

IF THE GOSPEL WERE

By Franco Maggiotto

Alpignano, Italy ~ March 2004

The Word of God Is Not Only Spirit, Religion, Science, Art, Sport, History Or Politics: It Is All This, And Much More Besides, In The Situation We Are Living in today.

If the Gospel were “***The Word was made spirit***”, spiritualists would be happy, but those who are not spiritualists would not be. And this includes the vast majority of people, who of necessity must concern themselves with practical realities: bread, work, love, affection, home, family, recreation and friends. They do not think of the spirit a lot, perhaps because they do not have much time left to do so, or maybe because they are not sure if there is a spirit, and, in any case, they do not really know what it is. An extravagance for the privileged? If the Word had been made spirit, for many it would have remained far removed from practical life.

If the Gospel were “***The Word was made religion***”, believers (or those who consider themselves such) would be happy, but miscreants or non-believers (or those who consider themselves such) would not be. There are, as we know, those who believe, those who think they believe, and those who think they do not believe. But there are also those who truly do not believe, and for many different reasons. Believing turns out to be impossible for them; it would be a pious fiction for them or else an act of intellectual dishonesty. So they keep a safe distance from religion in any and all of its forms and manifestations. If the Word had been made religion, they would have been excluded.

If the Gospel were “***The Word was made science***” scientists would be happy and all of those who love science would be too, and there are many such people — everyone, it could be said. What a wonderful thing it is to know! Science, what enthusiasm! We all wish to know: it is the principle of freedom and it is an unlimited undertaking. Every man, deep down, is a small-scale scientist who is an expert on something and does not tire of learning. But the supreme science that was discovered by the ancient Greeks is knowing how not to know. In what way? In that the fundamental questions of existence and human experience belong to an order which is different from that of science. If the Word had been made science, it would be silent when faced with the great questions of life.

If the Gospel were “***The Word was made art***”, all art lovers, and there are a great many of these, would be happy. We all love art in one way or another. Music, painting, sculpture, poetry, dance and so many other forms of artistic creation have lifted the spirit from the very beginnings of human history; for many they are

bread for the soul, and they enrich and beautify life. Who would be prepared to do without all this? No one. If, absurdly, art were all of a sudden to disappear from the world, humanity would go into dreadful decline. It would virtually wipe the slate of civilization clean. Yet despite the inestimable benefit that it brings and the amazing development it has enjoyed throughout the course of history, with so many achievements of imperishable worth, art has not succeeded in freeing humanity from wickedness or removing barbarity from the world. If the Word had been made art we would have to look elsewhere for the healing of humanity.

If the Gospel were “***The Word was made sport***”, all sporting enthusiasts would be happy, for they would be seeing recognition of the importance of sport, sport which occupies such a large part of our lives, our thoughts, our conversations and the passions of countless individuals. Almost all of us, to a greater or a lesser degree, are “fans” of something. In effect *homo ludens*, *man who plays*, either actively as an athlete or passively as a spectator, is a basic part of individual and collective experience. But sport, too, which does the body good and like art does good to the soul, which fosters encounters between different people and peoples and thus has a generally beneficial effect on human society, does not seem able to heal humanity. If the Word had been made sport, “man who plays” and the new man would be one and the same thing. But they are not.

If the Gospel were **But, the Gospel is “The Word was made flesh”**. Not spirit, not religion, not science, not art, not sport, but flesh. “Flesh”, i.e. what we all are, the material basis of everything and everyone, without which nothing and nobody would exist in the created order, at least nothing would be perceivable. There is no spirit without flesh, no music without an instrument, no painting without colour, no statue without marble, no writing without ink, no poetry without the hand that composes it or the voice that recites it or the ear that hears it or the eye that reads it. “Flesh”, that is what we all are, without exception, not what only some people are. The Word was made what we all are, so nobody is excluded. **After the birth of Christ there is no Word without flesh. May God grant that there should not be flesh without the Word.**

Franco Maggiotto