

**Reformed Theological Seminary**

**Marcella Althaus-Reid, the Queer Theologian**

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Liberation Theology is too *vanilla*. The likes of Gustavo Gutiérrez, James Cone, and Mary Daly have presented thoughtful analysis of theological power dynamics in the modern world, but they aren't dirty enough. This critique is at the core of Marcella Althaus-Reid's theological revolution. In her time as Professor of Contextual Theology at New College, University of Edinburgh, she called for the creation of an *Indecent Theology* which would address a more authentic social and sexual point of view. Her career began in social projects "inspired by the liberationist pedagogy" of Paulo Friere (a prominent Brazilian critical theorist), first in her home country of Argentina, and later in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> After completing a doctorate at St. Andrews, she was hired as the first female Professor of Theology at the University of Edinburgh. There, she produced her landmark work, *Indecent Theology*, as well as a major follow-up book, *The Queer God*. Both are foundational in the emerging field of Queer Theology, and Althaus-Reid is championed by LGBT-affirming denominations, including her own Metropolitan Community Church. Before discussing or reading her work, there are two important elements for Christians to be aware of. First, Althaus-Reid's work should not be read as if it were an attempt at traditional Christian theology. It would make no sense, and she would not have wanted us to. Her aim instead is to subversively reinterpret the Christian faith and tradition from an existentialist and liberationist point of view, for the sake of those who find themselves marginalized due to their non-heteronormative sexual practices or desires. Second, as a demonstration of her method of theological subversion, her writing style is intentionally offensive and extremely vulgar. This technique is not a personal attack on Christians; rather, it should be understood as her exemplification of doing theology from an "indecent" point of view. In any case, due to the R-rated nature of her writing, most would be wise to avoid Althaus-Reid's work. However, as far

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<sup>1</sup>"Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid," Transgender Theology Conference, accessed December 5, 2024, <https://www.transgendertheologyconference.com/2023/06/marcella-maria-althaus-reid/>.

as she represents a growing worldview, there is value in engaging with her material from an apologetics perspective. This essay will do just that. First, I will review her major bodies of influence, focusing on Foucault and Lyotard. I will then present several major arguments from *Indecent Theology* and *The Queer God*. My aim is not to comprehensively summarize the two books, but rather to draw from them in order to reconstruct point of view. Finally, I will offer an apologetic approach to the presented point of view, arguing that her call for indecency represents a desire to be known and loved which can only be answered by Jesus Christ Himself.

To understand Marcella Althaus-Reid's work, we must first understand her philosophical background. She owes much in particular to Foucault's queer theory, but draws from Althusser and Lyotard as well. Her philosophical background is not simply an influence, but represents her contextual starting point. She looks to Foucault's famous post-structuralist reinterpretation of power dynamics to understand how sexual and ethical norms are enforced. Foucault critiques a traditional understanding of power that he deems "essentially repressive."<sup>2</sup> He sees more within power dynamics than one force merely pushing down on another. To Foucault, power is everywhere, and comes from every one; in each social interaction, every party exercises some degree of power over the rest. The overall power dynamic is developed dialogically through the interactions of all parties. Importantly, power does not work merely by restricting a person's behavior, but by shaping them internally. In other words, power has an *internal hold on desire*. As parties in a social dynamic interact with one another, they shape each other from the inside out. This can be seen in parents educating their children, teenagers socializing with one another, or in institutions promoting codes of ethics. Foucault therefore argues that power is *creative* as

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, "The History of Sexuality," Monoskop, accessed December 5, 2024, [https://monoskop.org/images/4/40/Foucault\\_Michel\\_The\\_History\\_of\\_Sexuality\\_1\\_An\\_Introduction.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/4/40/Foucault_Michel_The_History_of_Sexuality_1_An_Introduction.pdf). P. 81

well as repressive. It can generate a non-alien social world with rules of conduct that people actually desire, because it seems to generate from their own hearts. In the category of institutions, Foucault sees a special technique of power: normalization.<sup>3</sup> Normalization occurs when an institution measures and judges individuals against its own established norm. This is done in a variety of ways, including law, tradition, and belief.<sup>4</sup> Systems of education, for example, test and grade students based on adherence to their own pedagogical norms. The process of normalization “imposes homogeneity” among a population, but also takes note of individuality by distributing rank and hierarchy on the basis of adherence to the norm.<sup>5</sup> As imposed norms are internalized, they are then perpetuated by the population through various forms of self-surveillance. One of the most powerful techniques of self-surveillance is religious *confession*. This is where, we will see, Althaus-Reid picks up her discussion of the hegemonization of sexual identity.

