



Concept Of "Divine Grace In Paradise Lost"

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Abstract

“Concept of grace”, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is an important theme which will answer various questions that sway in our mind. Twenty first century is challenging us with its problems and difficulties in understanding humanity. Individualism and selfish attitude of misusing human freedom is rampant today. War between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine, hype in unemployment and depletion of natural resources are worsening happiness of humanity. Hence, studying about the work of God’s grace with humanity is relevant. This paper focuses mainly the concept of ‘grace’ in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Over the years, the term grace has come to represent distinct things with philosophical and theological implications. This significant work offers a highly innovative 17th century reconstruction of the idea of predestination which predicts modern theological developments and throws crucial information on history. The study analyses Satan’s politics of envy, Eve’s desire to explore and Adam’s weakness in flesh against ‘the eternal grace’ of God that is always present to save man. This paper studies also the presence of ‘salvific grace’ that is very much prevalent in many circumstances with special reference to *Paradise Lost*.

Key Words: Milton, Paradise Lost, Grace, Salvific Grace,

The Etymology of the word “Grace”

The people from the beginning like to reflect on what grace does but seldom press the issue of exactly what it might be. Part of the reason, perhaps, is that the term grace is used in ways that denote more than one reality, and sometimes is used in ways that portray no perceived reality at all. “Grace” is an amorphous or mysterious reality and it is God’s unmerited mercy but such vocabulary describes a divine attitude more than a divine action. We are saved by God’s unmerited mercy is a relatively weak theological phrase that consists of insider vocabulary that is nearly empty of real meaning in common parlance. Grace is grounded in the divine incursion into human history and God’s relationship to humankind. Grace is, “God’s presence in

human experience, God's energy transforming human beings, God's power energizing human activities for good."

Term grace comes from the Greek word *charis* which means favor, beauty, charm, kindness, and benevolence. In the religious sense, it could be understood as gifts given by God and in the secular sense as a benevolent attitude. The parallel meaning also could be traced from three Hebrew words, such as, *hen*, *hanan*, and *hesed*. First, '*hen*' means favor or charm which is a quality in a person that wins favor, especially from a superior. Secondly, '*Hanan*' means "to be gracious" or "to show mercy to another". The emphasis is on action rather than an inner disposition and also it denotes a higher person's generous response to the inferior. Thirdly, '*hesed*' means "steadfast love", "kindness", "mercy", and "forgiveness". It reflects a generous giver who gives freely, openly, superabundantly, unexpectedly, with no regard for self: going beyond legal, obligatory, the conventional ways and means. It points to action as well as an attitude of kindness and friendship. This term comes closest to the full reality of grace understood in the Bible.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* covers the happenings or events starting from Satan's betrayal and fall from the high heavens to man's losing his celestial or state of grace by listening to Satan, the fallen angel. The man and woman abandon God's ways. Unlike other epic poems, John Milton's '*Paradise Lost*' focuses not just on the fight between two kingdoms or kingdom's destiny but on all mankind. God's mercy is infinite and eternal but so is Satan's pride. Though the poem is often controversial and hard to understand, it gives a great truth that despite man's fall God destined to save or bring back man to the state of grace. Man willingly rejects the plan of God by sinning but God through his grace pledges to save mankind which is actualized by the free choice of the Son who is the manifestation of God, the Father. God's son is listening and he freely chooses to sacrifice himself to save mankind. Milton offers a reconstruction of the traditional post-reformation doctrine of predestination, a reconstruction that heavily emphasizes freedom and universality of salvific grace (3.123-128). In it, the Father refers to an eternal and unchangeable decree of human freedom. Freedom is the focus of the eternal, decreeing will of God. The Father makes human free, rather than human salvation the object of predestination. According to *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve must be free and autonomous. The fall of Eve due to her desire to eat the fruit on the account of Satan's cunning words and of Adam's weakness is done without divine influence. Thereby Adam and Eve are the authors of their fall (3.122). Their act is done purely independent of God's knowledge and will. The freedom of Adam and Eve is this freedom that God himself has bestowed so that the freely predestining grace of God gets its primacy. God has an eternal purpose and that purpose is to save humankind through his grace. That is to say, before human beings have any need of salvation (before they have fallen), God has already planned their salvation. The gracious character of predestination is clearly expressed in the dialogue between the Father and the Son, God's call for salvation is universal (3.183-197). The salvific will is sincere and true. The salvific grace of God made manifest from the beginning "I will put enmity between your seed and her seed" (Gen 3:15), further, "the nations will be blessed through you (Gen 12:2-3)" and calumniated in the free choice of the Son (Phil 2:6-11; Cf. 2Pt 3:9).

