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Righting America at the Creation Museum

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INTRODUCTION

On May 28, 2007, the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, opened its doors, its purpose to “point today’s culture back to the authority of Scripture and proclaim the gospel message.” It does this by demonstrating that “the account of origins presented in Genesis is a simple but factual presentation of actual events.” Thus, throughout the seventy-five-thousand-square-foot museum, visitors encounter exhibits that assert claims such as these: the God of the Bible created the universe in six consecutive twenty-four-hour days less than ten thousand years ago; “The various original life forms (kinds) . . . were made by direct creative acts of God”; these acts of creation included the “special creation of Adam . . . and Eve,” whose “subsequent fall into sin” resulted in “death (both physical and spiritual) and bloodshed enter[ing] this world”; and the global flood was an actual historic event that accounts for geological strata and the fossil record.¹ The museum explains these claims to visitors by way of more than one hundred and fifty exhibits featuring animatronic human figures and dinosaurs (sometimes appearing in the same display), numerous explanatory placards and diagrams, and several miniature dioramas depicting a global flood, as well as a re-creation of a portion of the Garden of Eden that includes many life-size animal figures placed among artificial plant life, a waterfall with pool below, a life-size reproduction of the Tree of Life, multiple scenes with Adam and Eve, and the serpent.

It is tempting to dismiss the Creation Museum as a surreal oddity, an inexplicable and bizarre cultural site. But to imagine that the museum is a wacky but essentially irrelevant outpost on the far outskirts of American life is a huge mistake. As peculiar as it may seem, the Creation Museum lies squarely within the right side of the American cultural,

political, and religious mainstream. That is to say, the museum exists and thrives not because it is so preposterous—although some people are surely drawn to it precisely for this reason—but because it represents and speaks to the religious and political commitments of a large swath of the American population. More than this, and more important, the Creation Museum seeks to shape, prepare, and arm millions of American Christians as uncompromising and fearless warriors for what it understands to be the ongoing culture war in America.

In short, the Creation Museum matters, and all Americans ought to understand what is going on there. Hence this book. And to truly understand the museum, the only place to start is with fundamentalism, that remarkable movement that shows no sign of disappearing from the American landscape. As a quintessential fundamentalist institution, the museum shares and promotes the movement's core commitments: biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, patriarchy, political conservatism, and (of course) creationism.² Thus follows a brief history of fundamentalism and how the Creation Museum fits within this story.³

Fundamentalism, Creationism, and Answers in Genesis

Fundamentalism finds its origins in the mid- and late nineteenth century, when Darwinism (*On the Origin of Species* appeared in 1859) and historicism (or “higher criticism”) challenged traditional understandings of the Bible. The former raised questions about the Genesis story of creation (six days? all those separate creations?), not to mention larger theological questions about God's role in creation and the nature of human beings. The latter, because of its recognition that time and place shape texts and because of its determination to evaluate the Bible as one of these historical texts, raised serious questions about the supernatural character and literal authenticity of the biblical record. Who really were the authors of the sixty-six books of the Bible? How does one reconcile the inconsistencies and errors in the texts? What about the borrowings from the stories of other cultures?

Many American Protestants responded to these intellectual challenges by accommodating Darwinism and by coming to understand the Bible as an errant document that human beings, living in the stream of time, wrote. But other Protestants responded quite negatively to the threats posed by Darwinism and historicism. The most significant theological response was the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. First formulated

by Princeton theologians in the late nineteenth century, inerrancy emphasizes that the original “autographs” are the infallible product of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. As such, they contain no errors of any sort; they are factually accurate in all that they have to say, including when they speak on matters of history, science, and the like. While the texts and their translations that have come down to us have a few errors since only the original autographs are truly inerrant, the mistakes are understood to be so few and so minor that we can trust the Bible in our hands as the Word of God.

