The Hypostatic Union: A Logical House of Cards

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Framework: Historical analysis + philosophical critique + biblical evidence + LDS clarification
Target Audience: Christians who accept the Chalcedonian definition of Christ's two natures
Purpose: Demonstrate that the hypostatic union is a post-biblical philosophical construct riddled with logical contradictions, and that the LDS understanding of the Godhead offers a coherent, scripturally grounded alternative

Executive Summary

The **hypostatic union** is the doctrine, defined at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, that Jesus Christ possesses two complete natures — one fully divine, one fully human — united in a single person (hypostasis) "inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably." For over 1,500 years, creedal Christianity has treated this formula as the bedrock of orthodox Christology.

But this doctrine has problems — serious ones:

1. **It is not found in the Bible.** The phrase "hypostatic union" never appears in Scripture. The "two natures in one person" framework is borrowed from Greek metaphysics, not the teachings of Jesus or His apostles.

2. **It is logically incoherent.** How can one person be simultaneously omniscient and ignorant, omnipotent and weak, immortal and mortal, infinite and finite? Philosopher John Hick called it "logically incoherent, hence meaningless."

3. **It took 7 ecumenical councils over 350 years to formulate** — and the Church *still* couldn't agree. The Oriental Orthodox schism over this very issue persists to this day.

4. **It was shaped more by imperial politics than by revelation.** Emperors convened councils, pressured bishops, exiled dissenters, and used state power to enforce doctrinal uniformity.

5. **It is a product of Greek philosophy, not Hebrew theology.** Adolf von Harnack identified Christian dogma as "a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel."

6. **Every pre-Nicene Church Father was a subordinationist** — they all taught the Son was in some sense distinct from and subordinate to the Father, closer to the LDS position than to Chalcedon.

The LDS Alternative: Jesus Christ is a separate, divine being from God the Father. They are united in purpose, power, and glory — not fused into a single metaphysical substance. Christ took upon Himself a mortal body, grew "grace for grace" (D&C 93:12-14), and was resurrected with a glorified, tangible body. No impossible philosophical gymnastics are required because LDS theology rejects the artificial ontological gap between the divine and the human that makes the hypostatic union "necessary" in the first place.

PART I: WHAT IS THE HYPOSTATIC UNION?

1. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)

In 451 AD, roughly 520 bishops gathered at Chalcedon (modern-day Kadikoy, Turkey) at the command of Emperor Marcian. Their task: settle the raging controversy over how Jesus Christ could be both God and man.

The resulting **Chalcedonian Definition** declared:

> "We...teach...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized **in two natures**, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form **one person and one subsistence [hypostasis]**, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son."

This formula attempted to navigate between two condemned heresies:

- **Nestorianism** — the view (attributed to Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople) that Christ was essentially two persons, one divine and one human, loosely connected
- **Eutychianism/Monophysitism** — the view of Eutyches that Christ's human nature was absorbed into His divine nature, leaving only one nature

2. Key Terminology

Understanding the hypostatic union requires understanding the Greek philosophical vocabulary it depends on:

Term	Greek	Meaning	Problem
Hypostasis	ὑπόστασις	"Underlying reality"; concrete individual subsistence	Initially synonymous with *ousia* (Nicaea), later distinguished — causing immense confusion
Ousia	οὐσία	Essence, substance, "being"	Abstract — what makes something *what it is*
Physis	φύσις	Nature	Ambiguous — can mean a concrete individual OR abstract properties (this ambiguity fueled centuries of controversy)
Prosopon	πρόσωπον	"Face," person, the subjective center	Originally meant "mask" in Greek drama — an odd foundation for Christology
Communicatio Idiomatum	Latin	"Communication of properties" — the idea that properties of each nature can be predicated of the one person	Creates logical paradoxes (see Part III)
Homoousios	ὁμοούσιος	"Of the same substance" (as the Father)	Not found in the Bible; coined by Gnostics; forced

Term	Greek	Meaning	Problem
			into the Nicene Creed by Constantine

The fundamental question: None of these terms appear in the New Testament. The entire framework is borrowed from Greek metaphysics — Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic philosophy — not from the teachings of Jesus, Paul, or the apostles.

3. Historical Context: Why Was It "Needed"?

The hypostatic union exists because of a problem that Greek philosophical assumptions created in the first place:

The Greek assumption: God is absolutely simple, incorporeal, impassible (cannot suffer), immutable (cannot change), omniscient, omnipotent, and infinite. These are properties borrowed from Plato's "Form of the Good" and Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover."

The biblical witness: Jesus was born, grew, learned, hungered, wept, suffered, bled, and died.

The collision: If God has the properties Greek philosophy assigns Him, and Jesus is God, then how could Jesus experience any of those human things? You need some mechanism to explain how the infinite became finite, the impassible suffered, and the immutable changed.

The hypostatic union is that mechanism. It is a philosophical patch designed to reconcile Greek metaphysical assumptions about God with the biblical narrative about Jesus. Remove the Greek assumptions, and the "problem" the hypostatic union solves simply disappears.

