly sufficient. It captures a vital aspect of a demassified, post-industrial scenario of rapidly-interacting agents, but lacks the essential embeddedness of normal human experience. The task remains of somehow making the denizens of cyberspace and their offline lifeworlds more than just nodes in a network, of putting real flesh on the skeleton of the global information infrastructure.

The only resource capable of thus transmuting thin links into thick is the recognition that individuals are inalienably connected at some kind of *ontological* level. My claim then is that the Christian socialist ideal of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God comprises a compelling expression of that valuable resource. This ideal is not, like Castells' project identity, elective nor, like Wittels' network sociality, accidental. It denotes a primordial human identity, one that underpins all parochial perspectives and contingencies. It is there whether we know it or not, a necessary, universal relatedness into which humanity is hardwired, and which is able thereby to counteract the abstract instrumentalism that Castells imputes to the net.

The insistent objection will be that Christian socialism represents too slender a platform upon which to sustain any universal ethic. Castells himself claims that Christianity is 'a minority religion that is bound to lose its pre-eminence in the multiculturalism that will characterize the twenty-first century'. *Ergo*, bluntly, the information society 'cannot be built around Christianity'.[79] However, to reiterate: such an argument misconstrues the case that is being sketched here. The Christian socialists' seminal contribution consisted in their pioneering of a unique synthesis between the spiritual idea of God's fatherhood and the political idea of fraternity. However, that is not to deny 'the multiplication of the sources of

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[78] Andreas Wittel, 'Toward a Network Sociality', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18:6 (2001), 51-76.

[79] Castells, *End of Millennium*, pp. 1, 368.

normativity in highly functionally differentiated societies'.[80] The way that brotherhood is expressed will inevitably vary across cultures and other variables. Yet people everywhere can embrace the brotherhood of man as an ideal, even if they reject its ultimate legitimation in the fatherhood of the Christian God. The peculiarity of the prescription's origin does not matter, any more than it matters to present-day patients that penicillin happens to have been first isolated on a mouldy laboratory bench in St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, one blessed day in 1928.

This 1848 normative software, therefore, can and should be reloaded in the information age. To fulfil a contemporary role, however, some adjustments will be necessary. 'Mere brotherhood' was of course never about males alone, but the term does nominally excommunicate half of humanity; 'sisterhood' too. The natural compromise is 'siblinghood'. That—spiritual consanguinity—is the essential relation which needs to be recognized. Kingsley's potent phrase might thus be updated to 'simple siblinghood'. However, while inoffensive the latter has obvious limitations as a rallying-cry. I propose, therefore, that we adopt 'fellowship', a word which the Christian socialists used more or less interchangeably with 'brotherhood' and 'fraternity'. While it too may have suffered male overtones in the past, these are hardly significant now: females have long enjoyed academic fellowships and qualified as equal members of medical fellowships. The term has a welcome collegial as well as ecclesial air; but more importantly, it captures to a sufficient extent the underlying idea of brotherhood, without being open to a charge of being politically incorrect. So what I am advocating is an ideal of fellowship for the network society—in short, *the fellowship of the net*.

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[80] Stephen Rainey and Philippe Goujon, 'Toward a Normative Ethics for Technology Development', *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, 9:3 (2011), 157-79 at 163.

The ethic must be inclusive in another basic sense. We saw how the Mauricean vision of a worldwide fellowship expressly avoided any hint of the annihilation of natural identities. While the individual should see herself as part of a universal body, she remains a member of a family, a nation and a politically- and culturally-shaped set of intermediate collectivities, what today are called civil society organizations. Fellowship is part of the rationale of all natural human combinations and largely co-extensive with their ethical kernel, even that of many Castellsian perverse connections, as in the mafia's code of loyalty, for example. The fellowship of the net must thus be multilayered, its spiritual kingdom of nodes built upon and subsuming, while simultaneously transcending, the more intense ties of local and immediate situations. As we are told *ad nauseam*, the postmodern settlement mandates the incorporation of ethnic, cultural and other forms of difference. In formal terms, then, to refresh the paradigm of universal siblinghood necessitates enshrinement of a built-in principle of subsidiarity. In this sense the ethic is gradualist, not only in being politically reformist rather than revolutionary, but also in accommodating Wittel's network sociality and all other ontologically lower grades of human connectivity.

There needs, of course, to be a conviction that such a fellowship is workable. As noted above, the Fabian historian denied that the then new unit of industrial plants could be a meaningful site of fraternal relations. Scalability is what Wilson McWilliams was problematizing too, when his magisterial *Idea of Fraternity* concluded sternly that 'under modern conditions, general political fraternity is impossible'.[81] He added, however, that we can 'attempt to provide the greatest approximations possible': such efforts are made possible by the existence of 'the "inner city"', since 'such a fraternal city can exist within an unfraternal polity'.[82] In other words, although macrostructures might be unsupportive, human

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[81] Wilson C. McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973), p. 622.
[82] Ibid., p. 623.

fellowship can still flourish in the interior world of personal relationships. The Christian socialist tradition agrees, venturing the further proposition that this inner city is actually—could we but see it—the kingdom of God. Precisely because it is such, fellowship can and should be pursued in the outer, sociopolitical world, using as a proven template the actually existing church. And that goal has now become much more reachable, as a result of the technological means accompanying the rise of the network society.

