

## Jonathan Sarfati: Scientist?

### Brian Baxter

*Dear Jonathan, ...Why are you so rude and aggressive?* - David Palmer, conservative Presbyterian  
(CultureWatch site, 'Nothing to Fear from the New Atheist Crusaders', [4/3/08], comment dated 8/3/08)

Dr Jonathan Sarfati is a leading writer and speaker for the Queensland-based Creation Ministries International (CMI) and helps edit two of its journals. CMI has gone by several different titles e.g. Creation Science Foundation and Answers in Genesis, but for simplicity's sake I'll refer to it as 'CMI' throughout this article.

If you disagree with Sarfati about something he has written, or even if you express an opinion that differs from his own, he is quite likely to insult you.

*[Melbourne Age columnist Catherine] Deveny is yet another silly bint hired by a leftist rag for no other reason than she is an embittered apostate (being an unmarried mother undoubtedly helps too). Never mind that she has learned her history and theology from a Weetbix pack.*

(CultureWatch site, 'Disembowelling the Christian faith' [28/2/07], comment dated 1/3/07 - hereafter I'll abbreviate this notation to 'CW comment, date')

*[Former US Vice-president Al Gore is] a moron, claiming that global warming is a greater threat than terrorism.*

(CW comment, 10/7/07)

*Maybe KRudd [sic] hopes to become as filthy rich as [Al Gore], the leading globull [sic] warm-mongering pimp, living off his prostitution of climate science.*

(CW comment, 11/12/07)

*The most disturbing thing about the [2007 federal election] was the revelation of the leftward shift of once-evangelical organisations into evanjellyfish.*

(CW comment, 4/12/07)

But don't let this bother you too much. According to Sarfati, Jesus would have done just the same thing:

*Jesus was certainly no wimp, but frequently resorted to challenge-riposte including strong insults. When believers are commanded to imitate Christ, nothing was said about only imitating Him when He was gentle.*

(CW comment, 19/4/07)

Perhaps Sarfati's right. Jesus apparently called the Pharisees 'blind fools' (*Matt. 23:17*) and 'hypocrites' (*Matt. 23:27*) and told the unbelieving Jews, 'You are of your father the devil' (*John 8:44*). So much for 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'. Incidentally, toilet humour is evidently quite acceptable when insulting others as Elijah used it when mocking the prophets of Baal (*1 Kings 18:27*).

Another reason you shouldn't feel too upset if Sarfati insults you is that he's quite indiscriminate about it, excoriating fellow Christians as well as 'gutter atheists' (a favourite term of his). Thus, the 'evangelical left, like the self-appointed Evangelical Alliance', the Australian Christian Lobby, Fred Nile and Gordon Moyes of the Christian Democratic Party, overseas Christians like James Dobson of Focus on the Family, and even former Prime Minister John Howard all get either trenchant criticism or a good old spray when they need it.

You'll have noticed that Sarfati likes to invent new terms to describe the objects of his wrath, 'evanjellyfish' being one of these. Of course, evanjellyfish are Christians who dare to call themselves 'evangelicals' while failing to adhere to Young Earth Creationist ideology. Some of them even vote Labor! Such people aren't 'proper' Christians at all, but mere 'churchians', 'Chamberlainite churchians' or 'CINOs' ('Christians in Name Only'), or possibly their close relatives, the WFJs ('Wimps for Jesus').

And that isn't the half of it. Australia is crawling with 'Christophobes', 'misotheists' and 'neo-misotheists', 'fundyatheists' (i.e. 'fundamentalist atheists' like certain readers of this esteemed publication), 'atheopaths' (presumably people suffering from the disease of atheism), inhabitants of 'Leftacademia', 'greenienazis', 'religious tolerance bozos', 'victicrats' (human rights officials) and 'homonazis' or 'sodomofascists' (gay rights advocates). And 'ABC' doesn't stand for 'Australian Broadcasting Corporation' but for 'Antitheists' Bolshevik Collective', while 'MMM' evidently stands for 'Mendacious Mainstream Media'. Kevin Rudd is 'Chairman KRudd', Julia Gillard is 'Comrade Gillardova' and Hillary Clinton becomes 'Heilary Klinton'.

It all seems rather sad.