PART II: WHY PEOPLE DEFEND IT

Before dismantling the doctrine, it is important to steel-man it — to present the strongest case its defenders make.

1. Preserving Full Divinity and Full Humanity

The core motivation is soteriological (related to salvation). The argument goes:

- **If Jesus is not fully God**, He cannot save us — only God can bridge the infinite gap between Creator and creature
- **If Jesus is not fully human**, His sacrifice doesn't count for humanity — He must share our nature to redeem it
- **Gregory of Nazianzus** (4th century): "What has not been assumed has not been healed" — if Christ did not take on a complete human nature, He cannot heal our complete human nature

This is a powerful argument. It explains why the Church resisted both Arianism (Christ is less than fully God) and Docetism (Christ only *appeared* human).

2. The Authority of Tradition

For Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and most Protestants, the Chalcedonian Definition carries enormous weight:

- It was affirmed by an ecumenical council of 520 bishops
- It has been the standard of orthodoxy for over 1,500 years
- To reject it is to reject "the faith once delivered to the saints" (in their view)
- Major theologians across all traditions — Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Karl Barth — have affirmed it

3. Key Modern Defenders

Thomas V. Morris (*The Logic of God Incarnate*, 1986): - Proposed the "two-minds" model: Christ had a divine mind and a human mind, with the divine mind having access to the human mind but not vice versa - Distinguished between being "fully human" (having a complete human nature) and being "merely human" (having *only* a human nature) - Argued the incarnation is logically possible, even if mysterious

Oliver Crisp (*Divinity and Humanity*, 2007): - Defended an "abstract nature" view: Christ's human nature is a set of properties, not a concrete individual - Proposed "compositional Christology": Christ is composed of a divine nature and a human nature without being identical to either

Richard Cross: - Drew on medieval metaphysics (Duns Scotus) to argue that natures and persons can be distinguished without contradiction

4. The "Mystery" Defense

When all else fails, defenders appeal to mystery:

- "The incarnation is a mystery beyond human comprehension"
- "We accept it by faith, not by reason"
- "Our finite minds cannot grasp infinite truths"

While humility before the divine is admirable, this defense is ultimately an admission that the doctrine cannot be rationally defended. "It's a mystery" is not an argument — it is the absence of one.

PART III: WHY IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE — THE LOGICAL PROBLEMS

Problem 1: The Coherence Problem

The hypostatic union claims that **one person** simultaneously possesses two complete sets of properties that are mutually exclusive:

Divine Nature	Human Nature
Omniscient (knows everything)	Limited in knowledge (Mark 13:32)
Omnipotent (all-powerful)	Subject to weakness, hunger, fatigue
Omnipresent (everywhere at once)	Located in a specific place
Immutable (cannot change)	Grew in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52)
Impassible (cannot suffer)	Suffered and died on the cross
Eternal/uncreated	Born at a specific point in time
Infinite	Finite
Incorporeal (no body)	Had a physical body

The logical question: How can a *single person* be simultaneously omniscient and ignorant of the day and hour (Mark 13:32)? You cannot both know everything and not know something. These are contradictory properties.

The standard response is: "He knew it *according to His divine nature* but did not know it *according to His human nature.*"

But this is incoherent. **Persons** know things, not natures. I don't know math "according to my left hand" and not know math "according to my right hand." Knowledge is a property of the whole person. If Christ is one person, that person either knows the day and hour or doesn't. You can't have it both ways.

As philosopher **John Hick** put it: the claim that Jesus was both fully God and fully human is "logically incoherent, hence meaningless" — not because it is profound, but because it violates the law of non-contradiction.

Problem 2: The Two-Minds Problem

Thomas V. Morris attempted to solve the coherence problem with his "two-minds" model:

- Christ has a **divine mind** (omniscient) and a **human mind** (limited)

- The divine mind has access to the contents of the human mind, but the human mind does not have access to the divine mind
- This is like an asymmetric relationship where one level contains the other

Why this fails:

1. **It is functionally Nestorian.** If Christ has two separate centers of consciousness, two separate wills, two separate knowledge bases — how is that different from two persons? Chalcedon explicitly condemned dividing Christ into "two persons," but Morris's model does exactly that in all but name.

2. **Personal identity problem.** Which mind is "Christ"? When Christ says "I don't know the day or hour," which "I" is speaking? If it's the human mind, then the divine mind is a separate "I" — and you have two persons. If it's the one person, then that person doesn't know — contradicting omniscience.

3. **The access asymmetry is arbitrary.** Why would the divine mind have access to the human mind but not vice versa? This is asserted, not argued. And it still doesn't explain how *one person* can simultaneously hold contradictory beliefs.

Problem 3: The Communicatio Idiomatum Failures

The **communicatio idiomatum** ("communication of properties") is the principle that because Christ is one person with two natures, properties of either nature can be attributed to the one person. So you can say "God died on the cross" (divine person, human nature property) and "the man Jesus created the universe" (human nature, divine property).

