PARACONSISTENT LOGIC AND THE METAPHYSICS OF THE INCARNATION:
A DEFENSE OF Jc BEALL'S CONTRADICTORY CHRISTOLOGY[1]

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Introduction

The metaphysics of the Incarnation lies at the core of our Christian faith, presenting a profound and enduring problem concerning the identity of Christ, a problem that has engaged theologians and philosophers for centuries.

> Our Lord Jesus Christ is...one and the same Son, the self-same perfect in Godhead, the self-same perfect in humanity; truly God and truly man...one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same son and only-begotten God, The Word, Lord, Jesus Christ. - *Chalcedon 451*

Since the first articulation of the Christological Declaration of the Council of Chalcedon, a number of theological attempts have been made to resolve the apparent contradiction implicit

1. This article is based on research originally developed as part of my thesis. I extend my sincere gratitude to Professor Jc Beall (University of Notre Dame, USA) for his insightful evaluation and constructive feedback on the original manuscript, which significantly contributed to the refinement of this work.

in its formulation. The declaration that Christ is both truly human and truly divine articulates, with clarity and precision, a doctrinal commitment that raises significant metaphysical questions: namely, how two distinct natures, divine and human, can subsist in a single person of Christ without compromising the integrity of each nature.

Analytic theology, emerging as a recent intellectual development, endeavors to resolve the Christological dilemma through the precise argumentative methods and conceptual frameworks of analytic philosophy. Jc Beall, a philosopher at the University of Notre Dame, is actively engaged in the project of Analytic theology, contributing to its ongoing theological discourse. In his book "The Contradictory Christ," Beall articulates his principal argument: "Christ is a contradictory being by virtue of being both human and divine as declared by the Council of Chalcedon." He insists that the Chalcedonian formula about Christ contains and expresses a real contradiction,[2] and it is a contradiction because the way it is formulated leads to a theological and logical tension. This paper explores Beall's work on contradictory Christology, examining how his ideas challenge traditional views of Christ's identity and how we should approach the problem of the Incarnation. His approach offers a new yet controversial perspective by integrating paraconsistent logic with Christology, particularly in how his application of paraconsistent logic leads to a Christology that embraces the contradictions inherent in the belief that Christ is both fully divine and fully human. The discussion also includes some key arguments in support of Beall's position, followed by a critical evaluation of some of the main objections it faces.

2. Beall distinguishes paradox from contradiction. Paradoxes, on common usage, are apparent contradictions, i.e., propositions that appear to entail contradictions. A contradiction, on the other hand, is a contradiction regardless of how it appears to us.

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Defining the Core Theological Problem

In his article "A neglected *QUA* solution to the fundamental problem of Christology", Beall quoted Richard Cross:

> [T]he fundamental philosophical problem specific to the doctrine is this: how is it that one and the same thing could be both divine (and thus, on the face of it, necessary, and necessarily omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, immutable, impassible, and impeccable) and human (and thus, on the face of it, have the complements of all these properties).[3]

Beall argues that "the contradiction of Christ, on the proposed Christology, is not there because the Conciliar-text authors were sloppy; it is there because Christ's foundational role in Christianity requires something contradictory – and thereby something extraordinary, unique, and awesome."[4] It is not something that was forced by the council, but it was what Christ had revealed to them. At the outset, I think, it is important to note that Beall does not suggest nor insist that contradictory Christology is the true and best theory of the incarnation. For him, to insist that contradictory Christology is the true Christology is a difficult task and is therefore too difficult to prove. What he has in mind is to defend the viability of contradictory Christology and to present some reasons why it deserves our philosophical and theological attention. In pursuing this aim, Beall also examines the role of logic in theology and insists that the principle of *ex falso quodlibet* (explosion principle) is a philosophically open question. He insists that it is time to confront directly this Christological contradiction that has baffled theologians and philosophers

3. Jc Beall & Jared Henderson, "A Neglected Qua Solution to the Fundamental Problem of Christology." *Faith and Philosophy*, No. 36 (2019): pg. 157.

4. Jc Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," in *Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 7 (June 2019): pg. 416.

for centuries and to examine it from a critical perspective, and not to dismiss it without understanding its critical and salient points.

The main problem that Beall intends to address is the apparent contradiction of Christ (which he believes to be a true contradiction), i.e., Christ being both truly human and divine at the same time. Here is the simple illustration of the problem as identified by Beall:

1. Christ is immutable (by virtue of his divine nature).
2. Christ is mutable (by virtue of his human nature).
3. Therefore, Christ is both mutable and not mutable (via logic).[5]

From this, we can infer other attributes of Christ that are appropriate to him being human and being divine by virtue of *communicatio idiomatum*:[6]

> Something that has (or exemplifies) a nature N has whatever properties are entailed by having nature N.[7]
>
> Thus,
>
> Christ has a divine nature (entailing immutability) and independently and without diminishment also has a human nature (entailing mutability).

