



**God Wants
to Be Known**

*Saint Matthew and the Angel and
The Inspiration of Saint Matthew*



► Caravaggio

You may wonder how some of the most classic and well-known paintings and sculptures are found in Catholic churches, especially in the many churches in Rome. The answer is the Church recruited and commissioned artists to fill their churches with beautiful pieces that would tell the story of the history of God's People, focusing on ultimately Jesus Christ, God's Son who came into the world. Wealthy benefactors would pay artists handsomely to decorate churches, often suggesting the subject of the art and an overall theme.

This was the case in the early seventeenth century when San Luigi dei Francesi, a parish of French-speaking Catholics in Rome, hired Michele Angelo Merisi (1571-1610), known simply by the name of his hometown "Caravaggio," to paint three canvases detailing aspects of the life of St. Matthew, the author of the first Gospel.

Caravaggio was an interesting person. He had first arrived in Rome homeless, barely wearing any clothes. He had a violent temper and often carried a sword. He was charged with killing a man in a dispute, resulting in a death-penalty conviction that he appealed and finally had overturned. Nevertheless, his career as an artist prospered. He specialized in realism, which was important to the Church at the time, as the Church had just experienced a split due to the Protestant Reformation. Protestants preferred a bare sanctuary and little artwork.

Caravaggio completed his first two pieces, *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* and *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. Both were well received. He ran into some problems with the benefactor and the parish over his third canvas. The subject was meant to show how Matthew received divine inspiration as he composed his Gospel. Caravaggio's first attempt, called *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (left), was rejected. They did not want Matthew portrayed as if desolate with bare legs and sitting on a wobbly chair. Also the closeness of the angel interlocking his body with Matthew's was considered too risqué to be placed in the church.

In his second take, *The Inspiration of Saint Matthew* (right), Caravaggio portrays Matthew in a more scholarly pose. Also, the angel is separated from Matthew at a more acceptable distance. Matthew's stool is firmly planted, and his legs are covered. This painting still hangs in a side chapel at San Luigi dei Francesi. (The first painting was destroyed by fire in a Berlin aircraft bunker in 1945 and is known today only from black-and-white photographs.)



Focus Question

How can I know God?

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Introduction

DISCOVERING GOD



While an increasing number of teenagers count themselves as disaffiliated from organized religion, “the vast majority (85 percent) of US adolescents say they believe in God or a universal spirit, including 40 percent who are absolutely certain about this belief and 34 percent who are fairly certain.”¹

Drilling down a bit, one of the central beliefs that most people have about God is that “God is good.” This makes sense. It is likely that if we thought of God as evil and vindictive, we would probably spend our time cowering from God’s presence, and trying to appease him to keep us from his wrath.

People who believe in God also associate God with creation, not only creation of the planet that we live on, but also of our own personal lives as human beings. Even people who accept that the universe began from a random combustion of particles devoid of a Creator, usually do not hold that their own life and uniqueness was a similar confluence of chance. Instead, people who acknowledge a Creator God understand God to be personal and loving, creating each of us with knowledge of us and out of love for us.

Also, and different from many people who lived in earlier generations, most people today who acknowledge God believe there is but one God. This seems natural to us now, but it wasn’t always so. Monotheism did not originate with the Israelites, but the self-Revelation of One God to the Chosen People of the Old Testament was developed in their history. Monotheism contradicts not only *atheism* (belief in no God), but also *polytheism* (belief in many gods) and *pantheism* (belief that God and nature are the same). Accurately, of the major religions, only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are purely monotheistic.



Pope Francis receives in audience the members of the International Theological Commission at the Vatican. This commission is made up of thirty theologians who advise the pope and the Magisterium.

The Study of God

You know the suffix “-logy” means “study of” (e.g., biology is the “study of life”). Theology is the name for the study of God. *Theo* as a prefix derives from the ancient Greek word *theos*, for God. Theology is different from other fields of study because it is not a field where data can be used to prove a hypothesis. Rather, theology presumes faith. St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) described theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*—that is, “faith seeking understanding.” For Catholic theology, this requires beginning with a personal adherence to a definite set of beliefs. Catholic theology focuses on three aspects of faith: first, it is attentive to the Bible, the Word of God; second, it remains consciously faithful to the Church; and third, it is ordered to communicating the divine truth to all men and women in ways they can understand.

