

How Hope Fosters a More Prosperous Society

Is it possible for people to improve their lives through hard work, or is the system [rigged](#) against you? Your answer – and your results – may depend on your faith.

On EWTN, Carl Cannon of RealClear Politics discussed a [poll](#) in which the organization asked people whether the American dream is alive “for you personally.” Only seven percent of Americans say the American dream is “dead,” while 27 percent say it is “alive and well.”

But Cannon pointed out a salient fact: That number [rises](#) to 33 percent for Catholics and to nearly half (47 percent) of Christians who attend church more than once a week.

Religion makes people more optimistic – and evidence shows that hope itself leads to a more prosperous and productive society.

“It’s really hard to be successful without being hopeful,” [said](#) Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D., a professor at the University of Kansas School of Business and a Gallup senior scientist in his book *Making Hope Happen*. “When you think that the future will be better than the present, you start working harder today – and you’re much more likely to be engaged in your work.”

Gallup reports that companies with highly engaged employees earn [147 percent](#) more per share than their competitors.

Hope is responsible for 14 percent of all workplace productivity, according to Lopez.

More importantly, hope saves lives. A 2004 [study](#) of depressed inpatients found that “[r]eligiously unaffiliated subjects had

significantly more lifetime suicide attempts and more first-degree relatives who committed suicide than subjects who endorsed a religious affiliation.” (This also has economic consequences. Ten out of 10 social scientists agree death reduces productivity.)

Apologists for secularism and statism sometimes make two counterarguments. Some point to the high levels of self-reported happiness enjoyed by atheistic Scandinavian welfare states. Yet they leave out an important datum: While one in every eight residents of Nordic countries struggles with depression, “very religious people” who were not part of an ethnic minority “were more likely to be happier,” [according](#) to the BBC.

Others may highlight the depression and addiction of small-town America, which they assume to be the deposit of religious faith and values. The trouble here is that their vision is outdated.

“Some of these people in small towns and rural areas didn’t score as high on this” poll about the American dream “as people in urban areas,” Cannon told EWTN. “That makes me think some of these people who voted for the president felt, as we knew they did in these Rust Belt states, left behind. The American dream for them, not that it is dead, but it is under stress.”

Tim Carney, the author of [*Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse*](#), has [found](#) “the working class is increasingly falling away from church and organized religion.”

“The General Social Survey finds that 50 percent of Americans who go to church more than once a week call themselves ‘very happy,’” [wrote](#) Carney. “That number drops as church attendance drops, down to only 25 percent for those who go once a year or less.” As jobs and churches leave small-town America, opioids fill the void. (You can hear Carney discuss the topic with

Acton Institute Communications Director John Couretas [here](#).)

Working-class America has lost its hope as it has lost its religion, the bedrock of hope in American history. The Apostle Paul wrote that “tribulation produces ^{b]}”>[perseverance; and perseverance, ^{c]}”>[character; and character, hope” – and hope “does not disappoint” ([Romans 5:3-5](#)). Hope has been established as part of a [holy trinity](#) of defining Christian virtues. Productivity and prosperity in this world, and entrance into the next, depend on our recovering and incarnating them.

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