The history of Christology could be seen as an ongoing attempt to avoid the Christological contradiction implicit in the Chalcedonian declaration, since it did not conform to the prevailing view of logic at the time it was originally formulated.

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5. Ibid., pg. 401.

6. Communication of Idioms is the way how we attribute divine and human properties to Christ who is both human and divine.

7. As pointed by Beall, this is a default metaphysical (or extra-theological) principle about the relation between natures and beings that have them.

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Beall argues that what prevented them from accepting a logically contradictory Christology was their intellectual bias, which was built on an incorrect view of logic itself.[8] Thus, for him, logic should be viewed the right way so that one can proceed to construct the content of one's theory. Beall asserts that we should pay attention to the role of logic in our theological theories because it can affect the way we formulate them. Logic serves as the common foundation of all theories across all disciplines. It is the bedrock of all theories. Thus, when we add foundational premises to our theory about God, we should build these premises on the consequence relations dictated by the logic most appropriate to the theory.

The Role of Logic in Theology: Jc Beall's Interpretation

For Beall, logic is the basement-level closure/consequence relation involved in all true theories. It is the very foundation of all theories, not just of scientific and philosophical theories, but of theological theories as well. Beall says,

> Christian theology is a theory of God, just as macro physics is a theory of the macro-physical world and just as mathematical theories are theories of their respective mathematical phenomena (numbers, categories, sets, whathaveyou). (...) [New paragraph] When theorists aim to construct a true theory, they aim to construct as complete a theory as possible. In particular, the resulting theory should not only contain the initial thrown-in truths (e.g., that God is triune, that Christ has two natures, etc.); the theory should also contain whatever follows from the truths in the theory; it should contain all of the consequences of the theory's claims. (p. 22)

8. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 402.

He points out that the task of a theorist is "to construct a set of truths about the target phenomenon and close that set of truths under a consequence relation that is the right relation to 'complete' the true theory of the given phenomenon."[9] A theory is said to be complete if it does not only contain thrown-in truths about the target phenomenon (e.g., Christ has two natures or that Christ is the Second Person in the Trinity), but also what one can infer from the starting set of claims. Both of these constitute a complete theory. For Beall, any theory has a two-fold task: (1) gather the truths about the target phenomenon, and (2) construct the right closure relation to 'complete' the true theory – to give as full or as complete a true theory as possible.[10] This suggests that when the target phenomenon is identified and defined, we gather all the truths about this phenomenon and try to give a complete account of it by providing a right closure relation. Beall claims that, like all other sciences, theology should also be as complete as possible. That is the target. Therefore, whatever truths we can claim about Christ, these truths must contain all the possible consequences we can infer from the given set of claims about him by virtue of the consequence relation, and this consequence relation is fundamental in all theories. Beall adds,

> 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 on a consequence relation for our theory is required. (p. 24)

9. Ibid., pg. 404.

10. See Jc Beall, "The Simple Argument for Subclassical Logic," *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 28, Issue 1 (October 2018): pg. 30-54.

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This prompts the following question: "What have such theory-specific consequence relations to do with logic's role in theories?" or, in other words, "What is the role of logic in any scientific and systematic theory?" Beall says,

> Logic is a very special consequence (entailment, closure) relation. Logic is the common core of all (closed) theories; it is at the bottom of all of the (extra-logical, theory-specific) consequence relations of our true theories. (...) Logic itself does not say anything peculiar about knowledge claims, arithmetical claims, modal claims, or theological claims; logic ignores the specific subject matter of those sorts of claims and treats them as it treats claims about any subject matter whatsoever. (p. 24)

Beall insists that the role of logic in all systematic theories is foundational and universal – the bedrock upon which all theories are built, grounded in sound reasoning. Logic is also basically topic-neutral, and it does not add further information to the target theory but merely determines whether the theory is valid. It treats all claims with the same logical consideration, despite whatever is contained in the claim in question (e.g., a dog is an animal or witches are true). Logic concerns itself with the "form" of a sentence, not its content. As pointed out by Beall, "logic is formal in that its consequence relation holds only in virtue of the given logical forms."[11] A sentence may take one of the following forms:

(1) Atomic sentences: any sentence that is free of logical vocabulary.

(2) Truth claims (nullations): any sentence of the form it is true that . . .

11. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 406.

(3) Falsity claims (negations): any sentence of the form it is false that . . .

(4) Conjunctions: any sentence of the given (logical-conjunction) form, namely, . . . and . . . where 'and' is a logical conjunction.