Listening to God’s Word from the Bible is the primary principle of Catholic theology. Pope Benedict XVI wrote that “where theology is not essentially the interpretation of the Church’s Scripture, such theology no longer has a foundation” (*Verbum Domini*, 35, cf. 31). The Bible was written and formed by members of the Judeo-Christian community, under God’s inspiration. Jesus Christ, himself, is the one Word of Scripture; it is his life that is previewed in

the Old Testament, shared in the Gospels, and witnessed to among the early Christians who composed and listened to the New Testament epistles. In the Scriptures, God speaks particularly in creation, through the prophets, and especially in the life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

However, it is accurate to say that Catholics understand the Bible differently than many other Christians. The Church's International Theological Commission pointed out that the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Rather, it is a "religion of the Word of God," not of "a written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word."² Catholics believe that **Sacred Scripture** is "the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit."³ One of the things this means is that the Bible cannot be interpreted only according to the way it was intended for its original audience. The Word of God is alive and its message applied anew in each generation.

It was the Church herself, in the first century, that determined which writings were to be included in the Bible. The complete list is called the canon of the Bible. God continues to guide the Church's **Magisterium** in every generation to preserve, expound on, and spread God's Word to all. This action is associated with **Sacred Tradition**. As means for sharing God's Revelation, both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition "must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence."⁴

Regarding other Christians who consider themselves to belong to a "church of the book," they do not assign equal weight to Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. For them, every human concern can be answered in the pages of the Scripture, with the interpretation of passages often being taken literally and according to whatever way individuals choose to understand them.

Sacred Scripture The written transmission of the Church's Gospel message found in the Church's teaching, life, and worship. It is faithfully preserved, handed down, and interpreted by the Church's Magisterium.

Magisterium The official teaching authority of the Church. Christ bestowed the right and power to teach in his name on St. Peter and the Apostles and their successors. The Magisterium is the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome (the pope).

Sacred Tradition The living transmission of the Church's Gospel message found in the Church's teaching, life, and worship. It is faithfully preserved, handed down, and interpreted by the Church's Magisterium.



Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Given the criteria mentioned here, the intention of this course is to study how the one, good, Creator God reveals himself to human beings through **natural revelation** and **Divine Revelation**. One of the two sources of Divine Revelation is Sacred Scripture, the Bible; the other is Sacred Tradition. Both flow from the same source (God) and have the same goal (human salvation through Christ). Together they comprise what is called the **Deposit of Faith**.

This course will particularly focus on how God the Father fully revealed himself in the Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity as told in the Bible. To come to a deeper understanding of how this is true, it is important to understand how the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Along with this, we must understand how the Bible was formed, how it should be read, and how it accompanies the Sacred Tradition of the Church. These are among the main topics you will explore in this course.

natural revelation The knowledge of the existence of God and his basic attributes that can be derived by human reason while reflecting on created order.

Divine Revelation The way God communicates knowledge of himself to human-kind, a self-communication realized by his actions and words over time and most fully realized by the sending of his divine Son, Jesus Christ.

Deposit of Faith "The heritage of faith contained in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, handed down in the Church from the time of the Apostles, from which the Magisterium draws all that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed" (CCC, glossary).

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. What do most US teenagers believe about God?
2. Differentiate between monotheism, polytheism, and pantheism.
3. How is theology different from other fields of study?
4. Explain the difference between belonging to a "church of the book" and a "religion of the Word of God."

Vocabulary

5. Define *Magisterium*.
6. Explain *natural revelation* in comparison with *Divine Revelation*.

Reflection

7. How do you understand the Bible to be "divinely inspired"?



Section 1

OUR BUILT-IN DESIRE FOR GOD

How much of your life is ordered to the future? Do you imagine your life being better or more fulfilling when you:

