

A DIVINE SOCIETY

The Trinity, Community and Society

Dave Andrews

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A Divine Society
The Trinity, Community and Society
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PREVIEWS

The doctrine of the Trinity — that God is one yet three and three without ceasing to be one — is for many people the most perplexing of all beliefs. How does one make sense of it?

Most believers accept the doctrine, but not many are able to say why they do so or what, if any, practical significance it has for daily living. Not so Dave Andrews. He has meditated long and hard on what this most mysterious and beautiful of religious beliefs means, not just at a theoretical or speculative level — but also at a practical, down-to-earth level.

The triune God, he explains, is a profoundly relational or communitarian Being. Consequently those made in this God's image are also inherently relational beings. We can therefore learn much about what it means to live together healthily in community by reflecting on what we know of God's triunity, as well as what we know of human sociability. Andrews explores these matters in an engaging blend of storytelling, personal experience, theological reflection and pungent social analysis. Over and over again he shows how the Trinity, far from being some mathematical abstraction, is actually *an indispensable paradigm for living together in love in a cruel, violent and lonely world*.

Dr Chris Marshall

St John's Senior Lecturer in Christian Theology

Religious Studies Department

Victoria University of Wellington

Wellington, New Zealand

Dave Andrews is one of Australia's most innovative community workers. His vision for social change, however, comes out of a well articulated theological vision. Dave clearly demonstrates that Jesus' vision of the in-breaking reign of God rooted in Trinitarian theology can be the inspirational centre for contemporary community work. This challenging piece of integrated writing can be *a guide to all*

who seek to bring the shalom of God to all the places of pain and injustice in our world.

Dr Charles Ringma

Professor Emeritus

Regent College, Vancouver, Canada

When I met Dave Andrews a few years ago, I could feel the fire burning in him. Then I heard him speak. Then I read his books. Ever since, he has been and continues to be a major inspiration for my life and work. It's natural to think of Dave as a prophet: his fiery passion, his concern for justice, the way his life speaks even more eloquently than his words. But Dave is also a teacher, drawing from some of the most seminal theologians of today along with classic theologians from Christian history, and making them accessible to a wide audience. *Divine Society* offers a powerful example of what a prophet and a teacher can mean to the church today.

Brian McLaren

Pastor (crcc.org)

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I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for Tony Kelly, recently retired Senior Lecturer in Community Work at the University of Queensland. It was Tony who first encouraged me to think seriously about community in trinitarian terms.

I would also like to thank Brian McLaren, Chris Marshall and Charles Ringma for reading an early manuscript and giving me some of their initial responses. I have rewritten sections of the text with their comments in mind, and the book is better for it. However, I accept full responsibility for any inadequacies that still remain.

And I would also like to thank Pieter and Elria Kwant for the work they did on the book's publication; Isobel Stevenson for doing the original editing; Kris Argall for doing the final editing; Hugh Todd for doing the cover design and typography, and Frank Communications for arranging publication.

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Introduction to Dave Andrews for the 2012 Dave Andrews Legacy Series

I KEPT SEEING THIS guy on the shuttle bus - long hair, graying beard, a gentle 60's-70's feel to him. He seemed thoughtful, intense, friendly, and quiet, like he had a lot on his mind, as did I. Even though I saw him nearly every time I boarded the shuttle bus, we didn't speak beyond him smiling and saying, "G'day" and me nodding and saying, "Hey" as we boarded or disembarked.

It was my first time at Greenbelt, a huge festival about faith, art, and justice held every August in the UK. I had always heard great things about the event and so was thrilled when I was invited to speak. I was just as thrilled to get a chance to hear in person some musicians and speakers I had only heard about from a distance, so I went through the program and marked people I wanted to be sure not to miss.

It was near the end of the conference when a friend told me to be sure to catch an Australian fellow named Dave Andrews. "I've never heard of him," I said. "Oh, he's a force of nature," my friend said. "Kind of like Jim Wallis, Tony Campolo, and Mother Teresa rolled up into one." How could I not put a combination like that in one of the last free slots on my schedule?

