

# The secularist anointed to replace Christian conservative anointed—for evangelicals

*The Anointed: Evangelical Truth in a Secular Age*

Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson

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John Woodmorappe

On the outside removable cover, author Randall J. Stephens is identified as Associate Professor of History at Eastern Nazarene College while author Karl W. Giberson is identified as former Professor of Physics at Eastern Nazarene College. This book flits over topics as diverse as organic evolution, American history, child-rearing practices, homosexuality, eschatology, etc. However, it is quite shallow in its approach to these subjects, as the informed reader will notice at once.

The authors repeat the mantra about the ‘mountains of evidence’ for the evolutionary worldview without so much as a hint of a glimmer of skepticism. Not surprisingly, this world view permeates to other areas. As elaborated below, they flirt with modernism in theology and implicitly or explicitly support leftist social, moral, and political issues. They elaborate on the decline of traditional morality in American life but treat it in a cavalier manner—as some kind of natural or inevitable occurrence.

Stephens and Giberson dismiss the creation account in the Book of Genesis as non-literal because, according to them, God is presented

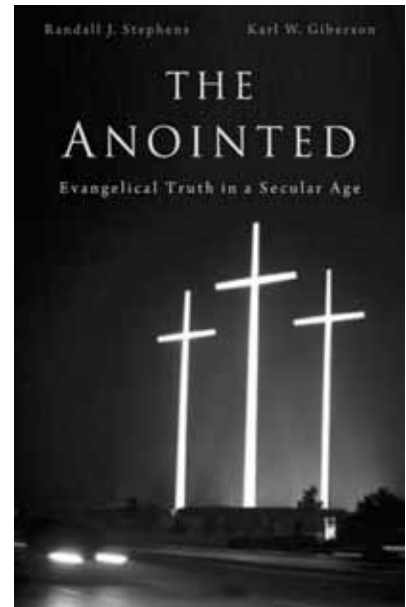
as anthropomorphic in His actions. However, the very same thing could be said, notably by the pantheist and atheist, about a personal God *in general*. After all, a God who experiences anger and love, answers human prayers, has a concept of—and concern about—wrong and right conduct, etc., is anthropomorphic in the extreme! (Actually, it is not God that is anthropomorphic, but humans that are theomorphic—created in the image and likeness of God.)

## The hypocrisy and anti-intellectualism of the authors

The very title of this book is ironic. The authors rail against popular evangelicals, whom they disparage as the ‘anointed’, yet blindly buy into secularist thinking, whose spokesmen they treat as the truly anointed—and who regard themselves that way!

The authors unreservedly support the ‘believe the elitists’ premise. They consistently harp on their opinion that evangelicals (at least American evangelicals) are anti-intellectual, largely because, according to the authors, evangelicals fail to defer to ‘experts’. Authors Stephens and Giberson are the worst offenders in this regard. Their very mindset of ‘don’t question the experts’, if nothing else, is anti-intellectualism par excellence.

Recall the qualifications of Stephens (history) and Giberson (physics). If they practised what they preached, they would be writing about history and physics—and nothing else. The authors seem almost obsessed with



Ken Ham, of Answers in Genesis, and his popularity. If Ken Ham has no right to publicly say anything about organic evolution because he is not a specialist in this area, then neither do Stephens or Giberson, as neither are evolutionary biologists! In addition, Stephens and Giberson have no right to discuss such topics as homosexuality, climatic change, and child-rearing, as they freely do in this book, since these subjects are outside their academic fields.

Both authors teach, or taught, at Eastern Nazarene College. The reader may recall that, during the 1981 Arkansas Trial in the US, some of the expert witnesses for the creationist position were implicitly disparaged because their professorship was at Bible colleges. By the same standard, Stephens and Gilbertson should therefore be disqualified, as any kind of authoritative writers, by the secularist experts whom they so slavishly admire.

Authors Stephens and Giberson routinely misrepresent the evangelicals they are condemning. This, too, is a form of anti-intellectualism. I discuss a few of the more egregious misrepresentations a little later.