According to *E. A. Walsh*, the meaning of Salvific is, having the intent or power to save or redeem the salvific life and death of Christ. Among St. Thomas Aquinas's most famous dictums is the assertion that "grace perfects nature." In fact today, no less than in centuries past, these three small words and all that they imply are still at a storm centre of scholarly debate. Does the continuity between nature and grace effectively eclipse the gratuity of grace? This question has proven of such central and enduring concern, that for a number of centuries scholars posited that for Thomas, humanity possessed a "pure nature" with wholly natural ends that were graciously transformed by a "superadded" gift of grace, together with its supernatural end in the beatific vision of God.

Actual Graces

When the term "grace" is used in pastoral, moral, and spirituality contexts, it often does not mean God's personal union with us, i.e., sanctifying grace. Instead, it refers to all the conditions and helps we need to live a good life. Actual graces are natural interior movements and exterior events interpreted in light of our foundational relationship with God. We pray for the "grace" to do some difficult task, or we speak of a surprise visit from an old friend as a grace. These actual graces are not divine interventions suspending the natural order. Instead they are natural occurrences appreciated for how they fit within our primary religious relationship. This happens in at least three ways.

First, we frequently interpret all external events in terms of our relationships. Most commonly, we evaluate events by whether they are good or bad for us. Often, we evaluate events by how they bear on others whom we love or hate. Similarly, when we are in love with God, we evaluate the world in terms of that relationship. Thus, if we feel moved to help a widow, we feel not only that she is a fellow human being in need, but also that she is a daughter of God. We give thanks when the red light turns to green, not because God changed the light but because the open road is part of the good life we share with the world's Origin and Destiny. In other words, when we are in love with God, all goods are potentially felt to be not just good in themselves or good for ourselves and others. They are also felt to be ways that our relationship with God makes a difference in our lives.

Second, when we are in a divine friendship, we properly attribute to that relationship an influence on the inner workings of our minds and hearts. For example, when we feel an urge to reach out to a beggar, we account that urge itself as part of the way divine love works in us. Or we might experience an insight into how to deal with a nasty neighbor, and we credit that insight to being in touch with the all-knowing God. In such cases, we feel inspired. Again, this influence is not a supernatural intervention in which God puts these thoughts and feelings in our minds. Instead, the causality is, to use Rahner's terms, formal or quasi-formal. That is, when we unite our hearts with the Trinity, that relationship itself forms how we think and feel.

Third, even evils can be understood as occasions of actual grace. On the one hand, we attribute to Providence the absence of particular evils. When, as secular persons, we escape some tragedy, we might feel relieved, and nothing more. But as religious persons, we also experience these feelings as part of the blessings that are part of our divine friendship. Again, we need not say that God intervened to spare us from a devastating

tornado (especially when our neighbor was not spared). Rather, we feel thankful to still be alive. On the other hand, when the green light turns red or when it is our house that has been destroyed, we turn this occasion into an opportunity to develop, say, the virtues of patience, resignation, or trust in Providence. The evil we experience is not itself a grace. It is a challenge to develop the requisite virtues or to overcome the world's evils. When we meet that challenge, or even when we attempt to meet that challenge, we strengthen our divine friendship by facing life's evils together. Jesus on the cross died, but in the process of dying, he handed himself even more deeply into Abba's hands. Death itself, though a creaturely evil, becomes a religious victory.

