

The Two Stanzas of the Colossians Christ Hymn

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness

and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God,

He is the head of the body, the church.

(the beginning)

the firstborn of all creation.

the firstborn from the dead,
that in everything he might be preeminent.

For by him

all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions
or rulers or authorities—

For in him

all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

all things were created **through him** and **for him**.

and **through him** to reconcile to himself all things,

And he is before all things,
and in him all things hold together.

making peace by the blood of his cross.
whether on earth or in heaven,

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death,

Why Structure Matters

Reading the text as it is presented on the other side of this sheet, it becomes obvious that there was a careful plan involved in how it was written. Parallels and connections abound in the hymn, and Paul carefully fleshes out every idea and then folds it into another to produce an ever-expanding view of the supremacy of Christ.

Over and over again, the ideas in the hymn overlap and expand to say more and more. It is a masterpiece of what is called **narrative theology**. Rather than making an overt statement right at the beginning, Paul presents us with great ideas in a creative, rhythmic narrative. It is not quite a story, as we think of narratives, but he takes his readers on a journey into deeper and deeper truth. It is a shame we have no clue what the tune would have sounded like.

At the beginning, he writes of the “domain of darkness” which he describes as “alien and hostile” at the end. And how are we “transferred” into the Kingdom of God? He tells us at the end that it is through being reconciled through Jesus’s death. *He makes Jesus central first to all of creation, and then to our salvation.*

Then in the first stanza, Paul establishes what we might call “**the cosmic Christ**.” This is the realization that Jesus is not just the God man, but truly God as a *man*. Jesus is the God of Scripture. In the second stanza then applies the tremendous concepts of the cosmic Christ to the Church, making a practical connection for the problems the Colossian Church was facing at the time. They were dealing with false teachers who were presenting a different version of Jesus. They were minimizing Jesus, trying to get him to fit into their philosophical ideas. Paul uses his hymn to push the boundaries of the mystery of Christ and his incarnation.

This narrative theology reduces the scale of the philosophical ideas, presenting Christ not as an idea but as a transcendent creator and redeemer. Paul demonstrates that Christ is greater than our perceptions and understanding, and he does so not through reason and logic but through lyric and verse. We cannot read this as an Aristotelian syllogism. It is theology structured as song.

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