Notes on Edwards’ use of “humility”

**SERMONS 1720-1723**

**The Nakedness of Job, Job 1:21**

“Now this doctrine...ought to teach us humility and so submission to God's will in all dispensations” (WJE 10:405)

**God's Excellencies, Psalms 89:6**

“Wherefore, I shall not presume to speak of the excellencies of God any further than he has taught and instructed us in his Word. I acknowledge, such a glorious, amazing, and astonishing and awful theme ought to be entered upon by mortals, by dust and ashes, with the greatest awe and reverence; with the deepest humility and fear, especially by such dust and ashes, and so likewise it also ought to be attended to at this time, by us all.” (WJE 10:418)

**The Way of Holiness, Isaiah 35:8**

“[...] did you not observe in the life of Christ wonderful instances of humility.” (WJE 10:473)

**Poverty of Spirit, Matthew 5:3**

“He begins with that which is the very foundation of Christianity: humility...” (WJE 10:496)

**Living to Christ, Philippians 1:21**

“we must die to our lusts and to our natural corruptions, by mortification and the deepest humility, and a mean and lowly thought of ourselves...” (WJE 10:569)

“if they examine themselves...if they would often compare their lives with the life of Christ and see how far their humility, meekness, and charity falls short of his.” WJE 10:575).

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1 WJE 10:465, “early effort in seminal definition, "The Way of Holiness" is much more a definition of holiness than an attempt to provide a "way" or practical guide to it. The prior existence of such a guide is established by mentioning the most relevant portions of the Scriptures, but Edwards eschews sustained analysis of them, even in the Application. Such an undertaking in practical theology would be beyond the scope of any one sermon, in any case, and would not be realized until many years later when, in 1738, Edwards composed the sermon series eventually published as Charity and its Fruits (1852).”
“so when they set an example of a sincere, universal, unaffected piety, humility, and charity, it has a wonderful influence to the contrary.” (WJE 10:577).

**Fragment: Application on Love to Christ, James 1:12**
How sweet will the thoughts of the perfections of His human nature raise when he thinks of His innocency, condescension, **humility** meekness, patience, and charity. (WJE 10:616).

**Shadows of Divine Things (late 1728-1729)**

114. The blue color of the serene sky, which is a pure pleasant color, yet is a feeble color. "Tis by a reflection of the weakest and least rays of the sun's light, hereby representing admirably not only the purity of the happiness of the saints in heaven, but that blessed humility…(WJE 11:94)

182. […] Many evil things, contrary to the humility and simplicity that is in Christ…(WJE 11:120)

**MISCELLANIES (CA. 1730’S—)**

5. **Heaven**
"We are very apt to conceive that those that are thus, that are more holy and more happy than others in heaven, will be elated and lifted up above them; whereas, their being superior in holiness implies their being superior in humility, or having the greatest humility; for humility is a part of holiness that is capable of degrees in the perfect state of heaven, as well as other graces. (WJE 13:201).

123. **Spiritual Sight.**
"So it is in the more complex spiritual ideas, as holiness, humility, charity; which include many of those simple spiritual ideas...(WJE 13:286).

343. **Moral. Law, Gospel**
"So the revelation of the love of Christ, the wonderful condescension of Christ, the humiliation and sufferings of Christ for us, etc.—they make the duties of charity, humility, meekness and patience, as they are commanded in the gospel, new duties as it were; they are gospel duties.” (WJE 13:416)
470. Work of Humiliation
   “a sense of the awful and terrible greatness of God...” (WJE 13:511)

SERMONS 1723-1729

A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate (early 1730’s)
   “Pride hinders men from seeing the excellency of God and amiableness of Christ, and makes them set up themselves as the most excellent. It hinders them from receiving the gospel, which is all founded in humility. (WJE 14:87)

Profitable Hearers of the Word (Fall 1728-early 1729)
   “It immediately appears in the proportion of light in the understanding, in the proportion of strength of faith and entireness of dependence on God; in the degree of holy disposition and inclination of soul; in the degree of humility and sense of our own unworthiness.” (WJE 14:267)
   “You are longing for more love to God, for a more unmoved faith in Jesus Christ, for more communion with God, for more of a Christian spirit and temper, for more of a spirit of charity and a spirit of humility. (WJE 14:273)

SERMONS 1730-1733

God Glorified in Man's Dependence (1730 Northampton/1731 Boston)
   “Humility is a great ingredient in true faith...” (WJE 17:213)

1738

Jer. 5:21-22. "'Tis a sottish and unreasonable thing for men not to fear God and tremble at his presence." Mar. 1738 (2x)

Rom. 14:8. "Such is the happy case of some persons, that whether they live they live unto Christ, or whether they die they die unto Christ, and whether they live or die they are Christ's." Mar. 1738. (1x)
Ps. 21:4. "God never begrutches his people anything they desire or are capable of as being too good for 'em." May 1738. (1x)

1 Cor. 13: 1-10 [Charity and Its Fruits]

RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS (1746)

Part Three Showing What Are Distinguishing Signs of Truly Gracious and Holy affections

VI. Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation.

Evangelical humiliation is a sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicablelessness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart.

