

ETERNITY IN THEIR HEARTS

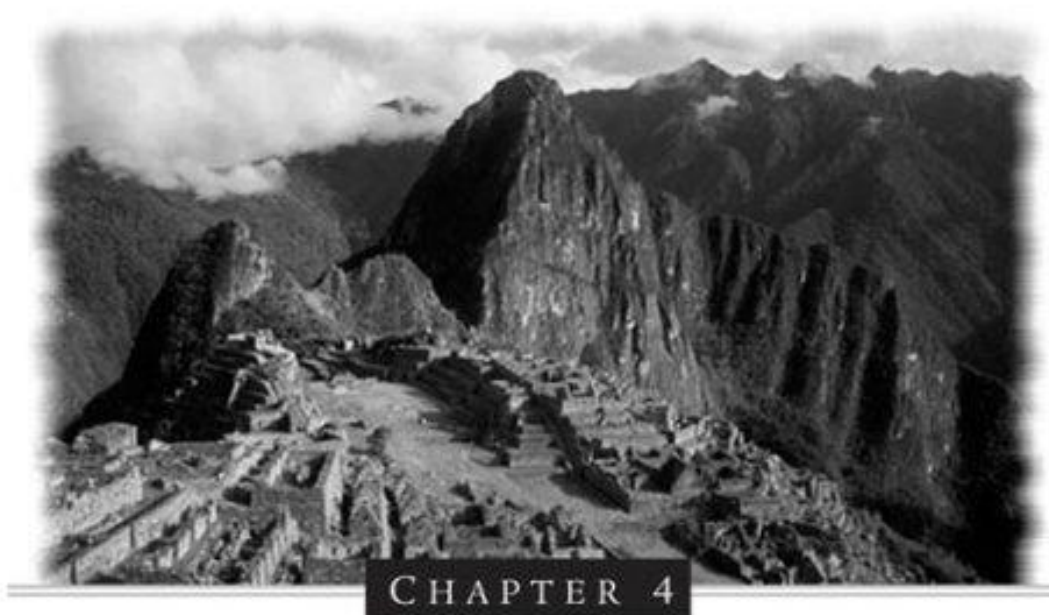
MORE THAN 230,000 SOLD

ETERNITY IN THEIR HEARTS



Startling Evidence of Belief in the One True God
in Hundreds of Cultures Throughout the World

DON RICHARDSON



Scholars with Strange Theories

In the preceding chapters, I have spoken only of patriarchs, apostles and Christian missionaries encountering the worldwide phenomenon of what could perhaps be called “native monotheism.” By now readers are surely asking, “Are not scholars of the secular academic world aware of the phenomenon?” And if they are, what sense do they make of it?

The answers to these questions form one of the most interesting chapters in the early history of anthropology and ethnology.

First, some background.

The nineteenth century was a period characterized by a passionate search for the origins of anything and everything. Much of the excitement arose from a general expectation that a theory which had been incubating for centuries in certain schools of philosophy might at last provide a key to all mysteries. The theory was labeled variously as “materialistic transformism,” “development” or “evolution,” with the latter term winning prominence.

When Charles Darwin applied and extended evolutionary principles to show how diverse biological forms could have emerged from simpler forms, the excitement increased. Other thinkers, working more or less concurrently with Darwin, hoped that principles of evolution would enable them to unlock mysteries of another kind of phenomena—the origins of human society, culture and religion. How did this particular group of scholars propose to explain the origin of something so complex as religion, for example, on an evolutionary model?

First, they dismissed the Bible's claim that the first religion to appear on Earth was a monotheistic faith—a faith which the one true God has confirmed since antiquity with successive revelations.

Nor did they accept another biblical insistence, that spiritism and polytheism in all their forms are “false” religions resulting from man's perverse attempts to remold the original “true” religion after his own misguided preference. In other words evolutionists erased distinctions between “true” and “false” religion as scientifically meaningless. Lumping all religions in the same crucible, they advanced a bold hypothesis: that the very religions the Bible calls “false” originated first!

For example, an Englishman named Edward B. Tylor theorized, in a two-volume work called *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, that the idea of a human “soul” must have been the natural seed thought from which all other religious concepts evolved.^[1] Ancient savages, Tylor suggested, imagined that they had “souls” while wondering at two groups of biological problems: sleep, ecstasy, illness and death on one hand, and dreams and visions on the other. The idea of “soul” was reinforced as savages noticed their reflections in water or their own shadows—apparent extensions of themselves. Dreaming, they saw themselves in places where, upon waking, they knew they had not been—at least not in their *bodies*.

