

course, out of a desire to impose his own will, out of a desire for conformity); he regulates the position of the various activities in the Church because this Church is the Body of Christ and should represent outwardly what it is inwardly, one body working together with all its variety of gifts to the one end, which is the end of Christ himself, the glory of God: 'There are different gifts, but one Spirit; different services, but one Lord; different activities, but the same God who works all in all' (1 Cor. 12:4).

For this, finally, is the relationship of the various orders in the Church—not distinction, but harmony. We distinguish in order to unite. And the final unity is that of God Himself. The people of God are chosen in order that through them and in them God may take possession of the whole of creation. This has been achieved in principle in Christ: 'He is the first-born of every creature, for all things were created in him . . . and all subsists in him . . . For God has been pleased to make fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all beings to him' (Col. 1:15-20). What is true in principle in Christ is to be achieved in practice, in reality, through Christ's Body which is the Church. And when this is achieved, 'Then shall be the end, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God and the Father . . . He must rule until all things are put under his feet; but when all things are subjected to him, then he, the Son, will subject everything to God, in order that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 12:24-8). Our Lord is the fulness of God, so to speak—the fulness of the godhead dwells in him, and God would be incomplete without him. But the Church is the fulness of Christ, so that through us God Himself is completed: 'He is the head, the Church is his Body, the fulness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:23). This is the glorious destiny of the people of God, in all its variety of ministries: 'Some are apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and teachers, to bind together this holy people for the service of God; to build up the body of Christ, to make up one perfect man according to the measure of the fulness of Christ' (Eph. 4:11-13).

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Ushaw

DR ALEXANDER GEDDES

1737-1802

'Why might not the Hebrews have their mythology, as well as other nations? and why might not their mythologists contrive or improve a system of cosmogony, as well as those of Chaldaea, or Egypt, or

Greece, or Italy, or Persia, or Hindostan?—If we may suppose, then, that the Hebrew historiographer invented his *Hexhaemeron*, or six days creation, to enforce more strongly the observance of the Sabbath; which I think much more probable; may we not, in like manner, consider his history of the Fall as an excellent mythologue, to account for the origin of human evil, and of man's antipathy to the reptile race? Regarded in this light, it will require no straining effort to explain it: it will be perfectly coherent in all its parts: it will be attended with no absurd consequence: it will give no handle to the enemies of religion to turn it into ridicule. The serpent will then be a real *mythological* serpent; will speak, like the beasts and birds in Pilpay or Esop; will be a most crafty envious animal, that seduces the woman from her allegiance to GOD; will be punished, accordingly, with degradation from his original state; and an everlasting enmity established between him and the woman's seed.—The respective punishments of the woman and of the man, will be, in the same sense, real; and the whole chapter an incomparable example of oriental mythology.—Reader! dost thou dislike this mode of interpretation? Embrace any other that pleases thee better. Be only pleased to observe, that the authority of Scripture is by no mean weakened by this interpretation.' (Bible, vol. I, Preface p. xf.)

The above passage, typical enough of Dr Geddes's way of thinking, reads in a very everyday manner today, but it was published in 1792, and together with much of Geddes's biblical work caused pain and astonishment to many orthodox Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, at the time, especially coming from one who openly proclaimed himself a Catholic priest. After publishing a *Prospectus* in 1786, Dr Geddes (who had been given the LL.D. degree by the University of Aberdeen in 1780) published the first volume of his translation of the Bible from the Hebrew, with copious critical notes, in 1792, and an *Address to the Public on the Publication of the First Volume* in 1793, where he writes (p. 2): 'It is well known, that my primary motive for engaging in so arduous an enterprise was to give a *tolerable*, and, if I could, a *creditable* version of the H. Bible, for the use of English Catholics.' The work was never completed: only one more volume, bringing the translation to the end of Chronicles, appeared in 1797, and projected companion volumes of *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures* never got beyond the first volume, on the Pentateuch, published in 1800. These large and handsomely printed books were produced mainly through the patronage of Lord Petre, a leading Catholic of the time, and by means of a subscription list, published as an appendix to his *General Answer* (1790), which includes names from the royal family, from among the gentry, Catholic and Protestant alike, several Irish

