

Loss of Context

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 16, 2010](#) issue

I don't know what I'm going to do without *Context: Martin E. Marty on Religion and Culture*. Earlier this year Marty and the Claretians, who have published *Context* 12 times a year, announced that it was closing down. I've been in a mild depression ever since. For 42 years Marty has been collecting, condensing, editing and commenting on articles gleaned from books, magazines, journals, newspapers, reviews and the culture at large. His son Micah has assisted him as editor for many of those years. They have earned release from the responsibility, but I will miss the result.

I looked forward to *Context's* monthly arrival, rejoiced when it expanded into a Part A and a Part B, delighted in the lighthearted last page and a joke or story that I could share. I recall Marty writing somewhere that there comes a time in life when one realizes that one is never going to read all the books one intended to read, that life becomes so cluttered that one can't begin to keep up with just the current books one wants to read. And so one turns to reading about those books in journal articles and reviews, finally settling for a paragraph or two in a magazine like the *Century*.

Context has been my way of dealing with the quandary of so many books and so little time. Reading what Marty said about a book, or a well-chosen passage excerpted in *Context*, was often my guide to my own book purchasing and reading. All the while, *Context* provided valuable resources for sermon preparation so consistently that my files are stuffed with *Context* clippings—some used, some waiting for the right homiletical occasion.

For myself and for many others who stand up on Sunday morning and try to say something faithful and useful, I thank Marty for the incredibly helpful resource he gave us monthly in *Context*.

The breadth and depth of *Context* reflects the man. Everyone who knows even a little about him wonders how in the world he does it all: reads all those newspapers, magazines, journals and books, turns out a stream of books of his own—including the recent *Building Cultures of Trust*—travels, teaches, lectures and preaches. Those

who know him more closely marvel not only at his energy and herculean output, but at his unfailing kindness and personableness. The man knows everybody, remembers names—including children's names and what college they attended—and enjoys meeting and learning about new people. One of the best parts of living in Chicago and working for the *Century* is that I occasionally cross paths with Marty.