

## Cultural Research Center

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### *American Worldview Inventory 2024*

#### Release #2: Millions of Americans Embrace Common Unbiblical Perspectives, Survey Shows

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More than two-thirds of Americans say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today. Yet few of them pause from their busy schedules long enough to consider that the problems they see are the result of increasing numbers of American adults making decisions based on shifting foundational beliefs and values.

In fact, the social problems troubling the majority of Americans are likely a symptom of the unprecedented change in worldview preferences, in which longstanding biblical beliefs are being discarded in favor of a wide range of alternative views.

American adults are increasingly embracing a host of unbiblical perspectives—and this profound shift in beliefs is causing many of the disturbing social patterns and lifestyles responsible for the deterioration of our society and leading to the overwhelming level of national dissatisfaction.

A new report from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, based on the *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, reveals that the typical American adult is not a worldview purist but is essentially a worldview plagiarist, combining beliefs and behaviors borrowed from an average of nine recognized worldviews into their personal worldview blend.

Most Americans have no idea that they are engaged in philosophical theft, or complicit in crafting a worldview that is uniquely theirs. Rather, most adults simply absorb philosophies and practices that feel good, work well, or seem popular in order to help them make choices throughout the day.

In fact, the dominant worldview in America is Syncretism, chosen by 92% of American adults as their dominant philosophy of life. Syncretism is the term used to describe a customized blend of philosophies of life that a person pieces together for their own satisfaction. It is therefore impossible to define the tenets of Syncretism in the same manner that one can for ideologically consistent philosophies such as Biblical Theism, Marxism, Secular Humanism, or the other dozen-plus identifiable worldviews.

Syncretism is the result of people relying upon their emotions to appropriate elements of various recognized worldviews toward creating an idiosyncratic, personally pleasing understanding of and response to reality.

Americans are indiscriminate in their mixing and matching of ideas and lifestyles, sometimes drawing from philosophies that are diametrically opposed to each other. For example, the research shows that millions of Americans simultaneously hold views taken from the Bible and Christian-loathing Marxism, or from a pantheistic worldview like Eastern Mysticism at the same time they embrace concepts from

Secular Humanism, which rejects all supernatural explanations. In other words, most people possess a worldview that is not internally consistent but which is emotionally and intellectually comfortable.

**Conflict Between Biblical Theism and Popular Perspectives**

The latest report from the Cultural Research Center identifies 10 of the most common perspectives widely embraced by adults that conflict with Biblical Theism, which is more commonly referred to as the biblical worldview. These beliefs are drawn from at least nine worldviews other than Biblical Theism.

| <b>Common Worldview Beliefs that Conflict with Biblical Theism</b>   |          |   |
|--|----------|---|
| <b>Worldview belief</b>  | <b>%</b> | <b>Source worldview(s)</b>                              |
| You strongly believe it is possible for a married couple to be bonded to each other for eternity   | 46%      | Mormonism   |
| People are neither good nor bad when they are born, but become either good or bad through their accumulated life choices                           | 46%      | Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Secular Humanism, Animism |
| When determining what is right and wrong, you are most likely to rely upon is your reason and emotions   | 35%      | Secular Humanism, Postmodernism, Satanism               |
| You strongly believe humans have no right to dominate animals, plants, or nature; we are supposed to live in harmony and interdependence with them | 31%      | Pantheism, Animism                                      |
| You strongly believe all animals, plants, the wind, and water have a unique spirit, just like human beings do                                      | 31%      | Pantheism, Mormonism, Wicca, Animism                    |
| You strongly believe a messiah has been promised; you are confident He will make His initial visit to earth to save His people                     | 28%      | Judaism   |
| Regarding God or a higher power, you, personally, believe a higher power may exist, but nobody really knows for certain                            | 26%      | Postmodernism   |
| The best indicator of a successful life is being a good person   | 24%      | Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Mormonism                 |
| In practical terms, the basis of truth is scientific, verifiable proof   | 23%      | Secular Humanism  |
| The universe came into existence in ways humans are unlikely to ever understand or discover  | 21%      | Postmodernism, Secular Humanism                         |

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Based on a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults conducted in January 2024.

The 2024 national survey shows that 66% of adults consider themselves to be Christians, yet just 4% of all adults—and only 6% of the self-identified Christians—possess a biblical worldview (i.e. Biblical Theism).

