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Dear Brother Moon:

I noticed in the Fall 1992 Columbia Annual Report that you had recently joined the faculty of Columbia Bible College. We trust that the Lord will give you a good ministry there and guide you in every phase of your work for Him--especially with the elementary teacher program.

When I noticed in the paragraph concerning you that you have a rather wide background of teaching, I could not help but wonder if you might be perplexed regarding the influence which extreme young-earth creationism has had on a great many teachers and ministers. We understand that this is true of at least some of the professors of Columbia Bible College, but we also have reason to believe that they try to avoid some of the extremism which we see in many of the leaders of the modern creationism movement.

Because I was a member of the science faculty of Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, during the years when that confusion was becoming prevalent in Bible colleges of the United States, I came to have a strong burden to help in that problem. My wife and I did a lot of praying for God's will concerning it, and as a result we have remained in contact with several old-earth special creationists and have been doing what we can to clarify misunderstandings regarding the problem. We are thankful to have been able to maintain a good relation with the Grace College Science Division people and with others in that institution.

The issue is not evolution, since all special creationists agree that such a doctrine is not compatible with the Bible. But the age-of-the-earth issue, which is continuously emphasized by the leaders of the creationism movement, has had an immensely detrimental effect in removing the desire of many public educators to be tolerant of evangelical churches. In the 1970's many public educators were actually trying to cooperate with creationists. But, as the latter began to more openly emphasize their insistence that the earth is only about ten thousand years old, this opportunity wasted away. The culminating blow in this wasting process was the Arkansas creation trial of 1980-81, in which the creationist leaders emphasized their insistence on a young earth and their belief that practically all types of earth science are corrupt and not to be trusted. At that point, the strong anti-creationist movement had its beginning--using the age-of-the-earth issue as its leading means of convincing educators that the whole creationism movement is totally unreliable and prejudiced against scientific data. (I have a couple of documented papers which outline the development of the anti-creationist movement, if you should need any more information on it.)

It is likely that your interest in conservative evangelical schools has provided you with the information that insistence on a young earth, and the rejection of most geologic research, were not a part of the doctrine of the conservative evangelical founders in America and Great Britain. They fought a consistent battle against evolutionary doctrine, but were convinced that we should not conclude that the Bible actually teaches that the earth and universe are extremely young. Such conservative leaders as the Scofield Reference Bible editors, and most of the founders of the early Bible Institutes (Moody, The Bible Institute of Los Angeles, Philadelphia Bible College, Columbia Bible College, etc.) felt that Christians are responsible to pay attention to carefully-collected earth-science data. In contrast to this, you have probably observed that the prevailing stand among the leaders of the creationism movement is that Christians should reject--or at least ignore--all earth science evidence which supports a great age for the earth. They defend this policy by saying that the Bible just does not allow us to believe in it,

and therefore we should leave it alone. I was at Grace College at the time that Dr. John Whitcomb, of Grace Seminary (on the same campus) began to widely disseminate this teaching. Several of the other professors in both the Seminary and the College refused to take such an extreme position. But the fact that neither of the schools had a geology or earth science department made it hard for the professors to obtain an appreciable amount of teaching on the subject--and I was involved mostly in teaching biology. (As you may know, neither Dr Whitcomb nor his associate, Henry Morris, had much background in geology--noneⁱⁿ sedimentology or sedimentary petrology.)

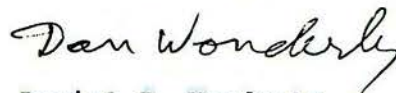
Morris formulated an elaborate set of hypotheses, based mainly on previous Seventh-Day Adventist writings, which he believed could explain how the Flood could have laid down all of the sedimentary strata of the earth. He did this not having any familiarity with the immense amount of accurate, non-radiometric data used by petroleum geology, which show that most of the sedimentary strata are very old. I am enclosing a couple of brochures which say a little bit about these petroleum geology data--as well as data from deep sea drillings into the sediments of the ocean floor. May I add a few more sentences about that here, before I close? (I realize that you probably don't have time to read many long letters.)

Beginning in the late 1950's, petroleum geologists developed research methods by which they can identify the approximate types of environments in which various kinds of petroleum-bearing sedimentary deposits were formed. (Most of these environments were similar to modern sea-floor environments in semi-tropical parts of the world.) During the 1960's and 1970's immense amounts of such sedimentological information were discovered, and petroleum geologists gained an excellent understanding of the processes of accumulation and lithification of sedimentary strata types. One of the very useful surprises which these geologists discovered during their many elaborate research projects was the presence of large numbers of in situ, biologically-formed, rock structures within the thick limestone strata series which exist at various depths, almost world-wide. Both of the books of which I am enclosing brochures include information on some of the types of these biogenic deposits--such as stromatolites.

Of course there are many other types of evidence for great age which are found in the earth's crust, but these non-radiometric ones which petroleum geology research has provided are some of the easiest to understand. Since the petroleum geologists are not really trying to accumulate evidence for either age or evolution, the data which they have published regarding the nature of oil-bearing strata (and other strata which they have to evaluate) contain little, if any, anti-religious bias.

Well, I hope that some of this information will be useful to you as you deal with the problems which elementary teachers have to face. If I can be of any further help, please feel free to contact me. If you think that you might have use for a complimentary desk copy of either or both of the books described in the brochure, I will be glad to send them to you. One thing I have not mentioned in this letter is the question of what to do about alleged positive evidences for a young earth. If you need material on that I could supply some and refer you to some.

Yours in Christ's service,



Daniel E. Wonderly

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