



**APRIL, 2019**

**Cynthia L Rigby, *Holding Faith: A Practical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2018.**

I read this book while auditing Richard Topping's 'Introduction to Theology' class at Vancouver School of Theology. It was the text for the course. I took the course to get an overview of contemporary considerations about the basic evangelical truths of the Christian Church. This book delivered exceptionally well on that promise. It is worth a careful and prayerful read.

Rigby teaches at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She sees Mary, the mother of Jesus, as model theologian. Mary ponders in the midst of everything that goes on in ordinary life and has the openness to be amazed. 'Holding faith' is laying claim to the hope that what God has promised has and will come to fruition, regardless of the ways things seem to be going. Faith/trust in God's forgiving and reconciling love unites us to Jesus Christ and enables us to participate in his life because he shares everything he is with us. Rigby cites Marilynne Robinson's introduction to an anthology of John Calvin's writings,<sup>1</sup> saying that the great divine energy upon which we ponder when we do theology exists primarily to make possible our miraculously delicate participation in it. This happens only because our Creator wants it to happen and makes it happen. Our participation is grateful response to this loving initiative and invitation from God.

Rigby presents her overview of theology as a series of conversations within the community of the pondering people of God we usually call "church." Here analogy for church is "home." She admits it's a somewhat dangerous analogy because of the many ways the church "falls short of being the safe and nurturing place it promises to be and that people of hope it will be." (206) But she insists that it's a good word for the church is called to be ever more faithfully. We are already a fellowship of friends in Jesus Christ, but are constantly growing into the fullness of that community as God draws us into God's future consummation of all the Trinity's promises.

Perhaps one way of indicating the scope and flow of Rigby's ponderings is to describe briefly the design of the overview. She begins by addressing the question of how we can speak of God at all. In essence, her answer is that God desires and enables such conversation, providing with a rich treasury of words

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<sup>1</sup> Marilynne Robinson, "Introduction," in John F Thornton and Susan B Varenne (eds), *Steward of God's Covenant: Selected Writings/John Calvin* (New York, NY: Picador, 2005).

and approaches in the Scriptures. With that foundation in God's revelation of the desired relationships in which life flourishes, she then looks at how God meets us, makes us, blesses us, and sends us. Each of these dynamics in our relationship with God issues in practical ways of being in and for the world as ambassadors of the forgiving and reconciling love we encounter most powerfully in Jesus Christ as the Spirit draws us into that flow of divine energy.

Here are the main doctrines or truths discussed under each of those four dynamics:

- God Meets Us - Incarnation (Where does God meet us?)
  - Trinity (In What Ways Does God Claim Us?)
- God Makes Us - Creation (Who Did God Create Us to Be & What Went Wrong?)
  - Sin & Salvation (What Is God Making Us Into?)
- God Blesses Us - Church (Where Is Our Home?)
  - Christian Life (What Does It Mean to Be God's Children?)
- God Sends Us - Christian Hope (Where Are We Headed?)
  - Christian Vocation (What Are We Called to Do?)

As she comes to end of over 300 pages of exploring what our ancestors and contemporaries in the faith have held over the years and across the continents, she acknowledges the ups and downs of holding the faith. Know that God is and will be God takes a lifetime of attention in community with diligence. In the final analysis, however, "people who hold tight to the faith that embraces them are never done gathering knowledge. This is because they are in the business of bearing witness to a God who is known, in each moment, ever-again. The learning continues; and I mean not only experiential learning. I mean book learning. I mean focused theological, liturgical, exegetical study. I mean the kind of study that leads us to be still. I mean the kind of study that creates sacred spaces for us to think, to contemplate, and to re-know the somethings that matter to everything: that God meets us and continues to make us, that God desires to bless every life and the life of the world, and that God sends us to share all that is meaningful with one another." (303)

Rigby's overview, with its particular way of framing the flow of Christian theologizing, is one of several books we will be reviewing at Brentwood as we compose a commentary on our Brentwood Declaration over the next several months. We will also be testing some pondering practices within the Spirit can transform our participation in God's divine energy of forgiving and reconciling love. The most provocative of those books will get their own review in this section of our website in coming months.