In Search of the Right Metaphor: A Response to Peet van Dyk's "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology" Part Two: Searching for an Alternative

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ABSTRACT

This article continues with the investigation of the dominion metaphor in Gen 1:28 that was published in OTE 23 (2). In the first section the author deals with alternative proposals to this metaphor, namely Earth as voice and the world as God's body. The former suggests an ecojustice hermeneutic as proposed by Norman Habel and the latter suggests a feminist critique as poposed by Sallie McFague. In the second section the author turns to an investigation of the transformation of the dominion metaphor in the Christ Hymn, Col 1:15-20. In the Bible attempts at mediating between God's transcendence and his immanence were pursued along two different paths, either following a Gnostic or Hellenistic Jewish dualistic speculative framework followed by traditional scholarship - Käsemann, Lohse, Schweizer), or within a pantheistic, (panentheistic) monistic framework, Stoicism. Only recently with a different structural analysis leading to the affirmation of the unity of the text, has the second route been pursued (van Kooten, Pizzuto, Balabanski). The latter reveals the rich imagery of the hymn celebrating Christ's role in creation (image of God; firstborn of creation; creator and head of the cosmic body) and in redemption (head of the body, the Church; firstborn of the dead; reconciler of all things) become evident. Both parts of the hymn are kept in balance by the central metaphor linking creation and redemption (in Christ all things hold together), the perfect image for the interconnectedness of all things. The final evaluation points to the great opportunity offered by the Colossian hymn, not only for the search of the right metaphor but equally for formulating an ecotheology.

A INTRODUCTION

In the first article of a two-part series we started with van Dyk's[1] challenge to South African Old Testament (hereafter OT) scholars to develop an ecotheology that could contribute meaningfully to a solution of the environmental crisis. We maintained that this is not possible without a critical appraisal of the

[1] Peet Van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," *OTE* 22/1 (2009): 186-204.

metaphors that have governed and still govern humanity's relationship to nature. The search for the "right metaphor" rather than the search for an ecotheology should be at the heart of the enterprise.

Van Dyk identified Gen 1:28 and Ps 8 as needing special attention because the account of the creation of humankind according to the image of God and invested with the authority to rule over all other creatures had aroused a lot of controversy. Van Dyk gave a survey of critical voices blaming the dominion imagery for the destruction of the environment. Van Dyk therefore specifically challenged OT scholars to investigate Gen 1:28 and Ps 8 and determine how these texts should be interpreted.

Taking up the challenge in the first article we looked at the dominion metaphor in Gen 1:28 and reaffirmed in Psalm 8. We found that the majority of scholars were hesitant to abandon the canonical reading determined by the Priestly account but have rather tried to interpret the texts in an eco-friendly way. One attempt has been to soften the harsh terminology used in Gen 1, the other to interpret the royal metaphor, ultimately derived from Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology in a more meaningful way either by placing it in its historical context and seeing in it a metaphor of empowerment for the Jews in Babylonian captivity or understanding it within the larger biblical context as responsible stewardship. Van Dyk specifically mentioned the concept of stewardship and requested that its role within the larger ecological debate needed to be clarified.

We saw that critics not only pointed out that all these attempts presented exegetical problems, but much more fundamentally that both Gen 1:28 and Ps 8 were determined by a world view in which a monarchical God and his earthly representative stand on top of a hierarchy and where humans are not part of nature but opposed to and above nature. The domination of nature, like the domination of women, is but one side of a coin, as feminist scholars have pointed out. There is no room for the fundamental insight of modern science that all things are interconnected and that we humans are not separated from nature but intricately connected with nature as part of the web of life. The dominion metaphor, also in its more ecologically sensitive interpretation, does not reflect but rather obscures this reality.

At the end of the first article we posed the question: Where does this leave us in our search for the right metaphor? If dominion cannot be the right metaphor for our time can the biblical metaphor be abandoned? Can it be replaced by images and concepts that are more consonant with our present scientific world view and reflect that reality? Other exegetes have taken this step. They have abandoned the imagery and have moved beyond the canonical reading in order to recover a different tradition not overshadowed by the

priestly account.[2] This brings us to the task at hand in this article.

In a first section we want to deal with two alternative proposals for different metaphors more consonant with our reality, the proposals of the Earth Bible Project and that of Sallie MacFague. We will evaluate whether they could serve as "right metaphors" or whether these attempts are also not fully satisfactory. In the second major section we will then turn to an example from the New Testament (hereafter NT), the Christ Hymn in Col 1:15-20, where the dominion metaphor of Gen 1 has not been abandoned but transformed. In the conclusion we will summarise the different positions and come to a final evaluation.

B THE METAPHOR ABANDONED

1 The Earth Bible Project: Earth as Voice

In the introductory essay of the five volume Earth Bible series, which Conradie[3] has termed "by far the most significant product of scholarly attempts to read the Bible from an ecologically sensitive perspective," Norman Habel[4] states that the environmental crisis is so pervasive that theologians can no longer ignore it. He claims that many readings of biblical texts "based on the assumption that human beings have divinely sanctioned 'dominion' over Earth and a mandate to 'harness nature,' support attitudes and perspectives that contribute to a devaluation of the Earth." The term "Earth" (without the definite article) that is here used stands for "that living system within which we humans live in a relationship of interdependence with other members of the Earth community."[5] In this context the dominion metaphor is no longer helpful.

This negative assessment of the dominion metaphor is expressed even more forcefully by Veronica Brady[6] in "Preface" to the first volume. She comments that God's command in Gen 1:28 "to have dominion over every living thing, far from being a word of life ... brings a word of death and has little or nothing positive to contribute to the struggle for Earth and for the future of humanity."

Norman Habel has undergirded this negative evaluation in his article,

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2 Gene McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies," in *Theology for Earth Community. A Field Guide* (ed. Dieter T. Hessel, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 38.

3 Ernst M. Conradie, "Toward an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics. A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project," *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 123.

4 Norman Habel, "Introducing the Earth Bible," in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (ed. Norman Habel, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 25.

5 Habel, "Introducing Earth Bible," 27.

6 Veronica Brady, Preface to *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (ed. Norman Habel, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 13.

