Doctrinal Orthodoxy and Philosophical Heresy: A Theologian's Reflections on Beall's Proposal

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1. Introduction

"A contradiction is false. It is false everywhere and always. It is false in hell. It is false in heaven. It is even false in theology." With these words, a distinguished philosopher began a lecture to a group of divinity school students. Accustomed to quick and easy appeals to "mystery," the theology students and aspiring pastors before him were rather taken aback, but this statement reflects a view that is not uncommon among philosophers. Indeed, Graham Priest (et al. 2018) refers to classical logic and its commitment to the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle as "orthodoxy."

But in his fascinating essay "Christ – a Contradiction," Jc Beall wields the resources of subclassical (or paraconsistent) logic in defense of Chalcedonian Christology. The past few decades have seen much ink spilled and many trees killed in arguments over the coherence of orthodox Christology (happily, this is an open-access electronic journal, so no trees were harmed in the making of *this* essay). Critics such as John Hick have made the case that "to say, without further explanation, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square" (1977, 178). Analytic philosophers of religion and theologians have risen to challenges such as that raised by Hick, and different proposals have been developed (or retrieved from the tradition) and defended against objections. We now have various combinations of metaphysics and doctrine: we have two-minds proposals with either abstractist or concretist metaphysics, we have both abstractist and concretist kenotic accounts on offer, we have "Model A's" and "Model T's." But for all the creativity and variety, what such proposals share in common is the commitment to demonstrate that Chalcedonian or, a bit more broadly, "conciliar" Christology is *not* contradictory. In other words, these proposals seek to show that there is no logical contradiction between the admittedly striking affirmations made by the creeds – and thus the Christology of the creeds should not be rejected on the grounds that it is necessarily false.

Beall takes a different approach. Indeed, it is a *very* different approach: he defends "the viability of 'Contradictory Christology'" by arguing that "the right response to the fundamental problem of Christology (viz., Christ's having two apparently complementary – contradiction-entailing – natures) is to accept the familiar contradictions" (401). I am not yet persuaded that such a move is either

viable or necessary; I am not convinced that the kind of work done in analytic Christology is unsuccessful (and thus that Christians *need* to resort to paraconsistent logics), and I am not sold on either the necessity or viability of the paraconsistent logics that call for exceptions to the law of non-contradiction. But such issues as the viability of more traditional Christological proposals or the debates over classical logic are not the focus of this discussion, and at any rate Beall offers an important option for thinking about the doctrine of the incarnation. He does so with verve, clarity, and rigor, and his proposal raises some fascinating and important issues. In what follows I shall make some observations about, and raise some questions for, his discussion of the role of logic – and especially the place of contradictions – in theology. I do so as a theologian, and I do so with attentiveness to the potential reception of his proposal by theologians.

2. Seeking Clarity: The Role of Logic in Theology

As a theologian, I find myself in hearty agreement with much of what Beall says about the role of logic in theology. He notes that any theory (in whatever field of inquiry) will include the (initial) truths that are basic to the theory and that motivate that theory. But any theory that strives for completeness and adequacy will also include "*whatever follows from the truths in the theory*; it should contain all of the *consequences* of a theory's claims" (403). Logic sorts out these relations of consequence; it helps us see what does – and what does not – follow from the first-order truth claims of the theory itself. I welcome much of what Beall says here, for logic has an important role to play in theology. As John Wesley – who is somewhat more renowned as an evangelist than a logician – puts it, logic is "necessary next to, and in order to, the knowledge of Scripture" (1959, 483). Despite the fact that it was considered "unfashionable" among the clergy of his time, nonetheless logic is invaluable. For with it we have the possibility of "apprehending things clearly, judging truly, and reasoning conclusively" (483). Logic "is good for this at least (wherever it is understood), to make people talk less; by showing them both what is, and what is not, to the point; and how extremely hard it is to prove anything" (492).

Beall insists that "theology is no different" from other disciplines in this respect (404). Logic is rightly said to be "'universal' and 'topic-neutral,'" and thus it includes theology (405). I could not agree more. Systematic theology is ultimately about God, but it is also about all else as that "all else" relates to God (see, for example, Webster 2009). As such, it includes not only core claims about God and the world but also whatever is entailed by those core claims. Thus "theologians must not only add various basic truths about God but also 'complete' (as far as possible) the theory via a consequence relation" (404). Accordingly, theologians should include in their theories not only those truths that they take to be revealed by God but also what truths of theological relevance really follow from those revealed truths.[1] They should

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[1] I say "what truths of theological relevance" because I think that Beall's way of putting matters commits us to too much. Every necessary truth follows from any truth, but surely systematic theology shouldn't have to include all of that to be complete. The task of systematic theology is daunting enough

recognize that the entailments of what they affirm are also included in their doctrinal proposals.