## **The steel trap**

But other CMI leaders don't see it that way. As far as they're concerned, Sarfati is a 'brilliant apologist' with 'one of the strongest creationist minds in the world' (Answers in Genesis *2001 Summer Holiday Super-Camp* brochure, distr. Feb. 2000, p.3) An apologist is a person who defends a position - in this case, the alleged truth of evangelical Protestant Christianity - through reasoned argument. CMI Head of Ministry Development Gary Bates really went to town in a 2004 *Creation* magazine interview with Sarfati (the article bears the title 'An awesome mind'):

*One of the reasons [Sarfati's writings] have become such a powerful tool for Christianity is the amazing flow of his clear, crisp trademark logic which has 'skewered' and silenced*

*many an evolutionary detractor ... [He is] one of the world's most powerful defenders of the authority of the Bible ...*

*Jonathan definitely fits the description of a real scientist and a brilliant one at that ... [Regarding Sarfati's skill at the game of chess], [f]or most mere mortals like me, this kind of brain power is an almost unimaginable gift ... Personally, I'm in awe of Jonathan's abilities ...*

In the same article CMI boss Carl Wieland expresses similar opinions about Sarfati's talents:

*Here [is] someone the Lord [has] blessed with a brilliant mind like a steel trap ... (Gary Bates 'An awesome mind', Creation magazine, June-Aug. 2004, 36-41)*

We can assume that Sarfati approved all these comments about himself as he co-edits *Creation* magazine. So what sort of arguments does 'a brilliant mind like a steel trap' come up with?

#### **On science and evolution:**

*... [S]cience is inductive. This means that it is logically fallacious, and thus folly to subjugate Scripture to science. (CW comment, 3/4/07)*

*[Charles Darwin] had an anti-theistic agenda ... This doesn't stop many churchian [i.e. non-fundamentalist Christian] academics kowtowing to every pronouncement made by Darwin and his God-hating successors, who in turn regard them as contemptuously as Lenin regarded his 'useful idiot' allies in the West. (Jonathan Sarfati with Mike Matthews [2002] Refuting Evolution 2 [Answers in Genesis], 162)*

*The Bible teaches that the first man, Adam, was made from dust and the first woman was made from his rib. Also, Genesis 1 teaches that living creatures reproduce 'after their kind' ... Therefore, we would expect no continuity between man and the animals. (ibid, 191)*

*... [CMI] believes that evolution is anti-knowledge because it clouds the minds of many to the abundant evidence of God's action in creation and the true knowledge available in His Word, the Bible. (ibid, 218)*

#### **On women's rights:**

*... [H]istorically, evolutionists have seen females as the inferior sex. (CW comment, 1/3/07)*

*Jim Reihner is a candidate for the Green Party, which has as its official platform hunting down and killing 'unwanted' unborn babies.*

(CW comment, 22/2/07)

*... [T]he feminists who love prenatal baby butchery have not liberated women nearly as much as they have liberated men who want selfish sex without physical consequences. No wonder Bill Clinton was such a huge abortion supporter. Even worse, feminists gave him a free pass for his exploitative philandering just because he kept abortion legal. This shows that feminists care little about most women.*

(CW comment, 3/4/07)

### **On killing people:**

*[The apostle] Paul affirmed that the government does not bear the sword in vain (Romans 13). This is a clear metaphor for the right of the government to kill wrongdoers.*

(CW comment, 23/3/07)

*(Regarding the divinely-approved massacre of the Canaanites by the ancient Israelites) As for the Canaanites, not only were they given centuries of fair warning, they practised child sacrifice ..., incest, bestiality, homo-sex [and] cultic prostitution - both male and female ... God ordered a particularly depraved people to be exterminated for gross depravity and the danger of polluting the people through whom the Messiah would come.*

(CW comments, 30 and 31/3/07)

### **On sex and marriage:**

*(Regarding sexual relationships) Those who advocate 'try before you buy' should try that at a cafeteria and see how they get on. Of course, the manager would insist that they bought what they tried, because trying it spoils it for someone else.*

(CW comment, 29/1/07)

(Note: this used to be known as the 'damaged goods' theory.)

*How can we expect people to honour business contracts when thanks to the corrupt anti-Christian Lionel Murphy, there needs to be no attempt to honour the marriage contract?*

(CW comment, 21/4/07)

### **On other religions:**

*... [I]f the universe were one big Thought, as Eastern religions teach, then it could change its mind at any moment.*

(Creation magazine, Sept.-Nov. 2007, 6)

### **On lying:**

*Under an atheistic world view, where we are just rearranged pond scum, there is nothing wrong with deception.*

(CW comment, 6/1/07)

### **On miracles:**

*[Contributor] Alan Simpson is wrong about miracles. They are better described as additions to the laws of physics.*

(CW comment, 1/5/07)

## **Background and qualifications**

According to his official CMI resume, Dr Jonathan D. Sarfati BSc (Hons.), PhD, FM was born in the country town of Ararat in Victoria in 1964. His family moved to New Zealand when he was a child and he later studied science at Victoria University in Wellington. He obtained a BSc (Hons.) in Chemistry with two physics papers substituted (nuclear and condensed matter physics). Sarfati, whose family were non-practising Jews, became a Christian in 1984.