Jean-François Lyotard's postmodern view of metanarratives is central to Althaus-Reid's hermeneutic principle. Metanarratives are overarching stories or worldviews which offer an explanation of and legitimization for knowledge, history, and cultural practices or institutions. The Enlightenment Metanarrative, for example, thought of history and culture in terms of human progress and holistically reframed modern understanding of the world along these lines. Lyotard views these metanarratives as overly restrictive and totalizing; the metanarrative's explanation of reality is too complete to be real, and too hegemonizing to represent the heterogeneity of modern

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish by Michel Foucault,” Monoskop, accessed December 5, 2024, [https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault\\_Michel\\_Discipline\\_and\\_Punish\\_The\\_Birth\\_of\\_the\\_Prison\\_1977\\_1995.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf). P. 183

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 184

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

people. Postmodernism, for Lyotard, represents an “incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>6</sup>

Metanarratives have “lost their credibility” as culture and epistemology have shifted away from historical ideals, undermining claims to universality.<sup>7</sup> Instead of advocating one metanarrative over the others, he pushes for a pluralistic worldview in which localized *little narratives* (petit récits) can tell stories from their own contexts and yet coexist alongside one another as a diverse crowd of perspectives.<sup>8</sup> He encourages readers not to think of this diversity as relativistic in the Nietzschean sense, but rather as pointing towards the beautiful sublimity of human knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Althaus-Reid understands traditional theological worldviews as types of metanarrative (she refers to them as *Grand Narratives*), and applies Lyotard’s incredulity towards them.

Althaus-Reid argues that Liberation Theology has not done enough to question the colonial metanarrative. The European conquest of Latin America systematically demolished and replaced the epistemological/theological universe of the continent. According to Althaus-Reid, liberation theorists did a good job disrupting the Grand Narrative of the European Christian by means of “theological discontinuity”, in the form of a dialogical process by which the marginalized classes reclaim theology as their own.<sup>10</sup> While Liberation Theology is indeed the basis for her *indecent theology*, it has had some serious epistemological oversights, particularly in the category of sexual experience and identity. She argues, “Liberation Theology needs to be understood as a continuing process of recontextualisation, a permanent exercise of serious doubting in

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, “The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,” Monoskop, accessed December 5, 2024, [https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Lyotard\\_Jean-Francois\\_The\\_Postmodern\\_Condition\\_A\\_Report\\_on\\_Knowledge.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Lyotard_Jean-Francois_The_Postmodern_Condition_A_Report_on_Knowledge.pdf), p. xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 80

<sup>10</sup> Althaus-Reid, Marcella. 2000. *Indecent Theology*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group. Accessed December 5, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. P. 4

theology.”<sup>11</sup> By recontextualisation, she does *not* mean switching actual sociocultural contexts (she agrees that the marginalized and the poor ought to be the hermeneutical starting point), but by reconsidering the *hermeneutical principles* that are being employed. In particular, she seeks a principle of “sexual honesty.”<sup>12</sup> In short, Liberation Theology has not spoken for groups marginalized on the basis of their sexual identity, and she aims to find a way to do so.

Althaus-Reid calls for theological incoherence as a response to European systematic theologies. Orthodox Christian dogma’s ability to taxonomize both the world and its reader is actually an “expression of its hegemonizing objectives”<sup>13</sup> We may recall Lyotard’s understanding of metanarratives as *totalizing forces*; this is what Althaus-Reid is afraid of. Theology not only has the ability to systematically categorize all phenomena, but, as with Lyotard’s metanarratives, it can also systematically conform all phenomena into its own categories. In this way, theology has the potential to silence those who do not fit into the established social framework. If the categories of theology do not reflect your own lived experience, you will be severely misrepresented, or worse, experience a conflict of identity. Liberation Theologies are not exempt from ability to misrepresent. Althaus-Reid reflects on her own experience as a young woman, watching Europeans travel to Latin America to witness firsthand the poverty and oppression spoken of by Liberationists. The “community of the poor” that Europeans wished to view was not real; locals were too heterogeneous for that, but they allowed Europeans “to misrepresent [them].”<sup>14</sup> The category of *poor* or *oppressed* does not represent a unified community, but is just a label that can be placed on anyone to whom it applies. A theology *from the poor* could be a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 32