This may seem obvious, but I am grateful for Beall's insistence here, and I hope that theologians will be properly appreciative of this point. For in modern and contemporary theology (in sharp contrast to much theology in the Christian tradition) it is sometimes too easy to find theologians making claims about the "implications" of some doctrinal proposal – either positively or negatively – without doing the hard work of seeing just what *is* implied or entailed. In other words, it is not uncommon to see theologians rush to celebrate the (desired) "implications" of some pet doctrinal proposal – but without pausing to demonstrate that the desired conclusions indeed are implied or entailed. Similarly, it is not hard to find theologians make affirmations and then deny the (undesired) implications; it is almost as if the operative assumption is that there are no such consequences if we do not *want* those consequences. A theologian may affirm some tenet of classical orthodoxy and then also affirm some other propositions that would entail the contradiction of that tenet – but then insist that there is no problem because they do not intend to affirm the contradictory proposition. But it is one thing to affirm some proposition A and deny some proposition $B.$ It is another thing entirely to affirm some proposition A and deny some proposition B while also affirming some proposition C – when C entails the denial of A and/or the affirmation of $B.$[2]

Beall concludes that "without a consequence (closure) relation our theories remain inadequate; they fail to contain truths that are entailed by the given set of truths. Inasmuch as theorists, and theologians in particular, aim to give as complete a theory of the target phenomenon as possible, the reliance of a consequence relation for our theory is required" (404). Beall is right that any theological theory should include whatever is entailed by the given set of truths. Amen – logic has an important role to play in theology, and theologians would do well to recognize this. As someone important in theology once said, "Come, let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).

But just what, more precisely, is the role of logic? Beall is unmistakably clear that it helps us trace consequences. But what does this mean, and does it do more? Logic (at least as it is classically understood) is invaluable in demonstrating what follows from a proposition (and that proposition's conjunction with other propositions), what comes "downstream" of a set of claims, what comes as an entailment whether we want it or not. But is this all that it can do? Or can it make more substantive contributions to theology? More directly to the issue at hand, logic can show where contradiction follows as a consequence. But does logic also show us that those contradictions are *false* – does it show that they are false simply in virtue of being contradictions? Here we see with clarity how Beall's view takes leave of classical logic – on Beall's account, logic itself does not show that contradictions are false. Various contradictions may in fact be false, and indeed Beall is insistent that they should not be accepted widely in theology. But logic itself does not rule out contradictions, and it leaves open the door to the possibility that some may in fact be

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– and the textbooks long enough – without also having to include "God is triune *and* 2+2=4" and "God is triune *or* 2+2-4." Thanks to Tim Pawl for very helpful conversation here.
[2] As Keith E. Yandell and I argued in McCall and Yandell 2009, 357.

true (and, indeed, one contradiction – the set of claims contained in orthodox Christology – *is* true).

3. Looking for Charity: The Role of Logic in Pro-Conciliar Theology

So what are we make of the apparent contradictions in the creeds and conciliar statements? Beall notes that Timothy Pawl makes the case that it is "at best uncharitable to interpret the conciliar fathers as advancing anything close to a genuinely contradictory Christology" (420). On Pawl's account (and I think that we could extend this beyond Pawl to other analytic apostles of Christian orthodoxy), it would be uncharitable to do so because this would mean that the conciliar fathers were asserting things that cannot even possibly be true (see Pawl 2016, 84–85). So, for the sake of charity, we should interpret them as making claims about *apparent* contradictions. Beall disagrees. In fact, he charges Pawl with an uncharitable reading because Pawl's account has the conciliar fathers using the "key predicates in non-standard and undefined ways" (420). So both Pawl and Beall want to promote a charitable reading. Neither, so far as I can see, wants to read the creedal statements in such a way that implies that the conciliar fathers were simply incoherent, and neither wants a reading that is implausible. Thus Pawl assumes that they were not asserting something they took to be a genuine contradiction, and thus Beall assumes that they really meant to affirm the contradictions (since they just asserted them without making the sophisticated "Pawline" moves or watering them down). Both want a charitable reading. But they disagree about what that *is.*