(5) Disjunctions: any sentence of the given (logical-disjunction) form, namely, . . . or . . . where 'or' is logical disjunction.[12]

Logic recognizes only a sentence that fits into one or more of its recognized logical forms. It has nothing to say about sentences that fall outside these forms, at least within the classical account of logic. However, Beall argues that to couch all sentences into just two logical possibilities - truth and falsity - oversimplifies the complexity of both language and reality. He insists that there are actually four logical possibilities: truth, falsity, gappy, and glut, which better capture the nuances of how we understand the world. If a theorist wants to take a full analysis of the target phenomenon, the space for all logical possibilities should be left open. We should not be confined to just two logical possibilities, especially if the target phenomenon pushes us to go beyond the classical account. Beall argues:

> Logic is involved in all consequence relations for our true theories, including our theory of God (i.e., our theology). Logic achieves this universal role – the foundation of all entailment (or closure) relations on our true theories – in virtue of recognizing the widest space of possibilities. It's not that 'anything goes' by logic's lights, but a vast array of otherwise very strange possibilities is recognized by logic.[13]

12. Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christ* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 25.

13. See Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 407.

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He insists that, in constructing a true and complete theory, we must go beyond merely limiting our logical possibilities to the binary dichotomy of true and false. It is true that "logic is a matter of preservation of truth in all cases,"[14] but this is not all there is to it. The chief task of logic, after all, is to account for all consequences and to see if each consequence is valid.

First-Degree Entailment: Beall's Target Theory of Logic

To start, I think it is important to underscore that in the standard account of logic, the semantic value of a sentence depends on what is happening at the atomic level. This means that "the semantic value of a sentence is a function of the semantic value of the atomic sentences."[15][16] An atomic sentence gets a semantic value by virtue of denotation, i.e., if the subject term corresponds to an extra-linguistic object and the predicate term says something true about the subject term, then the given sentence is said to be true, and vice versa. The truth and falsity conditions for atomic sentences are as follows:

- Truth in a model: Atomic Gη is true-in-a-model iff $\delta(\eta)$ is in G+.
- Falsity in a model: Atomic Gη is false-in-a-model iff $\delta(\eta)$ is in G–.[17]

Note: η is the subject of the given sentence, G is the predicate of the given sentence, and it can be either true or false (G+ or G–), and δ is the denotation function.

14. Jc Beall and Greg Restall, "Logical Pluralism", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol 78, No. 4 (December 2000) pg. 477.

15. In logic, atomic sentences are those that are either true or false and cannot be broken down into simpler sentences.

16. See Jc Beall, "Christ – A Contradiction: A Defense of Contradictory Christology," pg. 410.

17. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christology*, pg. 31.

This raises the following question: what constraints logic imposes on the interpretations of the predicates? There are two ways: exhaustion and exclusion.

- Exhaustion: every sentence is either true or false.
- Exclusion: no sentence is both true and false.

The classical account of logic demands both exhaustion and exclusion, and therefore does not allow gaps and gluts (gap refers to a statement that is neither true nor false, and glut refers to a statement that is both true and false simultaneously). First-Degree Entailment (FDE), on the other hand, allows for both gaps and gluts. FDE is a paraconsistent logic that rejects the principle of explosion and focuses on relevant implication. It does not limit itself only within the boundaries of the principle of bivalence but instead widens the logical space and allows a sentence to be either true, false, gappy, or glutty. As mentioned, unlike classical logic (which demands both exhaustion and exclusion) and the logic of paradox (which requires exhaustion, but not exclusion), FDE allows for both gluts and gaps within its framework without necessarily leading to logical explosion. FDE does not impose exhaustion nor exclusion on the predicates but expands the logical space and goes beyond the limited confines of the classical account.

FDE is a logic that can be seen as the result of evaluating formulas and arguments built with connectives {~, ∧, ∨, →}[18] according to the following assignments, where A and B stand for any formula:

1. ~A is true iff A is false; ~A is false iff A is true;

18. These are the basic logical operators: negation (~), conjunction (∧), disjunction (∨), and conditional (→). These operators function as connectors between propositions, resulting in a more complex proposition that in turn acquires a truth value.

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2. A ^ B is true iff A is true and B is true; A ^ B is false iff A is false or B is false;
3. A v B is true iff A is true or B is true; A v B is false iff A is false and B is false;
4. A → B is true iff A is false or B is true; A → B is false iff A is true and B is false.[19]

Consider the following:

A: "It is raining."

B: "The streets are wet."

In FDE:

1. A → B: If it is raining, then the streets are wet.
2. ~A → ~B: If it is not raining, then the streets are not wet.
3. A ^ ~A → ~B: If it is both raining and not raining, then the streets are not wet.

With this, the following then may be given as truth and falsity conditions for molecular sentences:

- Nullations: +A is at least true in model m iff A is at least true in model m.
- Nullations: +A is at least false in model m iff A is at least false in model m.
- Negations: ~A is at least true in model m iff A is at least false in model m.
- Negations: ~A is at least false in model m iff A is at least true in model m.

