Controversial Volume Subject Of Discussion

By RICHARD BEST

“Honest to God,” the small volume which set off a monstrous squabble in the grand Anglican tradition, will be the subject of discussion this Thursday in the Rice Chapel at 7:30 pm. The speaker is the Rev. Ian Hunt, a recent graduate of Chichester Seminary, and a protege of the tract’s author, Bishop Robinson of Woolwich.

THE BOOK set out to introduce British university students to the major ideas of modern theologians. Instead, it immediately became a cause celebre calling forth charges of heresy. One dusty, yet highly-prelate found “no Gospel in this book.” A book answering this charge, entitled, “For Christ’s Sake,” has also been written.

In “Honest To God” Woolwich first dismisses any conception of a God “up there” or “out there”; for him the “skies are empty.” God is not a “deus ex machina,” a supernatural being, but rather the “beyond in the midst of life,” the “reality undergirding . . . creation.” If one believes that life has significance then, ipso facto, he believes in God.

THE BISHOP then elaborates on the German martyr-theologian Bonhoeffer’s conception of a religionless Christianity consisting of faith stripped of prayer and mysticism. This doctrine is, according to Bishop Robinson, a call for participation in the “powerlessness of God in the world.”

Curiously, once he says that God no longer exists in any traditional sense, Woolwich goes no further than implying that traditional Anglican formularies ought to be seen in a slightly new light.

THE COMMUNION matters as much as ever; but the priest should stand behind the altar. Premarital sex is as naughty as before; “true” love doesn’t permit that sort of thing.

“Honest To God” has been variously seen as a renunciation of Christ, as a harmless work stressing some orthodoxies at the expense of others, and as an apologetic masterpiece. Yet it may be said that the book does deal with meaningful questions; the furor it raised is the surest certification of its relevancy.