



Chapter One : the Sphere And Application of Hermeneutics

I. Introduction

Nowadays, the question for me is whether *Paradise Lost* can speak to modern man. Hermeneutics is most often equated with biblical or textual exegesis but its implications for criticism both include and extend beyond the field of linguistics. Hermeneutics also enables the reader to engage in dialogue with words which articulate his understanding of what the text means. Hermeneutics helps the reader to rehear the poem's meaning, which may transcend time and place. Thus, insight into hermeneutics and hermeneutic theory is a necessary prelude to an explication of the meaning and significance of *Paradise Lost*.

This chapter is designed to explicate some essential aspects of hermeneutics, which include its origin, a brief historical survey of major hermeneutic theorists, the hermeneutical circle, its applications and metacriticism.

Not many scholars in Taiwan have been concentrating research into hermeneutics. In addition, when surveying classical hermeneutics, I find that the hermeneutical circle has laid a solid foundation for applying hermeneutical theory to the reading of texts, both biblical and secular. Here, I will explicate a variety of the definitions of the hermeneutical circle as introduced by literary theorists. Besides, I will make some judgments on these. However, it should be noted that the hermeneutical theorists present few real cases illustrating the application of

hermeneutics to the reading of texts, religious or general. In consideration of this weakness of past studies, I will explicate a few concrete, applicable examples to help readers gain a better understanding of both the literary theoretical philosophy itself and its practical applications. Finally, I am interested in explicating the conception of metacriticism, which will be illustrated in the critical reading of *Song of Solomon* in the Old Testament. Hopefully, readers can acquire a whole picture of hermeneutics, which, to be sure, will be very helpful for a contemporary reading of *Paradise Lost*.

II. Its origin

The long journey toward the explication of what hermeneutics is and how it functions begins by going back to the etymology of the word itself. Historically speaking, the word “hermeneutics” is closely associated with the Greek wing-footed messenger-god Hermes transmitting the messages of the gods to mortals. In other words, he not only announced them but acted as an “interpreter” who rendered their words intelligible. Indeed, he renders intelligible what is beyond human understanding.

Moreover, it should be pointed out that we can find a parallel in Exodus 28: 30 in the Old Testament, in which the priests acted similarly to the Greek wing-footed messenger. They transmitted the words of Jehovah by means of the Urim and Thummim whose interpretation was objective, for it was confined to certain fixed patterns designed to explain the divine meaning. It should also be noted that in the Old Testament, especially in Moses’ days, the Israelites sought the will of Jehovah with the help of the priests, who brought the hidden will of God to light by means of the Urim and Thummim. So, it seems to be assumed that the interpretations of the Urim and the Thummim could be the genesis of hermeneutics, as well. Hermeneutics is consequently engaged in two tasks: first, the ascertaining of the

exact meaning-content of a word, sentence, text, and the like; second, the discovery of the instructions contained in symbolic forms.

Actually, the roots for the word “hermeneutics”¹ lie in the Greek verb “hermeneuein,” which is commonly translated as “to interpret,” and the noun “hermeneia,” “interpretation,” accounting for the original meaning of hermeneutics—to interpret. The English word “to interpret” is composed of a threefold meaning: to say, to translate, and to explain. Thus, traced back to their earliest known root words in Greek, the origin of hermeneutics suggests the process of “bringing to understanding.” In this sense, hermeneutics refers to the interpreter’s system of finding the “hidden” meaning of the text.

Furthermore, the oldest and the most widespread understanding of the word “hermeneutics” refers to the principles of biblical interpretation. It is worth mentioning that the advent of classical philology in the eighteenth century had a profound impact on biblical hermeneutics, leading to the historical-critical method in theology. And later the interpretative methods applied to the Bible were also widely applicable to other books.

The term philology refers to the study of language as an object of scientific investigation. Philology had an impact on biblical exegesis in the eighteenth century. E. D. Hirsch’s book, *Validity in Interpretation* (1967) defines hermeneutics as the philological discipline through which one discerns the author’s intention.

In addition, it is realized that hermeneutics is derived from Biblical exegesis, with its aim to bring the meaning of the text into light. It is concerned with the semantic interpretation of the text. Traditionally, its focus was on the formulation

¹ *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* says: “Hermeneutics is the study of methodological principles of interpretation and explanation; the study of the general principles of biblical interpretation.

of rules for the understanding of the text. Furthermore, literary criticism stresses the textual significance, while hermeneutics, in a sense, does the authorial meaning.²

III. A concise historical survey of major hermeneutic theorists

Secondly, the following is a concise historical survey of major hermeneutic theorists: Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann, and especially Gadamer.

