

Christianity; S. Hauerwas and W. H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*; G. M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*; M. E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*; W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*; P. Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe*; D. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern*; R. J. Mouw, *Political Evangelism*; H. R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*; R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*; W. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*; R. J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*; T. L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*; J. R. W. Stott, *The Lausanne Covenant*; J. Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People*; R. E. Webber, *The Secular Saint: A Case for Evangelical Social Responsibility*; J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*; R. E. Webber and D. Bloesch, eds., *The Orthodox Evangelicals*.

J. P. CALLAHAN

Government. See [POLITICAL THEOLOGY](#); [SPIRITUAL GIFTS](#)

Government, Church. See [CHURCH, AUTHORITY IN THE](#)

Governmental Theory. See [ATONEMENT](#)

Grace. God's unlimited kindness toward his people regardless of what they might deserve. Christians often use the term as shorthand for the gospel, which is "the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24) or simply "the word of his grace" (Acts 20:32). This link between grace and the gospel indicates that the content of God's grace ultimately is identical to the relationship that God establishes with his people in and through Jesus Christ. As the eternal Son of God incarnate, Jesus reveals the true meaning of God's grace and is the one through whom it is distributed (John 1:14, 16).

The NT depicts God's grace in Christ as the fulfillment of God's eternal plan: "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9). God's eternal plan is ordered toward his goal of establishing a divine family. Before God created the world, he decided to adopt his people in Christ so that they can share his eternal love as holy children (Eph. 1:4–6). God enacts this plan through the history of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The incarnation marks the moment in which Christ unites his own eternal life to finite and fallen human life. Christ does not hold himself back in this union but rather takes on the burden of human sin so that he might redeem his people. This self-sacrificial union culminates in Christ's death on the cross, an event that reflects the "riches of God's grace that he lavished on us" (Eph. 1:7–8). God then raises Jesus from the dead both to vindicate his perfect life and to secure the eternal life of those united to him. The consequences of this union become "effective" for God's people as they come to faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25).

The believer's union with Christ comes by grace through faith, reflecting God's intention that his people's salvation result from his action rather than their own (Rom. 4:16). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith," Paul says, "and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Christians reflect God's grace when they live with the hope that God will raise them from the dead just as Christ was raised. This hope is identified with the indwelling presence of the Spirit, who serves as a guarantee that God's people will receive their promised inheritance (Eph. 1:13–

14). Christians also reflect grace when they understand God's character in light of it, as Peter demonstrates when describing the "God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ" (1 Pet. 5:10).

Identification of God's grace with Christ's saving work has prompted theologians to distinguish between different types of grace in order to explain how God relates to non-Christians. One such distinction is common grace and saving grace. *Common grace* refers to gifts God distributes to humans through created means. These gifts often are identified with blessings found in the natural world and innate capacities of the human mind. As Paul told the unsaved people of Lystra: God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17). While gifts associated with common grace may enable some to know truth about God apart from Christ (Acts 17:28; Rom. 2:14–15), this kind of knowledge is limited, mixed with errors, and so cannot lead to salvation. Hence gifts of common grace are understood rightly in light of their fulfillment in and through God's saving grace in Christ.

Saving grace refers to the reconciliation of sinners accomplished in and through Christ as well as the consequences of this reconciliation in believers' lives (2 Cor. 5:18). Approaches to saving grace vary among Christians. One point of variation regards how God's grace relates to the fallen human mind and will. Some argue that Christ's saving work distributes God's *prevenient grace* to all humans. This grace comes to sinners before salvation to convict them of their unrighteousness, call them to repentance, and enable them to freely cooperate with God's grace by ceasing to resist its work. Others argue that Christ's saving work comes as God's *irresistible grace*. This grace enlightens sinners' minds, changes their hearts, and draws them to salvation as the direct result of God's will and action in distinction from their cooperation.

The relationship between grace in creation—"nature"—and the "grace" of redemption in Christ is perennially controversial. According to a widespread though oversimplified typology relating this issue to Christ and culture, Catholics see grace perfecting nature, Anabaptists see grace opposing nature, Lutherans see grace dialectically flanking nature, and the Reformed see grace transforming nature.

The relationship between grace in creation and grace in redemption became freshly subject to intense debate during the twentieth century, particularly among Catholic theologians. The debates centered on how the final result of God's saving grace—the supernatural relationship that believers share with God in eternity—relates to God's original intention for human nature. Neo-Thomist theologians argued that in order for God's grace to be truly gratuitous, human nature must not be intrinsically ordered to this supernatural end. In contrast, *ressourcement* theologians such as Henri de Lubac insisted that God created humans with this supernatural goal in mind: human nature always was meant to be perfected by God's saving grace. De Lubac's position shares certain features with the position of the Protestant Karl Barth, who also insisted that human nature had been intrinsically determined by God's saving plan in Jesus Christ. The key difference is that while the Catholic de Lubac argued that human being is fulfilled by Christ's grace, the Protestant Barth argued that the incarnate Christ is the true human being in whom believers are able to participate by grace.

Despite such debates, most Christians stand united in the belief that in addition to reconciling sinners with God, grace propels believers to grow in holiness after the pattern of Jesus Christ. Peter tells readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Paul regularly links God’s grace to specific gifts that he and others receive in order to fulfill their ministries (e.g., Eph. 3:7–8; 4:7). The key to understanding the relation between God’s grace and human actions is to recognize that God remains the subject of grace even as its recipients grow in obedience. While God distributes grace to believers as a free gift, this does not make grace their possession any more than Christ himself becomes their possession. God’s grace comes more like a power, bonding believers to Christ so they can live with him in accord with their status as God’s beloved children. “For it is God who works in you,” Paul says, “to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13). Since this good purpose is identical to the “good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment” (Eph. 1:9–10), God’s grace forms believers into the image of Christ in anticipation of their eternal life as God’s beloved children (Rom. 8:29–30).

See also [Common Grace](#); [Neo-Thomism](#); [Nouvelle Théologie](#)

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K. L. JOHNSON

Grace, Means of. The means of grace, or media through which grace may be received, are various. The primary means is Holy Scripture, from which our whole knowledge of the Christian faith derives and the chief purpose of which is to communicate the saving gospel of Jesus Christ (John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:15). Preaching—the proclamation of the dynamic truth of the gospel—is, as Christ himself and his apostles show, of utmost importance (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16; 10:11–15; 1 Cor. 1:17–18, 23). Similarly, personal witness and evangelism are means for bringing grace to others.

If the aforementioned things are essentially means of saving grace, there are also means of continuing or strengthening grace. The exposition of Holy Scripture for the edification of Christian believers is one such means, along with personal study of the Bible. Another is prayer, in which the Christian communes with God, opening oneself to his purpose and power. Another is fellowship with other Christians in worship and witness. Yet another is participation in the sacrament of the breaking of bread, which Christ commanded followers to observe (Acts 2:42).

The means of grace should be rightly received, with faith and gratitude; otherwise, they become means of condemnation. Thus, the purpose of Christ’s coming was not to judge but to save the world. The person, however, who in unbelief rejects Christ is not saved but judged by Christ (John 12:47–48). The gospel must not only be heard; it must also be believed (John 5:24; Rom. 10:9–14; 1 John 5:13).

Similarly, the sacrament of the breaking of bread (known also as the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist) was instituted by Christ as a means of grace for all who