

Why Christianity Works (Smith 2007)

Smith, drawing from critical realism, phenomenology and the study of emotions, offers an argument for why Christianity “works.”

“My basic argument, which will focus on Christianity, is that the belief content of the Christian faith gives rise to certain practices and experiences—particularly emotional ones—that many people find highly engaging, compelling, persuasive, and convincing. That is, I will suggest that the very internal logic of doing Christianity persistently produces events, interactions, and feelings in and among people compelling enough to keep the tradition flourishing despite many countervailing forces.... What follows is explanatory both if God exists and Christianity is true and if God does not exist and Christianity is not true.”

According to this account, Christianity provides:

- A universe that has significance, not emptiness
- Significance for our lives
- Unconditional love from God
- Ownership and confession of sins
- Grace and forgiveness for sins
- Opportunities for transcendent worship
- A system for providing moral bearings
- Belonging in a community

“[I] do not believe Christianity will become extinct anytime soon. Christianity certainly is and will be influenced by the surrounding ideas and institutions, as it has always been. And many forces of modernity do exert a corrosive effect on Christian belief and practice. But Christianity also seems to possess a genius for adapting to its environment, selectively resisting opposition, and creatively initiating new moves.”