

## Physis, Ousia, Hypostasis, and Prosopon: Definitions

### 1. Physis (Nature):

φύσις (Physis)= nature, the nature of things, the force, laws, order of nature.

(<https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/5449.html...>)

- The term *physis* can refer to either **ousia** (essence) or **hypostasis** (particularity), depending on its context.
- **Physis as Ousia**: It signifies *what is common* or *general essence* shared by beings of the same kind. For example, the divine physis refers to the shared essence of the Trinity.
- **Physis as Hypostasis**: It can also refer to a particular, concrete reality — an individual with distinct existence.
- In Christology, *physis* is used to express the unity of the divine and human realities in Christ, such as in the phrase "**mia physis tou Theou Logou sesarkomene**" — one incarnate nature of the Word of God.

### 2. Ousia (Essence):

οὐσία, οὐσίας, ἡ (from ὄν, οὐσα, ὄν, the participle of εἰμί), **what one has**, i.

e. **property, possessions, estate** (A. V. **substance**)

(<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3776/kjv/tr/0-1/>)

- Ousia refers to *generality* or *essence* — what something *is* in its fundamental nature.
- In Trinitarian theology:
  - The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share the same **one ousia** — the divine essence.
- In Christology:
  - Ousia signifies Christ's divine essence as God and His human essence as man.

### 3. Hypostasis (Particularity):

ὑπόστασις (hypóstasis)= that which has foundation, is firm that which has actual existence a substance, real being the substantial quality, nature, of a person or thing the steadfastness of mind, firmness, courage, resolution confidence, firm trust, assurance

(<https://www.studylight.org/lexicons/eng/greek/5287.html...>)

- Hypostasis refers to *particularity* or *individual existence*. It is the concrete instantiation of an *ousia*.
- While *ousia* expresses what is shared and general, *hypostasis* expresses what is individual and unique.
- In Christology:
  - The Word of God (Logos) is a *divine hypostasis* who assumed human nature.
  - The union of the divine hypostasis of the Logos with the assumed human nature creates **one composite hypostasis** — fully divine and fully human.

#### 4. Prosopon (Person):

- Prosopon refers to the *person* or *external manifestation* of a hypostasis.
- It denotes how a hypostasis is revealed or expressed, particularly in relationship with others.
- In Christology:
  - Christ is **one prosopon** — the person of the Logos Incarnate.
  - The divine hypostasis of the Word reveals both His divine and human attributes through one prosopon.
  - Christ does **not possess a separate human prosopon**, as His humanity is united with His divine hypostasis.
  - Cyril 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Nestorius – (In Greek: [https://earlychurchtexts.com/main/cyriofalex/second\\_letter\\_to\\_nestorius.shtml](https://earlychurchtexts.com/main/cyriofalex/second_letter_to_nestorius.shtml))
  - In English: [https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/cyriofalex\\_second\\_letter\\_to\\_nestorius.htm#:~:text=We%2C%20therefore%2C%20confess%20one%20Christ,no%20separated%20from%20the%20Word](https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/cyriofalex_second_letter_to_nestorius.htm#:~:text=We%2C%20therefore%2C%20confess%20one%20Christ,no%20separated%20from%20the%20Word))