Catholic bishops, several Anglican bishops and many Anglican divines, together with many other names both Catholic and Protestant. Geddes received much encouragement from several important Anglican scholars during that time of the dawning of the new age of biblical criticism, most notably Dr Kennicott and Dr Lowth (*Prospectus* p. 143f.), but little from his Catholic brethren, except from his cousin Bishop Geddes, coadjutor to Bishop Hay in Scotland, in the early stages (*ibid.*, p. 145). Upon the publication of the first volume of the Bible, in 1792, it was proscribed by Dr Douglass, Vicar Apostolic of the London District, in a Pastoral, in these terms: ‘. . . the Church . . . has condemned the practice of printing the said Scriptures, or any expositions of, or annotations upon the same, unless such have been severally examined and approved of by due ecclesiastical authority: hence it is incumbent upon us to warn the Faithful committed to our care against the use and reception of a certain work of this kind, as far as it has yet appeared, which is destitute of these qualities . . . [title of Geddes’s Bible follows]’ (quoted in *Letter to Dr Douglass*, p. 19). Geddes had indeed not sought an Imprimatur, but he had sent his book to Dr Douglass in July 1792, and apparently without further reply the Pastoral was issued in December; Geddes then wrote personally to Dr Douglass in January 1793 and published his *Answer* in June. Within a month he was suspended by Dr Douglass (letters appended to the *Answer*, pp. 44-6). It was a sad story of conflict, embittered by the height of the Cisalpine controversy, in which Geddes was much involved on the Cisalpine side. We will refer to this again briefly later on; but before proceeding to look at Dr Geddes’s biblical teaching, it would be well to outline his earlier career.

Alexander Geddes was born in 1737 at Arradowl in Banffshire, of Catholic parents who were small tenant farmers. At the age of fourteen he went to the junior seminary at Scalan in the Highlands, and in 1758, aged twenty-one, to the Scots College in Paris. It was while he was in Paris that he became interested in Hebrew studies, through attending the lectures of M. l’Avocat, the recently appointed professor of Hebrew at the Sorbonne. He was ordained in 1764 and sent to the mission at Dundee. The following year he became chaplain to the Earl of Traquair in Tweeddale. In 1769 he was placed in charge of the Catholic mission at Auchinhalrig in Banffshire, and remained here for eleven years. He built a new chapel and repaired the presbytery, making use of his skills, learnt in boyhood, as a carpenter and gardener. He also erected a chapel at Fochabers, and these labours brought heavy debts. About 1775 he made an ill-fated attempt to restore his finances by taking over a farm at Enzie near by, but the

venture failed and his troubles increased. In 1779 he published a volume of translations into English verse of selected Satires of Horace, of which 750 copies were sold, bringing him in £100, and apparently this work was the immediate merit which brought him the Aberdeen doctorate in the next year, besides helping to solve his financial troubles. During his time at Auchinhalrig and Fochabers he was distressed by the hostility between Catholics and Protestants in the area, and he went out of his way to make friends with the local Presbyterian ministers, and occasionally (in the words of his biographer¹) 'attended upon their ministry'. It appears that this, and no doubt also the financial affairs, aroused the indignation of Bishop Hay, who suspended Geddes in 1779. The farm at Enzie was sold up, and the parishioners by 'extravagant bidding' helped him to pay off all his debts. In 1780 he left his congregation with much sorrow, and settled in London. He was helped by Lord Traquair, and in London by Lord Petre, and it was then that he began work on his translation. He became chaplain at the Imperial Embassy chapel, until the embassy was closed, and he preached occasionally in London and celebrated privately. But soon he gave up the exercise of his priestly function, though he never for a moment abandoned his Catholic priesthood, and he now devoted himself entirely to his studies, under the patronage of Lord Petre, and the remaining twenty years of his life were spent in London and entirely occupied with writing. He died of cancer on 26 February 1802, having been absolved by a French émigré priest, M. St Martin.

Dr Geddes wrote much about the task of the biblical critic and translator, and he was a pioneer in setting out to make his text 'faithfully translated from corrected texts of the originals' (title-page to Bible), that is, to base his work upon a critical text. This is so much a commonplace today, but in his time he needed to insist upon it over and over again. His working principles may be set out under the following heads, with references to places (often one of many) where he discusses the matter.