In 1819, Schleiermacher aimed to frame a general hermeneutics as the art of understanding. This art is in its essence the same whether the text be a legal document, a religious scripture, or a work of literature. With Schleiermacher, hermeneutics emerges as the art of understanding human expression in general rather than a science belonging exclusively to theology or literature.

In addition, Dilthey considers hermeneutics a methodological foundation for the human sciences announcing a new phase of hermeneutics, which is taken up by Heidegger in philosophy and Bultmann in theology. Dilthey sees in hermeneutics a core discipline that can serve as the foundation of all those disciplines focused on the experience, expression, and understanding of man's arts, actions, and creations.

Furthermore, Dilthey's concept of historicity has hermeneutic consequences for reader and critic alike. It means for one thing that "nonhistoricality of interpretation can no longer be assumed." Both reader and critic perceive, think, and understand in terms of a recollected past and an anticipated future.

² For instance, Hirsh holds that the author's intention must be the norm by which the validity of any 'interpretation' is measured. He argues that this intention is a determinant entity.

Following Dilthey, the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer represents the philosophical phases of hermeneutic reflection. In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger ventures to reopen the question of the meaning of being and to render explicit man's pre-understanding of what it means to be. His philosophy takes its departure from what he calls a "hermeneutic Dasein." Literally, Dasein means "there being" or "being there."

Hermeneutics in Heideggerian terms refers to a description of Dasein. It belongs to the nature of man to comprehend his being. A philosophy conceived as hermeneutical has to bring man's pre-understanding of being into the light. Language becomes the "house of being."

As an inheritor of Nietzschean philosophy, Heidegger tends to interpret Being/Dasein within the horizon of temporality and historicity. Since one moment can have eternal value, the here-and-now nature of time consciousness substantially affects Heidegger's hermeneutical view of Dasein. He considers the world in which we exist to be a perspective of understanding language, which is the house/substantial expression of being. As a result, prestructure and lived experience play important roles in his concept of hermeneutics.

Profoundly affected by Heidegger's existential philosophy, Bultmann's hermeneutics might be called existential hermeneutics. In *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, Bultmann deconstructs the conception of eschatology and stresses the here-and-now nature of his hermeneutics. It has been inferred that Nietzsche's concept of temporality can have affected his understanding of being/language.

According to Habermas, Nietzsche opened up the gate of postmodernity (Habermas 97). Nietzsche's view of historicity led to Heidegger's interpretation of language as existing within horizons/lived experience. Besides, it also contributed to Bultmann's deconstruction of eschatology and the construction of

demythologizing, of which here-and-now attributes manifest the influence of Nietzsche's conception of eternal recurrence. In short, Nietzsche's emphasis on "the present moment" has exerted an influence on the modern understanding of Logos. But as it travels into the later period of postmodernity, Nietzsche's philosophy casts a "dark shadow" on the temporality of postmodernity as well as its view of language/Logos. His declaration regarding the death of God/the Word resulted in the deconstruction of the center, thus bringing about the decentered subject.

Like Bultmann, Hans-Georg Gadamer was also remarkably influenced by Heidegger. Gadamer first traces the development of hermeneutics from Schleiermacher to Heidegger. Interpretation, he points out, involves translation from one situation to another: "Understanding is always the process of welding the interpreter's and the text's horizons which only seem to exist independently" (Palmer, 75). Gadamer also reasserts the hermeneutic principle of historicity or what he calls "historically operative consciousness" (Palmer, 197).

And it should be noted that Gadamer's view of language can be deciphered from the perspective of the Scripture. "Language is the universal medium in which understanding itself is realized" (Gadamer, 350). Moreover, "Language is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the objects takes place between people" (Gadamer, 345). I intend to interpret Gadamer's view of language in terms of the Word, that is, Logos. Accordingly, I will discuss the meaning of Logos, its relationship with creation, its effect on Christian cosmology, which shapes the projection of consciousness, and Gadamer's hermeneutical circle. Later, the conception of Being, the essence of Logos will also be discussed later.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1: 1). Logos denotes the manifestation of God. The Word is the

definition, explanation, and expression of God; hence it is God defined, explained, and expressed.

