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Copy
Dr Andrew Snelling
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Dear Dr Snelling,

You wrote to me about three years ago at my previous address, inquiring as to how I was going and also regarding the possibility of turning my old university paper on radioactive dating into a paper for the *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal*. I have enclosed a copy of your letter to help jog the memory, since this reply has taken so long. Thank-you for your interest in me and I am very sorry for the delay, the reasons for which are quite complex. Since you asked how I was going, it is probably easiest to tell you my story. I hope you will read all of my letter. I hope also that you will read it in the spirit in which it is offered - that of one Christian to another with a deep concern for truth and integrity.

When I was in high school in the early 1980's, I came across some CSF literature and I was rapt. It looked so good, so scientific and so professional. To a young Year-10 Christian who was committed to the Bible and who was also interested in the natural sciences I thought it was a God-send. I lapped up the issues of *Ex Nihilo* in Years 10, 11 and 12, and at first year uni in 1986, reading them cover to cover. I learned all the arguments, facts, figures and so on. I was thoroughly convinced of the truth of CSF's literature and I was a faithful supporter, so much so in fact, that my faith came almost to depend on the truth of CSF's scientific claims, since it was repeated over and over again that Genesis was the foundation of the whole Bible and if the CSF version of natural history—said to be in strict accordance with Genesis—wasn't true, then all was lost and our faith was groundless. How could we then trust anything else in the Bible? I tried to convince my friends and any one else who would listen, of the truth of this and I was a dedicated promoter of Creationism and CSF in my campus Christian group in 1986 and 1987 at Monash University. (Creation Science Fellowship)

In 1987, I began my studies in Geology and Earth Sciences at Monash University and I wanted to learn all I could. I was certain that "evolutionary" geology was wrong and I looked forward to being able to become qualified enough to help expose this great lie. I decided to begin my more specific studies in what I saw as the lynch-pin of modern geology - radioactive dating techniques. I eagerly gathered all of the references I could lay my hands on. I followed up all of the creationist arguments and papers I could find and I hunted down obscure journal articles referenced in those papers, to make sure I was on firm ground. The result of all my reading and research was the paper I sent to you, for which I received an excellent mark. This was where I was up to when we last corresponded.

I am sorry to have to tell you though Dr Snelling, that the experience of writing that paper, was the beginning of a devastating loss of confidence for me in the creationist arguments for "flood geology" and a young Earth. I had discovered in my research, that sure, there were some technical problems with radioactive dating, but once I understood how the techniques worked and independently reinforced each other, they were nowhere near as fragile as I had been led to believe. The only "devastating" critique of radioactive dating which my integrity would allow me to make was that there were some problems and that the techniques should

be used cautiously - a far cry from what I had expected! I can still remember one example: one of the creationist arguments was that decay rates have varied through history to such an extent that modern techniques were totally inaccurate. I was disappointed to discover that the greatest variation that scientists had been able to duplicate under the most extreme conditions was something like a 4% variation in some obscure isotope not even used for dating - not quite the approximately 4000% difference required to bring 4.5 billion years down to about 15,000!

I became deeply concerned by this and the rational side of my faith began to unravel. But I firmly believed that the Christian need not be afraid of the truth, no matter what short term difficulties it caused and I desperately wanted to know the truth of this matter. Studying the question of the age of the earth became something of an obsession for me as I continued my geological studies. I did well and I ended up topping my classes in second year Earth Sciences and also in second and third year Geology. I also received the first "High Distinction" for Sedimentology that my lecturer had ever given. But the more I read and learned and the more I saw with my own eyes on field trips, through mapping, down microscopes, and through seismic interpretation, the more I became gradually convinced that CSF was in serious error over the age of the Earth and that these "Godless" scientists were far closer to the truth.

Everywhere I looked, I saw more and more evidence of the vast antiquity of the Earth: whether it was complex structural and metamorphic terrains, igneous cooling rates, plutonic intrusions into fossiliferous strata, evaporite deposits, volcanic successions, cementation processes, *in situ* biogenic deposits, planktonic microfossil distributions, seismic stratigraphic mapping, palaeo-environmental reconstructions etc. etc. In the creationist literature conversely, I found inaccuracies, misunderstandings, plain straight-out distortions and gross neglect of geological data (further documented in Wonderly (1987)), such as this beauty from Henry Morris: "there is no type of geologic feature which cannot be explained in terms of rapid formation" (Morris, 1974, p.94)!

