

Cláudio Carvalhaes. *How Do We Become Green People and Earth Communities? Inventory, Metamorphoses, and Emergenc(i)es*. York: Barber's Son Press, 2022. 190 pages. \$29.99

In an age of climate crisis, how do people become “more aware of the ways of the earth...more aware of our mutuality and more aware of our lack of mutuality – especially within the patch[es] of land where [people] live” (16)? Cláudio Carvalhaes’ latest book seeks to reflect on his own journey to answering this question and offers a theological reflection on how readers might do the same. The book records Carvalhaes’ 2021 Students’ Lectureship on Missions at Princeton Theological Seminary. Rather than a highly revised manuscript, Carvalhaes has preserved the oral style of his lectures. The text is punctuated by line breaks, green type, and visual art – elements readers might not get by watching or listening to the lectures. With these features, the book communicates not only the fierce urgency Carvalhaes conveys but also the style of its original delivery. If one has heard Carvalhaes preach, teach, or lecture, it is difficult to not hear his voice and passion making their way through these pages.

In addition to an introduction, the book is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters replicate the three lectures delivered at Princeton. Chapter 1 invites readers into an “inventory,” by which Carvalhaes means understanding how various “traces” of history, particularly those unseen forces of coloniality shaping people. Carvalhaes is especially interested in how the “brutalism” of colonialism impacts the relationships among bodies and earth, as colonialism’s violence “deprives people everywhere from their ability to breathe and exist” (35) and disconnects us from one another. The work of inventory is highly personal and critical, naming the ways that identities are formed, identifying humanity’s interconnectedness and opening possibilities for how we build our relationality with all creation.

Chapter 2 explores “metamorphoses,” the type of transformation that means “a conversation that entails bodies relating, moving, and affecting each other” (51). Carvalhaes directs us away from the solipsism of modernity and toward “a theology through a larger cosmology where we are never alone but rather are constituted by so many – we are legions of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon, calcium, and phosphorus that exist in so many other forms of life” (56). Theology, then, attends to our interconnectedness which is more than just interhuman but involves the entirety of creation. This transformation is one in which humans live in recognition that we are more than ourselves. While Carvalhaes expresses urgency and conviction, he also displays grace in calling readers to the difficulty of this transformation.

Chapter Three’s title of “Emergenc(i)es” develops a sensibility that attends to “emergencies” and “emergences,” prompting readers to carefully consider how they notice the “despair, anxiety, and fear and hunger” (87) that demand attention but also to cultivate practices that help notice new life continually unfolding, despite the emergencies the earth faces. Carvalhaes advocates for communities of faith to develop ritual practices by which they can adopt a dual posture of gratitude and focus on what demands our attention. For Carvalhaes, ritual is an act of paying attention by which readers can develop “a more generous cosmology and a heart for other beings and other spirits” (94).

Chapters 4 and 5 are shorter than the preceding chapters. Chapter Four traces some instances and possibilities of the kind of “paying attention” to emergencies and emergences through which readers can “make kin,” “care for the earth,” and transform our “ways of relation.” Carvalhaes traces examples of practices that can simultaneously cultivate a cry for God’s mercy, voice lament, claim willingness to fight, and express joy. Chapter Five concludes the book by naming a different path for theology as a way of being: crossing different disciplines

(theological and otherwise), encountering different living beings, and engaging different practices of both mind and body. Here Carvalhaes demonstrates what he calls for: the chapter is punctuated by confessional storytelling, an exercise to develop our sensitivities, and ends with a benediction.

It is also important to note the book's substantive foreword and afterword from different authors, as well as a short chapter with reflections from the artist who painted a response to Carvalhaes' lectures. Each contribution sheds light on Carvalhaes' intentions and the book's substance as the prompt for an ongoing conversation.

Although the foreword admits that this is not a how-to manual but a theological method, the book could be strengthened with examples of communal liturgies. Readers hear moving stories of Carvalhaes funeralizing animals that have been struck by cars, in addition to recounting "Plantgate" at Union Theological Seminary. These examples stretch the imagination. At the same time, the book makes significant claims about the power of ritual to shift our collective attention, relationships, and affections. Readers might remain curious how Carvalhaes imagines more communal and congregational ritual-making, particularly in contexts with lower thresholds for the kind of risks Carvalhaes takes.

Despite this minor criticism, throughout the book Carvalhaes exemplifies a postcolonial epistemology and theological framework, citing critical theory and liberation theologies, traditional theological voices, alongside poetry, visual art, prayer, lived personal experience, biology and the sciences, the experiences of indigenous people, embodied practice, and more. These weave together in seamless ways, beckoning readers simultaneously into deep analysis, wonder, and action that fosters possibilities for our cosmos.

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