The Evaluation of the Validity of Christianity through
the Dynamic Relationship of Faith and Reason

Katie Farina
Honors Thesis: LS 499
13 April 2007
As one of the world’s foremost religions, Christianity appeals to billions of followers worldwide who passionately believe in the foundational elements of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet Christianity holds several doctrines which at times seem vague and difficult to understand within a world of modern reason. The doctrines of the Incarnation of Christ\(^1\) and Original Sin\(^2\) seem especially circumspect within a 21\(^{st}\) century mindset. Ultimately each obstacle that Christianity has encountered attempts to question the absolute and true nature of the religion. To fully understand the Church and her actions, it is necessary to examine a bit of her theological and theoretical history as well as the principal threats against the religion. In doing so, the modern scholar uncovers a foundational aspect of an interconnected and harmonious relationship between faith and reason. While these two concepts seem largely contradictory to an extent, they are interdependent upon one another within the Christian Church to serve as an undercurrent of belief that allows Christianity to claim matters of faith that are supported and reinforced by reasonable thinking. By examining several theories that question the existence of God along with religious threats against Christianity, the association between faith and reason serves as a basic foundational element through which the truth of Christianity can be determined and confirmed.

*Overview of Faith and Reason*

Christianity serves as one of the world’s oldest religions and grew out of the deep monotheistic tradition of Judaism, which can be traced to around 1800 B.C. (McFaul 32). Christianity itself diverged from Judaism by proclaiming Jesus Christ to be the Messiah. Therefore, Christianity can be traced to His Resurrection, which occurred merely a few decades after the Common Era. Furthermore, it is considered to be the world’s largest religion with approximately 2.1 billion followers or roughly 33 percent of the earth’s population (McFaul 32).
With such a following, it is no wonder why hundreds of scholars have attempted to understand the history of Christianity and how it came to be expressed in a modern society. Crucial to this investigation is discovering the exact nature of the relationship between faith and reason and specifically how these two perceptions grew together to form the foundation of the Christian faith.

The origin of the debate between faith and reason within the Christian Church can be traced back to the first century. A couple hundred years after the death of Jesus, the Christian Church was slowly forming itself into an institution to guide its ever increasing number of faithful followers. However, the heresy of Gnosticism soon became a lively threat to Christianity as early as the writings of the Gospels; this time period is representative of the first century especially between 50 A.D. to 120 A.D. The very nature of Gnosticism served as the catalyst for the beginning of a lengthy history of disputing the relationship between faith and reason. Gnosticism was a religious and philosophical movement that placed great emphasis upon a mystical knowledge that could only be obtained through ritual activity and secret instruction (Higgins 109). Gnostic followers believed that the “greater one’s understanding, the closer to complete liberation from this world” (Higgins 110). Contextually, Gnostics looked down upon Christians for being “less knowledgeable” and placing no emphasis upon reason. Early Church fathers including Saints Paul and Irenaeus of Lyons warned against such notions and supported the idea of a united faith and reason belief system. During this time period, the Bible served as one of the Church’s most staunch defense tools to affirm the faith.

The Christian Bible, as it is known today, consists of two halves—the Old and New Testaments. However the entirety of the Bible was not fully formed until nearly a century and a half after the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Early Christians relied heavily upon the
five books of the Jewish Torah and treated it as their own Scripture, especially given that Christianity grew out of Judaism. The New Testament was completed by the beginning of the first century; however, it was not until Saint Irenaeus put together a systematic theology in the late second century that the Christian Bible was completed with a specific selection of books. Additionally, Irenaeus undoubtedly assisted early followers to a further understanding of the true nature of the Bible and God’s works throughout its narratives. Insofar as to say that the Bible was nothing but a mythic metaphor ultimately diminishes its power as a communication tool between God and His people and attacks Jesus for His central message of salvation (Young 25). To serve as a basis of appeal, the Bible needed to possess an authority and conviction on Church matters. This authoritative nature rests in the Bible’s apostolic tradition, which Irenaeus effectively explained through his theology (Young 24). The controversy surrounding the authority and importance of the Bible coincided with Gnosticism—the original mechanism that began the debate between faith and reason.

The controversy regarding the discussion concerning faith and reason had exploded periodically over the course of Christian history with the Church repeatedly affirming the symbiotic nature of such a relationship. Early Church fathers appealed to standards of truth as well as philosophical aesthetics and cultural norms to fully explain the importance of the two concepts that simultaneously exist as singular entities and an inclusive whole (Young 23). Particularly important to understanding such a view is the ability to grasp the abstract, theoretical, and literal aspects of the concepts of faith and reason.

Within a Christian framework, the relationship between faith and reason is understandably complex. In an attempt to better understand such an association, it is necessary to comprehend each term as a singular perception within the theoretical framework of
Christianity. The definition of faith is often times misunderstood for it requires a deeper theological look past its surface attributes. Howe and Howe explain this elementary notion best when they claim, “Unfortunately, too many people think…faith is: accepting something against the evidence. But is it really better to believe something despite what our common sense tells us?” (23). It is precisely this battle between common sense and religion that sets up an academic search into the meaning and position of faith within religion.

In the simplest of terms, faith is merely a personal trust in someone or something (Howe and Howe 28). Yet it is the manner in which faith is expressed through religion that gives the concept an extended and fuller meaning. Howe and Howe explain the idea of faith in a complete and succinct manner, “Faith is not an amorphous wish or hopeful desire for something that one is not certain will be realized. Faith is a firm certainty grounded in the faithfulness of God and a certain expectation of the fulfillment of all of the promises which God has made to those who would trust him” (28). Scripture verse is riddled with stories of interactions between God and His people, which showcase the expression of faith. However, these narratives also distinguish between two important concepts within the definition of faith: an object of faith as opposed to an act of faith.

An object of faith is the person or thing in which one trusts; yet, within a Christian structure, this includes both the person and the Words of God (Howe and Howe 30). The explanation of an object of faith also serves as a clarification for the ultimate notion of faith, which is belief in a monotheistic Christian God. The ultimate object of faith is God, who by His very nature insures the truthfulness of the propositions He asserts throughout the Bible upon His people. Simply by accepting that a proposition is true is not the same as placing trust in the one who made the original assertion. In order to believe in the truth of the propositions, one must
ultimately trust in the supposed Author and Originator of the truth in such propositions (Howe
and Howe 31). Therefore in order to place confidence in the very act of faith, it is necessary to
possess devotion and belief in God. Comprehending the receiver of faith allows an individual to
further delve into the mysteries of such a subject and explore the act of faith.

As has been established, faith is so much more than the simple act of believing something
to be true. In order to further explain the intricacies of the definitional nature of faith, Kreeft and
Tacelli have defined four aspects (30). An emotional aspect of faith is characterized as the
feelings of assurance, trust and confidence within another. In reference to the Bible—and
Christianity—this emotional aspect is represented as hope (Kreeft and Tacelli 30). However,
“hope in this sense is the confident expectation of ultimately receiving that which has been
promised” (Howe and Howe 29). If the emotional aspect is represented by hope, then the
intellectual aspect of faith is characterized as belief (Kreeft and Tacelli 30). This aspect is “the
stable and unchanging commitment that is grounded in truth” (Howe and Howe 29). The final
two aspects are closely intertwined and represent the connection between God and His people.
The volitional aspect of faith is defined by exercising one’s free will to choose to make a
commitment to live, think and act on the basis of God’s Word and Scripture (Kreeft and Tacelli
31). This commitment to God must be combined with Kreeft and Tacelli’s fourth aspect of faith,
which is heart and will. One must possess the determination, discipline, and will to commit
themselves to God and His Word in order to live a full religious life (31). Upon examining these
four aspects, Howe and Howe remark intuitively on their influence upon the act of faith, “The act
of faith is more than simply accepting something to be the case. The act of faith in the biblical
sense involves the whole person, emotions, intellect, will and heart, in a total commitment of
trust in another” (30). In many ways, faith seems rather superstitious and whimsical and pushes the academic mind to search solace in the understanding of reason.

Whereas faith has come to rely upon belief for further explanation, reason depends upon a more scientific and logical exercise. Ferré provides one of the more basic yet inclusive definitions for reason, “By reason I mean the ability to identify, to discriminate, to evaluate, to interpret, to test, to order and to direct experience…Reason is an ability. It is a capacity of the self…Reason is man’s organ of interpretation. It is the self interpreting both itself and its world” (3). Therefore, reason is concerned with forming conclusions, judgments and inferences using sound judgment and good sense. Before analyzing the exact nature between faith and reason, it is pertinent to examine reason on the same two bases as faith: as both an act and an object.

