

# The Reciprocating Self: Trinitarian and Christological Anthropologies of Being and Becoming

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This paper summarizes a Christological and trinitarian anthropology in order to propose a developmental teleology that offers a vision for being and becoming human. From a Christological perspective, Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God, and becoming like Christ as distinct persons is God's intention for all of humanity. How humans are conformed to Christ occurs through and results in mutual, reciprocal relations with God, humans, and creation. Drawing on Christology and the doctrine of the image of God, I propose that living as reciprocating selves is God's *telos* for humankind. As such, the significance of conformity to the image of God in Christ, human diversity, relatedness, and reciprocity are discussed in light of humankind's relationship with God and one another. As humans respond to God's love and participate in the ongoing creating, redeeming, and perfecting work of the Trinity, humanity assists in building God's kingdom and glorifying God. This formulation does not limit the *imago* to a singular substance, quality, ability, or disposition that mirrors the image of God, but favors a malleable understanding of imaging God that enables humans to participate in the life of the triune God and become more Christ-like as unique selves. From this standpoint, imaging God is not only relational, but dynamic, functional, and directional. Although this *telos* is an eschatological goal, implications for Christian psychology are discussed.

As Christian psychologists, we have chosen a calling of being agents of transformation. For the most part, we have dedicated ourselves to a life of service, therapy, teaching, and/or understanding God's people. As stewards of the lives entrusted to us, we hope for healing, restoration, flourishing, and thriving. As such, it is important to ask, what is our goal or hope for our patients, our students, and our mentees? Happiness? Fulfillment? Well-being? Faith? The good life? How are these constructs theological-ly understood? Regardless of our aims or intentions, what do our techniques and methods yield in actuality? At the end of the last century, Cushman (1995) raised a valid complaint against the American psychotherapeutic movement for

This article is a revised and condensed version of chapter 2 of *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective, 2nd ed.*, by J. O. Balswick, P. E. King, and K. S. Reimer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016). Adapted by permission of the publisher.

The author thanks her colleagues Jack Balswick and Kevin Reimer for their encouragement and generous reciprocity in the larger project of the Reciprocating Self and offers gratitude to David Congdon at InterVarsity Press for his support of our work.

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proliferating empty selves. The following paper offers an alternative—reciprocating selves.

In our initial attempt to teach human development, my colleagues Jack Balswick and Kevin Reimer and I found ourselves at a loss when deciding what developmental theories and existing research to teach in a 10-week course on lifespan development. We were tasked with teaching all of human development—from the cradle to the grave—with a systems and contextual perspective in a graduate clinical psychology program in a Christian seminary. Needless to say, we were overwhelmed. As we wrestled with the syllabus we began to ask ourselves, "What is God's hope for human development?" Such teleological questions led us towards theology, and henceforth I proposed the concept of the *reciprocating self* originally based on a trinitarian theological anthropology. From these efforts, our book project, *The Reciprocating Self: Theological Perspectives of Development* (Baswick, King & Reimer, 2005) was born.

During the writing of the first edition of *The Reciprocating Self*, the field of systematic theology was in a major transition—especially as it related to theological anthropology. At that time the theological zeitgeist regarding the *imago Dei*, or the doctrine of the image of God, was often understood from a relational perspective and less from a structural or impersonal ontological perspective.

This trend started to emerge with Karl Barth in the early 1900s and gained great momentum in the latter decades of the twentieth century, with growing consensus among theologians that the uniqueness of the *imago Dei* was best understood through categories of relationality rather than inert structure (see Anderson, 1993; Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 2001; Shults, 2003; Tanner, 2001; Volf, 1996; Webster, 2003; Zizioulas, 1991; and others). As the second edition goes to press (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2016), theological perspectives are once again in transition. Current trends may be best understood as more expansive rather than narrowing. Thus theologians are less apt to limit the *imago Dei* to a single concept such as relationality, but rather inclined to include broader perspectives.

The current paper serves as a theological update to our original formulation of the reciprocating self (see Balswick et al., 2005) with the primary intention to provide an integrated perspective of human development in order to offer a hopeful vision for the work of Christian psychologists. As Christ's ambassadors on earth, continuing Jesus' ministry of reconciliation, healing, and flourishing, the notion of the reciprocating self offers a goal for our work with others as a means for nurturing fullness and abundance in Christ. In order to do so, I define and discuss the importance of *telos* and developmental teleology for Christian psychologists. Then I offer a brief overview of the relevance of the image of God as an understanding of what it means to be and become human. In the same section, I highlight particularly relevant aspects of Christological and trinitarian approaches to anthropology. The following section proposes an understanding of human *telos* formulated around the notion of the reciprocating self by emphasizing the importance of conformity to Christ, individual uniqueness, relatedness, and reciprocity.

Relationality is still central to our understanding of God's *telos* or goal for humankind. Thus the formulation of the reciprocating self proposed in this paper is still largely based on relatedness and a trinitarian anthropology. However, the final section of the paper discusses emerging functional, dynamic, and directional interpretations in regard to the reciprocating self in order to expand a practical theology including Christological and trinitarian interpretations to serve as an integrative framework for Christian psychologists. These perspectives offer important nuances that provide clarity regarding the nature and function of the reciprocating self. Specifically, a functional inter-

pretation highlights the significance of human contribution and vocation as important elements of reciprocity. A dynamic perspective emphasizes the malleability of humankind and the importance of relatedness as a means of growing the capacity to image God, and finally a directional perspective points to Christ as the perfect image of God and upholds the importance of being conformed to the image of God in Christ. The final section offers a framework based on Buber's (1970) I-Thou relationship that offers a practical conceptualization to understand how different types of relationship may help or hinder humans from growing closer to their *telos*.

### Developmental Teleology

Returning to the teaching conundrum previously mentioned, this paper offers a means of understanding what good or optimal development might be from a Christian perspective through presenting a *developmental teleology*, or a theological understanding of the goal of development. Drawing on the Greek word *telos*, which means goal, purpose, or completion, the question is posed, "what is God's view or hope for humankind?" or "what is the goal or purpose of human development?" These questions are very similar to those currently being raised by Miraslov Volf (2016) and colleagues with the "God and Human Flourishing" program at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture.<sup>1</sup> Not only does such an approach inform how one might teach human development, but also has much broader implications for Christian psychologists, such as informing goals for parenting and therapy and also has major implications for understanding perspectives of positive psychology.

Until the recent movements of positive psychology and positive youth development, defining good or optimal development has not been a traditional task of the psychological sciences. Similarly, psychology has not focused on teleological issues (see Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1998; Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003). In general, developmental theories describe processes of specific domains of psychological development (e.g., cognitive development, identity development) and processes of normative development. For example, Erik Erikson's (1968) psychosocial stages suggest normal developmental benchmarks for the eight stages of the life cycle. In addition, developmental theories also describe pathological development, or that which deviates from the norm (Cicchetti, 2015).

In fact, the field of psychology has predominantly focused on pathology and healing mental illness. Although historically different theorists (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987; Erikson, 1959; Jahoda, 1958) and recent efforts within positive psychology (see Benson & Scales, 2009; Damon, 2004; Keyes, 2007; Lerner, 2006; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) have explored positive aspects of psychology, a disproportionate amount of scientific psychology has focused on pathology and repair rather than positive or optimal development.

