Imagining 'us' as *Imago Dei*

Exploring organisational relationships through an *Imago Dei* paradigm

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Introduction

Leadership, the Trinity, *Imago Dei* and community development are four topics that have spilt much ink and caused great debate over many, many years. Countless books have been written on these different topics, and the conversations are far from finished. Thus it may appear to be an insurmountable task to attempt to bring them together in a short paper such as this; ridiculous even. Perhaps it is.

But my argument, in contrast to the complexity of these various topics, is in fact rather simple: if fundamental human relatedness is patterned after the relational Trinity, then *Imago Dei* must be a key paradigm that we use in developing contextual, culturally appropriate models of organisational relationships, particularly in the community development sector. I will argue that *Imago Dei* is implicit throughout the biblical witness, and is a necessary paradigm for restoring human flourishing. I will explore three widely accepted relational aspects of *Imago Dei*, and consider how they might shape a number of organisational relationships before briefly comparing *Imago Dei* in the Indonesian and Australian leadership contexts. I will highlight where current research intersects with *Imago Dei* in the areas of community development and organisational relationships, indicating that our current models of organisational relationships entail aspects of *Imago Dei* while also demonstrating that *Imago Dei* has the potential to address some of the issues and gaps in our various approaches.

The potential for a universal biblical leadership model

The concept of the servant leader is widely accepted among Western Christian authors as a sound biblical leadership model, and appears to have few critics (Scarborough 2009:30; Niewold 2007:118). Proponents of the servant leadership model point to Jesus' profound

claim that he 'came not to be served, but to serve' (Mt. 20:28). Recent research reinforces

the benefits of servant leadership, finding positive correlates between this model and

employee job satisfaction (Rude 2004:63), reduced employee burnout (Kaya et al. 2016:30),

employee loyalty (Ding et al. 2012:208) and higher organisational performance (Melchar

and Bosco 2010:84).

While I wish to affirm much of the servant leadership agenda, I do have a number of

reservations with a few undisclosed assumptions that this model of leadership often rests

on. In the first place, while Jesus' words above are profound, proponents of the servant

leadership model are somewhat selective in their exegesis (Scarborough 2009:108). Jesus

washed the feet of his disciples, but he also rebuked their ignorance with un-servant-like

bluntness on numerous occasions (Mk. 4:13, 50; 8:14-18, 33; 14:27). While Dan Allender, in

his insightful book, *Leading with a limp* draws from Jesus' example and the Old Testament

roles of prophet, priest and king to develop a leadership model (2006:187ff), the New

Testament witness seems to suggest that other leadership models are also appropriate, as

Banks points out:

> Acts 6 reveals democratic leadership; Acts 13 shows theocratic leadership; 1
> Corinthians 12-14 shows charismatic leadership; and 1-2 Timothy and 1-2 Titus
> reveal institutionalised leadership (2013:86).

Establishing a singular model of biblical leadership is perhaps more difficult than proponents

of the servant leader approach seem to suggest (see Kessler 2013:1f).

Another personal concern with recent leadership studies, is that the cultural contingency of

our preferred leadership models is often overlooked (Johnson 2007:213) despite leadership

being largely culturally shaped (Kezar and Lester 2010:164f; Westen et. al. 2006:761). A

recent study between the Malaysian and Australian contexts demonstrates that perhaps servant leadership is not always suitable across cultures (Jogulu 2010:708, 713); desirable leadership styles are not necessarily consistent across cultures (Arora and Rao 2009:339; Suryani et al. 2012:291; Irawando 2009:46).[1]

A final concern is the intense focus that is placed on leadership rather than organisational relationships more broadly. Christian leadership models rightly focus on Jesus, but often appear to overlook the fact that Jesus refused to do anything without the will of the Father and the empowerment, guidance and company of the Holy Spirit.

My reservations with the servant and other leadership models lead me to suggest that it may be helpful to shift the focus of organisational development away from the individual to organisational relationships more broadly, and to consider whether there is a universal biblical starting place for developing culturally appropriate models of organisational relationship. My suggestion is that the concept of *Imago Dei* may be that starting place.

Imago Dei as paradigm for developing models of organisational relationships

Why start with Imago Dei?

If culturally appropriate models of organisational relationships[2] are required, then an anthropological approach would be an appropriate starting place (Johnson 2007:214). From a biblical perspective then, a theological anthropology that transcends culture would be well suited. The question here is whether there is a fundamental, God-designed imprint of social

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[1] Desired leadership *characteristics* and *postures* do seem to have some consistency across cultures, as the GLOBE study demonstrates (see CCL 2014).   This will be discussed later in the paper.

[2] By organisational relationships, I mean any relationship that develops at an organisational level; leadership and the role of the leader is included in this term.

relatedness that, when followed, is conducive to human flourishing in the organisational setting.

