

WILLIAM TEMPLE AND 'THE LAST JUDGMENT'

by Chris Tutt

I RECENTLY came across an interesting reference to Spohr in an unusual source. I have had an opportunity of reading *William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury: His Life and Letters* by F.A. Iremonger. William Temple lived from 1881 to 1944 and for the last two-and-a-half years of his life was the Archbishop of Canterbury. There are several biographies of Temple and this one was written in 1948 by Frederick Iremonger who was Chaplain to William Temple when Archbishop of York and later became Dean of Lichfield.

Temple came from a privileged background and entry into the higher reaches of the Church of England was a probability from the start. His father, Frederick Temple, had also been Archbishop of Canterbury. William was educated at Rugby and Balliol College, Oxford, and then became a Fellow of Queen's, lecturing in Philosophy. However, at Oxford among his many interests he showed increasing concern about social conditions in contemporary Britain. He took an active part in an Oxford Mission to Bermondsey in South London. He was ordained and during the First World War he was Rector of St. James's, Piccadilly. He supported the Allied cause in the war but often warned against the spirit of mindless hatred of the enemy.

Temple rapidly established himself as one of the leading thinkers and reformers in the Church of England and in 1920 he became Bishop of Manchester. In spite of his avowed support for the Labour Party and his sympathy for the miners in the General Strike of 1926 he had become the obvious choice when a new Archbishop of York was needed in 1929. He had by this time gained an international reputation as a leading figure in the Ecumenical Movement. He took a great interest in how the German churches were reacting to Hitler's rise to power and made important contacts with leading figures in the 'Confessional' Church. Unlike some other leading figures in the Church of England he was fully aware of the threat posed by Hitler and showed great concern about the treatment of the Jews.

From his first wartime BBC broadcast in October 1939 he became a national leader who spoke for the conscience of Britain. While not agreeing with their views, he supported the civil rights of conscientious objectors. He wrote in a letter in 1943:

"There is a great deal to be said for refusing to fight, though I think myself that in this case it would be the shirking of duty. There is still more I think to be said for fighting in support of freedom and justice, but there is nothing whatever to be said for fighting ineffectively."

On Pastor Niemöller's birthday in January 1943 Temple preached at the Lutheran Church in London and thanked God that "the one effective centre of resistance to Nazi oppression in Germany had been the Christian Church"; and, like other good Europeans of repute, he was constantly watching for a chance of reaching those sections of the German people which had little sympathy with the Nazi regime and little stomach for the war.

When Cosmo Lang retired as Archbishop of Canterbury at the beginning of 1942, Temple himself thought that some of his views, particularly on social matters, would rule him out as a successor in the eyes of the Prime Minister and other members of the Government. But such was Temple's reputation and popularity in the country that he could not be ignored. Now, more than ever, he worked to a hectic schedule. Besides his many other duties he found time to write a paperback bestseller *Christianity and Social Order*. He can be seen alongside Keynes and Beveridge as an advocate of the Welfare State. Unfortunately the strain of this ceaseless activity was too much for him and he did not survive to see victory in 1945 and the election of a great reforming government.

Music was one of Temple's many interests, though one he had little time for in his later years. In Iremonger's book there are a number of quotations to illustrate the breadth of his love for music. Of

particular interest to us is the following passage, not only for Temple's own remarks, but also Iremonger's comments from nearly half a century later:

"His musical appreciation was already keen and intelligent. Every year he and his brother were taken by their mother to hear *Messiah* in the Albert Hall and to many good concerts. When he was 15 the three of them attended a performance of the Bach Mass in B minor at the Queen's Hall, and his mother laughed at the suggestion of a friend that such music 'was rather stiff for the boys.' On 31st May 1900 — the day on which the school 'heard of the fall of Pretoria' — he comes straight from the chapel to write

'The Last Judgment was very beautiful, but the bass soloist had not enough power; he was quite nice, but the long air "The Day of Wrath is near" requires a big voice. The beauty and tenderness of the chords struck me more than ever. I wonder if you remember the passage "Then come, Lord Jesus"? It is like this [an accurate transcription of the score follows]. The chord on "come" — E \flat , A \flat , D \sharp , C \flat , F \sharp — is as lovely a thing as I have heard. The passage is a quartet of eight parts. Spohr's trick of throwing in a minor sixth just before the common major chord at the end is very effective, as e.g. in "Holy, Holy, Holy", where just before the final chord of E major, he puts in C \sharp .'

"Musicians today think rather differently of the diminished seventh from our ancestors, who revelled in this particular chord; but, when the state of music in the public schools half a century ago is remembered, Temple's musical taste would seem to have been considerably in advance of that of most of his contemporaries."

Iremonger also records that Temple was a great Wagner enthusiast and that during his Oxford days he often made the journey to London to attend Wagner productions at Covent Garden. His favourites among the operas were *Die Walküre* and *Tristan*. He sang regularly at that time in the Bach Choir.

Temple's breadth of interest as a music lover was just one small part of his superb grasp of many subjects and issues coupled with his warm humanity which helped to make him such an outstanding leader of the Church. Fashionable criticism of the early 20th century dismissed Spohr as faded and outdated but there were individuals who appreciated his qualities and there were still many in Britain's churches and chapels who enjoyed his choral music. Elgar spoke warmly of Spohr and elements of Spohr's harmonic style can be found in his music. The coming generations of British composers from Vaughan Williams onwards tended to avoid like the plague any hint of Spohr-like harmony. But some open-minded listeners enjoyed the occasional performances that took place in the 1920s and 1930s of such works as the Nonet, the Third Double-Quartet and the Eighth Violin Concerto.