

## America's Changing Religious Landscape

### TRANSCRIPT

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KRISTA TIPPETT, HOST: I'm Krista Tippett, today a conversation about religion in America, with one of the great public theologians of our time, Martin Marty. For decades, Martin Marty has been watching developments that are now the stuff of daily headlines: the rise of religious fundamentalism across the world, the decline of the Protestant majority in American culture, and the vigor of evangelical Christianity in American life. Marty offers historical and personal perspective.

MR. MARTIN MARTY: I've often thought — I've often said, 'If Billy Graham had been born mean, we'd be in terrible trouble,' because he had so much power, so many gifts, and so on. One of my distinctions in religion is not liberal and conservative, but mean and non-mean. You have mean liberals and mean conservatives, and you have non-mean of both.

MS. TIPPETT: Martin Marty on America's changing religious landscape. This is *Speaking of Faith*. Stay with us.

[Announcements]

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MS. TIPPETT: I'm Krista Tippett. For decades, Martin Marty has been watching developments that are the stuff of daily headlines and partisan rhetoric: the vigor of evangelical Christianity in politics, the decline of the Protestant majority in American culture, and the rise of religious fundamentalism around the world. Today we'll probe the historical perspective of this leading scholar of religion. We'll discuss what's really new in religion as a force in American culture, politics, and daily life.

From American Public Media, this is *Speaking of Faith*, public radio's conversation about religion, meaning, ethics, and ideas. Today, "America's Changing Religious Landscape: A Conversation with Martin Marty."

Martin Marty has been called the foremost interpreter of religion in America today. The National Book Award, the National Humanities Medal, and the Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences are just a few of the honors he has amassed. He's served on U.S. presidential commissions and directed a visionary research project on religious fundamentalism. The University of Chicago Divinity School, where he taught for 35 years, has created the Martin Marty Center to continue his work on public religion.

But for all his celebrity and scholarship, Martin Marty draws crucial insight from his own personal grounding in the mainstream religious life of American culture. He began his working life not as a scholar but as a pastor. He was born into a Lutheran family in 1928, in the Nebraska of Dust Bowl and Depression, where his father was a teacher and a church organist.

MR. MARTY: We were a church family, of course, it was my father's profession, and I've reminisced with some folks about how I got babysat next to the organ bench and had to sit through long funerals as a child, and somehow it didn't turn me off from it all. I have a brother and a sister, and the three of us were well-schooled in literature and music and art, and also a very close basic sense of the faith of ordinary people, and I've tried to keep some sense of that in my lifework.

MS. TIPPETT: Much of Martin Marty's investigation into American religious life has centered on the dominant majority religion at the heart of our culture, the many denominations of mainline Protestant Christianity. But in our time, surveys show that majority is disappearing even as many Americans perceive the influence of evangelical Protestant Christianity to be growing. In his 2004 book, *The Protestant Voice in American Pluralism*, Marty describes the centuries from 1607 to 1955 as an era in American history in which "Protestants ran the show." That began to change and take on new dimensions in the 1960s, an era vivid in the American popular imagination for political movements and the Vietnam War. For Martin Marty, it was also a decade of astonishing religious turning points whose significance went unnoticed. I asked him to walk me through the religious watersheds of the 1960s that began to erode the dominance of mainline Protestantism.

MR. MARTY: The biggest single event that hit this country happened in Rome, and that's the Second Vatican Council. That is, Protestantism always knew what it was because it knew what Catholicism was, and it was over against that. Suddenly, Catholicism is friendly. It moves out into the public sector. The GI Bill puts Catholic young people into universities. They soon became the most educated group in the country, and Protestants were thrown off balance by that.

Secondly, it's the beginning of the surge of evangelicalism within Protestantism, which — in those days, I imagine a lot of the Protestant leaders kind of sneered at Billy Graham and looked down their nose at tent revivals and so on and didn't pay much attention to see how it was coming. And suddenly in the '60s, I visited Berkeley, you had the Jesus People, little girls getting baptized in their bikinis, and change of worship from a certain kind of formality. The rock bands were coming in. And another huge infusion was an awareness of the religions of the East. You might keep going to your Presbyterian church, but you start doing yoga and you start doing Buddhist disciplines, etc. And you didn't stop being Presbyterian, but you were of a different sort. You didn't take it all for granted.

MS. TIPPETT: I also think that something we've lost a memory of is how much tension there was between Catholics and Protestants, right, in this country, between different kinds of Christians, in a way that is absolutely unimaginable now. And I mean, personally for you, was that shift surprising?

