

Book Review:

Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine

By Cynthia L. Rigby

Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2018. 408 Pages.

Reviewed by Andy Kinsey

Bridging the gap between church and academy has always been a challenge. Finding practical ways to introduce and discuss matters of theology among all God's people, laity and clergy, has been a goal of those who teach theology and who minister among us. Too many times over the decades the good work of academic theology has remained in the hands of academics and left out of the hands of persons whose "ordinary lives" spark questions of faith. How do we hold these two aspects of the current theological landscape together? Indeed, how, as Luther once wrote, do we hold on to Christ while also claiming that Christ holds on to us? These are questions that hopefully bring us together in the cause of Christ's mission in the world: the faith we hold on to is also the faith that holds on to us. Faith holds us as we respond to Christ's call and bring in God's kingdom. Faith is the power of God's presence in our lives (11).

Cynthia Rigby's book *Holding Faith* conveys the core content of Christian doctrine and then offers the question many, even in the church, want to ask, "So what?" What do these teachings have to do with the practical realities of life, with ethical decisions, with relationships? Using theological literature, and utilizing scripture, but also bringing into the conversation sociology, fiction, and movies, Rigby's work shows us why theology matters and why it is important to understand the faith once delivered to the saints in ways that help us to grow (Jude 2). Indeed, Rigby reveals why approaches to Christian doctrines relate to life and why such doctrines instruct us to love God and one another more fully. As she states in the Introduction, faithful doctrine is not simply about repeating doctrines from the past but about discerning when the formulations of the past need to be let go so that other life-giving configurations of the Christian faith can emerge (xix). This is why Rigby's argument needs a hearing.

Though Reformed in outlook, Rigby's book has a solid ecumenical focus. It revolves around the classic doctrines of the church but it does so in ways that are accessible to persons across the church's traditions. For example, she does not begin with notions of unity, but with a basic question of revelation: how do we know God? What is the relationship between special and general revelation? Throughout the chapters, there are questions that will guide persons into the wider theological conversation.

This is what makes Rigby's book on *Holding Faith* worthwhile: in each major section she notes not only how we may speak of God (Part One - revelation) but also how God meets us (Part Two - incarnation) and the purpose of why God makes us (Part Three - creation). She continues with God blesses us (Part Four - church and Christian life) and finishes with splendid chapters on God's sending us in mission (Part Five - hope and vocation). The chapter on vocation is especially insightful, and the missional impulse will appeal to those who are seeking to connect to the wider missional/evangelical movement. All these sections flow with ease, as readers pick up hints about church councils, key theologians (especially Calvin and Barth) and contemporary debates in theology - all the while maintaining the focus: why do these doctrines matter to our lives?

Persons in the field of evangelism may appreciate this book. Others may not like the Reformed emphasis, though it is highly engaging with respect to all traditions. Persons who are involved in parish ministry and who are needing a solid text may find it appealing. The whole notion of holding is something persons may be able to understand, especially in an era when there seems to be little to hold on to! Nevertheless, Rigby's using popular examples from culture and literature does provide

practical approaches to access highly complex concepts. To those who teach this can be fruitful.

Rigby's book comes at a time of increasing division and fragmentation, both in the church and in the culture, not to mention the academy. These characteristics of contemporary culture are real and ever before us. And yet, as Rigby rightly contends, so is the ever-present God who speaks to us and meets us, who helps us and sustains us and who is ever going before us, whose love never ends (1 Cor. 13).