

The Great Dothan Creation/Evolution Debate

Our very own [Dr Robert Carter](#) (scientist and speaker at CMI–US) participated in what was billed as the Great Dothan Creation/Evolution Debate in Dothan, Alabama. The event was sponsored by [American Vision](#) and HIS Radio 94.3 FM.

Rob's opponent, Mr Rick Pierson, is well-known in the area as an outspoken opponent of creationism. The debate was held at the Opera House in downtown Dothan on November 27, 2007. Community support was strong. The facility (590 seats) was completely full before the opening bell. At least 300 people were turned away at the door.

This was the first public debate for Dr Carter, who holds a Ph.D. in marine biology from the University of Miami. He says, 'I knew 20 years ago that I wanted to be a creation scientist and speaker, but I specifically did not want to be in any debates! However, the people of Dothan were looking for someone to come and answer a challenge issued by a local antagonist. Once the opportunity was presented to me, I could not turn it down.'

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He goes on: 'We knew going in that this opponent would not be some sort of walkover. He has two undergraduate degrees (one in computer science and one in biology) and won top awards from his university department while obtaining his second degree. Certainly no slouch, as he proved.'

Rob started the evening with a multi-point defense of biblical creationism. His main point was that evolution, as an outworking of atheistic naturalism, is impossible in general. To believe in pure evolutionary naturalism, one must believe in the miracle of [the Big Bang](#), the miracle of the spontaneous [origin of life](#), the miracle of the origin of complexity, and the miracle of [the origin of information](#). 'Complexity is the Achilles heel evolutionary theory. And the fact that information cannot come from random natural processes is the final nail in the evolutionary coffin,' Carter says.

After that, Carter, who is actively involved in creationist research on human genetics, briefly outlined why there is no evidence for the evolution of man from apes. He said that he wanted to keep the debate at a level where the audience could understand what he was saying.

Photo courtesy Danny Tindell, Dothan Eagle



The Dothan Debate: American Vision president Gary DeMar (centre) moderates between evolutionist Rick Pierson (L) and CMI's Robert Carter at right. This picture was prominent on the front page of the local newspaper.

Photo by Brandon Vallorani



Part of the overflow crowd gathering at the Dothan creation/evolution debate.

Pierson started out with a list of evidences for evolution that supposedly debunked creationism, but he said he was not going to deal with most of them and that he would focus on just two of the points. Carter said this disappointed him for he had spent the bulk of his time preparing for the points that were not raised (not that he did not handle the other issues well)!

Pierson then launched into a detailed discussion on some complex issues in modern genetics. Most of the audience members with whom we spoke said that they could not follow the debate from this point until Carter's closing arguments. Even though he wanted to keep things simple, Carter obviously had to answer the points Pierson was raising, and answer them at the same level.

But Carter had little trouble brushing off Pierson's absurd claim, bordering on the discredited Lamarckian theory, that the Bible falsely implies that women have one more rib than men. Carter pointed out that even ancient people had no trouble realizing that if a father lost his little finger, his sons would still have all 10 fingers, and that in any case, the rib is the one bone that regrows—see [Regenerating ribs Adam and that 'missing' rib](#).

After the initial opening comments, each speaker had some time to rebut the opening statement of the other. They then went into a cross-examination session where each speaker was allowed to ask the other three questions. Pierson's questions mostly dealt with evolutionary arguments about leftover genetic junk ('[pseudogenes](#)'). Carter's first question was in the form of a challenge for his opponent to explain the rise of information using nothing but natural processes (the reply from Pierson was nothing more than standard arguments about an RNA world that preceded the DNA-based life we know today, without really answering the question, and ignoring the [immense chemical problems with this idea](#); see also [The RNA World: A Critique](#)). The next two questions from the creationist came from recent evolutionary challenges to traditional evolutionary theories: He asked for an evolutionary explanation for the results from the ENCODE Project (which essentially destroys the old idea of "[Junk DNA](#)") and he then asked for an evolutionary interpretation of a new paper that claims that the earliest ape ancestors walked upright and that modern apes have lost the ability (this, of course, is in complete contrast to the evolutionary story that has been told for over 150 years [New findings solve human origins mystery](#)).

Post-script: Creation-Thumper Stumped?

The *Dothan Eagle* newspaper ran a prominent front-page article on the debate, headed 'Darwin or deity?' The report was very fair and encouraging. Among other things, it stated that 'during the debate, Carter appeared to stump Pierson with a question dealing with the number of generations it should have taken to correct some mutations, according to evolutionary theory [i.e. [Haldane's Dilemma](#)].

'Pierson paused in mid-answer.

"It's very hard to answer these off the top of your head," he said.

'After pausing another moment, he said, "This looks bad, doesn't it?".'

From all reports, it appears that the debate was successful. Carter says that it showed the community that there are Christians willing to take a stand on important faith issues, that there are answers to common evolutionary ideas, and that a consistent application of biblical Christianity leads to rational and defensible conclusions. CMI hopes to be able to distribute a DVD of the debate in due course.

Ministry opportunities

American visitors: If your church could benefit from having ministry by Dr Carter on the relevance of creation and some of the exciting evidence for it, contact us to express preliminary interest.

Further reading

- [Australian Skeptics vs CMI–Australia](#)
- [Clash over origins \(Carl Wieland vs Mark Farmer\)](#)
- [The debate: Creationist versus Skeptic \(Carl Wieland vs Paul Willis\)](#)

Related resources



[Origins: creation or evolution? 2006 \(DVD\)](#)

In this lively technical debate, Dr Mark Farmer (evolution) and Dr Carl Wieland (creation) face off to take different positions on the following question: Which is a better explanation for the origin, diversity, and history of life on earth: biblical creation or evolution?

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