MR. MARTY: I, in 1956, was invited to join the staff of *The Christian Century*, which was the towering Protestant voice. Today it still is, if not towering, a strong voice, but it's ecumenical. It has a lot of Catholic writers; it has a lot of evangelical writers. But at that time, it was Protestant, and it was anti-Catholic. In 1950, on the cover of *The Christian Century*, there was an article, "Pluralism, A National Menace." Pluralism was they're worried about Catholicism. When I joined the staff five years later, pluralism was the best game in town. My first visits to campus, you always had one priest, one minister, one rabbi; that was called pluralism back then. But through that all, the Protestant still was in a privileged position. It simply was a kind of a reflex: 'We're the largest. We're the ones who left our stamp on America's literature, its poetry, its statecraft, etc.'

I'm going to say something in case I'm sounding critical.

MS. TIPPETT: You can sound critical if you'd like to.

MR. MARTY: I'd be happy to be critical, but I don't want to be distorting what I want to be. And that is to say, for all of that reflexive sense of establishment, I think I'm being a neutral, value-free historian when I say I don't know any time in human history that somebody that powerful yielded that gracefully. In the previous century, Protestantism was often used — white Protestantism — to enslave, and it was used to justify the reserving of the Indians. But in the 20th century, Protestants have sort of said, 'All right, you're making your case. We'll make room for you.' They weren't doing that much before the mid-'50s, but from then on in, they have done it even at the expense to their own identity.

MS. TIPPETT: And I'm sure you've read these statistics that are now coming out, that perhaps today or tomorrow or six months from now, there will no longer be a Protestant majority in this country. And it depends on how people measure these things but, still, it seems significant when what is replacing the number of people who say that they're Protestant are more people who say that they have no religion at all. In fact, it's very high among people who were born in 1980 or later. And then there's a category that's doubled, of people who call themselves just Christian, right, who don't identify with a specific tradition. How do you explain these statistics?

MR. MARTY: First of all, I think that Protestantism and Catholicism have very common fates here. They both have had trouble holding their younger generation. In some respects, the Protestants, Catholics, and Jews of the northern part of the United States share a lot with Canada, which is far less involved with church, or Western Europe, which is far, far less involved. Incidentally, that little section, I call it the spiritual ice belt: Western Europe, the British Isles, Canada and the northern U.S. We are really exceptions in the world, and we are really having a hard time catching up with understanding the rest of the world.

Protestantism is not in trouble around the world. I am a Lutheran, and we've had 300 years to get about eight million people. In 15 years from now, the African Lutheran churches will have added as many people as it took us 300 years to get. And that's true of many other Protestantisms and Pentecostals. Every day there are 23,000 new Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, and half of them would be called Protestant, if often in the Pentecostal version. So around the world, it's not a losing force. No longer, however, does it make the reference it once did to Western Europe and its daughter, the United States.

What will that mean for the United States? I don't think we're going to wake up some day and see total change. There's a strange thing that hundreds of years after the vital life of a religion is past, there's still a strong influence. We're still living off some of the Greek religious influences. We're living off a lot of medieval Catholicism. Our very universities are inventions of that. Our hospitals are inventions of that. So in a sense, meanings, ideas — in this case, ideas of liberty, freedom — that came very often from Protestants will live on even if not everybody goes to church. Still, the churches have been the places where these stories get renewed regularly.

MS. TIPPETT: OK. I mean, I just wonder, personally, is this something that troubles you?

MR. MARTY: I don't think I wake up in the morning having great worries about that. You can tell from what I've said I have a global view of humanity and of religion, and it moves around a lot. In the 1930s a great Catholic, Hilaire Belloc, said, "Europe is the Faith, and the Faith is Europe." Well, that was true then. Now the cathedrals are empty, but their granddaughters are full in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. I certainly think that some things borne by the Protestant message would be a great loss. One of its gifts to America was its sense that we're scripted. It's a scriptural faith, it's a Christ-centered faith, but it doesn't mean that all virtue and all morality goes with you. And I think that's been a nice irritating voice in classic Protestantism, which is, no matter how far along you'd come, God was holding you to a higher standard.

MS. TIPPETT: Religious historian and author Martin Marty. One of the most popular of his over 50 books is *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America*. He is considered by some to be a bridge between the devotional and scholarly worlds of liberal mainline Protestantism and evangelical Christianity.

MS. TIPPETT: Let's talk about evangelical Christianity, which at the same time that there are some statistics of people becoming less religious, there's certainly a sense that religion in some ways is more of a force now. I mean, I think there would be people who would take your phrase, "When Protestants ran the show," and say that a certain kind of Christianity is becoming almost a controlling force or, you know, we have an evangelical Christian in the White House. I mean, how are you observing what's happening now, with your broad view of things and of history?