Why this creates more problems than it solves:

A. The Lutheran-Reformed Split:

Lutherans and Reformed theologians — both claiming to affirm Chalcedon — cannot agree on how the communicatio works:

- **Lutherans** (genus maiestaticum): Divine properties are actually communicated to the human nature. Christ's human body is genuinely omnipresent (this is how Luther defended the real presence in the Eucharist).
- **Reformed** (Calvin): Divine properties are NOT communicated to the human nature. Christ's human nature remains finite, local, and limited.

If the doctrine were clear and coherent, its own defenders would agree on what it means. They don't. The communicatio idiomatum has generated 500 years of internal Protestant debate with no resolution.

B. The Predication Problem:

If we can say "God died on the cross," can we also say:

- "God was ignorant of the day and hour"?

- "God needed to eat and sleep"?
- "God was tempted by Satan"?
- "The omnipotent one was too weak to carry His own cross"?

These statements follow the same logic — but most theologians resist them because they sound blasphemous. This reveals that the communicatio idiomatum is applied selectively, not consistently. The rule works when it produces orthodox-sounding statements and is quietly abandoned when it produces uncomfortable ones.

C. The Nature-Mixing Problem:

If properties can be "communicated" between natures, then the natures are no longer truly distinct — which violates the Chalcedonian requirement that the natures are united "without confusion." But if properties cannot be communicated, then the natures are so separate that you have two persons — which violates the requirement of "without separation."

The doctrine is caught in an impossible middle: too much communication = confusion of natures (Eutychianism). Too little communication = separation of persons (Nestorianism). The "correct" amount is never specified and cannot be specified without collapsing into one error or the other.

Problem 4: The Kenosis Dilemma

Philippians 2:7 says Christ "emptied himself" (Greek: *ekenosen*) and took the form of a servant. This raises a devastating dilemma:

Option A: Christ emptied Himself of divine attributes (ontological kenosis) - If Christ gave up omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc., then He was *not* fully God during the incarnation - This contradicts Chalcedon's insistence that the divine nature is preserved "without change" - This was condemned as heretical (Gottfried Thomasius proposed this in the 19th century and was widely rejected)

Option B: Christ did NOT empty Himself of divine attributes (functional kenosis) - If Christ remained omniscient, omnipotent, etc., then in what sense was He truly human? - His human experiences (hunger, temptation, ignorance, suffering) were theatrical performances, not genuine experiences - This collapses into Docetism — Christ only *appeared* to be human

Option C: Christ emptied Himself of the *exercise* (but not possession) of divine attributes - This is the most common modern view, but it creates its own problems - An omniscient being who *chooses* not to use His omniscience is still omniscient — He just knows He's choosing not to access what He knows - This makes Christ's human experience fundamentally different from ours — we don't know the future because we *can't*, not because we're choosing to ignore what we know - His suffering is diminished: a person who knows they'll be resurrected in three days suffers differently than someone facing genuine annihilation

The bottom line: Every version of kenosis either undermines Christ's divinity, undermines His humanity, or creates an incoherent middle ground. The dilemma has no satisfactory resolution within the Chalcedonian framework.

Problem 5: Divine Impassibility vs. Christ's Suffering

Classical theism holds that God is **impassible** — He cannot suffer, be affected by anything external, or undergo emotional change. This was affirmed by virtually every major theologian until the 20th century (Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, etc.).

But the Gospels describe Jesus suffering intensely — Gethsemane, the scourging, the crucifixion, the cry of dereliction ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

This creates a trilemma:

1. **God is impassible** (classical theism)
2. **Jesus is God** (Nicene orthodoxy)
3. **Jesus suffered** (biblical witness)

You can hold any two, but not all three:

- If God is impassible and Jesus is God, then Jesus didn't really suffer (Docetism)
- If God is impassible and Jesus suffered, then Jesus isn't fully God (Arianism)
- If Jesus is God and Jesus suffered, then God is not impassible (abandoning classical theism)

Modern theologians like **Jurgen Moltmann** (*The Crucified God*) have argued that God does indeed suffer — but this abandons the very philosophical framework that generated the need for the hypostatic union in the first place. If God can suffer, change, and be affected, then the sharp divine/human distinction collapses, and you no longer need two natures to explain Christ.

Problem 6: The Anhypostasia Problem

The doctrine of **anhypostasia** (later refined as **enhypostasia**) states that Christ's human nature does not have its own independent personal subsistence (hypostasis). Instead, Christ's human nature exists "in" the divine hypostasis of the Logos.

In plain language: Christ's human nature is not a human person. It is a nature without a person — a "person-less" human nature that subsists in the divine person.

Why this is problematic:

1. **What is a nature without a person?** In normal experience, every human nature IS a human person. You cannot encounter "humanity" walking down the street without a person attached to it. A human nature that is not a person is an abstraction, not a reality.

