

The Theology and Design of the

WORLDVIEW INDEX

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A “worldview” is the totality of our beliefs about God, about the world, and about the relationship between the two. From a Christian perspective, unless our understanding of God comports with scripture, our “love for God” is misplaced. Is your God the God of the Bible, or some other god? The Worldview Index is designed to provide some insight.

Our worldview is the lens through which we interpret and make sense of everything around us. And while that may sound abstract, esoteric, and far, far removed from the practical concerns of daily living, the beliefs that we hold regarding these core issues about God have a profound effect on our priorities, on our sense of right and wrong, and ultimately, on our day-to-day behavior and decision-making.

There are, of course, many worldviews represented in our culture. Some are monotheistic (e.g., the worldviews of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), others are pantheistic (e.g., New Age and some eastern religions), and still others are agnostic, maintaining that the nature – and the existence – of god is ultimately unknowable. This latter category of worldviews, collectively-termed “secularism” (or “naturalism” by some), is considered to be the dominant worldview in western culture, say experts observers of society. It asserts that since God is unknowable, ultimate truth is unknowable.¹ The commentary of theologian R.C. Sproul is representative: “for the secularist, there is no ultimate answer because there is no ultimate truth... It’s a message that’s being proclaimed, indeed *screamed*, from every corner of our culture.”

Let’s look more closely at that worldview, contrasting it with a Biblical worldview.

Biblical Worldview Versus Secularism

Rather than use the standard philosophical jargon, let me try to explain the central distinctions between the Biblical and secular worldview through a concrete example. Joe Christian and Jane Secular are friends, but their worldviews are in serious conflict. Joe believes that there is a God and that God exists in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jane rejects the notion that we can know there’s a god. For her, there may be a god somewhere out there, but if there is, that god is simply unknowable.

¹ Although “secularism” is the chief competitor of a Biblical worldview, there are many varieties of secularism – philosophical systems that adhere to the same basic assumption about the unknowability of God, but which vary in their claims about what constitutes “right” and “truth.” Among these systems are some with which you may be familiar, for example, humanism, relativism, hedonism, pragmatism, and pluralism. However, the Worldview Index is not designed to distinguish among these varieties of secularism, only to estimate one’s worldview on the continuum from more Biblical to more secular.

Joe believes that God created the world and exists apart from the world. Jane cannot say whether god (if there is a god) created the world. For her, the observable realm – the here and now, the things we can experience through our senses – is all that exists for sure.

Joe believes that we can know God, God's will, and God's nature because God has revealed himself through scripture, through his creation, and most of all, through the person of Jesus Christ. Jane believes that if there is a god, there's no way to know whether that god is involved in the world. In fact, for Jane, there's no point in even talking about god because, for all intents and purposes, there's nothing one can say about god. The whole construct of "god" is a speculation.

The implications for daily living are almost infinite, since their divergent assumptions determine Joe and Jane's divergent opinions on right and wrong and how we should live. For Joe, absolute truth, absolute right, and absolute wrong are knowable through the Bible. For Jane, what's "true," what's "right," and what's "wrong" are relative to persons and situations. If there is no god – or even if there is an unknowable god out there – then who's to say what's right for everyone? Actually, from Jane's standpoint, it's the ultimate act of hubris and tyranny to claim to know such a thing! Now, that doesn't mean that Jane has no value system, no sense of morality, no sense of right and wrong, or no basis for the choices she makes. She does. But for Jane, the "rightness" of some behavior or of some decision is determined not in the Bible, but elsewhere, as we'll see in a moment.

These distinctions between Joe and Jane illustrate the core elements of a person's worldview: the nature of God, of the world, and of the connection between the two. And as these vary, so too will vary people's perspectives on appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

The Dimensions of the Worldview Index

Based on this theology, the Worldview Index presents a series of statements to estimate to what extent one ascribes to this theology, yielding a "Worldview" score. In particular, the premises of this instrument are that, among other things, a Biblically-consistent worldview maintains:

- God is the first cause of all that exists, the Creator
- God is unique and immutable, the One True God who has always existed and will always exist in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- God is transcendent: God is not part of the creation, but exists over and above the creation. God is omnipotent and omniscient
- God is immanent: Notwithstanding God's transcendence, God remains involved in His creation, providing for it, loving it without favoritism, guiding people, responding to prayers, and supernaturally effecting His purposes here on earth.
- The nature of man is sinful; that is, people are naturally inclined to do things their own way, rather than God's way
- God will hold us accountable for how we use our time here on earth and desires that we use it for His purposes

- God desires us to reject sin and to do His will, moving increasingly toward Christ-likeness with the help of God's Holy Spirit
- God teaches us what is sin and what is His will through His two-testament Word, the Bible, a book written by agents of God's choosing under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit
- God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, "one in being with the Father," to teach us how we should live, and to be crucified as the atoning sacrifice for our sins
- God resurrected Jesus and Jesus is alive today
- God has prepared a place in heaven for those who believe in Him and who put their faith in Jesus' sacrifice
- God will send Jesus a second time, at a moment that we cannot know, to bring believers to heaven

For each of the bullet-pointed beliefs above, respondents are presented with three statements and asked to select the one that comes closest to their beliefs. In each group of three, there is one statement that represents a Biblical worldview position (two points), one that represents a secular worldview position (zero points), and one that represents a middle ground between the two (one point). The respondent's worldview score is then calculated by summing the points, and dividing that sum by 24 (the maximum number of points obtainable on this 12 item survey), and multiplying that fraction by ten (so it will be on a more interpretable zero to ten scale, rather than a zero to one scale).

Factor and Reliability Analysis for the Worldview Index

We collected data from 1,594 respondents anonymously via our website, www.assess-yourself.org. The demographics of this sample are as follows:

- 70.7% Female
- 9.9% Black, 79.3% White, 3.5% Asian, 3.5% Hispanic, 2.3% other races, (1.6% unknown)
- Average age 44.3
- Age range: 13 to 84
- Average years as a Christian 23.8
- Respondents represent 50 countries. Eighty-six percent of the sample is from the USA, with 49 states represented (largest state representation is from California: 6.2%)

The Scree Plot below demonstrates clearly that there is one factor in the Index, a factor that we have termed “worldview.” This is the only Eigenvalue in the analysis that is greater than 1.0. Factor loadings for the twelve items ranged from 0.352 to 0.853.

The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach’s Alphas of 0.854, well above the standard threshold of 0.7, evidence that all items are measuring the same latent construct.

Scree Plot