An act of reason indicates both subjective and personal acts of the mind, which are used to discover, interpret, and understand the truth. There are three classic determinants that serve as acts of reason and include: simple apprehension, judgment and reasoning (Howe and Howe 25). Together, these function as experiences of reason not to be confused with an analysis of an individual’s process of reasoning. Typically these three will occur simultaneously and automatically within the mind leading to the capability and function of logical reasoning.

Simple apprehension consists of the mind taking notice of an object or person thus making the thing present within the mind. However, this process is limited for it does not engage the mind in affirmation or denial of the object or person (Howe and Howe 25). Usually apprehension is extremely vague and general but it is also the first step in knowledge. Knowledge occurs when an object, person, or field is studied intensely and possibly experienced. Simple apprehension thus serves as the first act of reason for it simply grasps the foundation of something. This first act of reason is then followed by judgment and reasoning.
Judgment is the act by which an individual will affirm or deny the object that was apprehended through the first step. Judgment is more complex than its previous step for it involves the knowledge of the item in terms of affirming or denying its existence (Howe and Howe 26). Judgment is also referred to as understanding and allows for the completion of the third act of reason—proving. Reasoning or proving is the act whereby the mind proceeds from a known truth to a new truth. Howe and Howe describe this complicated process best:

The new truth will be distinct from the previously known truth, but the latter is implied in the former. However, reasoning involves not only logical movement from premises to conclusion. Reasoning may also involve a movement from question to answer...Also, reasoning may be a movement from rhetoric to persuasion...Any progress of the mind from knowledge possessed to knowledge gained is an act of reasoning, and the act of reasoning may involve more than the strictly logical relations of premises to conclusions. (26)

This third act of reasoning is structurally dense but eventually allows for an individual to form a logical conclusion, which grows out of the first two acts of apprehension and judgment. It is this final act that allows for complete realization of an individual, object, theory, or concept. Furthermore, these acts of reason lead to the corresponding concept of objects of reason.

An object of reason is defined as whatever the mind can know by reason. It is a vague definition that is perhaps best understood via Howe and Howe, “Any object of reason can be grasped, understood either to be or not to be, and demonstrated, without any assumptions based on faith in divine revelation, to be true or false” (27). In many ways, reason serves as the direct opposite to the notion of faith; however, upon realizing that these two concepts find a way to harmoniously co-exist, one must inevitably attempt to determine and reconcile their relationship.

Many argue that faith is in fact contrary to reason insofar that faith requires believing in the unknown or mystical without empirical support. However, Christian doctrine intertwines these two notions in an attempt to prove that logical reason supports faith in God. From such a standpoint, trusting in God is extremely reasonable because He has demonstrated both His
faithfulness and trustworthiness repeatedly to His followers as seen through Scripture verses. It is by the very actions of God that He instills a sense of reasonable faith within Christian followers around the world (Howe and Howe 28). Yet three views on the existence of a relationship between these two ideas have proven quite prominent and deserve further exploration as well as a Christian rebuttal.

Faith absent reason is a theory that sets faith and reason into definitional opposing camps; it has proven to be one of the more popular injudicious notions. The hypothesis claims that matters of faith are extremely private whereas those involving reason are to be public. However, the Christian faith is comprised of claims and suppositions that involve reality; therefore, they are objective and not private. These claims include the notions of God as Creator and Jesus Christ as a Resurrected being. As such, these assertions can be investigated and given support philosophically, scientifically and historically—all of which are acts of reason (Howe and Howe 31).

Faith against reason is basically the notion that reason is useless in spiritual matters. This concept has had particular influence upon the Church if one recounts her historical nature. The heresy known as Fideism, as first purported by an early Church father Tertullian, claims that a person cannot reason about matters of the faith (Young 37). The Church defends this theory through the presentation of two distinct examples. First, Christianity relies upon the authoritative nature of the Bible, which is confirmed through the apostolic tradition. Secondly, the early Church fathers who condemned fideism used both common sense and, rather ironically, reason. Howe and Howe explain:

But if fideism offers any reasons why we should accept fideism, then it is using reason to say that we should not use reason, which is self-defeating…Though there are many things about God that are beyond our capacity to reason about, there are many things about God that are within the grasp of our reason, like the reasons the Bible gives for trusting God for our salvation. (32)
Ironically, it is the very argument that claims faith and reason to be at odds with one another that helps to further explain and give credit to the notion of faith and reason as existing within a symbiotic relationship.

The final view purports faith and reason as two extremely different halves of the same whole. Reason precedes faith insofar that it is able to demonstrate the overtures of faith, which include God’s existence, authority of the Bible, and the trustworthiness of the Bible as the Word of God. However, reason in no way leads to faith (Howe and Howe 35). Faith and reason are significantly different in both their definitions and functions; however, the two ideas complement one another and serve to further explain and explore the tenets of Christianity. It is through this cohabitation that an individual can fully grasp the importance of the Resurrected Jesus Christ within a 21st century mindset. It is by the very fact that Christians study the Bible and attempt to understand (reason) how it applies to life and what we believe (faith) that highlights their interlocking relationship. In closing, “reason does not cause faith, but our faith is not unreasonable” (Howe and Howe 36).

The controversy between faith and reason eventually culminates into two competing views of the Christian life with each offering a different response to the mysteries of the Christian faith. The first group accentuates the importance of faith and looks upon the mysteries with respect and awe. The second group highlights the act of reason and therefore looks upon the mysteries with fascination and enthrallment. Higgins further explains the exact nature of the latter group:

The allure of those mysteries compels these Christians to probe them more deeply. The question arises from a desire to understand more fully the mysteries of the faith. The Christian life for them is a constant exploration of the richness of God’s revelation…the preference…determines, in part, how one resolves the dilemma between faith and reason. (p. 117)
Higgins further explains that it is this exact group of individuals who look upon reason as a gift from the creator, which ultimately serves to lead them back to the Creator (109). Therefore, it is pertinent to find a balance between the models of faith and reason in order to fully understand the mysteries of the Christian faith and live a religious life, especially within a modern context.

The dilemma between faith and reason spans the entire history of the Christian Church. Modern-day expression of this issue has been highlighted by the scholar C.S. Lewis and via the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by Pope John Paul II. Lewis was a prolific author on the topic of Christian apologetics through which he attempted to defend his faith. Concerning the issue of faith and reason, Lewis believed that faith should be based upon the evidence and not in contradiction of said evidence (Purtill 72). In fact, Lewis believed that the majority of religious believers have held their beliefs on the basis of what they judge and eventually reason to qualify as good evidence. Lewis observed that, “[The] man who accepts Christianity always thinks he has good evidence whether like Dante’s scientific and philosophical arguments, or historical evidence, or the evidence of religious experience, or authority or all these together. For of course authority, however we may value it in this or that particular instance, is a kind of evidence” (as cited in Purtill 73). Moreover, Lewis contended that such belief and evidence must be placed against a backdrop of trust in God. It is this complete trust that allows for faith to serve as a commitment to God and express itself fully within the framework of reason. Lewis’ works emphasizing the cohesion of faith and reason were especially noteworthy when he began writing several decades ago. Similarly, the papal encyclical released by John Paul II also functions as a source of authority for this extensive subject.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical captures the very essence of the affiliation between faith and reason. He specifically examines the nature through which faith and reason can
The Validity of Christianity 12

simultaneously exist within the parameters of religious sensibilities. In *Fides et Ratio*, the late pope clearly outlines the perimeters throughout which faith and reason function in comparison to truth. Christians believe that true religion must be grounded in reality (Howe and Howe 24). Pope John Paul II further clarifies by claiming faith is necessary to highlight the path to reason, which ultimately leads to an expression of truth (as cited in Hemming and Parsons 109). Commenting upon the encyclical, Scola affirms that even if reason could not lay claim to faith, faith itself must be reasonable for it is deeply entrenched with truth in the human heart (263). The implications of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical are noticeable in his persistence that it is perhaps more important than ever for Christians to struggle to understand reason within their faith (Scola 264). As such, queries into this relationship have led to formations of Christian doctrine as well as current debates concerning cosmology. The first that shall be encountered is the history of dualism and its impact upon the Christian Church followed by the modernization of the historical debate concerning such a crisis of dualism.

**Dualism** is a pagan notion that originated among Greek scholars in an attempt to explain the act of creation. Unlike Christianity, Paganism was more interested in questioning how the natural world was ordered. They questioned the agent that imposed such order and the subsequent form such an instrument gave to the world. This pattern of belief supports two realms—the world of matter and that of divinity (DuBay 48; Young 17). Furthermore, dualism claims that the two worlds have co-existed with one another from all eternity; however, they are not equal. The realm of divinity is infinitely superior and imposed order upon the material realm bestowing upon the cosmos a sense of rationality (Young 18). In relation to creation, this concept of dualism was perhaps first presented by Plato in his dialogue, *Timaeus* (DuBay 48; Rubenstein 53; Young 27). Plato firmly asserts that the universe was the result of an eternal
mind that shaped the material universe to represent forms within the spiritual world (Young 27). Moreover, it is pertinent to note that by claiming such dualistic tendencies, Plato attributed no beginning to things.