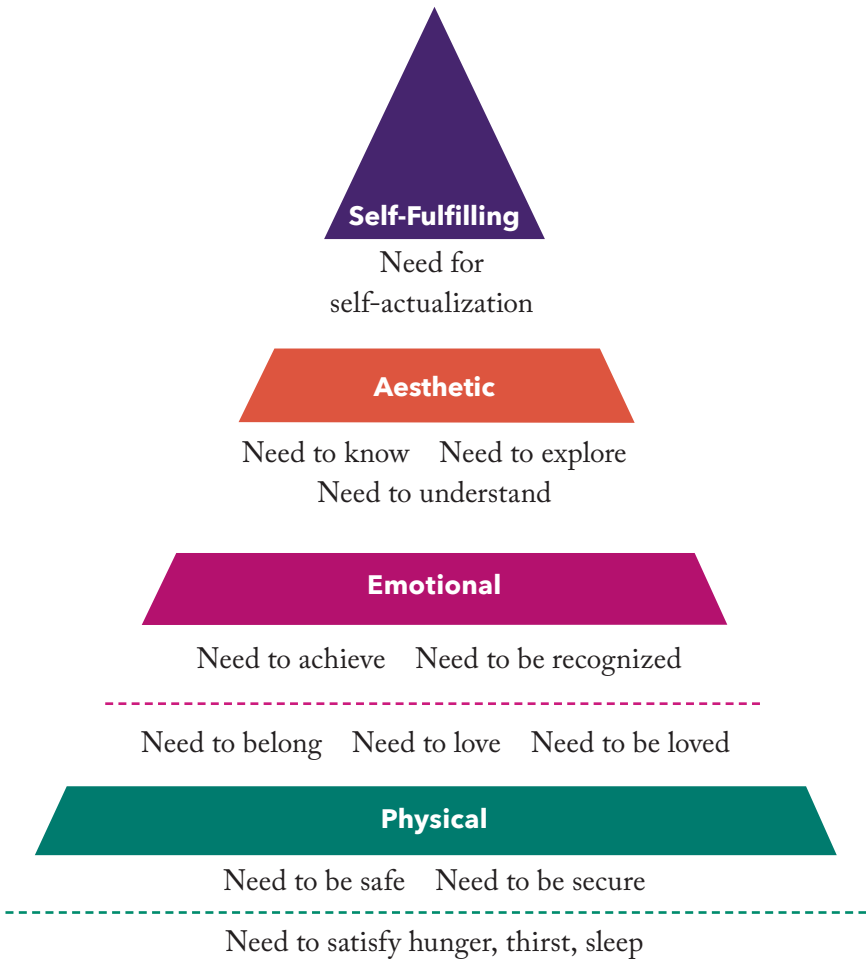
- ☒ pass your driver's test?
- ☒ finish high school?
- ☒ get accepted to college?
- ☒ make enough money to live independently?
- ☒ fall in love?
- ☒ have your own family?
- ☒ retire?



Modern psychology presents the issue in a similar way, claiming that you will not be happy until a certain number of your basic needs—such as food, health, safety, love, and **self-esteem**—are met. American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970) developed a pyramid to represent a human's hierarchy of needs. In the pyramid, the most basic needs come first. According to Maslow, we

self-esteem A sense of happiness and contentment about who you are as a human being. People with self-esteem consciously appreciate their own worth and importance.

must first meet the basic needs before we even can become aware of the other needs. Maslow's pyramid looks like this:



Maslow contended that once we are able to satisfy our physical needs, including our need for security, we are able to move to addressing our emotional needs. The emotional needs are related to the fact that human beings are social beings. We need to feel part of a group. We need to be loved and to be able to offer love. We need to have someone believe in us and to know we are competent. Emotional needs have a great effect on our self-esteem. Maslow also includes two higher levels in his hierarchy of needs. Aesthetic needs include an appreciation of beauty in many forms, as well as the need for

order and balance in our lives. Finally, we have a desire, according to Maslow, to strive for our full potential as a person. This is a lifelong process and one that occurs the more we challenge ourselves.

Is happiness and fulfillment really only future-oriented? Is happiness and fulfillment something to be achieved by working through a series of steps or completing a set of goals? More importantly, is happiness and fulfillment even possible using Maslow's hierarchy of goals or completing a set of goals as referenced in the questions that opened this section?

Part I of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins by clearly stating that only in God will we find happiness and truth and that “the desire for God is written in the human heart” (CCC, 27). Because we are created by and for God, the *Catechism* goes on to say that, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, our quest is never over. We can never stop searching for God.