Not only is the Bible errorless, but it also foretells the future. A second set of ideas intimately connected to inerrancy and developed in the nineteenth century made even clearer the Bible’s supernatural character: dispensational premillennialism. According to this eschatological system, a literal reading of the Bible (particularly the books of Daniel and Revelation) provides a sure guide to the past, present, and future of human history. Dispensational premillennialism divides history into (generally seven) segments, or dispensations; in each dispensation God tests humans, they fail, and God imposes a divine judgment (e.g., the Genesis flood). The current dispensation, the “church age,” displays the increasing apostasy of the church and the increasing decadence of civilization. But at the end of the church age, which would be preceded by the return of the Jews to Palestine, Christ will return in the air (the “rapture”) to retrieve the faithful. This will be followed by a time of “tribulation” that will include the reign of the antichrist, followed by the return of Christ and the saints, who will annihilate the enemy and establish the millennial kingdom of God.

Thanks in good part to a series of Bible and prophecy conferences, by the turn of the century many American evangelicals were strongly committed to biblical inerrancy and dispensational premillennialism. Then in 1909 Cyrus Scofield published his *Reference Bible* (a second edition appeared in 1917), which became the Bible of choice for conservative Protestants in the United States and which (with its heavy-handed dispensationalist gloss of the biblical text) cemented inerrancy and premillennialism in the evangelical consciousness.

These premillennialist evangelicals were alarmed but not surprised, given the dire “end times” predictions, by the spread of theological liberalism in Protestantism. In response, Lyman and Milton Stewart, who were wealthy evangelical oilmen, funded the publication and distribution (three million copies mailed to Protestant ministers, editors,

seminary students, and others) of *The Fundamentals*, a twelve-volume series on the “fundamentals of the faith” that appeared between 1910 and 1915. These volumes articulated a conservative theology—biblical inerrancy was at the center—that was designed to serve as the doctrinal rock upon which “orthodox” Christians would do battle with the liberal enemy. But while these volumes were suffused in a culture war binary, and while they provided the name of the crusading movement to come, the approach was not consistently militant. For example, while the Stewarts and the editors embraced dispensational premillennialism and took it to be a given, the volumes failed to proclaim it to be a “fundamental” of the faith. More striking, *The Fundamentals* did not treat Darwinism as anathema, with one essay even suggesting the possibility of theistic evolution.

This moderate (especially in retrospect) tone would be swept away—never to return—in the wake of World War I, when many Americans became convinced that the war against the barbarous “Huns” threatened Christian morality and Western civilization. Conservative evangelicals explained Germany’s devolution into amoral savagery in terms of the nation’s widespread acceptance of Darwinian evolution and biblical higher criticism (which they took to be a German invention). More than this, dispensationalists saw the British capture of Jerusalem in 1918 as thrilling evidence of the rapidly approaching end of history. In this atmosphere, further charged by the Red Scare, evangelicals gathered in Philadelphia in May of 1919 to create the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA). Presided over by the ardent Baptist premillennialist William Bell Riley, this interdenominational organization set forth two primary goals: to promote the “fundamentals of the faith” (including biblical inerrancy and dispensational premillennialism) among American Protestants and to purge the major Protestant denominations of liberals and modernists.

While a fundamentalist understanding of the Bible continued to spread rapidly among American evangelicals in the 1920s, and while many Protestant denominations experienced a fundamentalist “controversy,” the fundamentalist movement failed miserably in its efforts to capture control of the major Protestant denominations. Aggressive fundamentalist campaigns among the Northern Baptists and the Northern Presbyterians did not succeed in imposing fundamentalist creedal statements on the denominations, nor did they succeed in removing theological liberals from seminaries and mission fields.

By 1922, the fundamentalist movement had turned much of its attention to ridding public schools of Darwinian evolutionism. After all, evolution rejected the Genesis creation account, emphasized natural processes, and seemingly regarded human beings as nothing more than highly developed animals. The movement found the moral results of the latter notion in World War I and the dastardly aggression of a Germany fully committed to a Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” In response to this deadly threat, the WCFA and other fundamentalists embarked on a campaign designed to pressure state governments to pass legislation outlawing the teaching of human evolution in the public schools. Tennessee passed such legislation in 1925, making it illegal “to teach any theory that denies the Story of Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animal.” When Dayton science teacher John Thomas Scopes and the American Civil Liberties Union challenged the law, the result was the media circus known as the Scopes trial. Although Scopes was convicted, a prominent segment of the national media held the fundamentalist movement up to great ridicule, and that ridicule fueled the notion among academics and journalists that the fundamentalist movement not only lost the trial, but its death was a foregone conclusion.