19. Luis Estrada-Gonzalez, "The Logical Bases of Contradictory Christology: Comments on The Contradictory Christ," Ch. 2, *Manuscritto*, (July 2021) https://doi.org/10.1590/0100- 6045.2021. V44N4.LG (accessed November 22, 2024).

- Disjunctions: A v B is at least true in model m iff either A is at least true in m or B is at least true in m.
- Disjunctions: A v B is at least false in model m iff both A is at least false in m or B is at least false in m.
- Conjunctions: A ^ B is at least true in model m iff both A is at least true in m and B is at least true in m.
- Conjunctions: A ^ B is at least false in model m iff either A is at least true in m and B is at least true in m.[20]

With this, what are the invalid argument forms in FDE that are relevant to Beall's project? Beall identifies two:

1. A ^ ~A ⊭ B (Therefore, by logic's light, a theory can still contain a contradiction without entailing all sentences at all).
2. B⊭ A v ~A (Therefore, not all logical systems, including FDE, do not require the law of excluded middle by logic's light).

Now, we see why accepting contradictions does not necessarily lead to a logical explosion. As is always argued by the proponents of paraconsistent logic, it is too much to conclude that if one accepts a contradiction, one is necessarily forced to believe in everything. Also, it is important to highlight that the same truth and falsity conditions in the classical account are adopted in FDE. There are no logical alterations in terms of meanings and signification; the difference is that in FDE, the space of logical possibilities is expanded.

So now, what makes FDE the right account of logic *vis-à-vis* the classical candidate? According to Beall, FDE has at least three salient virtues:

20. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christology*, pg. 33.

1. The first virtue is that the familiar truth and falsity conditions are maintained, as illustrated above. "What is important to emphasize (...) is that these truth and falsity conditions are precisely the same conditions used in the standard classical-logic account."
2. A second virtue is that the resulting logic is clearly topic-neutral by not taking a stand on whether gappy or glutty atomic sentences are ruled out.
3. A third virtue is most relevant to the principal project of a contradictory Christology: namely, that logic does not force unique, strange phenomena into the cramped confines of classical-logic possibilities. (p. 35)

With the following reasons, Beall endorses the Contradictory Christology, which views the tension between the human nature and divine nature as a genuine contradiction, and this contradiction does not necessarily undermine the coherence of our Christian faith.

Why accept the Contradictory Christology: The Seven Virtues

Beall identifies seven considerations that motivate Contradictory Christology over the many consistent accounts: (1) simplicity, (2) avoiding *ad hoc* changes in meaning, (3) metaphysical neutrality, (4) preserving the principal subject of Christology, (5) balancing "from above" and "from below," (6) preserving the mystery of hypostatic union, and (7) Christology and the obvious need for faith. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Beall does not suggest that contradictory Christology is the true and sufficiently complete Christology. This, for him, is impossible to demonstrate due to our epistemic limitations. What he intends to do is to present some substantial reasons why a contradictory Christological approach is worthy of our

theological and philosophical consideration. Let us briefly discuss the seven virtues as viewed by Beall.

Simplicity

Beall argues that what makes contradictory Christology attractive is its simplicity. It is simple because it only presents to us the simplest account of the apparent[21] contradiction of Christ, i.e., "exactly one person who is one divine person (with all properties thereby entailed) who is also one human person (with all properties thereby entailed)."[22] Let us be clear that Beall does not propose a Nestorian view of Christ. He argues that Christ is one human person because Christ is both a person and human. Likewise, Christ is one divine person because he is the same person who is also divine. Thus, this is not about two persons being united together to form one "hybrid" person, but that Christ is both a human and a divine person. Clearly, with such a claim about Christ, a contradiction is identified.

> Except when saddled with an incorrect account of logical consequence, the contradiction who is Christ is exactly what anyone would expect from taking the transcendence and boundlessness of the immutable and impeccable God and uniting – however mysteriously – with the immanent, bounded, mutable and peccable humanity with which we are so intimately familiar, uniting not in a way that in two different persons or a new hybrid 'divine-human' nature. . . (pg. 37).

However, Beall adds, it is this contradiction that makes Christianity distinct from other belief systems. It is this contradiction that saves our fallen humanity. Without this

21. Beall argues that the simplest explanation of the apparent contradiction is that the appearance is genuine. He believes that the contradiction is real.

