



The Five False Worldviews That Ensnare Your Church

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Jeff Myers is an authority on Christian worldview and apologetics who teaches Christians how to understand what they believe, why they believe it and how to defend it against fatal worldviews. Over the last 20 years, Jeff Myers has become one of America's most respected authorities on Christian worldview, apologetics, and youth leadership development. He's the author of several books and the president of Summit Ministries. Dr. Myers lives in Colorado with his family.

In professional tennis matches, the ball moves so quickly that players have to swing at it before their conscious minds have time to process what's happening. I asked a friend who played against many world champions how winning tennis players mastered this skill. He explained that through thousands of hours of practice they learn to recognize subtle signs given off by their opponents and then fine-tune their reflexes to respond.

The same is true in today's battle of ideas. Culture rapidly fires fake worldviews at us that are contrary to God's Word. If we don't know how to recognize these worldviews or respond quickly enough, we risk being taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies (Col. 2:8).

According to new research commissioned by Summit Ministries and conducted by the Barna Group, Christians today are losing this battle of ideas. But they don't have to. Through a four-step process, we can alert believers to five fake worldviews that target them, and help them regain spiritual vitality.

How to Spot Bad Ideas Before They Catch Us Unaware

A worldview is our view of God, humanity and the world. A biblical worldview shows us what God is really like and where to turn for true answers to our big life questions.

But fake worldviews trick us into looking for answers in all the wrong places. They're everywhere—on television, in books and magazines, at the movies and in conversations with friends and family. We absorb them like we catch colds. We don't even know we're sick until it's too late.

Through surveys done over the last 20 years, researchers at the Barna Group have studied the worldview of church-going Christians. They've discovered that fewer than one in five of them has a worldview based on the Bible.

At Summit, we wondered, "Where do Christians get their worldview, if not from the Bible?" Here are a few of the most common fake worldviews that creep into the minds of Christians today.

Five Fake Worldviews That Entice Christians

Fake worldviews ruin people's lives, leading them to wrong values and harmful practices. In the research Summit commissioned with Barna, we asked questions about the influence of the five fake worldviews I wrote about in my *Understanding the Times Worldview Library*:

Secularism—the belief that the material world is all there is, and that God is irrelevant to what is important

Marxism—the belief that the current system must be overthrown because it exploits the poor to benefit the rich

Postmodernism—the belief that we should be suspicious of anyone who claims to know the truth, because none of us have access to it

New Spirituality—the belief that reality is spiritual, not material, and that what you do in this life will come back to you, whether good or evil

Islam—the belief that humans are in rebellion against Allah and must be made to submit through the practices revealed to the Prophet Muhammad

At Summit, we picked these five worldviews because of their enduring influence and because they summarize the basic religious commitments of probably 95 percent of the population in the West.

So what do Christians believe? We found that:

- 61 percent of practicing Christians agree with ideas rooted in new spirituality
- 54 percent resonate with postmodern views
- 38 percent are sympathetic to some Islamic teachings
- 36 percent accept ideas associated with Marxism
- 29 percent believe ideas based on secularism

We surveyed people from different Christian traditions and ethnicities who live in every region of America, in both rural and urban communities. Fake worldviews are influential everywhere. What lessons can we learn from this?

Two Lessons for the Future of the Church

Lesson One: Today's Christians suffer from a "Multiple Worldview Disorder." Just as some people have multiple personalities living inside their brains, believers tend to mix and match their ideas. Often they hold contradictory beliefs.

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For example, one-fifth of church-going Christians said there is no one "true religion, that many religions can lead to eternal life." Of those who strongly agreed with this statement, two-thirds also strongly agreed with the statement that "faith in Jesus is the only way to God." Both ideas can't be true. It's a Multiple Worldview Disorder.

Lesson Two: Post-Christian America is a reality. Using age 45 as a dividing line, we found a stark difference in worldview between Millennials and Gen-Xers on the one hand, and Baby Boomers and Elders on the other. On some questions, younger Christians were up to eight times more likely to accept fake worldviews.

For years Christian thought-leaders have warned us that we're on the brink of a post-Christian era. This study seems to show that we're toppling over the edge right now.