Once primitives got used to thinking of themselves as possessing souls, Tylor continued, it dawned upon them that other entities—animals, trees, rivers, mountains, the sky and even forces of nature—might be similarly endowed. Thus did spiritism (Tylor called it “animism”) come to birth—the first religion!

Ages later, said Tylor, a new phenomenon emerged in some human societies—stratification of classes! Human aristocracies ruling over peasants suggested aristocracies of “gods” ruling over run-of-the-mill souls and spirits. Thus polytheism, in Tylor's model, emerged from spiritism—but only where the social phenomenon of stratification of classes prompted it!

Still later, some human aristocracies experienced a further metamorphosis: one aristocrat was fortunate enough to be exalted above his peers as a monarch. Once again, theologically precocious minds projected this latest social development over their vision of the supernatural world. Result: One member of the local pantheon of gods began to gain stature above his fellow deities as a budding “supreme god.” Thus monotheism, said Tylor, gradually evolved out of polytheism—but only in areas where the social phenomenon of monarchy suggested it!^[2]

At least four notions were implicit in Tylor's evolutionary model. First, there was no longer anything very mysterious about religion; religion's natural origin and subsequent evolutionary development had now been scientifically explained. Second, since monotheism marked the final stage in religion's evolution, religion had now reached the end of a dead-end street. Third, further developments in human society were already dictating the next step for people who wanted to stay on the crest of evolution's wave: abandon religion with its now defunct God, gods or spirits.

Was it not more sensible, if one must trust in something, simply to trust in the

evolutionary process itself? Anything which could “create” spirits, gods and even a God and then outmode them must be greater than they!

What, then, was the fourth notion implicit in Tylor’s theory? It was the one which would make it possible to test the validity of Tylor’s thesis by field research. If Tylor was correct, primitive societies would be devoid of monotheistic presuppositions, since class stratification and the later concept of a monarchy had not yet developed to prompt the notion of monotheism.

Drawn by the impressive elegance of Tylor’s theory, dozens of notable scholars gave him their initial support. Probably the most detailed documentation of what followed is found in the writings of Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, an Austrian Catholic priest who was both a professor at Vienna University and the editor of *Anthropos*, a scholarly scientific journal. For example, in his *Origin and Growth of Religion*, Schmidt wrote:

[Tylor’s theory] with its crushing weight of facts, its smooth and unbroken series of stages of development, and the concise, dispassionate style of its exposition, left no room for opposition . . . for the next three decades it remained “the classical theory,” . . . almost without any loss of prestige. Even [Herbert] Spencer’s ghost-theory, which immediately succeeded it, could not deprive it of pride of place A notable proof of the extent to which Tylor’s theory influenced the world is the fact that it was accepted by a number of prominent students of ethnology and religion almost without alteration. Such unqualified acceptance is to be found in . . . [3]

Schmidt went on to list 39 European and American scholars who endorsed Tylor’s theory, naming the various books and articles in which their endorsements could be found. Included in the list was Scotsman Andrew Lang, whom Schmidt describes as “Tylor’s favorite pupil.”[4] Early in his career Lang championed Tylor’s theory in its struggle against Max Muller’s competing “Nature-myth” theory. Result: “Muller . . . was forced to compromise.”[5]

Occasionally, even in the heyday of evolutionary theories like Tylor’s, a few voices at least *tried* to call attention to scattered reports that even very primitive tribes acknowledged the existence of a Creator. But scholars paid little or no attention. Schmidt describes their attitude as follows:

The doctrine of progressive Evolution mastered the mind of all Europe, . . . all framers of theories concerning fetishes, ghosts, animism, totemism and magic, if they agreed in nothing else, were at one in this, that the figure of the sky-god must be got rid of from the earliest stages of religion, as being too high and incomprehensible [for savage minds] . . . unless it was preferred to deduce him from Christian influence. The strength of this universal current of thought was so great, and the

resulting discredit into which it brought the notion of the great age of the sky-god so complete, that hardly anyone found courage to oppose it and to draw attention to the quite frequent examples of this exalted sky-god appearing among decidedly primitive peoples, where not the least trace of Christian influence was to be found.[6]