MR. MARTY: I think those of us who write this kind of history are a little puzzled by the naiveté of the — well, people in journalism, in the media, in the general public, who think all this just got invented in the last four years and couple months. It has very deep roots. I trace it not to the '20s. Nobody cared about the religion of Harding, Coolidge, Hoover. And Roosevelt was a mainline Protestant, Episcopalian, and he could draw upon these themes very much. Harry Truman was a salty Baptist. Truman and Carter and Clinton, the three Baptist presidents of the century, know the Bible best. They can just recite reams of it at any moment. Eisenhower started having Billy Graham come by. When we say "evangelical" today, it's almost a long shadow originally of Graham. Today, evangelicalism is multi-headed. It's all over the place. You can't really generalize about it much anymore, but in its purer form, it came up in that way.

And, yes, in '64, they really galvanized around Barry Goldwater and the kind of conservatism. And they didn't get very far because he didn't get very far, but they got angry about being dismissed and so on. In 1976, when Jimmy Carter ran, he's the first one who would say, 'I'm born again,' first one to say, 'I had a personal experience with Jesus,' but they soon dropped him because they didn't like him politically. Ronald Reagan was not born again, but he was friendly to them. But you could see this long trend coming.

Robert Handy, one of our major historians, once wrote a little book on The American Religious Depression, 1925-1935, because the mainline churches were already beginning to lose some of their membership, their status. They were depressed. But Joel Carpenter, another historian, has since pointed out, through it all the fundamentalists who'd been disgraced in the 1920s started organizing. They bought radio stations. They started Bible colleges. They had magazines. And they were building a world inside the world. And suddenly

along come people like Billy Graham and presidents who favor it, and you have a very different kind of pattern, so that by the time — I would say by the time of Ronald Reagan, it became so vivid that the normal clergy in the White House would be evangelists, usually, until recently, of a rather moderate sort.

MS. TIPPETT: It also seems to me, though, that a mistake is made in media in lumping together — as you said, evangelicalism is a — there's a multiplicity of evangelicalism, and evangelicalism has a very different history and theology in some cases from Pentecostals and certainly from fundamentalists, although there is some overlap. How would you explain the distinctions?

MR. MARTY: All right. To the sociologists, the slightly more than one-fourth of America that would be called evangelical includes fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Southern Baptists, and conservative Protestant denominations. And they really have tremendous differences except when they converge on highly focal and, let's say, useful political points: gay marriage or something of that sort. But for the most part, they're much more diverse.

Until around the turn of the last century, all Protestants were called evangelicals; all evangelicals were called Protestant. During the century, though, you started having the liberal churches accenting more the Biblical story applied to social life, economic life, cultural life, whereas those who were evangelical started dealing with private life, personal life. That still goes down in our own time.

MS. TIPPETT: Why did that happen? How did that happen?

MR. MARTY: Well, I think the Protestants who ran the show had the sense that you can pass a law and get rid of slavery, you can join secular people to get antitrust laws, you could have child labor laws. All the while then, the revivalists, Billy Graham's ancestors — the greatest being Dwight Moody, a Chicago evangelist — looked out at the world and saw it in trouble, and he said, "The world is a flood, and God gave me a lifeboat and said, "Moody, rescue all you can." And I think they concentrated on heaven, on saving souls. And then on moral issues, they chose those over which an individual could have control: You shouldn't gamble. You shouldn't swear. You shouldn't drink.

Now what's so interesting today is, what have come to be called social issues in recent campaigns are not social, they're personal enlarged. In other words, the evangelicals and the fundamentalists and the Catholic conservatives concentrate on what goes on in the bedroom, and they don't talk much the way classic Protestants did about should the government be involved with poverty, with waging peace, all of those kinds of things. It's been their genius to organize that in our own time so they have great political power. The Republican Party in particular has seen that that can be amassed and help get votes for things outside of the bedroom.

MS. TIPPETT: Although there certainly are Catholics and evangelicals who are mobilized around poverty and those more classic kinds of social justice issues.

MR. MARTY: Oh, my, yes. Catholics are very much upfront. And some of the strongest social involvements of today are among evangelical Protestants. But that kind of Catholic and that kind of evangelical and that kind of Protestant are themselves in a kind of a loose coalition today. Not as powerful as the personal morality people, but there's a lot of power there. A lot of witness goes on.

MS. TIPPETT: Religious scholar and author Martin Marty. I'm Krista Tippett and this is *Speaking of Faith* from American Public Media. Today we're exploring Martin Marty's historical and personal perspective on the changing religious dynamics in American culture. For a half-century, he has studied the effect of increasing pluralism on American Christianity. He's also been a visionary scholar of religious fundamentalist movements around the world.

