

UNIVERSAL IDENTITY

Few people realize the paramount significance of an event which, almost alone, has shaped the historical circumstances of Christ's Nativity. Modern Christians cannot even imagine how decisively the "*decree from Caesar Augustus*" contributed to God's *dwelling among us*, at a specific place and time. The decree for a census to be taken throughout the entire Roman world comprised the most apposite excuse for covering up Christ's arrival as man on our planet. There was no more exquisite opportunity for Him who was seeking to appear in our midst as inconspicuously as possible and to rub shoulders with us not just as an anonymous someone, nor even as another individual amidst an over-crowded human species, but as our real and undisputable self, our true identity...

He always wanted us to be one with Himself. This is the reason why He made us in His Image. Precisely as in His own divine nature **unity takes precedence over multiplicity** such that we believe not in three gods, but in One God indivisible and inseparable in His Hypostases, in the same way this One and Unique God has created one single mankind as it was impossible to depict on it more than One and Unique Image of His own Triune Self. He thus proclaimed from the very beginning that at a certain time He would render this Image unto its Archetype. Appropriately, then, He chose a time of an imperial census in order to materialize His eternal plan. It was the first time in history after Babel that mankind, if only subconsciously, was making an attempt to overcome the fatal virus of division and rapture as if to re-articulate itself into a Single Image and thus enable itself to behold its very Self. Although the wrong person, namely Caesar, initiated such an attempt, because of the naively prevailing view that his subjects naturally comprised part of his inalienable universal property, he nonetheless did the right thing in order to facilitate the Lord's appearance in the flesh amongst His consubstantial siblings. Exactly then, during that census, turned up the One, who has always been our Archetype, timely and discreetly reminding us that every genuine property bears indispensably on it its owner's *Image and Superscription* (Matt. 22:20). As there was no contingency whatsoever

that even “*one of these little ones could perish*” (Matt.18:14), He made Himself inconspicuously visible the very moment when all rushed to delineate genealogically their human provenance - as if they were Caesar's natural servants by token of their birth within his territory - and disputed silently the implicitness of their Roman subjection by arranging to be born in the same territory. He intended to show how genuine and indelible is the *Image* and *Superscription* which His own creatures bear *by nature*. For it is precisely this Image and Superscription that makes them inalienable to all His impostors: false Lords, spiritual tyrants (ordinarily known as Christian leaders) and Caesars in all ages whether they be sensible or intelligible...

By His mere secret Presence the One who is simultaneously God and Man came to dispute precisely this superficially “normal” human dependence “*on the fashion of this world*”. His Prophets had proclaimed long before His arrival: “*He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets*” (Is. 42:3, Matt. 12:19). His reasoning was simple: Once He made Himself manifest as mankind's Archetype, the innumerable pebbles of His universal human Mosaic would confirm their primeval function: a ceaseless rush to attain their true fulfilment “*in Him*” (Col. 2:10) by abolishing all peculiarity, oddity and idiosyncrasy which, till then, held them in asphyxiating personal isolation by discouraging, as utterly meaningless, their natural tendency towards communal co-existence. What kind of self-conscience could each unique and unrepeatable pebble develop without an inkling of ever belonging to a Mosaic? How could the pebbles cease longing for assemblage and thus verifying their common identity? Theirs is a universal longing for articulation, an irresistible enticement to render themselves unto their eternal Self, once that Self was “*lifted up from the earth*” (John 12:32) nailed on the wood: an ultimate signal of humiliation, so that their exaltation may follow...

After such a dynamic human Presence on earth Christ continues to be unnoticeable (Luke 17:20), secret and yet utterly real since the time of Caesar's census. The mere fact that, two millennia later, in a globalised world, there are still people calling themselves “Christians” and “theologians” who consider as their vocation and duty to keep responding to one of the most powerful urges of our fallen nature,

namely, the task of asserting human identities, comes as no surprise. They have misunderstood so gravely His message that they do not hesitate to go so far as to try asserting even the identity of that particular God who hid Himself into human flesh and remained always "*hidden even in His self- manifestation*". All the more so - alas – they even assert identities of Churches, Nations, Cultures, Traditions, that is to say, of each fleeting shadow and treacherous dream of this age. This same process of specification still matters so much because these “Christians” stubbornly keep imagining that their collective identity is an everlasting reality on its own, with very clear characteristics, laws and values which must be delineated, declared *urbi et orbi* and embalmed as an historic heritage of ultimate significance, so that barbarians, enemies, agnostics, may not be able to destroy it...

Certainly, all those involved in quests for identities have not yet learned anything out of the riveting message of Caesar Augustus' census. They still dread, to this day, the loss of their own identity, as if Christ never existed, as if He was never made flesh "*for us men*" universally and not for a particular clan. They tremble lest mutation occurs in their nationalistic or ecclesiastical idiosyncratic fashions and that is why they ask for constant identity checks and verifications. They have turned themselves into sullen inquisitors in order to defend unreal, futile and impossible peculiarities, whether collective or individual. They cannot realise that only when "*that which is in part*" (1 Cor. 13:10) is abolished, the Perfect and Impartial and Indivisible One shall prevail. They completely forget that this world must pass away, so that the uncreated Kingdom of God may arrive and that is why they think, like Caesar Augustus, that if they diligently registered all the elements of their particular tradition or national culture, then, they would safeguard everlasting duration for the multi-faceted fashion of this world which is inescapably passing away... Worst of all, they believe that attachment to pedantic religious formalities or acts of worship can by itself generate true identity for an individual or a group, a church or a race...

Any group which struggles to delimit identities for everyone and for all evidently displays its own decadence, while blatantly ignoring the fact that our sole true identity has been indelibly engraved upon us

before the foundation of the world. God always intended that mankind should exist as His own *Image and Superscription* for He was always determined to be made flesh and thus become our genuine Identity which in no way can be counterfeited precisely because He Himself remains immutable: "*the same yesterday and to day and for ever.*"

Hence, we celebrate Christmas without registering, as Caesar did, the members of the Body of Christ, as we entertain no fear that mutation or decay may occur within His Immortal Body; on the contrary we already know by experience that "*Christ has proved Himself alien to any corruption*" and we look patiently for the forthcoming mark of His incorruption on our mortal bodies.

This marking shall be our second and final census which we have already dubbed *Second Coming*. Though we think that we shall all appear before His judgment seat, He would rather appear before us and be united with us, proving, at long last, His true universal identity with us by becoming "*all in all.*"

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