

Apologetics Forum, Catalina Lutheran Church
Friday, September 1, 2023

Collect for the evening

O God, You make the minds of the faithful to be of one will: Grant unto Your people that they may love what You command, and desire what You promise; that among the manifold changes of this world, our hearts may always be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.

Early Modern Apologists

1. **Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), the “irenic spirit”**
2. **Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the Wager**
3. **Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), apologetics as dogmatics**
4. **William Paley (1743-1805), the watchmaker**
5. **Joseph Butler (1692-1752), against deism**

Background/terms

Irenicism

Refers to attempts to unify Christian apologetical systems by using reason as an essential attribute; those who affiliate themselves with irenicism identify the importance of unity in the Christian Church and declare the common bond of all Christians under Christ.

Jansenism

An attempt to reform Catholicism by bringing in some Calvinistic doctrines such as the depravity of man, predestination, irresistible grace, and limited atonement. Jansenists also rejected the infallibility of the Catholic Church and spoke against the authority of the pope.

Enlightenment and The Age of Reason

An intellectual and philosophical movement that occurred in Europe, especially Western Europe, in the 17th and 18th centuries, with global influences and effects. The Enlightenment included a range of ideas centered on the value of human happiness, the pursuit of knowledge obtained by means of reason and the evidence of the senses, and ideals such as natural law, liberty, progress, toleration, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state.

American Enlightenment

A period of intellectual and philosophical fervor in the thirteen American colonies in the 18th to 19th century. The spirit of the American Enlightenment was to give Enlightenment ideals a practical, useful form in the life of the nation and its people. A non-denominational moral philosophy replaced theology in many college curricula. Some colleges reformed their curricula to include natural philosophy (science), modern astronomy, and mathematics, and "new-model" American style colleges were founded. Politically, the age is distinguished by an emphasis upon equality under the law, economic liberty, republicanism and religious tolerance, as clearly expressed in the United States Declaration of Independence.

First Great Awakening

A series of Christian revivals that swept Britain and its thirteen North American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. The revival movement permanently affected Protestantism as adherents strove to renew individual piety and religious devotion. The Great Awakening marked the emergence of Anglo-American evangelicalism as a trans-denominational movement within the Protestant churches. In the United States, the term *Great Awakening* is most often used, while in the United Kingdom the movement is referred to as the *Evangelical Revival*.

Deism

Briefly, the belief in the existence of God, specifically in a creator who does not intervene in the universe after creating it, solely based on rational thought without any reliance on revealed religions or religious authority. Emphasizes the concept of natural theology, that God's existence is revealed through nature. [more on this topic in section on **Joseph Butler** below]

Theistic (or theological) utilitarianism

Holds that although our knowledge of God is very limited, we know that he is perfectly benevolent, so there can be no doubt that he desires the maximum happiness for his creatures. We can safely assume that He desires us always to act to promote this end. For us, His desire is a command, and the actions commanded by God are our duties.

Hugo Grotius (1583 - 1645)

- **Biography**
 - Dutch humanist, diplomat, lawyer, theologian, jurist, statesman, poet and playwright
 - Major figure in the fields of philosophy, political theory and law
 - *De jure belli ac pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*)
 - *Mare Liberum* (*The Free Seas*) -- for which he has been called the "father of international law"
 - Contributed significantly to the evolution of the notion of *rights*
 - Also famous for having escaped prison in a book chest (he was in prison as a consequence of getting involved in a church-state conflict)
- **Apologetics**
 - Exhibited an "**irenic spirit**"
 - Lived during a time of much religious debate in Holland over Arminianism:
 - Remonstrants (pro-Arminius) → reject Calvinist doctrine of predestination; human dignity requires an unimpaired freedom of the will
 - Counter-Remonstrants → defended Calvinist doctrine
 - Grotius was a defender/sympathizer of the Remonstrants
 - "**De veritate**"
 - Book I → God as first cause, God's work making right the wrongs of evil
 - Book II → Christianity is the only religious that comports fully with human reason
 - Christ's followers were wise people, and would not have believed false or falsifiable things
 - There is ample evidence for faith, but evidence can only persuade; securing faith requires following the evidence with obedience
 - Book III → the Bible is a credible and trustworthy source
 - Book IV → a treatise against paganism
 - Book V → Judaism
 - that Jews recognize miracles in the OT but not the NT is a consequence of their being blinded by sin
 - Book VI → Islam
 - spread by conquest
 - Christianity's ethic of patience and kindness is superior to Islam's appeal to revenge
 - Conclusion
 - read Scripture, keep the teachings of Scripture
 - find mutual agreement to avoid conflict and sectarianism
- **Apologetic methodology**
 - Emphasize veracity of the Bible
 - Emphasize the historicity of the NT, and the reliability of the testimonies therein