MS. TIPPETT: I want to talk about the Fundamentalism Project that you did but, I mean, before we actually talk about fundamentalism, I'd like to note something that I thought was very interesting. I was reading your address that you gave at the conclusion of that project to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. You titled it, "Too Bad We're So Relevant: The Fundamentalism Project Projected."

I'll just read this quote: "The Fundamentalism Project scholars have found that fundamentalists tend to turn

intimate and private issues into public affairs. Concern for the zones of life closest to the self — world view, identity, sexuality, gender differentiation, family, education, communication — tend to take priority over macroeconomic concerns."

So my question to you is, is there something at the origins of fundamentalism that is also moving our culture as a whole right now?

MR. MARTY: OK. One quick word about fundamentalism. The fundamentalism we studied, to which you're referring, is not your friendly neighborhood fundamentalist down the block. Our assignment was to study the militancies. When we started this, a historian friend said, 'When you're studying American fundamentalism, Marty, remember there are no machine guns in the basement of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.' We were really studying a different kind of thing there, and yet there are certain things everybody had in common.

In the roots of fundamentalism in our culture, it started, of course, anti-evolution, anti-biblical criticism, and then it started taking a moral cast. But its moral cast, again, was the things that you should take control of. Virtue, advice were their big terms, not social justice and social change. Take what is a virtuous person; pass laws to promote that virtue. And I certainly am leaving a wrong impression if I'm suggesting that bedroom and clinical issues don't have social consequences. They have huge social consequences. If divorce becomes more easy and grows and families disintegrate and children don't have models in the parental world and they're not educable, it's a huge difference in the culture. So they don't have a monopoly on it either in its invention or its present carrying out, but I think more of them restrict their energies to that and, again, it's a very politically popular thing to do.

MS. TIPPETT: But here's my question: This description that you gave of fundamentalism, that people turn to intimate and private issues and that these take priority over macroeconomic concerns, could actually, I think, describe maybe a majority of Americans this year. So what I'm wondering is if there's something that you see that gives rise to that tendency within fundamentalism that is actually alive in our culture as a whole right now.

MR. MARTY: I think two things are going on. On one level, around the world people are having trouble with their identity, their belief — whom do I trust, who trusts me? And so a phrase we used in The Fundamentalism Project, around the world, there is a massive, convulsive ingathering of peoples into their separatenesses and over-againstnesses, to protect their pride and power and place from others who are doing the same thing. Now, look at American life. We don't do it the way they do it in Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan. We don't veil women or anything like that, but we're clustering more tightly. 'We're the virtuous, and they're the vicious. We're the good, they're the evil.'

MS. TIPPETT: I guess I'm still wondering how you understand the human and spiritual--maybe not theological, but the spiritual roots of this focus that seems to have become so definitive in our public life, on private issues of morality as the issues of morality.

MR. MARTY: I think that all through Christian history, anything related to sexuality was troubling and exciting. Clerical celibacy for 1700 years in Catholicism shows this, how much of an upheaval was caused when Martin Luther got married and when the Protestant clergy married. Every change in sexual mores is troubling because that's so close to the roots of creation and transmission of life. Now what's happened in our own time, I argue, every church body from the Mennonites to the evangelicals to the Roman Catholic Church are torn up over two words: sex and authority. By sex, I mean everything in the biological cycle, from in vitro fertilization or stem cell research, abortion, birth control, cohabitation outside of marriage. All these things are troubling all the churches, some of them sweeping...

MS. TIPPETT: And dividing people in them.

MR. MARTY: Oh, yes. Some people sweep these things under the rug or close their eyes to it or whatever. But I think it's very hard to get to the root of your part of the question as to why this longtime concern for personal morality, sexual morality, suddenly became so politically powerful. On one level, let's be honest,



it's very exploitable. Everything else I've talked about — caring for peace, caring for justice, caring for feeding — these are all relative things. How much foreign aid budget you're going to put into it, how much energy you're going to put into it. With abortion, you either have an abortion or you don't. You either perform gay right marriage or not. So it can be a big matter of identity and boundary, and I think that's very popular in a time when people lose their identity and their boundary. I always say that the laws on gay rights and the practices toward them will be changed when every tenth evangelical minister's daughter comes out. That is, when it gets close to you, you see these differently.

MS. TIPPETT: So liberal — let's say, Democrats and even liberal religious people who also have been struggling to find a voice in this last period will often hearken back to the days when it was the social justice issues that mobilized people and that had political force. Did those issues somehow achieve that force in the '60s because they became more personal for people and, I mean, could you imagine that happening again?

