

The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Including Its Relation to the Developing  
Christology of the Primitive Church  
Harris L. MacNeill  
*The Princeton Theological Review* 13:490-491. [1915]

Dr. MacNeill offers us in this monograph a very thorough, almost exhaustive, study of the Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The discussion draws within its scope practically the whole teaching content of the Epistle, since it is all more or less closely related to the Christology. Hence not merely the student of Christology but also the student of the Epistle in general will find much in it that is clarifying and helpful. The author is thoroughly familiar with the older and more recent work done in the exposition of Hebrews and admirably succeeds in organizing and presenting his material. That he does not fully succeed in reproducing the peculiar Christological idiosyncrasy of the Epistle is due not to any defect in his work, but rather to the method of approach pursued. In Hebrews the Christological element is not the dominant element: it is shaped by the soteriological element rather than that it shapes the latter. To understand the document fully it would be necessary to bring out how such a Christology was bound to arise out of such a general milieu of teaching. While good remarks to this effect are scattered through the discussion, the total impression produced in this line is not sufficient. We also must consider it a drawback that the exposition has been worked into an *a priori* scheme of the development of Christology in the primitive church as the subtitle indicates. This scheme is nothing but the old liberal scheme according to which the sonship of Jesus was at the first purely ethico-religious or at the most Messianic, and that the transcendental aspect which it bears in most of the New Testament writings shows the result of a gradual deifying process. For Hebrews this has the result that the author of the Epistle is credited with a reluctance explicitly to apply the term "Son" to the preexistent state. Also a tendency is discovered to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus as counterbalancing the transcendental aspect of His person, somewhat after the manner in which the Synoptical Gospels are believed to have conserved the true human Christ to the church. We confess that of a reluctance to carry the sonship back into the pre-incarnate and pre-mundane life of the Savior we are unable to find any trace in the Epistle. On the contrary the document appears to us in this aspect even more explicit and emphatic than the Pauline teaching. And as to the emphasis on the identification of Christ with human nature, this also is motivated not by any desire to tear down or offset the divine aspect, but arises purely from soteriological considerations, both the human and the divine natures being essential to the Savior's revealing and priestly function. The modern version to finding the doctrine of the two natures in the New Testament can not but obscure the facts especially where a writing like Hebrews with pronounced theological proclivities is concerned. Why the coordination of the two natures should have been more impossible to the writer than to coordination of the two offices of revealer and priest which he consciously makes in several passages, it would be hard to explain.