There is a distinction to be made between a legal and evangelical humiliation. The former is what men may be the subjects of, while they are yet in a state of nature, and have no gracious affection; the latter is peculiar to true saints: the former is from the common influence of the Spirit of God, assisting natural principles, and especially natural conscience; the latter is from the special influences of the Spirit of God, implanting and exercising supernatural and divine principles: the former is from the mind's being assisted to a greater sense of the things of religion, as to their natural properties and qualities, and particularly of the natural perfections of God, such as his greatness, terrible majesty, etc., which were manifested to the congregation of Israel, in giving the law at Mount Sinai; the latter is from a sense of the transcendent beauty of divine things in their moral qualities: in the former a sense of the awful greatness, and natural perfections of God, and of the strictness of his law, convinces men that they are exceeding sinful, and guilty, and exposed to the wrath of God, as it will wicked men and devils at the Day of Judgment; but they don't see their own odiousness on the account of sin; they don't see the hateful nature of sin; a sense of this is given in evangelical humiliation, by a discovery of the beauty of God's holiness and moral perfection. In a legal humiliation, men are made sensible that they are little and nothing before the great and terrible God, and that they are undone, and wholly insufficient to help themselves; as wicked men will be at the Day of Judgment: but they have not an answerable frame of heart, consisting in a disposition to abase themselves, and exalt God alone: this disposition is given only in evangelical humiliation, by overcoming the heart, and changing its inclination, by a discovery of God's holy beauty: in a legal humiliation, the conscience is convinced; as the consciences of all will be most
perfectly at the Day of Judgment: but because there is no spiritual understanding the will is not bowed, nor the inclination altered: this is done only in evangelical humiliation. In legal humiliation men are brought to despair of helping themselves; in evangelical, they are brought voluntarily to deny and renounce themselves: in the former they are subdued and forced to the ground; in the latter, they are brought sweetly to yield, and freely and with delight to prostrate themselves at the feet of God.

Legal humiliation has in it no spiritual good, nothing of the nature of true virtue; whereas evangelical humiliation is that wherein the excellent beauty of Christian grace does very much consist. Legal humiliation is useful, as a means in order to evangelical; as a common knowledge of the things of religion is a means requisite in order to spiritual knowledge. Men may be legally humbled and have no humility; as the wicked at the Day of Judgment will be thoroughly convinced that they have no righteousness, but are altogether sinful, and exceeding guilty, and justly exposed to eternal damnation, and be fully sensible of their own helplessness, without the least mortification of the pride of their hearts: but the essence of evangelical humiliation consists in such humility, as becomes a creature, in itself exceeding sinful, under a dispensation of grace; consisting in a mean esteem of himself, as in himself nothing, and altogether contemptible and odious; attended with a mortification of a disposition to exalt himself, and a free renunciation of his own glory.

[...]

As we would therefore make the holy Scriptures our rule, in judging of the nature of true religion, and judging of our own religious qualifications and state; it concerns us greatly to look at this humiliation, as one of the most essential things pertaining to true Christianity.⁵

Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. II, ch. 2, no. 11, says, "I was always exceedingly pleased with that saying of Chrysostom, 'The foundation of our philosophy is humility,' and yet more pleased with that of Augustine, 'as,' says he, 'the rhetorician, being asked, what was the first thing in the rules of eloquence, he answered, "pronunciation"; what was the second, "pronunciation"; what was the third, still he answered, "pronunciation." So if you should ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, I would answer, firstly, secondly, and thirdly, and forever, humility.'"

This is the principal part of the great Christian duty of self-denial. That duty consists in two things, viz. first, in a man's denying his worldly inclinations, and in forsaking and renouncing all worldly objects and enjoyments; and
secondly, in denying his natural self-exaltation, and renouncing his own
dignity and glory, and in being emptied of himself; so that he does freely, and
from his very heart, as it were renounce himself, and annihilate himself.
Thus the Christian doth, in evangelical humiliation. And this latter is the
greatest and most difficult part of self-denial; although they always go
together, and one never truly is, where the other is not; yet natural men can
come much nearer to the former than the latter. Many anchorites and
recluses have abandoned (though without any true mortification) the wealth,
and pleasures, and common enjoyments of the world, who were far from
renouncing their own dignity and righteousness; they never denied
themselves for Christ, but only sold one lust to feed another, sold a beastly
lust to pamper a devilish one; and so were never the better, but their latter
end was worse than their beginning; they turned out one black devil, to let in
seven white ones, that were worse than the first, though of a fairer
countenance. 'Tis inexpressible, and almost inconceivable, how strong a self-
righteous, self-exalting disposition is naturally in man; and what he will not
do and suffer, to feed and gratify it; and what lengths have been gone in a
seeming self-denial in other respects, by Essenes and Pharisees among the
Jews, and by Papists, many sects of heretics, and enthusiasts, among
professing Christians; and by many Mahometans; and by Pythagorean
philosophers, and others, among the heathen: and all to do sacrifice to this
Moloch of spiritual pride or self-righteousness; and that they may have
something wherein to exalt themselves before God, and above their fellow
creatures.

That humiliation which has been spoken of, is what all the most glorious
hypocrites, who make the most splendid show of mortification to the world,
and high religious affection, do grossly fail in. Were it not that this is so much
insisted on in Scripture, as a most essential thing in true grace; one would be
tempted to think that many of the heathen philosophers were truly gracious,
in whom was so bright an appearance of many virtues.... (WJE 2:311)