MR. MARTY: Oh, I think so. The personalization of civil rights, you suddenly had a face: Martin Luther King. You suddenly had causes: the four little Birmingham girls who were bombed. These are very, very vivid things so that the president of the United States had to get on television one night, and after you'd seen the pictures of the dogs attacking children and police attempts to put down blacks in the South, suddenly it did become personal.

I should also say in fairness — I'm really trying to be as accurate as I can — these involvements of white Protestants in peace movements and civil rights movements that was never massive. That was often leadership. Some people would call them generals without armies. And there's where I think we historians have kept saying a lot of evangelicals were up close, they were getting their hands dirty. The Salvation Army, for example, is an evangelical movement, one of the oldest. So we don't have any absolute lines here at all. I just think that the sudden choice to organize on the virtue-vice line, the 'we're entirely right and they're entirely wrong' line, was very exploitable in politics, and in many, many states that has come to prevail as the main political agency. Nobody would have dreamed of that 20 years ago.

MS. TIPPETT: Historian and author Martin Marty. This is *Speaking of Faith*. After a short break, more of his reflections on the nature of fundamentalism, separation of church and state, and the future of religion in America.

MR. MARTY: I once spoke in eastern Iowa and they said, 'Well, you live in pluralism.' I said, 'Where's the oldest mosque in America? It's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.' And they have Postville Lubavitcher Jews north of them, and they have transcendental meditation south of them, and they have gypsies east of them, and Amish west of them. That's the America we have. It doesn't mean it's all easy, doesn't mean everybody likes everybody.

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I'm Krista Tippett. Stay with us. *Speaking of Faith* comes to you from American Public Media.

[Announcements]

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MS. TIPPETT: Welcome back to *Speaking of Faith*, public radio's conversation about religion, meaning, ethics, and ideas. I'm Krista Tippett, today exploring America's contemporary religious landscape with Martin Marty.

Martin Marty is a celebrated historian and interpreter of American religious life. This hour he's been reflecting on the religious dynamics of contemporary America from his perspective of half a century of scholarship. Throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the present, he's been involved in many large-scale analyses of American Protestantism in particular, including its cultural influence and its pluralistic impulses.

And from 1987 to 1993, well before religious fundamentalism had become a feature of daily news headlines,

Marty directed a global fundamentalism project that was commissioned by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. That project studied militant religious fundamentalist cultures around the world, and resulted in a five-volume publication. I asked Martin Marty what he learned that surprised him and what shapes his reaction to fundamentalism now.

MR. MARTY: The first thing we learned was that it is religious. That is, we didn't let the psychologists in the first couple of years. This was a six-year study. We wanted to make sure that we caught the religious dimension and were convinced of that. And therefore fundamentalists, by and large, saw us as being fair. Our main instrument was the tape recorder. We sent out a couple hundred scholars around the world and they would ask, 'Why are you this?' and 'Why do you raise your family that way?' We studied it in 23 religions, by the way, Jains and Sikhs and everybody; it wasn't just Christians and Muslims and Jews.

What else did we learn? Number one, fundamentalism is not the old-time religion. Fundamentalism is a very modern packaging. That is, it's born when there's an assault on values that you have and are uncertain about. There has to be a threat to you as a group identity or to you as an individual. So the most important word in fundamentalism is you react. Very few fundamentalists are concerned about things that traditionalists and regular conservatives and orthodox are. You can't get a phone booth full of an argument on the most important Christian doctrines like the divine trinity and the two natures of Christ and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. They care about evolution. They care about being left behind as the world ends. But there's a very selective agenda. The whole left-behind theology is not the old-time religion. It was invented in the 1840s, which is really the modern world.

MS. TIPPETT: For someone like you.

MR. MARTY: That's right. I move glacially, not with a hurricane. And many other features were modern. Everywhere we studied them, they were better at the use of mass media than modernists were.

MS. TIPPETT: Now, that's interesting.

MR. MARTY: Yes. I once spoke in a church in — I think it was Dallas, and the pulpit looked like a 747 panel. A red light would go on, a baby's crying in nursery 23C, and another blue light and that means a Jaguar's lights were left on in parking lot D, and I could raise the temperature and the volume and everything else. And the minister in his sermon later on blasted technology, which he was using. In other words, he blasted the energy put into it, I suppose you'd say.

Well, I can go to a liberal Methodist church and I'm pretty sure the microphone won't work. I'm kidding, I'm kidding, but Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution was done through tape recordings from France. Al-Qaeda is very much at home with the Internet.

MS. TIPPETT: Very savvy, yeah.

