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Full Length Research

Christian theology and philosophical engagement with God: Questioning, revelation, and the knowledge of God

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ABSTRACT: The relationship between philosophy and Christian theology remains marked by a persistent conceptual tension concerning the roles of questioning and knowing. Philosophy, particularly in its metaphysical dimension, critically examines questions concerning reality, existence, and God, while Christian theology approaches knowledge of God through divine revelation, Scripture, faith, and theological reflection. The common assumption that philosophy merely asks questions while theology supplies answers creates an artificial separation between the disciplines and obscures their historical and continuing interaction. This study therefore asks how philosophical questioning contributes to theological knowing without displacing the normative authority of revelation. Using a qualitative historical-analytical and thematic literature-review method, the study examines selected classical and contemporary philosophical and theological sources, comparing their treatments of reason, faith, revelation, and the knowledge of God. The analysis finds that philosophical questioning can expose assumptions, clarify concepts, and stimulate theological reflection, while Christian theology provides a revelational framework within which questions about God, humanity, and ultimate reality are interpreted. The study further argues that the relationship is neither one of simple harmony nor of inevitable conflict: its constructive character depends on recognising the distinct sources, methods, and limits of philosophy and theology. The study contributes to the philosophy-theology dialogue by integrating classical debates with contemporary and African perspectives and by showing their relevance to Christian apologetics, theological education, and public theological engagement.

Keywords: Christian theology, divine revelation, epistemology, faith and reason, knowledge of God, philosophical inquiry, philosophy of religion.

INTRODUCTION

How human beings come to know God has occupied a central place in both philosophy and theology throughout history. Philosophy is a broad discipline encompassing epistemology, ethics, logic, metaphysics, political philosophy, aesthetics, and other fields. This study does not attempt to treat philosophy in its entirety; rather, it focuses specifically on its metaphysical and epistemological engagement with questions concerning God, ultimate reality, existence, and the possibility and limits of knowledge. Christian theology approaches these questions from a different starting point, grounding its knowledge of God primarily in divine revelation, Scripture, and faith. The two disciplines therefore possess distinct methods and sources, yet they overlap in their concern with truth, reality, meaning, and human existence.

The relationship between philosophy and Christian theology has shifted considerably across Christian history. Early Christian thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine engaged philosophical traditions in articulating and defending Christian faith. Medieval thinkers, including Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas, developed different accounts of the relationship between faith and reason. Anselm's understanding of faith seeking understanding, Abelard's emphasis on rational inquiry, and Aquinas's distinction between truths accessible to reason and truths requiring revelation illustrate important variations within medieval thought (Anselm of Canterbury, 2001; Williams,

2020; Aquinas, 2023).

Modern rationalism, empiricism, secularism, and later critiques of metaphysics subsequently reframed the debate over the sources, scope, and limits of theological knowledge.

Questioning God and knowing God are really two sides of the same relationship. Within the metaphysical focus of this study, questioning means critically probing God, ultimate reality, causation, existence, and being. Knowing, on the theological side, leans instead on God's self-disclosure through revelation and the believer's response of faith. Rather than treating these as opposites that cancel each other out, this study is more interested in how they interact, in how questioning and knowing move together within Christian thought.

The relationship between philosophical inquiry and Christian theology has sometimes been framed as a conflict between reason and faith. David Hume's critique of natural religion and Bertrand Russell's rejection of traditional Christian arguments illustrate important modern challenges to the rational justification of religious belief. By contrast, Karl Barth rejected the attempt to establish theology on autonomous human reason and insisted on God's self-revelation as the proper ground of theological knowledge (Barth, 2010). Contemporary scholarship continues to debate this relationship rather than treating it as settled. For example, McGrath (2016) defends a form of Christian natural theology, while recent work on Barth continues to explore the implications and limits of revelation-centred theology (Marshall, 2022; Molnar, 2022). The disagreement therefore concerns not simply whether reason has a role, but what authority reason possesses and how it should relate to revelation.

