

COOPER, Thia. *Queer and Indecent:
an introduction to Marcella Althaus-Reid.*

London: SCM Press, 2021, 224 p.

Graham McGeoch¹

Thia Cooper has written an excellent introductory guide to the theology of Marcella Althaus-Reid. It is the first book of its kind, despite the fact that Marcella's theological reputation and influence now covers a period of more than 20 years. In that time, her contribution has been recognized as the most important Liberation Theology at the turn of the millennium (Ivan Petrella), and she has been recognized as the person who gives content and meaning to Queer Theology (Linn Marie Tonstad).

Cooper's introductory guide gently takes the reader by the hand into the stories, sounds and smells of Marcella's theology. Each of the 13 chapters guides the reader through the theological worlds of Marcella including Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, Post-colonial Criticism, Queer Theory and Marxist scholarship. We meet the lemon sellers, the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and Mary as a rich white women who does not walk. We are encouraged to explore chestnut bushy hairy armpits, the feet of workers and plastic bags over heads.

Marcella's theology emerges as something that bodies do through loving acts. Cooper's introductory guide adroitly conveys this most difficult aspect of Marcella's theology. Let me contextualize this previous sentence. The recommendations on the back cover and acknowledgements in Cooper's book point towards the difficulty of reading (and one presumes understanding) Marcella's theology. I suppose this is a good starting point for a publisher wanting to sell an introductory guide to Marcella.

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However, personally, I have never found Marcella's theology difficult to read. She writes beautiful prose in English, with captivating stories and turns of phrase (many of which have later become iconic in theology). Her intellectual hinterland is vast, and she brings this multidisciplinary approach to her theology. Her world of material bodies is profoundly shaped by her experiences in Latin America, although not limited to Latin America.

Maybe I am missing the point. Marcella certainly never tired of telling me this in our conversations. She also always insisted that we (*latinoamericanos*) must stick together. As a Scottish person who had lived in Latin America, I was always particularly touched by how she included me in the Latin American diaspora. She encouraged me to read widely, and live at the margins.

Nowadays, I sometimes wonder if the aforementioned difficulty of Marcella's theology is related specifically to taught courses of theology in a university setting. Cooper nicely captures how colleagues (theologians) could be dismissive of Marcella's 'primitive theology'. The resistance to her theology at the American Academy of Religion in the early days, and the stubbornness of Latin American theologians like Jon Sobrino and Enrique Dussel in face of her critique certainly gives credence to this possibility.

Yet, Marcella's theology is not to be read (consumed?) in a university classroom, although it clearly can be. Marcella wants to do theology on the Pan-American Highway, in gay bars, at the doors of churches, in the desert with the Deceased Correa, within indigenous culture and language, and with excluded bodies. Marcella's theology focuses on excluded peoples' lives and loves and searches for the surprising God in the midst of excluded lives and loves.

The beauty of Cooper's introductory guide is that it manages to convey this *caminata* (way of doing theology). Each chapter can be read and explored on its own, and is best done in the company of different excluded bodies. It really is best to read the chapters with street sellers, sex workers, and indigenous women. Sit on the streets and look up at the faces who pass-by, or down at the feet that trod on. Do not read this book in a university library; you will miss the best bits! The theologians will probably dismiss you as primitive, and you will know then that you have understood Marcella's theology.

Cooper's book is a gift to theology and queer theory. It is a timely publication that will appeal to undergraduate and graduate students. It is written in an accessible style with summary points (something Marcella never did, as Cooper herself knowingly points out) and suggested bibliographies of Marcella's work to further explore the themes and concepts discussed in each chapter. The book is subtle in that it can be read not only as individual chapters, but also as an unfolding text. Each chapter moves deeper into Marcella's theology. In other words, the more chapters read in sequence, the deeper the understanding of the main aspects of Marcella's theology.

I read Cooper's book alongside Linn Marie Tonstad's *Queer Theology*², and certainly, the final part of chapter 3 and all of chapter 4 of Tonstad's book provide complementary material to Cooper's excellent organizing of Marcella's forward thinking theology. In Brazil, surprisingly, we only have very limited access to Marcella's texts in the Portuguese language³. Publishers would do well to look at Thia Cooper's book and consider a translation into Portuguese.

² TONSTAD, Linn Marie. *Queer Theology: beyond apologetics*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018.

³ Almost twenty years after its publication in English, *The Queer God* appeared in Portuguese. ALTHAUS-REID, Marcella. *Deus Queer*. Rio de Janeiro: Metanoia, 2019. Claudio Ribeiro translated and published "Marx em um Bar Gay: a teologia indecente como uma reflexão sobre a teologia da libertação e a sexualidade" as part of a collection of texts from Latin American Feminist Theologians including Elsa Tamez, Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer. RIBEIRO, Claudio. *Resgando o Verbo: teologia feminista em foco*. São Paulo: Fonte Editorial, 2016. The World Forum on Theology and Liberation (2005) produced an edited volume (published in various languages, including Portuguese) with one of Marcella's texts "Demitologizando a Teologia da Libertação: reflexões sobre poder, pobreza e sexualidade". Marcella was one of the Editors of the English-language version of the book. Luis Carlos Susin edited the Portuguese-language version. SUSIN, Luis Carlos (org). *Teologia para Outro Mundo Possível*. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2006. Some of her texts from *Concillium* are available in Portuguese. In 2021, André Musskopf and Ana Ester Pádua Freire edited a book of reflections from a Seminar Series on the Post-Graduate Program at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora based on Marcella's work. *Religião e Indecência: diálogos com Marcella Althaus-Reid*. Rio de Janeiro: Metanoia, 2021. While the quality of each chapter varies, reflecting the nature of the engagement of the students, the introduction by André and Ana Ester is excellent, as is the bibliography of Marcella's publications (which in turn is based on Thia Cooper's book and the work of Hugo Cordova Quero).