Pope Benedict XVI recognized that today there are many people who do not claim they have a desire for God. Rather than searching for something spiritual, they reach for things like concrete goods, career achievements, or human companionship in order to achieve satisfaction and happiness.

A Journey of Faith

Even when people will not acknowledge their desire for God, Pope Benedict pointed out that the very presence of the desire remains. The key, he said, is to recast our inauthentic desires into authentic ones and to show the satisfaction that comes with a search for God. He suggested two aspects.

The first, he said, was to “discover or rediscover the taste of the authentic joy of life.” True joy, he pointed out, involves things that are *lasting* in several areas of life: family, friendship, solidarity with those who suffer, self-denial for the sake of the other, love of knowledge, art, and the beauty of nature. These are enduring things because you can imagine them carrying on past your life on earth and into eternity. For example, can you imagine building on relationships with family and friends in eternity? Can you imagine growing in greater appreciation of beauty in eternity? And can you imagine growing in knowledge—especially of God—in eternity? The very nature of eternity is that it has no end. These are lasting and productive things that will keep us very busy as we live forever.

The second aspect in a search for God, according to Pope Benedict, is “never to be content with what you have achieved.” The path of incomplete

desire is always open to God. Pope Benedict termed it a “healthy restlessness” that leads us to search for a deeper good while at the same time recognizing that restlessness directed to earthly things will not bring lasting satisfaction.⁵ St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) famously wrote that “our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

Five Desires that Point to God

Different from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and different from the consciousness of animals, human consciousness also desires spiritual experiences. Five typical spiritual experiences are desired often:

1. Perfect knowledge and truth
2. Perfect love
3. Perfect justice and goodness
4. Perfect beauty
5. Perfect home and being

Notice the word *perfect* before each of these experiences. We seek perfect representations of these things, something that is spiritual and beyond our earthly experiences. Our desire for perfection in these areas is what is spiritual about them. The desire for perfection is really a desire for God who is perfect.

Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, a philosopher and theologian, has written about how our unfulfilled satisfaction for these desires in this world is evidence for God. Think about how this works. Our desire for perfect knowledge and truth is evidenced from the time we are young. Have you ever been around a child who can’t take an answer at face value? “Why?” and “Why is that?” are incessant questions children ask. We wonder why, even to adulthood, a person needs to ask “Why?” even though the answer has been given. The reason is that we know intuitively that all answers are in some way incomplete. There is always more to know. Our conscious and



Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, SJ

continual questioning is a sign that it is perfect knowledge and truth that we seek, answers that can be provided only by God.

We also desire perfect love, and we expect that in our human relationships. Does that ever happen? Have you ever witnessed a spouse in a marriage who is perfectly forgiving, self-giving, and honest at all times? Probably not. Yet, we have an idealized desire for this type of perfect love in our human relationships, including friendships. (You have probably been let down at one time or another by a close friend. And you have probably let down your close friend too.) Yet this desire for perfect and unconditional love does not leave us. It is not the desire that is in error; it's that we are looking in the wrong place. Only God can fulfill this desire for perfect and unconditional love.

Just as the young child screams, "Why?" he or she also can be heard saying, "That's not fair!" Adults, too, have a built-in sense for justice. We all wonder why people suffer, why there are wars, why some people have more than others. Again, this is a longing for perfect justice and goodness that cannot be ultimately achieved on earth. Perfect justice and goodness is a gift reserved to God and to be granted in his time.

Perfect beauty is also left to God. In this world, we find many beautiful things—sunsets, water views, music—but we eventually get bored with them or try to perfect them ourselves. Have you ever used filters on your phone camera to make a natural scene look "better"? Additionally, while we are attracted to "perfect beauty" we wonder what its origins are. This wonderment also leads us to God.

The fifth spiritual desire is for the perfect home and being. This equates to the desire—spoken of by politicians, religious leaders, and in Christmas cards—for peace, joy, love, and unity in our world. Not ever attained in the history of our world, these desires likewise translate to our desire for the perfect home, a home that is with and made by God.⁶

Even though we may go through times in life when we ignore or reject God, "he never ceases to call every person to seek him, so as to find life and happiness" (*CCC*, 30). This search for God requires the effort of our mind and will, as well as the help of others. Some of the ways to know God can be accomplished by our own human reason.

