

## The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age

By Randall Stephens and Karl Giberson

### Statement supporting nomination for the 2013 Grawemeyer Award in Religion

American evangelicals have long struggled with secular knowledge that challenges their faith. Believers are understandably protective of faith commitments around which they orient their lives and reluctant to surrender those commitments, even in the face of compelling evidence that they need to do so. The desire to keep secular challenges—evolution, the big bang theory, religious pluralism, homosexuality as “normal”—at bay creates an opening for authority figures that assure believers that their faith is safe and that these secular challenges can be ignored as nothing more than anti-religious prejudice. The result is a real tension within evangelicalism between Christians that accept the consensus of the various scholarly communities and those that reject them and embrace discredited ideas like young earth creationism.

*The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age* spotlights this tension, arguing that American evangelicalism is not the politically monolithic, textbook red-state fundamentalism that elected George W. Bush, opposes gay marriage, abortion, and evolution, and promotes apathy about global warming as the media portrayals suggest. Such a simplistic view understates the real tensions within evangelicalism, which is often an insular world where serious disagreements are invisible to secular and religiously liberal media consumers.

Evangelicalism struggles with this tension. *The Anointed* addresses a key question at the heart of this struggle: Why do the majority of evangelical Christians follow leaders with dubious credentials when they have other options? Why do tens of millions of Americans prefer to get their science from Ken Ham, founder of the creationist organization Answers in Genesis, who has no scientific expertise (and built the much ridiculed Creation Museum in Kentucky), rather than from his fellow evangelical Francis Collins, current Director of the National Institutes of Health and author of a major bestseller containing a winsome evangelical testimony? Why is pseudo-historian David Barton so influential and the highly respected Mark Noll all but unknown?

Exploring intellectual authority within evangelicalism, *The Anointed* reveals how America's populist ideals, anti-intellectualism, and religious free market, along with the concept of anointing—being chosen by God to speak for him like the biblical prophets—empowers a conservative leadership isolated from the world of secular arts and sciences. Today, charismatic and media-savvy creationists, historians, psychologists, and biblical exegetes receive more funding and airtime than their more qualified counterparts. Though a growing minority of evangelicals engages with contemporary scholarship, the community's authority structure still encourages anointed leaders to assume positions of leadership. Educated evangelicals are growing increasingly alarmed about the popularity of these anointed leaders and their discredited messages and are searching for ways to help their communities move past these indefensible positions, without sabotaging cherished religious beliefs.