"Geophany. The Earth Story in Genesis 1."[7] In his reading he finds that without the story of the creation of humans in Gen 1:26-30, the Earth story in Gen 1 presents a beautifully unified narrative, with Earth, *erets*, as the primary character. The story "emphasizes the intrinsic value of Earth as the centre of cosmos and the source of life."[8] But with the appearance of humans on the scene things change radically. The new section Gen 1:26-30 stands in direct conflict with the orientation of the Earth story in the preceding verses.[9] In these verses humans are given a distinct status and priority in relation to God in comparison with other living creatures.[10] Unlike other creatures, humans are created as a result of a consultation between God and the heavenly council. They alone are made "in the image of God" and receive a special blessing. Humans are not one among living creatures but are a superior species given the mandate "to rule" and to "subdue" the Earth.[11] He comes to the conclusion "that the human story (Gen 1:26-30) violates the spirit of the Earth-oriented story that precedes it."[12]

Habel[13] is critical of the many attempts by other biblical scholars to redeem the text. He asks whether interpreters by always assuming the primacy of the human story have not suppressed the voice of the Earth, whether it was not high time to restore the Earth story to its rightful place so that justice for Earth could be done. A new way of reading the text is therefore demanded.

> Rather than reflecting about the Earth as we analyze a text, we are seeking to reflect with Earth and see things from the perspective of Earth... We are concerned with ecojustice: justice for Earth. Our approach can therefore be called an ecojustice hermeneutic.[14]

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7 Norman Habel, "Geophany. The Earth Story in Genesis 1," in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (eds. Norman Habel & Shirley Wurst, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 34-48.

8 Habel, "Geophany," 45.

9 Habel, "Geophany," 46-48. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11. A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 143 has also noticed the difference. He identified two ANE traditions that were merged by the Priestly Writer: the tradition of the creation of the world and the tradition of the creation of humans. They were originally quite distinct.

10 See also Norman Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (eds. Norman C. Habel & Peter Trudinger, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 6.

11 Habel ("Ecological Hermeneutics," 6) is adamant that the term *kabash* reflects the exercise of force. "There is no suggestion of stewardship or care in this term."

12 Habel, "Geophany," 47.

13 Habel, "Geophany," 48.

14 Habel, "Geophany," 34.

The Earth Bible Team[15] has formulated six ecojustice principles as a hermeneutical tool for reading Scripture.[16] Among these the principle of voice, namely that Earth has an authentic voice is the most important.

This principle evoked considerable discussion among scholars.[17] Critics claimed that at the end of the exercise "the voice of the earth continues to look suspiciously like a human creation."[18] The Earth Bible Team responded that there were three grand narratives in Scripture, the story of God, the story of humanity, the story of Earth. In the past most interpreters had negated metaphors in which Earth were given voice.[19] It was, however, essential to give back Earth its voice in order to open up dimensions of reality that had been suppressed. Employing the metaphor of voice was therefore integral to the whole project.

> The metaphor of voice is more than a rhetorical device: the metaphor becomes another hermeneutical tool to enable us to move beyond the dualisms that we as a team have inherited as Western thinkers, and to begin relating to Earth as kin rather than commod-

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15 Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (ed. Norman Habel, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 38-53.

16 *The principle of intrinsic worth*: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value. *The principle of interconnectedness:* Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival. *The principle of voice*: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice. *The principle of purpose*: The universe, Earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. *The principle of mutual custodianship*: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community. *The principle of resistance*: Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

17 Cf. Earth Bible Team, "Conversations with Gene Tucker and other writers," in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (eds. Norman Habel & Shirley Wurst, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 29-30; Earth Bible Team, "The Voice of Earth. More than a Metaphor?" in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (ed. Norman Habel, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 23-28; Mark G. Brett, "Earthing the Human in Genesis 1-3," in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (eds. Norman Habel & Shirley Wurst, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 73; David Jobling & Nathan Loewen, "Sketches for Earth Reading of the Book of Amos," in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth* (ed. Norman Habel, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 72 state: "In the Bible, the earth is rarely personified as an autonomous subject, and rarely spoken of in a decidedly mythological way."

18 Earth Bible Team, "Voice of Earth", 23.

19 Earth Bible Team, "Voice of Earth", 25.

ity, as partner and co-creator rather than property.[20]

There is no doubt that the ecojustice principles in particular the principle of Earth as "voice" can be understood as a valuable heuristic key in leading us away from treating Earth simply as a object to be exploited. Can it therefore replace the reigning anthropocentric royal metaphor of humans created in the "image of God" and wielding dominion over all the creatures of the Earth?

Conradie [21] in his review essay thinks that the critique of the Earth Bible project of the reigning anthropocentric interpretations is not sufficient. He asks the question, how we relate the message of the Bible with a particular context and he emphasises the crucial role played by doctrinal keys.[22] These enable the interpreter to establish a link between text and contemporary context and are usually derived from core Christian beliefs. As an example he refers to attempts by systematic theologians to reinterpret controversial Christian doctrines with the use of such doctrinal keys to make them more acceptable.[23] In view of the supreme importance of doctrinal keys such as the metaphor of imago Dei for Christian belief, Conradie claims "that an ecological biblical hermeneutics should go hand in hand with an ecological reformulation of Christian doctrine."[24]

A very significant attempt at finding an acceptable metaphor more consonant with contemporary views of nature that can assist in reformulating Christian doctrine is Sallie MacFague's suggestion that we should consider the world as God's body.

2 Sallie MacFague: The World as God's Body

In order to understand the significance of MacFague's proposal it is important to note the difference between metaphors and models and how they function in theology.[25] MacFague[26] formulates the difference in the following way:

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[20] Earth Bible Team, "Voice of Earth," 28.

[21] Conradie, "Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," 132-133.

[22] Conradie uses the term "doctrinal key" instead of "metaphor" or 'root metaphor" as I have done in this article.

[23] Conradie, "Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," 133 refers to Douglas Hall's *The Steward, a Biblical Symbol Come of Age* to show how the doctrinal key (metaphor) is here used to develop a theology of stewardship that emphasises how to relate Gen 1:27-28 with ecological responsibility within the contemporary context. Norman Habel, however, has adamantly refused to accept that the mandate in the passage can be interpreted in terms of benign stewardship.

[24] Conradie, "Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics", 133.

[25] Cf. Anna Case-Winters, *Reconstructing a Christian Theology of Nature. Down to Earth* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), 29.

> The difference between a metaphor and a model can be expressed in a number of ways, but most simply, a model is a metaphor with "staying power," that is, a model is a metaphor that has gained sufficient stability and scope so as to present a pattern for relatively comprehensive and coherent explanation.

