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Rethinking Contemporary Church: Graph dynamics, Trinity interpretation, and hidden role of women as missional networkers¹

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ABSTRAK

“*The times they are a-changin’*,” demikian Bob Dylan menulis lagunya yang terkenal. Kita semua setuju dengan pernyataan tersebut, dan ini adalah saat yang tepat untuk membicarakan bagaimana gereja saat ini perlu berubah. Namun pertanyaannya adalah perubahan seperti apa yang ingin dilakukan gereja? Apakah dalam Kristologi, atau Liturgi, atau Eklesiologi? Mungkin banyak teolog yang mencoba memikirkan kembali posisi Kristologi mereka, namun hanya sedikit yang berani mengakui bahwa ada sejumlah pertanyaan mendesak dalam pemikiran lama Eklesiologi, seperti yang ditulis Jim Petersen (2009). Artikel ini mengeksplorasi lebih dari sekedar pertanyaan sehari-hari seperti yang dieksplorasi Strauch (1986), namun kami mengajukan pertanyaan terkait dengan hierarki persisten yang saat ini terkesan terlalu kaku untuk merangkul banyak teknologi baru, seperti jejaring graf. Kami memperluas gagasan lebih lanjut yang telah kami diskusikan sebelumnya (Simon & Christianto, 2020). Khususnya, sejak beberapa tahun silam, telah muncul berbagai diskusi seputar bagaimana situasi pasca-Covid-19 akan mempengaruhi gereja-gereja di seluruh dunia. Meskipun beberapa buku telah diterbitkan mengenai hal tersebut, khususnya bagaimana para pimpinan gereja perlu beradaptasi menanggapi keadaan baru ini, buku-buku tersebut tampak cenderung agak reaktif daripada melihat secara mendalam tantangan eklesiologi saat ini yang ditimbulkan oleh Covid-19. Beberapa gereja telah mengeksplorasi implikasi potensial dari model gereja cair seperti yang disarankan oleh Pete Ward, yang diilhami oleh seorang sosiolog Zygmunt Bauman. Dalam artikel singkat ini, penulis mengajak para pembaca untuk belajar dari gereja-gereja kecil dan sederhana, khususnya dari sudut pandang teori Graf/jejaring. Oleh karena itu, dalam laporan awal ini, mari kita bahas sebuah graf interpretasi Allah Tritunggal (the God Trinity) dan implikasinya

Kata kunci:
Spiritualitas modern,
relasionalitas, jejaring
graph, gereja abad-21

¹ Note: Although earlier version of this draft has been published in V. Christianto, *Hermeneutika tanpa Hermes* (Jakarta: Bina Warga, 2022), this extended article has not been published yet in a journal.

terhadap model Graf gereja. Kami melanjutkan artikel kami sebelumnya di Jurnal Amreta, yang membahas model gereja sederhana yang terinspirasi dari pembacaan atas Injil Yohanes pasal 1; yaitu ketika Yesus memanggil murid-murid-Nya yang pertama untuk mengikuti Dia, lih. Mis. model *free church* yang diusulkan oleh Miroslav Volf bertolak dari Injil Matius 17. Dengan mempertimbangkan komunitas-komunitas Kristiani paling awal yang telah tumbuh di masa lalu khususnya pada era abad-abad pertama Masehi, seperti yang dijelaskan oleh Wim Dryer dll., izinkan penulis mengajukan proposisi baru bahwa banyak hambatan berat yang dihadapi oleh Gereja-Gereja saat ini, hanya dapat ditanggapi dengan baik dengan memikirkan kembali kesaksian sebagai pengalaman bersama di antara jejaring atau relasi persahabatan. Dengan kata lain, penyebaran Kabar Sukacita yang cepat hanya dapat dicapai dengan memperkenalkan jenis analisis sosial baru, yang disebut teori dinamika Graf. Penulis juga akan membahas beberapa implikasi khususnya bagaimana peran para perempuan yang kerap tersembunyi dalam mengembangkan jejaring misional gerejani tersebut. Sebagai penutup, harapan penulis adalah bahwa pandangan tersebut akan membawa beberapa wawasan baru tentang bagaimana menghubungkan antara praksis eklesiologis gereja Kristen mula-mula dan gereja-gereja abad ke-21, terutama di berbagai wilayah dunia saat tubuh Kristus berada dalam situasi aniaya.

ABSTRAK (Afrikans)

“*The times they are a-changin’*,” soos Bob Dylan sy bekende liedjie geskryf het. Ons stem almal saam met daardie opmerking, en dit is so tydig om te praat hoe die kerk vandag in a-changin moet wees. Die vraag is eger watter soort verandering die kerk probeer omhels? Is dit in Christologie, of liturgie, of Ekklesiologie. Miskien probeer baie teoloë om hul Christologie-posisies te heroorweeg, maar min waag om te erken daar is 'n aantal dringende vrae in Ekklesiologie ou gedagtes, soos Jim Petersen geskryf het. Die huidige artikel verken verder as bloot daaglikse vrae soos Strauch verken (1986), maar ons vra vrae wat verband hou met volgehoue hiërargie wat nogal te rigied kan wees om baie nuwe tegnologieë, soos grafieknetwerk, te omhels. Ons brei verdere idees uit wat ons voorheen bespreek het (Simon & Christianto, 2020). Sedert etlike jare gelede was daar verskeie besprekings oor hoe die post-Covid-19 pandemie-situasie kerke regoor die wêreld sal raak. Alhoewel verskeie boeke gepubliseer is oor hoe kerkleiers by hierdie nuwe omstandighede moet aanpas en daarop reageer, lyk hierdie verslae eerder reaktief as om in diepte te kyk na die huidige ekklesiologiese uitdagings wat Covid-19 stel. Sommige kerke het die potensiële implikasies van die vloeibare kerkmodel ondersoek soos voorgestel deur Pete Ward, geïnspireer deur die sosioloog Zygmunt Bauman. In hierdie kort artikel nooi die skrywer lesers uit om by klein en eenvoudige kerke te leer, veral vanuit 'n grafiek-/netwerkteorie-perspektief. Kom ons bespreek dus in hierdie aanvanklike verslag 'n grafiese interpretasie van die God Drie-eenheid en die implikasies daarvan vir die kerklike grafiese model. Ons gaan voort met ons vorige artikel in die Amreta Journal, waar ons 'n eenvoudige kerkmodel bespreek het wat geïnspireer is deur die interpretasie van die netwerkmodel van Johannes hoofstuk 1; dit wil sê toe Jesus Sy eerste dissipels groep het om Hom te volg, vgl. byvoorbeeld die vrye kerkmodel ontwikkel deur Miroslav Volf uit die Evangelie van Matteus 17. Met inagneming van die vroegste Christelike gemeenskappe wat in die verlede gegroei het, veral in die era van

