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硕士学位论文

(同等学力)

托妮·莫里森作品《家园》中的宗教思想研究

The Religious Thought Reflected in Toni Morrison's Novel

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作者姓名： 彭芳

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The Religious Thought Reflected in Toni Morrison's Novel *Home*

By

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学位论文原创性声明

本人所提交的学位论文《托妮·莫里森作品“家园”中的宗教思想研究》，是在导师的指导下，独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，本论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。对本文的研究做出重要贡献的个人和集体，均已在文中标明。

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Abstract

The influence of Christianity on Western literature is unquestionable. It can be said that there is no western literature in its current form without Christianity. With the spread of Christianity, it has had a tremendous impact on Western literature. Its ideological, moral, and spiritual infiltrations have made it possible for some Western writers, whether dissatisfied with reality or personal feelings, were unconsciously influenced by Christian tradition.

Toni Morrison is the first black female writer in the contemporary American literary who received the Nobel Prize in Literature. She is also a black woman who has been well educated in Western educational and cultural background. Her works are based on the expression and exploration of black history, destiny and spiritual world, and are widely recognized by Western society. The influence of Christianity on her thoughts and works is enormous and far-reaching. In fact, her works and Christianity have obvious and close connections. Therefore, it is very necessary and feasible to study Morrison's thought from the perspective of Christianity, which can help us better understand her writing intention and value.

The novel cited in this thesis is *Home*, the masterpiece of Toni Morrison. Combined with historical background and social reality, the author conducted detailed analysis, systematic review and elaborate the influence of Morrison's religious thoughts that have impact her on works. The analysis of Morrison's practice of carrying out Christian thoughts in her works was done under the influence of triple culture (American culture, black culture, traditional Christianity culture). The main concepts of Christianity, the views of God, sin, redemption(salvation) and love are treated the main research focus on Morrison's religious thoughts in this thesis.

This thesis is divided into three parts: The first part is the introduction, which introduces the evaluation, related background and current literature reviews on Toni Morrison and her works, especially the novel *Home*. The research status of Morrison and her works at home and abroad, as well as this book. The impact of the framework and cultural background of the paper on its creation. The second part is the main body of the thesis, which is mainly divided into four chapters. The last part is the conclusion, on the basis of reiterating the main

arguments and opinions of this thesis, it is further proposed that the religious thoughts in Morrison's works expand the understanding of the nation, politics and religion that Toni Morrison wanted to convey, not only from the personal view; it is more inspiring and helpful, from the social aspect, to dealing with racial issues and cultural conflicts in the context of globalization.

Key Words: Toni Morrison God sin salvation love

摘要

宗教对于西方文学的影响是毋庸置疑的,可以说没有宗教就没有当前形态的西方文学。随着基督教的传播,对西方文学产生了巨大的影响,它的思想、道德、精神向方方面面渗透,使得西方一些作家——无论对现实失望不满还是出于个人情怀——都不自觉的受到基督教传统的影响。

托尼·莫里森是当代美国文坛首位获得诺贝尔文学奖的黑人女性作家,同时也是受过良好的西方教育和文化熏陶的黑人女性。她的作品以表现和探索黑人历史、命运和精神世界为主题,受到了西方社会的认可,基督教对她的思想和创作的影响是巨大而深远的。事实上她的创作和宗教就有着明显而紧密的联系。因此从宗教的视角来研究莫里森的思想是非常必要的、可行的,这可以帮助我们更好的理解她的创作意图和创作价值。

本文分析所引用的材料为托妮莫里森的力作《家园》,结合历史背景和社会现实,作者进行细致的分析,系统的梳理和阐述了莫里森的宗教思想对于其作品的影响,并通过分析莫里森如何在三重文化(美国文化、黑人文化、传统宗教文化)的影响下将宗教思想贯彻在其作品中。基督教《圣经》的主要核心观念——上帝观、罪观、救赎观以及爱观是研究莫里森宗教思想的主要出发点。

本论文主要分为三大部分:第一部分为引言,详细介绍了托妮莫里森及其作品的评价和相关背景,对于莫里森的作品尤其是本论文的研究素材——《家园》的国内外研究现状,以及本论文的框架和文化背景对其创作的影响。第二部分为论文主体,主要分四章展开。最后一部分为结论,在重申本论文的主要论点及主张的基础上,进一步提出莫里森作品中的宗教思想将其想传达的对于民族、政治、宗教的理解更为广阔的表达出来,不仅从个人方面,更是从社会方面对我们在全球化背景下处理种族、性别问题和文化冲突有了更大的启发。

关键词: 托妮莫里森 上帝 原罪 救赎 爱

Content

Abstract	IV
Abstract in Chinese	VI
Introduction	1
A. A brief introduction to Toni Morrison and her work Home.....	1
B. Literature Review.....	2
C. Multiple Cultural influences on Morrison.....	7
D. Thesis Statement	11
Chapter One Omnipotent and Helpless God	12
A. Omnipotent “God”	12
B. Helpless “God”.....	16
Chapter Two Original and Imposed Sin	21
A. “The original sin” in human nature	21
B. The “imposed sin” as black.....	24
Chapter Three Internal and External Salvation	27
A. Internal salvation	27
B. The external salvation.....	32
Chapter Four Self and Mutual Love	36
A. Self-love.....	37
B. Mutual love.....	41
Conclusion	44
Notes	47
Bibliography	51
Acknowledgement	55

Introduction

A. A Brief Introduction to Toni Morrison and Her Work *Home*

Toni Morrison (born Chole Adelia Wofford¹; February 18, 1931) is an American novelist, essayist, editor, teacher, and professor emeritus at Princeton University.

In 1988, Morrison won the Pulitzer Award and the American Book Award for *Beloved*. (Which was adapted in 1998 to be starred in the film of the same name by Oprah Winfrey and Danny Glover). Morrison won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. In 1996, the National Endowment for the Humanities invited her to attend the Jefferson Lecture, the highest honor the US federal government has in humanities. She was honored to receive the 1996 National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution, for her new opera *Magaret Garner*, which was firstly performed in 2005. On May 29, 2012, President Obama presented Morrison with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2016, she won the PEN / Saul Ripple Award for the Award for Achievement in American Fiction. In year 2012, Oberlin College became the main base of the Toni Morrison Association, an international literature association dedicated to the academic research of Morrison's works. In 2015 Morrison published her novel *God Help the Children* (Morrison's eleventh novel and also her latest one).

Morrison completed *Home* and dedicated it to her son Slade Morrison who was a painter and a musician, and died of pancreatic cancer on December 22, 2010. She published it in 2012.

Home told the story of Frank Money and his sister Cee Money the two black siblings. In order to escape from the boring lifestyle, change his destiny in the Lotus Town of Georgia totally, Frank Money volunteered to join in the Army and went to the Korean battlefield. But out of his expectation, Frank experienced the cruelty of the war on the front line, witnessed the death of his two best friends, and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

After returning to the United States, he lived an empty and lost life in Seattle. When Frank met a tailor named Lily, who wanted to open her own tailor shop and have a house of her own, he fell in love with her, and believed that his life would be

complete with her. Lily tried to cheer Frank up, but found that even in those smooth days, Frank was still listless and couldn't even deal with "the smallest task in life", such as paying bills, dealing with gas leaks, hitting mice, dealing with evil neighbors all those trivial things.

One day, Frank unexpectedly received a telegram which said that his sister was critically ill, and decided to go south to find his sister. On the way, Frank not only witnessed racial discrimination suffered by other blacks, but also personally experienced unfair treatment such as inexplicable searches. After many hardships, Frank arrived in Atlanta, where he saved his sister Cee, who was experimented as a white doctor's guinea pig, and returned to the town of Lotus in Georgia. Under the care of black compatriots, Frank restored Cee's health, and gradually gained the courage to face up to the crime of killing a Korean girl during the Korean War. In the end, the siblings re-buried bones of a black man who was killed by the 3K Party, which was witnessed by them in their childhood, to achieve their final spiritual salvation.

Morrison's *Home* was created under the influence of triple cultures (American culture, black culture, traditional Christian culture), which reflected her religious ideas and grasped the essence of her thoughts derived from but different from the main ideas of Christianity, and the main concepts of Christian Bible—the views of God, sin, salvation, and love. The religious thoughts reflected in Morrison's novel *Home* will help express Morrison's understanding of the nation, politics, and religion(Christianity) that she wanted to convey more broadly, not only from the personal aspect, but also from the social aspect in dealing with ethnic and cultural context of globalization. These thoughts greatly inspired people's understanding of American Literature.

B. Literature Review

Since the 1980s, Morrison's creations have gradually won widespread attention from the American critics. In 1988, *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature, which signified that Morrison's literary achievements have been completely accredited by the mainstream of literature. After that there was a large number of

research about Morrison's works were done, which formed a research boom on black literature. Until now, this boom has not subsided but has become more and more in-depth.

