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## Martin Luther: Perceptions of the Reformer in Popular Culture and Historical Scholarship

Kathryn R. Cross  
*Old Dominion University*

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MARTIN LUTHER: PERCEPTIONS OF THE REFORMER IN POPULAR CULTURE  
AND HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

by

Kathryn R. Cross  
B.A. June 2002, Washington and Lee University

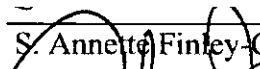
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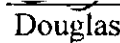
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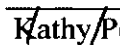
HISTORY

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Approved by:

  
S. Annette Finley-Croswhite (Director)

  
Douglas Green (Member)

  
Kathy Pearson (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### MARTIN LUTHER: PERCEPTIONS OF THE REFORMER IN POPULAR CULTURE AND HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Kathryn R. Cross  
Old Dominion University, 2008  
Director: Dr. S. Annette Finley-Croswhite

Martin Luther's remarkable life, his impressive body of written work, his dynamic and charismatic personality, and his impact on the world have long been a source of interest in the world of academia and of popular culture. This thesis examines the affect of the scholarly historical research of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries regarding Luther and its affect on perception of the reformer in popular culture as presented by the media.

The opening section of the thesis presents an examination and evaluation of Lutheran scholarship and how historical trends have affected the reformer's image in the academic world. Documents from the American version of *Luther's Works* are used to compare the reformer's own words with the opinions of scholars. The following section addresses the psychological perceptions of Luther using scholarship from the second half of the twentieth century to present day as well as many of the reformer's letters, sermons, and published tracts. Lastly the perceptions cultivated by the media industry are explored using three historical dramas and one documentary based on Luther's life and many websites that feature the reformer in some fashion.

The evidence produces the conclusion that though historical trends have produced an increasingly complex Luther, the outdated and weak great man theory continues to

dominate the media's portrayal of him because it resonates with the general public and, in turn, generates interest and income.

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, H. Lee Cross, IV for his support, guidance, patience, and love throughout the entire process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter                                   | Page |
|---|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION.....                      | 1    |
| II. HISTORIOGRAPHY.....                   | 4    |
| III. PSYCHOLOGICAL LUTHER .....           | 40   |
| IV. LUTHER ON FILM AND THE INTERNET ..... | 65   |
| V. CONCLUSIONS.....                       | 93   |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                         | 100  |
| VITA.....                                 | 107  |

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The perceptions of Martin Luther over the years in both historical works and popular culture have glorified and sensationalized the reformer and made him an enduring character for both academics and non-academics alike. Who is not moved by the young man who suffered at the hand of his father in Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther*? And how many high school and college history teachers have exploited the drama of Luther's life-altering experience in the lightning storm to generate interest in their students for the man that fell to his knees, swearing to become a monk, and actually did? Society's perception of Luther is colored by the large array of legitimate scholarship generated about Luther during the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but also by the glamour of television, movies, and the Internet. The industries of film and the Internet, in an effort to present Luther as a great man, but also one to whom the general public can relate, have neglected much of the important scholarship concerning the reformer. Though the historical trends have frequently reflected societal trends, popular culture continues to depict the reformer chiefly through his great actions rather than through the newer scholarship that explores his opinions, his motivations, and influence on many levels.

Why does the great man theory persist in media concerning Luther? Firstly, the general public, as a whole, does not have a firm understanding of the sixteenth-century and its people. In order to comprehend the scholarship regarding Luther's psyche, his

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This paper follows the style requirements of Kate L. Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).



internal motives, his deep struggles, and his attitudes on various subjects, the public must understand him in a sixteenth-century context. Because this is, for most, impossible, the media has created a Luther that audiences can relate on some levels (a clean, handsome Luther as opposed to the sixteenth-century reality), but who is defined by his actions as a great man. Producers, directors, writers, and others have different agendas when presenting Luther in the media. Some praise him, some criticize him, but over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the reformer has been characterized as a great man defined by his actions in the media because this interpretation engages the general public most effectively and therefore produces revenue.

The contextualization of Luther's sympathizers, biographers, and retractors both in scholarly literature and the media proves that the great man theory, while feeble, still dominates the reformer's perception in popular culture. Scholarship that breaks away from the great man theory presents a complex, conflicted, and seriously flawed man who was affected by many different forces in his life. The necessity of revenue, however, limits the media from exploring the multi-faceted Luther and instead continues to perpetuate the great man theory.

This study evaluates the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century scholarship on Martin Luther and its affect on the perception of the reformer in popular culture. Luther is recognized for his theological accomplishments and the study acknowledges that his concept of salvation through faith alone irreparably altered the world, but the study focuses on historical interpretations of the reformer and therefore does not include extensive information on and literature about his theology. In addition to a review of the scholarly research on the reformer, a number of Luther's writings,

taken predominantly from the fifty-five volume American edition of *Luther's Works*, are used to evaluate the images that have emerged in popular culture. Finally, three historical films, one historical documentary, and a variety of websites, all pertaining to Luther, are discussed to evaluate how scholarly interpretations of Luther are reflected in popular culture.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

Much of the reputable and serious research and scholarship during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries concerning Martin Luther and his theology can, according to Andrew Edward Harvey, be categorized into the “great man” theory of historical interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Founded on Thomas Carlyle’s ideas in *On Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, the great man theory, as defined by Harvey, suggests that historical events can be explained “by the actions of the personalities involved, disregarding, in whole or in part, the influence of environmental forces, such as the geographical, political, economic, religious, or intellectual movements in the midst of which their heroes lived and wrought.”<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the varied religious affiliations, nationalities, professions, political and/or economic ideologies represented by the plethora of Luther scholars of the past two hundred years, each major school of thought recognized him as a significant man whose dominating personality and extreme actions brought considerable and irreparable change to the world. Despite the over-arching theme of the great man, trends in Lutheran scholarship have diversified, particularly during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As societal and historical trends dictated change, Lutheran studies moved away from the simplicity of the great man theory to focus on the reformer’s human agency. Thus, while the historical image of Luther is indisputably that of a great man, his image continues to evolve in keeping with

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Edward Harvey, “Martin Luther in the Estimate of Modern Historians,” *The American Journal of Theology* 22, no. 3 (1918): 324.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 324.

historical revisionism and, as always, renders a different image of the reformer in every scholar's work.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the bias of religious affiliation was abundantly obvious in literature written on Luther. Leopold von Ranke, one of the most influential empiricist historians and the first modern scholar of Luther, offered a scholarly and scientific presentation of the great reformer in his *History of the Reformation in Germany* (originally titled *German History in the Age of the Reformation*) published in six volumes between 1839 and 1847.<sup>3</sup> Ranke constructed his groundbreaking study of the Reformation through extensive research and examination of historical documents, yet his nationality, education, familial background, and religion undoubtedly influenced his theories on Luther. Described as a "German conservative," he lived through the turmoil that Napoleon created in Europe and thus was probably attracted to the idea of Luther as a strong German hero who respected social order.<sup>4</sup> Ranke's own respect for social order was evident in his lifetime through his strong preference for the German monarchy over other, more radical forms of government, a stance that modern historians use to criticize him.<sup>5</sup> His German nationalism, in conjunction with his education in the classical studies at the Pforta school and later at the University of Leipzig, aided in his appreciation of Luther as a great man.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Ranke was born into a family that was dominated in previous generations by Lutheran

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<sup>3</sup>Arthur G. Dickens and John Tonkin, *The Reformation in Historical Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985), 171.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 169.

<sup>5</sup>Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1974), 90-91.

<sup>6</sup>M.A. Fitzsimmons, "Ranke: History as Worship," *The Review of Politics* 42, no. 4 (1980): 534.

ministers.<sup>7</sup> Ranke's heritage obviously influenced his interpretation of the events of the German Reformation, yet the methodology he practiced throughout his career emphasized a reliance on primary source documents that indelibly influenced the methods of future historians.

Ranke's early career and publications paved the way for the success of *The History of the Reformation in Germany* and his contributions to the study of history revolutionized the field. His academic post at the University of Berlin allowed him to explore the previously untouched archives of the Royal Library and his exposure to this enormous amount of archival material instilled in him a desire to seek out primary sources of history.<sup>8</sup> This exposure to primary source documents aided Ranke in creating professional standards for the study of history during his time at the University of Berlin.<sup>9</sup> Adamant about the use of primary source material, Ranker also insisted that all sources must be able to hold their weight against careful scrutiny.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, Ranke developed a methodology that, as explained by Ferdinand Schevill, was comprised of two main elements: firstly, that history should be based only upon documents recorded at the time of the event that a historian critically analyzes and examines and secondly, that these documents should be utilized objectively after analysis to construct an accurate presentation of the past event.<sup>11</sup> In his 1966 essay "The Burden of History," Hayden

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<sup>7</sup>Fitzsimmons, 534.

<sup>8</sup>Gay, 70.

<sup>9</sup>Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York: New York University Press 1999), 2.

<sup>10</sup>Green and Troup, 2.

<sup>11</sup>Ferdinand Schevill, "Ranke: Rise, Decline, and Persistence of a Reputation," *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (1952): 219.

White theorized that historians employ three strategies to explain history: mode of emplotment, mode of argument, and mode of ideological implication.<sup>12</sup> Anna Green and Kathleen Troup analyze White's assessment of Ranke in their 1999 publication, *The Houses of History*, and deduce that Ranke used a comic mode of emplotment, an organicist mode of argument, and a conservative mode of ideological implication.<sup>13</sup> The combination of these modes, according to White, suggests that Ranke used the synecdoche trope when writing history and consequently produced work that delineated European history as a series of interconnected events, creating a flowing narrative that interweaves the particular events with the larger picture of history.<sup>14</sup> Though Green and Troup note that White offers no evidence as to why Ranke chose this method, his explanation is sensible and applicable. Ranke's methodology influenced all of his works and generations of future scholars and though it has been subject to criticism over the years, his emphasis on the empirical collection of data has persisted. Ranke acknowledged that history is a "progressive discipline" and that consequently, later historians would undoubtedly surpass him because of the progress of the study and the availability of sources.<sup>15</sup>

Ranke's *History of the Reformation in Germany*, the work that deals most directly with Luther, is a prime example of his style. In the introduction he asserts his firm belief in the validity and importance of his methodology as the future of historical research and

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<sup>12</sup>Green and Troup, 206, 208.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>15</sup>Gay, 72.

highlights his usage of archival material.<sup>16</sup> “I see the time approach in which we shall no longer have to found modern history on the reports even of contemporary historians...still less, on works yet more remote from the sources; but on the narratives of eyewitnesses, and the genuine and original documents.”<sup>17</sup> In this manner, Ranke constructed his monumental work on the German Reformation and presented a picture of Luther based on evidence and influenced by personal opinion. Ranke relied heavily upon the ninety-six volumes containing the Acts of the Imperial Diets from 1414-1613, located in the archives at the city of Frankfurt, to anchor his research.<sup>18</sup> These volumes, including both Acts and reports from city deputies, forced Ranke to explore further.<sup>19</sup> In addition to the Frankfurt archives, he also gained access to the Royal Archives of both Prussia and Saxony, allowing him to examine the events and writings of the reigns of Holy Roman Emperors Maximilian I and Charles V.<sup>20</sup> These archival documents, in conjunction with collections of letters of Luther, Melancthon, and key deputies and earlier writings on historical figures, aided Ranke in his construction of an interesting, dramatic, factual, and what some would consider scientific depiction of the Reformation in Germany.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Gay, 74.

<sup>17</sup>Leopold von Ranke, *History of the Reformation in Germany*, trans. by Sarah Austin (London: George Rutledge and Sons, Limited, 1905), xi.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, viii, ix, x.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, x, xi.

In addition to Ranke's historical methodology, other elements of his style contributed to a depiction of Luther as a "giant" of great man of the Reformation.<sup>22</sup> The first book of *History of the Reformation in Germany* does not include Luther, but rather builds up to the climactic actions of the reformer by explaining political, social, and religious events that precede his arrival on the scene.<sup>23</sup> This foreshadowing allows Ranke to capitalize on the excitement of major events without subsuming the reader in background information.<sup>24</sup> When Luther does appear in Ranke's work, the author expresses the reformer's importance by providing lengthy background about Luther's early life rather than simply jumping straight into the events, a method that Peter Gay describes as "dramatic potential."<sup>25</sup> By building up Luther and his biographical information, Ranke turned history into a grand story with fascinating characters and that left the reader anxiously anticipating the outcome. Ranke employed the storytelling approach to history, yet he also heavily emphasized the importance of truth in history, thus it is interesting that his interpretation, written during the age of nation-states, nationalism, and liberalism, produced a heroic, just and nationalistic Luther, a man that could have been a hero not only in the sixteenth century, but also the nineteenth.<sup>26</sup>

Despite his devotion to "writing what happened," recognizing the nuances of each historical period, and relying on legitimate primary sources, Ranke could not escape the influence of his own environment. As a Lutheran and a German nationalist, he

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<sup>22</sup>Gay, 63.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 64.



undoubtedly looked with greater favor upon Luther than he did the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy. He worked in Berlin, the capital of the powerful and ambitious Prussian Empire, and some of his most famous works were produced during the years that German nationalism reached new heights and the Prussians led the Germanic people toward unification, yet also struggled with maintaining the conservative order. Thus, Ranke's interpretation of Luther presents a man who did not intend to instigate a revolt, but instead sought to purify religion and return it to its rightful purposes.<sup>27</sup> This portrayal glorified Luther as a great man pursuing the original, conservative approach to life – conveniently depicting him as a national hero who valued tradition and reviled corruption of the conventional order. Nineteenth-century German nationalists needed a Luther-like hero to achieve their nationalist aims – conservative and successful action. Although his image of Luther was influenced by his personal beliefs and background, Ranke introduced and illustrated many factors of Lutheran scholarship that historians continue to explore.<sup>28</sup> Ranke initiated methods that influenced future scholars and solidified Luther's image as a great man who brought glory to his nation and was justified in his actions.

Ranke's Lutheran, German nationalist slant not only inspired other writers that followed him, but also reignited the Catholic scholars' denunciation of his actions. Where Ranke viewed Luther as a great man because of his contributions to purifying religion and inspiring nationalism, Catholic scholars depicted Luther as a catalyst of negative change. Shortly before Ranke's study of the Reformation was published, the

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<sup>27</sup>Fitzsimmons, 548.

<sup>28</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 171.

Catholic scholar Johann Adam Mohler's work on Protestant and Catholic doctrine, *Symbolics*, examined Protestantism in a thorough manner rather than simply criticizing it.<sup>29</sup> Ranke's clear triumph of Lutheranism, however, triggered a return to the earlier pattern of Catholic criticism that included notable and influential contributions from Ignaz von Dollinger, Johannes Janssen, Heinrich Denifle, and Hartmann Grisar. These scholars, among others, set the agenda for the Catholic interpretation of Luther as a great man. The Protestant Ranke attributed his great man status to his monumental changes and his talent, charisma and personality, and the Catholics did as well, yet they considered his changes to be immensely disastrous.

Ignaz von Dollinger, while clearly biased toward Catholicism in his treatment of Luther, viewed him as an intensely powerful man. In his study of the Reformation, part of a surge of Catholic writing on the subject following Ranke's work, he delved into a new topic examining the reformer's internal motivations.<sup>30</sup> Unlike those before him who had analyzed the events that occurred in Luther's life, Dollinger utilized Luther's personal writings to derive the aspects of his personality that made him a powerful individual. Dollinger's research presents a negative image of the reformer: Luther as a man of excessive pride, obsessed with evil, prone to violence, and capable of using his power to manipulate others.<sup>31</sup> By further evaluating Luther's writings, Dollinger made the case that the Lutheran Reformation was a failure and claimed that the reformer's own

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<sup>29</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 180.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 182.

words acknowledged its failure.<sup>32</sup> Analysis of this nature provoked Protestant criticism and initiated interest in the psychological motivations of Luther. Though Dollinger's interpretations of Luther evolved as his relationship with the papacy declined, his initial conclusions identified Luther as a great man capable of controlling the thoughts and actions of his followers.

Johannes Janssen, another Catholic scholar of the Reformation, depicted Luther as a great man responsible for both the religious and social deterioration of the sixteenth century in his *History of the German People at the Close of the Middle Ages*.<sup>33</sup> While heavily influenced by Dollinger, Janssen's work is significantly less concerned with the internal motivations of Luther and his personal actions and focused more upon the Great Man's impact upon Roman Catholicism.<sup>34</sup> Janssen's portrait of Luther is similar in some ways to Dollinger's, yet he simply marked Luther as a destroyer rather than analyzing why he wished to destroy. He recognized Luther as an incredibly talented individual and also acknowledged his enormous role in history as the ultimate antagonist.

Denifle and Grisar both wrote about Martin Luther from the Catholic perspective at the beginning of the twentieth century, continuing the Catholic denunciation of the reformer, causing some degree of controversy, and sparking new ideas about Reformation scholarship. Denifle's *Luther and Lutheranism*, published in 1904, was particularly critical of Luther, and some scholars such as Bernhard Lohse assert that his

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<sup>32</sup>Gerald Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past and Present* 67 (1975): 30.

<sup>33</sup> Harvey, 327.

<sup>34</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 184.

thesis lacks the evidence necessary to support it.<sup>35</sup> Scholars also contest Denifle's claim that his only sources were the personal writings of Luther.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, his depiction of Luther presents a great man capable of instigating the moral, social, and religious decline of his age and of intimidating his fellow Germans into following him.<sup>37</sup> While Denifle was able to link Luther to the historical context of his time, he maintained that the reformer was a man demoralized by his "sensual nature" and who lacked the ability to comprehend theological issues.<sup>38</sup> Denifle was obviously influenced by Dollinger's psychological approach to dissecting Luther's motivations and consequently presented, like those before him, a biased history. His unapologetic indictment of Luther's character and motivations linked him to the severe criticism of earlier Catholic scholars and encouraged a Protestant rebuttal.<sup>39</sup> Lohse recognizes that *Luther and Lutheranism* was significant, but claims that "Denifle's polemic against Luther was so bitter and emotional that it has obscured the very real contribution that Denifle made."<sup>40</sup> Despite his immense criticism of him, Denifle obviously regarded Luther as a great man for he was capable of manipulating those around him into believing his claims.

