A Tribute to Dr. Kevin Anderson

(Adapted from Carter, Robert. 2022. Challenging evolution with science: Dr. Robert Carter interviews microbiologist Dr. Kevin Anderson. *Creation* 44(2):21–25.)

Dr. Kevin Anderson earned his Ph.D. in microbiology from Kansas State University. He spent some time as postdoc (courtesy of the NIH) and was a professor of microbiology at Mississippi State University. Prior to his untimely departure, Kevin was the director of the Van Andel Creation Research Center (VACRC). The lab is owned and operated by the CRS and is located on the campus of Arizona Christian University in Phoenix. Kevin left behind his wife, Diane (who also serves as the CRS Administrative Assistant), their three children, and four grandchildren. Dr. Robert Carter was privileged to interview him before Dr. Anderson was called home.

Kevin was a self-professed farm boy from Kansas. He said he was proud of his upbringing but knew early on that farm life was not his calling. Interestingly, he and Dr. Duane Gish (1921–2013) shared the same hometown. This formed a fun bond between them while both were alive.

As a high school freshman, Kevin read Michael Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain*, a fictional story about the discovery of a deadly pathogen from space. He said he was captivated by the scientific process described in the book and decided he wanted to be a microbiologist.

After his undergraduate degree, he received a Ph.D. in microbiology and spent most of his professional career doing laboratory research on bacteria. This included work on the genetics and ecology of anaerobic bacteria. In 2008, the journal *Structure* published a special report about a bacterial starch degradation system (Koropatkin et al., 2008). His post-doc research was the foundational work that led to much of what was reported in this special issue.[1]

Kevin grew up in a Christian home. He said he never went through a rebellious teenage stage nor a crisis of faith. Instead, he told me, "I went through a period of determining whether I professed to be a Christian simply because that was my family heritage or because that was my personal faith."

He said he entered college as a creationist, but with only a modest understanding of what that meant or any of the science involved. As a college student, he was very focused on learning how to interpret and follow the evidence.

> "I never actually encountered anything resembling the 'acid of Darwinism' which theistic evolutionist and physicist Karl Giberson (2008) claims he encountered in his college years, that 'ate' away his 'fundamentalist' understanding of Adam, Eden, and creation. I have always wondered what classes he took, because as a microbiology major, I never encountered such strong 'acid.' It might have had a big impact on my creation views if I had, but of course I never came across anything nearly as persuasive and challenging as claimed by Giberson (2008)."

Kevin took several evolution classes as an undergraduate. He recalled looking at his notes as he prepared for final exams and thinking, "Where is all this evidence everyone keeps talking about?" The material presented in the courses was little more than speculation and extrapolation (with lots of peppered moths (Lightner, 2012) and finches (Tay, 2020) scattered throughout). In fact, he said:

> "I was a much stronger creationist upon completion of my postdoctoral training than I was at the beginning of my academic years. I guess I must have been asleep during the five minutes in which they presented the overwhelming evolution evidence that apparently so deeply impressed

1 The first two footnotes of Koropatkin et al. were to a two-part paper: Anderson, K.L., and A.A. Salyers. 1989. Biochemical evidence that starch breakdown by *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron* involves outer membrane starch-binding sites and periplasmic starch-degrading enzyme. *Journal of Bacteriology* 171(6):3192–3198; Anderson, K.L., and A.A. Salyers. 1989. Genetic evidence that outer membrane binding of starch is required for starch utilization by *Bacteroides thetaiotaomicron*. *Journal of Bacteriology* 171(6):3199–3204.

> many of my peers. Rather, the science information I learned seemed to fit so well with creation and even Genesis."

When asked how his belief in creation impacted his time in school, Kevin said that his high school freshman biology teacher got annoyed with all his questions and how he constantly challenged evolution.

> "I think my great desire to understand the creation/evolution conflict motivated me to learn more about science than most of my academic peers. So, in that regard, it made me a better student because I was motivated to understand the tools and process of science even at an early age."

It also helped him understand the difference between science, philosophy, and theology, something too many scientists still do not understand.

> "My creation beliefs put me in the library studying topics that were not directly related to the classes I was taking but were a very valuable part of my maturing as a young scientist."

VACRC has a fully equipped and operating laboratory. He was able to leverage his experience in biochemistry and cell biology to perform laboratory work on dinosaur tissue and preserved proteins.

> "I certainly would have never guessed that I would be working with dinosaur bones in a laboratory or talking about dinosaur proteins. As the saying goes: to make God laugh, simply tell Him your plans! I've had a front row seat for some of the biochemical work challenging the various explanations currently offered by the evolutionist community."

This work is part of the *iDino* project that was spearheaded by the CRS. The goal is to focus on the biochemistry of protein preservation and degradation. They are examining why the various models that evolutionists have proposed to try to solve their problem do not work.

> "The presence of preserved original biomaterial in dinosaur bones has been well established, even though some evolutionists desperately try to offer alternative explanations. I think the main focus for creationists should be the lack of any sound explanation for the presence of this material in fossils—if they really were 66+ million years old as evolutionists and other old-Earthers claim."

When I asked if he had any faith-affirming encouragement to give to the next generation, he replied:

> "This fallen world will try to convince you that science has 'proven' the Bible wrong, and that creation is a failed idea. This is simply the rhetoric of people who are willfully denying their Creator and all the evidence that He left for us to discover in His creation [cf. Romans 1:18–32]. Evolutionists rarely allow close examination of their ideas, usually waving off challenges with dismissive claims such as, 'No real scientist believes in creation.' This is hardly an inspiring scientific conclusion, as it rests heavily upon everything but the use of science."

Getting back to his background in genetics, he concluded our interview saying:

> "Twenty years ago, evolutionists were literally giddy with claims that the newly published human genome sequence is devastating to those ignorant creationists. As more genome data and analysis was gradually gathered, that giddiness began to subside to the point that it is now almost nonexistent (and even then, usually just among the genetically ignorant). In contrast, creation geneticists have never been so vocal. It is a wonderful time to be a creationist, and even more so, a creation geneticist. The human genome data has been a godsend for us. For example, the concept that most of it is 'junk' (useless) DNA was embraced by evolutionists.
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> It is now clear that almost all DNA is in fact translated, sometimes into protein, but often into different forms of RNA that regulate the expression of many different protein-coding genes. So, even if only about 2% of the genome codes for protein, the rest of the genome is involved in regulating the cell in other ways. I find it highly ironic (actually, just plain silly) when we creationists are accused of being anti-science. Because people want to equate evolution and science, it's then assumed that to reject evolution is to reject science. That is hardly the case, since evolution is just one interpretation of the data—and, I would add, a highly flawed interpretation. Science only gives us the tools to gather that data. Scientific discovery continues to confirm creation (such as the genome data). So, we want more science discovery, not less."

Dr. Kevin Anderson will be remembered by many as a brave and effective warrior for the truth of the Bible and the Gospel.

References

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