Salvific Grace: Man's Redemption

Humans stepped on the earth with a pure white robe of Eden. This robe however was a bit stained when he made his first sin inside the garden of Eden. As days passed on Earth, the robe that once reflected purity and bliss, slowly turned into a rusty, dusty cloth, stained with the sins that he made, the purity of the robe was no more. Man did all his actions with a little taste for sin. His words, his actions, and his deeds overflowed with perversion and pride. The man was blind to realize that everything came out of the human body was impure and sour. His sweat, tears, blood, and excretion stink with impurity, his body scents out impure fragrance from all its pores. A perfect creation of God as he should have been, nothing coming out of him was sweet. He had no power to control these impure secretions coming out of his body, except for his actions and words, which are the only things that he has the power to secrete with a sweet tone, the choice that he makes turns his words and actions bitter as well. Man failed to realize that only his words and actions have the superior authority to redeem him from all his sins. He still struggles hard trying everything for redemption. This bundle of impure secretions known as man fights his ways toward eternal salvation in many ways, yet the easiest among them all is the graceful actions that guide him towards salvation. The salvific grace is just a by-product of all the actions that he makes, the redeeming factor of this grace judges his actions, yet he never tends to realize this eternal truth during his time on earth.

Attaining Salvific Grace

Salvific grace can never be attained directly, it's a complex process that requires love and compassion towards oneself and others. The love towards the Almighty Father is another way of attaining Salvation. Man's love with God, in simple words, the intimacy he has with the Almighty Father, this intimate love gets rattled and shattered with the impact of the sinful choices that he makes every day. This in turn leads him through a considerable amount of time – a phase of suffering, like when man was stripped away his wings in Eden and made to sweat and bleed, this suffering in turn shows him the light of salvation, the luminosity of the salvific grace that his father has towards him and guides him on all his endeavours.

Man, though closing his eyes to all his fellow sufferings around him, never failed to look at the vivid blazing light of salvific grace that beamed from the heavens, his light was always above his head, a beacon that guides the lost at night, like a lighthouse that gives hope to a confused sailor. Man had to walk under this beam to reach the grace of salvation. Many well-known saints, men, and women of God knew this path towards redemption, the path of salvific grace only gets revealed through the lines of the Holy Bible. This

path of salvific redemption and guidance through the Bible is not visible to the common eyes, the readers had to engulf themselves in those pages and had to listen to those pages instead of reading them. This in turn guides us to salvation, the order one had to begin towards redemption usually begins with the love towards God and the inevitable breakage of the infinite bond.

"Whose fault? Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me All he could have; I made him just and right; Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." 3.96-99

Adam and Eve, in the Old Testament, tell us God's intimate fatherly love towards his creation, and how it gets crumbled when they sin. The children of God shattered the intimacy of their Father when they sin, this, in turn, pushed them away from the gates of Eden and they fell on the dusty cold lands of Earth, a phase of suffering and pain. This is the third and the penultimate step before the salvific grace. Man, in turn, during this phase of suffering had to contemplate his actions and the sins in heaven while staying on earth. This reflection revealed to him an inner eye within his soul, that he never knew existed before, through this eye of the soul he saw his way back to the gates of Eden. God's salvific grace might be visible to the eye of the soul only after the realizing phase of self-purification. This was his way back to Eden, the eyes showed him what grace was. This fatherly guidance of his children away from eternal suffering can be said as the salvific grace of the Lord. The man saw this truth.

