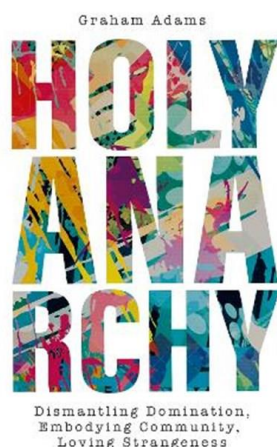


BOOK REVIEW

Holy Anarchy: Dismantling Domination, Embodying Community, Loving Strangeness

by *Graham Adams*

Reviewed by Jo Cribbin



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Christian thinkers and practitioners working in relief and development may sometimes, perhaps even often, question what exactly it means for the kingdom of God to be at hand, in the midst of the many crises and injustices that characterise the environments in which their organisations operate. Exactly where and how should we expect to see God’s kingdom come in the different parts of our world? What part do we have to play in its coming? Graham Adams’ *Holy Anarchy: Dismantling Domination, Embodying Community, Loving Strangeness* is a theological exploration of these questions and seeks to provide a way for Christian individuals, communities, and organisations to re-imagine what the coming of God’s kingdom could look like. *Holy Anarchy* adopts a decolonial approach—seeking to understand how colonisation and colonial logics and their effects continue to influence our relationships with one another, our systems, and society—and what a decolonial practice of seeking to undo these logics and their resulting power structures could look like in a faith community.

The book centres around the premise of “holy anarchy,” a term originally expressed by theologian

Andrew Shanks as an alternative to the “kingdom of God.” In four parts, *Holy Anarchy* addresses the themes of domination and injustice, how these may be subverted and dismantled, and how flourishing communities may emerge in their place. Adams walks the reader toward a vision of holy anarchy, exploring some of the obstructions that rise up to block its way, including empires of domination, unjust systems and structures, consumerism, and exploitative dominion over the earth.

In part one, Adams explores the notion of holy anarchy, comparing it to other theological expressions and conceptualisations of the kingdom of God. Holy anarchy is described as a future state of solidarity among peoples and God, marked by the flourishing of life and absence of domination of people over one another. Holy anarchy is not, however, just a distant horizon for which the church should wait and pray, impervious to and unmoved by the obstacles in our world that prevent its realisation; it is also a path that Christians and the church are invited to journey along. For Adams, a first step on this journey is a re-thinking of our understanding of truth. He explores two different types of truth: truth in hand, and truth in process. Truth in hand is the understanding that truth is fixed and unchanging, something that can be possessed or grasped in the hand, while truth in process understands truth as more akin to an open palm, which is not fixed but rather is evolving through a living network of conversation and interaction. For Adams, it is this truth in process that is of higher value for the coming of holy anarchy, as it creates an attitude in which difference may be understood and valued. If truth can be held in an open palm, we are able to ask ourselves what it is that we are not seeing, even as we are able to listen to and value others’ truths, and perhaps in the process be brought into deeper solidarity with one another.

Part two calls for a dismantling of domination through doing justice. Holy anarchy exposes patterns of domination and unjust structures for those open to perceiving it. In this section, God is described as one who subverts structures of domination and brings about holy anarchy instead, inviting us to do the same. This

willingness and ability to see and name injustice begins with an internal change, described by Adams as a process of being shaken by God, or “decolonising consciousness.” Adams argues that holy anarchy wakes us up and allows us to see the world as it really is, with all its injustices, power imbalances, and structures of domination. It also allows us to see and hope for an alternative future. It is only from a place of shakiness, from seeing things as they really are, Adams argues, that we are able to see the very injustices in which we ourselves are complicit, and can begin to reject them, replacing them with acts of justice.

In part three, Adams describes an embodiment of community that occurs as we are shaken by God, resulting in the forging of paths towards solidarity and communion with one another. Doing justice is not a purely individual practice—we are called into community and solidarity with one another, following the example of Jesus in his ministry, who subverted the power of Empire and dismantled domination in a radical, unexpected way. The communities we build, in our churches, neighbourhoods, and organisations will always be awkward and imperfect. Rather than brushing off such imperfections, Adams calls for the Church to recognise its shortcomings, acknowledge its failures, and, despite all this, continue to commit to an ever-deeper journey of solidarity, learning, and transformation.

In part four, “love kindness—befriend strangers,” Adams points to wider spaces for partnership and solidarity beyond the walls of the church, and the potential for faith to allow us to commune with others who may be wholly unlike ourselves. Adams challenges us to consider both the structures of domination, exclusion, and destruction in our own world and the harm such structures create, whether based on economics, race, gender, sexuality, disability, or religion. Holy anarchy shakes us open and allows us to recognise these injustices, both within and without ourselves, and moves us to act in love and solidarity with others in a genuinely radical way.

For Christian organisations working in relief, development, and advocacy, *Holy Anarchy* provides an invitation to examine the cultures and practices that permeate our organisations. It is an invitation to introduce a “decolonising consciousness,” to examine how we approach those who are different from ourselves in the course of our work, or to ask what biases prevent us from seeing colonial practices and structures of domination that may be present within our organisational practices.

Holy Anarchy may be more immediately accessible to readers with familiarity with academic theological writing, due to some of the language and concepts Adams employs. Yet any theological complexity is beautifully balanced with a collection of

original hymns and questions for reflection provided at the end of each chapter, in addition to an extended collection of worship materials at the end of the book. These may be the most valuable portions of the book as they provide a space for individual reflection and guided conversation—a space for truth in process to occur. *Holy Anarchy* may be a challenging and even uncomfortable read at times, but this is deliberate. Through rich theological reflection and liturgical practice, *Holy Anarchy* asks each of us to reject power, injustice, and dominion in our world, whilst at the same time inviting us to imagine a different reality, one in which structures of domination are dismantled, community is embodied, strangeness is loved, and difference is valued.

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