

THE WORLDVIEW DILEMMA OF AMERICAN PARENTS

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Every adult has a worldview. That worldview is typically fully developed and operational before a person becomes a teenager. Few people would deny the fact that parents play a significant role in the shaping of their children's worldview.

But there's a problem.

New research from the American Worldview Inventory 2022, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, shows that more than nine out of 10 parents of children under age 13 have a muddled worldview.

Two-thirds (67%) of pre-teen parents claim to be Christian, but only 2% of all pre-teen parents actually possess a biblical worldview, according to the new research. In fact, the study shows that a majority of today's parents are Millennials, the adult generation in America least likely to possess a biblical worldview. And according to the research, the younger the parent, the less likely they are to have a biblical worldview.

The Worldview of Parents:

George Barna, Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center and creator of the national American Worldview Inventory, explained that this year's initial wave of worldview studies focuses on the life-defining beliefs and behaviors of parents because of the substantial influence they have on the worldview developed by their young children.

"Every parent teaches what they know and models what they believe. They can only give what they have, and what they have to give reflects their driving beliefs about life and spirituality," Barna explained. "Parents are not the only agents of influence on their children's worldview, but they remain both a primary influence and a gatekeeper to other influences."

The new AWWI 2022 study found that although two-thirds of the parents of pre-teens claim to be Christian (67%), only 2% possess a biblical worldview. The outcome is barely different among the two-thirds who claim to be Christian. A mere 4% of them possess a biblical worldview.

Equally shocking was the finding that none of the six alternative worldviews tested is embraced by even 1% of parents. These alternative worldviews include: Secular Humanism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Nihilism, Marxism/Critical Theory, Postmodernism, and Eastern Mysticism/New Age.

That leaves more than nine out of 10 parents of pre-teens—a full 94%—having a worldview known as Syncretism, a blending of multiple worldviews in which no single life philosophy is dominant, producing a worldview that is diverse and often self-contradictory.

The research further indicates that large majorities of parents possess comparatively minimal elements of four competing worldviews in their own worldview, while three other worldviews are more substantially represented in the syncretistic views of those parents.

At least six out of 10 parents reflect very limited advocacy of the ideals found in Nihilism, Marxism, Postmodernism, and Secular Humanism. The parents of pre-teens are much more likely to harbor ideas drawn from Eastern Mysticism/New Age thinking, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, and Biblical Theism (i.e., the biblical worldview).

CRC's American Worldview Inventory 2021 was the first national research study to measure both biblical and competing worldviews held by American adults. More information about the beliefs of these competing worldviews is available [here](#).

Why So Low?

With so many parents of children under the age of 13 identifying as Christian, why do so few of them have a biblical worldview?

Although no single reason is uniquely responsible for the low incidence of Biblical Theism among parents, the ACU research identifies a variety of conditions that contribute to that reality.

- Millennials comprise a majority of today's parents of pre-teens. Among the nation's four adult generations, Millennials have the lowest likelihood of possessing a biblical worldview. In fact, the survey indicates that the younger a parent is, the less likely they are to have a biblical worldview.
- A biblical worldview, of course, emerges from accepting the Bible as a relevant and authoritative guide for life. However, a majority of current parents of pre-teens—almost six out of 10—dismiss the Bible as a reliable and accurate source of God's truth. Just four out of 10 pre-teen parents believe the Bible can be trusted as God's accurate words for humanity. Even so, fewer than half of those individuals (45%) read the Bible at least once a week.
- There are only three groups of churches boasting an above-average proportion of pre-teen parents who possess a biblical worldview: non-denomination or independent Protestant churches, Pentecostal or charismatic churches, and evangelical churches. Parents associated with congregations that are non-denominational or independent Protestant

were about eight times more likely than the national norm to have a biblical worldview, while those aligned with either evangelical or charismatic Protestant churches were about three times more likely. However, fewer than one out of every five parents of children under 13 (19%) attend those types of churches.

- Wealth also relates to the likelihood of today's pre-teen parents possessing a biblical worldview. Pre-teen parents in middle-income households are the group most likely to display biblical beliefs and behaviors. Notably, while pre-teen parents in households earning between \$40,000 and \$75,000 annually constitute one-quarter of all such parents, they also represent half of the pre-teen parents who embrace Biblical Theism. While pre-teen parents in lower- and working-class homes display average levels of biblical worldview incidence, pre-teen parents from households making in excess of \$100,000 annually rarely possess a biblical worldview (i.e., less than one-half of one percent of them).
- Overall, today's pre-teen parents are less enthusiastic about religious faith than has traditionally been the case. In fact, the AWVI 2022 research found that only half of pre-teen parents (52%) claim to be deeply committed to practicing their faith.

Who is Most Likely?