The continuing debate raises a specific scholarly problem: how can philosophical questioning contribute constructively to Christian theological knowing when philosophy and theology operate with different epistemological starting points and sources of authority? Existing treatments of faith and reason frequently emphasise either rational justification of belief or the priority of revelation, but the relationship between questioning and knowing can benefit from a more explicit comparative analysis that brings these positions into conversation with African theological perspectives. This study therefore asks: How can philosophical questioning and Christian theological knowing engage one another constructively without collapsing their distinctive identities? The study aims to clarify this relationship historically and analytically and to identify its implications for contemporary Christian thought, African theology, apologetics, and theological education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative historical-analytical and thematic literature-review design. Primary sources include selected classical theological and philosophical texts, while secondary sources comprise contemporary works in Christian theology, philosophy of religion, epistemology, historical theology, and African theology. Sources were selected purposively for their direct engagement with the relationship between reason, faith, revelation, philosophical inquiry, and knowledge of God. The analysis proceeds thematically and comparatively, identifying continuities, differences, tensions, and developments among major positions. Particular attention is given to Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Barth, Plantinga, McGrath, and selected African theologians and philosophers. The study does not employ questionnaires, interviews, or statistical procedures; its conclusions arise from critical interpretation and synthesis of the selected literature.

UNDERSTANDING PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

Philosophical inquiry is the systematic and critical examination of fundamental questions concerning reality, knowledge, existence, morality, and ultimate meaning. Because philosophy is broader than the study of God, the present discussion focuses specifically on its metaphysical and epistemological dimensions. Metaphysics investigates questions concerning being, causation, ultimate reality, and existence, while epistemology examines the nature, sources, justification, and limits of knowledge. Applied to the philosophy of religion, these dimensions generate questions concerning God's existence, divine attributes, religious experience, and the rationality of religious belief. Such questioning need not imply rejection of faith; it represents a critical attempt to clarify the claims being made about reality.

Applied to religion, philosophical inquiry addresses the existence of God, the nature of divine reality, the problem of evil, and the possibility of religious knowledge, using rational argument to evaluate religious claims and experiences. This need not imply skepticism toward religion; it reflects, instead, an intellectual commitment to understanding belief through reasoned reflection. Philosophy has shaped Christian theological thought quite directly. Augustine drew on Platonic categories to explain divine transcendence and human knowledge of God, while Aquinas integrated Aristotelian philosophy to develop a coherent account of faith and reason, making philosophy both a dialogue partner and a methodological tool for theology (Augustine, 1991a; Aquinas, 1947).

Questions such as whether God can be known through reason alone, or how an all- good God can permit suffering, show this impulse seeking clarity about theological claims, and such questioning need not be antagonistic to faith; it can deepen understanding of religious truth.

The nature and task of Christian theology

Christian Theology is the disciplined, systematic study of God, divine revelation, and the implications of God's self-

disclosure for human life and salvation. It is rooted in the conviction that God has revealed Himself through creation, Scripture, history, and supremely through Jesus Christ (McGrath, 2025). Its primary task is to interpret, explain, and apply revealed truth; Millard Erickson describes theology as the process of organising biblical teaching into a coherent system that addresses contemporary questions, a task that is both academic and ecclesial, seeking intellectual understanding while nurturing faith and guiding practice (Erickson, 2013).

The theological reflection developed in this study is located within the Magisterial Reformation tradition, in which Scripture is regarded as the supreme normative authority for Christian faith and practice. Tradition, reason, and Christian experience may assist theological understanding but remain subject to Scripture. Theology therefore goes beyond repeating established doctrines by critically interpreting and applying the biblical witness to contemporary challenges and contexts. Karl Barth's dialectical theology further emphasises that theology must continually listen to God's Word and respond faithfully to new situations while remaining grounded in divine revelation (Barth, 1963). Contemporary discussions of theology and philosophy similarly show that theological reflection can engage philosophical questions without surrendering its distinctive revelational basis (Maritz, 2023).

Questioning God and knowing God

These two concepts represent complementary dimensions of humanity's engagement with the divine. Questioning God is the intellectual, existential, and spiritual process by which individuals seek understanding of God's nature, actions, and relationship with the world, and, contrary to popular assumption, it is deeply embedded in the biblical tradition. Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and the Psalmists all voiced doubts and questions before God (Job 13:23–24; Psalm 13:1–2; Habakkuk 1:2–3). Job's confrontation with unexplained suffering, and the persistent questioning found in the lament psalms, show that genuine faith permits honest inquiry and struggle rather than requiring its suppression.

Knowing God, by contrast, is the acquisition of knowledge of God's nature, character, and will, grounded in Christian theology primarily in divine revelation rather than reason alone. The biblical idea of knowing God extends beyond intellectual awareness to relationship and covenantal fellowship. Jesus' statement that eternal life consists in knowing the true God and Jesus Christ (John 17:3) captures this relational dimension well. Theologians traditionally distinguish natural knowledge of God, gained through creation and reason, from revealed knowledge, which derives from Scripture and Christ. While reason can point toward divine existence, Christian theology holds that fuller knowledge of God's character and saving purpose requires revelation (Calvin, 1960).

