

Cláudio Carvalhaes. *Praying with Every Heart: Orienting Our Lives to the Wholeness of the World*. Eugene: Cascade, 2021. 290 pages. \$35.00.

I found the title of this text somewhat challenging. It seemed to be a legitimate call to pray-ers to widen the scope of their communication with the divine, to encompass the existential nature of the human world, while simultaneously presenting an erroneous descriptor of the world situation. To pray “with every heart” implies attuning oneself to all people and their issues in the magnitude that represents the differences of our world. To that end the contents address a wide spectrum of human experiences and need, with the recognition that “every” (and therefore all) is an impossible and unreachable goal. On the other hand, to speak of the “Wholeness of the World” in the way that it is presented, seems to offer an image of the current world as a place of harmonious unity. This is inherently false because the common and normative use of the term wholeness, which implies positive completeness is not a state that is representative of the known world or even the one Carvalhaes presents in the text and for which he calls his hearers to pray.

To pray with every heart for the wholeness of the world by orienting one’s prayer life to the cultural challenges that hinder the attainment of such a state seems more appropriate to the contents of the text. Carvalhaes aptly describes many of the challenges that result from the marginalization and de-humanization of peoples because of outward differences. He focuses on peoples and times and places that need the human and divine intervention sought in the action of prayer and attempts to reconstruct a trajectory of human devaluation that he considers are needful of prayer. In response, he uses the trajectory of his own prayer persona, which is based on both faith and practice, believing that “prayers have the power to recreate the past, reshape the present, and invent a future where the Reign of God can happen” (7). Within his story, he weaves the storied experiences of others met along his journey, both personally and through written accounts of their stories. This interweaving adds flavor to the book, but at times is somewhat disjointed in the movement of the text. And yet perhaps the intent may be deliberately to cause the reader to pause and reflect on the impact of the story on their own situation of as a pray-er, past, present, and future.

Carvalhaes takes several and deliberate (I presume) excursions into a theologically interpretative mode that seems aimed at naming or even calling out particular ills of individual Christians and the corporate Church on beliefs and practices that seem to offer specific and urgent reasons for praying. This may be somewhat discomfiting to the reader who expects to be simply guided in ways of praying, based on both the title and the Table of Contents, but may also serve as a guide to those who do not yet understand the challenges faced by those who are not considered normative in the present hierarchy of the culture in both the United States and the developed world.

The text offers actual prayers for use by practitioners, that are meant to shine God’s light into those situations that represent for many, in the words of St. John of the Cross, “the dark night of the soul.” Commendably, these prayers provide practical resources for praying Christians that both name and offer word pictures of situations world-wide that are apt representations of the woundedness of individuals and groups, for which prayer is needed. They provide the sentiments and a means by which pray-ers might address situations that are not part of their own experience, even that they do not fully understand, but for which they recognize the need for divine action so that they might be withstood in the present or overcome in the future.

In shaping this text, Carvalhaes has woven together several streams of previous work into a text that is as much theological as it is liturgical. That is both the strength and the challenge

inherent in the text. If one approaches the text with the expectation of finding immediate liturgical resources, there may be disappointment that one must weed through much surrounding material to understand the fullness and the applicability of the resources. On the other hand, the theological material pushes into several streams of liberation theology and ethics without fully engaging any of these areas. Most provide an appropriate backdrop to the prayers they precede or surround, but at times seem to be more of a critique than an interpretative stance and may be off-putting to the reader.

As the latest offering from this author, one recognizes the work as another way station along his journey, but it is a good representation of the wide focus of his knowledge, his energetic engagement and his liturgical imagination that is, as always, a gift to the church.

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