

CORRESPONDENCE

EVOLUTION OR DARWINISM?

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

Sir,—My attention has been called to a somewhat strange account by Father Reeves, in the March BLACKFRIARS, of a Catholic who went mad and died in a workhouse, apparently through reading a work by Canon de Dorlodot of Louvain, entitled 'Evolution,' and dealing with the origin of man. Father Reeves, of course, would not knowingly misrepresent anyone, and so I must charitably conclude that he is writing about Dorlodot's book from hearsay only, and not from personal knowledge. Otherwise, how are we to account for the fact that he not only gives the book a fictitious title, but also makes it deal with a subject which it expressly excludes?

As to the singular effect which the reading of the book is supposed to have produced, I am tempted to suggest, by a simple application of the methods of agreement and difference, that Father Reeves's own instructions must have had something to do with it. Many others have read Dorlodot who have not gone mad, but they did not discuss the matter with Father Reeves.

Yours sincerely,

ERNEST C. MESSENGER

Translator of 'Darwinism and Catholic Thought.'

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

Sir,—At the risk of being rewarded with a further instalment of my future biography instead of six shillings, I write to demand that sum of money from your esteemed contributor who lately favoured BLACK-

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FRIARS with a tragic story concerning bats in the belfry. You will remember the tale was of a certain highly-strung gentleman who had been thoroughly convinced by all theologians and your esteemed contributor that 'a human body generated by animal parents is the droll fancy of an unphilosophical age . . . , and that no vegetative or animal organism could *possibly* become informed by a human soul unless it was immediately disposed for assimilation by reduction to the condition of dead meat.'

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Then came the tragedy. A priest (poor man) put into the gentleman's hands Canon Dorlodot's book on *Evolution*. Its perusal shattered his former health-giving convictions. Crash, went the gentleman's mind back upon itself. Flop, went his jaded body in a fit upon the floor. He spent one night in a padded cell, and then departed to a better life.

Moved by this tragedy, and anxious to analyse the arguments which brought about the crash of mind, the flop of body and the padded cell, I hied me to a Catholic publisher in London town. 'Give me,' quoth I, 'Canon Dorlodot's book on *Evolution*.'

'You must mean,' quoth he, '*Darwinism and Catholic Thought*, for that is the only work he has published on the subject.'

With bated breath, I took the deadly volume, paid my six shillings, and hurried home, half wondering what would be my future status in life.

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Did bats assemble in the belfry? Did I experience the agonizing crash of mind, the excruciating flop of body, the painful end in padded cell? No, Sir!—nothing of the sort. In the language of the Schools, it was 'a frost.'

Your esteemed contributor has deceived me. He has caused me to expend six shillings on a false issue.

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The book, indeed, is an excellent work, replete with the deep learning of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, but it contains nothing about the origin of man. Its thesis is: *What judgment must we pass upon the Darwinian theory from the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy, if we leave out the special subject of the origin of man.* He has therefore misled me. He has been the *causa efficax* of a *grave damnum*. Through him I have lost six shillings. In conscience, he is bound to restitution. Let him not neglect this strict obligation.

Perhaps he will be *contumax*, will refuse, or plead a *causa per accidens*. Perhaps he will tell me I ought to have known better, that Canon Dorlodot, formerly a Professor of Dogmatic Theology in the Seminary of Namur, now a Professor of Palæontology at the Catholic University of Louvain, is one of Belgium's foremost geologists, that he is a renowned Latin, Greek and Hebrew scholar, well read in Patristic literature and a keen student of Thomistic philosophy and theology. Perhaps he will remind me of several lengthy conversations that I had with the learned Canon last August, when after a disquisition on the Council of Vienne, he said it was absurd to suppose that God had created the first man by substituting in an animal a human soul in place of its non-rational soul.

Be this as it may, what about my six shillings for the book, the philosophical arguments of which your esteemed contributor had so deeply pondered?

KEVIN CLARK, O.P.

To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.

Sir,—Dr. Messenger's complaint, hypothesis, and psycho-analysis of myself are all based on the assumption that I have represented the madness and death of

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a fictitious friend of mine as caused by the reading of a book by Canon Dorlodot on the evolution of the human body.