1. Literature reviews on Morrison's works in general

The study on Morrison and her works abroad presents a complex and diverse feature, coupled with the fact is that the data is too large to collect comprehensively. Therefore, the review of foreign research is inevitably partial. According to the existing data, the research can be roughly divided into two categories: one is the general study of Morrison's life, speech, thoughts, etc; and the other is a separate and concrete study of one or more her works. There are also comparative studies, such as studies comparing Morrison with other writers (black male writers, white female writers, or some minority ethnic female writers). For example, Gurleen Grewa's *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison, 1998* reviewed Morrison's five works (*Bluest eyes, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar children, and Jazz*). Linden Peach's *Toni Morrison, 2000* reviewed all seven published works of Morrison at that time. Nellie Y McKay's *Critical Essays on Toni Morrison, 1998* was a representative which had a general research on Morrison's works.

These current studies focus, home and abroad, almost exclusively on the two aspects of the study on motifs and the study on the features of narrative art. The former mainly focused on her thoughts and works from the aspects of race, gender, culture, class, social history, and so on. The research content involved characteristics of black cultural, racial politics, and female character traits of Morrison's works. The latter mainly discussed the unique postmodern narrative features in Morrison's works, including narrative structure, narrative mode, narrative strategy and narrative discourse. To sum it up, the former focused on ideological content and the latter was art form.

The monograph analysis and commentary on Morrison's research can also be roughly divided into the following categories:

Feminist commentary. Black feminist theorists and critics not only emphasized the experience of black women, but also combined racial and class commentary

perspectives in their analysis to explore the relationship and performance of the three elements in Morrison's works. Such as Lorraine Liscio's *Beloved's Narrative: Writing Mother's Milk*; Tulsa's *Studies in Women's Literature* (1992): 31-46; and Zhang Ru-wen's *Feminism in Toni Morrison's Novel Sula* (Foreign Languages Research, 2007).

Cultural commentary. This type of commentary linked reading created by Morrison to American culture, especially conflicts between culture of mainstream and cultures of marginal groups (such as black culture). Such as Wang Yu-kuo's *Interpretation of Toni Morrison's Cultural Stands* (Contemporary Foreign Literature, 2006; Holly Flint's *Toni Morrison's Paradise: Black Cultural Citizenship in the American Empire* (American Literature, 2007).

Aesthetic reviews. In Mar c. Conner's *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the unspeakable* (African American Review, 2000), the aesthetic principles and characteristics that permeate the novel were fully discussed.

Study from the author-reader perspective. Morrison has repeatedly stressed her influence as a reader and author in her works. Such as Ma Yan and Liu Li-hui's *The Third Space and Identity Representation: Post-Colonial Interpretation of Identity Construction in Tar Baby* (Journal of Hunan University -Social Sciences, 2017, 3).

Postmodernism, and post-structuralist commentary. This type of commentary focused on interpreting the relationship between Morrison's creation and various contemporary theories. Like J. Hillis Miller and Wang Feng-zhen's *Postmodern Ethics in Literature: Late Derrida, Morrison, and Others* (Foreign Literature, 2006,1).

Study from a religious perspective. From the perspective of religion, Morrison and her works were systematically studied. The foreign monographs and thesis concerning religion mainly focused on the intertextuality between Morrison's creation and the Bible, or the influence of African religion and culture on Morrison's creation, such as Gayraud S. Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism---an Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (New York, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990.). Channette Romero's *Creating the beloved*

Community: Religion, Race, and Nation in Toni Morrison's Paradise, (African American Review, fall 2005); Domestic research in this area was not much, mainly from the biblical myth theme, tasks, images and other perspectives, such as Ma Song's *A study on the Cultural Motifs of the Bible in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, (Master Thesis, Northwest Normal University, 2012).

1. Literature reviews on *Home*

*Home, Morrison's latest novel, is a comparatively brief tale set in the early 1950s, a concentrated look at a time many people -- especially politicians -- use as a symbol of America as a powerful, peaceful paradise, where families were stable and "Home" was a word that meant nothing but goodness and safety.*²

But for the novel of Morrison -- *Home*, there is rare research material could be collected because its shortage since being published.

Foreign research are mainly from magazines and website reviews. In a few short articles about *Home*, the focus was on the plot, theme, and characteristics of inheritance and change in Morrison's work. Only a limited number of journal articles and papers have studied *Home*.

Charles of the Washington Post spoke highly of the literary status of Toni Morrison and her excellent novel *Home*, which is subtle and powerful , and then gave the main plot of *Home*. This review concluded that Morrison described a touching but unpretentious story and showed the problems and growth of African Americans.

The Guardian commentator had a good comparison of the differences between Morrison's previous works and *Home* on the themes and their writing background. He then suggested that although Morrison's work involves many big issues, such as racial discrimination, gender discrimination, lingering memories, and generational inheritance, her work still focuses on smaller minor themes.

Tyrone Beason pointed out in *Home: Toni Morrison's Novel of a Southern Homecoming* that this new novel has made readers and the protagonist Frank go

through a sad journey and recognize the particularity and universality of his destiny.

Critics from the National Public Radio claimed that this novel is simple but powerful, full of the freshness of old-fashioned topic - the prodigal son return to the fold. *Home* was well received because it succeeded in stimulating people with new elements, such as some dark American history, such as McCarthyism's heinous behavior, cruelly killing innocent African-American.

There also are a few academic dissertations on *Home*. *Ghosts, Orphans, and Outlaws: History, Family, and the Law in Toni Morrison's Fiction* explained Morrison's intention of writing this novel.

Domestic research is mainly focused on the themes of Trauma theory, Identity construction, Spatial Narrative, Eco-criticism, feminism, and so on. For example,

Cheng Jianying, emphatically analysed the trauma of American blacks represented by Frank and Cee in the novel *Home*, and the salvation of black culture in *Trauma and Cultural Redemption: Interpretation of Toni Morrison's Home*.

Gao Jie, in her *Confusion and Reconstruction of Black Identity—Interpretation of Toni Morrison's Work "Home"*, discussed the black's way out through the theory of Identity construction.

Through in-depth elaboration and analysis of multi-dimensional narration, the spatial narrative features of *Home* were clearly presented by Tang Jing, in her thesis *The Spatial Interpretation of Toni Morrison's Novel "Home"*, so as to help readers deeply understand the theme of the novel, namely, discuss the realistic hardship of black life, the process of black self-seeking, the return of black culture and black returning home.

In *Constructing Harmonious Home -- Interpretation of Toni Morrison's "Home"*, Li Xiuxiu combined literary research with ecological thoughts, revealed the coordinating of the relations of natural ecology, social ecology and spiritual ecology through the Perspective of Eco-criticism,

Long Xueting, in *The Female Writing of Morrison's New Novel "Home"* Stated, from the perspective of feminism, that black women, in the mainstream white culture, should stick to the black culture and tradition, and highlight the value of the black

female culture, so that they can get the opportunity to heal and save themselves.

Studies, which are done through religious angle, are quite rare. Such as, Zhang Hongwei's *Trauma and redemption in Toni Morrison's novel "Home"*, has mentioned the salvation on the religious level.

In a word, there's a big gap in the existing religious studies.

This novel reflects, on the one hand, the African tradition that had retained its indispensable but unique characteristics under the cultural background of the United States; and on the other hand, Morrison's Christian thoughts -- as the integration of African religion and Christianity and also a typical demonstration of the process by which blacks adapted to American life.

C. Multiple Cultural Influence on Morrison's Creation

From the perspective of religion, this thesis takes the three cultures—American culture, black culture and religious culture — as the starting points of the four core concepts of Christianity—God, sin, salvation, and love. Based on Morrison's novels, Morrison's religious thoughts were systematically analysed repeatedly. Morrison's religious thoughts, formed under the triple background of American culture, black culture and Christian culture, had a distinct political color and religious thought on race with the aim of expressing love. From the perspective of the entire developing process, the conceptions of God, sin, salvation and love inherit from traditional Christianity; but they are more about the transformation or even subversion of traditional Christianity doctrine. It is a confluence of Christian thought and American blacks' traditional thought. Morrison's religious thoughts have gone through the process of confrontation with traditional Christianity. After continuous spiritual and intellectual exploration, Morrison found her true “God” and true religion: this was the God of "eternal love", and the religion of "love", thus restoring and emphasizing God's Justice and the love of Jesus Christ, "love" became the core and highest value orientation of Morrison's entire religious thoughts.

