

Professor Marcella Althaus-Reid: In Memorium
(Given in the Memorial Service, St. George's West Church
07 March 2009)

As Head of the School of Divinity (New College), and on behalf of all the academic, library and support staff, Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea (Principal of the University) and Professor April McMahon (Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Humanities & Social Science, who is with us today), I am honoured to give a brief tribute in memory of Professor Marcella Althaus-Reid, my dear colleague. Note also that University flags fly today at half-mast in memory of Marcella.

When I came to the University in 1996, Marcella was still in the early years of her academic career, and over the next decade it was a personal pleasure to watch her progress to Senior Lecturer, Reader, and then to a personal Chair as Professor of Contextual Theology. In the process, a wide international renown accrued for her numerous scholarly contributions and her innovative and bold approach to theology.

But Marcella was also a committed colleague in the School and University. She accepted a full teaching load and particularly enriched our course offerings at Honours and postgraduate level with her expertise and enthusiasm for Liberation Theology, Feminist, and Post-Colonialist theology. She was often a member of the teaching team in a course on Biblical Interpretation which I managed, and I can testify personally to the high ratings that she received from students, who found her lectures and seminar sessions particularly exciting and horizon-expanding. She prepared for and participated in School meetings, and took on Convenership of the School Quality Assurance Committee, which also involved participation in the wider University levels.

She was the first woman to hold a professorial chair in Divinity in the history of the University, a distinction that she wore with grace, never

acting like a prima dona but remaining a true team player even as she rose in scholarly acclaim. She will remain an inspiration, perhaps especially for women in Theology & Religious Studies here and across the world.

But she will also be profoundly missed in the School of Divinity here. Several colleagues have mentioned how difficult it is to grasp that she is really no longer with us. Her vibrant style, combining also a commitment to excellence and a readiness to ask of herself far more than of any of her students or colleagues, her cheery greeting (with that softly accented English), wonderfully scented office, and her deep, deep Christian faith . . . all these things which we all knew and appreciated so much make it hard now to accept her parting.

It is, for me, especially meaningful that this service is held on the day in the Church year commemorating the life and death of another strong Christian woman, St. Perpetua, and the Carthage martyrs. As a fellow Christian, however, it is not “goodbye” but “hasta la vista”, and I entrust her to that supremely Faithful One whose love is stronger than death.