

## **American Worldview Inventory 2020 – At a Glance**

### **AWVI 2020 Results -- Release #2: Faith and Worldview**

#### **Is the Bible True? CRC Survey Shows America's Distrust of the Bible Undermines Its Worldview**

April 7, 2020

Growing skepticism about the Bible, especially among young people and even in some of the nation's largest Christian denominations, is a leading cause of the precipitous decline of biblical worldview in America.

Stunning new results from the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* found that the number of Americans who believe that the Bible is true is down by 21 percentage points since 2000. This parallels a similarly precipitous 50% decrease in the biblical worldview in America over the same time period, from 12% to the current 6%—the lowest number ever recorded.

The study shows significant shifts in the relationship between peoples' faith and their worldview, including unexpectedly dramatic changes in how Americans view the Bible. Trust in the Bible can be seen to vary by religious affiliation, with growing skepticism continuing to drive the decline in the biblical worldview in America, according to the latest findings of the *AWVI 2020*, the first annual nationwide worldview survey conducted by veteran researcher Dr. George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

The *AWVI 2020* shows that people's beliefs about the Bible directly correlate with whether they develop a biblical worldview. Unsurprisingly, those who believe the Bible is the true word of God are much more likely to have a biblical worldview. Conversely, those more skeptical of the Bible—a rapidly increasing number of American adults—are less likely to have a biblical worldview.

#### **Here are key *AWVI 2020* findings:**

- Four out of every ten people (41%) believe that the Bible is the word of God and contains no factual or historical errors. One out of every seven of those adults (14%) has a biblical worldview. While that percentage is low, it is more than double the national average. The biblical worldview of those with a skeptical view of the Bible plummets to 2% or less.
- Church affiliation strongly affects a person's view of the Bible and their worldview. For instance, of the 13% of Americans who attend Evangelical churches, which teach that the Bible is the word of God and is reliable and trustworthy in all matters, 21% hold a biblical worldview, the highest of all faith groups looked at in the study.
- Those belonging to the other two major U.S. Christian faith groups hold a more skeptical view of the Bible and a correspondingly lower percentage possess a biblical worldview. Catholic churches, the largest U.S. denomination, attract one out of every five adults (21%). Only 1% of American Catholics have a biblical worldview. Mainline Protestant churches attract 8% of the adult public and 8% have a biblical worldview.

- As a person's trust in the Bible declines, so does the likelihood they will develop a biblical worldview. For example, "born-again" Christians constitute one-third of the population (33%) but less than one out of five holds a biblical worldview (19%), a figure that while low, is triple the national average (6%). Unsurprisingly, among "Spiritual Skeptics," the fastest-growing faith segment in the nation (21%), less than one-half of one percent hold a biblical worldview.
- Teens and individuals in their twenties read the Bible less often than other adults, attend church less often, and are more likely to attend churches that reject the authority of the Bible. Adults under the age of 30 are both the least likely to have a biblical worldview and to engage Christianity through churches that believe the Bible is the true word of God.

"These trends could be devastating—but only if they continue," said ACU President Len Munsil. "Our priority is to reverse these trends, especially in how we educate the next generation. For example, at Arizona Christian University, every student is immersed in studying the Bible and taught to think and live according to the biblical worldview."

"We want our graduates to lead lives that fully embrace and reflect the biblical worldview," he said. "Nothing is more important than preparing our students for lives of influence for the Kingdom in all areas of leadership in America and the world."

Barna explained that the weak linkage between Bible appreciation, church affiliation, and biblical worldview is concerning to see among young people. Barna admonished, "Remember, people do what they believe. This research underscores the fact that growing numbers of people are moving away from believing that the Bible is true, relevant, and valuable for our lives. Christian churches cannot keep doing what we have been doing in ministry for the past 30 years and assuming that things will get better." He added, "To reverse the declining incidence of a biblical worldview, new strategies for teaching and spiritual accountability are required."

The disturbing results from this new research emphasize the importance of carefully measuring and intentionally developing the biblical worldview, especially among younger people. CRC, which conducts strategic cultural research through a collaborative effort of the faculty and staff at ACU, is facilitating cultural transformation in America through worldview education. CRC is the only institute conducting this kind of nationwide worldview research and is using those studies as the foundation for creating new resources for worldview training. CRC's goal is to share its research findings with those who share a vision for Bible-driven cultural transformation. CRC is currently engaged in intentional biblical worldview training among all students at ACU.

This latest report, "**Is the Bible True? How Faith Affects Worldview in America**," is the second of 12 biweekly releases from the *AWVI 2020*. The full release of these results follows.