The relationship between questioning and knowing is dynamic rather than oppositional. Questions stimulate deeper theological reflection, and theological knowledge in turn generates new questions and insight. The pursuit of understanding God is thus an ongoing dialogue between inquiry and revelation, reason and faith.

Faith, reason, and divine revelation

Faith, reason, and divine revelation form one of the central concerns shared by philosophy and Christian theology. Faith is trust in God and acceptance of divine truth; reason is humanity's capacity for rational thought; revelation is God's self-disclosure through creation, history, Scripture, and Christ. Tertullian stressed the distinctiveness of Christian faith, while Augustine held that faith and reason are mutually supportive, summarised in the phrase *credo ut intelligam*, "I believe in order that I may understand" (Augustine, 1991b). Aquinas later argued that faith and reason share one divine source and so cannot ultimately contradict each other (Aquinas, 1975).

Reason assists believers in interpreting Scripture, evaluating arguments, and engaging intellectual challenges, but within the theological framework adopted here it does not possess independent authority over revelation. The limits of reason are therefore as important as its usefulness. Aquinas represents a strong confidence in the capacity of reason to establish certain truths about God, whereas Barth places greater emphasis on God's self-revelation. The contrast is instructive: the issue is not whether reason should be used, but whether reason or revelation provides theology's ultimate norm. A Reformation-oriented approach therefore permits philosophical reasoning while subjecting theological conclusions to Scripture.

Historical perspectives on philosophy and Christian theology

The historical relationship between philosophy and Christian theology is better understood as a pattern of dialogue, appropriation, resistance, and critique than as a simple history of harmony. At different moments, Christian thinkers have borrowed philosophical concepts, rejected particular philosophical assumptions, or reformulated them in the light of Christian revelation. The history is therefore significant not merely because philosophy influenced theology, but because theological responses also challenged philosophical accounts of reality and knowledge.

Philosophy and theology in the early church

As Christianity spread through the Greco-Roman world, it encountered sophisticated philosophical traditions, among

them Platonism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism, and early Christian writers faced the challenge of communicating the gospel to audiences shaped by Greek philosophical assumptions. Some viewed philosophy with suspicion: Tertullian's famous question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?", expressed concern that pagan philosophy might corrupt Christian revelation, even though he himself employed philosophical concepts in defending doctrine against heresy (Tertullian, 2019). Others were more receptive. Justin Martyr regarded Greek philosophy as a preparation for the gospel, since philosophers had grasped partial truths through the *Logos* fully revealed in Christ (Justin Martyr, 1997). Clement of Alexandria likewise held that philosophy functioned as a schoolmaster leading Gentiles toward Christ, much as the Law had prepared the Jews (Clement of Alexandria, 1991).

The most influential early synthesis came from Augustine of Hippo, who drew on Neo-Platonism to articulate Christian doctrines of God, creation, and human knowledge, arguing that reason, though limited, could assist believers in understanding revealed truth. His *credo ut intelligam* established a lasting framework for later discussions of faith and reason (Augustine, 2008). The early Church, then, did not reject philosophy outright; it appropriated philosophical tools while subordinating them to revelation, establishing philosophy as an important conversation partner for theology.

The patristic synthesis

The Patristic period, roughly from the 100-500 ADsecond to the fifth centuries, integrated philosophical reasoning with Christian doctrine in diverse ways. Augustine's approach illustrates a productive tension: faith precedes and directs understanding, yet believers are encouraged to seek intellectual understanding of what they profess. Anselm later expressed this orientation as *fides quaerens intellectum*, while the Cappadocian Fathers employed philosophical language to clarify Trinitarian doctrine (Ayres, 2021). Thus, the patristic synthesis should not be described simply as philosophy serving theology; it involved selective appropriation, critical adaptation, and theological transformation of philosophical categories.

Medieval Scholasticism

Medieval scholasticism intensified the dialogue between philosophy and theology. Anselm, Abelard, and Aquinas did not offer identical accounts of reason's theological role. Anselm began from faith seeking understanding; Abelard gave greater prominence to dialectical inquiry; and Aquinas distinguished truths accessible through natural reason from truths dependent upon revelation (Williams, 2020; Cross, 2022). Their differences show that the medieval synthesis was not a single position but a contested field in which reason was variously understood as servant, instrument, or partner of theological reflection. This diversity anticipates later disputes concerning natural theology and the limits of metaphysical reasoning.