When in the flesh, the Word is the manifestation of God. “No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1: 18) The Word brought the being of God into light; He interpreted and explained the invisible God in the heaven. Full of truth and grace, His intrinsic essence was so rich that four perspectives are required for its explanation—indeed, all four perspectives are messages for transmitting understanding to the world. In other words, with His form varying with these perspectives, the Word of God is the language of God, which serves to express the intrinsic matter of Being.

The incarnated Christ is the image of God, expressing the rich being of God’s intelligible universal dimension (Col. 1: 15). According to the King James Version, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). In Greek, “dwell” can be literally translated as “tabernacle.” So the Word not only brought God into humanity, but also became a tabernacle to God as God’s habitation on earth among men. So Christ is the house of Being—that is, Christ is the language of the invisible God. And this may account, from Milton’s perspective, for Heidegger’s well-known phrase, “Language is the house of being.”

And the Word is God named Being, which created the heaven and the earth by verbal utterance (Genesis 1: 1), for the Apostle John said in John 1: 1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Being that can be understood is the Word—the Word is the concrete manifestation of Being, while Being is the essence of the Word.

This cosmology affects the projection of consciousness because human beings write and interpret texts in terms of their cosmology. It has been well inferred that

the Christian cosmology leads to Gadamer's "hermeneutical circle." "We remember here from the hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole....It is a circular relationship in both cases. The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determined the whole" (Gadamer, 258-259).

The insight that individual parts *have* to be dealt with in relation to the whole and to the other parts marks a significant step in the development of hermeneutics. The anti-dogmatic self-understanding of early Protestant hermeneutics did not escape a hidden dogmatic of its own: the presupposition of the unity of the Bible apparent in the hermeneutic principle of considering parts within their "whole."

While considering the inter-relations between the Bible and Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, I drew up three principles for interpreting the Bible in the light of Gadamer's "hermeneutical circle." These three principles are stated as follows: an isolated portion of the Bible cannot comprehensively show forth an integrated truth; each verse is inseparable from other truths; and every portion of the Word stands by itself.

First, in interpreting the Bible, we are expected to be cognizant of the principle: an isolated portion of the Bible can not comprehensively show forth an integrated truth. Therefore, while reading and interpreting the Bible, we should not ignore the words "again it is written" spoken by the Lord in Matthew 4: 7. When the Lord was tempted, the devil quoted the words in Psalm 91, saying that God would give charge to His angels to bear Him up, lest He strike His foot against a stone. The devil said that He could jump from the top of the temple and would not be hurt because of the promise contained in the Old Testament. This is indeed a case whereby the devil tempted the Lord with an isolated passage of the Old Testament. When the Lord heard that, He answered right away, "Again it is written, You shall

not tempt the Lord your God” (Matthew 4: 7). Accordingly, it can be inferred that we cannot interpret any isolated portion of the Bible by itself. Instead, we must take into consideration the every semantically related verse in the Bible.

Second, no single verse can represent the whole truth. Nevertheless, many of the Jewish and Christian faiths believe that every verse of the Bible contains all the truths. On the one hand, no single verse can include the whole truth, and to understand a truth, one cannot rely on one verse alone, but is expected to take into consideration many other verses. Thus, each verse in the Bible contains all the truths.

Third, in engaging in an anatomy of biblical truths we are required to consider every portion of the Bible of equal importance. Only when an interpretation harmonizes with the whole Bible can this interpretation be considered credible and meaningful. Any verse that is semantically contradictory with a certain interpretation of the truth must not be deliberately ignored to satisfy the bias of the interpreter. Instead, that certain interpretation must be reconsidered and re-examined due to the evident inconsistency.

After this, some notions of Gadamer’s hermeneutics will be discussed from the perspective of the biblical truths. I intend to explain “hermeneutical experience,” “horizon,” and “effective-history’ in terms of the Word.

First, as mentioned before, “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1: 1). The Word is the being of the absolute transcendental one, who is beyond the limitations of time before the creation of the whole cosmos. The Word, however, was incarnated into flesh and came into being in this world. And the dimensions of the Word were thereupon deepened by His life experiences, including the incarnation, human life, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Now just as our reading of the Word is affected by the hermeneutical

experiences, the understanding of the text is influenced by the reader's life experience.

Second, the dimension of Logos corresponds to Gadamer's "horizon." "A horizon is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further. Thus horizon intentionality, which constitutes the unity of the flow of experiences, is paralleled by an equally comprehensive horizon intentionality on the objective side" (Gadamer, 217).