Yet states, particularly in the South, continued to introduce anti-evolution laws, and three states maintained such laws into the 1960s. More important, the fundamentalist movement continued to advance at the grassroots level, with a network of local churches (independent, affiliated with a fundamentalist denomination, or nominally mainline) across the nation that flourished thanks to a rapidly expanding web of nondenominational publishing houses, mission agencies, radio stations, and Bible institutes. Less than two decades after the Scopes trial, the movement reappeared on the national stage. In recognition of the damage done to the word “fundamentalist” in the 1920s, many of these fundamentalists drew upon their nineteenth-century heritage and re-named themselves “neo-evangelical,” or, eventually, just “evangelical.”

Some conservative Protestants rejected the name change, defiantly holding on to the word “fundamentalist.” But in good part this was a squabble over labels: notwithstanding the name change, many “evangelicals” continued (and continue) to maintain their commitments to biblical inerrancy, premillennialism, patriarchy, political conservatism, and creationism. Actually, in the 1930s and 1940s political conservatism had become much more pronounced. Strongly committed to unfettered

capitalism, fundamentalists were horrified by the New Deal, viewing Franklin D. Roosevelt's activist state as a clear sign that the one world government of the Antichrist was just around the corner. Such apocalyptic concerns intensified with the onset of the Cold War and the threat of atheistic communism at home and abroad, a threat intensified by the very real fear of nuclear warfare. By the 1950s, fundamentalists and evangelicals clearly and loudly occupied the right end of the American political spectrum. Fervently pro-business, militarist, and anticommunist, they passionately opposed both the expansion of the welfare state and all but the mildest threats to white privilege. While the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of a small but influential evangelical left, the vast majority of evangelicals and fundamentalists remained staunch political conservatives who decried the antiwar protests and the civil rights movement, opposed the Johnson administration's expansion of the New Deal, adamantly condemned the "sexual revolution" and feminism, attacked U.S. Supreme Court decisions prohibiting institutionalized school prayer and legalizing abortion, and blasted the Internal Revenue Service's efforts to remove tax-exempt status from Christian schools that discriminated on the basis of race.⁴

Tapping into this sense of outrage, television evangelists and shrewd Republican Party operatives in the late 1970s combined forces to mobilize these Protestant conservatives (most of whom were already Republican) to "take back" America by electing "pro-family, pro-life, pro-Bible morality, pro-America candidates" to office. Led by Jerry Falwell and his "Moral Majority," the Christian Right made a substantive contribution to the elections of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984. In the post-Reagan years, the Christian Right became a political powerhouse with an intricate web of local evangelical churches and national organizations, including Focus on the Family and Concerned Women of America. Perhaps most significant, with George W. Bush, the Christian Right had one of their own as president of the United States for the first eight years of the twenty-first century.

In short, over the past four decades the Christian Right has become the most reliable and perhaps the most important constituency within the Republican Party. Demonstrating how important it had become to the GOP, as of 2015 not one of the many candidates for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination publicly affirmed that he or she believed in evolution. While some sought to dodge the question, many flatly re-

jected evolution, with a number of them suggesting that creationism should be taught in public schools.⁵

Interestingly, when people in the early twenty-first century use the word “creationism,” they generally do not mean the “creationism” of William Jennings Bryan and other early fundamentalists. That is to say, what passes as “creationism” in much of fundamentalism and evangelicalism has changed. Oddly enough, this change has its origins far outside American evangelicalism and fundamentalism, in Seventh-day Adventism (SDA). In 1864 Ellen C. White, prophet and (along with her husband, James) SDA founder, had a vision in which she witnessed God’s creation of the world in six days (God rested on the seventh, an important point for the fledgling organization because of its focus on the importance of the seventh day as the Sabbath). Not only did White confirm that the Earth was approximately six thousand years old, but she declared that Noah’s Flood had reconfigured the Earth’s surface and produced the fossil record. No one outside of Adventism seems to have attended to White’s proclamations regarding the creation of the Earth until the early twentieth century, when SDA convert George McCready Price embarked on a writing career devoted to explaining and publicizing White’s pronouncements. In books such as *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science* (1902), *The Fundamentals of Geology* (1916), and (most important) *The New Geology* (1923), Price attacked evolution while providing the “scientific” evidence for an understanding of the Earth’s past that confirmed Ellen White’s vision of a catastrophic global flood. As Price saw it, his “flood geology” not only explained the fossil record but also resolved all questions raised by modern science about the Genesis account of creation.⁶