Modern and contemporary debates

The scientific revolution, Enlightenment rationalism, and empirical philosophy transformed this relationship in the modern period. Descartes sought certainty through methodological doubt, emphasising reason's autonomy (Descartes, 2008); Hume questioned traditional arguments for God's existence and the credibility of miracles; Kant argued that human knowledge is limited to phenomena and cannot directly grasp metaphysical realities such as God, sharply restricting the scope of natural theology even while defending belief in God as practically necessary (Kant, 2019).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced divergent responses to these tensions. Schleiermacher emphasised religious experience, Kierkegaard stressed existential faith, and Barth rejected attempts to ground theology in autonomous human reason, making revelation in Christ central to theological knowledge (Barth, 2010). The contrast between Aquinas and Barth is particularly significant: Aquinas gives natural reason a substantial role in knowledge of God, whereas Barth is much more restrictive about autonomous natural theology. Contemporary scholarship continues to interrogate Barth's position rather than treating it as beyond debate (Marshall, 2022; Molnar, 2022). Plantinga's contemporary epistemology, meanwhile, challenges the assumption that rational religious belief always depends upon propositional evidence (Plantinga, 2024). These positions demonstrate that contemporary philosophy-theology dialogue is characterised by disagreement as well as cooperation.

Philosophical inquiry as a means of questioning God

Philosophy has historically been one of humanity's principal means of questioning God, exploring the nature of ultimate reality through human experience and rational reflection rather than beginning, as theology does, from the premise of revelation. Philosophers ask whether God exists, what attributes God possesses, and whether belief in God is rationally justified. Such inquiry does not necessarily imply disbelief. It reflects a persistent quest to understand the divine through reason, one that has both challenged and enriched Christian theology by compelling it to clarify doctrine and articulate its rational foundations.

Classical philosophical questions about God: The earliest philosophical reflection on God arose from the search for rational explanations of the universe's origin, order, and purpose, moving beyond mythological accounts.

Plato associated ultimate reality with the Form of the Good (Plato, 1992); Aristotle proposed the unmoved Mover, a necessary and eternal being responsible for the cosmos's motion and order. These concepts significantly shaped later Christian understanding of God as the supreme, self-existent source of reality (Aristotle, 2016).

Classical inquiry generated enduring questions: Whether God exists, addressed through cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments appealing respectively to a first cause, apparent design, objective moral values, and conceptual necessity, and what attributes God possesses. Philosophers have traditionally attributed omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, immutability, and perfect goodness to God, attributes that raise further puzzles about divine foreknowledge and human freedom or the coherence of omnipotence itself (Craig & Moreland, 2021). Richard Swinburne argues theism remains among the most coherent explanations for the universe's existence and intelligibility, and other contemporary philosophers contend that developments in cosmology have strengthened arguments for a transcendent creator, evidence that classical questions about God remain central to contemporary philosophy (Swinburne, 2022).

The problem of evil

The most persistent philosophical challenge to belief in God is the problem of evil, the apparent contradiction between the existence of suffering and a God who is all powerful, all knowing, and perfectly good. Its classical formulation, attributed to Epicurus, asks whether God is willing but unable to prevent evil, able but unwilling, or both willing and able. The problem takes a logical form, arguing that God and evil cannot logically coexist, and an evidential form, arguing that the sheer quantity and intensity of suffering make God's existence improbable (Epicurus, as cited in McCloskey, 1960).

Christian thinkers have developed several responses. Augustine's free will defence holds that evil results from the misuse of human freedom rather than God's direct action, freedom's possibility being a necessary consequence of genuine moral choice (Augustine, 2003). John Hick's soul making theodicy argues instead that suffering contributes to moral and spiritual growth, developing virtues such as courage and compassion that a world without challenge could not produce (Hick, 2010).

Alvin Plantinga's response to the logical problem shows that God's existence and evil's existence are not strictly incompatible (Plantinga, 2019), while Eleonore Stump argues that suffering may serve purposes not immediately apparent from a limited human vantage, particularly in personal transformation and relationship with God. The problem thus exemplifies how philosophical inquiry challenges simplistic theological answers and encourages deeper reflection on divine justice and the mystery of God's governance (Stump, 2022).

Human reason and the search for ultimate reality

Philosophical inquiry reflects an innate human desire to understand ultimate meaning, asking why there is something rather than nothing and what constitutes ultimate reality. Materialists locate the basis of existence in physical matter, idealists in mind or spirit, and Christian philosophy identifies God as the ultimate ground of being and meaning (Ward, 2024). This search also raises epistemological questions about reason's reliability and scope: Enlightenment thinkers expressed confidence in rational inquiry, but Kant argued that while reason can organise experience, it cannot directly know transcendent realities such as God, freedom, and immortality (Kant, 2019).

