e-ISSN: 2656-7997
p-ISSN: 2775-3425

Hebrews Articulating Hypostatic Union With Christ

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Submitted: 13-03-2023 | Accepted: 26-05-2023

Abstract:

Hypostatic is derived from the original language of Scripture (Heb. 1:3) which brought the essential person of Jesus in his human and divine natures. In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is described as superior to all other beings and all other claims. The doctrine of the hypostatic union teaches that our Lord's divine nature and His human nature were united forever. He is different from the rest of humanity in that He is God and sinless and his unique theanthropic person of the universe. Despite the various opposing objections that attempt to criticize or disprove Jesus Christ's two natures (divine and human) his obedience to God's will even to the point of death shows Jesus' divinity and humanity working together in perfect harmony. The basic idea that Christ is hypostatically communicating with both divine and human energies is also experienced by believers when their humanity is energized by the Holy Spirit and able to speak to God. In conclusion, the explanation of the anthropic unity of the person of Jesus Christ is quite clear that Jesus has both a divine will and a human will. The union of Christ's divine and human natures are related to His acts as an incarnate person through His experience as a result of his person of Christ.

Keywords:

Hypostatic Union, Hebrew Perception, Two Divine Natures

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24071/jaot.v5i2.6108
Web: http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JAOT| E: jaot@usd.ac.id

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Introduction

The Greek word for "nature" is *hypostaseōs*. The source theological "hypostatic union" is a fancy way of saying that Jesus is both God and man. In the Book of Hebrew, Christ is a glorified exalted man who represents the people of God. It is clear in chapter two that Jesus fulfils Ps. 8 in his glorification. He is the true human crowned with glory and honour, fulfilling humanity's eschatological goal. His suffering death which leads to glory accomplishes a purpose for His people, so he "tastes death for everyone" (2:9) and He calls believers "brothers" (2:11). In the incarnation, he becomes united to humanity (2:14) so that he can aid the "seed of Abraham" (2:16). The purpose of the incarnation was so that he can be in a more specific union with those he is saving. Paul uses the words "in Christ" numerous times to point to this union, he also uses the imagery of our baptism into Christ or being the body of Christ to signify this union. Hebrew articulation of a concept of union with Christ differs from how Paul describes it.

However, Hebrews do have a conception of the people of God sharing in a union that links their destinies with the head of the people because Christ entered heaven as a glorified man, we hope that our destiny is the same as Christ's destiny (6:18-20). Christ is our anchor and we are tethered to Christ because of our great union with Him is evident that we are partakers in all his benefits. The term hypostatic is derived from the Greek word hypostasis meaning "personal". The hypostatic union is the "personal union" or joining of the two natures of Jesus, namely His divine and human natures. Furthermore, the hypostatic union is a doctrine widely accepted by the Church as accurately reflecting Jesus as both God (fully divine) and man (fully human). Douglas (2014) stated the importance of this doctrine by stating that the Mediator between God and mankind bring us back together, thereby saving lost humanity. The role of a mediator is to guide both parties towards a resolution. Regarding Jesus as our Mediator, the resolution involves restoring the relationship between God and man. Christ the Mediator needed to be God and man: for unless he had been a man he could not have been the head of the same kind with his body.

Without the hypostatic union of Jesus being fully God and fully man, He would not be able to execute His office of Mediator. It is immeasurably

to know that the hypostatic union of the incarnated Jesus Christ is important because the perfect revealer of God to mankind and the work of redemption. The redeemer had to be one person who was both human and divine. He had to be divine to die for all human beings so that his death might have infinite value. In his Christological doctrine, Cyril of Alexandria used the phrase hypostatic union to allude to the fusion of Jesus Christ's human and divine natures into one hypostasis (person). Perichoresis is an example of an image that can be used to explain the type of union that existed at the time of the incarnation. It was employed by the tradition before Cyril to explain how intimately the people of the Trinity are joined and that there are "not three gods, but one god." The hypostatic union in Christ illustrates that there are not two entities in one body but rather two natures bound together in perfect union in one (Crisp, 2007).