### Problems with 'following the experts'

If we defer to 'experts', as Stephens and Giberson repeatedly say we should, then precisely which ones should we believe? Do the left-wing and secularist elitists in academia, entertainment, and media know everything? How dare anyone question them!

The very mindset of the authors is self-defeating for the Christian. Philosophers study basic questions about existence, such as the question of God. It is safe to say that the majority of philosophy professors, notably those in prestigious academic institutions, reject the existence of God. Following the 'believe the elitists' mentality of authors Stephens and Giberson, evangelicals should do likewise.

In fact, the foregoing consideration applies to almost every issue raised by the authors. As elaborated below, if we 'follow the experts', then we have to reject virtually every aspect of our Christian faith.

Giberson laments elsewhere about his own students that have rejected the Christian faith because of (horror of horrors) those Christians who question evolution:

"... instead scientifically informed young evangelicals became so alienated from their home churches that they walked away, taking their enlightenment with them. ... Many of my most talented former students no longer attend any church, and some have completely abandoned their faith traditions."<sup>22</sup>

However, this works both ways. How many people (myself included) have been put off by the refusal of many pastors, deacons, and teachers to take a stand against evolution out of a desire to 'avoid controversy'? How many people have never come to Christ because they recognize Christian acceptance of evolution as a tacit admission that the Bible is wrong?

Finally, the 'only experts should speak' position of the authors is

hypocritical. Various 'unqualified' personages, having a large audience, make public pronouncements all the time about matters outside their expertise. For instance, in the US, movie stars and other celebrities do not stick to comments about entertainment. Instead, they commonly make public statements in support and recommendation of various leftist social and political causes, yet Stephens and Giberson have not a word of complaint about them.

### The author's burlesque of creationism and Intelligent Design

The authors also follow an extreme anti-intellectualism in their flippant treatment of creationism and Intelligent Design. Their conduct is so egregious that it borders on intellectual dishonesty, to say nothing of hypocrisy. Their concept of creationism is largely fixated at the Henry M. Morris and Ken Ham level and time. They almost completely ignore the thousands of degreed, qualified scientists worldwide who are declared creationists or proponents of Intelligent Design. Stephens and Giberson also nearly completely ignore the volumes of solid scientific creationist research that has been conducted in recent decades. For instance, there have now been seven International Conferences on Creationism, in which thousands of scholarly papers were published, but one would never know it reading Stephens and Giberson!

The authors quote arch-atheist Richard Dawkins with approval on creationists. This speaks volumes about their biases, to say nothing of the lack of quality in their thinking.

Stephens and Giberson misquote philosopher of biology Paul Nelson as saying that the evidence against his position is overwhelming (p. 34). I know Paul Nelson quite well and am familiar with many of his writings. He unequivocally states that the evolutionary position is inadequate and

flawed and that the preponderance of evidence points to Intelligent Design.

Perhaps the most laughable statement by the authors is the following:

"The sheer number of leading scientists who reject creationism while affirming Christian beliefs makes a strong argument for the compatibility of evolution and Christianity" (p. 50).

Now imagine telling this to the Old Testament prophet:

"Stop condemning idolatry. The sheer number of leading Jews who worship idols while affirming Judaism makes a strong argument for the compatibility of idol worship and Judaism."

One must also remember that any dead fish can float downstream but only a live fish can swim upstream against the current. Likewise, it is no feat for a Christian to float downstream and conform to the world, as by accepting evolution. Conversely, it takes a great deal of courage for the Christian scientist to 'swim upstream' against the strong current by rejecting evolution and not rarely enduring the intellectual arrogance (or worse) of his professional peers. In any case, there is no reward, in academia, for being an iconoclast when it comes to evolution.

### The four temperaments

Stephens and Giberson once again show their complete intellectual emptiness as they attack and dismiss Tim LaHaye for his 'simplistic outlook' about the four temperaments (p. 109). The four temperaments are sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic (figure 1).

The authors fail to inform the reader that LaHaye based his thinking on that of eminent psychologist Han Eysenck (1916–1997). Was Eysenck therefore also infected with a 'simplistic outlook'?