With each apparent breakthrough achieved on the basis of an evolutionary framework, some evolutionists became extremely vocal in predicting the eventual, ultimate triumph of evolution over all competing systems, especially theism. Christian clergyman-philosopher E. De Pressense, in his book *A Study of Origins*, wrote of the increasingly strident antitheism gathering momentum in his day:

I was struck . . . with the increasing vehemence of the attacks made, not only on Christian theism, but on the very foundations of spiritual religion. If we are to believe the men who come forward as the recognized organs of the scientific world, we must conclude that all that has been affirmed by the disciples of the Gospel . . . is but an empty dream. Our aspirations after a higher world are, to use the figure of one of this school, but as dead leaves whirled aloft into the air, which fall back upon the hand that flung them. Everything is to be reduced to energy, ever transmuted, but ever the same.[7]

De Pressense went on to mention:

The victory so loudly vaunted in the camps of materialism . . . Those who assert that science has pronounced a final verdict on the world of mind and of conscience . . . the promotion of a materialistic fanaticism at least as extravagant as any fanaticism of the theists. Nightly in our cities we hear the Boanerges of atheism thundering this credo . . . the premature triumph which materialism claims for itself in its popular manuals of science . . . and in high-sounding newspaper articles.[8]

De Pressense then proceeded to bring “this conflict between the thinkers of our age” before his readers. He added, “I have endeavored to be at once impartial and clear in stating the views held by those with whom I differ . . . I have always borne in mind that a man is often much better than his theories.”[9]

De Pressense included a philosophical critique of Tylor’s theory in his treatise but, like many others who attempted such critiques, he did not succeed in stemming the tide of evolutionary thought on the origin of religion.

Eleven years later, in 1898, it happened.

That “favorite pupil” of Tylor’s, Andrew Lang, allowed himself to read a missionary’s report, sent home to supporting churches from a distant field. The missionary said that

origin of these gods, referring them to European, and specifically to missionary influence.”[14]

Tylor made this reply official six years later in an article entitled “The Limits of Savage Religion.” But Howitt, who still did not perceive that his research was undermining Tylor’s theory, which he admired, and who later actually criticized Lang for using his research to attack Tylor’s theory, had already indicated to Tylor that no such “out” was available.[15]

Other scholars similarly proved that missionary influence could not explain the same phenomenon already showing up in many other parts of the world besides Australia. It was the beginning of the end for Tylor’s theory. Schmidt comments that, toward the end, “Tylor . . . could not be induced to speak, despite Lang’s direct challenges to [him].”[16]

It was Wilhelm Schmidt himself who, appalled by the lack of recognition given to Lang, threw himself into one of the most extensive research projects ever undertaken by one man. Schmidt began documenting and compiling evidence for “native monotheism,” evidence which was now beginning to flow in like a tide from all parts of the world. In 1912 (the year of Lang’s death), Schmidt published his mammoth *Ursprung Der Gottesidee* (*The Origin of the Concept of God*). Still more data kept pouring in, so he published another volume, and another, and another until, by 1955, he had accumulated more than 4,000 pages of evidence in a total of 12 large volumes!

The entire thirteenth chapter of Schmidt’s *The Origin and Growth of Religion* is devoted to quotations from dozens of anthropologists, showing that acceptance of Schmidt’s research was virtually universal. The tide had turned! And yet—

Before its downfall, Tylor’s theory had inspired certain scholars to apply his ideas in other fields. One would think that refuting the “mother theory” would cause its “conceptual offspring” in other fields to decline as well. This has not been the case. Some of the conceptual offspring of Tylor’s theory took on a life of their own, so to speak, and managed to distance themselves from their mother. Thus when she was axed, they were spared and persist, however unjustifiably, *to this very day!*

Once again, we are indebted to Wilhelm Schmidt for pointing out one such insidious connection: the connection between Tylor’s theory and liberal theology.

TYLOR’S THEORY AND LIBERAL THEOLOGY

Schmidt wrote: “A further important conquest for the animistic theory was the field of Old Testament theology. Here the agent was J. Lippert who . . . declared the theory to hold good for the development of the Jewish people and [their] religion. This application of the theory was immediately accepted by two leading theologians of Liberal Protestantism: B. Stade . . . and F. Schwall They were joined by a long array of other authors, such as R. Smend, J. Benzinger, J. Wellhausen, A. Berthold and others, who sought support for their ideas, not only in the results of textual criticism, which they employed, but in these data provided by ethnological research, as transmitted to them by Tylor’s theory.”[17]

