

... and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh . . .

The Age of Faith! That's what people call the pre-modern times in which our ancestors lived. The Bible and the long ago writings of Greek philosophers were – you could say – the only encyclopedias available back then. They told you all you needed to know about the world, its nature, its origin, its meaning. People believed in a divine maker whose interventions in human affairs were certain – indeed were required if one was to be “saved” – to transcend death.

But then doubt instead of faith preoccupied influential thinkers. Discoveries like that of America, of our circling the sun instead of the sun circling us raised questions about everything. Indeed, doubt became the norm. It was fashionable to be unsure.

But if you doubted things often enough, you could end up knowing *one thing* for certain: that you could *doubt*, which meant you could *think*; that you had a mind that *did* exist and was equipped with an ability to calculate down to the 'nth degree the world roundabout us so that at last we could be *sure* of things. Beyond wishing or jumping to conclusions you could measure things logically, mathematically – and discover the *material* truth of our world – and control it in technical ways – for instance by managing electricity for our own comfort; no more candles.

Science revealed the facts; it took precedence over the “superstitions” of the past. It put mind over matter, head trips that even viewed our very bodies as objects of investigation more so than flesh and blood, as something we have to put up with, that makes demands that distract our thoughts. Like a headache or a pain in my big toe or sadness over a spouse's dementia. How can you “think” with such physical distractions?

Which led some scholars of recent times (the 20<sup>th</sup> century) to ask questions – to object: it's not true that thinking, mind over matter, calculation tell us all we need to know about things. Our *whole body, our flesh and blood* is involved in our ability to know things. Feelings, indigestion, our finger tips, our response to sounds and smells, imagination, reflexes, moods play a role in our knowing. Our physical mobility can play a part: you see a hill from where you are; I see it from where I am. It's the same hill but in some way not the same. A tree is more than what science would call *a perennial plant with an elongated stem*. It can be a Christmas Tree, a family tree. What was the poem Joyce Kilmer wrote? *I think that I will never see / a poem lovely as a tree*.

Which brings to mind those opening verses of St. John's Gospel where it says: “And the Word became flesh.” What an astounding belief – beyond the reach of reason alone, *unthinkable!* The *Word* in the Bible refers to God's creative word or God's Law as given in Exodus or the writings of Scripture in general. John dares to say that Jesus is God's Word, God! who became flesh – flesh in the sense of soft, tender, full of grace, capable of feeling, of suffering with us, of touching us, bleeding for us, dying for us, poetizing . . . It almost seems to say that even God needed to know the way *we* know – as incarnate, as flesh and blood and *not* just as someone who might say: *I think, therefore I am*. Thinking seems not to have been enough - even for God!

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