Imago Dei is well placed to answer this question, for it is the belief that humanity was made in the image of the Trinitarian God *before* the fall into sin and the multiplication of culture at the tower of Babel (cf. Gen. 1:26, Gen. 3, Gen 11); *Imago Dei* was initially the uncorrupted, pre-culture pattern of human relatedness. While plenty of discussion throughout Christian history has been around exactly what that imaging entails, there is a strong case to draw a paradigm of relational being from *Imago Dei*; the Trinity being widely accepted as three-yet-one mutually interdependent distinct, yet equal persons existing in a dynamic, perichoretic relationship (Coffey 1999:66; Torrance in Gunton 2003:44; Erikson 1995:221f; McGrath 1994:254f; Grudem 1994:226ff; Buxton 2001:19).

Further, the relational nature of *Imago Dei* makes it highly applicable to organisational relationships and particularly organisational relationships in the community development sector.[3] Secular and well-renowned community development practitioner Robert Chambers has long lamented the way that community development practice has "…shifted from a paradigm of people to a paradigm of things" (Chambers 1997:37; Chambers 2012), arguing strongly that "…power and relationships are at the core of development. Yet they have been almost pathologically repressed and neglected" (Chambers 2005:207).

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[3] I would argue that it is applicable to all human relationships in the various forms; my argument here is for the particular way in which *Imago Dei* addresses the fundamental causes of poverty, making it highly relevant for the community development sector.

Bryant Myers argues in a similar fashion in his widely acclaimed book *Walking with the poor* that:

> The nature of poverty is fundamentally relational… [therefore] the transformational process must begin and end with different types of relationships… We must begin with people, not abstractions, research, analysis, or technique. Without transforming relationships there is unlikely to be much transformation (Myers 2001:185).

The perspective of Chambers and Meyers are importantly reflected in the definitions of poverty given by the poor in the *Voices of the poor* series (see Narayan et al. 2000:31ff). If relationships and power are core issues of poverty, then it is vital that organisations involved in community development demonstrate and practice 'transforming organisational relationships' that use power appropriately and have people - not 'things' or outcomes - at the organisational centre. Our message of transformation must be consistent with our method; we cannot encourage the poor towards holistic transformational relationships while perpetuating deforming relationships in our own organisations (Maggay 2015:1), an issue the poor have noted and lamented at times (Narayan 2000:184f).[4] In light of this, and given that community development agenda must be often undertaken cross-culturally, the concept of *Imago Dei* has a considerable contribution to make as a paradigm for community development relationships.

Objections to drawing social implications from *Imago Dei*

Drawing social implications from the concept of *Imago Dei* is not without its detractors, and while there is simply not enough room to address every objection, it is prudent to deal with some key concerns before exploring the social implications of *Imago Dei*. Karen Kilby is

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[4] NGOs are certainly not the worst in this, and received mixed reviews by the poor (see Narayan et al. 2000:201f); however, even if NGOs ranked around or slightly above average for institutions, there is considerable work that needs to be done before we match CBO reviews.

perhaps most noted for her recent critique of drawing social implications from the Trinity, making a compelling case that drawing social implications from *Imago Dei* is the projecting of our own social hopes onto the unknowable relational nature of the Trinity and then drawing paradigms from those very projections, a process she calls 'reverse projection' (Kilby 2000:442). Kilby argues that the doctrine of the Trinity should simply be used to assist Christians in understanding something of the complexity and mystery God (Kilby 2000:443). She maintains that the doctrine of the Trinity doesn't need to be 'relevant,' and that drawing authoritative social implications is inappropriate and out of line with the historical use of this doctrine (Kilby 2000:432, 443).

Kilby's critique offers some helpful insights to the discussion here; social implications from the concept of *Imago Dei* must be undertaken with caution, and be grounded in a worshipful acknowledgement of the complexity and mystery of the Trinity who exists beyond the human experience. We should avoid moulding God into a simplistic, anthropocentric understanding. Yet Kilby perhaps goes too far towards the transcendent end of the spectrum; for God is also imminent – he has revealed something of himself to humanity. Part of that self-disclosure is through words written in the created order that tell the story of God, and though "…their words aren't heard, his truth is spoken everywhere" (Ps. 19, Message translation). The idea of a 'divine spark' in humanity is a common belief across many faiths and finds parallels in the Ancient Near Eastern creation accounts of Enuma Elish, Atrahasis and Gilgamesh (Millard 1994:125). Thus if *Imago Dei* is reflective of the nature of the Trinity, then there will be Trinitarian echoes in the way that humans relate to one another, and cautiously uncovering those is simply that; uncovering – rather than 'reverse projecting' relational aspects of the Trinity. If humanity is crafted in the image of

God, then uncovering something of the relational mystery of the Trinity is a highly relevant pursuit, addressing the fundamental question of what it means to be humans in relation to one another. While drawing social implications from *Imago Dei* may be a relatively new endeavour in discussions on the doctrine of the Trinity, its relative youthfulness makes it no less a pertinent issue in Christian circles than (for example) the rise of feminist or liberation theologies.