MR. MARTY: Mass media helped produce fundamentalism because — first stage was born in the early radio; the second stage, Billy Graham, early television; the third stage now, Internet. What do you do? It comes at you with full force. You might try laws against obscenity and pornography. You might try to boycott Disney World. That doesn't do much. You're better off starting your own television networks. 'Mass media are what messed up the intimacy of my family life; I'll turn it right back upon itself.'

MS. TIPPETT: So as late as on September 11th, 2001, the word "fundamentalism" became a part of our public vocabulary. And I'm curious, as you watched that happen and have watched all the discussion since then, having spent this good block of time studying fundamentalism a decade earlier, what have you found to be missing in our analysis of fundamentalism recently?

MR. MARTY: I think, unfortunately, the word is used to clump everybody together. The overuse of the word "fundamentalism" — I should be claiming a patent on it because we did those five big fat books on it. But one of the themes of those five books was there are an awful lot of things out there and there's a lot of internal diversity. We would remind people — for example, the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s had 450,000 members in Indiana, in the North, and every meeting had a Protestant minister, it had a cross, it had the

open Bible, it had prayer, and the rest of Protestantism and the rest of Christianity would say, 'That's not a bit representative of the one billion of us out there.' So I think when al-Qaeda came on the scene that was our first message: Show the diversities. Make it easier for moderates to be moderate. Don't demonize the enemy. Do all that you can to show their varieties and to make it easy for them to be diverse.

MS. TIPPETT: Esteemed religious historian and author Martin Marty. I'm Krista Tippett, and this is *Speaking of Faith* from American Public Media. Today, "America's Changing Religious Landscape: A Conversation with Martin Marty."

MS. TIPPETT: You've lived a good long time as a public theologian and a religious thinker, and you quote a lot of great thinkers in all your works. I wonder, if I asked you who you think of as the most formative and influential religious figures in American life in the 20th century, who would you want to describe?

MR. MARTY: Among the well-known people, I would have to say the two Niebuhr brothers, Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, who towered at Union Seminary and Yale when Protestantism was strong. They both were strong for the prophetic principle. They weren't good at leading you into worship, though they did write prayers. But they were up close. They were in the thick of things.

Reinhold was a "cold warrior." He was a consultant in the Truman era to the Dean Achesons and then the John Foster Dulleses. He's there. But his interpretation of human nature — on one level, there was a group called Atheists for Niebuhr, but he once said, 'You'll never understand me if you don't know that I believe in Christ crucified.' He always went back to his roots in the gospel, but they also appreciated his analysis of human nature was so realistic, and his interpretation of history and the place nations played.

MS. TIPPETT: Here's a favorite quotation of the 20th century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, with which Martin Marty ended an address at the White House in 1998.

READER: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true, or beautiful, or good, makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, could be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint; therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness."

MS. TIPPETT: From Reinhold Niebuhr.

My guest, Martin Marty, is describing some of the most interesting and influential religious forces in his lifetime.

MR. MARTY: I certainly would have to put Billy Graham in the front rank. And I may not have always been in the same camp, we've exchanged a few nice letters and have never had a sour word in 30, 40 years, but there's no doubt about it that I've often thought — I've often said, 'If Billy Graham had been born mean, we'd be in terrible trouble,' because he had so much power, so many gifts and so on. One of my distinctions in religion is not liberal and conservative, but mean and non-mean. You have mean liberals and mean conservatives, and you have non-mean of both. But he's not a mean. And I think you'd have to say that's just been an enormous influence on many people.

Paul Tillich, of German import, was highly influential theologically. But I really think that people whose names you'll never know were influential.

MS. TIPPETT: Right. And who are some of those that are important to you?

MR. MARTY: Well, a custodian at a high school I went to. You'd come there in the morning and, as busy as he might be pushing a broom, he read your face better than the counselors did as to what your trouble was.

I personally have a lot of interest in the arts and I have hung out with people who are in music. Recently I was at the dedication of a new organ in honor of Paul Manz, a great, great organist who brought back something as corny-sounding as hymn singing into the great cathedrals. He and I have been on a couple of CDs together. I assure anybody listening that I don't sing, I narrate. But certainly Paul Manz would be in my front rank of people who shaped me.

A theologian named Joe Sittler, not among the best-known theologians in America, blind in the last years of



his life, nearly deaf, had a way with words and a way of discernment and a good-humored understanding of ethics that made the world richer for me.

READER: A reading from Joseph Sittler in the 1986 book *Gravity and Grace*:

"St. Augustine, at the beginning of his Confessions, makes a great and beautiful statement: 'Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.' Back of that statement lies a proposition which says that the human is created for transcendence ... that we are by nature created to envision more than we can accomplish, to long for that which is beyond our possibilities.