theology from any of a wide range of experiences of poverty, which may or may not speak for the rest. Liberation Theology gets loaded with caricatures and false assumptions, and risks losing its ability to truly represent its subjects. This is all the more dangerous when the theology is produced for the sake of market demand. Therefore, Althaus-Reid argues that Liberation Theology ought not to be thought of as a *proper theology*, but rather as a “creative movement” that breaks away from the Grand Narrative.<sup>15</sup> In other words, she is not trying to create her own queer systematic theology. She simply wants to push off against the grand narrative of the European colonizer in a way that comes from a sexually honest starting point. This is quite in line with Lyotard’s desire for a pluralistic worldview of *little narratives*. In what way should we break away from the European Grand Narrative? For Althaus-Reid, the answer is *indecenty*.

Althaus-Reid argues that liberation theology has perpetuated a facade of sexual decency that misrepresents its subjects. Traditional liberation theology opens no category for deviation from sexual norms. Therefore, it by nature carries its norms as baggage from orthodox Christian dogma. Althaus-Reid looks to the Virgin Mary as a paradigm for these norms. She critiques traditional Mariology for its *vanilla* understanding of sexual identity and femininity. Mary is a symbol of asexuality, submissiveness, and purity. Althaus-Reid’s issue with Mary is not that the Bible portrays her in the way it does, but with the way the Church has presented her as a norm for female self-identification.<sup>16</sup> Foucault’s understanding of the power of normalization does a lot to explain her perspective. Mary has been presented as paradigmatic for a *good Christian woman*, and every real woman is measured and judged according to their ability to model her. The pure sexual standards Mary represents are *normalized* into the hearts of women, so that they

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 57

themselves long for such values. Liberation theology carries these norms along with it. She argues, “the virginal liberationist does theology without lust.”<sup>17</sup> Althaus-Reid’s solution is to begin reconsidering symbols such as Mary in *indecent terms*. We must reimagine the meaning of Mary in the Bible from the point of view of our own sex and sexuality.<sup>18</sup> That is to say, to push off against the normalizing power of orthodox Christianity’s sexual rules, one must take *lust* as their hermeneutic principle.

Althaus-Reid asks readers to see theology as a sexual act. This is an audacious statement, but she has already set it up. She has already demonstrated that the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of theology do not exist merely in the theoretical realm, but are presented as productive norms. Therefore, doing theology has a significant effect on the sexual behavior of real people. She argues, “Systematic Theology can be considered as the case of an arbitrary sexual theory with divine implications.”<sup>19</sup> But it is not merely the sexual ethics of Christianity that Althaus-Reid finds dangerous, it is the conceptual categories of sexuality. Once again, we may return to Lyotard’s theory of metanarratives to see her argument. The metanarrative seeks to categorize all the phenomena in the universe. The insufficiency of a metanarrative is revealed (and it always is) when its categories cannot account for the lived experience of its subjects. Althaus-Reid applies this to theology, arguing that “While people struggle to find life and meaning in the relationships of the sofa beds of friends and lovers, Systematic Theology struggles to master and obliterate those meanings.”<sup>20</sup> It should be taken for granted that she has a problem with orthodox Christian sexual ethics. But Liberation theology, particularly feminist theology, will likely already break

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 49

<sup>18</sup> She offers plenty of examples, but they needn’t be repeated.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 88



from these ethics. The problem she has with liberationists is *conceptual*. Liberation theology fails to conceptually account for, and therefore speak for, minority sexualities. This is an expansion of the point made a few paragraphs earlier, that Althaus-Reid seeks a theology that accounts for sexual deviancy. She argues that doing theology from the hermeneutic point of view of lust opens up conceptual categories that account for a truer lived experience of sexuality. Failure to do so, she argues, creates “schizophrenic spiritualities.”<sup>21</sup> Theologians, even the liberationists, carry “the burden of a theology which leaves [them] alone when having sex.”<sup>22</sup> Again, this is not only because orthodox theology condemns non-Biblical sexuality, but also because non-lust-based theologies literally cannot account for the meaning people derive from their own nonconformist sexual experiences. In keeping with Lyotard’s desire for plurality, this theological schizophrenia is not cured by a single theology that claims to be more open-minded or accepting. Instead, it needs a diversity of theologies that come from the lived experience of individuals. Once again, the way to achieve this is through the hermeneutical principle of lust: *one must read their own indecency into the Bible*. Having established her theory, Althaus-Reid spends most of the remainder of her book detailing the specifics of what an indecent reading of the Bible might look like.<sup>23</sup> At this point, we can move on to her follow-up work, where she champions a specific technique for doing indecent theology: *queering*.

