

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2022

Release #5: Shocking Results Concerning the Worldview of Christian Pastors

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People have many expectations of pastors of Christian churches. One of those expectations is that pastors possess a philosophy of life that largely reflects biblical principles, a perspective commonly called a biblical worldview.

But a new nationwide survey among a representative sample of America's Christian pastors shows that a large majority of those pastors do not possess a biblical worldview. In fact, just slightly more than a third (37%) have a biblical worldview and the majority—62%—possess a hybrid worldview known as Syncretism.

The new findings come from the *American Worldview Inventory 2022*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University and administered to 1,000 Christian pastors to better understand the worldviews that drive their thinking and behavior.

Pastors and Biblical Worldview

Among all Christian pastors in the United States, slightly more than one out of every three (37%) possesses a biblical worldview.

The proportion varies by the pastoral position held. Among Senior Pastors, four out of 10 (41%) have a biblical worldview—the highest incidence among any of the five pastoral positions studied. Next highest was the 28% among Associate Pastors. Less than half as many Teaching Pastors (13%) and Children's and Youth Pastors (12%) have a biblical worldview. The lowest level of biblical worldview was among Executive Pastors—only 4% have consistently biblical beliefs and behaviors.

Much like other Americans, the pastors who do not have a biblical worldview are unlikely to fully embrace a competing worldview (such as Secular Humanism, Marxism, or others). In fact, less than 1% of pastors embody a worldview other than Biblical Theism (i.e., the biblical worldview).

Instead, their prevailing worldview is best described as Syncretism, the blending of ideas and applications from a variety of holistic worldviews into a unique but inconsistent combination that represents their personal preferences. More than six out of 10 pastors (62%) have a predominantly syncretistic worldview.

Pastors and Everyone Else

While it is shocking to discover that a large majority of Christian pastors do not possess a biblical worldview, pastors are more likely than other population segments studied by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University to embrace this life philosophy.

For instance, 37% of Christian pastors have a biblical worldview, compared to just 2% of the parents of preteens. The incidence is similarly low among other key population segments: men (2%), women (4%),

whites (4%), blacks (2%), Hispanics (less than one-half of one percent), and less than one-half of 1% among those who identify as LGBTQ.

One group within the general public that is more likely to possess a biblical worldview than pastors are SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians). *The American Worldview Inventory 2021* showed that 46% of SAGE Cons have a biblical worldview, a full nine percentage points higher than the incidence among pastors.

The Percentage of Christian Pastors That Possess a Biblical Worldview	
Pastoral Position	Percent with a Biblical Worldview
All Christian Pastors	37%
Senior/Lead Pastor	41
Associate/Assistant Pastor	28
Teaching Pastor	13
Children’s/Youth Pastor	12
Executive Pastor	4

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; N=1,000 Christian pastors; conducted February-March 2022. Note: the “All Christian Pastors” statistic is a weighted average of all five pastoral positions based on the proportion of pastors represented by each of the positions in churches nationwide.

Given that SAGE Cons constitute about 8% of the national adult population and pastors of Christian churches are less than 1% of the general public, SAGE Cons with a biblical worldview are roughly 10 times as numerous as Christian pastors with a biblical worldview.

Categories of Thought and Action

The *American Worldview Inventory* includes 54 worldview-related questions. Those questions fall within eight categories of belief and behavior, with worldview scores given to respondents for each of those eight categories.

The results of the surveys among pastors show that a majority of pastors have adopted biblical principles in regard to only one of those eight categories. Overall, 57% of all pastors think and act in consistently biblical ways regarding the purpose of life and their calling within it.

Interestingly, the only segment of the pastoral community for which a majority hold to biblical ways concerning life purpose and calling is Senior Pastors, among whom 60% are consistently biblical. Minorities of the other four pastoral segments have a biblical worldview in relation to purpose and calling—48% of children’s and youth pastors, 41% of Associate Pastors, 36% of Teaching Pastors, and 27% of Executive Pastors.

