

5-15-2022

Cláudio Carvalhaes. Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World

Eduardo C. Fernández SJ

Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University and Graduate Theological Union

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt>

Recommended Citation

Fernández, Eduardo C. SJ "Cláudio Carvalhaes. Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology*. Vol. 24 : No. 1 , Article 9. (2022) :69-72

Available at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol24/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact repository@usfca.edu.

Cláudio Carvalhaes. *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World*. Nashville, TN.: Abingdon Press, 2020. 359 pp. \$29.99 Paper. ISBN 978-1-7910-0735-5.

Sudipta Singh’s preface to this collection of prayers and liturgies composed with communities living in harshly challenging circumstances is a fitting introduction to this passionate and prophetic work. Singh, The Mission Secretary of Research and Capacity Development for the Council of World Mission (CWM) in Singapore, cites the esteemed Jewish theologian and rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who stated emphatically that prayer “is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, falsehoods” (xi). The Council for World Mission has labeled these pyramids “Empire.” CMW General Secretary Collin I. Cowan, explains that “worship is subversive because, through the act of worship, the worshipper says *yes* to God and in so saying automatically says *no* to empire and all the ‘ungods’ of our time, all the systems and forces that claim supremacy” (ix). This lament to God in which the prophet represents the sufferings of God’s people and at the same time, reveals God’s concern for those too often overlooked by dominant cultures, permeates *Liturgies from Below*.

Cláudio Carvalhaes, a Brazilian-born theologian, liturgist, and artist who teaches worship at Union Theological Seminary in New York, describes *Liturgies from Below* as a resource, “a collection of prayers, songs, rituals, rites of healing, Eucharistic and baptismal prayers, meditations, poetry, and art from four continents: Asia-Pacific Islands (Manila); Africa (Johannesburg); Europe (Sicily) and the Americas (Kingston). It is the result of a project called ‘Re-Imagining Worship as Acts of Defiance and Alternatives in the Context of Empire’ organized by the CWM during 2018-2019, which engaged approximately 120 scholars, pastors, artists, and students from different ethnicities, races, sexualities, churches, and theological backgrounds.” Carvalhaes describes the process, “At each location, [the participants] spent a week together in different local neighborhoods

and communities, where they lived alongside people, breathing in the circumstances of extreme poverty, oppression, violence, and pain . . . These are people who are living at the ends of the world” (7).

The objectives of the Re-Imagining Worship Project became enfolded as the work unfolded. Participants created and collected alternative liturgical resources that, defying the logic of empire, stressed not merely the gospel of health and wealth but that of the reign of God preached by Jesus of Nazareth. The project has also launched a network of liturgists from the margins who continue to share their resources on a site created for this purpose, “Re-Imagining Worship: Liturgies in the Context of Empire” (reimaginingworship.com). Finally, this project seeks to build the capacity of local congregations to develop and use alternative worship models, very much in the spirit of an inculturation that pays attention to what Vatican II describes as the “signs of the times.”

The book provided its share of surprises for me, a Roman Catholic, who has not only presided for decades at baptismal and eucharistic celebrations but written and taught in the area of inculturation and worship, especially as it relates to social justice and the mission of the church (J. Empeur and E. Fernandez, *La Vida Sacra: Contemporary Hispanic Sacramental Theology*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). It caused me to recall or *hacer memoria* of worship and eucharistic liturgies with and among people often on the margins of society, especially migrants and refugees. Indeed, among the most heart-wrenching prayers in the collection are the ones from these communities of displaced persons. I also recalled many evocative liturgies I experienced in Latin American countries as well as in the Philippines. Similarly, memories surfaced of prayer services held before our annual dinner for homeless people in Berkeley on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. All these are examples in which the world’s pain is evident but which also, like the Psalms, look to God as our ultimate vindicator, the God of Psalm 34 who “hears the cry of the poor.” Indeed, the

adapted compositions remind us again and again that the Book of Psalms continues to be our heritage as Israel's "soul book," one in which the psalmist unabashedly expresses awe, anger, or other emotions.

Liturgies from Below is an important addition to other resources such as that of the liturgist Bruce T. Morrill's *Practical Sacramental Theology: At the Intersection of Liturgy and Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021) and the U.S. Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) materials on social justice as related to liturgical celebrations, "Sacraments and Social Mission: Living the Gospel, Being Disciples."

This new collection provides concrete reflections on creating genuine solidarity with the poor "from the inside," that is, not only "praying for them but also with them." In this way our own hearts are broken and converted to God's compassion and prophetic action on their behalf. The prayers in *Liturgies from Below*, often adaptations of Psalms or other Scripture passages, are closely connected to individual cultures. Fortunately, they are not grouped together geographically in the book, lest we think of the prayers as being for or from "those people."

While in Roman Catholic circles, our way of proceeding is often meticulously outlined in liturgical rubrics, this much needed work, explicitly Christian, provides a resource for worship that echoes and promotes a faith that does justice. It serves as a gold mine for theological and ethical reflection. Its ecumenical contributions, such as those pertaining to ecology and to those most affected by our climate crisis, make for more passionate, engaged Christian worship, one that starts with our own need for God's intervention, a God who lovingly summons us not only to pray but to do something about our society's ills. What would it look like if we took more seriously specific contexts of prayer and the prayers practiced there, in slums, prisons, and refugee camps?

Liturgies from Below is a rich resource. It is a lovely example of what happens when we take inculturation seriously, a liturgy book where cultural symbols, rituals, and myths are celebrated and where worship is relevant in and to diverse cultural contexts. In the face of the destructive elements in globalization, Gospel values must shape the way we pray, as prayer ultimately shapes our beliefs and actions, echoing the ancient dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*, “the law of praying [is] the law of believing.”

Eduardo C. Fernández, S.J.

*Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University
and Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California*