

When the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky., opened on Memorial Day 2007, temperatures inside the 100,000-square-foot complex began to spike. Huge crowds of warm bodies will do that to an HVAC system, and it took months of tweaking through the museum's first hot summer to get the system working properly.

Mike Zovath, senior vice president of Answers in Genesis, the organization that built the Creation Museum, says he has learned his lesson. As a consortium that includes his group prepares to break ground this spring on a biblical theme park called Ark Encounter, which will include a replication of Noah's Ark built according to the dimensions given in the Book of Genesis, it is turning to the latest trends in "green" architecture. Scheduled to open in 2014, Ark Encounter will include environmentally sustainable technology "from Day One," Zovath said, and will be built by a firm that specializes in LEED-certified construction and design, the industry standard for environmentally efficient buildings.

That means geothermal heating, rainwater capture, active and passive solar heating and specialized window glazing. Even the 500-foot-long ark, which its owners say will be the largest timber-framed structure in America, will use sustainable heating and cooling, and lighting designed to reduce energy expenditure.

One might say that stories about green architecture have now officially jumped the ark. For a decade, at least, new office buildings, hotels, and even shopping centers have been trumpeted with news of their LEED ratings, which range from merely "certified" through silver, gold and the much-coveted platinum. Churches, synagogues and other places of worship have competed for environmental status through the LEED process. But it is a mark of success of the LEED standards, promulgated by the U.S. Green Building Council, that there is a new comfort level with them among conservative religious groups, including biblical literalists.

The Ark Encounter has been in the news recently because of its strict interpretation of the Noah story, a biblical passage that has taken on new resonance as global warming raises fears of larger and more devastating floods and droughts worldwide. Bloggers have pounced on pages from the Answers in Genesis Web site that patiently explain why dinosaurs will be included among the animals represented in its ark display: "God sent two of every (seven of some) land animal into the Ark," it says. "There were no exceptions." They also believe in unicorns.

But the appearance of the LEED standards on the organization's Web site is the bigger news, suggesting not only the extent of a trend already well documented - the embrace of environmentalism among evangelical Christians - but a fundamental shift in how religiously conservative Christians think of two basic biblical ideas: dominion and stewardship. And that change could have profound implications for the ongoing debate about global warming. Progress in battling the rise of global temperatures might depend less on consensus about environmental science and more on broad theological agreement about humanity's relation to the cosmos.

Read more: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/05/AR2011010505477.html?sid=ST2011010600258>

By *Philip Kennicott*
Washington Post Staff Writer
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