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“You Have Been God’s Grace to Me”: The Presence of Agape and Grace Outside Christianity in Marilyne Robinson’s *Gilead*

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Many theologians traditionally claimed that only people who believe in God are able to love truly, for love comes as the result of receiving God’s grace. This implies that non-Christians fail to love truly due to their lack of faith. However, many contemporary theologians have found this account of non-Christians unsatisfying, as it seems to fall short of explaining the ethical force of non-Christian lives. Thus, a theological question arises as to whether or not God’s grace exists outside the church, enabling people to love authentically. Marilyne Robinson addresses this very question in *Gilead*. Robinson shows that an unbeliever Jack and his godfather and a church minister, John Ames, both experience love truly. Since agape comes to human beings as the result of receiving God’s grace, Robinson suggests that Jack has already obtained grace from God. She also indicates that the cause of Jack's failure in his life is due to racism and social prejudice, not Jack’s lack of faith or the absence of God’s grace. Furthermore, Robinson's *Gilead* suggests that this broad understanding of Christianity helps Christians maintain and develop their faith in God while building a diverse religious community founded on respect and mutual understanding.

*Information about the Author:*

Ruyue Yuan became interested in the question of the presence of grace outside the church as it is one of the central questions that come up throughout the development of Christianity. She is a member of Christ College and the topic of religious studies has had a great influence in her spiritual experience. She is currently planning to go into academia for more research and hopes to become a college professor.

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