How to Stop Unbiblical Ideas and Fake Worldviews

In my book *The Secret Battle of Ideas about God*, I show how to combat fake worldviews by thinking of them as viruses that trick us into living lives that are contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

The virus analogy helps because when faced with potentially catastrophic outbreaks, doctors have learned how to take four decisive steps to curb a virus' growing impact. I call these steps the four I's—Identify, Isolate, Inform and Invest.

The four I's work with idea viruses, too. We can teach believers how to:

- Identify bad ideas generated by fake worldviews
- Isolate the features of bad ideas that are most likely to take us captive
- Inform others of how to find love, healing, purpose, peace and hope through Jesus
- Invest in those who've been sickened by bad ideas so they can emerge stronger than ever

The goal of the Barna-Summit survey is not to condemn people or put them in boxes. Rather, it is to understand the patterns of the world so we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). We are all at risk, but we can know the truth, and the truth will set us free (John 8:32).

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The Five Major False Worldviews by Jeff Myers

As we noted earlier, a *worldview* is “a pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationship to God and the world.” If you know a worldview’s assumptions, you can more accurately guess what its adherents believe and why.

There may be hundreds of worldviews operating today. Even some that are well-known, such as Judaism, have relatively few (around 13 million) followers worldwide. But many bizarre and even humorous worldviews have attracted followers. As the London *Telegraph* reported, 176,632 people in a 2012 national census of England and Wales considered their religious affiliation to be the “Jedi Knights.”¹ Another 6,242 said they worshipped heavy-metal music.² Obviously we can’t cover every worldview that has attracted followers, so we’re going to look at the five major false worldviews that make up the vast majority of the world’s population outside the Christian realm and are evangelistic (inviting everyone else to join them).

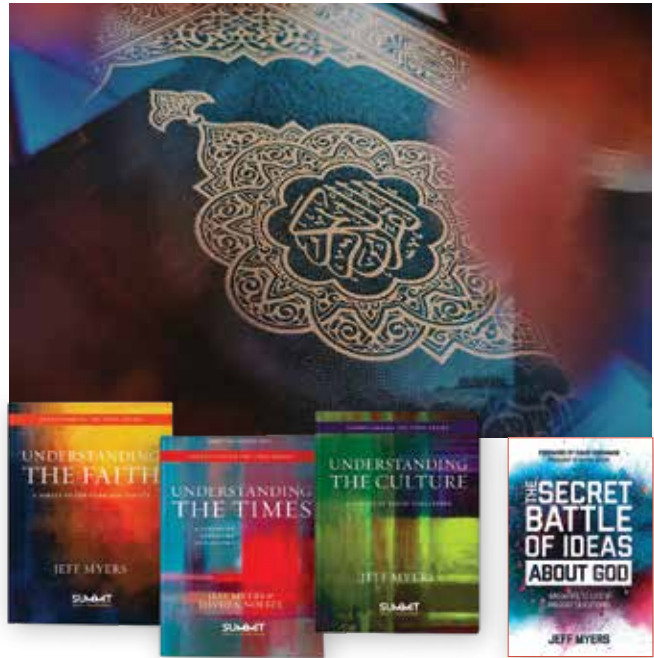
Islam

Islam began September 24 in AD 622, when 70 *muhajirun* pledged loyalty to an Arabian trader from Mecca who had fled to Medina and began receiving special revelations from Allah. The trader’s name: Muhammad. His submission to God gave his religion its name; *Islam* means “submission.” Those who submit to Allah and his

prophet Muhammad are called Muslims. Islam is based on a creed prayed aloud five times a day: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.”

Muslims believe that their holy book, the Quran, is God’s full and final revelation. The Quran specifies five things a person must do to become a Muslim: (1) repeat “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet” (2) pray the salat (ritual prayer)³ five times a day (3) fast during the month of Ramadan (4) give one-fortieth of one’s income to the needy; and (5) if able, make a pilgrimage to Mecca.⁴

According to Serge Trifkovic, “Islam is not a ‘mere’ religion; it is a complete way of life, an all-embracing social, political and legal system that breeds a worldview peculiar to itself.”⁵ Islam has grown rapidly in the last few decades; 1.6 billion people in the world now claim to be adherents.



