

Cultural Research Center



American Worldview Inventory 2023

Release #4: U.S. Adult Generations Vary in Spiritual Responses to Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives of every American—but it did not affect everyone in the same way, or to the same degree.

Newly released data from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University based on the *American Worldview Inventory 2023* shows that the four adult generations in the United States—Millennials, Gen X (Baby Busters), Baby Boomers, and Elders—had very different spiritual responses to the pandemic.

Millennials, Faith, and COVID-19

Millennials were hit hard by the pandemic in dimensions such as their emotions, finances, vocation, relationships, and ideology. But one aspect of their lives that did not appear to change much was their relationship to Christianity.

Of the four generations, Millennials experienced the least change in their perspectives about the Christian faith and their participation in biblical practices. Out of the two dozen comparable measures of religious beliefs and behaviors examined by the Cultural Research Center before and after the pandemic, America's youngest adult generation had just five statistically significant changes:

- Embracing their life's purpose as knowing, loving, and serving God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength rose by 9 percentage points;
- Believing that the Bible is true and accurate words of God rose by 8 percentage points;
- Believing that God is the basis of truth, as revealed to humanity in the Bible, decreased by 7 percentage points;
- Taking time to personally read or study the Bible during the week, other than when attending a church event, dropped by 6 percentage points;
- And attending a church worship service, either in-person or online, dropped by 7 percentage points.

In addition, there were two changes that were not statistically significant but were directional differences of 4 percentage points: decreases in belief that human life is sacred and in acknowledging one's sins and asking for God's forgiveness during a typical week.

It is worth noting that for all seven of those factors, both before and after the changes listed, a minority of Millennials embraced the belief or behavior in question. That suggests the generation was not highly committed to those factors either pre- or post-pandemic.

A further indication of their arms-length relationship to Christianity is that of the two dozen variables assessed, Millennials had the lowest score on all but four of them (and on those four they had the

next-to-lowest score). In other words, they were the generation least closely connected to biblical Christianity before the pandemic, and that connection was even weaker by the end of the COVID-19 era.

One of the most important outcomes from the research was that Millennials incidence of biblical worldview did not change since the start of the pandemic, resting at 2%, the lowest level of any of the four generations.

Gen X, Faith, and COVID-19

No generation endured greater spiritual turbulence than Gen X during to the pandemic. Gen X included people 39 through 57 years of age at the time the survey was conducted. The generation experienced the greatest number of statistically significant changes (10) plus two directional changes of note. In all but one instance, those changes showed Gen Xers moving away from biblical perspectives or behaviors.

In general, the nature of the spiritual transitions among Gen Xers during the pandemic era was a shift away from trust in God. Among the biggest changes in their religious perspective were declines in believing God created humans, that He is the basis of truth, and that He is the omniscient and omnipotent ruler of the universe. Those doubts have precipitated important transitions in religious behavior, including less frequent Bible reading, church attendance, confession of personal sin, seeking to do God's will, and worshipping God.

Another noteworthy shift is the decline in how many Gen Xers believe that human life is sacred.

As with Millennials, their incidence of biblical worldview remained low (5%) but unchanged by the end of the pandemic.

Baby Boomers, Faith, and COVID-19

Baby Boomers moved in the opposite direction from Millennials and Xers over the course of the COVID-19 period. Baby Boomers included people 58 through 76 years of age at the time of the survey. The generation underwent significant change in eight measures of their faith, with two additional variables showing directional change—but nine of those 10 areas of change moved Boomers toward being more in sync with biblical teachings! (The exception was the 12-percentage point decrease in Boomers contending that human life is sacred.)

Perhaps most interesting was the consistent uptick in religious behaviors. Boomers are more likely now than they were before COVID-19 to read the Bible, praise and worship God, seek and do God's will, and attend church services.

Despite the noted positive shifts toward biblical perspectives and actions, the biblical worldview incidence among Boomers dropped from 9% to 7% over the past three years. That was attributable to numerous indicators for which there were relatively small statistical shifts away from biblical points of view, the accumulation of which pushed the generation farther from a consistently biblical mindset and lifestyle.

The Elders, Faith, and COVID-19

As this generation nears the end of life (age 77 and older), they demonstrated the greatest degree of spiritual stability of any of the four generations. Overall, they endured just four statistically significant changes plus five smaller (i.e., directional, but not statistically significant) changes. Although their

biblical worldview incidence dropped by a single percentage point, Elders maintained the highest biblical worldview incidence of any generation (8%).

Some Key Shifts in Religious Beliefs and Behaviors During the Pandemic Era, by Generation								
Belief or Behavior	Millennials		Gen. X		Baby Boom		Elders	
	2020	2023	2020	2023	2020	2023	2020	2023
Purpose: know, love, serve God with all your heart, soul, mind, strength	21%	30%	28%	35%	33%	41%	44%	52%
God is the basis of truth, revealed in Bible	34	27	46	33	43	45	51	47
Human life is sacred	22	18	40	31	53	41	51	40
God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect and just Creator of the universe who still rules the world today	40	41	55	50	56	60	58	63
Read or study the Bible during the week, other than when at a church event	35	29	40	30	33	39	47	45
Thank, praise or worship God during the week, other than when at a church event	48	47	63	59	67	74	68	79
Attend a Christian church worship service, in-person or online, during the week	35	28	41	28	34	38	56	53
Acknowledge your sins and ask God's forgiveness during the week	46	42	56	50	56	59	64	68
Commit to knowing and doing God's will for your life, during the week	45	45	58	50	57	64	68	70
Source: <i>American Worldview Inventory 2023</i> , Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, January 2023, nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, ages 18 and older.								