- Desired peace and order as markers of the Christian faith
 - Willing to subordinate doctrine to ethics as a path to Christian unity
- Of note:
 - De veritate has no discussion of Trinitarian doctrine
 - De veritate only contains the most basic tenets of Christian belief
- Author's conclusion/critique → "... we need an approach [to apologetics] that roots Christian ethical response in Christian doctrinal belief"
 - Grotius "missed this very crucial mark"

Selection from *De veritate*, Book VI, Section XI, *The conclusion to the Christians; who are admonished of their duty upon occasion of the foregoing things*

"... Next follows an exhortation to mutual agreement, which Christ seriously commended to his disciples when he was about to leave them: we ought not to have amongst us many masters, but only Jesus Christ: all Christians were baptized into the same name, therefore there ought to be no sects or divisions amongst them; to which that there may be some remedy applied, those words of the apostle are suggested, to be temperate in our wisdom, according to the measure of the knowledge God has afforded us: if any have not so good an understanding of all things, that we bear with their infirmities, that they may quietly, and without quarrelling, unite with us; if any exceed the rest in understanding, it is reasonable he should exceed in good-will towards them; and as to those who in some things think otherwise than we do, we are to wait till God shall make the hidden truth manifest unto them: in the mean time, we are to hold fast, and fulfil those things we are agreed in. ..."

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

- **Biography**
 - French mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher, and Catholic writer
 - a pioneer in the natural and applied sciences
 - wrote in defense of the scientific method
 - invented a mechanical calculator (the Pascaline)
 - Associated with Jansenism
 - Following a religious experience in late 1654, began writing influential works on philosophy and theology
- **Apologetics**
 - "**Provincial letters**"
 - Critical of the Jesuits, uses mockery
 - "**Pensées**"
 - Died before it was completed
 - "... an apology not of the mind but of the heart"
 - Hoped to convince people to live out the "apparently meaningless practices" of the Catholic Church in hopes that they would come to belief
 - Contains multiple versions of the "Wager"
 - based on his decision theory

- a rational person should adopt a lifestyle consistent with the existence of God and actively strive to believe in God
 - why?
 - if God does not exist, one incurs only finite losses, potentially sacrificing certain pleasures and luxuries
 - if God does indeed exist, one stands to gain immeasurably (by an eternity in Heaven) while simultaneously avoiding boundless losses associated with an eternity in Hell

Selection from *Pensées*, Fragment 233

... Let us then examine this point, and say, "God is, or He is not." But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Do not then reprove for error those who have made a choice; for you know nothing about it. "No, but I blame them for having made, not this choice, but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager at all."

Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? ... Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.—"That is very fine. Yes, I must wager; but I may perhaps wager too much."—Let us see. Since there is an equal risk of gain and of loss, if you had only to gain two lives, instead of one, you might still wager. But if there were three lives to gain, you would have to play (since you are under the necessity of playing), and you would be imprudent, when you are forced to play, not to chance your life to gain three at a game where there is an equal risk of loss and gain. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. And this being so, if there were an infinity of chances, of which one only would be for you, you would still be right in wagering one to win two, and you would act stupidly, being obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life against three at a game in which out of an infinity of chances there is one for you, if there were an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain. ...

...