1. Influence of American culture

Morrison is an American, and is one of representatives of the American mainstream literature, so no matter what her race is, her mind would always be

integrated with the mainstream culture and the trend of convergence undoubtedly. In Morrison's novels, the reality, history, art, culture, life, society and human nature are always fully reflected both theoretically and literally. Her works have not only poetic language, superb narrative art, but also a profound sense of history. There is a critique of social reality and a reflection on life. It not only describes the course of individual emotion, but also explores the destiny of her nation and her people. In her novels, she wants to reflect the living condition of American blacks and the living condition of all Americans, and then ultimately led to the concern of universal living condition for all human beings.

In the early 1950s, the eve of the outbreak of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, there was a period of rampant racial discrimination, segregation and prejudice. White racists atrocities to blacks caused serious racial wounds on the psychological level, which exacerbated the racial exclusion and racial hatred by the American society, and destroyed the social stability and the rule of law in the United States.

Home with a background of historical events and historical environment in the 1950s, mentioned the "Golden Age" of America McCarthyism, "Red Terror", the influence of the Korean War to black survival plight, and the racial violence of "Ku Klux Klan" Party. Through this novel, Morrison revealed the irrationality, brutality and cruelty of white racism, showed the racial discrimination, prejudice and her historical consciousness. In her novel, Morrison mentioned in page 72 "The Morrison Case"³ and Albert Maltz⁴ which were the real cases in 1953, showed to the reader the historical event of "Red Terror".

2. Influence of religious culture

Morrison was well educated in Western education system and culture, which made her creation be recognized by mainstream of Western society. So the influence of Christianity on her thoughts and creations is enormous and far-reaching. As a devout Christian, Morrison once said, *The Bible was not a part of my books but a part of my life.*⁵

The influence of Christianity on Western literature is unquestionable. It can be

said that without Christianity there is no current Western literature. The main ideas in the Bible and the biblical culture embodied in it covers many fields such as sociology, history, law, philosophy, etc., and penetrates into the political, ethical, and moral aspects of the Western world. They are ingrained in the life and collective consciousness of Western nations.

From a spiritual perspective, the development of American culture is a history of the development of Christian culture. The development and evolution of Christian culture constitute the spiritual foundation of American culture. In terms of the historical process of the development of Christian culture, the morality of Christian culture in the United States explains the religious spirit of "Love" in American moral education as the code of conduct that respects equality, the ultimate belief of God and salvation. The core ethics of the original sin, the cornerstone of the pursuit of dedication, and the universal ethics are closely related to Christian culture. From the colonial period to the early days of the founding of the People's Republic to the Second World War and then to the 1960s and the present, in the course of historical development, Christian culture has penetrated into the goals of American moral education and can always be reflected in all aspects of American culture.

Morrison is an ideological writer. Her creations are kind of thinking. She combined reality, fables, myths and legends with history and reality and have them reflected in her real and imaginary world.

From a specific perspective, each of Morrison's works involves the content of the Bible. Some of them borrowed Morrison's notion of Christian "original sin" and "redemption"(salvation) to reveal hypocrisy and vainness of the so-called "redemption" of white Christianity by showing the tragic fate of black girls in a society dominated by white values (*The Bluest Eyes*). Some reinterpreted the meaning of "God" and "Satan" to express feminist rebellion (*Sula*); some appealed to the original image of the Bible - "Heaven" to refer to the ideal situation of black and the ideal dream of a beautiful and harmonious society (*Paradise*).

In a word, each of Morrison's works involves biblical characters, images, or themes to explain the core concepts of the Bible, such as the view of God, the original

sin, the concept of salvation and love. Through her understanding her works were sometimes filled with Christian philosophies and the ideas of Christian love. Therefore, it is very necessary and feasible to study Morrison's thoughts from the perspective of religion, which can help us better understand the her real intention and value of creation.

2. Influence of black culture

One thing we can not ignore is that Morrison is a black, so her creations have always been rooted in black culture. She has mentioned in the interview, *I love my people. First, as a black, black women are writing.*⁶

Her black identity and the sense of historical responsibility determined her deep concern for the destiny of her people.

Since the first work, Morrison has been committed to writing for black people, maintaining and promoting black culture, seeking the roots of American blacks' culture, and expressing and exploring the history, destiny and spiritual world of black people. It was not only the starting point of Morrison's novels, but also the basic subject and destination of her novels. Morrison has been conveying the voice of black people to American society through all her life.

Morrison even mentioned in her book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1993) that as a black writer, she tried to explain the racial superiority and cultural hegemony that was concealed and strengthened by the strong white language, and *I hope to extend the study of American literature to a broader field.*⁷

In her novels, the protagonists were mostly struggling between faith of their race and values of the white community, the contradictions and conflicts caused by traditional African culture and modern civilization, and strove to seek their own social identity and position.

In conclusion, the study on Morrison's religious thoughts in *Home* should be carried out under the triple cultural background -- mainstream American culture, traditional Christian culture and black culture. Only with the crossing, infiltrating and

integrating background, can we grasp the source and gist of her religious thoughts comprehensively and accurately.

D. Thesis Statement

For the connection between Morrison's religious thoughts and Christian thoughts in novel *Home*, it is necessary to grasp the essence of Morrison's thoughts and the main ideas of Christianity.

God, sin, salvation and love are the core concepts of Christianity, but this thesis will not simply discuss the doctrine of Christianity. The major Christian ideas – views of God, original sin, salvation and love will be the four starting points on which Toni Morrison's particular religious thoughts could be fully studied.

The main research methods of this thesis include: literature review, text reading and theoretical analysis. The diverse literary criticism methods are mainly black literature reviews, myth prototype comments, postcolonial theory and deconstruction, etc. In this thesis, Morrison's novel *Home* (published in 2012) is analyzed as the basis. Through the careful analysis of the novel, Morrison's views on God, original sin, salvation and love are systematically analysed, explained and elaborated, and the author would finally induce and summarize the prominent characteristics of the origin, evolution and core of Morrison's religious thoughts.

Chapter One Omnipotent and Helpless God

Since Morrison's first novel, she has started to express the concept of God in her own way through various means -- He is powerful, actionable, and capable of crushing all evil (All things that are unjust and unfair) in the world; but at the same time He is old, weak, indifferent, and helpless. This conflict of understanding officially verifies that blacks have their unique understanding of God with their own race.

A. Omnipotent God for American Blacks

The essential feature of Christianity lies in its belief in God. God is the absolutely only god believed in Christianity. God symbolizes unity, infinity, absoluteness, and eternity. God is at the absolute center and the core concept of the Bible.

The Christian view on God is very complicated, there are various descriptions about God in the world—he is transcending and presenting; both as one and three; he is completely different from and has a close relationship with people; showing that he is alive and immortal. ⁸

But one thing is beyond doubt -- that is the absolute belief in God. According to the interpretation of the Chinese religious philosopher - He Guanghu, the view of God is the understanding of deity or god -- *What is God.*⁹

The Christian concept of God was originally developed by the rain gods of various tribes in Israel, and finally became the only true god of Christianity. Later “He” evolved into a god with the characteristics of self-existent, all-sufficient, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent. Influenced by Plato's "negative theology", Christianity believes that the divine nature of God cannot be transfigured, which transcends all concepts, and cannot be affirmed with any concepts; the existence of God is absolute, without proof, people can only say that “God is not what”, not “what God is”. Man

cannot know God with reason, but can only understand God by faith.

Alister McGrath of the United Kingdom explored the theory of God from the Christian doctrine. First of all, God is the Father. This shows that the Christianity believes that God has a personality, he is not an abstract and non-personal idea. When portraying the attributes and characters of God, God is said to be "integrity" and "love".

God is the Father, which shows that the relationship between man and God is similar to the relationship between children and parents. And this means that people come from fathers. God cares about people as parents care about children, and can also exercise authority like a father.¹⁰

Christianity itself has an evolutionary process that keeps pace with the era. In the 20th century, the core value of Christianity has moved from religious perspective to cultural perspective, from simple beliefs to guiding people to pay attention to the ontology of life. Christianity moved closer to the real life of people because they firmly believed that only when God becomes more and more secular, will it not lose its influence and value.