Later, the Council of Chalcedon attempted to support Cyril's Christology (mixed with Leo's Tome) by stating that there is only one person (hypostasis) with two natures (physes) that are inextricably linked and cannot exist independently of one another. However, one might also contend that, as was earlier noted, Cyril was far from being a monophysite and that Chalcedon's interpretation of his argument was right. Church historians and theologians have long believed that the doctrine of the two natures of Christ was established at the Council of Chalcedon (451) to be the conclusion of the Christological disputes of the patristic age. The two-nature model of Chalcedon has thus endeavoured to guide the narrow road between the Scylla of Apollinarianism, Eutychianism, and the Charybdis of Nestorianism. Although the Chalcedon criterion has historically been used to gauge authentic Christianity, its construction is based on philosophical and metaphysical concepts that are alien to both the biblical and current world's applicability to modern theology. The hypostatic union is not merely one instance in the story of Jesus' incarnation but rather a fundamental to understanding God's perfect atonement, the complete substitution of man for himself and the eternal high priest.

Historical Background of Hypostatic Union

The hypostatic union is a phrase used in orthodox Christology in Christian theology to represent the combination of Christ's humanity

and divinity in one hypostasis (from the Greek word hypostasis meaning person or subsistence). Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria disagreed in the fifth century in which Nestorius asserted that Mary, the mother of Christ could not be referred to as the Theotokos. Nestorius believed that there were two separate entities or hypostases of divinity and humanity. He claimed that because the divine nature is unoriginal, divinity could not be produced by a human. Nestorius was ejected as a heretic at the Council of Ephesus in 431 which was presided over by Cyril and the Ephesian bishop Memnon. Nestorius was called a neo-adoptionist suggesting that the man Jesus is divine and the Son of God only by grace and not by nature. Cyril wrote in a letter to Nestorius using the term "hypostatic" (hypóstasin) to describe the union of Christ's divine and human natures. Having united to himself hypostatically flesh animated by a rational soul, inexplicably and income Cyril also emphasized the phrase "one physis of the Word of God made flesh which is Greek "the Word of God made flesh" (Saint Cyril of Alexandria, 1987).

Theodore of Mopsuestia, a renowned Antiochene theologian is thought to have argued that Christ had two natures, one human and one divine and two corresponding hypostases (in the sense of "subject," "essence" but not "person") that coexisted. He was doing this to combat the monophysite heresy of Apollinarism (Theodore, 1971). The word hypostasis as employed by Tatian and Origen might be used in Theodore's day to mean the same thing as ousia (which means "essence" rather than "person"). Since the discovery of Theodore's Syriac translation of his Catechetical Orations, the interpretations of Theodore's Christology in Greek and Latin have come under criticism. Chalcedon's Ecumenical Council issued the Chalcedonian Definition in 451. It concurred with Theodore that the Incarnation had two natures. The Council of Chalcedon insisted that hypostasis be used to denote the person (prosopon), not nature as with Apollinaris as it did in the Trinitarian definition. The Chalcedonians believed that Eutychian Monophysitism was a tendency among the Oriental Orthodox. The Oriental Orthodox prefer the term Miaphysite to be referred to as a reference to Cyrillian Christology which used the phrase "ma phsis toû theoû lógou sesarkmén" but they have consistently stated that they have never held the doctrines of Eutyches and that they have always affirmed that Christ's humanity is consubstantial with our own.

In contrast to one unique nature, the term "miaphysic" refers to

one united nature (monophysites) because the natures constantly act in unison, the Miaphysite position claims that even if Christ's nature is composed of two it can only be described as one when it is incarnate. To strive toward reconciliation, representatives from the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches have issued joint statements. The Assyrian Church of the East honours Nestorius and Theodore and the Roman Catholic Church recently issued a joint declaration noting that their historical disagreements were over language rather than the intended meaning. The incarnation of Jesus had long been accepted by the Church but how He could be both wholly God and man remained a mystery. Eutyches took a different approach emphasizing the unification of Jesus' two natures after the incarnation which became one nature. More than 500 bishops gathered at Chalcedon to discuss the objective was to create a coherent Christological viewpoint that walked the line between the Eutychean heresy (just one nature in Christ) and the Nestorian heresy (two personalities in Christ) (Holcomb, 2014). The Chalcedon Creed stated that Jesus should be recognized in two natures without confusion, without change, division and separation; that the distinction between the natures is in no way annulled by the union but rather that the characteristics of each nature are preserved and come together to form one person and existence; and that this is the essence of the Council's position.