Imago Dei and the biblical witness

Old Testament witness

Genesis 1:26-27 is the primary passage on which the concept of *Imago Dei* is founded:

> Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness…" So God created humanity in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

This passage is profound on a number of levels; God using the plural ('us, our') to make a singular humanity, and a corresponding echo: plurality (male and female) in the image of a singular God. This passage has rightly received intense observation by proponents of 'divine society' to borrow from David Andrews' title. While two other Old Testament passages are often quoted – Gen. 5:1-3 and Gen. 9:5-6 – by and large the remainder of the Old Testament is often passed over in favour of the New Testament witness.

But moving so quickly past the Old Testament for the concept of *Imago Dei* is perhaps misguided due to an overemphasis on lexical studies; for while the phrase 'image of God' is not readily employed in the Old Testament canon, I would argue that the concept of *Imago Dei* is implicit throughout the Old Testament witness. The direct correlation between why

the people of Israel must treat each other well is the often repeated refrain: 'I am the Lord your God' (see Lev. 19); they were to be compassionate as Yahweh is compassionate (Ex. 22:26-27), just as Yahweh is just (Deut. 16:18f), merciful as Yahweh is merciful (Lev. 19:33-34). The sum and pinnacle of the Law – the divine order – was fundamentally relational: 'You shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The metaphors and images that Yahweh employed in his Old Testament self-revelation were often highly relational; a husband (Hosea), a lover (Song of Songs), a family (Ps. 103:13; Ezekiel 38). Yahweh is a God people can talk to, interact with, argue with, eat with, live with, learn about and fall in love with - all relational interactions. Yahweh is no vending machine, he does not compute; his primary driver is his *hesed,* his steadfast love (Ex. 34; Ps. 136). It is significant that Yahweh's Old Testament revelation was not through clinical data, solid rhetoric and cold hard statistics, but primarily through story, song and poetry that stir something in our relationally stamped hearts, drawing us towards Yahweh and thus also towards each other. Kilby is right; Yahweh is transcendent and mysterious, but learning that through his unique self-disclosure only makes our whole understanding of who he is - and in turn what it means to be relational beings - deeper and more beautiful.

New Testament witness

The New Testament witness carries forward and fleshes out the concept of *Imago Dei*. While supporters of social Trinitarianism are often found gravitating towards passages like John 19, and Jesus' statement of 'may you be one, as I and the Father am one', the New Testament witness has an *Imago Dei* thread running completely through it, binding the whole biblical canon together (e.g. Mt. 22:36f). Jesus, the pinnacle of God's self-revelation, appears in the most relational way possible: as a fellow human being, with hands that touch

and heal, a voice and heart filled with compassion for the marginalised and condemnation for oppressors. He didn't come to fix flailing transportation systems, but to 'bring good news to the poor… proclaim release to the captive… give sight to the blind, unburden the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord' (Lk. 4:18f). And so Jesus' entire life, work and teaching was to restore broken relationships – relationships between humanity and God; relationships between people; broken relationships with creation (Myers 2001:181) – disease, hunger, idolatry, alienation from God, oppression, destructive weather patterns; restoring the broken, and deeply relational *Imago Dei*.

It's no wonder then, that the New Testament letters are again primarily aimed at relationships, because we are fundamentally relational beings made in the image of a relational God. That is why the three letters of John have no difficulty in seeing a direct correlation between relationship with God and relationship with each other; why James can declare that failing to care for the people around is us indicative of distance from God. It is a foundational assumption throughout the New Testament witness that we are broken in need of complete restoration, and the necessary refurbishment is the renewal of all broken relationships.

Relational aspects of Imago Dei

Equally unique giftedness

The Triune God is widely accepted in Christian circles as three equal distinct persons who are paradoxically one. I will not attempt to explain the meta-physics of this phenomenon here, but wish to highlight that each member serves, submits and empties themself (*kenosis*) for the others while simultaneously being served, completed, filled (*plerosis*) by

the others. Although each member is uniquely gifted, no two gifts are the same, and no role is given a superior status (Andrews 2008:21). This relational aspect of the Trinity extends to the stamp of *Imago Dei* on humanity, expressed eloquently by the Apostle Paul's use of the body as a metaphor for ecclesial relationships in 1 Corinthians 12. The body is made up of various parts, each playing a vital role, even though some parts appear to be more important due to their visibility.

The unique, equally important giftedness of everyone is supported by research on human relatedness (e.g Entwistle and Moroney 2001:299), the recent rise of servant leadership and its related studies of success mentioned earlier, each demonstrating that respectfully helping people to uncover and use their unique gift is directly correlated to improved organisational life. What they are all touching on and uncovering in part is the *Imago Dei* inherent in every person; we flourish when we are encouraged to exist along God's originally intended pattern for human relatedness.

