

# Theology and Natural Theology

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## I

The general credibility of theology was once widely held by theologians to depend on a successful natural theology. Today things are different. There are certainly some contemporary advocates of natural theology—and a few of these are even theologians; but it is presently fashionable to reject natural theology in the name of theology itself. But are there cogent, theological reasons for dismissing natural theology? I shall suggest that the best known modern defences of an affirmative reply are unacceptable.

## II

According to the natural theologian, 'God exists' is a respectable philosophical assertion which can be rationally sustained without recourse to the prior acceptance either of God's existence or of any special revelation. Typically, he insists that 'God exists' is rational, provable, justifiable or demonstrable. Bearing these points in mind, what is the nature of the theological opposition to natural theology?

We can begin to answer this question by noting the view that the nature of theism renders irrelevant the notion of arguing or reasoning or making inferences about God. Some observe that this is the position of the Bible. Biblical writers, it is argued, "did not think of God as an inferred entity, but as an experienced reality".<sup>1</sup> Others explain that proofs must result in abstraction, "a pale shadow of the living God who is the putative object of biblical faith".<sup>2</sup> In this connection we might note some remarks of Alasdair MacIntyre. In *Metaphysical Beliefs*<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre points to the enormous importance of faith where religious belief is concerned. He thus argues that natural theology, considered in its familiar guise as the presentation of supposedly demonstrative argument, is out of place in religion. "If we could produce logically cogent arguments", he

<sup>1</sup>John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>op. cit. p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>London, 1957.

says, "we should produce a kind of certainty that leaves no room for decision; where proof is in place, decision is not . . . If the existence of God were demonstrable, we should be as bereft of the possibility of making a free decision to love God as we should be if every utterance of doubt were answered by thunderbolts from heaven." (p 197) Working with a particular notion of God, other writers reach similar conclusions. In Volume I, part 2 of his *Systematic Theology*<sup>4</sup>, Tillich introduces the notion of proof and God. "There can", he says, "be little doubt that the arguments are a failure in so far as they claim to be arguments . . . Both the concept of existence and the method of arguing to a conclusion are inadequate for the idea of God . . . It would be a very great victory for Christian apologetics if the words 'God' and 'existence' were very definitely separated except in the paradox of God becoming manifest under the conditions of existence, that is in the Christological paradox. God does not exist, He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him." (p 227)

Moving on to a related but slightly different approach we might now think of Kierkegaard, Karl Barth and the general attitude of Neo-Orthodox Protestant theology. "If I have a system", says Barth in much-quoted words from *The Epistle to the Romans*<sup>5</sup>, "it consists in the fact that I keep in mind as persistently as possible what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative difference' between time and eternity both in its negative and its positive meaning." According to Barth, "The subject of theology is the 'word of God'. Theology is a science and a teaching which *feels itself responsible* to the living command of this specific subject and to nothing else in heaven or on earth, in the choice of its methods, its questions and answers, its concepts and language, its goals and limitations."<sup>6</sup> Thus as Thomas Torrance explains, for Barth "it is upon the sheer objectivity of the living God which will not allow us to consider his Being apart from his Act that any natural theology which proceeds by abstracting God's activity must invalidate itself."<sup>7</sup> In Barth's own words, "'God' is not a magnitude, with which the believer is already acquainted before he is a believer, so that as believer he merely experiences an improvement and enrichment of knowledge that he already has."<sup>8</sup> *Finitum non capax infiniti*. For Barth the attempt to know God apart from Revelation is merely the idolatrous thrust of the natural man who, precisely as natural, resists the objectivity of God." . . . the claim to a natural knowledge of God,

<sup>4</sup>London, 1968.

<sup>5</sup>Oxford University Press, 1933, 9.10.

<sup>6</sup>Forward to *Dogmatic in Outline*, London, 1949, p.5.

<sup>7</sup>'The Problem of Natural Theology in the Thought of Karl Barth'. *Religious Studies* 6 (1970), p. 123.

<sup>8</sup>*Credo*, London, 1964, p. 17.

as Barth understands it, cannot be separated out from a whole movement of man in which he seeks to justify himself over against the grace of God, and which can only develop into a natural theology that is antithetical to knowledge of God as he really is in his acts of revelation and grace.”<sup>9</sup>

### III

We may sum up the foregoing review by saying that the current theological rejection of natural theology revolves around three main claims: 1. Natural theology, especially in the sense of proof, is incompatible with love of God and free acceptance of him. 2. Natural theology and belief or faith are unconnected. 3. Natural theology is alien to the Bible. Let us consider each claim in turn and see how far it succeeds in discrediting natural theology.