At the Scopes trial, William Jennings Bryan referred to Price as one of two scientists he respected when it came to the history of the Earth. But Bryan and almost all early fundamentalists were old Earth creationists who had made their peace with mainstream geology. They either interpreted the days in Genesis 1 as allowing for a gap of time between the creative act of Genesis 1:1 and the remainder of the creation process, or they understood the word “day” as not a day of twenty-four hours, but as an “age,” that is, a large but unspecified amount of time. Bryan held to the latter “day-age” understanding of Genesis, a point he made clear at the trial under Clarence Darrow’s interrogation.⁷

Bryan’s betrayal (which is how Price understood it) notwithstand-

ing, Price's flood geology made inroads among American fundamentalists in the first few decades after the Scopes trial. Then, in 1961, John C. Whitcomb Jr., a theologian and professor of Old Testament at Grace Seminary in Indiana, joined forces with Henry M. Morris, a PhD in hydraulic engineering and chair of the civil engineering department at Virginia Tech, to write *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*. Borrowing heavily from Price (while significantly downplaying their indebtedness to this Seventh-day Adventist, in order not to alienate their fundamentalist and evangelical audience), Morris and Whitcomb claimed—as indicated in the book's title—a “twofold purpose” for *The Genesis Flood*. First, convinced as they were of the “complete divine inspiration,” “verbal inerrancy,” and “perspicuity of Scripture,” they sought “to ascertain exactly what the Scriptures say concerning the Flood and related topics.” Second, they sought to delineate the “scientific implications of the Biblical record of the Flood, seeking if possible to orient the data of these sciences within this Biblical framework.” In 489 pages they made their case: the Bible asserts that Noah's Flood, a global event, lasted one year; science confirms that this global flood produced the geological strata that can be seen today; ergo, Morris and Whitcomb demolished the case for evolution and an old Earth. While all of this did little more than reiterate Price's flood geology (albeit reworked for an evangelical and fundamentalist audience), Whitcomb and Morris did go beyond the Adventists in one important detail: they claimed that God created not simply the Earth in six twenty-four hour days, but, instead, the entire universe, which “must have had an ‘appearance of age’ at the moment of creation.”⁸

Morris and Whitcomb produced one of the most important books in twentieth-century American religious history. Like the *Scofield Reference Bible* before it, *The Genesis Flood* and the ideas it promoted swept through conservative Protestantism with extraordinary speed. Vast numbers of American evangelicals and fundamentalists enthusiastically accepted the notion that a commitment to reading the Bible “literally” necessarily required a commitment to a six-day, twenty-four-hour-a-day, creation, reinforced in their commitment by the apparent scientific apparatus of *The Genesis Flood* (which was replete with footnotes, photographs, and even the occasional mathematical equation). A host of organizations popped up to spread the young Earth creationist word throughout the United States and beyond. Among the most important were two organizations with which Morris had direct ties: the

Creation Research Society (CRS), established in 1963, and the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), founded in 1972. While these organizations conducted very little in the way of scientific “research,” they argued that “creation science,” a legitimate endeavor, deserved equal status with evolutionary science.⁹

ICR’s likely greatest long-term contribution to the creationist cause can be found in the fact that it provided the auspices under which Ken Ham made his American debut. Born in 1951 in Cairns, Australia, Ham’s father (Mervyn) was a school principal who served at various institutions throughout Queensland, and who inculcated Ham and his siblings in the conviction that the Bible (including the book of Genesis) had to be read literally. Armed with this knowledge, Ham secured a bachelor’s degree in applied science from the Queensland Institute of Technology and a diploma in education from the University of Queensland. In 1975 he began work as a science teacher in the town of Dalby, where he later reported to have been appalled by the fact that some of his students assumed their textbooks that taught evolutionary science successfully proved the Bible to be untrue. According to Ham, this experience “put a ‘fire in my bones’ to do something about the influence that evolutionary thinking was having on students and the public as a whole.” Having just read *The Genesis Flood*, which thrilled him, Ham began delivering well-received talks to local churches in behalf of young Earth creationism.¹⁰