2. **If Christ's human nature is not a person, is it truly "fully human"?** Being a person seems essential to being human. An impersonal human nature is not a complete human nature — it is a philosophical abstraction playing the role of a human.

3. **The "abstract nature" solution (Oliver Crisp):** If Christ's human nature is a set of abstract properties instantiated by the divine person, then Christ is not really "one of us" — He is a divine being wearing a set of human properties like a costume. This is sophisticated Docetism.

4. **The "concrete nature" problem (Richard Cross):** If Christ's human nature is a concrete particular, it should be a person in its own right (since every other concrete human nature is a person). Denying it personhood is an ad hoc move to avoid the conclusion of two persons.

Problem 7: The Verdict of Philosophers

The hypostatic union has been challenged not only by theologians but by analytic philosophers:

John Hick (philosopher of religion, University of Birmingham/Claremont): > "The doctrine of the incarnation is not a straightforward factual claim but is better understood as a mythological or metaphorical expression of the significance Jesus has for Christians… [It is] logically incoherent, hence meaningless."

Richard Swinburne (despite being a defender of Christianity): Acknowledged that the incarnation requires modifying the concept of divine properties to avoid contradiction — essentially admitting the standard formulation is incoherent without philosophical workarounds.

Keith Ward (Regius Professor of Divinity, Oxford): Argued for a "kenotic" model that effectively abandons classical Chalcedonian Christology, acknowledging that the traditional formulation faces "insuperable difficulties."

The pattern: Even sympathetic philosophers acknowledge the hypostatic union is, at minimum, deeply problematic. The most common defense — "it's a mystery" — is an admission that the doctrine cannot survive logical scrutiny.

PART IV: THE HISTORICAL RED FLAGS

1. Seven Councils, 350 Years, Still No Agreement

If the hypostatic union were a clear biblical teaching, it would not require centuries of philosophical refinement:

Council	Year	Issue	"Solution"
Nicaea I	325	Is the Son the same substance as the Father?	*Homoousios* (same substance) — but the term was contested for decades
Constantinople I	381	What about the Holy Spirit?	Extended *homoousios* to the Spirit

Council	Year	Issue	"Solution"
Ephesus	431	Is Mary *Theotokos* (God-bearer)? Nestorius vs. Cyril	Condemned Nestorius; affirmed *Theotokos*
"Robber Council"	449	Eutyches's monophysitism	Rehabilitated Eutyches (later overturned)
Chalcedon	451	Two natures or one?	"Two natures, one person" — the hypostatic union
Constantinople II	553	Three Chapters controversy	Condemned Nestorian-leaning writings; Justinian imprisoned the Pope to force compliance
Constantinople III	681	Does Christ have one will or two?	Two wills (dyothelitism) — Monothelitism condemned

The pattern is damning: Each council's "solution" generated new controversies requiring *another* council. The doctrine was not received from heaven — it was hammered out through centuries of political maneuvering, philosophical debate, and imperial coercion.

2. Political Manipulation of Doctrine

Council of Nicaea (325) — Constantine: - The emperor — a man who was not even baptized until his deathbed — convened the council and pressured the outcome - He insisted on the term *homoousios* (same substance), a word not found in Scripture and previously used by Gnostics - Dissenters were compelled to sign under imperial threat of exile - His motivation was political unity, not theological truth: "He wasn't particularly committed to any particular form of Trinitarian theology but wanted ecclesiastical unity above all else"

Council of Ephesus (431) — Cyril's Corruption: - Cyril of Alexandria arrived early and convened the council before the Syrian delegation (supporting Nestorius) could arrive - He distributed bribes to imperial officials to secure the condemnation of Nestorius - The process was so irregular that even sympathetic historians acknowledge it was a political coup disguised as a theological council

Council of Chalcedon (451) — Emperor Marcian: - Marcian convened the council and appointed imperial commissioners who controlled the proceedings - Under "considerable pressure from the emperor, who threatened to relocate the council to Italy," the bishops agreed to the definition - The result was a political compromise between Alexandria and Rome, not a purely theological achievement

Constantinople II (553) — Justinian: - Emperor Justinian imprisoned Pope Vigilius to force his compliance with the council's decisions - The Pope initially refused to attend, was forcibly brought to Constantinople, and eventually capitulated under imperial pressure - This is the council that supposedly represents the guidance of the Holy Spirit in defining doctrine

The question for believers: If these councils were guided by the Holy Spirit, why did they require imperial armies, political bribes, imprisoned popes, and exiled bishops to reach their conclusions?

3. Greek Philosophical Contamination

Adolf von Harnack (*History of Dogma*, 1886-99): > "The dogma of the church is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel."

Harnack argued that the Trinitarian and Christological formulations are paradigmatic examples of Hellenistic philosophy being imported into Christianity. The biblical writers — Jews writing in a Jewish context — did not think in terms of *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *physis*, and *prosopon*. These are categories borrowed from Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.