"I confess it, I admit it. But, still, is there no means of seeing the faces of the cards?"—Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc. "Yes, but I have my hands tied and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and am not free. I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?"

True. But at least learn your inability to believe, since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot believe. Endeavour then to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness.—"But this is what I am afraid of."—And why? What have you to lose?

...

The end of this discourse.—Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

- **Biography**
 - American revivalist preacher, philosopher, and Congregationalist theologian
 - Leading figure of the American Enlightenment
 - Widely regarded as one of America's most important and original philosophical theologians
 - Played a critical role in shaping the First Great Awakening
 - Known for "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
- **Apologetics**
 - His primary target → deism
 - His apologetics was a dogmatics (incomplete at the time of his death)
 - "A History of the Work of Redemption"
 - An attempt to re-construe all human knowledge in light of the central and inescapable reality of God
 - Agreed with Anselm's "faith seeking understanding" → human reason comes after one has embraced the truths of human revelation by faith
 - Used ontological, cosmological, and teleological, and moral arguments for God's existence
 - Used historical evidence
 - Pagan gods have come and gone, but not the God of Israel

- Survival of the Jewish people
- Jesus' public performance of miracles
- Work of the apostles
- Spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire
- Internal arguments, e. g.,
 - the intellectual certitude of a believer's spiritual perception is greater than the certitude gained by ordinary human reasoning about God
- Took best ideas of the Enlightenment and adapted them for Christian use, e. g.,
 - Moral philosophy: against the idea that human beings should seek their own happiness and that God's great aim is to promote human well-being → God is the proper and true aim of all right actions
 - History: all of history is unified by God's redemptive plan; the course of history is a way of "seeing" God's activity and discerning his reality
- Author's assessment
 - Edwards "seems" to have arrived at the opinion that the best apologetics is a good dogmatics, and that dogmatics ought to take the form of narrative or history

Selection from "History of Redemption"

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION IS A WORK WHICH GOD CARRIES ON FROM THE FALL OF MAN TO THE END, OF THE WORLD.

THE beginning of the posterity of our first parents was after the fall; for all their posterity, by ordinary generation, are partakers of the fall, and of the corruption of nature that followed from it; and these generations, by which the human race is propagated, shall continue to the end of the world; so these two are the limits of the generation of men on the earth; the fall of man, and the end of the world. There are the same limits to the work of redemption, as to those progressive works of God, by which that redemption is accomplished; though not as to the fruits of it; for they, as was laid before, shall be eternal.

The work of redemption and the work of salvation are the same thing. What is sometimes in Scripture called God's saving his people, is in other places called his redeeming them. Christ is called both the Saviour and Redeemer of his people.

I must show how I would be understood when I use the word redemption. —And here it may be observed, that the work of redemption is sometimes to be taken in a limited sense, for the purchase of salvation; (for so the word strictly signifies, a purchase of deliverance;) and if we take it in this sense, the work of redemption was not so long in doing: but it was begun and finished with Christ's humiliation. It was begun with Christ's incarnation, carried on through his life, and finished with his death, or the time of his remaining under the power of death, which ended in his resurrection: and so we say, that the day of Christ's resurrection is the day when he finished the work of redemption, i. e. then the purchase was finished : and the work itself, and all that appertained to it, was virtually done, but not actually.

But sometimes the work of redemption is taken more largely, as including all that God doth tending to this end; not only the purchase itself, but also all God's works that were properly preparatory to, or applicatory of, the purchase, and accomplishing the success of it : so then the whole dispensation, as it includes the preparation, the purchase, and the application and success of Christ's redemption, may be called the work of redemption. All that Christ does in this great affair as mediator, in any of his offices, either of prophet, priest, or king ; either when he was in this world in his human nature, or before, or since: and not only what Christ the mediator has done, but also what the Father, or the Holy Ghost, have done, as covenanted in this design of redeeming sinful men : or, in one word, all that is wrought in execution of the eternal covenant of redemption; this is what I call the work of redemption in the doctrine ; for it is all but one work, one design. The various dispensations or works that belong to it, are but the several parts of one scheme. It is but one design that is formed, to which all the offices of Christ directly tend; in which all the Persons of the Trinity conspire; and all the various dispensations that belong to it are united. The several wheels are one machine, to answer one end, and produce one effect.