22. See Jc Beall, *Contradictory Christ* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 37.

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contradiction, our human dignity would never be restored nor salvaged (see Aquinas' soteriological reasons of incarnation). There were too many attempts to resolve to maneuver this contradiction by theological machinations, but the heretics ended up overemphasizing one nature over the other. What this contradictory approach suggests is to accept the Christological contradiction as it is, the way it reveals itself to us. There is no need for further theological and linguistic manipulations just to get away with the contradiction. Beall insists that "[t]he mark of Christians is that via faith they accept contradiction; they believe that Christ is God incarnate, [one] divine person who is also [one] human person and who remains exactly [one] person."[23]

Avoiding ad hoc changes in meaning

One common attempt to avoid the contradiction is by changing or manipulating the meanings of some important technical terms used by early Christian theologians (terms like "divine" and "human") just to establish the consistency of their Christological accounts. Beall says:

> In the quest to consistentize Christ, a change-the-meaning strategy is common. One avenue along this route is to change the meaning of 'divine' and/or 'human,' perhaps rejecting the so-called classic-theism account of divinity or, in the other direction, the classic conception of humanity. A directly related strategy is to change the meaning – the standard usage – of the fundamental problem predicates such as 'mutable' and 'immutable' and so on.[24]

In his proposed contradictory Christology, the target divine and human predicates are not changed in terms of their

23. Ibid., pg. 38.

24. Ibid., pg. 38.

meaning and signification, and the logical vocabulary remains intact.[25] The theological terms, which are foundational in our understanding of Christ's identity and the incarnation, are not semantically manipulated. The terms like "divine," "human," "mutable," and "immutable" are understood and defined in the way they are originally and fundamentally articulated. If one might accuse his contradictory account of being another version of *ad hoc* maneuvering because it relies so much on a sub-classical account of logic and not on the standard account of logic, the accusation, Beall argues, is misplaced since all logical concepts and vocabulary are not changed or compromised. The way these logical concepts are used in Beall's contradictory account is the same as in the classical account. In his account, the standard truth and falsity conditions are defined the way they are defined in the classical account.

Metaphysical Neutrality

Another reason why, for Beall, we should accept contradictory Christology is that it is not metaphysically loaded, unlike the many sophisticated Christological accounts. In an interview, Beall argued that contradictory Christology does not depend on any complex metaphysical explanation to affirm the truth of Christ. Since the Church does not endorse an official Christian metaphysical system through which we can undergird the basic concepts of the metaphysics of incarnation, it is better to commit to a Christology that is not invested in any probationary metaphysical system. Beall argues that "one's solution to the fundamental [Christological] problem is better off than otherwise if it does not demand a particular metaphysics; rather, it is better off being neutral with respect

25. Ibid., pg. 39.

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to whatever the ultimate true metaphysics of such matters happens to be."[26] He goes on to say,

> While philosophers and theologians hope to one day obtain the true metaphysics of 'persons,' of 'wills,' of 'natures,' and so on (and so on), the viability of Contradictory Christology, as I've advanced it, is not threatened by the outcome of metaphysical inquiry.[27]

Therefore, for Beall, a good Christological account is one that is not threatened or affected by whatever metaphysical framework, no matter how powerful or weak it is, philosophers may discover in the future. The way Beall formulates and endorses his Christological account is not dependent on any metaphysical framework; the terms that are used in his contradictory account are theologically and metaphysically neutral and not metaphysically loaded.

Preserving the principal subject of Christology

Another reason why Beall endorses contradictory Christology is that it preserves Christ as the core subject, just as the Council of Chalcedon described him, i.e., he is both human and divine at the same time, and he is whatever is properly entailed by having those properties. In this kind of Christological paradigm, Christ's properties as being both human and divine are maintained. Beall argues that "a Christology wherein Christ is the principal subject of Christ's properties is better than one wherein something that is not Christ is the principal subject of the key properties of Christ." There have been persistent attempts made to avoid this Christological contradiction, and theologians and other Christians have endorsed different images of Christ—such as Christ being the firstborn before creation or Christ being

26. Ibid., pg. 39.

27. Ibid., pg. 39.

adopted by the Father—that differ greatly from the way the early Christian community first encountered and understood him. These theological developments increasingly diverge from the initial encounter with Christ that shaped the early Church's understanding of him. As for Beall, the more we deny the contradictory identity of Christ, the more we move away from the original identity that was endorsed by the early councils. As much as the heretics wanted to formulate a consistent Christology, they strayed from their principal subject, who was Christ. Even the modern attempt to use QUA (according to) devices to avoid this contradiction has veered away from the principal subject, Christ. This *qua*-solution is endorsed and defended by Prof. Daniel Rubio[28] of the Toronto Metropolitan University. In brief, what this *qua* solution does is to "divide the predicates between the two natures, such that some predicates apply to the person in virtue of the divine nature, and some in virtue of the human nature."[29] This leads to the following premises:

1. Christ-*qua*-divine is impeccable.
2. Christ-*qua*-human is peccable.

The problem with this, as pointed out by Beall, is that it divides Christ according to his (1) divine nature and (2) human nature, and this suggests two separate entities: (1) according to his divine nature, and (2) according to his human nature. An important question then arises: "Why are we talking about these entities when the issue on the table is that Christ – the one and only Godman – is both impeccable and peccable?" Beall stubbornly insists that this Christological strategy only

28. See his Article "In defence of *qua*-Christology" published by Cambridge University Press.

29. Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pg. 192.

