

Martin Marty's SPEAKING OF TRUST. A Review.

Colleagues,

Today's ThTh 285 comes from the hand of Albert J. Jabs, retired (well, not really) professor, Allen University and Limestone College, Columbia, SC. Al and I have some common bonds. We're both graduates of Valparaiso University. Both septuagenarians born in November, though he just entered the 70s turf. Both with family roots going back to the German Lutherans who once lived in what is now Poland. Al has been a member of the Crossings board for several terms. The context of his teaching career has been "black" academic institutions. No surprise then, that when Bob Bertram invited him to join the Crossings board, Bob introduced him at his first meeting as a pale-skinned "black street preacher." As you'll soon see. Al is irrepressible, and thus un-editable. So I pass him on to you straight-rap and all. Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

A book review by Al Jabs

*Marty, Martin. SPEAKING OF TRUST – Conversing with Luther about the Sermon on the Mount. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003
159 Pages*

THINKING TRUST AFTER THE 9/11 THRUST

Jesus promises us with eternal hope in the Sermon on The Mount. These promises are both timely and timeless. The world lies to

us and gives us false promises...and we have to deal with the wounds. It has always been paradoxical that Our Lord started to write (John 8:6) and may not have finished the line in the sand. Martin Luther and Martin Marty together may have written more than any other writers in Christian history. Indeed it is a formidable but exciting task to review such a book as Dr. Marty's recent work on trust, which may well be the most interactive volume of the 50 plus penned from his active hand ... and, with the lethal possibilities of today, perhaps one of the most important ever in Christian history.

When Pastor Marty flew into South Carolina, soon after 9/11, he was no crusader, but in his own words "a seeker." As he addressed the University of South Carolina audience on the general American religious situation, he came across as a mediator, a searcher and seeker for the causes of 9/11. He projected a peacemaker image attempting to fathom the mystery of the suicide attacks. With all of his writings on history, Marty was content to rest in God's grace until the fog had dissipated. The mixed crowd did not hear a crusader speech. There was a thoughtfulness ... hey, maybe a whisper of repentance rather than revenge/retribution ... and that could get even Dr. Martin Marty in trouble notwithstanding his Swiss background. Trust was written all over this top American religious historian. Yet, there is more about trust in this little volume. Read the book.

The world, in the minds of many, has changed forever as a result of 9/11. What can we really, deep down, believe? Thinking trust in a mistrustful and forgetful age is the heart of the small volume which can be read in a couple of sittings. The book is a mesmerizing work because it invites you to continue the conversation initiated by Jesus, and carried on by Luther, which is additionally passed on to Marty, who wants to convey the conversation on to you, dear reader, and to your

friends, for Marty emphasizes that even the Apostle Paul and Professor Luther did not think they had much faith until they started to explain the Solus Christus and Sola Fide spirit which activated their very active lives. Now, this is where the water hits the wheel, because Marty takes the conversation and crosses the Promise in many of the crossings of our busy, buffeted, and battered age. There is a strong invitation, and Marty, in an engaging, winsome manner takes the words to the hurts of the hours. There is healing in these helpful Promises. Read the book.

If one reflects on the brief day of life, some of us who are reading these lines have been graced by God for seventy years. Marty, who is nearing four score, knows the bleakness of losing a loved one, as he movingly describes his own plaintive pleas before hope and promise come. In the life and death of our own son for thirteen days, and the car deaths of my brother Ernie and daughter Jennie, and for many readers, your own crosses, an immediate bond is formed. What an antidote for the justice/injustice coming at us through the media/mail venues and dying of each day which comes as a kind of numbing/dumbing down through the tube.

The book is healing because it takes the immortal words of Jesus and takes that power and promise through the lens of Luther, and more importantly, reinforces Jesus as a walking and talking brother who comes with me and you in our class room ghetto, family concerns, community anxieties, and global angst. Marty brings it all into the intimacy of our living room and it is better medicine than Dr. Phil, "Today," and all the other "trust gurus" who have their own immediate promises to sell in an age of amnesiacs. Read the book, and look for the real Promise, but it has to be shared.