Keeping true to the initial confidence in faith as in Hebrews 3:6 even though Hebrews does not go into great detail about what is meant by the phrase. He had in mind that the believer reaps the rewards of Christ's exaltation which might perhaps be summarized as "unity with Christ" in light of chapter 2. Hebrew writers view the people of God as participating in a union that ties their fates to the Son of God Jesus Christ who serves as the head of the people. When Jesus was described as being created like his brothers in every respect in 2:17, it was referring to the incarnation but also highlighting the fact that the incarnation's goal is connected to his oneness with those he will redeem. The human nature of Christ is not supplanted by the divine nature nor is it absorbed by the divine nature but in the person of Christ, both natures are symmetrically joined. Saint John Damascene stated that: "Whatever Christ said and did, He did so as the God-man and all His actions and deeds were theandric. He did not execute the human humanly for He was not only man but also God; nor did He execute the divine divinely for He was not only God but also

a man (Tyneh, 2003).

Tyra (2015) stated that the intentional was paradoxical protection of the mystery against rationalizing explanations that effectively destroy the mystery. It is clear from their contributions that the Early Church Fathers spent considerable time concerned with refuting heresy and in doing articulated their position. It was in the Ecumenical Councils that established and recognized Christian doctrine and Dogmatic theology were formed. The hypostatic union in Christ achieved absolute proximity and communion of man and God at the same time becoming the model and the power for the moral unity between man and God (Bartos, 1999).

Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible also known as the Tanakh or the Old Testament is a collection of texts that have had a profound impact on both Judaism and Christianity. The authors of the Hebrew Bible made significant contributions to religious thought, ethics and culture that continue to shape the beliefs and practices of millions of people around the world (Bruce & Coogan, 2001). The Christian and the Jewish readings of the Hebrew Bible are both driven by forces external to the actual text. The Hebrew Bible emphasized the unity and singularity of God which emphasizes monotheism in the development of Judaism and Christianity as well as the broader history of religion. Mainstream Judaism has continued to read the text as Torah [guidance for living a Jewish life] (Kolatch, 1989). Both Judaism and Christianity overlap significantly with their Bibles and are not thinkable without them. In Judaism, central features such as dietary or purity laws are by no means absent from the Hebrew Bible but they have nothing like the prominence there that they enjoy in Judaism today. The Hebrew Bible consists of a collection of ancient Israel's highly variegated national literature, written and compiled between the eighth and second centuries BCE. Christians like Jews have always held steadfastly to their Scriptures; they have developed ideas that would have surprised the New Testament writers. One of the main stumbling points for both Christians and non-believers is reconciling the differences between their view of God in the Old Testament and their idea of who Jesus is in the New (Abundant Springs, 2013). These views can appear to contradict each other unless we understand this important

truth: the Old Testament only gave the partial revelation of God's nature but Jesus gives us a clear and perfect image.

Exegesis of Hebrews 11:1

The Greek term "hupostasis" is translated as "faith" in the New Testament. Faith's relationship to Jesus' hypostatic union depends on how this word is translated. The feminine word comes from the verb huphstemi which means to put or set under. According to Hebrews 1:3, when speaking of Christ as "the very image" of God's "substance" the word "substance" refers to the true nature of the thing being discussed as opposed to its outward manifestation. The Divine essence of God is present and manifested in the revelation of His Son. Hebrews 11:1 refers to "confidence or assurance" maybe "the giving substance to" and "substance" something that elpis "hope" could not similarly express. It could also mean that a title deed represents reality or that it provides a guarantee. In three different instances in the Hebrew New Testament, the Greek term "hupostasis" appears Hebrews 1:1 And He supports everything with the power of His word, reflecting His glory and accurately expressing whom He is making atonement for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven (New American Standard Bible), Hebrews 3:14 says that we have become partakers of Christ (New American Standard Bible) & Hebrews 11:1 says that the conviction of the unseen and the confidence of the things hoped for (New American Standard Bible).