1 The establishment of the Hebrew text by the collation of manuscripts and printed texts he regarded as the first task. In this he worked from Kennicott's collations, and used de Rossi's, which were in course of publication as he was writing (*Prospectus*, p. 20, published in 1786).

2 He was very insistent upon a proper use of the Septuagint, as a guide to the restoration of the text, and after this the other Greek versions and Origen's Hexapla (*Prospectus*, p. 23ff.), though he laments

¹ John Mason Good, *Memoirs of the life and Writings of the Reverend Alexander Geddes*: LL.D. (London 1803).

the absence of a critical edition of the Septuagint (*ibid.*, p. 38). He then considers the value of the Syriac and Arabic versions and finally 'the famous Latin Vulgate' (*ibid.*, p. 44ff.), where again he pleads for the task of a critical text of the Latin Bible (*ibid.*, p. 53). His remarks on the disputes between Catholics and Protestants on the merits of the Vulgate and the original seem very irrelevant now, but they must have been unusual at the time: 'The learned of both sides are in a fair way of being reconciled, in this one point at least . . . [for] the Catholics are ready to own that the Vulgate is not so pure a rivulet, as some of their too zealous predecessors maintained; and the Protestants as readily acknowledge that the present Hebrew text is not so untainted a source as was long believed. Thus both contribute, in different ways, towards a re-establishment of the true text. Those without hesitation correct the Vulgate by the original, where the Vulgate is evidently faulty; and these make no scruple to make use of the Vulgate in restoring the true text of the original, when the original is evidently or probably corrupt' (*ibid.*, p. 52n.).

3 His observations on 'sacred philology' are important, for at 'the revival of letters', he said, 'all being impressed with the idea, that they had before them an original [Hebrew] text', they could do no more than 'give to the words of that text . . . the best meanings they could find in such faulty lexicons as then existed. These, indeed, were gradually improved; and the true signification of many words, to which the rabbins had affixed a wrong or vague meaning, was discovered or determined, by having recourse to the Arabic and other kindred dialects, and by a more particular attention to the ancient versions' (*Proposals*, p. 1f., prefixed to the *Critical Remarks*). And in fact Geddes's *Critical Remarks* consist largely in a minute examination of the Hebrew words and Hebrew usage, which also occupies most of his *Letter to the Bishop of London* [Dr Lowth], containing queries, doubts and difficulties, published in 1787 while he was at work on his translation. His philological work is thorough: thus the discussion of the word *Elohim* (God) in the first verse of Genesis occupies over eight pages of the *Critical Remarks*, and his defence of his translation of *ruach elohim* (in v. 2) as 'a mighty wind' invokes evidence from the Targums and the Arabic version, and in a footnote there are passing philological references to Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, Swedish and Danish usages of the word for 'spirit'.

4 Another interesting principle is his insistence on the 'bare literal meaning', for his 'humble walk is that of a mere explainer, of a laborious pioneer, who endeavours to smooth the way for future commentators', and he adds: 'I have not, to my knowledge, thwarted

a single word of Holy Writ to support any one system of Religion. I have not so much as attempted, to disclose its allegories or its anagogies: but have strictly confined myself to the bare literal meaning' (*Address*, p. 2).

5 What is in these days called the distinction of literary genres in the Old Testament is a constant preoccupation of Geddes, as the citation with which this article opens shows, where the genre of mythology is affirmed. Again, in dealing with the four rivers of paradise and the site of the garden, after mentioning various theories, he adds: 'It may well be that we are labouring to find out a spot that never existed but in the creative imagination of the mythologist' (*Critical Remarks*, p. 37). And again: 'Do I believe, then, that the narrative of Genesis is not a literally true narration? or that it is in all, or many of its parts, a pure allegory? I believe neither the one nor the other: I believe it to be a most beautiful *mythos*, or philosophical fiction, contrived with great wisdom, dressed up in the garb of real history . . . and perfectly well calculated for the great and good purposes for which it was contrived; namely to establish belief of one supreme God and Creator . . .' (*ibid.*, p. 26).

