

## EDITORIAL

# Identity Crisis

About six months ago I watched a television program during which Morley Calaghan, the noted Canadian writer, was being interviewed. The topic of discussion concerned the present-day identity crisis, the search for the elusive answer to that nagging question, "Who am I?" The question itself isn't new, or at least corollaries of the question are not new. Self-actualization, self-fulfillment, self-interest and other such "self" concepts have been around for years. The word narcissism — self-love or egocentrism — comes from the word narcissus, the mythical youth who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool and, after wasting away from unsatisfied desire, was turned into a flower which today bears his name.

The rise of the current phenomenon, however, can be easily traced. During the Depression and WW II, most people were too preoccupied with earning a living to dwell on themselves. But with increased prosperity, growing affluence and increased leisure hours, most people in our western society became concerned with improving their quantity of life. Cars, televisions, cottages, boats, anything visible would do to keep up with the Joneses, or better yet, turn the Joneses green with envy.

This competition started to die down in the early 1960's when people discovered that more material goods did not necessarily give their lives more meaning. Instead, the focus was shifting from quantity to quality of life. Civil rights marches, war protests, environmentalist protests, even protests over shoddy safety standards applied to automobile manufacturing, all these efforts were bent toward improving the quality of life.

Then in the early 1970's there occurred another shift, this time inwardly. Our industrial society which had produced microminiaturization and computers had also produced increasing family instability, normlessness and loneliness. In the search for identity, supporters of Locke and Rousseau told us that the problem lay in society's rules, that inside each individual was the perfect person: creative, autonomous, one who loved all mankind. Take away the crippling "Leviathan" or State, and something beautiful would happen. It did all right, the flower generation turned inward — to drugs, communes and cults.

Trying to find ourselves can be difficult, even dangerous to our mental well-being, especially when we define and evaluate ourselves only in terms of ourselves. We don't suddenly stumble on our identities like someone finding a lost dollar on the street. Instead, we are what we do, because in reality, fulfillment needs a human connection. In some cases, people will even accommodate a tyrant because it is even more difficult to face the prospect of living alone.

Calaghan said that the identity seeker is actually pleading, "Will somebody please love me?" He is lost, left out, but does not offer affection himself. Calaghan went on to say that the clue to what you feel about yourself is within yourself. He said that the person who loves, who gives of himself to his co-workers, his family, his community and his country is the person who really knows who he is. Identity crisis? Not at all!

Calaghan is giving some food for thought. Maybe it's time we judged each other for what we are, rather than what we think the other could do for us. Perhaps our focus should shift so that instead of drawing to ourselves, we expand our affinity toward all our fellow Canadians. Instead of acting only when there is a plus factor in our favour maybe we should begin to get involved with each other. After all, those "others" are the ones who will give us the clue to who we really are. **Editor**