Plato’s notion of creation persisted for numerous years and served as the dominant theory for the ancient world. However as the Christian Church began to establish herself as a formidable religion, the inevitable question of creation needed to be addressed (Solomon and Higgins 36). Dualism served as an opponent to Christianity for its very essence called into question the sovereignty of God—his total control of existence. The co-existence of the two realms implied a deep struggle between God and matter, which represented a grapple between the two worlds for control of the universal cosmos. For if matter co-exists with God then there inevitably exists a co-eternal principle that merely limits God (Young 27). Therefore, in an effort to counter this notion, the early Christian Church created its doctrine of creation known as *ex nihilo*. *Ex nihilo* clearly states that God created the material world out of nothing. More importantly, the doctrine reinforced the Christian belief that it was not creation that should be worshipped and admired, but creation’s Creator. Another development surrounding the debate between dualism and Christianity in the first and second centuries was the assertion by Justin Martyr, a second century apologist, that creation had a beginning and was no longer timeless (Papanikolaou 245; Young 28). Martyr’s obvious contradiction of Plato’s theory serves as one of the great dividing lines between Platonic and Christian thought. Although this classic debate with dualism seemed to strengthen the Church, it has led to a modern crisis between the secular and non-secular world.

Dualism operates as one of the most distinctive features of religion around the world. Additionally, it serves one of many factors that is responsible for a current crisis of faith that has
struck most of Europe and is slowly making its way West (DuBay 48; Philipse 33; Solomon and Higgins 75). In modern society, religion and faith have been increasingly identified as possessing dualistic tendencies (DuBay 48). This notion that has become popular among the masses is in direct contradiction with not only Christian doctrine, but also the major monotheistic religions of the world, which include Islam and Judaism. Along with the association between faith and dualism, this debate simultaneously coincides with the ever-popular argument concerning the separation between church and state. This is a dangerous connection to make for it ultimately leads to a desacrilizing effect upon the world (DuBay 48). The process of desacrilization results in a denaturing of religion that displaces both God’s place within the material world, along with that of human beings as God’s creatures. Moreover, certain sects of Christianity have attempted to override this desacrilization by emphasizing traditional religious customs.

In particular, the Catholicism facets of Christianity such as Roman Catholicism, Ukrainian Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox Catholicism have relied upon a sacramental framework for the physical world, which serves as a method of communication and connection between god and His people. This reliance ultimately serves as an attempt to strengthen the bond between faith and reason and not fall into the trap of dualism and subsequent desacrilization (DuBay 49). In opposition to this Catholic standpoint, Protestantism bases salvation upon the integrity of one’s faith over participation in the sacraments. This emphasis welcomes dualism into a Protestant’s structure of belief. The friction between Protestantism, Catholicism, and dualism represents one of the great religious problems of our age for it has fractured the ultimate religious notion of a belief in God by allowing the material world to gain too much prominence and thus threatening God’s sovereignty. Therefore, DuBay claims that
more often than not, “dualism drives people out of religion to agnosticism and atheism” (49). Consequently, dualism symbolizes a great deal of contradiction and conflict that divides religious people around the world and causes many to abandon their faith altogether (Philipse 33). While it is necessary to note the tension produced by dualism among the world’s religious followers as a whole, dualism also threatens to dismantle western monotheistic religions.

As a broad topic, dualism implies a disparity between God and the material universe. However, another facet of dualism is known as substance dualism and emphasizes that, “human beings consist of a material brain having causal interaction with a nonmaterial mind or soul” (Bielfeldt 153). This view basically avers that the mind is metaphysically separate from the body. The clash between this position and that of the major monotheistic religions rests in the perspective that such substance dualism is necessary to explain the possibility of survival after death and more importantly the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Baker 491; Bielfeldt 154). Christianity has countered this point by emphasizing its doctrine of the Resurrection, which alleges that Christ rose from the dead as an embodied being of both body and soul (Bielfeldt 154; Van Inwagen 480). Substance dualism also threatens Christianity by claiming:

…causal interaction that substance dualism posits between the disparate orders of God and the universe. If God’s action in the universe is conceived dualistically, then at least some physical events must have divine causes. Because all causal influence with which we are familiar is mediated through the transfer of energy, there must be some energy transfer from God into the universe. (Bielfeldt 154)

Eventually, substance dualism fails because, “it violates physical conservation principles and offers no coherent account of how to link two ontologically disparate orders of being” (Bielfeldt 154). Ancient philosophical ideas attack Christianity on one final front by maintaining a primordial pagan notion known as pantheism. This concept claims that God emanates His very essence and being throughout the universe and literally places Himself within the very midst of the universe (Bielfeldt 157; Solomon and Higgins 76; Young 28). Christianity continues to
counter this belief through her doctrines of *ex nihilo* and by declaring God to be a transcendent being that acts in the world by communicating with the physical universe through the sacraments and the Bible. As previously stated, the relationship between faith and reason has led to contestations among creation, dualism, and world religions. The association also calls into question the great cosmological arguments of the existence of God.

**Arguments for the Existence of God**

The existence of God has been a cause of great concern both within the religious communities and among their secular counterparts. The intricate, complicated, and sometimes unknowable quality of the faith and reason relationship has made efforts into this field occasionally murky but also widely fulfilling. Several arguments have been put forth that highlight the serpentine path towards contemplating the true existence of a higher being. Each of these opinions is built upon a foundation of the interconnections of faith and reason; therefore, each deserves supplementary attention and exploration. The following influential arguments have proven to be the most popular and shall be discussed: The Kalam Cosmological Argument, The Thomistic Cosmological Argument, The Moral Argument, and The Ontological Argument.

Primarily, it must be determined that a cosmological argument concludes that God exists as the cause of the universe. Building off of such a definition, the kalam argument conjectures the existence of God through the belief that the universe began to exist a finite time ago (Craig, “J. Howard” 566; Geivett 62). However, it is first necessary to understand the overarching nature of the kalam argument before questioning and discovering its specific points. This argument claims that the beginning of the universe implies the existence of a first cause, which possesses qualities uniquely attributed to God as the personal Creator of the universe (Geivett 62). Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this argument that sets it apart maintains that the
universe began to exist at a certain time. Additionally, this central aspect of the kalam argument has gathered an abundant amount of support from both philosophical and scientific literature and studies (Geivett 64). This fundamental and novel claim serves as the basis for the kalam cosmological argument.

The kalam contention purports that a finite amount of events were necessary in order to result in the creation of the universe (Craig, “Kalam” 103; Geivett 65). This principle underscores the importance of a cause and effect relationship. Nothing can exist without something causing it to come into being. However, this bit of circular reasoning eventually leads the intelligent being to question the fabrication of God. The kalam argument places prominence upon the notion that God does not need a cause, because He is not an event (Craig, “J. Howard” 573; Geivett 65). This convoluted theory is perhaps best explained by Geivett, “When the universe begins to exist, time itself begins. God sans creation is timeless, but begins to exist in time when he creates the universe and time itself. God’s beginning to exist in time entails that God begins to exist” (67). Yet, this explanation leaves one to question whether or not the beginning of the universe must even have a cause. The kalam explanation for such a conundrum is riddled with the understanding of an act of reason in existence along with its object of reason.

Again, it is crucial and extremely helpful to return to Geivett’s words and explanation:

As long as something identifiable can be reasonably proposed as the cause of the beginning of the universe, it will be more reasonable to infer the existence of that than to suppose that there is no cause at all. This is a principle of rationality. Reasonable belief is guided by what it makes the most sense to believe. A best explanation in terms of a cause provides better guidance about what to believe than no explanation at all. While it’s true that the best explanation for some puzzling state of affairs is not always the correct explanation, the best explanation is at least the one most likely to be true, all things considered—until more is known and some other explanation commends itself as better. (73-4).

The rationality and reasonability employed by various proponents of the argument highlight the sheer importance of reason’s influence upon faith. Since such an argument has concluded the
existence of the universe had a beginning and a cause, it is now prudent to turn towards
questioning if such a cause must be God.

