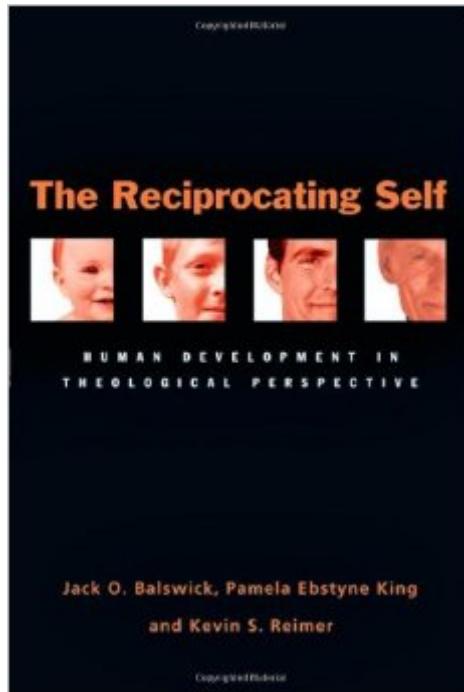


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# The Reciprocating Self: Human Development In Theological Perspective



## **Synopsis**

On the basis of a theologically grounded understanding of the nature of persons and the self, Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King and Kevin S. Reimer present a model of human development that ranges across all of life's stages: infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, elder adulthood. They do this by drawing on a biblical model of relationality, where the created goal or purpose of human development is to become a reciprocating self--fully and securely related to others and to God. Along the way, they provide a context for understanding individual development issues--concerns, tensions, worries or crises encountered by the self in the context of change. Awareness of these issues is most pronounced at developmental transitional points: learning to talk and walk, beginning to eat unassisted, going to school, developing secondary sexual physical features, leaving home, obtaining full-time employment, becoming engaged and then married, having a child for the first time, parenting an adolescent, watching children move away from home, retiring, experiencing decline in physical and mental health, and, finally, facing imminent death. Throughout, Balswick, King and Reimer contend that, since God has created human beings for relationship, to be a self in reciprocating relationships is of major importance in negotiating these developmental issues. Critically engaging social science research and theory, *The Reciprocating Self* offers an integrated approach that provides insight helpful to college and seminary students as well as those serving in the helping professions. Those preparing for or currently engaged in Christian ministry will be especially rewarded by the in-depth discussion of the implications for moral and faith development nurtured in the context of the life of the church.

## **Book Information**

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The authors of The Reciprocating Self believe that âœexisting developmental theory lacks teleology.â • They say, âœThe purpose of The Reciprocating Self is to present an integrated view of human development that is based on social science research and Biblical truths. We do this by drawing on a Biblical model of relationality, where the created goal or purpose of human development is to become a reciprocating self- fully and securely related to others and Godâ • (p. 9). This book is a treasure chest for those interested in developmental psychology. Many of the key researchers in this field, since the 1980â™s, have been summarized in the chapters on their life stage speciality. The book is written as an academic textbook, but it is helpful for anyone trying to understand the life stages of development from a Christian perspective. The authors note that most earlier developmental theories have been based on a naturalistic perspective, i.e., focused entirely on what humans are capable of without reference to anything theological. They point out the weakness of the naturalistic points of view and articulate a combined psychological and biblical perspective through the lens of the reciprocating self- a self which can grow as it is in positive relationship with God and others. They also have been careful to approach developmental theories from a positive, rather than a negative, point-of-view. So the book combines Bible teaching, positive psychological theory, and practical examples of peopleâ™s growth and behavior at each life stage. The extensive explanation of many developmental theories, particularly as the authors explain different life stages in development, make this book very difficult to adequately excerpt.

âœThe Reciprocating Self,â • responds to and rejects the modern construct that sees the self as empty, the book provides âœan alternative view of selfhood â ” the reciprocating selfâ • (Balswick, King, & Reimer, Kindle Locations 139-140). The empty self construct returns development theories that are fragmented and lack a unifying theorem. âœDevelopmental teleology refers to developmental completeness or a theologically informed understanding of the goal of developmentâ • (Balswick, King, & Reimer, Kindle Location 108). In âœthe Reciprocating Self,â • the authors progress this notion that God has a goal for our development. The baseline assumption is that we are created by God for a purpose. The authors depart from secular developmental psychology positions that understand human development to be the result of evolution, environment, or social context. Modern psychology endeavors to evaluate human behavior and human development in terms of what is normative. They seek to answer the questions, âœWhat is

normal? • and “What is deviant?” • But extracting God from human development story creates a problem. “The modern project has become the modern predicament, resulting in an era of fragmented, lonely, isolated people. One of the main moves of modernity has been to displace God from the transcendent to the immanent sphere, shifting the locus of the divine from a God who is Other to impersonal forces within the human mind and will-into human subjectivity • (Balswick, King, & Reimer, Kindle Locations 128-130). Understanding who we are and who we should be begins with creation. “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them • (Gen 1:27). To be human is to be shaped in God’s image.

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