Hebrews 11 serves as an encouragement to the dejected audience about the immediate setting. Hebrews 10:19–39 and Hebrews 12:1-2 passages use exhortatory rhetoric. The reasons why the new covenant in Jesus Christ was better than the old covenant of animal offerings were covered in the final verses of chapter 10 (Hebrews 10:1–18). This was followed by a comforting reassurance to "have faith" rather than "shrink back" (Hebrews 10:39). The author describes how many biblical characters' deeds demonstrated the reality and veracity of their beliefs. These circumstances produced evidence and expectations for the future both of which are crucial for understanding the meaning of these terms. The author of Hebrews gives instances of Christians who showed genuine, saving confidence in God. Each instance of faith illustrates a

person's confidence in God's ability to keep His promises based on what they knew and believed to be true. Faith's "certainty" and "conviction" do not come from wishful thinking or gullible blind believing. They acted with complete confidence that God would fulfil His promises, not by blindly accepting fairy tales as fact. According to Cockerill (2000), the heroes in Hebrews 11 are both Christological and not typological because each one foreshadows Christ rather than being types drawn from Israel's historical precedent.

The intriguing question of whether the author of Hebrews might have utilized the figures of faith to point to Christ's example without thinking of them as typological representations of Christ. The hypostatic union refers to the intimate unity of the two natures of Jesus. Jesus' natures retain its unique characteristics in the Hypostatic Union, uniting the divine and the human in one person in the person of Jesus Christ.

Early Chuch View on The Hypostatic Union

Before Chalcedon, there were several debates and controversies regarding the nature of Christ and his relationship with God. Some of the key debates and controversies include the Arian Controversy on the question of whether Christ was of the same substance as God the Father or of a similar substance. The Arians argued that Christ was of a similar substance while the orthodox position was that Christ was of the same substance. The Apollinarian Controversy on the question of whether Christ had a human soul. Apollinarius argued that Christ had a divine mind and a human body but not a human soul. This view was rejected by the orthodox position which held that Christ had a fully human nature including a human soul. The Nestorian Controversy on the question of how Christ's divine and human natures were united. Nestorius argued that Christ had two separate natures, one divine and one human and that they were not fully united. This view was rejected by the orthodox position which held that Christ had one nature, both fully divine and fully human. The Monophysite Controversy on the question of whether Christ had one nature or two. The Monophysites argued that Christ had only one nature which was a divine-human nature. This view was rejected by the orthodox position which held that Christ had two natures, both fully divine and fully human.

These debates and controversies ultimately led to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 which affirmed the orthodox position that Christ had two natures, both fully divine and fully human, united in one person. The Chalcedonian Definition became the standard for orthodox Christology in the Eastern and Western churches. One of the core teachings about the person of Jesus is traditionally called the hypostatic union. The word "hypostatic" was used officially at the Council of Chalcedon as a way to express the union of Jesus' two natures. The Church worked toward this teaching over centuries based on a couple of core questions: How is it that in Jesus both God and humanity come together? Does this entail that both humanity and divinity are kept intact or does Jesus lose some of his divinity or humanity in the Incarnation? These questions are central because how we answer them affects how we understand the salvation that comes from Jesus. It was for this reason that the Church fought so vigorously over the centuries to defend both the full humanity and the full divinity of Jesus. If Jesus is not fully God and fully man then we are not saved and we are still in sin.

Believing that Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time means he has everything that we have in our humanity except sin as well as everything that belongs to the nature of God. Chalcedon declared that these two natures exist without mixture or separation because the two natures are in union with each other. The Divine Person of the Son is the bond between these two natures. There is no change to either nature: humanity does not change at the moment of the Incarnation or does the divine nature change at that moment? The reason why the Church stops here in clarifying the relationship between the two natures of Jesus is to respect the mysteriousness of the union. No human mind can perfectly comprehend this mystery. This does not mean we do not seek to understand the relationship between humanity and the divinity of Jesus rather it means we have a healthy respect for the uniqueness of the event and the limitedness of our nature.