Unifying mutual interdependence

While organisational relationships shaped by *Imago Dei* will find ways of expressing the equally unique giftedness of each stakeholder, it will be guarded against an over-emphasis on individualism if properly applied. Moltmann suggests that the emphasis among Western Christians has been too much on the *one* God, leading to a lop-sided *Imago Dei* that has an overemphasis on the individual (Moltmann 1981:199f),[5] fostering authoritarianism and exclusion (Boff 2000:111).   Conversely, the East has perhaps been too socialist and communal at the expense of the individual; it is only the concept of the Trinity, and by

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[5] I think this is also seen in what I believe is an over-emphasis on the centrality of Christ. At times I feel that at times our Christocentricity would make Jesus squirm; from his perspective, he was unable to do anything without the will of the Father and the empowerment of the Spirit (John 5:19, 36; 8:42; 10:30; 14:10).

extension *Imago Dei*, that can help us to hold these two in tension (Moltmann 1981:199f; Boff 2000:66).

The recognition of equal unique giftedness in organisational relationships, if properly applied, will naturally lead towards unifying, mutual interdependence (Hall 1986:151; Moltmann 1981:175). This creates unity (rather than competition) around the required task while allowing each member to thrive because they will be working largely within their area of giftedness while being supported – and supporting – the people around them (Buxton 2001:258f; Fernandez 2004:189; Westen et al. 2006:732). Simon and Garfunkel were wrong and Merton was right: no-one is an island (Merton 1955:166).

The concept of mutual interdependence is affirmed by psychological studies (e.g. Westen et al. 2006:731, 763), 'team orientation' and 'participatory' as two of the preferred cross-cultural leadership traits in the significant GLOBE study (CCL 2014:4), and the rise and success of 'participation' as a key component of community development practice (see Chambers 2005:115). These are all echoes of the *Imago Dei* watermark found in every human heart across all cultures.

Dynamic yet purposeful

While recognition of equally unique giftedness naturally leads to a unifying mutual interdependence, it is a fallacy to then conclude that pure democracy and/or a loss of direction may ensue. Again, if we take the Trinity as our reference point for how these three-in-one operate relationally, we find a dynamic yet very purposeful and intentional God (Moltmann 1981:174). Jesus wishes that he could avoid the cross, but submits to the will of the Father; Jesus is led into the desert by the Spirit, but it's he – not the Father or the

Spirit – who must endure the devil's temptations and the agony of the cross.[6] The situation was never static, and the biblical witness is a rollercoaster ride; yet the *Missio Dei* has always known where it is headed. The story started in a garden, and it will end without end in a city.

The mutual interdependence that *Imago Dei* elicits is necessarily dynamic; the submitting to the others giftedness and the utilising of one's own gift to serve the rest can only result in vibrancy (see Kruger 2002:18). It's no wonder that Jesus and Paul used metaphors that were alive and dynamic; family, marriage, the human body, 'living' stones. This does not mean that the relationships are not purposeful or structured per se, but the structure must be relational and serve the stakeholders rather than the other way around.

Again, the dynamic-yet-purposeful aspect of *Imago Dei* finds support in recent research. The GLOBE study mentioned earlier demonstrates that people across cultures want organisational purpose and direction (i.e. they want a leader), but they want a leader who is charismatic and permits participation without being autocratic, self-centred and malevolent (CCL 2014:4).   Structure and direction is appreciated by employees, provided it is participatory and not overbearing; finding that balance is a demonstrable correlate to organisational adaptability (Srivastava 2001:253).

Practical organisational implications of *Imago Dei*

My argument has been that *Imago Dei* is suitable for developing contextual models of organisational relationships, bringing greater integrity – and transformation - to the agenda

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[6] Again, I do not wish to discuss into the metaphysical complexities of this; my reflection here is simplistic, as the Father and the Spirit both suffered through Jesus' death on the cross. My point here is that it was Jesus who hung on the cross *because* he was submitting himself to the will of the Father, through the *strength* of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Father and the Spirit suffered vicariously through Jesus' suffering on the cross.

of community development organisations. In this section, I hope to explore some broad practical implications of key organisational relationships in the community development sector. My goal here is not to be prescriptive, but to provide some reflections on how starting with *Imago Dei* might shape aspects of various organisational relationships.

Internal organisational relationships

Internal *Imago* organisational relationships will likely create space for staff members to help shape and develop their own job description rather than trying to force them to fit a role that they only proportionally fit (Buxton 2001:209f). Perhaps staff will have greater input into the development of their PD days so that the organisation builds on their inherent gifts rather than attempting to train them into roles they simply weren't designed for. Further, the inherent value that *Imago Dei* gives each person will hopefully see greater equality present across the organisation; as stated earlier, we often expect village communities to be entirely participatory in nature, but fail to place this expectation on ourselves (Maggay 2015:5). Decisions that will impact subordinates are often made without seeking their input, and managers can be guilty of taking glory that isn't theirs while passing responsibility for failures to those under their care. Conversely, subordinates often don't appreciate the complex tasks and giftedness of their managers. It's difficult to operate along those lines while eliciting *Imago Dei* in the people around you.

