

Luther on the stage

IF I told you that a Belfast academic, specialist in 18th-century drama, had written a play about Martin Luther, would you run for the hills? Would you expect a long boring treatise on the Reformation?

Well, according to Dr. Paul Whitley of Queen's University, "Belfast has not seen anything like it before."

Symphony For Luther is the working title of the production Dr. Whitley is writing in collaboration with Nico Andreas Hellea. It is not a play as such, but aims "to create an area wherein the arts merge together," says Dr. Whitley.

"We are having an actor playing Luther who speaks while the other 'characters' are played by dancers, visual artists and musicians who respond to Luther through their own mediums."

Drama, he suggests, must not simply be the spoken word — it can be as vivid and interesting when a painter paints. "In the actual process of painting, the artist is making a statement."

The play has seven characters, representing Luther's father, his wife, God, the Pope, the Emperor and Luther's mentor and teacher, Staupitz.

This ambitious project

will be using performance art to deal with the subject of Martin Luther, and Dr. Whitley is aware of the problems this poses for an audience.

"Perhaps the audience may be slightly confused at the beginning, but we hope by the end of the play, they will see the conception we are putting forward.

"The message is that Luther was an important man in what he changed but he was equally a man and never sure of what he was doing. The changes he brought about went beyond him."

"How do you link together one mode of art and another? How can the spoken word and music and visual art equal and answer each other?"

"We are hoping to show that they can and do, and that a total experience can be formed from the whole," Dr. Whitley explained.

The producers intend to involve the whole theatre in the staging of the play. There will be six stages, with something happening at each point, and the choir will sit in the audience.

"The audience will sit in the Arts Theatre and will be shown many things happening at the same time. Luther is only a part of that. What he says holds the whole thing together."

The production will run in

the Arts for eight nights from June 22.

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