

**The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age.** By *Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2011. 356pp. \$29.95.

Historian Randall Stephens and physicist Karl Giberson, colleagues at Eastern Nazarene College, have collaborated to investigate the “parallel culture of American evangelicalism” (p. 20) professed by many modern Americans. The text is an engaging tour of popular evangelical leaders, “the anointed,” such as Ken Ham, David Barton, Francis Schaeffer, James Dobson, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Oral Roberts, among many others. These leaders are carefully placed in their intellectual habitat, surrounded by the topics for which they claim or claimed divinely sanctioned expertise: human origins, the American founding, family values, end-times prophecy, and Christian education.

At the beginning of the book readers are introduced to the Creation Museum, which stands ironically, as the authors point out, on top of the famous Cincinnati, a 500-million-year-old rock formation containing some of the richest fossil beds in the world. The authors chart the history, ideas, and key proponents of young Earth creationism, and Ken Ham and his organization, Answers in Genesis, get particular notice. The reader is asked to puzzle why an Australian biology teacher (Ham) with a bachelor’s degree in applied science resonates with grassroots evangelicalism, but evangelical, pioneer geneticist Francis Collins, a member of the National Academy of Science, does not even come close to Ham’s following. Similarly, the authors unfold a complicated list of actors who argue that the narrative history of the United States has been rewritten by secularists bent on undermining America’s Christian heritage. This chapter in particular is a gem. The authors managed to weave the story of David Barton, a self-styled historian who claimed that the American founding was a Christian founding, with the likes of Peter Marshall, Francis Schaeffer, Rousas Rushdoony, and James Kennedy, who influenced or participated in the Religious Right of the late 1970s. The authors reveal how the narrative of American history has been politicized by evangelicals of the Christian Right as a means to wage culture war. David Barton not only rewrites history by baptizing the founders into faith they did not hold, he leads the fight to rewrite textbooks in Texas to reflect the America he wants rather than the America that is. James Dobson and Focus on the Family anchor the chapter on the dubious science behind the politics of evangelical child rearing and the anti-gay agenda. The chapter on evangelical apocalypticism did not quite have the strength of the other chapters. Although Reagan’s

proclivities for biblical prophecy are interesting, I wished the authors had charted with more depth the way that prophecy molded evangelical behavior, from attempts to breed perfect red heifers to pro-Israel politics to recent anti-Muslim sentiments (that have replaced anti-Communist ones). I also thought the book would have benefitted from a chapter on economics that engaged a pervasive evangelical sensibility that free-market capitalism and limited government have some sort of biblical warrant. My own wish list, of course, does not undermine the authors' observations; rather, it shows how their fine work whets the reader's appetite for more.

In the final chapter, the authors provide explanations for the parallel intellectual culture of American evangelicalism. They do not have a singular explanation. Rather, they wield a variety of lenses to explain the "anointed," including the power of the religious free market created by a separation of church and state, a pervasive American anti-intellectualism as described by Richard Hofstadter, the forging of insider/outsider boundaries, and American religious populism. The most interesting of these explanations was the use of Dan Kahan's "cue-based epistemology." However, the obvious irony that the authors would explain the beliefs of young earth creationists with an argument based on evolutionary biology would surely not be lost on the creationists. In fact, their depictions of the parallel culture often lacked sympathy. Most chapters end with what one might assume are the "respectable" evangelicals, such as geneticist Francis Collins, historian Mark Noll, and psychologist David Myers. Noll's 1995 intellectual jeremiad, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, in which he noted that there was not much of one, echoed through the pages of the book. The authors employed thinkers such as Collins, Noll, and Myers as intellectual counterpoints to the more popular experts examined. These counterpoints, of course, properly show the variety of opinions among evangelicals; however, the use of these counterpoints also left the book with an apologetic tone. This tone also comes through in the chapter in which the authors introduce the reader to Paul Miller, a college student raised in popular evangelicalism. Miller's intellectual dissatisfaction with parts of his evangelical upbringing ultimately led him to the intellectual evangelical haven of Gordon College. One wonders if this story reflects the authors' dissatisfaction with evangelical intellectual life as much as Miller's.

Despite these small criticisms, *The Anointed* is a fine work that is accessible to the average reader while having substance to offer the expert. It should be read by anyone who wishes to have insight into

the modern evangelical intellectual subculture that so influences American political and social life today.

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