The Relationship Between Christ's Divine and Human Nature

The term hypostatic union means that deity and true humanity are combined in one person and that personality is Jesus Christ. He did not have two personalities because He had two natures but because He is a man does not make our Lord less than God nor does His being God

prevent Him from being truly a man. The integrity of the attributes of His divine nature was not corrupted or compromised by the fact that His divine nature was united permanently with human nature. His two natures though united, retain their separate identities. There was no mixture of His divine nature with that of His human nature. His divine attributes are always united with His divine nature. His human attributes are always united with His human nature. Deity remains deity and humanity remains humanity. The infinite cannot become finite and the immutable cannot be changed. No attribute of deity was altered when our Lord became a man through the incarnation. The same holds when He died on the cross. To take away a single attribute from His divine nature would destroy His deity. To take away from His perfect human nature a single attribute would destroy His humanity.

Walvoord (1969) stated that though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one person. The normal pronouns such as I, You and He are used of Him frequently. The two natures of Christ are not only united without affecting the attributes of the two natures but they are also combined in one person.

Objections to The Hypostatic Union Of Christ

Within the debate of the hypostatic union of Christ, there are mainly three primary objections that emerge in opposition to this doctrinal view. The objection deals with the apparent contradiction of the two natures and the infinite will and finite will of Christ.

First Objection: It Is Contradictory to Say Jesus Has Two Wills

This objection fails to understand the correct meaning and understanding of Christian orthodoxy and I will counter this objection by listing four lines of evidence in support of Jesus possessing two wills. Firstly, the body of Christ consists of both divine and human natures, so too does the mind of Christ contain a divinely inspired will[1] as well as a

[1] John 2:19

humanly felt will[2]. Thiessen (1949) writes though there are two natures, there is but one person and though the attributes of one nature are not to be attributed to the other nature, the two natures are attributed to the one person. Secondly, it is the Person of Christ that is the anthropic, not the Nature of Christ. God-man is made up of the person of Jesus Christ, not out of each of His unique natures. It was through the incarnation that the union of the two natures was inseparably consummated in the personal union of Christ (God-man). This is evident from the fact that Jesus' divine and infinite intelligence was never mixed or transferred over into His finite and human intelligence as witnessed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Thirdly, being willing to become man, Jesus exercised His Divine Will (as the Son of God) by relinquishing His glorious estate and freely choosing to live and die for the sins of the world by His Human Will (2 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 4:4; Romans 1:3; 8:3; 1Timothy 3:16). Finally, the Council of Constantinople resolved the issue of the two wills in response to Nestorianism and Monothelitism. Macleod (1998) deals with a historic resolution by arguing that the Chalcedonian Definition of the Faith by affirming that in Christ there were two natural wills (duo physicathelemata) and two natural energizing (duo physicaenergeiai) his wills were distinct, yet inseparable; they always worked in harmony and the human was invariably subordinate to the divine. In conclusion, the unity of the person of Jesus Christ is quite clear that Jesus has both a divine will and a human will.

Second Objection: It Is Impossible For Jesus Christ to Be Infinite, and Yet, Finite At the Same Time

The attribution of a finite nature and an infinite nature in one person is often misunderstood and usually leads people to false conclusions about the divine and human qualities possessed in Christ (Macleod, 1998). Thus, an honest evaluation of the philosophical workings of Jesus' two natures according to Christianity will be assessed. Firstly, this objection assumes that Christianity is a form of Eutychianism which is a heretical teaching that accepts the notion that Jesus had only one nature comprised of both infinite and finite faculties. Christianity teaches that Jesus has two unique natures comprised of infinite faculties

[2] Matthew 26:39

(divine nature) and finite faculties (human nature). Secondly, it would be a contradiction if certain distinctions of either the divine or human natures were mixed up between the two or applied to the other nature. Jesus can't say (according to His human nature) that He was born before Abraham (John 8:58) or that His divine nature was tired or hungry (John 4:6; Mark 11:12). Thirdly, Jesus' human nature is limited to finite qualities while His divine nature is unlimited to infinite qualities. The Bible makes certain distinctions when referring only to His divine nature (John 8:12) or when referring to His human nature (John 19:28).

However, there are also many occurrences when Christ acted on a certain attribute but it was predicated on both His divine and human natures. When Christ cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me (Matthew 27:46), it was His humanity that was suffering while His divine nature fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of Psalm twenty-two. Fourthly, both natures are simultaneously active in the person of Jesus and are consistent in their proper infinitude and finitude without mixture, confusion or division. The pure essence of the divine nature is pure actuality (unchangeability) while the essence of human nature is pure potency (changeability) because it is made up of matter. Therefore, Jesus (who has an eternally divine nature) was begotten in a humanly finite and limited nature which was and forever will be perfectly displayed in His resurrected body.