Many contemporary philosophers nonetheless regard reason as indispensable to religious belief, since it enables individuals to evaluate evidence and distinguish truth from error, and Christian theology likewise affirms reason as a God given gift assisting the understanding of revelation. Keith Ward maintains that philosophical reasoning remains essential for articulating the rational credibility of religious belief in a pluralistic world. Reason thus functions not as faith's rival but as an instrument in humanity's ongoing search for ultimate reality, expanding theological reflection by raising questions that challenge believers to think more deeply about God and existence (Ward, 2024).

Limits of philosophical knowledge of God

Philosophy offers valuable insight into questions about God but also encounters significant limits. Contemporary defenders of natural theology, including Alister McGrath, argue that reflection on nature and human rationality can contribute to Christian knowledge of God while remaining shaped by a specifically Christian theological framework (McGrath, 2016). Yet the existence of such arguments does not settle the question of revelation. The disagreement between natural theology and revelation-centred approaches concerns the scope of unaided human reason, not merely the usefulness of philosophical argument. A balanced account must therefore recognise both the explanatory value and the epistemic limits of philosophical reasoning.

Philosophical reasoning also frequently produces divergent conclusions, different traditions offering competing interpretations of reality that highlight the difficulty of attaining metaphysical certainty through reason alone. Christian theology therefore holds that philosophical inquiry can prepare the way for faith but cannot replace it: it raises questions, clarifies concepts, and provides rational support for belief, yet ultimately encounters

mysteries that exceed human understanding. The knowledge of God remains both intellectual and relational, requiring not only rational reflection but divine self-disclosure.

Christian theology as a means of knowing God

Where philosophy seeks to understand God through rational reflection, Christian theology approaches knowledge of God primarily through divine revelation. God, in the Christian tradition, is not merely an object of investigation but a personal being who freely discloses Himself, so theological knowledge is grounded fundamentally in God's initiative rather than human intellectual achievement alone (McGrath, 2025).

Theology interprets and systematises the content of revelation as communicated through creation, Scripture, Christ, and the ongoing work of the Spirit, seeking not only intellectual understanding but relational communion. It provides a framework through which believers come to know God's nature, character, and redemptive activity.

Divine revelation and scripture

Revelation addresses the fundamental question of how finite human beings can know an infinite God, and Christian theology affirms that such knowledge is possible because God has chosen to disclose Himself. General revelation, God's self-disclosure via creation, history, and conscience, confirmed in Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:20 (Schreiner, 2023), affords a fundamental understanding of God's existence and might, but Christian theology believes is insufficient for comprehensive knowledge given human finitude and the distorting influence of sin. Special revelation, communicated through prophetic utterances, Scripture, redemptive history, and ultimately Christ, consequently becomes necessary (McGrath, 2025).

Karl Barth emphasised revelation's primacy, arguing that human beings cannot discover God through autonomous reasoning; God must reveal Himself, and revelation is not mere information but God's personal self-giving that establishes and sustains covenantal relationship rather than merely conveying facts (Barth, 2010). Among the forms of revelation, Scripture occupies a uniquely authoritative place, regarded as the inspired Word of God and the primary, normative source of theological reflection.

The doctrine of inspiration, grounded in passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16, affirms that Scripture originates from God's revelatory activity while being communicated through human authors, possessing both divine and human dimensions. Scripture reveals God's character, narrates His redemptive action culminating in Christ, and provides moral and spiritual guidance; the Reformation's principle of sola Scriptura reinforced its centrality as the highest authority in matters of faith and doctrine (Frame, 2024).

Beyond an academic resource, it functions as a means of spiritual formation: through reading, interpretation, and obedience, believers encounter God and deepen their knowledge of Him, so theological knowledge derived from Scripture involves both intellectual comprehension and personal transformation (Sonderegger, 2023).

