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Class: TH601 NA/NOS Systematic Theology II: Christ and the Church

QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the term “Christology from below”?
2. How would you explain the term “Christology from above”?
3. List and briefly discuss any two taxonomies listed by Bird of how Christ is presented in the Old Testament.
4. List three (3) similarities between the Matthean and Lucan accounts.
5. Bird states that a virgin conception is not predicted in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:14. What is his argument?

ANSWERS

1. Christology from below attempts to anchor Christian teaching about Jesus in history. It means that God reveals Himself in history, that Jesus was a historical figure, that the resurrection was a historical event and that His revelation is the lordship of Jesus Christ. It starts with the historical Jesus, outlines His life, death, and resurrection, then describes how Jesus impacted the origins and shape of the early church, looks at how the church fathers developed their doctrines about Jesus, and evaluate all these Christological developments through to our contemporary period.
2. Christology from above begins with the church’s proclamation of who Jesus was, is, and will yet be. Instead of moving from Jesus as a historical figure to Jesus as a divine being, this perspective starts with Jesus as divine and human, emphasizing the divine side, making Him the center of divine revelation. The primary twentieth-century supporters of Christology from above are Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth. For them, it does not matter what the historian proposes that Jesus might have said or done; instead, what is paramount is what God declares to be true of Jesus.
3. Two taxonomies listed by Bird of how Christ is presented in the Old Testament are:
 - a) Typologically – a typology is a hermeneutical approach that “sees in persons, events, or places the prototype, pattern, or figure of historical persons, events or places that follow it in time. Jesus’s life and work rehearse several patterns or types from the Old Testament. For example, in Romans 5:12-21, Paul says that Adam is a “type” or “pattern” of the One to come—Jesus Christ.
 - b) Christophany – Another approach to finding Jesus in the Old Testament asserts that certain theophanies in the Old Testament were, in fact, Christophanies (the appearance of the pre-incarnate Son). Many church fathers believe that the “angel of the Lord,” who appears in several places and speaks with an immediate divine authority, is the pre-incarnate Son (e.g., Gen 16:7-13).

4. Three (3) similarities between the Matthean and Lucan accounts are:
 - a) Jesus is of Davidic descent (Matt 1:16, 20; Luke 1:27; 2:4).
 - b) The birth is announced by angels (Matt 1:20-23; Luke 1:26-35).
 - c) Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35).

5. Bird states that a virgin conception is not predicted in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:14 because, in its original context, Isaiah refers to an infant to be born during the time of Ahaz, not a divine messianic deliverer to be born some seven hundred years later. The Hebrew word 'almah' means a woman of marriageable age, not necessarily a virgin. The idea of virginity is probably imported from the LXX through the word *parthenos*, which was used to translate 'almah, and *parthenos* often more readily denotes a "virgin."

TERMS

Christology: the study of the person and work of Christ.

Theophanies: appearances of God.

Allegory: this approach looks for a secret or hidden meaning, which is often unrelated to the true meaning of the passage/text.

SUMMARY

In 4.2 to 4.3.4, Bird examines Christological methods—Christology from above versus Christology from below, concluding that it is not top-down or bottom-up but looking at Jesus from behind, below, above, and before. He also discusses the life of Jesus, how He is presented in the Old Testament and what it contributes to Christology. Finally, he also addresses the ministry of Jesus, the birth of Jesus, and the reality of the virgin conception—quoting J. Gresham Machen that "even if the belief in the virgin birth is not necessary to every Christian, it is certainly necessary to Christianity."