SECTION Assessment

Comprehension

1. According to Maslow, what is necessary in order to be aware of higher-level human needs?
2. Is happiness only future-oriented? Explain your response.
3. According to Pope Benedict XVI, what are two aspects of desire?
4. How does the word *perfect* before our earthly desires make them spiritual desires?

Vocabulary

5. Define *self-esteem*.

Reflection

6. Why do you think people from childhood to adulthood ask “Why?” or “Why is that?” even if they have been given the answer?
7. What is something you imagine bringing fulfillment to your life in the future?



Section 2

GOD IS REVEALED THROUGH HUMAN REASON

This book is about how God is made known through Sacred Scripture, the Bible. But before moving on to that primary topic, let's consider people who may never once have the opportunity to read the Bible. Would these people be deprived of ever knowing about God? The Catholic Church answers clearly, "No, they would not."

The Church recognizes that knowing God is connected with faith, *and* it is also a matter of knowledge. A person can know that God exists by deducing evidence observed in nature; that is what is known as natural revelation. Many philosophers and great thinkers throughout history have come to believe in God based solely on their ability to think and reason. These include ancient pre-Christian philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and United States founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Those who recognize the existence of God by human reason but reject Divine Revelation (see Section 3, "God Reveals More of Himself") are called **deists**.

More recently, the most renowned atheist philosopher of the late twentieth century, Dr. Antony Flew (1923–2010), came to acknowledge God at the end of his life. Flew was influenced by Aristotelian arguments of a god who has super characteristics of power and intelligence (though Aristotle never used the term *god*). This is commonly called the "teleological argument," which states that the intricacies of the design in nature require an Intelligent Designer (God).

The teleological argument has grown in acceptance with advances in the understanding of DNA. Formerly, it was possible to think of microscopic forms of life as simply blobs of protoplasm that were generated randomly by natural forces. Research showed that even the simplest single-celled creature studied

deist One who believes in God based only on natural reason, not on any specific Divine Revelation or teachings of a religion.

has DNA with 482 genes comprising 580,000 amino base pairs. Antony Flew came to the conclusion that there is mathematically virtually no chance of such complexity of a living organism arising naturally. In a 2004 symposium, Flew said: “What I think DNA material has done is to show that intelligence must have been involved in getting these extraordinarily diverse elements together. . . . The enormous complexity by which the results were achieved look to me like the work of intelligence.”⁷

Discovering God by human reason is often the first step in accepting Revelation that can come only from God (e.g., the existence of an afterlife[∞]). Understanding natural revelation is an important tool as you make your way in a world where your contemporaries use science as the ultimate arbiter of what is true. Just make sure to be aware of incorrect premises about God (and creation) that can come from using our human reason. For example, *Scientific American* published a piece by Dr. Avi Loeb, former chair of the astronomy department at Harvard University and a member of the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Loeb proposed that it was possible that our universe was created in a laboratory by beings from a civilization more advanced than ours who used quantum mechanics to do so. Loeb said these other-worldly creators of what he called our “baby universe” would study the advancements in our universe to perpetuate knowledge and to create other baby universes moving forward. Loeb’s interesting premise was meant to dissuade the acknowledgment of a sole Intelligent Designer, or God. Catholic scientist Dr. Stacy Trasancos called it really “a throwback to ancient myths, with a modern-day quantum twist.” She added that “it still runs into the old question, ‘Who created the laboratory and designer?’”⁸ This question about



Dr. Antony Flew

∞ Note

Antony Flew never accepted belief in an afterlife as it was something that could not be revealed to him through reason. He did say, however, that while he did not “believe in the God of any revelatory system, I am open to that.”

life's origins was answered years ago by Aristotle and his deduction of a “prime mover and first cause” and later incorporated by St. Thomas Aquinas (1223–1274), a **Doctor of the Church**, and one of the greatest scholars in Church history, who offered five proofs of God's existence based on human reason.

