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## GOD DOES NOT DECEIVE MEN

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*Those who hold the doctrines of uniformitarianism and evolution usually do so because of such things as the fossil record, or other supposed evidence for a very old earth. Those, moreover, who want to combine evangelical Christianity and uniformitarianism may argue that if the earth is not very old, God would be deceitful in making it appear so. It is maintained here, however, the God does not deceive men; it is much more likely that they deceive themselves. Moreover, the essence of deceitfulness lies in the intent. God, in creating the world as it is, did not make it thus for the purpose of deceiving men, but for very good reasons, which, of course, may or may not be apparent to men at the present.*

### Introduction

One of the questions that continually comes to the forefront in discussions among evangelicals about science and scientific findings is the question of the age of the earth. Members of the evangelical community are the most concerned with this question and similar types of questions because evangelicals are most concerned with the accuracy of the Biblical accounts. Accuracy at this point means literal rather than mythological accuracy.

Thus, given the Genesis account, an elementary knowledge of mathematics, and a little guessing about the age of Terah at the time of Abraham's birth, one may well arrive at the conclusion that the age of the earth is not a very advanced age when compared with the age that many scientists declare. Herein lies the crux of the evangelical's dilemma: Biblical data and geologic data are in apparent conflict. But if the Bible

is true and God is author of both the Word and the world, then this apparent conflict must be resolved.

There have been many attempts to reconcile this rift between geologic and biblical data: the so-called gap theory, flood geology, day age concepts are but a few of the attempted reconciliations made by persons of conservative theological persuasion. More radical approaches have attempted reconciliation by such hermeneutical devices as mythological interpretations.

The latter approach, it would appear, is more of a radical bifurcation between spiritual and empirical statements than it is a reconciliation. The purpose of this study, however, is not hermeneutical nor is it the purpose of this paper to discuss relative merits or limitations of such interpretations.

It can be generalized however that the approaches listed above either become too biblical to suit the scientist or too naturalistic to suit the biblicist. Thus, there is room for an approach that is more satisfactory to both sides. This is not a search for a compromise position, but rather for a more satisfactory position because it is a more accurate position.

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### Search for A "Holy Alliance"

One methodology that is presented to the evangelical community as being a more satisfactory, sensible, and accurate position is based on the doctrine of uniformitarianism. The goal of the uniformitarian is to settle the apparent conflict between theological data and geologic data. It is worth noting that the approach of the uniformitarian evangelical is an academically sophisticated settlement of the conflict by combining certain principles of theology and science to arrive at what would hopefully be a "holy alliance".

It is the contention of those who hold to uniformitarianism that the geophysicochemico data have chronometers written into them. There are certain causal relationships that have been observed by the scientist, in time. This being the case, if the causal sequence has a constant temporal sequence then the causal sequence or chain may be used as a measure of time.

By taking these causal, now temporal chains, and looking back upon the geologic data, one ought to be able to make accurate statements about the elapsed time in or the necessary time for that geologic data. This it should be noted is the commitment of the uniformitarian position. It accepts that principle of uniformitarianism in nature: as it happens now, so it happened before. The inductive principles of science are taken to be as relevant to past events, even prehistoric events as they are to present events.

As was mentioned earlier, the uniformitarian position as assumed by some evangelicals, being basically an attempt at reconciliation, has not only a commitment to science but to theology as well. The theological principle that the uniformitarian most wants to utilize is a central aspect of God's nature: the inability of God to deceive.

In answer to the question, "Is it necessary for there to be as much time as the geologic data appear to indicate?", the uniformitarian evangelical responds by saying, "If there is not as much time as the geologic data seem to indicate then God is deceiving us." To put it another way, if God created the world in a short period of time while the physical data can be interpreted to support the necessity of a long period of time, then God is deceiving us into believing that there was time when in fact there was no time.

The reader should be aware of the fact that this paper in no way will make an attempt to establish the age of the earth. The main concern of this paper is the examination of both the theological and philosophical premises of uniformitarianism for they may or may not be correct. Furthermore, if those principles are correct, or at least are treated as if they were correct, they may be more potent than the uniformitarian evangelical can either allow or accept.

### Two Principles Are Basic

As has been declared to this point, the uniformitarian evangelical position rests on two principles: 1) The causal/temporal principle and 2) The theological principle of God's inability to deceive. It is contended here that the causal principle in the Uniformitarian's argument actually gains support from the theological prin-

ciple. The fact that God cannot deceive is the guarantee that the causal/temporal record must be accurate.

This being the case, it is necessary to examine the theological principle first and then attention can be given to the causal principle, and then only if it is necessary. It will also be noted that no criticism of the uniformitarian's conception of time will be made. However, there certainly are significant questions that can be raised about the relationship of time and deception within the character of God.

The uniformitarian evangelical position, as has been shown, holds that if God created in a short period of time what the geologic data seem to indicate took a long period of time, then God is a deceiver. Furthermore, if God deceives then there is a manifest moral blemish in the character of God. Traditional evangelical theologians following in the steps of Anselm and Descartes have held to the doctrine of the absolute perfection of God.

Furthermore, deception and perfection are incompatible attributes. Thus, if God is not perfect, He cannot be God. Since deception is an imperfection, if God deceives then He cannot be God. To this point there is no argument with the uniformitarian evangelical's theology. Certainly there is both credence and value in asserting that God cannot be perfect and deceive at the same time.

