

ALPHA & OMEGA

The phrase *In principio* occurs at the beginning of the first book of the Old Testament and at the beginning of the Gospel of St John.

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 rendered. The use of the singular is significant. As the sea is one thing, so is the undetectable entity in which exist the universe of common material beings. God created the heaven (Aristotle's 'heavenly body' or *aether*, which St Thomas calls 'the first altering body') before the stars, planets, asteroids and comets that people it.¹ Whether this occurred serially, beginning with some vast explosion - a 'big bang' - or whether God created these elements in their particularity is for the ruminations of experimental scientists.

The use of the singular *terram* is, likewise, significant since to men untutored in the subtleties revealed by modern science, the world in every generation presents itself as one reality - land, sea and sky in the setting of Sun, Moon, stars and the wandering stars (planets).

The conscientious reader may object: 'But God has revealed - and Holy Church acknowledges - that all things were created at once (*simul*)'.² And so they were. But while things may occur together this does not preclude one preceding another. God must have created the sea before he created the fishes that inhabit it! Nor does it preclude the creation of things in potency brought subsequently to act, for potency - 'can-be-ness' - is real, not imaginary, being.³

The *In principio* of the Gospel of St John is in dramatic contrast. 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. *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum*. When the Jews asked Jesus Christ, God become man, (*John* 8: 25): "Who art thou?" He replied: "The beginning..." The reply is more dramatic in the Latin Vulgate. He says: "Principium..."

The author of the book that had an immense influence on the Middle Ages, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, Boëthius (St Severinus) used the expression in one of his poems. He wrote—

¹ *St Augustine & St Thomas on creation* https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/creation_sts_augustine_thomas.pdf

² *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)

³ There is a good illustration of this in seeds lying dormant in deserts which, after 30 or even 50 years, spring to life with the advent of unexpected rains.

...Tu namque serenum,
Tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis,
Principium, vector, dux, semitas, terminus idem—

...For Thou art rest and peace,
To those who worship Thee; to see Thee is our end,
Who art together our beginning, our conductor, our lord, path and term.⁴

This reflects the *lex orandi* of the Catholic Church expressed in the ceremony surrounding the initiation at the Easter Vigil of the Pascal Candle which will stand before the altar for the Risen Christ until Ascension Thursday. The candle is inscribed with the symbols *Alpha* and *Omega*—our Beginning and our End.

There is a conjunction between the two beginnings cited at the openings of the Old Testament and the New. 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 God. Of the material things He created the highest is man whom He made in His own image and likeness.⁵

We were made by God for Himself. We were made *in* time but not made *for* time - this limited existence. We were made for eternity, to be happy forever with the One Who made us in heaven. There is a suasive proof of this in the fact that here we never have more than a moment of life together at any one time. In eternity, we will have all of life together forever – *perfect possession altogether of endless life* - as Boëthius teaches.⁶

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 (here signifying *genus* not *gender*) has a nature which is immaterial. But what is immaterial is, by definition, not susceptible of 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.⁷ He might care to weigh his own objections with the twenty one (!) that St Thomas raises, and consider the answers provided. Again, he may profit by reading the paper *The*

⁴ *Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. III, ix; transl. V. E. Watts, Penguin Books, 1969; last line altered by me.

⁵ As to which see https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/god-&-man-in-his-image-&-likeness.pdf

⁶ *Consolation of Philosophy* Bk. V, vi, teaching adopted by St Thomas Aquinas.

⁷ <https://isidore.co/aquinas/QDdeAnima.htm#14>

Two Rabbits on this website which sets out the essential part played in any material thing by its *immaterial* constitutive, its substantial form.⁸

When, almost fourteen billion years ago (so the scientists assure us), there occurred the dawn of the universe, 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*. 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 eternal home which Almighty God has designed for us. The thinker, the scientist, may wonder over the fourteen billion years. But what is fourteen billion years in comparison with eternity? No more significant than the 70 years or 80 of an average life time.

English poet and commentator Hilaire Belloc appealed to the sentiments expressed in the final quatrain of the *O Salutaris* when he opined that entering heaven will be like nothing so much as coming home.

*Unitrinoque Domino,
Sit sempitena gaudia;
Qui vitam sine termino,
Nobis donet in Patria*

Michael Baker

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⁸ https://www.superflumina.org/PDF_files/two_rabbits.pdf