Edwin Hatch (*The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, 1888): > "It was impossible for Greeks... with an education which penetrated their whole nature, to receive or to retain Christianity in its primitive simplicity."

Specific philosophical channels:

1. **Philo of Alexandria** (1st century Jewish philosopher) introduced Platonic emanation concepts and the *Logos* as a divine intermediary — which directly influenced the Gospel of John's Prologue and later Logos Christology
2. **Middle Platonism** shaped Justin Martyr's theology of the Logos as a "second God"
3. **Neoplatonism** (Plotinus, 3rd century) described three *hypostaseis* emanating from the One — a framework adopted almost directly into Trinitarian theology
4. The Nicene term *homoousios* "had been coined by Gnostics, was not found in the New Testament"

The irony: The very terms used to define "orthodox" Christianity were borrowed from pagan Greek philosophy, not from the Bible.

4. Pre-Nicene Subordinationism Was Universal

One of the most devastating historical facts for defenders of the hypostatic union: **every single pre-Nicene Church Father was a subordinationist.** That is, they all taught that the Son was in some sense distinct from, derived from, and subordinate to the Father.

R.P.C. Hanson (Anglican scholar): "Until Athanasius began writing, every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism."

Justin Martyr (c. 100-165): > "We reasonably worship Him [Jesus], having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the **second place**, and the prophetic Spirit in the third."

Origen (c. 185-254): > "The God and Father… is **superior to every being** that exists… the Son, being **less than the Father**, is superior to rational creatures alone (for he is second to the Father)."

Irenaeus (c. 130-202): Had "no difficulty in considering Christ as inferior to the Father" when commenting on John 14:28.

Tertullian (c. 155-220): While affirming the Son's divinity, explicitly described a hierarchy within the Godhead and the Son as derived from the Father.

What this means: The theology that prevailed for the first 300 years of Christianity — taught by every major Father — looked far more like LDS theology (separate, subordinate divine beings) than like the Chalcedonian "two natures in one person" that came later. The hypostatic union is a 5th-century innovation, not a recovery of original Christianity.

5. The Schisms That Never Healed

The hypostatic union did not unite Christianity — it fractured it:

- **The Oriental Orthodox Churches** (Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Syriac) rejected Chalcedon and still do today. They hold to **miaphysitism** — one united nature of Christ — and consider Chalcedon heretical
- **The Assyrian Church of the East** rejected the Council of Ephesus and was accused of Nestorianism
- These schisms, originating in disagreements over the hypostatic union, have persisted for over 1,500 years

If the hypostatic union were a clear, Spirit-guided truth, it would unite believers, not divide them permanently.

PART V: THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE AGAINST IT

1. The Bible Never Teaches "Two Natures in One Person"

The phrase "hypostatic union" appears nowhere in Scripture. Neither does:

- "Two natures"
- "One person, two natures"
- *Hypostasis* (in the Chalcedonian technical sense)
- *Homoousios* ("same substance")
- *Communicatio idiomatum*

The entire theological vocabulary of the hypostatic union is absent from the Bible. The doctrine is an extrapolation — a philosophical theory imposed on Scripture, not derived from it.

2. Jesus and the Father Are Consistently Depicted as Separate Beings

John 17:1-5 (The Intercessory Prayer): > "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, **Father**... And now, O **Father**, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which **I had with thee** before the world was."

Jesus is speaking *to* the Father as a separate being. He refers to the Father as "thou" and to Himself as "I." He describes a relationship ("I had with thee") that requires two distinct persons.

John 17:11, 21-22: > "That they all may be one; **as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee**, that they also may be one in us... that they may be one, **even as we are one**."

This is critical: Christ explicitly says the unity between Himself and the Father is the *same kind* of unity He wants His disciples to have with each other and with Them. No one claims the disciples are "one substance" with each other or with God. The unity is clearly one of purpose, love, and will — not metaphysical substance.

Acts 7:55-56 (Stephen's Vision): > "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and **Jesus standing on the right hand of God**, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the **Son of man standing on the right hand of God**."

Stephen sees **two distinct beings**: God (the Father) and Jesus standing at His right hand. This is not a vision of one being with two natures — it is a vision of two separate persons in two separate locations.

Matthew 3:16-17 (The Baptism of Jesus): > "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw **the Spirit of God descending like a dove**, and lighting upon him: And lo **a voice from heaven**, saying, This is **my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased."

Three separate manifestations simultaneously: Jesus in the water, the Spirit descending, the Father's voice from heaven. This is not one being with two natures — it is three distinct beings acting independently in the same moment.

3. Jesus Repeatedly Distinguishes Himself from the Father

John 14:28: > "My Father is **greater than I**."

If Jesus and the Father share the same divine nature equally (as Chalcedon requires), then the Father cannot be "greater than" the Son. The standard response — "greater in position, not in nature" — is an ad hoc distinction not found in the text.

Mark 13:32: > "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, **neither the Son**, but the Father."