Imago Dei will also hopefully shape internal organisational relationships towards greater mutual interdependence, reducing the tensions that so readily exist between managers and subordinates. *Imago Dei* offers the ability for an organisation to see leadership as 'distributed throughout the organisation' (Fowler 2000:168), drawing on the various

strengths present in the organisation rather than assuming that those in managerial positions are always best placed to make the required decision.[7]

Lastly, the dynamic purposefulness that *Imago Dei* is likely to foster may create the necessary space for broader staff input when reviewing the organisational mission and operations. Organisational sustainability is linked to its adaptability; its ability to remain dynamic yet purposeful (Fowler 2000:183ff). Further, role conflict, autocracy, and a lack of mutual respect are all correlates of employee burnout (Lieter and Maslach 2004:96ff); internal organisational relationships reflective of *Imago Dei* are well placed to mitigate this risk.

What about the leader?

While *Imago Dei* affirms rather than rejects the notion of leadership, I believe that it also has the potential to be a rather healing tonic to the tendency to focus on and elevate the role of the leader in organisational contexts. Moltmann makes the compelling argument that this overemphasis on the leader finds its roots in early Christian monotheism that was wrestling with Jesus-as-God in the face of Greek pluralism (Moltmann 1981:131). Western culture has struggled to shake the individualism that has followed; the over-emphasis on *one* God lending support to leadership that is tyrannical and domineering. Moltmann argues that keeping the Trinity at the centre would never allow Christians justification for that style of leadership:

> It is only when the doctrine of the Trinity vanquishes the monotheistic notion of the great universal monarch in heaven, and his divine patriarchs

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[7] The best manager is keenly aware that they aren't always best placed to make decisions, and actively employ people who strengths cover their weaknesses. One director I know readily admits that he always tries to 'recruit people better than myself.'

> in the world, that earthly rulers, dictators and tyrants cease to find any justifying religious archetypes anymore (Moltmann 1981:197).

The current over-emphasis on the leader's role in the organisation also runs the risk of seeing the Spirit primarily moving in the leader (Scarborough 2009:109), placing an incredibly heavy burden on the leader. I suspect that mutually interdependent leaders who understand their strengths and weaknesses will suffer lower rates of burn-out than their servant-leader counterparts;[8] not only are risk and responsibility shared through the web of organisational relationships, but the leader is also being re-filled as they pour themselves out in service to their subordinates. Perhaps then 'they can burn brightly without burning out' (Buxton 2001:275).

Thus *Imago Dei* offers to transform even the leader. I would argue this brings a greater sustainability to the current servant-leader model, reflective as it is of Trinitarian *kenosis*; for *Imago Dei* encourages the Trinitarian *plerosis* that sustains perpetual *kenosis*.

External organisational relationships

I wish to briefly touch on two external organisational relationships regularly encountered in the community development sector: firstly the relationship between the organisation and the people typically dubbed the 'beneficiaries' and secondly, the relationship between the organisation and its donors.

Reflecting on *Imago Dei* with program 'beneficiaries' may help the relationship move towards a healthier dynamic. In the first place, the inherent tones of equality and unique giftedness may help reduce the power differentiation that feeds the 'god-complexes' of both the organisational staff and the beneficiaries (Myers 2011:124,127). The mutually

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[8] I attempted to find research on rates of burn-out among those applying the 'servant-leadership' model, as I suspect the numbers would be similar in comparison to other models, but I was unable to find studies in this area.

interdependent aspect of *Imago Dei* may also help to reduce the one-directional perspective of transformational development that seems prevalent (Hammersley 2013:177); it may start conversations regarding how the 'beneficiaries' can assist the organisation in their own necessary, holistic transformation. Perhaps *Imago Dei* will kindly muddy the powerful waters of exactly who is helping who, a seemingly rare conversation in community development circles. Lastly, the dynamic yet purposeful elements of *Imago Dei* could contribute to creating the flexible-yet-focussed conditions that transformational community development practice often requires, while simultaneously sustaining and unifying the various stakeholders around the shared program.

I also wish to briefly explore potential implications of *Imago Dei* for the relationship between the organisation and the donor; for although we often refer to donors as partners, the relationship is often confined to the opening of a wallet in exchange for a brief ego boost (Sogge 2002:30; Shutt 2006:154). The focus of people tasked with donor relations is often on recruiting new donors, retaining them, and increasing their annual giving (e.g. Sargeant 2013).[9] Organisation-to-donor relations rarely look transformational, at times creating a well-hidden circle of irony where we partner with transformational development work in the field while unwittingly *deforming* our donor base through manipulative marketing that taps into their guilt or ego. It would be interesting to see donor relations managers exploring the concept of *Imago Dei* for their relationship with donors; it is possible that donors would be invited to participate in a wider variety of ways, drawing on

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[9] As part of a recent small research project done in conjunction with two other Masters students, we surveyed different ways in which 11 Christian aid organisations invited their donors to partner with them via their website. 69% of links were requests for donations/fundraising or raising awareness about the organisation. Only 2.9% invited the donor to pray about issues surrounding poverty; only 8% of tabs invited the donor to advocate for the poor, and only 4.6% invited the donor to change their lifestyle. Two of the eleven organisations contributed more than half of the invitations to activities other than donate; without their contribution to the survey, the figures would look significantly worse (Bergsma, Holtam, Spiller 2015:16f).

the inherently wide range of gifts spread throughout the donor base. Perhaps there would be less marketing, manipulative or otherwise, and a much greater focus on addressing the 'poverty of the non-poor' (Myers 2011:145ff); perhaps less grovelling by aid organisations, more 'aid' flowing back toward the donor base; perhaps the way organisations treat their donor base – and the way donors treat the development organisation – will look much more like an equally-gifted, mutually interdependent, dynamic-yet-purposeful relationship worthy of the term 'partnership'.