Though Denifle's depiction of Luther was vilified the reformer as a danger to Catholicism, not all Catholic scholars were as extreme. Hartmann Grisar, the Jesuit

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<sup>35</sup>Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 233.

<sup>36</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 200.

<sup>37</sup>Harvey, 326, 332.

<sup>38</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 200.

<sup>39</sup>Ephraim Emerton, "Martin Luther in the Light of Recent Criticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 7, no. 2 (1914): 208.

<sup>40</sup>Lohse, 233.

author of the 1911 work, *Luther*, echoed some of Denifle's psychological arguments and undoubtedly had an unfavorable impression of the reformer, yet his study offers more balance than did his predecessor. Indeed, in the preface to his major work, Grisar professed his attempt to evaluate his sources in an objective manner. Both Denifle and Grisar focused on Luther's pride and his willfulness, yet Grisar conceded to the corruption of the papacy during the sixteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Thus, Denifle considered Luther the ultimate great man capable of provoking the degeneration of society while Grisar, who also promulgated the great man theory, was cognizant of the assistance that an already demoralized papacy offered Luther. Denifle depicted the psychological issues as flaws, but Grisar deduced that Luther's pride, egoism, and sensualism were a result of his "diseased soul" or a psychopathic illness.<sup>42</sup> Thus Grisar's presentation of Luther was not as harsh as his counterpart's, yet it was equally condemnatory and his pity for the reformer's "illness" offended many Protestant scholars.<sup>43</sup> Dollinger, Janssen, Denifle, and Grisar, among many others, cultivated the Catholic scholarly perception of Luther throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite their strong attacks, even belittling the intelligence and morality of Luther, the whole of their work recognized his vital role in the development of religious, social, and political history and his status as a great man.

While the nineteenth and early twentieth century Catholic scholarship on Luther shared, if nothing else, a critical spirit, the Protestant work on the subject varied greatly.

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<sup>41</sup>Harvey, 338.

<sup>42</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 201.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 201.

Many writers, such as Julius Kostlin, honored Luther in their work while also recognizing his flaws.<sup>44</sup> Kostlin was a part of the widespread rebuttal of negative Catholic scholarship, but he was also capable of capitalizing upon some of the historical methods that were used to explore the psychological forces in Luther's career.<sup>45</sup> His translated works such as *Life of Luther* and *Martin Luther: The Reformer* are credited with garnering attention from English scholars and increasing their interest in the field.<sup>46</sup> *Life of Luther* is often considered a Protestant response to Johannes Janssen's work.<sup>47</sup> In the author's preface of one of the two English editions, Kostlin acknowledges that to Protestants, Luther is an "object of our love and veneration," but also acknowledges that those feelings "will not prevent, however, or prejudice the most candid historical inquiry."<sup>48</sup> In a seemingly pointed jab at the bias of Catholic scholars such as Janssen, Kostlin also notes that "for others," presumably Catholics and anti-Lutheran protestants, Luther is a "rock of offence," yet he is one that "even slander and falsehood will never overcome."<sup>49</sup>

The Catholic scholarship on the Reformation encouraged the Protestants to respond in an area that Ranke had not addressed in depth. Many scholars of the nineteenth century tackled the topic of Reformation theology, and while in agreement

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<sup>44</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 185; Julius Kostlin, *Life of Luther*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911).

<sup>45</sup> Harvey, 338.

<sup>46</sup>E. Theodore Bachmann, "Walther, Schaff, and Krauth on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 198.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>48</sup>Kostlin, ix.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, ix.

that the Catholic view was incorrect, there were many interpretations and disagreements concerning Lutheran theology. Two well-known scholars, Albrecht Ritschl and Theodosius Harnack, presented different interpretations of Luther. While Ritschl's work drew attention to Luther as a master theologian and was written in proper historical context, Harnack criticized it for omitting significant parts of Luther's theology.<sup>50</sup> Some scholars denounce Harnack's work for lacking the historical perspective necessary, yet others praise him for surpassing Ritschl in his theological interpretation, proving the continued personal bias that inevitably afflicts historians.<sup>51</sup>

Ernst Troeltsch is a prime example of the different types of Luther scholarship that emerged in the early twentieth century. Uninterested in much of what intrigued other Reformation and Luther experts, Troeltsch instead considered Luther a necessary subject of study in order to achieve his goal of placing the Reformation into historical context.<sup>52</sup> Troeltsch's approach to Reformation research sharply differed from his contemporaries for he neglected primary sources in favor of analyzing the multitude of secondary material.<sup>53</sup> Contrary to other scholars, who attributed the Reformation to the advent of the modern world, he reduced its significance and placed it in the context of the middle

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<sup>50</sup>Lohse, 220-221; Albrecht Ritschl, *Die Christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (Bonn, Germany: Adolph Marcus, 1888); Albrecht Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus* (Bonn, Germany: Adolph Marcus, 1880); Theodosius Harnack, *Luthers Theologie mit besonderer Beziehung auf seine Versöhnungs- und Erlösungslehre* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1969).

<sup>51</sup>Lohse, 221; Dickens and Tonkin, 187.

<sup>52</sup>Klaus Penzel, "Ernst Troeltsch on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 278.

<sup>53</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 188; Ernst Troeltsch, *Protestantism and Progress; a Historical Study of the Relation of Protestantism to the Modern World*, trans. by W. Montgomery (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958); Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper, 1960).

ages.<sup>54</sup> While Troeltsch maintained that the Reformation affected medieval religion, he contended that society did not dramatically change until the Enlightenment.<sup>55</sup> This view, unique at the time, still portrayed Luther as a great man and an agent of change, yet limited the scope of his change.

Upon the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ninety-five Theses in 1917, Lutheran scholarship went through a resurgence that lasted through the 1960s. Two essays written by Karl Holl and Franz Xavier Kiefl in 1917 exemplified the Catholic and Protestant interpretations at the beginning of this Lutheran Renaissance.<sup>56</sup> Holl's essay, as well as his other works, responded to the Catholic "attacks" on Lutheran doctrine and defended the doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>57</sup> With a Protestant slant, Holl countered many of Troeltsch's theories, emphasized Luther's revelation of the relationship between man and God, and attempted to demonstrate that the reformer's theology could be revealed in an orderly fashion.<sup>58</sup> The famous theologian Karl Barth supported Holl's theories and together they helped to create a new image of Luther in the early twentieth century.<sup>59</sup> Barth's and Holl's scholarship on Lutheran history and doctrine set the framework for Protestants at the start of the Lutheran Renaissance. Kiefl's Luther essay did for Catholic scholars what Barth and Holl had for Protestants. While obviously

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<sup>54</sup>Harold Grimm, "Luther Research Since 1920," *The Journal of Modern History*, 32, no. 2 (1960): 105.

<sup>55</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 188.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 203; Karl Holl, *What Did Luther Understand by Religion?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

<sup>58</sup>Grimm, 105.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 106.



influenced by the critical style of Grisar and Denifle, Kiefl recognized Luther's status as a German hero and evaluated the validity of his religious motivations.<sup>60</sup> According to Dickens and Tonkin, German Catholic treatment of Luther moved away from the styles of Grisar and Hartmann after this point, and while other Catholic scholars maintained the traditional bias, the start of the Lutheran Renaissance marked a turning point in Luther scholarship.<sup>61</sup>

Although Catholic and Protestant historical and theological interpretations of Luther evolved through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the image of Luther as a "great man" remained a common thread. Regardless of religious bias or historical method, Luther was recognized as a man that irreparably altered history through his actions and his dominant personality.

The impact of World War I, the interwar years, World War II, and the intellectual advancements made during the early twentieth century inevitably swayed Lutheran historiography. Germany, the home of Martin Luther and the Reformation movement was also the nation held responsible for instigating both World Wars. While the image of Luther as a "great man" still pervaded biographies of the reformer, the growing influence of Hitler darkened Germany's image. The second half of the twentieth century produced a multitude of works on Luther, many stemming from the worldwide conflicts of the World Wars, and others from the theological and historical developments of the Lutheran Renaissance and the ever-changing intellectual culture. The most marked shift in scholarship was the move away from the image of a purely Catholic or purely Protestant

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<sup>60</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 204; Franz X. Kiefl, "Martin Luthers Religiöse Psyche: Zum 400 jährigen Reformations jubilaum," *Hochland* (1977): 7-17.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

Luther. While this process began during the early stages of the Luther Renaissance, it became even more defined during the second half of the twentieth century. Theological discussions of Luther became deeply intertwined with modern philosophical ideas and the reformer was praised, scorned, or simply analyzed in relation to modern theories. Psychology, popularized by Freud, received renewed attention in scholarship and Luther's childhood, personality, relationships, and personal emotions were utilized to present new opinions about the motivating factors in his life. Historians also approached the byproducts of the Lutheran Reformation, both positive and negative. Luther's advancements outside of the religious Reformation, such as the push toward greater education in Germany, were evaluated, but scholars also assessed the negative affects of the reformer's writings and actions. The rise of social history in the last decades of the twentieth century led to an exploration of the affect that Luther and his reformation had on all levels of society, especially the lower classes and women. The new images of Luther produced in the second half of the twentieth century, while still recognizing him as a great man, analyzed the sixteenth-century man in the context of a world that he would not recognize and evaluated his human agency and its affect on history.

After the destruction and atrocities of both the World Wars were apparent, a new trend in Luther research surfaced that analyzed the reformer's influence over the German culture, German militarism and anti-Semitism, and German leadership. Thus, an evolution occurred in scholarship. Where the early writings on Luther were divided by Catholic and Protestant boundaries, the new criticism and, in turn, defense of Luther historically dealt not just with his theology, but also with his secular beliefs and ideas. Luther's actions during his life, particularly his reaction to the German Peasant's Revolt

of 1525, his harsh opinions about the Jewish people, and his abundant writings became a source of great interest to those who linked Germany's history to the great reformer. His heroic image became tarnished, not just because of his attack upon Catholicism, but also for the possibility of his unforeseeable influence on the German people and their compliance with political authorities.

Peter Wiener, a German émigré, produced a brief and very readable volume in 1945 entitled *Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor*. Wiener's selective usage of Luther's own writing is deceptive to the reader, yet equally thought provoking. In an attempt to link Luther's legacy to the militant leaders of Germany – Frederick II, Bismarck, William II, and ultimately, Hitler – Wiener espoused his own opinions and backed them with selections from Luther's works. Although he systematically related Luther to all aspects of Nazism, specifically anti-Semitism, Wiener's methods were weak and loose. E. Gordon Rupp vehemently, and often humorously, rebutted Wiener's thesis shortly after its publication. Like Wiener, Rupp used Luther's own words to illustrate his point. He aptly illuminated Wiener's selective usage to discredit the attack on the reformer. Despite Rupp's rebuttal, *Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor* made an impression on Luther scholars. Wiener's sensational writing undoubtedly attracted attention from popular culture as well as academia and though it was loosely written and omitted major facets of Luther's works, it presented a new and unfavorable image of the great reformer, even in the eyes of fellow Protestants.<sup>62</sup>

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, scholars continued to explore Luther's legacy in Germany in conjunction with the events of the first and second

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<sup>62</sup>E. Gordon Rupp, *Luther: Hitler's Cause or Cure?* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945); Peter Wiener, *Martin Luther: Hitler's Spiritual Ancestor* (London: Hutchinson and Company, Ltd., 1945).

World Wars. Heiko Oberman, the most celebrated and accomplished Lutheran scholar of the late twentieth century who will be discussed in greater detail in information that follows, analyzed the reformer's attitude toward the Jewish population in his work *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. In a section entitled "Luther and the Jews," Oberman explained that despite the undoubtedly negative words that Luther spoke about the Jews, his feelings were not as ruthless and harsh as many modern scholars, such as Wiener, believed. Oberman defended Luther as initially being a "friend of the Jews" and drew comparisons between the reformer's condemnation of the peasants (during the Peasants War) and his condemnation of the Jews.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Oberman rebutted the idea that Luther singled out the Jews for persecution and suggested instead that he viewed them as rebellious people that needed to be suppressed or subdued through conversion to Christianity. In explaining Luther's attitudes toward the Jews, Oberman revealed the reformer as a medieval man with customary prejudices, a desire to combat chaos and rebellion, but also as a man capable of compassion. To the apologist Oberman, while Luther's last sermon, entitled "Admonition Against the Jews," was particularly damning, it did include a charge for the congregants to "practice Christian love toward them and pray that they convert."<sup>64</sup>

The issues of Luther's influence over twentieth century German history continued to be a popular and intriguing topic throughout the second half of the twentieth century in many different fields of academia. Paul Lawrence Rose's 1990 publication *German Question/Jewish Question* tackled the history of Germany and the Jews and Luther is

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<sup>63</sup>Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), 290-293.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 294.

prominent in the early pages of the work. Rose, undoubtedly influenced by Oberman, presented Luther as a man that viewed the Jews in much the same way that he viewed the papacy or the rebelling peasants – as a threat to order.<sup>65</sup> Like Oberman, Rose claimed that Luther held Christian rulers responsible for the Jews and that the reformer believed them deserving of “love rather than punishment.”<sup>66</sup> However, unlike Oberman, Rose cited Luther as a precursor to the horrific anti-Semitism of the twentieth century and stated that he initiated “Verjudung” or “Jewification” and mapped out “practical” measures for the ruin of Jewish society.

Critical analysis of the Luther’s works engenders questions about the validity and bias of those who produce an apologist position concerning the reformer’s relations with the Jews. Oberman, like Ranke before him, was undoubtedly affected by his own German and Dutch heritage. His works dealt gingerly with the reformer’s most damning tracts about Jews and failed to mention that the Nazi party’s usage of his writings in their propaganda. Particularly in Luther’s *On the Jews and Lies* the words speak for themselves and read as an eerie precursor to the atrocities of the Third Reich. The tract, written in 1543, is notoriously condemnatory of the Jewish people, and its strong words force scholars to acknowledge the passion of Luther’s feelings when earlier works, such as *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew*, had suggested embracing the Jews.<sup>67</sup> Despite the words of his younger days, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, in addition to sermons near the

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<sup>65</sup>Paul Lawrence Rose, *German Question, Jewish Question: Revolutionary Anti-Semitism from Kant to Wagner* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 4

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>67</sup>Franklin Sherman and Helmut T. Lehmann, introduction to “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *The Christian in Society IV*, trans. Martin H. Bertram, ed. Franklin Sherman, vol. 47 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 124.

end of his life, illustrate Luther's raw emotions and receive much attention in modern times for the possible link between the reformer's scathing words and the Holocaust that occurred in the same land less than four centuries later. Luther stated: "Therefore dear Christian, be advised and do not doubt that next to the devil, you have no more bitter, venomous, and vehement foe than a real Jew who earnestly seeks to be a Jew."<sup>68</sup>

Scholars familiar with Luther's preoccupation and inner battles with the devil should acknowledge that by comparing the Jews with the devil he is expressing the severity and seriousness of his views. The ultimate pieces of evidence linking Luther to German anti-Semitism are his repeated admonitions for seven specific ways to combat the Jews:

First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them...Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed...Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them...Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb...Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews...Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping...Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an ax, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow...<sup>69</sup>

Luther made much of his case against the "lies" of the Jewish people through biblical arguments, but those are not the words that are remembered. Rather, Luther's suggestions and his condemnations stand out and it seems impossible to believe that the beliefs of a man who gained the image of a nationalist hero to many in the nineteenth-century did not precipitate in some way the disastrous effects of twentieth-century anti-

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<sup>68</sup>Martin Luther, "On the Jews and Their Lies (1543)," in *The Christian in Society IV*, trans. Martin H. Bertram, ed. Franklin Sherman, vol. 47 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 217.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 268-272.

Semitism. Oberman defended Luther as a man of his times, excusing his graphic language and obvious prejudices as normal for his era, but the reformer's words are too clearly and passionately expressed to be dismissed as an influence. While this defense might serve to exonerate Luther in some ways, it does not eliminate the clear link from his anti-Semitic tracts to the toleration and even acceptance of the anti-Semitic policies of the Nazi regime by the German people.

The scathing writings of his later years and their attachment to the Holocaust are a dark blot on the reputation of Luther, but not his only one. In addition to the studies concerning Luther's impact on anti-Semitism, there are also theories that the reformer contributed to the destruction of the World Wars by creating and advocating a policy of complete submission to the government that became a German way of life. Uwe Siemon-Netto argues against the validity of this theory in her 1995 publication *The Fabricated Luther: the Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth*, combating ideas proposed by serious and respected Lutheran scholars of the twentieth century. Siemon-Netto begins with an explanation of the "Luther cliché" – the idea that Luther's advocacy of submission to the government caused people to disregard their Christian morality in favor of absolute allegiance to the government, and consequently allow government evils to go unquestioned.<sup>70</sup> Beginning with an intense criticism of the film shown at the Holocaust Museum based on William L. Shirer's famous work, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, that suggests that Luther "advised absolute submission to the government" and "created a subspecies of cowardly quietists," Siemon-Netto systematically argues against

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<sup>70</sup>Uwe Siemon-Netto, *The Fabricated Luther: The Rise and Fall of the Shirer Myth* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 10-11.

the idea that Luther caused the Germans to submit to Hitler.<sup>71</sup> The author examines the work of many prominent scholars, writers, and theologians to present a well-defined, excellently researched, and thoroughly convincing argument against the “Luther cliché.”

Again, however, Luther’s own words counter Siemon-Netto’s arguments, particularly in his infamous tract addressing the German peasants, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*. The reformer’s reaction to the Peasants Revolt of 1525 is a pointed and sharp criticism of those that defy the ruling authorities and use violence to achieve their aims. In one section of the tract, he claims that the rebelling peasants “are doing the devil’s work.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, while Siemon-Netto and others reject a connection to the German tolerance of the Nazi regime, if Luther served as nationalistic hero to Germans, his attitudes and teachings would affect the national attitude toward authority. His opinion is clearly stated:

They have sworn to be true and faithful, submissive and obedient, to their rulers, as Christ commands when he says, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s’ [Luke 20:25]. And Romans 13 [1] says, ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.’ Since they are now deliberately and violently breaking this oath of obedience and setting themselves in opposition to their masters, they have forfeited body and soul, as faithless perjured, lying, disobedient rascals and scoundrels usually do. St. Paul passed this judgment on them in Romans 13 [2] when he said that those who resist authorities will bring judgment upon themselves. This saying will smite the peasants sooner or later, for God wants people to be loyal and to do their duty.<sup>73</sup>

Luther even glorified those who fight in support of their rulers: “Thus, anyone who is killed fighting on the side of the rulers may be a true martyr in the eyes of God, if he

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<sup>71</sup>Siemon-Netto, 15.