The kalam argument does in fact profess such a truth via seven arguments that are
pertinent to possess a full understanding of such a claim. Initially, the description of the
argument itself alleges that there is much more to be known than merely what evidence can
supply. Therefore one should not exclaim there is nothing more to the Creator simply because of
a lack of evidence at this moment in time. Second, the kalam description of a first cause agent
overlaps with the God notion in classic theism thus adding weight to the kalam cosmological
argument. The third factor expresses the specific parallels between the kalam creator and the
God-Creator of the Bible. This harmonization allows for a unification message of a common
Creator Agent. Fourth, this Agent is not self-caused in that it is self-subsistent and is timeless.
Fifth, the Creator in the kalam theory is a mindful being that has acted with a purpose upon
creating the universe. Sixth, the production of such a physical universe out of nothing implies
unimaginable intelligence and power. Finally, the kalam argument claims that the entirety of the
physical universe serves as a claim to the all-encompassing powers of a Creator Being (Geivett
74-75). The kalam cosmological argument for the existence of God is an extensive case that
claims a finite universe and a timeless Agent who created the world out of nothing, but with a
knowledgeable purpose in mind. However, this cosmological argument is simply one rationale
for the existence of God.

Similar to the preceding argument, the Thomistic Cosmological Argument also concludes
that God is real because, “the things we see around us never exist unless something makes them
exist” (Beck 95). Any cosmological argument concludes that God is the first cause whose
function is to serve as the initiating source of existence. Furthermore, objects exist within the
physical world because they are caused to exist by the first cause (Beck 95). However, before delving deeper into the Thomistic school of cosmology, it is first prudent to understand Saint Aquinas’ position and teachings within the Church. Saint Thomas Aquinas was a particularly important scholar and theologian throughout the 13th century and he is currently revered as one of the most influential theologians within the Roman Catholic Church (Rubenstein 218; Solomon and Higgins 65). His main platform aimed to show that, “the Christian faith was grounded in reason and that the law inherent in nature is rational” (Solomon and Higgins 65). Aquinas’ influence upon placing faith within the context of reason led to an expression of philosophy that has dominated the Church, especially in recent years.

Aquinas was a prudent follower of Aristotle and as such embraced his teachings of the material world and the subsequent reasoning of a great being’s intellectual mind. He served as one of the first influential theologians and emphasized the importance of a relationship between faith and reason. He purported such concepts through two influential books: *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Beck 97; Burrell 74). His claims supported the notion of an interlocking connection that allowed truth in faith to be revealed through rationality (Solomon and Higgins 65; Swinburne 105). Solomon and Higgins succinctly sum up Aquinas’ viewpoints:

> Reason was an appropriate instrument for learning the truth about the natural world…But Thomas also considered the natural world to be a reflection of the law of God. In recognizing the intelligible structure of the world of everyday experience through reason therefore, human beings gain insight into the mind of God as well…Seeing the work of God’s law throughout the natural world, Thomas claimed that reason would be led to God by contemplating nature. (65-66)

The Thomistic view of faith heavily relies upon reason to serve as a framework and backbone for faith. Understanding St. Thomas Aquinas’ views on faith, reason, truth, and religion allow for a complete discussion on his cosmological view that examines the existence of God as the first cause.
Returning to Aquinas’ argument for the existence of God, he bases his inferences upon simple observations of the surrounding world. He places careful introspection upon causal connections as a concurrent series and not one going back in time. Furthermore, he focuses upon the individual as well as actual consequences and finds no need to speak of the universe as a whole (Beck 98; Solomon and Higgins 66). Using these tools to explore his cosmological theory, Aquinas details three aspects to serve as undercurrents in his argument.

The first premise of Aquinas’ cosmological argument states that, “what we observe in this universe is contingent” (Beck 99; Solomon and Higgins 66; Turner 203). This basis is insular in the fact that it is only intended to concern those things that have actually been observed as opposed to everything that exists in the universe. The key element of this principle is highlighted through its central focus upon contingency meaning that, “something owes its existence to something else; it does not exist in and of itself” (Beck 99). Furthermore, everything concept and object that mankind knows about follows this definition of contingency stressing once again that everything exists and functions only as it is caused by other factors in its causal chain. Perhaps the most important aspect of this idea professes that even if the universe turned out to have spontaneously initiated, it would have no effect upon the cosmological argument since nothing in this premise claims a sense of knowledge about everything—only observation (Beck 99). Aquinas’ initial assertion basically claims a causal existence of everything within the universe. It serves as his foremost premise from which the following two arguments are built.

Aquinas’ second argument of cosmology claims that “a sequence of causally related contingent things cannot be infinite” (Beck 99). Through this premise, Aquinas attempted to further understand issues of causality and infinity (Turner 204). Eventually, this idea claims that
if such a causal chain of events in the universe were to stretch on into infinity, nothing would be explained about the initial cause of such a sequence. Therefore, a causal series within the cosmos cannot stretch out into infinity—there must be some sort of first cause. Although throughout this second clause issues of an infinite cosmos are explored, it ultimately sets up the third premise, which deals with the topic of the finite.

The third and final premise of this argument proclaims that, “the sequence of causally dependent contingent things must be finite” (Beck 100). This theory fulfills the obvious conclusion set up from the previous premise (Turner 205). Beck explains best, “…there might exist infinite things but not an infinite network concurrently causally dependent, contingent things” (100). This foundational idea exclaims that since the universe is not infinite, it must in fact be a finite mechanism, which leads to a further supposition of a first cause in such a sequence of contingent causes.

The notion of the first cause, as supported by Aquinas, claims that regardless of how many causes there might be in the series, there must indeed be an initial cause for its subsequent series. This convoluted idea is perhaps best summed up by Beck:

This concept of “first cause” involves two component concepts. To say that it is the first cause is to say that it neither requires nor has a cause itself. First is first! Thus it is fundamentally different to from every other cause in the system: it is not contingent. It depends on, is limited by, or exists because of absolutely nothing else. It does not pass on causality it receives in a transferring relation; rather it strictly initiates causality. It is itself uncaused. (101)

Ultimately, this first cause is the cause of all things within the universe insofar that it initiates any and all causal sequences. Once again, it is perhaps useful to quote Beck for his thoughts on the first cause, “It is the initiating cause of existence of everything in the series of causes and exists without any cause or dependency whatsoever. It is strictly an uncaused cause” (101). Thomas Aquinas’ cosmological argument arrives at the same conclusion as Aristotle; however, the overall theory is at times convoluted. Eventually Aquinas’ suppositions lead to a conclusion
that proclaims the existence of a first cause or infinite creature that resembles a divine being described within Scripture. This conclusion therefore leads to a discussion concerning the nature of such a God.

The Thomistic cosmological argument collides with Greek thinking, specifically the work of a man known as Parmenides. He supported the notion of the universe as one simple uncaused thing as opposed to a network of interconnected things (Beck 101; Solomon and Higgins 30). Although Parmenides believed in the infinite universe, his very thoughts and beliefs forced him to seek out and define the characteristics of such a cosmos. These four definitions would eventually serve as subarguments in support of a God as laid out by Aquinas.

The initial notion describes the first cause in reference to its uniqueness. According to the principles of reason and rationality, the initial cause is defined as such for it is the origin of all things (Beck 102). By itself, this first cause produces the sequence of causal events, which unmistakably come to form the universe. Following uniqueness, Parmenides’ second argument describes the simplicity of the first cause. Through this theory, it is pointed out that God has no parts, does not change, and is all one thing (Beck 102). The importance of this notion is the conclusion that God cannot be limited in His acts of causality. These two arguments may seem abstract and merely theoretical; however, together they investigate the meaning of faith and reason and have assisted the Church in creating some of her most important doctrines. Beck describes such a connection eloquently:

That there is only one God is crucial enough, and so is the point that God is what he is without change. Put together, these arguments form boundaries for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. That is, there is only one God, not three, and he does not have internal divisions or parts. The biblical data has to be compiled in a way that fits these logical boundaries. (103)

Parmenides’ foremost arguments assist in setting up the framework for the actions of faith and reason within the boundaries of the Christian religion. His explorations ultimately led to further
conclusions of an intermingling relationship between the two that must rely upon a first cause. While his initial two subarguments are rather abstract, they also provide the foundational basis for his final two premises.

The third idea purported by Parmenides defines the uncaused first cause as a being of perfection. The first cause is ideal because it exists in and of itself and suffers from no limitations thus existing in a state without restrictions. This argument is followed by his fourth and final notion of God as possessing a sense of personhood. Both Aquinas and Parmenides exclaim that God possesses both knowledge and will. Furthermore, the very act of God knowing Himself as the first cause involves a sense of perfect knowing that is truly rational and logical as only existing unto God (Beck 103). Once again, Aquinas has merged the aspects of faith in God with a sense of rationality and reasonability. Moreover, Beck sums up the issue of God and personhood within the cosmological argument rather articulately, “Put briefly, since the universe contains persons who are rational, social, moral and free, how could the first cause of all things be any less than a person? In particular, if the first cause if both uncaused and explains itself, then it must be free, not determined” (103-4). In closing, it is significant to mention and grasp that Parmenides’ subarguments combined with Aquinas’ premises provide the basis for a more fully developed concept of God. Now that the two major cosmological arguments for God’s existence have been explored, it is necessary to turn one’s attention to other possible explanations and theories.