He seems to have spent the later 1980s and early 1990s in a variety of pursuits. He worked at the university for some time after receiving his bachelor's degree:

*... [I]n my days as a university teaching assistant, before joining [CMI], I marked an examination answer wrong because it said 'God made it so' for a question about the frequency of infrared spectral lines, instead of discussing atomic masses and force constants.*

(*Refuting Evolution 2, op cit, 25*)

(Isn't it interesting that he feels the need to tell this story - as if there was an option?)

During this period he also played a lot of chess, becoming New Zealand chess champion in 1987-8 ([www.christianlogic.com/articles/read/interview-with-dr-jonathan-sarfati/](http://www.christianlogic.com/articles/read/interview-with-dr-jonathan-sarfati/), 1), the same year in which the International Chess Federation (FIDE) awarded him the title of FIDE Master (FM). According to [ratings.fide.com](http://ratings.fide.com) Sarfati's current FIDE rating is 2262, which means that there are 11,813 people who outrank him, 17 in New Zealand alone and 55 in Australia, including a well-known skeptic! My chess-playing friends tell me that Sarfati is a very good player, though not a great one. The reason I draw attention to this is that CMI constantly implies that Sarfati is one of the most accomplished chess-players on the planet and that this suggests a high intelligence which somehow carries over into his support for creationism. Not only is this quite illogical: it cannot even be supported on the basis of Sarfati's actual status in the chess world.

In 1995, Victoria University awarded Sarfati a PhD in physical chemistry for a thesis entitled *A Spectroscopic Study of some Chalcogenide Ring and Cage Molecules*. He describes the subject matter of his doctoral work as follows:

*My PhD thesis and published papers in secular journals [Sarfati's official resume lists a grand total of six such papers, all co-authored and none dating after 1995] largely involve a technique called Raman spectroscopy, which analyses extremely weak scattering at a slightly different frequency from that of the incident laser radiation. (Refuting Evolution 2, op cit, 118)*

On this narrow basis, Sarfati claims to be a reliable expert in the following scientific fields: astronomy; biological change, mutation and natural selection; human origins; the origin of life; and dating techniques. He makes similar claims in fields such as philosophy, ethics, linguistics, economics and theology (to the extent that theology can be regarded as a field of knowledge). When challenged on these claims, he often simply uses his PhD as a magic wand, much as a Transylvanian peasant might use crossed sticks to ward off a vampire:

*... I have an earned doctorate in science. There is nothing in real operational science to point to [an age for the earth of] billions of years ... (CW comment, 21/9/07)*

Sometimes Sarfati affects a patrician air:

*It's amusing to see [another contributor] lecture me on quantum mechanics, which was an important part of my doctoral thesis in spectroscopy. (CW comment, 9/1/07)*

At other times he becomes downright huffy:

*My PhD heavily involved infrared spectroscopy, so I can't be bluffed. Nor will I take kindly to any school student, or politicians without science qualifications, talking down to me especially in one of my areas of proven expertise. (CW comment, 7/8/08)*

### **'Areas of proven expertise'**

Sarfati's problem here is that he simply doesn't have many 'areas of proven expertise'. If he really thinks that writing a PhD turns you into an expert on anything you feel like talking about, then he's sadly mistaken. Whether your doctorate is in a science or in one of the humanities, the most you can claim is that you have become an expert in a small part of that field, and quite possibly for a limited period of time. Along with thousands of other Australians I have a PhD from a recognised university, but it has never occurred to me to make the wide-ranging assertions of expertise and authority in which Sarfati indulges. Young Earth Creationists (YECs) habitually distract their readers and listeners from the central research questions: what is the evidence for this proposition, how reliable is this evidence, and where does the evidence actually lead? Using your PhD like a club or battering-ram as Sarfati does is just a way of browbeating and railroading people.

So, if I want to know more about the state of infrared spectroscopy or chalcogenide ring and cage molecules as observed in 1995, I'll go straight to Dr Sarfati. Same goes for a chess problem - well, unless one of the 11,813 people who outrank him is available. If I have some basic question about chemistry I'd probably rely on Sarfati's answer, at least after I'd screened it for YEC contamination. But as for anthropology, astronomy, biology and all the rest of it, he simply doesn't have the expertise. He can express opinions but these must be judged by the same criteria as we judge anyone else's opinions, according to how well or badly they fit the evidence. Yelling 'I'm a scientist', or 'I'm a PhD' or 'Ask me anything about infrared spectroscopy and you'll see how smart I am' just doesn't cut it.

But my biggest problem with Sarfati's repeated assertions that he is a scientist has to do with the nature of science itself. Specifically, can Sarfati properly be called a 'scientist' at all?