<sup>72</sup>Martin Luther, “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants (1525),” in *The Christian in Society III*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs and Robert C. Schultz, ed. Robert C. Schulz vol. 46 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1967), 49.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.



fighters with the kind of conscience I have just described, for he acts in obedience with God's word."<sup>74</sup> The slaughter of the peasants by the princes, spurred on by Luther's words, might not have been his true intention. The bloodshed, however, did not alter his belief in submission to authority and therefore it must be considered, at least to some degree, as a factor in the successes of the Nazi party. The legacy of Luther's anti-Semitism plagued the Lutheran Church throughout the twentieth-century to the extent that in 1994, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America issued an apology to the Jewish community. The statement recognized Luther's words and their possible repercussions, articulated that the ELCA did not condone their usage by modern anti-Semites, and expressed a desire to live in love with the Jewish people.<sup>75</sup>

The mid-twentieth century further popularized Luther with readable and informative biographies of the reformer and extensive research concerning his theology and life. Roland Bainton dominated this period of Lutheran scholarship until his death in 1984. As a professor at Yale Divinity school and a scholar of the Reformation he amassed a considerable amount of research that consequently cultivated a new image of the reformer. Like Ranke, he relied on primary sources as the basis for his research, but his findings varied from Ranke's because of the incorporation of his own philosophy into history. Bainton identified three categories of thought on the causes of the Reformation: moral, doctrinal, and sociological, and identified Luther with the doctrinal cause.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Martin Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants," 53.

<sup>75</sup>"Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community," Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, <http://archive.elca.org/ecumenicalinterreligious/jewish/declaration.html> (accessed July, 1 2008).

<sup>76</sup>Roland Bainton, *The Age of the Reformation* (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1956), 12-14.

Bainton's study of Luther covered a variety of topics concerning the reformer, from his struggle with faith and religious liberty to artistic interpretations of him and his opinions of women. The Luther that emerged from Bainton's scholarship was a very religious and very real man prone to fits of depression, who constantly reexamined his faith, and was, at the same time, both medieval and modern. To Bainton, the Reformation was first and foremost a revival of religion and Luther was the ultimate figure of the movement.<sup>77</sup>

Comparing Luther to St. Augustine, he suggests that, "Luther similarly may be considered a medieval figure ushering in the modern age."<sup>78</sup> Thus, Bainton presented a new image of the reformer who, while a great man of enormous influence, was also very human.

*Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton's 1950 classic, is probably the most popular and well-read biography of Martin Luther. Bainton's impressive research and his ability to convey the reformer's history in an interesting and logical format popularized the history of the reformer to a new generation. *Here I Stand* quickly became requisite reading for all students of Luther and of the Reformation in general because of its insight into Luther's life as well as its readability. The Luther presented in *Here I Stand* was, much as in other Bainton works, an agent of change and a supremely religious man inspired by doctrinal beliefs. In many ways he was a medieval man with medieval beliefs, but also a beacon of modernity. Bainton's Luther was a hero, not without his flaws, but very likeable. He was a simple man in some ways, but one whose human agency altered the history of the world.

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<sup>77</sup>Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1952), 3-23.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

While *Here I Stand* is recognized as Bainton's greatest work, his other contributions to Lutheran and Reformation history were unsurpassed by the other scholars of his generation. He was forward-thinking and even produced works about the women of the reformation movement before such studies were popular for, as he stated, "I have always had an interest in those who have not had their due."<sup>79</sup> Bainton's research presented a very human Luther and opened the door for new Luther research in the twentieth century. His work was a benchmark for Lutheran studies and his influence is still reflected in scholarship.

The mid-twentieth century also produced scholarship that built upon the theological and philosophical ideas that emerged during the early Luther renaissance. Jaroslav Pelikan's *From Luther to Kierkegaard* presented the reformer's accomplishments as evangelical rather than theological or philosophical.<sup>80</sup> John Dillenberger drew upon the theological concepts of Barth and Ritschl in *God Hidden and Revealed* to use Luther's works to show a "hidden God." The application of new ideas about philosophy, politics, and theology to Lutheran ideas and principles provided authors with a wealth of material.

Despite the noted works of Bainton and others, the most significant contribution of the twentieth century to Lutheran studies in the English-speaking world was the translation of Luther's works into English. The American Edition, comprised of fifty-five volumes, an introductory edition, and a thorough index, was published over two decades by Concordia Press, Muhlenberg Press, and Fortress Press and edited by Jaroslav

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<sup>79</sup>Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), 9.

<sup>80</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. The first volumes went to press in 1955 and continued to be produced through the 1970s, creating a collection that includes the bulk of Luther's written work translated into English and consequently making his writing available to a wider range of readers. In 1961 the aforementioned historian E. Gordon Rupp reviewed the collection that already included fifteen volumes. Rupp expressed concern about scholars using translations rather than examining documents in their original language, but acknowledged that the work is consistent and that "technical, linguistically accurate Luther study in America will not wane but, rather, will grow because of the great opportunity here provided."<sup>81</sup> Such an addition is unsurpassed for it allows those interested in Luther to read, study, and interpret his works for themselves, even if their knowledge of German and Latin is restricted or non-existent. The translation of works allows undergraduate and graduate students of all disciplines the opportunity to be exposed to Luther's works, introducing the reformer to even greater numbers and consequently encouraging more scholarship. As the American Edition expanded to fifty-five volumes, its usage became increasingly popular and so widely used in both the academic and non-academic world that in 2001 the edition was put onto a CD-ROM. This development not only allows for easier access to Luther's own words, but also includes search options, references to other works, the ability to cut and paste documents, and easy access to references, among other amenities. According to reviewer Jonathan D. Sorum, the CD-ROM format will further popularize the American Edition of *Luther's Works*, a publication that "has gone a long way toward dispelling stereotypes and misunderstandings based on hearsay or very selective quoting and has allowed Luther's

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<sup>81</sup>E. Gordon Rupp, review of *Luther's Works* by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Martin Luther, *The Journal of Religion* 41, no.3 (1961): 213.

own voice to be heard, especially in the theological enterprise.”<sup>82</sup> For purposes of scholarship, many will continue to study Luther’s writing in their original language, but the monumental achievement of translating his works into English with consistency and accuracy has led to the continual growth of Lutheran studies in the English speaking world.

The psychological Luther, most famously explored in Erik Erikson’s *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, has fascinated scholars and students throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Erikson’s groundbreaking publication in 1958 delved deeper into Luther’s internal motivations and psyche than any other scholar. He wrote not from a historian’s perspective as much as from a psychoanalytic perspective and produced ideas that suggested that Luther’s relationship with his father was responsible for the reformer’s conflicts with an “angry God.”<sup>83</sup> This approach, while praised for its innovation and thought-provoking ideas, was a marked break from traditional methodology and Erikson was heavily criticized for his research that many believed was “baseless” and could not be supported by fact.<sup>84</sup> Despite the rampant and ever-present criticism of the work, Erikson influenced many scholars to explore the psychological influences on Luther. Authors such as Richard Marius, author of *Luther*, published in 1974 and *Luther: The Christian between God and Death*, published in 1999, continually explored the reformer’s driving influences, his personal thoughts, and the relationships that impacted his life.

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<sup>82</sup>Jonathan D. Sorum, review of *Luther’s Works on CD-ROM* by Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann, and Martin Luther, *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 33, no. 4 (2002): 1126.

<sup>83</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, *The Reformation in Historical Thought*, 280.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 280.

This trend of exploring Luther's personality and background was expanded by the aforementioned Dutch-born Heiko Oberman, undoubtedly the greatest Reformation and Lutheran scholar of the second half of the twentieth century after Roland Bainton. Oberman's body of work on Luther is less controversial than that of Erikson or Marius, but demands the attention of the scholarly world for its bold assertions and excellent research. Oberman analyzed the psyche of Luther in his work, but his trademark, what Hans J. Hillerbrand termed "vintage Oberman" in a review, was to overturn previously accepted ideas.<sup>85</sup> Hillerbrand also described Oberman's style as combative and provocative, a view also expressed in Donald Weinstein's preface to the scholar's last published work.<sup>86</sup> Both Hillerbrand and Weinstein describe Oberman as a relentless scholar, a master of his sources, and a critic of his fellow historians, and recognize that these things made his scholarship innovative and important. Over the later decades of the twentieth century, Oberman systematically approached Reformation topics and ideas concerning Luther and, upon a close examination of the evidence, brought forward new ideas. For example, in a 1976 article on the German Peasants' War, Oberman decried the idea that the peasants used a variation of Luther's ideas as their motivation. "Due to our modern resources which grant us a better insight into the social status and education level of the peasant leaders and '*Rottenpastoren*,' it has become highly probable that the peasants either warped Luther's ideas or deluded themselves about them."<sup>87</sup> Oberman

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<sup>85</sup>Hans J. Hillerbrand, review of *Impact of the Reformation*, by Heiko A. Oberman. *Church History* 64, no. 2 (1995): 284.

<sup>86</sup>Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the Last Days to the New World*, ed. Peter Weinstein (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), xiii.

<sup>87</sup>Heiko A. Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest: 450 Years after the So-Called 'German Peasants' War' of 1525," *The Harvard Theological Review* 69, no. ½ (1976): 109-110.

reevaluated the ideas and determined that though the peasants did not “warp” Luther’s ideas, he was undoubtedly used as a symbol.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, in an article published over a decade later, Oberman broke down the perceived image of the “old” Luther as “vile and bitterly resigned” and suggested instead that the language used in Luther’s later years was a continuation of his ongoing battle against the devil.<sup>89</sup>

Oberman’s *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, first published in 1982, is perhaps the most laudable biography of Luther since Bainton’s *Here I Stand*. Throughout the work, Oberman challenged twentieth-century scholarship that heralded the reformer as a modern man and instead examined Luther as a man – his relationships, his beliefs, his demons, his personality, and his influences. The Luther that Oberman presented is one plagued by his essentially medieval nature but confronted with an increasingly modern world. According to this interpretation, Luther never shed his medieval tendencies and allowed them to pervade his theology, his teaching, and his actions. Oberman presented a man who did not see himself at the dawn of the modern age, but rather one battling the anti-Christ during the final days before Christ’s second coming. This Luther was a great man, but not the hero figure that dominated much of twentieth-century scholarship. Instead, he was a very real figure in a very complicated time whose human agency indelibly affected the world around him. Oberman’s interpretation of Luther provoked new studies and ideas in the field of Lutheran scholarship and presented a new dimension of Luther. In *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* as well as later works, Oberman emphasized his characterization of Luther and forced readers to remove

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<sup>88</sup>Oberman, “The Gospel of Social Unrest,” 110.

<sup>89</sup>Heiko A. Oberman, “Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology In the ‘Old’ Luther,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 3 (1988): 435.

themselves from their post-Enlightenment image of the reformer.<sup>90</sup> Oberman forced a reconstruction of Luther for, as he stated in the preface to his *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, “From our perspective, he is a man between the times, not a man of any one particular era; but from his own perspective, his life and calling existed at the very end of time itself.”<sup>91</sup> Luther believed that the chaotic world around him was evidence that Christ’s second coming and the day of judgment were near, and thus his actions were those of a man who thought he was living at the end of time. Placing Luther in this context has encouraged a wide range of literature about not only the reformer’s actions, but also his motives, his influences, and his personality and has made Oberman one of the most respected names in Lutheran scholarship.

The final decades of the twentieth-century witnessed a marked rise in the genre of social history as scholars began to consider the affect that Luther and his reformation had upon society at large and the impact of his human agency. Scholars became increasingly interested in the untold histories of the sectors of society that, due to their social status and education levels, did not leave adequate primary sources to produce an overview of how they lived. Consequently, scholars began to research the lives of the lower classes, women, minorities, and greater society through the limited primary sources, statistical information, and nontraditional sources of information in order to develop histories of the time that were not focused on just a few individuals.

Martin Luther’s affect on the government, education, community were viewed by many historians in the twentieth century as a key to the Reformation’s success, but

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<sup>90</sup>Timothy J. Wengert, review of *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, by Heiko A. Oberman, *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 1 (1992): 112.

<sup>91</sup>Heiko A. Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), xiii.



critiqued as well for its shortcomings. Bernd Moeller asserted the Luther's theology of salvation by faith made the "works righteousness" futile and consequently, "the medieval division of Christendom into clergy and laity is also meaningless."<sup>92</sup> Thus, according to Moeller, Luther's theology was appealing religiously but also secularly for it implied that all humans were equal in the eyes of God. Both religious and secular roles in society were important: "Secular life itself was now freed of all the inferiority which had been attached to it during the Middle Ages. God himself was its origin and goal. And so Luther declared the exercise of every single calling to be equally a good work before God, as long as it was done in faith."<sup>93</sup> Moeller's work proves that Luther's human agency extended beyond the realm of the church and had a significant impact on everyday society. Steven Ozment emphasized the idea that Luther and his teachings were a form of liberation for the people in *The Reformation in the Cities*.<sup>94</sup> Ozment claimed that Luther's theological and educational approach "lightened the townsmen's burdens," freeing them from excessive worries and despair.<sup>95</sup> Gerald Strauss also explored education initiatives during the Reformation in greater detail in *Luther's House of Learning*. Strauss's analysis of Luther's original objectives of domestic instruction, their perceived failure, and the incorporation of political authorities in education revealed "the Reformation at its most human and most topical."<sup>96</sup> Through the exploration of this

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<sup>92</sup>Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation: Three Essays*, ed. and tran. H.C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 71.

<sup>93</sup>Moeller, 72.

<sup>94</sup>Dickens and Tonkin, 306.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 306.

<sup>96</sup>Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 3.

process, Strauss reveals the advancements made in education as well as the conflicts that it initiated.

One of the popular results of this new approach to Luther studies and to the feminist movement of the twentieth century was a revived interest in his wife, Katharina von Bora. While his upbringing and parental influences were explored frequently in earlier biographical accounts, the material on Luther's "Katie" increased when historians began to emphasize the importance of Luther's later years. In addition to the research done on von Bora, since the 1970s scholars have also placed great emphasis on Luther's views concerning all women and their role in society and have proved that the reformer's human agency undoubtedly affected attitudes and opinions. In a 1983 article in *History Today* Lyndal Roper explored the reformer's attitudes toward women, sex, and marriage, concluding that, "For Luther, natural womanhood meant desiring marriage and motherhood; manliness was inseparable from the exercise of authority over wife and children; and God's own ordinance hallowed these roles."<sup>97</sup> Roper elaborated upon other reformation attitudes toward women in her later work, *The Holy Household*, published in 1989. Her findings, similar to those of Merry E. Wiesner, present the idea that Luther viewed women as ultimately inferior to men, a view challenged by the research of Steven Ozment.<sup>98</sup> Roper's findings on Luther contribute to her overall thesis that the Reformation did not liberate women, but rather further freed men, consequently creating an even greater patriarchal society. According to Albrecht Classen and Tanya Amber Settle, Ozment, in addition to many others, argues that the Reformation allowed a degree

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<sup>97</sup>Lyndal Roper, "Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood," *History Today* 3 (1983), 38.

<sup>98</sup>Albrecht Classen and Tanya Amber Settle, "Women in Martin Luther's Life and Theology," *German Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (1991), 231-232.

of liberation for women and recognized their influence in the household.<sup>99</sup> In addition to the social history of women in the Reformation age, writers such as Classen and Settle explore Luther's relationship and attitudes toward various influential women in his life.

Luther's "Katie" has long been a popular subject for historians, though the sources that provide insight into her life are significantly fewer than her famous husband. Almost always mentioned in biographical accounts of Luther, von Bora's importance in the reformer's later life is undeniable, yet historians' treatment of her has varied through the ages. Jeanette C. Smith's 1999 article, "Katherina von Bora Through Five Centuries: A Historiography," is an invaluable resource in examining the scholarship on von Bora. Smith's information, gleaned from the written collections of Luther, von Bora, and their contemporaries, as well as secondary research over the centuries, reveals that while the reformer's wife has always been an intriguing subject, her image has changed greatly over time. Smith defines von-Bora scholarship into two basic periods – works written pre-Ernst Kroker and those written post-Kroker that benefit from the research he conducted for his early twentieth century works on von Bora, particularly his 1906 biography.<sup>100</sup> The twentieth century saw an increased output of new scholarship on von Bora, particularly around major anniversaries such as 1925, the four hundredth wedding anniversary of the Luthers, 1983, the five hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth, and 1999, the five hundredth anniversary of von Bora's birth.<sup>101</sup> Although literature on von Bora increased in the twentieth century, it was not always accurate. Roland Bainton's

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<sup>99</sup>Classen and Settle 231-232.

<sup>100</sup>Jeanette C. Smith, "Katherina von Bora Through Five Centuries: A Historiography," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30, no. 3 (1999): 761.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 761.

article on von Bora in his work *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy* even stated the wrong age of Luther at the time of his marriage, and the incorrect year of von Bora's death.<sup>102</sup> Despite the continuing flaws in work von Bora, scholars did begin to portray her as an increasingly modern figure in the second half of the century.<sup>103</sup>

Smith's assertion that scholars have begun to view von Bora as a modern woman, one who spoke her mind, received respect and love from her husband, and one whose opinions were valued, continues in the most recent literature on the reformer's wife. Works by Dick Akerboom and Rudolf and Marilyn Morris Markwald published in recent years continue this trend in Luther research. While the work done on von Bora is not always direct commentary on Luther, it does reveal a side of the reformer often left unexplored in theological and historical works – Luther, the man removed from the fame of his movement, as a husband, sexual partner, father, and friend.

