

The Bible and the Other Creation Museums

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August 2016

Young earth creationism (YEC), the belief that the earth is only 6,000-10,000 years old and its origins are as described in the opening chapters of Genesis, is in the news again. This is due to the brand new Noah's ark model, the Ark Encounter, that the apologetic ministry Answers in Genesis (AiG) has built in Williamstown Kentucky as a complement to their other facility, the Creation Museum, a 40 minute drive north in Petersburg KY.¹ AiG's founder, Ken Ham, was not the first to build a museum dedicated to YEC, although his success—not only in project management but in capturing the public eye for his cause—is a major factor in the growth of the creation museum phenomenon. There are now about thirty other creation museums in North America with a handful in Europe and elsewhere, including the Genesis Expo in Portsmouth UK that opened in 2000.² I have been to fourteen of the North American museums (all but one since Oct. 2015) and in this article I will present some of my initial thoughts on these other museums in comparison with the famous AiG facility and in view of some key issues relating to how they present the Bible.

¹ <https://arkencounter.com>; <http://creationmuseum.org>

² <http://www.genesisexpo.co.uk>



Adam and Eve from the Creation Experience Museum, north of Branson MO, one of the newer museums. They previously operated the Creation Museum of the Ozarks in Strafford MO, but this is now closed.³

It is difficult to make an up-to-date listing of creation museums as the smaller ones sometimes relocate or do not maintain much of a presence on the Internet, or simply consist of a room or two in a Church or even church camp, and are intended simply for the regular congregation or invited visitors. As well, apparently defunct museums can retain their websites for some time after closing. I have a list on my own website, and I'd be grateful for any corrections or additions to it.⁴



Answers in Genesis Creation Museum. Petersburg KY, viewed from the extensive gardens.

³ All photos are by James Linville.

⁴ <http://contemporarycreationism.com/creation-museums/>

The first creation museum was opened in 1976 in El Cajon CA by the Creation Science Research Center under the leadership of Henry Morris.⁵ Texas saw two more open in the early 1980s, the Discovery Center in Abilene and the Creation Evidence Museum of Texas in Glen Rose. According to Barone, there has been “explosive growth” in the number of museums since the 1990s.⁶ While the U.S. can boast of having the vast majority of them, Canada seems to have the most per capita, at five, although these are quite small.⁷ AiG’s Creation Museum occupies some 75,000 sq. ft. on 49 acres of in Petersburg KY. Opened in 2007, it simply dwarfs all the others except for the 120,000 sq. ft. Ark Encounter. On the other end of the scale are facilities like Canada’s Big Valley Creation Science Museum in Big Valley, Alberta, in a small standalone structure of around 900 sq. ft.⁸

⁵ Ken Ham was employed by Morris’s Institute for Creation Research for several years before forming Answers in Genesis in 1994. The museum, The Creation and Earth History Museum, has changed hands and is now located in Santee CA.

⁶ Lindsay Marie Barone, *The New Pulpit: Museums, Authority, and the Cultural Reproduction of Young-Earth Creationism*. (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015), 8-13, gives a brief history.

⁷ This number includes those temporarily closed due to relocation or renovation, and also includes those currently open in some capacity while still being under construction or further development. It does not include “travelling museums”, i.e. collections of displays that are made to be easily transportable for presentation at churches, schools, etc. A new development in this regard is the Semisaurus mobile museum (<http://www.semisaurus.com>), housed in a 45 ft. semitrailer and operated by the Creation Instruction Association. (<http://www.creationinstruction.org>) in Juniata NE. It is expected to be on the road by Sept. 2016.

⁸ <http://www.bvcsn.com>



Big Valley Creation Science Centre, Big Valley, Alberta. Alberta has a disproportionate number of Canada's museums. Another is currently relocating to Brooks, while a travelling museum is based in Red Deer.