Third, "understanding is, essentially, an effective-historical relation. If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, we are always subject to the effects of effective-history" (Gadamer, 267). In this regard, I hold that the interpretation of the ancient text can be renewed in the course of history. I tend to explicate this from the perspective of "dispensation."

God's words to humans can be, in terms of eras, divided into diverse dispensations. Basically, some words were spoken by God to man in the dispensation of the law. Some other words were spoken by God in the dispensation of grace. When trying to understand these words, we are obliged to differentiate between the different dispensations. It's inappropriate for us to apply the words spoken in the dispensation of the law to human experiences in the ages of grace. Take, the practice of the Sabbath among the Seventh-Day Adventists, for example. Actually, keeping the Sabbath was a commandment that God gave man in the dispensation of law. Nevertheless, when it came to the age of grace, the practice would fall into disuse due to the shift of dispensations.

IV. Discussion of the “hermeneutical circle”

Here, in an attempt to arrive at a better understanding of “the hermeneutical circle,” I will make a comparison of the views of certain major hermeneutic theorists.

Indeed, the word “hermeneutics” has undergone a revision and expansion of its traditional meaning in recent years. There are two sides to this historical conditioning: both the ancient text and the modern interpreter have their own historical conditionality. The task of hermeneutics is to facilitate a meaningful interaction between these two horizons, that is, in Gadamer’s words, a fusion of horizons. In other words, hermeneutics is the science of understanding a thought or event from one cultural context to another. This principle calls for something called the interpreter’s “pre-understanding” which plays an important role in interpretation. Nevertheless, the “pre-understanding” of the interpreter does not mean that the focus has now shifted utterly from the past to the present.

In addition, the insight that individual parts are supposed to be dealt with in relation to the whole marks a significant step in the development of hermeneutics. The anti-dogmatic self-understanding of early Protestant hermeneutics did not escape a hidden dogmatic: the presupposition of the unity of the Bible apparent in the hermeneutic principle of considering parts within their “whole.” And remarkable is the attempt to incorporate the “specific hermeneutics” of Biblical exegesis into a “general hermeneutics” that aims to provide the rules for any interpretation of signs whether they are of profane origin or not.

Dilthey, a German scholar, is the namer of the concept of “a hermeneutical circle.” The operation of understanding is seen by Dilthey to take place within the principle of the hermeneutical circle. He argued that the meaning of the constituent parts of a circle can be understood only if the whole has a prior meaning, and only when those constituent parts are understood can the meaning of the whole be

grasped. A whole sentence, for instance, is a unity. We understand the meaning of the individual parts by reference to the whole and at the same time grasp the sentence's entirety by reference to its parts. This then involves a progressive clarification of mutually conferred meanings. Furthermore, meaning is something historical; it is a relationship of whole to parts observed by us from a certain standpoint. It is not something outside history but a part of a hermeneutical circle that is always historically defined. That is, meaning is contextual; it is a part of the situation. It could only be understood through reference to life itself in all its historicity and temporality. And the meaning of any context can come only through historical understanding.

Indeed, the "hermeneutical circle" was first described in the early nineteenth century by German theologian Scheleiermacher, and was so named later by Dilthey. According to Scheleiermacher, a hermeneutical circle describes a paradoxical fact:

Understanding is a basically referential operation; we understand something by comparing it to something we already know. What we understand forms itself into systematic unities, or circles made up of parts.... By extension, an individual concept derives its meaning from a context or horizon within which it stands; the horizon is made up of the very elements to which it gives meaning. By a dialectical interaction between the whole and the part, each gives the other meaning; understanding is circular then. Because within this "circle" the meaning comes to stand, we call this hermeneutical circle (Palmer 87).

Heidegger, however, contends that 'the hermeneutic circle' is an interplay between the interpreter and a tradition in an open dialect. Following Heidegger, Gadamer holds that the interpreter must be closely associated with the tradition. Thus, once the tradition changes, the interpretation of the text will differ, too (Hoy 41-2).