Defining the next major Lutheran scholar after Heiko Oberman has proved a challenging task. Many of his contemporaries are still dominating the field of Lutheran and Reformation research, thus it is difficult to pinpoint the newest up and coming author. Among the most recent notable Luther scholars, however, Robert Kolb stands out as significant contributor whose work will influence the next generation of scholarship. Currently serving as the Mission Professor of Systematic Theology and the Director of the Institute for Mission Studies at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Kolb has made a name for himself in the field of Reformation studies. He served as the editor of the *Sixteenth Century Journal* for several years in the 1990s and has produced a vast amount of literature on the Reformation, and particularly on Luther. Kolb has written extensively

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<sup>102</sup>Smith, 761.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 763.

on the confessions of the Lutheran Church and the Lutheran perceptions of the reformer. In his 1999 publication *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer, 1520-1620*, Kolb examines the impact of Luther's movement on Lutheran Germany in the sixteenth century. He breaks Luther's influence into the three title roles: prophet: Luther as a man who replaced popes, church councils, etc. and one whose work lived on after his death through his writing; teacher: Luther's immense output of literature taught followers both during and after his life; and hero: the classic idea of the reformer as the great savior of German protestants and the triumphant victor over the papacy.<sup>104</sup> Kolb's more recent work such as the 2008 publication *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* written with Charles P. Arand, as well as his recent contributions to scholarly journals such as the *Renaissance Quarterly* analyze Luther's theology and life.

Kolb's Luther is, like the Luther of the scholars that preceded him, a great man. Kolb explores the complexities of Luther and examines everything from his theology to his image in culture. While he undoubtedly recognizes the reformer as a man of enormous influence, "his" Luther continues to develop as his scholarship increases.

Ultimately, throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and early years of the twenty-first century, the image of Luther in scholarship has continually changed based on historical trends. From the foundation laid by Ranke to the modern scholarship on Luther's sexuality, new representations of the reformer are continually being presented. Despite the variation and opinions presented in scholarship, Luther is undoubtedly cast as a great man of significant influence and the academic world will continue to have an

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<sup>104</sup>Robert Kolb, *Martin Luther as Prophet, Teacher, and Hero: Images of the Reformer 1520-1560* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 11.

impact on the way that both academia and popular culture perceive the man who is considered by many to be the giant, the hero, the villain, and the savior of society.

### CHAPTER III

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL LUTHER

Scholarship on Martin Luther in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries persistently followed the great man theory, but the intellectual development of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to a more significant interest in the reformer's psyche and a deeper look at the impact of his human agency. While Luther continued to be vilified by some and canonized by others, the new scientific and intellectual theories drove not only historians and theologians, but also psychologists, psychoanalysts, and other professionals to address the multi-faceted man that precipitated the largest schism in western Christianity. Biographers and scholars of the nineteenth century touched upon Luther's psyche as a potential cause of his actions, yet it was not until the twentieth century that the genre developed into an entire sub-study of Luther and the reform movement. The evidence presented in a variety of works exploring Luther's psychological makeup and its influence on his actions created new notions of the great man, and despite the contrasting opinions of several scholars, indelibly altered the scholarly and public perception of the reformer.

Seizing upon the ever-evolving science of the human psyche, intellectuals can utilize the wealth of primary sources written by or about Luther to draw their conclusions. Scholars have a seemingly endless supply of sources from the reformer's own hand to support their ideas, yet it becomes abundantly obvious that because of the plethora of sources and prolific writings of Luther, a definitive analysis of his psyche is impossible. Luther wrote so extensively that nearly every theory regarding his psyche

can be both proved and disproved by his own hand. Consequently, psychological profiles of the great reformer are inconclusive and frequently historically weak, but such examinations produce fascinating and memorable images of Luther that resonate in scholarly and popular culture.

The rise of psychohistory as a genre skyrocketed in the late 1950s, most historians agree, because of two events: the publication of Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* in 1958 and William Langer's 1958 presidential address to the American Historical Association that encouraged and challenged historians to use psychoanalytical psychology as a tool in creating history.<sup>1</sup> Psychohistory, by no means a completely new genre, was defined by historian Lewis W. Spitz as consisting of two modalities: historical psychology, the study of the psychology of groups, and psychological history, the studies of the psychology of the great men of history.<sup>2</sup> While historians had utilized this psychohistory, and Spitz argued, rudimentary psychoanalysis, to expand their historical interpretations throughout the nineteenth century, however elementary or biased, Sigmund Freud's remarkable studies in psychoanalysis at the turn of the century led to the changes in psychohistory that gave way to the rise of historical psychoanalysis in the early 1960s. The application of Freudian concepts to the study of history encouraged a full treatment of the great men and women of history. In other words, Freud's theories on childhood development, sexual nature, and relationships could possibly be applied to long-dead figures of importance to help understand the inner workings of their personalities, their inspirations, and the reasons for their greatness. Erikson's work was

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<sup>1</sup>Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 59.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis W. Spitz, "Psychohistory and History: The Case of *Young Man Luther*," in *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 58-59.



certainly not the first to apply the theories of Freud to Martin Luther, yet it led the way for a rise in psychohistory, drew attention (both positive and negative) from historians, theologians, and other professionals, and created lasting images and perceptions of the reformer, regardless of their validity or lack thereof.

Erikson, a psychiatric specialist rather than a historian, rocked the academic world with his 1958 publication, *Young Man Luther*. While exploring the great reformer's psyche was not a new phenomenon, Erikson's evaluation produced new images of the reformer and his motivations that reached beyond the interpretation of facts and primary source materials. In addition to his own scholarship, Erikson also drew heavily from the work of four scholars that analyzed Luther's psyche before him: Otto Scheel - "the professor," Heinrich Denifle - "the priest," Paul Reiter - "the psychiatrist," and Preserved Smith - "psychoanalyst."<sup>3</sup> Erikson noted in his introduction that *Young Man Luther* began as a chapter in a work on child psychology and the study of rebellious attitudes. Awed, as most are, by the enormous amount of primary source material authored by or related to Luther, Erikson seized the opportunity to create a psychiatric evaluation of one of history's greatest rebels. However, Erikson chose to focus his work on the psyche that drove the younger Luther to mount a rebellion against the Catholic Church, and although Luther's own reminiscences of his childhood can be found, albeit infrequently, in his writings, the sources pertaining to his early years are very limited. Thus, Erikson builds a case based on modern evaluations of childhood experiences to conclude that Luther's relationship with his father created the feelings and emotions that drove him to lead the reformation.

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<sup>3</sup>Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Historiography and History* (New York: Norton, 1958), 25-28.

Luther's "fit in the choir" is the initial focus of Erikson's work and he inferred from it, although reports about the actual event are conflicted, that, as a young monk struggling to find a merciful heavenly and secular father, the reformer was denying his father's doubts and simultaneously rebelling against his life in the monastery.<sup>4</sup> After establishing the importance of this sometimes-contested event, Erikson delves into Luther's childhood, of which there are few reliable sources when compared to his later years. However, with the relatively scarce information, Erikson concludes that Hans Luther was harsh on his son and that these early years had a far greater affect on the reformer than scholars had previously believed.<sup>5</sup> Rather, he explained, Luther's feelings toward his angry father were transferred to his relationship with God and Christ and his fear that they were strict and wrathful.<sup>6</sup> Erikson then links Luther's rebellion against the Catholic Church and a wrathful God to his relationship to Hans Luther, his father, suggesting that the father-son relationship was a key motivational factor in the Protestant Reformation.

While Erikson's opinion is thought-provoking, it has suffered criticism in the years since its publication by historians as well as scholars from other fields for its lack of substantial evidence. In the introduction to a series of essays responding to *Young Man Luther*, editor Roger A. Johnson noted that despite the criticism, Erikson did not respond to his critics by challenging them in print.<sup>7</sup> Roland Bainton, one of the foremost

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<sup>4</sup>Erikson, 38.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>7</sup>Roger A. Johnson, introduction, to *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 4.

Lutheran scholars of the twentieth century acknowledged Erikson's effort, but dismissed the possibility of an accurate psychoanalysis of the reformer with the simple statement, "The dead cannot be interviewed."<sup>8</sup> Bainton's criticism of *Young Man Luther* was straightforward and systematically challenges Erikson on three main points: that his evidence was "flimsy," that some of the projections from childhood to adolescence to maturity are "sometimes false, sometimes unnecessary, and sometimes implausible," and that the motives Erikson suggested in Luther are unfounded.<sup>9</sup> While Bainton criticized, in the same collection of essays other historians such as Spitz praised Erikson's work as a "notable example of psychohistory," and lauded it for ushering in the rise of psychohistory.<sup>10</sup> Thus while some historians critiqued Erikson's unorthodox historical method, others acknowledged that the author, not by profession a historian, did make valuable contributions to Lutheran scholarship.

Despite the array of views regarding *Young Man Luther*, Erikson's portrayal of Hans Luther as a brutal and violent father and Martin Luther as a son eager to please, but also to prove himself, has found its place in popular and scholarly interpretations of the reformer. Historians might rail against Erikson and his methods, but they usually at least acknowledge his arguments and the scholarship that he inspired. In popular culture, *Young Man Luther* adds drama to the reformer's early life and the father-son conflict appears in many of the plays, films, and media that document the Luther for entertainment purposes.

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<sup>8</sup>Roland H. Bainton, "Psychiatry and History: An Examination of Erikson's *Young Man Luther*," in *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 19.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup>Spitz, 68.

Another of Erikson's theories, that Luther's language proved an obsession with anal references, has been criticized by historians, but interestingly has not been seized upon by popular culture. Erikson focused on Luther's frequent references to defecation, flatulence, and constipation as an indicator of his anal preoccupation. For example, Luther's opinion that the devil can be combated by farting directly in his nostrils and his statements such as, "I am like a ripe stool," signify that preoccupation and are, according to Erikson, linked indelibly to the issues with constipation that plagued the reformer in later life and had so great an affect on his life.<sup>11</sup> Historians acknowledge Luther's colorful and scatological language. In fact, Bainton even wrote, "There is no doubt that he used language which today gives offense to those over thirty."<sup>12</sup> However, Bainton, as well as other historians, insisted that Luther's language was not highly unusual for his era and offer the scatological language of Thomas More as evidence.<sup>13</sup> Heiko Oberman, the aforementioned scholar and apologist, similarly defended the reformer's choice of words, and also cited that their vehemence was part of Luther's lifelong battle to combat the devil.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the scholarly rebuke of Erikson's focus on Luther's language, his analysis is intriguing and amusing. Even if such language was in keeping with the time, it is fascinating that a man of such intellect and import used it so freely. Why then is it not more visible in scholarly and popular culture sources on Luther? Perhaps scholars veil

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<sup>11</sup>Erikson, 61, 206; Martin Luther, "Luther Suffers Pain and Expects His End," 1542-1543, in *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, vol. 54 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 448.

<sup>12</sup>Bainton, "Psychiatry and History," 54.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>14</sup>Oberman, "Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the 'Old' Luther," 435.

some of Luther's cruder statements to protect the value and genius of others. Historians tend to excuse Luther's language and focus instead on his commentary on deeper subjects such as death, the devil, salvation, etc. The foul-mouthed Luther who is simultaneously religious and immensely intelligent is fascinating, yet receives little attention for perhaps the same reason that scholars skim over his disturbing and inflammatory writings on the Jewish people. Luther the theologian, the hero of the Reformation, and the brilliant scholar does not appear as appealing when he is advocating the burning of synagogues and making continual references to shit and dung. Whatever the reason, it is surprising that Luther's colorful language and references have not been overtly exposed in sources that reach popular culture. This facet of his personality would undoubtedly generate interest, but perhaps is rightfully subdued by his elegant and powerful command of language.

Heiko Oberman, previously referenced as an apologist, but also as one of the finest-twentieth century Lutheran scholars, paid careful attention to the psyche of Luther and the many nuances of his personality to contribute to the psychological history of the reformer. Oberman's monumental work *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, challenged the validity of Erikson's findings and promoted a new psychological image of the reformer.<sup>15</sup> Oberman rejected the idea that Luther was diagnosable as a neurotic or psychotic, but did acknowledge that scholars consistently overlook his shortcomings in favor of an image that either demonizes or sanctifies him.<sup>16</sup> While Oberman's work exhibits the scholar's bias in some ways, his new treatment of the psychological Luther

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<sup>15</sup>Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 91.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

produced the image of a man who perceived Christ and the Devil as “equally real” with an obsession that drove him to neurotic-like behavior.<sup>17</sup> To Luther, Christ and the Devil are in continual struggle and humankind is somewhere between the two.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as evidenced in Luther’s writings, life is a perpetual struggle against the forces of the devil. Oberman attributes some of Luther’s obsession with the devil to his upbringing, but also to what the reformer recognized as the continual appearance of the devil in the form of challenges or temptations. Oberman contended that Luther could not be fully understood or interpreted until scholars accept the reformer’s eternal struggle to thwart the work of Satan.

In response to Erikson’s treatment of Luther’s foul language and anal references, as well as the general scholarly opinion of the old reformer as a rude, angry and racist old man, Oberman defended Luther’s “scatological” language. Like Bainton, he placed Luther in the context of others of his time, excused his language as common and cited that he used it not only against others, but in reference to himself as well.<sup>19</sup> Just a few years after his introduction of Luther as a man “between God and the Devil,” Oberman explored the negative image of the “old” reformer in an article published in the autumn, 1988 edition of *Sixteenth Century Journal*. Luther’s emphatic and often abusive language is acknowledged by Oberman, but he countered the stereotypical image of the nasty old reformer as well as the newer psychogram that emerged from works such as Mark U. Edwards’ unapologetic and condemning work *Luther’s Last Battles: Politics*

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<sup>17</sup>Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 104.

<sup>18</sup>Oberman, “Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology In the ‘Old’ Luther,” 439.

<sup>19</sup>Oberman. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 108.

*and Polemics 1531-46*.<sup>20</sup> In Oberman's assessment, the psychogram that Edwards unsuccessfully tried to avoid creating, "un-Saints" Luther and also explained his bitter and foul language as the "expression of an old, disappointed, embittered man who sees the fruits of a life's work wasted by devilish powers and devious opponents."<sup>21</sup> Thus Oberman, an excellent historian but also clearly a defender of the reformer, challenged views linked to Edwards to present an alternate view of Luther and his later years. Oberman called for a reassessment of the typical categorizations of Luther's life and traced his "battles" and aggressive language to every stage of his life, even to pre-1517.<sup>22</sup> Using examples from writings in the "earlier" periods of the reformer's life, Oberman proved that Luther's language and his intense feelings were not a phenomenon of old age, but rather a life-long development. However, Oberman acknowledges, the "legend" of the old Luther as a vile, bitterly resigned, and apocalyptic old man "is slow to die."<sup>23</sup> The negative image of the old Luther and the disturbingly harsh writings in the final years of his life are controversial, interesting, and backed by the reformer's own hand. Thus, as in earlier eras of scholarship, different images of the reformer emerge and are endorsed by both scholarly and popular culture.

Richard Marius, a scholar of both Thomas More and Martin Luther, introduced new insight into the reformer's psyche with his 1999 publication, *Martin Luther: The Christian between God and Death*, but his findings are inconclusive and most likely affected by his own religious struggles. Marius attended the Baptist Theological

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<sup>20</sup>Oberman. "Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology In the 'Old' Luther," 437-438.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 438.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 439.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 435, 439.

Seminary in Louisville before abandoning his embarkation on a religious career for one in the academic realm. This abrupt switch, and his turn toward atheism, clearly affected his writing as much if not more than Oberman's national bias toward Luther. Marius's early work on the reformer, a biography published in 1974, evidences his negative opinion of Luther, yet it lacks the unsubstantiated, yet controversial ideas of his 1999 publication. Between 1974 and 1999, Marius reassessed his view of Luther and, perhaps encouraged or challenged by Oberman's thesis in *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* or by his personal spiritual development, created a post-modernist image of the reformer. Marius argued that Luther "represents a catastrophe in the history of Western Civilization" and that "whatever good Luther did is not matched by the calamities that came because of him."<sup>24</sup> In another postmodernist shift, the reformer was presented as a man whose obsession with death controlled his life and who was plagued by doubts "that God exists at all and that he can or will raise the dead."<sup>25</sup> This interpretation of Luther raises questions concerning about the reformer's motivations, his affect on the world around him, and his relentless, possibly selfish, pursuit of satisfaction with his theology: "He would shake the world to its foundations so he could believe in the resurrection of the dead."<sup>26</sup>

The psyche of Martin Luther cannot be analyzed without also taking into consideration his varied opinions concerning people who did not mirror his own image of a Lutheran male. Famously, and infamously, Luther is remembered in scholarly and

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<sup>24</sup>Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: The Christian Between God and Death* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), xii

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, xiv.



popular culture for his strong and influential writings about many groups, including women of all walks of life, Jews, “papists,” Anabaptists, and many more. H.C. Erik Midelfort dedicated a chapter in his work *A History of Madness in Sixteenth Century Germany* to the reformer. Midelfort claims that Luther linked madness to sin and often accused his opponents of such madness.<sup>27</sup> Luther’s writings reveal his impassioned beliefs about such groups, but like so many other subjects, the reformer writes so copiously that various opinions can be derived. To some, he elevated the stature of women, to others he limited their options in life and degraded them as second-rate creatures. Many scholars are apologists for his vehement writings against the Jews, using earlier writings in an attempt to prove that Luther was, instead, tolerant and respectful of the Jewish people. Regardless of interpretation or the omitting of certain selections, it is possible to ascertain some conclusions about Luther’s views on various groups and their influence over his life and works.