With the development of society, people's understanding and pursuit of God is also evolving. The concept of God, when it firstly appeared in the minds of people, is a symbol of the power of "redemption"; in the "Dark Ages" of the Middle Ages, it was the power of "order"; in the heyday of the Middle Age, it was the power of loving that began to sprout. This understanding has been the embodiment of the "eternal love" and "eternal justice" that continued till the late 19th century; around the mid-20th century, with the entry of various modern and postmodern theories "God" as a "high-spiritual relationship structure", began to become the new trend of today's interpretation.¹¹

American blacks have always been a very faithful race, and the identity and dignity of their entire nation were preserved around their worship. The history of African American's conversion to Christianity stemmed from the period of slavery. Since the blacks were looted from Africa to America, the religion they believed in began to be integrated with Christianity. At the beginning of the 18th century, the Great Awakening Movement, which swept across the northern American continent, greatly extended the Scope of admission, and the declining religion began to re-engage the participation of the people. Great Awakening not only deeply influenced all aspects of the life of the north American colonists, but also encouraged many black slaves became Christians. Accepting black slaves' conversion to Christianity, white slave owners can better meet the need for enslavement of blacks. For it can destroy their own African culture and traditional habits, thereby control and enslave the ancestors of American blacks who came to the "New World". But for black people, conversion to Christianity has another special significance: the emotional sustenance of religious beliefs can slightly alleviate the suffering caused by slavery, and the black religious organization has become a hotbed of "Black Enlightenment"

The concept of the Just God was soon widely spread among black people. When slaves talked about sin, they would consider it as an unjust act of human beings. Those who enslave human compatriots were so-called sinners in the mind of American blacks. They were full of confidence that God would charge those unpaid debts in the day of Judgment. It was bound to impose severe punishment on the white oppressors who had enslaved black people without humanity. American blacks saw themselves as God's chosen people similar to the Israelites. They found the courage to live and the dignity of life from religion.

The American blacks gained the dignity of life and the purpose of life. C. Eric Lincoln, in the preface of *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, elaborated on the formation of black religion. He said,

*And human experience - religious, social, economic, and political
experience - is an important part of the mainstream of social and cultural*

*development in the United States.... The reason why the United States is the United States is because of the existence of black people, and before the founding of this country, black people had already existed on the American continent. Blacks brought their religion to the United States. Later, they accepted white religion, but they did not use the whites' view to express it. Blacks intentionally, perhaps destined, shaped, processed, and transformed the religion that white slave owners passed to them, and turned it into something that closes to the most of their desires and the things that best express their special needs.*¹²

The Black Church provided organizational framework for most activities in the community: economics, politics, education, and religion. At the same time, they offered an opportunity to express their personal beliefs in a way that encouraged a sense of identity, and they created a situation in which their beliefs enabled them to ultimately win, even though they mostly lived in the cruel reality, mistreated, and gradually reduced in social status. *Within the black churches, ministers assumed a particular significance, not just as preachers of the gospel, but also as educators, community organizers and political leader.*¹³

*As Africans in America, they had 'alternative open to them - alternatives that they themselves fashioned out of the fusion of their African heritage and their new religion' (ibid.: 35). levine's emphasis falls importantly on the phrase 'that they themselves fashioned' because it underscores the essential quality of self-definition associated with these creative acts. In them and through them, the self is asserted in a world of constant denial in which the 'definition belong to the definers, not the defined'(Morrison 1987: 190)*¹⁴

The religious integration process of American blacks, with blood and tears, naturally greatly influenced Toni Morrison. In her work *Home*, black people's religious devotion to God appeared many times, and they believed wholeheartedly

that the Almighty God would become their spiritual support.

As the men shook hands they held each other's eyes, saying nothing and everything, as though "good-bye" meant what it once did: god be with you.¹⁵

In the bottom heart of Frank, he still deeply believed that God would be his protector and savior.

Lotus was separate, with no sidewalks or indoor plumbing, just fifty or so houses and two churches, ...(46)

Even for such a small town , people would resort to Christianity for their ultimate reliance.

B. Helpless God

For American blacks, they soon realized that Christianity was a strange religion, for it taught people that everyone was equal, everyone was a brother, but at the same time large-scale of black people were taken away from home and transported to a distant place to be slaves.

As Wilkinson argued,

The illiterate slaves who were forbidden to learn reading or writing listened to the bible being read by the preacher on church-organized occasions and were discouraged at the same time from exercising African religious practice.¹⁶

Hence the sacred promise of this holy book-- Bible was seldomly fulfilled, American blacks' attitude towards it was vague and skeptical. They began to express it, sometimes even used it to isolate white from their communication.

Morrison expressed her doubt in her novel *Home*, and demonstrated the failures

that American blacks' appealing to God for the sake of survival. Their efforts were all proved to be in vain.

As the background of *Home*, American industry was mainly concentrated in the north since the 1920s. The continuous development of industry has made the living standards of people in the north higher and higher. Passion, romance, music and money created the aura of the northern American cities. Therefore, the north had a strong appeal to the people all over the United States at that time. The free black people living in the south were also deeply attracted by this legendary aura. And just in this period, the harvest of southern crops was not good. Insects and floods had made the lives of free blacks in the south worse. In order to find opportunities to improve their lives, free blacks migrated from the south to the north in order to escape the tough living environment.

The rapid development of the northern industry required a large amount of labor, so many black people moved there to find jobs. However, material living standard changes did not seem to make American blacks' life happier. Although the white people in the north offered the banner of "Everyone is equal," they could not completely abandon racial prejudice in their hearts. With the increase of the black population in the north, the attitude of northern whites towards blacks was more complicated.

After that, the Korean War, which was a civil war erupted between the north and the south Korea, bursted out during the period from 1950 to 1953. When US President Truman announced the release of North Korea, many American blacks participated in the so-called "Integrated Army" without racial segregation.

In order to change their fate, American blacks especially youth were encouraged by the American government to join the army, their only intention was to avoid boring and tedious life, and also change their destinies. Frank and his two best friends were convinced, and quickly joined the army for their brighter and promising future.

*Could marbles, fishing, baseball, and shooting rabbits be reasons to get
out of bed in the morning? You know it wasn't.*

Mike, Stuff, and me couldn't wait to get out and away, far away.

Thank the Lord for the Army. (84)

But it turned out to be a total failure, his two friends died on the battlefield.

In June 1950, at the beginning of the war, there were approximately 100,000 black soldiers (the blacks accounted for 8% of the total number of US troops), but by the end of the war, the number of death among black soldiers exceeded 60,000. It can be said that African Americans have made significant contributions and sacrifices to the interests of the United States.

As was mentioned in *Home*, Frank was a black soldier who was encouraged to join the army to fight the Korean War, in order to change his life, but was in vain.

Morrison was suggesting that American society was full of "bad hostility" to a part of her people, the American blacks. From the beginning of the 1950s, McCarthyism began to spread, and five years before the complete bankruptcy of McCarthyism at the end of 1954, its influence was spread to the fields of American politics, education, culture, and diplomacy. In the same interview with Morrison, she said that the McCarthy group killed many blacks in the 1950s, regardless of whether their political position was left or right. The racism in the United States in the 1950s was very rampant. Many American blacks died of white lynchings. The justice and dignity of the law were trampled on by white racists. One of the most prominent vicious incidents was the Murder of Emmett Till, (Emmett Louis Till, July 25, 1941 – August 28, 1955) who was a young African-American and was lynched in Mississippi in 1955 at the age of 14, after being accused of offending a white woman in her family's grocery store. The brutality of the murder and the fact that killers were acquitted drew attention of the world to the long history of violent persecution of African Americans in the United States. Till posthumously became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁷

Morrison borrowed this story in her work *Home*, and transformed it into a story of a 8-year-old boy Billy.

Billy arranged his hands in rifle position. 'Drive-by cop' he said. 'He had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk pointing it. Some redneck rookie thought his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops.'

"You can't shoot a kid," said Frank.

"Cops shoot anything they want. This here's mob city. Arlene went a little crazy in the emergency room. They throw her out twice."(31)

There is also a real historical event reflected -- the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment in the United States. The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, also known as the Tuskegee Syphilis Study or Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment was an infamous, unethical, and malicious clinical study conducted between 1932 and 1972 by the U.S. Public Health Service. The purpose of this study was to observe the natural progression of untreated syphilis in rural African-American men in Alabama under the guise of receiving free health care from the United States government. The study was conducted to understand the disease's natural history throughout time and to also determine proper treatment dosage for specific people and the best time to receive injections of treatments.¹⁸

In *Home*, Toni Morrison exposed these historical events in an artistic pattern, showing the doubt of American blacks to God, whether they were blessed by Him, how could they suffer so much with a firm belief in Christianity.

Her admiration for the doctor grew even more when she noticed how many more poor people – women and girls, especially – he helped. Far more than the well-to-do ones from the neighborhood or from Atlanta proper. He was extremely careful with his patients, finicky about observing their privacy, except when he invited another doctor to join him in working on a patient. When all of his dedicated help and a patient got much worse he sent her to a charity hospital in the city. (64)

In those historical events mentioned by Morrison in an interview, there is a core idea that could be connected in tandem, that is, whether it is war, political persecution, racial discrimination, or so-called scientific experiments, American blacks are always the victims. In her words, there was an implication that the “Almighty God” didn’t help American black, no matter how hard they tried to survive, to struggle with their tragic destiny, they were always innocent victims.

Jesus stepped in and did that. He said ‘hold on there, Mr. Police Guy. Don’t hurt the least of mine. He who harms the least of mine disturbs the tranquility of my mind.’

