

Paleontologists brought to tears, laughter by Creation Museum

June 30 2009, by Britt Kennerly



Ken A. Ham President and Chief Executive Officer of Answer in Genesis stands with a mechanical Utahrapator at The Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, in 2007. For a group of paleontologists, a tour of the Creation Museum, which has been dubbed a "creationist Disneyland," seemed like a great tongue-in-cheek way to cap off a serious conference.

For a group of paleontologists, a tour of the Creation Museum seemed like a great tongue-in-cheek way to cap off a serious conference.

But while there were a few laughs and some clowning for the camera, most left more offended than amused by the frightening way in which evolution -- and their life's work -- was attacked.

"It's sort of a monument to scientific illiteracy, isn't it?" said Jerry Lipps, professor of geology, paleontology and evolution at University of

California, Berkeley.

"Like Sunday school with statues... this is a special brand of religion here. I don't think even most mainstream Christians would believe in this interpretation of Earth's history."

The 27 million dollar, 70,000-square-foot (6,500-square-metre) museum which has been dubbed a "creationist Disneyland" has attracted 715,000 visitors since it opened in mid-2007 with a vow to "bring the pages of the Bible to life."

Its presents a literal interpretation of the Bible and argues that believing otherwise leads to moral relativism and the destruction of social values.

Creationism is a theory not supported by most mainstream Christian churches.

Lisa Park of the University of Akron cried at one point as she walked a hallway full of flashing images of war, famine and natural disasters which the museum blames on belief in evolution.

"I think it's very bad science and even worse theology -- and the theology is far more offensive to me," said Park, a professor of paleontology who is an elder in the Presbyterian Church.

"I think there's a lot of focus on fear, and I don't think that's a very Christian message... I find it a malicious manipulation of the public."

Phil Jardine posed for a picture below a towering, toothy dinosaur display.

The museum argues that the [fossil record](#) has been misinterpreted and that [Tyrannosaurus rex](#) was a vegetarian before Adam and Eve bit into

that sin-inducing apple.

Jardine, a palaeobiologist graduate student from the University of Birmingham, was having fun on the tour, but told a reporter that he was disturbed by the museum's cartoonish portrayal of scientists and teachers.

"I feel very sorry for teachers when the children who come here start guessing if what they're being taught is wrong," Jardine said.

Arnie Miller, a palentologist at the University of Cincinnati who was chairman of the convention, said he hoped the tour would introduce the scientists to "the lay of the land" and show them firsthand what's being put forth in a place that has elicited vehement criticism from the scientific community.

"I think in some cases, people were surprised by the physical quality of the exhibits, but needless to say, they were unhappy with things that are inaccurately portrayed," he said.

"And there was a feeling of unhappiness, too, about the extent to which mainstream scientists and evolutionists are demonized -- that if you don't accept the Answers in Genesis vision of the history of Earth and life, you're contributing to the ills of society and of the church."

Daryl Domning, professor of anatomy at Howard University, held his chin and shook his head at several points during the tour.

"This bothers me as a scientist and as a Christian, because it's just as much a distortion and misrepresentation of Christianity as it is of science," he said.

"It's not your old-time religion by any means."

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