

POSTMODERNISM AND SECULAR HUMANISM ON THE RISE

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research

Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University

Release Date: October 19, 2021

With nine out of 10 adults (88%) crafting a unique worldview fashioned from the personally appealing parts of other worldviews, one of the most interesting questions relates to exactly which other ideas they find most attractive.

New analysis of data from the American Worldview Inventory 2021, the annual worldview assessment by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, indicates that postmodernism and secular humanism contribute significantly to the customized worldviews of Americans.

Overall, only 2% have adopted secular humanism as their dominant worldview, consistently thinking and acting in ways that are in harmony with the foundational tenets of that philosophy of life. However, one out of every six adults (16%) regularly thinks or acts in ways that reflect the principles of secular humanism.

Postmodernism has been embraced as the dominant, driving worldview by only 1% of the public. However, it, too, regularly forms the basis of the choices of 16% of U.S. adults, according to the latest AWVI 2021 findings from CRC Director of Research George Barna.

Those statistics suggest that secular humanism and postmodernism are among the more widely utilized worldviews, only behind biblical theism (i.e., the biblical worldview) and moralistic therapeutic deism as the life philosophies that Americans most often rely upon for decision-making guidance.

The research notes that most Americans do not know what worldviews they possess or draw from in their daily choices. In fact, the most common worldview among Americans is Syncretism, which isn't a true worldview but rather a collection of disparate worldview elements blended into a customized philosophy of life.

All total, 88 percent of American adults hold to syncretism, according AWVI 2021 findings. In Syncretism, individuals pick and choose elements from various worldviews, creating a hodge-podge of beliefs that often conflict and contradict one another.

A large share of American adults would be surprised to discover that many of their beliefs and behaviors are consistent with worldviews such as postmodernism, secular humanism, Marxism, and Eastern Mysticism.

This report is the eighth release from the American Worldview Inventory 2021, the first-ever national survey to measure both biblical and competing worldviews among American adults. Previous releases are available at the Cultural Research Center [website](#).

Postmodernism in America

The worldview known as postmodernism is an extension of another worldview called existentialism. The postmodern worldview is based on ideas such as the belief that all knowledge, values, and morals are dependent upon and thereby determined by social conditions; there is no absolute moral truth or universal moral boundaries; science and reason are of limited value to progress; and that everything, including personal identity and social roles, are constantly changing.

This worldview is very self-focused. It is skeptical or dismissive of large-scale narratives that seek to explain our existence and experience, including religious narratives (such as Christianity).

Postmodern thought is at the forefront of the emerging, non-traditional moral order in America. A foundation of such thought is that all truth is subjective and that there are no moral absolutes—a perspective adopted by 54% of Americans.

Those who embrace postmodernism, therefore, are more accepting than other people of breaches of traditional morality. For instance, lies or deceptions that protect an individual or are based upon an alternative view of the causal circumstances are deemed viable in a postmodern world. Similarly, incidents of theft or cheating that aid someone in need could be justified. Sexual relations outside of marriage are behaviors that would not trouble those embracing postmodern views.

Although most Americans describe themselves as Christian, four out of every 10 adults (41%) reject the notion that every moral choice we make either honors or dishonors God. That is consistent with postmodern thinking, which both claims that there may not be a supernatural being to whom we answer and that our moral choices are about our life rather than fulfilling the expectations of a supernatural being.

Given its doubts about the existence of God, believing that there are no all-inclusive religious principles, commands, truths, or teachings that should direct our choices, it is natural to find that postmodern advocates are offended by Christian evangelism. What may be more surprising, though, is the fact that more than one-third of adults share that view, deeming proselytizing to be untenable.

Some of the most common postmodern ideas that are widely accepted by adults in the United States include:

- 39% claim that human life has no intrinsic value
- 29% express their commitment to getting even with those who wrong them
- 29% believe there is no way of knowing whether God or a supernatural being exists
- 28% indicate that they treat people based on their current feelings and circumstances

- 24% believe that historical narratives are unreliable because they are subjective human perspectives

Secular Humanism in America

Over the years, secular humanists (who sometimes prefer to be called simply “humanists”) have composed numerous declarations to define their philosophy. Typically, secular humanism includes elements such as the centrality of human reason and scientific inquiry to point the way forward; a desire to develop a more humane and moral society through human effort and capabilities; disbelief in a supernatural deity, an afterlife, absolute moral truth, and religious belief; and a pursuit of fairness, justice, and tolerance.