Beautiful, thought Frank. Bible stuff works every time every place – except the fire zone. (31)

Then Toni Morrison tried to reinterpret Christianity and gave a new meaning to the concept of God. The blacks were not opposed to Christianity itself, nor to God, but to white people's interpretation of Christianity and the concept of God.

As Nietzsche said "God has died." God has not died but was helpless when facing racial discrimination, and the tragic destiny of American blacks.

Such a worrying disorder and the shaking of the foundation will undoubtedly bring the feeling of loneliness, loss, anxiety and despair to the black people, but it will also push the black people to start to think about how to get out of the predicament and how to save themselves.

Chapter Two Original and Imposed Sin

Morrison is not a pure religious writer, but her writing has many obvious and close connections with the Bible. Therefore, her understanding about the concept of “sin” derives from Christianity partially, and another part comes from the history of American blacks. And her religious thoughts are the result of white cultural hegemony. Generally speaking,

The "double consciousness" of black writers determines that on the one hand, they are eager for the recognition of white culture; on the other hand, they are separated from white culture because of the need to maintain their own black culture. Their works show a "continuous tension between assimilation and separation".¹⁹

There are two kinds of sins in Morrison's works: they are the “original sin” in human nature and the “imposed sin” as black.

A. “The original sin” in human nature

The biblical view of sin is that it is the disjoint of gods and men, that is, the damage of man's relationship with God. "Because both the Bible and Christian thought believe that God is the founder of the ethical law, ignoring it is also an offence to God," said Christian ethicist Karl Hpeschke. In this sense, “sin” is disobeying God's will and violating God. According to the Bible, sin is an offence and disloyalty to God. Human history is a history of being away from god because of “sin” and returning to god because of god's love and grace.

For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin,

*producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*²⁰

Sin is also divided into two kind: a sin inborn and a sin acquired. A sin inborn is "original sin", an acquired sin is equal to evil. The Bible traditionally holds that there are seven deadly sins: pride, wrath, Sloth, greed, envy, gluttony and lust. Good and evil are two aspects of human nature. *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*²¹

The doctrine of “original sin” has had a deep and lasting influence on Western culture.

*The Bible uses ‘original sin’ to explain human nature, and takes it as the starting point and theoretical basis of human nature defects and human sufferings. An insight into the sinfulness of man, an explanation of the sinfulness of man, and an affirmation of the indeterminability of man, by his own efforts, constitute an important part of the Bible.*²²

The concept of “original sin” was adopted in Morrison’s works, as deeply influenced by Christian idea. In *Home*, Frank, as an ordinary person, is not a good person in the strict sense. On the contrary, his human nature contains many evil aspects. For example, in order to stop himself from using the method of molesting a

young girl to alleviate the fear in war, resist the temptation and reshape his dignity, even to cover up his disgraceful behavior, Frank shot and killed the North Korean girl who he encountered on the Korean battlefield.

My relief guard comes over, sees he hand and shakes his head smiling. As he approaches her she raises up and in what looks like a hurried, even automatic, gesture sh says something in Korean. Sounds like “Yum-yum.”

She smiles, reaches for the soldier’s crotch, touches it.

Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill. (96)

To stop killing by killing, Frank gradually anesthetizes himself with killing on the battlefield to eliminate inner fear and sorrow.

Now he was reckless, lunatic, firing, dodging the scattered parts of men. The begging, the howling for help he could not hear clearly until an F-51 dropped its load on the enemies’ nest.

There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him. The copper smell of blood no longer sicken him; it gave him appetite.(98)

In order to cover up the disgraceful behavior, in order to escape self-blame, Frank even lied and deceived himself.

I have to say something to you right now, I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hid it from you because I hid from me. ... My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame.

I shot the Korean girl in her face.

I am the one she touched.

I am the one who saw her smile.

I am the one she said “yum-yum” to.

I am the one she aroused.

A child. A wee little girl.

I didn't think. I didn't have to.

Better she should die.(133-134)

This can fully revealed that as the protagonist, Frank has his dark side in his personality, and this represents the human “original sin” vividly.

B. The “Imposed Sin” as Black

In the novel *Home*, Morrison drew a long cultural memory of the inferior status of black people in the ideology of racial discrimination. Even if the next generation of American blacks who did not experience the catastrophes of their grandparents, they still had a sense of denial, of debasement, of racial depression. Frank's experience on his way home showed that as long as racial discrimination existed, American blacks would continue to suffer the same pain as their ancestors. Black soldiers returning from the war were not treated with the respect they deserved. The novel borrowed the words of the reverend Locke to state this fact directly, *an integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better. (18)*

As descendant of slaves, American blacks had long suffered from racial oppression and discrimination. The tragedy of black slaves first came from the white settlers' distaste for their black skin and slanders. In whites' view, American blacks were the "illegitimate children" of American civilization, which was essentially abandoned and humiliated. The mark of shame was the inherent black skin, which was the despair, guilt and fear of many black people. The American blacks were sinners inborn.

Skin color becomes a symbol, and everyone is automatically connected to the racial identity it represents. ²³

In the 1950s, slavery was abolished, but segregation prevailed and racial discrimination flourished. Class oppression combined with racial injustice aggravated the fate of black people. There was no doubt that slavery and its derivative racism caused a cultural trauma to the black community. Black slaves and their descendants

cannot escape this tragic destiny -- this was repeated again and again in individuals and groups, lasted for more than three centuries and affected generations, forming a permanent suffering that would remain in the collective unconsciousness of black people.

*The black man has been colonised mentally, his mind has been destroyed, his identity has been destroyed, he has been made to hate his black skin, he has been made to hate the texture of his hair, he has been made to hate the features that God gave him.*²⁴

They are the shackles that black people can't get rid of. It is the "original sin" rooted by white people in their hearts. It is the inferiority and shame of their race. It is the "original sin" imposed on them by white people.

In American history, the violence caused American blacks to suffer physical and mental hurt at different eras. Black people were eager for basic human rights, as evidenced by the black boy disabled by the police. When Frank asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up, the 11-year-old boy replied, "a man." Morrison expressed the desire of black Americans to be equal, and restored the fact that American blacks were not equally treated as white people.

Frank joined in the army in order to escape the unfortunate fate, but when he returned to the United States from the Korean War, he was not only traumatized by the war, but also faced with an unimproved social environment and a difficult economic situation. Although racial segregation and discrimination were not practiced in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, they were prevalent and rampant in the United States. The black veterans were not respected and recognized, but treated inhumanely. One day when Frank was wandering on the street, he could not remember which law he had broken and was handcuffed by the police on patrol and forced into a mental hospital. The police searched all his money and belongings and left him only a soldier's badge. The reason for all this was simply because he was a black man.

Morrison's view of "sin" and traditional Christian view of "sin" are both different

and related. Christianity believes that original sin is the “sin” and acquired sin is evil. Morrison denied the explanation of the situation of black people in the white people's Original-sin Theory, and put the black people's experience in the context of social history and culture for analysis and reflection. In her view, it is not "original sin" but slavery that imposed inferiority as black people's nature. It is the crime of racism that caused oppression and inequality. But when she looked at the evil of human nature, she inherited the traditional Christian view. She believed that Frank and Cee in the novel also had the dark side in human nature, which was also an important factor to their destiny. Only by recognizing these can we have a clear understanding and positioning of Morrison's religious thoughts and find the foothold of black culture and achieve self-improvement of individual life for American blacks.

Chapter Three Internal and External Salvation

Out of a strong sense of national pride and responsibility, Morrison has focused her attention on American blacks since her first work. She paid close attention to the living conditions of her compatriots. But it is clear that it was not Morrison's ultimate goal to reflect the hardship and suffering of American blacks simply, it is her real intention to help the black find a life that is integrated, rich and beautiful. As Morrison said, *if there is a consistent theme in my fiction, I think that is how and why we learn to live the fullest and harmonious life.*²⁵

Morrison's novels always gave people upward power in the sad and dreary tone, and she believes that how to obtain courage, bear difficulties positively, and achieve their salvation for the suffering black people are critically important.

A. Internal Salvation

Atonement(salvation) is an extremely important concept in the Bible. The atonement runs through the Bible and has a rich religious and practical significance. It refers to the act of remedy or compensation for the crimes committed, and mostly refers to the behavior of those who rehabilitate God and want to rebuild harmonious relations with him.

*He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*²⁶

*For the first time in the Old Testament" The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*²⁷

This is the most common form of atonement in the Old Testament. Through sacrifices, people transfer the sins of their own or their families to the sacrifices, and the sins of man are redeemed. In the Old Testament, life is considered to exist in the blood, that is to say, the blood represents the life. When the blood of the sacrifice is

offered, it is equal to the life. The way of sacrificing in the Old Testament is of God's command.

