GOD'S ESTRANGED CHILD: SELF-DEPRECATING IMAGES IN EDWARD TAYLOR'S PREPARATORY MEDITATIONS

THESIS

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Throughout his *Preparatory Meditations,* Edward Taylor used many images to deprecate himself. These images reflected his Puritan religious beliefs rather than an extremely low self-image.

The themes of his poetry were taken from the Bible, but they reflected the many duties which befell him in conjunction with his ministry at Westfield. By using images which were most familiar to him and the rhetorical devices of the seventeenth century, Taylor sought to seek God's forgiveness by doing His will—confessing personal guilt, asking for forgiveness, and praising God's mercy.

Because the meditations were directed only to God, Taylor never sought to publish them. Like the child he so desperately wanted to be looked upon as, he sought only his father's favor.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE OF EDWARD TAYLOR

That his deeds may be manifest that they are wrought in God.

The English Puritans who settled this continent during the seventeenth century brought with them the great traditions of English and classical literature, but more significantly they left their descendants a great quantity of literature which was the product of their own labors. Remarkably preserved manuscripts and printed works were passed down from one generation to the next, enriching the lives of those who read them and helping to establish from the nation's earliest beginning a literary heritage. By the twentieth century, all of the major writers of the colonial period had been acknowledged and their places in the literary traditions which they had helped to establish assigned--all except Edward Taylor, a writer whose poetry has been acclaimed as the best written during the colonial period. ¹

In 1939, Thomas H. Johnson brought Edward Taylor's poetry, which had remained in obscurity for two centuries, to public

view with the publication of The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor. This volume contained some of Taylor's miscellaneous poems, all of the poems which he had entitled God's Determinations, and portions of the Preparatory Meditations which Johnson, after reading a notation on the manuscript, had erroneously labeled "The Sacramental Meditations."³

During his lifetime, Taylor was a prolific writer. His library is said to have contained more than one hundred manuscript volumes which Taylor had had bound. Today, however, only thirteen of the volumes remain. The extant manuscripts include a diary, which Taylor kept during his passage to America and throughout his college years, twenty-five sermons, his poetry, and some letters—all of which Taylor refused to publish during his lifetime. After Taylor's death, his manuscripts were preserved in accordance with his wishes, but in accordance with those same wishes they were to remain for many years unpublished.⁴ Instead the works were passed from

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³ Stanford, p. lv.

⁴ Taylor's wishes concerning the fate of his manuscripts have become the subject of debate. Since Taylor died without leaving a will, his injunction to his heirs to preserve and not publish his manuscripts may have been more of a family tradition than an actual fact. See, for example, "Edward Taylor: A Revaluation," New England Quarterly, 31 (December, 1948), 518-530; Charles W. Mignon, "Some Notes on the History
one heir to another until they were finally dispersed in several New England libraries. 5

Taylor's ambivalent attitude toward his works has perplexed his twentieth-century readers. The reasons which Taylor had for wanting his works to remain unacknowledged and away from public scrutiny may always remain a mystery, but the intent of this paper is to explore the possible reasons for his attitude toward publication by examining Taylor's life, the rationale and process which he used in writing the Preparatory Meditations, and the images of self-deprecation which Taylor used to describe himself as a poet and as a seeker of God in the meditations.

Unfortunately there is little information about Taylor's life in America or in England, but of the information that is available, there is nothing to suggest Taylor was a failure or that there were circumstances in his life which had caused him to have feelings of extreme unworthiness.

Taylor is believed to have been born in Sketchly, Leicestershire, England, in 1942. His parents were yeomen who believed in the Puritan doctrine, and his upbringing was

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5Stanford, pp. liv-lviii.
strict. As the result of conversations with his sister about the life of Christ and the creation, Taylor was converted at an early age and resolved to dedicate himself to Christ. The amount of education which Taylor received while he was in England is unknown, but he is believed to have attended Cambridge for a year or two.  

During his youth, Taylor probably never suffered any persecutions because of his religious beliefs. His childhood and adolescence coincided with the years of Oliver Cromwell's reign--a time when people were encouraged to follow the Puritan way rather than not. Two years after the death of Cromwell, Taylor's religious beliefs caused him to be dismissed from a teaching position in Bagworth, Leicestershire; he was unable to sign the oath, required of all ministers and teachers, pledging allegiance to the Anglican Church. The oath was part of the Acts of Uniformity instituted by Charles II in 1662 as an attempt to destroy the Puritan movement in England.  

There is no record of Taylor's activities during the six years between 1662 and 1668. He may have worked as a farmer or a weaver near his place of birth. Taylor's poetry has many images which would lead the reader to conclude that he was knowledgeable about both farming and weaving.


On April 28, 1668, Taylor left England for the promise of religious freedom in The Holy Commonwealth of New England, a settlement of Puritans who had fled England with the fervent hope of establishing a settlement in accordance with the principles of their doctrine. Taylor noted in his diary that he attended to the spiritual needs of his shipboard companions and gave several sermons, although he had not yet been licensed to preach. 8

On July 4, 1668, Taylor arrived in Boston. He received a warm reception from Increase Mather, one of the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the New England Puritans. 9

The letters of introduction which Taylor brought with him undoubtedly helped him to receive immediate acceptance by the Mathers and other reputable New Englanders, and we may assume that the letters attested to his good Puritan character. Norman S. Grabo suggests that Taylor's ready acceptance into New England society came not so much from the young man's congeniality, but from his ardent religious beliefs which may have been recognized to be a "potential prop to New England's slipping dream" by the patriarchs of the settlement. 10


9 Grabo, p. 22.

10 Grabo, p. 22.
Soon after his arrival, Taylor went to see Charles Chauncey, president of Harvard College. Chauncey found Taylor acceptable and on July 23, 1668, Taylor was admitted to the college with advanced standing. He was given the honor of serving as college butler, a position reserved for mature students of the highest integrity. The position served to accord him an honor and helped him to meet his college expenses. Perhaps because of his prior education or his advanced age, Taylor graduated in three and one-half years. The poetry which Taylor is known to have written during his last year at school was not exceptional. There is no known record of his classmates' reaction to his works. Their silence speaks most eloquently of his talents at that time.\textsuperscript{11}

Taylor was intellectually gifted and planned to return to Harvard following his graduation to serve as Scholar of the House,\textsuperscript{12} but he gave up that ambition in order to answer the call of Westfield, Massachusetts, a remote farming community on the frontier which had been established in 1667. The town was without a minister, and they had sent a representative to the college to recruit a young man to serve their needs. On November 26, 1671, Taylor began the one-hundred-mile journey to Westfield which he was later to

\textsuperscript{11}Grabo, pp. 22-4.

\textsuperscript{12}Johnson, p. 14.
record in his diary as the "desperatest journey that ever Connecticut men undertooke." Taylor had doubts about accepting the ministry in such an isolated village, but eventually he did accept Westfield and maintained an active ministry there for over fifty years until his retirement in 1726.

The people of Westfield were initially more pleased with their young minister than he was with the prospect of ministering to them. After only two years of testing and observation, the townspeople asked Taylor to formally organize the church and officially to become their pastor. Usually this process took much longer; it was not unusual for a young minister to wait five or seven years before the congregation was satisfied that he was worthy of the task of ministering to them. Taylor delayed the formal organization of the church for eight years, partially because of his own uncertainty and partially because of the uncertain fate of the remote settlement during King Phillip's War in 1675-76. Perhaps Taylor had doubts about the inadequacy of his humble position to fully enable him to make use of his intellectual gifts. In 1679, Taylor finally consented to the organization of the church, and the people of Westfield officially elected him their pastor.13

13 Grabo, p. 25.
14 Grabo, p. 25
Taylor faithfully served the community of Westfield as both pastor and physician, attending to the physical and spiritual needs of those around him. Such a combination of roles was not unusual in New England. Indeed, Cotton Mather considered the two services an "angelical conjunction."  

The Puritans firmly believed in marriage. An unmarried man was looked upon suspiciously, and he was often required to pay extra taxes or perform extra duties in the community. Austin Warren writes, "Marriage was almost an obligation among the Congregational clergy as celibacy among Catholics..." Taylor married Elizabeth Fitch, daughter of Reverend James Fitch of Norwich, Connecticut, who bore him eight children, five of whom died in infancy. Shortly after the birth of their last child, Elizabeth died. Taylor, left a widower with three small children, cared for his children alone for several years and then married Ruth Willys of Hartford, Connecticut. Miss Willys' grandfathers had both served as governors of Connecticut. Taylor fathered six children in that marriage. Through each of his marriages, Taylor had

18 Warren, p. 52.
19 Grabo, p. 30.
aligned himself with prominent and distinguished families in New England.

When Taylor formally organized his church on August 26, 1676, he prepared a seventy-page statement recounting his religious conversion and outlining his doctrinal beliefs. The beliefs he professed were those of many other conservative Puritans. He believed that before the world began God fore-ordained that few men would be saved by the intercession of His son, Jesus Christ. The people who were to be redeemed were of the elect. The rest of mankind would justly suffer the pains of hell because of the original sin of Adam and Eve. Those who were pre-ordained to be saved would enter into a covenant with God. The covenant would be of grace. Man could not enter into this covenant on his own merits; God was the only one able to offer man salvation through the gift of grace. The gift of grace was extended to mankind through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whose crucifixion redeemed the anguish that all men owed to God as a result of the breaking of the first covenant. Once man and God made the covenant, each was bound eternally by it.

The Puritans were awed by the power and the majesty of God, especially when it was compared with the insignificance

20 Warren, p. 52.
of man. God kept His ways veiled from mankind, and no one was ever certain that he was to be saved; but with the proper diligence he might seek some sign within his heart that would give him some assurance of salvation.21 The Puritans believed that God extended grace to mankind through the taking of the Lord's Supper. When mankind took the bread and wine, there was a transference of grace and the communicant entered into the presence of Christ. The communicant's covenant with God was strengthened. Once a man had entered into the covenant, neither he nor God could break it.22

Taylor looked upon the spiritual union of God and man metaphorically. Christ was the divine poet; when Taylor ingested the bread and wine, the symbolic body and blood of Christ, he was transformed through grace and thus able to proclaim: "This rich banquet makes me thus a poet."23

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22 Edward Taylor, as well as other orthodox Puritans, believed that the communicant received Christ into his soul when he took the bread and wine, but the union was always interpreted as a spiritual experience. Taylor did not believe in the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation or in the doctrines of consubstantiation and ubiquitarianism associated with Martin Luther. See Meditations 2.107 and 2.108 (Stanford, Poems of Edward Taylor; and, Kathleen Blake, "Edward Taylor's Protestant Poetic: Nontransubstantiating Metaphor," American Literature, 43 (March, 1971), 1-24.