I arrived at the venue a few minutes late and there he was, the bearded guy from the bus. Thoughtful, intense, and friendly, yes — but *quiet* he was not. He was nearly exploding with passion — passion and compassion, in a voice that ranged from fortissimo to fortississimo to furioso. How could a guy churning with so much hope, love, anger, energy, faith, fury, and curiosity have been so quiet and unassuming on the bus?

He was a force of nature indeed, evoking from his audience laughter, shouts, amens, reverent silence, and even tears before he was done. He spoke of justice, of poverty, of oppression, of solidarity across religious differences, of service, of hope, of celebration, of the way of Jesus.

As I listened, I wanted to kick myself. *This is the most inspiring talk I've heard at this whole festival. Why did I miss all those opportunities to get to know this fellow on the bus? Now the festival is almost over and I've missed my chance!*

Later than evening, I boarded the shuttle bus for the last ride back to my hotel, and there sat Dave and his wife, Ange. I didn't miss my chance this time. I introduced myself and they reciprocated warmly.

I was a largely unknown American author at the time and hardly known at Greenbelt, much less in Australia, so I'm quite certain Dave and Ange had never heard of me. But they couldn't have been kinder, and as we disembarked, he pulled two books from his backpack and told me they were a gift.

The next day when I flew home from Heathrow, I devoured them both on the plane. First, I opened *Not Religion, But Love* and read it through from cover to cover. Then I opened *Christi-anarchy* and couldn't put it down either. When my plane landed, I felt I had been on a spiritual retreat . . . or maybe better said, in a kind of spiritual boot camp!

Things I was thinking but had been afraid to say out loud Dave was saying boldly and confidently. Ideas I was very tentatively considering he had already been living with for years. Complaints and concerns I only shared in highly guarded situations he was publishing from the housetops. Hopes and ideals I didn't dare to express he celebrated without embarrassment.

I think I gave him a copy of one or two of my books as well, and I guess he was favorably impressed enough that we stayed in touch and a friendship developed. I discovered that we were both songwriters as well as writers, that we both had a deep interest in interfaith friendships, that we both had some critics and we both had known the pain of labeling and rejection.

Since then, whatever he has written, I've been sure to read . . . knowing that he speaks to my soul in a way that nobody else does.

We've managed to get together several times since our initial meeting in England, in spite of the fact that we live on opposite sides of the planet. We've spoken together at a few conferences on both hemispheres, and I had the privilege of visiting him in Brisbane. I've seen the beautiful things he has been doing in a particularly interesting and challenging neighborhood there, walking the streets with him, meeting his friends, sensing his love for that place and those people. He's been in my home in the US as well, and we've been conspiring for some other chances to be and work together in the future.

In my speaking across North America, I frequently refer to Dave's work, but until now, his books have been hard to come by. That's why I'm thrilled to introduce this volume to everyone I can in North America.

Yes, you'll find he's one part Tony Campolo, one part Jim Wallis, and one part Mother Teresa, a force of nature, as I was told.

You'll also find he is a serious student of the Bible and a serious theological sage — the kind of reflective activist or thinker-practitioner that we need more of.

In a book like *Christi-anarchy*, he can boldly and provocatively unsettle you and challenge you. Then in a book like *Plan Be*, he can gently and pastorally encourage and inspire you. Like the central inspiration of his life, he is the kind of person to confidently turn over tables in the Temple one minute and then humbly defend a shamed and abused woman from her accusers the next.

You'll see in Dave's writings that he is highly knowledgeable about poverty, ecology, psychology, sociology, politics, and economics . . . not only from an academic standpoint, but also from a grass-roots, experiential level. His writing on these subjects grows from what he has done on the ground . . . for example, nurturing a community network that is training young adults to live and serve among the

supervising homes for adults who are learning to live with physical and psychiatric disabilities, encouraging small businesses to hire people who others would consider unemployable and developing a non-profit solar energy co-op for local people.

Dave's writings and friendship have meant so much to me. I consider him a friend and mentor. Now I am so happy that people across North America can discover him too.