Even when it came to the history of the science of geology, much of the creationist literature I read distorted the account, making it seem as if young Earth flood-geology was displaced by modern "old Earth" geology specifically in order to support the theory of evolution! As I later learned though, to my utter dismay, these arguments were rubbish and showed little appreciation of the history or practice of geology as a science. Most of the early geologists were Christians who only began to conceive of an ancient earth after the weight of the evidence they had accumulated through mapping became too great to sustain a belief in a young earth and the belief that Noah's flood was responsible for all fossil bearing strata. It was in the eighteenth century, well before Darwin was even born in 1809, that geologists discovered evidence that the earth's crust was a great deal older than the few thousand years assumed by the reformers. Not only did they reach their conclusions many years before Darwin launched his theory of evolution, but many of the early geologists were Bible-believing Christians and creationists.

James Hutton published his "Theory of the Earth" in 1788, (Hutton, 1788) followed in 1795 with "Theory of the Earth with proofs and illustrations" (Hutton, 1795), in which he concludes on the subject of the Earth's age: "The result, therefore of this present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, - no prospect of an end." (Quoted in (Albritton, 1986, p.101)). In Hutton's view, "geological time must be immeasurably vast to accommodate the succession of events which he inferred to have taken place. He appears to have been the first to comprehend the implications with regard to time as expressed in what geologists now call angular unconformities separating two thick sequences of strata." (Albritton, 1986 p.101). Hutton was not an atheist but a deist and providentialist (Albritton, 1986, p.101). Charles Lyell

M. published the first volume of his famous "Principles of Geology" in 1830, the year before Darwin set sail on "The Beagle" on his five year voyage of discovery (Lyell, 1830-1833). The age relationships between many of the major formations in Europe were worked out well before the theory of evolution gained the ascendancy and these were merely confirmed rather than established by later radiometric dating. There is simply no justification therefore, for the oft-repeated assertion, that the vast age of the earth deduced geologically, is merely a necessary prop for the theory of biological evolution without independent support.

Since the discovery of the vast antiquity of the Earth, biologists have been able to say that, yes, some sort of "evolution" has occurred, and no they don't fully understand the mechanisms. This is not simply a case of godless scientists trying, by any means possible, to avoid acknowledging the Creator. The reason they are able to say this, is that geologically, there is unequivocal evidence of developmental progression from simple to more complex forms of life over the history of the planet, which, to an agnostic biologist, can only mean some sort of evolution - descent with modification. It doesn't matter that not all of the "links" have been preserved, indeed it would be very surprising if they were! Neither does it matter that biologists and geneticists are unable to give a completely satisfactory explanation of the evolutionary mechanism and that some mysteries still remain. The fact remains that it soon became apparent to the early, mostly Christian, geologists, that life-forms increased in complexity as one progressed from older to younger strata. The age relationships were not assigned to the strata on the basis of the theory of evolution, as is often implied in creationist literature, but they were deduced by the stratigraphic relationships in the field. It was found from tracking these units across Britain and Europe that certain types of fossils occurred in particular strata. Of course, the option of naturalistic evolution (let alone philosophical evolutionism!) is not open to the Christian, and it is a separate question whether one understands this increasing complexity, discovered through extensive field work over 200 years, in terms of either "progressive creation" or a form of "theistic evolution".

It is often implied in many of the creationist writings I have read, that there is some sort of conspiracy in the geological community against "flood geology" which prevents it getting a fair hearing. But I no longer believe that there is such a "conspiracy" within geological science. The scientific community doesn't function like that. Most geologists would love to find evidence that would overturn the dominant paradigm of an ancient earth. It would surely earn them instant fame, a Nobel prize, a place in the history books and a great deal of money from publishing royalties and the lecture circuit! But the evidence just isn't there. As a science, Geology left behind "flood-geology", not because those early pioneers were trying to disprove the Bible or were looking for an excuse not to believe, but because the weight of the evidence forced them to. They were men of integrity, many of whom loved God and it does them a gross injustice to imply otherwise.

It is hard for me to describe the absolute devastation I felt at first, when I discovered all of this. I felt utterly betrayed - as if the rug had been pulled out from under me and almost my whole worldview. I had placed so much trust in CSF and now I could see with my own eyes the failures of the "young Earth" arguments. I was embarrassed and ashamed that I had pushed these arguments so strongly among my friends and family - both Christian and non-Christian. I had gained something of a reputation as "the Creationist" and I had stood up firmly for what I had believed to be true. Now I was ashamed that I had put such a great unnecessary stumbling block in the way of my friends and my father and my faith was almost in tatters.

You must remember, that I desperately wanted "conventional geology" to be wrong. I had no interest at all in it being right, but I could not, with integrity, follow the CSF "party line" any longer. When your letter reached me in 1991 I was still feeling pretty hurt and angry and confused. I just didn't know how to reply.