23 Meditation 2.10.

All poems referred to will be taken from Donald E. Stanford, ed., The Poems of Edward Taylor (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960). In all poems cited, the number preceding the period will indicate the series.
Only those men who had received some assurance of their salvation were allowed to enter into the rite of the Lord's Supper. To take communion while in an unregenerate state was to invite eternal damnation. The basic doctrine of the Puritan faith was clearly outlined in the Shorter Catechism prepared by the Westminster Assembly in 1648.\textsuperscript{24} Taylor also believed, along with many other New Englanders, in the Half-Way Covenant. This covenant extended membership in the church to the children of church members, although these children had not experienced a religious conversion. The children were allowed to be baptized and to attend church services, but they could not take communion until they had given evidence of a religious conversion. The Puritans believed in two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The communion service was considered to be the most sanctified and spiritually rewarding practice of the New England church.\textsuperscript{25}

The means which the Puritans employed to discern the workings of grace upon their hearts were an unceasing examination of conscience; careful reading of Scripture (the revealed word of God) in order to better know and understand the will of God; observation of the natural world around them for signs of the workings of God; and careful attention

\textsuperscript{24}Warren, p. 54.

to the advice of those who were presumed to be of the elect. Edward Taylor performed all of these practices diligently. He could not take them lightly; for into his care was given not only his own soul, but the souls of his church members as well.

In 1682, when Taylor was forty years old, he began to write a series of poems based on the scriptural text of his communion-day service. The observance of the Lord's Supper was usually held in Westfield every two months. Taylor was to write two hundred and seventeen of these poems during a period of forty-three years, from 1682-1725. The poems were entitled Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lord's Supper, Chiefly upon the Doctrin preached upon the day of administration and served as means of private devotion upon the significance of the sacrament and helped Taylor prepare himself for communion. Taylor wrote that the purposes of the meditations were to "stir up all of the sacramental graces: repentence, faith, humility, a discerning eye, hunger and thirst after communion with God in Christ, thankfulness, and holy joy in the Lord."28


27 There is a difference of opinion as to the number of meditations which Taylor actually wrote and as to the five lapses which he had between writing his poems—which may not have been written at regular intervals. See, for example, Thomas M. Davis, "Edward Taylor's Occasional Meditations," Early American Literature, 43 (1969), 17-29; also, Jesse Jones, "A Note on the Number of Edward Taylor's Preparatory Meditations," Early American Literature, 49 (1974), 81-2.

28 This quotation is from one of Taylor's sermons given in 1694. Grabo, p. 35.
Taylor ceased writing the meditations in 1725, when he was no longer able to perform his ministerial duties because of extreme age. Having spent the last years of his life as an invalid, he died on June 24, 1729, at the age of eighty-seven. He was buried in Westfield where he had lived for so many years. The citizens erected a tombstone in his honor which paid tribute to his life and works as a minister. His epitaph reads:

Here rests ye body of ye Rev'd Mr Edward Taylor
Ye Aged, Venerable Learned & Pious Pastor
of ye Church of Christ in this town who after
He had served God and his Generation Faithfully
for many years fell asleep June 24, 1729 in
ye 87th year of his age.29

CHAPTER II

TAYLOR'S MEDITATIVE PROCESS

For It Pleaseth the Father that in Him Should All Fulness Dwell.

Edward Taylor chose to honor God, petition for grace, prepare himself for the task of administering and receiving communion, and examine his conscience of signs of regeneration or transgression by writing meditative poetry. The writing of meditative verse was firmly established in the Anglican and Roman Catholic literary traditions, but for the New England Puritan no tradition of this literary genre existed. Verse writing was looked upon with a lenient eye; sometimes it was even encouraged, but Edward Taylor's writing of meditative verse represented a singular task.¹

The publication of George Herbert's The Temple in 1633 is known to have had direct influence upon the writings of Taylor, but Herbert was an Anglican poet living in England.² Taylor is also known to have been familiar with another metaphysical poet, John Cleveland, whose native home was not far from Taylor's birthplace. Cleveland's poems were very popular


in England during the seventeenth century. Taylor was of course influenced by the literary style and texts from sacred scripture. Many of his poems are based upon texts from the Song of Solomon (which he referred to as Canticles) and the book of John. Like many others of his day, Taylor liked to interpret the erotic Hebrew love poetry allegorically. Christ was considered to be the bridegroom, the bride was interpreted to be the church or the individual church member, and the "weddin feast" was the sacrament of communion which celebrated their union.\(^3\)

The use of spiritual meditation to further one's knowledge of God's holy will and man's place in that will as well as to assist the mind of man better to comprehend the glory and majesty of God, was a practice widely advocated by Puritan leaders. Shortly before Taylor began writing his meditations, Increase Mather published, in 1682, *Practical Truths*, a collection of eight sermons outlining a method of meditation very similar to the form which Taylor used in preparing his works.\(^4\)

Mather's sermons were preceded by a statement taken from the *Shorter Catechism*, published in 1648 as the result of the Westminster Assembly. This publication summarized the *Institutes* of John Calvin. The statements found in these

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works outlined the religious doctrines followed fervently by all devout Puritans in Old and New England. The Shorter Catechism stated explicitly that meditation was a necessary act before anyone could partake of the Lord's Supper.  

A year later in 1649, Richard Baxter, another Puritan, published The Saint's Everlasting Rest. This book was a detailed manual on the art of meditation and was popular for many years in the New England settlement. Taylor's library contained several of Baxter's works, but it did not include the one on meditation. It is probable that he had read the work before he came to America since it had been published in England and enjoyed popularity among Puritans there.

Baxter's method included three essential acts which corresponded to the division of the faculties of the soul: the memory, the understanding, and the will. When these three faculties were called upon to dwell on the Lord, a solemn action took place in the soul during the meditation.

The theme of the meditation should be based upon some heavenly doctrine called to mind by the memory. Once the doctrine was remembered, the understanding or reason was called upon to interpret and analyze that which had been remembered. When comprehension and understanding had taken

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6 Martz, Poem, p. 69

7 Martz, Poem, p. 69
place, the affections of the will (emotions) were aroused. The person performing the meditation was then to feel love, desire, hope, and joy in the Lord.

In addition to these three steps, Baxter also saw the necessity of combining prayer with the meditation. Prayer provided a means of keeping the soul's consciousness on the Divine Presence. When God became the highest object of man's devotion, the soul became elevated and the emotions were activated. No other part of the meditation could serve such an important part in the uniting of man and God in spiritual union.

To further help the soul dwell upon the Lord, Baxter suggested using sensory images to apprehend the glory of God and the splendor of heaven. By recalling to mind the greatest joys of which man was capable of having on earth and comparing them to the untold joys of perfection, man was able to elevate his soul. Earthly joys were insignificant and base when they were compared to the heavenly raptures. By dwelling on these things, man was able to increase his longing for heaven.

Still another treatise on meditation with which Taylor was probably familiar was the work of Thomas Hooker, a prominent Connecticut minister. In 1657, Hooker published The Application of Redemption, a work that outlined a method of meditation which emphasized man's dwelling on his sinful

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8 Stanford, p. 70.
nature. No one should ever forget his sinful nature, which was his birthright given to him by Adam and Eve.9

Taylor frequently followed the advice of Baxter and Hooker when he prepared his meditation.10 It is not unusual to read a meditation beginning with an account of man's fallen state, of the sins which man had no part in committing but which had been handed down to him, and of the sins for which he was directly responsible. The emotion which accompanies his recollection of his fallen state is despair.

One of the more vivid examples of man's inheritance of original sin may be found in Meditation 2.77:

A State, a State, Oh! Dungeon State indeed. 
   In which mee headlong, long agoe Sin pitcht: 
As dark as Pitch, where Nastiness doth breed: 
   And Filth defiles: and I am with it ditcht. 
A Sinnfull State: This Pit no Water's in't. 
A Bugbare State: as black as any inke.

I once sat singing on the Summit high 
'Mong the Celestiall Coire in Musick Sweet 
On highest bough of Paradisall joy, 
Glory and Innocence did in mee meet. 
I, as a Gold-Fincht Nighting Gale, tun'd ore Melodious Songs 'fore Glorie's Palace Doore.

But on this bough I tuning Pearcht not long: 
Th'Infernall Foe shot out a Shaft from Hell, 
A Fiery Dart pilde with Sins poison strong:

9Martz, Poem, p. 66.

10Although Taylor followed the advice of Baxter and Hooker in preparing the content of the poems, his form for writing the meditations does not always follow their suggested direction. Often Taylor begins by praising God and then describing his sinful state. See, for example, Meditation 1.10.
That struck my heart, and down I headlong fell.
And from the Highest Pinicle of Light
Into this Lowest pit more darke than night.

A Pit indeed of Sin; No water's here:
Whose bottom's furthest off from Heaven's bright,
And is next doore to Hell Gate, to it neer:
And here I dwell in sad and solemn night,
My Gold-Fincht Angell Feathers dapled in
Hells Scarlet Dy fat, blood red grown with Sin.

Taylor shows that man no longer had control of his destiny: he is confined within the dungeon of sin forever. The poem's tone of despair is deepended when Taylor shows that man is capable of remembering the joys of heaven and compares them to the horrors of hell.

In Meditation 2.25, Taylor presents a more personal lament for his fallen state. The poem does not speak of the sins of fallen humanity, but those of the poet:

Guilty, my Lord, What can I more declare?
Thou knowst the Case, and Cases of my Soule.
A Box of tinder: Sparks that falling o're
Set all on fire, and worke me all in Shoals.
A Pouch of Passion is my Pericarde
Sparks fly when ere my Flint and Steele strike hard.

I am a Dish of Dumps: yea ponderous dross,
Black blood all clotted, burdening my heart,
That Anger's anvill, and my bark bears moss.
My Spirits soakt are drunke with blackish Art.
If any Vertue stir, it is but feeble.
Th'Earth Magnet is, my heart's the trembling needle.