Christ as the full revelation of God

Although creation and Scripture disclose important truths about God, Christian theology maintains that the fullest revelation is found in Jesus Christ, portrayed not only as a messenger of divine truth but as the incarnation of God's self-disclosure. John's declaration that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14) affirms that God has entered human history in a uniquely personal way, and Hebrews contrasts earlier revelation through the prophets with the definitive revelation through the Son, the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being (Bruce, 2022). At least three aspects of God's nature are shown by Christ: first, in His teaching, compassion, and self-sacrificing love; second, in His redemptive purpose, which is demonstrated by the cross and confirmed by the resurrection as triumph over sin and death; and third, in His perfect obedience and communion with God, He reveals humanity's true calling. According to N. T. Wright, Christian theology argues that one can only know God's character, intentions, and saving purpose through Christ. This centrality sets Christian theology apart from purely philosophical inquiry, as philosophy can infer the existence of a supreme being (Wright, 2024a).

The role of faith

Faith is the right human reaction to revelation. Revelation offers the objective basis for knowing God, while faith enables believers to receive, trust, and appropriate it. Christian theology consequently opposes both rationalism, which relies only on reason, and fideism, which eliminates reason altogether, regarding faith and reason instead as complementary. Biblically, faith is more than intellectual assent; Hebrews 11:1 characterises it as confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see, involving trust and personal reliance as well as cognition.

Augustine's phrase *crede ut intelliga*s, believe so that you may understand, expresses faith's priority: divine realities surpass unaided reason, so faith precedes full understanding without eliminating the need for reflection, creating instead the conditions under which deeper understanding becomes possible (Augustine, 2018). Alvin Plantinga argues belief in God may be rationally warranted even apart from formal argument, since faith can arise from properly functioning cognitive faculties designed for

knowledge of God (Plantinga, 2024).

A transforming dimension is also carried by faith. The knowledge gained through faith becomes both intellectual and experiential, going beyond knowing about God to knowing God personally, as believers enter into a living relationship with God through it. This relationship changes understanding, values, and action. It is also not something pursued alone but rather something that grows in a community through shared activities like worship, prayer, and fellowship. Understanding God is ultimately dependent on God's gracious self-disclosure and humanity's faithful response; however, Christian theology provides a way to know God through its foundation in revelation, guidance by Scripture, focus on Christ, and appropriation through faith.

How knowing God and asking questions are interdependent

One of the most important topics in the conversation between Christian theology and philosophy is the question of knowing God and knowing God better simultaneously. Christian theology seeks answers to the deep problems raised by philosophical investigation regarding the presence of God, suffering, moral responsibility, and ultimate reality through revelation, doctrine, and faith. However, philosophical inquiry and religious explanation fall short in capturing the nature of the relationship. Philosophers in philosophy encourage theologians to ponder on philosophical topics, and theologians provide philosophical enquiries with interpretive frameworks for understanding philosophical questions. In a nutshell, the relationship is vibrant, conversational, and beneficial to both parties. Philosophers have long served as a springboard for theologians to reflect on their faith by encouraging them to question, clarify, and defend the reasonable grounds upon which their beliefs rest. Augustine believed that believers can get a better knowledge of revealed truth through reason, while Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum* shows the notion that faith naturally seeks intellectual clarity (Anselm of Canterbury, 2001).

The relationship between knowing God and asking questions is neither a simple partnership nor an inevitable conflict. Philosophical questions about God's existence, suffering, freedom, morality, and ultimate reality can expose assumptions that theology must examine carefully. Theological claims, in turn, challenge philosophy to consider forms of knowledge that cannot be reduced to empirical verification. Augustine and Aquinas illustrate confidence in reason's contribution, whereas Barth places revelation at the centre of theological knowing. Plantinga offers another contemporary model by arguing that belief in God can possess rational warrant without depending on formal arguments (Plantinga, 2024). The comparison suggests that the central issue is epistemological ordering: what counts as knowledge, what justifies it, and what limits should govern philosophical reasoning within Christian theology.

Aquinas's synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian doctrine demonstrates how philosophical reasoning can bolster theology without replacing revelation. Many theological developments regarding human freedom, the Trinity, and Christology emerged in response to philosophical challenge (Aquinas, 2023). Theologians are still reaping the benefits of contemporary thought, which is driven by questions like religious language, divine action, and the problem of evil.

Theological enquiries aim to resolve existential problems stemming from pain, shame, hopelessness, and mortality, as well as more abstract philosophical questions, by drawing on revelation, Scripture, tradition, and faith. According to Karl Barth, the main source for answers regarding salvation, grace, and eternal life is not human questions but rather God's revelation, which reorients human understanding. This is in contrast to the Christian view, which primarily relies on speculative reasoning (Barth, 2010). Because God's actuality is beyond human understanding and theological investigation is always a work in progress, questions will always persist. This is why theological answers frequently lead to new questions. This is eloquently demonstrated in African theology.