### **Is Sarfati a scientist?**

On the plus side, Sarfati holds a PhD in physical chemistry from a recognised university and has published half a dozen papers in peer-reviewed science journals. He, of course, claims that CMI's *Journal of Creation* is a peer-reviewed scientific journal, but as the 'peers' are all Young Earth Creationists we'll ignore these contributions for now.

Against this, he doesn't seem to have undertaken any serious scientific work since 1996 when he joined CMI in Brisbane. During the last 12 years, therefore, he has been fully occupied in promoting the YEC religious position on a variety of fronts, very few of which have anything to do with his scientific speciality of infrared spectroscopy.

Here is a basic definition of 'science': 'knowledge covering general truths about the operation of general laws, especially as obtained and tested through the scientific method and concerned with the physical world' (Webster). This system of acquiring knowledge uses observation and experimentation to describe and explain natural phenomena via the development of hypotheses, theories and laws.

Sarfati doesn't do this at all! Since at least 1996 he has been engaged in another set of activities entirely and what's more, he has been entirely frank about this:

*We [creationists] base our science on the biblical framework of history ... That is, during creation week about 6,000 years ago, [God] created distinct kinds of creatures. Shortly after that, Adam sinned and brought death and mutations into the world. (Refuting Evolution 2, op cit, 21)*

*[CMI] always makes it very clear that we start from a biblical framework ... [H]ow can a cursed creation interpreted by a fallible methodology of sinful humans [i.e. science] determine how we interpret the perfect, unfallen Word of God? Rather, we can gather true knowledge about God from His general revelation [i.e. nature] only if we study it in the light of Scripture ... Let us be clear: if the Bible is the Word of God, it can have no*

*error in the original autographs in any area on which it touches, whether theological, historical or scientific.*

(Letter in *New Life*, 18 Nov. 1999)

*Our starting point: The authority of the Bible is the main emphasis of [CMI]. We don't try to 'prove' the Bible with science; rather, we accept the Bible's propositions as true without proof; i.e. as 'axioms' or 'presuppositions'.*

(*Refuting Evolution 2*, *op cit*, 211)

*... [T]he Bible is the Eyewitness account of the Maker who was there [at the creation], knows everything and never errs ... But scientists weren't there ..., don't know everything, and make mistakes.*

('But Genesis is not a science textbook!' (editorial), *Creation* magazine, Sept.-Nov. 2004, 6)

*It is just not biblically possible to date [a T-rex] skeleton to millions of years before Adam sinned.*

("Sue", the T. Rex', *Creation* magazine, Sept.-Nov. 2000, 18)

*Evolutionists believe that the solar system condensed out of a cloud of gas and dust called a nebula, hence the nebular hypothesis. There is no way to reconcile this with the Biblically revealed order of events ...*

('Venus: Cauldron of Fire', *Creation* magazine, June-Aug. 2001, 31)

I find the last quote especially revealing as Sarfati concludes his sentence with the words, '*and there are many scientific problems with the theory as well!*' This indicates not only that he rejects the nebular hypothesis primarily because of his interpretation of the Bible, but also that he acknowledges the difference between Bible-based and scientific objections. The clear implication is that he is no longer a scientist, but instead someone whose overriding concern is to advance the interests of his religion.

If Sarfati wants to continue referring to himself as a 'scientist', he should in all honesty add the qualifiers 'ex-' or 'former'. Like other religious and political enthusiasts - not all of them Christian by any means - he tries to impose a wholly stultifying straitjacket on the theory and practice of science. The question of whether a scientific hypothesis is or is not 'biblically possible' should be a non-issue, but Sarfati accords it central importance in his scheme of things. A 'science' which lurches down that path is not worthy of the name.

## **Conclusion**

Bobby Fischer, a very great chess-player, died last January aged 64. Here are a few lines from one of his obituaries:

*By [1970], Fischer's reputation - demanding, unpredictable and surly - was firmly established ... [A few years later], he had joined the Pasadena-based Worldwide Church of God and reportedly gave it \$US61,000 of his [chess championship] prize money.*

*Disillusioned, he left the church after Jesus Christ failed to return in 1975 as church founder Herbert Armstrong had promised ... Garry Kasparov, the Russian grandmaster, speculated in 1990 that Fischer's bizarre behaviour was the result of the American becoming 'a prisoner of chess who got lost in its depths and could not find his bearings in the real world outside'.*

(*'Eccentric genius who checkmated himself', Melbourne Age, 23 Jan. 2008*)

Let's hope that the obituary writers will one day be a little kinder to former NZ chess champion and former scientist, Jonathan Sarfati.

Oh, and as for all you moronic bints, bozos and pimps out there - just watch it!

---

*This article was originally published in [The Skeptic](#) Vol 28 No 3, Spring 2008. Reproduced with permission.*