

ified by the accident of death" (*Orthodoxy*, p. 83). Dunn may glory in the liberal's exercise of liberty, but these "strong" could be making a tyrannical claim to an exclusive possession of the Spirit. The Catholic has to take tradition seriously because he takes Pentecost seriously, but that no more means merely repeating what was said in the past than does democracy mean slavishly repeating your neighbour's opinions.

So, Dunn rejects the possibility of an "orthodoxy" in the sense of a "final expression of Christian truth whose meaning is unequivocal". And I agree with him, but he has replaced it with a minimalist orthodoxy, an orthodoxy of the lowest common denominator. Obviously there is no space in this review to explore what a Catholic might mean by orthodoxy but I would suggest that it might be defined not so much in terms of the minimum that one must say as the maximum that one cannot deny. One is orthodox not so much by saying the right thing as by refusing to say the wrong thing. No theology is capable of including all the insights of the New Testament, and in that sense every theology is inadequate. Some of us may be primarily inspired by Paul or by John or even, sad to say, by the Pastoral Epistles. That is fine provided that our interpretation of the New Testament does not explicitly exclude or refuse what it is unable to appropriate. An orthodox theol-

ogy is thus by definition open beyond itself and can make no claim to be final or complete. It is surely a characteristic of heresy to refuse whatever does not fit into its system. The great conciliar definitions have nearly always had this function of protecting theology from becoming trapped by the limitations of any single system. Dunn points out that one of the earliest heresies, Ebionism, was essentially conservative: "Ebionism was rejected because in a developing situation where Christianity had to develop and change, it did not" (p. 244). Now Dunn himself provides the justification for such conservatism by making the "unifying strand", "the canon within the canon", the sole criterion of acceptable diversity and thus giving one the excuse for rejecting anything in the later writings of the New Testament that goes beyond this minimum. The Ebionites would have opted for a rather smaller minimum than Dunn, but they would have been delighted with his arguments. In the end Dunn is just as frightened of pluralism as he *thinks* Catholics are, but he avoids the real problems by advocating toleration of others. If we really are to face up to the challenge of diversity in the New Testament then it will only be by accepting that our canon is the whole of the New Testament, and not any canon within the canon.

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE O.P.

**EXPLORATIONS IN THEOLOGY 1** by D. E. Nineham. *SCM Press, London 1977*  
pp. 212 £3.95

**EXPLORATIONS IN THEOLOGY 2** by C. F. Evans, *SCM Press, London 1977*,  
pp. 198 £3.95

These two volumes, the first of a new series, are collections of papers by Dennis Nineham and Christopher Evans. Both collections focus on New Testament criticism and its implications for theology in general. The eleven pieces in Evans's collection include a series of four lectures on the Passion narratives of the Gospels and a thoughtful essay on parable as a mode of discourse. Of Nineham's eleven articles, only one is previously unpublished: "Schweitzer Revisited," a substantial reappraisal of the achievement and importance of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The rest are, according to the publishers, "saved from likely oblivion in relatively inaccessible pamphlets, journals or other

collections," but a three-part study of "Eye-witness Testimony and the Gospel Tradition" first appeared in the widely accessible *Journal of Theological Studies*, while an article on "The use of the Bible in Modern Theology" and a very illuminating study of the genealogy in Matthew were originally published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*.

Perhaps the chief interest of Nineham's collection, then, lies not so much in the content of the individual papers as in the record they provide of the evolution of his thought during the twenty year period which those papers span. Indeed, the two volumes together well illustrate the developments of an important strain of Biblical

criticism and academic theology during the last quarter century or so, from the cautious optimism of the 50's to the rather self-conscious radicalism of the present, from let us say, Dodd and Taylor to *The Myth of God Incarnate*.

For Evans, critical study of the New Testament still essentially undergirds the proclamation of the Church. His brisk study of "Hermeneutics" shows that, for him, exegesis and interpretation, "the meaning of the text then and its meaning now" (p. 71), may be at times uneasy bed-fellows, but the former has not yet filed for divorce.

Nineham has, of course, also wrestled with the problem of delineating the meaning of a text in its own time and of relating that to its meaning for our time. He has, however, come to the view that "the dilemma is an unreal one and the anxiety unnecessary" (p. 152), for it is the interpreter's task simply to present the thought of the New Testament documents in all its pastness. The value of this activity seems to lie in the beneficial effects for "our spiritual progress" of "passing over", "that is, passing over to, and living again, earlier periods of our own lives, individual and corporate, and the lives of other groups and other ages" (pp. 162-63). This means that the New Testament scholar must "explore the nature of New Testament Christianity in the same impartial spirit in which Malinowski investigated the religion of the Trobriand Islanders or Evans-Pritchard that of the Azande." The scholar must, then, approach the text without assuming "the occurrence of a unique, once for all, divine intervention in New Testament times...unless and until its necessity has been clearly demonstrated. No other procedure could really claim to be an appeal to history" (pp. 160-61).