In 1977 Ham moved to a school in Brisbane, where he continued his presentations on young Earth creationism. Soon he joined with another teacher who shared his young Earth creationist views, John Mackay, to begin selling creation science materials to Queensland public schools, which by law taught both evolution and creationism. In 1979, Ham left his job to found with Mackay what eventually became known (after merging in 1980 with the Creation Science Association, a similar group from South Australia headed by Carl Wieland) as the Creation Science Foundation (CSF). The CSF ministry of spreading the young Earth creationist gospel expanded rapidly in Australia; it even ventured into the United States, in the form of speaking tours. In January 1987, Ham moved to the United States to work with Henry Morris and ICR as a traveling creation science evangelist. The next month an extraordinarily strange conflict erupted between Ham (who was still a co-director of CSF) and Mackay. The latter accused Ham’s personal secretary, Margaret Buchanan, of being a “broomstick-riding, cauldron-stirring witch,” a

“frequent attender of seances and satanic orgies” who engaged in “necrophilia.” In response to a request for evidence, Mackay claimed that he had received divinely inspired “spiritual discernment.” CSF eventually pushed Mackay out of the organization, and (after a few months with CSF scientist Andrew Snelling as temporary manager) Wieland replaced Mackay as the organization’s co-director (and later married Buchanan). Despite all of this, Mackay eventually resumed work with Ken Ham.¹¹

Ham remained in America, working in behalf of ICR as an evangelist for young Earth creationism, touring the nation and delivering his popular “Back to Genesis” seminars. Unlike ICR, which sought to develop and publicize a “creation science,” Ham bypassed research and instead concentrated on reaching Christian laypersons with a simple, three-pronged message. He argued that evolutionary teaching was evil and had produced almost unspeakable cultural decadence; the first eleven chapters of Genesis, read literally, revealed both the truth of the origins of the universe and a guidebook for the proper organization of society; and, finally, true Christians should join the culture war against the forces of atheistic humanism. This message proved to be wildly popular with evangelicals and fundamentalists. In contrast with the generally paltry crowds that attended ICR presentations, people flocked to hear the charismatic Australian creationist. In the wake of his remarkable success, and with Morris’s blessing, Ham and a few colleagues left ICR in 1994 to establish Answers in Genesis (AiG) as an outreach of CSF. In 1997 CSF itself became Answers in Genesis, reflecting both the success of the American organization and a commitment to emphasizing biblical creationism. In 2005, Ham and Wieland not-so-amicably parted ways over, to quote AiG’s official history, “organizational and philosophical differences” (and not over “doctrinal issues”). Ham retained control of AiG activities in the United States and United Kingdom, while Wieland remained in charge of what was now called Creation Ministries International in Australia, with connections to ministries elsewhere in the English-speaking world.¹²

According to AiG, its purpose is “to provide seminars, lectures, debates, books, along with other forms of media, museums, facilities, and exhibitions that uphold the authority and inerrancy of the Bible as it relates to origins and history.” Its website (www.answersingenesis.org), which it launched in 1995, forms the center of all this activity; the popularity of the website (in 2014 it received 14.4 million visits and 43.9

million “pageviews”) gives credence to the organization’s claim to be “the world’s largest apologetics organization.”¹³

The website¹⁴ has links to a number of online AiG magazines, including *Answers* (a quarterly magazine started in 2006 for which there is also a print version), which seeks “to illustrate the importance of Genesis in building a creation-based worldview, and to equip readers with practical answers so they can confidently communicate the gospel and biblical authority with accuracy and graciousness,” and *Answers in Depth*, also started in 2006, which “provides Christians with powerful apologetic answers, careful critiques, and close examinations of the world around them.” One also finds on the AiG website links to various AiG blogs, with Ken Ham’s most prominent. Under “Media” visitors can find a link to *Answers with Ken*, the daily sixty-second radio program that Ham started in 1994, which, according to AiG, “is now heard on more than 700 stations.” Also under “Media” are: *Answers Conversation*, weekly fifteen-minute podcasts that discuss “the objective propositional truth revealed to us by God through . . . His infallible, inerrant, and inspired Word”; *Answers Mini-Dramas*, sixty-second radio plays on topics such as “Aliens and the Bible,” “Dad: Spiritual Leader,” and “Halloween Evangelism”; video clips of various lengths on topics such as “Age of the Earth,” “Evolution,” and “Worldview”; and, a plethora of creationist cartoons attacking (to mention just a few targets) evolution and its social effects, the idea of global warming, and the myth of liberal tolerance. Under “Outreach,” one finds a list of conferences and activities (including “Embrace: Answers for Women 2015,” “Answers Mega Conference,” “Dealing with Compromise: Answers for Pastors,” “Children’s Ministry Conference,” and “Grand Canyon Raft Trips”) plus a calendar of large and small conferences and a roster of more than thirty speakers (including some in the United Kingdom) who are available for those seeking to organize an Answers in Genesis event. Finally, a link to the AiG “Store,” offers an abundant supply of creationist apparel, books, curricular material, digital downloads, DVDs, and more.¹⁵

