

documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6,000 years have yet passed.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

In his book, *From the Greeks to Darwin*, Henry Fairfield Osborn wrote, *When I began the search for anticipations of the evolutionary theory . . . I was led back to the Greek natural philosophers and I was astonished to find how many of the pronounced and basic features of the Darwinian theory were anticipated even as far back as the seventh century B.C.*<sup>35</sup>

We have seen how the early Christians, many educated in Greek thought, rejected evolutionary ideas after their conversion. They rejoiced at being called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God's revelation. They now worshiped the One who had made all things out of nothing, who was now making men new, and who would one day make a new heaven and earth.

## References

1. Acts 17:18.
2. W.K.C. Guthrie, *In the Beginning: Some Greek Views on the Origins of Life and the Early State of Man* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1965).
3. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, 5.795-796, 822-823, Loeb Classical Library.
4. Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 11.14, in Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale, 1984), pp. 86-87.
5. Acts 17:24-26 (NIV).
6. Acts 14:15 (NIV).
7. Colossians 1:16 (NIV).
8. Colossians 2:8 (NIV).
9. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 8, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1.198.
10. Romans 4:17 (NASB).
11. Defenders of creation *ex nihilo* included Clement of Rome, Hermas, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Eusebius, Augustine, and others.
12. Eusebius, *Church History*, 4.20, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 1:197.
13. *Ibid.*, 4.24, p. 202.
14. Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, preface & 25, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, 3:359 & 369.
15. Theophilus, *To Autolycus*, 2.4, Oxford Early Christian Texts.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, 2.8
18. *Ibid.*, 2.34.
19. *Ibid.*, 2.10.
20. Exodus 20:11 (NASB, NIV).
21. Eusebius, 5.13, 27; 6.22, pp. 229, 245, 270.
22. Theophilus, 2.15.
23. Basil, *On the Hexameron*, 1.1.2, *The Fathers of the Church*, 46:4,5.
24. *Ibid.*, 2.8, p. 34.
25. Davis A. Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 20.
26. Luke 3:23-38.
27. Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, and Eusebius.
28. Myriad literally meant 10,000, but sometimes indicated a countless number.
29. Theophilus, 3.25,28.
30. *Ibid.*, 3.29.
31. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1.19, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:404.
32. Augustine, *The City of God*, 11.3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2:202.
33. *Ibid.*, 11.4, p. 202.
34. *Ibid.*, 12:10, p. 232.
35. Henry Fairfield Osborn, *From the Greeks to Darwin* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. xi.

Reproduced with permission from:

INSTITUTE  
for CREATION  
RESEARCH

1806 Royal Lane • Dallas, Texas 75229  
800.628.7640 • www.icr.org

Distributed by:

Creation &  
Earth  
History Museum



10946 Woodside Ave. North • Santee, CA 92071  
619.599.1104 • www.creationsof.org

view article online at: <http://www.icr.org/article/early-church-defended-creation-science>

# ...If you call out for Insight...

No. 160  
October 1986

You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.  
Based on Proverbs 2:3-5

## The Early Church Defended Creation Science

by Louis Lavallee, M.S., M.Div.\*

As the early church grew in the Graeco-Roman world, the apostles and fathers preached to men who believed in evolution. In Athens, Paul encountered Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.<sup>1</sup> These and other early philosophers were also scientists. They observed the world and attempted to explain its nature and origin. They had many views on origins, all evolutionary.<sup>2</sup>

For example, the Epicurean, Lucretius (b. 98 B.C.), wrote about origins in his book, *On the Nature of Things*. He believed the earth had spontaneously generated all living forms: "It remains, therefore, that the earth deserves the name of mother which she possesses, since from the earth all things have been produced;" and "of herself she created the human race."<sup>3</sup>

The famous physician, Galen (c. 170), expressed Stoical views of creation in one of his medical works. Matter, he believed, was eternal and his god was not above the laws of nature. Galen wrote:

*It is precisely this point in which our own opinion and that of Plato and of the other Greeks who follow the right method in natural science differ from the position taken up by Moses. For the latter it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God, even should he wish to make a bull or a horse out of ashes. We, however, do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he [sic] chooses the best out of the possibility of becoming.<sup>4</sup>*

## The Teaching of The Early Church

The apostle Paul told the Athenians about "the God who made the world and everything in it" and "from one man . . . made every nations of men."<sup>5</sup> Earlier, he urged the Lycaonians to turn from their idolatry "to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them."<sup>6</sup>

Paul and the early church fathers preached Christ, through whom "all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible."<sup>7</sup> New converts were warned, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

By God's grace these converts included philosophers, such as Justin Martyr (b. 100). He wrote that on hearing the gospel, "a flame was kindled in my soul;

\*Mr. Lavallee, Environmental Engineer, Mississippi Department of Natural Resources, has an M.S. degree from Harvard, and the M.Div. from Reformed Theological Seminary, in Jackson, Mississippi.

and a love of the prophets, and of those men who are friends of Christ, possessed me. . . . I found this philosophy alone to be safe and profitable."<sup>9</sup>

The early fathers, like Justin, exchanged their evolutionary view of origins for the Biblical one. They believed the Bible and that God created all things out of nothing in the space of six days only a few thousand years ago, and once judged mankind with a worldwide flood.