The interaction between revelation and reason is probably the best example of this dynamic in action. Though they may appear to be at odds with one another at first glance, Augustine's *credo ut intelligam* and Aquinas's assertion that revelation and reason originate from the same divine source indicate that the two are actually complementary rather than competing. Knowledge that lies beyond the capabilities of the mind is bestowed by revelation (Augustine, 2018; Aquinas, 2019). Modern debates have frequently portrayed the two as opposing authorities, with Enlightenment rationalism praising reason as the principal criterion for truth and some varieties of fideism discrediting rational inquiry. However, modern theology is more and more in favour of dialogue than argument.

Contemporary discussion is increasingly concerned with dialogue rather than a simplistic victory of one discipline over the other. McGrath's natural theology permits reasoned reflection on nature within a Christian framework (McGrath, 2016), while recent philosophical and theological work on divine revelation continues to explore how theology and philosophy can engage without collapsing their methodological differences (Kim, 2024). In the African context, this dialogical orientation is especially significant because theological knowledge is often articulated through communal, experiential, oral, and culturally embedded forms of reasoning. Resane (2022), for example, describes African theology as dialogical and publicly engaged, while Molefe and Maraganedzha (2023) demonstrate that African traditional religious ideas can be examined as sources for philosophical reflection. These

perspectives broaden the conversation beyond inherited Western categories.

In the grand scheme of things, knowing God and questioning him are not mutually exclusive pursuits. On the contrary, one can gain a better understanding of the other through both processes; in fact, the two are complementary rather than competing in humanity's never-ending quest for the meaning of life.

Modern reason for Christian faith

The interaction between Christian theology and philosophical investigation has implications for contemporary Christian thought and practice. Theology in a cognitively complex, pluralistic, scientifically informed, and digitally mediated world must address questions of human existence, truth, meaning, identity, and religious knowledge. Philosophical engagement can strengthen theological reflection when it is critically and appropriately used, while theology can offer normative and revelational resources for addressing questions that philosophy alone cannot settle.

Justification and critical thinking

Apologetics, the rational defense and explanation of Christianity in the face of intellectual opposition and other worldviews, is one area where this has significant implications. Christians ought to articulate their faith rationally, as Peter urges believers to be ready to answer anybody who asks them to explain the hope they have (3:15). An argument's rational credibility in public discourse can be demonstrated by philosophical reasoning, according to William Lane Craig, while others show that historical argument can strengthen confidence in Christian truth claims (Craig, 2022).

In African contexts, apologetics must also engage indigenous religious traditions, secularisation, religious pluralism, and contemporary social realities. Idowu's work demonstrates the importance of serious engagement with African conceptions of God, while Bediako shows how Christianity can engage indigenous religious worlds without losing its theological identity (Bediako, 1995). Recent African scholarship similarly emphasises dialogue with African cultural and philosophical resources rather than treating them merely as obstacles to Christian theology (Resane, 2022; Molefe & Maraganedzha, 2023). This approach makes apologetics more contextual and publicly responsible.

On a broader scale, apologetics is transformed from a defensive posture into an active engagement with modern culture that seeks truth and human flourishing when it is informed by philosophical inquiry. This theology can make a constructive contribution to discussions about bioethics, environmental responsibility, and social justice.

Critical thinking and theological education

Theological education is much more than just teaching doctrine; it calls for analytical reasoning, self-reflection, and intellectual discernment, all of which are impacted by the philosophical and theological relationships. Modern theological schools carry on the work of Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas by including courses in philosophy, ethics, and hermeneutics in order to teach students how to discern good doctrine from bad and how to responsibly interpret Scripture (Williams, 2020).

Believers increasingly encounter competing claims through digital media, social platforms, and emerging technologies. Theological education therefore requires more than doctrinal transmission; it requires philosophical and theological skills for evaluating arguments, sources, assumptions, and claims to knowledge. The emergence of artificial intelligence intensifies this need by raising questions about authorship, consciousness, personhood, truth, and the limits of machine-generated religious information. These questions do not replace traditional theological concerns but extend the need for disciplined reasoning and theological discernment.

A secular era: Faith and reason

Science, cultural plurality, and secularisation have intensified questions about the public credibility of religious belief. Charles Taylor's account of the secular age illustrates the changed conditions under which Christian faith is articulated (Taylor, 2007), while McGrath continues to defend meaningful dialogue between science and Christian theology (McGrath, 2024). The contemporary philosophy-theology dialogue must therefore engage not only classical arguments for God's existence but also science and religion, religious pluralism, atheism, public theology, and the intellectual conditions of multicultural societies.

Addressing modern scepticism also requires a conversation between faith and reason. Theological answers to questions of pain, religious variety, and moral relativism ought to be laced with philosophical contemplation; according to N. T. Wright, Christians have a rich theoretical framework within which to place questions of human origins, evolution, and the fate of the universe (Wright, 2024b). African theologians offer insightful commentary on the topic as well. For example, Tinyiko Maluleke notes that African Christianity shows how faith is still relevant in the face of fast modernisation, and other theologians contend that Christian theology needs to address modern social issues while maintaining its dedication to transcendence and divine revelation (Maluleke, 1997). In short, the secular age does not do away with the need for theology, but it heightens the importance of thoughtful engagement between faith and reason.

What this means for the spiritual growth of Christians

Spiritual formation is another important implication. The maturation of Christian faith involves knowledge, trust, worship, moral transformation, and communal participation. African theological perspectives can deepen this account by emphasising relationality, community, and the integration of faith with everyday life. Magesa (2010) highlights the moral and communal dimensions of African religious life, while recent African theological scholarship stresses dialogue with contextual experience and public realities (Resane, 2022; Sakupapa, 2023). Philosophical questioning, when exercised responsibly, can therefore contribute to intellectual humility and discernment rather than undermine spiritual formation.

Integrating intellectual knowledge, moral conduct, and social worship, modern spiritual theologians stress that mature faith comprises trust and critical examination. Spirituality in African contexts integrates faith, community, morality, and everyday life, according to Laurenti Magesa. John Mbiti emphasises that African religious consciousness is deeply relational, shaping how individuals understand God and spiritual growth. A key insight into spiritual formation as a communal process is offered by African Christianity (Magesa, 2010). Humbleness is fostered by the connection between knowing God and questioning him. This is because knowing our own limitations prevents us from being theologically arrogant, and trusting in God's self-revelation guarantees that true knowledge of God is still within our reach.

Last but not least, a theologically grounded, emotionally robust, and intellectually responsible spirituality can be nurtured when believers make no distinction between faith and reason, but rather allow reason to deepen appreciation for God's truth through spiritual disciplines like prayer and service.

African theological perspective

The philosophy-theology dialogue acquires additional significance in African Christian contexts because questions of knowledge are frequently embedded in communal life, religious experience, oral tradition, cultural identity, and indigenous conceptions of reality. African theology therefore does not merely reproduce a Western debate between reason and revelation; it also asks how Christian knowledge of God is articulated within particular cultural worlds. Resane (2022) describes African theology as dialogical and publicly engaged, while Molefe and Maraganedzha (2023) demonstrate that African traditional religious concepts can be subjected to systematic philosophical analysis. Similarly, Sakupapa (2023) highlights the importance of contextual and indigenous knowledge in contemporary African theological discourse.

This perspective challenges any assumption that rationality is exhausted by abstract Western philosophical categories. African approaches can foreground communal reasoning, relationality, experience, oral wisdom, and the integration of faith with social life. These resources do not replace Scripture within the Magisterial Reformation framework adopted in this study; rather, they constitute contextual questions and interpretive resources that require theological discernment. The African contribution to the philosophy-theology dialogue therefore lies not in rejecting philosophical reasoning but in widening the conversation about human experience, knowledge, rationality, and theological understanding.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that philosophical questioning and Christian theological knowing are distinct but potentially constructive modes of engagement with questions of God, reality, and human existence. The historical analysis demonstrates that the relationship has never been uniform: Augustine and Anselm emphasised faith seeking understanding; Aquinas gave natural reason a substantial role; Barth placed revelation decisively at the centre; and contemporary thinkers such as Plantinga and McGrath continue to offer different models of the relationship between reason, evidence, and faith. The study therefore rejects both the simplistic claim that philosophy merely asks while theology merely answers and the opposite claim that the two disciplines are interchangeable.

The principal contribution of the study is its epistemological clarification of the relationship between questioning and knowing. Philosophical questioning can expose conceptual weaknesses, test assumptions, and stimulate theological reflection, while Christian theology provides a revelational and doctrinal framework for interpreting questions about God.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest. Nobody has paid or supported the author, and no personal, professional, or institutional stake in this work has shaped how the sources were read or what the paper concludes. The author carried out this study independently, as a conceptual piece built on the existing literature. Every source used is cited. The only purpose was scholarly, and the findings are presented fairly, without leaning toward any organisation, person, or group.

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