You'll feel as I did - so grateful that you didn't miss the chance to learn from this one-of-a-kind, un-categorizable, un-containable, wild wonder from Down Under named Dave Andrews.

Brian D. McLaren

author/speaker/activist (brianmclaren.net)

INTRODUCTION

‘EVERYBODY LOVES COMMUNITY’

Everybody loves community.

According to sociologists Colin Bell and Howard Newby, ‘everyone — even sociologists (who usually like to sit on the fence) — want to live in community.’¹

In his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Williams reports that the word ‘community’ — ‘unlike all other terms of social organisation (such as ‘group’, ‘party’, ‘network’, ‘association’, or ‘institution’ etc.) — is never...used unfavourably.’²

I think it is probably an exaggeration to say the word ‘community’ is ‘never used unfavourably’, but it is true to say that it is seldom used unfavourably. And the reason for that is because the word ‘community’ is essentially a heartfelt word — like ‘love’, ‘romance’, ‘friendship’, ‘marriage’ or ‘family’ — which has deep, positive, passionate connotations for most of us most of the time.

I can think of many examples where people have talked unfavourably about issues to do with their community, or about the leadership, direction, and/or organisation of their community; however, I can think of only one example of people talking unfavourably about the notion of community itself. And that was about the ‘communities in Queensland’ — the state of Australia where I live — where the word ‘community’ was a euphemism for a reservation run by the state for aborigines, who had been removed forcibly from their land at the point of a gun. So the only example I’ve come across myself — where people do not talk favourably about ‘community’ — is where the word ‘community’ was political double-speak for the destruction of a much-loved community.

When we talk about a community, we are usually talking about a particular context in which we feel at home — ‘a place, or a group of people, or a tapestry of meaningful relationships which creates a gracious space that embraces us in a strong-but-gentle, undeniably-beautiful sense of belonging’.

David Clark says it well in *Basic Communities*:

community [is] essentially a sentiment which people have about themselves in relation to themselves: a sentiment expressed in action, but still basically a sentiment or a feeling...People have many feelings, but there are two essential feelings for the existence of community: a sense of significance and a sense of solidarity.³

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Aussie commentator, Hugh Mackay, says that human beings are like mobs of kangaroos, because — like them — ‘we are creatures who thrive on our connections with each other. We are at our best when we are fully integrated with the herd; we are at our worst when we are isolated.’⁴ In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam observes that

1. *We are most healthy when we are most connected.* Due to the encouragement of healthy norms, assistance in ill health, advocacy for proper healthcare, and ‘herd immunity’, people who are connected are less likely to suffer heart attacks, strokes, cancer — even colds! They are also two to five times less likely to die prematurely.⁵
2. *We are most happy when we are most connected.* The best single global indicator of happiness is connectedness. Those who have strong relationships with family and friends are much less likely to experience loneliness, low self-esteem, eating and sleeping disorders, and sadness and depression, than those with weak relationships.⁶
3. *We are most honest when we are most connected.* In relationships, long-term credibility is worth a lot more than any gain from short-term treachery. This explains why there are a lot fewer unreliable used cars returned to second-hand dealers in small-town communities.⁷
4. *We are most generous when we are most connected.* The most common reason for giving is being asked. The most common reason for not giving is not being asked. People are more likely to be asked if they are in contact with others. Thus, people in clubs

and churches are ten times more likely to give help than those who are not.⁸

5. *We are most prosperous when we are most connected.* When people know one another, they are much more likely to share access to jobs, promotions, bonuses, and other benefits.⁹ Moreover, when people trust one another, there is a significant reduction in expenses from the cost of security to insurance.¹⁰
6. *We are most safe and most secure when we are most connected.* The willingness of neighbours to look after one another, and to actually intervene to protect one another when someone causes trouble, can reduce all kinds of crime in a neighbourhood. A local neighbourhood watch can reduce graffiti, muggings, even gang violence.¹¹

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I am part of a community workers' co-operative called the Community Praxis Co-op. The Co-op exists to empower people and resource and strengthen the capacities of groups and organizations in order to develop just, peaceful and sustainable communities. It undertakes projects in teams of two or more members, and the Co-op member I have done the most work with in a team is a brilliant community development practitioner by the name of Peter Westoby. In the car on the way to and from our Co-op work on government sponsored community development projects, Pete and I have had many long and vigorous talks about the art of community development.