1. *Is it true that natural theology, especially in the sense of proof, is incompatible with love of God and free acceptance of him?*

I believe the answer to this is negative. MacIntyre, who clearly represents the contrary view, relies in doing so on a questionable account of what it must mean to believe in God. His position seems to depend on the following premisses none of which are obviously true: (a) If something is believed in it cannot be provable or proved. (b) To believe in something is a matter of decision. (c) If the existence of God is provable someone who believes that this is so cannot freely decide to love God.

It is true that a person can believe in something even though this something is not and cannot be backed up by proof. People believe in all sorts of things (the truth of propositions, the existence of certain objects) and perhaps a person may lack a proof but believes notwithstanding. All the same, I can now believe something which may later be proved to me. Furthermore, one thing may be proved or provable as a matter of fact while also believed in by someone unaware of this. I may trustingly believe something of which, e.g. a scientist has a demonstration. (a) is therefore not necessarily true. Something can be both proved and it can be believed in.

Moving on to (b), a useful point to remember is that it would be wrong to suggest that belief can never be a matter of choice and therefore (if one might so put it) depend in some sense on will or decision. Given any belief of mine I may have contributed to it in the sense of having allowed it to come about. I can listen with an open mind and so learn. Or, as H. H. Price suggests, I may come to believe things by carefully and deliberately focussing my attention on what serves my purposes. I may select a proposition that I wish to believe and “*imagine* in as much detail as possible the kind of

<sup>9</sup>Torrance, p. 125.

situation there would be if the proposition were true.”<sup>10</sup> We might, in this connection, instance the paradoxical and elusive notion of self-deception.<sup>11</sup> It does not follow from any of this, however, that belief is always a matter of choice. One reason for this stems from the possibility of interchanging ‘belief’/‘knowledge’ and their related verbs. Traditionally, knowledge and belief have been sharply distinguished, but the distinction is a fragile one. It is true that someone’s ‘I believe that-P’ need be no knowledge claim. “ ‘I believe. . .’ throws light on my state. Conclusions about my conduct can be drawn from this expression. So there is a *similarity* here to expressions of emotion, of mood, etc.”<sup>12</sup> But it is also in order to regard an expression of belief as equivalent to a claim to know and *vice versa*. If I say ‘I believe the earth is round’ I am not necessarily doing anything different to what I would be doing if I said ‘I know it to be so’. And ‘I believe in God’ may mean ‘I know that there is a God’ just as ‘I know that there is a God’ could equally be expressed by ‘I believe in God’. But if it is possible to say ‘I believe in God’ meaning (at least in part) ‘I know that there is a God’ it is possible to deny that choice enters into belief in that being holdable as an example of knowledge the belief is somehow involuntary. This is because to speak of knowledge is to refer to compulsion. To talk of ‘knowing’ is not to isolate what might be called an ‘achievement word’. It is rather to refer to something that happens to one and is, in this respect, like referring to ‘learning’, ‘seeing’ and ‘dying’. One cannot choose to know, though one might wish to know or try to know. One just knows. As Nelson Pike puts it, “The knowing-state does not appear to be a state of mental action. It is not at all clear that knowing is a kind of doing. What is he doing? . . . He is deliberating. That makes sense. What is he doing? . . . He is knowing. That makes no sense at all.”<sup>13</sup> Where belief claims include knowledge claims we can therefore say that the belief referred to in them is not intentional (or a matter of choice) in the sense that I can intend (or choose) to believe whatever I believe just as I can intend (or choose) to take a day off work. I may find that I cannot but believe.

Is it maybe in my power what I believe? or what I unshakeably believe?

I believe that there is a chair over there. Can’t I be wrong? But can I believe that I am wrong? Or can I so much as bring it under consideration?—And mightn’t I also hold fast to my belief whatever I learned later on?! . . .

What I know, I believe . . .

<sup>10</sup> ‘Belief and Will’. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume 28*, 1954, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> See T. Penelhum, *Problems of Religious Knowledge*, London, 1971, pp. 149-155.

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, 1968, p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> *God and Timelessness*, London, 1970, p. 124.

Can I believe for one moment that I have ever been in the stratosphere? No . . .<sup>14</sup>

These remarks of Wittgenstein deserve serious reflection.