This emphasis on disease and treatment is more natural for the field of psychology. Given the limited “tools” of psychology as a scientific field of inquiry based on the modern values of reductionism and universals, making claims about *ideal* development is a challenge. When discussing and defining “ideals,” values and ideology are invoked. Disciplines that address issues of ultimacy such as theology and philosophy are better equipped to define ideals. The healing approach in psychology has been facilitated by the fact that (1) it is extremely important and necessary, and (2) for social sciences it is easier to define the desired or adaptive direction of change if the goal is to restore an earlier or “normal” state rather than promote optimal development. It is much messier to define optimal development without engaging diverse cultural or ideological opinions. Such a task invokes teleology.

For the most part, psychology lacks the epistemological tools to address issues of teleology. Although there are some exceptions such as Christian psychology (e.g., Johnson, 2007), Buddhist psychology, (e.g., Kalupahana, 1987), and other integrationist models (e.g., Coe & Hall, 2010), most of psychology occurs within a modern, naturalistic framework. For example, Aspinwall and Staudinger (2003) point out that if psychologists intend to define good or optimal development, they must address several difficult questions. For example, do they determine optimal development based on adaptiveness or human functioning? If so, how do psychologists operationalize adaptiveness or functioning? Do they use subjective indicators and ask people for their subjective opinion if they are doing well or are mature? Or do they use objective measures and examine factors like longevity and define optimal development by those who live the longest? Do psychologists consult value or ethical systems? Do they consider democratic ideals as a lens for viewing good development? Do they

consider the virtues of Aristotelian ethics? These are questions traditionally asked by theologians and philosophers, not psychologists.

Furthermore, most psychologists tend to follow a consensus criterion of truth, not absolute truth. As scientists, psychologists turn to empirical research to determine what people generally agree on. Consequently, “normative” or “conventional” beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are not deemed absolute but are determined by consensus opinion. For example, research on wisdom has reliably demonstrated high levels of consensus or agreement about whether or not a judgment satisfies the definition of wisdom. In this case the research identifies the consensus understanding of wisdom and does not have to define wisdom based on one philosophical tradition or another.

### **The Reciprocating Self and the Image of God**

However, as Christian psychologists we have an advantage. We are not only scientists but also believers in a creation that reflects something of its Creator and Redeemer. We are not limited to the resources of psychology, but can tap into the resources of our theology. Although both of these traditions of thought address issues pertaining to maturity and growth as humans, they are not parallel lines of inquiry and do not address questions of human nature on the same level.

Christian theological anthropology provides a worldview in which psychological theory can be critically engaged and shaped. The Bible offers a symbolic world that creates perceptual categories through which we can interpret reality (Hays, 1996). Thus, the aim of this paper is to propose a developmental teleology—a theological understanding of becoming a complete human being as God intends. Christians recognize that humans are made in the image of God and that Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15), and acknowledge that God’s goal or purpose for humankind is to become conformed to the image of God in Christ. Drawing upon Christological and trinitarian anthropologies, the reciprocating self is proposed as a means for understanding the significance of the particularities of individuals being conformed to the image of God in Christ, relatedness, and reciprocity. In short, I focus on the significance of uniqueness, unity, and reciprocity as humans become more like Christ. Although originally formulated in the ethos of relational understanding of the *imago Dei*, this article moves beyond a sole focus on relationality

to also acknowledge the importance of functional, dynamic, and directional interpretations of the *imago*. That said, the substance of the reciprocating self remains the same—a differentiated self living in interdependence with God, humans, and creation—however, applying functional, dynamic, and directional “lenses” to this understanding of human *telos* provides important nuances for Christian psychologists.

Being created according to the image of God is very important to a Christian view of human development. Grenz (2001) contends, “Throughout much of Christian history, the link made in scripture between humans and the divine image has served as the foundation for the task of constructing a Christian conception of the human person or the self” (p. 183). Interpretation of the *imago Dei* strongly influences our understanding of what it means to be human. Consequently, the *imago* has a significant bearing on our understanding of the processes and goals of human development.

As the theological inquiry of what it means to be human, theological anthropology may take as its starting point the affirmation that humans are made according to the *imago Dei* (Latin for “image of God”), found in the book of Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . . .” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Given that no explicit definition of what constitutes God’s image or likeness is present in the Bible, scholars have debated this topic for centuries. Traditionally, the *imago Dei* was viewed from a structural perspective and thought to refer to certain characteristics or capacities inherent in the structure of human nature (Grenz, 2001; Shults, 2003). From this perspective humans reflect the image of God because they possess within the substantive form of human nature some of the qualities God possesses. Theologians have not always agreed on the specific feature(s) found in the human nature that marks the divine image and thus makes humans similar to God (see King & Whitney, 2015). Culture and context have often played a part in theologians’ interpretations of what specific characteristic(s) comprise the image of God. Reason, will, and love have always been contenders for the attribute indicative of the image of God.

However, this static structural view of the *imago Dei* is no longer unquestionably accepted as the correct view of theological anthropology. As the Christian tradition developed in dialogue with Western philosophical trends, the *imago Dei* passages were directed towards application to the *individual* self. During the last century, however, this emphasis on the *individual* self has been challenged. With the resurgence in the study of the Trinity—the threeness of the one God—an anthropology of the *relational* self emerged. As academics are prone, the field of theology is shifting and expanding its understanding of the *imago Dei*. Taking a posture of humility and acknowledging that there is not one right answer to “what is the *imago*?” in this article I include other interpretations in order to offer a both broader and deeper understanding of *telos*.

### Christological Anthropology

Christology also offers an important reference for understanding the significance of uniqueness, relatedness, and reciprocity both from the perspective of the *imago Dei* and also from Christology more broadly. Jesus Christ came as a unique individual, as God incarnate to live among humanity as a Jewish man living in first-century Palestine. Jesus is the incarnation of the eternal Son and the perfect image of God. Since humankind is made in the image of God, then humans are to become more Christ-like, as he is the perfect image of God (Crisp, 2015).

Moving beyond the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and considering other resources within Christology that inform our understanding of being human, I point to the significance of our salvation through Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are saved *from* sin and death and freed *for* new life in Christ and participation in God’s ongoing work in the world (Wright, 2004). Through God’s work of redemption we are invited to participate in God’s ongoing work of creation, redemption, and perfection on earth.

Wright (2004) emphasizes covenantal relations between God and his people. This perspective recasts a more traditional forensic understanding of the atonement in relational terms. For Wright, justification can be more broadly understood as God’s “declaration” of membership in this covenant family for which the evidence of this membership is found in a believer’s faith in Christ. How we then live into this new order is marked by reciprocity. Our lives are lived in

response to the love of God (King, Barrett, Furrow, Whitney, Greenway, & Crisp, 2013). It is not simply an acceptance of what God has done through the cross, but also an offering of our lives (Rom. 12:1-2) as an indication of our acceptance and embracement of our part in God's ongoing and unfolding story of covenantal faithfulness. Our life in Christ retains a specific "context where freedom and vocation are informed by what has been promised (i.e., God's covenant), what has been provided (i.e., death and resurrection of Christ), and what has been called (i.e., our faithful obedience in the body of Christ)" (King et al., 2013, p. 13).

No Christology is complete without understanding the role of the Spirit. Human transformation towards the image of God in Christ and our ability to participate in God's ongoing work in the world are enabled by the work of the Spirit. Christ sent his Spirit as the Sustainer and Perfecter. The Spirit enables all of creation to become what it was created to be (Gunton, 1993). The Spirit enables human transformation towards the image of God as unique persons. The call to relatedness is evident in God's love for the world and continued engagement with creation and the ongoing work of redemption through the Son and perfecting through the Spirit. In some way the Son and Spirit work together within the human person to redeem, perfect, and sustain (Whitney, 2013).