Trust and mistrust were and are key themes of this book. The

Beatitudes are there and they are the most important words we can read. If we line up with the world, that is where our trust and hopes are. Last night, as I heard my own son, Commander Eric—currently attending the National War College—lecture on global terrorism as a possible generational enemy, my thoughts went back to the significance of trust in an age of growing mistrust and spreading hate ideology. How can radical Islam be confronted by the Sermon on the Mount? We trust that Jesus Christ has broken the back of sin, death, and the devil. This is Resurrection power that must be translated into each of our own orbits.

Marty could have given a little more depth on the battle with terrorism, but that is for the reader to do. Marty as a faithful pastor, for over half a century knows the value of that key word...trust...and I would agree, that this is what the book is all about. The dynamics of trust and mistrust cannot be adequately explained without the Sermon on the Mount, and that is what Marty attempts to do with interactive conversation. Anyone, in the pulpit or pew, can carry these promises to the hidden agendas of life, so that insulation and isolation, encouraged by the addictive powers all around us, do not have the last word.

Marty can be as tough as nails when he digs into the horrors of history or the 160,000 Christians who die under persecution in any given year. This remarkable book is local and global in meeting needs for all in any season of life. Repeat, the accusing voices do not have the last word. Again, read the book.

Marty is right when he suggests we think C (Christ), in answer to the big "D's" of disappointment, doubt, discouragement, and depression. The interaction possibilities could make this into an enduring volume. For those of us who are somewhat addicted

to the email venue and snail mail hopes of each day, it would be good to review "Speaking of Trust" as a conversation-starter for the church group, the community klatch, or the decision- or power-centers of our communities. Better yet, give the decision-makers the book.

I am convinced that all of the Apostles, prophets, seasoned church sufferers, and Luther had visions of eternity as they trudged through their respective lives. Marty reveals a glimpse of timelessness, but he brings us back to face the mire. Luther, in the mind of Marty, felt that God impinged on his daily life. The 159 pages of this little book has that kind of potential of lifting power, but again this transformative power can only come through interaction and dialogue in the best and worst of our days. The reflections are made to order for such messaging.

Marty was at his best with the last chapter in "The Company of the Persecuted." Powerful, profound, and pervasive, it is. Jesus warns us with the caveat: "Blessed are you when men (women) revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." (Matthew 5:11) Our Lord allowed His Only Son to be tortured, mutilated, and murdered for our sakes. My Islamic brothers and sisters and other works-righteousness friends buck and turn away at this incomprehensible action...but the Blood Sacrifice was completed. The Sermon on the Mount ties in here, because Paul took his beatings and other savaging; brother Luther has always been the victim of unjustified vitriolic and racist polemics, and of course he could give back sometimes with interest, but he had to take his hits. I am sure Marty has been the recipient of some considerable sniping as well. Yes, say it, you and I and others on this faith journey have also had to take some hits, and like Luther, our own white shirts carry a few dirty spots as well.

The story of my Uncle Emil is important in this. In 1945 he was hit with a communist rifle butt, threatened with death on several occasions, and transported toward seemingly inevitable death in a gulag deep in Russia. Yet, it was his singing of that confirmation hymn, "Jesu, geh voran" (Jesus, lead thou on), that made it possible for him to survive. With God's intervention, he was rescued by a Russian doctor who sent him back home because of his lame foot. He then worked without pay on a Polish collective farm. He had survived but all the other Lutheran villagers died.

Finally, all of us have our pet interests, woundedness, and theological issues, and my own beloved family wonders why I keep on going back to the suffering issues of my own ethnic Lutheran minority German family roots which went through ethnic cleansing in Poland circa 1945-1949. Dr. Marty's well-written inspirations can tie into all of these areas as well as the end of this universe.

Jesus invites Trust . . . Marty can help. Read the book.