Schmidt later quotes a Professor Brockelmann as claiming that “Wellhausen . . . was

more or less consciously under the influence of . . . E.B. Tylor . . . [and] . . . upposed animism to be the only source of religious life.”[18]

It was this Wellhausen who became prominent in developing a famous theory claiming that vestiges of the polytheism which, as required by Tylor’s theory, must have preceded the development of biblical monotheism, can still be found in the Old Testament. He claimed that monotheistic priests later tried to expunge earlier statements consistent with polytheism from the Pentateuch, but they overlooked some! The resulting school of Higher Criticism not only weakened the faith of millions of Christians and undermined the vitality of hundreds of thousands of churches worldwide, but also deflected great numbers of unbelievers from taking the Bible seriously. Yet to my knowledge no liberal scholar has ever blown a whistle and said, “Wait! Since we no longer endorse Tylor’s theory, why are we still endorsing this orphaned offspring of Tylor’s theory?”

Even conservative theologians have often accorded Wellhausen’s liberal theology an undeserved compliment by attacking it as if it were a conceptually independent structure. Their attacks might have been more effective had they publicly exposed the fact that Wellhausen’s theology is based upon an anthropological theory which most anthropologists no longer endorse.

EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND NAZI RACISM

Nineteenth-century theories of biological and cultural evolution strongly implied the probability that one branch of mankind, the European branch, had already outdistanced the rest of mankind in physical and cultural evolution. A writer who dared to develop this implication to its logical conclusions was German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

The views of Nietzsche and of many evolutionists of his time can be illustrated as follows. Picture all human societies as runners in a gigantic cultural “marathon.” The goal is to race from the cultural simplicity of the stone age toward the ultimate cultural achievement of an ideal society enjoying technological mastery over nature. It follows that if all the runners begin at the same starting line at the same time and run over the same course toward the same finish line, their participation in the “marathon” will make it possible to judge their respective strengths and weaknesses on one scale. And if the societies of any one genetic branch of mankind tend to “lead the pack,” so to speak, it will prove that that branch of mankind has achieved a superior physical evolution as well.

The inevitable conclusion was that European man’s highly technological societies were the “lead runners”—those averaging five minutes per mile or better. Other societies were like runners averaging six, seven or eight minutes per mile. Primitive tribes were the slowest of all; they were like marathoners averaging only nine, ten or eleven minutes per mile.

Nietzsche in particular focused attention upon the lead runner in the marathon. Nietzsche named him the “Superman.” “Superman” was an individual qualified—because of his more rapid evolutionary development—to dominate mankind. He must achieve that

domination by sheer “will to power.” Moral qualities were not required, for the superman was, as Nietzsche put it, “beyond good and evil.”

No doubt Nietzsche and his fellow evolutionists never dreamed that another German, Franz Boas, would shortly undermine the concept of European racial supremacy. Boas’s *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) in effect initiated a revision of our illustration of all human societies participating in a single marathon. Boas, in effect, insisted that many “marathons” were being run simultaneously. Each society or group of societies had its own starting line, its own starting time, its own course and its own finish line. Hence it was simply not possible to measure the respective “strengths” and “weaknesses” of societies on one scale! A culture pursuing harmony with nature, for example, should not be judged by the norms of a culture pursuing technological mastery over nature!

That being true, it was simply not valid to use culture as a basis for drawing conclusions about the innate superiority of one genetic branch of mankind over others!

One might have hoped that Boas’s refutation of European racism would have spared us from any ill effects potential in racist thinking. But such ideas were not to be expunged so easily. Some three decades after Nietzsche’s death, an ambitious German named Adolf Hitler decided that if Europeans were the most highly evolved branch of mankind, he and his fellow Germans were easily the most highly evolved branch of the Europeans, i.e., “the super race.”

Hitler accordingly, as head of the super race, wanted to prove himself “the superman.” The rest of the story remains one of humanity’s worst nightmares.

The point is that another application of nineteenth-century evolutionism managed to survive the shakeup caused by the downfall of Tylor’s theory coupled with the general acceptance of Boas’s new approach. The result was incalculable suffering for mankind. The mere fact that the originators of a theory may later abandon it does not guarantee that leaders in other fields will automatically abandon it also!

Naturally, Hitler’s Nazis did not like Franz Boas or his writings! During the 1930s, they rescinded an honorary doctorate which Kiel University had conferred upon Boas. At the same time, they made public bonfires of Boas’s writings in German cities.[\[19\]](#)

Nazi racism, then, was founded upon a deliberate rejection of available evidence.