  Here are some observations. First, I take it that the creedal statements were intended neither, on the one hand, as mere "grammatical rules" or "linguistic regulation" (with no metaphysical commitments or constraints whatsoever), nor, on the other hand, as more-or-less complete explanations of the incarnation.[3] Both readings are, in my view, both uncharitable and quite implausible. I think that it is much better to think of the creedal statements as both making central affirmations ("here is what we *must* hold") and crucial denials ("here is what we *can't* believe") – and then as leaving interpretive space for various possibilities and metaphysical development between the core of what we must hold and the boundaries beyond which we cannot go. If I am correct, then we should not expect them to make explicit their metaphysical and logical commitments as part of the creeds (or even as addendums).

  Second, it seems to me that the any charitable reading will be one that allows for the possibility of coherence while not being historically implausible. So if we have reason to think that the framers and defenders of the conciliar statements were thinking along the lines of Beall's subclassical proposal, then interpreting them as making claims that they knew were directly contradictory might be the charitable way to go. But in the absence of such reasons, it becomes less plausible. And, if less

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[3] The phrase "linguistic regulation" is taken from Coakley 2002, 143–163.

plausible, then it is also less charitable, for then we are interpreting them as making overt contradictions – while also believing contradictions to be false.

So do we have such reasons? Commenting on the philosophical history, Nicholas Rescher and Robert Brandom note that

> Since Aristotle's day, virtually all logicians and logically concerned philosophers in the mainstream Western tradition have had a phobia of inconsistency. They have been near to unanimous in proscribing it from the precincts of their logical and ontological theorizing, holding that the toleration of inconsistencies would inevitably bring cognitive disaster in its wake (1979, 1).

This may be true of the philosophical history, but, not surprisingly, it is also true of the theological history. As Ephraim Radner points out,

> Almost all the Fathers were wary of affirming that Scripture had within itself real "contradictions," a charge associated with the enemies of Scripture. And much effort was made to explain the presence of such *apparent* tensions within the texts (2016, 218).

What they took to be true about claims made within the text of Scripture they also took to be true more broadly. Thus, for example, Gregory of Nyssa relies upon both "the law of excluded middle" and "the law of non-contradiction" in his debates with Eunomius of Cyzicus. Indeed, he claims that "contraries of contradictories are themselves contradictory of each other," and that "it is always a true axiom, that two things which are naturally opposed to two things mutually opposite are themselves opposed to each other," and he then presses these axioms into service in a *reductio* argument against the Eunomians (see "Against Eunomius," 1.42). With direct reference to Chalcedon, Coakley concurs:

> In a broadly accepted sense, the Chalcedonian "Definition" does indeed involve a "paradoxical" claim – the claim that "God" and "man," normally perceived as strikingly different in defining characteristics, find in Christ a unique intersection. Here "paradox" simply means "contrary to expectation," and the mind is led on from there to eke out an explanation that can satisfy both logic and tradition. However, we should be careful to distinguish this meaning of "paradox" from a tighter one in which not merely something "contrary to expectation" is suggested, but something self-contradictory. . . The overwhelming impression from following the debate leading up to Chalcedon, however, as well as that which succeeds it, is that the "paradoxical" nature of the incarnation in the first sense is embraced (with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm), but that "paradox" in the latter sense is vigorously warded off (2002, 154–155).

If this is right (and I think that it is), then the efforts of Pawl (and his fellow apostles) should be seen as a kind of "eking out" effort. Pawl's is not the first such effort, and indeed it has a great deal of both formal and material continuity with important theologians within the Christian tradition. As such, it is neither uncharitable nor implausible.

4. Hoping for Rarity: Contradictions Galore?

Beall rightly anticipates a "very common reaction" to his proposal (416). He wants to make it clear that he is *not* "proposing that theologians should seek to find contradictions willy nilly;" he is not suggesting "that theologians ought to seek out contradictions" (416). There is good reason, he insists, for us to reject most logical contradictions as false. True logical contradictions are very rare, for many are ruled out by the objects of inquiry themselves. His proposal, again, is that it is only on state occasions – notably, for our purposes, the incarnation – that the truth might require a genuine contradiction. He does not want to completely "rule out" the possibility that there may be other true contradictions in theology, but he clearly does not intend for this to be taken as license (422).