The third contention for the existence of God is referred to as the moral argument. This premise sets up five main ideas that serve as the foundation for the moral debate and subsequent conclusion in support for the existence of God. The first notion claims that basic moral values do in fact exist and that there is no good reason to deny them. Furthermore, humans have dignity
because they were fashioned in the image of God who is the source of all goodness and morality (Copan 109; Martin 828). Simply put, “Naturalism cannot adequately account for moral obligation or human rights since valueless processes cannot conceivably produce valuable personal beings. If God doesn’t exist, then objective moral values and rights don’t exist” (Copan 109). Moreover, morality is not the byproduct of any evolutionary forces, but rather reinforces our human dignity as bestowed by God. “Finally, nontheists may argue that if God exists, then God’s commands or character must be subject to nonarbitrary principles of goodness that are independent of God; so moral values can exist independently of God” (Copan 109). The subargument even claims that such moral values and dignity are in fact supported by atheists who are forced to recognize the intrinsic connection between God and objective human dignity and morals. However, it is by the very interconnected and inherent relationship between faith and reason that theological scholars are able to declare that such moral values and human dignity have their basis in the Creator God.

Parallel to the faith and reason relationship there is an intrinsic connection between God and objective moral values along with human dignity. Support for this notion has ironically enough come from astute and intellectual atheists who recognize the existence of morality, but cannot trace its origin to any scientific or philosophical source (Martin 829). It is permissible to use remarks by such atheists for support of the morality-God association because, “all humans are hard-wired the same way: they are made to function properly when living morally. This moral awareness is part of God’s general self-revelation. We see something of God in the moral order of the universe” (Copan 112). The concept of morality is a tough one to grasp given that many people do in fact acknowledge such a sensation and awareness of right and wrong; however, they cannot pinpoint its cause or connotation without first acknowledging a divine
being in the sense of a God. Copan explains the relationship between morality and God effortlessly:

Theism is the more natural context...Given materialistic, impersonal, nonconscious, valueless, deterministic processes, the atheist is hard pressed to account for personal self-conscious, valuable, morally responsible persons. Theism offers a better fit, and this fit is one important basis for affirming one context (in this case, theism) and rejecting another (naturalism). The reason theism makes more sense here is that personhood and morality are necessarily connected. That is, moral values are rooted in personhood. Without God (a personal Being), no persons—and thus no moral values—would exist at all. (113)

In conclusion, the moral assertion for proof of God’s existence via the presence of morality and human dignity claims that there is the necessity for such a divine being (Copan 113). This argument points to a personal God to whom the human race is responsible. Therefore, only if God exists can such moral properties found in the world be realized and logically affirmed through such reasoning. However this is only one of several arguments that petition for the existence of God.

The fourth and final argument that shall be explored is known as the Ontological Argument. Such an argument holds that the very concept and definition of a divine being, such as God, affirms his existence (Craig, “Ontological” 125; Solomon and Higgins 63). Solomon and Higgins explain this argument best, “Ontological proof argues that the very definition of God implies God’s existence. God, according to Anslem [an 11th century scholar], is “that than which none greater can be conceived...God is by definition the most perfect being and so no greater being can be conceived” (64). In his work entitled “The Ontological Argument,” Craig concurs, “the common thread in ontological arguments is that they try to deduce the existence of God from the very concept of God...claim that once we understand what God is—...the most perfect being or the most real being—then we shall see that such a being must in fact exist” (125). The ontological argument follows very closely with the moral argument, but goes one step further to claim that it is necessary to accept the definition and conception of God as the
most perfect conceivable being, because then the logical mind is forced to commit to the existence of God (Craig, “Ontological” 133; Solomon and Higgins 64). Moreover, the ontological theory goes even further to hypothesize the existence of God within the framework of an omnipotent and omniscient being.

One modern, influential philosopher who concurs with the ontological argument is Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga assumes that the concept of “God” is a coherent concept and thus gives support for the existence of God within the world (Craig, “Ontological” 125). It is perhaps prudent to outline Plantinga’s argument form before discussing his conclusions. Craig once again outlines the premises effectively:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being exists.
2. If it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, then it exists in every possible world.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then it exists in the actual world.
5. If a maximally great being exists in the actual world, then a maximally great being exists.

(“Ontological” 128)

To many followers of ontology and Plantinga, his argument is substantiated through reasonable thinking and logical contemplation. Supporters of this belief argue that the conclusion and its premises are true, because the initial idea is coherent and rational—it is philosophically and scientifically correct to presume that such an all-powerful being exists (Craig. “Ontological” 127-9). Using deductive reasoning skills along with the classic philosophical argument form offered above, the ontological theory proposes that such an omnipotent being exists due to the very definition and conceptual formulation of such a being.

Each of the four arguments for the existence of God presented here have been formed against the backbone of the formidable and compelling relationship that exists between faith and reason. Furthermore, this debate concerning the existence of God has assisted the Christian Church in affirming her divine truthfulness and claims of salvation. Especially through the work
of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Church has been able to combine the aspects of faith and reason to arrive at a logical conclusion for the existence of God. While it is not necessary to go into an in-depth history of the exact nature of Jesus Christ, it is through the affirmation of the existence of God that salvation is ultimately able to be brought through Him. Moreover, just as this association between faith and reason has served as the foundation to explain the existence of God and the truth of Christianity, it has also served as fodder for modern debates of various religious institutions that challenge the Christian faith.

**Religious Challenges to the Christian Faith**

Throughout this paper, the issues of reason, faith, truth, and the existence of God have all been covered in attempt to further validate the essence of God’s being within the universe. However, the strength and truthfulness of the Christian religion is constantly called into question even though it persists as the largest religion around the world (McFaul 31). Higgins’ work deals with twelve major theological dilemmas, one of which explores both the role and validity of the Christian religion operating in a world with numerous other religions.

Ultimately the question posed inquires if Christianity is the only true religion. Higgins poses such a dilemma expressively:

> Is Christianity the only true religion? On one hand, it would seem that either Christianity is right and all other religions are wrong or vice versa. After all, Christianity is based on two claims: There is one God and Jesus is God’s definitive revealer. To argue that there is not one God (as, for example, is the case of Hinduism) or that Jesus is not the most important of God’s messengers (as, for example, is the case in Islam) is to make a claim which is simply incompatible with Christianity. There is either one God or many gods. Either Christ is God’s definitive revealer or he is not. Both claims cannot be true. (57)

While the previous view succinctly explains the issue with other religions from a Christian standpoint, there still exists the ever-growing power and popularity of these other faiths. Therefore, it is necessary to explore four pertinent arguments that stand in opposition to
Christianity; yet, ultimately allow the Church to proclaim its stance as a true religion through the Incarnation and salvation brought by Jesus Christ.

The first argument that stands in contradiction to the Christian faith is a set of dual concepts that shall be explored together known as religious pluralism and Christian exclusivism. The first one that shall be discussed is the aspect of religious pluralism. Clark provides an adequate definition, “Religious pluralism states: Any (or perhaps all) religions lead to God or salvation. Following any religious path enables believer to reach the religious goal” (292). Fletcher explains the same concept in a different manner, “…the idea of religious pluralism…that among humanity there are many different religions” (17). The basic concept of religious pluralism is a philosophical notion that many religions exist within the world and each leads to salvation. Furthermore, pluralism attempts to answer the question of salvation while ignoring that of truth (Clark 303). However, several forms, subtleties, and premises are covered under the wide umbrella of pluralism that color its definition and deserve to be further investigated.

One form of pluralism interprets all religions as true in the sense that they produce valuable results. However, it is important to note that this view simply claims that religion is useful, not necessarily truthful. The main force driving this argument insists that the majority of faiths produce emotionally mature and adapted citizens, thus religious faiths are merely deducible to being valuable and useful (Clark 301). This aspect of pluralism threatens the Christian faith, because it reduces the magnanimous and extraordinary dogmas and doctrines of the faith into nothing more than a useful tool to teach individuals how to became productive members of society.
Another aspect of the pluralistic theory focuses upon the prospect of defining God and is fluently described by Clark:

…God is completely infinite and therefore unknowable. This form of pluralism uses the phrase ‘Ultimate Reality,” which is supposedly more neutral…This stance honestly acknowledges that all religious concepts are equally far from God. Yet this view interprets all the religious experiences in the various religions as real encounters with God. We can’t know anything of Reality, but we can experience it. (302)

This feature of pluralism emphasizes the relativity of all religions and eventually claims that no religion can ever fully describe the “Ultimate Reality” (Ferré 289). The classic failure represented in this facet of pluralism once again diminishes the truth in any religion and fails to conceptualize the “Ultimate Reality” for it implies an inconsistency found in many religions that needs to be avoided. Once again, pluralism is involved in a dissociation of faith and reason by attempting to separate the two concepts as incompatible and detrimental to religion as a whole.

