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What Of The Luther Film?

The Legion of Decency notes that the film: "contains theological and historical references and interpretations unacceptable to Catholics." The consensus seems to be that the film, in picturing an age when ecclesiastical abuses were prevalent, confuses the abuses of individual churchmen for the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

By unduly stressing individual abuses, the film seems to be designed to arouse and foment ill-feeling among Christians rather than to throw light on pre-Reformation days, and on the capricious career of Martin Luther.

Where Does It Fail?

As students of history, you should welcome an authentic and objective portrayal of this significant epoch in the story of Western Europe. But historically and theologically the film misses the mark -- largely because the producers indulged in half-truths. For example, the picture:

1) Openly and flagrantly misrepresents Catholic teaching on indulgences, making it appear that a person can buy indulgences; that indulgences remit sin; and that they constitute a permission or license to commit future sins.

2) It almost completely evades the real issue in Luther's revolt, and fails to show that Luther actually "doctored" certain biblical texts to suit his personal tastes.

3) It contains inaccuracies regarding the Catholic Church's unchanging position on the mercy and justice of God; and fails to show how Luther himself distorted the Church's teaching in its application to himself.

4) It fails to show the essentially erratic character of Luther, his bad temper, his course tongue, his melancholia, his sensual attacks on what he himself called his own "diabolical obsession," his vacillating and opportunistic attitude-first toward the peasants whom he had urged to revolt, and later toward the princes whom he in turn goaded to a bloodthirsty attack on the peasants.

It could be an interesting picture if it were to tell the facts as they are known and recorded by competent historians on both sides of the theological fence. But no, it is a Hollywood version of history, nicely doctored and fictitiously colored for the sake of box-office appeal. And that's not enough for a scholar.

As a man of university stature, regardless of your theological background, you should feel obligated to go to recognized historians, rather than to Hollywood, for the facts in the case. Scholarly minds will not bother to see it; or if they do, will not take it too seriously. The picture, incidentally, was directed by non other than Irving Pichel, notorious for his multifarious connections with Communist-front organizations and activities!!

Your Christmas Cards

We suggest you buy locally and help the Missions. Select designs that include the Child and His Mother. Keep Christ in Christmas. After all, don't you think that He ought to have some part in His own Birthday Party! See your hall representative.