In short, Answers in Genesis is a creationist juggernaut. Strikingly, a relatively small group of people (the same names repeatedly appear) produces a mind-boggling flood of print, media, and social media material. Such production testifies to the missionary zeal of this cadre of young Earth creationists and to the fact that this cadre is relentlessly “on message,” presenting the same set of propositions again and again. This is even true for the online *Answers Research Journal* (*ARJ*), which

from its inception in 2008 has been edited by AiG's director of research (and young Earth geologist), Andrew Snelling. *ARJ* advertises itself as "a professional, peer-reviewed technical journal for the publication of interdisciplinary scientific and other relevant research" that produces "cutting-edge creation research." Certainly the titles of many of the articles suggest that *ARJ* is not a typical research publication, for example, "Fungi from the Biblical Perspective," "Where in the World Is the Tower of Babel?," "An Initial Estimate toward Identifying and Numbering the Ark Turtle and Crocodile Kinds," and "A Proposed Bible-Science Perspective on Global Warming," which claims that "there is no reason either biblically or scientifically to fear the exaggerated and misguided claims of catastrophe as a result of increasing levels of man-made carbon dioxide."¹⁶ Moreover, when one looks closely at *ARJ*, one notices that authors are often not identified in the table of contents, and just a few individuals contribute a large percentage of the articles. For example, in 2012, Callie Joubert, whose credentials are not provided, contributed almost 50 percent of the articles published that year, including one in which he uses philosopher of science Michael Ruse to make the point that "a fear of God and the afterlife play a major role in shaping the thinking and behavior of the so-called atheist." In 2013, Joubert only contributed one article; however Simon Turpin, identified on the AiG website as having a "BA degree in theology and intercultural studies," and Danny Faulkner, AiG's resident young universe astronomer, combined to contribute eleven of the thirty articles published that year. The next year *ARJ* editor Snelling (five articles), Joubert (three articles), and Faulkner (six articles, including "Interpreting Craters in Terms of the Day Four Cratering Hypothesis") produced 45 percent of the 2014 volume.¹⁷

One explanation for the small number of contributors to the *Answers Research Journal* could be that, for the past half-century, "creation science" has produced meager results. But from the beginning Ken Ham and AiG focused not on scientific research but on making the case for biblical creationism. And this meant building a museum. According to Ham, this dream went back to his days in Australia: "standing near an 'ape-man' exhibit" in a "secular . . . museum," he "overheard a father telling his young son, 'This was your ancestor' . . . My heart ached [and] my cry to the Lord was: 'Why can't we have a creation museum that teaches the truth?'" When Ham and his colleagues founded AiG in 1994, they set up shop just south of Cincinnati, a location "chosen

because almost 2/3 of America's population lives within 650 miles," and thus perfect for the future Creation Museum. Despite local and national opposition, AiG succeeded in 1999 in getting a forty-seven-acre plot just west of the Cincinnati Airport rezoned for a museum, and then secured the final purchase of the land in May 2000. Just seven years later, the \$27 million museum was finished, funded by donations and AiG funds, and without need for a mortgage.¹⁸