*The Queer God*, published in 2003, builds on *Indecent Theology* by offering a specifically queer reading of the Bible. While *Indecent Theology* certainly discusses LGBT identities and practices, this time she covers a good deal more territory. Its proposed “indecencies” include topics ranging

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> She also spends some time ironing out the implications of her theory. She presents a less-relevant but interesting argument that an indecent reading of the Bible will help keep theology tethered to a materialistic worldview (111).

from heterosexual promiscuity to illegal practices of sadomasochism. Even so, the similarity between the two books means that there is a lot of overlapping content. This paper will include a discussion only of the unique arguments from *The Queer God*. Furthermore, this book also deserves the same R-rating as *Indecent Theology* (perhaps even worse). There is much content that is better left unsaid, if even read. For both of these reasons, the discussion of *The Queer God* will be much narrower than the previous. I will focus only on those ideas which most crucially demonstrate her point of view and offer space for apologetics.

There are theologians all over the place. They might be in an office, a factory, or a gay salsa bar. Liberationists argue, to this effect, that the identity of a theologian should not be “ideologically determined,” but should itself be the starting point for “contextual theologies.”<sup>24</sup> To create a queer contextual theology, one must *queer* theology, by which she refers to a process of “deliberate questioning of heterosexual experience and thinking which has shaped our understanding of theology.”<sup>25</sup> This requires both honesty about one’s own sexual experience as well as the practice of reading those experiences into the Bible. This is indecent theology again, just wearing new clothes. She takes it a little further, arguing that homosexual experiences are incompatible with totalitarian theologies (her name for the theological bad guys in this book), and that the experiences in themselves un-shape the theologies from the subject’s point of view. Acts of homosexuality (and the love and meaning derived from them) are able to disrupt the entire theological worldview. For Althaus-Reid, this disruption is the key.

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<sup>24</sup> Althaus-Reid, Marcella. 2003. *The Queer God*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group. Accessed December 5, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. P. 5

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Althaus-Reid explores the practice of confession as a hegemonizing tactic of totalitarian theology. It is once again helpful to return to Foucault's theory of normalization. By constantly evaluating people against a standard, an institution (or any source of power) slowly impresses those norms onto their own hearts. The subjects begin to evaluate themselves and one another against the standard, now desiring to model it. Confession is essentially the ultimate form of submission, in which an individual repents of their subnormal behavior to the institution of power itself. It is a complete internalization of the norm itself and of the institution as its origin.<sup>26</sup> In other words, it is a complete internalized oppression. Life is reinterpreted as dyad: sins to be confessed, or actions to be rewarded; bodies to be ashamed of, or those approved by the Church; clergy or lay; sacred or profane. Althaus-Reid pushes back against dyadic thinking (thinking in terms of binaries or oppositional categories), as it artificially enforces hierarchy between groups and concepts. The way out of the oppression is not simply to love oneself even when one suffers through "hetero-hell" (her word for the fate that awaits those who practice non heteronormativity), but to break the dyad through *critical bisexual thinking*.<sup>27</sup>

One must think bisexually to escape the oppression of binary theology. Bisexuality is her chosen metaphor for the ability to think fluidly, or choose a third option. It refuses to place people or concepts into oppositional categories and instead allows for an inclusive understanding of the human experience.<sup>28</sup> This is not just a way to be more open minded; it has implications for the practice confession. Althaus-Reid sees the dialectic of punishment and confession as deeply formative for the body and life of a Christian. Drawing from Foucault, she argues that "the subject allows itself to be re-presented and interpreted by an Other who has followed a similar

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

pattern before.”<sup>29</sup> Thinking bisexually allows confession to be reinterpreted. It is still a process of self-formation, but not one of comparison and judgment. She refers to her version of confession as a “tango”, presenting it as an honest and intimate process of mutual self-discovery and formation.