ἀλλ' ὅτι τὸ αὐτοῦ πάλιν ἐγήγερται  
σῶμα. Οὕτω Χριστὸν ἓνα καὶ Κύριον  
ὁμολογήσομεν· οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπον  
συμπροσκυνοῦντες τῷ Λόγῳ, ἵνα μὴ  
τομῆς φαντασία παρεισκρίνηται, διὰ  
τοῦ λέγειν τὸ, *συν·* ἀλλ' ὡς ἓνα καὶ  
τὸν αὐτὸν προσκυνοῦντες, ὅτι μὴ  
ἀλλότριον τοῦ Λόγου τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ,  
μεθ' οὗ καὶ αὐτῷ συνεδρεύει τῷ  
Πατρί· οὐχ ὡς δύο πάλιν  
συνεδρευόντων υἱῶν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐνὸς  
καθ' ἑνωσιν μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας σαρκός.  
Ἐὰν δὲ τὴν καθ' ὑπόστασιν ἑνωσιν ἢ  
ὡς ἀνέφικτον ἢ ὡς ἀκαλλῆ  
παραιτούμεθα <sup>1</sup>, ἐμπίπτομεν εἰς τὸ  
δύο λέγειν υἱούς. Ἀνάγκη γὰρ πᾶσα  
διορίσαι, καὶ εἰπεῖν τὸν μὲν,  
ἄνθρωπον ἰδικῶς, τῇ τοῦ Υἱοῦ κλήσει  
τετιμημένον· ἰδικῶς δὲ πάλιν, τὸν ἐκ  
Θεοῦ Λόγον, υἰότητος ὄνομά τε καὶ  
χρῆμα ἔχοντα φυσικῶς. Οὐ διαιρετέον  
τοιγαροῦν εἰς υἱούς δύο, τὸν ἓνα  
Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. Ὡφέλησε  
κατ' οὐδένα τρόπον τὸν ὀρθὸν τῆς  
πίστεως λόγον εἰς τὸ οὕτως ἔχειν, κἂν  
εἰ προσώπων ἑνωσιν ἐπιφημίζωσι  
τινές. Οὐ γὰρ εἴρηκεν ἡ Γραφή ὅτι ὁ  
Λόγος ἀνθρώπου πρόσωπον ἥνωσεν  
ἑαυτῷ, ἀλλ' ὅτι γέγονε σὰρξ. Τὸ δὲ  
σάρκα γενέσθαι τὸν Λόγον, οὐδὲν  
ἕτερόν ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι παραπλησίως  
ἡμῖν μετέσχεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός.  
Ἰδιον δὲ σῶμα τὸ ἡμῶν ἐποίησατο,  
καὶ προῆλθεν ἄνθρωπος ἐκ γυναικός,  
οὐκ ἀποβεβληκῶς τὸ εἶναι Θεός, καὶ  
τὸ ἐκ Θεοῦ γεννηθῆναι Πατρός· ἀλλὰ  
καὶ ἐν προσλήψει σαρκός μεμενηκῶς  
ὅπερ ἦν. Τοῦτο πρεσβεύει πανταχοῦ

“The natural union was not of generalities [abstract unhypostatized natures] but of hypostases of which Emmanuel is composed. And do not think that hypostases in all cases have a distinct person assigned to them, so that we should be thought, like the impious Nestorius, to speak of a union persons... Though the hypostasis of God the Word existed before, or rather was before all ages and times, being with God both the Father and the Holy Spirit, yet still the flesh possessing an intelligent soul which He united to Him did not exist before the union **nor was a distinct person assigned to it.**”

(Severus of Antioch 2nd Letter to Oecumenius)

## Hypostatic Union vs. Prosopic Union

### 1. Hypostatic Union:

- The hypostatic union is the **natural and inward union** of the divine and human in the **one composite hypostasis**.
- In this union:
  - The divine hypostasis of the Logos assumes human hypostasis, forming a single composite hypostasis.
  - The divine and human aspects coexist fully and perfectly without confusion, change, division, or separation.
  - This union is real and essential, not superficial.

### 2. Prosopic Union:

- The prosopic union refers to the union of the *prosopon* (person or outward appearance) of the divine and human realities.
- In this concept:
  - The divine and human hypostases remain **separate** but appear as one *prosopon*.
  - This view is rejected because it suggests a mere external or relational union rather than a real inward union.
  - Christ does have a *human prosopon*; He is one composite *prosopon* who fully reveals both the divine and human aspects.

## Asymmetric vs. Symmetric Dyophysitism

### 1. Symmetric Dyophysitism:

- Symmetric Dyophysitism asserts that Christ's divine and human natures remain **distinct and parallel**.
- It emphasizes two complete and independent natures, which risks dividing Christ into two separate hypostases or persons.

### 2. Asymmetric Dyophysitism:

- In asymmetric Dyophysitism, the divine nature is understood as the active and primary principle that assumes and perfects the human nature.
- The human nature is real and complete but remains united and subordinate to the divine.
- This avoids any division, as Christ is **one hypostasis** and one *prosopon*, where the divine and human are inseparably united.