Thus (b) may also be rejected and we are therefore left with MacIntyre's claim that if the existence of God is provable then someone who believes that it is so cannot freely decide to love God. The crucial words here are 'freely decide to love'. MacIntyre supposes that one can do this and in a sense he is right. If 'to love' means 'to act' in a loving way' (as it might be said to in the light of I Corinthians 13) then, assuming one is free to do anything, one can, in principle, freely decide to love. But 'love', as we all know, can also be a matter of emotion and with this in mind we can add that 'to love' may not be to choose to do something but rather to *find oneself doing something*. Furthermore, it is in any case perfectly possible to take up with a policy of loving action not only in spite of having a proof of God's existence but because one thinks one has such a proof. MacIntyre might reply that accepting a purported proof of God's existence would inevitably lead one to respond to God in a loving way. But belief in God and positive response towards him must be distinguished both in thought and reality. It might seem irrational for the convinced theist not to live his life as one of loving response to God, but irrationality is a factor to be reckoned with and recognising that religious propositions are true does not automatically lead people to respond religiously. Would that it did! MacIntyre might reply that although one thinks one has a proof of God's existence one cannot really be right since 'the God of the philosophers' is not 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'; but it all depends upon who the philosophers are and, in any case, there is no *prima facie* reason for rejecting an identification of a being believed in for philosophical reasons with one believed in without these. The description of the being given by the believer and philosopher may not be one and the same. But two people can give different descriptions of the same person. It is enough if they agree in much of what they say about the person in question. That the philosopher cannot say enough about 'his' God to justify us in identifying it with 'the God of the believer' is by no means obvious.

2. *Is it true that natural theology and belief or faith are unconnected?*

The first major reasons for accepting an affirmative answer to this question come in Tillich's claim that God does not exist and in Barth's assertion that God is immeasurably distant from man, that, as Barth is better known for putting it, God is 'wholly other'. Neither Tillich nor Barth's case seems to me decisive however.

To say that something exists is usually to say that there actu-

<sup>14</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Oxford, 1969, paras., 173, 177, 218.

ally is something or other. To say that God does not exist is therefore to say that there is not actually something or other where 'something or other' is God. I can see no way out of this. But Tillich says God does not exist in the course of maintaining the desirability of faith. From a Christian theologian this is simply flat self-contradiction. It is possible to construe 'God does not exist' as a way of denying that God's existence is what Hume called a matter of fact. This would mean appealing to the idea that God is not part of the material world. But even on this understanding it only follows that natural theology is irrelevant to the question of God's existence if (a) the concept of a non-material being is an impossible one and (b) it is in fact impossible to provide rational grounds for believing in such a being and identifying it with God. Most philosophers would now regard (a) as pretty suspect and, if he is to remain anywhere within the Christian tradition, Tillich would have to agree. (b) could only be supported by some other argument than Tillich's claim that God does not exist. This would, in fact, involve some consideration of the arguments of natural theologians.

Taken at its face value, one might suppose that the description of God as 'wholly other' entails that God is absolutely different from everything besides himself. But in so far as one can make sense of such an entailment it seems to commit its exponent to abandoning theology. For however different God may be he must be spoken of through the use of terms applicable to what is not God. Yet if this is the case God cannot be absolutely different from everything besides himself. If a theologian denies this he may be extricated from the position of saying that God might be reasoned to by natural theology, but only at the cost of admitting that nothing can be said of God. One will not, for example, be able to speak of God's will, for, as Brand Blanshard suggests, "If God is 'wholly other', the attempt of rational men to lead reasonable lives is as likely to represent his will as the life of some wayward beatnik or some dervish from Berchtesgarden."<sup>15</sup> As Fredrick Ferre trenchantly puts it, in terms applied to God cannot result in true propositions, "What possible difference can it make . . . *which* . . . words happen to be spoken by the theologian or preacher? Why are the meaningless words of Scripture more to be respected than the meaningless words of a racing tabloid?"<sup>16</sup>

Theologians like Barth, however, may now reply that while the above arguments are sound enough on a human level, that level is corrupted by sin. All our reasoning is too clouded ever to reach a knowledge of God and his ways. This move, however, is unconvincing. Certainly a Christian theologian is treading on thin ice if he claims to produce all the truths of Christianity out of some logic-

<sup>15</sup>*Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. S. Hooke, New York, 1961, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup>*Language, Logic and God*, London, 1970, p. 133.

al box in some way that bypasses the idea of the gift of revelation. But if reason is so clouded that it cannot make a true statement about God by its own powers then it cannot even say that God is 'beyond' reason, for there is only human reason to make such a claim. It might be said that human reason does not make this claim, that it is actually part of Revelation. This may be denied by saying that a particular supposed revelation must be accepted and no questions asked. But why should we accept this? And how are the claims of competing 'revelations' to be assessed if we do?