Overall, all aspects of pluralism serve as a hindrance to the Christian faith and pose as a threat to the faith and reason relationship that is clearly such a defining aspect of Christianity. The pluralistic movement fractures the delicate association by placing the faith aspect into a state of subordination to reason. Ultimately, however, it was such claims professed by pluralism and other threats to Christianity that allowed the faith and reason relationship to fully bloom into a concrete association that can stand the test of time and prove victoriously valid for the Christian faith. For without various contenders to Christianity’s claim of a harmonious faith and reason connection, the religion would not have articulated the definition and importance of such a relationship.

The second in the presented series of threats has been termed religious exclusivism. Once again, it is advantageous to turn towards Clark’s coherent definition:

only one true religion leads to God. Attaining the spiritual goal requires a believer to find and follow the one true faith, for other religious paths will not lead to the spiritual goal. But exclusivism doesn’t deny religious variety…exclusivism doesn’t reject religious freedom. In fact, most exclusivists in the West happily accept them. Exclusivism requires the denial only of
However, exclusivism falls into a trap of hypocrisy.

In opposition to pluralism, exclusivism focuses upon the question of truth as its only objective. Exclusivism yearns to discover the divine truth that will lead all beings on a spiritual quest to salvation. However, the question of the validity of such an expedition is exclusivism’s only purpose and although it acknowledges the existence of other religions, it contradicts its core meaning by condoning several religions at the same time. Clark explains more simply:

…if exclusivism is about the truth question and only one religion is deeply true, other religions teach many true things…If Christianity is deeply true, Buddhists are right that suffering is universal. Muslims are right to believe in one God…So exclusivism regarding the truth question means that only one religion is right on the most central of religious questions. It doesn’t mean either that this one religions is right about everything or that all other religions are wrong about everything. (295)

Ultimately exclusivism’s internal incongruities characterize a threat to Christianity in a similar manner as pluralism, whereby both attempt to dislodge faith and reason from their unique relationship. While pluralism attempts to place reason on a pedestal, so does exclusivism endeavor to epitomize the importance of faith over logical reasoning. Yet exclusivism obviously falls into such a trap by claiming there to be one true religion, but in reality affirms many. While exclusivism and pluralism are not religious institutions, they continue to function in opposition to the Christian faith and pose a threat to her internal structure. However it is perhaps more useful now to turn towards two major world religions that uphold such diverse and different beliefs from Christianity that they inevitably threaten the faith.

The final two threats to the Christian faith that assist in causing a disruption between the flow of faith and reason are Middle-Eastern religions that are becoming increasingly popular. While Christianity boasts the most followers worldwide, Islam and Hinduism come in a close second and third, respectively. Nearly 2.1 billion individuals adhere to the Christian faith while 1.3 billion follow the rules of Muhammad and Allah and 900 million are loyal to the Hindu
The Validity of Christianity 31

tradition (McFaul 31). The increasing attractiveness of these religions towards a more spiritual-minded belief system has resulted in friction within the internal belief structure of Christianity. While all efforts in the 21st century are aimed towards a peaceful cohabitation of all religions, Hinduism and Islam still stand in stark contrast to Christianity and threaten the belief structure of the religion as a whole.

The center of the Hindu religion resides in the subcontinent of India. As such, Hindus focus on self-improvement with the general aim of attaining first-hand personal and spiritual experiences (Asad 8; Busse 155). Zacharias describes several basic aspects of this religion, which provide an adequate definition to begin such a discussion of Hinduism in relation to Christianity:

Karma, the moral law of cause and effect, is tacitly believed and assumed. Life carries its moral bills and they are paid in the cyclical pattern of rebirth till all dues are paid in full. The repercussions of fatalism and the indifference to the plight of others are inescapable but dismissed by philosophical platitudes that do not weight out the consequences of such reasoning...Life is a form of suffering. This is universal, and pain provides the context of our pursuit. (315)

Hinduism and Christianity both place a high emphasis upon morality as it relates to the human being. However, Hindus are much more fatalistic in their views on pain whereas Christians have an understanding of the power of forgiveness from God. Yet Hinduism is ruled by a popular Eastern conception known as pantheism.

The very essence of this religion has an underlying current of pantheism, which stands in complete cultural contrast to the mostly western religion of Christianity. Therefore, possibly the biggest obstacle for a complete understanding of these two religions is the culture barrier, especially in light of Hinduism’s eastern pantheistic framework (Zacharias 308). While the cultural differences between these two religions are highly important to explore, they are ultimately interwoven with the basic definitions of these religions that together serve as roadblocks to further understanding.
Hinduism serves as a religion expressed by transcendental meditation full of philosophy and mysticism. Insofar that, “…any doctrine that smacks of biblical teaching is castigated as being divisive and a cultural imposition, while the fundamental beliefs that have spawned the nebulous world of value without doctrine are the grand elephant that the doctrinaire misconstrues…” (Zacharias 310). The basis of the Hindu religion is an ancient pagan philosophy known as pantheism. As mentioned previously, pantheism supports the notion that God has emanated from Himself a divine essence in order to create and form the universe (Bielfeldt 157; Solomon and Higgins 76; Young 28). But such spirituality is often portrayed as being all-embracing and mystical while it downplays the Christian faith into nothing more than a judgmental and exclusionist religion that is intolerant of other religions and peoples (Ferré 289; Zacharias 310). This division parallels Hinduism’s attempts to dislodge the faith and reason relationship that is such a foundational aspect of Christianity.

As previously discussed throughout the exploration of other threats, Christianity is based upon its commitment to the truth. The religious faith proclaims that only through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has salvation been brought to the world. Hinduism challenges this belief on several fronts, especially due to its foundational elements as a “philosophy of values,” best highlighted by Mahadevan:

Facts as such do not fascinate the Indian philosopher except as revealers of value. The discoveries of facts about the laws that govern them is the business of science and not of philosophy. Philosophical inquiry...must lead to the apprehension of value. Any metaphysical investigation which does not so lead is generally compared to such futile occupations as examining the teeth of a crow. Logic is a useful instrument of catharsis by means of which the philosopher rescues his intellect from obscure and conflicting conceptions, and from unreflective modes of thinking. It is of negative help insofar as it may clear away impossible ideas about the nature of reality, self-contradictory notions, and uncritical dogmas. It is the purified intellect that is said to become the instrument of intuition…When logic degenerates into logic-chopping, reveling in a mere display of fine-spun theories, it is worse than useless to the philosopher, because it does not then aid in the process of discovering and realizing the supreme value….A philosophy is to be judged by its fruits; and the final fruit of philosophy is the experience of value. (152)
Mahadevan’s words briefly detail the influence that pantheism, an eastern stream of thought, has had upon Hinduism. As a “philosophy of values,” Hinduism stresses the importance of a mystical faith that rules their lives and must be adhered to in order to transcend beyond reincarnation. However, this practice is often to the detriment of logical reasoning and thus sets up a discussion based upon faith and reason within the Christian Church.

Perhaps it is prudent to begin with a quote from Zacharias, who uses an analogy to explain some pertinent aspects of Hinduism:

> The world is not being constructed on reclaimed land from the sea of faith in which we seek common values without finding common reasons from which those values stem. Yet the deeper one probes into the reasoning, the more one has to wonder whether this disjunction between values and reasons will sooner or later take away from us the water of life.” (310)

Perchance the crux of the opposition between Hinduism and Christianity rests in the very definitional aspects of their religion based upon faith and reason. For Christianity, the combination of faith and reason existing in an interdependent relationship is the foundational basis of the religion. Together, the two concepts form the very essence of religion, which strives towards expressing itself as truthful. Reasoning gives logical support for believing in acts of faith without scientific evidence. However, Hinduism threatens this truthfulness by placing too much emphasis on the spirituality and mysticism of a faithful life, which effectively cuts out all reasoning aspects. Once again, Zacharias explains that, “Religion [Hinduism] is not a commitment to propositional truth or the world as an object of reason” (315). This precise foundational aspect of Hinduism contradicts the very basis of Christianity, which places so much emphasis upon faith and reason. Although Hinduism exists as a threat to the Christian faith, it is only the third most popular religion (fourth if one considers atheists and agnostics); it has not been the subject of public scrutiny and media attention (McFaul 31). Islam has arrived at the forefront of much speculation and undue criticism since September 11, 2001; however, one
needs to examine Islam’s basic core belief structure to discover how the religion threatens to dismantle the basic foundations of the Christian faith.