Luther’s attitude toward women, marriage and sex had a profound impact on his life and work. The sources concerning his earliest female influence, his mother Margarethe Luther, are scant, yet scholars have been able to glean enough from records and the writings of the reformer, Phillip Melancthon, and others to examine her heritage, her marriage, and her relationship with her son Martin. Called “Hanna” most scholars agree that Luther’s mother came from the distinguished Lindemann family, a pedigree that would have afforded both Martin and his father, Hans, considerable advantages in

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<sup>27</sup>H.C. Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 84.

the school and work place, respectively.<sup>28</sup> Despite her respectable social background, Hanna Luther is referenced most frequently in works on her son for three memories that he mentions in his enormous body of work. The first, which Erikson and other Lutheran scholars have used to show the authoritative hand in the Luther household, is drawn from Luther's recollection of a time when his mother beat him until he bled for taking one nut. The second is a recollection of a decidedly negative "ditty" that Hanna Luther sang: "No one cares for me and you, That is my fault and yours too!"<sup>29</sup> Lastly, many scholarly works read into Luther's commentary on his mother's superstition and belief in witchcraft to draw conclusions about the reformer himself. Undoubtedly, Luther's mother had an affect on his intellectual and psychological development. As many scholars have noted, the incident over the beech nut shows that she could be a harsh disciplinarian, yet a solid consensus of other reports about her disciplinary actions does not exist, so she is judged and evaluated as a disciplinarian based upon one incident. The ditty that Hanna Luther reportedly sang to her children suggests a certain degree of hopelessness, yet whether it can be seen as a negative influence in the young reformer's life is debatable. It is a ditty, not a mantra, that reflects the hopelessness of the sixteenth-century in general, a pervasive pessimism. Will scholars ruminate in the next century about the negative affect of "rock-a-bye-baby" on today's leaders? Despite this skepticism, the ditty is one of the limited times that Luther mentions his mother specifically in his writing, so perhaps it was something that had an effect on his life. Luther's mention of his mother's belief in witchcraft and her superstitions does not mark

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<sup>28</sup>Ian D. K. Siggins, "Luther's Mother Margarethe," *The Harvard Theological Review* 71 (1978): 126.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 125.

her as an exceptional or strange woman for her time, but does indicate that the reformer's preoccupation with the devil, his obsessive nature, and his belief in witchcraft could be linked to his mother. Her belief in witchcraft is not an isolated incident, but rather suggests a belief that was incorporated into her daily life. Though the extent to which this influenced Luther is unknown, it can be presumed that it did have an affect on his own opinions concerning witchcraft and superstition. As in many cases, the maternal influences in Luther's life most likely had an indelible effect on his psyche, yet in the case of Hanna Luther, the shortage of information makes it impossible to accurately gauge the measure of her influence.

After his youth and before his marriage to Katharina von Bora, Luther wrote extensively on the subject as well as the role of wives and mothers and his writings continued after their union. His teachings encouraged clerical marriage and sanctified it as a holy and honorable institution that, while not a necessary sacrament, was the state in which all but a few men and women were designed to live. According to Luther, marriage was an honorable institution ordained by God for several purposes, including the expression of human sexuality, which he found very natural.<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Nicholas Grebel, dated November 1, 1521, four years before Luther's own marriage, the reformer commented: "That most miserable celibacy of young men and women daily present such great horrors to me that even now nothing sounds worse to my ears than the words 'nun,' 'monk,' and 'priest.' I consider marriage to be a paradise, even if it has to endure greatest poverty."<sup>31</sup> Marriage was a natural and holy way to avoid the lust that Luther

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<sup>30</sup>Lyndal Roper, "Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood," 33.

<sup>31</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Nicholas Grebel, November 1, 1521 in *Letters I*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 48 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 322.

claimed was present in both sexes and maintained that it was the natural state for males, but even more so for females because most were meant to bear children rather than to remain in a virginal state.<sup>32</sup> In a thoroughly novel approach to sexuality at the time by a former monk, Luther recognized that the forces existed in human beings that precluded most of them from remaining celibate creatures.

Luther's strong views on marriage often also describe his attitudes toward the role of women. Basing many of his attitudes on Biblical examples, he viewed marriage as a partnership, yet did not waver from the idea that women were, from the very beginning, inferior to men.<sup>33</sup> He believed that "natural" women were inclined toward marriage and those who avoided such a state, principally nuns, were rejecting their "normal" role in womanhood as wives and mothers.<sup>34</sup> These views, combined with Luther's seeming insensitivity toward the danger of childbirth, lead many scholars to conclude that his writings and movements were a step backward in the progress of females. Additionally, Luther sanctioned sex within marriage as a natural and important part of a union and even encouraged couples to engage in it for reasons other than begetting children. According to Lyndal Roper, this sanctioning and encouraging of sexual activity, as well as Luther's condemnation of nunnery as unnatural, might have affected women's sexual freedom by requiring too much of them as mothers, wives, sexual partners, housekeepers.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>34</sup>Roper, "Luther: Sex, Marriage and Motherhood," 35.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

Luther's views of sexuality, marriage, and women were no doubt colored by the society that surrounded him, but he also traces his beliefs to biblical sources. Throughout his writings, he examined the women of the Bible to provide scriptural backing for his opinions. In his lectures on Genesis, Luther indicated that Eve, and thus women in general, was designed by God to be a "helpmeet to man."<sup>36</sup> Thus, woman began as inferior in many ways to man and the fall only worsened a woman's role in the world by causing her to have pain while bearing children and to serve and stay near to her husband. Luther also used other women in the Bible to expound on his views. Though he does not advocate the veneration of the Virgin Mary, he does value her as a model of morality for both men and women of the Christian faith.<sup>37</sup> His writings use biblical examples to show why women should not preach, but Luther also writes that women are capable of prophesying, ruling, and leading when necessary or called by God. Luther, drawing from 1 Timothy, believed that women, under normal circumstances, should not be allowed to preach: "But in the congregations or churches where there is a ministry, women are to be silent and not preach [1 Tim. 2:12]."<sup>38</sup> His reverence for women, but also his reluctance for them to preach was echoed in a sermon on Joel 2:28. "The four daughters of Philip were prophetesses. A woman can do this. Not preach in public, but console people and

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<sup>36</sup>Martin Luther, "Sermons on Genesis, 1527, Wiemar Collection XXIV," printed in Susan Karant-Nunn and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>37</sup>Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, 34.

<sup>38</sup>Martin Luther, "Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers," 1532, in *Church and Society II*, trans. and ed. Conrad Bergendoff, vol. 40 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 391.

teach. A woman can do this just as much as a man.”<sup>39</sup> Despite this attitude, in his own marriage, Luther trusted his wife to make major decisions in his absence. “I have written to Doctor Pomer, the pastor, that the Count of Schwarzburg is asking that a pastor be sent to Greussen. As a wise woman and doctor, you, with Master George Major and Master Ambrose, might also give counsel as to which of the three candidates I suggested to Pomer might be convinced [to go].”<sup>40</sup> Luther wrote in 1531 that women should be silent in the church, but he clearly leaned on and trusted his wife to conduct church affairs in his absence suggesting that he allowed room for females agency in the Lutheran Church.

Consequently, scholars can use sources relating to Luther to praise him as a man who believed in the abilities of women and entrusted them with responsibility, who valued the sanctity of marriage and encouraged respect for females, and whose liberal views on sex validated women as just as worthy of sexual pleasure as men. In many ways he regarded women as very important and worthy creatures. However, as a man of the sixteenth century and one who felt his views could be substantiated in scripture, Luther’s ideas on women are far from modern and instigate humor in some and outrage in others. For example, selections from *Table Talk*, words of the reformer recorded by students and guests in his house reveal statements that would appall feminists of recent decades. One of the more interesting include: “Women ought to stay at home; the way they were created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit

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<sup>39</sup>Martin Luther, “Sermon on Joel 2:28, 1531, Weimar Collection XXXIV,” printed in Susan Karant Nunn and Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Luther on Women: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61.

<sup>40</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Mrs. Martin Luther, July 2, 1540 in *Letters III*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 209.

upon [keep house and raise children].”<sup>41</sup> Such commentary, however, must be examined in the context of Luther’s time as well as his audience. His writings to and about his wife suggest a similar note of sarcasm and bias, yet also reveal his devotion and admiration for her.

The most prominent woman in Luther’s life was obviously his wife, Katharina von Bora. A former nun, von Bora married Luther, a former monk, and their union has sparked controversy and consistently generated interest since 1525. Though few sources exist of von Bora’s own writing, her husband’s works are filled with references to her, supplying scholars with a bevy of information about not only her personality, but also her role as a wife, the nature of the Luther’s’ marriage, and a more personal look at the reformer’s views on women, sex, love and marriage.

The 1525 marriage between the Luthers instigated controversy in both the Catholic and newly Protestant realms and conveniently coincided with the year of the Peasant Rebellion. Luther was, in the truest form, practicing what he preached. Before his own marriage his teachings encouraged clerical marriage and sanctified it as a holy and honorable institution that, while not a necessary sacrament, is the state in which all but a few men and women were designed to live. He also honored it as a way to combat lust and encouraged sexual relationships within marriage both to procreate, and to create intimacy and affection.<sup>42</sup> Despite his reverence for the institution, he was initially reluctant to enter it, stating just one year before his marriage to von Bora that:

“Nevertheless, the way I feel now, and have felt thus far, I will not marry. It is not that I

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<sup>41</sup>Martin Luther, “The Difference Between Men and Women,” 1531, in *Table Talk*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert, vol. 54 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 8.

<sup>42</sup>Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, 137.

do not feel my flesh or sex, since I am neither wood nor stone, but my mind is far removed from marriage, since I daily expect death and the punishment due to a heretic.”<sup>43</sup>

When he did commit to marriage, he did for reasons other than the achievement of connubial bliss:

Indeed the rumor is true that I suddenly married Catherine; [I did this] to silence the evil mouths which are so used to complaining about me... In addition, I also did not want to reject this unique [opportunity to obey] my father's wish for progeny, which he so often expressed. At the same time, I also wanted to confirm what I have taught by practicing it; for I find so many timid people in spite of such great light from the gospel. God has willed and brought about this step. For I feel neither passionate love nor burning for my spouse, but I cherish her.<sup>44</sup>

Despite Luther's practical entrance into partnership, the union deepened into a seemingly respectful and loving marriage and made von Bora a recognizable name and image of the Reformation. Luther's letters to his wife and his references to her in other written works imply that a deep bond of love developed between the couple. In his earliest references to his wife he calls her "Katherine," yet within a year began to use "my Katie" or "my dear Katie" when addressing letters to her or just speaking of her to others. As their relationship evolved, the genuine partnership between husband and wife became increasingly evident in their written correspondence. Von Bora was not only the wife of Luther and the mother of his children, but also his listening ear, his confidante, his caretaker, and the "master" of their household who managed affairs in his absence. Their writing suggests affection, playful teasing, and respect: "I said to myself what good

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<sup>43</sup>Martin Luther, letter to George Spalatin, November 30, 1524, in *Letters II*, ed. and Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 49 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 93.

<sup>44</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Nicholas von Amsdorf, June 21, 1525, in *Letters II*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 49 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 117.



wine and beer I have at home, and also [what] a pretty lady or (should I say) lord.”<sup>45</sup> Luther’s letters also express the sincerity of his emotions for his wife, as well as for their children. Shortly before the birth of his second child, he wrote to Justus Jonas of his concerns after hearing of a woman that died of the plague after childbirth: “I am concerned about the delivery of my wife, so greatly has the example of the Deacon’s wife terrified me.”<sup>46</sup> Though von Bora safely delivered a girl, she died as an infant, an event that produced great sorrow from Luther: “My baby daughter, little Elizabeth, has passed away. It is amazing what a sick, almost woman-like heart she has left to me, so much grief for her overcome me. Never before would I have believed that a father’s heart could have such tender feelings for his child.”<sup>47</sup> Nearly fourteen years later, when another of his children, thirteen-year-old Magdalen, died, the reformer’s grief was equally as strong:

I and my wife should only joyfully give thanks for such a felicitous departure and blessed end...yet the force of [our] natural love is so great that we are unable to do this without crying and grieving in [our] hearts, or even without experiencing death ourselves. For the features, the words, and the very movement of the living and dying daughter who was so very obedient and respectful remain engraved deep in the heart; even the death of Christ (and what is the dying of all people in comparison with Christ’s death?) is unable totally to take all this away as it should.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Mrs. Martin Luther, July 29, 1534, in *Letters III*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 81.

<sup>46</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Justus Jonas, November 10, 1527, in *Letters II*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 49 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 173.

<sup>47</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Nicholas Hausmann, August 5, 1528, in *Letters II*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 49 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 203.

<sup>48</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Justus Jonas, September 23, 1542 in *Letters III*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 238.

For a man such as Luther to admit that even Christ cannot relieve him from his grief and suffering validates the sincerity and depth of his love for his family.

Katharina von Bora has generated great interest in the centuries since her death, most recently as a result of the rise of social and women's history. By most she is hailed as a good wife and mother, a strong, intelligent female figure, and a good match for the reformer. However the image of von Bora was not always so positive. Up until the second half of the twentieth century she was criticized by many scholars, particularly those of the anti-Lutheran or Catholic persuasion.<sup>49</sup> While even his harshest critics attributed to Luther some admirable qualities, von Bora was viewed by many as an errant nun, Luther's whore, a nagging wife, ultimately, an unacceptable woman. In a time when women enjoyed few rights, those who did not accept the legitimacy of the Luther marriage cast more shame upon von Bora than they did her husband. For a man, even a man of the church, to keep a whore was nothing as sensational as the idea of a runaway nun becoming the companion of a breakaway monk. Thus until the rise of feminism and women's history, and even after, von Bora's historical reputation was popular, but not overly positive. Even as recently as 1974 Richard Marius characterized her as a "miserly, greedy, and narrow woman, a typical German hausfrau of the time."<sup>50</sup>

Inspection of Luther's works, especially those related to his wife, in light of the social history and women's history movements of the twentieth century, present von Bora as a strong, opinionated, intelligent, and dependable woman – half of a strong, loving, and mutually advantageous marriage. Scholar Jeanette Smith, in her historiography of

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<sup>49</sup>Karant-Nunn and Wiesner-Hanks, 186.

<sup>50</sup>Richard Marius, *Luther* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1974), 185.

the reformer's wife, even muses about what von Bora might have accomplished had she not been occupied as a wife and mother during her early years, and then homeless and poverty stricken as a widow.<sup>51</sup> Most modern scholars agree that von Bora and the Luther marriage had a profound effect on Luther's actions and his attitudes toward women. His sanctification of marriage increased after his own union, yet he was also able to cite the negative aspects, mostly attributed to the work of the devil. Additionally, he valued the role that von Bora played in his life and came to know the pleasures of companionship that he praised as a benefit of marriage. Although his writings sometimes referred to his wife in sarcastic terms, Luther cherished von Bora as a "gift from God" and was certain that marriage, despite its inconveniences, was a righteous, mutually beneficial, and holy institution.

Luther's attitudes toward sex, women and marriage have undoubtedly colored scholarly and cultural perceptions of the reformer. Roland Bainton claimed that Luther's legacy was felt most deeply in the home. Some scholars call the reformer's views modern and liberating, and still others condemn his opinions.<sup>52</sup> Regardless, his marriage to von Bora not only provided him with a satisfactory marital life, but also provided the world with a Mrs. Luther, the great reformer's wife. As the first Protestant preacher's wife, von Bora created an ideal. She was her husband's confidante and his helpmate and not only ran their household with efficiency, but Luther also consulted her in matters of the church. In her own right, von Bora has inspired many scholarly and popular works and continues to do so, from mini-series to the annual marriage celebration reenactment

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<sup>51</sup>Smith, 767.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 767-768.

in Wittenberg, Germany.<sup>53</sup> Thus, as in the case of Luther many images of the reformer's wife have emerged.

Erikson and others seized upon the “neurotic” episodes of Luther's life to explore his psyche, yet in recent years scholars, particularly Oberman, have focused on the periods of depression that plagued Luther in the throughout his life. In many letters written over the course of his adult life, particularly those written to close friends, Luther wrote of being plagued by the devil. The term used for his periods of depression is *Anfechtung*, a word described by Roland Bainton as one “for which there is no English equivalent. It may be a trial sent by God to test man, or an assault by the devil to destroy man. It is all the doubt, turmoil, pang, tremor, panic, despair, desolation, and desperation which invade the spirit of man.”<sup>54</sup> Unlike Erikson and others, Oberman does not attribute the dark periods of the reformer's life to clinical depression, but rather to his ongoing preoccupation and struggle with the devil and the forces of Satan.

Shortly after the Diet of Worms, while isolated at Wartburg Castle under the protection of Frederick the Wise, Luther wrote to Melancthon of his internal struggles: “As far as I am concerned, all is well, except that the troubles of my soul have not yet ceased, and the former weakness of the spirit and faith persists.”<sup>55</sup> Less than two months later, another letter to Melancthon revealed that Luther's spirits remained low: “Already eight days have passed in which I have not prayed or studied; this is partly because of temptations of the flesh, partly because I am tortured by other burdens.” Luther was not

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<sup>53</sup>Smith, 768.

<sup>54</sup>Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 42.

<sup>55</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Philip Melancthon, May 26, 1521, in *Letters I*, ed. and trans. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 48 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 232.

only troubled by his mental state, but also by his troubled bowels. According to Oberman, the reformer's problems related to hemorrhoids and possibly anal fissures began at Worms and Wartburg and were a problem that plagued him for the rest of his life.<sup>56</sup> Most likely because of the problems he experienced, Luther's writings reveal an obsession with bowels and their function. In a letter to his wife, Luther celebrates his healthy bowels, an unusual topic for any type of correspondence: "I am drinking beer from Naumburg which tastes to me almost like the beer from Mansfeld which you praised to me. It agrees with me well and gives me about three bowel movements in three hours in the morning."<sup>57</sup> In an earlier letter to his friend Philip Melancthon, Luther condemns the devil to bowel troubles, implying that he considers such a condition the height of discomfort and pain: "[The devil] has sworn to kill me, this I certainly know, and he will have no peace until he has devoured me. All right, if he devours me, he shall devour a laxative (God willing) which will make his bowels and anus too tight for him."<sup>58</sup> Luther's repeated mention of such matters throughout his lifetime suggests that he could have suffered from Bowel obsession syndrome (BOS), described as, "an OCD-like functional syndrome characterized by fear of fecal incontinence and compulsive behaviors of evacuation-checking," in a case study published in *Psychosomatics*, a journal associated with the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine.<sup>59</sup> Though a conclusive

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<sup>56</sup>Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 327-328.

<sup>57</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Mrs. Martin Luther, February 1, 1546 in *Letters III*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 291.