But God has been very gracious to me. I am still a Christian and I love Jesus more than ever, but I have come to a different understanding of Genesis. I am actually completing a Bachelor of Theology degree this year at an evangelical college here in Melbourne and one of my major research concerns has been to work through this whole issue. I now have on my data base nearly 300 books and papers on this subject, most of which I have copies of. Recovering has been a struggle though, because of how hard a narrow literalism had been drummed into me, and I have been very grateful for the writings of other Christians who are also experienced geologists such as Davis Young and Dan Wonderly in the U.S., both of whom I occasionally write to. They are also extremely concerned at the negative effect "young-Earth" creationist teachings are having on people's receptivity to the Gospel in the geologically educated community.

There are many books and papers which I found helpful, but I would be very interested, in particular, in knowing how you would respond to the arguments presented by the following authors:

Dalrymple, G.B., (1983a) "Can the Earth be Dated from the Decay of Its Magnetic Field?", *Journal of Geological Education* Vol 31, No. 2 124-133.

Dalrymple, G.B., (1983b) "Radiometric dating and the age of the earth: a reply to scientific creationism", *Federation Proceedings* Vol 42, No. 13 3033-3038.

Dalrymple, G.B., (1991) *The Age of the Earth* (Stanford University Press,) 474 pp.

Fraser, A., (1977) "Radiometric dating", *Christian Graduate* Vol 30, No. 4 120-126.

Shea, J.H., (1983) "Creationism, Uniformitarianism, Geology and Science", *Journal of Geological Education* Vol 31, No. 2 105-110.

Wonderly, D., (1977) *God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments: Evidence of Long Time Spans in Earth's History* (Flint, Michigan: Crystal Press,) 258 pp.

Wonderly, D., (1987) *Neglect of Geologic Data: Sedimentary Strata Compared with Young Earth Creationist Writings* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute,)

Young, D.A., (1988a) *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* (Thousand Oaks, California: Artisan Sales,) 188 pp.

(I have included as an appendix a list of some of the other works I have found helpful as well as those cited in this letter).

I do not expect a detailed response to them, but I strongly believe that if you are going to travel the country preaching about a young earth, you must be capable of systematically and convincingly refuting all of the lines of evidence presented by these authors. But I have yet to see a creationist work which even comes close.

Dr Snelling, you, as the staff geologist of CSF, are providing the chronological underpinnings for the other recent-creationist scientists, most of whom I gather, are biologists, geneticists and engineers who just do not understand the geology. They trust absolutely in what you say and trust in your integrity as a Christian as well as your integrity as a professional geologist. Now I have no wish to question your integrity, but I must confess that I am astounded that you can continue to maintain a young-Earth position. It surely must be because you believe Genesis absolutely requires it, rather than on the independent basis of the accumulation of

M.
scientific evidence! This, in itself, is a curious way for a scientist to operate: to be absolutely certain of his conclusions and then go looking for evidence that will support it. Doesn't this aspect of your work concern you? If you believe that the only "Biblical" way of understanding Genesis, is from a "young-Earth" perspective, I think you have been sold a lemon by your fellow creationist "biblical scholars". There are other ways of understanding Genesis without violating the text as the word of God.

Doesn't it make you wonder a bit too, why the overwhelming majority of CSF's and ICR's member scientists are biologists, engineers, geneticists and so on, but there are hardly any professional geologists? In fact I would be very interested in seeing a list of the names of all of the professional geologists who are members of CSF or ICR. How many have PhDs in such fields as structural and metamorphic mapping, sedimentary petrology, carbonate sedimentology, geochronology or seismic interpretation? Can you tell me how many geologists there are with extensive field experience - who know what the rocks are actually like - who are members of CSF or ICR and hold to the "flood geology" model? Are there many? Would you be prepared to name them? I would love to hear how they manage it, because I certainly couldn't, and this caused me enormous anguish at the time.

I am quite frustrated by the impression I get, that the CSF scientists seem to spend most of their time on the road in "ministry" and with no time left for "research". I imagine it can all become self-fulfilling and self-sustaining after a while: old arguments are repeated uncritically and old presuppositions are not reexamined - there is no time! But in view of your extremely influential position in the church and in the Creation Science movement and in view of the trust so many geologically less-educated Christians place in what you say, I implore you to reevaluate your "young Earth" position in the light of the overwhelming evidence available today for an ancient Earth - both radiometric and non-radiometric - a mere tiny sample of which I have referenced. Our concern as Christians engaged in the scientific study of God's world must always be for the truth of Geological history as it actually happened, not as we think it should have happened according to a particular understanding of Genesis. I hope you will reassess your arguments and teachings, and particularly the geological data, with the utmost care and integrity - aside from preconceived notions about how old the Earth is supposed to be. If you can honestly maintain a young-Earth position after thoroughly digesting and following-through Young's, Wonderly's and Dalrymple's arguments and data and Albritton's history of our science, I, and I am sure they too, would love to hear from you. I mean this quite sincerely. If not, please give some thought to the enormous amount of damage your "ministry" may actually be causing.

