

American Worldview Inventory 2020 – At a Glance

AWVI 2020 Results – Release #3: Perceptions of God

Americans Continue to Redefine – and Reject – God

April 21, 2020

Groundbreaking new research about American faith and worldview shows that although we proclaim “In God We Trust” on our currency, a slim 51% majority of Americans believe in a biblical view of God – down from 73% thirty years ago. Increasingly, the research finds mounting evidence that Americans are both redefining – and rejecting – God.

Stunningly, Americans are more confident about the existence of Satan than they are of God. Overall, 56% contend that Satan is an influential spiritual being, yet almost half (49%) are not fully confident that God truly exists. And 44% of believe Jesus Christ sinned while on Earth. Americans are also confused about the nature of the Holy Spirit, with over half—52%—saying that “the Holy Spirit is not a living entity, but merely a symbol of God’s power, presence or purity.”

According to the latest release of findings from the *American Worldview Inventory 2020* by Dr. George Barna, Director of Research for the Cultural Research Center, some of the largest drops in belief in a biblical description of God in the past 30 years are among youngest Americans ages 18 to 29 (down 26 points), oldest Americans, i.e., born before 1946 (down 25 points), and women (down 25 points). The largest drop was among those attending Pentecostal or charismatic Protestant churches (down 27 points). Only those in households with income at least 20% above the national average saw an increase (up 2 points). Overall the study found a 50% drop in biblical worldview in America in the past 30 years, from 12% to the current 6%—the lowest number ever recorded.

Here are other key AWVI 2020 findings from this release:

- A major shift in beliefs about God shows dramatically increasing skepticism about His existence. Those who say “a higher power may exist, but nobody really knows for certain” has exploded from 1% of the public 30 years ago to 20% today.
- Americans are almost evenly divided on the nature of Jesus Christ. Overall, 44% agreed that “when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was fully divine and also fully human, and therefore committed sins, like other people.” Slightly fewer (41%) viewed Jesus as fully divine and fully human, and *sinless* while on earth.
- Among those *least likely* to possess an orthodox biblical view of God:
 - “nones,” i.e., atheists, agnostics, with no religious interest or associations (9%);
 - political liberals (35%);
 - adults who self-identify as LGBTQ (36%);
 - and adults 18 to 29 years old (38%).

This latest CRC report, “**Americans Continue to Redefine – and Reject –God,**” is the third of 12 biweekly releases from the *AWVI 2020*. The full release of these results follows.

American Worldview Inventory 2020 Results – FULL Release #3: Perceptions of God

Americans Continue to Redefine – and Reject – God

Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, Cultural Research Center

Released: April 21, 2020

Half of all American adults believe that their money contains a lie. That's one conclusion you might draw from a new report based on a nationwide survey conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

Every piece of paper currency printed in the United States contains the words, "In God We Trust." The new survey, however, reveals that only half of American adults (51%) believe in a traditional, biblical view of God as the "all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect and just creator of the universe who still rules the world today." In fact, faith in a deity fitting that description has plummeted from three-quarters of adults thirty years ago (73% in 1991) to the present-day statistic of barely half of American adults.

This and other insights regarding views about spiritual beings are drawn from the *American Worldview Inventory 2020*, an annual nationwide survey conducted by the Cultural Research Center. That survey reveals that only 6% of U.S. adults have a biblical worldview – that is, a way of thinking and behaving that is predominantly driven by the acceptance of biblical truths, precepts, and commands.

This latest report based on the *AWVI 2020* indicates that a significant reason for the small number of people with a biblical worldview is the dramatic rise in the popularity of disparate and unbiblical views that Americans have adopted concerning God.

Prevailing Descriptions about Deity

Half of the nation accepts the orthodox biblical view of God as one who created and controls the universe; is omnipotent, omniscient, and without fault; and is just in His decisions.

But what about the other half of the population? Alternative views about the being, or some concept of a divine presence, can be summarized in five contrasting options.

- One-fifth of the public (20%) embraces a conventional agnostic perspective: "a higher power may exist, but nobody knows for certain."
- One-tenth (10%) possess a common "new age" or modern mystical point of view, claiming that "'God' refers to the total realization of personal, human potential or a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach."
- A traditional atheistic view – i.e., that "there is no such thing as God" – is a view held by 6% of U.S. adults.
- Less common views include the 4% who possess a polytheistic view ("there are many gods, each with different powers and authority") and 3% who are pantheistic ("everyone is god").
- The remaining 6% of the public does not know what to think about the notion of God.

Belief Segments

Which people groups are most likely to embrace the orthodox biblical view of God? The *AWVI 2020* data indicates that such a belief is most likely to be held by Integrated Disciples (i.e., adults with a biblical worldview – 97%); SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians – 92%); born-again Christians (84%); political conservatives (70%); blacks (62%); upscale individuals (i.e., college graduates with above average household income, 59% having a biblical God view); Republicans (67%); and people 50 or older (57%). In addition, the South is the only region that has more than half of its residents maintaining an orthodox biblical understanding of God (59%).