## Creation Out of Nothing

In Scripture, the early fathers read about God who "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."<sup>10</sup> This doctrine was defended by many.<sup>11</sup> One was Theophilus, who, according to the historian Eusebius, became the well-known bishop of Antioch in 169.<sup>12</sup> Trained in Greek literature and converted to Christ as an adult, Theophilus defended the faith in an apology, *To Autolytus*. It contained an extensive treatment of creation and became a model for other fathers.<sup>13</sup> The classical scholar and Bible translator, Jerome (b. 347), included Theophilus in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, which listed "those who have published any memorable writing on the Holy Scripture." Jerome described Theophilus' writings as "short and elegant treatises well fitted for the edification of the church."<sup>14</sup>

Concerning Greek views of origins, Theophilus wrote:

*Some of the Stoics absolutely deny the existence of God. . . . Others say that everything happens spontaneously, that the universe is uncreated and that nature is eternal . . . that God is only the individual's conscience. Plato and his followers . . . say that matter is as old as God. But if God is uncreated and matter is uncreated, then according to the Platonists God is not the Maker of the universe.*<sup>15</sup>

For Theophilus, "God . . . made the existent out of the non-existent."<sup>16</sup> He explained, "They (the Greeks) made these statements (about origins) by conjecture and by human thought, not in accordance with the truth."<sup>17</sup>

Theophilus knew that "the God and Father and Maker of the universe did not abandon mankind but . . . sent holy prophets to proclaim and teach the human race."<sup>18</sup> Theophilus admonished Autolytus to search the Scriptures so that he might discover the truth. The harmony of all parts of Scripture concerning the origin of the world and man showed that God was its author. The "Spirit of God . . . came down into the prophets and spoke through them about the creation of the world and all the rest."<sup>19</sup>

## Six Days of Creation

The Ten Commandments record that "in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them."<sup>20</sup> According to Eusebius (b. 263), several fathers wrote commentaries about the six days of creation.<sup>21</sup> Theophilus included such a commentary in his apology to Autolytus.

Like other fathers of this period, Theophilus saw many types and figures in Genesis 1, yet retained the literal interpretation. For example, he wrote,

*On the fourth day the luminaries came into existence. Since God has foreknowledge, he understood the nonsense of the foolish philosophers who were going to say that the things produced on earth came from the stars, so that they might set God aside. In order therefore that the truth might be demonstrated, plants and seeds came into existence before the stars. For what comes into existence later cannot cause what is prior to it.*<sup>22</sup>

A later father who wrote on the six days was Basil, born about 330 into a Christian family. He was highly educated in Greek thought, yet by God's leading became an able and well-loved pastor in Cappadocia, where he preached a series of sermons on the six days of creation. The sermons were used by Ambrose of Milan, and have been translated into other languages. In them Basil admonished,

*Let us hear . . . the words of truth expressed not in the persuasive language of human wisdom but in the teachings of the Spirit, whose end is not praise from those hearing, but the salvation of those taught. . . . The wise men of the Greeks wrote many works about nature, but not one account among them remained unaltered and firmly established, for the later account always overthrew the preceding one.*<sup>23</sup>

Basil's position on the length of the creation days is seen in his exposition of Genesis 1:5.

*"And there was evening and morning, one day." Why did he say "one" and not "first"? . . . He said "one" because he was defining the measure of day and night . . . , since the twenty-four hours fill up the interval of one day.*<sup>24</sup>

As Davis Young concludes, "In general, the church fathers regarded the days of creation as ordinary days corresponding to our existing sun-measured, solar days."<sup>25</sup>

## Recent Creation

In his gospel, Luke, the beloved physician, recorded 75 generations from Jesus to Adam.<sup>26</sup> Using the numbers found in the Old Testament, Theophilus and others<sup>27</sup> added up the number of years from the creation of the world. Theophilus concluded,

*There are not two myriads of myriads<sup>28</sup> of years, even though Plato said such a period had elapsed between the deluge and his own time, . . . The world is not uncreated nor is there spontaneous production of everything, as Pythagoras and the others have babbled; instead the world is created and is providentially governed by the God who made everything. And the whole period of time and the years can be demonstrated to those who wish to learn the truth. . . . The total number of years from the creation of the world is 5,695.*<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the total number of years, Theophilus acknowledged, *If some period has escaped our notice, say 50 or 100 or even 200 years, at any rate it is not myriads, or thousands of years as it was for Plato . . . and the rest of those who wrote falsehoods. It may be that we do not know the exact total of all the years simply because the additional months and days are not recorded in the sacred books.*<sup>30</sup>

Origen (b. 185), the great theologian of the Greek churches, defended "the Mosaic account of the creation, which teaches that the world is not yet ten thousand years old, but very much under that."<sup>31</sup>

And Augustine (b. 354), the great bishop of the Latin churches, wrote, "the Scripture . . . has paramount authority, . . . to which we yield assent in all matters."<sup>32</sup> "That God made the world, we can believe from no one more safely than from God Himself."<sup>33</sup> On the age of man and the earth, Augustine wrote, *Some hold the same opinion regarding men that they hold regarding the world itself, that they have always been . . . . And when they are asked, how, . . . they reply that most, if not all lands, were so desolated at intervals by fire and flood, that men were greatly reduced in numbers, and . . . thus there was at intervals a new beginning made. . . . But they say what they think, not what they know. They are deceived . . . by those highly mendacious*