

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2022

Release #6: Only Half of Evangelical Pastors Possess a Biblical Worldview; Incidence Even Lower for Most Denominations

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Subsequent to revealing that the *American Worldview Inventory 2022* found [just 37% of Christian pastors](#) have a biblical worldview, the alarming findings were dismissed by some as not surprising given the degree of “wokeness” that has invaded Christian churches.

“What would be shocking,” opined one pastor, “would be if the numbers were low among evangelical pastors.”

How do you define “low”?

The latest *AWVI 2022* release from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University indicates that barely one-half of the pastors of evangelical churches (51%) have a biblical worldview. Because evangelical churches, by definition, believe that the Bible is God’s true and reliable words to humanity, it is particularly shocking to find that half of evangelical pastors do not have beliefs and behaviors that are consistently biblical.

The incidence of Biblical Theism (i.e., a biblical worldview) is slightly higher among pastors of non-denominational and independent churches, but even lower than the evangelical norm among the pastors of Mainline, Catholic, Traditionally Black Protestant, Charismatic/Pentecostal, and Holiness churches.

Percentage of Christian Pastors that Possess a Biblical Worldview, by Denominational Family*	
Denominational Family	Percent with a Biblical Worldview
All Christian Pastors	37%
Non-denominational, Independent	57
Evangelical Protestant	51
Charismatic/Pentecostal	37
Mainline Protestant	32
Holiness	28
Traditionally Black Protestant	9
Roman Catholic	6

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

* Information about denominations is found below.

Proportions among Denominational Groups

Of the seven denominational groupings evaluated, only two featured at least half of their pastors possessing a biblical worldview. Those were the non-denominational and independent churches, with 57% of pastors having a biblical worldview, and evangelical churches, with 51%.

Slightly more than one-third of the pastors of charismatic or Pentecostal churches (37%) have a biblical worldview, which is a few percentage points higher than the norm among pastors of mainline Protestant churches (32%). Churches aligned with holiness theology were at a similar level (28%).

The pastors least likely to possess biblically consistent beliefs and behaviors were those associated with Traditionally Black churches (9%) and Catholic priests (6%).

Baptist churches, which are widely regarded as among those most likely to embrace the Bible as God's inerrant word, did not live up to that stereotype. Slightly less than one-half of the pastors serving at Baptist churches (48%) have a biblical worldview. The exception was pastors of Southern Baptist churches, where about three-quarters (78%) have consistently biblical beliefs and behavior.

Because a worldview is best measured by examining both belief and behavior—you do what you believe—findings from the *AWVI 2022* show that the levels of biblical fidelity are consistent across beliefs and behaviors. That suggests that the survey results are not reporting arbitrary characteristics. Instead, it appears that the nation's pastors are, in fact, doing what they believe, but those beliefs are simply not in harmony with biblical teaching.

Percentage of Christian Pastors that Possess a Biblical Worldview, by Size of Adult Congregation	
Average Adult Attendance	Percent with a Biblical Worldview
All Christian Pastors	37%
100 or fewer adults	41
101 to 250 adults	45
251 to 600 adults	14
601 or more adults	15
250 or less adults	42
251 or more adults	15

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

Worldview and Church Size

The *AWVI 2022* discovered that pastors of smaller congregations are more likely than those of larger congregations to have a biblical worldview.

Overall, 41% of the pastors of churches that average 100 or fewer adults at their weekend services are Integrated Disciples—i.e., have a biblical worldview, having successfully integrated their biblical beliefs into their daily behavior. The numbers were best among the churches that attract 101 to 250 adults per weekend; 45% of those pastors have a biblical worldview. In this post-pandemic era, about nine out of 10 Christian churches in the United States has 250 or fewer adults attending on a typical weekend.

The most disappointing statistics related to the pastors of mid-sized and large churches. In churches with more than 250 but no more than 600 adults per weekend, only 14% of pastors are Integrated Disciples, while a similar 15% of the pastors of congregations averaging more than 600 adults fit the profile.

This conforms to [previously released findings](#) from this study showing that pastors who fill the position of Teaching Pastor and Executive Pastor had among the lowest scores recorded. Such pastoral positions are typically found only in larger churches. Only 13% of Teaching Pastors and a mere 4% of Executive Pastors have a biblical worldview.

Worldview and Congregational Ethnicity

Some 60 years ago Dr. Martin Luther King pronounced Sunday at 11 a.m. to be the most segregated hour of the week. Things have changed for the better since that declaration, but most congregations are still dominated by a single racial or ethnic group.

In total, the survey indicates that 67% of Christian congregations are white-dominant; 10% are black-dominant; 4% are Hispanic dominant; 3% are other minority-dominant; and 16% are mixed. Among the mixed congregations, 7% are primarily whites and blacks; 5% are mostly whites and Hispanics; 3% are mainly whites and Asians; and 1% are various other combinations.

In total, 42% of pastors serving white-dominant congregations have a biblical worldview. That eclipsed the 27% of pastors serving predominantly black congregations and the 7% serving primarily Hispanic congregations.

