

## History Exposes 'Martin Luther' Film As Fraud

By REV. RICHARD TORNEY

Four hundred years ago Europe was bubbling with a violent political and religious revolution. In half a dozen nations the Catholic Church was being split by denials of doctrine and defections of morals. Several separate national churches were established and brother fought against brother over new and contradictory faiths. Out of that welter of flaming nationalism and bitter religious dispute came the term "Protestant" to create a profound change in the civilization of the Western world.

The memories of that turbulent era of revolt and protest have been vividly brought to life in a new movie called "Martin Luther" which is currently playing in Rochester and across the nation. Claiming to tell the story of how a German Catholic priest fought with his conscience, defied his superiors, abandoned his holy vows and sparked the cause of religious independence, this film story is gripping and excellently acted. It is a bonfire lit thanks to the good advertising and cooperative plugging which churches and church groups have given to the ticket sales.

Dramatically, "Martin Luther" may be nominated for the "Oscar" as one of the best films of the year but as a lesson in history it is a fraud filled with falsehoods, distortions and brazen errors. "Martin Luther" will easily pay back to the 6 Lutheran church groups in the United States the \$500,000 they guaranteed to its producers in Germany. But because it is so slanted, so skillfully distorted and so subtly edited, this story will do harm to thousands everywhere it is shown. It will spread error and encourage prejudice in the very day when we need the harmony of all peoples.

**NEITHER CATHOLICS NOR PROTESTANTS** can hide from the true facts of the Reformation; for history, which is essentially frank and honest, must be faced even though it is disagreeable. But in "Martin Luther," despite the opening words of the narrator that this script is the result of reliable and honest scholarly research, the film biography turns out to be a drama in which history is assaulted, human failures of churchmen are made to look like defections of church doctrine and the hero himself is given a false face he never owned.

Now, no Catholic questions the right of any religious group to make a picture of the career of their leader. And Martin Luther's life, honestly treated, would make an outstanding movie-story. But Catholics do have a right to cry out "Unfair!" when a film is passed off as a true and honest story which is really a distorted and biased version of the truth. (For example, the Encyclopedia Britannica and Cambridge Modern History would enlighten many who have the old prejudiced view of the Reformation.)

Objective history shows that the Church of Rome was imperfect, but not totally corrupt in the 1500's; it shows that Luther was sincere, but not the glorified, virtue-filled apostle of truth; and that the Reformation was not the triumph of reason and courage over the superstition and avarice of the Medieval Church. This film, therefore, in refusing to state the objective historical facts, sins against honesty and justice and charity by perpetuating old lies, by spreading hostile suggestions and by feeding the contempt of those who hate the Catholic Church.

**THERE ARE MORE THAN A DOZEN MISREPRESENTATIONS, slanted suggestions and outright errors** in "Martin Luther." I would like to comment on just a few which I imagine have been brought into family discussions or office arguments about this film.

The main preoccupation of this extraordinary movie is Luther's quarrel with his church. The story covers only a few of the better years in his life and it keeps him always in a better light of righteousness than history remembers. On the contrary, the Catholic Church is always discredited and her representatives are stupid, evil and made doltish by their blind faith. Luther is shown as a sincere troubled man whose conscience, backed by prayer and study, gave him no alternative but defiant revolt against ecclesiastical abuses. But, in actual fact, Luther set himself not only as a reformer, but an innovator. History admits grave corruption existed which cried for cleaning up, but Luther introduced new doctrines and rejected interpretations of old truths, partly because of misguided conviction and partly because the men who stood in power and taught those doctrines were humanly evil.

The movie makes a great deal of the doctrine of indulgences, and of the obvious scandal of selling the privilege of escaping from God's punishment for sin. A monk named Tetzel is pictured as saying that as soon as a contributor puts a coin in the almsbox, a soul rises from Purgatory into Heaven. In another scene, Luther is told if he kisses a relic of St. Peter, he will be saved from "17,000 years of flames in Purgatory."

Tetzel was wrong and Luther knew it, but he also knew the Church has never taught—neither in 1517 nor in 1953—that a spiritual favor from God can be "bought" with money. But this movie would have the audience believe that the whole subject of contrition and judgment is a "racket" contrived by avaricious churchmen. I claim this movie dishonestly slanders Catholicism by showing that Rome ladeled out forgiveness for cash, as a matter of universal doctrine and not simply human greed.