TYLOR’S THEORY AND COMMUNISM

Political movements vary drastically in their attitudes toward religion. Some are strongly pro-religious. Others tolerate religion as one of the givens of mankind. Still others exploit religion for political purposes. But Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ilich Lenin, the founding fathers of Communism, adopted a rather more ambitious policy. Communism, they determined, must suppress and even, if possible, annihilate religion from the earth!

Communists may find it expedient to exploit religion now and then for specific political reasons, but even then their ultimate aim is still the annihilation of religion.

Annihilating religion, they have often found, requires the annihilation of religious

people. Or the forcible removal of children from religious families. Or the use of torture and imprisonment. No matter; as a congenitally anti-religious political system, Communism rampages toward its goal.

Ironically, Communism's anti-religious policy has been an albatross around Communism's neck! Millions of Indonesians, for example, vigorously and decisively foiled a Communist attempt to take control of their homeland in 1965. Their strongest objection to Communist control was the fact that they simply would not tolerate Communist suppression of religion. Apart from that policy, Communism might have won control of Indonesia, a victory that would have helped their cause awesomely!

Why did Communism's founding fathers burden their fledgling political movement with such a grossly disadvantageous policy? Perhaps if Lenin, at least, had foreseen the remarkable ability of religious people to maintain and even disseminate their faith in spite of the worst that Communists could do, he might have entertained second thoughts about making the annihilation of religion a primary goal of Communism.[\[20\]](#)

What persuaded the founding fathers of Communism that annihilating religion was both a feasible and a desirable goal? I have never been satisfied with assumptions that it was simply a personal preference of those involved. The following quote, translated by my friend Hank Paulson from a German edition of *The Collected Works of Lenin*, shows that Lenin, at least, claimed a rational scientific basis for such a goal:

Our party program is in its entirety built upon a scientific hence materialistic world view Our program . . . contains the unveiling of the historical and scientific explanation of the origin of religious mystery Thus our program necessarily contains the propaganda of atheism.[\[21\]](#)

It is not difficult to discern the influence of Tylor's theory behind such a statement. As Wilhelm Schmidt emphasized repeatedly, Tylor's theory took the minds of scholars in Europe and America by storm in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Lenin, either independently or through Marx or others, must have heard or read that science had at last debunked religion's claim to represent genuine spiritual mysteries. Previously, opponents of religion had relied mainly on philosophical arguments. But wasn't it much more devastating to be able to claim that religion's origin and subsequent development had now been *scientifically* explained—all without the slightest recourse to real spiritual entities?

Further evidence that Tylor's theory influenced Communist attitudes toward religion comes from the fact that Tylor's view of the evolution of religion was taught as the main foundation of atheism in colleges and universities throughout the Communist world. Communist governments, moreover, constantly sent streams of literature as well as teams of lecturers or exchange professors out into the third world and even to western countries to teach Tylor's theory as proven fact! Consider a few instances.

My friend Dr. Wayne Dye of Wycliffe Bible Translators was invited to lecture at a

scientific symposium in Papua New Guinea. Also invited were a number of anthropologists from Communist nations. And what did the Communists teach the young Papuan university students in their audience? The validity of Tylor's theory of the origin of religion! It sounded *strange* to Dr. Dye to hear scholars still propagating such concepts in the twentieth century. During breaks, Dye asked the Communist anthropologists how they reconciled their teaching with the fact that theories like Tylor's had been refuted during early decades of this century. To his surprise, they appeared quite unaware that such a refutation had occurred!

Early in 1983, at a student conference convened in San Diego, a freshman from one of Southern California's major universities told me that he was studying undergraduate anthropology under a visiting professor from Communist China. "He has been teaching us Tylor's theory right down the line," the student complained. "Nor has he ever mentioned that the theory has since been abandoned in the light of more recent ethnological research. The entire class, moreover, is lapping it up. I myself would not have known that it was all false had I not read *Eternity in Their Hearts*."

The student's complaint raises an ethical question: Was it just for a university to require students to pay hard-earned tuition so that a Communist could teach them outdated theory subverted as Communist dogma? The students paying for the course trusted the University to hire professors who would teach them *valid* anthropology. The University was betraying that trust. Most likely, the University later had to charge still more tuition so that other professors could help the students unlearn what the Communist professor had taught them.