Althaus-Reid expands on her hermeneutics of lust. She argues, as before, that one must have an epistemologically, not just geographically, textualized theology. But now she takes it further than mere contextualization. She puts forth her hero, the theological-villain. The villain makes political and sexual transgressions a presupposition of doing theology. They gather their source material for theology from stories of deviancy and rebellion.<sup>30</sup> The villain employs a “libertine epistemology”, which prioritizes a theology that embraces transgression and resists ethical constraints.<sup>31</sup> This expands on *Indecent Theology*’s hermeneutics of lust by proactively seeking out transgression for the sake of discovering new truth. It is no longer merely about representing existing experiences; the theologian-villain must embrace transgression. The purpose of this libertine epistemology is to fight “combinative reduction”, the hermeneutic principle that serves as the theologian-villain’s nemesis.<sup>32</sup> Combinative reduction occurs when a narrative reaches a *saturation point* in interpretation. Althaus-Reid claims that at a certain point, there is a limit to the meaning that can be drawn from a text (usually the Bible); at this point, the meaning is adopted by the reader and used to interpret the next narrative. But the theologian-villain does no such thing. Instead of accepting the meaning at the saturation point, they *queer* the passage (they think fluidly and apply queer experiences to the text).

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 18

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 29

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

This reconstruction represents the bulk of Althaus-Reid's argument. Christian readers will have long been aware that the Gospel is not present in her writing. This is a radical postmodern philosophy expanded to include Christian terminology, culture, history, and tradition. This should not be seen as a point against her, because she never claims to be doing anything else.

Apologetics is the appropriate response to Althaus-Reid's theology. There are two responses to avoid at the start. First, it is easy for Christians to read work like this and walk away completely offended. She does an excellent job at intentionally profaning the Word of God and the Gospel that has brought us new life. The temptation, therefore, is to attempt a takedown of her theology to defend ourselves against it. And certainly there is room to critique her work. But history is not on the side of the heretics. The Church has defended herself against 2000 years worth of bad theologians, and we remember the names of only a handful. But the Gospel of Jesus Christ, never wavering, even in the face of great darkness. Therefore, a takedown of Althaus-Reid is not of ultimate importance, and, given her relatively fringe reception, does not seem necessary at this point. The second response to avoid is taking notes from her to build up our own orthodox theology. In the first place, the Gospel we have in Scripture is complete and speaks to all generations. We must be thoughtful about how we contextualize God's Word to our audiences, but adding anything substantive to the Gospel is foolish and wrong (Galatians 1:9). In the second place, Althaus-Reid would not want us to cherry-pick from her work to build up our own doctrine. Unless we adopt her core principle of *indecenty*, we miss her whole point. She might even take offense to us eclectically using her work for the sake of what she views as an oppressive institution. Therefore, a wise response to Althaus-Reid is simply to preach the

Gospel. *Indecent Theology* is not the work of a misled believer in need of correction, but of a materialist atheist using Christian language and ideas. Her work represents a real worldview held by real people, so we might use it as a context in which to preach the Gospel. We ought to seek Biblical truths, which, unmodified, speak the Gospel meaningfully to Althaus-Reid's point of view.

Althaus-Reid skirts close to Biblical Truth with her desire for sexual honesty. As we saw, she argues that approaching the Bible from a sexually inauthentic point of view creates a schizophrenic theology which fails to properly represent the subject. She calls for a theology with an epistemologically contextual point of view (the hermeneutic of lust). There is a degree to which she is right-- failure to approach the Word from a morally authentic perspective is disingenuous and misguided. The author of Hebrews reminds us that, "no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). Honesty, even sexual honesty, is not optional before the God who sees everything. Likewise, Proverbs counsels, "whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). A morally disingenuous approach will not get us closer to the Lord; in fact, we risk turning into the Pharisees of the New Testament. The Gospel demands that we are honest about our sin before God.