die eerste eeue nC, soos verduidelik deur Wim Dryer ens. ek het 'n voorstel gemaak Dit is duidelik dat baie van die ernstige struikelblokke wat kerke vandag in die gesig staar, slegs behoorlik gereageer kan word deur getuieis te heroorweeg as 'n gedeelde getuieis en ervaring tussen netwerke of verhoudings van vriende. Met ander woorde, die vinnige verspreiding van die Aankondiging kon slegs bereik word deur 'n nuwe soort sosiale analise bekend te stel, genaamd grafiekteorie en netwerkdinamika. Ons sal die gevolge van hierdie nuwe voorstel in hierdie oorsigartikel bespreek, sowel as 'n paar implikasies in die besonder vir die dikwels verborge rol van vroue in die ontwikkeling van hierdie kerklike missionale netwerke. Om af te sluit, is dit hierdie skrywer se hoop dat so 'n in-diepte kyk sal 'n bietjie vars insig bring in hoe om te verbind tussen ekklesiologiese praktyke van die vroeë Christelike kerk en die 21ste-eeuse kerke, veral in baie streke van die wêreld waar die liggaam van Christus onder erge vervolging verkeer.

ABSTRACT

“*The times they are a-changin’*,” as Bob Dylan wrote his famous song. We all agree with that remark, and it is so timely to speak how the church today needs to be in a-changin’. The question, though, is what kind of change the church is seeking to embrace? Is it in Christology, or liturgy, or Ecclesiology. Perhaps many theologians try to rethink their Christology positions, but few dare to admit there are a number of pressing questions in Ecclesiology old thoughts, as Jim Petersen wrote. The present article explores beyond mere daily questions such as Strauch explored (1986), but we ask questions related to persistent hierarchy which may be quite too rigid for embracing many new technologies, such as graph network. We extend further ideas that we discuss previously (Simon & Christianto, 2020). More than that since several years ago, there have been various discussions regarding how the post-Covid-19 situation will affect churches throughout the world. Although several books have been published on how church leaders should adapt to respond to these new circumstances, such reports seem rather reactive rather than looking in depth at the current ecclesiological challenges posed by Covid-19. Some churches have explored potential implications of the liquid church model as suggested by Prof. Pete Ward, inspired by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. In this short article, the author invites readers to learn from small and simple churches, especially from a graph dynamics/network theory perspective. Therefore, in this initial report, let us discuss a graph interpretation of the God Trinity and its implications for the church graph model. We continue our previous article in the Amreta Journal, where we discussed a simple church model inspired by the interpretation of the John Gospel chapter 1; i.e. when Jesus called His first disciples to follow Him, cf. for example the free church model considered by Miroslav Volf from the Gospel of Matthew 17. Taking into account the earliest Christian communities that have grown in the past, especially in the era of the first centuries AD, as explained by Wim Dryer etc., let us put forward a proposition: that many of the serious obstacles faced by churches today can only be responded to properly by rethinking shared testimony and experience among networks or relationships of friends. In other words, rapid spreading of the Great Good News from God could only be achieved by introducing a new type of social analysis, called graph theory and network dynamics. We will discuss some implications in particular for the often hidden role of women in developing and propagating these ecclesiastical missional

Keywords:
Everyday Spirituality, 21st
church, ecclesiology,
graph network dynamics

networks. To conclude, it is this writer's hope that such an in-depth viewpoint will bring several insights into how to connect between ecclesiological praxis of the early Christian churches and the 21st-century churches, especially in many regions of the world where the body of Christ is under severe persecution.

INTRODUCTION

Although more than dozen of studies have been written regarding many aspects in recent 21st church practices, including problems in Christology, relationship among mainstream and Pentecostal churches etc. (Hwang, 2004; van Kooij & Tsalatsa, 2012). Nonetheless, rarely has been a study on the deep ecclesiology challenges faced by churches today in the context of situations of post-Covid pandemic, which we experience globally in the past few years regardless of where we live, which has so many impacts on our daily activities, including our works and also religious activities. Church attendances tend to decrease (although there are bouncing church attendances reported in recent months), and also a number of church ceremonies shall be delivered in a digital way. Although some books have been published on how church leaders shall adapt and respond to this new circumstance, the reports seem to be a bit reactive instead of taking a deep look into present ecclesiology challenges imposed by the Covid-19. Some churches have explored the potential implication of

the liquid church model as suggested by Pete Ward, which himself was inspired by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman.²

Perhaps many theologians try to rethink their Christology positions, but few dare to admit there are a number of pressing questions in Ecclesiology old thoughts, as Jim Petersen wrote. The present article explores beyond mere daily questions such as Strauch explored (1986), but we ask questions related to persistent hierarchies which may be quite too rigid for embracing many new technologies, such as graph network. We extend further ideas that we discuss previously (Simon & Christianto, 2020).