<sup>58</sup>Martin Luther, letter to Philip Melancthon, June 29, 1530, in *Letters III*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 329.

<sup>59</sup>Piero Porcelli, Ph.D. and Gioacchino Leandro, M.D., "Bowel Obsession Syndrome in a Patient with Ulcerative Colitis," abstract, *The Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine*, <http://psy.psychiatronline.org/cgi/content/abstract/48/5/448> (accessed July 1, 2008).

diagnosis is impossible, the idea that Luther could have suffered from this syndrome associated with Obsessive-compulsive disorder adds to the theories of Erikson, Oberman, Marius and others that the reformer was afflicted throughout his life by psychiatric problems that affected his actions.

Luther's frequent references to the devil and his distressed mental state appear consistently throughout his life, but are more concentrated in some periods. Oberman suggests that after a brush with death in 1527, the reformer's weakened health led to more frequent periods of depression: "Luther's real torments, which manifested themselves as melancholy, partly preceded and partly followed his illness, and they were intensified by a weakening of the body from which he was never to completely recover."<sup>60</sup> In the final years of his life, the reformer, continued to write about the presence of Satan in reference to his depression: "I write nothing about myself except to ask you to pray in my behalf that the Lord may free me from the blows and thorns of the angel of Satan, and that according to His will He may grant me a good hour when I am to be delivered from this misery."<sup>61</sup> The temptations and darkness that are brought on by the devil are frequently mentioned throughout his works, but they do not overpower the content of the correspondence. The devil was simply a part of life that Luther endured and persevered against on a daily basis until death.

While elements of Luther's psychological profile will inevitably be debated by scholars for decades to come, the images that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth

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<sup>60</sup>Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 321.

<sup>61</sup>Martin Luther, letter to James Propst, September 15, 1538, in *Letters III*, ed. Gottfried G. Krodel, vol. 50 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, 184.

centuries have shaped both scholarly and popular perceptions of the reformer. His complexities, together with his prolific writings allow scholars to draw many conclusions about the reformer and his nature, his attitudes, and his influence. In a relatively little-known work based on his graduate work under Roland Bainton, Vergilius Ferm explored the concept that sources relating to Luther reveal his “simultaneous contradictory natures.”<sup>62</sup> The theory is applicable to many historical figures whose actions resulted in mixed opinions, yet Ferm’s use of Luther’s own words makes his case stronger. Luther’s prolific writing has allowed scholars to formulate images relating to their own bias for, as Ferm suggests, the reformer himself indicates that he sees himself in a variety of ways. Scholars seize the information and utilize it to create their own interpretation of the figure, likely in keeping with their personal bias, and have a plethora of primary source material to illustrate their opinion. Luther, however, is no more different from most of us who, at one time or another, have chosen to display contradictory natures. However, unlike most of us, Luther not only chose to record his feelings on paper, but also led the world to a period of remarkable and controversial change. Consequently, his psychological profile, his attitudes and opinions, his nature and his beliefs have been and will continue to be scrutinized by historians, theologians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and the general public.

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<sup>62</sup>Vergilius Ferm, *Cross-currents in the Personality of Martin Luther; A Study in the Psychology of Religious Genius* (North Quincy, Massachusetts: Christopher Publishing House, 1972), 37.

## CHAPTER IV

### LUTHER ON FILM AND THE INTERNET

Perceptions of Martin Luther have evolved greatly since the nineteenth century as a result of new historical trends, but also because of the active role that the media plays in supplying the general public with information and shaping our ideas of history. Luther the great man, Luther the revolutionary, Luther the renegade monk, Luther the son desperate to please his father, Luther the anti-Semite, Luther the loving husband and father, Luther the social reformer, Luther the cold-hearted encourager of slaughter – historians over the past nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have cultivated all these perceptions of the reformer and many more and their ideas have affected the information that is disseminated to the public through the all-important and far-reaching mediums of film and the Internet.

Much to the chagrin of professional historians, television and movies dominate the public's understanding of historical events and the industry profits from such productions when the content is interesting and entertaining. Luther, undoubtedly a fascinating character to those who love him and those who despise him, is a continued source of interest to the media industry and many productions depicting his life have been produced since the early decades of the twentieth century. Such films have contributed to the public perception of Luther and also bring to light the many advantages and disadvantages of using film as a historical reference. For the purposes of this study, four productions were selected to analyze the image of Luther that is conveyed to the general public through film: *Martin Luther*, released in 1953 and directed by Irving Pichel,



*Luther*, a 1973 production based on John Osborne's play and directed by Guy Green, *Empires: Martin Luther*, a 2002 PBS documentary directed by Cassian Harrison, and *Luther*, a 2003 film directed by Eric Till. The productions represent a wide range of authorial views and genres and each presents a slightly different image of the reformer. Although there are obviously many similarities concerning Luther's basic biographical information, the manner in which they are portrayed and the weight they are given varies greatly as does their efficacy as learning tools. Before addressing the films individually, however, it is imperative to analyze the importance (or lack thereof) of film in the field of historical study.

Why put history on film? There is no shortage of arguments on both sides of the issue. Critics of history on film are usually concerned that visual media makes analysis of historical information difficult and note that film does not reveal historical methods.<sup>1</sup> There is also concern that filmmakers take liberties by recreating images for which they have no factual basis. Specifically, Robert Brent Toplin identifies five specific problems with cinematic history in his essay, "In Defense of Filmmakers:"

First, movies tend to favor the "great person" approach to history. Secondly, dramatic films usually depict specific events rather than explore big ideas or offer broad analyses. Thirdly, historical movies do not ordinarily offer comprehensive views of the past. They leave out a great deal. Fourthly, the movies frequently present one-sided rather than multi-sided perspectives. Finally, dramatic films about history, at least the Hollywood variety, deal disproportionately with stories about war.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David Herlihy, "Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Films and History," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1192.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Brent Toplin, "In Defense of Filmmakers," in *Lights, Camera, History: Portraying the Past in Film*, eds. Richard Francaviglia and Jerry Rodnitzky (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 122.

Toplin's concerns refer more specifically to one of the two genres of historical visual media, the historical drama, yet documentaries, the other genre, are not immune to the problems as well. Despite these concerns, many scholars are working to recognize the importance of visual media in history and generate scholarship on the subject to provide critical analysis of films and their contributions to the field. Robert Rosenstone, an accomplished scholar in the field of film and history, praises film for its ability to recapture the narrative form of history.<sup>3</sup> He is cognizant of the drawbacks of historical films, particularly the impossible task of including all of the relevant information into a movie that is less than two hours in length and notes that despite this: "The inevitable thinning of data on the screen does not of itself make for poor history." Other historians praise visual media for its ability to immerse viewers fully into a historical period, and also simply for generating interest for history in the general public. David Herlihy, a historian that expresses concern in his writing about film "pretending" to know more than it does, does acknowledge that "Any recourse that awakens interest in history among students and the public should be encouraged."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, John E. O'Connor notes: "Series such as *Roots* (1976) and *Holocaust* (1978) may be challenged for their historical accuracy, but no one denies that as media events they raised major historical issues for discussion in living rooms and over lunch tables as never before."<sup>5</sup> O'Connor argues that instead of criticizing historical films, the profession instead should encourage their students and the general public to conduct a thorough analysis of the film in the same

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<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1175.

<sup>4</sup>Herlihy, 1192.

<sup>5</sup>John E. O'Connor, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1201.

fashion as a written manuscript.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Robert Brent Toplin notes that scholarly journals should devote more attention to historical films and include reviews written not just by film enthusiasts, but by specialists in the historical era represented in the films.<sup>7</sup> Despite these varied assertions and suggestions, many drawn from a special issue of *The American Historical Journal* devoted to history and film, the efficacy of historical films as a source of information continues to be debated and the works chosen for this study provide interesting insight into the positive and negative aspects of history on film.

*Martin Luther*, the 1953 black and white film directed by Irving Pichel, is a favorable representation of the reformer that traces his life from his decision to enter the Augustinian order in 1505 to the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Though historians Jaroslav Pelikan and Theodore G. Tappert are listed as writers, Allan Sloane and Lothar Wolff are credited with adapting the information for the screen. Unlike many characterizations of the reformer, the film does not dwell on all of the Luther “myths,” embracing only a few. For example, scholars are likely pleased by the lack of a dramatic lightning storm and a subsequent conversion. The film does not contain a scene depicting the devil in the cloakroom or the hurling of an inkwell at Wartburg Castle. And presumably because Eric Erikson’s *Young Man Luther* had not yet rocked the scholarly world, Luther’s fit in the choir and his dysfunctional relationship with his father were not explored as key factors in his development as a theologian. In fact, where most good story-tellers focus on Luther’s anguish in trying to please an angry God, *Martin Luther* spends minimal time on the debilitating time of his life that leads to his theological

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<sup>6</sup>O’Connor, 1204.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Brent Toplin, “The Filmmaker as Historian,” *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1212.

revelations. Instead, the film sweeps into his accomplishments in academia and at Wittenberg and then straight to the drafting on the *95 Theses*, the debate with Johann Eck, his excommunication, and eventually the Diet of Worms, Luther's return to Wittenburg, and the Augsburg Confession of 1530.<sup>8</sup>

Luther is portrayed as a hero of sorts; he settled his own internal struggle with God and the selling of indulgences and subsequent drafting of the *95 Theses* allowed him to awaken all of Christendom to freedoms of salvation by faith rather than works and make the papacy aware of the abuses occurring in the church hierarchy. His defiance at the Diet of Worms is cheered and the visual image of a humble monk facing elaborately dressed princes and officials urges viewers to root for the underdog. Upon his return to Wittenberg after his time in captivity at Wartburg Castle, the film depicts Luther's horror at Karlstadt's perversion of his ideas. Conveniently, on film, the icon-smashing comes to a stop, Karlstadt flees, and the atrocities of the Peasants War of 1525 and Luther's part in them go unmentioned. Instead, the years between 1525 and 1530 are years of great joy for Pichel's Luther. His warm marriage to Katherina von Bora, his continued teachings whilst the princes and his followers press forward against the Holy Roman Emperor and the welcome arrival of children lead viewers to embrace this innovative man who has come full circle since his early days as a monk. The elimination of Luther's fiery admonition to the princes to slaughter the peasants is a major omission. The film concludes with the Augsburg Confession in 1530, and thus fails to cover the final sixteen years of Luther's life. The wars of religion that break out between the Protestants and Catholics (ultimately instigated by the events of Luther's reformation) and plague Europe

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<sup>8</sup>Irving Pichel, dir. *Martin Luther*, DVD, with Niall MacGinnis, John Ruddock, and Pierre Lefevre (New York: RD-DR Corporation, Lutheran Church Productions, Luther-Film, G.m. b. H., and Louis De Rochemont Associates, 1953).

for decades are not included in this biopic. With the exception of his days in the monastery, the periods of deep depression that plagued Luther all of his life are nonexistent in the film, despite their prevalence in his written works. Lastly his scatological and disturbing writings and opinions about the Jews (as well as the Papists and peasants) are conveniently omitted by bringing the film to a close in 1530. Thus, *Martin Luther* presents to the world the image of a great Christian, German hero, a revolutionary, but a respectful and reluctant one.<sup>9</sup>

Pichel addressed his own work in a 1953 article in *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television*, and admitted to slight inaccuracies in the film. “For example, it combines three emissaries from the Pope to Germany into one....Some scholars believe that John Eck of the Leipzig debates and the John Eck who drew up the Church’s Confutation of the Augsburg Confession were different men with the same name. The film makes them one...”<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Pichel later goes on to state that there was “an obligation to adhere as closely as possible to the facts of the record” because the film was commissioned by Lutheran Church Productions.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the ever-present background music melody of Luther’s famous “A Mighty Fortress is our God” should clue the viewer in to the pro-Lutheran bias! Pichel’s recognition that the film was intended to show the reasons why Luther instigated a revolt against the Catholic Church validates the observation of a favorable interpretation of Luther. The film, therefore, is not a

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<sup>9</sup>Pichel, *Martin Luther*.

<sup>10</sup>Irving Pichel, “‘Martin Luther’: The Problem of Documentation,” *The Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* 8 (1953): 176.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

completely accurate biography of the reformer, but instead is a positive interpretation of the events that led the reformer to begin the process of reformation.

Despite this historical criticism, *Martin Luther* is an enjoyable film and one that most likely led some to explore Luther further.

*Luther*, the 1973 film based on John Osborne's play, sets a completely different tone regarding the reformer. Rather than praising the reformer, the film begins with the narrator, presumably a peasant, smearing the blood of his fellow peasants on the reformer's clean shirt, claiming that Luther abandoned those that helped his reformation and instead "cuddled in the arms" of his wife, the former nun Katharina von Bora.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the 1953 film, in which Luther was chiefly portrayed as heroic and inspirational, he is, from the first scene, recognized as a man capable of great errors in judgment. After the tone is set, the film reverts back to 1506 and Luther's commitment to the Augustinian Order, and his fervent desire to out-do his fellow monks. This use of the flashback is, according to Marnie Hughes-Warrington and Maureen Taurim, frequently used in historical films to, " 'emphasize the past as a motivational force within the psychology of character' or to signal the therapeutic address of trauma."<sup>13</sup> The director, Guy Green, sets the viewer up to critically view the actions of Luther's life that led him, as the peasant narrator claims, to abandon those who helped the Lutheran Reformation.

Instead of a detailed background including information about Luther's early childhood and decision to enter monastic life, the film turns back the clock only as far as 1506, the year of the reformer's commitment to the church. Possibly to emphasize his

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<sup>12</sup>Guy Green, dir. *Luther*, DVD, with Stacey Keach, Maurice Denham, and Judi Dench (New York, NY: Caedmon, 1973).

<sup>13</sup>Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *History Goes to the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 64.

later break with the Catholic Church and his marriage to a former nun, there is a large emphasis on the serious nature of Luther's lifelong commitment to monasticism. Starring as Luther, Stacy Keach portrayed him as an anxious, diligent, neurotic monk who tortured himself with an incessant desire to confess every possible sin, to punish himself, and to out-do his fellow monks through his piety and devotion. However, the film makes it clear that Luther's actions do not absolve him of his feelings of guilt. The perfectionist and struggling young Luther is well documented by historians and through his own writings, but director Green, drawing heavily on the Erikson-influenced work of Osborne, does an excellent job of highlighting the reformer's deep personal battles.<sup>14</sup>

The Eriksonian influence on the play and film are undeniable. Released nearly fifteen years after the groundbreaking and controversial *Young Man Luther*, the film is evidence of Erikson's influence on both the scholarly and popular perceptions of Luther. Particularly evident is the complicated relationship between the reformer and his father, Hans Luther, and the theory that it contributed to his theological inspirations. While the film does not cast as dark a shadow on Hans Luther as the *Young Man Luther*, it does utilize several scenes to emphasize the influence of the father/son relationship. For example, early in the film the famous fit in the choir scene is depicted. While most historians (and all of the other films viewed for this project) do not include this incident in their works, Erikson made much of it. The scene shows Luther shaking uncontrollably in the midst of the choir and falling to the ground yelling, "I am not."<sup>15</sup> While the film does not link this directly to his problems with his father, it does establish the instability

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<sup>14</sup>Green, *Luther*.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

of Luther's mind and the lack of fulfillment that he felt. Following the event, a wise advisor counsels Luther with the words that are usually attributed to Staupitz, "God is not angry with you; it is you who are angry with him."<sup>16</sup> Though his soul is not completely settled, this understanding seems to bring some degree of peace to Luther. In the scenes that follow, Hans Luther figures prominently. Visiting for his son's first mass, Hans Luther observes his son's blunders during the Eucharist, argues with his superiors, teases him, and offends the reformer's fellow monks. This presentation of the oppressive father leads to a long scene of confrontation between Hans and Martin Luther and many of Erikson's ideas are exposed in the quarrel. The reformer speaks of being beaten by his mother and father, and Hans Luther suggests that the lightning storm that inspired his son to be a monk might have been a trick of the devil rather than a sign of God. The quarrel, however, ends with a peaceful parting and a contrite Hans Luther, suggesting that father and son reached a new level of understanding. The Eriksonian theory that Luther's struggle to please an angry God and an angry father are linked plays out in the movie by the sequencing of the scenes.<sup>17</sup>

Following the obligatory nod to the father/son conflict that Erikson made so popular through psychohistory, the film cuts directly to Luther's time as a professor and priest at Wittenberg. Interestingly, it omits the reformer's trip to Rome, an event that biographers and filmmakers frequently use to illustrate Luther's realization of corrupt church practices. It is assumed by many that the trip served as an awakening for Luther and makes his frustration with the church and the practice of indulgences understandable to the average reader/viewer. As priest and professor, Luther seems at peace with his role

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<sup>16</sup>Green, *Luther*.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



in the church until John Tetzel begins the selling of indulgences. Luther's *95 Theses* and his fiery sermons against indulgences decry the corruption of the church and the film presents the image of the reformer as a hero to the common people, freeing them from the monetary necessities of the Catholic Church and assuring them of salvation by faith alone. At this point in the film, Luther sheds the superior piety of a monk and is portrayed as a genuine, normal, Godly man in pursuit of reform. His actions, as well as his language, are real, and he speaks frequently of his bowels and upon receiving the papal bull of excommunications even proclaims that the "bull will roast and so will the balls of the Medici."<sup>18</sup> The uncouth Luther that has intrigued many authors, including Erikson, emerges, but not to his fullest extent.

The film moves rapidly from the excitement at the Diet of Worms to Luther's reaction to the smashing of idols and the Peasants Revolts of 1525 with the peasant narrator commenting, "He encouraged us until we took up arms...then he wrote an appeal for our extermination."<sup>19</sup> The devastation that occurred in response to Luther's appeal to the princes, *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*, is depicted as the reformer walks amid the bodies of slain peasants, obviously disturbed by the carnage that he encouraged. The flashback that began at the start of the film complete, the peasant narrator commences his argument with Luther. The reformer defends his actions through scripture while the simple presence of blood makes the case of the peasants, and the film offers no conclusive closure to the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Green, *Luther*.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid..