While there are certainly no quick fixes to the vexing issues surrounding relationships that community development organisations have with the poor and with their donor bases, *Imago Dei* may well help imagine a better way forward.

Intra-organisational relationships

Relationships between funding organisations and implementing organisations are often dubbed 'partnerships' with little acknowledgement of the power play and relational tension that occurs in these realms (Hammersley 2013:176). At times the perception seems to be that this relationship is an 'innate thing' (Pasteur and Scott-Villiers 2006:97), particularly from the funding organisation's perspective (Patel 2001:83). Capacity-building is almost always a one-directional activity developed with little negotiation or regard for culturally and/or politically appropriate methods (James 2001:25, 27). As Rick James notes:

> Northern NGOs demand much more of their partners than they do of themselves… If Northern NGOs believe in the effectiveness of capacity building for the organisational development of 'partners', they should practice it in their own organisations… There is something very disturbing and inconsistent if organisations only advocate a particular approach with those over whom they have power (James 2001:50,64).

Robert Chambers notes the 'orientation' of these relationships as typically being 'control' that demands 'outputs and indicators', suggesting that an 'empowerment orientation' is needed, where the emphasis is on "…discussion, negotiation… principles, processes and directions… subject to review, reflection, learning and adaptation" (Chambers 2005:73). His suggestion to remedy this situation, in *Putting the first last*, is worth quoting in full:

> …it is the hierarchal fields that need to be weakened to give individuals freedom to spin and move and to relate to others in all directions. These are moves into a new space, a meta-paradigm of uncertainty, autonomy, adaptation and multiple interactions, surviving and thriving in and on a permanence of change (Chambers 1997:204).

What perichoretic language! While Chambers would likely take issue with my analysis, I would suggest that he is describing inter-organisational relationships that are moving towards the *Imago Dei* paradigm, where capacity-building is a two-way street, where equality is granted, and giftedness is recognised and maximised to develop a vibrant, relational way of working together towards the common goal of holistic transformational development of *every* stakeholder (see Barefoot Collective 2009:11f). The relationship becomes an act of transformational development in and of itself.

Imagining *Imago* across cultures

Suggested ground rules

I made the case earlier in this paper that *Imago Dei* is a suitable foundational paradigm for organisational relationships across cultures. I am not suggesting here that *Imago* organisational relationships should be culturally appropriated or indigenised. *Imago Dei* doesn't need translating or indigenising, because it is present already beneath every culture.

Imago Dei needs uncovering, liberating, restoration to its rightful place chairing discussions on human relatedness.

Like any other contextual theology, we can expect that the concept of *Imago Dei* will both affirm and critique our current cultural approaches to organisational relationships. 'The kingdom of God is within you', Jesus said, but that mustard seed isn't a tree yet; it still needs growing and watering, tending and pruning. "Every human culture is an extremely complex mixture of brilliant truth, marred half-truths, and overt resistance to the truth" argues Tim Keller (2012:110). Organisations that seek to model their various relationships on the *Imago Dei* paradigm will find it both confirming and confronting of their current relationships.

The process of developing a culturally appropriate model of organisational relationship using the paradigm of *Imago Dei* must by definition be undertaken as a conversation grounded in love. To have it developed only by those in power would be a terrible parody. Rather *Imago Dei* must shape the manner in which *Imago Dei* is discussed and developed into a local paradigm of organisational relationships. No-one holds the monopoly on understanding *Imago Dei*, stakeholders in the conversation will need to depend on the wisdom and insight of others in order to fully and creatively explore its potential implications. The fact that *Imago Dei* must chair the meeting regarding *Imago Dei* necessitates that it is a regular, ongoing conversation, rather than a singular action. Think spirals rather than full stops.[10]

Ideally this conversation would take place within the organisation, while also at the same time being a conversation across cultures that can assist each other in finding existing

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[10]Thus this paper is inadequate: for example, in discussing various organisational relationships above, I have failed to discuss the organisation's relationship with God and the organisation's relationship with creation, even though both are key aspects of *Imago Dei*.

echoes of *Imago Dei* in one another's approach while also helping one another to uncover blind spots, applying the same principles for developing contextual theologies (e.g. Padilla 1980:76), for indeed, *Imago Dei* for organisational relationships is a contextual theology of organisational anthropology.

