

Conclusion :

Understanding and Interpretation on the Axis of the Word

I. The problem of method

All the issues of this dissertation have been discussed around the axis of the Word, especially the first three chapters of Genesis, for they serve as a critically important horizon for observing the epic story of paradise lost. The first chapter is the concise record of the creation of the cosmos, in which the first couple, Adam and Eve, appeared in the limelight of the whole universe. And their love, marriage and sexuality are the main themes of the second chapter. Furthermore, with the downfall of the first couple, original sin came into the world. The originator of sin is Satan, the evil Spirit, who has ever since been moving in the hearts of rebellious humans. The resulting punishment of sin calls for the necessity of salvation, for the price of sin is definitely death, as previously ordered by God. The first ten chapters of *Paradise Lost* is a tragedy, while the last two chapters, a tragedy-turned comedy, or tragicomedy,¹ for these two chapters focus on the coming of salvation. Based on the horizon of the first three chapters of Genesis, I have carved out the main themes of *Paradise Lost*, which are elaborated in Chapter Two (on salvation), Chapter Four (on creation), and Chapter Five (on love, marriage and sex), respectively.

1. The script of the dramatic epic *Paradise Lost*, especially the part concerning salvation proceeds according to God's will as recorded in the Book of Isaiah. For example, the 53th chapter of Isaiah serves as a prophesy concerning how, when, where, and why Jesus Christ the only son of God will be humiliated and crucified on the cross for the sins of the world. According to this script, the Holy Son came into the world and finally died in the way prophesied in the Old Testament. Jesus Christ's life and work were a total realization of the previously written script. By comparing the biographical accounts of Jesus Christ, we can see how the drama unfolded.

As to the functions of the other chapters, namely, Chapter Three and Chapter Six, the inter-textuality and my own voice mark their significance. Since salvation according to the first twenty-six lines of the first Book of *Paradise Lost* serves as the fore-structure and central theme in the semantic development of the prophetic epic,² Isaiah, the most important prophetic book concerning God's way as well as His promised salvation for all generations, is worth study for its inter-textuality, which can enlighten the reader's understanding of salvation itself. Moreover, in Chapter Six, the conception of rebellion and obedience serves well as an enlightening perspective for deeply and comprehensively interpreting the significance of all the issues presented in this dissertation—creation, love and wedlock, and the coming salvation. Indeed, in the chapters interpreting these issues, a lot of literature reviews have been done. So, in this chapter on rebellion and obedience alone, I raise my voice in an effort to make unique contributions to the interpretation of Milton's epic. All my points of view are based on an open and individual reading of the Bible. It is hoped that a fusion of horizon can be reached. That is, a valid dialogue can be undertaken between the past and the here-and-now world. But, as mentioned in the "Introduction", "self" and "I" play a vital role in interpreting any work. The sixth chapter on rebellion and obedience serves as an instrument for me to thoroughly explain my personal views in interpreting the major themes of *Paradise Lost*. All of my interpretations is controlled by the hermeneutic principle of the "hermeneutic circle," which functions to eliminate any personal bias and helps the reader to get a whole picture of the literary work. So my own voice is indeed based on my personal reading of the Bible, which has been interpreted according to life experiences and the study of philology.

2 The epic story of *Paradise Lost* concerns man's fall and a promised salvation. God's way is righteousness, love and mercy. Man's fall caused the loss of paradise, which was in accordance to God's principle of justice. The prophesy of Christ's death, however, brings forth hope for all human beings. Actually, Milton's epic is the imaginative elaboration of the first three chapters of Genesis all right, but this expanded description of the cause of salvation, the necessity of salvation, and the promise of the coming of salvation, in a sense, can prompt us to crown Milton as the greatest poet in history in terms of describing the prophetic future of the world as well as the long past of man's fall.