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

The final scenes include glimpses of Luther's life as a husband to Katharina von Bora and father to their children, yet it is difficult to clearly ascertain his level of comfort with the reform that he inspired. Staupitz, visiting the Luthers, remarks that he misses the monks in the monastery and admonishes Luther for encouraging the princes to slaughter the peasants. His melancholy mood and gentle prodding of Luther suggest that even those closest to the reformer were not always in full approval of his actions. The film ends shortly after this confrontation, prompting the viewer to question the outcome of Luther's actions and determine whether he was a hero-reformer or a dangerous rebel.<sup>21</sup>

*Luther*, written in the early 1960s, was heavily influenced by Erikson's work, but most likely also was influenced by the continued translation of Luther's works into English by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann. The American edition of Luther's works opened the works of the reformer to those outside the world of elite academia and therefore allowed them to read and interpret him on their own. In a similar fashion, *Luther* presents many different angles of the story of the early years of the Reformation. Though many might argue that it highlights Luther's faults, it does give the viewer the unique opportunity to view him as something other than a religious hero. If nothing else, the film humanizes Luther while it also recognizes him as a great man. Such treatment differs from the aforementioned 1953 film and other treatments of the reformer that promoted Luther's accomplishments without also recognizing his failures.

Three decades after the release of the 1973 *Luther*, Hollywood generated renewed interest in the reformer with a 2003 production of the same name – *Luther*. Despite the similarities in name, the modern version of Luther's life is quite different than its immediate predecessor. Starring Joseph Fiennes, of *Shakespeare in Love* fame, and

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<sup>21</sup>Green, *Luther*.

capitalizing on new technology, the 2003 *Luther* is a visually beautiful production, but one in which the reformer's heroism and greatness triumph. The pro-Lutheran slant is likely a result of the funding provided for the film by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and the additional support from the Protestant Church of Germany and the German Information Center. The film is an engaging account of Luther's most famous years, from 1506 to 1530, yet conveniently neglects the more controversial final decades of his life.

Director Eric Till uses the first half of the movie to provide the background necessary for understanding the early events of the Protestant Reformation and in the process capitalizes on and dramatizes many of the Luther myths. The opening scene is a dramatic interpretation of the famous lightning storm that, according to legend, frightened Luther into committing his life to God through monasticism. Most historians and biographers agree that Luther was preparing to become a monk before his experience in the storm, yet *Luther* (2003) omits this information and moves swiftly to the reformer's first mass. The influences of Erikson that have become a part (despite controversy) of Luther's image in popular culture are observed through a brief confrontation between father and son at the first mass, but more visibly through the depiction of the reformer as a shaking, psychologically imbalanced man spiritually paralyzed by his inability to come to peace with what he believes to be an angry God. In keeping with popular accounts of Luther's life, particularly Irving Pichel's 1953 production, the reformer's trip to Rome figures prominently as an eye-opening experience that might have led him to seek reform. The visuals are amazing – brothels for clergymen, the peddling of religious items, and the hordes of desperate people

climbing the stairs for indulgences – and capable of convincing the audience that Luther is justified when he later challenges both the practices and theology of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup>

Whether Luther's visit to Rome contributed to his breakthrough that salvation is achieved by faith alone is debatable, but the film makes it clear that by the time the reformer is established at Wittenberg as a priest and professor, he achieved peace with God and himself. In a later scene, he even achieves peace with his father! The transformation is obvious. He is no longer the fearful monk, but rather is presented as a confident, engaging lecturer with a good sense of humor, fortified in his faith through a knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. This Luther, though he lacks the charmingly vulgar vocabulary that the real Luther used, is real, likeable, practical and understandable. His theories resonate with theology students and commoners alike and his transformation is inspiring. The once cowering monk, ever fearful of judgment transformed into the self-assured and righteous teacher and priest, all because of a knowledge of God's all-forgiving love. Who wouldn't root for him?<sup>23</sup>

John Tetzel, as depicted by Alfred Molina, is the perfect antagonist to Luther's image of goodness and love. The Tetzel portrayed in *Luther* (2003) is ruthless and will stop at nothing, even setting his own hand on fire, to coerce people of the need for indulgences. Upon hearing of the sale of indulgences (through a fictitious single mother who bought one for her crippled offspring), the film's Luther flies into a raging frenzy that leads to a scene depicting the ultimate Luther legend – the nailing of the *95 Theses*!

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<sup>22</sup>Eric Till, dir. *Luther*, DVD, with Joseph Fiennes, Alfred Molina, and Peter Ustinov (Los Angeles, CA: MGM Home Entertainment, 2004).

<sup>23</sup>Till, *Luther*.

In the film, Tetzl is seen only as an agent of the Pope and, conveniently, the censoring that he faced from the church because of his unethical practices is not included in the film. The events that follow Luther's initial reaction to the sale of indulgences are depicted in a similar fashion to those in other films and biographies and that highlight his great man status. To many of the people and to the princes, he is heroic for offering comprehensible, reassuring theology and an alternative to the Roman Catholic Church and its many financial obligations. However to the hierarchy of the Church he is dangerous nuisance, made obvious through an embarrassingly overdone scene in which Pope Leo X's 1520 papal bull (in which he compared Luther to a wild boar) is read aloud while the Pope hunts and kills a wild boar. Following the death squeals of the great boar, the camera cuts directly to Luther's face, forcing the audience to recognize that the battle of the Reformation has officially begun. Such dramatics cause historians and scholars of Luther to roll their eyes, but to the general public, drama provides the necessary intrigue to keep their attention.<sup>24</sup>

In keeping with the rest of the film, the Diet of Worms and Luther's "kidnapping" by Frederick the Wise are over-dramatized, yet the treatment of the Peasants Revolt of 1525, while also dramatic, is vague and presents a different side of Luther. Rather than differentiating between the different rebellions, nearly all are lumped together. Luther, outraged by the blatant disregard for temporal power and the perversion of his ideas, responds by ordering the princes to cut down the rebels. However, in contrast to the 1973 production's Luther, who defended himself and his actions to the peasant narrator, the reformer of the 2003 film expresses visible remorse for the deaths of the rebels. In a

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<sup>24</sup>Till, *Luther*.

particularly dramatic scene, he walks amongst the slain and even finds among them the body of the single mother's crippled child. This presentation of the one of the darkest blots on Luther's career is not nearly as damning as the 1973 film, yet it does at least concede that the reformer was capable of great error, a topic avoided in the 1953 Irving Pichel production.<sup>25</sup>

The final scenes of the film do not adequately present the important and intriguing events of Luther's life after 1525. In the film, life at the former monastery is full of love, song, and fervor for the new Lutheran religion. Katharina von Bora and her pursuit of Luther leads to a joyous marriage ceremony, though Luther himself admitted in his letters that he felt no passionate love for his new spouse at the beginning of their marriage. and the birth of Protestantism did not free former nuns and monks from the hardships of sixteenth-century life to a life of leisure. The film offers a glimpse of reality as a missionary is burned at the stake while attempting to spread Lutheranism, yet its conclusion is deceiving. One of the final scenes of the film takes place at Augsburg in 1530, when the Protestant princes refuse to back down to the Holy Roman Emperor. The scene is triumphant, celebratory, and gives the viewer the impression that the success of the Reformation was complete. Although the ending credits cite milestones in the Reformation, they do not elaborate upon the decades of religious turmoil and warfare that resulted.<sup>26</sup>

The 2003 version of *Luther*, much like Irving Pichel's 1953 film, supports the great man theory and favorable view of the reformer. Luther's accomplishments figure much more prominently in the film than his shortcomings, and the handsome and

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<sup>25</sup>Till, *Luther*.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

humorous Joseph Fiennes makes him a very charismatic, likeable character to audiences. Through character development of Luther, as well as other figures like the endearingly daft Frederick the Wise and the arrogant Charles V, the Reformation story comes alive in a way that twenty-first century viewers can appreciate – visually pleasing characters and costumes, interesting story, twenty-first century special effects, and stunning settings. Not all of the Luther myths are represented, but the classic ones that many viewers might recall from high school history, such as the lightning storm and the nailing of the 95 *Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg, are fleshed out in the film. By incorporating the bits of common knowledge held by much of the general public about Luther into a film that elaborates on his actions helps to draw the interest of the average viewer. Thus, while the 2003 film is not without bias and will never be inclusive enough to please professional historians, it does an excellent job of engaging and educating an otherwise uninformed viewer.

The historical drama is increasingly becoming the most popular medium of education for the general public, but the other type of history on film, the documentary, still plays a very important role. In 2002 PBS produced a two-part film on Martin Luther as a part of their *Empires* documentary series. The result is a much more comprehensive view of Luther's life than those represented in previous historical dramas. Not only is it two hours in length, but it also incorporates quotations from Luther's works and the commentary of respected historians Euan Cameron, Susan Karant-Nunn, Miri Rubin, Alistair McGrath, Mark Edwards, and Michael Mullet. In addition to describing the important scenes of the reformer's life, the commentators provide important and relevant background information about the time in which Luther lived and the life of monasticism,

among other things, as well as interesting facts about the other characters of the Reformation. Thus, the documentary format allows the viewer to observe historical method and different perspectives to a greater extent. The ability to use the dramatization of events in Luther's life while also providing relevant background information and deeper insight into the events concerned gives *Empires: Martin Luther* an historical edge and makes it what many would consider a more useful way of expressing history on film.<sup>27</sup>

Though the documentary format allows more angles to be explored and is presumably more factually based, it cannot escape from bias and the influence of nineteenth, twentieth, and twentieth-first century historiography concerning Luther. Unlike the aforementioned films, in which the story of Luther's most famous years are transformed into interesting narratives, *Empires* provides background, presents an event, and then analyzes it through Luther's own writings and the words of the various scholars consulted. The differing opinions of the scholars allow the viewer to assimilate the information and come to their own conclusions. For example, it is accepted by many that Luther did not desire to become such a famous figure, yet at the close of part I, Euan Cameron comments that the nature of the *95 Theses* and their posting make it difficult to believe that Luther did not want to "go public" with his ideas and criticism.<sup>28</sup>

The film is broken into two parts; "Driven to Defiance" and "Reluctant Revolutionary." The opening scene in both sections is of Luther, on his way to Eisleben in 1546, just days before his death, reflecting on the events of his life. Part I covers the

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<sup>27</sup>Cassian Harrison, dir. *Empires: Martin Luther*, DVD, with Timothy West, Liam Neeson, and Nick Powell (Alexandria, VA: PBS DVD Video, 2003).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.



reformer's life through 1517, and the influence of Erikson is heavily felt during the discussion of Luther's youth. The scholars explore the possible reasons for Luther's decision to enter monastic life, a stark contrast from the 2003 *Luther* that offers the lightning storm as explanation. Because documentary filmmakers seek specialists instead of actors, they can bring scholarship to the screen. Some of the scholarship that emerges can be novel and expose new findings that might previously go unnoticed. For example, Luther's thunderstorm conversion experience is a story that legitimate scholars use in their description of him, but in *Empires* Euan Cameron that there were other factors involved in the reformer's decisions to enter monastic life. Cameron informs viewers that in 1505 the plague affected Erfurt, caused the death of three of Luther's friends and generated great anxiety and fear in the reformer, perhaps providing the inspiration behind decision to become a monk. McGrath suggests that, like many, Luther saw the confines of monasticism as the only path to salvation and joined the order for the protection of his own soul. The scholars offer repeated examples of Luther's self-sacrifice, his persecution of the flesh, and his relentless desire to confess his sins and perform his duties regardless of his own comfort. Luther's self-criticism and spiritual anxiety figure prominently both in historical dramas and documentaries, in large part because of the rise of psychohistory and also because it humanizes the reformer to those around him.<sup>29</sup>

Part II, entitled "Reluctant Revolutionary," much like the historical dramas previously discussed, focuses mainly on the early years of the Reformation, 1520-1530. However, in contrast to the aforementioned films *Empires* elaborates more heavily on the influential writings of Luther during this period and their effects on his life and on society

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<sup>29</sup>Harrison, *Empires: Martin Luther*.

around him. For example, when explaining *An Address to the Christian Nobility*, Susan Karant-Nunn comments that Luther understood the political necessity of pleasing the princes in order to support his reform. Conversely, Euan Cameron implies that Frederick the Wise's motivations for protecting Luther are unknown, yet Karant-Nunn suggests that his political savvy and wooing of the princes in *An Address to the Christian Nobility* saved him from persecution by the authorities. Luther was fully aware that in order to continue his reform, he needed the support and trust of the secular powers. While a similar message might be able to be conveyed through historical drama, the viewer would almost have to have a previous knowledge of Luther and the Reformation-era politics to draw the correct conclusions. The documentary format, however, allows the production to clearly delineate the information and subsequently forces the viewer to acknowledge the many different secular and religious aspects of Luther's actions. Similarly, the scholars, particularly Mark Edwards, are able to explain the reformer's crude, "earthy" language, whereas in a historical drama, an uninformed viewer might be very confused by frequent references to bodily functions and harsh words for opponents.<sup>30</sup> Lastly, the comprehensive treatment of the Peasants Revolts in the 2002 documentary far surpasses the attempts made in historical dramas. The film explains the beginning phases of the revolts and allows viewers to receive perspectives from both sides about the conflict. In Luther's defense, the documentary presents his horror at the radical interpretation of his ideas and explains his desire to prevent social revolution. The historians, however, and the evidence, bring to light the disturbing writings of Luther about the peasants (and later the Jews) and prove that his actions, inadvertently or not, led to the deaths of thousands.

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<sup>30</sup>Harrison, *Empires: Martin Luther*.

Thus, while it is not without its faults, the documentary is able to explore both the positive and negative images of the reformer with less ambiguity than historical dramas.<sup>31</sup>

The final portion of the documentary shifts swiftly from a negative image of Luther to an evaluation of his impact on the world. His marriage to Katharina von Bora and his role as father to the six children they produced is discussed with brevity before the film concludes with a discussion of Luther's importance in world history. Despite their varying opinions, the scholars reach an easy conclusion that the reformer fits the mold of the great man. Despite his shortcomings, his prejudices, and his scatological language, Luther irreparably altered world history. Thus, even though this production offers different and richer perspectives on Luther's life and allows the viewer to gain deeper insight into historical analysis, it does not deviate far from the great man theory that continues to dominate most historical films, but instead explores the reformer's human agency.<sup>32</sup>

As a historical tool, *Empires: Martin Luther*, can be considered very effective in conveying a history of the great reformer. In addition to the aforementioned benefits, it has a companion website ([www.pbs.org/empires/martinluther.html](http://www.pbs.org/empires/martinluther.html)) that allows viewers to learn more about Luther and his era. What differentiates this film from others like it are its three extra sections that allow viewers to explore the life of Luther beyond 1530. The sections, entitled "Luther's World," "Luther the Hero," and "Luther the Villain" explore topics not ordinarily included in film accounts of the reformer's life. The extra footage shows the advances made in Lutheran scholarship over the decades as well as the shift in focus and provides the viewer with a more accurate picture of recent

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<sup>31</sup>Harrison, *Empires: Martin Luther*.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

historiography. For example, in “Luther the Hero” the scholars praise the reformer as a humble, likeable man who was devoted to his family. This image of Luther, though contested by some, has become more prevalent since the rise of social history and women’s history in the 1970s. Scholarly works by Lyndal Roper, Susan Karant-Nunn, Steven Ozment, and many others have explored the social affects of Luther as well as his views on women and family. Conversely, “Luther the Villain” sheds light on the darker parts of Luther’s career that are frequently avoided in historical dramas and documentaries. Mark Edwards brings up the question of whether Luther should be held responsible for the Wars of Religion that plagued Europe for centuries after his death. The historical dramas previously discussed, as well as the main portion of the *Empires* documentary, refrain from passing judgment on the issue and usually end on the high note of the 1530 Augsburg Confession. However, it is Luther’s writings about the Jews that dominate “Luther the Villain.” Mark Edwards and Michael Mullet elaborate on the issue in the extra footage, echoing arguments made in Lutheran historiography since the close of World War II. Edwards cites the Nazi usage of Luther’s writings after Kristallnacht and explains the link that some scholars have made between the reformer and the Holocaust. Mullet expresses the opinions of some of the scholarly world, such as Roland Bainton who said that he wished Luther had died before writing *On the Jews and Their Lies*, and Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, who considered omitting the tract from their English translation of the reformer’s works. The information contained in the extra footage is a valuable learning tool for it goes beyond the basic chronology of Luther’s life from 1505-1530 and explores more deeply his personality, his motivations, his opinions, and his convictions. The director’s choice to not incorporate it into the

main portion of the documentary suggests that in order to remain appealing to the general public, Martin Luther must be presented as a great man.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, the general public continues to receive the great man image of Martin Luther through the medium of film. The limitations of time, the desire to engage the interest of the audience, the trends in historiography, and source of funding inevitably alter the ways in which the reformer is presented. Film, however, is still a useful tool for educating the masses. Irving Pichel's Luther is epic, Guy Green's is haunted by his past, Eric Till's is heroic and laudable, and Cassian Harrison's documentary presents many sides while still elevating the reformer to great man status. Lutheran historiography has shaped the way history is presented on film and has consequently cultivated the many perceptions of Martin Luther in popular culture.

The presence of Luther in popular culture is also readily found on the Internet. In the twentieth century the medium of the Internet has exponentially increased the amount of information available to those with specific and general interest in the reformer. In an ironic twist of fate, Luther has become an industry on the internet. Websites selling Luther paraphernalia further the public image of the reformer as a great man and Germany and its cities boast of Luther on tourism websites, enticing readers to visit the land of the great reformer. However, in a valuable, albeit less amusing, use of the Internet, sites such as Project Wittenberg and Project Gutenberg serve as legitimate sites for scholarship by making the Luther's works available to the general public. Ultimately, despite the fluff that dominates Google searches for Martin Luther, there are websites that affect the public perception of the reformer and also contribute to scholarship.

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<sup>33</sup>Harrison, *Empires: Martin Luther*.