Moreover, the churches face not only challenges caused by covid-19 and related issues. Daniel Estulin has written book on how Tavistock Institute seems to play greater role to modern societies, not only in Europe but also to America, and ours too.³ There are also other negative influences, caused by liberalism, cultural relativism, and degradation of Judeo-Christianity values to young people, and much more damaging influences of such Tavistock hidden role in society, so to speak. All of these may discourage many church leaders, that there is not much hope in the future, except to accept the dire reality, such as declining Christianity in Europe and UK, as also happened during first thousand years of Christianity in Middle East, Africa etc. (see Philip Jenkins's book: *Lost*

² Pete Ward. *Liquid Ecclesiology: the Gospel and the Church*. (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2017).

³ As of today, I read this morning at Christian Post, that the US Federal Law has passed same-sex marriage bill. Url: <https://www.christianpost.com/news/house-passes-amended-same-sex-marriage-bill-sends-it-to-biden.html> (source: Internet, accessed 9th Dec, 2022)

History of Christianity"). To quote a short review: "Considering Christianity has been the most profound influence on the culture of the United Kingdom for over a thousand years, this trend (with the resulting accompanying trends in the breakdown of the family and plummeting birthrates) portents a dark future."

Therefore, a big question to ponder by Christian leaders in Asia, is: "*How can we come up with methods in order to avoid the same pattern of declining Christianity after rapid period before moder era?*" Or if you would ask more proactively, how can we reverse the obvious pattern of declining Christianity in modern societies, in Europe, UK, USA etc.

Or, to put it more bluntly: "*Does it seem inevitable that post-Christianity era will be the fate of all societies in all modern regions of the world?*"

Therefore, in this review article, we will study a graph interpretation of the God Trinity and implications to Graph model of the church. We will also discuss implications to the psycho-social meaning of such graph network model of the church. It is our hope that such an in-depth look will bring several fresh insights into how to connect between ecclesiological experience and praxis of the early Christian church and the 21st-century churches, especially in many regions of the world where the body of Christ is under severe persecution.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative method, mainly literature review. Data was obtained through an in-depth study of books, journals and articles relevant to the topics discussed, especially regarding everyday spirituality. The implications of everyday spirituality and friendship dynamics in and through the church in future network mapping will also be explained in detail.

Findings and Discussion

Hermeneutics presuppositions: Towards a grounded approach to ecclesiology

Reading some books written by scholars like Fritjof Capra, Gregg Braden, and others lead us to question where we are heading as an entire human civilization.

One of the most interesting insights came from Iain McGilchrist. In his book, *The master and his emissary*, he suggests us to look at our divided brain: the deep polarization caused by two hemispheres of human brain has led mankind astray. ⁴In essence, his arguments can be summarized as follows: learning from church fathers until St. Augustine around 3rd or 4th century AD, we can read an integrative perspective and harmony between the left and right brain. But since then and especially to the work of

⁴ Iain McGilchrist. *The Master and His emissary*. (London: Yale University Press, 2015).

scholastic theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, our theological thoughts have gone down the road where the left brain predominated the entire brain function.

Perhaps for a moment, we can take a breath with a sort of relief that God has come to rescue at the beginning of the 20th century, with the emergence of the new Pentecostalism movement (cf. Azusa street movement, 1906-1908). But after a few decades, the leaders of this new movement have turned into more like prosperity teachers in disguise, led by those health and wealth televangelists. Even if some of them have repented, including Ps. Jim Bakker and Ps. Benny Hinn, the damage has been done.

Therefore, now we can ask: what can we do to offer rescue to this situation? Or should we return to the first Pentecostalism movement when Peter spoke with authority and the early church movement was equipped with signs and wonders? What does it mean to worship God *in Spirit and Truth*? And does it suggest that we need to develop ecclesiology from the grounded approach?

It is known that *Grounded theory* has influenced social science research for nearly 50 years and has produced many theoretically innovative studies. This powerful methodology employs strategies to gather rich data and encourage the "emergence of conceptual categories" with careful analysis

to produce explanations and potentially generate theory. The 'theory making' potential of grounded theory has a natural application in theological research.⁵

As Bruce A. Stevens wrote:

“The aim of grounded theology is to develop theology from the ‘bottom up’. The methodology is essentially that of grounded theory. This involves looking for emergent themes in the data, articulating what might be considered a theological insight and evaluating this in light of the theological tradition. Most qualitative research using grounded theory in practical theology has been exploratory and largely descriptive. Theological reflection is often an afterthought, and not the goal of the research.”⁶

Therefore, let us begin with several “grounded” observations. As Paul G. Hiebert -a missiology scholar- once emphasized, there seems to be a systematic “*flaw of excluded middle*” by many missionaries coming to Asia and Africa, whose people are accustomed by an overwhelming number of spirit manifestations (Hiebert, 1980).

In a similar tone, in our previous two papers, we argued that it seems like an insurmountable task if we want to reach God in His richness, with simple binary logic (Aristotelian way), because the binary logic cannot capture the complexity nature of human mind (Ward, 2017; Zawislak, 2019).

⁵ Bruce A. Stevens. ‘Cosmic Loneliness’: An Exploration in Grounded Theology. *J. Aging Geriatr Med* 2018, 2:2.