My Mannah breedth Worms: Thoughts fly blow'd are.
My heart's the Temple of the God of Flies.
My Tongue's an Altar of forbidden Weare
Fansy a foolish fire enflam'd by toys
Perfum'de with reeching Offerings of Sins
Whose Steaming reechs delight hobgoblins.

The sins which Taylor ascribes to himself are: a passionate nature, a corrupt heart, a wicked tongue, and a worldly mind.
Once Taylor had recalled his sinful state, we read of his praising the blessedness of Christ, His saving grace, and the glory of heaven. The emotion which accompanies this recollection of perfection is joy.

In Meditation 1.25, Taylor follows this guideline by using the imagery of man being clothed in grace through the wearing of the robes which Christ wore while He was in the tomb:

But, my sweet Lord, what glorious robes are those
That thou has brought out of thy Grave for thine?
They do outshine the Sun-Shine, Grace the Rose.
I leape for joy to thinke, shall these be mine?
Such are, as waite upon thee in thy Wars,
Cloathd with the Sun, and Crowned with twelve Stars.

The final section of the meditation is devoted to the recalling of the Father's will that some men would be saved by the mediation of the Son. The possibility of salvation, the realization that Taylor may be one of the elect brings about the feeling of hope. Each meditation is a hymn of praise to the Father and the Son.

In Meditation 1.16, Taylor prays that he will be chosen to receive God's grace:

Lord let thy Golden Beams Pierce through mine Eye
And leave therein an Heavenly Light to glaze
My Soule with glorious Grace all o're, whereby
I may have Sight, and Grace in mee may blaze.
Lord ting my Candle at thy Burning Rayes,
To give a gracious Glory to thy Prayse.

\[\text{Martz, Poem, p. 66.}\]
Throughout his poems, Taylor followed Baxter’s advice to recall the most exquisite earthly joys in order to gain some appreciation of the joys of heaven. The use of commonplace imagery, the smell of flowers and herbs, the taste of food, the pleasure of performing daily activities used throughout the poems to describe the glories of heaven.\(^{12}\) In Meditation 2.56, we are able to see how Taylor describes heaven through the use of earthly delights:

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Should I with silver tooles delve through the Hill Of Cordilera for rich thoughts, that I
My Lord, might weave with an angelick skill
A Damask Web of Velvet Verse thereby
To deck thy Works up, all my Web would run
To rags, and jags: so snicksnarld to the thrum.

Thine are so rich: Within, Without. Refin'd.
No workes like thine. No Fruits so sweete that grow
On th'trees of righteousness, of Angell kinde
And Saints, whose limbs reev'd with them bow down low.
Should I search ore the Nutmeg Gardens shine
Its fruits in flourish are but skegs to thine.

The Clove, when in its White-green'd blossoms shoots,
Some Call the pleasentst sent the World doth show.
None Eye e're saw, nor nose e're smelt such Fruits
My Lord, as thine, Thou Tree of Life in'ts blow.
Thou Rose of Sharon, Vallies Lilly true
Thy Fruits most sweet and Glorious ever grew.

Thou art a Tree of Perfect nature trim
Whose golden lining is of perfect Grace
Perfum'de with Deity unto the brim,
Whose fruits, of the perfection, grow, of Grace
Thy Buds, thy Blossoms, and thy fruits adorne
Thyselufe, and Works, more shining than the morn.
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suggests that the complete volume of poems does not represent an attempt by the poet to follow an overall plan.\textsuperscript{13} The immediate and only purpose of the poems, he maintains, was to prepare Taylor for the communion service. The poems are, however, divided into two sections. This sectional division was probably made by Thomas H. Johnson after he saw that Taylor had begun renumbering the Meditations. The poet numbered the first poems in his manuscript from one to forty-nine and then began renumbering the remaining poems from one to one hundred sixty-five. Taylor gave no explanation for the revised numerical order. Johnson labeled poems one to forty-nine as the first series and poems one to one hundred sixty-five as the second series.\textsuperscript{14}

The first thirty poems of the second series are concerned with typology. Within the second series, Taylor also included a series of meditations on successive verses from Canticles.\textsuperscript{15}

Although Taylor appears not to have had a unifying plan for writing his Meditations, there are recurrent themes which may be found throughout both series. These themes were popular among the puritans and echoed the very doctrines of their faith. The themes of the meditation resemble the structure of the meditations--man's fall from grace, the majesty of

\textsuperscript{14}Stanford, \textit{The Poems of Edward Taylor}, p. 500.
\textsuperscript{15}Stanford, "Edward Taylor," pp. 60-95.
God, and the hope for redemption—the very essence of the Puritan faith. The meditations fail to provide systematic theology; they are the traditionally oriented synthesis of Taylor's own faith.¹⁶

Although the meditations were mostly written as individual spiritual exercises, they nevertheless constitute a unified whole when they are viewed as the work of half a lifetime. During the forty years that Taylor took to write the meditations, he never deviated from his purposes—to praise the blessed Trinity and to desire a closer relationship with God through the gift of grace.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: But whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall prosper.

One of the unifying themes of the Preparatory Meditations is Taylor's glorification of God through the use of contrasting images of deprecation which he employed to describe himself and mankind. Although God was the embodiment of perfection and needed no embellishment from man, the Puritans often used their own shortcomings as a foil for God's goodness so that they might better comprehend His nature. This practice outwardly reflected the Puritan's inherent theological beliefs.

Edward Taylor was an orthodox, conservative--almost reactionary--Puritan minister who believed in the absolute goodness and omnipotence of God and in the absolute sinfulness and impotence of fallen man. He believed that the relationship which existed between God and man had been severed when man knowingly and willfully broke the law of God. The only way that man and God could be brought together again was through the mediation of Jesus Christ, whose absolute obedience to God had never faltered.

Taylor also believed that before the world was created, God predetermined who would be saved through the mediation
of Jesus Christ and who would justly suffer the pains of hell. The minister also knew that man was incapable of knowing whether he would be received into heaven. Because each man was ignorant of his fate, he had to live righteously according to the will of God by closely following the teachings of the Bible, the revealed word of God given as a guide to man; by diligently examining his own soul for signs of redemption or reprobation; and by praying that God had extended Christ's saving grace to him through the gift of faith.¹

In the Christographia, a series of sermons written between 1701-3, Taylor sought to explore the theanthropy (the divine and human nature) of Christ and to explain the mystical union between Christ and man which occurred when a member of the elect took the symbolic body and blood of Christ at the communion service. In the first sermon of the series, the state of fallen man is thus described:

. . . we may see what an accursed, poisonous, ruinating Evill thing Sin is, and what a dismal, woefull, Miserable, and forlorn condition man is cast into by Sin. The Case is such that the Elect of God, the objects of God's everlasting Love are sure on the accord of Sin to sustain the vengeence of God's everlasting Wrath, and the torments of Eternall flames in Hell unless they be


The reader will, hopefully, be tolerant of the seemingly redundant references to the religious doctrines of the Puritans. The importance which they gave to their religion cannot be stressed too often, especially in a discussion of Edward Taylor.
relieved and their condition is so execrable that it is beyond the relief of all Created help. . . None But the Eternall Son of God could Succor them.  

The hope of salvation and the certainty of man's sinfulness pervaded the thoughts of every conscientious Puritan. Perry Miller says, "Being men of piety, the Puritans frequently humbled themselves in the dust before the majestic God and called themselves worms. . . ." Edward Taylor was a conscientious Puritan and a man of piety. He believed in sin; he preached about sin; he taught his congregation the ways of sin and how to avoid them; and he saw sin within himself and in his congregation at Westfield. His position in the town did not isolate him from sin, but placed him in the very midst of the sinful world. Austin Warren describes the minister's life as "... following the usual pattern of the New England clergyman: he was the philosopher-king of his village as well as its priest and pastor: in Taylor's case, as often, he was the town physician."  

The intense introspection which Puritanism encouraged its followers to practice; its emphasis upon the reprobation of man; and the deterministic doctrine which it maintained

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2Stanford, p. 537.


could have no other effect upon its believers than to cause them to feel an acute sense of unworthiness and self-deprecation. Bert C. Bach maintains that self-deprecation was in itself a tenet of Puritanism and that Taylor made it a theme for the meditations.\(^5\)

Although the Preparatory Meditations are Taylor's private poem prayers of devotion and supplication, the self-deprecating images which the poet employs are used not only to describe himself in the particular, but to describe mankind in general. The belief that all men are born with the stigma of original sin ("All men benighted are by fall, and Sin! 2.114) serves to unite Taylor with the rest of humanity. Taylor sees himself as an individual and as a type for everyman.\(^6\)

Meditation 2.35 shows how he unites himself with the rest of humanity and describes the helplessness of fallen man:

\begin{verbatim}
We have our Souls undone, Can't undo this.  
We have Undone the Law, this can't undo:  
We have undone the World, when did amiss,  
We can't undo the Curse that brings in Woe.  
Our Undo-Doing can't undo, its true.  
Wee can't our Souls, and things undone, renew.
Without thee wee can nothing do, its sure.  
Thou saidst the same. We finde thy Saying true.  
Thou canst do all things: all amiss canst cure,  
Undo our Undo-doing, make all new.  
Thou madst this World: dost it thy play-house keep  
Wherein the Stars themselves play Hide-and-Seek.
\end{verbatim}


The use of the pronoun we is not usually found in those meditations which describe the fallen state of man. Meditation 2.29 takes on a more personal tone when Taylor uses the singular pronoun I.

What shall I say, my Lord? with what begin?
Immense Profaneness Wormholes ery part.
The World is saddlebackt with Loads of Sin.
Sin Craks the Axle tree of this greate Cart.
Floodgates of Firy Vengeance open fly
And Smoakie Clouds of Wrath darken the Skie.

Even though Taylor does not say that he has sinned, he does describe the state of the world. The fact that Taylor is in the world and able to describe it makes him guilty by association.