A number of new facilities are also in the planning stages, and some of these are rather ambitious. The Institute for Creation Research, founded by Henry Morris in 1970 and now based in Dallas TX, has plans for a \$21 million dollar "Discovery Center for Science and Earth History".⁹ Kent Hovind, who famously lost his Dinosaur Adventure Land in Pensacola FL after his tax troubles and other legal issues cost him several years in prison, is now seeking funding and volunteers to build a new facility in Lenox, Alabama that will include a science center, museum and camping grounds.¹⁰ Lest one think that such large projects are restricted to the US South, mention must be made of the organization in Boise ID that is seeking support for a huge facility called Northwest Science Museum. Their promotional video speaks of a 350,000 sq. ft. building that will also include a full size Noah's Ark model. A "Vision Center" is already open to the public.¹¹ A group in Switzerland has the dream of building Genesis Land theme park featuring, as one might expect, another full scale model of the ark and tracing the biblical story from creation to the return of Christ.¹² While these last two projects are described in images and videos on

⁹ <http://www.icr.org/museum-tour/> Dallas already hosts the Museum of Earth History that is in the process of expansion <http://www.moeh.org>.

¹⁰ <http://www.pnj.com/story/news/local/2015/07/10/hovind-free-jail-back-pensacola/29969745/> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3g525hK7Ns>

¹¹ <https://northwestsciencemuseum.com>

¹² http://www.genesis-land.ch/HTML/home_eng.html

their respective websites, it is impossible to tell how far along they are in their plans and funding.

I should note here that the term "museum" in reference to creationist facilities can be controversial in some circles. As I was told by one paleontologist, creation museums don't actually have a lot of real artifacts from the past and the curators have little training in the interpretation of the artefacts they do possess. This isn't the place to debate the issue of labels and, in any case, I agree with Susan Trollinger and William Trollinger who argue in their recent, and excellent volume, *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, that the AiG facility at least serves as a museum for its believing patrons.¹³ The same can be said of the other museums, big and small.

Most of the museums are operated by non-denominational organizations that are registered as non-profit organizations in their respective countries (in the US, 501c3 status), although there are exceptions (e.g., the aforementioned Big Valley Museum). Some museums are simply part of the ministry of specific churches. The New Life Sanctuary Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is home to a small museum, while a Wesleyan Church hosts the Creation Science Centre on its property in Cornwall, Ontario.¹⁴ On the other side of the coin, the Discovery Church grew out of the Discovery Center of Abilene.¹⁵ Before one ventures out to any of these facilities, however, it is best to peruse their websites and/or telephone them as not all have regular opening hours. Some are set up only for pre-arranged guided tours. Some museums have a fixed entrance fee while others operate solely on donations.

Most academic work on the creation museum phenomenon deals with AiG's museum and I suspect considerable academic attention is now directed at their new Ark Encounter.¹⁶

¹³ Susan L. Trollinger, and William Vance Trollinger Jr., *Righting America at the Creation Museum* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 17.

¹⁴ <http://newlifesanctuarychurch.com>, <http://www.creationsciencecentre.ca>

¹⁵ <http://evidences.org>

¹⁶ See already James S. Bielo, "Literally Creative" in Vincent L. Wimbush (ed.) *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 20-33.

Much of this work deals with how the natural history museum genre is employed to legitimize creationism and to cast doubt on the story of the earth told by secular museums. Doctoral dissertations by Kathleen Oberlin and Steven Watkins from 2014 treat the AiG museum specifically. A number of journal articles do so, too.¹⁷ Some other newly minted PhDs take a wider look at a number of different creation museums, for example, Lindsay Barone and Larissa Carneiro.¹⁸ According to Jill Stevenson, large museums such as AiG's suggests that creationism may have reached the fourth of Elizabeth Crooke's stages in the development of social movements: 1) unrest/ agitation, 2) popular excitement that builds belonging, 3) development of a formal ideology (e.g. creation science or intelligent design, vs. simple creationism), 4) the institutional stage in which formal tactics are developed.¹⁹

Other academics have looked at the continuing grass roots nature of a good part of the creationist movement.²⁰ My own research suggest that while academic interest in the