Furthermore, the horizons of the first three chapters of Genesis correspond to that of the first chapter of Romans, a book which explicitly delineates the salvation of God. Here, the author Apostle Paul's linear thinking concerns the theme of God's way, that is, salvation as arriving in the order of creation, marriage, sex, sin and salvation. In presenting the arguments on sin, Satan and salvation, Apostle Paul calls on the reader to pay attention to the existential meaning of the creation of the cosmos—"for from the world's creation the invisible things of him are perceived, being apprehended by the mind through the things that are made, both his eternal power and divinity,--so as to render them [unbelievers] inexcusable" (Romans 1: 20). God's eternal power and divinity are manifested by His concrete creation by which the invisible God has confirmed His existence. Ignoring the being and existence of God leads to the worship of idols, and then indecency in marriage or sex, which can be induced from the passage starting from Romans 1: 24 and ending in Romans 1: 27. In addition, accompanying the discourse on the abuses of sex and marriage is a long catalogue of sins, which is inclusive of unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil dispositions, whispering, backbiting, hatred of God, insolence, pride, boasting, invention of evil things, disobedience to parents, being void of understanding, faithlessness, being without natural affection, and being unmerciful. And it should be noted that the arguments against sin last from Chapter One to Chapter Eight, ushering in the call for salvation. So, whether in Moses' Genesis or in Apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans, the themes of creation, marriage, sex, sin and salvation are inter-connected, forming a logical rational method of perceiving God's way. This is the reason for the construction of the major themes of this dissertation and also accounts for my usage of these horizons.

II. The hermeneutical meaning of Milton's Work

Here, based on these horizons, I've got to briefly flashback Milton's views concerning salvation, creation, love and wedlock. The reconstruction of the author's intention helps with a fusion of horizons between the author and the reader.

First, salvation as the central theme of *Paradise Lost* is manifested in the first 26 lines in Book One. Indeed, there is a unifying and united structure in this epic. The central facts of God's redemption and man's fall construct the central meaning of the work.

Second, concerning the theme of creation, Milton's decision to follow Genesis and presents an account of creation which is literal and which describes and essentially unfallen world, was largely influenced by the Reformation, especially the accounts published by Calvin and Luther, both of whom are concerned with a simple message: all things were created by God; man sinned, and all nature lost its original state of order and perfection.

Third, it is to be pointed out that the first part of Book III is the most useful point at which to begin to examine Milton's idea of love. Furthermore, the Son's act of self-sacrifice is the dramatic high point of Book III. In addition, Milton's idea of wedlock was in the principle of the Protestant doctrine. That is, the husband is to love his wife, and dwell with her in chasity and marital fidelity. Yielding to his patriarchal hierarchy, the wife is in turn to submit herself to her husband, help him, obey him, and give him comfort.

In addition, "deep at the noises of the waterspouts"³ of the epic is the focal point of rebellion and obedience. Underlying beneath these themes is the choice of free will—to obey or to rebel. The subverting power of the whole universe derives from Satan. For Milton's Satan, the downfall is actually the beginning of his devilish rule

³ Psalms 42:7, "Deep calleth unto deep at noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

over the world as “the prince of the power of the air.” He has paved the way for man’s first disobedience in the Garden of Eden with his perverted will. In other words, the sin of man originated first in the instigation of the devil.

III. The hermeneutical significance of the major themes

Furthermore, the eternal validity of *Paradise Lost* is unchangeable. For the action of *Paradise Lost* conveys its essential theological meanings. Once upon a time, Adam sinned and lost Paradise; but the Son of the mysterious God manifested his Father's hidden mercy and grace,⁴ and produced his mercy, by offering himself as a sacrifice to redeem man from that sin. Milton's epic tells his readers that if they believe in that sacrifice, everything Adam lost will be restored to them. Until that restoration, the believing reader can not find his "justified way" through this world. He has God's providence as his guide, and he can learn of that providence by continuously studying to know God's ways as they are revealed in the Word/Logos. Here, I will address the major themes mentioned before, and concisely state my view of the essential theology within my personal Bible.⁵

A. The essential theology of creation within a personal Bible

Concerning the creation of the universe, we've got to know that the creation, in God's eyes, can be divided into the old creation and the new creation. The creation in Genesis is the so-called old creation, which has been contaminated by sin and been put under the heavy burdens of vanity and labor. The old creation is physical, while the new creation, in God's eyes, is spiritual. That is, through the works of the cross, a universal church, namely an epistemologically new substance saturated with the life of Christ, has been born. This is indeed a spiritual mystery, which was designed to be revealed to later generations to manifest God's power and wisdom.

⁴ See John 1: 18, "No one has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

⁵ An openly and individually interpreted Bible is the creed strongly proclaimed and insisted upon by Martin Luther in his movement of religious reformation.

