

The Doctrine of Creation
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www.answersincreation.org/doctrine.htm

According to many today, the doctrine of creation is one of those critical doctrines that one must believe in. In many churches, it is required belief before a person becomes a member of the church. However, it has not always been that way. As you will see, this is a relatively new doctrine, invented by twentieth-century young-earth believers and their ministries. Let's take a look at this doctrine...it's history, it's relevance for today, and it's necessity for belief.

What is a Doctrine?

First, let's look at the definition of a doctrine. According to Webster's, a doctrine is "teaching, instruction." However, doctrine as it relates to the church is much more restrictive than this phrase. Doctrine in the church indicates a fundamental truth that must be believed in. A few examples for definitions are:

- philosophy, philosophical system, school of thought, ism -- (a belief (or system of beliefs) accepted as authoritative by some group or school)¹
- is the body of beliefs about God, humankind, Christ, the church, and other related concepts considered authoritative by the community of faith, becoming the standard of interpretation and application of the Bible and the Christian faith.²
- A set of accepted beliefs held by a group. In religion, it is the set of true beliefs that define the parameters of that belief system.³
- Positions or principles held to be sacred, or inspired, truths in a system of beliefs. In Christianity, these beliefs are an instruction to be taught to the faithful by means of the catechism, sermons, and through the religious dogma of the church. The Anglican Church's Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion is an example of religious doctrine.⁴

As you can see, it is clear that doctrines of the church are key teachings that members should believe in to associate with that particular denomination. The final definition gives us our starting point. An example of doctrine from the Anglican Church is the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html), which defines the Anglican system of belief.

Click on the link to the Thirty-Nine articles, and scan for references to the creation. There are none. Thus, the doctrines which are key to the Anglican system of belief, dating from 1801, do not include any key beliefs about the creation.

Now, let's expand our search to other key systems of belief. When it comes to the history of the church, one of the most telling items about doctrines are the three creeds. Creeds were, from the earliest days of the church, used for the purpose of baptismal professions, in order to teach the new converts the proper path right at the beginning of their Christian walk.⁵

First, the Nicene Creed comes from the fourth century. The traditional wording⁶ is...

*I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;
And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost
of the Virgin Mary,
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried;
and the third day he rose again
according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
and he shall come again, with glory,
to judge both the quick and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.
And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,
who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son];
who with the Father and the Son together
is worshipped and glorified;
who spake by the Prophets.
And I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.*

In the third and fourth lines, the new believer is affirming that God is the creator of all things. Note that there is no reference to a length of creation...it merely states that God is the creator. Thus, to become a believer in the fourth century, there was no requirement for belief in a young earth. In fact, many of the church fathers took II Peter 3:8 to mean the days of creation were 1,000 years long.

Next, consider the Apostles Creed. It appears in its full form in the 5th century, but it has roots all the way back to the 1st and 2nd century.⁷ It states...

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:*

*Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.*

He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead.

*He ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.*

Once again, we have a general statement that God is the creator, but no specific mention of the length of time that it took. Thus, it would be no problem for an old-earth believer to be accepted in the 2nd century church.

Third, let's consider the Creed of Athanasius (http://www.holybible.com/resources/athanasius_creed.htm). It dates to the fourth century.⁸ Although it is the longest creed, it does not even mention creation.

Therefore, it is clear from early church doctrines that the length of creation was not a requirement for faith.

Church Denominations

Now, let's consider church denominations, which set standards of belief for their members. As you may be aware, Answers In Creation has a listing of denominations which are open to an old earth (www.answersincreation.org/denomination.htm). A review of the 50 major denominations that have been reviewed shows that only two are hostile to old-earth believers (independent, fundamental Baptist churches, and the Assemblies of God). Two others have statements denouncing evolution, but do not have a position on the length of the creation days. One of the two largest denominations, the Southern Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists, do not rule out old earth belief, but individual churches vary in their beliefs. Forty-four of fifty denominations present no problems with old-earth believers.