¹⁷ Kathleen Curry Oberlin, *Mobilizing Epistemic Conflict: The Creation Museum and the Creationist Social Movement* (PhD Diss., Indiana University, 2014). Steven Mark Watkins, *An Analysis of the Creation Museum: Hermeneutics, Language, and Information Theory* (PhD Diss., U of Louisville, 2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.18297/etd/1536>. See also, Ella Butler, "God is in the Data: Epistemologies of Knowledge at the Creation Museum", *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 75 (2010), 229-251; Brent Hege, "Contesting Faith, Truth, and Religious Language at the Creation Museum: A Historical-Theological Reflection", *Theology and Science* 12 (2014), 142-163; John Lynch, "'Prepare to Believe': The Creation Museum as Embodied Conversation Narrative", *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 16 (2013), 1-28; Jill Stevenson, 2012. "Embodying Sacred History: Performing Creationism for Believers", *TDR: The Drama Review* 56 (2012), 93-113.

¹⁸ Barone (2014); Larissa Soares Carneiro, *Divine Technology: How God Created Dinosaurs and People* (PhD Diss., North Carolina State University, 2016), Julie Homchick, *Displaying Controversy: Evolution, Creation, and Museums* (PhD Diss., University of Washington, 2009).

¹⁹ Jill Stevenson, *Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First Century America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 131; she is citing E. Crooke, *Museums and Community: Ideas, Issues and Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2007), 110.

²⁰ See, for instance, Douglas Bafford, *Contesting the Secular Other, Constructing the Creationist Self: Scientific Discourse and Religious Narrative among Kentuckian Evangelical Christians* (MA Diss. Brandeis University, 2015), Paul J. Wendel, *Creationism at the Grass Roots: A Study of a Local Creationist*

spectacle of “Big Creationism” is hardly misplaced it should not relegate the study of the local phenomena to side-show status or ignore the smaller museums like the Boneyard Creation Museum in Broken Bow NE.²¹



The interior of The Boneyard Creation Museum in Broken Bow NE.

The influence of the large scale ministries is surely in evidence in the smaller, but there is something in the more modest facilities that is lacking in, or even undermined by, the giant facilities that cost tens of millions of dollars. All of these museums are tangible signs of opposition to the secular world but it is one thing for a large ministry with a national or global reach take the plunge and quite another for a family or individual to invest a good part of their savings and lots of time and effort to create a museum and open it to the public. The different social contexts in which the largely uniform creationist message is proclaimed needs to be taken into account in appraisals of the movement. AiG may be confronted with unfriendly criticism from the general public, media, or educational and scientific quarters, and may be justified in seeing itself in a David vs. Goliath contest. The small local ministries, however, may be making an even braver stand in their own hometowns. Theirs is a different kind of declaration of non-conformity. Since many

Institution (PhD Diss., Kent State University, 2008). On a more popular level, Jason Rosenhouse, *Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolution Front Line* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012).

²¹ <http://www.boneyardcreationmuseum.org>

churches, even other evangelical ones, accept the notion of an old earth and of theistic evolution, more may be at stake in taking a visible public stand for YEC in a small town and a modest museum than in the Ark Encounter.



*The partial cast of a giraffe skeleton at
New Life Sanctuary Church, Winnipeg Manitoba.*

Besides size, there is the issue of professional design vs. what Barone calls the “Do It Yourself” (DIY) approach.²² The latter are in some ways is the most interesting. In my travels, I have talked to a number of museum owners who have admitted that when they started they had no idea how to put together a museum or the amount of work that was involved, although all say it has been well worth the effort. It is unlikely that there will ever be much of a financial return on their investment, but that is hardly the point for these people. Theirs is a labor of love, religious obligation and what they often feel is social responsibility; to do their part to save their communities from the ravages of secularism.²³

²² Barone (2015), 11.

²³ I am often asked by skeptics to confirm that AiG is simply Ken Ham’s get-rich-quick-scheme. My standard answer is that enjoying success does not necessarily imply hypocrisy or “selling out”.