As mentioned before, there exists a rupture between Genesis 1: 1, and 1: 2. The former creation was sternly judged by God due to the rebellion of Satan and his followers, and thus became chaotic. And the creative work by God's creative words later followed suit. God created the cosmos by His creative words, and He did not gain rest until the creation of Adam and Eve, the union of the two of whom is the symbol of the heavenly marriage between the Lamb, signifying the crucified Christ, and the universal church, symbolic of the wife of the Lamb in the Apocalypse. However, tragically enough, Adam and Eve merited expulsion from the Garden of Eden because of the temptation of Satan, who is virtually the old serpent, and their rebellion marked disobedience to God's words. The loss of Paradise was due to Satan's rebellion and man's disobedience, while the ways can be justified only by the promise of salvation, meaning the crucifixion of God's Son, which will bring about the new heaven and new earth of the Apocalypse. Just as Apostle Paul declares, "So if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

The formation of the universe and the story of humankind seem to end in the loss of Paradise all right, but the drama of salvation will definitely bring about a new heaven and earth as well as new spiritual race; that is, the redeemed assembly consisting of Israelites and Christians.

The vanity of the old creation, which was tainted and spoiled by Adam's disobedience, which is essentially against the ways of God, condemns human generations to a sheer waste of time, just as Solomon the preacher proclaims in Ecclesiastes, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth standeth for ever. The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to its place where it ariseth" (Ecclesiastes 1: 4-5). And the omnipresence of vanity is indeed a Christian view of history and time. The old creation has been for generations yoked to the corruption of original sin, that is, man's disobedience. All creatures have been waiting for the freedom of salvation. Hope for the

transformation of the sin-tainted world is deeply hidden in the thinking of the preacher, whose view of history forms the temporality of Christianity.⁶

King Solomon further points out in Ecclesiastes that all things within temporality are seeped in a vanity of vanities. All human plans or goals are meaningless in history. All that men experience in this earth is the heaviest of burdens...”this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit” (Eccles. 1: 13-14).

In the New Testament, Apostle Paul delineates human suffering and vanity, and the urgent hope for the salvation promised by Christ’s second coming in Romans, an epistle concerning Christ’s salvation and the way man is destined to go through in experiencing the salvation.

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us. For the anxious looking out of the creature expects the revelation of the sons of God: for the creature has been made subject to vanity, not of its will, but by reason of him, who has subjected the same, in hope that the creature itself also shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans together and travails in pain together until now. (Romans 8: 18-21)

⁶ Nietzsche’s “eternal recurrence” presents a challenge to the temporality of Christianity. Nietzsche is convinced that every event in the life of an individual, a people, a culture and in the cosmos itself is destined to repeated occurrence. And he maintains that an entire eternity has already elapsed up to the present instant. The notion is well depicted in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. “Everything goeth, everything returneth; eternally rolleth the wheel of existence. Everything dieth, everything blossometh forth again; eternally runneth on the year of existence. Everything breaketh, everything is integrated anew; ...Every moment beginneth existence, around every ‘here’ rolleth the ball ‘there.’ The middle is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity” (Nietzsche 244).

Here, the coming glory indeed refers to the second coming of Christ. At that time, the revelation of the sons of God will bring forth the glory which will have been produced after a long period of suffering. So too, we can see in the epistle of 2 Corinthians, an autobiography of Apostle Paul that he had experienced so much suffering for his faith. However, he declared, “but if indeed our outward man is consumed, yet the inward is renewed day by day. For our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4: 16-18). In addition, due to the disobedience of Adam, original sin came into the world and thus all creatures on the earth were cursed (Genesis 3: 17). Sin as well as the resulting corruption put man and all other creatures in unconscious bondage. King Solomon further points out in Ecclesiastes that all things within temporality are a vanity of vanities. All human plans or goals are meaningless in history. All that men experience on this earth is the heaviest burden, which can be affirmed by the following verses—“ this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and vexation of the spirit” (Eccles. 1: 13-14).⁷ The corruption and vanity of the cosmos tainted by sin calls for the need of God’s salvation, which was first promised at the very beginning with the downfall the first parents.⁸

B. The essential theology of love and marriage within a personal Bible

Second, as I have mentioned in the “Introduction,” following the creation of the universe in the first chapter of Genesis, we can see the ordained love and wedlock of the first parents in the second chapter of the same Book. Echoing

⁷ It is noted here that King Solomon’s nihilism and “the sore travail,” the two motifs resounding in Ecclesiastes, find an affinity with Nietzsche’s nihilism and “the heaviest burden.” The people whom Nietzsche referred to as nihilists were the ones who neglected the present world and anticipated an other world.