³ The call to prayer, the shahada, is an integral part of the salat: “*Allahu Akbar; Ashadu anna la ilaha illa Allah; Ashadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah; Haiya ‘ala al-salat; Haiya ‘ala al-falah; Al-salat khayrun min al-nawm; Allahu Akbar; La ilaha illa Allah.*” The English translation is “God is most great; I bear witness there is no God but God; I bear witness Muhammad is the prophet of God; Come to prayer; Come to well-being; Prayer is better than sleep; God is most great; There is no God but God.” See more at “Salat: Muslim Prayer,” ReligionFacts.com, November 10, 2015, accessed March 26, 2016, www.religionfacts.com/islam/practices/salat-prayer.htm#sthash.U8xtC709.dpuf.

⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 368–69.

⁵ Serge Trifkovic, *The Sword of the Prophet* (Boston: Regina Orthodox, 2002), 55.

¹ Cited in Henry Taylor, “‘Jedi’ Religion Most Popular Alternative Faith,” *Telegraph*, December 11, 2012, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/9737886/Jedi-religion-most-popular-alternative-faith.html.

² Taylor, “Alternative Faith.”



New Spirituality

What we term New Spirituality is perhaps the most difficult worldview to precisely define. You don't have to sign, recite or proclaim anything in particular to join, nor must you attend a church. While unofficial in its dogma, the New Age culture contains an extensive set of beliefs that, once understood, predict what people with those beliefs will value and how they will act.

New Spirituality is a free-flowing combination of Eastern religions, paganism, and pseudoscience that pops up in odd places. Some of the bestselling books of all time—by authors such as Deepak Chopra, Rhonda Byrne, Marilyn Ferguson, and Shakti Gawain—describe a world spiritual in nature but not governed by a personal, all-powerful God. Rather, the spirituality in the world is “consciousness,” an energy in which we all participate and can even learn to control. Talk-show host Oprah Winfrey has admitted to holding many of these beliefs.

We will study New Spirituality not because it is deeply philosophical or consistent but because some of its associated beliefs—karma, Gaia, being “one” with the environment, reincarnation, meditation, holistic health and so forth—are a daily part of life for millions of Americans and have influenced such academic areas as psychology and medicine.



Secularism

The primary identifying characteristic of Secularism is its *nonbelief* in other worldviews.

Secularism comes from the Latin word *saecularis*, roughly meaning “of men,” “of this world,” or “of this time.” Secularists believe humans are the center of reality. They disdain the influence of those who believe in ideas of gods, an afterlife, or anything beyond what we can sense. The primary identifying characteristic of Secularism is its *nonbelief* in other worldviews. Ironically, though, Secularists do generally have an agreed-upon set of beliefs about the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. So even though they view their beliefs as the *opposite* of religion, they are actually quite religious.

Interestingly, in the 20th century, several fairly well-known philosophers such as John Dewey and Julian Huxley, and later Paul Kurtz and Corliss Lamont, combined the term *secular* (“we are for the world”) and the term *humanism* (“we are for humans”) and developed a philosophy of Secular Humanism. Their manifesto, published in 1933 and updated in 1973 and 2000, led thousands of like-minded individuals to form a club called the American Humanist Association (AHA), whose motto is “Good without a god.” With no apparent sense of irony, the AHA operates as a tax-exempt organization based on the IRS section 501(c)(3) *religious* nonprofit exemption. Though its founders have passed away, the AHA still recruits members. Their dues support a publishing company and a monthly publication.

Secularism is an umbrella term for a set of beliefs that the vast majority of academics today accept unquestioningly. We use the term *Secularism* as a prediction, not a label: if someone accepts a Secularist viewpoint on such disciplines as theology, philosophy and ethics, we can predict fairly accurately what they believe about biology, psychology and so forth.

