# Professor Jane O. Newman

CL 10 (Fall, 2016): Renaissance Europe Goes to the Movies

Viewing Questions: Luther (dir. Eric Till (2003)

1. To get a sense of how Eric Till’s film is representing the story of the great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther (1483-1546), take a look at how the opening scene and the final scene of the film are shot. Who is the center of attention, who else is present, and what do the characters’ interaction with one another tell the viewer about how we are meant to understand the story of Martin Luther?
2. The film takes places in a number of locations, including Erfurt, Wittenberg, Worms, Rome, the Wartburg castle (where Luther translates the Bible), and Augsburg. What are the important events that take place in each city?
3. There are three dates given in the film: 1507, 1521, and 1530. What are the events that take place in these years?
4. Several of the Catholic figures – and the Catholic Emperor Charles V too – mention being very concerned about the “Turks.” Why are the Turks important for the film?
5. What is the significance of Luther’s marriage to Katharine von Bora? How is it depicted in the film? Did any of the scenes remind you of the Elizabeth film? Is this what the “Renaissance” is supposed to look like?
6. In the film, Luther nails a sheet of paper on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. These are the 95 Theses. What is the response in the film?
7. Many scholars say that the Reformation was made possible by the invention of print (of moveable type so that books could be printed and distributed to a mass audience, instead of copied out by hand as manuscripts). How is print culture evident in this film? Is it important to the dissemination of Luther’s thought?
8. We see Luther “teaching” several times in the film. Who does he “teach”?
9. What are “relics”? What are “indulgences” (Tetzel calls them “passports to Paradise.” What does he mean?) Why does Leo X /Albert of Mainz want people to buy them? Why does Luther think that relics and indulgences are not to be considered in an individual’s pursuit of spiritual salvation?
10. The Peasants’ Wars / Uprisings are depicted in this film in several ways. What is Luther’s alleged role in promoting the uprising, and how is he said to have reacted? How is he represented as reacting in the film? What does Spalatin mean when he says to Luther: “Have a care, Martin. You may need these butchers”?
11. How many times do we see Luther “arguing with the devil” in the film?
12. The figure of Hannah and her daughter, Greta, are fictional figures. What is the director doing by introducing them as more or less central to the film?
13. What did you make of the boar hunt sequence / scene?
14. The Luther film is cluttered with scenes of people looking at / staring at Luther (when he tries to celebrate his first mass, when he preaches in the church at Wittenberg, when he arrives in Worms, when he refuses to recant at Worms, etc.) Pick one scene and analyze how your / a contemporary audience’s way of viewing the film is being modeled for us in the way the onlookers in the film look at Luther.
15. What does the Latin word: “revoco” mean?
16. One of the most often cited Luther lines is: “Here I stand. I can do no other.” (In German, the line is: “Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nichts anders.”) When does he say this in the film?
17. In the film, Luther is shown translating the New Testament into German when he is hiding out at the Wartburg castle. This achievement is identified as one of Luther’s main achievements. Why does he think translating the New Testament into the vernacular (look this word up!) is important? To whom does the film show Luther giving a copy of his German New Testament?
18. Although the film tells the story of the Protestant Reformation as an exceedingly private one about Luther’s faith, for example, it also depicts the political struggle between the Emperor Charles V and the so-called Electors (there are seven of them) that was one of the main issues at the time. What is the significance of the four **secular** Electors defying the Emperor in the scene at Augsburg?