### Trinitarian Anthropology

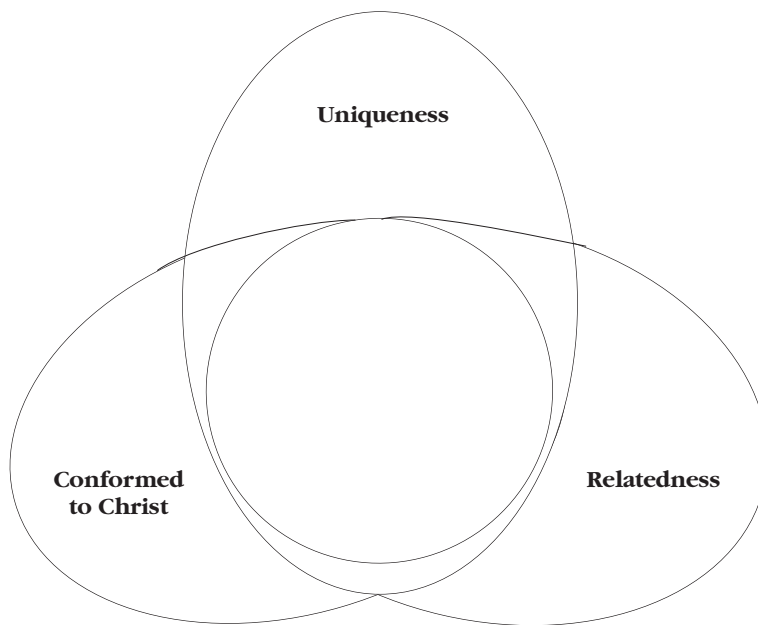
In addition to Christological perspectives, an understanding of ideal personhood, informed by the interrelations of the triune God, is proposed. Drawing upon the Trinity as a theological analogy, albeit a limited analogy, the relations of the unique persons of the Trinity are compared to how human persons are to exist in and through relationship. This theologically grounded analogy provides a lens through which human development and clinical application may be understood.

The doctrine of the Trinity reveals that God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three divine persons of the Godhead live in unity as one, yet remain three distinct persons. The communion of the Godhead does not compromise the distinctiveness of the three. In this way, *particularity* and *relatedness* co-occur because their relatedness is characterized by perfect *reciprocity* where the three live with and for each other.

Within the Trinity there is unity and uniqueness (or diversity). In Trinitarian theology, relatedness comes hand in hand with particularity.

The theological concept of *perichoresis* refers to the mutual indwelling within the Godhead, meaning that the three persons of the Trinity dwell with and within each other. Thus it describes a mode of being in communion that does not sacrifice difference or diversity. "God is what he is only as a communion of persons, the particularity of whom remains at the center of all he is, for each has his own distinctive way of being" (Gunton, 1993, p. 191). Zizioulas (1991) writes that the being of God is not some blank unity but a being in communion. The particularity of Father, Son, and Spirit is as vital as their unity as one. In addition, there is an ontological interdependence and reciprocity of the three persons of the Trinity.

In the following paragraphs I suggest that to live as beings made in the image of God is to exist as reciprocating selves—that is, as unique individuals living in relationship with God, human others, and creation. Uniqueness refers to living as both distinct and diverse individuals. Unity refers to human relationships with God, other people, and the rest of creation. It is important to clarify that although through our relatedness and interactions with God and others human beings reflect the triune nature, human beings are not constituted by the triune nature. A discontinuity exists between the unity of the Godhead and unity among people. Humans are discrete persons, and are not constituted of the same essence as the Father, Son, and Spirit of the Godhead. Human persons are essentially distinct from one another and are essentially distinct from God. To be clear, humans do not share a divine nature as do the members of the Trinity. God is triune and human beings are not (Anderson, 1982). Nor am I attempting to build the case that individual humans are composed of three entities, aspects, or functions—whether they are Father, Son, and Spirit; id, ego, and superego; or body, mind, and spirit. This is not the intention. Rather, I suggest that to bear the *imago Dei* is to reflect the Trinity's unity and uniqueness within our own relations with divine, human others, and creation. The relational life of the triune God is not represented *within* ourselves but *among* ourselves. Another helpful distinction between the particularity and relatedness of the Godhead and among humans is that although both are ontological—descriptive of the being and essence of God and of humans—the dynamic created between particularity and relatedness through reciprocity for humans is also an



**Figure 1.** *Telos* of the Reciprocating Self

issue of epistemology. Humans come to know their ontological particularities and relatedness through their ongoing interactions with God, humans, and creation. In sum, although there is discontinuity in the analogy, it does not render the interpretation useless. Humans are not identical with the *imago* but bear the *imago*.

### ***Telos***

Taken together, Christological and trinitarian anthropologies point to the importance of becoming like Christ as unique selves through reciprocating relationships. As such, human *telos* is not a destination, but it is an ongoing dynamic that involves being conformed to the likeness of Christ as unique individuals in relationship with God, humanity, and creation. There is no benchmark for having reached one's *telos*. That said, although *telos* is not a destination (at least this side of eternity), it has a direction—towards that which for God created humanity. I understand this goal for humankind in three ways.

#### **Conformity to Christ**

First, as Christians we affirm that we are made in the image of God. As discussed previously, the Bible declares that Christ is the perfect image of God. Becoming like Christ is part of our *telos* (see Figure 1). Being conformed to the likeness of the image of God in Christ is a shared *telos* amongst

humans. Thus, we take on the ways of Christ and grow towards the character of Christ. Believers are to take Jesus' command to his disciples to "Follow me" literally. They follow his actions of love, care, liberation, justice, healing, reconciliation, and redemption to heart. As such, *conformity* to Christ does not mean *uniformity* with Christ. As we discuss further below, we are all unique creations, and we are to become more like Christ as our unique selves. We are to become *like* Christ, not to *become* Christ.

#### **Uniqueness**

Second, although we are called to conformity to the image of God in Christ, that does not mean uniformity with Christ. An element of human *telos* is to be and become more fully the unique person that God created each person to be (see Figure 1). So although human *telos* is to become more like the image of God in Christ, each person does that uniquely—with one's own particular gifts, strengths, and passions.

Inherent in the *imago Dei* is the value of uniqueness. Christological perspectives of the *imago* highlight that the eternal Son came to dwell with humanity as the Jewish man Jesus of Nazareth. Trinitarian anthropology emphasizes the uniqueness of the three persons of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One is never compromised by another. The Father

remains the Father; the Son remains the Son; and the Spirit remains the Spirit, each contributing uniquely to salvation history. Yet at the same time the three remain one. The unity of the Trinity does not jeopardize the uniqueness of the Father, Son, and Spirit (Torrance, 1989, 1992). Through the Nicene Creed we affirm the unique relations among the members of the Trinity:

We believe in one God, the Father,  
the Almighty, maker of heaven and  
earth . . . We believe in one Lord,  
Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, . . .  
For us and for our salvation . . . We  
believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life, who proceeds from  
the Father and the Son.

At the heart of orthodox theology is the recognition of the coherence of the different activities attributed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For example, it is the Holy Spirit that takes the lead enabling us to participate in the Son's ongoing life of worship of the Father. Although we are not able to fully understand or explain the immanent Trinity, we can know of God's work in the world—of creation, redemption, and the perfecting work of the Spirit (Whitney, 2013). The Son's work is apparent through justification and the Spirit's work through the ongoing process of sanctification. Our salvation and our glorification of God are not possible without each member of the Trinity.