The Father and the Son: A Salvific Bond

The bond between the Father and the Son might be the purest as defined in the Bible, the affinity of this bond can be seen in various parts of the Bible itself. God, being the Almighty Father above was never bothered by the sin of his creations at Eden, however, he felt it necessary to push them away from the Garden of Eden as it was the only way they might contemplate their sinful actions and be a better version towards his fellow siblings. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are one and the same, by the actions of the Almighty Father sending his Son to guide his creations towards the salvation, and to die in the process of redemption, shows us the intimacy of love he has towards his children, as by sacrificing the Son for the sins of his creations, he sacrifices himself.

Though banished the man to the wastelands of the earth during the phase of suffering, the Father never failed to share the path of salvific grace with him. He made sure man multiplied and spread his children on earth, for God knew the only way the man would find the justifications behind God's actions is when man becomes a father himself. When the man saw his children sin to one another, his heart ached, his soul reflected and his eyes inside opened for the very first time. He saw the redemption necessary to attain salvation, he saw the pathway of salvation hidden in plain sight, all these years thinking that he was sent away from the heaven to earth to suffer, but it was now when the man saw his children sin, his own blood Cain and Abel sin, he saw what he needed to see, now, the man was the father, and his children were the sinners, what once he thought was a punishment, when he was in the place of the son, was actually a hidden lesson indeed when he was in the place of the father.

As I mentioned before, the Bible needs to be read through the soul and not through the eyes. Man's intimacy with God is a two-sided sword. It hurts man when he was pushed into earth, it hurts him when he realized that his bond with his Father was no more. But instead of enduring the agony, he realized and reflected, as age passed when his offspring chose the path of sin. He realized what it meant to be a father. He realized what it actually takes to be a father who needed to let the kids suffer in order to teach them a lesson about a better future. It was only then, that the man realized that the sword that the father used to hurt his son was a double-edged sword, it hurts the father more than it hurts his son.

The Suffering

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. - Genesis 4: 10-11

"First Fruits, the green Eare, and the yellow Sheaf,

Uncull'd, as came to hand; a Shepherd next,

More meek came with the Firstlings of his Flock,

Choicest and best; then sacrificing, laid." (11. 435 – 440)

The above verses refer to the manipulation by which the grace of God was lost due to selfishness and avarice man got from his surroundings. The earth was ploughed, watered, and nurtured by the children of God in the beginning, but it was poisoned, dumped, and spoiled by the children of man as time passed through. After Cain and Abel, their children multiplied and spread across the globe, they sinned more and more till the globe was no more a place of God, it was dark and greasy, and it smelled rotten inside the minds of the people, they cared one another no more. Man here becomes sinful with lust and pride. Unlike all his forefathers, this time his cravings wanted him to be God.

His forefathers who realized their pure bond with God saw the human in God, they saw the revealing fatherhood inside God himself. But his offspring as time passed wanted to see God in themselves, they thought of themselves as God and sinned even more. The almighty, realizing his children once again choosing the path of eternal suffering, wanted to guide them once again. He saw the graceful of them all out there, and revealed to him about the great flood that will happen soon, and asked him to take a pair of all species along with him inside the ark, he was Noah, the only man whose soul was so pure that it saved the entire humanity altogether. *But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord, these are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. (Genesis 6: 8-9)*

"The story of Paradise Lost becoming Paradise regained is the story of God's grace brings us from Alienation from him to membership in his family. God's grace restores us to what Adam lost for us – Sonship to the God who made us loves us, and provides for us in every detail in life."

(Sinclair Ferguson in BY GRACE ALONE) (reflection by Ferguson to substantiate what John Milton wants to say in PL).

The purity of his heart was the key to the redemption of all the upcoming generations. Noah was a man of morale who was not bothered by peer social pressure. He did no sins just because his neighbours did, he could have sinned and led a better life than his neighbours but he controlled himself. He could have stolen from his fellow brethren and invested it in his kids. But he chose not to do so. He would have been teased by his fellow neighbours for his clean and pure lifestyle, but did he sin?

