

GOD WANTED HIM TO BE FIRST IN EVERY WAY

The primacy of Jesus is attested in various ways in the Hymn of Colossians. He is first mentioned in the prologue as the beloved Son who is a king; and in both of these determinations Jesus has a primacy. He is loved by the Father before time begins, and thus before all creatures in time. He is first in his kingship, because a king takes precedence over all that he rules.

In the Hymn itself he is saluted as “the first-born of all creation”. We might think of Jesus of Nazareth, whose human nature was a created reality; but far more likely is the idea that his divine birth gives him precedence over all created realities. This precedence is not a matter of mere priority in time, since the whole creation was brought into being “through him and for him”; he is not only the locus of God’s creating deed, but he is the finality of the creation: it was made not only through him but for him.

The precedence of Christ is boundless, stretching to things invisible as well as visible, and in particular the hymn places him above all celestial forces of dominance; his priority can be sensed in the consistency of creation (“he holds all things together in unity”).

The unity between creation and redemption is a vital theme in the NT. Any notion that Jesus comes into the world to supply a sticking-plaster to heal a faultily-built creation is obviously blasphemous, suggesting as it does that the Creator did a very shaky job and needs to be corrected by the greater competence, understanding, or compassion of his Son. When the Scripture says that “God wanted all perfection to be found in him”, it cannot mean that God wanted his Son to behave perfectly or to do well in the world, but that he wanted human beings to discover the perfection of the Son’s eternal life. That God wants everything in heaven and on earth to be reconciled in him means that the only reconciliation that will finally work in the universe is in him. The identity of the Cross with this reconciliation is the great mystery we have to fathom in trying to understand the Kingship of Christ.