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Identity Crisis

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LEIGHTON FORD

Identity Crisis

Modern man is suffering from a kind of spiritual amnesia. He is passing through a deep crisis of identity.

Many businessmen are torn between the nearly total demands of the company and the needs of their family.

Housewives devour popular articles on the "feminine mystique", and try to figure out whether it's enough to be "just a housewife", or whether they need a career, too, in order to be fulfilled.

Students march in picket lines with the sign, "I am a human being, do not bend, fold, spindle, or mutilate."

Teenagers drop out of the conformity cult, let their hair grow, take off their shoes, and put on beads as if to say, "Look, man, just because my hair is long, am I no longer a man, a human being? Is a man just a haircut on a clotheshorse?"

The original American astronauts were given a battery of psychological tests. One test was this, "Give twenty answers to the question, 'Who am I?'"

Try to answer that. You'll find it's an interesting exercise. I am a human being, a male, a son, a husband and a father, a friend, a Canadian citizen, an American resident. I am a taxpayer, a tennis enthusiast, a communicator of the Gospel, a reader of newspapers and books, a car driver, et cetera.

Now, when you have made your list and you have run out of things to add, have you answered the question? Do you really know who you are?

Hermann Hesse, the German novelist said, "The true profession of a man is to find his way to himself. I have become a writer, but I have not become a human being."

Because we are searching for identity, we tend to become imitators of other people, like a little boy mimicking his favourite cricketer — copying his bowling style or waving his bat just as he does. We paste on bits and pieces of other people. We make love like some actor. We play golf like Greg Norman. Now part of this process is natural because we learn by imitating others. But the tragedy comes when we never find our true self. As someone said, "We begin life as an original, and we end up as a copy."

So where do we go next? If going back to

England or Ireland doesn't do it, if our family relationships with our parents are all fouled up, if science can tell us what an atom is but not what a man is, where do we turn?

Perhaps it is time to turn back to our Bibles and read them again. Perhaps this ancient Book, which so many have poooh-pooohed as out of date, has something to say to this dilemma of modern man.

One of the key ideas that runs through the Bible is the idea of the image of God. In Genesis we read that "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion . . . so God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (1:26, 27). Genesis 5:1 (Amp.) tells us that "When God created man He made him in the likeness of God." God warned Noah, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (9:6, RSV).

Notice in these two passages that the sacredness of sex and the sacredness of human life both hang on "the image of God". And I believe that part of the reason for the sexual promiscuity that we see today is a perverted drive to find this relationship with God for which we were made.

Now this idea of the image of God is carried over into the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man "is the image and glory of God". James 3:9 (RSV) speaks of the sin of cursing "men, who are made in the likeness of God."

Now what does the Bible mean when it says that men are made in God's image? Well, first of all, it doesn't mean that we bear the physical

likeness of God, because "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). God doesn't have a body like men. What it means is that spiritually we men are made for God. Man is not God; man is dependent on God. But man is more than an animal, more than muscles and flesh and bone. Man is also a spirit — with a mind, intelligence, a moral sense of right and wrong — and this is what gives to man a capacity to have a relationship with God.

On one occasion Jesus asked to see a coin that was used to pay taxes. "Whose likeness is this?" He demanded. And they said, "Caesar's" (cf. Luke 20:24). The word Jesus used is *eikon*, "likeness", the same word that is used of man made in the likeness of God (1 Corinthians 11:7). The coin was not Caesar, but it belonged to him because his image was stamped on it. So man is not God, but he belongs to God because man's nature has been stamped with God's likeness.

You see, if you want to find your identity, you have to go back — not back to your childhood, not back to your homeland across the seas — but back to Eden, back to God.

Now the Bible tells us something else. Men bear this image of God; but it has been shattered, it has been defaced, because of sin. Man has rebelled against the status given him. Man didn't want to be God's image, he wanted to be God! "Ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5) was the temptation that came to Adam and Eve. This is what sin fundamentally is — "God-Almightiness", the big "I", the superman, turning from God to our own way.

Once upon a time, in the beginning, man reflected the beauty and goodness of God as

clearly as still water in a pool reflects the shining moon from its surface on a summer night. But the chilling winds of our rebellion have churned the water into waves. The moon still shines, but the pool no longer reflects it from its broken surface. And the true Light is no longer reflected from our broken, disordered lives. The identity crisis is a squalling, terrified baby born from the womb of man's first sin.

Again, the Scripture says this broken image of God shines again in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is "the image of the invisible God", says Colossians 1:15. Jesus Christ is the picture of what God is like because He is God the Son. He is also the image of what true man, genuine man, authentic humanity, is like.