That position has a history of its own. Perhaps the most important paper in Evans's volume is his inaugural lecture at Durham in 1960, "Queen or Cinderella." In it, he argues that theology is "unable to function on her own, and is always driven to look for a partner before she can dance to full effect" (p. 86). After centuries of dancing with philosophy, theology switched in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to a new partner, history, and in the process herself helped to create critical historical method. By 1960, however, there

was reason to think that the affair might be running its course, for the Gospel "escapes a purely historical description, and the historical method does not suffice to penetrate to its heart" (p. 99). Where to look for a new partner was, however, a problem, as philosophy showed no interest in taking up the torch again.

Nineham's volume contains a response to this lecture, first published in 1975 and entitled "A Partner for Cinderella?" In it, he advances the claims of the sociology of knowledge as a suitable candidate, for sociology will tell theology that "she must learn to contextualise any statement on any subject whatsoever with the question: 'Says who?'" since "the meaning of any set of words is relative to the historical situation and cultural context of the person who speaks or writes them" (p. 139).

The tension between exegesis and interpretation has at last become intolerable, and Nineham, in sharp reaction against the proponents of Biblical theology and salvation history, who claimed to offer a method of containing that tension, has been driven more and more to emphasise the pastness, the historical particularity, of the events and books of the New Testament. It is, then, natural that he should seek alliance with the historical relativism of the sociology of knowledge.

Nearly two decades have passed since Evans wrote his inaugural lecture, and, despite minor flirtations, theology, or at least that important part of it that Nineham represents, hasn't yet managed to seduce a new partner. Instead the old dance has become wilder and more abandoned. Or is theology simply beginning to lose her balance because she has, after all, been dancing all this time with only one good leg? That is, theology, for Nineham, appears to be a function of, if not co-extensive with, Biblical criticism, to the virtual disregard of Church and tradition. Indeed, his attitude to the development of that tradition is dismissive, if not frivolous. After all, "those essentially late-Hellenistic constructions, the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation" (p. 139) were developed in a period "of relative cultural stability and also relative cultural homogeneity" and "in the Western world to which Christianity spread, ... no philosophical tradition serviceable to a theist, was available except the one actually employed"

(p. 135).

Nineham, then, demonstrates the not wholly surprising conclusion that, if Scripture is approached with a suspension of faith and disregard of tradition, it can be read in a way quite different from that in which faith has traditionally read it. In the process he raises real and important

questions about the nature of the interpreter's task, but surely it would pay us all to think through the relation of Church, Scripture, and tradition before we pack our bags for the Trobriand Islands.

PAUL PARVIS O.P.

**LOVE IN PRACTICE**, by Ernesto Cardenal, translated by Donald D. Walsh.  
*Search Press, pp. 265 £4.95*

These commentaries from the Third World are an accusation against affluent Christianity. The message of our Gospel has been screwed up: when God sent his Word through Jesus the liberator, it was 'good news'; the earth was God's gift to all men, and though it had been stolen by a few exploiters and oppressors, it would soon be held in common again. The Apostles rejoiced in this socialism as the kingdom of God spread. Jesus taught them that sin (selfishness) isolated man from God's family: no one could be a child of God while he took his brother's share as his own. God wanted not ritual and sacrifice but a change of mentality; what mattered was the Spirit working through man's relation to man. Love one another was his law, and his prayer was for justice, for his kingdom to come on earth.

Over the centuries this teaching has been screwed up by false prophets who have maintained the status quo: solidarity with the real chosen race (the poor) has weakened; we stand by as they suffer hunger and torture, as they are afflicted by the leprosy of our greed, or enslaved by our monetary system. When we say all will be well for you in heaven, our word is shit. We may share the same eucharist, but can sheep and wolf be of the same family? In spite of Christ's new exodus, golden calves abound; others lose faith in brotherhood crying, what can I do? A Christianity not working for social change has lost its salt, the sword is blunted. We have become 'bad news'.

The early disciples' mentality survives among the peasant population of Ernesto Cardenal's parish in Solentiname who live from small crops and fishing. Like the Pal-

estine of Christ's day, their country is oppressed. But they do not ask God to do what men should accomplish, though it is the reading of the Gospel that made them radicals. Till Cardenal arrived they were apathetic about religion; he brought them true faith, a new genesis, the Word which did not deceive. Their community (scattered through many islands) was drawn together, their creativity developed in painting and woodcarving, and they recovered hope as they witnessed the power of the Spirit working through man to change reality, hope for the Revolution. The mystical body of Christ is more tangible in this community where each family takes turns after Mass to cook for all present and then stay long into the afternoon chatting, children from different islands playing together. The Mass was central to their life, but these gatherings were warm, joyful, unsolemn.

This book is more than a collection of dialogues held in place of the homily on the Sunday Gospel. We glimpse life in the community, beautiful tropical settings, effects of weather on the lake, family relationships, leading personalities, visitors, significant events elsewhere, and the constant shadow of repression in Somoza. Their insights shame trained theologians as the Spirit speaks through them. The language is colourful and spontaneous, direct and enriched by their splendid surroundings and their experiences; the uncensored language they use at home rather than pious, inhibited speech. Mostly they speak of love: for them theology is for liberation, and liberation is love in practice.

JOHN LYONS