Jesus explicitly says He does not know the time of His return. If He possesses a fully divine, omniscient nature, this statement is either false (He actually knows) or meaningless (He knows with one nature but not the other — but see Problem 1 above). The simplest reading: the Son genuinely does not know, because He is a separate being from the all-knowing Father.

John 20:17: > "I ascend unto **my Father, and your Father**; and to **my God, and your God**."

Jesus calls the Father "my God." If Jesus IS God in the Chalcedonian sense (sharing the same divine substance), then God is calling God "my God" — which is either incoherent or implies subordination that Chalcedon denies.

Matthew 26:39 (Gethsemane): > "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless **not as I will, but as thou wilt**."

Jesus has a different will from the Father and submits His will to the Father's. This only makes sense if they are separate beings with separate wills. (The Third Council of Constantinople (681) affirmed Christ has two wills — but this just doubles the problem: whose will is the "real" Christ's will?)

4. The New Testament Shows Christological Development

Biblical scholars have documented that Christology *developed* within the New Testament period itself:

James D.G. Dunn (*Christology in the Making*): - The earliest Christians identified Jesus's divine sonship with His **resurrection** (Acts 13:33, Romans 1:3-4 — "declared to be the Son of God... by the resurrection") - Matthew and Luke push sonship back to His **birth** (virgin birth narratives) - Hebrews and John push it further to **pre-existence** - This progressive development is visible *within the biblical text itself*

Bart Ehrman (*How Jesus Became God*): - Traces the evolution from "low Christology" (Jesus as exalted human) to "high Christology" (pre-existent divine being) across the New Testament - The earliest sources (Paul's letters, early speeches in Acts) reflect adoptionist or exaltation Christology - The latest sources (Gospel of John) reflect incarnation Christology - The Chalcedonian definition is a 5th-century endpoint of a trajectory that began in the 1st century

Larry Hurtado (*Lord Jesus Christ*): - Christ-devotion emerged within two decades as a "dyadic" (two-fold) devotional pattern - Early Christians worshipped Jesus alongside the Father — a "mutation" within Jewish monotheism - But this early binitarian worship is distinct from the later ontological claims of Nicaea and Chalcedon

The implication: The Bible itself shows Christology evolving. The hypostatic union is the *endpoint* of centuries of theological development, not the *starting point* of Christian belief. The earliest Christians did not think in Chalcedonian categories.

PART VI: THE LDS ALTERNATIVE — THE GODHEAD

1. Three Separate, Divine Beings United in Purpose

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches:

> "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit." — D&C 130:22

The Godhead consists of three **separate, distinct beings**:

1. **God the Father** (Elohim) — an exalted, glorified, embodied being
2. **Jesus Christ** (Jehovah) — the firstborn spirit son of the Father, the creator under the Father's direction, who took upon Himself a mortal body and was resurrected with a glorified physical body
3. **The Holy Ghost** — a personage of spirit who testifies of the Father and the Son

They are **one** in purpose, power, testimony, mind, will, and glory — but they are not one in substance. Their unity is the unity of perfect love and alignment, not metaphysical fusion.

FAIR LDS: > "Though each God in the Godhead is a personage, separate and distinct from each of the others, yet they are 'one God,' meaning that they are united as one in the attributes of perfection. Accordingly they all think, act, speak, and are alike in all things; and yet they are three separate and distinct entities."

2. How LDS Theology Handles Christ Being Both God and Man

Here is where the LDS position shows its elegance: **it doesn't need the hypostatic union because it rejects the premise that creates the "problem."**

The traditional "problem": - Divine nature = uncreated, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipotent, impassible, immutable, infinite - Human nature = created, corporeal, limited, passible, mutable, finite - These are so radically different that you need a metaphysical mechanism (the hypostatic union) to unite them in one person

The LDS dissolution: - LDS theology rejects the ontological gap between the divine and the human - God and humans are the same *species* at different stages of development - Joseph Smith: "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted Man" (King Follett Discourse) - Divinity is not a fundamentally different *kind* of being — it is the full maturity of what humans already are

BYU Religious Studies Center ("Condescension and Fullness"): > "LDS Christology bypasses traditional debates about how one person could have two complete natures... Mormon theology assumes a single nature along a developmental continuum from finite to infinite."

Since there is no unbridgeable metaphysical gulf between God and man in LDS theology, no "hypostatic union" is needed to bridge it. Christ was a divine being who took upon Himself mortality, genuinely experienced human life, and returned to His glorified state. The mechanism is straightforward: condescension and exaltation along a continuum, not the fusion of incompatible natures.

3. LDS Monophysite Christology: One Nature, Not Two

A remarkable insight from LDS scholars:

BYU RSC: > "Latter-day Saints are monophysite in their christology; that is, they believe Christ has only one nature, which is simultaneously both human and divine. This is possible because the human and the divine are not mutually exclusive categories in LDS thought."