Taylor did not see himself merely as a sinful man supplicating himself to a justly wrathful, but benevolent God. He saw himself as having many roles and many needs in the divine plan. For each of his roles and needs, God was believed to have had a superior role and an answer. Meditation 1.29 shows this relationship:

I being grafft in thee there up do stand
In us Relations all that mutuall are.
I am thy Patient, Pupill, Servant, and
Thy Sister, Mother, Doove, Spouse, Son and Heire.
Thou art my Priest, Physician, Prophet, King,
Lord, Brother, Bridegroom, Father, Ev'ry thing.

The metaphoric relationship which Taylor believed God and man to have is further outlined in Meditation 1.39 where God is portrayed as the judge, Christ as the advocate (lawyer), and Taylor as the client (sinful man). In Meditations 2.20
and 2.50, Taylor describes God as being the master artist. In Meditations 2.71, 2.108, 2.109, and "The Reflexion," God and Christ are portrayed as hosts or caterers. In Meditation 2.78, God is likened to a vintner.

The range of metaphors used to describe the Lord are varied, but they certainly fall within the scope of Taylor's awareness and knowledge; possibly they reflect the roles which Taylor played in conjunction to his ministry at Westfield—if Austin Warren's judgment of Taylor's position in the community was correct. We know that Taylor was the town's minister and physician; his poetry attests to his artistry; he was twice married and fathered fourteen children so we know that he knew the role of father and spouse; he was the child of his parents; we have the preserved records and manuscripts to show that he was a friend to the townspeople and to some of the most influential people in the settlement; and it is not inconceivable to believe that his life on the frontier caused him, at various times, to assume the roles of host, vintner, and judge.

Whatever positions of distinctions Taylor enjoyed in these roles while he lived in Westfield is not known, but when these roles are attributed metaphorically to God, God is credited with the highest mastery, and Taylor's competence is juxtaposed to one of incompetence.

Many of the self-deprecating images which Taylor uses to describe himself and humanity are related to illness.
Christ is the physician and Taylor (or humanity) is the patient. The use of such a metaphor is appropriate because Taylor was himself an acting physician. The metaphor seems even more appropriate when we remember that the Puritans considered sin to be a sickness which had corrupted the healthy body of man after the fall.  

The deprecations and allusions which Taylor uses to describe his state go from a relatively mild, rational generalization in Meditation 2.60B:

Lord, oynt me with this Petro oyle. I'm sick.  
Make mee drinke Water of the Rock. I'm dry.  
Me in this fountain wash. My filth is thick.  
I'm faint, give Aqua Vitae or I dy.

to a more specified complaint in Meditation 2.14:

Halfe Dead: and rotten at the Coare: my Lord!  
I am Consumptive: and my Wasted lungs  
Scarce draw a Breath of aire: my silver Coard  
is loose. My buckles almost have no tongues.  
My Heart is Fistulate: I am a Shell.  
In Guilt and Filth I wallow, Sent and Smell.

to finally, a whole catalogue of sin induced illnesses which Taylor despairingly writes of in Meditation 2.27:

And in my Search I finde myselfe defild:  
Issues and Leprosies all ore mee streame.  
Such have not Enterance. I am beguild:  
My Seate, Bed, Saddle, Spittle too's uncleane.  
My Issue Running Leprosy doth spread:  
My upper Lip is Covered: not my Head.

Hence all ore ugly, Nature Poysond stands,  
Lungs all Corrupted, Skin all botch't and scabd

A Feeble Voice, A Stinking Breath out fand
And with a Scurfy Skale I'me all ore clagd.
Robes rent: Head bare, Lips Covered too, I cry,
Unclean, Unclean, and from thy Camp do fly.

Woe's mee. Undone! Undone! my Leprosy!
Without a Miracle there is no Cure.
Worse than the Elephantick Mange I spie
My Sickness is. And must I endure?
Dy of my Leprosy? Lord, say to't nay,
I'le Cure thee in my wonder working way.

The physician and patient metaphor is also extended to
include all of mankind as Taylor writes about the sin-sickness
of the world. In Meditation 1.4, the reference to sin-sickness
is stated matter of factly; indeed, more emphasis is placed
upon the efficacy of the medicine than on the seriousness of
the illness:

The Rosy Oyle, from Sharons Rose extract
Better than Palma Christi far is found.
Its Gilliads Balm for Conscience when she's wrackt
Unguent Apostolorum for each Wound.
Let me thy Patient, thou my Surgeon bee.
Lord, with thy Oyle of Roses Supple mee.

But, Taylor does not limit his self-deprecating images to
such mild exhortations. As with the personal deprecations,
he moves from bad as seen in Meditation 1.18:

My Phancys in a Maze, my thoughts agast,
Words in an Extasy; my Telltale Tongue
Is tonguetide, and my Lips are padlockt fast
To see thy Kingly Glory in to throng.
I can, yet cannot tell this Glory just,
In silence bury't, must not, yet I must.

to worse in Meditation 2.67B:

Methinks
My Soule sends out such putrid sents, and rhimes
That with thy beams would Choke the aire with Stincks.
And Nasty vapors ery where, whereby
Thy rayes should venom'd be that from thee fly.
The Fiery Darts of Satan stob my heart.
His Punyards Thrusts are deep, and venom'd too.
His Arrows wound my thoughts, Words, Works, each part
They all a bleeding ly by th' Stobs, and rue.
His Aire I breath in, poison doth my Lungs.
Hence come Consumptions, Fevers, Head pains: Turns.

Yea, Lythargy, the Apopleckick Stroke:
The Catochee, Soul Blindness, Surdity,
Ill Tongue, Mouth Ulcers, Frog, the Quinsie Throate
The Palate Fallen, Wheezings, Pleurisy.
Heart Ach, the Syncopee, bad stomach tricks
Gaul Tumors, Liver grown; spleen evills Cricks.

The Kidny toucht, The Iliak, Colick Griefe
The Ricats, Dropsy, Gout, the Scurvy, Sore
The Miserere Mei.

As the poet becomes more specific about describing the illnesses of fallen man, the emotions which he presents become more despairing.

One must question the earnestness with which Taylor made these complaints. Primitive living conditions, serious illnesses and a lack of medical knowledge to treat them effectively, and untimely deaths were commonplace occurrences in the seventeenth century. Taylor in fulfilling his role as town physician, came into contact with human morbidity often enough, but the contact was also extended into his private life. In "On Wedlock and Death of Children," the funeral elegy written for his wife, Elizabeth, and Meditation 2.40, Taylor writes of the loss of his first wife and six of their children.

Certainly Taylor was deeply affected by the loss of his friends and loved ones, but the images and deprecations used
to describe the condition of humanity which assault the sensibilities of the modern reader may not have seemed so harsh to Taylor. His daily contact with death and illness may have made him less squeamish about these images than his modern critics tend to be.

In fact, he may have unconsciously been stating the worst facts of his case in order to have the master physician attend to him on the premise that the doctor sees the sickest patient first. Whatever the conscious or unconscious effect Taylor sought to achieve by the use of these images, the outcome was the glorification of God and of the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Another frequently used metaphor found in the meditations implies that Christ is the advocate (lawyer) of all men, God is their judge, and Taylor, or humanity, is the defendant. Taylor never attempts to deny his guilt, but pleads for mercy. In Meditation 1.38, the references to guilt and judgment are generalized. When Taylor speaks of sin, his tone is sorrowful, but restrained:

Oh! What a thing is Man? Lord, Who am I?
That thou shouldst give him Law (Oh! golden Line)
To regulate his Thoughts, Words, Life thereby.
And judge him Wilt thereby too in thy time.
A Court of Justice thou in heaven holdst
To try his Case while he's here hous'd on mould.

How do thy Angells lay before thine eye:
My Deeds both White, and Black I dayly doe?
How doth thy Court thou Pannellst there them try?
But flesh complains, What right for this? let's know.
for right or wrong I can't appeare unto't.
And shall a sentence Pass on such a suite?
Soft; blemish not this golden Bench, or place.
Here is no Bribe, nor Colourings to hide
Nor Pettifogger to befog the Case
But Justice hath her Glory here well tri'de.
Her spotless Law all spotted Cases tends.
Without Respect or Disrespect them ends.

God's Judge himselfe: and Christ Atturny is,
The Holy Ghost Regesterer is founde.
Angells the sergeants are, all Creatures kiss
The booke, and doe as Evidences abounde.
All Cases pass according to pure Law
And in the sentence is no Fret, nor flaw.

What saist, my soule? Here all thy Deeds are tri'de.
Is Christ thy Advocate to pleade thy Cause?
Art thou his Client? Such shall never slide.
He never lost his Case: he pleads such Laws
As Carry do the same, nor doth refuse
The Vilest sinners Case that doth him Choose.

In Meditation 1.39, however, the pleas for mercy become more intense and the tone of the poem becomes more despairing as Taylor reflects upon his own sins:

My Sin! my Sin, My God, these Cursed Dregs,
Green, Yellow, Blew streakt Poyson hellish, ranck,
Bubs hatcht in natures nest on Serpents Eggs,
Yelp, Sherp and Cry; they set my Soule a Cramp.
I frown, Chide, strik and fight them, mourn and cry
To Conquour them, but cannot them destroy.

I cannot kill nor Coop them up: my Curb
'Sless than a Snaffle in their mouth: my Rains
They as a twine thrid, snap: by hell they're spurd:
And load my Soule with swagging loads of pains.
Black Imps, young Divells, snap, bite, drag to bring
And pick mee headlong hells dread Whirle Poole in.

Lord, hold thy hand: for handle mee thou may'st
In Wrath: but, oh, a twinkling Ray of hope
Methinks I spie thou graciously display'st.
There is an Advocate: a doore is ope.
Sin's poyson swell my heart would till it burst,
Did not a hope hence creep in't thus, and nurse't

Joy, joy, Gods Son's the Sinners Advocate
Doth plead the Sinner guiltless, and a Saint.
But yet Atturnies pleas spring from the State
The Case is in: if bad its bad in plaint.
My Papers do contain no pleas that do
Secure mee from, but knock me down to, woe.

Although Taylor never denies his guilt, he seems to be
horrified by it. He implies, correctly, that his guilt is of
his own doing, but he is driven by a compulsion over which he
has no control. As the defendant, he throws himself on the
mercy of the court in an attempt to have himself saved from
himself. The efficacy of the lawyer will be established if
the defendant can be rehabilitated rather than merely punished
for his crimes. If Taylor can succeed in convincing the
lawyer to plead his case and then convince the judge to treat
him with compassion, he will have achieved his goal of sal-
vation. Taylor almost seems to be reasoning that if he can
be saved in spite of his transgressions, the judge and advocate
will merit even more praise and glorification.