It is fascinating how the DIY museums are extensions of their founders' own personalities, interests and drives. The museum in Winnipeg began when pastor John Feakes's own collection of creation related materials outgrew his basement. It now occupies space in the church where Feakes is pastor. As such, creationism is only one part of the congregation's spiritual life and mission. This Baptist church is also involved in helping the homeless and, according to Feakes, it is important not to put the struggle against secular science ahead of Christ as the focal point of one's Christian's life.²⁴

In some cases, creationism is only one part of the museum's total collection. The Mt. Blanco Fossil Museum in Crosbyton TX is a combined enterprise, embracing owner Joe Taylor's fossil casting company, a publishing company, and his art gallery, the highlight of which is the collection of large paintings of pop and country music album covers.²⁵ The Grand River Museum in Lemmon SD was founded when rancher Stuart Schmidt grew tired of having the many fossils discovered on his property taken to various colleges and museums.²⁶ The museum also features local and native American history.²⁷

²⁴ Mr. Feakes was a most gracious host during my tour of the museum.

²⁵ <http://www.mtblanco.com>

²⁶ <http://www.thegrandrivermuseum.com>

²⁷ I'm grateful to Mr. Schmidt for driving quite some distance into town from his ranch to meet with me.



Grand River Museum, Lemmon SD. "Garth", the Triceratops found near the Grand River by Stuart Schmidt, founder of the museum.

An added bonus of a visit to Grand River is the award winning metal sculptures by John Lopez, Schmidt's brother in law.²⁸ Lopez's impressive cowboy riding a triceratops proudly announces the museum to the passersby, while the legendary struggle of Hugh Glass (whose story inspired the blockbuster film, *The Revenant*) with a bear is a dramatic feature of the interior of the building.



Sculpture by John Lopez outside of The Grand River Museum in Lemmon, SD.

²⁸ <http://www.johnlopezstudio.com>

The Heart of America Science Center in Haviland KS, while still under construction, is also planning on wings devoted to local history.²⁹ In Southern Pines NC one finds perhaps the best example of creationism mixed in with a variety of other attractions. On the floor beneath a Christian bookstore and fudge shop one finds the North Carolina Museum of Creation, Taxidermy Hall of Fame, and Antique Tool Museum.³⁰ According to Barone, the enterprise had its start when pastor Kent Kelly needed space to display all of the tools and other items he had collected while recovering from a stroke.³¹

I mention these kinds of combined and DIY operations to illustrate something of the “human” element that is often missing in the more publicized discourses that play out in debates, books, newspapers, and websites (not to mention the occasional courtroom). Creationism is part and parcel of the North American religious and cultural landscape, and with the opening of more and more creation museums in big cities and small towns alike, it is a very tangible part. More importantly, creationism is only one part of the lives of those who espouse it and so is inextricably intertwined with everything else that makes these people who they are. These combined museums not only highlight the circumstances and personalities of their owners, but instill in the visitor a sense of the naturalness of creationism that single minded museums may not be able to replicate. While they all “normalize” creationism and anti-evolutionism as something worthy of the museum genre, the combined museums also put on display the successful negotiation of creationism and life within the wider society.

As can be expected, there are some clear similarities in the theological and scientific perspectives across all of the creation museums, most, if not all of which are part of

²⁹ <http://hoasrc.org>

³⁰ <http://www.invisiblehim.org> I have not yet visited this museum. I doubt there is anything to be made of the coincidence, but AiG’s facilities also feature fudge shops, and I can recommend them without reservation.

³¹ Barone (2015), 11. And see http://robesonian.com/archive/67112/view-full_story-1637278-article-all_creatures_great_small_and_stuffed.

evangelical protestant ministries.³² Some museums, however, focus primarily on fossils and refuting secular sciences while others offer more in the way of interweaving the Bible and natural and human history. This is only partly attributable to the varying amounts of physical space available.