Aquinas's Five Ways for God's Existence

Note that the “five ways” for God's existence offered by St. Thomas Aquinas in his classic work *Summa Theologiae* (*Summary of Theology*) are not proofs in the sense that science would define the term today.⁹ Rather, they are “converging and convincing arguments” (CCC, 310) for the existence of God. His arguments are based on (1) motion, (2) causality, (3) contingency, (4) degrees of perfection, and (5) design. The first three arguments are “cosmological arguments”—that is, based on the understanding that the cosmos or universe requires a first cause, which is God. Note also that the fifth way, design, is based on the teleological argument that convinced Antony Flew that there is a God.

Aquinas's first three ways, the cosmological arguments, are these:

1. God is the Prime Mover.

Our senses can observe that many things are in motion. The earth itself is in motion. The scientific definition of *motion* is “the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality.” For example, fire, which is *actually* hot, makes wood, which is *potentially* hot, to be *actually* hot. Similarly, something that is potentially in motion cannot be actually in motion unless it is moved by another force. Think about a boulder that plunges down a hill after an earthquake or after being pushed by a tractor. The earthquake and the tractor are examples of the force or the mover. Taking this example back a step, the force that caused the movement would also have needed something to move it.

The world is in motion in both time and space. For there to be motion there must have been a “prime mover” or “first mover” who started everything. That “unmoved mover” is God.

Doctor of the Church A Church writer of great learning and holiness whose works the Church has highly recommended for studying and living the faith.

2. God is the First Cause.

Consider how Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), a German astronomer, used the cosmological argument of the “first cause” to convince his friend of God’s existence.

Kepler discovered that the earth and planets traveled around the sun in elliptical orbits. One of his closest friends insisted that God did not exist and that the universe began and operates by its own means. Kepler made a model of the sun with the planets circling around it. When the friend saw the ingenious model, he commented, “How beautiful! Who made it?”

Tongue in cheek, Kepler answered, “No one made it; it made itself.”

His friend rejected the answer and insisted that Kepler tell him who made the model.

The famous astronomer then answered, “Friend, you say that this toy could not make itself. But listen to yourself. This model is but a very weak imitation of the vast universe, which I think you said made itself.”

Nothing causes itself. Even a model, like the one made by Kepler, requires a creator. Everything that exists results from something or someone that came before it. Logically, there has to be a first cause or “uncaused cause” that is eternal and started the universe off.

3. God is the Necessary Being.

Contingency, a main premise of Aquinas’s third way, is connected with the Big Bang Theory. Contingency refers to something that depends on something else in order to happen. The Big Bang Theory is the name for the most-cited current explanation and cosmological model of how the universe began. It states that the universe began with one small particle (atom) that then inflated over millions of years to form the present cosmos while continuing its expansion.

Yet, the “one small particle” that began the expansion must have always existed and had no beginning. “Nothing” cannot create “something.” For anything to exist, there must be a necessary, eternal being (God) who always existed and brought other beings into existence.

Cosmologist and atheist Stephen Hawking admitted that the Big Bang Theory constitutes an argument for God. “If the rate of expansion of the universe one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, the universe would have already recollapsed before it reached its present size.” Without the intervention of a necessary being, human life would have been impossible.

The fourth way is based on the procession of degrees from less to more—for example, “more true” or “less true.”

4. God is the Absolute Being.

It is possible to recognize different degrees of not only truth, but also goodness, justice, beauty, and so on in the world. Think of the words “good, better, best” or qualifying something as “most beautiful.” You can only speak of such different degrees of qualities by comparing them to a supreme model or absolute being as a reference point: God.

In other words, things cannot be more perfect or less perfect unless there is a wholly perfect being. Whatever is perfect is the cause of the less than perfect—that is, the higher is the cause of the lower. The grades of a student with the 3.8 GPA, a very good average, are nonetheless “less perfect” when compared to someone who has a perfect 4.0 GPA. This means that there must be a perfect being, which is the cause of perfections of the less-than-perfect beings. This is the perfect or absolute being, God.

Finally, the fifth way, based on the teleological argument, is this:

5. God is the Grand Designer.

The world contains beauty, symmetry, and power that only a grand designer could create. The earth’s environment is a marvel in itself. As far as we know there are no other planets in our solar system able to sustain life.

Prominent scientists have a difficult time imagining the possibility of human life forming in the universe out of chance alone. Other scientists who remain skeptical that God created the universe and life in it have