

Uniformitarianism

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In the last issue of “The Reformed Witness” pamphlet we considered the truth of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture and its relation to the truth of creation. By the perspicuity of Holy Scripture we mean that Scripture is basically clear and plain. The meaning of Scripture is not obscure or clouded. But the meaning of Scripture is plain and understandable to the ordinary believer. The outstanding proof of this is that Scripture is addressed by God to the ordinary believer. That God addresses the Bible to the ordinary believer and intends that the Bible be read by the ordinary believer proves the perspicuity of the Bible.

The theistic evolutionist denies the perspicuity of the Bible. He does this especially by his reinterpretation of Genesis 1, and the “days” of Genesis 1. By interpreting the “days” of the creation week in a way other than the plain, literal sense of the word “day”, and by doing this for scientific rather than Biblical reasons, the theistic evolutionist overthrows the truth of the perspicuity of the Scripture. At the same time he sets himself and his alleged scientific findings above Holy Scripture. From now on our understanding of Scripture is subject to the scientist and the scientist’s discoveries. Because of its denial of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture, the Reformed believer rejects the contentions of theistic evolution.

In this issue of “The Reformed Witness” pamphlet we want to look at the theistic evolution from the point of view of its dependence of the un-Scriptural principle of “uniformitarianism.” One of the basic pre-suppositions of the theory of theistic evolution, as well as the atheistic brand of evolutionary thought, is the principle of uniformitarianism. So critical is the principle of uniformitarianism to the theory of evolution that, it is safe to say, if the principle of uniformitarianism be dis-proved, the whole structure of evolutionary thought falls to the ground.

Although a frightening word in appearance, the idea expressed by the “uniformitarianism” is not difficult to grasp. Those who hold to the principle of uniformitarianism teach that the same “natural laws” and processes which are at work in the creation today have always been present in the creation and have always operated in exactly the same way. All things have remained basically the same since the beginning. The laws and processes which apply in the world today have continued unchanged from the past until the present. The idea of uniformitarianism has been expressed in the phrase, “The present is the key to the past.”

The principle of uniformitarianism comes into play in connection with what is considered to be the main evidence for evolution, the fossil record. One of the strongest evidences for evolution is the fossil record and the great ages which scientists assign to many of the fossils. But in dating fossil remains, scientists presuppose uniformitarianism. Their whole method of dating is built on the presupposition of the principle of uniformitarianism.

The most common method of dating fossils is the radioactive dating method. The most common radioactive dating methods are the uranium method and the carbon-14 method. The uranium method is the basis for the presently accepted idea that the earth is about 4.5 to 5 billion years old. Without going into detail, in radioactive dating a parent substance (for example, uranium) is gradually changed into a daughter substance (for example, lead). This takes place at a fixed rate. Scientists are able to determine how quickly a given amount of radioactive uranium changes into lead. Given this rate of decay, by measuring the relative amounts of uranium and lead in a fossil, scientists are able to determine when this process began, and hence, the approximate age of the fossil.

Sounds fool-proof, doesn’t it. Most scientists and science teachers have thought so. For over half a century now they have contended that uranium dating in particular has proved the earth to be billions of years old.

But is this method fool-proof? The answer is: No. Apart from many inconsistencies and discrepancies in the methods themselves, there is one basic flaw to all the dating methods. What is that flaw? That flaw is the principle of uniformitarianism. That’s not difficult to see. All the dating methods presuppose the principle of uniformitarianism. The uranium method presupposes that radioactive uranium has always turned into lead at exactly

the same rate. The carbon-14 method presupposes that carbon-14 has always turned into nitrogen at exactly the same rate. If, for example, at some time in the past uranium decayed into lead at twice the present rate, it would be impossible, using the present rate of decay to determine the correct age of a fossil. The approximations of the scientists would be incorrect.

The theory of evolution rests heavily on the evidence of the fossil record. The dating of the fossil record depends on the principle of uniformitarianism. But is uniformitarianism correct? Have the same natural laws and processes which are at work in the creation today always been present in the creation, and have they always been present in exactly the same way?

The answer of the Bible is: No. The Bible refutes the principle of uniformitarianism. The outstanding passage of Scripture which dis-proves the principle of uniformitarianism is II Peter 3: 3-7. In this passage, the Apostle Peter predicts that in the last days unbelieving scoffers shall arise who will deny the promise concerning Christ's second coming. One of the arguments that these scoffers shall put forward to deny the possibility of Christ's return in judgment is that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." These scoffers rest their argument that Christ is not going to come again on the principle of uniformitarianism. Nothing has changed, they say, since the beginning of the world. All things continue today as they ever have.

The Apostle denies this argument of the scoffers. He denies that all things continue the same from the beginning to the end of the world. He does that by appealing to the historical event of the Flood. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished," II Peter 3:5,6. The principle of uniformitarianism is dis-proved by the Flood. All things have NOT continued the same since the beginning of the world. The same laws and processes have NOT always been at work in the creation. For at one time, in His just judgment over man's sin, God sent the great catastrophe of the Flood of Noah's day. That was such a catastrophe that changed entirely the earthly creation. Such a radical change was produced by the Flood that the Apostle Peter refers to two different worlds in II Peter 3. He refers to the world before the Flood as "the world that then was", and he refers to the world after the Flood as "the heavens and the earth, which are now." They are, very really, two distinct worlds, so completely different are they.

This great difference between the world before the Flood and the world after the Flood is evident from what the Bible tells us in the Book of Genesis. We'll point to just one evidence of this great change. If you read the genealogy recorded in Genesis 5, the genealogy of Adam up to the Flood, and Noah's genealogy through his son Shem in Genesis 11 it immediately strikes you that the relative ages of the men recorded in Genesis 11 are about half of those recorded in Genesis 5. After the Flood man's life-span was cut in half, a rather drastic change, wouldn't you say! Suddenly after the flood men are no longer living to be 900 years old and older, but now they are living to be about 450 years old. (By the way, a similar sharp decline in man's age took place after the Tower of Babel.) From this it ought to be clear to us that conditions before the Flood were not the same as those after the Flood. The world before the Flood, and the conditions in that world, were quite different from the world as we know it today.

In the light of the clear teaching of Scripture, the principle of uniformitarianism cannot stand. And if the principle of uniformitarianism cannot stand, the scientific methods of dating the fossil record cannot stand. And if the alleged evidence of the age of the fossil record cannot stand, the main pillar of the theory of evolution falls to the ground.

It is interesting that even the fossil record itself testifies against the principle of uniformitarianism and gives evidence for the Flood. Fossils are not produced by slow uniformitarian processes. To become fossilized a plant or animal must usually have hard parts, such as bone or shell. It must then be buried quickly to prevent decay, most commonly either by volcanic activity or by watery inundation. The evidence of the fossils themselves points to the great catastrophe of the Flood.

Were the fossils and the rocks and the other characteristics of the earth's surface formed slowly over billions of years by the same processes now at work in the earth? Does the principle of uniformitarianism apply? The evolutionist says: Yes. His entire evolutionary theory depends on the principle of uniformitarianism. But the child

of God, in the light of the Word of God, rejects the principle of uniformitarianism. And along with his rejection of uniformitarianism goes his rejection of the theory of evolution.