Creation and Earth History Museum in Santee CA. This museum is the descendant of the first such museum, founded by Henry Morris.

The Creation and Earth History Museum in Santee CA, now operated by the Light and Life Foundation, is of some 10,000 sq. ft. is well designed with galleries dedicated to biblical themes and proof of a young Earth. There is also a large gallery on human anatomy.³³ As in the AiG museum, the fall of humanity receives a good amount of attention, the visitor being treated to displays representing death and suffering while disturbing sounds such as babies crying play over the audio system. One interesting thing about CEHM is the Tabernacle Theatre that is a representation of the interior of the wilderness tabernacle of the Pentateuch complete with full size figurines of Aaron and other priests, the brazen altar, the ark of the covenant and other accoutrements. The 30-minute narrated presentation describes how the biblical tabernacle prefigured Christ. Before taking one's seat, a sign invites the visitor to take a plush lamb from a bin as an aid to help focus on the price of

³² Seventh Day Adventism also affirms young earth creationism, but I am unaware of any museums grounded in this tradition.

³³ Barone (2015), 9.

redemption.³⁴ In comparison, AiG emphasizes God’s killing of animals to make clothes for Adam and Eve as prefiguring the need for Christ’s eventual, perfect sacrifice (AiG does not distribute loincloths).



The Glendive Dinosaur and Fossil Museum, Glendive MT. This is the second largest museum in the state dedicated to dinosaurs

Some museums give no indication of their creationist leanings in the actual name of the facility. The Glendive Dinosaur and Fossil Museum (Glendive MT) and the Akron Fossils and Science Centre (Copley Township OH) are representative of this.³⁵ This sometimes attracts objections from non-believers who claim this is a ploy to “lure” the unsuspecting into engaging creationist propaganda.³⁶ It needs to be remembered, however, that creationists see themselves as proponents of “true” science and so feel no need to offer disclaimers. In any case, when I visited Glendive (July 1, 2016), I was informed of the museum’s biblical grounding before I was asked to pay the admission fee. The 20,000 sq.

³⁴ If I might venture a suggestion for those looking for a thesis project, the role of the biblical sacrificial system plays in the material culture of modern evangelical Christianity would be a fascinating topic. See, for instance, the full size sanctuary model at Noah’s Ark Biblical History Museum and Café, in Winston OR <http://www.noahsarkwinston.com>.

³⁵ <http://www.creationtruth.org>; <http://www.akronfossils.com>

³⁶ See, for instance, Randy Moore’s review by the National Center for Science Education <https://ncse.com/library-resource/glendive-dinosaur-fossil-museum-glendive-montana>.

ft. venue boasts of being the “largest dinosaur and fossil museum in the context of biblical history,” and has two dozen full size dinosaur displays along with a theatre.



The impressive interior of the Glendive museum.

Along with the extensive (and impressively displayed) dinosaur exhibits, there is also a gallery dedicated to the Bible’s integrity and history (e.g. Torah scrolls are on display). Even so, there is little that seeks to explicate the Bible’s teachings on creation in any detail.³⁷ Indeed, none of the museums I have visited actually display the full text of the biblical accounts of creation and the flood. In commenting on this in regards to the AiG museum, Trollinger and Trollinger write: “For all this emphasis on the Bible as the final authority, it is striking that there are no Bibles in the museum for visitors to read”.³⁸ Rather, AiG and smaller venues tend to feature brief, and even edited, passages with relatively little exegetical unpacking.

³⁷ One can also see Torah and Esther scrolls, yads, and associated Judaica at the AiG museum and at CEM in Texas.

³⁸ Trollinger and Trollinger (2016), 115-16. Even the audio-video presentation of the first six days of creation at AiG museum offers an abridged reading of Genesis 1 and it does not include the reference to the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3). Indeed, references to the seventh day (the first thing the Bible mentions as being sanctified by God) figures only incidentally at the AiG museum and at others.

