

Brief Evaluation of Religious Outlook

If we have to classify Cunninghame Graham's religious outlook according to his explicit statements on the matter, we must call him a reverent agnostic. But we slip too easily from our shoulders the theological challenge of his life, if we leave him thus.

Does this not fit him?

"Listen, O isles, unto me; and hearken, ye people, from far; The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath He made mention of my name. And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath He hid me....."¹.

Is there not found in him a likeness to that Son of Man, out of whose mouth went a two-edged sword?² What does his utterance bring to mind if not the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God³, whose penetration is decisive:

"For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow....."⁴.

I would offer the following assessment of his religious outlook.

To Cunninghame Graham, the Father seemed too removed from life to be offered more than acknowledgement. Yet human beings had to be castigated for the encroachment of human pride on His sole dignity and majesty. Jesus Christ was the ideal of all life, a phenomenon. He was in the end but a subject for meditation and longing. The Holy Spirit, whom dull human eyes, Cunninghame Graham once said, perceived only as a white dove, is scarcely mentioned. Yet to the Holy Spirit, teaching truth, unmasking sham, claiming an unqualified offering of life, he was alert and obedient. In grace, compassion and indignation of life, Cunninghame Graham was a knight of the Holy Spirit.

In every age, the Church has its blind spots, especially a divided Church which is denied the corrective influence afforded by fellowships in different lands which are under different pressures. The younger churches have contributed much in our day to the social thinking of the Church as a whole. They had been the deprived ones. They knew what it was like to be made to play second fiddle. The Church in this century had been brought thus to a fresh understanding of the Gospel. The Redeeming God is not dissociated from the Creating God. Redemption is for the creation. Christ's Saviourhood is no longer narrowed and individualised. The Atonement is known to affect the whole of social and national life. The Holy Spirit is active in the world, not to guide pilgrims through this weary land of life, but joyously to claim and transform individual, communal and international relationships, and prepare the earth for its Bridal Day. When the context and full-bodied thrill of redemption are missing from the Church's testimony, what wonder is it that there will be those who reject its message in the name of truth and compassion? I am convinced that with Cunninghame Graham it was not a

¹ Isaiah, 49: vv. 1 and 2.

² Revelation, 1: v. 16.

³ Ephesians, 6: v. 17.

⁴ Hebrews, 4: v. 12.

matter of his will proving to be not up to his understanding. In all honesty he could not see the relevance of the Church's life and Gospel to those things which the Holy Spirit secretly laid upon his soul.

He was by so much an impoverished witness to righteousness. The sense he had of life's futility went deep, and continually placed a query mark against his battle for the right. That his life was dedicated was not enough. He needed to know the persistent love of the Father for His creation, the effective deliverance accomplished by the Son, and the flamboyant adventurousness of the Spirit.

This deprivation is relevant, too, to his social outlook.

There is a certain emptiness in the life of a man who is not able to see the relevance of the Church's life and Gospel to those things which the Holy Spirit secretly laid upon his soul. He is a man who is not able to see the relevance of the Church's life and Gospel to those things which the Holy Spirit secretly laid upon his soul. He is a man who is not able to see the relevance of the Church's life and Gospel to those things which the Holy Spirit secretly laid upon his soul.

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