Contrasting Imago in the Australian and Indonesian contexts

There is a measure of irony then, for my solo attempt below at contrasting how *Imago Dei* might look in the Australian and Indonesian contexts. However, this paper is intended to be a starting question, a 'first-thought' contribution to a conversation rather than a completed, proven hypothesis. My aim here is to demonstrate that *Imago Dei* offers the potential to maintain cultural identities while positively shaping organisational relationships (Hall 1986:156f).[11]

Establishing a current, distinctive 'Indonesian' leadership model is problematic due to the wide cultural variance across the thousand or so inhabited islands of the archipelago. Most leadership studies in Indonesia have been undertaken in the Javanese context, most likely due to Java being a major business centre in Indonesia (Suryani et al. 2012:291).[12] Nevertheless, Indonesian organisational structures are typically hierarchical, bureaucratic and paternalistic with 'family' a regular metaphor for Indonesian organisational relationships (Suryani et al. 2012:296; Irawanto 2011:175). Recent research looking at preferred Indonesian leadership qualities produced results consistent with the international GLOBE study results (Suryani et al. 2012:299; Irawanto 2009:44), suggesting that a paternalistic, hierarchical approach to organisational relationships can be a culturally

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[11] My examples will only draw on the 'internal organisational relationships' outlined above.

[12] I mostly travel in the East-South-Eastern province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), and many of small to medium business are owned by people of Javanese or (very often) Chinese-Javanese descent. I have been told numerous times that the Javanese generally have a keener sense of business compared to other Indonesians.

appropriate expression of the *Imago Dei* paradigm (see for example, Irawanto 2011:189f, 193f).[13] *Imago Dei* may well affirm the clarity of roles and the highly relational nature of Indonesian organisational relationships while also gently reforming some aspects, perhaps permitting greater input by subordinates and greater mutual-interdependency between managers and subordinates.

Likewise, establishing a distinctive Australian model of leadership is problematic, but worth a brief exploration in this paper. Australians typically prefer a 'low-power distance', egalitarian approach to leadership and organisational relationships (Lewis 2006:199f), with high levels of autonomy (Hofstede 2016) and informality (Rymer 2008:116).[14] Australians generally dislike the 'tall-poppy'; the leader is preferably 'one of the mates', yet Australians paradoxically still desire strong leadership (see Rymer 2008:123). *Imago Dei* will likely affirm the equality that Australians desire while perhaps challenging the notions that 'tall poppies need the chop' and the related: 'you'd better give me a good reason if you want me to do it'. It might reduce the Australian preference for the individual while increasing mutual interdependence and unity across the organisation; less of 'me and my bit'; more of 'us, and our organisation'.

My goal here is not so much to draw conclusions regarding the impact that an *Imago Dei* shaped organisation might have, but to demonstrate that very different cultural aspects of the Indonesian-Australian organisational context may continue under the paradigm of *Imago Dei* (Indonesian patriarchy and Australian egalitarianism) while simultaneously being redeemed, reshaped and reimagined by *Imago Dei*. My hypothesis is that *Imago Dei*

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[13] Suryani et al. use the word *bapak-ism* to describe paternalism in the Indonesian context. While it is certainly hierarchical, the *bapak* or 'father' leads by modelling, supervising, guiding, energising and motivating their subordinates (Suryani et al. 2012:301).

[14] See Appendix 1 for a tabled comparison of Australian and Indonesian cultural dimensions.

wouldn't so much result in one universal model of organisational relationship, but that existing cultural-contextual models will be transformed to look more like the perichoretic dance of the Trinity to the benefit of all involved.

A word of warning: working in the here-not-yet

I wish to close this paper with a word of warning – perhaps most to my naïve self – that developing contextual organisational relationships using the paradigm of *Imago Dei* is very much a work attempted in the here-not-yet (Enthwistle and Morony 2011:302; Fernandez 2004:185; Hall 1986:63). It is an eschatological task that must be done with the hope, suffering and persistence of Brueggemann's *Prophetic imagination*. Getting leaders to permit an *Imago* conversation in their organisation may prove to be a daunting task; and even where *Imago Dei* is permitted as paradigm, the people attempting it are as broken and twisted as myself, and together we'll find creative ways of manipulating *Imago Dei* into *Imago Diaboli*. Despite this, youthful dreaming is still an imperative; we must not be afraid to dream of and attempt life-as-its-meant-to-be in the messy here and now, as Hall argues:

> …Within the community of the Cross we can begin to *image God* in our relationships with others of our kind. It is undoubtedly unimpressive, this beginning, with respect to what it might be and finally must be… yet compared with the being-alone and being-against… it may well be that church [and organisations] of the near future… will prove the one inter-and transnational movement capable of upholding and communicating a vision of world community that is not just another cloaked ideology of empire (Hall 1986:160, emphasis original).

