

Before the Beginning

‘Several centuries ago, the Pope announced that all Jews had to leave Italy. There was, of course, a massive reaction: the Jewish community was understandably angry. The Pope had a proposal: he would enter a religious debate with a distinguished rabbi. If the rabbi won the debate, then the Jews could stay; if the Pope won the debate, then the Jews had to leave. There was one problem. The rabbi could not speak Latin; the Pope could not speak Hebrew. So it was agreed the entire debate would take place using hand gestures in silence. On the day of the great debate, an expectant crowd gathered. The Pope and the rabbi sat opposite each other for several minutes before the Pope raised his hand and showed three fingers. The rabbi looked back and raised one finger. The Pope looked puzzled; he paused and in the next gesture, he waved his finger around his head. The rabbi responded quickly by pointing to the ground where he sat. After another pause, the Pope then brought out a communion wafer and chalice of wine. The rabbi responded by pulling out an apple. At that moment, the Pope stood up and said, “I concede the debate. This man has out-performed me. The Jews are free to stay”. Later, the Cardinals gathered around the Pope, wanting an explanation about what happened. The Pope said, “Well, I start-

ed by holding up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there was still one God affirmed by both Jews and Christians. After much thought, I then waved my finger around me to show him that God was all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground to show that God was also right here with us. Two good responses. So next I pulled out the wine and the wafer to show that God absolves us of our sins. His response was excellent; he pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had an answer for everything. What could I do?" Meanwhile, the Jewish community crowded around the rabbi. They wanted to know what happened. "Well", said the rabbi, "first he said to me, 'You Jews have three days to get out of here'. So to put it bluntly, I showed him my finger. Then he waved his hand around telling me that the whole city would be cleared of Jews. So I said to him, 'Listen here Mr. Pope, the Jews . . . we stay right here!" "And then?" asked a community leader. "Who knows?" said the rabbi. "He pulled out his packed lunch and so did I".'

This so-called debate was most definitely a comedy of errors! However, one can discern that even in this joke, God has a plan. The Lord gave the Pope a refresher course of basic doctrine, while He aggravated the rabbi while arranging for the Jews to stay. All the while, the Pope thought they were talking about the Holy Trinity. Now the Trinity, the Triune God, is admittedly a very difficult concept to wrap one's head around. It's easier for us

to not try to figure it out, how it works, but just simply accept it. Because it's in the Bible. From the first page, indeed the very first *three* verses of the Bible, that is, Genesis 1:1-3. But first, let's consider the original languages of the Holy Bible. Hebrew in the Old Testament, with the odd passage or two in Aramaic or Babylonian or Persian. And Greek in the New Testament, with an occasional word of Aramaic or Hebrew to "spice" things up. We might think the use of these two languages was serendipitous, it was not. It was deliberate and planned by God. God knew which languages would best carry forth the enormity of His revelation to humanity, in the first two main stages of history which would come to pass. Namely, the stage before Christ, and the stage after Christ came. Each of these two languages is perfectly suited, more than any other, to convey God's self-revelation in humanity's stage of "development" at the time.

So, for the best, most complete understanding of God's revelation to us, we should read God's written Word in the original Hebrew and Greek. However, most of us can't do that. And the translations, for us, English, are inadequate and misleading in many places but they do the best they can. It's also no accident that in our own day, there are more translations of the Bible in English than in any other language—approximately 900, but only a few of these are widely read. However, many, including you, who diligently study the Bible as it leads us to knowing our Savior ever better, will often and should compare different English trans-

lations. For in so doing, we gain a fuller understanding of the original intent of the original words. This is the best way we, who can't understand the original languages, can gain a handle on the real feel and range of meaning that God wants us to know.

The Bible's first chapter is truly foundational. Without it, we really would be "groundless". The first chapter sets the stage for everything. Indeed, we can't understand anything about anything or anyone without the foundational anchors of what reality and life is all about, where it came from and where it's going. See how clueless most young people are today, since they've never read the Bible. Depending on the translation, we can see some poetic beauty in Genesis 1. But when examined in the original Hebrew, its absolute, breathtaking beauty is apparent. That it is a divine revelation becomes patently obvious, for no human being could ever have constructed such symmetry in the phrases, verses, and passages in just this one chapter! If any of the Bible was dictated word for word to a human, Genesis is it. Moses was engaged by Holy Spirit to, like a secretary, take down dictation, and write it all, exactly as spoken. And this is reflected, even in the imperfect translations we read today. For it speaks of things that Moses had no knowledge about, and indeed had predated him by many centuries. Why else would it reference geographical places that hadn't existed for hundreds of years? Where they now were and their modern names would have to be explained in glossaries and commentaries. But which proves the words' antiquity and divinity.

The Trinity is first revealed in the first *three* verses. God the Father is revealed in the very first sentence. “God created”. So God here creates water, perhaps an enormous watery sphere. It’s huge. In fact, at this point, it’s as big or bigger than the entire universe later to be created. But it’s not alone. Father God had created it. As yet, it had no real form or contents. But Holy Spirit was all around, “hovering over the surface of the waters”. So we see Father God thinks. Then Holy Spirit moves. According to John 1:1-3, the Words that Father God thought are Christ Jesus Himself. So God the Father thinks. God the Son becomes the Word expressing the thought, and God the Spirit makes it manifest in physical and supernatural reality. Genesis 1:3 says that ‘Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light’.

This was no ordinary light. This was primordial light. This was the very first light. This was not created light. This was Christ Jesus Himself, the Son of God, uncovering Himself as it were, revealing Himself as it were, showing His glory as the Light of the World. He illuminates the watery “everything”, so as He reveals Himself there is light, and as He turns away His face, there is darkness. We see that only later, on the fourth day, does God the Son create the actual physical light that we can see with our eyes that comes to earth from the sun and the moon and the stars.

Now on the first day, creation is just water, an enormous ball, perhaps, of watery water. On the second 24-hour day, God separated the waters above from the waters below with an expanse,

called “sky” in our translation, but more accurately “heavens”. And the earth begins. For this sky encompasses everything we now know as the universe. And God on day four populated the heavens with the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars, galaxies, and everything. And as vast as the universe is, it’s not all there is. There is God’s creation that’s far bigger than it, for the heavens are just the divider between us on earth and, for us, a whole other universe outside of the universe we can see, surrounding it!

Most importantly for us, when the Son of God first unveils Himself in verse three, time itself begins. For before this, time itself didn’t exist. God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent—all knowing, everywhere present, and all powerful. He is outside of time, knows everything that has ever been and ever will be, already, at the same “time” so to speak. For God, everything that ever was and ever will be has already been! Truly He is before the beginning. As we understand this, even in Genesis 1:3, we already know that God, our Creator, knows everything that has and will ever happen to us, that we have and will ever do, and that through Lord Jesus, He forgives us of the wrong things, and loves us anyway and therefore is always and forever with us in whatever, whichever and everything we go through each and every second and minute and hour and day and week and year of our lives, both on earth, and eternally in heaven. For He, They, made us in Their image. Thus we are eternal creations, who will never cease to exist. For it was all planned for us, before the beginning!