Eysenck proposed that the ancient four temperaments can be mapped into four fields, each of which is governed

by a scale of neurosis and stability on one hand, and introversion and extroversion on the other hand. And he used the Hippocratic categories to give the combinations one-word names. Thus, we have the melancholic (neurotic introvert), phlegmatic (stable introvert), choleric (neurotic extrovert), and sanguine (stable extrovert). Most artists, writers, and scientists are melancholics. Most ‘strong, silent types’ are phlegmatics. Most military and political leaders, and ‘Type A’ personalities, are choleric. Most salesmen and ‘people-oriented’ types are sanguines.

Tim LaHaye extended Eysenck’s thinking into the spiritual realm. He also developed programs so that each person could develop the strengths of his/her temperament and overcome the weaknesses of his/her temperament.

### Child-rearing

Stephens and Giberson mis-represent the likes of James Dobson by constructing a false dichotomy between love for the child and corporal punishment. Actually, conservative child-rearing specialists are the first to point out that child-rearing is not just discipline and that discipline is not just punishment—far from it. In addition, who ever said that corporal punishment is the *only* form of discipline that parents should use?

The authors would have us believe that most experts have rejected corporal punishment in child-rearing and cite the declarations of some American psychological organizations to support their argument. Because of this, they argue that evangelical leaders such as James Dobson are self-evidently wrong to accept corporal punishment.

What if the no-spanking conclusion tacitly flows from the humanistic premise that there is no such thing as objective good

and bad, or that the child is a blank slate, or (the left-wing notion) that all human relations are arbitrarily governed by the advantages of the privileged/powerful over the non-privileged/powerless? What if these same secular experts come to a point, in the future, that they declare that teaching children to believe in God is maladaptive or even a form of child abuse (as Dawkins has claimed, while downplaying real sexual abuse<sup>3</sup>)? Following the believe-the-experts mentality of Stephens and Giberson, evangelicals should then do likewise.

Worse yet, what if the psychology experts, whom Stephens and Giberson are so enamored with, declare (as experts did in the Soviet Union) that belief in God is a form of mental illness and that those who hold to theism should be subject to therapy—involuntary if necessary? Assuming that Stephens and Giberson believe in God (sometimes one wonders), would they then set the example by obeying the experts and undergoing the onerous therapy to lose their belief in God?

The authors allege that psychological studies have shown that corporal punishment “models aggression”. If

this is true, is it necessarily bad? One can think of the aggression that God shows to express His hatred of sin (notably in the Bible, ironically for which reason the Bible is attacked by infidels), or the aggression shown by policemen in stopping the actions of vicious criminals. Was Allied military aggression wrong to put an end to Nazi Germany and her murderous policies?

Consider the argument that homosexuality is normal, and should be accepted, because it occurs in nature. Following the same reasoning, corporal punishment should also be accepted, because it occurs in nature. Among animals, the mother commonly inflicts pain on her offspring for corrective purposes.