Moreover, Heidegger's notion of 'the prestructure' also contributes significantly to the development of 'the hermeneutic circle.' He raises this notion with the belief that interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something given in advance. Therefore it is almost impossible to understand anything without prejudice and presupposition. For historicity and temporality may affect the formation of the prestructure of understanding. And since historicity and temporality are deeply related to personal, lived experience, understanding has something to do with human existence. Accordingly, Heidegger explains the meaning of understanding as follows:

In every case this interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance—in a fore-having. As the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood—a Being which stands (Heidegger 191)

Understanding is thus prior to every act of existence. But since the preunderstanding³ of the text is to some extent prejudicial, the validity of the preunderstanding/presupposition needs to be based on the 'hermeneutic circle.' For the validity of the presupposition is expected to correspond to the interpretation of the individual parts.

So, it follows that Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle puts emphasis on the relationship between the constituent parts and the whole of the text, while Heidegger and Gadamer's 'hermeneutic circle' on the interplay between an interpreter and a tradition. The former is an objective⁴ gesture of interpretation,

³ According to Heidegger, the hermeneutic circle can be expressed in two aspects: first, the structure of the understanding involves a fore-structure which is constantly projected upon what is found. Dasein is essentially interpretive. Second, Dasein is ontologically close to itself. The meaning of this methodological statement can be seen through the results of his analysis of Care.

⁴ According to E. D. Hirsch, the norm must always be the intention of the author. In order to make this meaning objective, it has to be reproducible and changeless. To take this position, he affirms that the verbal meaning is something independent, changeless, and determinate.

while the latter adopts a historical view of the text by placing the interpreter as well as the text in the tradition. However, these two hermeneutic views are mutually complementary, for the former is aimed at exploring “meaning”⁵ and the latter at discovering a textual “significance.”⁶

Besides, it has been pointed out that Heidegger and Gadamer are commonly interested in the phenomenological insight that every interpretation draws on anticipations of understanding. In spite of this basic agreement, there are some important differences between Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s accounts of the hermeneutic circle.

First, Heidegger does not speak of the circle of the whole and its parts, but often of the circle between understanding and its unfolding in the interpretative process. However, Gadamer clearly associates the idea of circularity with the idea of the coherence of the whole and the parts. The circle⁷ for Gadamer describes a constant process that consists in a revision of the anticipations of understanding in terms of a better and more cogent understanding of the whole. Gadamer would see in this coherence of the whole and the parts a criterion of correct understanding (Gadamer, 291). This coherence of the whole and the parts is guided by what Gadamer calls the anticipation of perfection.

⁵ Indeed, the so-called authorial intention is so limited by the expressive capabilities of language that only part of the authorial meaning can be fully expressed. And because of the time gap, it is substantially difficult for the reader of later ages to uncover the absolute authorial meaning. Furthermore, despite the absoluteness of the authorial meaning, the reader’s construction of meaning could be relative and significant.

⁶ Concerning the significance, we are obliged to mention Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Gadamer, following Heidegger, orients his thinking to the conviction that understanding is a historical act and is connected with the present. He relegates the interpretation of works to the historicity and temporality of the reader.

⁷ Concerning the limits of the circle metaphor, there is not really a circle, since it only expresses a requirement of coherence that calls for a constant revision of the hypotheses of interpretation—in this regard, Gadamer seems more epistemological than Heidegger.

Second, Heidegger is primarily concerned with the anticipation of existence⁸ which is involved in every understanding, and that his hermeneutics of existence is interrogating. On the other hand, it seems that Gadamer concentrates more on the more limited problem of text interpretation in the human sciences.

Third, Heidegger insists on the fact that understanding is oriented towards the future, while Gadamer prefers to insist on the determination of understanding by the past. Gadamer argues that the past stamped us through its effective history, and that if we seek to illuminate this history, perhaps we can make ourselves conscious of, thereby overcoming some of our prejudices.⁹

In addition to these philosophical statements, it is worth mentioning that actually the Christian cosmology leads to the general notion of the “hermeneutical or hermeneutic circle,” sustaining the view that there is a holding center in the interpretation of the text. In hermeneutics, this is the aforesaid presupposition/preunderstanding, which is supposed to be coherent with and unify the individual parts. It is held that the notions of ‘subject’ and ‘center’ do exist in literary works, biblical and secular, in the Western metaphysical tradition.

The centering conception in hermeneutics seems to be conceived in logocentrism and to be derived from the world view of the Bible. In Hebrew culture, the universe is considered to have been created by Jehovah, a universal being, who used the power of His word to create the universe. It is noted that the Word in Genesis is indeed the same Word depicted in the first chapter of Gospel of John. The Gospel of John 1:1 states, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In the beginning, God dispensed His word to

⁸ Heidegger brings hermeneutics from a theory of interpretation to a theory of existential understanding. Interpretation which depends on existential understanding is not the general logical method found in classical philology, but refers to a conscious recognition of one’s own world.