The significance of uniqueness is further demonstrated through the work of the Spirit. Our Christian tradition often emphasizes the unifying work of the Spirit. The Spirit draws persons through Christ to the Father, and it is the Spirit that unifies the communion of saints. It is important to recognize that although the Spirit is the reconciling and unifying agent at work in human-divine relationships and among humans, such work does not abolish but rather maintains or even strengthens particularity. We are unified not for assimilation or homogenization, but for relationship with others—relationship that does not subvert but establishes and affirms the other, whether God or humans (Gunton, 1993). Through the same Spirit individuals are given different gifts—healing, wisdom, prophecy, preaching, discernment, speaking in tongues . . . and these gifts are given “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). These unique gifts contribute to our unity. The body of believers finds completeness in human diversity. Paul pointedly asks, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the

whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?” (1 Cor. 12:17). The particularities enable a unified whole.

As the analogy of the body and its many parts illustrates, relatedness comes hand in hand with particularity. For there is no distinction without unity. The personal identities of the members of the Trinity emerge out of their relationships. By definition there is no Father without the Son. An individual recognizes his or her uniqueness in relationship with another. In a sense, the other provides an orientation for the self to be made known. For example, no doubt, through the unity and intimacy of marriage, we more fully recognize our “particularities” and become aware of our unique patterns and habits. It is in relationship with another that we more fully encounter, not only the other, but ourselves as well.

### **Relatedness**

As much as we celebrate human uniqueness, *telos* is not an individual enterprise. *Telos* insists on relatedness. God reached out to humanity through his Son, and draws humankind to Godself through the Spirit. Love and relatedness is at the center of creation. God created humankind to be in relationship with God, humankind, and God's broader creation. Christ, as the perfect image, exemplifies this love and unity. The Gospel of John's depiction of Jesus clearly provides one of the main meanings of sonship: essential identity with the Father (Barrett, 1978). Jesus attests to the unity of Father and Son when he prays, “You, Father, are in me and I am in you” (Jn. 17:21). Making the case that the Father and the Son share unity within diversity, he tells the disciples, “For just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (Jn. 5:26). The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes:

To be fully human is to be recreated in the image of Christ's humanity; and that humanity is the perfect human “translation” of the relationship of the eternal Son to the eternal Father, a relationship of loving and adoring self-giving, a pouring out of life towards the Other. (Williams, 2012)

We as humans are too created to be in such loving relationships with one another and God.

Similar themes of relationality are evident in trinitarian theology. Although Christians affirm the distinct members of the Trinity, Christianity is a monotheistic faith. We believe in one God. One of

the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith is our understanding of the triune nature of God—that God can be simultaneously one being and three persons. Karl Barth (1975) wrote, “The divine modes of being mutually condition and permeate one another so completely that one is always in the other two” (p. 370). Although the three are distinct, they are not separate; they exist with and for each other. John commences his Gospel with this astounding reality: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). John testifies to the *distinction between* and *unity of* the Father and Son. Not only was the Father with the Word (the Son), but the Word was God. We have already seen that Jesus witnesses to the unity of the Father and the Son by recounting not only his utter dependence on the Father but also by declaring that those who see the Son, see the Father.

Thus we understand that relationality is seminal to the *imago* (see Figure 1). Human beings reflect this relationality. Just as God exists in relationship, humans are to exist in relationship—“To be human is to be created in and for relationship with divine and human others” (Gunton, 1993, p. 222). This concept is broadly represented in the New Testament, and incorporated into the integrative model of Sandage and Shults (2007). All believers are called by God to be a part of a relational community, placed in the body of Christ by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). In reminding us that community is what God intends, Bonhoeffer (1954) suggests that “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate” (p. 30). For theologian Stan Grenz (2001), the image of God does not lie in the individual, but in the relationality of the persons in community.

### The Importance of Reciprocity

Reciprocity is the glue that holds the relational polarities of uniqueness and unity together as a person is conformed to the image of God. Unity and uniqueness—in reciprocity—are at the heart of the triune God. The three persons remain unique through their mutual interrelatedness. The theological term *perichoresis* (co-inherence, mutual indwelling) was applied to the Trinity to capture the unique nature of these reciprocal interrelations. Each person of the Trinity finds being in each other without coalescence. Reflections of the reciprocity between the Father and the Son can be found, for example, in the

Gospel of John. The Father and the Son are one and the Son was also sent by the Father. The Father has committed both the bestowal of life and the responsibility of judgment to the Son. Yet the Son judges and wills only as the Father does. The Father gives power and authority to the Son, and the Son reciprocates by following the Father’s example.

The reciprocal dynamic is further seen in the high-priestly prayer of John 17. Jesus prays, “Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24). The Father lavishes divine love on the Son and thus glorifies him. In turn, the Son reciprocates the love received from the Father and in this manner glorifies the Father eternally (Gunton, 1993). This is not an example of “codependent back scratching”—I’ll give you glory if you give me glory. Rather, in love the Father gives life to the Son, and the Son chooses of his own will to glorify the Father.

Moltmann (1996) nicely summarizes:

According to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity the three divine Persons exist with one another, for one another and in one another. They exist in one another because they mutually give each other space for full unfolding. By existing mutually in each other, they form their unique Trinitarian fellowship. (p. 298)

The mutual reciprocity between the Father, Son, and Spirit allow them to experience diversity within union—to experience simultaneous unity and uniqueness. Within the Trinity there is no impinging on one another. They each contribute uniquely to their united working. The particularity of Father, Son, and Spirit is as vital as their relatedness. Through the Spirit we participate in the Son’s communion with the Father (Torrance, 1989, 1992). The Son and Spirit *act* within the created realm. In some way reciprocity is mysteriously present in the way the Son and the Spirit work together within the human person to redeem, perfect, and sustain.

### Imaging God

In order to broaden an understanding of the proposed conceptualization of the reciprocating self beyond the previous description as a purely relational interpretation of the *imago* in the origi-



nal edition of *The Reciprocating Self* (Balswick et al., 2005), the following section highlights relational, functional, dynamic, and directional interpretations of the *imago* found in current theology (see King & Whitney, 2015).

### **The Relational *Imago***

Theological anthropology suggests that bearing the image of God means living as unique individuals in reciprocating relationships with others. To be human is to be a particular being in relationships, distinct and unique, yet inseparably bound up with the other, for “all particulars are formed by their relationship to God and the creator and redeemer and to each other” (Gunton, 1993, p. 207). Particularity is discovered in relationship with our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sustainer, and with each other. If humankind is to realize its created intention, humankind must then be understood as socialkind (Gunton, 1993). It is the self’s encounter with divine and human other that enables it to realize its uniqueness. To be human is to be in relationship with another. Humans experience their unique selves most fully when in a healthy relationship with God or another. Macmurray (1961) states, “Persons constitute each other, make each other what they are” (p. 17). In Luke 17:20-21, Jesus proclaims, “The kingdom of God is among you,” suggesting to some commentators that God’s reign is initially evident in the relationships between believers and only a sign of what is to become.