Is there a pattern here? The roots of the young earth movement are with a man named George McCready Price, a Seventh Day Adventist from the 1900s. He was a loud voice

in the move to promote six 24-hour day creationism, starting around 1902.^{9,10} Although the Seventh-Day Adventists are now not as restrictive, their statements on creation have deep roots. In fact, the modern movements, led by Answers in Genesis, the Institute for Creation Research, and Kent Hovind, have their roots in Mr. Price.¹¹

In fact, the Baptist denominations have historically, over the last thirty years, provided the main base for promoting young earth creationism through the parachurch organizations of AiG and ICR. But what about the Assemblies of God? Their statements of faith come from 1916, a time at which Price was preaching his young-earth creationism. Although there is no clear ties between the two, both the Assemblies and Adventists beliefs arose about the same time (the Assemblies had been loosely forming since the 1890s).

The pattern is that young earth creationism did not start until the 1900's, and then only in a few select denominations, in which it continues to this day, with the help of a few outspoken individuals and third-party organizations. Interestingly, during the fundamentalist movement of the 1920s, early fundamentalists railed against evolution, but did not make any clear prohibitions against an old earth. Evolution was the enemy, not an old earth.¹⁰

Why did the father of young-earth creationism, Price, preach so adamantly about creation? Seventh Day Adventists claimed that they had a vision, in which they saw the creation of the world in six 24-hour days. Thus, you could easily say that today's young earth movement is based on a vision (someone's dream?)...not a solid base upon which to make a real doctrine!¹²

Creation Becomes a Doctrine!

We have just looked at the churches that made creationism a fundamental belief. It appears that this doctrine did not exist prior to 1900. It is a 20th century creation, and is only adhered to by a few churches (even the Southern Baptists do not claim it is a doctrine, although many of their churches will argue for it).

Starting in the 1920s, Fundamentalism grew, and eventually several individuals saw the need to defend the young-earth position of creation. There were many, but most significant of these is the ministry of Henry Morris, who founded the Institute for Creation Research in 1970. Through this ministry (which took off in 1961 with his book *The Genesis Flood*) he and his disciples proclaim creation as a doctrine. This can be seen in Chapter 17 of his book, *Biblical Creationism*, first published in 1993, and in *Impact* Article Number 132, from 1984 (icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-132.htm)

Conclusion

In summary, young-earth ministries of the 20th century have added the doctrine of creation to the church. For nearly 1,900 years, this doctrine was not needed. However, because of a vision (dream) from some Seventh Day Adventists, we are now stuck in this creation battle, as young-earth/old-earth proponents argue their position against each other.

A young-earth doctrine is not a part of most church denominations, nor was it ever a part of any pre twentieth-century church organizations which were responsible for setting doctrinal beliefs. As such, this doctrine should pass into history.

Millions of people, when given the choice of believing in a young earth, when all the evidence from God's creation says it is old, were turned away from the gospel. Fundamentalists of the 1920s and later made a fundamental mistake by insisting on a young earth. From that time, the word "Fundamentalism" has been used by the secular world to stereotype Christians, and it has done much harm. It is clear from scripture that you can believe in an old earth, and still believe in an inerrant Bible. You can be a fundamentalist and believe in an old earth.

We must stop turning people off to the Bible by insisting on young earth belief. Yes, many thousands have been saved by young-earth ministries...but compared with the millions that have been lost, the choice is clear.

- 1 WordNet 2.0 Search
- 2 Jude Ministries Definition (<http://www.judeminstries.org/Contending/somedefinitions.htm>)
- 3 www.inthelight.org (http://www.inthelight.org/dictionary/dic_c-d.htm)
- 4 PBS.COM, Church Vs. State Glossary (<http://www.pbs.org/williamsburg/church/glossary.html>)
- 5 The Three Creeds (http://www.churchsociety.org/crossway/documents/Cway_093_ThreeCreeds.pdf)
- 6 The Nicene Creed (<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/creed.nicene.txt>)
- 7 The History of the Apostles Creed (<http://www.path-light.com/history.htm>)
- 8 The Athanasian Creed (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02033b.htm>)
- 9 George Price Biography (<http://www.geocities.com/lclane2/geoprice.html>)
- 10 The Historical Development of Creationism
(<http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/history2.shtml>)
- 11 The Historical Development of Creationism, Part 3
(<http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/history3.shtml>)
- 12 Special Revelation, through dreams and direct contact with God, is believed by all non-Pentecostal churches to have ended after the Apostles departed the earth. A bad example of what can happen when a religion is based on a dream can be seen in the Mormon church, founded by Joseph Smith