Within a year of its opening, 404,000 visitors had toured the museum.¹⁹ On April 26, 2010, less than three years after opening, the Creation Museum welcomed its one-millionth guest; by the summer of 2015 2.4 million people had visited the museum. The average visitor had a "college or advanced degree," a "household income of \$67,500," and had traveled over 250 miles to get to the museum. With these admission numbers and the museum's ticket prices—as of 2015 adults paid \$29.95 for a one-day admission ticket, with an additional \$7.95 for a ticket to the Stargazer Planetarium—the Creation Museum has generated significant tax-free revenues (tax free because AiG is a religious nonprofit and tax-exempt organization). As indicated by AiG's 2013 tax return, the Creation Museum generated nearly \$4.8 million in total revenue during the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2013.²⁰ Visitors keep arriving at the Creation Museum, and AiG expects their numbers to increase by 50 percent annually once the organization's latest project, the construction of a life-size replica of Noah's Ark (the Ark Encounter project), comes to completion at a location just forty-five minutes away from the Creation Museum.²¹

Questions and Method

The Creation Museum is the crown jewel of the AiG apologetics enterprise, an impressive and sophisticated visual argument on behalf of young Earth creationism and a highly politicized fundamentalism. Given its ongoing popularity, given that the kinds of claims it makes increasingly appear in American culture and politics, the Creation Museum demands close examination. This book—the first full-scale scholarly treatment of the museum—offers precisely such an examination. Three central questions animate this examination: What is the message of the Creation Museum? How does the museum convey this message to its visitors? and How (in conveying this message) does the museum constitute its visitors as Christians and as Americans? Just under the

surface throughout the book is a fourth question: What does all this mean for American religion and politics?

To answer these questions, the authors engaged in participant observation. Accordingly, we each visited the museum at least seven times since 2007, taking field notes and photographs. In addition, we purchased and watched the videos on display in the museum and read materials by AiG representatives on the museum and its construction. Beyond attending to the museum itself, we read hundreds of books, online articles, and blog entries written by Ken Ham and his AiG colleagues. We also attended an AiG event at a church in eastern Ohio, which provided a window into AiG's outreach programs.

The Creation Museum makes a sophisticated and complex argument by way of state-of-the-art communication technology. AiG further advances these and other arguments on its website, through its books and DVDs, and by way of off-site events. Because a visit to the museum or some other AiG location—real or virtual—can be an overwhelming experience, one of the chief aims of this book is, quite simply, to slow it all down. That is to say, this book contains a close content analysis of the exhibits, placards, dioramas, videos, and images on display in the museum and of the flood of words produced by the small band of AiG young Earth creationists. Only by slowing it down, by taking the time to analyze precisely what is being conveyed, can anyone hope to understand what the Creation Museum is saying and doing and why it matters.

To capture and analyze all that the museum conveys requires an interdisciplinary approach. So this book draws upon several scholarly fields, including religious and political history, museum studies, visual rhetoric, argumentation, biblical studies, and history of science. That said, the focus of the book remains the same throughout: to see as clearly as possible what the Creation Museum displays and says, and to see what it does with what it displays and says.

In this regard this book takes very seriously what the museum says about itself and what AiG spokespersons—especially Ken Ham—say about what the museum is doing. This is particularly true in the first three chapters, where we examine the museum as a museum, the museum's treatment of science, and the museum's treatment of the Bible. These chapters start with what the museum/AiG assert—about the museum as a state-of-the-art museum, about the museum displaying lots of “real science,” and about the museum as committed to upholding bib-

lical authority—and then compare these claims with what is going on at the museum.

Suffice to say here that there is a significant gap between what the museum and AiG promise and what the museum actually delivers. The final two chapters—on politics and on judgment—provide a more fully developed explanation of what is happening at the museum. To do this requires more time outside of the confines of the museum and in the larger world of AiG. While both the museum and AiG are public—anyone can visit the museum, visit the AiG website, and/or attend AiG events—much of the messaging in the world of AiG is directed toward the true young Earth creationist believers. Attending carefully to what is being said here, to insiders as it were, reveals much about what is actually happening at the museum.

The Creation Museum seeks to shape Christianity and Christians in powerful ways that will have a lasting impact on American life. All of us have a stake in understanding what is happening at the museum and its role in preparing and arming crusaders for the ongoing culture war that polarizes and poisons U.S. religion and politics. Put simply, as bizarre as the museum may seem to many Americans, what happens inside its doors matters to all of us.

Let us enter.