The range of ideas adopted from worldviews other than Biblical Theism is staggering. About half of all adults firmly believe that it is possible for a couple married on earth to be bonded to each other for eternity. In contrast, Biblical Theism holds that marriage ends upon one's earthly death.

The *AWVI 2024* study also found that nearly half of all adults claim that people are neither good nor bad when they are born, but become either good or bad on the basis of the decisions they make over the course of their life. That contradicts biblical teaching, which posits that every human being is born as a sinner, our sins result in our condemnation by God, but that rejection can be overcome through the grace extended by Jesus Christ upon our repentance and embracing Jesus Christ as our savior.

Roughly one-third of all adults say they depend mostly on their reason and emotions to distinguish right from wrong. Biblical Christians believe that God is the source of all truth, and that He conveys truth to humans through the Bible.

One out of three adults strongly believe humans are supposed to live in harmony and interdependence with animals, plants, and nature, and have no right to dominate them; and the same proportion also strongly believes all animals, plants, the wind, and water have a unique spirit, just like human beings do. The Bible, however, explains that mankind is God's highest creation and He gave humans dominion over everything else He created. Unlike animals, plants and the rest of creation, only people are made in the likeness of God and have an eternal soul.

Approximately one-quarter of the adult population firmly believes a messiah has been promised and will make His initial visit to earth to save His people. Biblical Theism contends that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and that upon His second coming He will save those who have repented for their sins and have called upon Him to be their savior.

One out of every four Americans says that nobody really knows for certain whether or higher power or God exists, yet the Bible indicates that creation itself is evidence of His existence, along with the testimony of Jesus Christ, the experience of the prophets, and more.

One-fourth of adults also argue that the best indicator of a successful life is being a good person. The scriptures indicate that success is consistent obedience to God and the life principles He provides in the Bible.

One out of every five adults stated that scientific, verifiable proof is the only viable basis of truth. Biblical Christians believe that there is no truth apart from God, and that by His nature and words He has defined truth, as delineated in the Bible.

One-fifth of adults also claim the universe came into existence in ways humans are unlikely to ever understand or discover. However, the biblical worldview asserts that God created the universe in six days, as described in the opening chapters of the Bible. There is an abundance of archaeological and historical evidence, with a growing body of scientific support, that harmonize with the biblical account of creation.

In addition to the nine belief systems that serve as the source for those 10 unbiblical beliefs, the research also discovered that millions of Americans accept worldview perspectives from several additional life philosophies such as Marxism, Nihilism and Islam. In fact, of the 10 worldview

perspectives listed above that more than one-fifth of Americans embrace, each of those perspectives is believed by more than 55 million adults and by as many as 120 million adults.

Examples of other significant but somewhat less widely held beliefs of Americans are:

- “As long as you do no harm, do whatever you want.” A core tenet of Wicca and Satanism, as well as a principle embraced by Secular Humanism and other worldviews, this idea is held by a projected 40 million American adults. It clashes with the biblical concepts of obedience to law and order, and betrays selfishness rather than a commitment to harmony and service. Notably, this particular belief is held by a large majority of adults in Gen Z (66%) and fits with the recent cultural shift toward radical individualism and the widespread rejection of law and order.
- “A successful life is best described as one that creates a more humane society, through the application of reason, dialogue, and good will.” This notion, a hallmark of Secular Humanism, is a foundational philosophy for about 50 million adults. It directly conflicts with the biblical idea that a successful life is best characterized by consistent obedience to God.
- A popular alternative to the aforementioned Secular Humanist ideal is the belief that success is best achieved by doing whatever provides a person with happiness and fulfillment. This viewpoint is championed by Satanists and those driven by Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Establishing happiness and fulfillment as the pinnacle of success is a central belief of roughly 45 million Americans.
- Although one-third of Americans (32%) admit that they are scared to die, there are several popular antidotes to that fear. Biblical Theism posits that those who acknowledge their sins, ask Jesus Christ to spare the resulting eternal condemnation, and then seek to live differently, can live in God’s grace and presence forever. That view has been adopted by 34% of adults.

But a view of growing popularity is that there is no life after death, either physically or spiritually; we simply cease to exist. That mindset is held by 19% of adults, representing more than 50 million adults. That perspective is promoted by worldviews such as Marxism, Nihilism, Secular Humanism, and Satanism.