I want to ask you Dr Snelling: Please, for the sake of the Gospel and the Lord Jesus, whom I do believe you love, please think very carefully about what you are doing. If you are wrong about the age of the Earth, and I now firmly believe that you are, you are at present involved in a "ministry" which is inoculating huge numbers of non-Christians against the Gospel, putting a great stumbling block in their way and giving increasing numbers of Christians a basis for their faith which can be easily blown away by any geologist who knows his stuff. God managed to rebuild my faith, but the loss of confidence at the time was absolutely shattering. I am only now beginning to speak up as boldly as I once did for Jesus, and God alone knows how many other enthusiastic "young-Earth" converts have actually lost their faith because they did not have the time or the resources or the scientific training, as I did, to work through the issue properly, once some of the problems with it were discovered.

I hope you will consider the issues I have raised. If I may make one request - if you ever use this letter or my story as a "sermon illustration" in any of your writings or your talks, please do not present me as someone who has fallen for the "great lie" or as yet another "casualty" of the evil of modern geology. I have thoroughly researched these matters to the

best of my ability over a number of years and, as a Christian committed to serving and following our Lord, I have been forced by the weight of the evidence and my commitment to integrity and truth, to painfully abandon the young-Earth position. The tragedy in my case was emphatically not the evidence for an ancient earth which I was eventually forced to face, but the flimsy arguments for a young Earth promulgated by CSF and ICR, in which I had placed so much faith and trust. I doubt though, whether "testimonies" such as mine ever make it to the pages of "Creation" or "Prayer News".

So, once again, thank-you for your interest in me and my progress, but no, I don't think my paper would be suitable to rework into a technical paper for *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal*. I thank you for the offer though. I also thank you for your kind wishes in your letter to me. I know that the Lord has been with me in my studies and I believe He has indeed given me wisdom and guidance as I have sought to serve Him.

Yours in Christ,



Brett Parris.

The following are books and papers referenced in the text and a small sample of some others I have found helpful:

Albritton, C.C., Jr., (1986) *The Abyss of Time: Changing Conceptions of the Earth's Antiquity after the Sixteenth Century* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc.,) 251 pp.

Campbell, K., (1989a) "Some Problems with creation science", *St. Mark's Review* No. 137 12-19.

Campbell, K., (1989b) "Professor Campbell Replies...", *St. Mark's Review* No. 138 31-32.

Hutton, J., (1788) "Theory of the earth; or an investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution, and restoration of land upon the globe", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* Vol 1, No. 2 209-304.

Hutton, J., (1795) *Theory of the Earth with proofs and illustrations* (2 vols; London & Edinburgh: Cadell and Davies & William Creech,)

Johnson, M.R., (1988) *Genesis, Geology and Catastrophism: A Critique of Creationist Science and Biblical Literalism* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press,) 171 pp.

Lucas, E.C., (1987) "Some scientific issues related to the understanding of Genesis 1-3", *Themelios* Vol 12, No. 2 46-51.

Lyell, C., (1830-1833) *Principles of geology* (3 vols; London: John Murray,)

Morris, H.M. (Ed.) (1974) *Scientific Creationism* (trans. Translator; Series El Cajon, California: Master Books,) 277 pp.

Munday Jr., J.C., (1992) "Creature Mortality: From Creation or the Fall?", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol 35, No. 1 51-58.

Other sources are on p. 4 and 7.

Spanner, D.C., (1987) *Biblical Creation and the Theory of Evolution* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press,) 191 pp.

Young, D.A., (1972-73) "Some Practical Geological Problems in the Application of the Mature Creation Doctrine", *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol 35, 268-280.

Young, D.A., (1974-75) "Another Look at Mature Creationism", *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol 37, 384-389.

Young, D.A., (1977) *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House,) 217 pp.

Young, D.A., (1987a) "Scripture in the Hands of Geologists (Part One)", *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol 49, No. 1 1-34.

Young, D.A., (1987b) "Scripture in the Hands of Geologists (Part Two)", *Westminster Theological Journal* Vol 49, No. 2 257-304.

Young, D.A., (1988b) "Theology and Natural Science", *The Reformed Journal* Vol 38, No. 5 10-16.