This relational understanding of the *imago Dei* suggests that being human involves living in reciprocating, authentic relationships with others. Following the pattern of life lived out by Jesus Christ—between himself as the Son of God and the Father, between himself as Jesus and God’s people, or the pattern as best understood by the Trinity—such relationships are characterized by mutuality, give and take, and they enable the self to be known most fully in the process of knowing another. In such relationships there is space to simultaneously be oneself and to be in relationship with each other. There is room to encounter the other and to encounter the self through the other. The self is never lost in face of the other. The other does not impinge on the self, but the other promotes the presence of the self. In reciprocating relationships there is give and take, and take and give. A high view of both the self and other is required to value the giving and the receiving. In mathematics, the definition of *reciprocal* reflects this simultaneous distinction

within unity. According to Webster’s Dictionary, a reciprocal is “a pair of quantities whose product is unity.” Christians could say that to be human is to live as unique quantities whose product is unity. Thus, uniqueness and unity are both central to our imaging God.

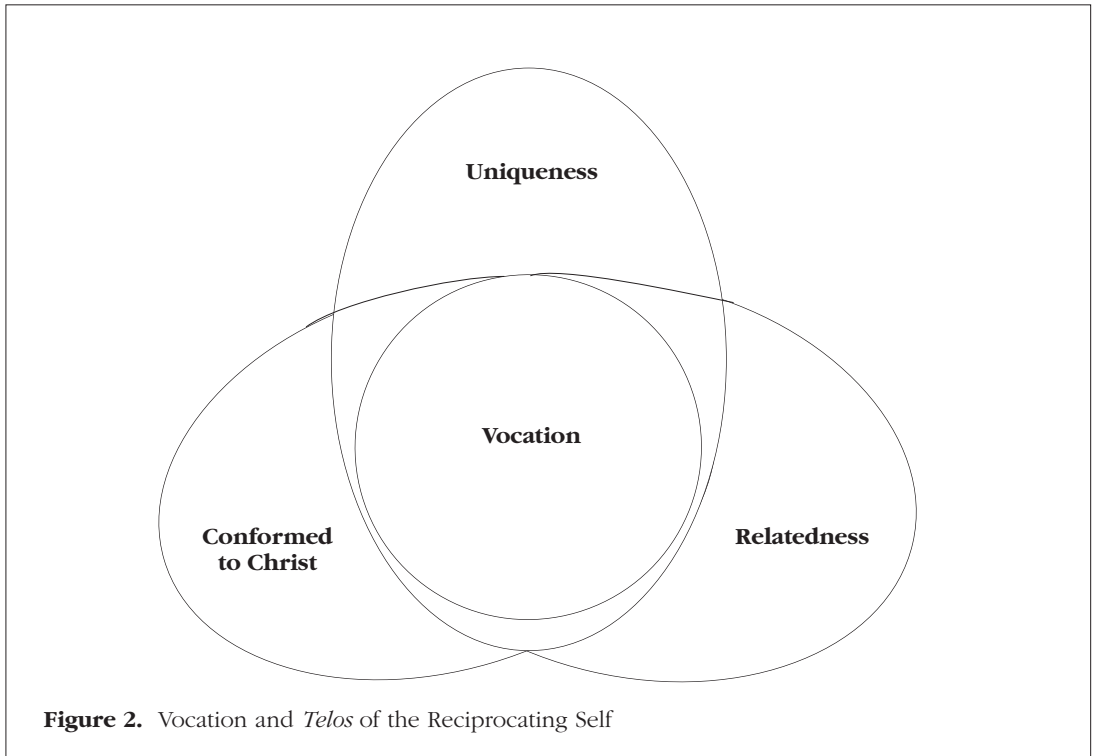
From a relational perspective, the emphasis of the image is the simultaneous uniqueness and unity, as well as the reciprocity that holds the self and other simultaneously distinct and together. For example, Gunton (1993) emphasizes the theology of particularity and the theology of relatedness. As Christian psychologists, this recognition of the sacredness of human uniqueness is a profound gift we can offer our students and/or patients. Humans long to be known and accepted as ourselves. Psalm 139 poetically makes this point by describing our uniquely created self as a wonderful work of the living God:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. (vv. 13-15)

Everything is created by God to be and become what it is, and not another. We are distinct and particular beings. Similarly, nurturing the capacity of our patients, students, and/or parishioners to be in mutually beneficial relationships furthers them in their journey of realizing God’s purposes for them. Functional interpretations contribute further insight into the nature of mutually beneficial relationships.

### **The Functional *Imago***

An important nuance to this reciprocity is highlighted by recent “functional” interpretations of the *imago*. This approach emphasizes how humans are to relate to the rest of creation and is based on the commission that God gave Adam and Eve in Genesis. This interpretation suggests that bearing the image of God is apparent when human beings *act*—when they rightly exercise the authority that God has given to them (Mouw, 2012). Harry Kuitert (1972) describes humans as “covenant partners,” which emphasizes a “role” that God has given humans to take on as God’s living image. From this perspective, our call as humans is to be image bearers, and we do so by being covenant



partners. “Covenant” emphasizes the importance of relationships, while “partnership” points to the privilege and responsibility of living with God, fellow humans, and creation.

This view is not only consistent with our suggestion of the reciprocating self, but nicely amplifies the honor and responsibility we have in relating not just to God and fellow humans, but also to the rest of creation. This functional interpretation acknowledges the commission that God gave Adam and Eve in Genesis to have dominion over the rest of creation. Mouw (2012) points out that this feature of exercising dominion is applied uniquely to human beings among the creatures. Consequently, bearing the image of God is apparent when human beings are responsible stewards of the creation that God has given humankind. Although a concern at the time of writing the first edition of *The Reciprocating Self* over ten years ago, environmental mindfulness is now a dominant social issue for our world today. This cultural trend informs and expands the original formulation of the reciprocating self. No doubt, living as a reciprocating self includes living as covenant partners with the natural order. Joel Green (2004) nicely summarizes:

Our human vocation, given and enabled by God is to relate to God as God’s partner in covenant. To join in companionship of the human family and in relation to the whole cosmos in ways that reflect the covenant love of God. This is realized and modeled supremely in Jesus Christ. (p. 197)

Additionally, the functional emphasis often highlights the significance of vocation as an individual’s unique expression of contributing to God’s ongoing work in the world. True humanity occurs in our active participation—receiving and responding to the life of the triune God in the social and contextual realms in which God has placed us (Webster, 2003). From this standpoint, the reciprocating self is an individual who lives out life contributing in meaningful ways to the contexts and systems in which one lives. As such, salvation offers freedom through which we can embrace our part in God’s ongoing and unfolding story of redemption. Thus, vocation is conceived of as joyful and active consent to engaging and contributing to God’s work as unique individuals being conformed to the likeness of Christ. From this perspective, vocation might be represented by the confluence of those

places in our lives where our conformity to Christ as unique individuals relates to the broader world (see Figure 2). Our *telos* is then understood as an invitation to a new order—one set forth and defined by the pattern, the *logos* of Christ, and an invitation to participation in God's ongoing work in this world.

### The Dynamic *Imago*

Developmental psychology describes in detail the importance of relationships for human development at every stage of the lifespan (Lerner, 2015; Overton, 2015). Recent psychological research on spiritual development also highlights the developmental importance of relational transcendence (King & Boyatzis, 2015; Miller, 2015; Tomlinson, Glenn, Paine, & Sandage, 2016)—the awareness of our connection or relationship—to God. In addition, at the heart of the Gospel is a God who desires to relate to his creation in such a profound manner that God became human and sacrificed his beloved Son in order to be in communion with us. We understand our salvation to be dependent on Christ and our relationship with God upon receiving and accepting this gift of grace from God. As a response to this magnanimous gift we offer our lives as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). Our lives as Christians are based on an ongoing love relationship with God. Furthermore, it is through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in and through us—and our response to the Spirit—that we are sanctified and brought closer to the likeness of Christ in our own uniqueness.