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rejects the fact that Christ as one subsistent being is the bearer of the target properties of being human and divine. There is no need to use these methods to avoid the contradiction. This will only substitute Christ for a version altered by theological manipulations.

Balancing "from above" and "from below"

Another reason for accepting contradictory Christology is that it respects both the divinity and humanity of Christ. It defines both natures in the way they should be defined. Though this may lead to a contradiction, it does not prioritize one over the other just to maintain consistency. Though there is a struggle to hold the tension between Christ's humanity and divinity, Beall's proposal avoids distorting Christ. Oliver Crisp, a British theologian, makes a point that an imbalanced Christology that puts more emphasis on the divinity of Christ "falls prey to a distortion of Christ's genuine humanity, including Christ's genuine human experiences – the experiences as we, in our limited and peccable state, experience them." The same point is true when one puts more emphasis on the humanity of Christ. Therefore, any imbalanced view of Christology, either putting more emphasis on above or below, will lead to an incorrect understanding of the incarnation as advanced by the Chalcedonian fathers.

The Chalcedonian Christology, which is what we hold to be the true Christology, demands a balanced view of this divine-and-human tension. There have been a few attempts to hold this tension between divinity and humanity and to avoid the contradiction, but most of these attempts have prioritized either one of the two natures, which leads to an imbalanced view of Christology. Logically speaking, it is difficult and epistemologically incomprehensible to imagine that Jesus could be both perfect and imperfect at the same time, or both limited

and unlimited at the same time, or both powerful and powerless at the same time. Contradictory Christology maintains that these two are possible in Christ. It may be a contradictory claim, but not incoherent. The only way for Beall to balance the tension between these two completely different properties is to accept the contradiction.

Preserving the mystery of the hypostatic union

The mystery of the hypostatic union lies at the core of Christology. Beall argues that the problem is not about the unification of the two natures; after all, some theologians claim and maintain that the hypostatic union is consistent and not contradictory. However, the problem arises only when we attempt to elaborate on what is entailed by these two distinct natures, and the contradiction begins to emerge when we try to unite them in one person. But if the hypostatic union is said to be consistent, as most theologians claim, then where lies the mystery? If all the consistent Christological accounts have finally pinned down the contradictory problem, then is it fair to say that the hypostatic union is no longer a mystery? In Beall's contradictory account, the mystery of the hypostatic union is maintained. His Christological framework maintains that it is a mystery, not because Christ is contradictory, but that:

> [t]he mystery is rather one of implementation or mechanism: how the contradiction was pulled off. We have precise (largely mathematical) models of how to think about the contradiction, but these models are at best guides to the truths that follow (or don't follow) from Christ's contradictory being; they don't provide an explanation of how the actual contradiction was realized. How a contradiction is truly realized in a world that in most other respects is truly described by consistent theories remains mysterious at its core. (pg. 45)

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Christology and the obvious need for faith

With the kind of Christological framework that the contradictory Christology offers, one is led to accept and believe the truth about Christ, the incarnate God, i.e., a contradiction. As pointed out by Beall, believing in the full truth requires believing in the contradictory truth of Christ, and this is one of the many distinct features of our faith. To say that Christ is fully human and fully divine is to hold the tension between "from above" and "from below." It is not that we should compromise one to make room for the other, but we maintain that both are true in Christ in every respect. Beall argues that it is in this tension that faith is required. This is obviously difficult to accept and understand because we are accustomed to a kind of logic that rules out contradictions, but Beall challenges his readers that what is required to accept the whole truth about Christ, which includes his contradictory identity, is faith. This faith, he adds, should be rooted in the incarnation: "faith that Christ is the transcendent God and that Christ is as human as you and me, peccable as we are, impeccable as God must be – and not because of some secretively non-standard semantics or the like."[30]However, Beall puts a caveat here. He does not talk about faith the way we talk about it in soteriology (faith that saves), after all, this is a huge and separate topic. By faith, he means that one has to believe in the contradiction contained in the Chalcedonian formula, which seems to evade our ordinary logical understanding and to be counterintuitive.

To conclude, for Beall, what is striking about Christological accounts that pursue consistency is that they have "produced a multitude of metaphysical gadgets and baroque edifices; but each such construction, while interesting and abstractly

30. See Beall, *Contradictory Christ*, pg. 46.

coherent, always carries the whiff of heresy."[31] They have the tendency to prioritize one nature over the other or focus too much on one property and forget the other. What is dangerous about these attempts is that they lead us further and further away from the simple and "gobsmacking," as Beall puts it, truth, i.e., the contradictory Christ. It is easy for non-Christians to see the contradictoriness of Christ, as one should expect when two contrary natures are united in one person. Now, Beall challenges us to shake off that "dogma" that endorses that all inconsistent theories should be rejected.

