

Pauline notion of Christ as the Head of his Body the Church  
“**And he is the head of the Body, that is, the Church** (v. 18) (as in 1 Cor.12, Rm.12:6) to show that he is **also** the head of all creation:

“**In him all things hold together .. God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth**” (v.17, 19-20).

There is, therefore, now a **cosmic dimension** to Paul's original theology, one of the features of the letter that is used to argue against Pauline authorship. Another feature is that the notion of ‘Church’ used in this letter is that of the **Universal Church**, not a particular community as St. Paul usually uses the term.

But this cosmic dimension is preceded by Christ being shown to be in the image of God with a fundamental role in creation:

“**He is the image of the unseen God .. For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth**” (v.15-16).

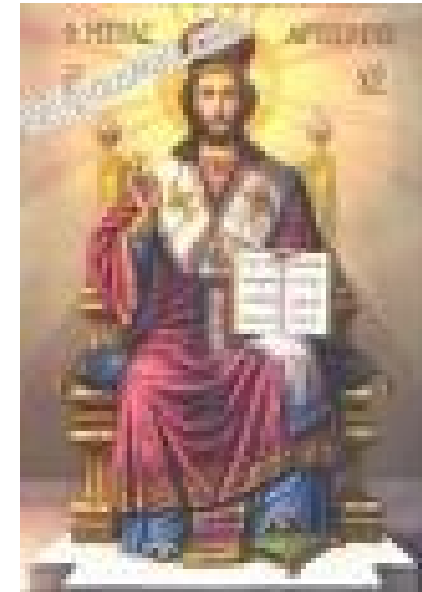
As in the Prayer Hymn of Philippians, being in the image of the unseen God means that Christ had pre-existed creation, while his resurrection “**He is the beginning the first born of the dead**” (v.18) is a sign of his exaltation and the start of the cosmic process for everyone and everything to be reconciled to him.

The phrase “**First born (Greek, Protokos) of all creation**” (v.15) (is often quoted to argue (as is the phrase ‘He is the beginning’ referred to above) that Christ was himself created. However, it actually intends to show that he was the **source** of all creation as the subsequent: “**He exists before all things**” (v.17) demonstrates.

This Prayer concentrates on **Christ’s glory** - his likeness to God, his pre-existence, creative role, his power over death, his control of all creation. In this it transcends the Prayer of Philippians that chose to emphasise Christ’s **self emptying sacrifice** with his **exaltation**. Both show how the early Church recognised the divine in Christ but it is clear this was not yet seen as absolute equality with the Father

## Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

### 26. Jesus is Divine - The Prayer of Philippians and Colossians



1. In the Prayer Hymn of Philippians, if Jesus originally was in the ‘likeness of God’ why does it then have to emphasise his exaltation after his death?
2. What parts of the two prayers indicate that the early Church had not yet come to accept Christ as fully God?
3. What are the differences in emphasis of the two prayers?

## St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Although Pauline authorship of this letter is not contested, there is now quite a widespread view that the document we have is actually a composite of **three** letters that Paul wrote to the Philippians during a period of captivity (1:13).

The first letter (4:10f) is a letter of thanks to them for a gift they had sent him through their representative, Epaphroditus.

The second letter (1-3:1, 4:4-7, 4:21-23) sent a few months later, was taken by Epaphroditus who had now recovered from an illness (2:25f). It does not address any theological issues, rather it is in the form of a friendly exhortation to avoid petty rivalries, and to strive for unity in the joy of knowing Christ. It is as part of this exhortation that St. Paul includes the great Christological **Prayer-Hymn (2:6-11)** that is such an important witness to the beliefs of the early Christian community about who they understood Jesus was.

The third letter (3:2-4:3) is more urgent in tone, as some 'destined to be lost' (3:19) were still being disruptive to the community.

### The Great Christological Prayer Hymn (2:6-11)

This hymn is important to us because it was not composed by St. Paul but represents the thoughts of some early Christian group, possibly Judean or Samaritan as arguments have been made for an Aramaic original. St. Paul obviously valued it highly to include it in his letter as an example of **humility**, a virtue that he urged the Philippians to adopt. The humility comes from Jesus' **emptying of himself**, leading later to Kenotic theology.

The hymn can be divided into two parts of three:



### Part 1

Christ's original status (v.6)  
Christ's first humiliation (v.7)  
Christ's second humiliation (v.8)

### Part 2

Christ's exaltation (v.9)  
Christ's first homage (v.10)  
Christ's second homage (v.11)

The opening of the hymn (v.6) shows that Jesus was considered to be **divine**, but he was **not** considered to be God himself, only in the form or **likeness** of God "**Who being in the form of God**".

The continuation is sometimes translated "**did not count equality with God something to be grasped**" (as in the New Jerusalem Bible) but the Greek 'isa theo' really means 'being **like** God', so there is **no** equivalence with God intended here.

The **divine** Christ was humbled by becoming human "**but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as humans are**" (v.7) (an example Jesus wanted us to imitate as he showed by washing the feet of his disciples) **and** by accepting the torture of the cross (v.8).

But Christ's death is followed by his glory "**For this God raised him high**" (v.9) so that he would be recognised as being **divine** and worshipped as such by creation (v.10) **but also** so that his **power** over creation would be acknowledged "**That every tongue would acknowledge Jesus as Lord**" (v.11).



However, as the final phrase demonstrates "**to the glory of God the Father**", which reinforces the priority of God the Father in verse 9 above, this hymn shows that the early Church had not yet concluded that Jesus himself was also God.

### The Letter to the Colossians

This letter is Deutero-Pauline, that is, it is more likely to have been written by a follower of St. Paul than by the saint himself. It contains another great **Prayer Hymn/ Poem** (1:15-20) that develops the basic