This view can be described as a “dynamic understanding” of the *imago* and argues that the image is not a static capacity or ability, but rather that the image of God becomes apparent as humans are conformed to Christ through interactions with each other, God, and creation (King & Whitney, 2015). From this perspective, a more productive conversation may be to discuss *how* humans image God, rather than *what* the image is. The first is a verb, suggesting that imaging God involves action (i.e., participating in God's works of creating, redeeming, and perfecting), whereas the latter is a noun and suggests the image is a fixed entity. This dynamic perspective stresses that imaging God is an ongoing process. So although qualities, properties, or capacities may be relevant to the *imago*, this does not mean such qualities(s) are “immobile” (Weber, 2003, p. 86). Thus, as King and Whitney (2015) discuss, the *imago* or imaging God may involve specific capacities that enable humans to engage and respond to fellowship with

the Triune God. All humans are created in the image of God but not all are moving toward fully realizing their capacity to image God. From Webster's perspective, humans “become” what they were created to be “through participation in the drama of creation, salvation and consummation” (Weber, 2003, p. 227). In this way, we never possess or attain our *telos*, “rather life is a perpetual movement of receiving and responding” to a gift and the absolute generosity of the triune God (Weber, 2003, p. 228).

Thus the *imago* is dynamic in that it stems from ongoing human engagement with the being and activity of the triune God. For example, the *imago* is apparent as we pursue vocation of finding one's place in serving God's world. The emphasis from the dynamic perspective is on the potential for change or for the *imago* to become more apparent as an individual is transformed through their participation (knowingly or not) in God's work in the world. Such a conceptualization affirms the importance of various qualities such as reason, will, love, and relational capacities identified by different static approaches of the *imago*, but emphasizes the process by which these qualities enable an individual to engage in the ongoing activity of God.

### The Directional *Imago*

Although the *imago* may be understood to be dynamic and to emerge through relatedness and vocation, Christology offers a specific direction for this movement, that direction is towards the image of God revealed in Christ. King and Whitney (2015) couple dynamic and directional approaches in order to emphasize that imaging God involves a trajectory and is specifically headed towards becoming more like Christ as we live out the relatedness modeled by the Trinity. Although humans do not come to completion or perfection in our earthly lives, through the work of the Spirit, the Sustainer and Perfecter of our faith, humans can live more fully the life of love that Christ exemplified. We were created with the capacity for transformation, and Jesus is the pattern for humanity (Crisp, 2015; Tanner, 2010).

In the context of discussing Thomas Aquinas's view of the Incarnation, Gerald O'Collins (2002) wrote, “The incarnation should also be recognized as the highest conceivable development for humanity.” Christ, as the *logos*, is the pattern for all of humanity and sets forth an example which humankind can follow. As such, Christ is both the Alpha and Omega (see Thompson, 2014). He is both the source of all creation and the goal of

all creation. Consequently, becoming like Christ is part of human *telos* (see Figure 1).

Thus, whether drawing on relational, functional, and/or dynamic interpretations of the *imago*, a directional approach informs all three—specifically that our relationships, our actions, and our transformation all drawing us more towards becoming like Christ. Thus, Christians point to the Beatitudes (see Hunsinger, 2015) and the fruit of the Spirit as goals for human development. Thus, we can confidently say that human *telos* is characterized by compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peaceableness, thankfulness, and inspiration by Christ's Word (Marshall, 2001). Becoming like Christ points back to the importance of the dynamic approach. Kathryn Tanner (2010) integrates dynamic and directional approaches. She emphasizes that in order to become Christ-like, humans need to point themselves towards Christ and abide actively and receptively in Christ with the assistance of the Spirit.

### Common Grace

A major question that often surfaces in a discussion of Christian *telos* is the issue of a “nonbeliever.” I have put forth a distinctly Christian *telos* that involves being conformed to the image of Christ through relatedness with God. Is this formulation of *telos* relevant to non-Christians? I think so. The doctrine of common grace allows for an understanding of the gifts of God's goodness and presence in all of creation (King & Whitney, 2015). Specifically, common grace suggests that the Spirit is moving and transforming lives and culture whether those involved acknowledge this or not. It is important to note that the notion of common grace does not denote that the gifts of common grace given to all people by God offer salvation, rather, they make God's goodness apparent. These are glimpses and reminders of God's kingdom to come, where all will be whole and complete. Sin thwarts how humans relate to God, hinders our conformity to Christ, and disrupts the created order; it does not corrupt creation entirely or alter God's commitment to humanity (Moltmann, 1985). God's covenant love continues to graciously sustain humanity and allows for humans to be conformed to Christ's likeness (see King & Whitney, 2015).

### Implications for Being Human

Although some suggest that human nature is endowed with the image of God, I am not

equipped to comment with certainty about the substantive nature of the *imago*. That said, I contend that humans image God when they live in reciprocity with God, humans, and the rest of the created order. From this perspective, reciprocity is both the means and the end of human life. Our *telos*, God's goal for humans, is to live in perfect reciprocity with God, others, and creation as they become more like Christ, and the means by which we realize this is through relating to God, others, and creation.

### The Self and the Divine Other

We are created to be in relationship with God. This relationship is to be characterized by uniqueness, unity, and reciprocity and results in our becoming like Christ. Similar to, albeit not the same as, the interrelationships within the Trinity, humans are to experience simultaneous communion with God that does not jeopardize our particularity.

Throughout the Bible, God continually affirms human uniqueness. Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in Samaria (Jn. 4:1-42) illustrates this point. He interacts with her as a unique individual with specific needs. He recognizes and accepts her as a woman and a Samaritan. He not only addresses the felt need of her thirst, but he speaks to her specific emotional and relational problems. Jesus also gradually reveals his own unique identity. The woman recognizes him first as a Jew, then a rabbi, and finally as a prophet. Jesus responds by declaring his distinction as the Messiah and the means by which to worship God. In this interaction, both the particularities of the woman and of Christ remain intact. The encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well also illustrates reciprocal giving—Christ recognizes the woman's needs and offers to quench her spiritual thirst. She in turn goes out and proclaims the truth given by Jesus and draws others to believe and worship Jesus.

A person's relationship with God is characterized by the uniqueness of both the created and the Creator, and the unity between the two. This is evident when Jesus prays, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn. 17:21). Throughout the Bible, life is found in Christ—not on our own: “I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Full life is found in relationship with Christ. The Spirit's role in this is to “realize the true being of each created thing by bringing it, through Christ, into saving relation with God the

Father" (Gunton, 1993, p. 189). From an attachment perspective, experiencing God's love is like the "ultimate secure base" from which we can explore and live life fully (see Sandage et al., 2016).

We are most human when we are jointly united to Christ through the Holy Spirit, enabling us to participate in the Son's union with and glorification of the Father. In the end the Spirit will bring together all believers with all of creation, gathering them into the Son, the one in whom all things "hold together" or find interconnectedness (Col. 1:17). Grenz (2001) declares that this is the *telos* for which we were created: "Glorifying the Father in the Son (through the Spirit) together with all creation is the ultimate expression of the *imago Dei* and therefore marks the *telos* for which humans were created in the beginning" (p. 327, parenthetical comment added). The goal of our lives—the point of human life—is to glorify the Father in the Son and through the Spirit.