The Islamic religion was founded by the prophet Muhammad during the seventh century (Asad 196; Busse 9; Fletcher 1). Adherents to this religion believe that God revealed the Qur’an as a more complete version of the Christian Bible to His last prophet, Muhammad. Believers in the Islamic faith, Muslims, do not believe that Muhammad founded a new religion rather they believe that Islam serves as the fulfillment of the ancient promise by God to Abraham; therefore, it is meant to supersede Judaism and Christianity (Asad 197, Fletcher 7, Neuwirth 316). Yet, Saleeb explains, “…the most significant challenge of Islam to the Christian faith has to do more with Islamic theology [where] we find the source of Islam’s fundamental opposition to Christianity…Islam challenges every single foundational doctrine in the Christian faith” (350). However before turning to examine the four major threats, it is first necessary to explore the five articles that define the Islamic faith.

The first and most important belief in Islam celebrates the absolute oneness of God. One of the most prominent Muslim thinkers in the West during the 20th century explains it adequately, “There can be no doubt that the essence of Islam is al-tawhid, the act of affirming Allah to be the One, the Absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord and Master of all that is” (al-Faruqi, “Al-Tawhid” 17). The claim of the absolute oneness and sovereignty of Allah is the single unifying theme throughout Islam (al-Faruqi, “Al-Tawhid” 17; Saleeb 351). This monotheistic trait of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God is also supported by Christianity (Mojzes and Swidler 80). Following the presence of God, Muslims have a strong sense of trust in his prophets.
The Validity of Christianity 35

The second article that Muslims believe in supports the notion of prophets being sent by God to serve as messengers to His people. Islamic tradition states that while humans are not fallen or sinful creatures (as is purported by Christianity via Original Sin), they are very prone to be led astray from the path that leads to true worship. Therefore, God has sent nearly 124,000 messengers to all humans and cultures to teach the Islamic message of submission to God and to guide His people towards living a more proper life of worship (Fletcher 4; Saleeb 352). However, Saleeb explains an important caveat to this notion, “…despite the claimed equality, most Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final and the greatest prophet of God and His message of Islam is the only uncorrupted, complete and thus the only universally valid message for all humanity” (352). With an understanding of God’s messengers, Muslims next turn towards their words.

The third aspect of the Islamic faith centers upon the scriptures bestowed by God’s prophets. These books are to serve as an expression of God’s message for His people. According to Islam, the only authentic and complete book of God in existence is the Qur’an, which Muslims believe was revealed to Muhammad over a period of nearly 20 years from 610-632 A.D. (Neuwirth 316; Saleeb 351). They also support the notion that these books represent the literal words of God, because they were dictated to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel (Asad 237; Saleeb 352). Similarly, the core of the Christian belief can be found in her Scriptures via the Bible. Mojzes and Leonard explain more fully:

…Abrahamic religions believe that God and human beings can and should communicate with each other. God communicates to people by revelation, one of the most important of which is revelation through prophets. Their revelations are recorded in the Holy Scriptures of each religion. While the Holy Scriptures…are not identical…[they] acknowledge God’s truth…It is the duty of people to read or listen to God’s Holy Writings and to respond with prayer, praise, and an appropriate acceptance of God’s commandments for how we live. (80)

Now, Islam turns from the Word of God to His agents.
The fourth article that is archetypal of the Islamic religion centers around a belief in angels who serve as invisible representatives of God. Angels are meant to be in communion with God as servers and worshippers; however, they also interact with human beings in order to provide protection from evil and receive their souls at the moment of death (Saleeb 352). Christianity also holds a similar function of angels as prophets and servers in accordance with God (Mojzes and Swidler 80). The final article that shall be explored next deals with the final day.

The fifth aspect of Islam deals with warnings from the Qur’an to God’s people that there will be a final day of judgment when people will have to account for their life’s work. Muslims believe that, “life has a moral purpose and those who fulfill their purpose with true worship and righteous deeds earn eternal paradise. Those who reject God’s message of guidance and whose bad deeds outweigh their good deeds will suffer eternally in hell” (Saleeb 353). An essential aspect of a Muslim’s life is to accumulate merits and good works in order to earn salvation. Now while Christianity supports the existence of a heaven and hell based upon one’s moral actions, it does not support the idea of having to earn salvation. Christian tradition claims that such salvation was bestowed upon God’s people by the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Along with these five articles of faith, Islam also claims five pillars, which deal with committing good deeds and living a righteous life under God. However, it is through an understanding of the five articles that one can now recognize and explore the four ways through which the Islamic theology threatens the Christian faith. Saleeb provides a brief overview of the concepts that Islam challenges in Christianity:

Islam denies the Christian doctrine of God, especially the biblical view of the fatherhood of God and the doctrine of the Trinity. Islam denies the Christian view of human beings, in particular the doctrines of sin and salvation. Islam unequivocally disputes the biblical view of Christ in regard to his death and deity. And finally Islam rejects the authenticity and authority of the Christian Scriptures. (354)
Each of these issues represents a specific theological challenge that Islam presents against the Christian faith and shall be further explored.

The first issue that Islam presents to Christianity is that of the doctrine of God. While each religion recognizes the omnipotent power of a monotheistic God, the Islamic religion rejects several Christian notions such as the fatherhood of God as well as the Trinitarian nature of such a God (Saleeb 356). For a Muslim, such issues are disrespectful to God for they bring the divine being down to a human level and introduce logical contradictions that disagree with the essence of pure monotheism. Islam challenges the very heart of Christian doctrine—the incarnation—and Saleeb describes this friction, “Islam sees itself as God’s final religion to humanity with the basic message that there is no god but the One true God (Allah)…This [Islam] is the purest form of monotheism, i.e., the worship of Allah who has neither begotten or beget nor had any associates with Him in His Godhead” (356). In addition to attacking the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, Muslims also refute the notion of the Trinity.

The doctrine of the Trinity states that there exists one God in three beings. Many Muslims claim that this is a contradiction to the orthodox nature of a monotheistic God and thus Christianity is a false religion. However, what is important to understand about Christianity and her doctrine of the Trinity is that, “Christians do not affirm God to be three persons at the same time and in the same sense. What Christians claim is that in one sense God is one and in a very different sense there is a divine plurality (three eternal “persons” or distinctions…” (Saleeb 357). According to such a belief structure, there is no logical contradiction to be applied to this doctrine as Muslims contest. Once again, it is an obvious argument between the foundational relationship of faith and reason. Furthermore, the basic disagreement between Muslims and
Christians on the topic of the Trinity has to deal with the very character of God, who He is, what He has done and His ultimate purposes in history (Saleeb 359).

The major Christian doctrines that Islam challenges are all based upon the existence of God’s character as revealed through the Bible. The narratives, which reveal God’s character, ultimately prove that His acts in history speak to His people to display His true nature. The Islamic emphasis is based upon God only revealing His will, not His person. Furthermore, the God of the Bible wants to be known to His followers in a personal and intimate relationship while Muslims emphasize the utter transcendence of God. Christians believe in a loving God who is engaged with the suffering of humans due to the fall from Original Sin, whereas Islam sees its God as a judge who is to be feared (Saleeb 359). Following the threat to the doctrine of God, the next issue between the two religions focuses upon human beings.

The second matter through which Islam conflicts with Christianity deals with the very nature and essence of God’s people. Muslims view themselves as special creations of God who were created for the sole purpose of serving and worshipping only Allah. While Christians also believe that they are to worship one God, it is routed in the doctrine of Original Sin that views human beings as fallen creatures who are born sinful. Islamic theology strongly disagrees with the Christian concept of sin and its subsequent development of salvation. As al-Faruqi explains,

\[
\text{In the Islamic view, human beings are no more ‘fallen’ than they are ‘saved.’ Because they are not ‘fallen,’ they have no need of a savior. But because they are not ‘saved’ either, they need to do good works—and do them ethically—which alone will earn them the desired ‘salvation’…Islam teaches that people are born innocent and remain so until each makes him or herself guilty by a guilty deed. (“Islam” 9)}
\]

The very act of denying salvation opposes the precise essence of Christianity as represented through the Incarnation and Original Sin.