The Barthian may now, however, argue as follows. Recent philosophical and scientific development stresses the importance of approaching any field of inquiry with the methods appropriate to it. If one forgets one's field of research and applies oneself to it using the methods appropriate to some other one will ask the wrong questions and one's tools, though valuable enough in the right research, will be unable to deliver whatever goods there might be to lay hold of. God is the Father of Christ, known through the work of Christ and through the New Testament. From this it follows that human thinking which demands a rationalistic approach to the existence of God is a presupposition standing between man and God. It prevents the objectivity of God from revealing itself.

Certainly our enquiries must be governed by their subject matter and the truth of a proposition should evidently be tested in the light of the class to which the proposition belongs. If someone says that John kicked the bucket we would do well to consider English idiom before finding out that there was no bucket for John to kick and declaring the claim nonsense. Nevertheless, the above observations hardly suffice to discredit natural theology. In the first place, merely by demanding objectivity (letting enquiry be guided by the nature or truth of God) the Barthian has not shown that he is himself concerned with objectivity. He needs to establish that God is not the sort of thing which is open to investigation favoured by natural theologians. To begin with, he needs some good reason to believe that God is actually there to be talked of at all. This introduces a second point. The language used of God itself raises questions of justification that natural theology tries to answer. God is said to be a such-and-such (a creator, a father, a personal presence). When existential claims about the sort of thing God is said to be are made in non-theological contexts it makes perfectly good sense to ask for evidence, reasons and proofs. There is no obvious reason why one should not ask similar questions in the case of existential claims concerning God. Thirdly, Christ cannot be taken as the only way in which one can get to know God because knowing that Christ is a revelation of God presupposes knowing something about God to begin with. One cannot just shout 'Christ' at the prospective believer and leave matters there. For one thing, 'Christ' and 'God' are not always interchangeable terms. So as Ronald Hepburn aptly puts it,

“How can one at once *both* make Jesus one’s sole guide to what can be affirmed about God, *and* insist that many things we say about Jesus may *not* properly be said about God also?”<sup>17</sup> Finally, there is the problem of knowing Christ. If knowledge of God is not simply identified with knowledge of Christ this is large enough, but is it any less of a problem to know God where that is regarded as knowing Christ? Two centuries ago there might have been no doubt on the matter but only the rash would declare this to be so today. If one believes that there is a God acting on history one might, as Aquinas argued, be more inclined to take the New Testament assertions about Christ at their face value. If, however, the knowledge of God only begins with knowledge of Christ then all one has to go on is the New Testament, and it is hard to see how that alone could give one the certainty traditionally demanded of faith. Even when we appear to have very early testimony, how can we be sure that there is not some distortion of truth before us? Why not the result of apologetic zeal or, in the case of reported miracles, plain misunderstanding of what, if anything took place? In the nature of the case, and with only the texts to guide us, it seems exceedingly difficult to answer such questions with confidence. It could be said that our knowledge of Christ does not come from the New Testament but that knowledge of God is only to be gained through a *present* experience of Christ. but, although I have some sympathy with such a suggestion, as an attempted refutation of natural theology its value is limited. How would one know that one was presently aware of Christ and not somebody else? Surely one can only know that it is Christ of whom one is aware by knowing about the historical Christ and by checking the present Christ in the light of what one then knows. Appeal to present experience of Christ as a weapon against natural theology demands a satisfactory resolution to the problems of historical scepticism regarding the Christ of Galilee.

But now, another line of argument. Cannot faith overcome all our difficulties? Why bother about natural theology when faith is something not gained in any intellectual way but by gift of God?

