

What Is the Christian Hope?

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Percentage of American adults
who identify as Christian:

2023, 62% 2007, 78%

who identify as Protestant, 40%

who identify as Catholic, 19%

who identify as nonaffiliated, 29%

who attend services at least monthly, 33%

who identify as both liberal and Christian:

2023, 37%, 2007, 62%

Percentage of American adults
who identify as mainline

2023, 11% 2007, 18%

who identify as evangelical

2023, 23% 2007, 26%

who identify as Presbyterian, 2%

2024, 1.1 million 1967, 4.2 million

Percentage of first-generation immigrants
who identify as Christian, 58%
who identify with other religions, 14%
who identify as nonaffiliated, 26%

Those 18-24 tend to be less religious
43% identify as nonaffiliated

But young men now participate in church life
at the same level as young women

What Is Our Hope?

The Apostle Paul — Jesus' resurrection

Pope Leo XIV — unity in Christ, love

Protestant theologian Wolf Krötke — Christ as
true humanity

Wolf Krötke, 2011

A Jump Ahead: The Church's Hope in a Post-Christian Era

First, the Reformation insight of a “priesthood of all believers” means that every believer is responsible for the *proclamation of the gospel* and for representing his or her faith in a world that he or she shares with non-believers. Congregations should therefore do everything possible to help Christians understand their responsibility to set forth the faith outside of the church, where one works and lives and spends his or her free time. It is essential that faith manifest itself *in those places* where people distant from the church actually live their lives.

Second, children's and youth work, including ministry to parents and young adults, should logically be *the* focal point of the church's service on the ground. When we think of the coming generation, we see the chance to *begin* anew, without the ballast of prejudices and bad experiences that many people had with the church in the past. We can again emphasize what gives the Christian message its strength, namely, that God in his humanity brings to life everything that *lets us be truly human*—in brief, faith in God's clarity and clarifying power, hope in the future, and love for our fellow human beings.

Third, in order to hold these two things together—God and true humanity—the church must acquire intellectual and spiritual concentration. The religious pluralism of contemporary society tempts the church to experiment with whatever approaches the transcendental, the mysterious, the esoteric, the meaningful, or the uplifting. We should not simply negate these dimensions of life. The truth of Christian faith is supported by the discovery that we humans are more than those things that we can control. But this pluralism can also entangle us in a jungle of religious vines that choke the voice of the gospel.

To keep a clear eye for what is possible or not possible in this regard, the church must develop an ability to answer critically for the *truth* of the gospel—whether God is almighty or powerless, a person or an impersonal power; whether he rules over the world and our life, or leaves us and the world alone to our own devices; whether he is the same God whom other religions honor, or not. If congregations give the impression that they

themselves don't know what to say about such fundamental matters, they will have a hard time attracting others to Christian faith.

What is needed, then, is a church in which a growing number of people are capable of taking responsibility for the truth of the Christian faith. Such a church concentrates on the coming generation and remains spiritually and intellectually awake. A church that is really on the way to other people and enters into their world has no reason for resignation, even when the work of reminding people about God makes only slow progress. To be sure, the Christian churches have become a minority. But when we concentrate on the riches of God's humanity, we already have a huge jump ahead into the future.

Wolf Krötke (1938–2023) was a Protestant theologian in communist East Germany and then in the reunited Germany. He wrote much about the church's hope in a post-Christian world.

The Apostle Paul's Defense

“My flesh will dwell in hope . . . , [in] the resurrection of the Christ” (2:26, 31)

“I am on trial with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead” (23:6)

“A hope in God . . . that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (24:15)

“And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise . . . that God raises the dead” (26:6, 8)

“It is because of the hope of Israel [in the resurrection] that I am bound with this chain” (28:20)

Pope Leo XIV

Excerpts from his inaugural sermon, May 18, 2025:

It is never a question of capturing others by force, by religious propaganda, or by means of power. Instead, it is always and only a question of loving as Jesus did.

In this our time, we still see too much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth's resources and marginalizes the poorest. For our part, we want to be a small leaven of unity, communion, and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love and become his one family: in the one Christ, we are one. This is the path to follow together, among ourselves but also with our sister Christian churches, with those who follow other religious paths, with those who are searching for God, with all women and men of goodwill, in order to build a new world where peace reigns!

This is the missionary spirit that must animate us; not closing ourselves off in our small groups, nor feeling superior to the world. We are called to offer God's love to everyone, in order to achieve that unity which does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the social and religious culture of every people.

Brothers and sisters, this is the hour for love! The heart of the Gospel is the love of God that makes us brothers and sisters. With my predecessor Leo XIII, we can ask

ourselves today: If this criterion “were to prevail in the world, would not every conflict cease and peace return?” (*Rerum Novarum*, 21).

With the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit, let us build a Church founded on God’s love, a sign of unity, a missionary Church that opens its arms to the world, proclaims the word, allows itself to be made “restless” by history, and becomes a leaven of harmony for humanity.

Together, as one people, as brothers and sisters, let us walk toward God and love one another.