Pete believes that community development is much less about technique, and more about soul, and that community development practitioners cannot simply move in and quickly mobilise a community to solve their own problems. According to Pete, we can only participate along with others in the community in invoking the 'soul of the community'. He often cites a quote from the mystic, Thomas Moore, who says that 'human community [is] the work of the ghosts of memory, the spirits of place and the soul of culture.'¹² Pete says that 'true community can only be born if there is some transformation of awareness and attention'. Community as a reality

‘can only be dreamt of’ when we are in touch with ‘the archetypal mysteries of our psyches’ in the depth of our souls. He says that we need ‘models, images and pictures that enable us to imagine a new world’ and can ‘inspire a hope that ignites possibilities that seem beyond reality.’¹³

If we are going to enable one another to imagine a society with a greater sense of community, both Pete and I believe there are four things that we need to do. Firstly, we need to help one another recognise our hopes for the world, which usually involve some kind of renewal of community in our society. Secondly, we need to provide one another with an opportunity to explore alternative approaches to the renewal of community. These include those commended by the archetypal metaphors embedded in our psyches that are expounded in the mysteries of the major religious traditions. Thirdly, we need to establish places for substantive conversations — around those metaphors — about the possibilities of developing a renewed sense of significance and solidarity in society. Fourthly, we need to encourage one another to engage the world in the light of the possibilities that those metaphors provide, so that we do our best to create as many gracious community spaces in society as we can, to embrace our fellow human beings in a ‘strong-but-gentle undeniably-beautiful sense of belonging’.¹⁴

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The archetypal metaphor of community I would like to offer you for your consideration in this process is the Trinity, as it is so poignantly depicted in Rublev’s Icon, *The Holy Trinity*.

According to Baxter Kruger,

The Trinity is the most beautiful doctrine of the Christian faith. But it has been disastrously neglected and forgotten, and when it is talked about, the discussion is dominated by those philosophical types that get caught up in all the technicalities and miss the main point of it all.¹⁵

The famous philosopher, Immanuel Kant, probably spoke for a lot of people when he said, 'even if one claims to understand it, the doctrine of the Trinity provides [us with] nothing, absolutely nothing, of practical value.' He said that we need to face the fact that it 'offers absolutely no guidance for conduct.'¹⁶

However, Leonardo Boff, the liberation theologian, spoke for millions of poor people in basic ecclesial communities around the world, when he said that the 'divine society' was their 'permanent utopia' — the true social program for any human society seeking participation, equity and equality.¹⁷

My hope is that *A Divine Society* will provide a practical theology of the Trinity you can use as an imaginative framework to work towards more community in society.

This book is dedicated to my children and to my children's children.

Dave Andrews

Brisbane 2008

‘The Secret of the Universe
Is in the Heart of God.
The Secret of Heaven on Earth
Is in that Heart of Love.
Love that breathes Reality
Into our Sacred Dreams,
Stirs forgotten Memories,
And sets our Spirits free.’

from *Songs of Love and Justice* by Dave Andrews

‘In our Heart of Hearts,
We hold the Hope most dearly;
We hold the Hope most dearly
 for Humanity:
That we will come to see
The Love that we all feel
Become so real
We’ll be Community
Like the Holy Trinity.

And every now and then
We glimpse the fragile Beauty,
We glimpse the fragile Beauty
 of our Unity:
And sometimes we can see
The Love that we all feel
Become so real
We are like Family
Speaking Smiles and Kissing Tears:

Through dark Nights of Prayer,
Hard Days of Care.
Pitting Hope against Despair.’

from *Songs of Joy and Sorrow* by Dave Andrews

PART ONE

THE TRINITY AS AN ICON OF COMMUNITY