The dominant model for the relationship between God and the world in traditional Western theology has been monarchical; "the classical picture employs royalist, triumphalist metaphors, depicting God as king, lord, and patriarch, who rules over and cares for the world and human beings."[27]

MacFague[28] summarises the major problems with this model. We have already noted some with regard to the dominion metaphor in Gen 1 and Ps 8. The first is that God is distant from the world and not present in the world. He controls the world through domination and benevolence. Second, his benevolence extends only to his human subjects; there is no concern for the cosmos, for the nonhuman world. Because this model is not only highly anthropocentric it is also characterised by dualistic hierarchies, such as male/female, spirit/nature, human/nonhuman and so forth. This dualistic framework leads to a graded differentiation in which it is assumed that one in each pair is superior and by all rights should rule over the other.[29] Finally, because God rules either through domination or benevolence this model undercuts human responsibility for the world. It supports attitudes either of domination of the world or passivity toward it. McFague considers the monarchical model to be dangerous in our time and believes that it should be abandoned.

As an alternative MacFague[30] proposes that we should imagine the world, and that means the universe and everything it contains, to be God's body. In comparison with the monarchical model this metaphor presents several advantages, positive values that Case-Winters [31] finds "very appealing indeed."

(i) The metaphor presents an affirmation of bodily nature that stands in stark contrast to anti-body, anti-matter tradition in Christianity.[32] Annalet van Schalkwyk[33] also comments on the attractive aspects of this

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[26] Sallie MacFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature as God's Body," in *Liberating Life. Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (eds. Charles Birch, William Eakin & James B. McDaniel, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 207.

[27] MacFague, "Nature as God's Body," 208.

[28] MacFague, "Nature as God's Body," 209-211.

[29] Cf. Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature* , 24.

[30] MacFague, "Nature as God's Body," 213-218.

[31] Cf. Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature,* 31.

[32] Cf. Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature,* 30-31.

[33] Annalet Van Schalkwyk, "Ecofeminism, Ecofeminist Spirituality and Sustainability," *Grace and Truth* 25/1 (2008): 10.

metaphor in that it "speaks of the immanence of God's presence in the cosmos and the earth. It speaks of women's bodily-yet-spiritual identification with the Divine in the earth, and, moreover of God's inclusion of (female and male) bodies" together with all other bodies of the earth and the cosmos "within Her greater body."

(ii) Just as we relate sympathetically to our bodies, God relates sympathetically to the world. God is in touch with all parts of the world through his interior understanding.

(iii) While the monarchical model encourages attitudes of militarism the model of the world as God's body encourages holistic attitudes of responsibility and care. Divine bodily immanence is portrayed as divine vulnerability. The world as God's body puts God "at risk."[34] It can be ravaged and destroyed and it therefore needs to be treated with reverence.

Anna Case-Winters,[35] while seeing the positive aspects of MacFague's proposal raises also serious questions:

(i) McFague understands her position as panentheistic rather than pantheistic but Case-Winters asks whether the use of the metaphor "does not entail too close an identification of God with the world… When the ontological distance between God and the world is let go, transcendence collapses into immanence."[36] By identifying God and the world not only divine transcendence but also the alterity (otherness) and integrity of nature is compromised.

(ii) Case-Winters also asks whether in this model we still can speak of human responsibility for creation (or anything else) because it would seem that whatever humans do is really only God's action. "How can this model of God's relation to and interaction with the world serve as a model of our own?"[37]

(iii) One could add other questions: How does this model of the world as God's body relate to the other one deeply ingrained in the Christian tradition since NT times of the Church as Christ's body? Would the relationship not have to be clarified? Furthermore, is it possible to simply abandon the monarchical model that is fundamental for the understanding of Christ as king?[38] Would it not be better to transform the royal

[34] MacFague, "Nature as God's Body," 213.
[35] Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature*, 32-34.
[36] Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature*, 33.
[37] Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature*, 33.
[38] One would just have to consider the role of Christ the king in hymns and worship songs.

model in such a way that the negative aspects of the old model are eliminated? Indeed, such a transformation of the old model has already happened in the NT message of the Cosmic Christ. In our last section we want to briefly see how the transformation of the royal model in Colossians can serve us in our search of the right metaphor for our time.

C THE METAPHOR TRANSFORMED: THE DOMINION OF THE COSMIC CHRIST ACCORDING TO COL 1:15-20

1 The dominant view on the Christ Hymn, Col 1:15-20

Already in the OT there are attempts at mediating between the concept of a transcendent God and his immanence without collapsing one into the other.[39] According to Ernst[40] these attempts were pursued along two different paths, first following either a Gnostic or Hellenistic Jewish dualistic speculative framework, second, within a pantheistic (panentheistic) monistic framework inspired by Stoicism.

Much of earlier scholarship has sought to interpret the Christological claims of the so-called Christ Hymn in Col 1:15-20 within a dualistic framework or, as Balabanski[41] has termed it, within of a cosmology of distance between the divine on the one hand and humanity and the material world on the other.[42] Since the pioneering analysis of the hymn by Käsemann in his 1949 article[43] this dualistic framework is closely linked with an analysis of the structure. Käsemann had claimed that the author of Colossians made use of a traditional hymn to which he added interpretative glosses. A majority of scholars have followed him in this, indeed "this is nothing less than common opinion" as Van Kooten[44] comments.[45] Most scholars have, however, offered their own

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39 See Case-Winters' critique of Sallie McFague referred to above.

40 Josef Ernst, *Pleroma und Pleroma Christi. Geschichte und Deutung eines Begriffs der paulinischen Antilegomena* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1970), 22.

41 Vicki Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology. Retrieving a Stoic 'Permeating Cosmology' in Colossians 1:15-20," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (eds. Norman C. Habel & Peter Trudinger, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 154-155.

42 Ernst Käsemann, "Eine urchristliche Taufliturgie," in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* (vol 1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1960), 34-51 sees the background in pre-Christian Gnosticism. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1971), 45-46 and Eduard Schweizer, *Der Brief an die Kolosser* (Zürich: Benziger, 1976), 52-56 interpret the text against the background of Sophia and Logos speculation of Second Temple Judaism.

