

Persons in a Relationship-of-Grace: Imaging the Life and Mission of the Church After the Triune God

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Abstract

This study frames grace (*charis*) as a social system of reciprocity and considers how the concept serves to constitute the Trinity as persons in a relationship-of-grace. There is subsequent exploration into the nature of the church's participation in the life and mission of the triune God. Investigation begins by approaching Paul's use of grace amidst the backdrop of the Greco-Roman system of gift-giving and reciprocity wherein grace establishes a social bond and is expectant of a response. This understanding of socially reciprocal grace is then considered through a perichoretic relational trinitarianism, followed by an anthropology of personhood shaped by God's gift of atonement. By proposing the triune God to be constituted as persons in a relationship-of-grace, the ecclesial body itself can further be depicted as bearing image to this grace-oriented relationship. Accordingly, missional ecclesiology is shown to be rooted in holistic reconciliation as grace is continually received and reciprocated, offering a social approach to missiological practice. Within this renewed vision of God and humanity, the church is established as a participant in the life of the Trinity as it comes to reside in the divine reciprocal dynamic while simultaneously realizing corporate ecclesial communion.

Trinitarian theologies, despite their myriad of approaches, remain largely concerned with addressing how the entities of the triune persons are constituted by way of their relations to one another.¹ Though God has been conceived in social relations by both church fathers and contemporary theologians, such analogies

1 For a detailed investigation of intra-trinitarian relations, see Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), at 44: though diverse trinitarian theologies conceive of "relations" differently, their "disagreements underscore a shared commitment to the importance of the category of 'relations.'" There is accord that "each person is only identifiable by means of reference to the others."

remain diverse and rather contentious.² Yet, if humanity is called to image God and participate “in Christ,” it is reasonable to ask what they are imaging and participating in.³ This question inevitably leads to the doctrine of the Trinity.

A central distinctive of the Trinity is the reciprocity shared between the three persons in an eternal exchange of gifting. In antiquity, reciprocity itself was expressed through the Greek term *charis* meaning *gift* or *grace*; as a social system, *charis* offers critical insight into the practice of gift-giving. Grace, of course, has a diverse understanding amongst its many interpreters and some may reasonably assume it to have no place in the intra-trinitarian communion. Indeed, the common perception of *pure* grace as unmerited, undeserved, and often incongruous, would necessarily limit its role in the relationship of the Trinity who inhabit one another in perfect love.⁴ However, more recent studies with greater historical investigation into the socio-cultural background of the NT see context as determinative, where the concept of grace could justifiably be situated within a system of reciprocity.⁵ Though often viewed as a narrow one-directional inference of redemption and blessing, grace is increasingly recognized as a relational experience shaped in mutuality. This elaboration of grace has implications for the apprehension of God, the human person, and the church. The essential being of each of these entities, moreover, directly informs the practice of mission.

To this end, this study will establish the Trinity as persons in a relationship-of-grace and identify how their divine communion is extended to both human beings and the ecclesial body. This will first require an approach to grace that is more comprehensive and polyvalent, allowing for different emphases and bypassing limitations created by a narrow treatment of the term. Following

2 There is a concern that human relations are projected onto God and swiftly reflected back as the appropriate ecclesial model after the likeness of the Creator. For a thoughtful critique of social trinitarianism, see Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (New York: Cambridge, 2010), 207–46; and also Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity,” *New Blackfriars* 81:956 (2000): 432–45.

3 Participation refers to a view of the gospel as God’s engagement in humanity and His people’s mutual participation in the life of the Trinity (ex. 1 Cor 1:9, 10:16; Gal 3:26–27). For a thorough exploration of the theology of participation, see Michael J. Thate et al. eds., “*In Christ*” in *Paul: Explorations in Paul’s Theology of Union and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018).

4 A recent New Testament text describes grace as “the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of undeserved blessing.” See Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 561. Applying this definition directly to the trinitarian relations would rightly raise concerns of Arianism and possible imperfection within the Godhead. Referencing the Orthodox tradition for instance, James Payton explicitly states, “We cannot assert, though, that grace is involved in the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity.” See James R. Payton, *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 162.

5 Referring to the polyvalent *perfections* of grace outlined by John Barclay, Wendell Willis clarifies “Paul does not have a singular ‘correct’ perfection, but makes different emphases in his varied uses.” Wendell L. Willis, “Paul, the Gift and Philippians,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 41:2 (2019): 175.

contemporary NT scholarship, Paul's theology will be situated within the social structure of reciprocal grace. This renewed vision of biblical *charis* will then be considered in relation to the doctrine of God, approaching it through a perichoretic trinitarianism where members of the Trinity exist in unified relation to each other in a social bond of grace. Subsequently, human relationality and the meaning of the atonement gift offered to all people is investigated in light of the God being imaged. Rather than a direct replication of the divine relations, humans will be shown to participate in this relationship as is eschatologically inherent to their anthropology. This enables the necessary groundwork to present the church itself as participants in the life of the triune God—understood as a relationship-of-grace—characterized by a missional ecclesiology rooted in holistic reconciliation. Thus, the first task undertaken will be the establishment of a more biblically contextualized comprehension of grace.

Framing Grace Within its Biblical Context

Recent scholarship has reconsidered the significance of *charis* within ancient society and the implications this has on Paul's use of the term in his epistles. This section will provide a concise study of the way gifts functioned in the Greco-Roman socio-cultural context within which Paul was communicating, offering clarity around the meaning of grace. As its relation to God, humans, and the church will be subsequently considered, first establishing a theological framework for grace will therefore be pivotal to the ensuing argument that the Trinity exists in a relationship-of-grace.

In antiquity *charis* was a gift or benefit, the object of favour, as well as the resulting gratitude. John Barclay observes that *charis* itself carried little theological significance in the Greek of Paul's day; rather it implied an "act (or attitude) of favor or benevolence—not a special kind of gift, just any favor or benefit."⁶ Yet, benefaction was often comprised of calculated gift exchanges serving to enhance social cohesion through an ethic of reciprocity.⁷ It is this reciprocity that shapes the fundamental structure of gifts within the system of grace—giving, receiving, and reciprocating. *Charis* describes the giver, the gift, as well as the recipient's gift in response. The Old Testament depicts those of equal status, both Jews and non-Jews, participating in reciprocal exchange of gifts.⁸ Though

6 John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), xiv, 2. Note how these meanings of *charis* capture a circular movement: "a gift given to a favored person creates gratitude in return."

7 Enoch O. Okode, *Christ the Gift and the Giver: Paul's Portrait of Jesus as the Supreme Royal Benefactor in Romans 5:1–11* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2022), 3.

8 See Gen 33:1–11; Exod 2:16–22. *Equality* nor *reciprocity* are in opposition within either the Hebrew Scriptures or Greco-Roman philosophy; see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 40.

recipients of gifts within Greco-Roman culture did not sense themselves contractually obligated as this held no legal standing, there was a strong moral and social obligation that arose from them.

Beneficiaries often considered themselves in debt as some form of reciprocity was expected toward the giver, even if only gratitude, honour, and chiefly loyalty.⁹ The stoic philosopher Seneca considers the social expectation of gifts and recognizes that there are instances where gratitude may be the only means of appropriate response, as it is a virtue capable of fulfilling the required social obligation.¹⁰ Collectively, citizens would offer honour towards elite municipal benefactors, often encapsulated by status, titles, and privileges. These incongruous gifts disregard the worth or capacity of the recipient, as well as the value of their corresponding gift; yet there was a clear expectation for a response. Contemporary biblical studies increasingly suggest that Paul's use of *charis* also carries this expectation of recipients.¹¹

This system, moreover, was not only practiced at the political and elite level but amongst every social group, including the poor. Ryan Schellenberg's scholarship exploring the ethnography of both ancient and modern poverty observes the many studies in which reciprocal modes of exchange among those at the subsistence-level have been documented both in tribal societies and among the urban poor globally. He stresses the unpredictability of resources amongst the poor and how this fosters a practice of reciprocity (or swapping) to manage such a fluctuation in stability.¹² Generous compassion towards peers when one is economically sufficient could later help mitigate a personal crisis as friends graciously do the same.

Other anthropological studies indicate that when reciprocal obligations are incurred as a group (such as a church) they allow for more diverse sets of mutual partnerships to be formed with the marginalized.¹³ This social practice extends beyond one-to-one gifting as collectivists promote giving as a community, helping to strengthen corporate identity.¹⁴ This all upholds the assertion that Paul promoted reciprocal forms of giving within ecclesial networks as a strategic means of generosity during times of misfortune and extreme need.

9 E. Randolph Richards and Richard James, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes: Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 77–79.

10 David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 108, 115; Barclay, *Paul and the Power*, 8.

11 For instance, Paul often presents a lifepath towards or away from God, where even “under grace” there are obligations of obedience (Rom 6:14–18).

12 Ryan S. Schellenberg, “Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul's Rhetoric of Generosity,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137 (2018): 222–23.

13 A study of reciprocal relationships in Bolivia, for instance, found that despite a decline in traditional bonds, there is a distinct increase in reciprocity amongst evangelicals in this region. See Amber Wutich, “Shifting Alliances: Reciprocal Relationships During Times of Economic Hardship in Urban Bolivia,” *Chungara: Revista de Antropología Chilena* 43 (2011): 127.

14 Richards and James, *Misreading Scripture*, 68.

As a social practice, reciprocity becomes fundamental to Paul's use of *charis* when framed within the Roman *patron-client relationship*. This enabled relationships between persons and groups of unequal-statuses complete with expectations of benefaction and obligation. It may be that Paul's motive for refusing financial support from the Corinthian church, while gratefully accepting it from Philippi and elsewhere, relates to these client obligations.¹⁵ Moreover, this patron-client framework extends into Greek and Roman religion, wherein it was generally understood that the gods initiate the cycle of reciprocity and human benefactors respond with sacrifice and worship. Both the social and religious outcome of gifts (whether in equality or incongruity) was to tie those involved together, as the giving and receiving of a gift constituted a social bond.¹⁶

Polyvalent Perfections of Grace

The motif of grace can be disaggregated to encompass several definitions of *perfected grace* (that is its ultimate reduction) frequently identified within antiquity and theology. As gifting within the system of *charis* is a multifaceted experience, grace can be perfected in multiple ways; yet each of the distinct understandings of grace can stand alone, without requiring one to commit to them all. The following briefly examines some of these perfections of grace.¹⁷

Superabundance references the large scale, lavishness, and all-encompassing quality of the gift. There is less concern for its contents, and more for the gift's overall size and even permanence or duration. *Singularity* focuses on the giver's attitude and approach as *solely* benevolence and goodness, refraining to punish or judge. *Efficacy* expresses the impact of the gift on the nature or agency of the recipient. Gifting birth or rescuing life have immense effect. Finally, *incongruity* (as discussed above) is to gift without regard to the worth of the recipient. Impressive generosity might strive to be as unselective and indiscriminate as possible. Each of these polyvalent classifications of grace has been depicted as the standard expression of *pure* and *perfected* grace. Any one or any combination of them may perfect a facet of grace without necessarily comprising them all.

Faith in Relation to Grace

Concise attention will be given here to *pistis* as a response to *charis*. Patrons were to bestow *charis* towards clients who would in turn offer loyalty expressed as *pistis* (translated as *faith*). Referencing "faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16), Barclay asserts

15 N.T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 251.

16 Okode, *Christ the Gift and the Giver*, 6, 30; Schellenberg, "Subsistence, Swapping," 222. Notably, faith is practiced in both patron-client relations and equal "friendships." See deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 120.

17 The subsequent classifications of perfected grace are a selection from Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 70–75.

pistis Cristou as “trust in Christ,” arguing that “trust” is a preferable translation to “faith” as it evokes a sense of relationship.¹⁸ Paul is not referring to belief in an impersonal doctrine, he contends, but rather a personal dependence on what God accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus—the gift. Trust in Christ becomes the appropriate response to the grace of God.

Matthew Bates, nevertheless, advocates that *pistis* is better understood as “allegiance” and that the gospel should be reconsidered accordingly. Part of his conviction stems from Paul’s frequent titles for Jesus such as Christ and Lord, indicative of the allegiant relationship a people would hold towards their Messiah and King. Bates contends that if the gospel’s apex is Christ’s enthronement and *pistis* is understood largely as allegiance, then Paul’s gospel and mission seek to bring about practical obedience (characteristic of allegiance) to King Jesus.¹⁹

Barclay, however, takes issue with the translation “allegiance” due to its over-emphasis on the action of believers rather than a dependence on the primary promise and act of God in Christ.²⁰ Yet, while trust may imply slightly more inter-iority, it likewise conveys an active relationality. In fact, Bates observes that Barclay himself often seems to suggest that Paul construes faith as allegiance, at times using the terms interchangeably in his own writing.²¹ For instance, discussing Paul’s desire for the Corinthians to support Jerusalem, he states that it was their “shared *allegiance* to Jesus Christ” that united these early believers across borders, portraying them as “participating in the *charis* of God,” on this occasion with a literal gift.²² Far from inferring self-reliance, *pistis* becomes a reciprocal response to the grace of the gospel received in faith. Trust and allegiance are necessarily incorporated into *pistis* within a grace-faith structure.²³ To live by faith is to respond in *trusting-allegiance* to the Christ-gift.

The implication then, is that Paul used the social structure of reciprocal

18 Barclay, *Paul and the Power*, 48. Though not the intention of this article, it is difficult here to avoid entering what can be called the *pistis Cristou* debate regarding whether such passages refer to the *pistis* of Paul (the objective genitive reading) or that of Christ (the subjective genitive reading). For an overview see Nijay K. Gupta, “Paul and *Pistis Christou*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*, ed. Matthew Novenson and R. Barry Matlock (New York: Oxford, 2022), 470–87.

19 Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 85–86. Michael Gorman likewise posits Paul’s ministry as eliciting an “obedience of faith,” “faithful obedience,” or even “believing allegiance,” see Gorman, *Participation in Christ: Explorations in Paul’s Theology and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 10.

20 Barclay, *Paul and the Power*, 49n19.

21 Barclay’s own notion of *pistis* is not entirely inconsistent with Bates’ view as he himself emphasizes that Paul’s “allegiance is now exclusively to Christ, the source of his new life in faith.” Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 398.

22 John M. G. Barclay, “Paul and the Gift to Jerusalem: Overcoming the Problems of the Long-Distance Gift,” in *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*, ed. Steve Walton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 95; emphasis mine.

23 David deSilva similarly argues that NT “faith” is meant to arouse both *trust* and *loyalty* towards God, as *pistis* integrates both concepts. See deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 120–21, 155.

grace-faith as an analogy for the divine-human relationship. God gives freely and benevolently (grace) to his people, who respond in trust, loyalty, and allegiance (faith). This relationship can be observed in Galatians 2:19–21 as follows: Paul acknowledges “the grace of God” by in turn giving up his life and choosing to “live for God,” that is to “live by faith,” reciprocating the gift of the Son who first “loved” him and “gave himself” for the apostle.

Consequently, Jewish gifting practices were generally comparable with the surrounding culture, with a notable exception: Hebrews were to give to the poor generously even though they were clearly unable to reciprocate.²⁴ Having received God’s gracious gift of divine liberation, justice and compassion, Israelites were to respond with justice and compassion themselves as an act of faith. Their benevolent redemption becomes a powerful basis amongst the people of God for practicing social justice and inviting others to share in their gift. As Barclay explains, “Jews were expected to live out their *allegiance* to God, and their commitment to ‘righteousness,’ in giving to the poor,” corresponding with the resources available to the giver.²⁵ What is more, though the destitute may have nothing to give in return, even here there is an element of reciprocity as it was God who would repay the giver with blessing. Jews had an arguably stronger motive for compassion towards the poor and marginalized since they anticipated a response not from their neighbours but from Yahweh.²⁶ This has missiological implications, as the early church often responded to the gift of the gospel with the “grace of giving” towards those outside their social group (Phil 4:14–17; 2 Cor 8:1–7).²⁷

Today there is evidence that this invigorating theology of grace can help facilitate an ecclesial and missiological approach to relational reconciliation through an ethic of reciprocity.²⁸ Having received such abundant gifts from God, many contemporary Christian communities model a faith-filled response as they

24 For instance, Proverbs 11:24–25 follows the Greco-Roman framework of reciprocity, while Proverbs 19:17 exhibits this ethic of giving to the poor without expectation of return.

25 For Barclay, to be righteous is to stay loyal to the truth of the gospel by deriving life from the Christ-gift in faith, the ground of one’s being. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 43, 377–79; emphasis mine.

26 See this ethos in Deut 24:13 and further consistency with Jesus’ teaching in Matt 6:1–4 and Luke 6:38; 14:12–14. Notably, this practice extends beyond family and nationality to include foreigners, see Exod 23:9; Lev 19:33–34; Deut 15:12–15. Barclay refers to the interchange of grace as being “triangulated” between humans and God, as God’s people pass on what they have divinely received. See Barclay, “Paul and the Gift to Jerusalem,” 95.

27 Willis, “Paul, the Gift and Philippians,” 178–79.

28 Consider John Perkins who for decades has been undertaking a holistic approach to community development. Perkins insists that initiatives based in reconciliation must “create value and gratitude” for the gift invested. In his words, “it’s an issue of grace – there’s undeserved favor, and you feel a huge gratitude for it. He [Christ] gave me and forgave me, and now I love him.” See John M. Perkins, “Reconciliation and Development,” in *Following Jesus: Journeys in Radical Discipleship – Essays in Honor of Ronald J. Sider*, ed. Paul Alexander and Al Tizon (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 77, 80.

gratefully follow Christ out into the world. As will be shown, grace itself is located in the very communion of the triune Creator to which we now turn.

Perichoretic Relationship-of-Grace

What of the place of *charis* within the identity of the triune God? With a renewed perspective of biblical grace, social reciprocity will now be explored as an essential distinctive inherent within the being of the Trinity. This is best understood following the classic trinitarian doctrine of *perichoresis*, as well as the modern development of a more relational trinitarian theology with no fixed order among the persons-in-relationship. The doctrine of the Trinity acknowledges a dialog between the Father, Son, and Spirit, as well as with humans within the economy of redemption, best expressed through social analogies.²⁹

The trinitarian relations are complementary, or in Wolfhart Pannenberg's explanation, the three persons are "living realizations of separate centers of action" where God can act only as a communion of the different persons within one another.³⁰ Furthermore, the persons of the Trinity are distinct not only in their being interdependent but also *mutually internal*: "the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 17:21). They indwell and mutually permeate one another while still remaining distinct persons. Miroslav Volf refers to this indwelling relationship of mutual giving and receiving as the *reciprocal interiority* of the trinitarian persons.³¹

A reciprocal trinitarianism is inclusive of both Christology and Pneumatology as the relations among the divine persons and their ministry in the world are germane.³² This approach does not separate attention towards the life of Christ from the relationship among the divine persons, but rather the Son is considered within a trinitarian framework, relocating Christ and his work within the Trinity. Likewise, this is true of the Holy Spirit who risks being isolated from the work of the triune God when in fact the ministry of the Spirit should be identified in the

29 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace, Revised and Updated: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2019), 327; Dudley Brown, "Holy Spirit and the Trinity in the Black Church," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 10:1 (2021): 33. Intriguingly, Brown observes how African Trinitarian reflections often emphasize such social analogies within a relational and dynamic communion.

30 Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 215.

31 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 209.

32 Volf feels that Kathryn Tanner holds a position of Christological exclusivity, leading her to a misplaced critique of his social trinitarian view. See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 328, and also Tanner, *Christ the Key*, 207. Wesley Hill likewise suggests that Christology is misconstrued when isolated from the other divine persons, offering instead an approach through a mutually interpretive relational matrix. See Hill, *Paul and the Trinity*, 25–30.

incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.³³ Each Trinity member's life-giving activity is co-constitutional of the personal identity of the others. Trinitarian personhood is realized through the giving and receiving that occurs within their dynamic relational reciprocity.³⁴

The theological concept for this co-constitutional mutual indwelling is *perichoresis*, a co-inherence in one another without any coalescence. Gregory of Nazianzus is the first to employ the term theologically in his *Epistle* 101, while Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria later applied the noun to capture trinitarian mutual abiding and co-inherent unity. In these contexts, one dimension of the verb (περιχωρούσων) can be interpreted as “pass reciprocally” or “to reciprocate” while the noun (περιχώρησις) can refer to “reciprocity.”³⁵ The envisioned reciprocal back and forth of the early church fathers came to be expressed much like a synergistic dance with a mutual inter-sharing of attributes. This dance is reminiscent of the *Charites* (or Graces) of Greek mythology. Portrayed as three sisters dancing hand-in-hand, they represent a circular relationship of reciprocity. The *Charites* allegorize divine favour, the giving and receiving of gifts, and the social bond of *charis* “so fundamental to Greek culture.”³⁶ Within the perichoresis, God is movements of relationship (the patterns of the dance itself), a living expression of circular giving and receiving.³⁷ Perichoretic unity is predicated on the reciprocal relations of the divine persons as they themselves are constituted through their mutuality.³⁸

More recently, relational trinitarians have suggested initiating the exploration of God with the “self-reciprocating identity and love” inherent within the

33 This enables what Steven Studebaker has deemed a trinitarian paradigm of grace and a participatory theology of atonement. See Steven M. Studebaker, *The Spirit of Atonement: Pentecostal Contributions and Challenges to the Christian Traditions* (New York: T&T Clark, 2021), 40, 56–57.

34 Studebaker compellingly argues for the full personhood of the Spirit within the Trinity who likewise contributes to the co-constitution of both the Father and Son's personal identities. Steven M. Studebaker, *From Pentecost to the Triune God: A Pentecostal Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 107–108, 142–43.

35 Verna Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 (1991): 54–56.

36 Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults: A Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 162. Non-reciprocal isolated acts of grace were “entirely foreign to the ideal of giving in the first century.” deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 109.

37 Paul Fiddes observes that “in the divine dance, so intimate is the communion that they move in and through each other so that the pattern is all-inclusive,” much like “a perichoresis of movements.” Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 72–73.

38 For Pannenberg, the perichoresis captures how the deity of each member of the Trinity is ontologically dependent on the activity of the other two as they mutually glorify one another. Gifted from each person to the others, theirs is a “received divinity.” See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 48–50.

community of the Trinity.³⁹ Stanley Grenz captures this perichoretic approach succinctly: “the three members of the Trinity are ‘person’ precisely because they are persons-in-relationship; that is, their personal identities emerge out of their reciprocal relations.”⁴⁰ This enables Father, Son, and Spirit to be in one another without requiring their mutual indwelling to limit trinitarian plurality. The mutual self-differentiation of the three constitutes the concrete form of the trinitarian reciprocal relations.

Accordingly, there is a clear alignment with the above description of grace as a fundamental structure of gifts within a relational system of reciprocity—giving, receiving, and reciprocating. The sharing of grace within the triune God maintains the same outcome of gifts within Greco-Roman society: uniting participants together in a social bond. Their identity forms out of their grace-filled communion; thus, the Trinity can be perceived as persons in a relationship-of-grace.

It is prudent to clarify that the intra-trinitarian experience of grace is not identical with the grace afforded to creation.⁴¹ There is no hierarchy amongst the divine persons, discarding any parallel with a patron-client relationship.⁴² It does not include the unmerited favour and undeserved blessing extended towards humans, as the Holy Trinity is innately worthy of the divine gifts they reciprocate in their being. Given his audience, Paul discusses grace in relation to the human experience of gospel salvation; yet if grace is understood to be multifaceted, the term remains flexible enough to be applied towards God using specific facets of grace. This returns us to the polyvalent perfections of grace. First, if God is to give such abundant and surpassing grace to humans (Rom 5:17; 2 Cor 9:14), it is hard to imagine any less extravagance being gifted amongst the persons of the Trinity. The life of Jesus offered in obedience or the Father appointing the Son as heir of all things at his right hand (Heb 1:2–3) reflect a *superabundance* of grace, as does the permeance of their eternal reciprocal interiority. Second, while a divine-human gift motivated by *singular* benevolence and goodness has proven difficult to reconcile with God’s necessary enactment of justice and judgement, within the Trinity there is no need to account for such relational transgressions. The essence of each is holy and righteous, freeing the triune persons to gift

39 Jason S. Sexton, *The Trinitarian Theology of Stanley J. Grenz* (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 58.

40 Grenz, *The Social God*, 332.

41 Within the Orthodox doctrine of grace, the persons of the Trinity dwell in eternal communion as the divine essence, while the divine energies are God acting outside the divine essence, working within and sustaining creation as grace itself. See Payton, *Light from the Christian East*, 163–64. This article proposes that the divine essence is in fact a relationship-of-grace through which characteristics such as love are reciprocated, and by which the three persons of the Trinity gift co-constitution in self-differentiated unity.

42 DeSilva, however, emphasizes that persons of equal statues could practice *faith* in a reciprocal exchange that “deepens relationships of trust, loyalty, and mutuality.” See deSilva, *Honor, Patronage*, 109, 121, 124.

themselves in singular goodness to one another. Finally, the *efficacy* of the grace shared within the Trinity is evident in how the three co-constitute one another's personhood through their life-giving activity. Their mutual gifting has a profound impact on the nature and agency of each member.

As has been demonstrated, however, it is in how the triune persons express the reciprocal nature of gifts that the Trinity most clearly displays a relationship-of-grace. Indeed, John's proposal that "God is love" can be understood to be grounded in a dynamic relational reciprocity, framed within the biblical system of *charis*. As the reciprocity of love requires both a subject and object between whom a bond is created, this relationality can be found precisely within the communion of the triune God (negating that God can only be love via his creatures). Thus, love is a central attribute that is mutually given and received in grace, where the persons of the Trinity are constituted as both lover and beloved. Just as the love of God is eternal, so too is the grace of God which eternally gifts love within the intra-trinitarian communion. The divine reciprocal interiority as a coinherence of mutual self-giving love is of the essence of God.⁴³

What is more, it is into this dynamic relational reciprocity—the perichoretic community of persons in a relationship-of-grace—that humanity is drawn and graciously invited to participate in together. Here the telos of both the *imago Dei* and the *ecclesia* come into focus as the Trinity informs and inspires the social vision of the church. In the following section humans and their relationship to the God of grace will be examined.

Gifting Reconciliation

Consideration as to how individuals and the church may model the Trinity raises anthropological inquiries as to how humans relate to their Creator. Truthfully, life within the loving unity of the Trinity is questionable for humans who are marred by sin; yet Scripture speaks of a hope that persons can be reconciled to their God. Foundational here is the biblical concept of the *image of God*. Grounded in the nature of the Trinity, the divine image is a gift to all people while God's likeness is humanity's proper pursuit.⁴⁴ The Greek term for image is *eikon*, meaning "icon," implying that to serve as the icon of the Trinity is to usher in His presence and earthly rule as a governing ambassador, operating somewhat like an idol meant

43 Correspondingly, Clark Pinnock suggests "It is the essence of God's nature to be relational. This is primordial in God and defines who God is." The argument is predicated on the assumption that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. The immanent Trinity . . . is revealed by the economic Trinity." Pinnock concludes, "Thus the self-giving love that we see in the Gospels has roots in what transpires within God the Trinity." Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 32–35.

44 Many of the Church fathers distinguish between *image* (a universal statues) and *likeness* (an anthropological goal). James R. Payton, Jr., *The Victory of the Cross: Salvation in Eastern Orthodoxy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019), 25–26, 117.

to direct worship to the Lord while also reflecting His character and dynamic stewardship back into the world.⁴⁵ Redemptive love and creative power are integrated within the *eikon*, where human relationships are meant to reflect the divine “gracious self-giving” as power *with* rather than power *over* others.⁴⁶

Anthropologically, to be human is to be embedded in a complex web of multivalent relationships through which personhood is constituted. Emmanuel Katongole outlines the *integral ecology* within which humans are held in bonds of social life comprised of solidarity and belonging.⁴⁷ This notion is expressed with theological variance but effectively promotes a holistic vision of personhood: humanity was created to be in perfect union with God, others, oneself, and creation, but this intent was disrupted by *eikons* themselves.⁴⁸ Yet, the God of love longs to reconcile sinful humanity and draw this new creation into grace-filled communion within the perichoretic life. Given the triune God’s desire for humanity to participate in its *reciprocal interiority*, Scot McKnight is perceptive in affirming that “genuine reality then is relational; genuine atonement is reconciliation.”⁴⁹ As God is triune persons-in-relationship, Grenz posits that the *imago Dei* must in some sense entail humans-in-relationship who through their social bonds reflect the divine love as a reconciling community.⁵⁰

A relationally fractured *eikon*, therefore, requires that expiation attend to more than a narrow view of sin; a central task must be the restoration of right relationships. Fortunately, God does offer an atonement that has personal, corporate, and cosmic implications, capable of reconciling human relationships in all four directions and ultimately renewing the vibrant image of God within His created beings. Atoning salvation is not a divine-human transaction, but rather salvation is

45 G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 30; Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 145–61. The Hebrew *selem* (image) likewise has a semantic range including idol or a cult image. See J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 17, 128–29.

46 Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 177–78, 183. Richard Middleton suggests that God shares power with creatures as an act of generosity and love, inviting them to participate in the creative process itself.

47 Emmanuel Katongole, “Mission as Integral Ecology: Doing Theology at Bethany,” *Mission Studies* 39 (2022): 167. Katongole draws inspiration from Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

48 See Katongole, “Mission as Integral Ecology,” 173; Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 97–108; Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007): 36; Howard A. Snyder and Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 147–49.

49 McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 16. Rudolf Bultmann’s analysis of Pauline “sin” suggests that it is not a transgression of divine commands but the idea that life (rather than being received as a gift from God) can be procured by one’s own power. Sin is to live from one’s own self-reliance rather than from the grace of God. See Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 137. This distortion of power does violence to multi-relational humanity.

50 Stanley J. Grenz, “Ecclesiology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhooser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265–67.

relational, reincorporating persons into their Lord.⁵¹ God saves by enabling *eikons* to become His adopted children by grace, inviting them to share in the fellowship that God's only natural Son has eternally enjoyed with the Father.⁵² Within the Orthodox perspective, "grace is God himself," working in humanity for their transformation into his likeness.⁵³

Paul's theology emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the perfect *eikon* of which humans are gloriously being transformed into through the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). This transformation, suggests Susan Eastman, comes through participation in a relational interchange larger than oneself, facilitating a network of reciprocal exchange. The constitution of the self "in Christ" with other believers in the Spirit becomes "intersubjective all the way down, in relationship to Christ and in relationship to others."⁵⁴ Divine reconciliation demonstrates an abundance of trinitarian love, whereby personhood is realigned with the relational God whom humanity mirrors—triune persons in a relationship-of-grace.

Within this newly restored relationship, atonement can be understood as a gift from God; however, to receive the Trinity's restorative atonement (to be saved by grace) has a reciprocal expectation: faith, trust, and allegiance. That God has given such amazing gifts to human-clients who have not upheld their obligations subverts the Greco-Roman system while elevating the Lord as the great patron. Indeed, that God gave while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8) demonstrates an *incongruous* perfection of grace. Life in the Trinity is offered as an unmerited gift when the redeemed are united by faith in Christ through the Spirit; yet this does carry an expectation of its recipients.⁵⁵

In her review of the patristic models of atonement, Darby Kathleen Ray outlines their relational view of sin and corresponding atonement theology requiring a "transformation in one's relationship to evil . . . interpersonally, communally, institutionally, and globally."⁵⁶ Likewise, Robert Schreiter discusses this

51 Robert J. Daly, "Images of God and The Imitation of God: Problems with Atonement," *Theological Studies* 68 (2007): 50.

52 Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 185.

53 Payton, *The Victory of the Cross*, 166. In the Orthodox tradition, all that came into being either through God's creative activity or it must be God himself. God did not become gracious sometime after creation (for God did not change with creation), but rather grace existed in God throughout eternity. Grace is uncreated (*gratia increata*) and therefore it is God himself. Payton emphasizes that this grace is limited to God as the divine energies, to the exclusion of the divine essence. See Payton, *Light from the Christian East*, 162–64.

54 Susan Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 173.

55 While humans can only receive from God without "giving" anything in return, faith, trust, and allegiance are appropriate responses to God's gifts as an expression of love towards the divine giver.

56 Darby Kathleen Ray, "Praxis of Atonement: Confounding Evil Through Cunning and Compassion," *Religious Studies and Theology* 18 (1999): 39–41.

transformative power of grace where God's reconciliation is offered first to those who have been sinned against as a gift in faith, enabling them to reencounter their humanity. A subsequently restored *eikon* then becomes an agent of reconciliation, discovering God's grace to both forgive one's perpetrator and also help them rediscover their own humanity.⁵⁷ Thus, as Ray states, holistic reconciliation necessitates "the redefinition of self as self-in-relation, the relocation of agency within the limits of reciprocity."⁵⁸ Restored humans love because God first loved and sent the Son to atone for sin, enabling the grace-filled participation of *eikons* in the divine ministry of reconciliation. This is how love is known to humanity (1 John 3:16).⁵⁹ The gift of atonement establishes a social bond, which in practice reveals that reconciliation is first the work of God, yet that into which we are invited together. Here, personhood should be viewed as a relational gift, "the gift to me of others."⁶⁰

Finally, to be a restored *eikon* is to be a missional being sent to represent the creator by participating in the perichoretic relationship and image love in grace after God's likeness.⁶¹ This is seen in how the Gospel of John instructs the disciples to first *abide* and then *go*. For Michael Gorman, *abiding* is as intimate as the language of *mutual indwelling* within the perichoresis, with connotations of a "permanent, roots-in-the-ground relationship with Jesus."⁶² Once they firmly abide in him (and only then), those in Christ are sent to *go* and *do* the ministry into which they are invited, giving shape to a participatory missiology. So, human missional activity flows from the reincorporation of image bearers into the triune God as welcomed participants in the self-giving community-of-grace.

Grace enables humanity to discover its relationality and the reciprocity that holds it together. The gift of reconciliation signifies a summons to enter into God's overflowing perichoretic love and live in faithful reciprocity. Reintegration within a relationally *integral ecology* asks that God's people approach mission through attentiveness to oneself, to others, to the earth, and to God. This further

57 Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), 27, 32. In 2 Cor 5:18–21 God both reconciles and gives the ministry of reconciliation.

58 Ray, "Praxis of Atonement," 40.

59 Love (*agape*) describes both the eternally divine community, and the core attribute God shares in relationship to creation. Grenz concludes, "*Agape*, therefore, is predicated of both the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity." Grenz, *The Social God*, 313–17. Having reframed grace as gifting through social reciprocity, this article further suggests *charis* is likewise predicated of both the immanent and economic Trinity.

60 Timothy Chappell, cited in Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 171.

61 God's being as self-giving love, argues Volf, is that which should be reflected back to God. This is a love first gifted by the Trinity and then reciprocally passed downward towards humanity in order to be taken up again into the divine community. See Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and The Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology* 14:3 (July 1998): 417.

62 Michael J. Gorman, "John: The Nonsectarian, Missional Gospel," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 7 (2018): 159.

connotes participation in ecclesial life, as the *missio Dei* is of the essence of the church as it embodies the loving action of God moving out in continual renewal and redemption. In this final section, the people of God will be explored as an ecclesial body welcomed into the divine community of persons in a relationship-of-grace.

A New Humanity in Christ Together

Now consider the place of the church within the reciprocal interiority of the Trinity. If the perichoretic unity of the triune God—in its profoundly intimate and gracious love—is understood to be grounded in their *mutually interior* being, in a strict sense, there can be no equivalence to the interiority of the divine persons at the human level. Here is one of the clear limitations of this model: humans cannot be internal to another's self in perfect communion. Moreover, humans are engrossed in a life of sin that inhibits them, as of yet, from being fully restored into the image of the triune God which they are eschatologically destined to become.⁶³ A human self can surely exhibit the selflessness of love; however, a person can in no way indwell the being of another, preventing perichoretic interhuman unity.

Nevertheless, the argument set forth is that there is a correspondence between the Trinity and the church. Acknowledging critiques of theologies that overreach in aligning the two models, any reflection on the relation between the Trinity and the church must consider God's uniqueness. Still, Volf posits that an analogy between the unity of the triune God and human unity is possible, predicated on faith simultaneously incorporating one into communion with God and the church.⁶⁴ This is a full participation in the life of the Trinity where believers are a temple corporately, indwelt by the Spirit, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Eph 2:19–22).

There is certainly scriptural basis for supposing redeemed Christian communities may in fact dwell within the Trinity, just as Jesus prayed that his people “be in us” (John 17:21). As Christ is in reconciled humans (John 14:20) through the Spirit, so these persons are in the triune God “by grace . . . through faith. . . it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8). Christ lives and offers himself to God through the Holy Spirit so that he can offer that same Spirit-breathed life to all people—united to him as co-heirs—who enter into communion with the living God.⁶⁵ Yet, for Paul, when the church is inhabiting Christ, it is inhabiting God; his Christocentricity is

63 See Volf, “The Trinity is our Social Program,” 405.

64 Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 327; Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 192.

65 Studebaker, *The Spirit of Atonement*, 104. This has been posited by Pannenberg as a Christological anthropology, where humans have fellowship with God through participation in the communion of the Son with the Father by the Spirit in the life of the Trinity. See Sexton, *The Trinitarian Theology*, 59.

really an implicit Trinitarianism.⁶⁶ Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, leads restored beings “simultaneously into both trinitarian and ecclesial communion.”⁶⁷ The self-in-relationship becomes what Grenz terms the *ecclesial self*, where the intended outcome of Christ’s atonement establishes the new humanity within the triune God and His people.⁶⁸ To be “in Christ” includes a relational reality that is both personal and corporate, transcending the local church community as members “are in Christ *together*.”⁶⁹

From here, Volf meticulously establishes the argument that where Christ followers assemble, together they serve as an image of the triune persons and reflect the trinitarian unity of God.⁷⁰ While there is no mutual interiority amongst individual people, the indwelling of the Spirit in each Christian establishes the church as a body in communion with the Trinity. As the people of God enter into the living temple—the place where God and humans meet—they also encounter one another. For Volf, the *ecclesia* can be modeled after the triune God in so far as churches are “concrete, anticipatory experiences, rendered possible by the Spirit, of the one communion of the triune God.”⁷¹ The church then, can be said to be an image of the Trinity.

Accordingly, the transfer from an external to an internal relocation within the Trinity implies that the church too become persons in a relationship-of-grace. As Eastman explains it, the gift of God’s graciously self-giving presence in daily life conforms personal identity around the reception of a gift. Therefore, gifts based in both corporate and individual relationships are essential to the transformed intersubjective life that Paul proclaims.⁷² Following the framework above, grace remains a relational bond that remodels the collective within God’s gift-giving dynamic. More than an individualistic one-to-one relationship, “faith means swearing allegiance to Jesus and his household . . . by God’s grace, I am made part of God’s household.”⁷³ The sharing of gifts within the community occurs amongst humans and God, as grace is constantly received and reciprocated. As a community imaging their God, interhuman gift-giving becomes a means of participation in grace, “as believers are drawn into something both utterly beyond

66 Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 4. Gorman employs the term *theosis*, arguing “to be one with Christ is to be one with God; to be like Christ is to be like God.”

67 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 195. See Matt 28:19; Eph 4:4–6.

68 Grenz, *The Social God*, 305, 332. The *ecclesial self* offers an eschatological view of the *eikon* where personal identity is formed through participation in the divine dynamic of love as those who are “in Christ” form a “corporate personality.”

69 Gorman, *Participation in Christ*, 5; emphasis original.

70 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 197. Church fathers as far back as Tertullian have affirmed this allusion in their ecclesiology.

71 Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 195. See 1 John 1:3–4; Rev 21–22.

72 Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 170–71.

73 Richards and James, *Misreading Scripture*, 109.

them and wholly integral to what they do.”⁷⁴ Through the Spirit the people of God are benevolently invited to share in the grace-filled relationship of love the Son enjoys with the Father.

This invitation to have God dwell among humanity and humanity within God is at once the gift and the mission to which the church is called to partake in trusting-allegiance. There is a divine intent that *eikons* locate themselves within the ecclesial community as representatives of the trinitarian reality, whereby “the goal of human existence is to be persons-in-relation after the pattern of the perichoretic life disclosed in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁵ McKnight recognizes the implication here, arguing that eschatological reality for humans is to “participate in the reciprocal interiority of the Trinity in Christ through the Spirit, and to extend this interiority to others as an approximation of that *perichoresis*.”⁷⁶ It is therefore imperative that the church image God’s incarnational and missional presence as a community-in-relationship full of grace.

Gorman has elevated the missional gospel embedded within the New Testament, offering a holistic interpretation of the life found in the triune God. The abundant life of Jesus offered through the grace of God is at once material, physical, as well as spiritual and God’s people are to extend this divine life to others in both words and deeds.⁷⁷ The living water of Christ may in some instances include literal water by way of his followers, revealing the presence of divine life here and now. Yet, such missiological activity can only occur by *abiding* in Jesus as a church in discerning communion with the Trinity. New life in God is embodied such that missional ecclesiology involves a reconciling community bound together by a shared dependence on the grace of God (Phil 1:7) and a desire to mutually reciprocate an abundance of gifts.

Within a relational anthropology, human vocation is attained in sharing life with the other whereby image bearers extend themselves through reconciled relationship.⁷⁸ Dudley Brown explains how much of Black Theology’s concept of the Godhead is embedded in a relationally dynamic lived trinitarian view, where the triune God is manifest in the experience of the oppressed and marginalized.⁷⁹ The encounter of divine restoration remains the medium amongst the people of God

74 Barclay, *Paul and the Power*, 135.

75 Grenz, *The Social God*, 332.

76 McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 16.

77 Gorman, “John,” 150, 153, 156.

78 Perkins grounds the ministry of reconciliation in God’s gift of grace to which the church is to respond in faith by taking up the mission to be one with every other believer in Christ. See John M. Perkins, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), 131, 145. For a discussion of relational anthropology as Christian mission, see Pavol Bargár, “Toward Community amid Brokenness: Christian Mission as (a Pursuit of) Relational Anthropology,” *International Review of Mission* 110:2 (2021): 240.

79 Brown, “Holy Spirit and the Trinity,” 35–37.

for practicing social justice, compassion, and the grace of giving (2 Cor 8:1–7). Together the church images God by participating in divine reconciliation, fostering right and loving relationships in all areas of life: with God, self, others, and creation. As a reconciled body, this must include the church's reckoning with power structures containing inherent "institutional corporate sin."⁸⁰ Thus, the characteristic action of the *ecclesia* becomes grace-infused mission as the deeply other-oriented character of God shapes the identity of the church.

The atoning grace of God renews the self and transforms the ecclesial community, reshaping social practices within the fabric of the church. This is precisely how Aimee Byrd proposes to confront ecclesial tension amongst the sexes; not by homogenizing men and women but by empowering them to exercise their gifts in reciprocity.⁸¹ Mutual interdependence within the church body allows *eikons* to truly encounter the other, while reflecting the diversity and personal distinctiveness of their creator.

Ruth Padilla-DeBorst shares of a diverse congregation in Argentina where all members were ordained and affirmed in their value, expressing how no one was more worthy or more sacred than another. Young and old, male and female, all were considered "responsible citizens in God's economy" with gifts from the Spirit meant to contribute to the faith community as they participated in the mission of God.⁸² Such a socio-dynamic church challenges more authoritarian ecclesial models (often reflecting a hierarchical Trinity) through equitable practices that emphasize instead a community comprised of relational mutuality.

This necessitates multiple interpretive and structural approaches to human experience, context, and histories.⁸³ Reactionary resistance to divergence in theological perspective can be better reconciled through ecclesial self-differentiated unity. Chul-Ho Youn suggests that if the church is to recenter its mission in the *missio Dei trinitatis*, it should follow a hermeneutical process that seeks mutuality through transcultural dialogue, facilitating "diverse stories derived from diverse understandings of the biblical narratives in diverse cultures."⁸⁴ An ethic of incongruous gift-giving insists that a person's worth or status not only be disregarded, but that members be afforded space to mutually reciprocate with

80 Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2020), 39. McCaulley draws attention to Paul's reprimand of the authorities rather than the Roman officers themselves, focusing on the corporate structure perpetrating social injustice (Rom 13:3–4).

81 Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 146–52.

82 Ruth Padilla-DeBorst, "Church, Power, and Transformation in Latin America: A Different Citizenship is Possible," in *The Church from Every Tribe and Tongue: Ecclesiology in the Majority World*, ed. Gene L. Green et al. (Carlisle: Langham, 2018), 35–36, 47.

83 Bargár, "Toward Comm/unity," 238.

84 Chul-Ho Youn, "Missio Dei Trinitatis and Missio Ecclesiae: A Public Theological Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 107:1 (2018): 235–39.

personal experience and creative power. The missiological implication is a flourishing of diversity within a community relationally dependent upon the other. In making room for strangers, in all their multiplicity and uniqueness, a church community is formed as persons in a relationship-of-grace—imaging their God.

Conclusion

The divine persons are co-constituted by their eternal gift-giving in a perichoresis of unified mutuality. This reciprocal interiority therefore realizes a mutual self-giving expressed as persons in a relationship-of-grace within the trinitarian life. It is this God who sustains creation and grants the Christ-gift (though distinct from the intra-trinitarian facet of grace), facilitating reconciliation and reincorporation into the divine life. It is not that humanity directly mimics the communion of God but rather they follow after the triune persons as *eikons* invited (and indeed expected) to participate in the self-giving community-of-grace as both individual and corporate image-bearers. Consequently, as the church enters into new life with the triune God, they too become persons in a relationship-of-grace. Following the proposed understanding of grace accordingly offers a framework for participation in the divine life, the ecclesial life, and the missional life. At their best, contemporary churches assume their identity as people of the triune community-of-grace and live out this model of reciprocal relationality as they abide in their God and follow Him into the world.