One cannot blame the Communist professor for teaching the only thing he himself has been taught within the Communist educational system. The fault lies with the University for not screening the professor to ascertain his ability to teach modern anthropology.

A Christian visiting the former socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia struck up conversations with various Communists about faith in God. Every Communist responded by defending atheism on the basis of arguments recognizable as Tylor's theory. Some even handed the visitor tracts explaining that it was unscientific to believe in something which, though it claimed to represent spiritual reality, was itself merely a product of evolution. Since the Christian at that time knew nothing of the background of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory, he was unable to score any points against the Communist position.

Clearly, the overthrow of Tylor's theory has not prevented Communists from using it as justification for their ongoing suppression of religion. Marx can hardly be blamed, for he died in 1883—a year before Howitt's papers on native monotheism among Australian Aborigines raised the first major doubts about Tylor's theory. Likewise, Engels died in 1895, three years before Lang published his initially ill-received blockbuster *The Making of Religion*. Perhaps we shall never know the extent to which Lenin may have been exposed to reports of changing opinion in the Western world.

At any rate the problem of “strange” theories about the origin of religion still persists in the modern world. It is easy for scholars living comparatively sheltered lives here in the west to say, “Oh, but we don’t hold that position today.” It is quite another thing for missionaries scattered across the third world to learn how to counteract the insidious use which hostile political forces still make of such ideas.

My point is not to suggest that someone should have muzzled Tylor! It was fair enough that his ideas should have their “go” in court. Nor is it in any way my purpose to suggest that the science of anthropology per se is untrustworthy. I believe that Christians should seek involvement in anthropology and other social sciences in order to bring the balance of a theistic value system to bear upon such sciences.

If Wilhelm Schmidt had not devoted himself to such an involvement, recognition of the unscientific basis of Tylor’s theory might have been delayed for years!

Perhaps one criticism can be made of the liberal scholars who initially opposed or ignored Andrew Lang’s objections to Tylor: They accepted Tylor’s theory very quickly, not only because of its elegance, but also because it fitted their presuppositions about evolution and the supposed supremacy of European man. They accepted Lang’s and Schmidt’s opposing evidence with heel-dragging reticence because *their* evidence did not confirm such presuppositions. Had the general response to Lang and Schmidt been as rousing as the earlier response to Tylor, possibly, just possibly, the resulting discussions would have caught Lenin’s ear before he began pulling the Iron Curtain down around Russia following the Communist Revolution in 1917 (which was also, incidentally, the year of Tylor’s death).

Lenin, if I may give him the benefit of a doubt, might then at least have had second thoughts about resting so many Communist hopes upon Tylor’s theory. Communism’s anti-religious stance accordingly might have become less rigid.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, effectively signaled the end of the Communist rule in Eastern Europe. Shortly thereafter, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary all abandoned Communist rule. The Iron Curtain had come crashing down in Europe, but Communist ideals still flourish in the Far East. Today, religious freedom continues to be suppressed in Communist nations such as China, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam and, to a lesser extent, Cuba (in 1998, Pope John Paul II was allowed to visit the country—the first time such permission has been granted since the Cuban Communist Revolution of 1959).

Hopefully, this review of the history of the matter will enable Christians to be not only better informed but also better able to respond to some of the forces opposed to the gospel in the world today. It might also give great encouragement to Christians who are still under Communist oppression in these countries to hear that even science has officially rejected the basis Communism uses to discredit religious faith.

Before leaving the subject of “Scholars with Strange Theories,” I want to comment on the controversy surrounding anthropologist Margaret Mead’s first book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Although this debate isn’t getting the buzz that it once did several decades ago, students of anthropology will no doubt be familiar with Mead’s research and her views on

the relationship between culture and developmental stages in young adults. Mead's first book, according to some, has had about as liberalizing an influence on the way we raise and educate our young as has Dr. Spock's famous book on child rearing.

In 1983, an Australian anthropologist named Derek Freeman strongly criticized Mead (who died in 1978) in his book *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* for giving the public misinformation about Samoan culture. Freeman stated that the whole matter would not be a critical issue at all had not liberals like George Bernard Shaw, Havelock Ellis and many others decided to lend Mead's book a visibility and influence out of all proportion to its worth. That is not to discredit Margaret Mead's life work as a whole.

Conservatives should bear in mind that the controversy in debates such as these is not between liberals and conservatives, but rather between two groups of liberals, neither of which especially wants the outcome to favor conservative causes.