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Therefore we argue that eastern philosophical systems, such as *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* in classic Javanese belief, suggest neither nor logic, often called "*ngono yo ngono ning ojo ngono.*" (you can do that, but don't do like that.) That "neitherness" or "bothness" position can be considered paradoxical in terms of classical Aristotelian logic but not in sentential logic.

In other words, we can hypothesize that any system of logic that can convey "neitherness" or "bothness" situations may consider better to explain the Divinity Realm.

After discussing such a logical proposition, let us consider Iain McGilchrist again. As a psychiatrist, his argument on the left and right function of the human brain can be captured in essence as follows: the left hemisphere which usually processes in detailed manner any problem (logically) should not predominate the right brain, which captures holistic and spiritual process (McGilchrist, 2015).

In the words of Blaise Pascal, probably Gilchrist's conclusion is quite similar to:

"The heart has its own logic, which reason cannot understand."

In that sense, both heart as spiritual brain function should not be governed by the left brain function. In other words, in the spirituality realm especially

in worshipping God, we should not let the emissary (Logical process) lead the master. It should be the other way around.

This problem of choosing between Logic or *going beyond Logic*, or from rationality to go beyond rational thinking can be traced back even to classical history of mathematics. It is known that Pythagoreans Worship rationality and Logic in mathematics, up to the point when they were shocked when one of their disciples found an irrational number, those Pythagoreans left that disciple drowning in the sea.

So we know that what McGilchrist described is a real issue and not just a joke.

Similarly, several inventions in mathematics were not easily accepted at first, such as transcendental numbers, transfinite sets, Cantor sets, or non-Diophantine arithmetics.

Let us give some examples of non-Diophantine arithmetics. From primary school, all of us learn that $1+1=2$, $2+2=4$, and so on. For instance, the arithmetics of giving follow non-standard Logic. And from management studies, we learn that good teamwork needs synergy, where $1+1=3$. The value of synergy is much more just the addition of the members. Finally, we can also point out that Trinitarian Logic cannot be reconciled with

Aristotelian Logic or Diophantine arithmetic, as we learn that Trinity means that $1+1+1=1$.

That can be considered as example of non-Diophantine Logic in Theology. That non-standard Logic in understanding Trinity can be compared with the notion of the uncountable noun in English grammar.

It is known that countable nouns mean $1+1=2$ and so on, like adding of two apples, two oranges, two potatoes, etc. But that arithmetic operation does not follow uncountable nouns. For example, we cannot call water + water = 2 water because water is an uncountable noun. But we shall call it "a glass of water" or "a cup of coffee."

That is another metaphor for a better understanding of Trinity from non-Diophantine arithmetics.

Now the question is: How can a church be united with God in Christ? We will explore this question as follows.

Hypothesis

Before we discuss further, we shall begin with several assumptions, especially concerning anthropology, or perhaps it is better to call it "theo-anthropology." As Threlfall wrote, "Students of Christian theology would

affirm with confidence that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is fundamental to theological anthropology. But when pressed with the question, "What does it mean that humans were created in the image of God?" their answers are less than confident. (Threlfall, 2019)

One thing becomes clear, that we shall find a delicate balance between market-oriented selfishness as coined in the term, *homo economicus*, and even more as Yuval Harari wrote: "toward *homo deus*," vis a vis term introduced by the book of Genesis 1, *homo imago Dei*. It becomes clear that once we accept the latter term, *homo imago Dei*, then we find an array of moral and ethics imperatives derived from that stance, in opposed to morally-neutral economics considerations which are often be judged by utility-maximisation purposes. According to Fikkert & Rhodes, "In particular, if left unchecked, the narratives, institutions, policies, and practices of mainstream economics that are at the heart of globalization tend to transform *homo imago Dei*—an inherently relational being created in the image of a relational God—into *homo economicus*—an autonomous, individualistic, purely self-interested, materialistic creature." (Fikkert & Rhodes, 2017).

Allow us to argue in favor of theo-anthropological view, called: *indivi-group*, i.e. human beings are both individuals and part of their societies/communities. Or, in elementary particle terms, we may call that

human beings are like *fersons* (composed of mixed fermion and bosons). That is our hypothesis in this article.

The above hypothesis brings us to a question: Does a graph interpretation of God The Trinity bring new insights to the socio-praxis of a church?

Graph interpretation of the Trinity

As it is known from many elementary mathematics textbooks, we can consider three basic well known notions of discrete mathematics or graph theory and related fields of mathematics, i.e.: matrix, relation and graph. They are known, but the given definitions will allow for introducing a uniform notation and allow for entering some restrictions on the considered ideas. To the surprise of many beginners, these objects are equivalent. It means that based on one of them the other ones can be constructed (built, determined) in an unambiguous manner (Zawislak, 2019).

It is interesting to remark here that most symbols to describe God the Trinity from ancient times look quite similar to mathematical objects, for instance: knots, or *Borromean ring*, or a graph.

As Zawislak puts it:

“The paper focuses on a proposal of redraw the last scheme in a form of a graph in the sense of graph theory. As we see something was done in medieval times and (surprisingly) it looks almost like a contemporary graph. The Holy Trinity is a mystery. But if we would like to analyze the scheme, it is partly illogical and partly logical, i.e.: if every Person is connected to God then God seems as the fourth element different than mentioned ones. If they are related to God why are not identical one to another (transitivity)? Logically – ghost is invisible, man body is visible, ghost is a spiritual entity and man is a material entity. Therefore, the proposal of redrawing of the scheme consist in drawing a graph, which could overcome the mentioned discrepancies. What is interesting, mathematical analyses of the Bible and related topics have been done in versatile aspects. Graph theory was not mentioned in some references, however, versatile networks were used.”⁷

Provided we can accept such a graph/network interpretation of God the Trinity, then let us discuss implications of this analogy to an ecclesiology model, which for convenience, we will call “Graph Model of church.”

