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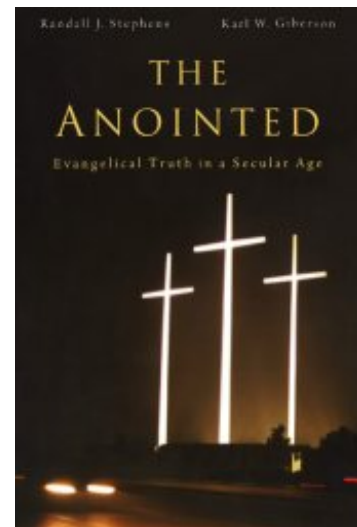
Total Capitulation: The Evangelical Surrender of Truth

Evangelical Christians will either stand upon the authority and total truthfulness of the Bible, or we will inevitably capitulate to the secular worldview.



Tuesday, October 25, 2011

Evangelical Christians are not surprised to find themselves analyzed and criticized within the pages of the secular press. After all, the truth claims that characterize authentic evangelicalism are increasingly seen as unusual (and perhaps even dangerous) by the secular mind. Nevertheless, evangelical readers of *The New York Times* recently found themselves taken to task by writers presenting themselves as fellow evangelicals. Their essay reveals the central question that evangelicals must now answer: Do we really believe that the Bible is the Word of God?



In their opinion essay, Karl W. Giberson and Randall J. Stephens accuse evangelicals of “simplistic theology, cultural isolationism, and stubborn anti-intellectualism,” among other things. They point specifically to the rejection of evolution, which they call “the rejection of science,” and then refer to this as “textbook evidence of an unyielding ignorance on the part of the religious.”

At times, the writers use the words *fundamentalist* and *evangelical* almost interchangeably. Following a line of argument popular among secular observers of conservative Protestantism, they explain that fundamentalism “appeals to evangelicals who have become convinced that their country has been overrun by a vast secular conspiracy.” In other words, they explain evangelical conviction in terms of psychology, not theology.

Evangelicals, they argue, “have been scarred by the elimination of prayer in schools; the removal of nativity scenes from public places; the increasing legitimacy of abortion and homosexuality; the persistence of pornography and drug abuse; and acceptance of other religions and of atheism.”

In response to these developments, Giberson and Stephens argue that evangelicals created a “parallel culture” which includes everything from church programs to summer camps, colleges, publishing houses, media networks, and more. There is truth in the description of an evangelical subculture, of course, but these authors surely know that this “parallel culture” emerged early in the twentieth century — long before prayer was removed from public schools or any of the other developments they list had taken place. But, then again, that honest admission would ruin the story they are trying to tell.

Giberson is well known as a leading proponent of evolution, and he has launched several lines of attack against evangelicals who reject evolution. A former professor of physics at Eastern Nazarene College, Giberson has argued that evangelical theology will simply have to give way to evolutionary theory, going so far as to admit: “I am happy to concede that science does indeed trump religious truth about the natural world.”

Stephens is an associate professor of history at Eastern Nazarene College. Together, Stephens and Giberson have also written a new book, *The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*. The main thesis of the book is that evangelicals are following the wrong set of leaders, especially when it comes to intellectual matters. They level their attack on figures like James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, and Ken Ham, founder of the Answers in Genesis ministry. Their main accusation is that these leaders, along with others, simply embarrass evangelicalism before the watching world by refusing to accept what Giberson and Stephens call “secular knowledge.”

Dobson, for example, is lambasted for arguing on behalf of reparative therapy for homosexuals seeking to change their sexual orientation. Giberson and Stephens simply reject reparative therapy because the American Psychological Association disavowed it in 2000. Dobson, they accuse, charged that the APA did so under pressure from homosexual activists. Giberson and Stephens fail to concede that the APA discussion was well known at the time to have indeed been driven by homosexual activists, who then claimed the decision as a victory for their activism.

So far as they are concerned, rejecting a position statement of a group like the American Psychological Association is tantamount to an irrational rejection of “secular knowledge.” What they fail to see, evidently, is that their own intellectual posture represents a total capitulation to whatever any secular authority may demand.

Something deeper is going on here, of course. Appearing on the October 20, 2011

edition of National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* program, Giberson argued that homosexuality should not be much of a concern at all. He revealed even more of his own approach to the Bible by asserting that "there's just a handful of proof text[s] scattered throughout the Bible about homosexuality," adding: "Jesus said absolutely nothing about it."

That hardly represents an honest or respectful approach to dealing with the Bible's comprehensive and consistent revelation concerning human sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Is Romans 1, for example, just a scattered proof text? Is not all of the Bible God's Word? Well, Giberson has already made his view of the Bible clear — it is simply "trumped" by science when describing the natural world.