Conclusion

I acknowledge the complexity of leadership and organisational relationships, the multifaceted discussions on the nature of the Trinity and the debates around *Imago Dei*; I realise that Hall's words above were written thirty years ago, and I readily admit that holistic community development practice is easy to talk about but very difficult to do. In light of the immense intelligence, discussion and research that have been applied to these topics, my hypothesis may appear somewhat naive. But I also wish to give an equal nod to the scavengers on the Smokey Mountain rubbish tip in the Philippines, who reflected on the *Imago Dei* while they worked among the trash, the cacophony and the stench of the garbage dump in sharp contrast to the silence and comfort of the libraries, books and journal articles that I have enjoyed while writing this paper. Their reflections on *Imago Dei* radically and holistically transformed their community life and the life of the priest and seminarians who initially thought they'd come to help and teach (Beltran 2012:126ff, 163ff). Reading their story alongside my brief study of *Imago Dei* was incredibly helpful for me,[15] and enables me to I close this paper with a quiet yet firm resolution to attempt *Imago Dei* a little more in my various organisational – and non-organisational - relationships. Relationship done in this pattern is silent-yet-loud participation in, worship of and witness to our incredible God who stands behind it all. He made all things good, and is making all things new - because His steadfast love endures forever.

May our love go and do likewise.

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[15] I was recently given *Faith and struggle on Smokey Mountain* by a friend, and literally finished reading it the night before submitting this paper. It is a powerful story demonstrating the holistic, mutually transformative work that can occur when contextual theology is developed and applied with current community development practice. A profoundly encouraging and humbling read.

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Appendix 1: Hoefstede's Indonesian and Australian Cultural Dimensions

Below is a chart comparing six cultural dimensions that Hoefstede has mapped for numerous countries, including Indonesia and Australia. While the comparison necessarily makes broad generalisations, Hoefstede's work demonstrates the need for leadership and organisational relationships to be developed along culturally appropriate lines. Leadership models best suited for Australia will likely fail if attempted in Indonesia without modification.

 The plotted cultural dimensions are:

PD – Power Distance (acceptance of unequal power by those with less power)
INDIV – Individuality (preference for the interests of the individual)
MASC – Masculinity ('tough' love; competitive, assertive, material reward)
UAI – Uncertainty Avoidance Index (uncomfortableness with ambiguity and uncertainty)
LTO – Long Term Orientation (preference for tradition, cautious of change)
INDUL – Indulgence (preference for gratification and fun over maintaining social norms)

Source: https://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html
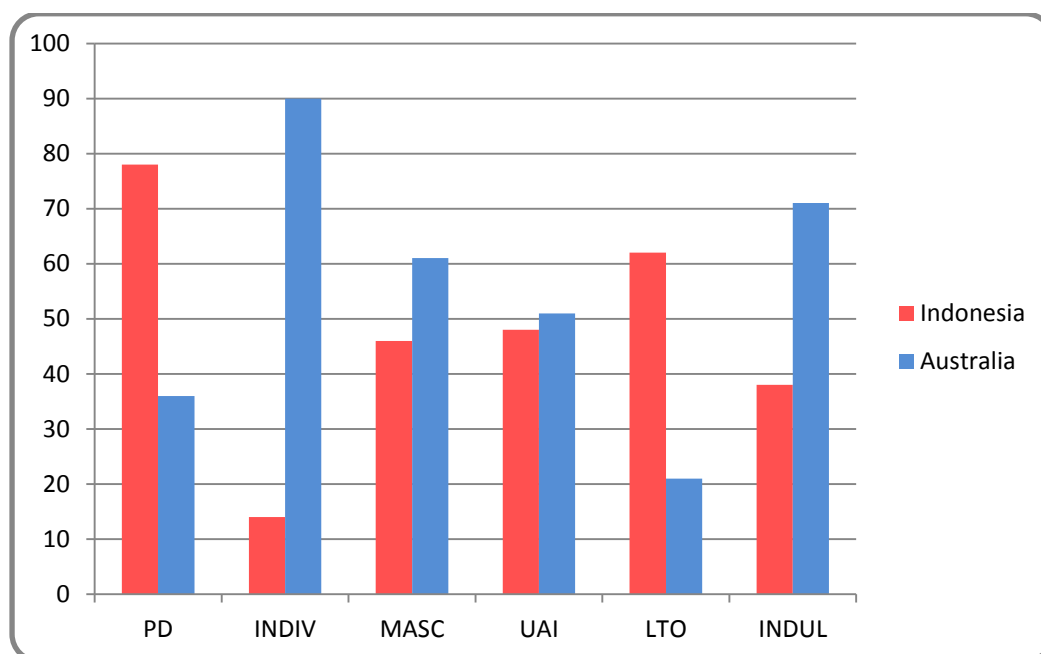
Appendix 2: *Imago Dei* and Jayakaran's 'ten seeds' PLA tool

I find myself drawn towards Dr. Ravi Jayakaran's ten seed method of community discussion and information gathering, and I thought it would be an interesting personal exercise to map my experience of *Imago Dei* in the Australian and Indonesian contexts to see if there were places of overlap/compliment/shared deficiencies. I allocated 10 'seeds' for each: blue to represent Australia, and red to represent Indonesia. Regardless of the accuracy of my plotting, I believe that Jayakaran's method could be a useful tool for organisations to highlight areas of continuity and discontinuity with the *Imago Dei* paradigm, particularly given the participatory nature of the plotting (see Jayakaran 2002). The various areas could be added to or changed to explore different organisational relationships, depending on what insights develop from the organisation's discussions on the relational aspects of *Imago Dei*.