

THE PARADOX OF A VEILED REVELATION

[This is about how religion calls vague scriptures and messages from God revelation. A revelation that reveals badly is not a revelation]

Excerpts from the Gifford Lectures Brand Blanshard

<https://www.giffordlectures.org/books/reason-and-belief>

Suppose, however, that a consistent body of Scriptural teaching were at last achieved. Suppose that by identifying some passages as quotations merely, others as metaphorical, others as interpolations, by contracting the scope of revelation to faith and morals, and by using adroitly the extensive armoury of Catholic apologetics, we could put together the pieces of the vast picture puzzle, collected from many places and many centuries, into some sort of unified whole; what then? Looking at this effort in the large, we could see that we should still be committed to a strange and improbable hypothesis. For our hypothesis would then be that a Deity who desired to communicate the truth to his creatures, and who possessed all the means of doing so, chose to bury that truth beneath such layers of obscurity, ambiguity, and apparent contradiction as to baffle nearly everybody. One cannot refute that theory, because it will absorb every new difficulty placed in its way as just another obstacle planted there by Deity for reasons that are in the end beyond us. It is like the scientific theory held by Edmund Gosse's father, who was a geologist of some repute, though a fundamentalist in religion and an opponent of evolution. When there came to light in deep-lying strata fossils that must have been deposited there before the date when on his reckoning the world was created, he explained them by suggesting that they had been placed there by the Creator to puzzle us, deceive us if deceivable, and so test our faith. Such a theory cannot be disproved, for it is consistent with any evidence that might be adduced against it, but for that very reason also it carries no conviction. Furthermore, a theology of this kind seems really self-defeating. For if God were what it implies that he is, if he were the kind of being who, able to vouchsafe a saving revelation to all mankind, reserved it for a small minority even of those then living, a being who, by granting it at a late stage of life on earth, cut off from it the earlier millions who might have been illumined by it, and even then chose to hide much of it under deceptive veils from those anxious to understand it, he must have a character different from that which in human beings we call good. A theology that offers itself as rational should not drive us into irrationality on the cardinal point of God's goodness.