

Creationist museum brings dinosaurs on board Noah's Ark

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A vegetarian *Tyrannosaurus rex* frolicked alongside human beings only a few thousand years ago in the Garden of Eden until Eve decided to munch on that apple, according to the Creation Museum, which opens in Kentucky today.

The \$27 million (£14 million) exhibition is funded by evangelical Christians, who apparently believe that by reclaiming dinosaurs and fossils for their literal biblical interpretation of natural history, teenagers are less likely to look at internet pornography or get pregnant out of wedlock.

This sprawling 50-acre (20hectare) site is the latest effort to counter the evolutionary science taught in state schools that Answers in Genesis, the religious group behind the museum, claims has chipped away at the nation's moral fabric.

It uses much of the same technology seen in mainstream museums. There are realistic moving, roaring dinosaurs and a lifesized model of a ship being built by animatronic craftsmen. In this corner of northern Kentucky the dinosaurs get to go on the ship, which happens to be none other than Noah's Ark.

Inevitably the museum, which hopes to receive 250,000 visitors a year, has attracted criticism from members of the scientific community, who plan to stage a "rally for reason" outside the entrance today. Two petitions are in circulation among university lecturers complaining about the inaccuracies of the exhibits and efforts by the "Religious Right to inject creationist teachings into science education".

Although attempts to reintroduce an element of creationism - rebranded as "intelligent design" - into science lessons have foundered, three of ten Republican presidential candidates said in a recent debate that they did not believe in evolution. Opinion polls show consistently that half of Americans believe that humans did not evolve but were created, along with all living creatures, by God 6,000 to 10,000 years ago.

The museum has a series of rooms depicting the darkening of a world that abandons a literal interpretation of the Bible. Two teenagers, apparently indoctrinated with evolutionary teaching, are shown at home. The girl is talking to Planned Parenthood and the boy is looking at pornography on a computer. These images culminate in a wrecking ball, labelled with the words "millions of years", smashing down a church.

Ken Ham, the Australian-born founder of Answers in Genesis, believes that the battle for minds should be fought among the very young because of children's fascination with dinosaurs. These creatures have long since posed a "test of faith" for creationists because of fossils suggesting that T.rex and suchlike walked the Earth - and then disappeared - millions of years before the Book of Genesis says that God spent six days making everything.

“Dinosaurs are one of the icons of evolution, but we believe they lived at the same time as people,” Mr Ham said. “The Bible talks about dragons. We believe dragon legends had a basis in truth . . . We like to say, ‘You’ve captured them for evolution, and we’re going to take them back.’ ” All those fossils, some of which are exhibited in the museum, were created not millions of years ago but by the biblical floods.

In one exhibit two palaeontologists – a light-skinned creationist and a dark-skinned evolutionist – are shown digging up a dinosaur skeleton and, of course, reach different interpretations. The message is that it is OK, even scientific, to defy evolution.

Eugenie Scott, director of the National Centre for Science Education, calls the museum “the creationist Disneyland”. Lawrence Krauss, a theoretical physicist at Case Western Reserve University, accuses it of spreading “documented lies”.

Mr Hams says: “Why do they worry about my little museum? They’ve got museums all over the world.”

Literal truth

- The basis of creationism is belief in the Bible’s literal truth. Most creationists believe the Earth is only a few thousand years old
- They believe that life did not evolve gradually through natural processes but was formed supernaturally by God
- The only changes possible in plants and animals are negative ones of degradation or extinction
- Natural processes are seen not as self-sustaining but as maintained daily by God. Miracles are thus seen as God’s choice to do something differently

Tom Baldwin in Washington

Sources: creationministries.org ; clarifyingchristianity.com

P.S.

* From The Times, May 28, 2007:

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/visual_arts/article1848419.ece