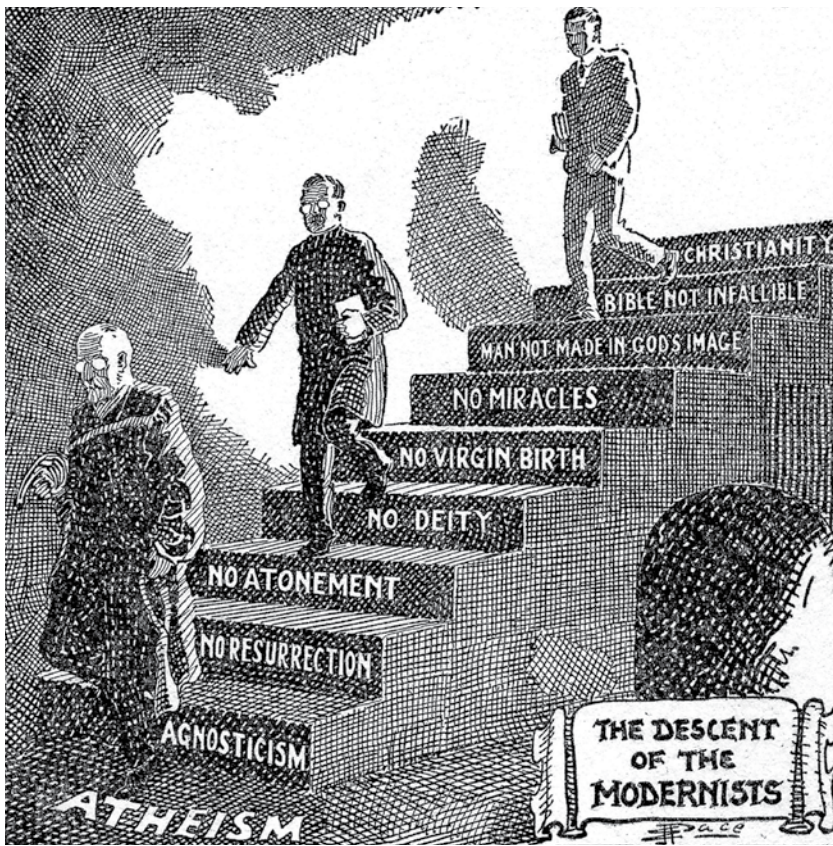
There is another irony to those who say that adult violence against a child, no matter how mild and well-intentioned, is never justified. They are commonly the same liberals who have no problem in supporting so-called abortion rights, where murderous violence is directed against the unborn child who furthermore has done no wrong—save that of being an inconvenience to one or both parents.

### Homosexuality

Stephens and Giberson uncritically repeat all the standard arguments for legitimizing homosexuality. For instance, they argue that the institution of marriage has changed with time, as by the one-time acceptance of polygamy. The fact that professing evangelicals are parroting this argument makes it all the more egregious. Among other things, this irrelevant contention ignores the fact that the divine model of marriage has, from the beginning, been one man and one woman (Adam and Eve). Jesus Himself cited Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to explain God’s design for marriage (Matthew 19:3–6, Mark 10:5–9). Since the authors



Figure 1. The four temperaments as understood by the Ancient Greeks.



**Figure 2.** Professing evangelical authors Stephens and Giberson are well on their way down this pernicious stairway.

explicitly reject a historical Adam and Eve, it should be no surprise that they reject Christ’s teaching on marriage based on this history.

The authors accept, with no questioning, the opinions of various psychological organizations in the USA that have declared homosexuality to be normal and unchangeable, and that children raised by openly homosexual parents are no different from children raised by heterosexual parents. Actually, different studies have come to different conclusions.<sup>4,5</sup> In any case, we are left with the same problem of ‘expert’ opinion. What if these same psychological or skeptical<sup>6</sup> organizations one day declare that there is no compelling evidence that sexual relations between adults and children are harmful to the children, provided that there is no coercion, secrecy, or shame associated with such

conduct? Should we then embrace such acts as normal, especially if most of our ‘evolving’ society accepts them, or if only out of fear of being called unenlightened or bigoted?

The authors dismiss the suggestion that males who became homosexuals never bonded with their fathers. They say that many homosexuals had “decent dads”. Even if true, this misses the whole point. The point is not whether or not the dads were decent but whether the growing boy ever formed a true bond with his father. Unfortunately, many otherwise decent dads are distant to their children.

For all their endless protestations of evangelicals being anti-intellectual, the reasoning of the authors is superficial in the extreme. They thoughtlessly repeat the argument about ex-gays not staying that way proving the innateness of homosexuality. Consider the fact

that the vast majority of apparently successful dieters regain their excess weight after several years. Yet there are a few who have long-term success in sustained weight loss. Does the fact that many ex-homosexuals commonly revert back to homosexuality prove that homosexuality is unchangeable, or does it show that once-practised behaviours involving basic instincts, notably those related to food and sex, are very resistant (but not completely refractory) to lasting change?

### The Second Coming of Christ—warmed-over modernism

Hal Lindsey, and some others like him, have gained popularity for their emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ. The authors clearly resent this fact.