Despite this union and reciprocity with the life of the Trinity, human particularity is not lost. In our relationship with God we not only encounter the living God, but we become most fully ourselves. Just as within the Godhead the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, exist with, for, and in one another, so God does this with creation, giving us the space we need to be ourselves while remaining in relation to him: "God's indwelling presence gives to created being forever the 'broad space in which there is no more cramping' " (Moltmann, 1996, p. 308). God acts not as a dominating Other but the One in whom we live and move and have our being. Moltmann (1996) explains that relatedness to God does not threaten the distinctiveness of creation: "It is neither necessary for the world to dissolve into God, as pantheism says, nor for God to be dissolved in the world, as atheism maintains. God remains God, and the world remains creation" (p. 307). Our relationship with God does not sacrifice our particularity, but rather it allows us to become more fully who God created us to be. Trinitarian theology reminds us that we are most human when Jesus Christ brings us into the presence of the Father, drawing us to him by the Holy Spirit. We are offered an invitation to participate in God's ongoing work as our unique selves. Through encountering and participating in the love of Christ, we are filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19).

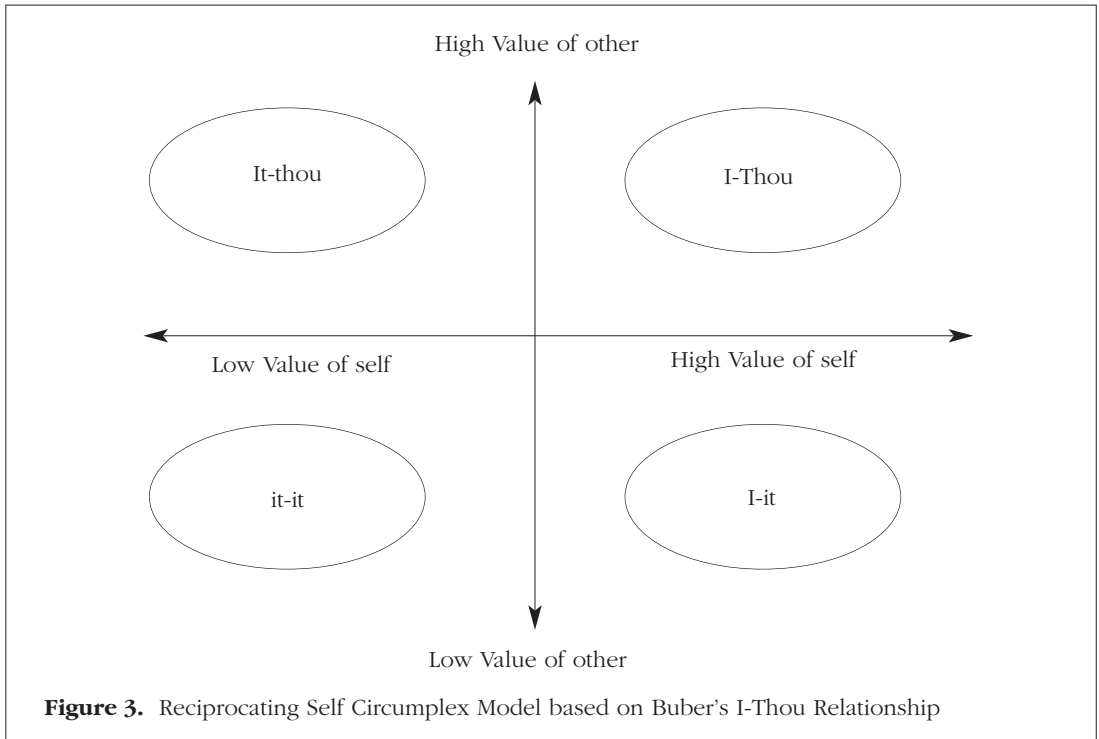
Christology reminds us that humans are the image of God "not by the way of human imitation of God, not by what we are ourselves, but

in virtue of some sort of incorporation of what remains alien to us, that very perfection of God that we are not" (Tanner, 2010, p. 72). As Tanner describes, we have life by imaging God and we do so by "living off God"—like a fetus living off of its mother. God created us, Christ offers us salvation, and the gift of the Spirit allows us to be shaped in the image of Christ. By "attaching ourselves to the incomprehensible that has attached itself to us" we find life and gain a new identity and vocation that we would never be able to achieve on our own terms (Tanner, 2010, p. 56). Abiding in Christ enables fullness of life (Jn. 10:10; Col. 2:9).

### The Self and the Human Other

To bear the image of God is to live in reciprocating relationships with God and our fellow human beings and become more Christ-like. Martin Buber, a Jewish theologian, referred to this type of relationship as an "I-Thou" relationship. Buber's (1970) theological anthropology was that human beings are to be in relationships where a whole self, the "I," is in mutual relationship with a whole other, the "Thou." This supposes an authentic personal encounter of both the I and the Thou. One is not dominant; the other is not inferior. The relationship is characterized especially by the reciprocity of communication. Buber starkly contrasted I-Thou with I-it ways of relating; the former being appropriate to the way a person should relate to humans and God, the latter, the way to relate properly to the impersonal natural world. Buber regarded relating to persons as if they were things as a violation of humanity and God. Engaging in such I-it relationships among persons, the "I" could only experience him- or herself as superior, while also failing to see the other as a whole self, experiencing the other only as an impersonal "it." Both persons are thereby dehumanized. Neither is moving towards the image of God in Christ, nor is either realizing the fullness of their being through authentic intimacy or encouragement of vocation.

In an I-Thou relationship, a person would acknowledge and respect the difference between themselves and others while maintaining a communicative relationship with them. They would experience unity in their mutual recognition of being Thou to each other but each remain personally distinct as I. Only in the context of encountering the other as Thou does the self truly encounter itself. In such a relationship, both "persons encounter their own being in the other"



**Figure 3.** Reciprocating Self Circumplex Model based on Buber's I-Thou Relationship

(Anderson, 1982, p. 46). Buber writes, "I require a Thou to become; becoming I, I say Thou" (Buber, 1970, p. 62). Being and becoming is a dynamic process that from the Christian perspective necessitates meaningful contribution and becoming more Christ-like. Buber's I-Thou relationship necessitates an I that is already being and an I and Thou that are becoming with and because of each other.

Applying Buber's theory of relatedness, a circumplex model is presented (see Figure 3) in order to illustrate the reciprocating self and its violations. The names of the four models of relatedness are derived from Buber's writing on the I-Thou relationship and are to be interpreted according to the theological anthropology presented in this paper. See Balswick et al. (2016) for a number of artistic expressions that capture much of the contrasting qualities of relationality considered in this discussion.

**The I-Thou relationship.** Such an I-Thou relationship simultaneously facilitates uniqueness and unity. The self and other both experience the presence of the other in such a way that enables both to develop. Ideally neither impingement nor domination occur in the context of the relationship. Rather, both the self and other are recognized and appreciated as unique, differentiated selves. Such a relationship enables the self and other to

become more fully what God created them to be and to experience their particularity more fully in their unity. Such a relationship is consistent with the notion of covenant partners that actively participate in God's continued work of redemption as they become more like Christ.