Introducing Graph Model of simple churches

Basically the Kingdom Graph model is quite simple and still maintains the basics of healthy ecclesiology, rooted in allied communities (koinonia). The Kingdom Graph model is somewhat different from the pattern of mission approach that is usually developed in the West by mission experts which is often inappropriately carried out in Asian countries that value community/family; while in the West the emphasis on mass

⁷ S. Zawislak. The Holy Trinity in The Light of Graph Theory. (*Engineerxxi*, vol. 2, 2019).

communication, such as the TRC and others, may not be as effective as it was in the past.

To quote Schor, one useful approach to analysis is network theory: "The new approach to modeling is a product of network theory, the branch of mathematics devoted to analyzing relational systems. Here, a network is any system that can be represented as a set of 'links' connecting a series of 'nodes.'"

Basically, a graph represents relationships between entities called nodes. A simple definition of a graph as a data structure: A graph is a general data structure consisting of a finite node (or vertices) and a set of edges connecting them.

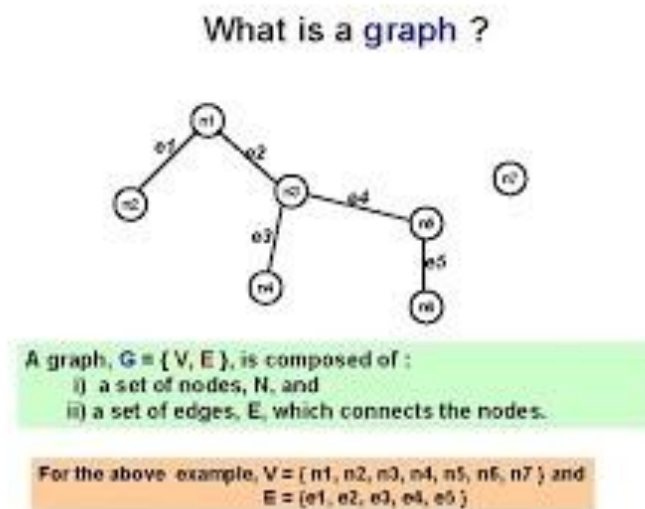


Diagram 1. Simple definition of a graph

At this point, some readers may ask: wow, this is too mathematical, so what does that have to do with the church? Answer: if we listen to the

Lord's Prayer, there is a well-known phrase there, Thy Kingdom Come. And the kingdom of Heaven, which we hope to come and come to earth, should also imitate the relational pattern and perichoresis, which are two of the characteristics of God the Trinity (or in Javanese expression, we may call Him: *Sang Hyang Triniji Suci*). See for example, the following Diagram 2:

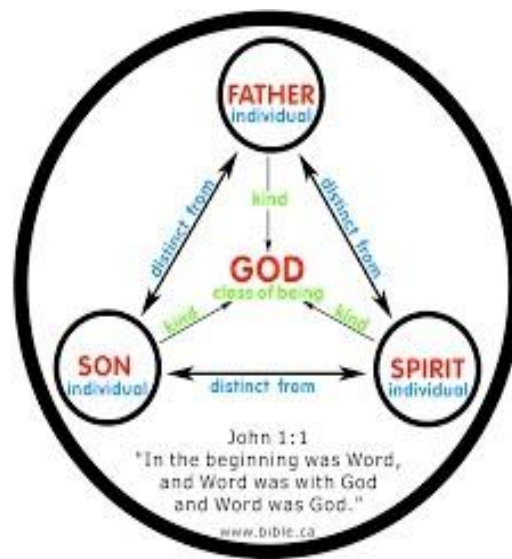


Diagram 2. Trinity in a graph perspective

If we can accept the perspective of a relational graph to describe the Trinity above, then it is certainly not difficult to begin to realize that the expression of prayer: Thy Kingdom Come becomes a prayer and at the same time a hope for the church to continue to grow as a relational and perichorecial community. Or in the words of Wim Dreyer:

“Different network models help us understand how the early church functioned and had the ability to preach the gospel in a wide area. As already indicated, traveling teachers, healers, and

merchants were important in the spread of the Christian faith (see Arterbury 2005). In villages, towns, and groups of Christians congregated, receiving traveling teachers with hospitality. This traveler brings news, maybe money to help people local Christians and to bring news and contributions to the next group of Christians.”⁸

Then where can we verify whether this concept is at the same time biblical and can also be applied in the field?

From Diagram 2 we quote briefly from John 1:1, let us examine the Gospel of John 1 says about the first disciples who started following Jesus. If we study carefully John 1:29-51, there are some interesting things about how the first disciples were called by Jesus directly, and some were introduced by others (by John the Baptist and their brother). That is, the essence is relationship or is relational. See also Garrison (2016).

Let's put verses 29-51 in a simple table:

⁸ Wim A Dreyer, “The Amazing Growth of the Early Church,” *HTS Theological Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 1–7.