We are living today in what has been called the age of the anti-hero. Yet we desperately need heroes — models of what it means to be alive, what it means to be good, what it means to be committed, what it means to be a man! Where can we find them?

Parade magazine took a poll of twenty-one hundred young people sixteen to twenty-three years of age. They asked, "Is there any living . . . figure whom you admire or respect or with whom you identify?" Over 53 percent said No.

Well, I would like to suggest that in the Person of Jesus Christ is One in whom you can find your identity, whether you are under thirty or over thirty.

A university girl said, "I studied Jesus Christ not just to learn who He was but to know who I am."

Bishop Stephen Neill points out: "Before (the lost image of God in man) can be restored, that true human reality into which man is to be transformed must be visibly set forth before his eyes. This it was that was accomplished in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth."

You may be surprised if you get a Bible and start to read about Jesus Christ, how in Him you will see the true Pattern for your own life. This happens to me many times. Sometimes I get the feeling that I have goals that I can accomplish by my own efforts. Then I read about Jesus kneeling in prayer; and I suddenly realize that if Jesus, being the Son of God, the real Man, needed to pray, how much more I do! I am not sufficient without God. Or sometimes as a preacher I get all lost in words and ideas and concepts. Then I look at Jesus, and what do I see? Jesus was involved with people. He didn't just preach about leprosy; He touched a leper. He didn't just lecture on hunger; He fed people with empty stomachs.

And then there is something even more wonderful that the Bible tells us about this image of God. You see, if this were just a great ideal that I saw in Jesus, I couldn't identify with Him. "Be like Jesus!" Who? Me?

Yes, me, and yes, you. Because the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ can actually share Himself with us and give us a new identity. God's purpose is to conform us "to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). That is why He sent Jesus into the world. Jesus didn't come just to live out a great ideal. He came to die and to come alive. He died to pour out His life and put it in the believer. That is why we are not just supposed to admire Jesus. We are to put Him on

(Romans 13:14)! Ephesians 4:24 (RSV) says, "Put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

You see, the likeness to God that we had at the first, the likeness that we lost by sin, is created again in us when our lives are joined to Christ.

Paul the Apostle often called himself "a man in Christ" (2 Corinthians 12:2). That is true identity — to be in Christ, to know that He has received me into His own life, to know that He has started on a lifelong project of making me like Him, and that someday "(I) shall also bear the image of the man of heaven (1 Corinthians 15:49, RSV).

That is Christian identity. I know my past, where I came from; I came from God. I know what went wrong; I tried to play God instead of being satisfied to be a real man. I know my future; my destiny is Christ. And I know the present; I can face myself now — my problems, my hang-ups, my assets, my faults — because I have turned myself over to God. And He has accepted me as I am because Jesus Christ died for me, and He is working in everything that happens to help me discover who I am to God!

And here is a paradox. As I become more and more by God's power like Jesus Christ, I don't become less like Leighton Ford. Only as I become like Christ can I be what Leighton Ford was meant to be.

Now let me ask you; Have you made this exciting discovery of identity in Christ?

Bob Slocum is an aerospace engineer. He wrote: "I became convinced that Jesus Christ is the God behind the physical universe. The

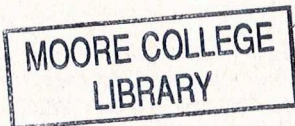
important question then became not whether I thought God was real, but whether God thought I was real. The idea took hold that in Christ, God does love me and takes me seriously; and I began the experiment of placing my life in His hands and setting out to discover what it meant to live for Him."

How about your making that experiment — starting like right now?

There are three "you's" — the person you think you are, the person others think you are, and the person God knows you are and can be through Christ. Will the real **you** please stand up today and find your identity in Christ?

If you are willing to come to God today to tell Him that you know that you have failed in His plan for your life, but that you know He has loved you through Jesus Christ and you want Him to come into your life, He will do it. Will you ask Him in prayer right now?

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MY DECISION

Believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for me and is now living, I want this to be my "hour of decision."

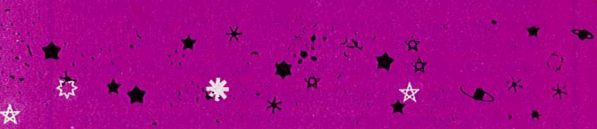
Acknowledging that I am a sinner, I receive Jesus as my personal Savior and will trust in, rely upon and adhere to Him as my Lord.

name _____

address _____

date of decision _____

If you desire additional spiritual help, please write to
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