Unfortunately for the complaint, hypothesis, and psycho-analysis, I have not represented anything of the kind.

Incoherently perhaps to some readers, but to the evident satisfaction of others, I have represented my friend as becoming mad in the act of borrowing Canon Dorlodot's book on Evolution. Presumably, therefore, he never read it. Dr. Messenger may have other sources of information: I have only the text of my pathetic little essay to go upon. From that I learn that it was a fallacious application of probabilism that gave him a fit. His madness would therefore seem to have been religious mania. No book on Evolution that I know has ever caused that.

I have read Canon Dorlodot far more carefully than Dr. Messenger has read my article. I described it by its subject-matter provisionally, scoring the word 'Evolution' as a reminder to fill in later the title of Dr. Messenger's English translation, which was inaccessible to me at the time. You went to press before my opportunity came. When reading the proof I decided that the matter was not important enough to justify a considerable rearrangement of type. Nor was it; especially as this correspondence is giving the translation the advertisement it well deserves.

My criticisms of Dorlodot may possibly be more soothing to some of your readers and more maddening to others than seems likely to Dr. Messenger. Time alone prevents me from troubling you with them now. For Dr. Messenger's satisfaction, however, may I note one or two points immediately?

(1) I am well aware that in his volume on the *Origin of Species* Canon Dorlodot has expressly excluded

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the origin of man, and expressly promised to treat it subsequently.

(2) I know from personal experience and frequent observation that the mere mention of the published volume (and, much more, the careful reading of it) nearly always leads Catholic priests and laymen to the discussion of human origins by stages such as I have outlined in your recent issue.

(3) I consider that Canon Dorlodot's philosophical arguments in favour of Evolution, both Absolute and Mitigated, are better than any that have been advanced for or against it by any modern writer.

(4) I am able to assert, independently of any school of thought, that Dorlodot fails practically in a matter the importance of which he appreciates theoretically (Trans., p. 95). His metaphysical basis is defective. He has not analysed scientifically the foundations of his ideas of necessity, possibility, impossibility, activity, substance and causality. Consequences of this appear most conspicuously in his discussions of the gradation from vegetative to sensitive life.

(5) I have no fault to find with any application of methods of agreement and difference leading to the conclusion that when I discuss the relations between religion, philosophy and experimental science, I have a special talent for maddening people.

JOHN BAPTIST REEVES, O.P.

P.S.—Though Father Kevin Clark wisely abstains from all conjectures, charitable and uncharitable, about my having read or not read Canon Dorlodot, he agrees with Dr. Messenger that my friend not only read him but died in consequence. I make my usual bow to this consensus of scientific opinion. Against this overwhelming majority of Catholic scientists, I cannot (on my own showing, *n'est ce pas?*) maintain

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without certified madness that the contrary opinion is the exclusive truth.

My debt to Father Kevin is greater than he claims. I did not know that Dorlodot had committed himself to any statement about the origin of the human body. I rejoice to hear that he has reached the only conclusion in this problem that I have ever fought for. The philosophy—if philosophy it be—which has led him there, will show him in due course that, despite certain apparent contradictions in concrete nature, there is a creative and genetic gulf between inanimate and animate creatures, and again between vegetative and sentient life. That done, my pity for his philosophical arguments and views will cease; only my envy of his learning and ability will remain.

I owe a joint debt to Fr. Kevin and Dr. Messenger for a fine practical demonstration of another point I have attempted to prove in these pages with windy words. Hypotheses blind scientists to facts. Most scientists proceed on the fundamental hypothesis that an outsider invading their subject cannot know what he is talking about. Hence, like my two critics, they fail to observe what, in fact, he actually is talking about, even when it is under their nose and doing its utmost to stare them in the face. Even when working independently, this and a few other common hypotheses blind them to precisely the same set of facts: the facts namely that are invisible to the eye, naked or encased, and visible only to faith and the pure intelligence that is called, sometimes philosophy, sometimes common sense. Hence they miss the one thing in any creation that redounds most to the glory of its Creator.

J. B. R.