What then are the practical implications of a network society reconstituted along such lines? It might be thought that the answer must be the installation of co-operative institutions, the main nostrum, as we saw, of the Christian socialists themselves. Many leftists attuned to post-industrial times still talk that way. 'We are', advises Christian Fuchs, for example, 'already witnessing a shift from a largely competitive mode of society to a more co-operative one'.[83] Elsewhere, he turns this into an eternal truth: a 'true' information society must be co-operative, because only such is compatible with the 'real' nature of information as a 'public good'.[84] In a similar vein, Nick Dyer-Witheford calls for a 'noncapitalist commonwealth' based on co-operation.[85] However, the plain lesson of twentieth- as well as nineteenth-century history was that producer co-operatives do not succeed. Isolated experiments might work for a season, but co-operative commonwealth 2.0 is as much a mirage as was co-operative commonwealth 1.0. Moreover, even if such a monopoly form were possible, it is not desirable. The Christian socialists oversimplified in depicting socialism and competition as mutually exclusive, as their own famous predilection for sports like rugby and boxing proved. Brothers can compete, if they play fair. Thus, a private economy in certain industries,

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[83] Christian Fuchs, 'Co-operation and Self-organization', *Triple C: Cognition, Communication, Co-operation*, 1:1 (2003), 1-52 at 45.

[84] Christian Fuchs, 'Information and Communication Technologies and Society: A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy of the Internet', *European Journal of Communication*, 24:1 (2009), 69–87 at 78.

[85] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 209, 216.

including high tech, can be part of the solution, on condition that these are designed to fit inside an overarching social framework imbued with the spirit of fellowship.

While compatible to some extent with market forces, however, the fellowship of the net is at odds with our harsh neoliberal hegemony. The Christian socialists of 1848 bravely confronted a 'new world' involving 'a vast class of novel evils along with the benefits of the manufacturing system';[86] we must do likewise with the evils as well as benefits of informationalism. They improved the condition of 'those who work, chiefly with their muscles…for wages';[87] we must address the condition of information labour, those who chiefly process data with their minds. The brotherhood of man contained a message of outrage and hope for the poor and destitute; the fellowship of the net must offer the equivalent to the post-industrial paupers inhabiting Castells' fourth world. Lawrence Wilde is correct that only a gospel of ethico-inclusive solidarity can 'break the divisive dominance of neoliberalism';[88] that is why its revival is a matter of urgency.

Fair background institutions will thus need to continue serving as the offline infrastructure. However, the information age calls also for something innovative. This returns us to where we began. It is precisely as a result of advances in information and communication technologies, and especially the world wide web, that a new fraternal consciousness has at last become an achievable aim. Facebook, LinkedIn and other apps now populating the 'network of networks'[89] have led the way in demonstrating that it is possible to make human connectivity scalable. They have read the times well, tapping into people's evolving curiosity and sociability, enabling an unprecedented transcending of geographical,

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[86] *Politics for the People*, 'On the Development of the Principle of Socialism in France', 13 May (1848), 24-6 at 25.
[87] Ludlow and Jones, *Progress of the Working Class*, pp. 3-5.
[88] Wilde, 'Working Class Solidarity', p. 27.
[89] William H. Dutton, 'The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks', *Prometheus*, 27:1 (2009), 1-15.

racial, gender, generational and other barriers. However, commercial systems cannot bear the burden of the interlinking of humankind. Whatever their rhetoric, their real goal is, and has to be, profit. Hence the task for the twenty-first century becomes obvious. It is to develop *public* online platforms that are stable and capacious enough to facilitate the integration of a highly-networked but centrifugal global information society. The future will surely reveal their exact technical form;[90] a new version of the nineteenth-century value of fellowship can supply the requisite spiritual content. In short, network society needs to rediscover the 'secret' interconnectedness of humankind, and then invent ways of implementing it. Such would constitute the long-overdue second life of mere brotherhood.

Conclusion

This article has attempted an articulation of two temporally and intellectually removed bodies of thought, the social theory of the network society and the political philosophy of religious socialism. More specifically, it has sought to solve the problem referred to by Castells as the 'bipolar opposition between the net and the self', through a reapplication of the Christian socialist doctrine of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God. It suggested that Castells himself cannot solve his own problem, because the movements to which he appeals comprise too narrow a base for a solution. The diseased social morphology that he has usefully reported requires an ontological-level response, and the doctrine of the universal constitution of human siblinghood, updated for the information age as the fellowship of the net, fits the bill. I am recommending, therefore, that the formula of the fellowship of the net be injected into relevant public deliberations and policies, in the tradition of what John Marsden calls 'the marshalling of theological resources for sustaining a vision for social

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[90] For secular interpretations of the potential of online communities, see Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), and Michele A. Wilson *Technically Together: Rethinking Community Within Techno-Society* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2006).

democracy in our own generation'. [91] Some will no doubt scoff at such a left-field intervention, but can citizens who are really in earnest about securing a less divided future afford to spurn any help at all?

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[91] John Marsden, 'Frederick Denison Maurice, Christian Socialism, and the Future of Social Democracy', *The Heythrop Journal*, 45:2 (2004), 137-57 at 155.