Consequences of Disbelief In The Hypostatic Union of Christ

The human nature of Jesus Christ exists by the act of being of the divine Person. Only the divine Person that exists in Jesus is an essential property of his divine nature. The divine Person must solely possess them since all properties and actions are always of the person and not of nature. Without denying the distinction between the two natures and their respective properties, the communication idiomatum is the mutual attribution of the properties of each nature to one Person. The acts of nature are not done directly but only through the sole Person the incarnate Word, true God and true man. Either Christ can be declared unequivocally unable to sin because of his divine nature or he risks falling into temptation with the cunning manipulation of the devil (Feinberg, 1935). Thus, a tempted Christ able to succumb to trickery and commit

transgression against God cannot be God. If Christ's humanity cannot resist temptation in disobedience to God or if Christ's divinity could sin then His death upon the cross would be ineffectual because of his impure state (Zathureczky, 2008). If Christ is not equal with God in his exact image (Hebrews 1:3) and does not dwell in His fullness (Colossians 2:9) then He would be unable to stand in the glorified presence and keep His eyes upon Him (John 14:9).

If Christ is lesser than God or merely a human being, there is no guarantee that what he reveals concerning God is fully true (Feinberg, 2006). It is through the mediatorial office of Christ, with full knowledge of each other (John 1:18; John 14:9) that provides the revelation of the perfection of God to humans (Zabriskie, 1939) through direct contact with His Father. Further, he reveals the humanity of man to the LORD God in his mediatorial effort with his full knowledge of humanity by sharing human attributes. If His hypostatic union is denied, no one will know the LORD God that has been introduced to mankind by Christ and He will not know His human beings created in His image because of the separation caused by a sin against the holiness of God. For Christ to accomplish the fulfilment of prophecy, He has to be both God and man. No human can atone for even his sins, let alone the whole world. A Savior must be raised by God and He must be equal to the Father and His Spirit even His sacrifice risks the rejection of God as inferior (Feinberg, 2006).

Only the Son of God through His divinity and his humanness can fulfil the will of God to become the ultimate sacrifice for the imputation of sin. The basic idea that Christ is hypostatically communicating with both divine and human energies is also experienced by believers when their humanity is energized by the Holy Spirit and able to speak to God. Without the example of Christ's relationship with the Father, the full capabilities to reflect and share God's energies will be difficult to understand. Believers are united with God's hypostases, by His grace that produces the connection of energy that flows from God to believers (Austin, 2010). Without the ability of human beings to become holy, they cannot approach a holy God. Hebrews 2:14 **says plainly that Christ took on flesh and blood so He could die and destroy the power of death and thus end the devil's control; through Christ's sacrificial death (Zabriskie, 1939). The LORD God gave the Lord Jesus Christ a name above every other name** (Philippians 2:9) in

reward for His sacrifice that requires Him to first quiet his God nature and assume flesh and blood as a human being.

If He had not been exalted, He would be a humble lesser god with little power that could be overcome by the greater power of a bigger god. His exaltation, bestowed upon Him by His Father, demonstrates that He is superior to everyone else and that He possesses all of the divine qualities. Without Christ's Incarnation, it would not be possible for mankind to regain the greater dominion that was lost as a result of sin.

Conclusion

Hebrews provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the hypostatic union with Christ, highlighting the importance of both his divinity and his humanity as well as his role as mediator between God and humanity. Hebrews does not use the term "hypostatic union" but it articulates the concept in its description of Christ's nature and work. The author of Hebrews articulates the hypostatic union of Christ as a fundamental Christian doctrine. Hebrews affirms the hypostatic union as an integral belief of Christianity and highlights Christ's role as a mediator between God and humanity. In conclusion, the book of Hebrews provides important insights into the doctrine of the hypostatic union with Christ. Its emphasis on Christ's high priesthood and his role as mediator between God and humanity highlights the importance of Christ's dual nature as both fully divine and fully human. Through his humanity, Christ can identify with humanity's weaknesses and offer a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity while through his divinity, he can bridge the gap between God and humanity and serve as a mediator who can bring humanity into the right relationship with God.

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