⁹ See *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, The Library of Living Philosophers, vol. XXI, edited by L.E. Hahn, 1997, 95.

create the universe as well as human beings. The eighth chapter of *The Great Chain of Being* echoes the first chapter of Genesis, explicitly describing the history of God's creation.¹⁰ Arthur O. Lovejoy holds that the essential excellence of God consists in His limitless creativity—that is, in an unstinting overflow of His own being into the fullest possible variety of beings. The being of the Word/logos is the holding center by which all things exist, just as the hub holds together the spokes of a wheel (Col. 1: 17). David, a well-known Hebrew king and poet wrote in Psalms 8:

O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heaven...When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;...Thou madest him (man) to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beast of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the path of the seas...

This poem is characteristic of the Hebrew world view. Just as God is the center of the universe, man rules over all creation.¹¹ The created world is confined to an absolute patriarchal power frame. This biblical cosmology affects the projection and unfolding of consciousness for human beings who write and interpret texts in terms of their cosmology.¹² And as a result, biblical exegesis used to be stated on the basis of a pre-understanding, which functions as a holding center of the construction and semantic manifestation of the texts.

¹⁰ God is, on the one hand, the universal Plenitude, whose happiness is consummated within his own circle, who supports himself upon the basis of his own all-sufficiency and his own end and center.

¹¹ In the twentieth century, however, these centers were destroyed. In the eyes of post-structuralists, since there are no absolute or fixed points, the universe is decentered.

¹² Since, according to Aristotle, art is the imitation of Nature, and Nature is the manifestation of the perfection of God, it follows that “your art is the grandchild of God.”

Besides advancing the circular relationship between the details and the whole,¹³ Gadamer proposes the concept of ‘historicity’ in the interpretation of texts. Accordingly, philosophical hermeneutics breaks with the development of hermeneutics as a general theory dealing merely with the methods of understanding and interpretation of texts as represented by the tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Indeed, Gadamer’s theory precisely relies on the historicity of human experience and life. In applying the hermeneutic theory of understanding, Gadamer demonstrates how historicity constitutes the mode of being. The historicity of understanding revealed through language belongs to the ontological conditions of human existence. That is, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics is a project which appropriates both the finite and historical nature of human experience of the world. It is also to be noted that the historicity of experience and understanding demonstrates the limitations of these experiences. It follows that based on the temporality of life experience, as well, are Gadamer’s understanding of the universality of language and the concept of historical continuity. However, the meaning of Being as well as the truth revealed through language is also concealed by language. Thus, this represents a historical limitation for any theory claiming absolute validity.

Based on this philosophical reasoning, we can see that the being of the Word in the beginning in the first chapter of the Gospel of John is supposed to have been manifested and to be understood in terms of temporality and historicity, that is, the life experiences of the incarnation of the Word. By this, we can get an insight into the different ontological structure of the being of the incarnated flesh, who is full of grace and truth in the limited temporality of this earth.

¹³ Gadamer defines the ‘hermeneutic circle’ as follows: “We remember here the hermeneutical rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole...It is a circular relationship in both cases. The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts are determined by the whole” (Gadamer, 258-259)

This is why only two genealogies were stated in the four gospels—i.e., in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. The former depicts Jesus as the descendant of a kingly race, so he needs a genealogy to introduce his royal origin. In addition, in the Gospel of Luke, described as a man, Jesus accordingly needs a genealogy to explain his family history. However, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus experiences his life as if he were a slave, who therefore does not need a genealogy to introduce his obscure ancestors. Likewise, exceeding the temporality of this world, Jesus in the Gospel of John was described as God, a being of universal plenitude. Hebrews 7:3 says, “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God.” Therefore, it is inferred that the pre-understanding of each gospel as well as the incarnated Word’s historicity determines whether the genealogy will appear in the biography.

Take Ecclesiastes, as well. As mentioned before, the meaning of Being and the truth revealed through language is also concealed by language. The fore-structure of Ecclesiastes is found in the words with which it begins and ends—“A vapor of vapors/vanity! All is vapor!” The presupposition is echoed in such constantly recurring phrases as “a vapor and a grasping at the wind,” and “this too is a vapor.” The word “hebel,” “vapor” or “breath,” connotes what is visible or recognizable, but insubstantial, momentary, and profitless. In fact, of particular shades of meaning, the individual parts of the book explain and approve of the presupposition found coherent in different contexts.