6 A less satisfactory aspect of Geddes's work, where the foregoing principles have often in later times been applied, is his adoption of what his friend Charles Butler called 'the German scheme of rationalising the narrative of the Old Testament' (*Historical Memoirs of the English Catholics*, (3rd ed., 1822) vol IV, p. 418—where there is a section on Geddes, pp. 417-21). Thus, for example he is prepared to explain the plagues in Egypt in terms of 'an extraordinary inundation . . . followed by an uncommon brood of frogs, gnats . . .', or the crossing of the Red Sea ('the subject of much controversy and criticism during the last part of this century') in terms of a 'pass at Suez . . . where at this day there are shallows fordable at low water' with 'nothing miraculous in the event' (*Critical Remarks*, pp. 212 and 225).

7 On the subject of pentateuchal criticism, it is extremely interesting to read his opinions in 1792 of 'some modern writers' such as Astruc (1753) and Eichhorn (1787), within forty years of the birth of the 'documentary theory'. He thinks that the distinction of two documents in Genesis by Eichhorn, with 'a third one incorporated, which he ranks under the name of Interpolations', although he provides a list of the passages from Eichhorn, to be 'the work of fancy', but he adds: 'I am not so self-sufficient as to imagine, that I may not be in the wrong, or that they may not be right' (*Bible*,

vol. I, Preface p. xixf.). His own opinion is interesting nowadays: 'Although I am inclined to believe that the Pentateuch was reduced into its present form in the reign of Solomon, I am fully persuaded that it was compiled from ancient documents, some of which were coeval with Moses, and some even anterior to Moses. Whether all these were written records, or many of them only oral traditions, it would be rash to determine . . .' (*ibid.*, p. xix). Geddes was probably the first writer in English to publish a discussion of the new pentateuchal theories.

8 Geddes discusses at length the medium of translation: 'Two extremes were, I knew, to be equally avoided, a wild paraphrase and a servile version' (*Prospectus*, p. 126). After discussing the various existing English versions, he concludes that the five necessary qualities are faithfulness, perspicuity, elegance, uniformity and 'a particular attention to that diversity of style which characterises the different Scripture-writers' (*Prospectus*, pp. 126, 128, 129, 136-7). At the end of his preface he apologises for his perhaps too 'verbal' translation, adding, as it were with a sigh: 'The fetters of long usage are not easily broken, even when that usage is tyrannical. But the day may come, when the translator of the Bible will be as little shackled as the translator of any other ancient book' (*Bible*, vol. I, Preface p. xxii).

9 Lastly there is the question of Geddes's theory of inspiration, which he never fully worked out. The point is raised in connection with God's command to destroy the Canaanites, and he sees only one solution, 'namely, to acknowledge fairly and openly that the Jewish historians, both here and in many other places, put in the mouth of the Lord words, which he never spoke . . . But is not this, at once, giving up a point, for which we have been so long and strenuously contending, against the opponents of revealed religion; the absolute and universal inspiration of the Hebrew writers? It is, certainly in some measure, giving up that contested point . . .' (*Bible*, vol. II, Preface p. iii). And he refers to his own teaching of 'partial and putative inspiration' without fully explaining it, except by his rendering of 2 Tim. 3: 16 as 'Every Scripture, which is divinely inspired, is also useful . . .', suggesting that this text does not mean that all Scripture is inspired. (It should be noted that the Vulgate, but the Greek less easily, is patient of this interpretation, and this rendering appears clearly in the margin of the RSV: Douay leaves the matter open, as does the Latin.) From this, the often quoted remark of Charles Butler (*loc. cit.*, p. 417) that Geddes 'absolutely denied the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the sacred writings' is seen to be not entirely warranted. And Geddes added: 'The word *inspiration* must, in the

language of Paul, have a different meaning from that which our divines have affixed to it' and he states that with regard to the Hebrew writings he cannot believe in their 'absolute inspiration' (Bible, vol. II, Preface, pp. xi-xii). It is probable, however, that what Geddes was striving to demolish was a theory of mechanical word-for-word inspiration of the sacred writers, and indeed such an opinion, if unorthodox at his time, would not be proscribed today.