43 Reprinted in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen* 1, 34-51.

44 George H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003), 115.

analyses and the number of solutions proposed by different scholars for the original text of the hymn varies a great deal.[46] All scholars however agree that a distinction has to be made between the theology of the putative "original" hymn and that of the so-called redactor. The cosmology of distance is particularly evident in cosmological statements of the so-called original hymn.

It is obvious that within an overarching dualistic framework there is a need of an intermediary to bridge the chasm between the transcendent God and Earth.[47] In the Colossian hymn that intermediary is Christ. Because this is the framework within which the Christological claims of the Colossian hymn have traditionally been explained the dominion metaphor is not transformed but rather reaffirmed. That can be seen in the following ecologically problematic features of the theory:

(i) Although Christ is the intermediary to bridge the distance between God and Earth he does not really get involved in the Earth. The hymn celebrates Christ's role in creation but he still remains distant even in creation because he is the pre-existent one and belongs to the realm of God.[48] As such Christ has dominion over all the cosmic demonic forces and triumphs over them.[49]

(ii) Within a dualistic framework creation is devalued. Scholars have recognised that spatial categories are paramount in the hymn. But if the original hymn spoke of the body and the head of Christ in cosmological terms this statement could be used by the redactor only if it had been

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[45] See for instance Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser,* 50 who claims that it can no longer be disputed that the author used such a hymn "Dass ein vom Verfasser übernommener Hymnus vorliegt, ist nicht mehr zu bestreiten."

[46] See Outi Leppä, *The Making of Colossians. A Study on the Formation and Purpose of a Deutero-Pauline Letter* (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2003), 87; Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 118; Vincent Pizzuto, *A Cosmic Leap of Faith. An Authorial, Structural, and Theological Investigation of the Cosmic Christology in Col 1:15-20* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 144-156; 158-183 for an appraisal of the different solutions proposed.

[47] Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology," 154. For Gnosticism it was the Primal Man as the Redeemer, for Jewish wisdom speculation, the intermediary was Sophia wisdom, for Philo, it was the Logos.

[48] Lohse, *Colossians,* 48 for instance translates "*prototokos tou kosmou*" (the firstborn of creation) as "the firstborn before all creation." Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 58 echoes this view. "Nach dem Gesagten kann das nicht heißen, dass Christus erstes Glied der Schöpfung ist; man muß also komparativisch verstehen: ... früher als ... vor aller..."

[49] Cf. Käsemann, "Urchristliche Taufliturgie," 45-46. Heinrich Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* (Freiburg: Herder 1961), 14-15 follows Käsemann in his understanding of the *stoicheia tou kosmou* ("cosmic elements") as evil cosmic powers.

"corrected"[50] Cosmology had to be reinterpreted in terms of soteriology and eschatology.[51]

(iii) There is a heavy anthropocentric bias in the traditional interpretation. Scholars have usually emphasised the second stanza dealing with redemption; the affirmations of the first stanza dealing with creation are seen exclusively in this light. For example, Käsemann sees in verse 14 referring to Christ "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" the hermeneutic key for the whole passage. He states categorically that there is no legitimate direct approach for a theology of creation that does not lead via eschatology.[52] This view is echoed by Lohse and Schweizer who also state that salvation is for humans and for humans alone.[53] In this context Balabanski's [54]comments seem very apposite: "If we work within a framework of distance, with a mediator/savior who is

[50] Cf. Käsemann "Urchristliche Taufliturgie," 45 who comments: "Von da aus ergibt sich das eigenartige Faktum, dass die Irrlehre in Kol. mit einem Bekenntnis bekämpft wird, dessen Formulierung selber aufs stärkste von der Heterodoxie geprägt ist." Lohse, *Colossians,* 55 speaks of the reinterpretation of the mythological statement of the cosmos as Christ's body in term of the historical entity, the church. See also Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 52-53.

[51] That is the significance of the insertion of *tês ekklesias* (the Church) in v. 20b. Cf. Käsemann's statement ("Urchristliche Taufliturgie," 50), "Die Einfügung von *tês ekklesias* hat dogmatisches Gewicht. Sie illustriert das 'Versetztsein in das Reich des Sohnes und macht aus der kosmologischen eine eschatologische Aussage. Christus ist auch Haupt der Mächte und Gewalten. Aber sie sind nicht sein Leib im eigentlichen Sinne. Sie sind in 'in ihm,' sofern er ihr Schöpfer ist und Gewalt über sie hat." A similar statement can be found in Schweizer (*Brief an die Kolosser*, 54-55): "Während der Hymnus mit der Prädikation Christi als des Hauptes des Leibes seine Einheit mit der Welt betont, die in ihm zusammengefaßt und - nach der zweiten Strophe — versöhnt ist, legt der Verfasser des Briefes das als Vorherrschaft über die Mächte aus."

[52] Käsemann "Urchristliche Taufliturgie," 51: "Es gibt keinen Weg zur Schöpfung außer dem Weg über die und in der Vergebung. Jeder unmittelbare, also nicht von der Eschatologie herkommende Zugriff wird zur Kosmologie, zum Fall aus der Vergebung, zur neuen Versklavung unter die kosmischen, dann unter die dämonischen Tyrannen."

[53] Cf. Lohse, *Colossians*, 61: "The great drama, wherein the principalities are stripped of their power and the reconciliation of all things has taken place, *is for the sake of man alone...*" (ltalics mine). Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 63: "daß Christus als der gepriesen wird, der von Anfang an, schon vor der Schöpfung 'Bild' und 'Erstgeborener' ist, d.h. Ausdruck der *letztlich auf den Menschen abzielenden Bewegung der Liebe Gottes*" (italics mine – G.W.). The fact that humankind is not mentioned in the hymn is for Schweizer a clear indication that there is a difference between the author of Colossians and the original hymn. See also Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith,* 167.

[54] Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology," 157.

aligned to humanity first and foremost, the rest of creation is necessarily secondary and derivative. So when we hear the affirmation in Col 1:20 that "through him God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things; "we might hear 'all things' meaning 'all things pertaining to humans.'" In this scheme of things creation has no intrinsic value.

