"You Have Been God’s Grace to Me": The Presence of Agape and Grace outside Christianity in Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead*

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Central Question

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Augustine’s Agape and Eros

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Does God’s Grace extend to non-Christians, since love exists among all human beings?
Agape and Eros

- Agape: Christian love that contains divine power and transforms Eros.

- Eros: earthly love that yields from egoism.
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Characteristics of Agape

Four characteristics of Agape (Nygren, *Agape and Eros*):

- Groundless.
- Indifferent to value.
- Creative of values.
- Initiator of fellowship with God.
"(Ames) I’d never have believed I’d see a wife of mine doting on a child of mine...it’s your existence I love you for, mainly...When you love someone to the degree you love her, you see her as God sees her. (Robinson, 52-3, 139)"
"(Ames) He took a little leather case out of his breast pocket and opened it and held it in front of me. His hand was not steady...It was posed like a portrait photograph—himself, a young woman, and a boy about five or six...He said, ‘You see,’ and his voice was so controlled it sounded bitter, ‘You see, I also have a wife and child.’ (Robinson, 219)"
"(Jack) I swear I had no intentions at all, honorable or otherwise. It was just pleasant to see her face. (Robinson, 229, 222)"

"(Ames) You see how it is godlike to love the being of someone. (Robinson, 136)"
"(Ames) There is a reality in blessing, which I take baptism to be, primarily. It doesn’t enhance sacredness, but it acknowledges it, and there is a power in that. I have felt it pass through me, so to speak...Not that you have to be a minister to confer blessing. You are simply much more likely to find yourself in that position. (Robinson, 23)"
"(Ames) He took his hat off and set it on his knee and closed his eyes and lowered his head, almost rested it against my head, and I did bless him to the limit of my power...Nothing could be more beautiful than that, or more expressive of my feelings, certainly, or more sufficient, for that matter...Then he sat back and looked at me as if he were waking out of a dream...I told him it was an honor to bless him. And that was absolutely true. In fact I’d gone through seminary and ordination and all the years intervening for that one moment...‘We all love you, you know,’ and he laughed and said, ‘You are all saints.’ (Robinson, 241-2)"
"(Ames) For example, whenever I take a child into my arms to be baptized, I am, so to speak, comprehended in the experience more fully, having seen more of life, knowing better what it means to affirm the sacredness of the human creature. (Robinson, 91)"

"(Robinson) Love is probably a synonym for grace. (Painter, 488)"
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Advised by Dr. Edward Upton.

Thank you for listening!
Bibliography