Objections to Contradictory Christology[32]

Like any other proposed theory, there are some objections and criticisms raised against Beall's proposal. There are philosophers and theologians, such as James Anderson, who attack his view and describe it as a major deviation from the classical account of logic and should be rejected. Beall painstakingly responds to each of these objections in his book and provides some reasons why these objections do not pose a threat to his contradictory account. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, we will consider only five major objections.

> **First Objection:** "Your Christology (and your theology, more generally) has it that various central Christian claims are both true and false, and therefore false! Your account of Christ is therefore false. Therefore, we should reject your account."[33]

31. Ibid., pg. 47.

32. Some of these objections emerged from Beall's engagement with philosophers and theologians through interviews, debates, and personal correspondences. Thus, attributing each objection to a particular source proves difficult.

33. Ibid., pg. 49.

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For Beall, to dismiss a theory that is both true and false by virtue of it being false is also to dismiss it by virtue of it being true as well. It is the goal of any true theory to reach the full truth and comprehensive understanding of the target phenomenon; this includes whatever it entails. If the evidence challenges our common understanding of what a true theory should be, it is theoretically justifiable to give much epistemic consideration and priority to the evidence rather than to our epistemic bias. As pointed out by Beall, most of our scientific theories deal with only "true" statements about the world because that is how they observe it (yet, with the progression of science, certain contradictions are affirmed, particularly in light of quantum indeterminacy). However, in the case of contradictory Christology, we deal with Christ, who is a completely different subject. Christ's role in the history of salvation is utterly unique because it demands contradicting qualities. This unique role is necessary for our salvation, as St. Athanasius beautifully puts it: "For the Son of God became man so that we might become God." This contradictory appearance of Christ, as Dale Tuggy puts it, should be faced squarely by able and responsible theologians. Beall suggests that we should not be hasty in rejecting any theory that appears to be contradictory since our goal is to find the full truth, no matter how contradictory it is.

> **Second objection:** "Coherence is a necessary condition for truth, and a coherent Christology rules out Contradictory Christology since a true list of Christ's properties cannot contain contradictory pairs."[34]

This objection, as pointed out by Beall, rests on the principle that "true theories must 'hang together' in a way that avoids outright triviality, where triviality is the uncontroversially

34. Ibid., pg. 50.

absurd 'trivial theory' – namely, the theory containing all sentences in the language of the theory."[35] In logic, trivialism is the view that all contradictions are true, or that everything is true. Obviously, this is not the view that Beall endorses. Of course, not all contradictions are true, but some contradictions are not necessarily incoherent. Looking at the role of Christ being contradictory, most of our basic theological tenets make sense because of this contradictory affirmation. Beall and other paraconsistent logicians maintain that there are propositions that are contradictory and necessarily coherent.

> **Third Objection:** "The patristic writers who informed the conciliar documents that at least partially define target Christian theological doctrines (e.g., incarnation and trinity) were entirely unaware of suitable sub-classical accounts of logical consequence that make sense of gluts or contradictory theories generally. In turn, the conciliar fathers who wrote target doctrinal texts were obviously not thinking of such accounts of logical consequence, and hence were not thinking about or otherwise entertaining would-be true contradictions in theology. Hence, any contradictory Christian theology is either conspicuously detached from the intentions of conciliar writers or simply getting such intentions wrong. Either way, any would-be contradictory Christian theology should be rejected."[36]

Beall responds to this objection in four points:

(1) It is true that most patristic fathers were unaware of sub-classical accounts of logic, but it is not necessarily true that they were not advancing contradictory

35. Ibid., pg. 50.

36. Jc Beall, "Ten Objections to Contradictory Christology," in *Paradox and Contradictions in Theology*, ed. Jonathan Routledge (New York: Routledge, 2024), pg. 57.

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accounts of theology. Basil Lourie, a professor at National Research University Higher School of Economics, argues that Byzantine patristics endorsed a kind of theology that is contradictory but without a full explicit account of logic on which it could be grounded. One notable figure that pushes for a paraconsistent account is Patriarch Eulogius of Alexandria (see the article "Theodore the Studite's Christology Against its Logical Background"). Beall points this out to insist that paraconsistency is not new to the early Christians. Even though Aristotelian dogma was regarded as the orthodox view of logic during the Chalcedonian era, there were still those who challenged it.

(2) Another reason for rejecting the above objection is that, though there was no explicit paraconsistent logical account during the patristic period, it is not clear that there was a clear, consistent, and non-contradictory account of Christology. After all, there is still an ongoing debate about how we should understand the concept of hypostatic union, and any attempt to give a consistent account always leads to a heretical declaration. Sarah Coakley, Cambridge, argues that the Chalcedonian formula has its own limitations. There are gaps within the formula, and one of these is its failure to provide a consistent and non-contradictory Christological account (see the article "What Chalcedon Solved and Did Not Solve").

