

Study in Black and White

MARTIN LUTHER

(Louis de Rochemont Associates)

LUTHER is a formidable and portentous figure — viewed from either side of the chasm which divides Christendom—but, because the chasm still exists and divides, something more than mere distance in time is necessary to see him steadily and to see him whole. I can't claim to do so. I was born and brought up on his side of the chasm, learned to look at him with one eye at least half-closed, and today possess prejudices and convictions unlikely to encourage a detached viewpoint.

Yet it was a prejudice for religion rather than any religious prejudice (if I may make such a distinction) that attracted me to this production. I have so long been disgusted by Hollywood's sticky-fingered handling of the Christian faith that I am grateful for any film which approaches a religious theme with dignity and intelligence, and though the comparison may offend some, *Martin Luther* satisfied me in the same way as did *Monsieur Vincent*. The two films, of course, differ vastly. *Monsieur Vincent* honoured a saint. In it, faith was im-

plicit and the accent was on good works. In *Martin Luther* the question of faith is the explicit central theme—"The just should live by faith alone." Yet common to both is the salutary assertion that religious belief is of fundamental importance.

Again like *Monsieur Vincent*, *Martin Luther* was made outside the commercial film industry, with Church backing, and is, of course, frankly partisan and propagandist. As propaganda it is skilful enough to make the small concession, and to make it appear larger than it is. If all the protagonists had been treated with the same insight and understanding as is shown to the Vicar von Staupitz (John Ruddock), who was Luther's immediate superior in the Dominican order, it would be easier to believe that the tragedies of history are conflicts of right and right, not right and wrong.

But the propagandist is, inevitably, so concerned with who is right and who is wrong that the larger question, What is the truth? remains unanswered. *Martin Luther* is a notable and—in some passages of photography and dialogue—a noble film, but it is an essay in black and white, with few relieving half-tones. Niall MacGinnis's Luther is a first-class study in controlled emotion, but it is the

finer side of Luther's profile that we are shown. John Ruddock's portrayal of von Staupitz is, as I have indicated, a sensitive and most moving performance, but there appeared to me to be a tendency to caricature the Roman hierarchy. I could not believe that Leo X—a Medici—was quite such a pompous empty character as the glimpses we are given of him suggest. After all, the same leaven of the Renaissance worked in him as in Luther.



CHARLES WINNINGER
The clichés shine like jewels

Martin Luther was directed for Louis de Rochemont by Irving Pichel (who also played Chancellor Brueck), and photographed in Western Germany by Joseph C. Brun. Pictorially it may remind you in places of *Rembrandt*, which is perhaps reason enough for seeing it.

THE SUN SHINES BRIGHT

(John Ford-Republic)

FIRST things come first on the page this week, but, let me admit it, not without effort. I was impressed by *Martin Luther*, but I loved *The Sun Shines Bright*. John Ford, its director, is one of the great figures of the American cinema. He is of Irish extraction, was born an Easterner (State of Maine), has directed films as diverse as *The Informer* and *They Were Expendable*, and will almost certainly be remembered by the generality of filmmakers as the high-priest of the Western. But if *The Sun Shines Bright* means anything at all his heart belongs to Dixie.

Films which are the fruit of an affectionate devotion, though few, are almost always memorable, but I find it difficult to recall one—Flaherty's *Moana* or *Louisiana Story* perhaps excepted—in which the sun shone more softly than in this one, or where the whole warmth of a director's affections was more patently engaged.

The picture is built upon three tales by Irvin S. Cobb, and Cobb's Judge Priest, a grassroots Democrat, is the

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N.Z. LISTENER, APRIL 1, 1955.