"We are formed for God. ...Faith is a longing. Humankind is created to grasp more than we can grab, to probe for more than we can ever handle or manage.

"...This restlessness may make us want to throw in the towel — or to pull up our socks. You can either be creatively restless, as before the unknowable, or you can simply collapse into futility. One of the goals of the Christian message is to join together the people of the way, the way of an eternally given restlessness, and to win from that restlessness the participation in God, which is all that our mortality can deliver."

Theologian Joseph Sittler, from the book *Gravity and Grace*.

MS. TIPPETT: You often mention a Dutch philosopher.

MR. MARTY: Oh, yes.

MS. TIPPETT: How do you say his name?

MR. MARTY: Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who was a Swiss-German Jew and Christian. He's one of those geniuses that you can quote 20 pages of and then the 21st page is so nutty you're not sure you can use it. But I'll give a quick illustration of what I get from him. For example, he says — and this is extremely important in my life. He says you can write the history of learning in the western world in three Latin phrases.

The first is, in Latin, *Credo ut intelligam* — "I believe in order that I may understand." It's the birth of the universities in Europe, Bologna, Paris, Oxford. You believe to apprehend the universe; truth is divinely revealed and can be appropriated. And that's the charter that believers should never be afraid of learning.

Secondly, modern learning, without which we couldn't do, is Descartes. René Descartes. *Cogito ergo sum* — "I think, therefore I am." Modern university is born on skepticism and doubt and inquiry and criticism, and you want that. I don't want a med school in which they're just taking things on faith. I want them to be extremely critical. But he said, 'That, too, gets sterile.' And so he says, in the 20th century, that we also have to learn that truth has a social character. I'm learning from this conversation with you. We learn from conversing with someone else, we learn from the meaning of "I" and "thou."

And his third motto was *Respondeo etsi mutabor* — "I respond although I will be changed." I'm not changed when I argue with somebody because I know an answer and I got to defeat them. I'm always changed in a conversation because they're going to surprise me. It's kind of a game, it's kind of play. And I think that that's the kind of learning we need more in the churches, in theology, in politics, and in personal life.

MS. TIPPETT: You've done a lot of projecting in your life. I mean, I found one book written in 1971 where you were projecting the church in that century, and there was projecting in The Fundamentalism Project. I wonder what you have been wrong about, as you look back, and also I wonder, as you look forward, where you are finding your hope and nurture.

MR. MARTY: Well, looking ahead, it's a very foolish thing for a historian to do because we have nothing to say until something's happened. I mean, our specialty is the past. But when you're involved in the worlds in which I'm involved, you do hang out with the people who do projecting and you go along with them. My biggest misses were I didn't foresee three huge things: One, the explosion of evangelicalisms; number two, the highly individualized spirituality of which you spoke earlier, the people who are on a spiritual search but

they're doing it at the coffee shop, at the mega bookstore, or they're doing it in a little chanting group, and they're not doing it in the churches. That's certainly a force I hadn't foreseen. And then I think the vitality that has come with the new pluralism, and that's because I did a lot of writing before 1965 when the immigration laws changed.

MS. TIPPETT: That's another one of those points in the '60s that you say how important that was for our religious life, that we never talk about as a turning point in the '60s.

MR. MARTY: Well, it's huge. It was the year of the Selma March. It was the year of the engagement in Vietnam. It was the year of all the LBJ Great Society legislation, and Congress made a little change in the immigration laws, after 41 years. And it was just in time for all the boat people. It's just in time for people from Africa to come direct, and so on. And it was just a huge change...

MS. TIPPETT: Because it gave rise to a pluralism and a multiculturalism in a new way.

MR. MARTY: Yes. It makes new demands on hospitality, etc. Lewiston, Maine, suddenly has people from Somalia. I once spoke in eastern Iowa and they said, 'Well, you live in pluralism.' I said, 'Where's the oldest mosque in America? It's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.' And they have Postville Lubavitcher Jews north of them, and they have transcendental meditation south of them, and they have gypsies east of them, and Amish west of them. That's the America we have. And when you go to a hospital today, your doctor's probably Pakistani and your nurse is Filipino, and your clinician is Jewish, etc. That's our future. It doesn't mean it's all easy, doesn't mean everybody likes everybody, but it does mean that your interpreting is being done on a larger scale.