## **American Worldview Inventory 2020 Results – FULL Release #2: Faith and Worldview**

### **Is the Bible True? CRC study finds America’s Distrust of the Bible Undermines Its Worldview**

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Center

Released: April 7, 2020

The big picture about the incidence of biblical worldview in the United States – that just 6% of adults have that perspective – stems from some dramatic shifts in the relationship between peoples’ faith and their worldview. The most incredible changes relate to how Americans view the Bible. These insights come from the first annual nationwide worldview survey conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, entitled the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* (AWVI).

A biblical worldview, by definition, is based upon belief in and application of the truths, principles, and exhortations contained within the Bible. However, the results of the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* point out that the changes in perceptions and acceptance of the Bible have facilitated the continuing decrease in the incidence of a biblical worldview in America.

#### **Perceptions of the Bible Matter**

Industry data shows that the Bible has been the bestselling book in the United States for more than 50 consecutive years. Research suggests that more than eight out of every ten Americans own at least one Bible. As many as four out of ten adults claim to have read the entire Bible. Two out of every ten adults say they read the Bible on a daily basis. Clearly, the Bible is a book with a broad presence and substantial influence in the United States.

As would be expected, the AWVI survey revealed that peoples’ beliefs about the Bible are directly correlated with whether they develop a biblical worldview. For instance:

- Four out of every ten people (41%) believe that the Bible is the word of God and contains no factual or historical errors. One out of every seven of those adults (14%) has a biblical worldview. While that percentage is low, it is more than double the national average.
- Among the 13% of adults who believe the Bible is the inspired word of God but contains some factual or historical errors, only 2% possess a biblical worldview.
- Nearly one-quarter of the nation (23%) possess a positive view of the Bible but do not believe it is the literal or inspired word of God, or that it is completely accurate. (They see it as a “holy book” of religious teachings or as a valuable guidebook for societal development.) However, less than 1% of these people develop a biblical worldview.
- One out of eight American adults (13%) are indifferent to, or dismissive of the Bible, citing it as merely a descriptive narrative of how its authors viewed the ways and principles of God, or as an unrealistic book of fables and myths. Not quite 1% of the people in this category hold a biblical worldview.
- The remaining 9% of the general public do not know how to describe the nature or value of the Bible. About 1% of that segment has a biblical worldview.

Describing these data differently, only half of the nation’s adult population (54%) believes that the Bible is the word of God. Even fewer – just four out of ten (41%) – believe that the Bible is totally true in all of its empirical and historical statements.

Stunningly, when comparing the current data with that from 2000, there has been 21 percentage point decline in the proportion of adults who believe the Bible is the word of God (from 75% to 54%) and a 17-point drop in the number who believe the Bible is without error (from 58% to 41%).

**Differences by Church Affiliation**

It is not surprising, then, to find that different segments of the Christian population have varying incidences of biblical worldview possession.

For instance, the 13% of Americans who attend evangelical churches – i.e., congregations who teach that the Bible is the word of God and is reliable and trustworthy in all matters – have the highest likelihood of being Integrated Disciples (i.e., people with a biblical worldview). Overall, more than four out of five people (84%) associated with an evangelical church contend that the Bible is the word of God, and three-quarters of those at such churches (74%) believe the Bible has no errors. One out of five people at evangelical churches (21%) are Integrated Disciples.

Q1: Which of these descriptions comes closest to what you believe about the Bible?							
Belief about the Bible	Church Type / Affiliation						
	All adults	Evangelical	Charismatic Pentecostal	Mainline Protestant	Catholic	Jewish	Atheist/Agnostic None
the inspired word of God that has no errors, although some verses are meant to be symbolic rather than literal	21%	39%	33%	16%	27%	7%	4%
the actual, true word of God that should be taken literally, word for word	20	35	35	21	20	12	3
the inspired word of God but with some factual or historical errors	13	10	10	23	14	12	6
just one of the many holy books that provide religious teaching; it is neither more nor less reliable than the sacred literature of other religious traditions	15	6	5	20	15	19	24
not inspired by God but tells how its authors understood the ways and principles of God	6	4	4	9	5	12	8
a valuable text that has helped society develop, but it is neither divine nor inspired	8	2	7	4	8	16	14
a book of fables and myths that have little, if any, basis in reality	7	*	3	2	4	12	24
don't know	9	3	3	5	7	9	17

Not far behind are adults aligned with a Pentecostal or charismatic church. Although they are just as half as prolific as evangelical churchgoers (6% of all adults), they are nearly as likely to say that the Bible is the word of God (78%), and two-thirds of those attending Pentecostal or charismatic churches

believe the Bible has no errors (68%). In total, one-sixth of the people attending these churches (16%) qualified as Integrated Disciples.