This is the key move. In traditional theology, "divine" and "human" are mutually exclusive categories — so you need the hypostatic union to hold them together in one person despite their incompatibility. In LDS theology, "divine" and "human" are points on the same continuum — so there's nothing incompatible to reconcile.

B.H. Roberts (LDS apostle and theologian): > "I deplore those theological refinements which try to tell us about the humanity of Jesus being separate from the divinity of Jesus… He was divine, spirit and body."

Christ is not a divine person wearing a human nature like a suit. He is a divine-human being — one person, one nature — because divinity and humanity are not opposites.

4. The Kenosis Works in LDS Theology

The kenotic model — Christ "emptying himself" (Philippians 2:7) — creates an unresolvable dilemma in Chalcedonian theology (see Problem 4 above). But in LDS theology, it works beautifully:

D&C 93:12-14: > "And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness."

Christ genuinely grew. He genuinely learned. He genuinely progressed from grace to grace. He did not arrive on earth with a hidden omniscient divine mind — He began as an infant with a veil of forgetfulness over His premortal knowledge and developed into the fullness of His divine identity.

Orson Pratt: > "All that great and mighty power he possessed… vanished from him as he entered into the infant tabernacle."

This is not a metaphysical trick or a philosophical puzzle. Christ genuinely condescended. He genuinely experienced human limitation. And He genuinely overcame, progressing from grace to grace until He received a fullness. His suffering was real, not theatrical. His growth was genuine, not simulated.

The LDS kenosis is coherent because Christ is not simultaneously fully omniscient and fully ignorant. He genuinely set aside His divine power and knowledge, and genuinely regained it through faithfulness and obedience. The Chalcedonian model cannot allow this without undermining "fully God" — the LDS model embraces it as central to the Atonement.

5. Social Trinitarianism: Non-LDS Scholars Agree

The LDS model of the Godhead aligns closely with what academic theology calls **Social Trinitarianism** — the view that the Trinity consists of three distinct divine persons united in love, will, and purpose rather than in a single metaphysical substance.

Non-LDS scholars who support this framework:

Cornelius Plantinga (Reformed theologian): > "A person extrapolating from Hebrews, Paul, and John would naturally develop [Social Trinitarianism]."

Timothy Bartel (Oxford University): Concludes that the only "logically tenable account" of the Trinity requires "three distinct individuals, each fully divine."

Jurgen Moltmann (German Reformed theologian, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*): Argued for a social doctrine of the Trinity where the three persons are united through perichoresis (mutual indwelling) rather than through a single substance.

Leonardo Boff (Catholic liberation theologian): Developed a social Trinity model emphasizing the communion of three distinct persons.

Stephen H. Webb (non-LDS philosopher): Characterized Mormon theology as "an alternative reality come to life — a counterfactual history of post-Nicene developments of pre-Nicene theology."

The LDS position is not an eccentric outlier — it aligns with a significant stream of contemporary Trinitarian theology that recognizes the logical problems with classical substance metaphysics.

6. Theosis: The Early Church Fathers Agree

One of the most powerful LDS arguments: the earliest Church Fathers taught that humans can become divine — a doctrine (theosis/deification) that is fully consistent with LDS theology but deeply uncomfortable for traditional Christians who insist on an unbridgeable gap between God and man.

Irenaeus (c. 130-202): > "Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215): > "The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God."

Athanasius (c. 296-373): > "He became man that we might become God."

Basil the Great (c. 329-379): Celebrated "the being made God" as the purpose of the incarnation.

2 Peter 1:4: > "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the divine nature**."

The LDS connection: If humans can become "partakers of the divine nature" — if the purpose of Christ's incarnation is to make humans divine — then the gap between "divine" and "human" is not an unbridgeable ontological chasm. It is a distance that can be traversed. And if it can be traversed by humans (through Christ), then Christ's own movement from divine to human and back is not a metaphysical impossibility requiring the hypostatic union — it is the supreme example of a principle that applies to all of God's children.

Lorenzo Snow (LDS Prophet): > "As man now is, God once was: As God now is, man may be."

This is not a bizarre Mormon innovation — it is a restoration of what the earliest Church Fathers taught.

7. The First Vision: Empirical Evidence

Joseph Smith's First Vision provides something no ecumenical council ever could: **a direct, empirical witness of the nature of God.**

> "I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other — *This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*" — Joseph Smith—History 1:17

Two separate, distinct, embodied Personages. The Father spoke and pointed to the Son. They occupied separate positions in space. They had visible, tangible forms.

This is not a philosophical theory or a creedal compromise — it is a theophany. It cuts through 1,500 years of philosophical speculation and returns to the simplicity of the biblical witness: the Father and the Son are separate beings, united in purpose and glory.

8. The Resurrected Christ: Tangible, Physical, Divine

Luke 24:39: > "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

3 Nephi 11:14-15: > "Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world."

The resurrected Christ has a tangible, physical body — and He is God. Divinity and corporeality coexist without contradiction in the LDS framework. The traditional insistence that God must be incorporeal is a Greek philosophical import, not a biblical teaching.