The relevance of this approach seems clearer if some understanding of faith such as Aquinas offers were forthcoming. Could we perhaps say that articles of Christian faith may be adhered to by an act of will guided by God and could such a view justify us in bypassing the enterprise of natural theology? Aquinas would not have thought so and, whatever the merits of his comments on faith, I would agree with him. To begin with we still have the problem of the kind of thing God is said to be and the questions of justification which this raises. Simply saying that belief is a gift does not remove this. One may certainly have a religious conviction that God exists, the trouble is that there seems no clear reason for denying that this

<sup>17</sup>*Christianity and Paradox*, London, 1958, p. 66.



conviction should be, in principle, open to rational support. Barth could always argue that it could be rational and yet non-rational—perhaps in the sense that it might be based on experience. One might say, with John Coventry, that “faith is ‘above’ reason (i.e. reasoning)” in that in faith “we are referring to the original and originating experience of being confronted with God in Christ”<sup>18</sup>. But either this is a retreat to the objectionable argument considered above or (as it seems to me to be for Coventry) in some way an acknowledgement of the natural theologian’s undertaking. What the natural theologian is seeking is a reason to believe, and experience, which is fundamentally an intellectual fact, can be as good a reason as any other. Certainly, natural theologians have been prepared to allow that experience may provide grounds for belief in God.

### 3. *Is it true that natural theology is alien to the Bible?*

Since, as is generally agreed, the contemporary Christian is not bound to accept every point of view adopted in the Bible, it is perhaps worth saying at the outset that our answer to this question need not necessarily be regarded as decisive in deciding the issue with which I have been concerned throughout this article. Nevertheless, if it could be argued that the Bible is not actually hostile to the idea of natural theology one might reasonably conclude that a much respected attempt to refute the natural theologian could be safely ignored. So the question ought to be taken up. Is the Bible hostile to natural theology?

The crucial passages to consider here are Romans 1:18 ff and Acts 27:16 ff. According to Barth, the former of these must be understood thus: The general topic is man in the world. To him Paul attributes a knowledge of God and, thus, a possibility of knowing him. But rather than considering man abstractly Paul is thinking of him as objectively confronted with the Gospel’s revelation of God’s wrath, and hence of his grace in Christ. According to Paul, all men are slaves to sin; but this judgment is not made independently of revelation. It follows from faith in Christ. Man knew God but was also sinful so that his knowledge, so to speak, turned back on him and condemned him thus, for the first time, actually revealing God.

Let us observe carefully that all this is not, so to speak, catechised out of the heathen as the content of a knowledge which they apply to the Gospel, as the content of a reflection which they had already advanced or could advance for themselves. It is all just as new for them as the judgment that the Jews never kept the Law but have already broken it is quite new to the Jews. That is, it is the truth of revelation proclaimed by the apostle of Jesus Christ . . . It is not therefore, timeless, general

<sup>18</sup>*The Theology of Faith*, Cork, 1968, p.18.

or apologetic. It cannot be separated even for a moment from the apostolic Gospel declared to the heathen. It is all the objective judgment upon man which is grounded only in the fact that Jesus Christ . . . also brought to light the truth of man, namely that he is directed towards God.<sup>19</sup>

According to Paul, Barth is saying, man independently of Christ cannot know God; he is reprobate. Man, however, is chosen by God, something manifested properly through Christ. Only with Christ does God become known at all. Everything else is idolatry.

Much of this reading undoubtedly does bring out Paul's meaning in opposition to the interpretation often put upon Romans by natural theologians. Some of these have regarded Paul as advancing a theory of the natural knowledge of God independently of the fact of Christ with the implication that Paul could happily have provided a philosophical treatise as the first task of theology. But Romans is not an early draft of a treatise *De Deo Uno*, and Paul was a theologian first and a philosopher, if at all, second. The central fact for him was a new revelation. But it would be equally unjust to the text of Romans to interpret it as denying a knowledge of God independently of Christ. Paul's point is that there is a new revelation going beyond the old, not that the old is entirely scrapped. The fact of Christ, for Paul, added depth to the Jewish idea of God as it added depth to the religious idea of higher paganism. Nothing in the text of Romans rules out this interpretation and it follows that what Paul means by idolatry is the course which the knowledge of God has in fact taken. He speaks of the minds of men being 'darkened', which can only make sense on the supposition that there was some light to be extinguished in the first place. He speaks of 'supressing' the truth, which must presuppose some knowledge to shut away. He refers to the fact that men are inexcusable, which implies some knowledge of God ignored or neglected. As Henri Bouillard observes, "One is forced to admit that, for Paul, it is the pagan consciousness itself which knows God and does not know him at the same time."<sup>20</sup>

Rather than accepting Barth's exegesis then, another representation of Paul's meaning is available. All men, as a matter of fact, have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. This is a judgment which falls on the Jew and the Gentile. The latter is guilty because he does not act on what even he knows of God. What he should realise, and what he basically knows, is that veneration of the world turns the natural order upside down, reversing the roles of creature and creator. To this situation a remedy is required and the ultimate answer is to be found in Christ.