Those kinds of ideals are found in the thinking of millions of Americans. Some of the more common expressions of secular humanism include the following beliefs held by millions of people:

- 54% believe the universe had a scientifically explainable beginning; it was not created through any type of supernatural intervention
- 48% contend that human beings are the result of an explicable evolutionary process; the worldview rejects the idea that humans were created by God or are made in His likeness
- 36% identify “success” in life as the various human accomplishments that produce happiness or a sense of fulfillment
- 33% say that their primary guide to morality is human reason
- 24% believe that truth can only be determined through scientific inquiry and proof

Other secular humanist beliefs are less widely accepted by Americans. Those include notions such as atheism (6% believe there is no such thing as God, a supreme being, or a supernatural being).

A Comparison of the Beliefs of People Who Possess Competing Worldviews				
Belief	All U.S. Adults	Have a BWV	Draw Heavily from:	
			Secular Humanism	Post-Modernism
Our understanding of reality is based on cultural interpretation	22%	*	33%	65%
Human beings are just biological machines corrupted by society	23	*	69	62
Success is best described as consistent obedience to God	21	98	1	*
The basis of truth is scientific proof	24	*	75	44
The basis of truth is God, as revealed in the Bible	41	99	4	*
Human beings developed over a long period of time, from less advanced forms of life, without supernatural intervention	48	2	87	78
Don't know, believe, or care if God exists	34	0	85	87
There is no life after death on earth	16	0	69	53

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2021*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, N=2,000 adults 18 or older. Due to space limitations, belief descriptions are not the exact wording used in the survey. Abbreviations: BWV = Biblical Worldview; * indicates less than one-half of one percent.

Biblical Worldview Distinctives

The research brings to light the unique views of the biblical worldview.

Whereas postmodernism cautions people against sharing their personal faith views, the biblical worldview encourages people to do so as an act of love, making the grace of God real for those who need His forgiveness and acceptance.

While secular humanism promotes material progress as the foundation of meaning and success, the biblical worldview sees materialistic pursuits as a distraction, if not outright idolatry.

Postmodernism does not teach that human life is of great value. The biblical worldview does, pointing out that humans were conceived by God, made in His image, worthy of respect because of that heritage, and that God describes life as a gift.

Although neither postmodernism nor secular humanism believe that absolute moral truth exists, the biblical worldview points to the proven and indisputable truth principles in the Bible as authored by God, provided in a form we can access and understand, and relevant to our ability to discern the meaning of life and our role in the unfolding of God's larger narrative for humanity. It is those truth principles that ought to shape our moral choices, rather than accepting the secular humanist and postmodern morality standards.

Christians Must Wake Up

The war of worldviews that is being waged in America is one in which biblically inclined Christians must be active.

“A major reason for the extensive acceptance of alternatives to the biblical worldview is that Christians are not devoted to understanding, discussing, and—most importantly—living out the biblical worldview,” commented George Barna, the director of the study.

“Our research reveals that our worldview is influenced by many factors, but one of the most significant is observing what a worldview looks like in action,” Barna explained. “With only six percent of adults embracing the biblical worldview, the importance of the other six out of 10 adults who call themselves Christian but who do not reflect biblical thinking and living cannot be overestimated.”

Barna noted that these two alternative worldviews—postmodernism and secular humanism—provide plenty of opportunities for discussion about the gap between public perceptions and biblical teaching.

“If you list the components of the alternative views, you wind up with a fascinating, even controversial, list of topics,” the ACU professor explained. “That list would incorporate origins of the universe, evolution, truth, moral behavior, life after death, the existence of God, role of history, definition of success, and more.”

Barna continued, “Followers of Christ who believe that the Bible contains truth and practical guidance for living have a different way of understanding these matters than do, literally, 88 percent of the population.”

“That divergence places the burden on our shoulders to explain why we believe the Bible is true and to be able to describe in the simplest terms what it teaches about all of these matters,” Barna said. “If we cannot articulate a persuasive perspective on these matters, great numbers of people will suffer the consequences of their biblical illiteracy and our inability to serve them well by overcoming that deficiency. It truly is a matter of life and death, with global implications.”

About the Research

The American Worldview Inventory 2020 (AWVI) is an annual survey that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions drawn from eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior. AWVI 2020 was undertaken in January 2020 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 non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) is under the auspices of Arizona Christian University and 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 that information with organizations dedicated to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith but remains non-partisan and inter-denominational. Access to past surveys conducted by CRC, as well as additional information about the Cultural Research Center, is available at www.culturalresearchcenter.com.