Selection from "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

And let every one that is yet out of Christ, and hanging over the pit of hell, whether they be old men and women, or middle aged, or young people, or little children, now harken to the loud calls of God's word and providence. This acceptable year of the Lord, a day of such great favours to some, will doubtless be a day of as remarkable vengeance to others. Men's hearts harden, and their guilt increases apace at such a day as this, if they neglect their souls; and never was there so great danger of such persons being given up to hardness of heart and blindness of mind. God seems now to be hastily gathering in his elect in all parts of the land; and probably the greater part of adult persons that ever shall be saved, will be brought in now in a little time, and that it will be as it was on the great out-pouring of the Spirit upon the Jews in the apostles' days; the election will obtain, and the rest will be blinded. If this should be the case with you, you will eternally curse this day, and will curse the day that ever you was born, to see such a season of the pouring out of God's Spirit, and will wish that you had died and gone to hell before you had seen it. Now undoubtedly it is, as it was in the days of John the Baptist, the axe is in an extraordinary manner laid at the root of the trees, that every tree which brings not forth good fruit, may be hewn down and cast into the fire.

Therefore, let every one that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation: Let every one fly out of Sodom: "Haste and escape for your lives, look not behind you, escape to the mountain, lest you be consumed."

William Paley (1743-1805)

- **Biography**
 - English Anglican clergyman, Christian apologist, philosopher, and utilitarian
 - Best known for his natural theology exposition of the teleological argument for the existence of God, which made use of the watchmaker analogy (see Selection below)
 - Strong supporter of the American colonies during the revolutionary war, partly because he thought it would lead to the destruction of slavery
- **Apologetics**
 - Believed that the reality of God is evident to an impartial, inquiring mind
 - Believed that Christians should seek both salvation and social justice for others
 - **“The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy”**
 - contains his version of **theistic utilitarianism**
 - the existence and continuation of the cosmos is explained only by theism – atheism offers no explanation
 - Unique in the history of apologetics → combined philosophical and theological argument with social apologetics and cultural engagement
 - an abolitionist
 - held that wealthy people have a Christian obligation to help the poor
- Problems with his argumentation (David Hume a significant critic)
 - why can't there be many designers, or many gods?
 - why should we believe that the design is good? If it is, why is there evil?

Selection from “Natural Theology; or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of God”

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there. I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever; nor would it, perhaps, be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone; why is it not admissible in that second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, namely, that when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive—what we could not discover in the stone—that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e. g., that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, or placed in any other manner or in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it.

This mechanism being observed... the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker—that there must have existed, at some time and at

some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehend its construction and designed its use.

Nor would it, I apprehend, weaken the conclusion, that we had never seen a watch made; that we had never known an artist capable of making one; that we were altogether incapable of executing such a piece of workmanship ourselves, or of understanding in what manner it was performed; all this being no more than what is true of some exquisite remains of ancient art, of some lost arts, and, to the generality of mankind, of the more curious productions of modern manufacture.

Selection from “The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy”

When God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about both.

If he had wished our misery, he might have made sure of his purpose, by forming our senses to be so many sores and pains to us, as they are now instruments of gratification and enjoyment: or by placing us amidst objects so ill-suited to our perceptions, as to have continually offended us, instead of ministering to our refreshment and delight. He might have made, for example, every thing we tasted, bitter; every thing we saw, loathsome; every thing we touched, a sting; every smell a stench; and every sound a discord.

If he had been indifferent about our happiness or misery, we must impute to our good fortune (as all design by this supposition is excluded) both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to produce it. But either of these (and still more both of them) being too much to be attributed to accident, nothing remains but the first supposition, that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness; and made for them the provision which he has made, with that view, and for that purpose.

