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Bill Schlotter

Religion Scholar, Writer Martin E. Marty to Inaugurate 'Religion in American Life' UCSB Lecture Series with April 14 Appearance

Officials at UC Santa Barbara's Walter H. Capps Center for the Study of Ethics, Religion, and Public Life think they have found the perfect speaker to launch their newly endowed Martin E. Marty Lectureship on Religion in American Life.

Turns out it's one Martin E. Marty, emeritus professor of the history of modern Christianity at the University of Chicago, author of more than 50 popular books on religion, and the consensus reigning dean of American religious scholars.

Marty will inaugurate the lectureship named in his honor with "Mapping American Spiritualities," at 8 p.m. Thursday, April 14 in Victoria Hall, 33 West Victoria St., Santa Barbara.

His appearance is free and open to the public.

"Martin E. Marty is the leading commentator of American religious and spiritual trends," said Wade Clark Roof, director of the Capps Center and a professor of religious studies at UCSB. "He is the person sought after by all the news media. When Marty speaks, people listen."

Marty began his career as an ordained Lutheran minister in 1952. In 1963, he gave up his congregation to join the faculty of the University of Chicago, where he taught in the Divinity School for 35 years. What he has done more than anything is write, authoring more than 5,000 articles and 50 books, including "The Righteous Empire," which won the National Book Award. Other books include "Modern American Religion," "The One and the Many: America's Search for the Common Good," and "Martin Luther." At a 70th birthday celebration for Marty, TV journalist Bill Moyers joked that he felt he should keep his remarks short so Marty might get home early and have time to write another book before lights-out.

But Marty is recognized for much more than just being prolific. His skill in explaining complex religious issues to common Americans has made him a favorite with American readers, who have increasingly turned to him for analysis.

"He is at his best as a translator," Roof said. "That is he bridges the gap between academia and journalism. He places contemporary events into historical and sociological perspective, communicating effectively with non-specialists."

Roof said the lectureship will bring a major religious voice to the Santa Barbara community once each year.

"The annual Marty Lectureship will bring well-known commentators to our community," he said. "Their views will be of interest to people of many differing faiths and traditions."

And he added that the Capps Center and the community are indebted to the donors---who have asked to remain anonymous---for establishing the \$300,000 endowment. In addition to funding the Marty Lectureship, the endowment helps the Center meet the terms of a \$500,000 3-to-1 matching grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 2002.

"The donors are to be congratulated for their vision and generosity," Roof said. "By honoring Martin E. Marty in this way, we all benefit---the Santa Barbara community and the University."

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