Why? Why should Noah follow good morale and good deeds when no one asked him to do so? Why should he be clean on the inside when he never knew the rewards that awaited him? His father taught him so and so did his children. God saw this purest grace inside his soul. He leads him not only to Noah and his family's salvation but to all the generations that follow. From then, every child that stepped on Earth was a seed of Noah. Noah was the salvific grace for the entire humanity as well as all the animals and birds that he rescued with his Ark. He was the salvific redemption that redeemed all the species' lives from that point forward. A pure soul suffers at the hands of all the impure ones for being different from them, but when the salvation falls on them altogether, the impure souls suffer eternally, while the pure souls rejoice at the gates of Eden.

The Light of Salvation

Grace is morally guiding a new born soul but having grace on a sinful soul usually leads to suffering, and then the sinful soul reflects and cleanses itself once and forever. Men of God fight for the impure sinful souls and they guide them into the light of salvific grace. Missionaries, Priests, and Counsellors are to name a few who guide the unclean souls back to the path towards salvation. The book of Exodus talks about the struggle of Moses. He was a leader who guided the souls of Hebrew towards Sinai. They wandered around the wilderness for 40 years when God finally revealed himself to Moses and changed their lives. The salvific grace which is evident here from the story of Moses is, that he was the lamp that guided the lambs to their safe barns. Moses was the child of God, he walked and talked with God. One might argue that Moses is the perfect example of God's grace on Earth, when he was born he saw the blood of his people enslaved in Egypt. With the grace of God, Moses escaped the evil clutches of the Pharaoh and Moses was the guiding soul that guided the Egyptians to the blessed land of Canaan. ***For the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)*** From both Noah and Moses, we find the way how salvific grace works. For the sinners, thieves, and murderers who were blinded to the side of salvific grace, God selects a medium through which his grace reaches the dark, barren souls of the sinners. This medium selected by the Almighty Father has the power to amplify the supplied grace into salvation.

Conclusion

Milton did believe in prevenient grace even when he was arguing most strongly for predestination. Apart from salvific grace, I highlight here prevenient and subsequent graces. Prevenient grace is a temporary aid or assistance given by God enabling man to exercise his free will and to accept the gift of salvation. It also strengthens him in overcoming a temptation when he is wavering or in doing a good deed. On the other side, subsequent grace accompanies his free act, preserves and reinforces the holy habits which render man's actions more pleasing to God. The sin of man brought us here, and the light that shows us the path back towards Eden is always inside us by contemplating the sins we made. We can see the eyes of our soul open and guide us back to Eden. This life as we know is a path of suffering, a continued struggle towards something that is never valued in the eternal scales of the God, the day when we together as humans, stop valuing the material possessions that we go behind, the possession that taunts us to take the route of sinning, and start valuing our soul over everything, by staying loyal to oneself, that being our own soul, is the day that we finally look above and see a beam of light fall from the gates of Eden. That is the day we step back into the paradise that we never lost, (but seem to have lost) and was above us all along. "***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.***" *Acts 4:12*

I have tried to develop a concept of grace that puts emphasis on the contemporary Christian experience. I have tried to show that it is also compatible with many of the claims and distinctions found in traditional theologies of grace. I have argued that, in its primary meaning, grace is the emotion of God's love, offered, accepted, returned, and developed into mutual love. This love is a form of participation, emotional participation of love in the life of the beloved. God's love for us evokes our responsive emotion of love for God. Ideally, this love pervades our whole life. By enacting this love, we further develop it. It leads us to interpret all of life's events in terms of it. This grace is redemptive in the most fundamental sense: It overcomes personal separation between ourselves and God. This grace then moves us to challenge and rectify evils found in ourselves, in other human beings, in social structures, and in our world so as to make creation consonant with divine love. As a consequence, our affections, thoughts, activities, and relationships possess different meanings that is, they are transformed or elevated because they are part of our religious friendship with God. When we cooperate with this love in our lives and in the world about us, we join God's love in transforming the world.

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