⁸ As the state of fallen mankind, please see the second chapter of Ephesians, where man is described as able to be led by evil spirits and to be ruled by Satan, the king of the fallen earth.

Moses' compositional sequence in the Book of Genesis, Apostle Paul, in the first chapter of Romans in the New Testament, also delineates the topic of marriage after observing that the creation of the universe aims to manifest God's wisdom and glory. On the one hand, the creation of the universe, especially that of human beings, who were made in God's image and after the likeness of God, has the intrinsic purpose of manifesting the existence and omnipotence of God, just as King David declared in Psalm 8, "When I see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast established; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Psalms 8: 3-4). On the other hand, the making of the universe is for man's marriage, which is blessed in this way—"And God blessed them; and God said to them. Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 28).

Indeed, the creation of today's universe, which started with the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis, is due to Satan's rebellion, so its intrinsic meaning is to manifest the power and wisdom of God. In addition, God's provision is for man's obedience, which, however, is to be based on his reason and free choice. The loss of paradise resulted from man's disobedience, that is, his subverting an ordained divine power relation: creatures are obliged to be obedient to the Creator and the divine logic conveyed by His words.

Accordingly, in this dissertation, especially in the sixth chapter, I discussed the essential relation between husband and wife, which is based on the power relation ordained by God. That is, God is the head of Christ; Christ is the head of the husband; and then husband is the head of the wife. Only when based on this ethical relationship can an individual's family be blessed by God.

C. The essential theology of salvation within a personal Bible

Third, concerning the essential theology of salvation, five central points are briefly sketched as follows: the necessity behind the gift of salvation began at the very beginning of man's fall; the motivation of salvation is God's love; the realization of salvation is effected through the crucifixion of God's only son, Jesus Christ; the purpose of salvation is to save the world from lust, sin, self, and Satan's authority; and the ultimate end of salvation is a new heaven and earth, as prophesied in Revelation.⁹

III. Free will: hermeneutical experience of rebellion and obedience

Human salvation depends on the obedience of faith. Man's obedience, however, is based on his free will. The Old Testament is based on law, while the New Testament, on love. Salvation itself is a manifestation of God's love, for He sent His son to be crucified on the cross for the world, which had fallen because of sin. Indeed, sin had come into the world via the first man, Adam, and salvation as well as grace was realized via Christ, Who came to the world to save those who are willing to receive the salvation, which had been prophesied in advance in the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Isaiah.

Meanwhile, free will can be paradoxically said to be a kind of gift from God. In Genesis, God created man, who was put before two trees—the tree of life and the tree of knowledge. The former is symbolic of God's eternal life, while the latter, human civilization, which is a provision for man's existence in a waste land without faith, namely, a wandering life without God. Man, as a creature, can choose his own way, deciding whether he will obey God or not. He has the privilege to choose eternal life; however, he also can ignore God's words, building up his own urban,

⁹ As to salvation, the most important prophetic book in the Old Testament is Isaiah. This is why I used the third chapter of this dissertation to discuss the prophesied salvation.

secular civilization to live a self-sufficient life. Indeed, on the one hand, Jehovah God is so omnipresent and omniscient that he can create, arrange and determine everything and every situation. Take the king of ancient Egypt (the Pharaoh), for instance. According to Exodus, the great Jehovah hardened his heart so as to ignore Moses' persistent petitions and the numerous wonders arranged by God so that he kept impeding the impending exodus of the Israelites. In Romans of the New Testament, we can see that the only reason the pharaoh rejects the Israelites' pleas is that God has hardened his heart. This means that God arranges a sublunary situation and determined a part of human history. However, on the other hand, man is ordained to preserve his autonomy, his free will. Take the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, for instance. The death of the Lamb, a symbol of Christ, is prophesied in the Old Testament, especially in Isaiah. The crucifixion of the Lamb is pre-ordained and arranged by the divine will with regard to the date, place and manner. However, according to the four gospels of the New Testament, the realization of the divine plan must be effected through the "obedience" of Jesus Christ. In other words, he has the freedom to determine whether he will follow Father God the Father's will or not. As a creature, he has the privilege to interrupt, rearrange, or follow God's plan. Before he decides to execute God's will, he, according to written history, prays three times. In these prayers, he engages in a dialogue with the Planner, the divine Creator, to co-determine his fate.

