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3 June 2007

THOUGHTS AFTER VISITING THE CREATION MUSEUM
2 Timothy 3:14-17

Last Tuesday I visited the Creation Museum in Boone County. We've been hearing the buzz about this museum for years and I admit I was curious. I might not have gotten around to visiting except that my daughter Rachel wanted to go while she home on a visit. Rachel is working on a degree in museum studies and she wanted to see what kind of museum might emerge from a unified vision and a nearly thirty million-dollar budget.

So we went on Tuesday, the day after the protests, the day after the huge crowds. I want to reflect aloud this morning on my impressions, not because the museum itself is such a big deal, but because it represents a very real tension within the Christian faith, a tension that cuts through most congregations and denominations. That tension has to do with how we read the Bible, how we understand inspiration, and how we live together.

Let me tell you what I liked about the museum. Lots of helpful staff dressed in cool safari gear. The building and the exhibits are first-rate, aesthetically pleasing, everything new and polished. The movies are professionally produced. Excellent models, especially the dinosaurs. A fine collection of fossils. The landscaping isn't finished, but they have built on a nice piece of land and have put in a lake and walking trails and picnic tables, so that should be quite pleasant when it's finished.

I also appreciate the unapologetically Christian message of the museum. The salvation story is presented clearly and repeatedly, the mission of Christ set against the backdrop of the human fall, and as an evangelical Christian who believes that we are saved from sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, I applaud the clarity and centrality of that message in the museum.

What didn't I like?

I think it's a bit expensive at twenty dollars a head for adults.

Also, I was miffed to learn that Dinosaur Den is unfinished and closed to the public, and nobody told us that before we bought our tickets.

Sometimes the talking exhibits sort of talk over each other and it's hard to hear.

In a zeal to drive home a particular set of beliefs, the exhibit text cards are sometimes repetitive and preachy.

What about the overall philosophy of the museum, their approach to the Bible? Am I "for it or agin it?"

Yes. I'm "for it" and yes, I'm "agin it."

I am for giving people the freedom to interpret the Bible in the way that makes most sense to them. I think the protests at the Creation Museum last weekend were simply silly. It would be like our mounting a protest at the nearest Unitarian Church because they don't believe in the Trinity. It would be like our friends from the Baptist Church picketing outside our doors because we practice infant baptism. Has our culture become so fearful and paranoid that we cannot allow differences of belief without being threatened and outraged?

Which is not to say that I agree with how the Creation Museum reads the Bible. I think there are many reasons to read those opening chapters of Genesis as parables of profound truth and insight, rather than reading them as scientific documents. The reason I take that position has almost nothing to do with Darwin or the Big Bang Theory. Instead, my study of the Bible itself has convinced me that the Scripture writers were just as able to speak truth through stories as through history—and just as inclined to do so. Jesus made up stories in order to teach truth; why couldn't God at least occasionally do the same in the Old Testament?

I try to make allowance for folks who feel their positions deeply and passionately, but even so, the Creation Museum makes sweeping statements that trouble me.

“Christianity stands or falls on the first eleven chapters of Genesis.”

Personally, I love those chapters, but I think Christianity stands or falls on Jesus Christ who got up from the dead one Sunday morning.

“The fact that the Bible is utterly without contradictions or discrepancies proves that it is the inspired word of God.”

I, for one, don't need any proof that the Bible is the inspired word of God. I take that on faith. But apparently I didn't buy the right Bible—the one without discrepancies and contradictions. If I didn't believe this book to be the inspired word of God, I wouldn't have devoted my life to studying it, preaching it, and living by it. But to use words like inerrant and infallible is to make claims that the Bible never makes for itself.

As Reformed Christians, we have a long tradition of interpreting Scripture in the light of the best possible historical, linguistic, and scientific research. That is a more challenging task than literalism, but it also, I believe, yields a richer reading of the Bible. The Reformed tradition also respects the freedom of different approaches to Scripture. Indeed, one of the driving principles of the Reformation is the freedom of personal interpretation within the community of faith. In short, we don't want someone telling us, “This is what the Bible means, this is the only thing it means, and if you don't agree you're wrong.”

And that's my real problem with the Creation Museum and with its creators. They give the impression that there is exactly one way to read the Bible—their way—literalism, as if every sentence were dictated word for word by God, leaving no room for human freedom and culture and expression, leaving no room for poetry or mystery or parable, leaving no room for people of good conscience to disagree. It is somewhat subjective, I confess, but I have the feeling that the mindset behind the Creation Museum views people of other opinions as either ignorant, misguided, or tools of the devil being used to undermine the church and destroy our culture.

That attitude within the body of Christ saddens me. There is another Reformation principle that seems still fresh today: In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, mutual respect. In all things, love. Is that still possible today? I think it is possible and necessary. So in that spirit, let offer a few final thoughts.

I think the differences in how people read the Bible are worth further discussion from folks on any side of that issue. I don't think that is an insignificant matter.

But if you locked me in a room with the board of the directors of the Creation Museum, we'd find plenty to agree on—

- that God created all things, seen and unseen, all that has ever been and all that will ever be;

- that we live in a fallen world in which sin is an ever-present reality in our lives, in our homes, at every level of human existence and we have all fallen short of God's plan for us;
- that good intentions, hard work, and self-help plans cannot restore us to a healthy, living relationship with God;
- that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, come into the world to reveal God's love, to extend God's invitation to come home again, and to make that homecoming possible by taking our sins upon his own shoulders on the cross;
- that Christ is risen from the dead and we Christians abide in him as he abides in us, we live by the powerful reality of the Holy Spirit, we approach the living Lord through Scripture, prayer, sacrament, and obedient service within the family of God's people.

I believe those matters are essential. Those foundation stones are unquestionably biblical. I've never met Ken Hamm, the fellow who put together the Creation Museum, but I'm pretty sure he and I share all those beliefs and probably a great many more. With so much in common, maybe the question of whether there were dinosaurs on Noah's ark is less important than it seems at first glance.

In other words, I know there's room in the family of Christ for Ken Hamm. I hope Ken feels the same way about me.

Soli Deo Gloria!