A minority of Christian pastors think and act biblically in relation to each of the other seven categories of worldview measurement. Specifically in the other categories, only 47% have a biblical worldview regarding family and the value of life; 44% concerning issues related to God, creation, and history; 43% in relation to personal faith practices; 43% when it comes to matters of sin, salvation, and one’s relationship with God; 40% pertaining to human character and human nature; and 40% when it comes to measures of lifestyle, personal behavior, and relationships.

Lowest of all is a category that might have been expected to top the list: beliefs and behaviors related to the Bible, truth, and morality (39%).

Percentage of Pastors Who Have a Biblical Worldview in Relation to Categories of Belief and Behavior						
	Pastoral Position					
	All	Senior/ Lead	Assistant/ Associate	Teaching	Executive	Children's/ Youth
Purpose, Calling	57%	60%	41%	36%	27%	48%
Family, Value of Life	47	49	38	30	17	44
God, Creation, History	44	47	34	29	14	33
Faith Practices	43	47	29	15	7	24
Sin, Salvation, God Relationship	43	48	30	18	7	22
Human Character and Nature	40	44	30	18	7	19
Lifestyle, Behavior, Relationships	40	44	29	17	5	20
Bible, Truth, Morals	39	43	32	21	8	18

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2022*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; N=1,000 Christian pastors; conducted February-March 2022.

The Worldview Deficit in the Pulpits

During these challenging times in America, Christian churches have tremendous opportunities for influence in our nation. However, when the worldview of the leaders (i.e. pastors) of most churches is indistinguishable from that of non-believers, it is difficult to capitalize on those ministry opportunities.

One of the more troubling revelations emerging from this research, according to George Barna, the Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center, is the worldview of pastors who work with young people.

“Keep in mind,” Barna cautioned, “a person’s worldview primarily develops before the age of 13, then goes through a period of refinement during their teens and twenties. From a worldview perspective, a church’s most important ministers are the Children’s Pastor and the Youth Pastor.”

He continued, “Discovering that seven out of every eight of those pastors lack a biblical worldview helps to explain why so few people in the nation’s youngest generations are developing a heart and mind for biblical principles and ways of life, and why our society seems to have run wild over the last decade, in particular.”

Barna, veteran researcher and author of the *AWVI* studies, lamented the statistics regarding the prevailing worldview of pastors. “This is another strong piece of evidence that the culture is influencing the American church more than Christian churches are influencing the culture. The research indicates that Americans are more likely to experience a positive impact on their worldview by hanging out with SAGE Cons than they are by being in the presence or under the teaching of pastors.”

Barna offered a note of hope in spite of the data. “You cannot fix something unless you know it’s broken,” he commented. “Other recent research we have conducted suggests most pastors believe that they are theologically in tune with the Bible. Perhaps these findings will cause many of them to take a careful look at how well their beliefs and behavior conform to biblical principles and commands.”

“God is in the transformation business. Pastors who are willing to allow Him to transform their thinking and behavior can emerge from that process as a powerful example of what can happen when one’s heart, mind and soul are surrendered to God,” Barna said. “It certainly seems that if America is going to experience a spiritual revival, that awakening is needed just as desperately in our pulpits as in the pews.”

About the Research

The data referred to in this report are taken from the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on 54 worldview-related questions that measure both beliefs and behavior within eight categories of worldview application.

This wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was conducted in February and March of 2022 among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Christian pastors. The survey sample utilized denominational and geographic quotas to replicate the incidence of churches on those attributes. To optimize the representative nature of the sample, each pastor invited to participate in the survey was contacted a minimum of six times before being replaced in the sample universe. The survey interviews were conducted by both telephone and online modes and lasted an average of 17 minutes each. The survey data for the entire sample have an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 3.2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling elements in the research process. The data were minimally weighted to better approximate a key characteristics (e.g., pastoral position) to reflect known church distributions.

A separate wave of the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* was undertaken in January 2022 among a national sample of 600 parents of children under the age of 13. Reports related to that survey have been released and are accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory*, other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation, and worldview-related surveys among the ACU student population. The groundbreaking ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration is undertaken among students just prior to their graduation, enabling the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

CRC is guided by George Barna, Director of Research, and Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Access to the results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center is accessible at www.CulturalResearchCenter.com. Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at www.ArizonaChristian.edu.