The Puritans had come to New England in order to seek out
God's will and to be in an environment which would enable them
to be free of temptation. Unfortunately they found the devil
lurking in the wilderness ready to snare them into the pit of
sin if ever they were not wary. Sin was both an internal foe
which man had to deal with as the result of the fall and an
external force which could tempt men with things of the world

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which Satan had defiled. Meditation 1.39 shows that Taylor had accepted this idea when he speaks of "black imps" and "young devills" who seek to pitch him head long into "Hells Whirle poole."

Norman S. Grabo suggests that Taylor's interest in the occult and unnatural phenomena would have had Taylor taking part in the witchcraft trials had he not been so isolated in Westfield. If Grabo is correct, it would be reasonable to assume that Taylor saw himself as a man being challenged by sin in a race with sin losing the lead by only a hair's breadth. The disparagement which Taylor uses to describe himself could be interpreted to be a cry for help from a man whose excessive fears have caused him to become paranoid.

The Bible allegorically refers to the relationship between Christ and man as that of bride and bridegroom. Christ is, of course, the bridegroom and the bride is the church or the elect church member. In his meditations, Taylor


Taylor's interest in witchcraft, the occult, and unnatural phenomena was shared by three of his dear and lifelong friends, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, and Samuel Sewall—and by his father-in-law, Reverend James Fitch. Taylor and Fitch, notably the latter, contributed most of the information found in the last chapter of Increase Mather's The Essays for the Recording of Illustrious Providences. Samuel Sewall, who had been Taylor's friend and roommate while they attended Harvard, was one of the principal judges at the Salem Witchcraft Trials. He undoubtedly wrote his friend of those proceedings—which may have made Taylor's isolation, if nothing else, well informed.
often uses the image to describe himself. The metaphoric relationship appears to be more personal with less generalizations about sin than are found in the poems having the physician and lawyer images.

Taylor assumes the role of a shy young girl whose attributes are not remarkable. Somehow she has been brought to the attention of the most wonderful man in the world and she can hardly believe her good fortune. Meditation 2.143 expresses her awe:

Wonders amazed! Am I espous’d to thee?
My Glorious Lord? What! shall my bit of Clay
Be made more bright than brightest Angells bee,
Looke forth like as the Morning every way?
And shall my lump of Dirts ware such attire?
Rise up in heavenly Ornaments thus, higher?

In Meditation 2.157B she even becomes boastful about the attention she is receiving:

How Blest am I having so blesst a Lord
If I improve in blessedness a right
He loves me so that he doth mee afford
A Banquet such that none can make the like.
Its not a single meate but certainly
It life mentains and that eternally.

Unfortunately the thrill of knowing that she is loved begins to fade. As she thinks about the wonderousness of her lover, she begins to think that her love should be more intense than it is:

What art thou mine? Am I espous’d to thee?
What honour's this? It is more bright Renown.
I ought to glory more in this sweet glee
Than if I'd wore greate Alexanders Crown.
Oh! make my Heart loaded with Love ascend
Up to thyselfe, its bridegroom, bright, and friend.

(Meditation 2.115)
She then realizes that her feelings could be compared to a dried apple:

My Love alas is but a shrimpy thing  
A sorry Crickling a blasted bud  
A little drachm, too light a gift to bring.  
Its but a grain weight and scarce ever good,  
And shall I then presume thee to obtain  
If I should rob thee of so small a grain.

(Meditation 2.161A)

Finally she realizes that she cannot love at all according to the measure and kind of love that she has been given:

Oh! Hide bound Heart, Harder than mountain Rocks  
Can not one beam of this bright golden Head  
Have enterance, thats trim'd with black Curld Locks  
In all its vigorous green up flowerished  
My Child affections thus to touch and thaw.  
And to thy golden head their Spirits draw?

(Meditation 2.118)

Taylor, like the girl he has metaphorically transformed himself into, cannot accept the love that has been given unto him. He deprecates himself for not being able to return the glorious love which Christ has given him: he feels unworthy of the infinite love which Christ has to offer.  

Taylor seeks to glorify Christ by showing that Christ is capable of limitless love and understanding and that he is willing to extend it to one whose love is, at best, limited.

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10 As Taylor grew older, he used less images of self-deprecation to describe mortal love's unworthiness to divine love. Mortal love could never be equal to divine love and Taylor always accepted this fact, but he appeared to be more passively grateful for it towards the end of his life. See, for example, Meditations 2.157A through 2.165.
The deprecation image is used throughout the poems, but in Meditation 2.133 they are conspicuously absent. This is perhaps the only poem among all of the meditations which employs humor:

Ye Daughters of Jerusalem I pray
Delude you not yourselves, think not
To steale from me my Souls beloved away.
I my Beloveds am, and he my lot.
He and his All yea all of him, is mine
His Person, offices, his Grace and Shine.

The Bridgrooms all the Bridges, his all is hers.
He's not partable nor by parts give out:
Who hath him hath him all, all bright no blurs.
He's what's hers. Or she's all him without.
He faithfull to his Spouse will ever bee.
He'l not bag such that to him spoused flee.

Ye Daughters of Jerusalem ne'er please
Your fancies with such thoughts as tell you do
That you may rob me of my Lord, and seize
Him for your own, oh never deale not so.
The Bridgroom, and his bride are Relates sure
That never Separation can endure.

Christ will not play the knave to shab me thus
Though knavishness of such sort youths oft Use:
And youthish Damsells to do so don't blush
Yet shamefull't is and grossly to abuse.
Your Virgin beauty will not taking bee
Him by his Eyes t'inchant his love from mee.

Whom Christ espousseth is his Spouse indeed.
His Spouse or bride no Single Person nay.
She is an agrigate so doth proceed
And in it sure and cant be stole away.
And if you thus be members made of mee
He'll be your Bridegroom, you his Spouse shall be.

Thus you in me enjoynd shall be made bright
And thus united, his Choice Spouse be made.
You'll be his Bride, the Bridegrooms Great delight
And thus we both shall be most True displaid.

Christ is glorified in the above meditation because he is faithful and will not turn away from the one whom he has chosen
to love. Since his love is limitless, he is exulted because he can love many and his affections will not fade. The knowledge of this love makes the bride bold.

In each of the examples already given, God provided an answer to Taylor's needs when he metaphorically portrayed himself as a patient, as a bride, and as a client. The deprecating images perhaps served as a means of obtaining the graces that he so desperately wanted. Through his role as minister and as sinner, Taylor was also serving the needs of God. Christ's death would have been in vain had it not been for sinful men like Taylor. God needed Taylor in yet another way, to help bring the elect to conversion and to maintain the church on earth, by preaching the gospel and setting the example for the community.

One could not be a church member, much less a minister, unless one had shown signs to the congregation that his soul was free from serious sin and that he was probably of the elect of God. It is possible that Taylor, who was a man of sensitivity and piety, had doubts about his ability to serve the needs of God as a minister to his people. The deprecations found in the meditations could have served as a means of catharsis.

Although he was not isolated from the village, his position as minister may have set him apart from the rest of the community. Taylor would have lost the support of his community had he evidenced any grave uncertainty about his election.
The following stanzas taken from Meditations 2.17 and 2.26 show the minister's private uncertainty:

Thou Greate Supream, thou Infinite first One:  
Thy Being Being gave to all that be  
Yea to the best of Beings thee alone  
To serve with Service best for best of fee.  
But man the best servd thee the Worst of all  
And so the Worst of incomes on him falls.

Hence I who'me Capable to serve thee best  
Of all the ranks of Beings here below  
And best of Wages win, have been a pest  
And done the Worst, earn'd thus the Worst of Woe.  
Sin that imploys mee findes mee worke indeed  
Me qualifies, ill qualities doth breed.

Unclean, Unclean: My Lord, Undone, all vile  
Yea all Defild: What shall thy Servant doe?  
Unfit for thee: not fit for holy Soile,  
Not for Communion of Saints below  
A bag of botches, Lump of Loathsomeness:  
Defild by Touch, by Issue: Leproust flesh.

Thou wilt have all that enter do thy fold  
Pure, Cleane, and bright, Whiter than whitest Snow  
Better refin'd than most refined Gold:  
I am not so; but fowle: What shall I doe?  
Shall thy Church Doors be shut, and shut out mee?  
Shall not Church fellowship my portion bee?

How can it be? Thy Churches do require  
Pure Holiness: I am all filth, alas!  
Shall I defile them, tumbled thus in mire?  
Or they mee cleanse before I current pass?  
If thus they do, Where is the Niter bright  
And Sope they offer mee to wash me White?

Taylor had looked within himself and had seen his failings in the way that he served God. Meditations 2.26 shows even more despair and deprecation as he expresses that he is not to be worthy of serving either God or the members of the elect.
Although only a brief outline of Taylor's life has been recorded, there is really nothing to suggest that he was a man more sinful than the rest of humanity. When one considers his chosen profession, it would seem likely that his personal sins—at least those known to the world—would be negligible. Taylor's public confession of sin when he organized the church at Westfield told of no grave mortal or habitual sin; in fact, the sins which he recited seem quite venial. He told of his parents who would piously "Crop the budding forth of original sin into any visible sin with wholesome reproofs, or the rod," of being guilty of "transgressin" of the Sabbath, and "some disobedience to my parents, and too often the evill of lying and also inward evill were things that did prevail."\textsuperscript{11}

Alan Simpson maintains that the Puritans were obsessed with sin and looked for signs of it everywhere. When they discovered a sin, they magnified it. If they could not discover any, they invented it.\textsuperscript{12} If that belief can justly describe all Puritans, then it could be considered especially appropriate for Edward Taylor, a man of great scrupulousness was somehow fulfilling the needs of God.

Thus far the references to the poet's self deprecation and his sinful state have been generalized. There have been

\textsuperscript{11}Grabo, p. 32.

no specific mentions of any particular sin, just sinfulness. The only transgression which might be interpreted to be a sin was the lack of proper affection for the Lord. Taylor seems to be plagued with sins that are of omission rather than those of comission. Taylor feels that he does not have the capability to appreciate or return the superior love which has been given unto him.