PART VII: SCHOLAR SUMMARY TABLE

Scholar	Affiliation	Key Contribution
Blake Ostler	LDS philosopher	Social Trinitarianism for LDS theology; logical critique of hypostatic union as "absurdity and logical impossibility"
David Paulsen	BYU (Philosophy)	Divine embodiment was earliest Christian view; Neoplatonism introduced incorporeality
Robert Millet	BYU (Religious Education)	Godhead doctrine; interfaith dialogue on LDS Christology
B.H. Roberts	LDS General Authority	Rejected "theological refinements" that separate Christ's humanity from divinity
Stephen H. Webb	Non-LDS philosopher	Mormon theology as "counterfactual post-Nicene development of pre-Nicene theology"
R.P.C. Hanson	Anglican historian	All pre-Athanasian theologians were subordinationist
Timothy Bartel	Oxford University	Three distinct divine individuals is "only logically tenable account"
John Hick	Birmingham/Claremont	Hypostatic union is "logically incoherent, hence meaningless"
Thomas V. Morris	Notre Dame	"Two-minds" model — strongest modern defense (but collapses into Nestorianism)
Adolf von Harnack	Berlin	Christian dogma is "a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel"
Edwin Hatch	Oxford	Documented Greek philosophical influence on early Christianity
Bart Ehrman	UNC Chapel Hill	Documented evolutionary development of Christology from low to high
James D.G. Dunn	Durham	Christological development visible within the New Testament
Larry Hurtado	Edinburgh	Early binitarian worship distinct from later ontological Trinitarianism
Cornelius Plantinga	Calvin Seminary	Social Trinitarianism as natural biblical reading
Jurgen Moltmann	Tubingen	

Scholar	Affiliation	Key Contribution
		Social Trinity; God suffers (undermining classical theism's impassibility)
Tertullian	Carthage (2nd-3rd c.)	Affirmed God is corporeal: "For who will deny that God is a body?"
Justin Martyr	Rome (2nd c.)	Placed Christ "in the second place" — clear subordinationism
Origen	Alexandria (3rd c.)	"The Son, being less than the Father" — explicit subordination

PART VIII: QUICK-FIRE RESPONSES TO COMMON OBJECTIONS

"The hypostatic union is biblical."

Response: The phrase "hypostatic union" never appears in Scripture. Neither does "two natures in one person," *homoousios*, or *communicatio idiomatum*. The entire vocabulary of this doctrine is borrowed from Greek philosophy. The Bible teaches that the Father and Son are separate beings united in purpose (John 17:21-22), not that one person has two metaphysically incompatible natures.

"You're just too simple to understand it — it's a mystery."

Response: Calling something a "mystery" is not an argument — it's an admission that the doctrine can't be rationally defended. The LDS view doesn't require mystery: the Father and the Son are separate beings, united in purpose and glory. That's straightforward, biblical, and logically coherent.

"If Jesus isn't fully God (in the Chalcedonian sense), He can't save us."

Response: Latter-day Saints absolutely affirm that Jesus is God — fully divine, the Creator, the Redeemer. We just don't accept that His divinity requires the metaphysical framework of the hypostatic union. Christ's saving power comes from His divine identity and His Atonement, not from a Greek philosophical theory about His "natures."

"The early Church unanimously taught the hypostatic union."

Response: This is historically false. Every single pre-Nicene Church Father — Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian — was a subordinationist who placed the Son below the Father. The hypostatic union wasn't formulated until 451 AD, over 400 years after Christ. And even then, the Oriental Orthodox churches rejected it and still do today.

"But the councils were guided by the Holy Spirit."

Response: The councils were convened by Roman emperors, influenced by political pressure, and marred by corruption (Cyril's bribes at Ephesus, Justinian imprisoning the Pope at Constantinople II). If the Holy Spirit was guiding these councils, why did they need seven tries over 350 years to get Christology "right"? And why do major Christian traditions still disagree?

"LDS theology is polytheistic."

Response: We worship one God — the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Ghost. We are henotheistic (worshiping one God while acknowledging the existence of other divine beings), which is exactly what the Bible teaches (Psalm 82:1, 6; John 10:34-36; 2 Peter 1:4). In fact, any discussion with Jews or Muslims quickly demonstrates that no Trinitarian Christian is "strictly monotheistic" either — they believe in a God who is three persons. The difference is that our three persons make logical sense.

"You can't become God — that's blasphemy."

Response: Tell that to the early Church Fathers. Irenaeus: "He became what we are, that He might bring us to be what He is Himself." Clement of Alexandria: "The Word of God became man, that thou mayest learn from man how man may become God." Athanasius: "He became man that we might become God." 2 Peter 1:4: "partakers of the divine nature." Romans 8:17: "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." The doctrine of theosis is ancient, biblical, and still taught in Eastern Orthodoxy today.

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