These hermeneutical principles are not applied simply to biblical textual interpretation but rather are drawn from a wider sphere of experience, including history, art and moral practice. In other words, if the principles of understanding language were formulated, these would comprise a general hermeneutics. Such a hermeneutics could serve as the basis and core of all ‘special’ hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is no longer seen as a set of principles confined to a specific

discipline belonging to theology; it is the art of understanding any utterance in language.

V. The Word as judgment

In this dissertation, the thinking and reasoning is, in principle, based on the axis of the Word/Logos. It is understood that the Word fundamentally covers the aspects as follows: Logos in creation, the presence of Logos, Logos in incarnation, the absence of Logos, Logos and post-modernity. In addition, the Word can be well used a criteria of criticizing the criticisms of the works basically and essentially related to the Bible itself. That is, hermeneutics, in a sense, is a kind of meta-criticism.

All things were created by, through, and for Logos, and sustained by Logos (Col. 1: 16-17). This accounts for the origin of logocentricism, which is the essence of the Western metaphysical tradition. This cosmology affects the projection of consciousness because human beings write and interpret texts in terms of their cosmology.¹⁴ It is well inferred that the Christian cosmology leads to Gadamer's "hermeneutical circle," sustaining the view that there is a holding center in the interpretation of the text. In hermeneutics,¹⁵ this is a so-called presupposition, which is supposed to be coherent with and unify the individual parts. It is pointed out that the notions of "subject," and "center" do exist in literary works, biblical and secular, in the Western metaphysical tradition.

¹⁴ Since, according to Aristotle, art is the imitation of Nature, and Nature is the manifestation of the perfection of God, it follows that "your art is a grandchild of God."

¹⁵ The roots for the word "hermeneutics" lie in Greek verb "hermeneuin," generally translated as "to interpret," and the noun "hermeneia," generally translated as "to interpret," and the noun "hermeneia," "interpretation," which accounts for the original meaning of hermeneutics—to interpret.

In terms of temporality, Logos in creation exceeds the limitation of temporality and is operated before the very beginning of the universe. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Gospel John 1: 1). The Word is the being of the absolute transcendental One, Who is beyond the limitation of time before the creation of the whole cosmos. The Word, however, was incarnated into flesh and came into being in this world. Since then, He had been limited to the temporality of the operation of the whole universe until His resurrection and ascension. In fact, with the creation of the world, the totality of Being/Dasein is subjected to the temporality of this earth. That’s why Jesus the flesh of God is also destined to be limited to such temporality.

When in flesh, the Word is the manifestation of God. “No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Gospel John 1: 18). The Word brought the being of God into light; He interpreted and explained the invisible God in heaven. Full of truth and grace, His intrinsic essence was so rich that four perspectives are required for its explanation—in fact, all four gospels are messages for transmitting the understanding/knowledge of God to the world. In other words, with His expression varying with diverse perspectives, the Word of God is the language of God, which serves to express the intrinsic matter of the transcendental One. Likewise, Being is language with various forms varying with time perspectives.

The presence of Logos is the expression of the invisible God, Who lives in the unapproachable place of man. With incarnation, He shows forth the virtues and attributes of the mysterious Creator of the universe. However, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, in Nietzsche’s words, is the death of God, which turns out to be the presupposition of postmodernity. However, here, I will point out the unconcealed aspect of the death of God, that is, the transformation of Logos.

In terms of the being of the Word, Nietzsche's declaration is somewhat paradoxical. For the Word has a double meaning in Greek; its translation can be either "Logos" or "Rema." In the beginning Logos preexisted with God and He was transformed into flesh within temporality. And then His crucifixion might result in the declaration of God's death. Actually, Logos was dead just as St. Paul held that "the letter/the dead Logos kill (2 Cor. 3: 6). The death of the Word, however, has an unconcealed side, which can be considered a margin with the function of supplementing the insufficiency of Nietzsche's declaration. "For the preaching/the word of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1: 18). An unconcealed aspect of the Word is actually related to the living and diachronic nature of Rema, which is the metamorphosis of the dead Logos. For after the crucifixion of the Word, He was transformed into the living Word, that is, Rema, which in one sense broke the life-death cycle, exceeding the synchronic nature of temporality and rejuvenating His being within a diachronic temporality. Thus this accounts for Roman 10: 8, "But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the Word of faith, which we preach." Thus, it is inferred that just as he neglected the unconcealed salvation of this world in Ecclesiastes, so Nietzsche neglected or intentionally disregarded the unconcealed aspect of the Word. Furthermore, I go on the assumption that the misleading eschatology in some degree led to Nietzsche's inspiration of "eternal recurrence." Likewise, Nietzsche's unawareness of the nature of Rema might result in his declaration, which provided a wrong premise for the decentered subject in postmodernity.¹⁶