... Evil, no doubt, exists; but is never, that we can perceive, the object of contrivance. Teeth are contrived to eat, not to ache; their aching now and then, is incidental to the contrivance, perhaps inseparable from it: or even, if you will, let it be called a defect in the contrivance; but it is not the *object* of it. This is a distinction which well deserves to be attended to. In describing implements of husbandry, you would hardly say of the sickle, that it is made to cut the reaper's fingers, though, from the construction of the instrument, and the manner of using it, this mischief often happens. But if you had occasion to describe instruments of torture or execution, you would say, is to extend the sinews; this to dislocate the joints; this to break the bones; this to scorch the soles of the feet. Here, pain and misery are the very *objects* of the contrivance. Now, nothing of this sort is to be found in the works of nature. We never discover a train of contrivance to bring about an evil purpose. No anatomist ever discovered a system of organization calculated to produce pain and disease; or, in explaining the parts of the human body, ever said, This is to irritate; this to inflame; this duct is to convey the gravel to the kidneys; this gland to secrete the humour which forms the gout: if by

chance he come at a part of which he knows not the use, the most he can say is, that it is useless: no one ever suspects that it is put there to incommode, to annoy, or to torment. Since then God hath called forth his consummate wisdom to contrive and provide for our happiness, and the world appears to have been constituted with this design at first; so long as this constitution is upholden by him, we must in reason suppose the same design to continue.

... I seem, for my own part, to see the benevolence of the Deity more clearly in the pleasures of very young children, than in any thing in the world. The pleasures of grown persons may be reckoned partly of their own procuring; especially if there has been any industry, or contrivance, or pursuit, to come at them; or if they are founded, like music, painting, &c. upon any qualification of their own acquiring. But the pleasures of a healthy infant are so manifestly provided for it by *another*, and the benevolence of the provision is so unquestionable, that every child I see at its sport, affords to my mind a kind of sensible evidence of the finger of God, and of the disposition which directs it.

...

We conclude, therefore, that God wills and wishes the happiness of his creatures. And this conclusion being once established, we are at liberty to go on with the rule built upon it, namely, "that the method of coming at the will of God, concerning any action, by the light of nature, is to inquire into the tendency of that action to promote or diminish the general happiness."

Joseph Butler (1692-1752)

- **Biography**
 - English Anglican bishop, theologian, apologist, and philosopher
 - Known for critiques of Deism, Thomas Hobbes's egoism (that moral agents ought to act in their own self interest), and John Locke's theory of personal identity (all humans are born as blank slates; the whole personality comes from sensory experiences alone)
- **Butler vs deism**
 - common ground
 - There is an intelligent first cause of the universe, whom we may call God
 - God is a rational being who created the universe to be orderly and work according to intelligent principles
 - We are made in God's image, and each of us has been given the inner light of reason
 - where deists differ
 - God does not intervene in human history
 - Reject the incarnation, Trinity, and atonement

- One cannot have a personal relationship with God
- There are no miracles—these would conflict with rationalism and science
- Consider themselves to be reformers of Christianity
- * There has never been a church or denomination of deists/deism
- deists are on a spectrum
 - God is eternal, infinite, intelligent, independent, and He created the world
 - God is all that, and also exercises providential governance over the world (not moral governance)
 - God is all that, and also He is a moral governor, but there is no immortality
 - God is all that, and also there is a future life and there is a judgment where virtue is rewarded and vice punished
 - They all agree—there is no need for revelation to discover the truths of these claims
- **“The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature”**
 - what is revealed to us about God’s moral purpose and our salvation is independently supported by what we observe in the workings of the world
- Butler’s central claims about Christianity (vs deism)
 - God is a moral being who rewards and punishes according to merit
 - the claims of Christianity are not as fanciful or ill-supported by evidence as many people believe
 - it is folly to wait for “all the evidence to be in” before making a commitment to faith (the author calls this “Butler’s Wager”)
- For consideration: deism today
 - History books will say that deism declined about the 1730s—but the ideas remain
 - consider the statement “I am a spiritual person, but I am not religious”