Perhaps that is the key to understanding the self-deprecating images. Taylor (humanity) and God are not equals. Man is the creation of God and subservient to him. In Meditation 2.126 Taylor writes of his relationship to God:

My Lord, my Love, my Sov'reign, and Supreme,
Thy Word's my Rule, thy Law's my Life's sweet line.
All Law subordinate not to this Beame
No right contains: but is of Sodoms Shrine.
Thy mouth's most sweet, the Winde pipe of thy lungs.
Conveighs all Sweetness from thy Heart that throngs.

God and God's law represent the ultimate good. Taylor's sins are not an intentional disregard of these laws, but a half-hearted obedience of them. Original sin has enfeebled and enslaved Taylor's ability to do right; the power which he once had to do right has been neutralized or set loose as a destructive force by sin.

Taylor wants to do the right thing, but he appears to have reached Saint Paul's dilemma:

For that which I do I allow not: for what I would that do I not, but what I hate, that I do. 13

13King James Version: Romans 7:15.
Hypocrisy is one of the specific sins which Taylor confesses to. He laments having this sin in Meditation 1.35:

Oh! that I ever felt what I profess.
'Twould make me then the happi'est man alive.
Ten thousand Worlds of Saints can't make this less
By living on't, but it would make them thrive.
These Loaves and Fishes are not lessened
Nor Pasture over stock, by being fed.

The hypocrisy which Taylor deprecates himself for having is not limited to his affections and professions, he admits in Meditation 1.36 that he does not really try to avoid the ways of sin:

What rocky heart is mine? My pincky Eyes
Thy Grace spy blancht, Lord, in immensitie.
Fur finde the Sight me not to meliorize,
O Stupid Heart! What strang-strange thing am I?
I many months do drown in Sorrows Spring
But hardly raise a Sigh to blow down Sin.

To find the Lord, thus overflowing kinde,
And t'finde mee thine, thus overflowing vile,
A Riddle seems onrivetted I finde.
This reason saith is hard to reconcile.
Dost Vileness choose? Or can't thy kindness shown
Me meliorate? Or am I not thine own?

The first two run thy glory would to Shame:
The last plea doth my Soule to hell Confine.
My Faith therefore doth all these Pleas disdain.
Thou kindness art, it saith, and I am thine.
Upon this banck it doth on tiptoes stand
To ken o're Reasons head at Graces hand.

In Meditation 2.1, Taylor tells of his failure to love God and to show his proper gratitude for all that has been given unto him:

I Chide myselfe seeing myselfe decay.
In heate and Zeale to thee, I frozen grow.
File my dull Spirits: make them sharp and bright:
Them firbush for thyselfe, and thy delight.
Taylor alludes to the same sins in Meditation 1.40:

Still I complain; I am complaining still.
    Oh! woe is me! Was ever Heart like mine?
A Sty of Filth, a Trough of Washing-Swili
    A Dunghill Pit, a Puddle of mere Slime.
A nest of Vipers, Hive of Hornets; Stings.
    A Bag of Poyson, Civit-Box of Sins.

The self-deprecating images which Edward Taylor chose to describe himself and as a type for humanity were drawn from the Bible, and they reflected his duties as a minister at Westfield. Unlike God and Christ, Taylor's talents, patience, and understanding were limited; but his faith in the efficacy of Christ as mediator was boundless. As be-fitted a right-thinking Puritan, Taylor stated that he was powerless and vile, corrupted by sin, in need of special grace. His desperation makes him bold as he assumes the roles of patient and client; but, when he assumes the role of bride, his Puritan doctrines assert themselves. He may want desperately to love and be loved, but he must not think himself worthy of that love lest he appear prideful and be cast out from God.

The purpose of writing the Preparatory Meditations was to prepare Taylor for the task of administering and receiving the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The confession of one's sinfulness and the subsequent glorification of God for his goodness was an established part of the ritual.14 For Taylor

however, the process of preparation would present another cause for self-deprecation. These self-deprecations, God's role as the benevolent father, and Taylor's role as child will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

EDWARD TAYLOR'S POETICS:
THE POET AND CHILD OF GOD

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit. That we are the children of God.

Edward Taylor primarily saw himself as a repentant sinner and as a seeker of divine mercy. When he was twenty-nine, he became Westfield's minister; when he was forty, he became God's poet. Before the world had been created, he had been the child of God. The writing of the Preparatory Meditations came about because of his ministry and his love for God; the poems represent his attempt to bring himself closer to God and nearer salvation as he prepared himself to administer and receive the most important sacrament of his church. The self-deprecating images which he uses to describe himself as a poet exceed those which he used specifically to describe his own sins and the reprobation of the world.

Writing poetry was Edward Taylor's means of stating his desire to glorify God, and to seek His mercy and forgiveness as he wrote his poems, he used the standard rhetorical and poetic devices which he felt would appeal most to his audience, God, and most effectively serve his purpose, seeking salvation. In this chapter, the poet's view of himself and his poetic diction will be discussed.
Every Puritan was obligated to God for his very existence, for any good fortune which he might receive, and for God's great beneficence which accepted Christ's passion as an atonement for the sins of man so that he might be saved. Roy Harvey Pearce describes the manner in which these obligations were met: "under the covenant of grace, even those who were assured of their election had to do such good works as would manifest it, but as an effect, not as a cause."¹

Through careful study of the Bible, man could determine which actions would be pleasing, good, and acceptable to God.

One of Edward Taylor's ways of fulfilling this obligation was writing holy poetry—which would glorify God by praising His goodness and mercy. The poet was quite familiar with many passages from the Bible which admonished men to praise the Lord, such as the Psalms.

In Meditation 2.117, he praises the Lord by metaphorically referring to Him as a great king:

A King thou art, my Lord, yea King of Kings.  
All Kings shall truckle and fall fore thee down.  
Thou hast a Kingdom too Whose great bell rings  
A Passing peale to Worldly Kings and Crowns.  
Thou art the King of Saints and Angells bright.  
Thou art the King of Glory, and all Light.  

Under thy Banner Lord, enlist thou mee.  
Make me to ware thy Colours, saving grace.  
Them flourish in my Life, and make thou mee  
To beare thy Standard and thy Banner trace

To beare thy Standard and thy Banner trace
And so me to thy Palace Glory bring
Where I thy Standards Glory ere may sing.

There are, however, no deprecations in this poem; the poet asks only that he be made one of the king's standard bearers and thus be given the authority to praise his Lord more effectively.

The king-and-servant metaphor symbolically mirrors Taylor's own conception of his relationship with God. Just as a king and servant could never be equals, he and God could not attain equality. If, however, the servant could fulfill his duties especially well, he might be noticed and singled out for special praise and reward. Meditation 2.23 shows the uncertainty which the poet feels; he wants the recognition of his lord, but feels that he may not be worthy of it:

Greate Lord, yea Greatest Lord of Lords thou art,
And King of Kings, may my poor Creaking Pipe
Salute thine Ear; This thought doth sink my heart
Ore burdened with over sweet Delight.
An Ant bears more proportion to the World
Than doth my piping to thine ear thus hurld.

It is a Sight amazing strange to see
An Emperor picking an Emmets Egge.
Most strange it's that Almighty should to mee
E're lend his Ear. And yet this thing I beg.
I'm small and Naught, thou mayst much less me spare
Than I the Nit that hangeth on my hair.

Taylor's sincerity of motive for writing the meditations is not to be doubted. His poems are prayers of praise and petitions for grace and salvation, but the poet realizes his humanity and its inherently sinful nature. He does not
deprecate his humanity, that would be blasphemous, but he
does berate himself for having so many human frailities.
Too often the poems which should be the spontaneous expres-
sions of his love and gratitude are, in fact, the result of
his obligation to duty, which he willfully and laboriously
writes. Using the poetic diction of the seventeenth century,
Taylor describes the barren nature of his muse who will not
coopoperate freely, but has to be brought to task:

Thus my leane Muses garden thwarts the spring
Instead of Anthems, breatheth her ahone.
But duty raps upon her doore for Verse.
That makes her bleed a poem through her searce.

(Meditation 2.30)

Taylor has further cause to deprecate himself when he
laments that his unwillingness to write poetry is shown in
the quality of the work which he produces:

The words my pen doth teem are far too Faint
And not significant enough to shew
Thy Famous fame or mine affection paint
Unto thy famous Selfe in vivid hew.
My jarring Pen makes but a ragged line
Unfit to be enricht with glories thine.

But thus I force myselfe to speake of thee.
If I had better thou shouldst better have.
It grieves me I no better have for thee
Finding thou art the Lilly growing brave
Even of the Valley rich where lillies grow
Of Graces Bright makin a gracious Show.

(Meditation 2.132)

p. 103.

3 Grabo maintains that Taylor's use of poetic diction
(his calling upon the muse) is "always to contrast his muse
with the true source of inspiration, Christ." See, p. 93.
Thomas H. Johnson criticized Taylor's poetry for its lack of scope and imagination, but Norman S. Grabo suggests that Taylor was acutely aware of his shortcomings and often complained of his dulled imagination. Time and time again, Taylor laments that his ability to sing God's praises has been diminished because of sin. Even when he desires to sing the praises of his Lord, he is incapable of doing so because he cannot conceptualize the true greatness and majesty of God. The following stanzas from Meditation 2.43 illustrate the poet's inability to describe the Lord; his works, he fears, are not examples of praise, but of defilement:

When, Lord, I seeke to shew thy praises, then
Thy shining Majesty doth stund my minde
Encramps my tongue and tongue ties fast my Pen,
That all my doings, do not what's designd.
My Speeche's Organs are so trancifide
My words stand startled, can't thy praises stride.

Nay Speeches Bloomery can't from Ore
Of Reasons Mine, melt words for to define
Thy Deity, nor t'deck the reechs that sore
From Loves rich Vales, sweeter than homy rhimes.
Words though the finest twine of reason are
Too Course a web for Deity to ware.

Words Mentall are syllabicated thoughts:
Words Orall but thoughts Whifflid in the Winde.
Words Writ, are incky, Goose quill-slabbred draughts,
Although the fairest blossoms of the minde.
Then can such glasses cleare enough descry
My Love to thee, or thy rich Deity?