In addition, Metacriticism offers a valid criteria to evaluate hermeneutics in general and biblical hermeneutics in particular. With Gadamer, a paradigm-shift is said to have taken place in the very nature of hermeneutics. In Gadamer,

¹⁶ Under Nietzsche's influence, Jameson raised the concept of "the breakdown of the signifying chain." to account for the decentered subject. This kind of linguistic malfunction may lead to the non-identity of the subject.

hermeneutics explores the basis of understanding and thus forms a ‘metacritical’ or ‘transcendental’ basis for theories of interpretation. Metacriticism, a criticism of criticism, is an evaluation of a critic’s own program of criticism. It’s the analysis and questioning of critical discourse, critical practice or a critical model. It analyzes and evaluates the logic, terminology and structure of critical practice. It also attempts to establish general, universal principles or rules for criticizing the texts. For Gadamer, “method” is inherently a limited instrumentality and, indeed, a secondary stage in the art of interpretation. More basic are the perspective and the presuppositions with which the interpreter approaches the text. In other words, method serves the purposes of one’s perspective and presuppositions.

Take Song of Songs in the Old Testament, for instance. Some critics hold that this book is erotic¹⁷ and sexual. This denies the centrality of the cross and seeks to find meaning from human reason and experience. Christian theology must offer a universal critique of life and thought, and even a metacritique of other criteria of thought, understanding and action. We must show how the cross of Christ or the Christ-event has become a metacritique of all theories of meaning. Some metacritics say that the presupposition of interpreting the Bible is Christ and his cross.¹⁸ If we agree with this comment, in the shadow of the cross,¹⁹ sexual flesh is nowhere to be found especially in the Biblical text. Can it stand the test of a meta-criticism wherein Christ and his cross remain at the heart of understanding?

In addition, some metacritics say that the terminology of the Song of Songs is deeply associated with the essence of Christ. For example, the song signifies a life of experiencing an inner, deep, intimate and spiritual communication or union with Christ. The song of songs means a life of lives. And indeed in terms of logic, the

¹⁷ Further inquiries may be directed to MColeMD@theColeFamily.com

¹⁸ For Thiselton, the heart of biblical metacriticism is Christ, who is the center of the biblical texts and their subsequent interpretation.

¹⁹ The message of the cross is not merely context relative but offers a universal critique even though it was given in a particular socio-religious context.

Song of Songs is a counterpart to Ecclesiastes. The recurring theme of Ecclesiastes is vanity in vanity. However, the theme of the Song of Songs is the fullness of the union with Christ.

In conclusion, the Word in the beginning was incarnated into the flesh, full of grace and truth. And the incarnated flesh confined in the historicity and temporality of this earth manifested and interpreted the invisible God through the means of His life experiences. The exegesis of the Word forms the origin of hermeneutics. And the nature of circularity of the being of God lays a formidable foundation for the formation and application of the hermeneutic circle. In addition, historicity and temporality lead to the forging of definitive horizons, be they of the author or of the reader. This calls for the fusion of horizons, and leads to the controversial issues of “meaning,” and “significance.” In this chapter, I have illustrated the application of hermeneutics to the Messiah’s genealogy and Ecclesiastes. Theoretically, these applications are based upon the notions of presupposition and historicity. Finally, I propose that metacritique can be seen as kind of hermeneutics, which seeks to establish general rules of interpreting all signs or texts, and to establish the supreme status and authority behind the texts. In the following chapters of this dissertation, I will use the notions presented above to decipher the themes of *Paradise Lost*, explaining its meaning and significance in order to establish a fusion of horizons between the author and the reader. Thus, the application of hermeneutics is instrumental to a contemporary reading of the epic, which not only addresses the human past but is intimately associated with man’s present and future.