However, to assert that God cannot deceive therefore the earth is as old as geologic data appear to indicate does not follow. The reasoning is simple.

### Elements of Reasoned Position

Deception refers to motives, not actions. For an act to be a deceptive act, it must be an act that is done with the intent of making a person believe that something is the case when in fact it is not the case. Thus, to say that God is a deceiver because geologic data seem to indicate more time than in fact there was would necessitate the accuser's knowing the motives of God at the time of creation. God would be a deceiver if and only if He meant human beings to believe that there was more time than there actually was, and that for the sake of deception. †

Apart from the fact that, philosophically speaking, it is difficult to reason from an act to the motivation for that act; given that difficulty, one might still be tempted to call God a deceiver if there were no other reasonable method of explaining why there appeared to be time when in fact there was no time.

But, that most certainly is not the case. It might well be the fact that God so designed the world with events and sequences that never happened, though totally consistent with the presently occurring regularities, for revelatory purposes; to understand more clearly how the world functions and will continue to function.

†A simple illustration might be helpful here. In former times many believed that the earth was flat. (I am not saying, nor do I believe, that the earth is flat according to scripture.) Such was one's natural first impression. Was God deceitful, then, in making a spherical earth which would appear flat at a casual look? Of course not. For the flat appearance arose from the relative sizes of men and of the earth, and from the laws of optics. And these things are necessarily as they are, or at least it is desirable, for reasons far more important than those connected with mere appearances. —Editor

It might simply be the case that God created in such a fashion to demonstrate His tremendously complex and awe inspiring designing capabilities lending credence to the teleological argument for God's existence. The point here however is not to explain why God did create within less time than geologic data supposedly indicates.

In fact, that is not even being asserted. What is being stated is this: One can believe that God is truthful without necessarily believing that the current interpretation of geological data is true. The nature of God is no guarantor of the causal/temporal assertions of the uniformitarian evangelical.

But, the argument is not yet finished. Suppose that the previous discussion of deceit and God's nature is incorrect. Suppose for a moment that the uniformitarian evangelical position is true. Suppose that God, in the most strict sense of the word, cannot deceive. What would be the consequences of such a position?

It will become obvious that such a position though apparently pure in science and hopefully pure in theology should be of necessity totally unacceptable to any evangelical including the uniformitarian evangelical. The fact is that given the uniformitarian evangelical presuppositions about the nature of God and the temporal aspect of causality, God would never have been able to create.

1. If God alone existed, then if God created, He created something from nothing.

2. If God created something from nothing, He created it in some stage of completion, for to be is to be in some state.

3. If God created something in some stage of completion, there is from the inductive *ex post facto* perspective an implication of prior time in the created object to bring it to that stage of completion.

But,

1. since there was no time in which those causal factors could have worked, and

2. since God cannot deceive it becomes obvious that God could not create for any creation will imply that

time existed when in fact it did not exist, or that causal sequences were taking place when in fact they were not taking place.

The scientist looking back on the geologic data via the mechanism of his causal/temporal sequences will never be able to find a beginning, for whatever object he observes will always imply a preceding causal factor. Therefore, the uniformitarian evangelical can never in a meaningful manner speak of creation.

Thus, as hinted earlier, if one accepts the uniformitarian position as true, as a Christian one arrives at a conclusion that is not at all Biblical. In fact the best condition one may maintain is the eternal coexistence of matter and spirit, a position which has been labeled as heresy from the beginnings of church history.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, one might note that since the basic premise of uniformitarianism does not work, the uniformitarian evangelical can say little about the age of the earth. It may make sense to some to believe in an advanced age for the earth, but not on the basis of uniformitarian principles.

It must be noted here too that no criticism of the inductive principle and no criticism of the concept of the constancy of time were made in this analysis. Both of these issues and many others as well, certainly could have been explored and possibly, if not probably, would have even further enhanced the case of this article. But those analyses were not necessary and therefore as indicated earlier were not pursued.

What in fact then promised to be a "holy alliance", uniformitarianism and God's creative acts, ends up being an illegitimate relationship. Uniformitarianism is not the academicians' delight. It is not the evangelicals' panacea. It is simply: an *ad hoc* "hypothesis" supported by unclarified theological assumptions. As such it is a failure in an attempt to reconcile biblical and geologic data.

### New Printing of Greek Received Text

Persons who read Greek may be interested to know about a new printing of the Greek Received Text of the New Testament. This text, which is that in the majority of manuscripts, was used for the translations made at the time of the Reformation.

Many later translations, however, were much influenced by a few manuscripts, considered to be very old, which had been found in the meantime. Many students, however, while admitting that those manuscripts are old, maintain that they are corrupt, having been made when heresies, such as Arianism,

were rife. So they believe that the Received Text is better.

This new printing is being distributed by the Trinitarian Bible Society. The price is about \$5.00 for ordinary binding; a leather-bound Testament is also available. The printing, it may be said, is excellent; and the Greek type is about as clear as any ever seen.

Addresses of the Society are: in Britain: 217 Kingston Road, London; in Canada: 26 Gracey Boulevard, Weston, Ontario; and in the United States: 2046 Dean Lake Road, N.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49505.

— The Editor