That perspective is especially popular among older adults; 25% of people 65 or older embrace that idea, compared to 15% among adults ages 18 to 19. However, among that younger age group, 22% contend that after they die, they will return to earth as a different life form or different person—almost triple the incidence of that belief among the 65-plus segment. This belief, commonly referred to as reincarnation, is a core belief of Eastern Mysticism, Wicca, and Animism.

### **How Integrated Disciples Differ**

When examining the correlation between the views of people who possess a biblical worldview—a segment known as Integrated Disciples—the survey shows that the group is unusually consistent in their relative rejection of many of the unbiblical ideas embraced by large swaths of their fellow Americans. Of the 10 beliefs identified in the report, just 1% or fewer of all Integrated Disciples accept half of those non-biblical beliefs.

The perspectives dismissed by Integrated Disciples included relying upon reason and emotions to determine right from wrong; contending that humans are unlikely to ever discover or understand how the universe was created; believing nobody really knows for certain whether God or a higher power exists; affirming that the best indicator of a successful life is being a good person; and suggesting the basis of truth is scientific, verifiable proof.

Very few Integrated Disciples—fewer than one out of 10—adopt three other popular assertions. Those were the view that people are neither good nor bad when they are born, but become either good or bad through their accumulated life choices (accepted by 2% of Integrated Disciples); all animals, plants, the wind, and water have a unique spirit, just like human beings do (4%); and humans have no right to dominate animals, plants, or nature but are supposed to live in harmony and interdependence with them (7%).

There are two beliefs that substantial numbers of Integrated Disciples accepted even though they conflict with biblical teaching. About half of all adults with a biblical worldview (48%) adopt the Mormon notion that it is possible for a man and woman who are married on earth can be bonded to each other for eternity. The other large-scale failing among biblical theists is the one-third (35%) who believe the Jewish perspective that a messiah has been promised and He will make His initial visit to earth to save His people. Biblical Christians, of course, recognize the “initial visit” of the Messiah as being the first coming of Jesus Christ some 2,000 years ago.

According to Dr. George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center, the low incidence of acceptance by Integrated Disciples of perspectives associated with worldviews other than Biblical Theism indicates that the segment is comprised of people who possess an unusually consistent and predictable group of beliefs. Given that most American are Syncretists, whose beliefs are inconsistent and unpredictable, adults with a biblical worldview stand out in American culture as unusual.

### **Different Church Groups Hold Different Views**

It is not surprising that different church segments of the Christian community in the United States possess distinct points of view. What might be of interest, however, is how many people from those different faith groups hold specific perspectives.

The two largest Christian-based church groups—Protestants and Catholics—have relatively similar views on half of the 10 perspectives identified. However, there are noteworthy differences related to five of the perspectives. Those divergences related to the following:

- Success is being a good person: this idea is accepted by 31% of Catholics and 20% of Protestants.
- People become good or bad based on their choices, not a predisposition from birth: this is a theological position embraced by 52% of Catholics and 34% of Protestants.
- Determining right from wrong is based on reason and emotions: more than one-third of Catholics (36%) but just one-fifth of Protestants (21%) adopt this point of view.
- Humans cannot know for certain whether a higher power exists: this unusual position for adherents of a theistic faith is claimed by 22% of Catholics and 13% of Protestants.
- Have confidence that a messiah will come to earth for an initial visit to save His people: this Christ-denying belief is held by 27% of Catholics and 42% of Protestants.

### **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 several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States

measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. The current wave of worldview research was undertaken in January 2024 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.

The survey utilized was based upon the questionnaire used in prior years to evaluate worldview, with additional response options included in many questions to represent the perspectives of previously unexamined worldviews. Those additional worldviews incorporated into this study were Animism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Satanism, and Wicca. The eight previously studied worldviews that were again represented in the survey were Biblical Theism, Marxism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Nihilism, Pantheism (i.e. Eastern Mysticism), Postmodernism, Secular Humanism, and Syncretism.

### **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 worldview and cultural transformation. 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 from a longitudinal perspective.

CRC is guided by Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, and Dr. 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. Results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center are available at [www.CulturalResearchCenter.com](http://www.CulturalResearchCenter.com). Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at [www.ArizonaChristian.edu](http://www.ArizonaChristian.edu).