In the New Testament, salvation is closely related to Jesus Christ. It can be argued that salvation is manifested in the presence of Jesus Christ on the cross. When John saw Jesus, he said, *Behold, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*²⁸

Obviously, the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ are closely linked, consistent with the theme of atonement. Jesus Christ shows God's love for mankind by his atonement, *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*²⁹

The atonement of Jesus Christ is the eternal salvation of mankind.

In this way, the salvation in the Bible is actually achieved by means of some "mediators". The Bible is about far more than a sacrifice for the atonement, but the pursuit for individuals to gain inner renewal through the power of God, to free themselves from sin, to achieve complete faith in God, to renew as people belonging to God. And God will give them grace, then the relationship between man and God is re-established and a reconciliation is achieved. Because the sinner is not "healthy" or "completely corrupt", and God is kind, He will be lenient to the sinner. In this way, people will have the opportunity to completely convert to God through atonement(salvation). It can be said that atonement is the pledge of sin even if God or deity gives kindness and grace to human. This is the concept of "all sins are redeemed" in the Bible.

One of the great charms of Morrison's novels is that they tell the stories of American blacks and the stories of individuals. Everyone may encounter difficulties in their lifetime, but the attitude towards life determines the rise and fall of his life to a large extent. Like in *Home*, Frank experienced all kinds of misfortunes and fell to the bottom of life. However, he did not indulge in depression and sorrow, but actively tried to find his own self-salvation. For Frank, the ultimate target in getting rid of the trauma, caused in his childhood by war and racial discrimination, was the result of his free choice.

After returning from the battlefield, Frank was completely in a state of confusion.

He wandered on the streets of Seattle, using the veterans' allowance for gambling, and losing money. He had worked on some odd jobs and lost his work later. He struggled, but all in vain. He was poor, stupid, and depressed. Frank got acquainted with a girl named Lily who brought a temporary comfort to him, and eased his pain brought by the nightmare. Lily tried to cheer him up, but even in those days when life was better, Frank was often listless and in a state of paralysis. The psychological trauma caused by the war led to his losing not only his ability to act, but also the direction of life, and could not find the meaning of existence. His plan for the future was to "live on." In the end, this completely angered Lily, and the relationship between the two broke down. After the two broke up, Frank became angry, self-loathing, and uncontrollably anxious.

Michiko Kakutani said in her book review: *The contrast between those who struggle for a better life and those who struggle in the abyss of life is a common theme in Morrison's novels. In her novels, we can often see those who were defeated by life: poverty, family breakdown, and the burden of history (slavery, racial discrimination) made them incapable of action, and their lives became survival in the lowest sense of the word. While the others driven by love, ambition, and the power to reach their heart, wanted to find their identity and social place in a world beyond them.*³⁰

Fortunately, it didn't last for long, after losing his lover, Frank found his own way of salvation through family affection, his sister Cee. His love to his sister helped Frank find the value of his own existence.

Cee was Frank's only care in the world, and they two grew up together on their own. Frank pitied and protected her, and his love for Cee was a selfless, unrequited, unadulterated emotion. He hoped not only to save his sister's life, but also to save his own ,

No more people I didn't save. No more watching people close to me die.

No more

And not my sister. No way.

She was the first person I ever took responsibility for. Down deep inside her lived my secret picture of myself – a strong good me tied to the memory of those horses and the burial of a stranger. (103-104)

Whether it was time to go back and find his sister who was at the critical moment, this would be a crucial choice that Frank faced after receiving the telegram. He once hesitated because he hated returning to the south where was overwhelmed by racial discrimination. But when he received the telegram that informing his sister's being critical ill, Frank's strong sense of responsibility prompted him to make a decision to return to his hometown, because his sister was like an integral part of most of Frank's life. The affection of siblings allowed Frank to concentrate on finding and taking care of his sister, thus caused him temporarily forgot his own pain. The protection to his sister gave Frank a sense of value, a sense of accomplishment and a heroic spirit. The love and responsibility for his sister is the source of his self-salvation, and the process of Frank's salvation was in sync with the journey of saving his sister. To save his sister, Frank must go back to the Lotus Town — a place he was reluctant to go back, a place full of memories of miserable childhood. Returning there also meant that he had to face the families of his two friends who died in Korean War. Therefore, Lotus Town was another battlefield for him. This small town represented a painful past and a difficult present; going back there meant that he had the courage to face the past and accept the present. During the journey to the south, Frank realized that although those memories were terrible, they would not crush him or let him fall into paralysis any more.

His condition improved significantly, and gradually he got rid of the trauma caused by war. The ghost who was always wearing a uniform and often plagued him finally disappeared with the process of his recovering mentally. Lotus Town, in Frank's eyes, became much brighter and much better than it once had been in his memory. He could see and enjoy flowers, deep green trees, and hear children's

laughter and women's songs there. The strength and growth of his sister also made Frank be deeply touched and inspired. His attitude towards life had changed dramatically. He no longer hated and complained, but chose to forgive and cheer up.

The novel also told a story that when Frank was standing on the battlefield in Korea, he met and killed a Korean girl who often searched for food in trash, happened to touch the crotch of the relief guard. The guard shot the little girl, but at the end of the novel, Frank admitted that the one who killed the Korean girl was not the relief guard but himself. Frank's confession turned him from a victim to a perpetrator.

From Frank's inner monologue, it was learned that it was the coldness of Korea, the loneliness and bloody killing on the battlefield that made him lose his humanity, and eventually killed the Korean girl who tried to seduce him. Just like the illusion when Frank was a child, the dead body of his black compatriot was replaced by a beautiful stallion, Frank's murder during the Korean War was suppressed and replaced by illusion that it was done by others. This showed that Frank had no enough courage to confess the crime. He had been condemned by his conscience when he was in contact with Lily.

Frank was able to face up to his sin, after learning about his sister's misfortune. In his view, there were similarities between that Korean girl and his sister. When Frank firstly saw the Korean girl hiding in the bamboo looking for food, he even smiled for a long time, because it reminded him of the event of stealing peaches with his sister in his childhood. When he learned that his sister was persecuted by a white doctor, Frank could no longer cover up his crimes as what he did before. Because he realized that his sister and the Korean girl were both weak in life, and he was no difference from the white doctor when it came to dealing with the weak. This was the reason why he hated himself so much.

Eventually, Frank chose to face his own sins, admitted the crime he committed against that Korean girl, and decided to face up to it.

At the end of the story, Frank and his sister carefully dug up the bones of that black man who died of the brutal genocide of white racists and had been hastily buried by the white many years ago. they wrapped his remains in the first quilt made

by Cee after her physical and mental recovery, and solemnly buried them under a weathered laurel tree by the river. The laurel stood for the tenacity and toughness of human nature. The quilt represented the new life of his sister and her spiritual independence. This solemn burial ceremony was a tribute to all innocent lives, and it was also Frank's self-salvation, representing his courage to face up to the harm he had caused to the little girl in Korea and a start of his new life with a pious way of salvation.

I stood there a long while, staring at that tree.

It looked so strong

So beautiful.

Hurt right down the middle

But alive and well.

Cee touched my should

Lightly.

Frank!

Yes?

Come on, brother. Let's go home. (147)

There were threefold significance of his salvation: saving his masculinity, saving his dying sister, and preserving the sanctity of innocent lives. The way he saved himself was by taking responsibility, facing life squarely, and confessing sins he had committed.

In *Home*, love and responsibility redeemed people from a desolate, withered past, and finally found the key to the locked heart. After reburied the black man's remains, Frank's sense of "guilt" was released and his mind was released, which gave him freedom and reconciliation and a peaceful spiritual harbor.

B. The external salvation

To Frank, the journey from the west coast of the United States to Georgia was filled with black fraternity and mutual assistance. Not only did Frank receive the

money, food, clothing, etc. that he needed from his black compatriots, he also felt compassion and affection. For example, reverend Locke reminded him,

Listen here, you from Georgia and you been in a desegregated army and mayby you think up north is way different from down South. Don't believe it and don't count on it. Custom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous.(19)

It was the mutual assistance of the black people that offered Frank a recovery.

Sitting on the train to Atlanta, Frank suddenly realized that those memories, powerful as they were, did not crush him anymore or throw him into paralyzing despair. He could recall every detail, every sorrow, without needing alcohol to steady him. (100)

The care of his fellow blacks on the journey was the cure to his wounds. In addition, Frank's account also played a positive role. Frank was talking to a third-person narrator who told the story. The empathetic listener acted like a confidant to whom he confided secrets, who helped him control his emotions, collated his memories, and witnessed his recovery. This shows that, in the bottom heart, those Frank trusted in and dare to rely on were his compatriots only. If there were not, he would create one himself in his own mind.

In the 1950s, when racial discrimination was still rampant, every black man was struggling to find a haven from racial violence. The step-grandmother of Frank prided herself on owning a house. She only cared about money, but not other people, she treated her family members (her husband's family) as foes. So when she suffered a stroke there was no one who wanted to take care of her.