Table 1. Graph of the relation among first disciples of Jesus

Text	Who introduced?	To whom is Jesus being introduced?
1:29-34	John the Baptist	John's disciples
1:37	John the Baptist	Two disciples, including Andres
1:41-42	Andrew	Simon
1:43	Jesus	Philip
1:45-47	Philip	Nathanael

If we put the above table into a graph, it would be as follows:

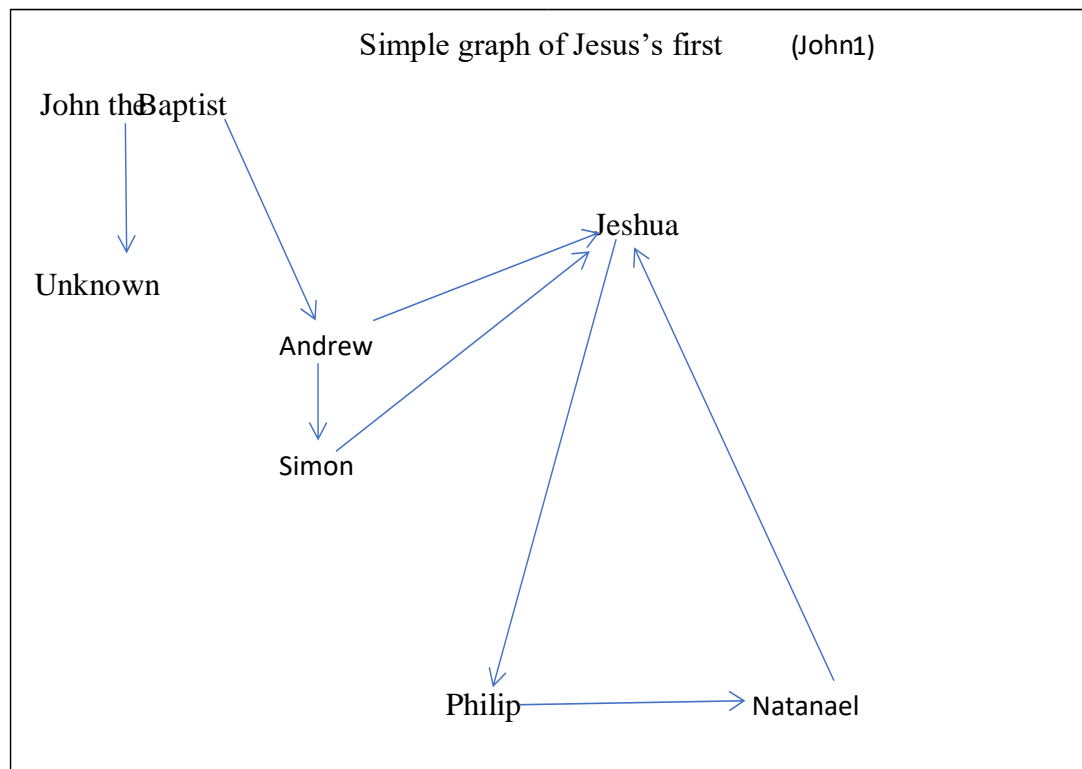


Diagram 3. Graph of the relation among the first disciples of Jesus (John chapter 1)

We can also read about such a natural acquaintance relationship in the introductory chapter written by Brother Yun in the book *The Underground Church* (Bach & Zhu, 2019). Furthermore, Diagram 4 shows how the Jesus Movement can be seen from a graph network perspective.

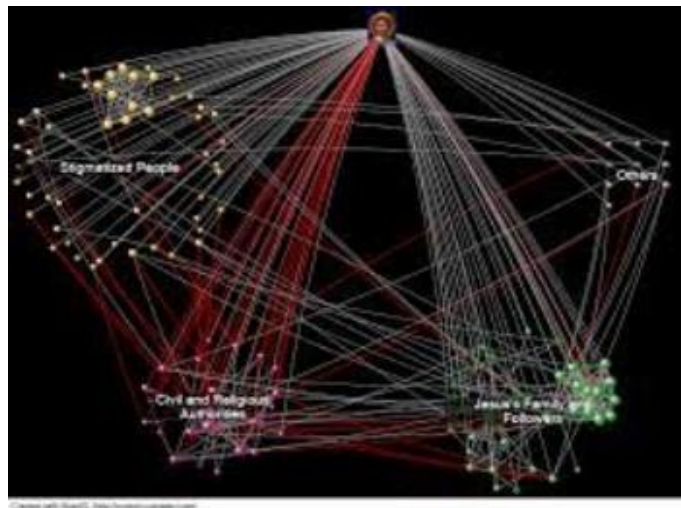


Diagram 4. Jesus movement's network

This is a simple explanation of the proposed Graph model of churches, which of course, needs to be explored again to be a blessing in understanding the church process more dynamically.

Implications for contemporary churches

Even though there are indeed many obstacles for the continued life of the churches in this country, whether they are large churches or medium/small churches, it would be good if we also learn to be grateful that there are also various lessons in the midst of this pandemic atmosphere.

A few weeks ago, a friend of the writer sent an article from Rev. Thom S.

Rainer, as I attached at the end of this paper. However, if you read carefully, Rev.Thom Rainer's article may not fully match what we experience on a daily basis. Therefore, allow me to provide a summary in my version regarding the wisdom in the midst of this pandemic (at least from what I am experiencing at the moment).

An uneasy recipe: hidden lessons from graph dynamics theory

Apart from suggestions for instance by BILD encyclical document for churches network in Global South,⁹ and other reports, actually there are only a few studies on how we can apply lessons from graph theory into better organizational model of modern churches. Here is a few things that we can offer here, although allow us to give a caveat emptor: *the following advise is not meant to be mandatory.*

Characteristics of a living organisation

Argyris (1977) defines learning as the detection and correction of mistakes, while Kaplan and Norton call it strategic readiness. With the capacity and readiness above, we will be able to make changes happen. This is what Gary Hamel and Lusa Valikangas call *resilience*.

⁹ BILD's report has thesis: There is a connection between the spontaneous expansion of the Early Church and the *simple gathering together of communities of believers* on the first day of every week in homes/tenements around an evening meal, celebrating their new life in Christ. (Jeff Reed. THE CHURCHES OF THE FIRST CENTURY FROM SIMPLE CHURCHES TO COMPLEX NETWORKS. Iowa: BILD, 2015): 8. See also Valeriy A. Alikin. The earliest history of the Christian Gathering. Leiden: BRILL, 2010.

