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Righting America

University of Dayton

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Righting America

A new book by two University of Dayton faculty is attracting attention for its examination of Answers in Genesis’ Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, the rise of creationism in America and the role of the museum in supporting the politics of the Christian right.
And with the companion $91 million Ark Encounter theme park set to open July 7, *Righting America at the Creation Museum* by Susan and William Trollinger offers compelling insight into how Answers in Genesis validates and promotes young Earth creationism to millions of visitors and what that might mean for America.

The heart of the Ark Encounter is a giant structure — the largest timber frame structure in the United States — resembling a boat that seeks to match the Ark as described in Genesis. Projections are that it will attract upwards of two million visitors in its first year.

"We took the museum very seriously, taking what it says about itself as a museum, the science it says it includes and its commitment to biblical authority, and compared those claims with what is actually said and seen in the museum," said historian Bill Trollinger, who studies American fundamentalism.

In the introduction, the Trollingers say, "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."

Rather than a message of hope and compassion, the Creation Museum emphasizes — and the Trollingers expect the Ark Encounter to follow — a message of horrific judgment for individuals who reject God and do not believe in Christ, and for a culture that has rebelled against the authority of the inerrant Word of God as interpreted by Answers in Genesis. Last time, the judgment came in the form of a global flood that drowned everyone on Earth except for eight people in Noah's family; Answers in Genesis asserts the coming judgment will be the eternal, conscious torment of hell.

Reviews of the book have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* and are upcoming in other publications. The Trollingers' website on the book has already attracted about 1,300 unique visitors.

The Trollingers began studying the museum in 2007 and were intrigued by its popularity, curious about the messages it was sending, the ways in which those messages were conveyed and what impact it may be having on American religion and politics.

During at least seven visits to the museum, they conducted a detailed analysis of the museum's content, state-of-the-art technology, exhibits, dioramas, videos and other displays.

Susan Trollinger, whose previous book *Selling the Amish: The Tourism of Nostalgia*, examined the messages conveyed in Amish tourist villages, brought her focus to how the Creation Museum's arguments, stories, images, spaces and merchandise shape the ways visitors to the museum understand themselves and interpret the world.

The result is a "...carefully researched, engagingly written book" that "takes readers on a virtual tour of the Creation Museum... This book is, to my knowledge, also the first of its kind," wrote Ronald L. Numbers, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "No one else has devoted such meticulous attention to the messages of the museum or done so in such a lucid, even-handed manner."

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press, the book is available in hardcover for $26.95 and as an e-book.
For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu.

Righting America at the Creation Museum blog

About the book

A concise overview

Susan Trollinger

Bill Trollinger

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