Marxism

Some religious worldviews develop over hundreds or thousands of years, but others are made up whole cloth in a very short period of time. Such is the case with Marxism and its offshoots Leninism, Maoism, Trotskyism, Fabian socialism, and the various socialist organizations that operate in the United States and around the world. Marxism was invented by Karl Marx, a scholar determined to demonstrate that ownership of private property, the basis for capitalism, was the root of the world's evils.

Despite its clearly atheistic philosophy, Marxism has also made many inroads into the church.

To Marx, history could be defined as a struggle between the haves (the owners) and the have-nots (the workers). If only the workers would rise up to overthrow the owners, they could form a workers' paradise in which all wrongs are righted, all possessions are shared and all injustices are brought to an end. The utopian state at the end of this long and bloody struggle is called *communism*. People who strive to bring about this state are called *communists*, and their bible is *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx's most famous and enduring work. Other such manifestos are still in print today, including the teachings of Chinese communist leader Mao Tse-tung and a book published by Harvard University Press called *Empire*.

Some say it's pointless to include Marxism as a dominant worldview in this article, but we disagree. Despite the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which dominated what is now called Russia, around 20 percent of the world's population still lives under the rule of communists. The largest communist country in the world today is China. In spite of its growing industry, China's communist rulers are still very much in control. And when we also consider countries operating on the principles Marx taught but not using the label *communist*, we are talking about a *majority* of the world's population living every day with the consequences of Marx's philosophies. Despite its clearly atheistic philosophy, Marxism has also made many inroads into the church. Some evangelicals involved in the so-called Christian Left have embraced key tenets of Marxism.

Postmodernism⁶

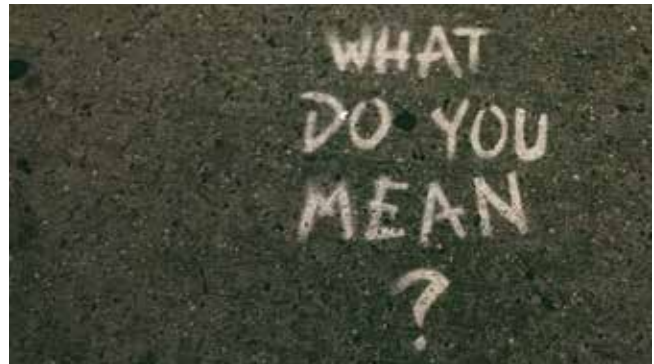
People talk about postmodern art, postmodern architecture and even postmodern ways of doing church, and yet they don't realize that Postmodernism is a well-thought-out and deep philosophical worldview. The father of Postmodernism, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, had many disciples including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Jean-François


Lyotard and Richard Rorty. All are now dead, but their teachings strongly influence higher education to this day.

In short, we can say Postmodernism began as a reaction against modernism, the idea that science and human reason can solve humankind's most pressing problems. While science can be used for great good, Postmodernists understand it to be hopelessly corrupted by the quest for power. It was scientific "progress," for example, that enabled the creation of weapons of mass destruction.

According to Postmodernists, the modern story of science and technology is one of many attempts to formulate what's called a *metanarrative*, or grand story of reality that claims universally valid, "God's-eye"-view, pristine knowledge of the world. Postmodernists say metanarratives become so compelling that people stop questioning them, and it's precisely then that they become destructive and oppressive. Postmodernists are generally suspicious of all modern metanarratives because they are so often used as tools of oppression. Many Postmodernists engage in a process of examining exactly what causes people to fall under the spell of various metanarratives. This is called *deconstruction*. The way deconstruction works on metanarratives is similar to someone revealing how a magic trick is done: in the revealing, people stop being deceived. Postmodernists believe "deconstructing" dominant metanarratives causes them to lose their stranglehold on people's minds.

Postmodernists have been carried away by their own ideas, calling *everything* into question—even the idea that we can know reality itself!



So there you have it. **Islam, New Spirituality, Secularism, Marxism, and Postmodernism.** By understanding these five worldviews, we'll see how people come to grips with the rules of the world and form patterns they hope will answer life's ultimate questions. 

⁶ Since we will be speaking of Postmodernism as an identifiable pattern of ideas, we will capitalize all references to the term as a worldview.