And, again, the two biggest of those — and I guess you could say I probably didn't foresee that either, since we're talking about what I didn't foresee — is that half of everything we're talking about today is done by women. And that was not true in the '50s. When I was writing the third volume of my three-volume work on American religion, I said to my class, half of whom were women, 'Help me out. I need women who are big in religion in the '50s. I can't have an index of all men.' And they couldn't find hardly anybody. And then one of them said, 'I'll bet they were seething.' And I said, 'OK, Julie, you're going to right a history of seething women of the '50s,' and she found interesting stuff. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Catherine Marshall, all these people whose husbands are up front, and they're seething. They're all ready to change along the way. So I didn't foresee how sudden and total that is.

It's hard to think your way back to when very few women added work outside the home if they had children at home. And I think the...

MS. TIPPETT: That's a piece of pluralism we don't really think about, in terms of how people are active in our public life. Women are more of a force in that way.

MR. MARTY: Oh, yes.

MS. TIPPETT: Religious historian Martin Marty. We're exploring how his historical and personal insights shed light on the religious dynamics of contemporary America.

MS. TIPPETT: I think that there is a real sense among many people in our time that the whole relationship between church and state—as we define that, it's not really just church and state anymore, right, it's mosque, synagogue, church, and state, and many other variations of religious expression, but that that is shifting profoundly. But I wonder, with your perspective as a historian, you know, how new, how profound is this shift and how do you view this?

MR. MARTY: On one level, the image of the wall of separation never worked. We did never have a wall. For example, tax exemption of churches probably pays more to the churches in America than being established governmental churches in Europe ever did. I like James Madison's word, there's a "line of distinction," a line of separation between religion and civil authorities.

I think of it more, too, as zones. Most people know when you've really overstepped. Most people don't want religion utterly in a box. When the astronauts looked at the Earth on Christmas Eve, they read, "In the

beginning God created the heavens and the Earth." I think Madalyn Murray O'Hair and one or two other people protested, but most people thought, 'That's great.' And when you have the space shuttle disasters, the president gets up and is at his most eloquent invoking religious language. Well, if you read real separation of religion and the state, you wouldn't do that.

It gets more complex in some other areas. There is much more eroding of that line than there had been. I think, though, again, many of us who are nervous about crossing the line are also interested in religion in public life. I'm all for the teaching about religion in public schools. I think you should know that Martin Luther King was a black Baptist and what that did for him. You should know why the Puritans came. You should know why your Hindu neighbor does something different. But a lot of people want to convert that and say, 'But we should teach the majority religion as the truth about life, and we should worship in that tradition.' And that's where we get nervous, and yet there's a strong popular appeal. 'If only we had prayer amendments. If only we had stipulated prayer.' And here's where a Protestant of the old school or a real Protestant would say, 'Watch out. Give religion privilege and it gets corrupt. And look at Europe if you want a sample of that.' So in my view, religion has its place all over the public sphere as long as it is persuasive and voluntary. And the minute it gets to be coerced and privileged and assumed, somebody's going to run it at the expense of others or it'll get fat and corrupt.

MS. TIPPETT: Where do you look for nourishment and hope? Where do you look around and say, 'This is exciting. I'm happy for my grandchildren to be living in this time'?

MR. MARTY: The most important thing in my world, when I mention public life I don't mean only politics. A lot of people equate the two. Politics is one branch of it. Public life is town meeting, it's the mall, it's the supermarket, it's the college, it's all those things. And I'm greatly cheered by artists, by musicians, by people who live out their vocation. It's almost a hobby for me to pursue people who just never get their name in print and do heroic things.

I'm cheered by — I never know how to speak without proper nouns. I like a group called Opportunity International, which is one of a number of microeconomic ventures around the world that lends money, put 140,000 people around the world to permanent work last year. Now, they're religiously motivated people and they give me tremendous hope, as do the people on the other end, 92 percent of whom pay their loans back in two years, which inspires me. That kind of thing.

In the city where I live, Chicago, there are all kinds of groups that provide leadership in the inner city without condescension, without imposing on them. There are others that train people. In one of these groups, the Christian Industrial League, trains people, mainly Mexican men, to start their landscaping companies and women to start their homemaking companies — not just to do the work, but to start companies. And they plant the flowers that we see in the city of Chicago. Come see them.

And family is very important. I draw nurture from the family. We love friends. I can't say enough — I once wrote a book about friendship. In a cold, brutal world, you can't do much better for somebody else than to stimulate friendship. And the model there again is God. As distant as God's supposed to be, God also condescends and is our 3:00-in-the-morning friend. So I'm nurtured by all those kinds of things.

MS. TIPPETT: Martin Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago. The Martin Marty Center has been founded there to promote public religion endeavors. He's the author of more than 50 books, including, recently, *The Protestant Voice in American Pluralism*, *When Faiths Collide*, and the Penguin Lives volume on Martin Luther.

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