Resilience is understood as the capacity to recover to initial condition where damaging situations happen. Studies have shown, one of the characteristics of a healthy organization is that it is more like an organism or living creature with flexible adaptability capabilities. There are studies by de Geuss et al. who analyzed resilient and long-lived companies and found that they share several characteristics in common, among them behaving similarly to living things (cf. Fritjof Capra, *Hidden Connections*, 2009). Capra also argues that a living social system, as we have seen, is a self-forming communication network. In the field of social network analysis, a method that is increasingly being used is a branch of mathematics called graph theory. In essence, a graph consists of nodes and vertices.

In summary, there are several points of thought that can be drawn from graph theory, including: (a) graph instability is closely related to graph distance, (b) the theme of the small world hypothesis suggests a theorem called the six-step rule. degree of separation), and in the end this suggests that the network organization model will be more flexible in responding to various changes.¹⁰

¹⁰ V. Christianto & F. Smarandache, *Clan Capitalism, graph distance & other issues*, Kogaion Editions, 2013; see also S. Alghithami, R. Budiarto et al., *Entropy*, 2020.

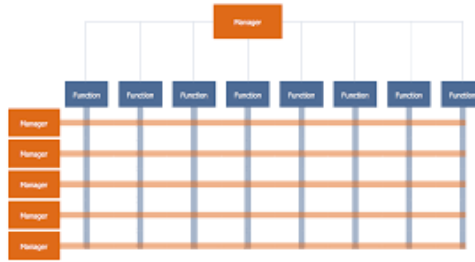


Diagram 5. Matrix type Organisation

These are some things that we can briefly describe, that it is time for the machine organization model to be re-examined, and it seems necessary to adopt a matrix organization model that is expanded into a *network organization model*. (Diagram 6)

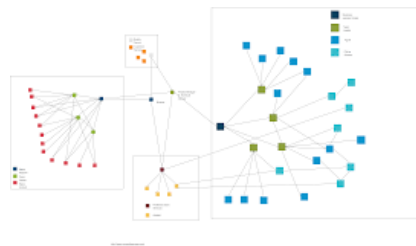


Diagram 6. Network organization

One of implications of our proposed model of Church as network of friends, is that it can be modeled in a simpler way as network of small firms, and it is quite likely it will exhibit cooperative collective dynamics. See for instance plot of simulation written in Wolfram Mathematica simulation package.

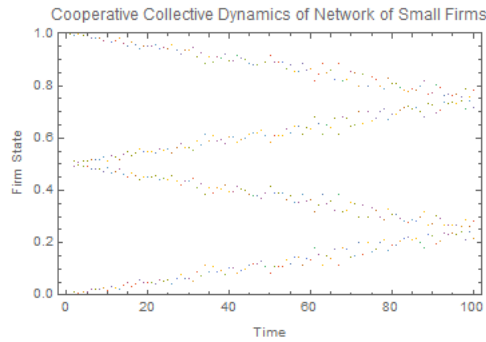


Diagram 7. Cooperative collective dynamics of network of small entities (with constant of local behavior was set to 0.5)

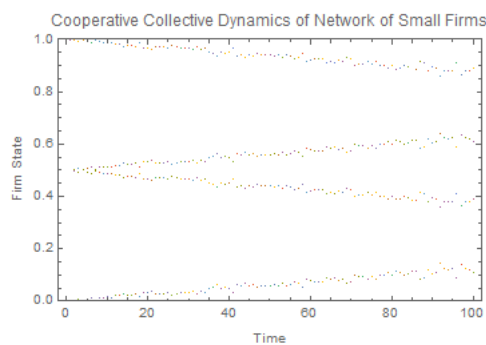


Diagram 8. Cooperative collective dynamics of network of small entities (with constant of local behavior was set to 0.25)

One thing shall be emphasized here, that by arguing in favor of collective dynamics of network of small entities, what we wish to do is to emulate what was done by Earliest Christianity in 1st-second century AD. But if we put that model into reality of Church congregations in 21st century, there are obvious differences. Thereafter, precautions shall be made that the more established structure of existing Churches work hand in hand with the more dynamics part of network of small Christian groups.

Discussion: Highlight of new wisdom for a post-pandemic church

(i) It seems we shall begin to appreciate 5-fold ministry*

The ministry of most churches as we know today, as far as the author is aware, generally rests on two main pillars: senior pastors and junior pastors (especially in charismatic churches), and pastors and *elders* (especially in mainstream churches). Indeed, there are also churches that apply a combination, for example: senior pastors, junior pastors, and *elders* (sometimes also equipped with *deacons*). And there is also the function of a teacher, for example in the service of Sunday school teachers.

If we shall speak in a more honest way, there is actually a so-called 5-fold ministry that was recommended by St. Paul to the Ephesians (cf. Ephesians chapter 4).

As far as the author knows, three ministries such as evangelists, apostles, and prophets are no longer applied, even considered foreign and impressed ancient for today's churches. As if it only applies to the early church which was pioneered by the apostles. Even the ministry of apostles - if it were to be reinstated - is likely to invite endless debates if we start asking, who will appoint the apostles?

However, the other two ministries, namely evangelists and prophets, are still relevant, especially - if you quote the Ephesians letter earlier - for the maturation of the congregation as the Body of Christ.

At first the author also pondered over the prophetic ministry: that it was only in the Holy Scriptures, not for 21st circumstances. But with this pandemic, I have started to recognize names such as Chuck Pierce, and

others, who often act as intermediaries appointed by God to proclaim messages and prophecies from God. . However, everything must be tested for truth first, so we need wisdom and discerning spirit.