Few of the museums I attended show any real preference in translation or awareness that differences between translations may matter. I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Terry Mortensen from AiG in October 2015, and he commented that AiG employs the New King James Version as a compromise between tradition and ease of language. He admitted that the ministry is sometimes criticized for this by KJV exclusivists. Many museums are at pains to assert that the “days” of creation are to be read as literal 24 hour periods of time and not a creative step that took an “age” of many years. On the other hand, refutation of the documentary hypothesis is typically absent, although a number of museum staff I have talked to are well aware of it, at least in general terms. Similarly, the ambivalence of Gen. 1:1-3 is routinely ignored. Many scholars, along with some standard Christian translations such as the New Revised Standard Version, the Common English Bible, and the Good News Translation, render the passage as indicating that there was some form of preexisting primordial matter that God used to create the heavens and earth.³⁹ This, of course, challenges the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In some smaller museums, the staff seemed not even aware that such differences in translation even exist. At AiG, Mortenson said that the issue would be too technical for the average museum visitor and, in any case, the conventional reading was defensible. It still seems odd to me that the question is not even addressed, given the emphasis AiG and many other creationists put on the need to challenge what they consider to be other deplorable compromises in scriptural interpretation that afflicts the modern Church.

Few of the museums actually display a full model of the universe’s early history by filling out the story of Genesis 1-11 with insights from physics, astronomy, and biology. The reshaping of the earth after the flood is one biblical episode that does get considerable attention. Less prominent is how to understand the term *rāqîa’* in Gen 1:6-8, 14-16, 20, that separates the waters and in which the greater and lesser lights are placed. This term is translated as “firmament” in the KJV and as “dome” in the Common English Bible. Scholars typically understand this as a solid structure comparable to the solid heavens

³⁹ E.g. CEB: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters— God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And so light appeared.”

imagined by other ancient Near Eastern cultures. This causes problems for creationists since it is obvious that the earth's atmosphere is not currently covered by any kind of dome-like structure. Very many creationists along with some standard translations, prefer the position that the *rāqîa'* is properly understood as “expanse” (e.g., New American Standard, English Standard Version), and so it can simply refer to outer space. Other creationists, however, hold that the *rāqîa'* was a vapor or water “canopy” that dissipated with the flood in Noah's time. This idea was popularized by the highly influential book of 1961 by John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*.⁴⁰ This is now a minority position within YEC as scientific and biblical objections have been raised, even by some within the context of Morris' own Institute for Creation Research.⁴¹ The Santee Museum, originally founded by Morris, however, still advocates this position although it does not make much of the issue. Far more interested in the firmament is Carl Baugh, the founder of the Creation Evidence Museum of Texas.

⁴⁰ John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications*. Philipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1961).

⁴¹ See Jane Albright, “Noah's Flood—The Bible, the Science & the Controversy: Pt 1 The Bible and the Vapor Canopy Theory” <http://rsr.org/files/docs/albright-flood-series-1-VCT-20160721.pdf>



The interior of the Creation Evidence Museum, Glen Rose. The “Creation in Symphony” mural on the upper level illustrates Carl Baugh’s complex theory of the origins of the earth.

Baugh proposes a “complete model of creation” in which the heavens are the “space time dimension” and the hydrogen and oxygen of the primordial water of the earth are the building blocks of all other matter across the universe. Baugh proposes that the firmament was approximately 10 miles above the earth and consisted of the elements of water so compressed that the hydrogen formed super conducting metallic crystals, the entire structure being only a few inches thick.⁴² Visitors to the museum are first directed to a video presentation of Baugh’s theories. For its part, AiG seems a bit agnostic, largely ignoring the issue in the museum itself while some of its writers, while doubting the canopy model, say further research is needed.⁴³

Regardless of the differences in size, scope, and particular positions vis-à-vis science or the bible, creation museums serve a number of significant functions for their intended audiences. The museum genre offers cultural validation and, as Jill Stevenson points out,

⁴² The museum’s website presents aspects of the theory in different files: http://www.creationevidence.org/evidence/crystallane_canopy_theory.php, http://www.creationevidence.org/evidence/creation_model_session_1.php