Another case is Frank's girlfriend -- Lily who wanted to buy her own property. For her this was the real support which can make her feel safe psychologically. But racial discrimination made it hard for minorities to own property.

No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay or Asiatic race excepting only employees in domestic service. (73)

The methods American blacks adopted were countless, but it seemed that none of them could truly save them. Cee dreamed of building love nests with her boyfriend, but she was cheated and her dreams were shattered.

In the cultural context in which American blacks had long been deprived of equal human rights, Morrison thought about how to create a house born of violence and trauma with its memory and history, which can be transformed into a “home”. Owning a house doesn't mean owning a home. Home is not only a living space, but also a place for residents to feel free and safe. Morrison had admitted that all her works were dedicated to how to transform a house under racist shadow into a home full of certain peaceful atmosphere without racial discrimination. Through the stories of the Frank, the novel implied that only by making the Negro feel loved through the community, can the cold, dark house be transformed into a warm “home”.

It was the help of family and the help of their black fellows that brought Frank and Cee out of their wounds. In addition to Frank's rescue, the help of black women was vital to Cee. When she returned to Lotus Town, Frank entrusted Cee to the care of black women in the community. Each of them used their different ways to help her recover, telling her in words of blame, warning and encouragement, and taught her how to sew the quilt. Black women often comforted each other by telling stories, singing songs and so on. They united to fight and repair the wounds of racial discrimination. Quilt collages were not only daily necessities, they were also works of art reflecting the creativity of black women, and an indispensable part of American black culture. It was through learning to sew quilts from her black compatriot that Cee recovered, and in the process she learned to stand on her own, saved up money by selling quilts to make Lotus Town have water and electricity. It could be seen that the community bond of black people was of vital importance. It helped black people heal

the wounds, establish dignity and subjectivity.

Frank Cee regained her confidence with the help of the black community, Frank changed his mind about his hometown. He continued to rent the house his parents had lived in, and made repairs and arrangements to start a new life in his hometown. This spiritual identity was marked by the re-burial of the bones of the monies. They found the bones of a black man who had been carelessly buried by a white man more than a decade ago, and buried them again with the epitaph, *Here stands a man.*(145)

Reburying the bones meant putting the dead to rest with a ceremony of mourning and getting a decent burial, let the living accept the wounds of their past lives, buried the memories of their fears, and begin anew.

Frank Money is a typical representative of the American blacks who suffered from physical, psychological and cultural trauma, he went out of it through salvation, which embodied him the courage, will and mutual support that American blacks showed in the absurd world and difficult predicament striving for the survival. It also vividly expresses that the American blacks who wanted true equality, freedom must start from two aspects: self-reflection, perfection, and the unity and mutual support of the whole nation.

Chapter Four Self and Mutual Love

Love is the most important message of the entire Bible. It can be said that love is the soul of biblical culture. The common belief of Christian is that God is the god of love and Jesus Christ is the embodiment of love. Love refers to the love of the Holy and the world. Love in the Bible is always explained through the attributes of god.

Holy love originated from God's love for man. Holy love is manifested in three different forms of God's love in the creation of all things, the love of the covenant with its chosen people, and the love expressed by oneself and Jesus Christ. First of all, according to the interpretation of Christianity, God created all things, and the behavior itself is the expression and realization of holy love.³¹

Beloved, let us love another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of god was made manifest among us, that God live through him. In this is love, not that we might loved god but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.³²

Love is the ultimate value of Christianity, and it has always been the ancient and eternal theme of literary creation. Morrison, who has a deep understanding of life and society, has an insight for this ancient theme of life and eternity.

Different writers have different understandings and expressions of love. As a black female writer, a writer with profound comprehension to life and Christian belief, Morrison did not show sentimental or romantic love in her works, but placed love in different contexts and social background. They showed a colorful, sometimes incomprehensible and even different love. Morrison gave a deep meaning to love.

A. Self-love

For blacks who lived under slavery and racial discrimination, memory meant blood, tears and suffering. So even they had such a terrible past, they still chose to lock those painful experiences into their memory drawers. Although their history was dark, the nature did not differ from each other because of the history; the sun rises, the moon still appears, and the stars are just as bright. For loving this world, being in love with life, one must tolerate everything and live well.

Morrison once said that love is her basic theme.

*In fact, my writing has always been about the lack of love or love... to write about how people relate to each other, to lose love or to seize love, or to be obsessed with love... Write about love and how to survive, how to survive in this world in which we are victims to some extent.*³³

She even expressed directly, everything she wrote was actually about love.

The reason is that Morrison realized that,

*Only in the way of love, can black women understand the value of selfs and empower themselves. Only by healing the wounds and awakening the soul with the power of love, can the black ethnicity survive entirely.*³⁴

In terms of "love", she showed more in the novels were the love to the world, the love of lovers, the love of husband and wife, the parental love and so on. In many works, she emphasized that black people should love each other. As stated in Wang Shouren's work, *The relationship between human is distorted because of the lack of love, and the solution to racial and gender issues needs to start with love.*³⁵

Morrison believed, *Love is the biggest metaphor of today: we must embrace ourselves.*³⁶

Her works strove to bridge the direct or indirect disharmony between the injured

individual and the broken group, and built a beautiful world with love. In short, Morrison's concept of love in her works are moral trait that people urgently need. In her view, love can establish a relationship of respect, dialogue, harmony and complementarity among people, so that the spirit of individuals and nations can be continuously improved and promoted. Love is a particularly effective means to resolve ethnic, and cultural conflicts. Relying on love can break the boundaries of ethnicity and cultures, and achieve the coexistence and integration of racial equality and different cultures.

1. Love oneself

Self-love is to open up to oneself, so that he can feel everything around him and his own mind; self-love is a will to accept everything one does without any comment or criticism; self-love is to give oneself enough attention so that he can often touch his mind; self-love is to let oneself live like this -- to express what are moving him, what he believes to be important, to make him more and more visible to himself and others; self-love is to be master of the life and experience he is going through, comprehend and take comprehension and responsibility one has acquired; self-love is to treat himself as someone important according to his own will but not the recognition through the value of others; self-love is to face oneself and communicate with himself. It is when one means very important to himself, and only in this way can he be happy. By listening to, feeling, tracking, giving up control over, and expressing oneself help him to better understand and know himself more.

That is how Cee's compatriots taught her to love herself:

"Men know a slop jar when they see one."

"You ain't a mule to be pulling some evil doctor's wagon."

"you a privy or a woman?"

"Who told you you was trash?"

"How was I supposed to know what you have to stay awake – otherwise it just walks on in your door."

"But—"

"But nothing. You good enough for Jesus. That's all you need to know ."

(122)

Self-love is especially important for American blacks who have been devastated by slavery and racial discrimination for a long period of time. This is the first step for black to seek for self-consciousness and equal rights.

Martin Luther King, the leader of the Black People's Rights Movement, and the pastor of the Baptist Church, has long recognized the importance of self-love for the liberation of black people. The education that black children received from childhood is that black people are ugly, inferior, and insignificant, which makes them have a serious sense of inferiority and a denial of self. Therefore, for such a hard-working nation, self-respect and self-love are especially important to realize the value and dignity of being a human being.

Even semantics have conspired to make that which is black seem ugly and degrading. In "Roget's Thesaurus" there are 120 synonyms for blackness and at least 60 of them are offensive, as for example, blot, soot, grim, devil and foul. And there are some 134 synonyms for whiteness and all are favorable, expressed in such words as purity, cleanliness, chastity and innocence. A white lie is better than a black lie. The most degenerate member of a family is a "black sheep." Ossie Davis has suggested that maybe the English language should be reconstructed so that teachers will not be forced to teach the Negro child 60 ways to despise himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of inferiority, and the white child 134 ways to adore himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of superiority.³⁷

He appealed to blacks not to be ashamed of their ancestors' history of being slaves, but to be ashamed of those who created the evil slavery.

In the history of the United States, black people have been taught to hate themselves. For such a nation, *Love - the opposite of hate, is the most effective means of resistance, and the most effective means of regaining history.*³⁸

Morrison also recognized the important role that self-love played in the

liberation of black people. By the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, racism and ethnic oppression were still very severe. American blacks were still inferior citizens, struggling at the bottom of American society, living in poverty, not being well educated, not being able to enter high-level institutions, not being permitted to participate in voting and elections, and enjoying no freedom of personality and movement as whites. In many states of the south, blacks could not eat in restaurants operated by whites; many public places even hang the signboard "Whites Only". What was worse, black people could only sit in the rear compartment on the bus, the central part of the car allowed blacks to sit, but when white people got on the bus, they must give it up to the whites. Therefore, if the blacks wanted to be liberated and become independent and free people, they must know the personal values of their own and learn to cherish themselves. For black people, self-love is especially important. This is the strength and motivation for survival.