Beall's own preferences are clear enough, but I am not sanguine about their reception among theologians. I worry that many theologians will indeed take what Beall says as open season on the constraints of classical logic and, more importantly, to license contradictions galore.[4] It is not hard to imagine a theologian being convinced by Beall and then saying, "Cool, I no longer need to worry about avoiding contradictions." Beall might remonstrate with "No, you theologians should not 'seek out contradictions'" (416). But the theologian's response is quick: "look, we don't have to seek them out – they are all over the place and come looking for us. They are unavoidable. The good news now is that we don't need to worry about them."

My worry, in other words, is that contemporary theologians might take Beall seriously – too seriously. Beall says that "until there's good reason to accept that our true theories of phenomena beyond Christ are likewise glutty I see no reason not to reject the spread of contradictory theories" (419). But a theologian converted to Beall's position may wonder what reasons there might be not to *accept* the spread of such theories. Contradictions will be seen as delightfully if perhaps recklessly mischievous – but will become dangerously promiscuous. Not only will logic in theology be "gappy" (where the "law of excluded middle" is rejected and the proposition may be neither true nor false) and "glutty" (where the "law of contradiction" is rejected and the proposition may be both true and false), it will also be overly promiscuous.

While some theologians might welcome and cheer such a development, others may be concerned about the proliferation of contradictions. Indeed, some – perhaps still under the spell of "classical logic" – may fear that to allow one genuine

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[4] Ephraim Radner discusses several recent (and not-so-recent) theologians (most notably Pavel Florensky and Vladimir Lossky) who make explicit and positive use of contradiction, and he references the work of Graham Priest. See Radner 2016, 216–219, and Florensky 1997, 106–123.

contradiction as true is to embrace all falsehoods. They would see that this would be very bad news indeed for theology because it would open the door to all falsehoods both contingent and necessary. Beall denies "explosion" as a consequence of logic itself while allowing that it might be a part of theory-specific consequence relations (e.g., 428), and he quite understandably says that detailed discussion of such matters is beyond the scope of the essay. Fair enough, but at some point something further needs to be said about this if his proposal about logic in theology is to be helpful to theologians. For as matters stand, it is less than fully obvious why we should not conclude "*ex contradictione quodlibet*" (roughly, *very* roughly, "out of contradiction, whatever the heck").

I take it that it is safe to assume that Beall has much more to say about such matters (indeed, I take this to be an assumption safer than which is difficult to conceive). Assuming further that his explanations here turn out to be satisfactory, his proposal still raises further questions. It is entirely understandable that these are not the concern of his paper, but the answers will be important nonetheless when considering the reception of his work among theologians and especially in considering its utility for ecclesial theology.

5. Some Questions for Contradictory Christology

Beall's proposal is intriguing at several points, and it raises some important questions. I take it that these questions will be important when theologians consider the adequacy and helpfulness of his proposal. I focus on several here.

The first question is epistemological: how are we to know which are the "true" contradictions and which are the false? The theologian who makes do with the shop-worn old tools of classical logic and theology has a ready and easy answer: there are no "true" contradictions. If something is genuinely – and not just apparently – contradictory, then it just is false. Sorting out the apparent contradictions from those that are genuine is the hard work, but once we get clear on that the work is easy (or at least easier). Once sorted, the genuine contradictions are rejected as false. But on Beall's proposal, the hard work may come after the initial sorting exercises; once the genuine contradictions are separated from those that are merely apparent, rounded up, and corralled together, the really hard work begins. For now we have to sort out the "true" contradictions and quarantine them off from their sickly false cousins. And how are we supposed to do *that?* Again, it is entirely understandable that Beall does not supply us with the needed tools and methods here, but at some point that assistance will be crucial if his proposal is going to have a positive impact in theology.

A second question is closely related to the first: what is the level of required support that is needed to establish the truth of both claims of a contradiction? Beall's proposal rather casually refers to "initial thrown-in truths" (e.g., 403), and he mentions the affirmations of two-natures Christology as an example. But in theology, at least, matters are often somewhat more complicated than this, especially when engaging in constructive theology but sometimes also when doing retrieval theology. If two theological propositions taken together seem to produce a contradiction, does

that give us reason to go back and look closely at the data or evidence (whether textual, empirical, experiential or just what) supporting the propositions? If another non-contradictory theory is not impossible and also makes more-or-less adequate sense of the data, is that one to enjoy a preference (at least initially)? If so, then why? Just how much support for the propositions must one have to embrace something that surely is an actual contradiction? Once again, I understand that Beall cannot deal with all such questions here (first things first), but at some point answers to such questions will be important if his proposal is to put down theological roots and produce some doctrinal fruit.