⁴³ See, for instance, Bodie Hodge’s 2009 article, “The Collapse of the Canopy Model”, <https://answersingenesis.org/environmental-science/the-collapse-of-the-canopy-model/>.

museums help create belief, rather than just reflect it.⁴⁴ It would be interesting to see how the continuing trend to open ever larger, creationist facilities influences opinions among rank and file creationists. Virtually all of the owners of small museums I talked to expressed gratitude to Ken Ham and AiG (and other large ministries, like Creation Ministries International). Still, one might wonder whether the grass roots movement will always be completely happy with AiG if this “creationist juggernaut” (to use Trollinger and Trollinger’s expression), is seen in the future to be arbiters of orthodoxy.⁴⁵ On the other hand AiG has already attracted criticism from some evangelicals for being too ecumenical on other doctrinal points not related to creationism.⁴⁶



The beautifully done foyer of the Museum of Earth History on the campus of Christ for the Nations school in Dallas, TX.

The diversity and increasing number of creation museums illustrates the dynamic nature of the creationist movement and its success in providing the tools of cultural reproduction.⁴⁷ Creation museums offer a believers a reprieve from social and moral breakdown of the

⁴⁴ Stephenson, (2013), 22, 131, 155. She also observes (p. 131) that museums are regarded as one of the most reliable sources of information in America, citing a 2001 survey by the American Association of Museums.

⁴⁵ Trollinger and Trollinger (2016), 11.

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http://www.wayoflife.org/database/creation_science_ministries_why_new_evangelical.html

⁴⁷ Barone (2015), 21.

secular world evident.⁴⁸ They physically mark the landscape, creating sites of authenticity and sacrality in which eternal truths are identified, marked, and given tangible form and presence.⁴⁹ To my mind, these places are both tourist and pilgrimage sites that evoke not only foundational sacred narratives and offer a rebuke to the secular world but also create identities and community and serve educational functions as well.⁵⁰ Erik Cohen writes of how many tourists want to recover a more pristine authentic and holistic reality and suffer a “diaspora of consciousness”, in which they feel intellectual and spiritual estrangement from the here and now.⁵¹ This seems to apply to many conservative, evangelical Christians who feel as outsiders in their own communities and countries.⁵² Cohen also notices that,

For individuals in most of the Western world, religion must be reconciled with a rationalist worldview. Pilgrims expect not so much a supernatural encounter with the Divine, but an intellectually and spiritually fulfilling exploration into their cultural-religious roots, which will help them establish or enhance their religious identity within the context of the larger society to which they will return at the end of the journey.⁵³

Creation museums clearly serve that reconciling function for the true believer.⁵⁴ But rather than simply offer the believer proof that the Bible is accurate about the ancient past, these

⁴⁸ E.g., Stephenson (2013), 154-156. Barone (2015), 62.

⁴⁹ Even secular museums can be thought of as quasi-sacred places; Gretchen T. Buggeln, “Museum Space and the Experience of the Sacred”, *Material Religion* 8 (2012), 30-50.

⁵⁰ See Thomas S. Bremer, “Sacred Spaces and Tourist Places”, in Dallen J. Timothy and Daniel H. Olsen (eds) *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (London: Routledge 2006), 25-35. Erik H. Cohen, 2006. “Religious Tourism as an Educational Experience”, in Dallen J. Timothy and Daniel H. Olsen (eds) *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys* (London: Routledge 2006), 78-93, (78), rejects the idea that tourism and pilgrimage are opposed concepts.

⁵¹ Cohen (2006) 78-79.

⁵² More than one of my contacts at creation museums referred to North American society as a whole as “pagan”.

⁵³ Cohen (2006) 79.

⁵⁴ Barone (2015), 14, 62, describes the AiG museum as a “heterotopia” where different ways of knowing are brought together.

museums offer far more important to the faithful: landmarks around which one might remap their world and find in it more signs of the promise of a better one to come.