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5 Grabo, p. 103.
Words are befouled, Thoughts filthy fumes that smoake,  
From Smutty Huts, like Will-a-Wisps that rise  
From Quaugmires, run ore bogs where frogs do Croake,  
Lead all astray led by them by the eyes.  
My muddy Words so dark thy Deity,  
And cloude thy Sun-Shine, and its Shining Sky.

Frustration and self-deprecation are the only plausible recourses for a man whose reputation and profession were based upon the ability to conceptualize, comprehend, and articulate all the knowledge that sinful man was ever to know to his congregation:

I fain would take, I thinke,  
Vengeance upon myselfe: But I confess,  
I can't Mine Eyes, Lord, shed no Tears but inke  
My Handy Works, are Words, and Wordiness.

(Meditation 1.24)

William J. Scheick maintains that: "a lack of clarity of one's own language signified the absence of the Spirit's illumination of the soul's eye. It was the fear that he had been denied this grace which goaded Taylor to bemoan frequently the inability of his thoughts to come to terms with his God."^6

When the Spirit of God was absent from his heart, Taylor's own spirit was affected. In Meditation 2.7, he complains:

All Dull, my Lord, my Spirits flat, and dead  
All water sockt and sapless to the skin.  
Oh! Screw mee up and make my Spirits bed  
Thy quickening vertue For my inke is dim.  
My pensill blunt.

Using his comprehensions and talents alone, Taylor is, at best, limited, but the poet has faith in the infinite

goodness and kindness of his master. God, who would expect fine craftsmanship, would also provide the means to help his servant:

Lord dub my tongue with a new tier of Words
More comprehensive far than my dull Speech
That I may dress thy Excellency Lord
In Language welted with Emphatick reech.
Thou art my King:

(Meditation 2.19)

The inspiration, purpose, words, and wisdom needed for writing the meditations would be provided by God, but the way that they would be used would be left up to the servant/poet. The most obvious means of accomplishing this task would be to merely recite the Puritan cosmology, with its inherent juxtaposition of God and man, in verse. God encompasses all and man is almost a nonentity. God because of His goodness is at the zenith of creation, and man, because of the Fall, is at the nadir.

Taylor uses such a juxtaposition in the "Prologue" to the Preparatory Meditations. Man is described as a "crumb of dust" so worthless and insignificant as to be hardly noticed at all. God is portrayed as the "boundless Deity" whose glories are indescribable. The simple juxtaposition of God and man is not, however, the only method which Taylor employs to use God's tools. Classical languages and rhetorical handbooks were studied by the students and were a standard part of the curriculum while Taylor was in attendance at Harvard.
Donald E. Stanford maintains that "It is fair to say that the influence of these rhetorical style sheets was as pervasive as that of the Bible or as that of any other source" found in the meditations. Amplification, meiosis, puns, rhetorical questions, and the use of the conditional subjunctive verbs may be found throughout the poems as Taylor sought the use of rhetorical devices which would enable him to glorify his God.

Amplification, the practice of piling up specific repetitions that reinforce a proposition was used quite frequently by Taylor to impress upon himself the glory of the Lord. Meditation 1.17 illustrates how he uses this device to show the Lord was much greater than the earthly concept which he uses for his example:

A King, a King, a King indeed, a King
Writhe up in Glory! Glorie's glorious Throne
Is glorifie by him, presented him.
And all the Crowns of Glory are his own.
A King, Wise, Just, Gracious, Magnificent.
Kings unto him are Whiffles, Indigent.

What is his Throne all Glory? Crown all Gay?
Crown all of Brightest Shine of Glory's Wealth?
This is a Lisp of Non-sense. I should say,
He is the Throne, and Crown of Glory 'tselfe.
Should Sun beams come to gilde his glory they
Would be as 'twere to gild the Sun with Clay.

If amplification could be used to impress the glory of the Lord upon the poet, it could also be used to impress the poet with his own pathetic state.

Unclean, Unclean: My Lord, Undone, all vile
Yea all Defild: What shall thy Servant doe?
Unfit for thee: not fit for holy Soile,
Nor for Communion of Saints below.
A bag of bothches, Lump of Loathsomeness:
Defild by Touch, by Issue: Leproust flesh.

(Meditation 2.26)

Taylor also employs meiosis or diminishing in his poems.
To show the insignificance of man to God, man's little worth is understated intentionally. Meditation 2.18 shows how the poet uses this device to describe himself:

A Bran, A Chaff, a very Barly yawn,
   An Husk, a Shell, a Nothing, nay yet Worse,
A Thistle, Bryer prickle, pricking Thorn
   A Lump of Lewdeness, I am, yea what not Lord?
   And wilt thou be mine Altar? and my bord?

Mine Heart's a Park or Chase of sins: Mine Head
   'S a Bowling Alley. Sins play Ninehole here.
Phansy's a Green: sin Barly breaks in't led.
   Judgement's a pingle. Blindman's Buff's plaid there.
   Sin playes at Coursey Parke within my Minde.
   My Wills a Walke in which it aires what's blinde.

Frequently Taylor uses puns to describe the difference between God and man. Meditation 2.48 contains an obvious example of the pun on mite and might. Throughout the poem there are forty-two uses of this pun:

O! What a thing is Might right mannag'd? 'Twill
   That Proverb brain, whose face doth ware this paint.
(Might ore goe's Right) for might doth Right fulfill
   Will Right revive when wrong makes Right to faint.
   Might hatches Right: Right hatches Might, they are
      Each Dam, and Chick, to each: a Lovely paire.

Then Might well mannag'd riseth mighty: yet
   Doth never rise up to Almightiness.
Almightiness nere's in a mortall bit.
   But, Lord, thou dost Almightiness possess.
   Might in it's fulness: all mights Fulness bee
      Of ery Sort and Sise stow'd up in thee.
But what am I, Poor Mite, all mightless thing!
That cannot rive a rush, that I should e're
Adventure t'dress Almighty up, or bring
Almightiness deckt in its mighty geere?
Then spare my Stutting Stamring, inky Quill,
If it its bowells on thy Power distill.

As he wrote the meditations, Taylor was seeking to praise the Lord, but he also sought some sign that would evidence his salvation. He often asks rhetorical questions of God as he seeks assurance that he is one of the elect. These questions reflect his impatience with himself and his longing for God:

Dull, Dull indeed! What shall it e're be thus?
   And why? Are not thy Promises, my Lord,
Rich, Quick'ning things? How should my full Cheeks blush
   To finde mee thus? And those a lifeless Word?
My Heart is heedless: unconcerned hereat:
   I finde my Spirits Spiritless, and flat.

(Meditation 2.12)

The use of conditional subjunctive verbs also seems to help the poet serve the Lord. The use of such verbs signifies his inability to serve the Lord and his petition for grace. The glorification of God is implied because Taylor's faith in His willingness to help never falters:

Fain I would sing thy Praise, but feare I feign.
My Sin doth keepe out of my heart thy Feare,
   Hopes hoppled lie, and rusty Chains worn cleare.
My Sins that make me stand in need of thee,
   Do keep me back to hugge all Sin I see.

When thou shalt Crown me with these Crowns I'l bend
My Shallow Crown to crown with Songs thy Name.
Angels shall set the tune, I'le it attend:
   Thy Glory'st be the burden of the same.
Till then I cannot sing, my tongue is tide.
Accept this Lisp till I am glorifie.

(Meditation 1.43)
In Meditation 2.44, Taylor admits that he can never really achieve the purpose of his poetry. No matter how fine the rhetoric is that he uses or how beautiful the words, nothing that he can use is really befitting his master:

The Orator from Rhetorick gardens picks
His Spangled Flowers of sweet-breathed Eloquence
Wherewith his Oratory brisk he tricks
Whose Spicy Charms Eare jewells do commence.
Shall bits of Brains be candid thus for eares?
My Theme claims Sugar Candid far more cleare.

Things styld Transcendent, so transcende the Stile
Of Reason, reason's stares neere reach so high.

The harshness of Taylor's poetry, his inability to write as well as he could or would, is an obsession with the poet. Karl Keller believes that he desperately wants to please his God, but he cannot find the way: 8

My tatter'd Fancy; and my Ragged Rymes
Teeme leaden Metaphors: which yet might serve
To hum a little touching terrene Shines.
But Spirituall Life doth better fare deserve.
This thought on, sets my heart upon the Rack.
I fain would have this Life but han't its knack.

Reason stands for it, moving to persue't.
But Flesh and Blood, are Elementall things.
That sink me down, dulling my Spirits fruit.

(Meditation 2.82)

Taylor fears that his failings as a poet reflect the condition of his soul:

Am I bid this Feast? Sure Angells stare,
Such Rugged looks, and Ragged robes I ware.

(Meditation 2.62)

Taylor begs forgiveness for the harsh poetics, but Keller believes that they are the "humility that God insists on."\(^9\)

Taylor often refers to his poems as "lisping nonsense from a child"; this deprecation is perhaps the most important and appropriate allusion to his own state and to his words addressed to God. By comparing himself to a child, Taylor seeks to claim his kinship with God and Christ. He was, in all probability, familiar with Christ's admonition:

"Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of heaven."

In Meditation 1.34, Taylor describes his childish attempts:

My Lord I fain would Praise thee Well but finde
   Impossibilities blocke up my pass.
My tongue Wants Words to tell my thoughts, my Minde
   Wants thoughts to Comprehend thy Worth,
   Thy Glory far Surmounts my thoughts, my thoughts
   Surmount my words: Hence little Praise is brought.

   But seing Non-Sense very Pleasant is
   To Parents, flowing from the Lisping Child,
   I Conjue to thee, hoping thou in this
   Will finde some hearty Praise of mine Enfoiled,
   But though my pen drop'd golden Words, yet would
   Thy Glory far out shine my Praise in Gold.

Taylor thought of himself as a child and, according to Alexis T. Gerhard, envisioned Christ speaking to the elect as one would speak to little children in God's Determinations, another lengthy series of poems written during the interval in which he wrote the Preparatory Meditations.\(^10\) When the

\(^9\) Keller, p. 248.

poet perceived himself as a child of God, he was trying to assume a self-identity with Christ, the son, and God, the father, as a son and heir to the kingdom of heaven.

