I. Introduction

1. A matter of epistemology (theory of knowledge): Can we really know God? If so, how?

2. Agnosticism: intellectual denial that God can be known and have a relationship with humans.
   
   (1) Hume: we only know by means of sensory data
   
   (2) Kant: things as they really are/things as they appear - impossible to know God as He really is. He is Infinite; we are finite.

3. Challenge of logical positivism - all metaphysical statements do not make sense (nonsensical) - impossible to describe GOD in human language.

4. Biblical acknowledgement: God is incomprehensible because He is transcendent

   Job 11:7-8 (Zophar): Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens -- what can we do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave -- what can you know?

   (God) 38:2: Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?

   Ps 97:2: Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

   145:3: Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

   Isa 40:28: ...his (God's) understanding no one can fathom.

   55:8-9: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'

   Eccl. 5:2: Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.

   1 Cor 2:10b-11: ...but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

5. Christian faith affirmation

   (1) Partial truth does not mean we cannot know and experience the God who wants us to know Him through His self-revelation.

   (2) Jesus' definition of eternal life:

      And this is life eternal that they should know
you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3)

II. Possible Ways of Knowing God

1. Philosophical reasoning - the deductive, indirect approach

   (1) Thomas Aquinas - know God by His creative "effects"
   
       i. Way of causality - perfect God is behind perfections in creation
       ii. Way of negation - God is the opposite of all our imperfections
       iii. Way of eminence - whatever is good about humans is perfect in God
       iv. BUT, one must add biblical revelation to know God as triune and Redeemer
           God
       v. Thomistic tradition of doctrines or statements about God paralleled by
           Princeton theologians in late 19th century

2. Way of Personal Religious Experience, directly

   (1) Schleiermacher - the infinite God can be intuitively experienced by means of absolute
       dependence on God (God-consciousness)
   
       a. Focus on God's immanence
       b. For Schleiermacher mental experience consists of:
           (a) Knowledge produced by perception
           (b) Moral conduct follows perception
           (c) Intuition, awareness more than simple emotion produces absolute
               dependence
   
   (2) Rudolf Otto's focus on God's transcendence

       Mysterium tremendum - almost blown away by God's transcendence, holy
       otherness

   (3) Martin Buber's supreme "THOU"

       Knowing God by knowing others

   (4) Personal conversion by personal confrontation with the living Christ

   (5) Mystical experience - be absorbed into the divine by means of self-transcendence and
       self-emptying.

3. Knowing God by His Self-Revelation

   (1) Creation/Creator (Ps 19:1-6)

   (2) Relationship of Bible and revelation
(3) Christocentric (Barth)
(4) Mighty acts of God in salvation history
(5) All of world history reveals God (Pannenberg)

III. What It Means to Know God

1. God is the Subject
   (1) The initiative is His
   (2) Doctrinal beliefs no substitute for personal relationship with God (beliefs AND encounter)
   (3) Most importantly, HE knows us (Packer)

2. God makes Himself known in history in Jesus Christ and ultimately in the eschaton.

3. Indispensable function of community for knowing God’s presence now and eschatologically.

IV. Work of Alvin Plantinga

1. Recognized by consensus as "greatest philosopher" of 20th century
   (1) Worked primarily on two major problems:
      i. Evil (besetting in any age)
      ii. Christian knowledge
   (2) Tremendous contributions

2. Christian Knowledge
   (1) Can Christian knowledge (not just theism) be taken seriously in our day? "Is Christian belief warranted?"
   (2) Two key questions:
      i. The truth factor (not as pushy today)
      ii. Worth factor: "Does Christian belief merit our consent?"
   (3) Agnostic challenge: can anything really worthwhile be said confidently about God?"

      Agnostic self-refutation: If one declares "No one can say anything confidently about God, you are saying something about God"

   (4) His model (as a Dutch Calvinist Christian philosopher):

      The Holy Spirit testifies to the truth in the believer's heart - this God-given capacity is "epistemologically as trustworthy as any other resource we have" such as sense perception, memory, etc.
He does not argue the Truth question - that must be personally decided.

(5) His basic contribution: "He has helped preserve a space for intellectually respectable Christian belief."

IV. Theological Summary

1. God can only be experienced personally as a Redeemer God, thus one must be cautious in seeking to argue non-believers into His Kingdom.

2. However, intellectual demonstrations can possibly help genuine seekers to appreciate the plausibility if not the credibility of believing in God’s reality and “knowability”.

3. The work of the Holy Spirit must never be presumed nor neglected in Christian witnessing.

4. Above all, we believe in God and know Him personally because of His initiative and the working of His Holy Spirit in and through His Christian community.