In fact, Stephens and Giberson cite some theologians who are bewildered over the popularity of the likes of Hal Lindsey, and say that Christians today should not take the “Christ is returning to Earth” preachers seriously, as the belief in His Second Coming was something appropriate to 1<sup>st</sup> century thinking. Interestingly, many of those he cites in support of this position come from mainline denominations—precisely the ones that are the deadest spiritually.

The authors are repeating nothing more than the same old stale, theological liberalism. If the belief in Christ’s return was just a product of its time, why not everything else in the Bible (as unbelievers tell us)? Why is not the Saviour, salvation, heaven, hell, belief in God itself, etc. *also* merely a product of its time, and in-applicable today? Clearly, Stephens’ and Giberson’s thinking, taken to its logical conclusion, abrogates the entire Christian faith and is indistinguishable from atheism (figure 2).

The authors almost gloat over the fact that Hal Lindsey incorrectly predicted that the Soviet Union

would attack Israel, in fulfilment of Ezekiel 38, and be destroyed by God. Since then, the Soviet Union has broken up, and this cannot happen. However, Lindsey may still be onto something. Russia has a long history of imperialist aggression and some Russians nowadays speak of being “between empires”. So why can’t the attacker be some other form of Russia instead of communist Russia?

Finally, the authors miss the point about preachers such as Hal Lindsey. He never claimed that his ideas were authoritative or infallible. To the contrary, he stressed that, even if they were incorrect, they would still have served their purpose in getting more Christians to focus on the Second Coming of Christ and to orient their thoughts and their lives accordingly. *That* is the legacy of Hal Lindsey and other preachers who focus on the impending Second Coming of Christ.

There are sobering issues involved in what Stephens and Giberson are doing. Scripture (2 Peter 3:3–4) has an explicit and stern warning to those who would belittle or undermine the fact of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. The authors, and those who support them, should take heed.

The authors stoop so low as to attack famous evangelists, such as Billy Sunday. This reminds me of a story about a prominent evangelist. A woman came up to him and said: “I do not like your method of evangelism.” He asked her: “What is your method of evangelism?” She responded candidly: “I do not have one.” He replied: “I think that I like my method of evangelism more than your method of evangelism.” So what form of evangelism are Stephens and Giberson proposing? None.

Finally, the authors attack Hal Lindsey (p. 159) and Oral Roberts (p. 228) personally—for their wealth—and pronounce it incompatible with Christianity. This would have been news to wealthy people commended in Scripture such as Job, Abraham,

Isaac, and Joseph of Arimathea. And isn’t this judgmental attitude ironic, coming as it is from authors that soft-pedal homosexuality and otherwise advocate an almost ‘anything goes’ approach to Christian belief and living? So it’s hardly surprising that they also ignore God’s command: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly” (Leviticus 19:15).

### Conclusions

The ‘believe the elitists’ thinking advanced by Stephens and Giberson is not only hypocritical and self-refuting. It also smacks of a dangerous tendency towards totalitarianism. The reader may recall how fascism and communism spoke of people not knowing what is good for them, and the need of a Leader, or a cadre of ‘better people’ to tell them what to believe, and even to rule over them. May God forbid!

Romans 12:1 teaches the Christian to be renewed in the mind and not to conform to this world. Authors Stephens and Giberson tend towards the exact opposite: Christians should actively orient their thinking according to the ways of the secular world and resist anyone who disagrees.

This book, despite its shoddy character, is not devoid of value. It shows to what extent some self-identified evangelicals have strayed from biblical truth and openly embraced anti-Christian belief systems and practices. Where will it end (figure 2)?

Finally, the authors completely miss the point about the people they are condemning. The evangelical personages that the authors berate are popular because politicians are often two-faced and are not addressing the issues behind the cultural and moral decline of American society. Ken Ham is popular because the American church is not doing its

job promoting the Christian faith in a manner that connects with our scientific age. Hal Lindsey, and others like him, have a significant following because the preaching and teaching of the American church has usually been very superficial, uninspiring, and lacking in vision. Unfortunately, authors Stephens and Giberson are very much part of the problem among evangelicals—if they are properly called evangelicals at all.

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