The doctrine of Original Sin as represented by the Christian faith is perhaps the doctrine with the most empirical verification supporting its standards. Saleeb elaborates that, “it is
Beyond doubt and a matter of simple observation that human beings and the social environments they create have been and continue to be deeply flawed and broken” (361). For if people are born in a total state of innocence as Islam claims, why is there an almost universal recognition that no one is perfect and everybody sins? Furthermore, why isn’t there a significant percentage of the population that remains sinless if everyone is born that way? Perhaps the best display of the major disagreement concerning these doctrines has been expressed by Saleeb:

…in regard to the doctrine of atonement, it is not Christianity that has deviated from the path of God’s previous prophets, but Islam. By denying the necessity of atonement and insisting that good works is all that is needed to obtain salvation, Islam has completely disregarded the entire witness of the Old Testament Scriptures and the consistent teaching through the Torah (found especially in the sacrificial system of Leviticus) that the sinful human being cannot approach a holy God without the provision of a sacrificial atonement. It is the Christian view of the cross that is the reasonable and climactic conclusion of God’s revelation in the Old Testament, not the Islamic denial of it. (362)

Yet, this notion circles right back around to the disagreement based upon God’s character. Christians view the essence of God’s character as being based upon love (Saleeb 362). With this notion in mind, a follower of the faith can easily accept his or her state of Original Sin and God’s salvation through Jesus Christ. However denying that claim, such as in Islam, leaves Muslims with a cold and impersonal relationship with God that depends solely upon one’s actions in this life to obtain salvation. Following this issue, it is the very stake of the Incarnation—Jesus—that serves as Islam’s next threat.

In regards to the issue of Jesus Christ, the Islamic religion does acknowledge many truths about Him such as His virgin birth and His ability to do miracles; however, Muslims deny His deity and death (Busse 118). It is however pertinent to point out that Christian theology does not elevate a human being to the status of God neither is Jesus the Son of God in a physical or biological sense. Islamic tradition tends to misunderstand this basic aspect of the doctrine of the Incarnation and thus the very essence of Jesus Christ (Saleeb 363). Moreover, both the Islamic Qur’an and the Christian Bible have a strong foundational element of the stories found within the
Christian New Testament book, which describes the life and works of Christ (Busse 119). Yet, many Muslims specifically refute specific evidence found in the New Testament that proclaims the divinity of Christ, which is clearly specified throughout His ministry as seen via these narratives. Nonetheless, Islam continues to question Jesus’ claims as God and His statements of worship (Saleeb 365). Not only do Muslims fervently deny the divinity of Christ, they also deny His death via crucifixion.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ serves as one of the most important and crucial aspects of Christianity. It is on this point in particular that Muslims aggressively divide. Saleeb states this denial and inconsistency rather well:

> When we come to the topic of Jesus’ crucifixion, we can be confident that we are standing on the firmest historical grounds of our faith, whereas, exactly at this point, the Qur’an faces its weakest historical claim. If there is one thing that all biblical scholars across the whole theological spectrum agree about the historical Jesus, even all the liberal scholars whom Muslims love to quote, is the fact that Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross. The significance and the aftermath of the cross are hotly debated issues, but the fact of his death by crucifixion is beyond historical doubt. (366).

Although historically the crucifixion of Jesus is adapted as truth, the Islamic faith discounts this act and claims it to be a hoax insofar that Jesus was merely saved in an attempt to fulfill his prophethood in a similar manner as the other prophets who had escaped death (Busse 133). Yet, the denial of the crucifixion by the Islamic faith does so in three major ways for which Muslims have failed to provide any satisfactory answers.

The first issue questions that if Jesus were not crucified how can history account for the utter conviction of every single apostle and disciple and writer of the New Testament, which Muslims adopted, that exclaims the crucifixion to be the cornerstone of the Christian faith? (Saleeb 367). The cross serves as the absolute foundation for understanding the nature of Jesus and what His actions have done for humanity via the expression of salvation. The second issue is a logical progression from the first: if there is no cross, there is no Resurrection. One popular
claim of Muslims is that someone else died on the cross instead of Jesus (Busse 133; Saleeb 367). However, if this were true then how does Islam account for the numerous accounts of the appearances of the Resurrected Jesus as written in the Gospels? The third problem Muslims possess towards the cross is the very issue of how such a negation of the crucifixion affects the characterization of God. This main issue is adequately covered in the following manner:

If God really rescued Jesus from suffering on the cross and instead made it only appear like that to the people (as Muslims believe) wouldn’t this act involve God in the greatest act of deception in human history? Muslims must thus conclude that God not only deceived the disciples of Jesus and all the subsequent generations of Christians from the very beginning, but also that he allowed this deception to continue unchallenged for six hundred years till the advent of the Qur’an. These are very serious questions that most Muslims would rather ignore than face with honesty and historical scholarship. (Saleeb 368)

Questioning the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus fractures the entire framework of the New Testament and subsequent expression of salvation through the Christian religion. This particular Islamic threat dismantles the very foundation of Christianity and Islam's own expression of the New Testament through the Qur’an.

The final threat Islam produces against Christianity surrounds the presence of the Bible. The underlying conviction behind all the Muslim charges against Christian theology is the Islamic rejection of Christian Scriptures. Islam claims that the Bible has been corrupted and has lost its purity and original form that was revealed by God to His prophets, which effectively results in defacing the Bible of its authority (Saleeb 368). While the Christian Church has opposed such claims by citing the work of Saint Irenaeus and others who formed systematicologies in the period of the early Church, modern scholars have pointed out significant lines of thought that deal with this Islamic claim and the most popular shall be discussed.

The dilemma present in this Muslim position on the Bible is obvious when the Qur’an is fully examined, because it speaks of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in such a positive and encouraging manner. The Qur’an repeatedly refers to the Bible as the “Word of God” and
frequently advises its readers that the Qur’an has come in confirmation and fulfillment of the previous scriptures; therefore, Muslims are commanded to believe in such works. Yet, how is it possible for the Jewish and Christian Scriptures to have such a totally corrupt Bible if they are praised in the Qur’an and even commanded to be followed? If the Bible was in fact corrupt before the advent of Islam and the Qur’an, then the book itself affirms an illegitimate source. If Muslims claim that the corruption occurred after the seventh century, scholars can point towards the many manuscripts of the Bible that predate the Qur’an by centuries (Saleeb 369).

The numerous threats purported by the Islamic faith that have been explored all serve to fracture the very essence of the faith and reason relationship of Christianity, which expresses the innate truthfulness of the religion. Calling into question the very character of God’s nature by discrediting reasonable thinking puts faith on such a pedestal that allows for extremists to distort the Muslim religion. In relation to Christianity, questioning God’s intentions reduces Him to a sort of Platonic demiurge where the realm of divinity is praised over the evil world of matter. Yet the Christian God is one of love and respect who has acted in such a way as to facilitate relationships with His people to encourage moral behavior as well as spiritual existence. Whereas Islam destroys the inter-workings of faith and reason, Christianity uplifts them and praises them thus allowing Christians to use logical and reasonable thinking to defend their faith.

Since the beginning of the Christian faith nearly two millennia ago, questions concerning its true nature have been a constant source of debate. Throughout its theological development, Christianity has focused its core belief structure upon the examination of the relationship between faith and reason. It is this central tenet that combines the aspects of mystical faith with logical reasoning that has served as the basis that Christianity has used to judge both its internal doctrines and potential external threats against. The interdependent relationship between the
concepts of faith and reason has allowed for Christianity to extol the works of Saints Thomas Aquinas, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and many others for determining and upholding the vital aspects of the Trinity, Incarnation, Resurrection and subsequent salvation of all humanity through Jesus Christ. It is also through such a melding of devotion and logic that Christianity has been able to reasonably deduce the existence of a divine essence and Creator. Perhaps the most important facet of the harmonious dynamics between faith and reason is the ability of such a connection to confirm and uphold the truth of the Christian doctrines, especially the Incarnation and Resurrection, when faced with other religious institutions who threaten to dismantle the core nature of Christianity. In closing, if it were not for the historical and theological development of Christianity to focus upon faith and reason, the Church of the 21st century would fail to provide her followers with a true religion that promises salvation through Jesus Christ.
1. The Doctrine of the Incarnation literally means “God made flesh.” This tenet proclaims that the divine being of Jesus was begotten by God and made human and was thus able to bring about salvation. For further clarification, refer to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana ed. New York: Catholic Book Co., 1994. especially paragraphs 262, 463, and 483.


3. The five pillars of Islam include: faith or belief in the oneness of God and the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad; establishment of the daily prayers; concern for and almsgiving to the needy; self-purification through fasting; and the pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able. For further information, refer to Zahid, Ishaq. "Five Pillars of Islam." Islam 101. 13 Mar 1998. 13 Apr 2007 <http://www.islam101.com/dawah/pillars.html>.

4. The Doctrine of the Trinity professes that three persons exist in one God. These three entities are: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Spirit (Holy Spirit). For further clarification, refer to *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana ed. New York: Catholic Book Co., 1994. especially paragraphs 237 and 253.


Craig, William Lane. "J. Howard Sobel on the Kalam Cosmological Argument." *Canadian*


Mahadevan, T.M.P. “Social, Ethical, and Spiritual Values in Indian Philosophy.” The Indian