Something similar is said in Acts 17, though Barth has an exe-

<sup>19</sup>*Church Dogmatics* 11/1, Edinburgh, 1957, pp. 120-121.

<sup>20</sup>*The Knowledge of God*, London, 1969, p. 57.

genesis of this which contests the point. He sketches the context of the passage noting that before reporting the discussion contained in it the author of Acts says that Paul was indignant at the idolatry of Athens (vs. 16). After the discourse he adds that at the mention of resurrection Paul's hearers scorned him and only a handful became Christians. Could Paul have wished to be saying in this context that man has knowledge of God apart from revelation? On the contrary, Barth declares,<sup>21</sup> the discourse "is not an attempt to understand the world of the Athenian philosophers in itself and to try to go beyond it from within; it is the announcement of the judgment which comes to this world from without. It is *this* world, surely, but seen from *without*." When Paul talks about the 'unknown God', Barth adds,<sup>22</sup> the reference is pure irony. The Athenian's God is unknown because the Athenian does not know God. But this interpretation overlooks the central section of the speech. Paul paints the picture of a God whose will is that all men should be drawn to him in right worship. For that purpose men have a kind of religious insight and inspiration which could result in knowledge of God and has indeed done so ("as even some of your poets have said"). Full knowledge, saving knowledge, comes through Christ and it corrects the misunderstanding that can arise and has in fact arisen at Athens, viz. idolatry. But behind the idolatry lies culpable error ("we ought not to think . . . the times of ignorance God overlooked") which implies, as does Romans 1, some appreciation of the heathen insight and suggests the paradox of knowing and not knowing mentioned by Bouillard. We can be said to have here not an *argument* for God's existence (that, certainly, never appears in any clear form in the New Testament), but we do seem to have a reference to some kind of general revelation into which the fact of Christ can fit, what Gartner calls "a reference to the revelation of God provided in the life of the nations".<sup>23</sup> In line with Romans 1, the speech in Acts seems to suggest that Christian revelation is really illumined and its full significance appreciated in the light of some prior knowledge. For most of the New Testament writers the Old Testament is the background against which the new revelation is appreciated. In Acts 17 what corresponds to the Old Testament is the kind of theory represented by Greek poets and quoted in verse 28. As Bouillard adds, talking of Paul presented in Acts, "In accepting pagan wisdom he interpreted it in a Christian manner . . . it is from their baptized wisdom that he argued to show the culpable illogic of their idolatry . . . He is affirming the radical possibility of a natural knowledge of God and even, it seems, the reality of a formulated

<sup>21</sup>*Dogmatics* 11/1, pp. 122-3. Cf. *Dogmatics* 1/2 (1956), pp. 305-6.

<sup>22</sup>*Credo*, p.12.

<sup>23</sup>*The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation*, Upsalla, 1955.

knowledge, which is at least partly correct. This thesis differs slightly from the epistle to the Romans which, instead of announcing the *possibility and reality of a formulated knowledge*, simply disengages *the reality of a knowledge obscured through lack of knowledge.*"<sup>24</sup> Such a thesis is by no means incompatible with the outlook of natural theology; indeed it seems to presuppose it.

#### IV

In the light of the above discussion we may now, I suggest, fairly conclude that the contemporary theological critique of natural theology is not unanswerable. This is not to say that theologians must have a natural theology. Such a strong suggestion would demand more argument than space here allows me. Suffice it to say that natural theology remains a challenge to the theologian.

<sup>24</sup>op.cit., pp. 58-9.

## Between Prophet and Philosopher

Douglas Kent Clark

Heu vatum ignare mentes . . .

—Vergil, Aenid, II.63

The God of the Psalmists and the prophets was not in nature, He transcended nature—and transcended, likewise, the realm of mythopoetic thought. It would seem that the Hebrews, no less than the Greeks, broke with the mode of speculation which had prevailed up to their time.

—H. and H. A. Frankfort

"The Emancipation of Thought from Myth"<sup>1</sup>

At least until the advent of counter-cultural occultism, we of the post-medieval West, whether we regard ourselves as heirs of the secular Greeks or of the pious Hebrews, have liked to think that our own speculation has broken completely with mythopoetic thought. As successors to the rationalists and empiricists, many of today's philosophers have attempted to find ultimate knowledge through "scientific" investigation, and, failing, have settled for an under-

<sup>1</sup>H. and H. A. Frankfort, "The Emancipation of Thought from Myth", *Before Philosophy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Repr. 1971), p. 237.