A third question is perhaps due only to my ignorance (as a under-informed theologian). It concerns the relation of subclassical (or paraconsistent) logics to a set of issues that are important in theology. It is this: how does Beall's proposal map onto issues of modality? Issues of modality are important in theology generally and in Christology specifically, and it is not clear how Beall's proposal impacts our understanding of modality. One way of approaching this issue is to consider the following proposition

(T) *it is possible that there is at least one true contradiction*.

It seems obvious that Beall is committed to (T). Now compare it with

(NT) *it is not possible that there is at least one true contradiction*.

Now consider further the conjunction of (T) and (NT). Putting them together yields

(TNT)[5] *it is possible that there is at least one true contradiction and it is not possible that there is at least one true contradiction*.

It seems obvious that (TNT) is not only *about* contradictions, (TNT) itself *is* a contradiction. But is (TNT) a true contradiction? Or does it suffer the inconvenience of being a false contradiction?

Suppose that (TNT) is true. If (TNT) is one of the true contradictions, then we are left to conclude not only that there is at least one true contradiction *and* that there are no true contradictions, we are also to conclude that what is possible is also impossible and even that what is necessary is also impossible. So what is true is also false, and what is *necessarily* false is also true. According to S5, $\Diamond p \Rightarrow \Box \Diamond p$. Thus the first conjunct of (TNT) cannot fail to be true if it is true at all. To put it in possible worlds semantics, if it is true at all, then it is true in all possible worlds.[6] Accordingly, there is at least one possible world where a contradiction is true, and it is true in all possible worlds that there is at least one possible world where a contradiction is true. But the second conjunct, if true, is also necessarily true (because $\sim\Diamond p = \Box\sim p$); it is true in all possible worlds. If the second conjunct is true, then there is no world in

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which the first conjunct is true; while if the first is true, then there is no world in which the second is true. Either way, there is no world in which both are true.

This leaves me, as a theologian, with at least two concerns. The first is that I struggle to know what it would even mean to say that (TNT) is true. The second problem is that (TNT) would seem to give us modal collapse or something even more worrisome (perhaps modal explosion). Where "modal collapse" happens when possibility is "collapsed" into necessity, here it seems we have the threat of *impossibility* collapsing into necessity, of necessary truth "collapsing" into necessary falsehood. Since I think that modality is important in theology (and that reality has a modal structure), I think that theology should be very wary of any theory with such consequences.

Suppose, on the other hand, that (TNT) is false. If (TNT) is false, then these consequences do not follow. So, it seems, the obvious thing to do is to reject (TNT) as false. But on what basis? The classical logician will immediately recognize that (TNT) is false and will reject it as such – (TNT) is not only about contradictions, it *is* a contradiction. Thus it is false. It is necessarily false, and not even Chuck Norris can make it true. There are a lot of hard problems in philosophy, but this is not one of them. End of story. But Beall's theory can hardly take this route. For on his view, as we have seen, logic is "clearly topic-neutral by not taking a stand on whether gappy or glutty sentences are ruled out" (414). With respect to some topics, it may indeed be the case that there is no room for gluttiness (with mathematics, this clearly *is* the case), while with respect to other matters, acceptance of gappiness and gluttiness may be appropriate. The salient point is that logic itself does not decide. As Beall puts it, subclassical "logic does not force unique, strange phenomena into the cramped confines of classical-logic possibilities" but "is silent on whether theorists *should* entertain a contradictory (glutty) theory." The upshot is that when considering the possibility of a true contradiction on the subclassical account, "logic itself, contrary to the standard account, doesn't rule it out" (414). Logic itself does not rule out (TNT). So if it is going to be eliminated, it will have to be on the basis of something theory-specific. However, in this case there is no other theory that (TNT) is about, and because there is no theory there are no theory-specific eliminators. The contradiction in question is straightforwardly and merely about (modal) logic – so we have neither logic itself nor other theory-specific criteria to guide us. If logic itself does not rule out the possibility of a true contradiction, then logic does not rule out this one. But neither is it obvious that anything else does (since it is a logic-only matter).