2 The Alternative View: Background and Structure

Only fairly recently has an alternative framework for analysing the Christological statements of the hymn been proposed: Stoicism.[55] In contrast to the contemporary cosmologies of distance, Stoic cosmology proposes a different model for the divine/material world and human connection. Stoics understand the world as a unified cosmos, which is held together by a rational agent, Nature, physics, which is the ultimate cause of all things. As such, Nature is another way of referring to God. "So Nature or God is the active principle in the world, interacting with inert matter.... We could therefore call this cosmology panentheistic par excellence."[56]

In addition to this different framework a different view of the structure has also been proposed. In a clear move away from earlier positions, Van Kooten[57] and Pizzuto[58] have argued that, contrary to common opinion, the whole passage has been conceived by the author of Col himself, and does not entail critical modification of an existing hymn.[59] Pizzuto[60] maintains that "the fragility of any hypothesis requiring a reconstruction of the hymn becomes all the more apparent if we are able to demonstrate that the portions claimed to be glosses serve an integral role with those portions acknowledged to be original." He is able to show this original cohesion of the entire hymn in his structural analysis. He demonstrates a structure in the form of an inverted parallelism in which the parts are chiastically arranged according to the overall pattern A-B-C-B'-A'.[61] This chiasm highlights "the thematic movement behind the pattern, which provides coherence, direction and structure to the entire hymn."[62] He has analysed the passage in the following manner:

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[55] See Van Kooten, "Cosmic Christology," and Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology."

[56] Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology," 155. See also Ernst, *Pleroma*, 11.

[57] Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 111.

[58] Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 183.

[59] Thus also Leppä, *Making of Colossians*, 88.

[60] Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 183.

[61] Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 118-119; 203-205.

[62] Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 203. Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 114 has also analyzed the text in terms of a chiastic structure, but because he includes vv. 15-20 into the introductory prayer 1:9-23 he comes to a somewhat different conclusion. We cannot here debate the merits of the two different proposals.

A: Cosmological Focus: Christ's role in Creation: "All things created in, through, for Christ;"
B: Summative statement of A: "He is before all things;"
C: Pivotal axis between Christ in Creation and Christ in Redemption: "All things cohere in Christ;"
B': Summative statement of A': "He is the head of the church;"
A': Soteriological Focus: Christ's role in Redemption: "All things reconciled through and for Christ."

Pizzuto[63] claims that "the balance achieved through this chiastic structure provides an interpretation of the text that recognises the importance of parallelismus membrorum in service of its Christological content". His proposal on Col 1:15-20 in English translation is the following:[64]

A	15a	Who is the image of the invisible God
	15b	<u>firstborn of all creation;</u>
	16a	for in him were <u>created all things</u>
	16b	in the heavens and on the earth,
	16c	the visible and the invisible,
	16d	whether thrones or dominions,
	16e	whether rulers, or powers;
	16f	all things, through him and for him, have been created;
B	17a	And he is before all things,
C	17b	And <u>all things in him hold together</u>,
B'	18a	And he is the <u>head of the body, the church;</u>
A'	18b	Who is the beginning,
	18c	<u>firstborn of the dead,</u>.
	18d	so that he might come to have first place in everything;
	19	for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
	20a	and through him, <u>to reconcile all things to himself</u>,
	20b	by making peace through the blood of his cross,
	20c	through him <*to reconcile*> whether the things on earth, or the things in heaven.

In the next sections we will consider the metaphors of Christ's role in creation and redemption following Pizutto's structural analysis within the panentheistic framework of Stoic physics and will see how these metaphors have transformed the destructive dominion metaphor in an ecologically sensitive manner.

63 Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 205.

64 Those images of special importance for our analysis of the transformation of the dominion metaphor are underlined.

3 Metaphors of Christ's Role in Creation and Redemption

3a Metaphors of Christ's role in creation

(i) Image (*eikon*) of the invisible God (1:15a)

The hymn begins with the solemn statement that Christ is "the image of the invisible God." This title seems to recall the story of creation, in particular Gen 1:27 which has been at the centre of our investigation, the affirmation that God created man "in his own image, in the image of God he created him" and gave him dominion. "Yet even though the term 'image' *(eikon)* suggests Gen 1:27, it is out of the question to interpret it as a direct reference to the biblical account of creation. When the word *eikon* is defined as the 'image' of the invisible God, the Hellenistic use of the term is to be assumed."[65] In his investigation of the Greek use of *eikon*, Kleinknecht[66] points out that to modem logic this statement seems to be a contradiction. How can there be an image of something invisible? But to Greek understanding the image is not only a functional representation of an object, but at the same time an emanation and revelation with a substantial participation in the essence of the object. That means, if Christ is the "image" of the invisible God he reveals God and makes him visible. The invisible God becomes visible in Christ.

Important for understanding the metaphor in Col 1:15 is the background in Greek philosophical thinking. In Platonic philosophy the cosmos as a whole is the *eikon* of God, not primarily the individual human being as in Gen 1.[67]The philosophical line leads to Philo and the Stoic idea of the harmony of all things. In this monistic line of thinking there is no emphasis on dominion. If the Cosmic Christ is the *eikon* of God he reveals God, not in a pre-existent state beyond the physical world but within the world. The other metaphors of the Colossian hymn make this meaning quite clear.

(ii) Firstborn (*prototokos*) of creation (l:15b)

If the divine nature originally secluded in the invisible God (1:15a) expresses itself in Christ and now assumes a corporeal existence then the metaphor that Christ is the firstborn (*prototokos*) of creation means that he represents the first phase of creation. That does not detract from his pre-eminence. On the contrary, the cosmos is now viewed as co-extensive with Christ.[68] Sittler[69] expresses the significance of this metaphor when he says of Christ: "He comes to

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65 Lohse, *Colossians*, 46.

66 Hermann Kleinknecht, "εἰκών. C. The Greek Use of εἰκών," *TDNT* 2: 389.

67 Kleinknecht, "εἰκών," 389; Käsemann, "Urchristliche Taufliturgie," 41; Lohse, *Colossians*, 47.

68 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 24 against Lohse and Schweizer. See footnote 46 above.

69 Joseph Sittler, "Called to Unity," *The Ecumenical Review* 14 (1962): 177.

all things, not as a stranger, for he is the first-born of all creation, and in him all things were created." That Christ is creator is expressed in verse 16 and in the summative statement 17a.

(iii) Creator and head of the cosmic body (*ta panta*)

The statement in verse 16a that all things were brought into being in Christ is further specified in 16b-16f: things visible and invisible including cosmic entities like thrones, dominions and powers. This whole list indicates what the author of Colossians thinks the cosmos to be composed of and which powers he considers to play a role in its functioning.[70] Van Kooten[71] points to Stoic physics according to which five topics deal with the composition of the cosmos: bodies (*somata*); principles (*archai*) elements (*stoicheia*); gods (*theioi)*; and finally non-bodies such as limits, place and voids. Because for Stoicism, God is in all things, physics and theology are really one. This applies also to Colossians. This is shown by another interesting chiastic correspondence, which, apart from the overall inverted chiasm that determines the structure of the whole hymn, Pizzuto[72] finds in verse 16. Between 16b-c and 16d-e there is interplay between the visible and invisible, or the earthly and heavenly.

