

## LENT

The phrase *In principio* occurs at the beginning of the first book of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the first book of the New. The reader will object: 'Not so. The Gospel of St John is not the beginning of the New Testament'. To which the reply is, true it is not the first of the books of the New Testament *chronologically*, but it is first in the order of reality, i.e., *ontologically*.

The *In principio* at the beginning of *Genesis* refers to creation—

<i>In principio</i>	the beginning of time
<i>creavit Deus caelum</i>	the beginning of place
<i>et terram</i>	the beginning of earth and of all the heavenly bodies

Time and place were created together. The word for the setting, the place, in which all material being would be created is in the Latin Vulgate *caelum* - the heaven - not *caelos* 'the heavens' as it is translated. The use of the singular is significant. Creation of the heavenly bodies, the stars, planets, asteroids and comets and, in due course, the planet on which God placed us, followed. (Whether this occurred serially, beginning with some vast explosion—a 'big bang'—or whether He created them in their particularity is for the ruminations of experimental scientists.) The reader may object: 'But God has revealed - and Holy Church acknowledges - that all were created at once (*simul*)'.<sup>1</sup> And so they were. But while things may occur together this does not preclude one occurring before another. God must have created the sea before he created the fishes that people it! In the same fashion He created the setting, the heaven (Aristotle's 'heavenly body' or *aether*, which St Thomas calls 'the first altering body') before the stars, planets, asteroids and comets that inhabit it.<sup>2</sup>

---

In contrast is the *In principio* of the Gospel of St John. This has nothing to do with time but refers to the eternal beginning, the generation of God the Son by God the Father in an eternal *now*. It is the beginning that is always beginning—unto all eternity.

Yet there is a conjunction between the two. It is referred to in the third verse of St John:

*Omnia per Ipsum facta sunt et sine Ipso factum est nihil quod factum est.*

God made everything there is. No thing exists that was not made by Him and every existing thing reflects some perfection of its Creator. Of the things God created the highest is man whom He made in His own image and likeness. In Psalm 99 we read:

*Scitote quoniam Dominus ipse est Deus; ipse fecit nos, et non ipsi nos: populus ejus, et oves pascuæ ejus*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiasticus* 18: 1 and the definition *Firmiter* of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215 "Firmly we believe and simply we confess that the one true God... by His own almighty power at once (*simul*) from the beginning of time made each creature from nothing, the spiritual and the corporeal, namely, the angelic and the earthly, and then man". (DS 800)

<sup>2</sup> *St Augustine & St Thomas on creation* [https://www.superflumina.org/PDF\\_files/creation\\_sts\\_augustine\\_thomas.pdf](https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/creation_sts_augustine_thomas.pdf)

We were made by God for Himself. We were made *in* time but we were not made *for* time, this limited life: we were made for eternity, to be happy forever with God in heaven.

There is a proportion, an inter-relationship, between —

natures                      powers                      acts                      ends.

A creature which is capable doing *acts* which are immaterial (knowing not just that things are, but what things are, the natures of things) can only do so because it has the *power* to do such acts; and such a creature has the power to do so only if it has a *nature* which is immaterial. Therefore man (signifying *genus*, not *gender*) has a nature which is immaterial. But what is immaterial is, by definition, not susceptible to corruption, i.e., death. Therefore, though his body dies, the soul which forms, orders and maintains it in existence cannot die.

Anyone who doubts this thesis will profit in reading what St Thomas has to say on the subject in Article 14 of the *Disputed Questions concerning the Soul* reproduced in English and Latin at the site listed below.<sup>3</sup> He might care to weigh his own objections with the twenty one (!) that St Thomas raises, and consider the answers provided.

---

When, almost fourteen billion years ago (so the scientists assure us), there occurred the dawn of the universe and of the setting in which the heavenly bodies and our planet began to be, the Almighty gave to those who were to benefit from it, *that is, to us men* (rational animals, possessors of intellect), a singular gift - *time*.<sup>4</sup> With it we are enabled to refine ourselves, our loves and our knowledges, to amend our lives and to be sorry for our sins that we might be disposed for that home which Almighty God has designed for us to be with Him forever – the Kingdom of Heaven.

The thinker, the scientist, may wonder over the fourteen billion years. But what is fourteen billion years compared to eternity? It is no more significant than is the 70 years or 80 of an average life time.

The opportunity to amend our lives, to prepare ourselves for the eternity that God has planned for us, is what the Church holds out to us this Lent.

Michael Baker

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 — *Ash Wednesday*

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://isidore.co/aquinas/QDdeAnima.htm#14>

<sup>4</sup> It is sobering to consider this in perspective. If we accept the findings of science, God gave us men, *the pinnacle of His material creation*, the gift of time almost 14 billion years ago!