(ii) Church of all nations

Of course, with this pandemic, most of us have become more open to virtually "visiting" each other's churches. It could be that a family who is used to morning worship in a denomination during this pandemic can attend worship services or streaming services in 2-3 churches at once. Of course, this enriched the people even more, although it also made church administrators dizzy: for example, if you ask, are the number of people attending Sunday worship streaming really registered congregations or just visitors who just happen to attend online worship services?

On the one hand, this can be seen as an obstacle to monitoring their respective congregations, but on the other hand, this seems to be an opportunity for churches to work in pulpit ministry without having to question whether the listeners of a streaming program are members or not.

It seems that gradually the church began to realize the true meaning of the Unity of the Church. This means that churches are increasingly aware of themselves as part of the Church of all nations, which serve and share with each other.

(iii) Growth of microchurches.

Pastor and author, Thom Rainer states that one trend is the growth of microchurches. Of course, this is not a pleasant thing for churches that have large congregations, but it could be that the pandemic can actually be a blessing in itself for churches that do not have too many congregations. Because most worship activities are done virtually, it is possible that a church with a congregation of 100-200 people can actually provide worship services that reach many people.

In a very interesting article, Ps. Jeremy Stephens reviews two types of microchurch, which he calls: (a) microchurch with a specific purpose, (b) micro-church model incubator.¹¹ Perhaps what Ps. Jeremy Stephens meant by a church with a specific purpose such as the Tampa Underground Network, for example.¹²

Of course, it must be re-examined whether the description of the two types of micro churches is appropriate for the context of the church in this country.

(iv) Church leaders shall appreciate hidden role of women as good networkers.

¹¹ See for instance, Gordon R. Middleton. Learning from First Century Dynamism and Early Church Strategy: A model for today. (*Leadership Advance Online– Issue X*, Summer 2007).

¹² Tampa Underground Network. url: Episode 8 - Tampa Underground Network: Pioneering New Mission Structures in North America - Send Institute. Url: <http://www.tampaunderground.com> (accessed online, 9th Dec. 2022)

As Bible studies show, women were the last disciples at the cross and the first at the empty tomb.



Illustration 11. Christ in the Garden (orig. painting by Emile Bernard, 1880s)

They remained integral to the work of the church in its early centuries. Catherine Kroeger scours historical data to compile an impressive collection of stories about noteworthy women in the early church.¹³

One of the best-kept secrets in Christianity is the enormous role that women played in the early church (Haldeman, 1973; Hughes, 2021). Though they leave much unsaid, still, both Christian and secular writers of the time attest many times to the significant involvement of women in the early growth of Christianity. Celsus, a 2nd-century detractor of the faith, once taunted that the church attracted only "the silly and the mean and the stupid, with women and children." His contemporary, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, acknowledged in his Testimonia that "Christian maidens were

¹³ Note: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/women-in-the-early-church> (accessed online 12th Sept. 2023)

very numerous.”¹⁴

In fact, church leaders shall minister women properly in order they can participate actively and properly in congregations, as St Paul also has shown in his letters. Such a participation drew from simple fact that women are often very good at networking.

(v) It seems really possible that small churches will spread more flexibly in networked form.¹⁵

Here are a few suggestions on how a relatively small church organization can maximize leverage of graph dynamics:

- Identify your connectors. These are the people in your church who have large networks of friends and acquaintances. They are the ones who are most likely to spread the Good News to others.
- Give your connectors the tools they need. Make sure they have the resources they need to share their faith with others, such as training, materials, and opportunities to connect with people outside of the church.
- Create a sense of urgency. People are more likely to act when they feel like there is a sense of urgency. Help your connectors to understand the importance of spreading the Good News and to see how their actions can make a difference.

¹⁴ Note: <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/women-in-the-early-church> (accessed online 12th Sept. 2023)

¹⁵ Note: These few suggestions were inspired by Malcolm Gladwell, and was outlined with assistance from <http://bard.google.com> (assessed on 4th August, 2023)

- Celebrate successes. When your connectors share the Good News and see people come to Christ, be sure to celebrate their successes. This will encourage them to continue sharing their faith and will help to create a culture of evangelism in your church.
- Be patient. It takes time for the Good News to spread. Don't expect to see a tipping point overnight. Just keep working with your connectors and celebrating successes, and eventually you will reach a critical mass of people who have been touched by the Gospel.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Apart from, of course, the factor of the Holy Spirit's work and the fervent spirit of the believers inside this networked Church model, there is one factor that may also play a role, namely that the churches there seem to resonate with an ancient belief that is actually monotheistic.

In the second part above, the author briefly describes a Graph model of churches. Deeper explanation of the Graph model of Church above, of course, needs to be explored again to be a blessing in understanding the church process more dynamically.

One thing shall be emphasized here, that by arguing in favor of collective dynamics of network of small entities, that we wish to do is to emulate what was done by Earliest Christianity in 1st-second century AD. But if we

put that model into reality of Church congregations in 21st century, there are obvious differences. Thereafter, precautions shall be made that the more established structure of existing Churches work hand in hand with the more dynamics part of network of small Christian groups. One thing shall be clear that it is often quite impossible to the existing hierarchical form of present congregation, as they have been there for several decades or even several centuries.

What we can suggest for church leaders in this 21st century is to keep in mind that we still have choices, see Table as follows to summarize ideas presented in this article:

Summary table: our choices of form of structure

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainstream / Protestant churches - Lutheran / Orthodox etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simple networked churches / future churches (yet to emerge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Situational combined with servant leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Synodal way - Episcopal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pentecostal-Charismatic churches - New emergence churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authoritarian style leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hierarchical form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networked structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership style

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