Chiasm			
16b	A	*en tois ouranois*	(invisible/heaven)
	B	*kai epi tês gês*	(visible/earth)
l6c	B'	*ta 'orata*	(visible/earthly)
	A'	*kai ta aórata*	(invisible/heavenly)
Inverse Chiasm			
16d	B	*eite thronoi*	(visible/earthly)
	A	*eite kyriotetes*	(invisible/heavenly)
16c	A'	*eite archai*	(invisible/heavenly)
	B'	*eite exousiai*	(visible/earthly)

It is clear from this intricate relationship between the earthly and the heavenly components of the cosmos that Käsemann's and Schlier's claim that the principalities and powers are evil forces[73] cannot be upheld. The invisible things that operate within the cosmos most probably stand for the powers exerted by the planets[74] but they are part of creation and are in Christ and together with everything visible constitute the cosmic body of Christ.

The author of Colossians does not speak of Christ as the head of the cosmic body. As a disciple of Paul he may have been hesitant to deviate directly from the usage of soma in the genuine Pauline letters, although Paul

[70] Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 121.
[71] Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 17.
[72] Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 190.
[73] See footnote 47 above.
[74] Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 122.

never describes Christ as the head of the church, the body of Christ is the congregation.[75] But according to Van Kooten[76] this interpretation is supported by Col 2:10 where Christ is termed the head, the commanding faculty of all the cosmic principles and powers. It also seems that the adverb in 2:9 "bodily" (*somatikos*) refers to the cosmic body in which the fullness (*plêroma)* of God resides.[77] The physical cosmos, then, in all its spatial extension has been created and assembled in the cosmic body of Christ. That is expressed in the repeated use of *pan/ panta* that have been created "through him and for him," a concluding formula in verse 16b that is strongly reminiscent of Stoic formulations.[78] The final summative statement in verse 17a emphasises the pre-eminence of Christ in everything. Sittler[79] expresses it well: "He is not only the matrix and *prius* of all things; he is the intention, the fullness, and the integrity of all things: for all things were created through him and for him."[80]

3b The Central Metaphor: In Christ All Things Hold Together

The idea that the cosmic entities derive their order and being and that the coherence of the cosmos is ensured by its continuous existence in Christ *(en auto*), is stressed in Col 1:17b. All things are therefore not a tumbled multitude of facts or individual units in an unrelated mass, but a cosmic body in which all parts are interconnected because Christ is in all things.[81] The author of Colossians and contemporary Stoicism had a similar concern for the internal coherence of the cosmic body.[82] Stoicism had the conception that the stability of the cosmos was ensured by bonds that held the cosmos in all its discreet elements together. According to Stoic physics one of the elements, fire was this bond. In

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75 Leppä, *Making of Colossians*, 94.

76 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 23.

77 Ernst, *Pleroma*, 10-11 points to the fundamentally different conception of *plêroma* in gnostic dualism and Stoic monism: "Nach dem religiösen Grundgefühl der Stoa ist die ganze Welt ein einheitlicher Kosmos, der bis in die kleinsten and letzten Teilchen hinein von der göttlichen Macht durchdrungen wird. Da alle Dinge aus der Materie durch die Gestaltung der göttlichen Urkraft gebildet werden, kann die Gottheit mit der Welt und den einzelnen Dingen in der Welt gleichgesetzt werden."

78 Cf. the classic Stoic formulation of Marcus Aurelius addressed to 'Nature' *physis*: "All things come from you, subsist in you, go back to you," Balabanski, "Critiquing Anthropocentric Cosmology," 156; Lohse, *Colossians*, 46. See also Van Kooten *Cosmic Christology*, 122-125 on prepositional metaphysics in Middle Platonism and Stoicism.

79 Sittler, "Called to Unity," 177.

80 Sittler, "Called to Unity," 177.

81 Cf. Sittler, "Called to Unity," 177; John Cobb, "The Role of Theology of Nature in the Church," in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (eds. Charles Birch, William Eaking & Jay B. McDaniel, Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1990), 271.

82 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 18.

Colossians Christ is assigned this important position.[83] In him "all things hold together." Col 2:19 uses the nouns "ligaments" (*syndesmoi*) and "sinews" (*aphai*) to express a similar thought that the body, holding fast from the head is nourished and held together.

It is important to note that the conception of the internal coherence of the cosmic body in Christ is of fundamental significance for the author of Colossians is shown also by the role the statement plays in the chiastic structure of the hymn as a whole. It is, as Pizutto[84] has shown, the "pivotal axis between Christ in Creation and Christ in Redemption." Similar syntax and structure demonstrates a link between the icon of the invisible God (A) and the One who reconciled all things through the blood of his cross (A').

3c Metaphors of Christ's Role in Redemption

(i) Head of the body, the Church (*tês ekklesias*)

We have seen that since Käsemann scholars have tended to consider the statement in verse 18a, "And he is the head of the body, the church" as a sure indication of the insertion of *tês ekklesias* into traditional material. Christ is the head of the cosmos in the sense of absolute dominion over all the cosmic powers, but only the church is his body. Schweizer[85] reaffirms this view in his interpretation of Col 2:19.[86] But this view has been countered by Van Kooten[87] who points to the whole context which clearly shows that a cosmological understanding of *soma* is to be preferred.[88]

One of the reasons advanced by Schweizer[89] why he considers *tês ekklesias* an insertion is that it is mentioned too early in the hymn, in a strophe dealing with creation, and omitted where it more naturally belongs, in the sec-

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83 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 20-21.

84 Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 203.

85 Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 125.

86 He interprets "body" in v. 19 in the following way: "Wie überall, wo der Verfasser selbst spricht, kann damit nicht der Kosmos gemeint sein, der ja nicht mehr in Gottes Kraft wächst. sondern nur die Kirche (1:18.24). Wieder wird deutlich, dass Christus zwar Haupt über die ganze Welt ist, dass aber nur die Kirche sein Leib ist."

87 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 56-57.

