

one of systematic subversion of hierarchical power. I use the word *subversion* here precisely in its sense of 'turning things around from below'. How is this possible? Hierarchical power, although claiming that all power comes from above, is, in fact, dependent on assent to its power and economic support from below. It is precisely at this point of assent and economic support that Catholics need to subvert hierarchical power.

Each organizational level of the Church needs to disassociate its automatic assent and economic support from the level above it. Most particularly, such assent needs to be disassociated from the Vatican in order to begin to construct a more organic sense of local church, diocesan and national churches. Religious orders also need to disassociate themselves from Vatican power by appropriating control over their own property and perhaps by defining themselves as non-canonical communities. This would imply also the forging of a new sense of international networking among themselves as an order. As assent to authority and economic support falls away from the hierarchical apex and is funnelled to the local levels, where the actual ministry of the Church is being carried on, hierarchical power, as ability to coerce, will wither on the vine. The networks that hold the church together on local, diocesan, national and international levels will begin to be redefined in a way that must take into account the integrity of the base. Perhaps, out of this process, arbitrary monarchical authority will be reshaped into constitutional government, elected by and accountable to the people.

## Reviews

**ALEXANDER GEDDES: PIONEER OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM**, by Reginald C. Fuller. *The Almond Press, Sheffield, 1984 176 pp £6.95.*

With this long overdue publication of Reginald Fuller's Cambridge doctoral thesis, the place of Alexander Geddes (1737–1802) in the history of biblical criticism is at last clearly established.

His cousin, John Geddes (1735–1799), after their early years together, followed a very different path. He studied in Rome, became rector of the Scots College at Valladolid, and returned to Scotland in 1781 as a bishop. He soon became a prominent figure in the social and literary world of 'Enlightenment' Edinburgh, attending Lord Monboddo's famous supper parties and developing a close friendship with Robert Burns. He also travelled a great deal, mostly on foot, visiting his far-flung flock. His name is appropriately remembered today by a society which brings Edinburgh's Catholic intellectuals together regularly, over a bottle or two of wine, to discuss matters theological.

The two cousins corresponded amicably over many years, for all the divergence of their lives. Alexander Geddes was the son of a small tenant farmer in the Enzie of Banff.

*Pace* Dr Fuller, this is not "the Highlands of Scotland". It runs along the coast of the Moray Firth, just inland from Buckie. The "Old Faith" remained strong because the land-owning Gordon family kept it until 1728. The Geddes family must have been somewhat unusual because they read the Bible at home, and in the King James version. At the age of seven Alexander went to a school run by a laird for his sons and the sons of his tenants. When he was fourteen he went to the seminary in Glenlivet, much more remote, much less famous than it is today, and certainly in the Highlands of Banffshire. In 1758 he was sent to Paris, to complete his studies for the priesthood. The Scots College (which David Hume enjoyed visiting) was a very independent, Gallican-minded place, heavily involved in Jacobite affairs. The move from the discreet and subdued Catholicism of his native Banffshire to the Paris from which Voltaire had recently fled must have opened his eyes. On being ordained, however, Geddes returned to Scotland. He worked briefly on a parish in Dundee before being appointed domestic chaplain to the Stuarts at Traquair (near Peebles). He eventually had to leave because the dowager countess (a convert) found his "free and easy ideas and lack of respect for Rome" unacceptable. He then spent eleven years, perhaps the happiest of his life, running a parish near his birthplace. He built chapels, wrote poetry, translated Horace, dined with the gentry, and made such friends with the local clergy both Episcopalian and Presbyterian that his bishop eventually manoeuvred him out. He was an "ecumenist" *avant la lettre*. In 1781, having been offered no new appointment, he moved to London, permanently as it turned out. He was lucky to have the patronage and friendship of Lord Petre. That aligned him inevitably with the lay Catholics who were clashing increasingly with the new breed of protoultramontane bishops. But as he began to get more deeply into biblical studies, and to write about the story of the Fall as a "myth", and so on, Geddes found himself suspected of unorthodoxy. With the publication in 1792 of the first volume of his translation of the Bible (Genesis to Joshua) these suspicions deepened. In 1793 he was forbidden to exercise his priestly ministry. When he died, nine years later, the bishop refused permission for a public requiem. By that time, of course, Geddes was established as one of the finest biblical scholars of the day.

It is a sad story, in some ways. The Catholic Church has had a long struggle with the Enlightenment. The problems are still with us, even after "Liberal Catholicism", "Modernism", and more recent developments. That Geddes is a significant figure has already been suggested, in these pages, by Bernard Aspinwall (*New Blackfriars*, July 1977). Dr Fuller's sober and documented monograph, which includes illustrations as well as a bibliography of published and unpublished writings, with directions about where to locate copies, definitively establishes the importance of Alexander Geddes. He is a founder of modern biblical studies in Britain (as T.K. Cheyne noted in 1893, in *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*). And he is the only other Catholic scholar besides Richard Simon who represented biblical criticism between Erasmus and Lagrange.

FERGUS KERR OP

**SEASONS OF THE SPIRIT—Readings through the Christian Year; selected and edited by George Every, Richard Harries and Kallistos Ware. SPCK. £7.50**

There is one piece in this book in which the writer is being taken round a monastery library by the abbot. He discovers that the books are, for the abbot, not so much examples of "influences and development" which have shaped man's destiny, as "books which were useful for life in the Spirit". Their authors were "fathers and teachers who had become friends". Such is the key to unlock the rich treasury of prose, poetry and meditations to be found in this anthology. It is a wonderfully catholic collection; sweeping across the centuries from the early Fathers to contemporary poets, and even including an extract from the *Church Times*! It embraces well-known writers like Augustine, Mother Julian and Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, as well as