

Museum of misinformation

A religious motivation doesn't make distorting science any less fraudulent, says **Lawrence Krauss**

AN INTERESTING cultural experiment is taking place in Petersburg, Kentucky. It will shed light on the following question: how much money and glitz does it take to institutionalise a lie about science?

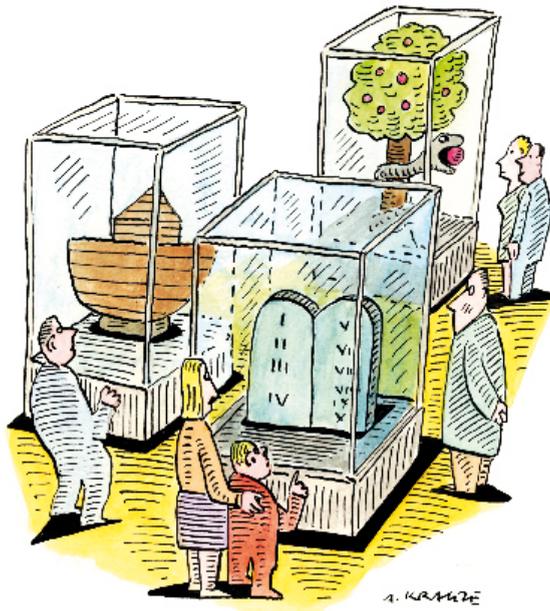
Of course, “buying” reality is not a new idea, especially in politics. Nor are institutional attacks on science, from the Nazi campaign against “Jewish physics” to the post-war Soviet effort against genetics. The Kentucky experiment differs from these, however, by borrowing a strategy from sideshows through the ages, reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*: smoke, mirrors and high-tech gimmicks. A lot is riding on the effectiveness of the man behind the curtain.

That's because the experiment is the \$27 million Creation Museum, which opens this week to great media fanfare. Designed to resemble natural history museums throughout the world, this will be a supernatural history museum, as it denies most, if not all, of natural history on this planet as centuries of careful study and experimentation have revealed it.

Ken Ham, the man who created the group Answers in Genesis, which is behind the museum, interprets the historical narrative given in *Genesis* as literally true. Since *Genesis* is incompatible with essentially all of modern scientific knowledge, Ham concludes that modern scientific knowledge must be incorrect.

An intellectually honest approach would then be to denounce modern science as flawed, and not depend upon the technological results that depend upon science for their development. Indeed, you could argue that those who support a 6000-year-old Earth are hypocritical every time they get on a plane, use a car, or watch TV.

Ham's approach, and that of the Creation Museum, is precisely the opposite. While renouncing knowledge, Ham and his colleagues are still enamoured of the illusion of



science. They have created a museum that appears scientific but that simply lies about the science.

This is why the museum should be condemned and shunned by the media, educators and government officials. Not because of its purported religious basis, but its basis in lies.

The Creation Museum is designed to suggest that science demonstrates the viability of a literal interpretation of *Genesis*. It argues that scientific evidence supports a six-day creation of the Earth, a 6000-year-old universe, and a world where dinosaurs and humans happily roamed together. In doing so it repeatedly misrepresents the process and results of science, and distorts the scientific record. Yet in every case it takes advantage of the wizardry of science to get its point across, with a series of dazzling animatronic displays and explanations.

Alas, scientific fraud is generally not subject to legal intervention unless there is a financially injured party. What, though, of the thousands of

young children who may visit the museum, which was located where it is because it is within a day's drive of two-thirds of the US population? Are they not intellectually injured when they enter a high-tech museum with an air of authority that claims, nonsensically, that according to scientific evidence, the Grand Canyon was created by the biblical flood?

The early media reports on the museum rave over the quality of the dinosaur models and describe the polite earnestness of its director. But then, good cons always seem realistic, and good con artists are always personable. Ham has been quoted as saying: “The Bible is true. No doubt about it! Paul explains God's authoritative word, and everyone who rejects His history – including six-day creation and Noah's flood – is wilfully ignorant.” By distorting reality and denying scientific discoveries that have illuminated our understanding of nature and our place in the cosmos, however, Ham and his colleagues raise wilful ignorance to a new height. Better to quote a real enemy of ignorance, Albert Einstein, who said, “Blind respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth.”

Religion doesn't have to lead to bad science, and bad science should not be defended simply because it might have a religious basis. Not a single historical record supports any of the nonsense displayed in the museum regarding dinosaurs and humans cohabiting. Not a single piece of astronomical data supports a 6000-year-old universe (the Creation Museum's planetarium notwithstanding).

Religious tolerance is important in modern society. There should be little tolerance, however, for religiously motivated fraud. The media and government officials alike need to be clear that this project is misguided, as they would more easily be if the fraud was not motivated by religion. And parents should be ready to bring lawsuits for any school system that uses public funds to bring students to this museum of misinformation. ●

Lawrence Krauss is director of the Center for Education and Research in Cosmology and Astrophysics at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. His most recent book is *Hiding in the Mirror*

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