Among those who are least likely to possess an orthodox biblical view of God are the “nones” (i.e., atheists, agnostics, those who have no religious interest or associations, 9% of whom have a biblical view of God); political liberals who are Independent (23%); adults associated with non-Christian faiths (29%); political liberals, regardless of their party affiliation (35%); adults who self-identify as LGBTQ (36%); and adults 18 to 29 years old (38%).

Changes in 30 Years

Apart from the huge drop in the proportion of adults who believe in a biblical view of God – down from 73% to just 51% – the survey also showed that the major shift in beliefs about God during those three decades has been a dramatic increase in the proportion who say “a higher power may exist, but nobody really knows for certain.” That group has exploded from 1% of the public thirty years ago to 20% today.

The only other perspective that has grown in popularity is the traditional atheist view: “there is no such thing as God.” Since 1991 that belief has expanded from 1% to 6% of adults.

One perspective on deity that experienced a significant decline in the past thirty years is the belief that “God refers to the total realization of human potential, or a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach.” Acceptance of that view has diminished from 16% to 10%.

The largest declines in possession of an orthodox, biblical perspective on the nature of God since 1991 were among individuals who attend Pentecostal or charismatic Protestant churches (down by 27 percentage points); people in the 18 to 29 year old category (down 26 points); adults in the Elders generation, (i.e., people born before 1946, down 25 points); and women (down 25 points).

The sole subgroup of the population to experience an increase in those who have a biblical view of God were people whose household income is at least 20% above the national average. That segment registered a very small increase (two percentage points).

Other Views about God

A majority of Americans (57%) also stated that they believe “it is impossible to be certain about the existence of God; it is solely a matter of faith.” About one-third of the public (36%) disagreed with that view and 8% were not sure.

The survey also found that seven out of ten Americans (71%) say they “have no doubt that God loves you unconditionally.” Digging deeper, the survey showed that seven out of ten adults (70%) who consider God to be personal, powerful and perfect also believe without a doubt that they are loved unconditionally by God.

Further, the research revealed that two out of three adults (66%) believe “God has a reason for everything that happens” to them.

Just one-third of the public (34%) said they “wonder if God is really involved” in their life. Most people (60%) say they do not harbor such doubts.

An examination of the views of adults who have a biblical understanding of the existence of God and their views about other aspects of God is instructive. The survey showed the following:

- Only half (51%) of those with a biblical view of God also believe that it is possible to be certain that God exists. That means nearly half of those who believe in a personal, powerful and perfect God – 45% – also believe that certainty about the God they believe in is impossible.
- Seven out of ten adults who possess an orthodox biblical view of God (70%) do not doubt that God loves them unconditionally.
- Two-thirds of those with a biblical perspective on God also contend that He has a reason for everything that happens to them (67%).
- Shockingly, a mere one out of three (34%) who have a biblical view of God also believe that He is involved in their life.

When looking at people who hold all five of those biblical views about God – that He is the omnipotent, omniscient, perfect, and just creator of the universe and still rules it today; He loves the person unconditionally; He has a reason for everything that happens in a person’s life; and that He is involved in the person’s life – just 10% of the public hold all five of those views.

Other Spiritual Authorities

One of the most stunning outcomes from the survey relates to the nature of Jesus Christ. Adults are nearly evenly divided in their views on the sinless nature of Jesus. Overall, 44% stated that they agree that “when He lived on earth, Jesus Christ was fully divine and also fully human, and therefore committed sins, like other people.” Slightly fewer (41%) disagreed with that view, embracing the biblical teaching that while Jesus was both fully deity and fully human, He did not commit sins during His time on earth. One out of every six adults (16%) did not have an opinion about this perspective.

Most Americans believe that “Satan is not merely a symbol of evil but is a real spiritual being and influences human lives.” Not quite six out of ten adults (56%) agree with that point of view. Three out of ten (30%) disagree with that view while the remaining one out of seven (14%) do not have an opinion on the matter.

To place that finding in context, Americans are now more confident about the existence of Satan than they are of God! Overall, 56% contend that Satan is an influential spiritual being; just 51% believe in a God who is an influential spiritual being – and a significant share of them (49%) are not fully confident that He truly exists. In other words, just one out of every four adults (25%) both possesses a biblical perspective on God and contend that it is possible to know with certainty that He exists.

Meanwhile, just over half of all adults (52%) contend that “the Holy Spirit is not a living entity but is a symbol of God’s power, presence or purity.” An additional one-third (32%) believe that the Holy Spirit is real, and one-sixth of adults (17%) do not have an opinion about this.