Again and again, Giberson and Stephens point to the Bible as the issue. Evangelicals follow the wrong leaders, they assert, because they tend to trust those who "first and foremost have an unquestioning belief in the literal truth of the Bible." Who would have known?

Giberson and Stephens reject those who believe the Bible's clear teachings on the sinfulness of homosexuality and prefer a figure like David Myers who "believes that Christians can be faithful to God, the Bible, and their tradition and still believe that homosexuality is morally acceptable." On what authority? Once again, the norms of secular science trump everything else. Myers, they say, earned the Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. He has "won several prestigious National Science Foundation grants" and has edited respected scientific journals.

They use language intended to both impress and scare a secular readership. James Dobson, they sneer, believes in the use of corporal punishment by parents. This "defender of spanking children" is dismissed as an authority on rearing children, even though they have to admit that he also holds a Ph.D. from a respected institution (the University of Southern California), taught on its faculty of pediatrics, and has been published in respected scientific journals. They reject Dobson on homosexuality and prefer the approach of Evangelicals Concerned, an activist group which argues that God "does not judge men and women on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation."

Oddly, Giberson and Stephens criticize evangelical leaders who, for example, "pepper their presentations with so many Bible verses that their messages appear to be straight out of Scripture." Do they seriously believe that evangelical Christians should prefer leaders who would let the Bible be silent and base their arguments on some other authority? Clearly, this is exactly what they suggest.

In *The Anointed*, Giberson and Stephens reveal more of their understanding of the Bible. Consider this passage:

“Christians have long been called ‘People of the Book.’ The label is especially appropriate for evangelicals. But the Book is thousands of years old, written in obscure languages, from a mysterious and incomprehensible time and place.”

That just about says it all. In a very important paragraph in their essay for *The New York Times*, Giberson and Stephens write:

“Like other evangelicals, we accept the centrality of faith in Jesus Christ and look to the Bible as our sacred book, though we find it hard to recognize our religious tradition in the mainstream evangelical conversation. Evangelicalism at its best seeks a biblically grounded expression of Christianity that is intellectually engaged, humble, and forward-looking. In contrast, fundamentalism is literalistic, overconfident, and reactionary.”

We now know that when Giberson and Stephens speak of the Bible “as our sacred book,” they mean something far less than what evangelicals have historically believed — that the Bible is the very Word of God. The most honest part of that paragraph is found where the writers admit that they “find it hard to recognize our religious tradition in the mainstream evangelical conversation.”

That is a huge admission — and one that is especially telling. Giberson and Stephens are far outside of the evangelical mainstream, and they know it. Even on the issue of evolution, Giberson affirmed *Talk of the Nation* host Neal Conan’s assertion that the rejection of evolutionary theory “is the mainstream of evangelical thought.”

So, what are we to make of their essay in *The New York Times*? Did Giberson and Stephens hope to shift the evangelical mainstream by means of their essay? Not likely. They have made their preference for “secular knowledge” and secular affirmation clear enough. They could rest assured that the readership of *The New York Times* would overwhelmingly agree with their worldview and with their assessment of evangelical Christianity. That, we must assume, is their reward.

They have, however, set the central issue before us. Evangelical Christians will either stand upon the authority and total truthfulness of the Bible, or we will inevitably capitulate to the secular worldview. Giberson and Stephens force us to see, and to acknowledge, the consequences of the evangelical surrender of truth.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler

Disclaimer, Note 1: In this article, I reference Dr. James Dobson and Focus on the Family. I now serve on the Board of Directors of Focus on the Family, and I did so during

years of service with Dr. Dobson as Chairman of the Board. I consider him a personal friend.

Disclaimer, Note 2: In *The Anointed*, Giberson and Stephens include a section dealing with me as an example of a leader who rejects evolution and is thus misleading evangelicals. They refer to me in respectful terms, but make their criticisms clear. I am accustomed to criticism, and I am glad to engage in public conversation. In a very odd section of their consideration of me, Giberson and Stephens write: “Mohler, whom *Time* called the ‘reigning intellectual of the evangelical movement in the U.S.,’ believes that the Bible is inerrant and must be interpreted literally, although his forays into speculative end-times prophecy might lead one to conclude otherwise.” Forays into speculative end-times prophecy? I am not intimidated by legitimate criticism or disagreement, but this statement made me curious, since to my knowledge I have never engaged in such speculation or forays. I followed their footnote to this article: Broward Liston, “[Interview: Missionary Work in Iraq](#),” *Time*, April 15, 2003. I have no idea what it has to do with “speculative end-times prophecy” since nothing even close is mentioned in the interview.

Karl W. Giberson and Randall J. Stephens, “[The Evangelical Rejection of Reason](#),” *The New York Times*, Tuesday, October 18, 2011.

Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson, *[The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age](#)*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

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