**I-It relationship.** The I-it relationship is in sharp contrast to the I-Thou. The I-it relationship is characterized by a high view of the self and a low view of the other. The other is neither experienced as a whole being nor appreciated in its entirety. In the I-it relationship the other serves as an object, in a functional or utilitarian role for the self, regardless of the created uniqueness of the object. The self in the I-it relationship merely interacts with human others as objects. The call to be a covenant partner with God tending to God's people and creation is overlooked. The other is instrumental, not integral, to the I's being. Individuals who relate to the other as an it are often dismissing. They have a positive view of themselves and a negative view of others. Such individuals avoid closeness with others because of negative expectations. However, they maintain a sense of self-worth through defensively denying the value of intimate relationships. Such individuals experience superficial relationships with others. The potential for transformation through relationship toward our *telos* in Christ is not likely realized in this compromising dynamic.

**Fusion: The It-Thou relationship.** Another distortion of the I-Thou relationship is the fused relationship in which the individual holds a low view of self and a high view of the other. Although the other is more highly regarded than the self, this is not done in a healthy, differentiated manner. Rather, the other is seen as a source of security or identity for the self. The other is not recognized as a unique, respected individual but rather as one who exists in order to conform to the needs of the self. Such individuals seek close relationships with another in order to gain a sense of acceptance or validation, not to mention grow towards vocation. They seem to believe that if others will act properly toward them, they will attain a secure self. This can lead to a fused personality. Individual uniqueness and distinctiveness are lost. No space for individual self-expression exists in this model of relatedness. Nor is there room for reciprocity. Neither the self nor the other have any space for personal development. Consequently, the other's unique self is not validated and is lost as it conforms to the thoughts, feelings, and needs of the wounded self. In "Buberian" terms, this form of relatedness could be called it-thou. In this formulation, the self is referred to as an it rather than an I in order to emphasize the low view of the self. Because the self sees the other as having something to contribute, the word *thou* rather than *it* is used to convey that the other is perceived as necessary to the self's being. The word *thou* is not capitalized in order to denote that the other is not mutually related to as in the I-Thou relationship.

**Dissociation: The It-It relationship.** The opposite of fusion is dissociation, where the self attempts to exist on its own, not in relationship with another. In the final quadrant the it-it relationship is characterized by a low view of self and low view of other. Unlike the previous model, where not enough space between self and other exists for self-expression, there is too much space in this dynamic. The self does not perceive itself worthy of closeness with another, nor does it expect the other to offer closeness. Such individuals have often been hurt in close relationships. The negative expectations they form cause them to avoid interpersonal closeness to avoid the pain of loss and rejection. Defensively, they remain in isolation. Although we hope for the continued work of the Spirit, the capacities which make the *imago* apparent are less likely to be developed in this context.

**The reciprocating self.** Exploring the above stances of relatedness provides a basis by which

the reciprocating self may be understood. The reciprocating self is the self that in all its uniqueness and fullness of being engages fully in relationship with another in all its particularity. The reciprocating self is the I or Thou in the I-Thou relationship. Buber (1970) writes, "Relation is reciprocity" (p. 62). It is the self that enters into mutual relationships with another, where distinction and unity are experienced simultaneously. The I-Thou selves reciprocate, having the capacity to give and to take. The reciprocating self does not treat the other as a mere utilitarian object from which it only takes. It does not seek fusion, where it takes to the extent that it demands the loss and sacrifice of the other. It is not dissociated—where there is no give or take. Rather, the reciprocating self lives in mutual relationships of sharing and receiving with others, enabling the self and other to more fully grow in the capacities that allow one to more fully image God and more fully live into the unique lives and vocations they were created for.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to provide a theological perspective on being human. As such, the notion of the reciprocating self serves as a developmental teleology. The paper proposes a *telos* for humans—to be unique and particular humans in relationships with divine and created others as they are conformed to the image of God in Christ. In mutually reciprocating relationships we encounter the other and ourselves most fully. I have found this formulation of the reciprocating self helpful to not only provide a lens through which one can evaluate psychological theories—whether developmental, personality, or clinical—in order to understand which is most consistent with biblical perspectives, but it has also provided and inspired a vision for what I hope for God's people entrusted into my care both as a minister and a professor.

As a developmentalist, this perspective has encouraged me to emphasize the importance of developing psychological capacities that facilitate human relations to God and God's created order. I am less concerned with identifying a limited or bounded singular quality, ability, or disposition that mirrors the image of God, but favor a more malleable understanding of the image of God that is a dynamic process that enables humans to participate in the life of the triune God and become more Christ-like (see King & Whitney, 2015). From

this standpoint, the image of God is not only dynamic, but it is directional. It is dynamic in that humans image God as they relate to God, humans, and creation as they participate in the ongoing life of the Trinity, and it is directional from the standpoint that Christ is the perfect image of God. In this way, optimal trajectories of development that nurture capacity for relating to others. Furthermore, this trinitarian and Christological formulation of *telos* informs an understanding of thriving and flourishing and provides an important basis for integration of theology and psychology (King & Whitney, 2015).

Although the reciprocating self is ultimately an eschatological goal, Christian psychologists carry out Christ's ministry on earth by enabling persons in the here and now, to the extent possible, to become more fully reciprocating selves. As such, Christian psychologists have the potential to be active ambassadors of Christ and are equipped to build God's kingdom, not only by providing healing and wholeness, but by promoting the capacity and motivation to be engaged and active participants in God's creation. Nurturing individuals to live as reciprocating selves in intimate, mutual relationships with one another not only enables humans to more fully image God but also allows humankind to participate more fully in God's ongoing activity in this world.

In *Constructing the Self, Constructing America*, Philip Cushman (1995) identified the *empty self* as a result of self-focused therapies. He described how the development of modern psychotherapy is intertwined with the evolution of American consumerism and how both affect the way we perceive and experience the self. He argued that current theories and therapeutic practices promote a sense of self with an insatiable need to consume in the interminable human quest for self-fulfillment and for self-realization. The American values of independence and self-fulfillment have led to the American psychotherapeutic culture to nurture individuals who are focused on self-care and personal fulfillment that is too often an end in itself. He critiqued the American therapeutic community for promoting individuals who are preoccupied and in perpetual need of filling and fulfilling themselves. This conceptualization of the reciprocating self offers an antidote to the empty self he described.

In the last 20 years since Cushman's book was published, psychological approaches that are sensitive to issues of relatedness are evident in the growth of theoretical approaches such as

intersubjectivity, attachment, dynamic systems, relational developmental systems, relational spirituality, interpersonal neurobiology, eudaimonic well-being, positive psychology, and positive youth development. The importance of reciprocity is also evident in the empirical study of transcendence, contribution, civic engagement, generosity, and other virtue strengths. Despite this growth, the empty self is all too prevalent in our culture. Perhaps at no other time in history, especially when technology tempts humans to decrease authentic intimacy and human relatedness, a *telos* such as the reciprocating self is needed. God's intention for being and becoming human is inextricably intertwined with our relations with God, one another, and creation. As Christian psychologists, our theology provides a vital vision for what God hopes for the people he created out of love. Thus, as we more deeply encounter and relate to God, we will be empowered through God's love, grace, and Spirit to engage with others and enable them on their journey to become more fully themselves as they grow in their capacity to live in reciprocity with God, humankind, and creation and become more Christ-like.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the Yale Center for Faith and Culture website for an overview of burgeoning scholarship, grant, research, curricular, and public activities that comprise this project directed by Miraslov Volf: <http://faith.yale.edu/god-human-flourishing/god-human-flourishing>

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