The statistics for churches with mixed congregations were not as expected. In congregations comprised mostly of whites and Hispanics, 34% of the pastors in those ministries have a biblical worldview. The proportion dropped considerably in churches where the body is a mixture of whites and blacks (23% of those pastors have a biblical worldview) or a combination of whites and Asians (also 23%).

Percentage of Christian Pastors that Possess a Biblical Worldview, by Congregational Ethnicity	
Dominant Congregational Ethnicity	Percent of Pastors with a Biblical Worldview
All Christian Pastors	37%
All or mostly white	42
All or mostly black	27
All or mostly Hispanic	7
Combined: all or mostly non-white	22
Mixed: white and Hispanic	34
Mixed: white and black	23
Mixed: white and Asian	23
Combined: mixed, all types	31
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2022</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; N=1,000 Christian pastors; conducted February-March 2022.	

Proportions Consistent Across Question Categories

The *American Worldview Inventory* evaluates worldview based on 54 belief and behavior questions. Those questions are divided into eight categories. The survey revealed that the ethnic and racial character of churches is related to the biblical strengths and weaknesses of their pastors.

For instance, churches that are composed of congregations that are primary white, primarily black, or a mixture of blacks and whites are most likely to have pastors whose strongest area of biblical belief and behavior pertains to Purpose and Calling. Hispanic-majority congregations are most likely to have pastors whose biblical strength is Family and the Value of Life. Congregations that are a mix of whites and Hispanics are most likely to have pastors whose strongest area of biblical belief and behavior relates to God, Creation, and History.

In the same manner, the *AWVI 2022* reveals that churches have different biblical weaknesses by the racial and ethnic make-up of the congregation. Uni-racial churches—whether they are mostly white, mostly black or mostly Hispanic—are most likely to have pastors whose biblical weakness lies in the area of Bible, Truth, and Morality. Congregations that are a mixture of white and Hispanic typically have pastors whose biblical blind spot relates to Human Character and Nature. Churches that blend whites and blacks usually have pastors whose biblical weakness is Sin, Salvation, and Relationship with God.

Percentage of Churches Whose Pastor Has a Biblical Worldview in Relation to Categories of Belief and Behavior							
	Denominational Family of Churches						
	Non-Denom./Indep.	Evangelical	Main-line Protest.	Roman Catholic	Charismatic/Pentec.	Trad'lly Black Protest.	Holiness
Purpose, Calling	70%	65%	60%	42%	46%	25%	40%
Family, Value of Life	68	59	41	23	46	18	35
God, Creation, History	55	56	49	11	42	14	30
Faith Practices	60	55	45	5	40	13	31
Sin, Salvation, God Relationship	62	54	48	4	38	12	27
Human Character and Nature	58	53	39	5	36	11	31
Lifestyle, Behavior, Relationships	57	55	38	6	38	11	30
Bible, Truth, Morals	58	55	34	13	38	6	31

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

Redefining the Church World

In commenting on the study, lead researcher George Barna, Director of Research for the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, offered three additional observations.

“First, the old labels attached to families of churches are not as useful as they were in the past,” Barna noted. “The best example is the term ‘evangelical,’ which has traditionally connoted churches where the Bible is revered and is taught as God’s reliable and relevant word for our lives. With barely half of evangelical pastors possessing a biblical worldview—and that number continuing to decline—attending what may be considered an ‘evangelical’ church no longer ensures a pastoral staff that has a high view of the scriptures.”

Barna also touched on a centuries-old division. “The theological rift between Protestant and Catholic churches remains intact, though neither segment is doing a proficient job of making the Bible a trustworthy and authoritative guide for people’s life.”

He continued, “While the 40% of all Protestant pastors holding a biblical worldview far exceeds the 6% among Roman Catholic priests, both of those incidence levels are disturbingly low. Our study among the public in 2021 revealed that only 5% of adults who regularly attend a Protestant church, and just 1% of those regularly attending Catholic churches, have a biblical worldview, so neither segment of churches is getting the job done.”

Barna’s final comment touched on America’s megachurch phenomenon.

“Some critics have said that megachurches attract people by compromising the gospel, teaching what people want to hear rather than the hard truths stated within the Bible. While this research does not directly touch on that argument, the data do show that larger churches are less likely to have pastors who maintain a biblical worldview.”

Barna explained, “You cannot give what you do not have, so it is plausible that pastors of some large churches attract people by teaching a cultural standard rather than a biblical standard. There are obviously some great Bible teaching churches and pastors among the nation’s largest congregations, but the data suggest it is more common to find pastors with a biblical worldview in smaller churches.”

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.

The study among pastors refers to several segments of churches, or denominational families. Examples of the denominations represented in those families include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Mainline Protestant: American Baptist, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church.

- Evangelical: Baptist Bible Fellowship, Free Will Baptist, Southern Baptist Convention, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church in America.
- Traditionally Black: AME, AME Zion, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention USA, National Primitive Baptist, Church of God in Christ.
- Charismatic/Pentecostal: Assembly of God, Church of God – Cleveland, Foursquare, International Pentecostal Holiness, United Pentecostal.
- Holiness: Christian & Missionary Alliance, Church of God – Anderson, Church of the Nazarene, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist.

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.