Moreover, at least if I'm understanding him correctly, Beall's view wants to maintain space for the axioms of classical logic within it. He describes subclassical logic (at least his preferred version of it) by saying that what it "does *not* do is reject any classical-logic models;" instead it "simply *expands* the space of models to recognize ones that go beyond the narrow confines of the classical-logic space" (411). Since the second conjunct stems from the very classical-logical model that he wants to include and expand around, it would seem to be included.

So what are we to do with (TNT)? Rejecting the second conjunct outright seems to be against the grain of Beall's preferred subclassical account (committed, as it is, to inclusion of classical logic even as it expands around and beyond it). And to reject (TNT) as one of the false contradictions seems arbitrary (because logic itself

cannot rule it out, and, as a logical matter, there is no theory-specific evidence that would do so). I guess we could say "so much the worse for thinking about modality." But perhaps instead we should conclude "so much the worse for any system that makes it so difficult to reject something so obviously problematic." But without good reason to reject either conjunct – and Beall's account is committed to the first and without obvious reason to reject the second (since the logic itself is neutral on the issue and we don't see any theory-specific reasons to reject it) – we are unsure how to avoid it. So taking (TNT) as true threatens modal collapse or explosion, but Beall's subclassical logic leaves us unsure (pending further explanation) of how to avoid it. Either way, we have modal instability.

More broadly – and more importantly – we are left to wonder about the relationship between subclassical logic (as applied to theological issues) and modality. It is understandable that Beall does not address all such matters here; his is, after all, an essay on Christology rather than an essay on the relationship of subclassical logic to modal logic. But neither is this irrelevant, for modal considerations are important in theology. This is true generally, and Christology is no exception. Beall's account assumes that

> "Christ has a divine nature (entailing immutability) and *independently and without diminishment* also has a human nature (entailing mutability)."

This follows from orthodox Christology, but of course there is more to say. To the issue at hand, it is important to note that Christ has a divine nature *necessarily* but has a human nature *contingently* (see Cross 2002, 179). Theology needs an account of modality adequate to handle such affirmations.

Perhaps there are also good reasons for the subclassical logician to consider (TNT) to be one of the false contradictions and to reject it as such (in this case, one can think of my worries merely as potentially common misunderstandings that are likely to be made by theologians). Or perhaps it is the case that acceptance of subclassical logic will entail different understandings of modality.[7] If so, then it would be good to know the price; theologians should look carefully and count the cost before embracing it. I am confident that Beall has more to say about these matters. But accounting for modality in subclassical logic is not, as Beall (2010, 11) recognizes, "entirely straightforward," so I look forward to further clarification as we seek to relate his proposals about logic to theology.

A fourth and final question is more directly practical and even pastoral in nature. This is a concern about the potential and even likely reception of Beall's proposal, which is, of course something over which Beall does not have much control. Nevertheless, given the argument he makes and the enthusiasm for affirming contradictions that one sometimes finds among contemporary theologians who are not as careful as Beall, there are reasons for concern. The question is this: how is the account drawn here to offer helpful practical guidance for Christian communities if it

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[7] Haack 1974 (2) sees modal logics (such as T, S4, and S5) as "supplements" to classical logic rather than "rivals" to it.

is affirmed and applied more broadly? Nicholas Wolterstorff observes that theologians often have an urge to "heal the world" (2005, 83). More broadly, theology is (at least partially – there are debates over this) a *churchly* enterprise. Doctrine plays important roles in the formation of the community of faith and in the formation of character and the virtues within that faith community (see Charry 1997). Will the acceptance of contradictions (in this case of the doctrine of the incarnation, at the very heart of the Christian faith, but potentially more broadly as well) actually strengthen the faith of the faithful and assist ecclesial communities in the important work in moral and spiritual formation? Or might it bring harm? Consider the following scenario:

> The Pope and his Council of Cardinals, along with the Orthodox Patriarchs and Metropolitans, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the relevant Protestant ecclesial leaders, embark on an ecumenical study of the debates over the ordination of women to the priesthood. They assemble the "ideal" team of scholars; they get the best theologians (of the various disciplines) gathered from the respective ecclesial groups. Notably, all parties agree that this is an ideal team. They lock themselves in the basement of the Vatican with the full range of resources. In other words, this is the All-Star team, they have all that they need, and they have as long as they need.
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> Something interesting and unexpected happens. The longer they are together, the more they become convinced that there are unassailable theological arguments for the restriction of ordination (to some set of ecclesial offices) to males – *and* they become increasingly convinced that there are unassailable theological arguments for opening ordination (to the full set of ecclesial offices) to women. Interestingly, both the "traditionalists" and the "progressives" are in substantial agreement on both accounts: scholars from both sides see and affirm the strength of the arguments for both conclusions. They seem to be stuck, and – because they tacitly assume that a contradiction cannot be true – they keep going back to the arguments. But each time they do so, they are even more deeply convinced of the theological case to be made for both conclusions.
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> Fortunately, however, the basement of the Vatican has decent internet access, and at some point a bishop who is frustrated by the situation seeks diversionary relief by reading the *Journal of Analytic Theology.* There he comes across a brilliant article commending "Contradictory Christology," and he is immediately taken by the idea that subclassical logic is appropriate for theology. The next morning he makes the case that it is appropriate for the issue before them; he argues that the only thing holding them up is this dang relic called the "Law of Non-Contradiction." What we need, he says, is a "glutty" theology of ordained ministry. The scholars and clerics agree. In one accord, this ideal team of ecumenical scholars issues an important statement: they conclude that the ordination of women to the

priesthood is both theologically permissible and morally obligatory *and* that the ordination of women to the priesthood is both theologically impermissible and a grave sin. Understanding that this might be initially confusing to the catholic faithful, they include in their statement not only their strongest arguments for both views but also a short primer on subclassical logic.

The catholic faithful find this statement and accompanying explanations – to be interesting but also super confusing. Indeed, they are frustrated by it, and they keep asking this question: "But what do we *do*?" They begin to hope that their leaders do not make similar progress on other contested issues. For while these sorts of exercises might be good for ecumenism considered abstractly, they are not good at all for the life and health of the church.

Christian theology attempts to tell the truth – the whole truth so far as we can – about God and all things as these are related to God. As the truth, it is supposed to shape and mold our characters (individually and communally), it is supposed to form us spiritually and morally, it is supposed to give us moral guidance. How can it do so if it includes contradictions (or even allows for their possibility)? Perhaps the answer is that there will be no true contradictions on matters with practical import; maybe it is the case that anytime there is a contradiction with respect to a practical, pastoral, or moral issue that itself is a clue that there must be some theory-specific reason to judge the contradiction false. Maybe so, but such a criterion might threaten to rule out the very Christological move being made by Beall. At any rate, more explanation would be welcome indeed.

5. Concluding Observations

I am not yet convinced that we *need* to resort to subclassical logic to hold to classic, conciliar Christology. I think that there are viable options to be found in the proposals that defend the creedal accounts while staying within the bounds of classical logic, so I do not feel the pressure to make the move that Beall is recommending. I would rather give up philosophical "orthodoxy" than surrender theological orthodoxy, so I am, as a theologian, appreciative of Beall's work in this area. But at this point I do not think that it is the only way forward. Nor am I convinced that paraconsistent or subclassical logics make the best sense of reality; I am not persuaded that the debates over the "Law of Non-Contradiction" are settled in favor of its demise. But such issues are beyond the scope of Beall's essay, and accordingly they have not been the focus of my response. Instead, I have tried to voice a theologian's concerns and raise some questions that seem important – even where these go beyond the immediate scope of his essay. I have done so in hopes of raising concerns that will perhaps assist Beall in his "larger project" as well as help theologians think through what is at stake.

I say these things as a theologian – one who is very well aware that theologians have a great deal to learn from specialists in logic and one who is appreciative of their work. Beall's proposal is very stimulating. It is original (at least so far as I can see) and

imaginative, it is well-informed, and it is rigorous and rich in argument. It is an honor to engage it. I have benefitted much from thinking through it, and I am certain that other theologians will as well.

Ibn Sina once said that "those who deny a first principle should be beaten or exposed to fire until they concede that to burn and not to burn, or to be beaten and not to be beaten, are not identical."[8] I don't want Christian theology (or Christian theologians!) to take a beating, but I also do not want Christian theology to pick up a tool that burns it.

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[8] Cited in Scotus 1987, 9. The citation is referenced to Avicenna's *Metaphysics* 1.

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