Study Questions for: Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life*

**Preface:**

1) The author notes that “whenever denunciation would be in order his [Luther’s] words and actions will show him condemning himself without much help from this biographer interfering as a righteous scold.” As you read the book, determine the extent to which Luther, in fact, condemned himself.

2) With respect to the author characterizing Luther as “a late-medieval contributor to the early modern scene,” to what extent is this an accurate characterization? For himself, the author sees Luther “as a wrestler with God, indeed, as a God-obsessed seeker of certainty and assurance in a time of social trauma and of personal anxiety.” To what extent is this characterization accurate and/or inaccurate?

**Chapter One:**

3) Be sure to understand the significance of what is meant by the certainty Luther “was seeking in life, the assurance his soul and mind demanded,” both when he began to study theology and after he became a theologian.

4) What does the author mean when he writes that the experience of God for Luther “was uncommonly vivid, but the God revealed was at the same time hidden”?

5) Become familiar with the controversy over indulgences, including Luther’s 95 Theses.

6) The author calls attention to the character and contradiction that was Martin Luther, none of which provide a simple answer to the question of why this man was able to “upset his world” and begin “to shape a new one.” What do you think?

**Chapter Two:**

7) What was the nature of the political situation that affected the actions that Holy Roman Emperor Charles V might, or could, take against Luther in 1521, following the pope’s excommunication of Luther?

8) In his statement before the Diet of Worms, in 1521, Luther said that his “conscience is captive to the Word of God.” What did Luther mean by this? Looking at Luther’s life and words, to what extent was his pronouncement accurate?

9) What is the significance of Luther’s “twisting of his translation” of the New and Old Testaments to justify some of his own interpretations, most especially his insertion of the word “alone” (as in “by grace alone”)?

10) Pass judgment as to the accuracy of these words of Luther: “I simply taught, preached and wrote God’s Word….I did nothing; the Word did everything.”
11) How did Luther view temporal (or secular) authority? What is the significance of his judgment for the relationship between church and state?
12) Evaluate Luther’s role in the Peasants’ War (1524-25) as to the consistency between his earlier words and actions, on the one hand, and his words and actions during and after the war/revolt.

Chapter Three:

13) Come to an understanding of Luther's views on marriage, marital sex, and the role of women vis-à-vis man.
14) What were Luther’s views on children?

Chapter Four:

15) Become familiar with Luther’s views on the pope (as Antichrist), the Muslim Turks, and the Jews (especially rabbis).

Afterword:

16) Assess the short- and long-term significance of author’s conclusion: “As much as any individual he broke the hold of a single religious system and polity and helped free others to make basic religious choices on the basis of informed consciences, yet at the same time he stressed obedience to authority so strenuously that many who followed chose or were forced to conform and submit to those above them.”