The Internet can spread false information, promote ideas, sell products, and influence popular opinion, yet it can also be a reliable and useful research tool for those conducting serious academic studies. The website of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, for example, provides links to the Archives of the ELCA, allowing researchers to identify the works available. Additionally, the ELCA page offers information and documents relating to Lutheran publications and inter-faith and ecumenical affairs.<sup>34</sup> The Evangelical Church of Germany has an English version available at [www.ekd.de](http://www.ekd.de) and contains translations of Luther's *95 Theses* and his *Small Catechism*, among other documents.<sup>35</sup> Other branches of the Lutheran Church, both in the United States and abroad, boast impressive web pages with information about the reformer, the Lutheran religion, and information about Lutheran publications. Though in most cases the pro-Luther bias is not completely transparent, any serious scholar should take into account that Lutheran web sites will more likely differ in their interpretations of the reformer than sites of other denominations, despite the improvement in ecumenical relations.

Two of the most significant sites for serious Lutheran research are Project Wittenberg and Project Gutenberg. Project Wittenberg, a site out of Concordia Theological Seminary, continues to develop as an "international electronic library of Lutheranism." The project was constructed by academics who hoped to assemble Lutheran works (by Luther and other prominent Lutherans) in one location and it continues to grow. In addition to hymns, bible commentaries, sermons, tracts, and letters, most of them translated into English, the Luther page of the Project Wittenberg site

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<sup>34</sup>Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. [www.ecla.org](http://www.ecla.org) (accessed July 1, 2008).

<sup>35</sup>Evangelical Church in Germany. [www.ekd.de](http://www.ekd.de) (accessed July 10, 2008).

boasts biographical information and links to writings about Luther by his contemporaries such as Philip Melancthon. The project is ever-expanding and has been credited with providing documents to major electronic text libraries such as the Lutheran Electronic Archive, the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, and Project Gutenberg. Project Gutenberg, like Project Wittenberg, is a site dedicated to making materials available to the public via electronic text. By simply searching “Martin Luther” on the Project Gutenberg main page, many of his works are made available for download. While Project Wittenberg provides greater primary source material, both are valuable resources for research, mostly because of their availability. Despite being considered by most as legitimate, valid sources of information, the projects are not without their faults. The projects are a collaborative effort of a group of people mainly consisting of volunteers, thus this method of production should prompt researchers to double check their sources for potential errors. Regardless, both Project Wittenberg and Project Gutenberg are improving scholarship on Luther by making his works more accessible to scholars around the world.<sup>36</sup>

Luther abhorred the idea that relic-viewing or the purchase of indulgences could guarantee salvation and admonished the Catholic Church for their corrupt fund-raising practices. Thus it is ironic that in the twenty-first century Luther is used for profit on the Internet. For decades historians and filmmakers have cultivated the image of Luther as a great man and a Germanic hero and the ever-increasing popularity of the internet echoes this interpretation. Luther is not just a great man on the Internet, he is also revenue. The website [www.oldlutheran.com](http://www.oldlutheran.com) proclaims itself as the “Center for Lutheran Pride (but not

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<sup>36</sup>Project Gutenberg. [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) (accessed July 8, 2008); Project Wittenberg. [www.projectwittenberg.org](http://www.projectwittenberg.org) (accessed July 8, 2008).

too proud)” and in addition to Lutheran humor, recipes, games, confirmation resources, even a “Lutheran Tidbit of the Day,” among other things, there is an online store.<sup>37</sup> Fans and devotees of Luther can purchase bobble-head dolls, books and videos, “Here I Stand” golf gear, a variety of Lutheran Rose paraphernalia including temporary tattoos, and t-shirts, coffee mugs, beer steins, and even home brew labels bearing the reformer’s image or words.<sup>38</sup> What would Luther make of this absurd marketing of his image? His disdain for relics and indulgences indicates that it would probably outrage him, yet on the other hand, it does expose greater numbers to Lutheranism. Regardless, [www.oldlutheran](http://www.oldlutheran.com) and its wide variety of Lutheran merchandise suggest that the reformer is being marketed to the general public as a heroic, inspiring, and often humorous icon.

Through tourism websites, Martin Luther has become more than just a historical figure, instead, he is an industry. The crush of Martin Luther paraphernalia and attention commenced with the 1983 celebration, and now in the era of mass technology and globalization people around the world can experience the commercialization of Luther through a host of websites. German websites, many of which are available in English as well, present the Great Man version of Luther and can prove to be very useful sources in the study of the reformer, but also of his value to the tourism industry. Two of the most obvious sites, [www.luther.de](http://www.luther.de) and [www.martinluther.de](http://www.martinluther.de) , provide a variety of information about Luther and are minimally involved with tourism. The first, [www.luther.de](http://www.luther.de), is an easy to comprehend, relaxed site with menu choices that include legends, time, and people to provide a readable overview of the basic Luther concepts. The page provides

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<sup>37</sup>Old Lutheran: The Center for Lutheran Pride! (but not too proud). <http://oldlutheran.com> (accessed July 1, 2008)

<sup>38</sup>[www.oldlutheran.com](http://www.oldlutheran.com) (accessed July 1, 2008).



many external links to more detailed information and is ideal for someone seeking basic but comprehensive knowledge about the reformer.<sup>39</sup> The Luther Memorials of Saxony-Anhalt, a foundation that maintains four museums related to Luther maintains [www.martinluther.de](http://www.martinluther.de). The site, which offers an English version in addition to the German one, provides information about the museums, biographical information about leading characters of the Reformation, and even access to databases and sections of Luther's writings. Though the databases and primary source materials are available only in German, the site fulfills its purpose of encouraging people to explore the foundation's collections and holdings in order to gain a greater understanding of Reformation history.<sup>40</sup> Both [www.luther.de](http://www.luther.de) and [www.martinluther.de](http://www.martinluther.de), though to different degrees, are representative of general information sites that promote the Great Man image of Luther through a German perspective.

The tourism industry promotes Luther as an attraction and the cities that claim him as their own use their websites as a way generate interest and revenue. The most prevalent examples of this type of promotion can be found at [www.wittenberg.de](http://www.wittenberg.de), <http://eisleben.eu>, and [www.wartburg-eisenach.de](http://www.wartburg-eisenach.de). Eisleben, the city of Luther's birth and death, maintains a site with tourist references to the reformer. Though there is an English version of the site, the information in English is limited to a few main categories and the attractions related to Luther fall in those categories. The Luther Memorials, two of which are maintained by the foundation mentioned earlier, are listed and explained in English. Regardless of the religious affiliations of visitors and inhabitants, Eisleben

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<sup>39</sup>A Mighty Fortress is Our God. [www.luther.de](http://www.luther.de) (accessed July 1, 2008)

<sup>40</sup>Luther Memorials Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt. [www.martinluther.de](http://www.martinluther.de) (accessed July 1, 2008).

identifies Luther as a great man and recognizes his value as a tourist attraction by providing information both in English and in German about the house of his birth and death, the churches where he was baptized and preached, the memorial statue constructed in 1883, and the planned walking tour for Luther enthusiasts. Although not all of the information on the website is translated into English, almost everything relating to Luther is, signifying his importance to the Eisleben tourist industry.<sup>41</sup>

The other great city of Martin Luther's career, Wittenberg, also utilizes the web to promote their connection to the reformer. Wittenberg's promotion of Luther as a tourist attraction is even more apparent on the English version of their webpage and does not present a scholarly image of Luther, but rather one that will generate interest in everyone. For example, Wittenberg calls itself "the city of Martin Luther" and advertises two major events connected to his legacy; a yearly celebration of his marriage to Katharine von Bora and the Reformation Festival. Like the Eisleben site, the Wittenberg site promotes Luther as a great man and a joyful tourist attraction. At least on the Internet, there is no mention of his infamous anti-Semitic or anti-Papist tracts and his scatological writings. Instead, he is portrayed as somewhat of a national hero, much like George Washington or Thomas Jefferson in the United States. Perhaps the museums and exhibits dig deeper into the various eccentricities and criticisms of the reformer, but the image presented on the web ignores the controversial Luther and instead promotes the jolly, interesting source of national pride and interest.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Lutherstadt Eisleben. <http://eisleben.eu> (accessed July 1, 2008).

<sup>42</sup>Lutherstadt-Wittenberg: Experience World History. [www.wittenberg.de](http://www.wittenberg.de) (accessed July 1, 2008).

Ultimately, in the age of technology and mass media, images of Luther have expanded beyond religious and historical scholarship to provide popular culture with marketable images of the reformer. Filmmakers, merchandisers, and the tourism industry have contributed to the image of Luther as a great man and a figure interesting enough to merit significant attention from the media industry.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Perceptions of Martin Luther have evolved in popular culture since the *95 Theses* brought him to the attention of the world in 1517. Society's image of Luther has been cultivated through many mediums and despite the trends and developments in historiography, the great man theory prevails in the minds of the general public. Most students and church-goers (both Protestant and Catholic alike) remember the great Luther legends – the lightning storm, the nailing of the *95 Theses*, the conflicted monk, and the confident reformer proclaiming, “Here I stand!” before the Diet of Worms rather than the theories cultivated by historians over the past two centuries. He was, undoubtedly, a great man and his legacy has lasted through the centuries, but the great man theory does not adequately define the complex nature of Luther. The reformer was influenced by forces that affected his capacity for and the extent of his human agency, and these factors were deeper than the immediate problem of corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's agency was motivated by more than the dry historical context. His inner demons, his possible psychoses, environmental forces, and his own medieval ideas about God, Christ and the Devil undoubtedly affected his actions. So why does the great man theory continue to dominate the public perception of Luther? Its simplicity and easy categorization of Luther offers society with an uncomplicated, historically comprehensible figure, and thus one that popularizes films and lures tourists. Historical scholarship during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has presented an increasingly

complex and often controversial reformer, yet Luther the great man, a relic of nineteenth-century historiography, still resonates with the general public.

Nineteenth-century scholars, particularly Leopold von Ranke, developed that modern notion of Luther as a great man, beginning the general theory that still pervades in popular culture. Ranke's portrayal of Luther as a nationalist hero was agreeable to nineteenth-century Germans who respected the reformer's reverence for social order and conservative reform. Though Catholic historians of the time viewed Luther in a different light, they also implemented the great man theory to describe his human agency. Ranke's contributions to historical method laid important foundations for the field, and he recognized that historians of future years would surpass his accomplishments in theory and in practice. Though their opinions on Luther contrasted with Ranke's, Catholic historians of the nineteenth-century such as Denifle and Grisar reiterated the great man theory. The chief difference in scholarship was religion – Protestants looked favorably on Luther's accomplishments and Catholics generally viewed him as a trouble causer. Regardless of their differences, scholarship from both sides recognized that Luther's personality, his actions, and his writings irreparably altered the course of history. This consensus in scholarship laid the groundwork for the explanation of Luther that continues to permeate popular culture.

The World Wars of the first half of the twentieth-century led to a resurgence of scholarship on Luther and new images of the reformer appeared. After World War II Luther was directly linked by many to the atrocities of the Holocaust because of his sixteenth-century writings on the Jewish people. Historians drew connections between Luther's anti-Semitic writings and his advocacy of submission to government authority to

help explain why the Holocaust was possible in Germany. The linking of one of the great men of history to the one of the greatest human tragedies generated scholarship, but views conflicted and were not decisive enough to sway the popular perception of Luther. In fact, Irving Pichel's 1953 film *Martin Luther* makes no mention of the reformer's harsh writings about the Jewish people and instead promulgates the positive great man theory. As *Martin Luther* was released less than ten years after the end of World War II, it can be assumed that the link between Luther and the Holocaust had no major affect on the way that the general public perceived the reformer, or at least the way he was projected on the public. Instead, Pichel's Luther is heroic, his accomplishments are easy to comprehend, and his story is inspiring and interesting. Obviously influenced by Ranke, Pichel crafts a narrative account of the reformer's most important years and elevates Luther to great man status in an effort to engage and inform the viewer. Thus, even though Luther's image in the field of history was deepening beyond the great man theory as historical trends affected scholarship, he remained most marketable to popular culture as a great man.

New trends in history during the 1960s and 1970s overtook the great man theory in scholarly work and emphasized the idea that complex factors were working on Luther that affected his actions. Erikson's *Young Man Luther*, while controversial in the scholarly world, applied twentieth-century knowledge of the human psyche to the reformer and suggested that Luther's motivations were not entirely based on religious convictions. Rather, Erikson argued, Luther was redirecting his anger toward his father toward his struggle with an angry and unforgiving God. Erikson's emphasis on the strained father/son relationship is supported with minimal evidence, but it has become, to

some degree, a fixture in the public perception of Luther. Erikson's work continues to receive public recognition while other, more historically sound scholarship goes unnoticed, presumably because *Young Man Luther* adds drama and easily comprehensible conflict to the great man interpretation of the reformer. Thanks to Erikson, Luther is no longer just an inspiring hero, but also the victim of harsh parenting. The 1973 film version of John Osborne's play, *Luther*, incorporates Erikson's ideas and attempts to stray from the great man theory by presenting a deeper side of Luther through his familial conflicts, his actions during the Peasants Revolt of 1525, and his uncouth language, but fails to separate itself completely. Rather, Luther simply becomes a more interesting great man with a colorful vocabulary. Despite the attempts made to expose the public to new ideas of Luther, his tangible accomplishments between 1505 and 1530 still dominate the film and project his image as a great man.

The 2003 production of *Luther*, despite the monumental works of Oberman, Edwards, Roper, Marius, Ozment and countless others that identify forces other than human agency that motivated Luther throughout his lifetime, solidifies the representation of the reformer as a great man to the general public. In dramatic fashion, the film feeds on Luther myths and is a twenty-first century version of the 1953 production. Luther was a conflicted young man, whose actions heroically sparked the Reformation. There high and low moments in the film, but he eventually achieves peace and finds happiness in marriage and family. Since the 1970s, women's rights and mental health issues have become a mainstay in the news and have gained acceptance in society, so why does the scholarship of Oberman and Roper (among others) on these topics not find its place in films such as *Luther*? Presumably because the general public demands a Luther that they

understand and recognize, and the media complies. There is little to no evidence of scholarship newer than 1953 in the production and the classic summation of Luther's life between 1505 and 1530 keeps the great man theory alive in society.

The 2002 PBS documentary, *Empires: Martin Luther*, is the most effective of the films discussed at presenting historical analysis that differs from the generic great man theory. Commentary by accomplished scholars from different fields of expertise allows viewers to observe aspects of Luther's life and personality that are not generally depicted in historical dramas. The documentary genre incorporates more background information and is more akin to a history lesson than to pure entertainment. Still, however, the demand for viewers necessitates that the general course of the documentary stays in line with the great man theory, a concept to which viewers can identify and comprehend. Consequently, in *Empires*, the finest and most thought-provoking material is cut from the finished product and used only as extra features.

Why does the great man theory prevail in the public's perception of Luther when the historiography of the past half-century relating to the reformer highlights its inadequacies as a timeless idea? Luther's actions during his lifetime were not simply the reactions of a strong, charismatic man to a particular situation, but rather were influenced by a variety of external and internal forces in his life. According to Euan Cameron, he did not become a monk as a result of a one-time, life-altering experience in a lightning storm. Rather, Cameron asserts, the 1505 plague in Erfurt affected Luther's psyche and heightened his awareness of his own mortality, making him increasingly concerned with salvation. Thus the lightning storm did not necessitate an immediate conversion, but was rather a final verification to Luther that he must take steps to ensure his salvation. This



explanation negates the great man theory for according to Cameron's idea, Luther was not a man whose future was determined by a freak lightning storm, but rather one who was contemplating the decision long before the famous event. Cameron expresses his idea in *Empires*, but why does it not appear, for example, in the 2003 production of *Luther*?<sup>1</sup> The lightning storm is certainly more dramatic, more memorable, and more entertaining, and thus is more effective in popular culture.

With the exception of the extra features of *Empires*, Luther's anti-Semitic writings are not projected in the great man perception of the reformer that dominates popular culture. Harsh enough to be used by the Nazi party and to necessitate an official statement of apology from the ECLA to the Jewish Community in 1994, the writings reveal an unattractive side of Luther. They reveal that the great man was prejudiced, and an advocate of destruction at certain times rather than peace, unattractive qualities in a religious hero. Oberman excused Luther's opinions of the Jewish people, but did highlight other aspects of the reformer's life that undoubtedly shaped his decisions and fail to be recognized by the great man theory and the general public, most notably his mental and physical health and his status as a medieval man. Luther experienced periods of intense depression and these episodes undoubtedly affected his decisions, yet historical films tend to limit his psychological issues to events that occur before 1517.

In order for media to portray a more realistic Luther, the public must first be able to comprehend the time in which he lived. The general public, however, possesses little knowledge of sixteenth-century life so the media must create a representation of Luther that resonates with twenty-first century culture. Consequently, in the most recent film, the handsome Joseph Fiennes (a far cry from the sixteenth-century portraits of the

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<sup>1</sup>Harrison, *Empires: Martin Luther*.

reformer) becomes Luther. His language, his looks, his actions, even his body language provide the modern audience with a figure to whom they can relate, and also reflect the charisma and charm that Luther must have possessed.

Luther cannot be defined by the great man theory alone, yet the media continues to cultivate that image to the public. He was a man capable of great things, but also one that was seriously flawed in many ways and full of complexities. His obsessive-compulsive preoccupation with his bowels, his disturbingly severe writings against the Jews, and his neuroses and psychoses among other things complicate him but also humanize him, yet the media industry fails to incorporate these aspects. Luther the great man is heroic, intriguing, and even handsome in some accounts and it is this image that brings people to the box-office. Similarly, merchandising and tourism websites must support the great man ideal of Luther in order to survive economically. People do not buy coffee mugs or attend festivals because of Luther's strange psyche, but rather because he is regarded as one of history's most influential individuals because he redefined the nature of salvation as sixteenth-century citizens understood it and created a new "reformed" European church. Ultimately, the great man theory is economically beneficial and therefore it will continue to be promulgated by the media and historical integrity will continue to be compromised to ensure a profit.

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## VITA

Kathryn R. Cross  
History Department  
BAL 8000  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23509

Kathryn R. Cross received a B.A. in European History and Journalism from Washington and Lee University in June, 2002. In January, 2004, she began taking courses offered by the History Department at Old Dominion University. Mrs. Cross was inducted into the Old Dominion University chapter of the Phi Alpha Theta honor society in 2007. She expects to receive an M.A. in History from Old Dominion University in August, 2008.