88 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 20-21 sees three different usages of *soma* in Colossians: 1. ecclesiological; 2. physiological; 3. cosmological. The notion of a cosmic body of Christ is absent in Paul's authentic letters. It appears for the first time in Colossians. "The author of Eph was aware of its occurrence in Col, because he is dependent on that letter, but he was unwilling to identify the cosmic body with the body of Christ, and consequently dropped this notion altogether." He replaced it with the concept of the body of Christ as the church. Scholars have tended to interpret Colossians in terms of Ephesians (Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 204).

89 Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 53-54.

ond strophe dealing with redemption.[90] But, as Pizzuto[91] points out, this problem is easily resolved once the chiastic structure of the hymn is recognised. In the structural chiasm verse 18a (B') "serves as something of an introduction or preparatory statement which summarizes the 'redemption theme' taken up in the remainder of the hymn (A')." It balances line 17a (B) which serves the same summative function in section A.

(ii) Firstborn (*prototokos*) of the dead

The author's interest in balance is evident also in the next statement: "Who is the beginning, firstborn of the dead" (v. 18b.c.) Christ who is the firstborn (*prototokos*) of all creation and in this capacity is superior to any part of the cosmos is also the firstborn (*prototokos*) of the dead and as such is the origin of the church.[92] He is both "so that he might come to have first place in everything" (18d). The reasons for Christ's pre-eminence in creation and recreation are given by the author in verse 19 "for in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell."

Schweizer [93] takes the dwelling of the divine nature in Christ both in Col 1:19 and 2:9 to refer to the body of the resurrected Christ. But Van Kooten[94] considers it a simplification if the divine nature is thought to dwell in the resurrected Christ exclusively. The interest of the author is in balancing between Christ's role in creation and in recreation. It also needs to be pointed out that in Stoic thinking *pleroma* always refers to the cosmos as a totality insofar it is filled with the divine nature and kept by it in its unity and coherence.[95] In this context the entire fullness therefore appears to be the fullness of the divine nature which takes on in Christ the shape of the visible body of the cosmos.[96]

(iii) Reconciler (*apokatallasson*) of all things

What was God's purpose when he resided in his fullness in Christ? It was, as is expressed in verse 20ab, "to reconcile all things to himself, by making peace through the blood of his cross." The reconciliation by Christ of the entire cosmos, "whether the things on earth, or the things in heaven" (20c) is the ultimate divine purpose. In this way Christ becomes first in everything.

Traditionally, scholars have had difficulties with verse 20. For Schweizer[97] the reference to the cross in 20b somehow "limps after" and thus is

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90 See also Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 160.
91 Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 161.
92 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 113-114.
93 Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 107-108, commentary on Col 2:9.
94 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 25.
95 Ernst, *Pleroma*, 15.
96 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 113.
97 Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 53-54.

subordinated to the resurrection which is not in agreement with usual NT teaching. It must therefore be an addition by the author of Colossians. In response Pizzuto[98] points out that in the chiasm v. 20 serves as a parallel to verse 16 creating a balance between the first and the second section and emphasising Christ's role in both.

More problematic for scholars has been the concept of cosmic reconciliation. On the one hand is Schlier's[99] understanding of reconciliation in Colossians which is based on the assumption that the hymn is not by the author of Colossians. For him reconciliation is synonymous with the idea of the disarming, pacification and ultimately subjugation of the cosmic forces (*stoicheia*) to the lordship of Christ (Col 2:15).[100] Against this view the author of Colossians stresses that Christ with his death on the cross has again become the actual head over the cosmos (Col 2:9-10) when he put off together with his human body (2:11) the cosmic principles and powers (2:15) as well.[101] In this way he exposed them openly and triumphed over them in himself (2:15). While Schlier sees cosmic reconciliation as subjection and domination, in Colossians the principles, powers and elements of the present cosmos are brought back under Christ as head (Col 2:10). They have been restored to their original status and really make up his cosmic body again (2:9; 2:17; 2:19).[102] Cosmic reconciliation is cosmic restitution.

The other common misunderstanding is the one of Käsemann, Lohse and Schweizer that we noted above.[103] The assumption is that all affirmations concerning Christ's relation to the cosmos must be interpreted through the lens of human sinfulness and redemption, "as if human kind were the measure of all things."[104] Instead, Pizzuto notes that the hymn calls for a balance between the two strophes in which the role of the cosmic Christ in both creation and re-

98 Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 165.
99 Schlier, *Principalities and Powers*, 14-15.
100 Cf. Pizzuto's comments *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 169.
101 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 129.
102 Van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 22 argues that according to the author of Colossians probably the present cosmic order has only recently been re-established. The principles and powers were originally brought into being in Christ (Col 1:16) but they arrived at a position where Christ had to subdue them. It is likely that the present stability of the cosmos is the result of a restitution of the original order of the cosmos. "This idea of an original constitution of the world, its decay, and its subsequent return to the same condition as before, is also current in contemporary Stoic physics." Schweizer, *Brief an die Kolosser*, 68 has also made a similar observation. Hellenistic Judaism acutely felt the fragility of the world. "Die Brüchigkeit der Welt und ihrer Ordnung wird überall empfunden. und der Mensch kommt sich wie ein Gefangener der im Kampf mit sich selbst liegenden Natur vor."
103 See footnotes 50 and 51 above.
104 Pizzuto, *Cosmic Leap of Faith*, 171.

demption is recognized. Sittler[105] speaks of an astounding statement of the purpose of God between the two poles — "Christ" and "all things." "For it is here declared that the sweep of God's restorative action in Christ is no smaller than the six-times repeated *Ta panta*. Redemption is the name for this will, this action, and this concrete Man who is God with us and God for us — and all things are permeable to his cosmic redemption because all things subsist in him."[106] The metaphor of cosmic reconciliation in Christ is a perfect expression of the concept of the interrelatedness of all things.

D CONCLUSION

We have seen that the model of the transcendent monarchical God who created the world and humans in his own image in order to give them dominion over all other creatures (Gen 1:28) can no longer be considered the "right metaphor" for our time. The negative impact this metaphor has had on humankind's treatment of nature cannot be denied. In the first article we saw that scholars have attempted to reinterpret the imagery in ecologically more sensitive ways, but all these attempts have ultimately not been successful. Theology based on the royal model and the separation of humans from the rest of nature has not had the ability "to diagnose, judge, and heal the ways of men as they blasphemously strut about this hurt and threatened world as if they owned it," as Sittler[107] comments.

