

Delving into the Luther enigma

LUTHER'S 95 theses changed the face of the world as we know it. Nicodemus Productions Symphony on Luther, an art and drama extravaganza based on Luther himself and on reaction to Luther by a number of artists — dance, painting, music (and to some extent, the lighting designs of Michael Poyner, which are quite an impromptu reaction at times) may not change the world but they may throw an eccentric into the conventional workings of the theatre.

It was indeed a highly controversial experience and at this point let me urge, with all the fervour I can command, for anyone with the slightest interest in art or drama to insist on a revival somewhere, sometime, of this unique and original innovative production, if only to see and be amazed by the towering tour de force of Luther himself — the only speaking role in the production and a tormented, soul-torn, agony-ridden conscience pacing around the plethora of locations and erections.

Betimes Luther becomes a pulpiteer, counterpointed by a webspun globe representing the Roman Church, a stage that seems suspended, halfway and tormentedly, between heaven and hell.

Elsewhere galleries host a puzzling ongoing kaleidoscope of old masters, occasionally offering a clue, occasionally a making a statement.

These accepted, expert-desig-

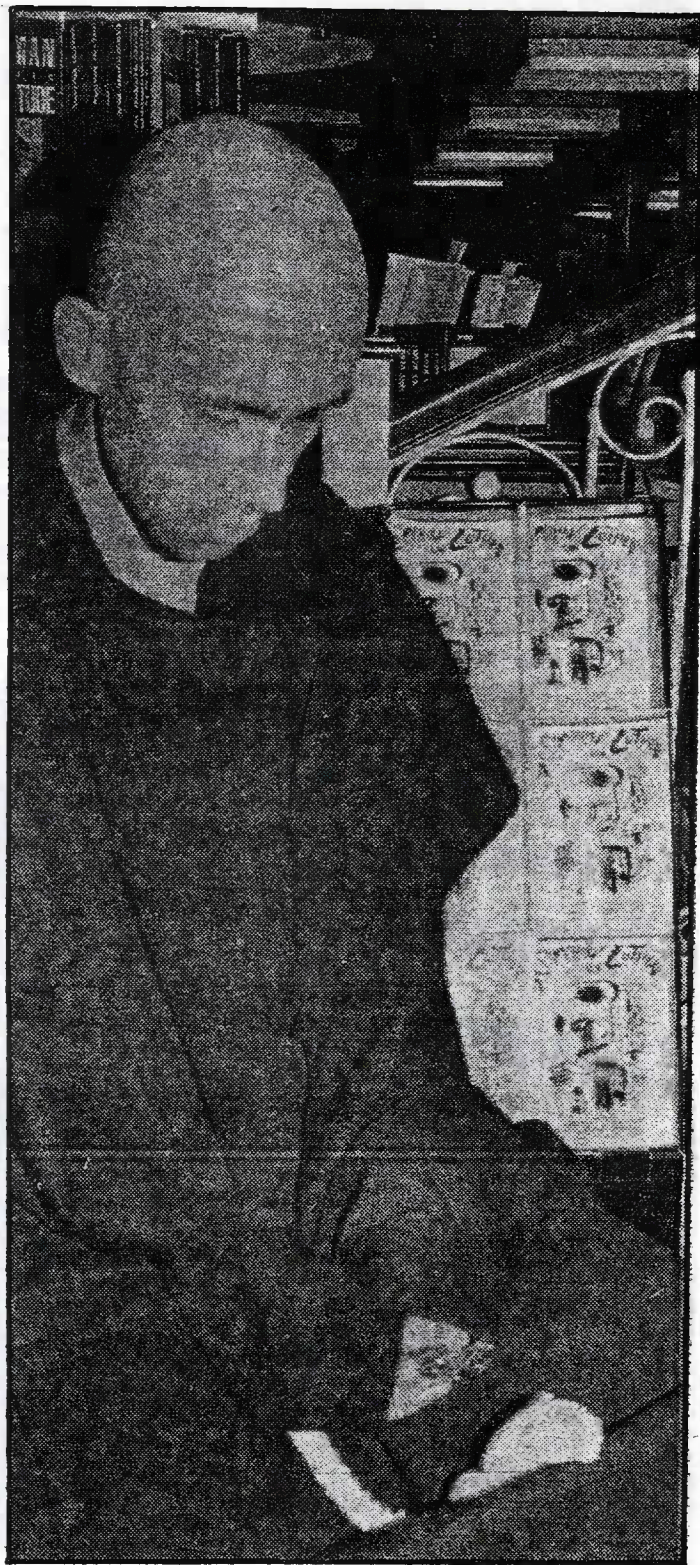
nated works of art are projected in contrast to the living artist who is painting a visible and motivated response to the agonised, reflective, shocked, agonised, tranquil, passionate, argumentative Luther and his quandry.

The dancers react in much the same way as do the musicians, enhancing a fusion of really integrated art, but one has to be remarkably quick to catch many of the illusions and the allusions, so fast does the reaction come from all quarters. Forget about the eitheological content — theological argument doesn't seem so very important in the "artistic" content of this production so, although some acquaintance with Wittenberg, Rome, Aquinas, Erasmus and a smattering of theology as well as Reformation history and art could conceivably be a help to those who would be enlightened.

For there is nothing theologically or chronologically controversial here although, as it so true of Luther himself, there will assuredly be those who misunderstand that Luther, reformer as he was (and largely unwillingly so) was truly driven from conscience and the necessity of conscience to challenge what he genuinely believed to be great wrongs.

Yet Luther was, ironically, at all times a staunch upholder of the Church and of order and discipline and established Christian doctrine, as much at odds with heresy and the Pope or the Emperor or any divine.

Thus, he had little time for the revolutionaries and the self-appointed interpreters who



DEEP THOUGHTS: David Worden in his role as Luther

jumped on his reluctant band wagon

So what of the esoteric, simulate rape scene? It proved so inconclusive as to whether what was being depicted was a symbolic rape of a nun figure or of the Church itself it almost passed unnoticed and, in the event, so abstract that the representation didn't seem to matter at all and damn near impossible to work out — a classic Lutheran case where effect

appears more important than cause.

Yet, beneath (or above) all this, Luther is essentially a play about communication and all of the reaction in it is about communication or maybe in the end, it is about lack of communication, or even, dare one suggest, about deliberate misinformation. In the finale, may be the key to where and why the Reformation may have gone wrong.