Here we should glance at Geddes's troubles with ecclesiastical authority, which were more closely connected with the Gallican question than with biblical problems. It was the time of the problem of the Oath of Allegiance of 1774 and the First Relief Act of 1778, followed by the Gordon Riots ('No Popery') in 1780. The question of the 'deposing power' of the Pope was being discussed, and strenuously denied by Geddes and his friends of the Cisalpine Club. Geddes strenuously distinguished Catholicism (and even Roman Catholicism) from 'Popery', which for him stood for papal control in political affairs. It is not for us here to go into this aspect of Geddes's troubles, but it should be remembered that his Bible was proscribed together with Sir John Throckmorton's Cisalpine tract, and that the greater part of Geddes's *Letter to Dr Douglass* is concerned with Throckmorton. Similarly in his *Answer to the Bishop of Comana's Pastoral Letter* (Bishop Gibson's letter), of 1790, written anonymously as by 'a Protestant Catholic' (not as quoted in DNB, Gillow and elsewhere, as by 'a Protestant Catholic') is concerned with the question of the relationship between papal and episcopal power. It is, however, worth quoting an opening remark of Geddes, commenting on the first words of the Pastoral, 'Matthew by the grace of God and of the Apostolic See': 'Bishop by the grace of the Apostolic See! It is a flagrant innovation, my Lord, in the Christian Church, and derogatory from the episcopal character; a badge of spiritual vassalage, which your brethren on the Continent begin to be ashamed to wear; and which many of them have already shaken off. The good Bishop of Pistoja and Prato has set the example, even in Italy; and there is little doubt but his example will soon be followed by other good bishops'. Amid present discussions of 'collegiality', Geddes's remark is interesting, even though it is most plainly and defiantly Gallican. The attitude of Geddes in this controversy does much to explain the friction between the Vicars Apostolic and himself, and their readiness to find his other opinions heterodox. Moreover, his refusal to seek an *Imprimatur* was connected with his claim to independence from papal control, and it will be remembered that the proscription of his translation was first of all on this ground.

Another current question upon which Geddes held a view then unacceptable and now common enough was on the relation of Scripture and Tradition. In one of his last works, *A Modest Apology for the Roman Catholics of Great Britain*, published anonymously in 1800, he examines the points in which 'we Roman Catholics' agree with, or differ from, Protestants, and here he discusses the 'Rule of Faith': 'Tradition only (said the Romanist) is the Rule of Faith.—No; (replied the Protestant) Scripture, Scripture only is the Rule of Faith' (p. 39). But now, he says, 'new, and more tenable positions' were taken up, and 'the Catholic language now was, that the *Word of God*, written or unwritten; that is, *Scripture* and *Tradition*, were together the Rule of Faith: whilst the Protestant, still contending for Scripture alone as the only Rule, yet acknowledged that the authority of primitive and universal Tradition was necessary to prove the Rule' (p. 41). So, 'both parties were agreed that the Word of God alone was the Rule of Faith' and 'there have not been wanting Roman Catholic Theologians, particularly of the Sorbonnic school, who have freely confessed, that every fundamental Article of Faith is either expressly or implicitly, contained in the written Word' (p. 42).

Lastly, Geddes's views on the vernacular in the liturgy are worth noting. The point is raised in a similar context of differences with Protestants. He says that the Roman Missal, which is, 'in general as good a model of liturgical composition as now anywhere existeth . . . need not be ashamed to appear in a vernacular dress . . . The day however, I trust, is not at a great distance, when every National Church will open her eyes to reason, and perform every part of the Divine office in the language of her own country . . .' (*ibid.*, pp. 168-70).

There is a sadness about the story of Alexander Geddes. Many writers have written disparagingly of him. None has denied his learning. His many friends loved him, though they admitted his eccentricity. He himself wrote: 'I am not ill-natured; those, who know me, know the contrary. Animated and irascible I am: but I am neither malevolent nor resentful. I may safely say that "the sun never set upon my wrath"' (*Preamble* 'addressed to the English Catholics', prefixed to his *Letter to Dr Douglass*, p. iii).

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