In this second article we therefore turned to scholars such as those linked with the Earth Bible Project and feminist scholars, prominently among them Sallie MacFague, who have abandoned this model and have been looking for alternatives. The ecological hermeneutic developed by the Earth Bible Team proved a valuable heuristic tool for more ecological sensitive reading of Scripture, but the alternative metaphor "Earth as Voice" has not been sufficiently attractive to replace the reigning dominion metaphor. A more significant suggestion has been advanced by Sallie MacFague. She claims that imaging Nature as God's Body would be a much more appropriate metaphor for our time. Other mainly feminist scholars have seen great advantages in this image, but the main criticism has been that by identifying the universe with God, God's transcendence is collapsed into immanence. We concluded that all the proposals advanced so far have not been satisfactory. It is evidently not easy to abandon the royal model which is so deeply embedded in Christian theology. This led us a consideration of the question whether the dominant metaphor could not perhaps be transformed in such a way that the negative aspects of the old model are eliminated while at the same time

[105] Sittler, "Called to Unity," 177.
[106] See Steven Bouma-Prediger, *Greening of Theology. The Ecological Models of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joseph Sittler, and Jurgen Moltmann* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995), 97 on Sittler's rhetoric of cosmic extension.
[107] Sittler, "Called to Unity," 184.

remaining in the main Christian tradition. Indeed, we saw that such a transformation had already happened in the NT message of the Cosmic Christ as developed in the Colossian hymn, Col 1:15-20, and that there was really no need to search for a new right metaphor but rather to listen anew to what the text had to say to our own context.

Already in 1962 Joseph Sittler[108] asked whether it was possible to fashion a theology universal enough to affirm redemption's force enfolding nature, as theologians so far have affirmed redemption's force enfolding history. He points to the cosmic Christology of nature of the Colossian hymn whose "theological magnificence . . . lies, for the most part still tightly folded in the Church's innermost heart and memory."[109] We have seen that traditional exegesis of the Colossian hymn has not been able to see it in this way because it interpreted the hymn within a framework of distance between the transcendent God and the pre-existent Christ on the one hand and the world subjected to Christ's dominion on the other.[110] Only recently the real meaning of the rich and varied imagery of Col 1:15-20 has become clear. This imagery displays a fundamental transformation of the traditional royal dominion metaphor and an openness to ecological issues that can contribute meaningfully to the development of a new ecotheology. In the following I want to give a short summary of the main points showing this transformation in the metaphors of Christ's role in creation and redemption.

1) The first and central metaphor in the Colossian hymn is that of Christ as the "image (*eikon*) of the invisible God." This image of God is not the royal human being of Gen 1 who rules on God's behalf, but, according to Greek conceptions, it is the *eikon* that makes God visible in the cosmos. Christ the *eikon* of God also exercises dominion. But this dominion is never understood as domination. That is made clear by the other images that speak of Christ's role in creation. He is "the firstborn of creation," he is preeminent, but not in the sense of a pre-existent Christ who is separated from creation. He is not separated but part of and within creation. That is shown by the next metaphor, Christ the head of the cosmic body. In the Colossian image there is no collapsing of the transcendent invisible God into immanence of the visible cosmic universe. The advantages of Sallie MacFague's metaphor of nature as God's body are retained while at the same time avoiding the disadvantages that have been demonstrated by MacFague's critics.
2) The central metaphor in the Colossian hymn is that in Christ everything is connected. This metaphor demonstrates beautifully how far the old dominion metaphor has been transformed. There is no longer the sepa-

[108] Sittler, "Called to Unity," 182.
[109] Sittler, "Called to Unity," 183.
[110] See Lohse's disparaging remarks on Sittler in *Colossians*, 60, footnote 211.

ration between the image of God, the human, belonging to the side of God and the rest of nature subdued by human rule, there are no longer hierarchical dualisms characteristic of the world view of both Gen 1 and Ps 8. Christ the "image of God" does not stand outside the created order as its Lord and Master, but he is inside because the world is his body of which he is the head. He unifies and binds everything together.[111]

3) The Colossian hymn balances Christ's work in creation with his work in redemption. The central role in Christ's work of redemption is his death on the cross. By emptying himself of all power[112] Christ achieved reconciliation. Scholars have always restricted this work of reconciliation to humans only. This has given traditional interpretations a heavy anthropocentric bias. But for Colossians Christ has reconciled "all things" not only humans, but all of nature as well. Paul's call on the Corinthians to "be reconciled with God" (2 Cor 5:20) can now in the situation of the environmental crisis, by extension be expanded to an entreaty to humans to be reconciled with nature.
4) What implications has this transformed metaphor of the dominion of the true "image of God," Christ, for the nature of us human beings and our place within the created order rather than apart from and above it as Gen 1:28 implies? This question is of particular relevance to the church, that is, according to Col 1:18, Christ's body. According to the introductory thanksgiving the author expressly refers to the "kingdom of his beloved son" into which the believers have been transferred in baptism (Col 1: 13).[113] If through baptism we have been transferred into Christ's kingdom we cannot carry on with our domineering and destructive attitude toward nature. As human beings "created in the image of God" we can only follow the self-giving love of the true image of God which encompasses not only humans but all of creation (*pan/ ta panta)* as well. The *imago Dei* can then only be "viewed as a calling rather than an attribute or a possession of the human being to the exclusion of all others."[114] The real challenge now is for us as human beings to live out our calling to be

[111] The Cosmic Christ is the perfect image for the interrelatedness of all things.

[112] The same conception is also found in Phil 2:7. A beautiful image for this reconciling activity of Jesus with the rest of creation is found in Mark 1:13 which states that after his divine installation to be the Son of God (Mark 1:11) and his temptation by Satan in the wilderness (v. 12) Jesus was "with the beasts" (v. 13). Jesus reconciles humans and wild animals and restores the conditions of paradise (cf. Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1980), 47.

[113] Lohse *Colossians*, 40: "By defining 'redemption' as 'forgiveness of sins,' in agreement with the common Christian understanding, the summons to praise clearly refers to baptism."

[114] Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature*, 122.

imago Dei. That is possible only when the "image" is restored to its true meaning in Christ,[115] or as Paul states in 2 Cor 3:18:

> And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image (*eikon*) from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

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[115] Case-Winters, *Reconstructing Theology of Nature*, 123.

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