Throughout the meditations, Taylor impresses the reader with his childlike faith and determination. He is as a small child longing for acceptance and love, one who feels rejected because of his disobedience by a stern father. The child seeks the help of his older brother, Christ, in seeking the favor of their father once more. The child's pleas for forgiveness are contrite, humble admissions of guilt, but at the same time he tries to elicit sympathy from his father for having been punished. The overall tone of the poems move from sincere pleading to a mild cajoling—the use of the conditional subjunctive. Taylor's childish temper and his fears will not be banished until he has some assurance of his father's love and forgiveness:

Am I thy Child, Son, Heir, thy Spouse, yet gain
Not of the Rights that these Relations claim?

Am I hop't on thy knees, yet not at ease?
Sunke in thy bosom, yet thy Heart not meet?
Lodgd in thine Arms? yet all things little please?
Sung sweetly, yet finde not his singing sweet?
Set at thy Table, yet scarce tast a Dish
Delicious? Hugd, yet seldom gain a Kiss?

Why? Lord, why thus? Shall I in Question Call
All my Relation to thyselfe? I know
It is no Gay to please a Child withall
But is the Ground whence Priviledges flow.
Then ope the sluce: let some thing spoute on me.
Then I shall in a better temper bee.

(Meditation 1.37)
Through the use of standard imagery biblical themes, and common rhetorical devices, Edward Taylor sought to produce poetry which would be pleasing to God. Often his attempts were crude and harsh and he was aware of it. Like the child he desired to be, however, he presented the meditations to his heavenly father in hopes that they would gain him recognition and approval.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Meditations: Private Prayers for Forgiveness

When thou prayest; pray to thy Father which is in secret and thy Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

Edward Taylor wrote poetry, but he did not consider himself a poet, nor his work art. He became a poet only at those special times when he received Christ's grace at the communion table, and his poetry came about only at the inspiration of God. Had Taylor proclaimed himself to be a poet or acknowledged his work as art, he would have been declaring himself a member of the elect. Michael D. Reed maintains that Taylor could not recognize his works and thus declare his salvation: "to assert his own regenerate state would mean to run the risk of pride and hypocrisy."\(^1\)

The minister believed that God is the master artist, that His works transcend all human awareness. As far as the limited comprehension of sinful man could perceive, each Puritan was certain that God's most visible artistry is the world and that His most magnificent work is the word or truth. In Meditation 2.50, Taylor describes God's artistry:

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The Artist's Hand more gloriously bright,
Than is the Sun itself, in's shining glory
Wrought with a stone axe made of Pearle, as light
As light itself, out of a Rock all flory
Of Precious Pearle, a Box most lively made
More rich than gold Brimfull of Truth enlaid.

Which Box should forth a race of boxes send
Teemd from its Womb such as itselfe, to run
Down from the Worlds beginning to its end.
But, o! this box of Pearle Fell, Broke, undone.
Truth from it flew: It lost Smaragdine Glory:
Was fill'd with Falshood: Boxes teemd of Sory.

The Artist puts his glorious hand again
Out to the Worke: His Skill out flames more bright
Now than befor. The worke he goes to gain
He did portray in flaming Rayes of light.
A Box of Pearle shall from this Sory, pass
More rich than that Smaragdine Truth-Box was.

The truth is, of course, the word and Christ is God's word
incarnate.

God's poem is truth; the truth of God is Christ; Christ
is the master poet. Taylor attempted to declare the truth
which Christ embodied when he wrote:

Oh' Godhead Fulness! There doth in thee flow
All Wisdoms Fulness; Fulness of all Strength:
Of Justice, Truth, Love Holiness also
And Graces Fulness to its upmost length
Do dwell in thee. Yea and thy Fathers Pleasure
Thou art their Cabbinet, and they thy Treasure.

(Meditation 1.27)

Taylor's purpose for writing the meditations was to
glorify God, to express gratitude for the saving grace of
Christ, and to confess his sinful nature—with the hope that
his contrition would enable him to be acceptable to God and
worthy of grace. This purpose limited his sources of inspira-
tion to the Bible, the revealed word of God, but this ability
to comprehend the word of God had been damaged by the fall.
In Meditation 1.27, he describes his inability to expound
upon his chosen subject:

Oh! Wealthy Theam! Oh! Feeble Phancy: I
Must needs admire, when I recall to minde,
That's Fullness, This it's Emptiness, though spy
I have no Flowring Brain thereto inclinde.
My Damps do out my fire. I cannot, though
I would Admire, finde heate enough thereto.

What shall I say? Such rich rich Fullness would
Make stammering Tongues speak smoothly, and Enshrine
The Dumb mans mouth with Silver Streams like gold
Of Eloquence making the Aire to Chime.
Yet I am Tonguetide stupid, senseless stand,
And Drier drain'd than is my pen I hand.

Because of the incomprehensible wealth and beauty of his theme,
Taylor knew that he could never achieve mastery in his art.
Perfection could not be improved upon and his crude attempts
would appear as "dawbing pearls with mud" and might be con-
strued "as illookst impudence as ever were." 2

The minister was sincerely, piously devout. He longed
for God; he wanted to be used by God; he wanted some assurance
of God's saving grace; and, he sought the kingdom of God--not
to escape the pains of hell, but to be nearer to the object of
his love. In "The Return," Taylor expresses his longing for
God:

Thy Service is my Freedom Pleasure, Joy,
Delight, Bliss, Glory, Heaven on Earth, my Stay,
In Gleams of Glory thee to glorify.

2Meditation 1.13.
But oh! my Dross and Lets. Wherefore I say
Oh! that thou wast on Earth below with mee:
Or that I was in Heaven above with thee.

Often he metaphorically compared God to a master musician
and himself to an instrument. His desire to be used, to be
handled by God, is always apparent. Like the instrument he
represented himself to be, he could only stand mute and idle
until someone (God) took him in hand:

Be thou Musician, Lord, Let me be made
The well tun'de Instrument thou dost assume.
And let thy Glory be my Musick plaide.
Then let thy Spirit keepe my Strings in tune.
Whilst thou art here on Earth below with mee
Till I sing Praise in Heaven above with thee.

("The Return")

The instrument which he most often alluded to was the
Elizabethan viol whose strings were in constant need of re-
tuning and, unless they were carefully attended to, would
produce a harsh sound: 3

My Deare Deare Lord! my Soul is damp Untun'd
My strings are fallen and their screw pins slipt.
When I should play thy praise each grace perfumed
My strings made fit with graces wax most slick.
My notes that tune thy praise should, pleasantly,
Will onely make an harish symphony.

(Meditation 2.152)

Once, however, the "graces wax" (the saving grace of Christ)
have been applied to the instrument, it could become worthy
of use by God.

3 Austin Warren, "Edward Taylor," in Major Writers of
America, ed. Perry Miller (New York: Harcourt, Brace and
Taylor's whole life—all of his talents, energies, and thoughts—appears to have been directed upon the Lord. His childlike faith in God's mercy and in Christ's grace were implicit. He was an idealist. Because of this idealism, he could never be objective about his shortcomings; he saw himself only in relationship to his God.

Kenneth B. Murdock describes the New England Puritan as a "hard working idealist, and the more intense his faith, and the more profound his yearning for salvation, the more frequent moments he was overwrought." Edward Taylor was certainly one of these hard working idealists and his overwrought state manifested itself in extreme states of euphoria over the Lord and in extreme states of despondency over his own sinfulness. Taylor, to some, might appear as having suffered from manic-depressive tendencies, but of what little is known about his life, there is little to suggest that it was filled with precarious exhilarations and depressions—except with his relationship with the Lord. Such extremes of emotion are often seen in small children; Taylor desperately wanted to be considered a child of God.

The composition of meditative verse (or prose) was an acceptable Puritan pastime; to Taylor it was an obligation

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and a duty which he was convinced that he owed to God, but it was also a way in which he sought to actually take part in his own salvation. In the "Prologue," he hints of this intention:

"To prove thou art, and that thou art the best."

By proving God's existence, he hoped to prove his own.

The poet sought to praise God, admit his unworthiness, confess his guilt, and be accepted by God. The self-deprecat ing images which he used in the meditations are the means by which he expressed his willingness to admit his shortcomings and subordinate himself to God. Since salvation was an ongoing process, he had to admit over and over again his unworthiness. This was a necessary act before anyone could be saved.

The reason why Taylor never published any of his works will never be known unless some forgotten scrap of paper hidden away in an unknown volume is found and brought to public attention, but the publication of Taylor's other works is of no concern for the purposes of this paper. The discussion is limited to the self-depreciating images found in the Preparatory Meditations. Scholars have speculated that Taylor did not want his works published because he felt them inferior to the accepted Puritan standard of verse or that


7 Lind, pp. 518-30.
his writings were too much influenced by the Anglo-Catholic literary tradition. Speculation has even been made not only as to the suppression of his verse, but that even the facts of his whole life represent a wish to remain obscure and unnoticed.

Taylor's unwillingness to publish his meditations is not a final self-deprecating act. He did not publish his meditations because they were written as a means of private devotion as the title implies: Preparatory Meditations before my Approach to the Lords Supper. Chiefly upon the Doctrin preached upon the Day of administration. The use of the possessive pronoun my is indicative of the personal nature of the poems; the use of the first person singular pronoun throughout the poems also limit the universal appeal of the meditations, although Taylor's contemporaries could have read the meditations and projected the poet's feelings onto their own.

The meditations are the poet's personal communications with his God, his proclamation of love, and his plea for help. William J. Sheick suggests that the meditations "reflect the poet's quest for self-conversion, that is to say for love and identity." The love and identity which he sought could be

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10 Sheick, p. 89.
gained only by the recognition of him by his father in heaven.

As a very small child seeks to please and gain recognition from the people he loves and from whom he desires love, so was Edward Taylor when he wrote the meditations. The only audience of which he was aware was God and that is whom he sought ultimately to please. His sin gave him cause for deprecations, but his childlike enthusiasm and faith gave him the courage to voice them. Honesty is the basic element of love and Taylor would have been dishonest had he denied his guilt. The denial of guilt would have been a denial of his love for God which would have denied him of God's love. Edward Taylor found the courage to write his confessional meditations in his love for God and in his faith that his shameful ways would be forgiven:

I am asham'd to say I love thee do.
But dare not for my Life, and Soule deny't.

(Meditation 1.36)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles


