Introduction
For years I have been a student of identity formation. Academically, I have been taken by Erik Erikson's approach to identity. Personally, I can vividly recall times, both past and present, where identity concerns kept me preoccupied. Today, I find myself absorbed in observing my two adolescents forming their sense of self. To a large degree this involves listening to stories of the self and deciding which is most true about who they are and who they are to become. I pray daily the baptismal words, "that they will always remember who they are and to whom they belong." I pray that the Christian story is at the very core of their sense of self.

When I reflect on the trends in the Christian Church I am discouraged by the lack of examples of those whose sense of identity is at its root shaped by the Christian story. Our understanding of discipleship is quite thin. It is a form of Christian faith that utilizes this faith as a means to an end determined by some other object of faith. One's identity is centered by some other story of the self.

I believe that for both western culture in general and the Church specifically, understandings of the self are shaped primarily by stories of the self that are authorized by consumerism and popular psychology. These stories are often mutually supportive in creating a particular view of the self.

For individuals, this has concrete, practical consequences. Our essential views of our selves are shaped to reflect either a Christian notion of the self or one shaped by the sources mentioned above. The ways we invest our time and resources are shaped by our sense of self. Views of work and vocational choices are influenced by our views of self and what we believe is important. Views of marriage and parenting are radically altered if we accept a view of the self that asserts that the self is most important and that "self-care" always takes precedent over the care of spouse or children.
The Christian Church has in many ways capitulated to a view of the self that is other than Christian. This has tangible effects on the way we understand spirituality, discipleship and the nature and purpose of ministry. One clear example is the tendency in the last twenty years or so to turn religious education into self-help, emphasizing adjustment to life skills, in place of theological and Scriptural literacy.

This paper will begin with a discussion of the loss of the Christian self and the role of popular psychology and consumerism in creating this loss. I will then outline essentials of a Christian sense of identity focusing on createdness, relatedness, separatedness and re-createdness.

Loss of the Christian Self
Rise of the popular psychological self
Popular psychology refers to views of the self that have influenced the everyday ways in which people view themselves and the ways in which they are to become better selves. Psychology began to make itself known to a wider population in the United States soon after World War II as we became more affluent and in search of superficial happiness. In the beginning, psychology attempted to maintain its commitments to a scientific approach which demanded careful attention to research and humility in the claims of what could be accomplished through psychological inquiry and therapy. By the nineteen-seventies the gap between the laboratory and the counseling room was wide. Therapy now grew more out of the insights and intuitions of counselors belonging to one or another of the psychological stories (Dawes).

With the rapid expansion of therapeutic psychology, counseling was democratized and made available to all classes of people. We came to understand the pursuit of personal happiness as the story of our lives, and therapists were those who would help us get there. When we were confused and in need of someone to talk to we no longer turned to friends, family or clergy but to our therapist.

Clearly, the story is much more complex and we have gained enormous benefit from thoughtful and careful psychological research and practice. The above comments point to the way in which western culture and the Church have
come to gain our sense of self and to live our lives out of the story of popular psychology. David Meyers states, "The exaggerated promises in the claims of popular religion and self-help recipes are the foundation stones of modern Towers of Babel" (Meyers, 145). The Babel analogy is particularly relevant because of the claims of the therapeutic story that make a god of humans and priests of therapists. The story is told in a particular language and told with authority. As to language, popular psychology has created its own language which confuses us. Parker Palmer states that the profession of psychotherapy names and analyzes "our problems in a language so mystifying that only trained professionals can understand it" (Palmer, 44). Id, superego, repression, sublimation, unconscious, dysfunction, syndromes, addiction, codependency, boundaries. Words which carry power and claim legitimacy. When only the professionals can understand the language, they have the power to determine what story of the self is held by western culture. Numerous persons help give the details to this story (Dawes, Bellah, Lasch, Rieff).

These stories are not value-free, as is often claimed. Dawes points out that "mental health professionals have had a profound effect on our culture's beliefs about what constitutes a good life, what types of behavior are desirable, and most important -- how people "should" feel about the world" (Dawes, 9). They are alternative stories of life or philosophies of life that make particular claims and state them as true. The consequences of such a view of the self will be explored later.

Rise of the consumer self
In western culture, consumption takes precedence over production. Quality of production takes second place to quantity of production. Advertising becomes the evangalist in such a culture, as we must constantly be reminded of our need to consume. Consumerism also manifests itself in a grand myth of never-ending progress. Christopher Lasch in. The True and Only Heaven, suggests that the belief in progress grows out of the 18th century's belief in the insatiablity of human desires and the need to satisfy them. Prior to this time these desires would have been condemned but are now seen as inalienable rights and serve to undergird notions of both economic and human
development. Each generation should be better off financially; we must continue to develop and have new experiences in our lives.

Robert Bellah argues that American culture is shaped by "market totalitarianism" (Bellah, 1991, 468). The market determines everything in western culture: how the government is performing, the value of particular goods and services, and ultimately the very worth of the self. In higher education the market has become the determiner of the curriculum. When the market controls to this extent we must continually flood the market with more goods. We measure our success as humans, organizations and a nation by how much we produce, buy and sell. Marketing and advertisement become essential services in a culture that needs to keep before its members the idea that they have needs that must be satisfied, have every right to be satisfied and need to be satisfied for the good of the country. In fact, advertising convinces us that impulse gratification is a basic human right. "You deserve a break today!" Under such market totalitarianism the ideal self becomes the "market maximizer" (Bellah, 1991, 468). The good person is the shrewd shopper who can make great deals and use the market to her or his advantage. With such a view of the ideal self, sometimes, just to feel good about ourselves we must spend a lot of money. A recent example is the Jackie Kennedy estate sale. Here is a clear example of consumer frenzy where items went for more than 40 times their estimated worth. A Seattle Times article reports one observer's statement as he watched one item go for much more than its worth - "oblivious consumption".

How has the Church accommodated? As to the belief in progress, we have easily shifted our notion of success to bigger is better. Bigger congregations, budgets, buildings and programs. To be successful we must be relevant and powerful. In place of purpose we think of efficiency. If success is progress and progress is numbers then what will cause that effect? We don't need the Holy Spirit when we have pollsters.

We have also come under the control of market totalitarianism. What does the customer want? What is selling and how can we market that in better ways? Concern about good theology and worship receive giggles due to the irrelevancy of such questions in the marketplace.

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The identity and vocation of ministers becomes distorted. Eugene Peterson writes:

"The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are the churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeepers' concerns - how to keep the customer happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money. Some of them are very good shopkeepers. They attract a lot of customers, pull in great sums of money, develop splendid reputations. Yet it is still shopkeeping; religious shopkeeping, to be sure, but shopkeeping all the same" (Peterson, 1).

The Church has also found itself as a provider of religious goods and services for a society of religious consumers. We spend more time on market research than product research. Many have discovered the big business of selling God. You can find God on T-shirts, toys, videos, cassettes, nic-nacs, and books. The other day I was given a pack of "Testamints", breath mints with a Bible verse. A "US News and World Report" article claims it to be a three billion U.S. dollar a year enterprise. Most evangelical publishers have been purchased by large secular publishers because the market is so good.

Author Kathleen Norris, writes of her experience in a Benedictine Monastery in her latest book, The Cloister Walk. She makes the following observation which confronts us with the reality of consumerism.

"While consumer culture speaks only to preferences, treating even whims as needs to be granted (and the sooner the better), monastics sense that this pandering to delusions of self-importance weakens the true self, and diminishes our ability to distinguish desires from needs" (Norris, 14-15).

Consequences of the popular psychological self and the consumer self
In an intriguing article, Philip Cushman, addresses how both the popular therapeutic culture and the consumer culture cooperate to produce the "empty self". The consumer culture creates a context in which supposed needs can
never be fully satisfied. We always need something more. In such a culture our dissatisfaction leads to emotional problems that the therapeutic community steps in to solve. Both, however, attempt to solve the problem by offering not a real solution but by offering something more to acquire, either things or therapy. The result is the continuation of the empty self. Following are several of the further consequences of both.

**Idolization of the Self**

Both popular psychology and consumerism have given credibility to the idolization and aggrandizement of the self. With the rise of the therapeutic story we have the rise of a preoccupation with the self which signals the priority placed on the self. The story focuses on "individual rights". All thoughts about the self and all decisions related to the self grow from the effect on my individual rights. These rights are considered "inalienable" and "self-evident" - - entitlements which cannot be infringed upon. The primary right of the individual is the pursuit of happiness; all people have the inalienable right to pursue their own happiness - at all costs. In his book, *New Rules*, Daniel Yankelovich traces the shift in American culture from a culture of self-denial to one of self-fulfillment. In *Foolishness to the Greeks*, Lesslie Newbigin speaks of the "myth of fulfillment". The right to happiness becomes something that also has the right to be fulfilled immediately. We must have instantaneous and immediate gratification of our wants and wishes. A clear example of this is the relative value placed on marriage and self. In previous stories of the self, marriage was held to be a primary value and the self was secondary. Therefore, individuals sacrificed individual rights in service of the marriage relationship. In the therapeutic story the values are reversed with marriage becoming a relationship that is to serve and satisfy individual rights. Many have pointed to this self-centeredness as characteristic of a narcissistic personality who constantly uses others for the self. This is true of the therapeutic story but narcissism must be rightly understood. In reality, the narcissistic self is an empty self which is grasping at whatever he or she can to become a self. This is indeed a sad picture of the outcome of the never-ending need to have an identity by always needing to satisfy individual wants.

If the self is aggrandized, a belief must be in place to support this view. Self-esteem becomes the key to unlock the wonders of the god-self. Self-esteem
means the value we place on the concept we have of ourselves. If I am good at fishing and live in a fishing community then I will have a greater possibility of high self-esteem. The concept I have of myself is valued by others and myself in that community. If, however, I conceive of myself as a good fisherman in a highly technical and commercial community, my self-esteem may suffer because of the dissonance between my self concept and the prevailing image that is valued in the community. What is fascinating about the therapeutic story is that high self-esteem is held to be another inalienable right. Simply because we are human we are to hold ourselves in high regard. There is no relationship to a concept of the good person in a given context. High self-esteem is believed to be the cause of every good deed and the lack of high self-esteem the root of every social ill. Industry believes that if it acts in ways to enhance its workers' self-esteem it will increase productivity. Education believes that if it works on students' self-esteem it will raise academic performance. If only we esteemed ourselves enough all evil would disappear, all failure would turn to success. The problem is the research concerning self-esteem does not support this belief. Robyn Dawes states, "Despite claims that pervade the popular media, for example, there is absolutely no scientific evidence that feeling good about oneself is a necessary condition for engaging in desirable behavior" (Dawes, 31). One of the most humorous examples of the self-esteem cult is the California task force on self-esteem which was formed to assist Californians to feel better about themselves. It was assumed that high self-esteem was needed to cure all social and personal ills. They believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that the relationship between high self-esteem and the end of social problems was true but decided to do research to support their belief. Their research concluded that no causal relationship existed between self-esteem and good or bad behavior. However, in their conclusion they reaffirmed their belief despite the research. It is indeed fascinating how a belief can become so engrained in the mind.

The truth of the matter is that most research indicates that people think very highly of themselves. David Meyers states, "Research consistently reveals that, on a variety of dimensions, most people see themselves as better than average" (Meyers, 22-23). Consider another example. Schools in the U.S. have been emphasizing self-esteem for at least ten years. What is curious is to consider the increase in violence by adolescents who are products of self-esteem.
education. We may wish to believe that the educational efforts failed which explains the violence. However, the evidence reveals that the opposite is true. Recent research points out that most of those who commit violent acts have high self-esteem (Baumeister et al). In fact, they most often hold a sense of superiority over others. Since they are so valuable, no one else is and therefore the other is expendable. The story is indeed perverse. As Dawes points out, in this story whoever thinks well of him or herself is healthiest. "It doesn't matter whether they are immoral or conceited" (Dawes, 34).

Precedence of feelings
Another consequence of the empty self is the predominance of feelings and the interior life. The story is an old one - the battle between thinking and feeling. Popular psychology and consumerism tell us that for too long we have been dominated by reason, logic and analysis. This dominance has led to all sorts of ill effects on the self; repression, lack of fulfillment and lack of spontaneity to name but a few. If you must always be reasonable you will never experience true happiness. Indeed there is a kernel of truth to this aspect of the story; we do live by both reason and emotion. The problem is that psychobabble wants us to live primarily by feeling. The root of most of our problems comes from not expressing our emotions and allowing ourselves to feel. We must learn to express our feelings, males in particular, or we are not fully human. As Wendy Kaminer points out in, I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional, the measure of any action or relationship is how it makes you feel. It does not matter what consequences there may be for you or others. just so it feels right.

I have been in a number of situations where these assumptions guide the direction of conversation. It is interesting how desperate people in groups are to get those who do not appear to be sharing their true feelings to do so. You must conform and find some deep feeling to share in order to be accepted. You must use the right words and be sufficiently vulnerable in order to be a "good" group participant. If you do not share your deep feelings then you are obviously hiding or repressing some pain. Behind this is the belief that the true self is hiding somewhere inside of us and must be discovered and brought to the surface by sharing our true feelings.
Individualism
The empty self is also the individual self. Robert Bellah uses Michael Sandel's term the "unencumbered self" to describe the extreme individualism sponsored by western culture. The unencumbered self is found in a process of negation which "involves breaking free from family, community, and inherited ideas" (Bellah, 1985, 82-83). Colin Gunton in, The One, the Three and the Many describes the same situation where we collapse to a belief in the primacy of the individual over the many or over the one in relationship. This extreme individualism leads to many problems including a distorted view of the self. It leads to a highly privatistic view of meaning and authority in which each individual becomes an island of truth. It also leads to a society where individual rights take extreme precedence over social rights. Laws are no longer constructed to protect society but to protect the individual.

Irresponsible Self
The empty self is also an irresponsible self. As Bellah points out, this notion of the self "denies all forms of obligation and commitment . ." (Bellah, 1985, 101). When individual rights and good feelings are the measure of authentic selfhood, any situation which hinders my rights or creates bad feelings is deemed "toxic" to the self. Responsibilities can be persons I have somehow agreed to care for or acts I have committed to perform. When I come to a point with these obligations that I "feel" they are interfering with my good feelings then I must stop the relationship or be free from the task. When responsibilities interfere with self-fulfillment they must be jettisoned. Rules, obligations and commitments are toxic to the empty self.

Responsibility can also mean admitting to wrong doing. This may lead to guilt which is another toxic word and experience. Guilt is always bad and damaging to the psychobabble self. Guilt is counter-productive to good self-esteem. Wendy Kaminer reminds us that people with no guilt and no shame have been typically understood as sociopaths.

Irresponsibility by people results in a community of victims. If my life is not going well or if something bad has happened, it must be someone else's fault.
People are always victims - never participants. Our current epidemic of lawsuits is a wonderful example. A woman spills coffee on herself and is burnt - obviously a victim of an uncaring restaurant. Or what about those who simply are irresponsible adults? Their problems are never of their own making. As victims we are tyrannized by childhood experiences; whatever my problem is it is because of my parents. Again, I know that there are traumatic and terrible cases of child abuse that cripple people as adults, but not everyone is so abused nor do all of those abused live as victims. But in western culture being a victim is a way to get ahead. According to Kaminer victimhood gives us, "identity, attention, sympathy and entitlements." It gives us "absolution without accountability" (Kaminer, xiii).

Persons become invalids and dependents in such a situation. Interesting that the results of a story that claims to build the self, weakens the self. It does so by making people dependent on therapists, self-help gurus and the latest fads of psychobabble. Visit your local bookstore and browse the self-help section. It is amazing how paternalistic the advice-giving sounds. They speak and write with an air of authority and wisdom that leads people into dependency on them and the current trend. People develop feelings of inadequacy because they do not understand the words used by the gurus who usually make up the words and concepts.

The Church and the Empty Self
As goes the western culture so goes the U.S. Christian Church. It is important to remember that the Church had a psychology derived from the sources of Scripture and the Christian tradition prior to the rise of the "science" of psychology. As the "science" grew, however, the Church jettisoned its own sources for the supposedly more objective and true sources of the "science" of psychology. This section will briefly trace the history of this movement beginning with an antagonistic relationship between Christian faith and psychology yet ending with accommodation to the story of psychobabble.

We must be careful to acknowledge the complexity of this story, particularly in regard to the diversity of Christianity in the U.S. We must be aware of two broad streams of North American Christianity: "liberal" and "conservative" or "evangelical". These descriptors of North American Christianity are often
misused and abused. They are used as badges of honor or bricks to throw. I use them here only because of their relevance to this discussion. Historically, these two broad streams were different in their response to psychology. By "liberal" Christianity I mean that form of Christianity that moved away from a more historical understanding of basic Christian doctrine in an attempt to make the faith relevant to a newly enlightened culture. The attempt was to take a faith developed in what many consider to be a period of ignorance and lack of scientific evidence and bring it into the light of such evidence and understanding. By doing so there was a move away from the authority of Scripture and Christian tradition as the source of our faith. This led to an early appropriation of the new psychological understandings by the liberal stream of Christianity in the U.S.

"Conservative" or "evangelical" Christianity, however, tended to react against the new approaches to the faith and desired to stand in the middle of the historic stream of Christian faith as understood primarily through Scripture and Christian tradition. By so doing, this branch of the Church tended to ignore new approaches to faith and therefore reacted against the psychological developments. Although this is an oversimplification of a highly complex story, it provides adequate insight into how North American Christianity accommodates to popular psychology. Liberal Christianity tends to quickly adopt the latest trends in culture. Conservative Christianity resists then usually ends up on the same wagon. Such is the case with the relationship to popular psychology.

We turn now to telling the highlights of that story. To do so we will look primarily at the way the Church understood the "good life" and therefore how ministers understood their roles. I am deeply indebted to E. Brooks Holifield's, History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization, for his careful, in-depth analysis of this question.

Obviously, from the beginning Christianity developed its understanding of the way humans think, act and feel. From Scripture to the early Church Fathers we find references to what motivates people, why people act the way they do and exhortations on how we should act. Much of this work in the 1600's and 1700's in North American Christianity was done by ministers who worked
primarily on the question of the relationship of mind, soul and body. They also
invested a great deal of thought into the inter-relationship between reason,
the affections and the will. The debate was over how good people became and
continued to be good. Was it primarily a matter of reason or of will? Few
thought it was a matter of good feelings. References to the "self" were a
problem for most Christians. Self-centeredness, selfishness and self-honor
were conditions to be overcome.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s, however, the growing "science" of
psychology was having an impact. The "mental philosophers" or psychologists
were increasingly telling their story of the self informed by a scientific world
view and free from religious constraints. Most ministers still held these
insights as secondary to the Christian Scriptures and tradition, and still saw
salvation as the ultimate goal with the self as something to be overcome. The
psychology of the time lent itself well to this direction. In the early 1900s
Freud's model dominated with the idea of the "conflicted self". Despite Freud's
anti-religious bias, Christians still saw similarities between his conflict model
and the views of the self in conflict as exemplified by Paul in Romans chapter
seven where the flesh and the spirit are at odds.

Psychology was beginning to make itself known to North American
Christianity, primarily liberal Christianity. The conservatives were still very
skeptical of the secularity of such views. By the early 1900's liberal
Christianity was making use of the term "self realization" to characterize the
good life. There remained the moral constraints of Church and society to keep
this from becoming self indulgence, but the trajectory was clear. Along with
this it was clear that the true self was somewhere inside the person. Freud
taught us that behavior was simply a manifestation of the inner conflict and
we must have ways to access this inner life. Therefore, the true self was the
inner self. On the east coast many liberal Christians were working with the
new psychology. Boston Divinity School offered courses on the psychology of
religion by 1905 and many churches began to offer counseling guided by the
sources of psychology.

A clear example of this influence is revealed in the field of religious
education. Through the 1800's the Sunday School served as the primary source
of training in Christian faith. Its primary text was Scripture which, it was believed, offered a clear understanding of human nature. People were to be saved, become moral, and memorize Scripture. This view was challenged when in 1903 the Religious Education Association was founded. Its purpose was to bring instruction in faith into the enlightened age. It was driven by two primary sources: liberal Protestant Christianity, and the budding field of psychology and its implications for education. Character formation and self-realization replaced salvation and moral behavior as the goals of religious education. The view of the child and what education was to do for her became shaped primarily by psychology, with Scripture and Christian tradition becoming secondary.

The period of the 1900s through the 1920s was dubbed the "period of psychology" with religious education leading the way. Preaching, according to Harry Emerson Fosdick was to be modeled after the counseling session with sermons on depression, anxiety and self-realization. Counseling centers were appearing in a variety of liberal Protestant churches. The conservative churches even began to join the trend. Southern Baptist Gaines Dobbins began a campaign in 1920 to "capture psychology for Christ" (Holifield, 227).

Interestingly, Post-World War II United States continued the love affair with psychology and the Church along with it. Culturally it was a positive time. We were victors and experienced much success and affluence. Psychologists had worked their way into the military endeavor by offering psychological profiles of our troops and the enemy. They had become the experts on the human psyche and, without troops to test, turned their attention to industry and the population at large. Prior to this period, psychotherapy had been something for the rich. If you were one of the affluent you needed a psychotherapist and were proud of it. For the less fortunate, however, therapy was still feared and indicated some weakness. This changed with the popularization and democraticization of psychology. With affluence, we all have the right to be happy and western culture was coming to believe that psychology had the keys to the happy kingdom.

Indeed, the North American Church followed. The popular religious press began to print books such as Norman Vincent Peale's. The Power of Positive
Think, published in 1952. The Church became the place not to find God but to find happiness and friends. The Journals on pastoral care began printing articles on aging, depression, middle age crises and faith as "God's psychiatry". Pastoral counseling now aimed at fostering self-realization. The period also marked a shift in how self-realization was defined. Prior to this period self-realization was still understood in a social context which placed moral constraints around the self. Society began a move away from legalism and moralism and the constraints of any social institution. The self was now realized, not in the context of relationships and society, but on its own. The self was on its way from realization to hedonism and the Church was helping it get there.

It must be admitted, the Church was slow to address emotional problems adequately. Some Christian leaders, such as Paul Tournier, tried to integrate psychology faithfully into Christian belief. Others warned of the explosion and popularization of psychology. Albert Outler warned in 1954 of the "uncritical pretensions" of the secularist psychotherapist (Holifield, 326). Reinhold Niebuhr likewise warned of the excessive happiness and optimism of psychology and attempted to remind the Church about sin (Holifield, 300). But none wanted to hear bad news, neither liberal or conservative Christians. Most wanted a piece of the American Apple Pie and psychology was going to give it to us. Religion was to make us happy and secure and help us to realize our dreams. Notice, again, the confluence of consumerism and popular psychology. Liberal Christianity dropped the need for salvation and conservatives re-interpreted it to mean happiness. Psychology and pastoral counseling courses became central to the curriculum at theological seminaries. Pastors were beginning to see themselves as therapists and those who helped lead parishioners to self-realization.

Psychology was itself undergoing change. Freud's approach that lead us inward and found a conflicted self was challenged by both behaviorism and humanistic psychologies. B.F. Skinner challenged the psychoanalytic approach's emphasis on inwardness and feelings. He wanted to see psychology be a true science which had no room for feelings. This approach appealed to American pragmatism because it offered ways to get things done, but it was not appealing in its view of the self. Humanistic psychology, therefore, arose to
challenge such a low view of the self. Lead by Erich Fromm, others such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers drew us back inward and reminded us of the good and the beautiful that was there. It is not surprising that such a psychology grew, not out of a "science" of psychology, but more out of early 1900s liberal Protestant Christianity. Carl Rogers had studied for the ministry and it is clear that his view of persons was derived from such theology. Nevertheless, the ground was prepared for a humanistic psychology which placed the self at the center of the universe as good and beautiful. Following the romantic literature of the 1800s the self was now an inward mystery, good and beautiful and to be highly exalted. The time was right for a religion which worshipped the self and popular psychobabble would provide the sacred texts and priests for such a religion.

The 1960s are honored and blamed for many movements and discoveries, but it must be remembered that the 1950s prepared the soil for such innovations. The growing move away from traditional institutional and social loyalty and the aggrandizement of the self all began with the popular psychological explosion of the 1950s. The humanistic psychologies which began in the 1950s would now move into mainstream America and have explicit effects on the way we lived our lives, treated our spouses, raised our children and thought about God. Within the general culture people were finding themselves through encounter groups, therapy, retreats and a growing self-help book market. Where was the Christian Church? Standing in line waiting its turn to baptize the new psychology. After all, it taught us to love and is this not the central message of the Christian faith? This understanding of love was, however, somewhat different from the love found in the Christian tradition. The love of self was elevated to first position and the Christian Church followed suit. In the 1970s a movement in relational theology began which emphasized self love and the importance of human relationships. Lloyd Olgivie wrote, Let God Love You; Father John Powell wrote, Why Am I Afraid to Love You? to name two examples. The good news in this appropriation of popular psychology was the rediscovery of God's love. The bad news was its emphasis on self love and the relativizing of sexual ethics which followed from an emphasis on acceptance of others. The Great Commandment, "love your neighbor as yourself" became a command to love yourself. Lyman Coleman created the Serendipity small group material to help people in the Church to accept and love themselves and
to share their true feelings. I recall being at a "Festival of Hope" conference at
the Anaheim Convention Center in California in the early 1970s. Most of the
above mentioned were the speakers and we were placed at round tables in
groups of ten. Our first task was to use a styrofoam cup with yarn and marker
pens to create something which would let the others at our table know who we
were. Not long after this we all joined in doing the bunny hop. The Church was
clearly on its way into the full appropriation of popular psychology.

Sunday school curricula began to reflect the trend. For years the debate
between "liberal" and "conservative" Christian churches on curriculum was
whether or not the curriculum was to be "student" centered or "Bible"
centered. Student centered curriculum began with the life of the student and
attempted to apply Christian teaching to the needs of the student. Bible
centered curriculum began with the Bible and attempted to teach the Bible to
students with application to follow. Currently, you find very little pure Bible
study. The call is for "relevant" material, which is a subtle way of saying there
is little or no relevancy in the Bible to "meet their needs."

Small groups are now central to the Church's ministry and have followed the
same path as the Sunday School. Important and useful as they are, small
groups in the Church have followed the path of self-fulfillment. Their central
purpose has become to meet the needs of the individual, not to hold the
individual accountable. Robert Wuthnow's, Sharing the Journey, is a useful
study of the small group movement in America and chronicles how in many
cases small groups lead to a "domesticated deity", one who is shaped in my
image to meet my latest needs.

In the 1980s and 1990s self-esteem has become the source of life. No longer do
we sense the need for salvation but for self-esteem. Robert Schuller boldly
proclaimed that the recovery of high self-esteem would lead the way in the
next revival. Religious children's songs began to emphasize self-esteem, good
feelings and success. Children in the Church proudly sing, "It's great to be a
beaver, to be a big achiever" or "I'm a promise, I'm a possibility". "Jesus Loves
Me" is no longer good enough; I must love me.
Christians are flocking to therapy as a way to find themselves, love themselves and forgive themselves so that they can then find God, love God and feel God's forgiveness. There are growing numbers of "Christian" counseling centers and mental health hospitals.

The religious book market in America has exploded and is predominated by religious self help; an interesting oxymoron. Christian bookstores are full of books and tapes on self-understanding, self-improvement or self-fulfillment. Those shaping evangelicalism are predominately psychologists with little or no theological training. Robert Coles laments concerning "pastors and priests who proclaim psychological pieties when what is needed is good, hard prayer" (Coles). Brooks Holifield sums up the situation nicely, "The problem is that our era has evidenced a singular preoccupation with psychological modes of thinking - modes which have tended to refashion the entire religious life of Protestants in the image of the therapeutic" (Holifield, 355-356).

Essentials of Christian Identity

Given the above critique of current notions of the self the constructive task of describing essentials of a Christian identity remain. There are at least four essentials of Christian identity we must consider; createdness, relatedness, separatedness and re-createdness. These four give the essential outline of a Christian perspective on identity and personhood, and either directly or indirectly critique non-Christian notions of the self.

Createdness

It is intriguing how western cultures so highly value human dignity. Attempting to separate such a view from religious warrants leads western culture to assert that such a view is simply self-evident. Philosophically, this transition begins with Descartes. In a culture saturated with popular psychology and consumeristic jargon this person of self-evident worth begins to believe in self-creation. The "self-made person" is one who did it his or her way. They need no one and no one contributed to their personhood. Many questions could be directed at such a view but the essential problem is the assumption of self-createdness. Contrary to this view the Christian faith asserts that the dignity and worth of human life and indeed all of creation is
located in our being created by God. God is the source and origin of personhood. God is the "I AM" and therefore the source of our "I Am-ness".

"Wesley's most fundamental conviction about human life was that we are created and dependent beings" (Maddox, 67). As created by God we first find our identity being connected to our bodies. God creates our bodies and states that this is good. Embodiment is a central characteristic of our createdness and personhood. Our identities are not reducible to our bodies but we cannot neglect the worth of embodiment as a part of our identity.

Further, not only are we created with bodies but these bodies are given life by the breath of God. Genesis 2:7 states that "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." Living being or soul implies personhood, selfhood, identity. We are "inspired" to be persons by God's will.

Not only does God "breathe" humankind into personhood, God also calls us into personhood. As Abraham Heschel states, "Thou art precedes I am. I am because I am called upon to be" (Heschel, 98). Throughout Scripture we have examples of how God's call on a person brings forth a clear sense of who they are. Abraham, Moses and Paul are three examples.

By understanding our identity as being breathed into us and called out of us by God, we gain a sense of purpose and meaning in life. It becomes clear that our call is to respond to our creator in praise and love. We are responsible to find our purposes in life in doing those things that further God's purposes. Having such a purpose gives direction to our lives. As Colin Gunton states, "To be created is to have a direction, a dynamic, which derives from the createdness of all things by the triune God" (Gunton, 230).

In summary, to affirm our createdness relieves us of the burden of creating ourselves. Our identities are confirmed upon us - not created by us. This is clearly reflected in the wonderful baptismal ritual, in which, as the sign of the Cross is made on the forehead of the one being baptized, the words are said, "I mark you with the sign of the Cross so that you will always remember who you are and to whom you belong." Or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects in his
poem from prison, "Who Am I", whether he is what others see him to be or what he senses himself to be, he knows, "that I am Thine."

Relatedness
If we are created and called into being by God then it follows that we are created in and for relationship. This stands in contrast to many of the popular conceptions of the self which argue for an individualism that views the self as being found and formed, not in relationship, but in the selfish use of relationships. The self-made person, or the one who does it her way is quite different than a self formed and found in relationship.

The primacy of relationship is located in the belief that persons are created in the image of God. The image of God is often thought to refer to characteristics such as consciousness, creativity and will. Wesley, as well as others, however, understood it differently. As Wesley states, "In this image of God was man made. 'God is love'" (Jackson, 66.). Wesley did not view the image of God as some substance that persons possessed but as a relationship in which persons lived. "As such, his was a relational anthropology, making proper relationships central to true human existence" (Maddox, 68). That relationship is one created and sustained in love. As Thomas Merton states, "To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. Love is my true identity" (Merton, 60). To be created in the image of God means that we are created by love, in love and for love. We are created by relationship, in relationship and for relationship.

To gain some understanding of what relationships of love look like we must look to God. When we look to God we find a God revealed as triune. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of central importance to the Christian faith and yet one which is very difficult to understand and to appropriate in understanding Christian formation. This is due in part to emphasizing the aspects of this doctrine which focus on the inwardness or substantialness of God. In essence this means attempting to determine who God is as three persons by reflecting on how God is in God's self. Contemporary work on the doctrine of the Trinity is reminding us to focus on what God does as Father, Son and Spirit in order to understand this doctrine. Catherine LaCugna states: "... Christian theology must begin from the premise that because the mystery of God is revealed in
the mystery of salvation, statements about the nature of God must be rooted in
the reality of salvation history" (LaCugna, 3-4). Or, as Colin Gunton argues, our
understanding of God "... resides not in his abstract being but in the concrete
particulars that we call the divine persons and in the relations by which they
mutually constitute one another" (Gunton, 191). In other words, our
understanding of God as triune is derived from our observation of what God
does as three persons and how God relates as three persons.

God is a "communion of persons". Both LaCugna and Gunton arrive at this
understanding following the traditions of the Cappadocians and Eastern
Orthodoxy. This implies that we know God as three distinct persons who act in
communion towards one end. LaCugna appeals to perichoresis or the idea of
"being-in-another" to help us imagine the Trinity. Perichoresis is most
typically used in discussing the nature of Jesus as both human and divine and
is therefore quite useful in understanding the Trinity. We have here what
some refer to as the "divine dance" of three distinct persons in one another. It
is an image of the one God as three mutually and interdependent persons.

With this brief comment on the doctrine of the Trinity we turn now to reflect
on its implications for understanding personhood. La Cugna states that the
document of the Trinity is "...the framework for reflecting on the nature of the
human person, on the relationship between humankind and all other
creatures of the earth, on the relationship between ourselves and God"
(LaCugna, 380). It is clear once again, that based on such an understanding,
Christian identity is opposed to extreme individualism and self-made identities.
"To be a human being is to be created in and for relationship with God and
with other human beings" (Gunton. 223). Adam and Eve provide an example.
Adam was incomplete and lonely without Eve. God creates Eve as an expression
of God's own identity as "person-in-communion" and in response to Adam's
lack due to being a person without communion. Personhood is socially and
relationally constructed. Caution must be raised and we must be reminded that
God is a communion of persons so that there is individuality of person. I will
say more about this concern in a moment but for now it needs to be clear that
what is created out of relationship is one's identity.
If personhood is socially and relationally formed then we must reject the popular psychological self that is pre-occupied with itself and the purchased self of consumerism. Personhood and identity is first found in relationship with God. Thomas Merton states, "Ultimately the only way that I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence" (Merton, 36). We are created to be in relationship with God and this is the primary relationship for the formation of identity. If I do not allow God to breath being into me and by love call me into existence, then I will not know myself as I am intended to be. Even if we accept a relational understanding of identity, we often neglect our relationship with God as prior to relationship with others. We often attempt to find ourselves in relationship with others only to be hurt and confused in our identity because we have neglected to first love God. We must remember, "Our self is given by God. It is made in the image of God. Its identity is in God, and its primary relationship is to God" (Bondi, 77).

Implied here is the idea that the self-in-itself is a relationship. Humans have the ability to be self-reflective which is essential in coming to know oneself. Theorists of the self such as George H. Mead and Erik Erikson have made us aware of this aspect of the self. There is an "I" which can observe the "me" as well as the "me" that others observe. It is in reflecting on these observations that we come to construct our identities. As Christians we believe that God is a part of this "intrapersonal" process. The idea of perichoresis may help. As God is a divine dance of the mutual persons of the Godhead, so are we. "dances of the self" as we incorporate into our identities, the call of God, the self we observe others reflecting back to us and the "me" we observe. It is in this dance that we become ourselves.

Relatedness also affirms that our personhood, our identity is formed in relationship with other persons. We do not come to know ourselves in isolation and withdrawal from others but by engagement and involvement with others. Abraham Heschel puts it sharply, "Man alone is a conceit" (Heschel, 45). As I am in relationship with others I come to know myself as they come to know their selves. Identity formation is a process of mutuality and reciprocity as we interact with one another. As Jesus states in the Gospels, we find ourselves as we lose ourselves for Christ's sake and the sake of others. Carol Ochs comments,
"Not only are we not by ourselves; we are not for ourselves" (Ochs, 43). This understanding of Christian identity may well be the most controversial in our current context. The self of secularity is one pre-occupied with itself and cannot imagine a relationship which is not primarily for its own benefit. Against this view of the self which argues that self-actualization is the goal of personhood, Christian identity seeks self-transcendence. Self-transcendence implies the movement towards God and others for the sake of others. It is in this giving of oneself for the other that the truest self is formed.

To be formed as a self in this way requires that we be a part of a community of others committed to such a goal. Paul’s image of the Body of Christ provides a way of understanding the community of faith as the location of Christian identity formation. It is a Body made up of diverse parts, all of which are needed for the full functioning of the entire body. The goal of the Body is to glorify God by assisting each member to become selves before God. It is a Body in which I give myself to others before God and others give themselves to me before God. It is here we remind ourselves of who we really are and who we are to become. It is here we learn to show preference for the other, to care for their needs. As we do so we come to know ourselves before God.

To understand the formation of identity relationally can be a frightening concept. We become frightened of losing ourselves to other persons. I think of the fear of soon-to-be-married persons. They can often be concerned with being overpowered by the other. In some weddings this is dramatically displayed with the ritual of lighting the marriage candle. Here the couple takes a candle representing themselves, light a single candle representing their relationship and often then extinguish their own candle. I recall planning the wedding of a couple who wanted to make use of this ritual. The woman was particularly concerned that they not extinguish the individual candles due to her fear of losing herself.

At another level some people do not necessarily fear the loss of self to another, but to God. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop states, "Man fears that God will smother out his individuality, his identity, his selfness" (Wynkoop, 143). In essence, they fear being the moth flying too close to the flame. These fears are real and call for a response. In both cases the fear is based on both real experience and on a
misconception of a theologically sound understanding of self-as-communion. With a misunderstanding of the Trinity comes a misunderstanding of persons-in-communion. When we neglect the three persons of the Godhead the uniqueness of each person is lost. In lived experience this leads to the extinction of the self, feared by some as those who, for various reasons hold power abuse others. If, however, we hold fast to "persons-in-communion" we can overcome the fear of extinction and freely give ourselves in love to the One-in-Three who first loves us. By so doing we are more able to risk being-in-relationship with others.

A further question is begging for response. Why the fear? Does not perfect love cast out fear? Why the false selves and views of personhood? We must address ourselves to another essential understanding of persons in the Christian tradition; our separatedness.

Separatedness

In the Genesis narratives where we first discover who God is and who we are, and what the purposes are for our relationship, we also discover something of what went wrong. The idyllic picture of God and persons in relationship, and Adam and Eve in relationship is soon distorted. We find in humankind's attempt at self-groundedness the answer to the question of why fear and false views of the self exist. The Christian tradition has consistently argued that what the story teaches us is that sin enters the world through a desire to be self-centered. Thomas Merton states that original sin is primarily selfishness and self-centeredness (Merton, 43). Or, as Carol Ochs asserts, the story teaches us of our alienation and not being ones self (Ochs. 76). This loss of our true self leads us to create false selves which are then fiercely defended as true selves. In western culture these false selves are the ones referred to earlier which are legitimated by popular therapeutic and consumeristic arguments.

At root, these false selves deny our essential createdness and relatedness. Wesley believed that all persons shared in "Inbeing sin" which was marked by a loss of the image of God. This loss is essentially a loss of relationship with our creator since the Image of God is primarily our relationship to God. To deny our createdness in this way leads humankind to create the self in our own image which we then attempt to worship. To deny our relatedness is to lose the
possibility of finding our true selves. We first of all lose our primary relationship to God which is the ground and source of all other relationships. In so doing we then attempt to construct views of the person which not only deny the need for God but also the need for authentic mutual relationships with other persons. We construct views of the self which claim that separation and individualism are the ways to true personhood. We claim that we do not need anyone to be ourselves which leads to further alienation.

Along with alienation, separation and false selves, sin leads us to distorted self-love. Wynkoop states, "Wesley says, self-love is not a sin, but an indisputable duty. The sin is selfishness, which is a distortion of love, not its essence" (Wynkoop, 141). We distort self-love in two directions. One, we over-emphasize it as in current views of the self that hold self-love and self-esteem as the cardinal virtue. Two, we under-emphasize self-love, as has the Christian tradition, which is a contradiction of God's testimony about humankind.

In the light of sin, we are left either to follow sin and completely reject the Christian story of the self or, as the Christian tradition is known to do, we accommodate to a secular view of the self and claim it to be Christian, or we return to our story to affirm our createdness and relatedness and our separatedness. The story obviously does not end here.

Re-createdness
The good news of the Christian Gospel is of God's provision of a way back to God, of the possibility of a re-created person. The story of the Prodigal Son has been paradigmatic for understanding the core of the Gospel. In this story the son returns to his father as well as to himself. In returning and restoring relationship, he acknowledges his createdness and relatedness as fundamental to his personhood. It is in Christ that the possibility of re-createdness is revealed. Two theological convictions about the nature and work of Jesus guide us in understanding this possibility: Incarnation and Kenosis.

The Incarnation is the belief that God was made human flesh in Jesus. The Incarnation is the revelation or disclosure of who God is and that God is for us. It reveals to us that God is a "communion-of-persons" and that we are created to be in relationship with our God. As LaCugna puts it: "We look to Jesus Christ
to see both who God is and who we are" (LaCugna, 293). God in Christ provides for us a way back to God and to ourselves. Due to our separatedness, brought about by our attempts at self-createdness, we must turn about and take a new direction to find ourselves. Metanoia or conversion is the classic Christian understanding of this turning about or returning. But as the story of the Prodigal teaches, we must come to a point of recognizing our separatedness and distortion of our true selves. When we acknowledge our own sinfulness and self-centeredness we have the possibility of finding ourselves. As we return to God we become new selves. Paul makes much use of the image of being "in Christ" and the "new creation". Second Corinthians 5:17 states: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new." In Galatians 2:20 he writes, "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." And in Colossians 3:10 Paul speaks of putting on the "new self which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator." Metanoia implies becoming a new self or a true self for the first time.

This new self is found only in the relinquishment of the old or false self that we have taken on by imitating the culture around us. It is only as we surrender the belief that we are the ground of our being and acknowledge God in Christ as the ground of our being that we are truly our selves. This is the paradox of finding by losing. As Merton states: "I shall be lost in Him: that is, I shall find myself" (Merton, 37). Or, returning to the theme of the Incarnation, Romney Moseley states: "Authentic Christian selfhood begins when a person chooses as his or her single purpose in life the task of witnessing to the truth of the Incarnation" (Moseley, 104).

Phillippians two gives us further insight into the nature and work of Christ. This passage speaks to the "kenosis" or self-emptying of Jesus. It is central to an understanding of Jesus as both human and divine as well as understanding his work. Here it is stated that Jesus emptied himself of the need for equality with God, although that was indeed his to have. He emptied himself in order to reveal God's salvation to humankind. In the context of Phillipians two, Paul uses this affirmation ethically, that is, he calls on Christians to imitate the model of Jesus as illustrated in this act. The passage, therefore, becomes
important in the development of a Christian view of personhood. We become persons by imitating Christ.

LaCugna states, "The ultimate norm or archetype of human personhood is Jesus Christ" (LaCugna, 291). If we desire to have a true sense of self and identity the way is by imitating Christ. Thomas a Kempis stands out as one who sought to help the Church understand the importance of Jesus as model of personhood and Wesley was deeply influenced by a Kempis. Indeed, Wesley would not consider the question of personhood overly complex. We know ourselves as we follow Christ. In Jesus we have a concrete model of authentic personhood.

The example of Jesus as self-emptying leads to several insights about authentic personhood. First, personhood is not something to be grasped and vigorously defended. Personhood is something we have as children of God but we need not grasp and hold it as a possession. It seems to me western culture is one that works too hard on finding itself and then works too hard in defending the rights of that self. A culture that places the search for the individual self above others is not a model to be followed by Christians. An example from human relationships may help. It seems to be a common characteristic of relationships that often the more we attempt to create relationship with another the less they are interested in our friendship. When we stop "grasping" after the relationship there is a greater possibility of it becoming a friendship. It seems true about personal identity as well. The more we dwell on ourselves the less we know or even like ourselves. If we empty ourselves and give ourselves for others we find ourselves. Romney Moseley states, "To be entirely present to oneself is to empty oneself of every claim to selfhood" (Moseley, 118).

A second implication of kenosis is the inversion of cultural notions of power and worth. In a culture of consumerism, the one with the most wealth wins. They have the prestige, the power and the influence. In a culture of shallow popular psychology, the one with the most appealing personality who can give the appearance of confidence and being competent wins. These views of the self are turned over. Hierarchies are inverted in order to level distinctions in persons. It is the least who are most precious. When we as persons attempt to compare ourselves with others we rarely look "down" or to those less fortunate.
than ourselves. We look "up" to those society claims are good persons, who have position and power. Implied here is the idea that strength is found in weakness. If we wish to be true selves we will recognize the lies of the culture and relinquish our efforts at gaining strength and power. We will resist the lies of consumerism and self-centered therapies that count self as a thing to be grasped.

To be re-created in God's image is both contemporary and eschatological. In Christ, by God's grace we are now new persons. By returning to God we find our true selves. We are not, however, fully ourselves. There is an eschatological dimension to our personhood. Ephesians four states that the vision and direction of our lives is to be maturity, which is the full stature of Christ. What is here expressed is the reality of the distance between our selves now and the self we are becoming. The task is to grow into the self that God has made new in us. This is essentially, to work towards authenticity and integrity. To be at one with whom we hope to be and are indeed, created to be. This is the process of sanctification -- the process of growing into our true selves. For Wesley, sanctification is the process of the restoration of the image of God. It is the process of "renewing our souls after the image of God" and a "recovery of the divine nature" (Jackson, 47). And, since the image of God is relationship, the process of sanctification or becoming our true selves is one of growing in our love of God and neighbor. We are becoming our true selves by loving God and neighbor.

However, as Wesley understood, this process is one which requires our full cooperation and discipline. We must respond to the grace given to us to become our true selves. The Christian self is a responsible self. Agency is a central feature to Christian identity. In many ways we are what we do or we become what we do. In a culture that gives precedence to feelings this is often overlooked. We must not be reductionistic and reduce the person to actions but, likewise, we must not neglect the place of responsibility and agency. To be and become our true selves requires daily, focused attention to personal holiness. We must attend to the means of grace in order to be and become ourselves. We must in all our actions strive towards integrity and authenticity. We cannot do this alone but must become ourselves through relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We become ourselves in relationship to both God and
others. Merton states, "You and I were made to find our identity in the One Mystical Christ, in Whom we all complete one another 'unto a perfect man, [sic] unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ" (Merton, 70).

Further, we must commit ourselves to social holiness to be and become our true selves. The love of neighbor manifest in concrete acts of love and care is an act of being and becoming ourselves. The repudiation of all forms of cultural lies which deny personhood to the "least" is an act of finding ourselves.

We can do none of this alone. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, enables us to be and become our true selves. I believe Wesley's understanding of the Holy Spirit was practical and concrete. The indwelling Spirit reminds us to be ourselves by enabling us to overcome the old, false self which is encouraged by a culture of the false self. The Holy Spirit does so by guiding, reminding and convicting us as to what we are to do as new selves re-created in God's image.

**Conclusion**

I have attempted to identify and describe a contemporary hindrance to Christian discipleship. The problem is the Christian Church's accommodation to a "secular" view of the self. Two primary sources of such a view are popular psychological views and consumerism. In order to counter such a view of the self, I have offered a Christian view of the self and suggested four essentials of such a view: createdness, relatedness, separatedness and re-createdness. A Christian view of the self must be derived from our understanding of who God is. The current renewal of interest in Trinitarian theology assists in thinking about God and in turn the implications for human personhood. In particular, an Orthodox view of the Trinity as "persons-in-communion" combined with an approach to the Trinity emphasizing God's threefold manner of self-revelation in history, clearly points to some important dimensions of Christian personhood. Discipleship, then, becomes living into the self God has created anew in us.
References