There was a steep decline in the proportion of Integrated Disciples among those attending the other two major categories of Christian churches in the U.S. The largest denominational grouping in the country – Catholic churches – attracts one out of every five adults (21%). However, only six out of ten of them (61%) believe the Bible is the word of God, and less than half (47%) believe the Bible is error-free. Only 1% of American Catholics have a biblical worldview.

The other significant Christian segment is mainline Protestant churches. Those congregations contain 8% of the adult public. Like Catholics, just six out of ten mainline attenders (60%) contend that the Bible is the word of God, and less than four out of ten (37%) say the Bible is without error. In total, 8% of those at mainline churches are Integrated Disciples.

### **Beliefs and Worldview**

Among the 180 million adults who say they are Christian, less than one out of 10 (9%) has a biblical worldview. “Born again” Christians are one-third of the population (33%). These people were not identified as such by self-identification, but by claiming to be Christian and to believe that they will experience Heaven after they die solely because they have confessed their sins and accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Although this group is often described as the “backbone” of the Christian Church, less than one out of five of them had a biblical worldview (19%) – a figure that was low but triple the national average (6%).

Individuals who fall within the realm of Spiritual Skeptics (i.e., atheists, agnostics, and those with no religious interest/affiliation) constitute the fastest-growing faith segment in the nation. They currently represent more than one out of every five adults (21%). As might be expected, given their dismissal of the Bible and Christianity, less than one-half of one percent of the Skeptics had a biblical worldview.

American Jews are roughly 2% of the adult population. While Judaism does not accept the New Testament in the same way that Christianity does, one of the more surprising revelations from the American Worldview Inventory was that Jews were more likely than Catholics to have a biblical worldview. (Caution must be used in this interpretation because the difference between the two groups, while consistent over time, falls within the range of sampling error and therefore may simply be due to reliance on sampling.)

As expected, although 8% of the nation aligns with faiths other than Christianity or Judaism, less than one-half of one percent of those individuals qualified as Integrated Disciples. The small number of people who fit the definition were affiliated with the Mormon church.

### **Challenge for the Future**

The weak linkage between Bible appreciation, church affiliation, and biblical worldview raised concerns for George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center and creator of the *American Worldview Inventory*. “The study shows that people in their teens and twenties read the Bible less often than other adults, attend church less often, and are more likely to attend churches that reject the authority of the Bible,” the veteran researcher commented. “Young people are also less likely than older adults to believe that the Bible is the word of God and that it is true.”

As Barna points out, “As we look to the coming decades, we should be concerned that adults under the

age of 30 are both the least likely to have a biblical worldview and to engage Christianity through churches that believe the Bible is the true word of God. To reverse the declining incidence of a biblical worldview, new strategies for teaching and spiritual accountability are required.”

Barna recommended that Bible-believing churches consider investing very heavily in a comprehensive worldview development process. “America desperately needs a full-court press to facilitate the widespread respect for, appreciation of, and acceptance of the value and veracity of the Bible. Without that as a foundation we will not get people to intentionally and purposely develop a biblical worldview.”

“Remember,” the author of numerous bestselling books admonished, “people do what they believe. This research underscores the fact that growing numbers of people are moving away from believing that the Bible is true, relevant, and valuable for our lives. Christian churches cannot keep doing what we have been doing in ministry for the past 30 years and assuming that things will get better.”

“The consequence of our ineffective ministry strategies is obvious: Americans have embraced alternative worldviews that are destroying our country on every front. Parents and churches must deliberately and strategically work hand in hand with each other, as well as with schools and the entertainment industry, to rescue America from the moral and spiritual freefall we’re in. God provided His words of life in the Bible for our well-being. Time is short, we must immediately join together in a concerted effort to restore His truth and wisdom to our lives.”

### **About the Research**

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020* (AWVI) is the first wave of an annual series of surveys that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions that are drawn from eight categories of worldview application. Those questions are divided into queries regarding both beliefs and behavior. In addition to the worldview questions, the survey also contains an array of demographic and theolographic questions. In total, the AWVI instrument incorporates 68 questions and took respondents an average of 16 minutes to complete.

AWVI was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults. The survey included 1,000 interviews with a nationwide random sample of adults via telephone, plus another 1,000 adults interviewed online through use of a national panel of adults. A survey of 2,000 individuals has an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of undeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

### **About the Cultural Research Center**

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University is located on the school’s campus in Glendale, Arizona. CRC conducts nationwide research studies to understand the intersection of faith and culture and shares the information with organizations focused on impacting the spheres of cultural influence in order to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith but remains non-partisan and inter-denominational. In addition to Dr. George Barna, the Director of Research, Dr. Tracy Munsil serves as the Executive Director of the Center. More information about the Cultural Research Center is available at the Center’s website, located at [www.culturalresearchcenter.com](http://www.culturalresearchcenter.com).