Her call for sexual honesty and contextual theology represents a desire to be *known*. She does not want the queer community to be forgotten or glossed over by the Church, left to suffer in their theological confusion. This is how we may respond to her desire for sexual honesty: we are fully known and fully seen, in all our indecent context and experience, by the only One

whose perspective truly matters. In spite of that fact, He loves us enough to send His Son to die for us. Of course, Althaus-Reid would push back strongly against the idea of God's *judging* gaze. She might ask, what good is being completely known if we are going to be judged for who we are? God's judgment, though it has harsh consequences for every one of us, is ultimately dignifying. God does not judge animals for their behavior. As far as we can tell from scripture and plain reason, there is no ethical imperative put on them. But He cares about what we do. This distinguishes us from the rest of Creation, and puts us in a place of dignity and privilege. To say that God does not care what we do, even in bed, would be to lower our status below what God has given us as His image-bearers. But God's appraisal of our worth does not stop there. Christ's death on the Cross for our sins is our ultimate value judgment.

Of course, complete honesty before God is not easy. There are depths to our sinful hearts that remain unknown to us, and are only slowly revealed through a lifetime of sanctification and conviction. Unlike in Althaus-Reid's contextual theology, believers do not need to do all the legwork to achieve complete honesty. The Spirit of God knows us better than we know ourselves, and works on us in ways that subvert our intentions and plans. This takes us to another apologetic point, the metanarrative of the Gospel.

The metanarrative of the Gospel is not another restrictive worldview, it is the Kingdom of God. The Bible does not push ethical rules or metaphysical principles for their own sake. In fact, to see the Bible as merely representing a worldview would miss the point. The testimony of Scripture points not just to a system of belief, but to the person and work of Jesus Christ Himself. The Spirit uses the means of faith in Scripture's perfect testimony to draw us to Jesus. No other worldview or metanarrative can make this claim, that at its core resides a living and active

person (Christ) whose colonial and hegemonizing activity is done by His own Spirit so that He may reside in the hearts of believers (I am only using this type of language in response to Althaus-Reid's use of it). Furthermore, the hegemonizing work of the Gospel is completely subversive. It is not seen, as in other worldviews, in the powerful controlling the poor. In fact, the wealthy are the ones whose hearts must be especially "colonized" by the Spirit (not because they are qualitatively more sinful, but because of the hardness of heart that comes from being in a place of privilege). All of the synoptic Gospels attest that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God" (Matt 19:24). This highlights an important presuppositional difference-- Althaus-Reid would take Christian Doctrine to be merely a product of Church history, fashioned in the image of the theologians who wrote it. If Doctrine is a man-made worldview, then she is right to assume that the hegemonization of orthodox beliefs may be unfair. It would just be another way human beings exercise control over one another. But the Bible claims that it is the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). It is inspired by God directly, and is His testimony about Himself to humanity. If this is our presupposition, the spreading of the Gospel no longer looks so insidious. Instead, it looks like human beings pointing one another to an outside influence which claims to be the author of our Salvation.

Finally, the Bible offers a true and better answer to Althaus-Reid's call for *indecenty*. Scripture is more raw and vulnerable than many scholars understand. One does not need to spend much time in the Old Testament to see that it engages with some of the worst perversions of human nature: bloodshed, cruelty, sexual abuse, and sometimes even human sacrifice. But this type of engagement does not stop in the Old Testament. The Gospels each recount the most vulgar thing ever done by sinful humanity: the crucifixion of Jesus. As the Son of God, Jesus was the only



truly *decent* person to walk the earth (to use Althaus-Reid's language). His crucifixion was the greatest act of injustice ever committed. And yet, God uses the most indecent thing for our greatest good. In his book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, James Cone (one of the liberation theologians Althaus-Reid seeks to build on) argues, "the cross is a paradoxical religious symbol because it *inverts* the world's value system with the news that hope comes by way of defeat, that suffering and death do not have the last word, that the last shall be first and the first last."<sup>33</sup> What could be more *indecent* than this? God does not tell humanity to clean itself up for the hope of a reward. He meets them at the height of their wickedness and *subverts* their worst desires for the sake of their own salvation.

Althaus-Reid seeks to construct an *indecent theology* which comes from and speaks for the experience of queer Christians. She builds off of postmodern philosophical traditions, applying their principles to Christian doctrine and history. She calls for new ways of thinking which subvert, surprise, and challenge traditional doctrine. Importantly, she argues that this must be done from the hermeneutical starting point of lust. While her theory may provide some interesting insights, it neither contains nor leads readers to the Gospel. Christians, therefore, would be wise not to approach Althaus-Reid and her contemporaries with fear, but rather, with the Gospel itself. While her words may seem offensive, they are, as with all worldly philosophy, a deeper cry for the meaning and love that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>33</sup> Cone 23

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