So when Frank asked the 11-year-old boy, Thomas, *"You are deep, Thomas."* Frank smiled. *"What you want to be when you grow up?"*

Thomas turned the knob with his left hand and opened the door. "A man," he said.(33)

2. Love the black culture of their own

Of course, loving one's own body is only the first step of self-love. For black individuals, the key element of self-love is to love their own ethnic culture. This is the foundation on which black individuals depend. Morrison has always been critical of the strong culture of white people, and is equally critical of blacks who followed the mainstream value model that was on the contrary and was even harmful to black culture, interest and origin. Morrison realized that the internalization of the white value standard and the abandonment of the black cultural identity were the greatest sorrow of the black people and the main problem within the black people. Therefore, Morrison hopes that American blacks can recognize the importance of self-affirmation, because only by recognizing and developing the cultural identity of themselves, rather than simply catering to mainstream cultural models, can blacks be truly equal and

accepted by American society.

B. Mutual love

If self-love is used to refer to oneself, refer to the inside, then mutual love means to love the outside, other people. Mutual love is an extension of self-love. In Morrison's works, there are many stories of mutual love, including love between male and female, that is, heterosexual love; love among the same sex is brotherhood or sisterhood; mutual love among family members within the family, such as fatherly love, maternal love; and the mutual love and mutual assistance of the black community. If self-love is the basic condition for black people to achieve the dignity of individual values, mutual love is the support of individual survival.

1. Mutual love of black community

Solidarity and mutual assistance between black compatriots is a major feature of the black culture. After Cee suffered from the cruel torture of the experiment, and knew that she has lost the ability of being a mother forever, she lost her confidence to life completely. Frank took her home, hoping his fellow could help and save her.

It was also because of the help of their compatriots that made Cee regain her life step by step.

Cee was different. Two months surrounded by country women who loved mean had changed her. The women handled sickness as though it were an affront, an illegal, invading braggart who needed whipping. They didn't waste their time or the suffering with resigned contempt.

...

As she healed, the women changed tactics and stopped their berating.(121-122)

Morrison always places special emphasis on the important role that the community played in the growth of black people. She recognizes that when self-love developed to the extreme, one's personal value standards would be in conflict with the collective values of the black community.

*"Based on her long-term observation and deep reflection on the black issue, Morrison realized that it is not enough to have self-love. In the struggle for liberation, the individual's value standard should be unified with the collective values of the black community; Need mutual love and need mutual help and support."*³⁹

Without the help of the black community, Cee would not be able to finally get out of the shadows and heal the wounds of her soul. In addition to positive appealing to black people, Morrison emphasizes the solidarity and mutual assistance of the black community; in the novel *Home*, there is also a large amount of stories reflecting the issue of lacking love - such as love between male and female, maternal love, etc., telling us the preciousness and necessity of love from another aspect.

2. Mutual love beyond race

*In the New Testament, use "agape" (Agape is a word mainly used to refer to 'love' in the New Testament) There are three words in Greek that can be translated into English, which have three different meanings respectively. The most commonly used is eros, which refers to sex; the second is philos, which means friendship or brotherhood; agape is the least specific and least commonly used in Greek that means 'love'. 'Love' is a kind of divine love, absolute love, and supreme love that Christianity believes in God through Jesus Christ. Jesus reflects this perfect and selflessness with his righteous salvation. And 'love' that benefits all human beings. In Christianity, 'Love' is a kind of love that is complete self-sacrificing. It is an extraordinary, pure and sacred love. Only this 'love' is the true perfection of moral life of all human beings and absolute standard of secular love.*⁴⁰

Morrison is not a theologian, nor is she a writer who writes purely on the subject of religion. She does not emphasize the selfless "Love" in her work in the way of

propagating the doctrine, but tells the reader in the form of literature and art, except for self-love and mutual love, black people should pursue the love beyond races. This transcendence of love includes “I” who transcends selfishness in love or heterosexuality, transcends narrow black nationalism in racial relations, and breaks through the boundaries of different cultures in cultural conflicts to achieve coexistence and integration.

While Morrison criticized white racism, she also saw the danger of radical black nationalism to blacks. The leader of the Black People’s Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, stated that racial discrimination was characterized by white violence and hatred against black people. The black riots advocated or supported by the radical Black People’s Movement leaders were actually violent, responding to hatred with hatred. This did not help to resolve racial contradictions and ethnic oppression. Morrison also showed a very similar view in her works: as black people, they have seen other problems within the black people, such as extreme arrogance, blind exclusion, self-restraint, and male hegemony. The problems caused by extreme black nationalism were apparent racial development and intra-ethnic harmony.

Morrison's view of love and Christian doctrine have great similarities. She emphasized that black people should love themselves and love each other; love must be expressed beyond selfishness, narrow black nationalism and the boundaries of cultures.

Conclusion

Through the discussion in the previous chapters, we can briefly summarize Morrison's religious thought reflected in her novel *Home*. Morrison's religious thoughts were the product of the triple cultural background. They were the result of the collision, interweaving and infiltration of American culture, black culture and religious culture. In the conflict and integration of the three, she formed her view of God, new interpretation and definition of the concept of sin and salvation. Her religious thoughts were the products of a special American culture. Through the inheritance of the traditional Christian thoughts, but different from it, Morrison shows distinct black theology as a feature of her works.

Morrison's religious thought roots in black culture, and has a distinctive feature of ethnic politics. The following is a summary of Morrison's religious thoughts reflected in her novel *Home*.

Since Morrison's first novel, she started to express the concept of God in her own way through various means. In her novel *Home*, Morrison started to take God as a transcendental existence any more. She put the main concept of God in the context of social history, context of ethnic politics to explore. He is powerful, actionable, and capable of crushing all evil (All things that are unjust and unfair) in the world; but at the same time he is old, weak, indifferent, and helpless. This conflict of understanding officially verifies that blacks are unique to their own nation in their understanding of God. Morrison reinterpreted Christianity and gave God a new meaning. She also claimed the understanding to Christianity of American blacks -- they blacks were not opposed to Christianity itself, nor to God, but to white people's interpretation of Christianity and the concept of God.

In Morrison's novel *Home*, it can be clearly recognized that her definition to "sin" is different from its traditional Christian meaning. Addition to the "original sin" that explained by Christianity, Morrison demonstrates another concept -- "imposed sin", through the experiences of American blacks. That is to say that as black, this race was imposed a sin by the society. No matter what their personalities are, they are

sinner inborn. In the current situation, the black is surely a inferior race.

Not only did Morrison absorb the views of black theology, refuting and abandoning the biblical concept of "original sin" used by white racists to discriminate against and oppress blacks, profoundly revealing the evils of slavery, she also proposed her own unique views on the ways to salvation of American blacks. Morrison's concept of salvation has the characteristics of Protestantism and was very different from Catholicism. This conclusion does not rely on the priest or the church as the medium of God, but, emphasizes with God in mind, the initiative of human being. Human being can achieve self-salvation through their own efforts and mutual assistance. And Morrison's concept of salvation showed strong humanistic care.

The idea of "love" that Morrison showed in her novel *Home* is love of fraternity and transcendence. In her view, religious love can enable people to establish a relationship of respect for dialogue, harmony and complementarity, so that the spirit of individuals and nations can be continuously improved and promoted. "Love" is a means to resolve ethnic and cultural conflicts. It can break the barriers between the boundaries of races and of different cultures, and achieve the coexistence and integration of ethnic and cultural harmony and equality. The author believes that in Morrison, the meaning of "God" is the power of salvation. As the power of salvation, love is always the key solution.

Morrison's religious thoughts have both confrontation and inheritance of traditional Christian thought. It shows the challenge, transformation and even subversion of traditional Christianity. It also reflects the characteristics of black religion when it came to the views of God, sin and salvation, As we have analyzed, Morrison's religious thoughts have gone through the process of confrontation with Christianity.

Morrison's religious thoughts are closely related to ethnic politics, and her views on social issues such as race, social status and culture are tightly connected. Therefore, her religious thoughts, following the above reasons evolves with the development of the times. Morrison's religious thought gradually formed a complete system in her creative process. Under the triple background of American culture,

black culture and religious culture, Morrison's religious thoughts root in the experience of American black people, and had political color and purpose of love as its core value.

Through her own works, Morrison conveys her views on the problems faced by contemporary blacks – both to maintain their traditional and cultural characteristics, and to a certain extent compatible with white culture, in order to create their own black history, and at the same time, it can also make its national culture gain vitality.

Morrison's works,

*attracts the academics, of course, because of the quality of the works, the historical breadth of plentitude, and the positive attention to important cultural issues. For the ordinary reader... it is because of the deep emotional theme of the works. Though wrote about black life, Morrison's description to the depths of her emotions made her speech profound and influential to many readers of different races and cultures.*⁴¹

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