The survey revealed the characteristics of the people most likely to have a biblical worldview. There were few surprises in the description of pre-teen parents whose beliefs and behaviors are most likely to coincide with a biblical worldview:

- Residents of the southern and western states
- People over the age of 45
- Political conservatives
- Theological conservatives
- Individuals who attend a Christian church associated with Protestantism
- Adults who have not graduated from a college or university
- People from households making between \$40,000 and \$75,000 annually
- Born-again Christians

While each of those segments of pre-teen parents is more likely than the norm to possess the biblical worldview, there was no segment in which even one out of five members of the segment has such a life philosophy.

The only demographic or theolographic segments in which at least 10% possess the biblical worldview were pre-teen parents who attend independent or non-denominational Protestant churches (16% have the biblical worldview); those who read the Bible daily (10%); those who self-identify as "very conservative on theological matters" (10%); and those who consider themselves to be "very conservative on social issues, such as abortion and same-sex marriage" (10%).

Children are Spiritually Disadvantaged

According to Barna, who directed the Cultural Research Center project, the data show that most American children begin life at a spiritual disadvantage, given the religious and lifestyle choices of their parents.

“A parent’s primary responsibility is to prepare a child for the life God intends for that child. A crucial element in that nurturing is helping the child develop a biblical worldview—the filter that causes a person to make their choices in harmony with biblical teachings and principles,” said Barna. After noting that the Bible assigns the worldview development process to the child’s family and community of faith, he reiterated that neither of those seems engaged in the task.

“Sadly, the research confirms that very few parents even have the worldview development of their children on their radar,” Barna explained.

“The typical American parent is either fully unaware that there is a worldview development process, or they are aware that their child is developing a worldview, but they do not take responsibility for a role in the process,” he said. “Or they are aware the child’s worldview is being developed, but choose or allow outsiders to accomplish that duty on the parent’s behalf.”

Barna also pointed out, “It seems that most pre-teen parents are unaware—or certainly unfazed—by the contradiction between calling themselves ‘Christian,’ but living in ways that repudiate the teachings of Jesus and the principles in the Bible.”

As he noted, “Shockingly few parents intentionally speak to their children about beliefs and behavior based upon a biblical worldview. Perhaps the most powerful worldview lesson parents provide is through their own behavior, yet our studies consistently indicate that parental choices generally do not reflect biblical principles or an intentionally Christian approach to life.”

Pre-teen Parents and Biblical Worldview Incidence		
Pre-teen Parent Segment	Incidence among pre-teen parents	Biblical worldview incidence within segment
All pre-teen parents	100%	2%
Self-identified Christians	67%	4%
Theologically defined born-again Christians	22%	8%
Attend a Catholic church	24%	1%
Attend an evangelical Protestant church	11%	6%
Attend a mainline Protestant church	11%	2%
Politically conservative	19%	9%
Politically liberal/progressive	17%	1%
Age of parent: 18 to 24	13%	*
Age of parent: 25 to 44	56%	2%
Age of parent: 45 or older	31%	4%

Source: American Worldview Inventory 2022, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University; conducted January 2022; N=600 parents of children under 13.
*indicates less than one-half of one percent.

The research shows that most pre-teen parents not only claim the Christian faith but also identify a church connection. The substantive gap between their faith self-identification and what Christian churches claim to teach and foster is significant. Those contradictions raise questions for churches regarding the content being taught; the presence of accountability processes; how churches measure their worldview impact; and the nature of discipleship in today's churches.

One of the chilling questions raised by the survey is whether the data point to a forthcoming virtual extinction of the biblical worldview in America. Barna allowed that such an outcome was a statistical possibility, but an unrealistic expectation.

“To expect the biblical worldview to disappear in America essentially posits that God has given up on America and that there is not a tribe of devoted followers whom He can rely upon to usher in an era of spiritual renewal,” the ACU researcher explained.

“The reality is that culture-changing movements can transform a nation with as little as 2% of the population on-board. Turning around the paucity of commitment to the biblical worldview cannot happen overnight, in the United States, but it can happen.”

Barna noted, “While the percentage of American adults with a biblical worldview is small, it transcends the lower size limit of movements that have successfully transformed aspects of American culture. We estimate that there are perhaps 10 to 15 million adults in the country who have a biblical worldview and therefore might be engaged in such a worldview transformation effort.”

The ACU professor continued, “A relevant question is whether there is sufficient concern among that remnant to get organized and wage an uncompromising, strategic, and tireless battle to recast the heart, mind, and soul of Americans.”

As Barna noted, “The most effective population to target with such efforts, of course, is children, but incorporating the parents of those young people in the process would be highly beneficial as well.”

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 measure both beliefs and behavior within eight categories of worldview application.

The initial 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. The survey data have an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus four 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.

A second wave of the American Worldview Inventory 2022 was conducted in February 2022 among a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Christian pastors. The data from that wave will be released later in 2022.

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.