There Is a Noteworthy Correlation between Political Views and God Views

**Q: There are many different beliefs about God or a higher power.
Which of these descriptions comes closest to what you, personally, believe?**
(N=2,000 adults)

Belief about God	All adults	SAGE Cons	— Political Party —				— Political Ideology —		
			Repub	Dem	Indep	Not Regist'd	Conserv	Moderate	Liberal
God is the all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect and just creator of the universe who rules the universe today	51%	92%	67%	46%	44%	42%	70%	46%	35%
A higher power may exist, but nobody really knows for certain	20	2	14	23	24	20	11	24	27
God refers to the total realization of personal, human potential or a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach	10	4	10	10	8	11	7	10	13
There is no such thing as God	6	*	2	7	6	8	3	5	11
There are many gods, each with different power and authority	4	1	2	4	5	4	4	3	5
Everyone is god	3	1	2	4	3	6	2	3	5
don't know	6	*	3	6	10	11	3	9	5

Notes: * Indicates less than one-half of one percent
Abbreviations: SAGE Cons stands for Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians
: Repub stands for (self-identified) Republican
: Dem stands for (self-identified) Democrat
: Indep stands for (self-identified) Independent
: Not Regist'd stands for (self-identified) not registered to vote
: Conserv stands for (self-identified) conservative political ideology

Dramatic Implications for America

The director of the *American Worldview Inventory* project, George Barna, stressed the significance of these new findings. “It’s no wonder that more than nine out of ten Americans lack a biblical worldview given that peoples’ fundamental understanding of the nature and existence of God is flawed,” the veteran researcher and bestselling author remarked.

“All of the spiritual noise in our culture over the last few decades has obviously confused and misled hundreds of millions of people in our nation,” Barna said. “The message to churches, Christian leaders, and Christian educators is clear: we can no longer assume that people have a solid grasp of even the most basic biblical principles, such as those concerning the existence and nature of God. Our previous report, concerning Americans’ views about the Bible, produced similar red flags. What were once basic spiritual truths that most people embraced are no longer perspectives that people accept – or, in a growing number of cases, know anything about.”

Barna also highlighted the new wave of popular thinking about deity in America that is revealed by the results of the *American Worldview Inventory*. “Thirty years ago, people spent time learning and thinking about God. As our culture has become more self-absorbed, less time is invested reflecting on authority and truth,” Barna continued. “During that same period, we have transitioned from a people

who upheld the existence of absolute moral truth to a nation where the majority now rejects moral absolutes.”

As Barna explained, “The result has been a seminal shift in our collective focus, from other to self, and from absolute truths to conditional truths. That shift, in turn, helps to explain why the ‘doesn’t/don’t know/don’t care’ population, regarding the existence of God, has mushroomed from 8 percent to 32 percent in just 30 years – a 300 percent increase! That’s one-third of the nation’s adults who have chosen to dismiss traditional teachings about God, the importance of personally determining whether a powerful, holy, Creator God exists, and the implications of their conclusion for their present and future. This is the paramount existential crisis of our era.”

Dr. Barna serves as a professor, as well as the Director of Research at the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. His ACU colleague, Dr. Tracy Munsil, serves as the Executive Director of the Cultural Research Center, and she also weighed in on the latest results.

“Biblical beliefs that used to be thought of as ‘no brainers’ can no longer be classified as such,” Munsil explained. “The fact that four out of ten adults believe that Jesus Christ – who came to earth to *save* us from our sins – was Himself a sinner and therefore in need of salvation is mind-boggling. Add to that the fact that more people believe in the existence of Satan than the God of Abraham, and you cannot miss the breadth of the spiritual crisis in America today.”

About the Research

The *American Worldview Inventory 2020 (AWVI)* is the first wave of an annual series of surveys that estimates how many adults have a biblical worldview. The assessment is based on 51 worldview-related questions that are drawn from eight categories of worldview application. Those questions are divided into queries regarding both beliefs and behavior. In addition to the worldview questions, the survey also contains an array of demographic and theolographic questions. In total, the *AWVI* instrument incorporates 68 questions and took respondents an average of 16 minutes to complete.

AWVI 2020 was undertaken in January 2020 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults. The survey included 1,000 interviews with a nationwide random sample of adults via telephone, plus another 1,000 adults interviewed online through use of a national panel of adults. A survey of 2,000 individuals has an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of undeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon non-sampling activity.

About the Cultural Research Center

The Cultural Research Center (CRC) at Arizona Christian University 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 the information with organizations focused on impacting the spheres of cultural influence in order to transform American culture with biblical truth. Like ACU, CRC embraces the Christian faith but remains non-partisan and inter-denominational. In addition to Dr. George Barna, the Director of Research, Dr. Tracy Munsil serves as the Executive Director of the Center. More information about the Cultural Research Center is available at the Center’s website, located at www.culturalresearchcenter.com.