In the light of this, salvation must be based on free choice. Satan and his followers chose to fight in their suffering resulting from God's judgment. Christ chose, according to His reason and love, to obey God to such an extent that He was willing to be crucified on the cross to fulfill God's plan for man's redemption. And Adam chose to eat the forbidden fruit out of his love for Eve. This choice was based on his free will. So the fall of mankind was essentially based on free will, and salvation likewise is to be attained via free will and reason.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the sixth chapter, free will serves to offer a choice between rebellion and obedience, a binary opposition, which was interpreted in terms of such major themes as creation, marriage, sex, and salvation. The choice based on man's free will result in one of two consequences—death or life. Rebellion, related to Satan, lust and sin, will definitely lead to death as preordained in Genesis 3:3, “but of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ye shall not eat of it, and ye shall not touch it, lest ye die.” This is indeed the key biblical verse that helps us understand that, although man has the free will to make a choice between rebellion and obedience, he is definitely responsible for the results. In the sixth chapter, in discussing the binary opposition between rebellion and obedience, I picked some examples of the binary opposition manifested in the Bible. These examples included the choices between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, between the Spirit and the flesh, between obeying conscience and rebelling against conscience, and between two gates, two trees, and two houses. All of these binary choices are allowed for man's free will and, based on his choice lead to two different results—life or death. Indeed, as Apostle pointed out, men have been called to liberty all right, but they are not allowed to turn liberty into an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:13). Obeying God paves the way for the Spirit to write an existentially significant history for an individual, a group, a nation, a race, and even the whole world; however, rebelling against God, namely, following the words of Satan, as the first parents and human history witnessed, will definitely result in shame, punishment and destruction.

In addition, it is the negation of self that can save man from the sin of rebellion, preparing him to receive the obedience of faith.¹⁰ The acceptance of salvation and the realization of faith are decided by man's free will, which can choose to obey or rebel against the way of God. Chapter Six engages the arguments

¹⁰ Philippians 1:21, “for me to live is Christ, and to die gain.” Here, to die and to live Christ refers to the negation of self.

on the focal point of this dissertation, namely, rebellion and obedience, which is analyzed and explained in terms of creation, marriage, sex, and salvation in Chapter Two, Chapter Four, and Chapter Five, respectively. There it is pointed out that it is free will that determines an act of rebellion or obedience. God's way of bending man's will is through suffering in life experiences. As aforesaid, Job's sufferings actually deepens his understanding of God, broadening his life experiences, which results in a real blessing although he had previously gone through the water and fire of Satan's testing. So, suffering, according to men's life experiences in history, proves to be a shortcut to blessings if an individual or a people can adamantly choose to obey the will of God.

The history of paradise lost is really a legacy for man to learn the lesson of obedience. According to the essential doctrine of the Bible, obedience from faith basically is based upon the principle of obedience to the moving of the Spirit, the doctrine of the Scripture, and an environment nicely arranged by the Lord. Suffering is blessing in disguise, for suffering in life experiences is designed to train the people of God to obey and respect the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, Who indeed beyond human temporality¹¹ created the world, died in His incarnation to save the world, and will cleanse sins and crush His enemy Satan, the old serpent in paradise, ushering in a new heaven and a new earth with the second coming of Jesus

¹¹ Concerning my view of temporality, please see "Nietzsche and Jameson on Temporality: On the Axis of the Word" attached in Appendix. Until now, I have interpreted the epic within the horizon of theology as confined by Triune God, Who is the center of the universe. However, dialectically speaking, could the divine reason be deconstructed, paving a way for postmodernist reading of the epic? And if *Paradise Lost* could be interpreted in a deconstructionist way, what could be the center holding the whole text? It is assumed that God plays the part of being the center of the origin of texts. In a critical reading, God's perfect nature and unsurpassable wisdom can be challenged by such questions—Is God responsible for the fall of mankind as well as Satan? Is God responsible for creating good and evil? If the critic is not equipped theological knowledge, these kinds of critical readings are likely to fall into valueless debates. In addition, the humanistic literary judgment would be overshadowed by prejudice and blindness. That is, "self" and "I" combine to spark the endless debates on couples of controversial issues. Falling off the axis of the Word, the interpretations would become endlessly uncertain. Thus, a vicious circle of misreading could emerge. And the center of the text is deconstructed, its eternal artistic and philosophical value fall into uncertainty, prejudice, and blindness.

Christ. And the fulfillment of the promised salvation on the one hand needs God's mercy and great love, and on the other hand depends on man's choice, which is based on his free will, just as our first parents would make their free choice in paradise.