**OVER AND OVER AGAIN** the whole Catholic Doctrine of forgiving sins and cancelling God's punishment is maliciously twisted by the movie. This is the true answer which the movie deliberately snubs: to obtain forgiveness from the guilt of sin a person must be sorry for the deed, must make a good confession and be absolved by a priest. To obtain for oneself some reduction of punishment after death, a person must perform some stipulated good action while free from sin. To obtain the same favor for another also requires the state of grace. No coins can replace these personal actions and the Church never officially said they could and never approved those corrupt churchmen who committed such simony.

Further, the Church never taught that an indulgence was a forgiveness of sins—an indulgence has always been simply a lessening of the time of punishment for sins and this privilege never stipulates exactly how many years of punishment in Purgatory are cancelled.

Luther's growing contempt for relics and holy things, as shown in the movie, disturbs everyone who sees the picture. The film makes the very idea of venerating a saint's bones or honoring a piece of the True Cross at ridiculous and morose. But the events which horrified him in real life were abuses of men, not corruptions of doctrine. The Church today readily admits the abuses of greedy churchmen of 1517 and no Catholic history book excuses the sad facts. The Church also admits men in high places put the wrong theological interpretations in the public mind. But why does this movie insist on suggesting to its audiences that the Church officially taught something which it never officially believed? A dishonest slant wounds like a bold lie.

History is not so gentle with Luther as the movie is when we examine what happened after

Luther was excommunicated by Rome for his heresy. He was more than a rebel against corrupt leaders—he was a violent denouncer of Church authority and, after defying his former superiors it was an easy and logical step to deny the truths they had been teaching. This was heresy; a serious charge. Society, still Catholic, labelled him an outlaw. He needed friends.

**YET, THE MOVIE FALSELY SHOWS** that the German princes embraced the teachings of Luther out of religious motives and apparently preferred heresy to following the Church of Rome. But, even Protestant historians state frankly that Luther insured the success of his revolt by appealing to nationalism, by seeking the backing of secular nobles and by showing them that, if they got involved in religious controversy, they could fatten their treasuries by taking over rich monasteries and church treasuries.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, obviously a work with no religious axe to grind, says of Luther: "If the German princes had not found it to their financial and political interest to enforce his principles, Luther might never have been more than the leader of an obscure, mystic sect."

As the film ends, Luther is shown living a quiet, respected life with a wife and two children. It looks like the triumph of conscience—he is life in the mind of the audience as the successful champion of Christian truth. No hint is given of the extremes he had already gone to in destroying the faith and religious practise of his German people.

Following his own principle that faith alone was enough for salvation he taught that man and woman could not lose heaven no matter how often they sinned, as long as they believed firmly in God. One of his books records how horrified he was later on at the result of such free morality. The Bible, he said, could be interpreted any way one wished, yet he violently insisted on his own arbitrary decisions on the meanings and the value of many sections of it.

While he claimed the tradition of the Church had no power to tell him how to read the Bible, he denied others the right to interpret it if it contradicted him. He wrote: "Whoever teaches otherwise than I teach condemns God. I can endure nothing which is against my teaching." Because they disagreed with his concepts of faith, he threw out St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of St. James. And he abolished just as boldly as he does in the film where we saw him write in a word to help St. Paul say that a man is justified by faith, "alone."

**THE FILM ALSO WHITEWASHES LUTHER** where it shows him criticizing an associate for lidding the people to destroy images and crucifixes. In the movie, his friend Karstadt, is made the goat of the incident where religious treasures are shown being toppled. Luther roughly charges him with irreverence for holy things. But, actually, historians prove that Luther himself openly taught that the Church's use of art was idolatry and he himself whipped the people into a frenzy to destroy. German religious art never recovered from the violence of the Reformation. He was equally violent in throwing out ceremonial and exterior worship, in denying the value of mortifications, prayers for the dead, intercession of saints. He appealed to the Emperor to abolish church holidays, to prohibit Masses for the dead, and to confiscate all the property of the Church.

Instead of becoming gentler and more tolerant with age, as the movie claims he did, Martin Luther grew more vituperative. He wrote many wild articles against the Papacy, against the Jews, against the peasants who wanted political freedom, against marriage ethics, against every contemporary who questioned his infallibility to interpret the Bible.

In the movie "Martin Luther" the only monk who gets any sympathetic treatment from the director is Luther's superior, the vicar general of the Augustinian Order to which Luther belonged. All the other monks are pictured as either superstitious, greedy, crafty, dishonest or inept in their vocations. The vicar general is pictured absolving Luther from his solemn vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and religious life supposedly so that Luther will not violate these vows in the steps of revolt he is intending to take against the Church. Legally speaking, this superior could not free Luther from his priestly vows if he wanted to—historically, it is a fact that he never did. Right to the day of his death, Luther was taunted by his adversaries for breaking his vows, yet he never defended himself by claiming the Church had removed them from him. The movie uses this fiction to clear Luther of any moral violation of solemn promises.

**ANOTHER FICTION ABOUT THIS superior** is a scene where he says goodbye to Luther and refused to offer the priest any mercy or forgiveness for Luther's errors. The audience reaction is naturally that the man wasn't much of a Christian and that Luther was certainly brave to persist in his teachings when his trusted friend would not support him. The full truth of history is that this monk, whose name was Father Von Staupitz, did not break with Luther until nearly seven years later. He stuck by him, was removed from his monastery as a result, lost his position as vicar general and finally retired in ecclesiastical disgrace.

All through these remarks, I have spoken of the contradictions between the movie version of Luther's career and the real-life historical facts which are available in any history book. Please do not interpret this comment on the movie as an attack on Lutheran people or the doctrines of the Protestant churches of today. My objections are to a film which is being looked at by millions and will be believed. I question the sincerity of those people who made this movie story of Luther. History is available but the film because they did not have to be such wretched historians to tell the interesting and significant facts saturated with untruths and twisted views—it seems that somebody has trampled the virtues of scholarship and honesty and charity.

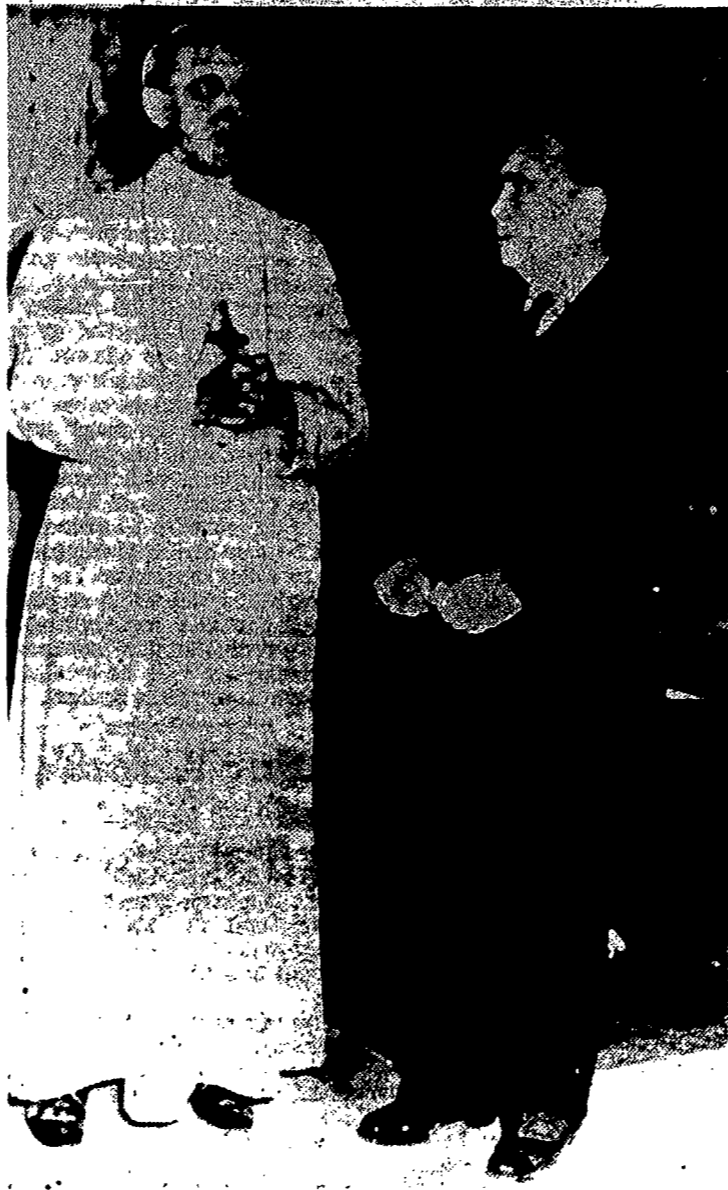
**Missionary Expelled, 30 Years In China**

Hong Kong — (NC) — Msgr. Jerome Haberstroh, S.V.D., Prefect Apostolic of Sining, China, has been expelled by the Reds on charges of "imperialism, espionage, and resistance to the independent church."

Prior to his expulsion, Monsignor Haberstroh was held in solitary confinement by his Red captors for 13 months. For the first 8 months the communists refused him a change of clothes.

The 60-year-old priest, spiritual head of a prefecture larger than the area of Texas, worked in China since his ordination in 1923. He was made Prefect Apostolic of Sining in 1937.

## POPE GREET'S HOUSE SPEAKER



Castel Gandolfo—Pope Pius XII greets Rep. Joseph W. Martin of Massachusetts, speaker of the House of Representatives, at a private audience granted the Congressman at his summer residence here. (RNS Photo).

## French Cardinals Announce Rules For Worker-Priests

Paris — (RNS) — New rules drastically revising the activities of worker-priests were announced here by three French Cardinals.

The regulations, to be incorporated in a formal statute, were drawn up after the cardinals' recent consultations with Pope Pius XII and Vatican officials.

In announcing them, the Cardinals — Maurice Felin, Archbishop of Paris; Achille Lienart, Bishop of Lille, and Pierre Gerlier, Archbishop of Lyon—said the worker-priest program could not be "maintained in its present form."

But to preserve the contacts built up with French workers, they said, certain priests will maintain church missions in working-class neighborhoods.

**THE CARDINALS** said priests must:

- (1) Be specially chosen by their bishops.
- (2) Receive rigorous training in both doctrine and spiritual leadership.
- (3) Perform only part-time manual labor so they may be free to fulfill the demands of the priesthood.
- (4) Make no temporal commitments that might involve them in labor union or other responsibilities that should be left to laymen.
- (5) Not live alone but be attached to a community of priests or to a parish and contribute to parish life.

**THE RULES** will mean a considerable change in the lives of the worker-priests, most of whom have laid aside their clerical garb, worked full factory shifts at regular wages and lived as the workers live.

Aim of the program, begun around the end of World War II, has been to re-Christianize the laboring classes, a group that in France has been largely anticlerical and Communist.

## Reds Lure Children From Sunday Mass

London — (NC) — As a means of keeping Polish children from attending Mass, the Communist regime is reportedly sponsoring special Sunday morning gatherings.

Supposedly voluntary meetings, conducted by teachers and partly academic and partly social, are in effect mandatory. They are always held during the hours the children would be attending Mass.

Reports from other Iron Curtain countries tell of similar Sunday morning gatherings which both adults and children are forced to attend.

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## Chapel In Korea Dedicated To Heroic U. S. Chaplains

Seoul, Korea — (NC) — Korea's newest Catholic chapel stands in the grounds of St. Columban's mission here, a memorial to five U. S. chaplains who gave their lives in the Korean war.

Bishop Paul M. Ro, Vicar Apostolic of Seoul, dedicated the memorial chapel and celebrated solemn pontifical Mass in it.

**THE FIVE** chaplains in whose memory the chapel was built are: Father (Capt.) Herman D. Felhoelter, O.F.M., Cincinnati; Father (Capt.) Francis X. Coppens, Boston; Father (Capt.) Leo P. Craig, O.P., Everett, Mass.; Father (Capt.) Emil J. Kapaun, Wichita, who died in prison camp; and Father (Lt.) Lawrence F. Brunner, St. Louis, missing and believed to have died in captivity.

Attending the dedication ceremony were Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, 8th Army commander, and his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Paul D. Harkins; Maj. Gen. Randolph McC. Pate, USMC, commander, 1st Marine Division, and his assistant commander, Brig. Gen. Joseph Burger, USMC; and Brig. Gen. William J. Bradley, Catholic from Lowell, Mass., assistant commander, 2nd Infantry Division. Also present were some 80 chaplains of the U.S., British Commonwealth and Philippine forces, and a number of Korean and foreign civilian priests.

Dr. Soemnn Pak, Minister of Social Affairs, Republic of Korea, represented President Syngman Rhee. Dr. John Chang, former Korean ambassador to the U.N. and U.S., afterwards premier, attended.

Father (Col.) John K. Connolly of Sacramento, Calif., as deacon, and Father (Lt. Col.) Stephen H. Stoiz of Brooklyn, as subdeacon, assisted Bishop Ro at the dedication.

## Apostolic Delegate To Canada Named

Vatican City — (NC) — Two important appointments involving changes in papal representation in Canada and Great Britain were announced simultaneously by the Vatican press office.

The first was the transfer of Archbishop Giovanni Panico, Apostolic Nuncio to Peru, to the post of Apostolic Delegate to Canada. This office was made vacant by the recent appointment of Archbishop Ildarando Antoniazzi as Papal Nuncio to Spain.

The second was the nomination of Archbishop William Godfrey, Apostolic Delegate to Great Britain, to the See of Liverpool, vacant since the death of Archbishop Richard Downey last June.

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