The few changes they adopted showed their inclination to become more biblical. More than anything, they demonstrated a heightened interest in God. Specifically, they were more likely after the pandemic than before it to believe in the God of Israel, believe that their life purpose is to know, love and serve God as fully as possible, and to devote regular time to thanking and worshiping Him. There was also a small increase in the number of born-again Christians among the Elders.

Paradoxically, the biggest shift of all among the oldest Americans was an 11-point decline in believing that human life is sacred.

Different Reactions to the Pandemic

Millennials entered the pandemic era as the group least open to and engaged with Christianity—and they exited that era largely unchanged in that posture. It is not that Millennials are not spiritual people; they simply are not attuned to biblical beliefs and behaviors and remain the generation that is least impressed by Christianity.

Journalists often focused on Millennials during the pandemic, and the anecdotal evidence portrayed them as the age group struggling the most with the effects of the lockdowns, layoffs, widespread

deaths and health impairments, oppressive government regulations, and pervasive cancel culture activity. Yet, while religious faith—and Christianity, in particular—could have been a source of strength and clarity amidst their fear and confusion, they chose to draw their perspectives and energy from non-biblical sources.

[Related studies](#) conducted by the Cultural Research Center during the pandemic suggest that the Millennials' rejection of biblical Christianity did not serve them well. Three-quarters reported lacking purpose and meaning in life. A large majority contended feeling bereft of deep, healthy interpersonal relationships. More than half reported being impaired by mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, fear, and suicidal thoughts.

Given that their dominant worldview—as is true for each generation—is [Syncretism](#), it stands to reason that a more comprehensive and consistent philosophy of life may have served them better during the health and lifestyle challenges of the past three years.

Adults in the Gen X cohort were much less indifferent to their religious convictions and habits, choosing to generally cut ties with churches and biblical content as they searched for life solutions in response to the COVID-19 crisis. They consciously chose to abandon their Christian moorings in favor of more self-centered life solutions.

Intriguingly, while younger people typically (albeit slowly) follow the lead of their elders, the opposite was the case for Baby Busters. During the pandemic years, Gen Xers seemed to be mimicking the lead of their children's generation (Millennials) and placing greater distance between themselves and their parents' generation (Boomers). Busters have always had a complicated and dysfunctional relationship with Boomers. The spiritual gap between them widened unusually quickly since 2020.

Boomers and Elders pretty much held the line on biblical Christianity during the pandemic period. While neither segment could be described as a bastion of biblical Christianity—after all, only 7% of Boomers and 8% of Elders possess the biblical worldview, less than half of each group (43%) is classified as born-again, barely four out of 10 in each generation claims the Bible as their primary source of moral guidance, a minority of both generations even bothers to read the Bible during a typical week, and less than one-third of each group defends the existence of absolute moral truth—they now are the nation's most solid contingent of Christians.

Even though Boomers and Elders assumed somewhat divergent responses to the COVID-19 tribulations, both groups clearly leaned upon their Christian faith as a primary coping mechanism—something that cannot be said for the two younger generations.

It is that striking disparity of response in the midst of the national crisis that argues for fresh ideas and approaches to making biblical Christianity relevant to younger Americans—not compromising the substance of biblical Christianity but helping younger adults to experience and express that faith in ways that may not be comfortable among older generations.

This generational rift in religious life is nothing new. Boomers themselves were a spiritual thorn in the side of their parents and grandparents 40 years ago. However, the reemergence of this division is certainly a major barrier to national unity, growth, vision, and strength in America today. These data underscore the urgency demanded in addressing the situation.

What the Research Tells Us

During times of crisis, every generation turns to their worldview to navigate the challenges. Sadly, because Syncretism is the prevailing worldview of each generation in America today, the response of

Americans to the pandemic and the political turbulence it facilitated have been every bit as muddled and chaotic as the worldview on which they are based. The ideological and philosophical confusion that characterizes America is perhaps the biggest reflection of the nation's rejection of biblical principles and its decision to replace God's truth with "personal truth".

The last three years have been a time of high anxiety for tens of millions of adults. It was an ideal time for the Christian Church to provide wise guidance and emotional calm. Unfortunately, most churches agreed to the government's dictate that they close their doors and remain mostly silent. That left an unprepared populace to follow the primary form of leadership available to them: government perspectives and policies. Obviously, that has not worked well, given how dissatisfied a large majority of the country is with the direction of the nation and the quality of post-COVID life.

With only one out of every 50 Millennials embracing a biblical worldview, America's children are especially vulnerable to the inward-looking approach to life that their parents and most other adults practice. As a nation, we may be past the danger of COVID-19, but we are in the thick of the danger brought about by people relying upon Syncretism as their dominant worldview. Biblical churches must see this as a time for an urgent response to the direction society is taking. While the Left pursues the Great Reset, it is time for the Church to pursue the Great Renewal—leading people's hearts, minds, and souls back to God and His life principles.

About the Research

This report examines data from the research through the lens of the nation's four adult generations. For the study, people were assigned to generations based on specific age categories. Millennials were those born between 1984 and 2002, making them age 20 through 38 at the time of the survey. Gen X was defined as people born from 1965 through 1983, i.e., adults of ages 39 to 57 when the survey was conducted. Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964, constituting ages 58 through 76 in January of this year. Elders are represented by people born prior to 1946, covering everyone 77 or older.

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 2023 wave was undertaken in January 2023 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon both sampling and non-sampling activity. Larger levels of statistical error may occur in relation to subgroups of the aggregate sample attributable to the smaller sample size of those subgroups.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding cultural transformation. Recent national studies completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and politics.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind ACU Student Worldview Inventory is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final administration just prior to

graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students.

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