(3) Another reason has to do with divine inspiration and the intention of the conciliar fathers. This divine inspiration is what affirms the "canonicity" of the written text in question. Beall argues that this divine inspiration may sometimes be at odds with the intention of the conciliar

fathers.[37] He further argues that a divinely inspired writer "may write something that she intends to be read one way, but the truth, divinely inspired as it is, goes against [her] intentions." Beall admits that there is no way we can establish that this really happened to the conciliar fathers, but still, this is possible. We have to remember that, though the conciliar fathers were very familiar with Aristotelian logic, and yet they still pushed for a kind of Christological view that seems to evade consistency.

(4) A final point to note is that the Chalcedonian declaration puzzled not only us as contemporary readers but also the very conciliar fathers who were believed to be divinely inspired. This is not because they want to sound complicated, but because they, too, are grappling with the reality that is revealed to them. It is, therefore, a result of hard thinking and reflection that leads them to apparently contradictory claims, Beall argues. It is easy for them to affirm only the humanity or the divinity of Christ, but they insist on affirming both. It is easy for them to affirm that Christ is the adopted son of the Father or that he is a demigod, but they still insist that Christ is truly God and truly human. They affirm all this even if this leads to a contradictory conclusion. As pointed out by Beall, this situation is so common among those who seek truth and are divinely inspired, i.e., "writing what is true without understanding exactly why or how it is true."

Fourth Objection: "Much of traditional monotheism, and especially Christian theology, is explicitly entwined with central mysteries. The Catholic Church,

37. Ibid., pg. 56.

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> for example, maintains that trinitarian reality is a fundamental mystery. Such phenomena often appear to be contradictory, but they are thereby just 'paradoxes'—just *apparent contradictions*—and not actually contradictory (Anderson 2007). Accordingly, motivation for contradictory theology is entirely undermined when one accepts instead that target apparent contradictions are pointers towards divine mysteries, not towards actual divine contradiction."[38]

Beall highlights two important responses to this objection:

(1) If the theological contradiction is too strong, as it is in the case of Christ being both truly divine and truly human, why not accept that the subject in question is contradictory? As in any scientific process, if a contradictory claim is supported by evidence, as is required of all scientific claims, there is no compelling reason to reject its truth. Beall further adds that if one claims that all theological contradictions must be rejected by virtue of their being contradictory, then this needs a substantive argument to support the claim.

(2) Another point to respond to this objection is the following: "The existence of mystery and the appearance of contradiction are very different things, sometimes related, sometimes unrelated."[39] Beall argues that unless we can establish both are correlated "one-to-one," then the possibility that the apparent contradiction is just a "pointer" to non-contradictory mystery is subject to suspicion. Beall further adds that the existence of divine mystery does not undermine or diminish his contradictory account of Christology.

38. Ibid., pg. 60.

39. Ibid., pg. 60.

> **Fifth Objection**: "It looks like Contradictory Christology naturally generalizes to other parts of theology. In particular, doesn't the general proposal require that every apparent contradiction in theology be treated as contradictory – including, perhaps especially, the very familiar 'logical' puzzles involving God's omniscience, omnipotence (a too-heavy stone) and the like?"[40]

Beall responds to this objection with a resounding "no." While it is true that all other contradictory theological claims are open questions and logic leaves open such contradictions, it is still important to establish that these theological contradictions are ontologically and epistemologically motivated. As it is always emphasized by Beall, any contradictory claim needs to be supported by evidence. What Beall suggests is to consider each contradictory problem and examine it critically, and if this problem leads you to a resounding contradictory conclusion despite being guarded by theological skepticism, then there is no good reason to reject the conclusion. After all, we should adhere to the general principle that we should accept whatever conclusion we may come up with, despite our philosophical and theological prejudices.

Conclusion

Jc Beall's contradictory Christology offers us a new approach to the problem of the Incarnation. It is one of the most intriguing developments in contemporary Christology. Its bold claim has already sparked considerable criticism and brought forth important discussions among theologians. His insistence that we should reevaluate our understanding and view of logic, expanding it beyond the limits of the classical account, is both controversial and revolutionary. However,

40. See Beall, *Contradictory Christ*, pg. 111.

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what many theologians find compelling in Beall's proposal is his emphasis on giving greater attention to the logical framework and entailment relations of our theological premises. This emphasis on the logical framework and entailment relations is essential to the pursuit of a true and complete theory about Christ, for it is at this point that the core intellectual labor is situated. As pointed out by Thomas McCall, professor of theology at Asbury University, "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."[41]

The paraconsistent logic endorsed by Beall continues to exert considerable impact on contemporary logical theory. It has captured the interest of philosophers and logicians, as well as theologians, in recent years. With the rise of analytic theology, the growing emphasis on clarity and precision in theological discourse has prompted the application of paraconsistent logic in theology, an approach initially endorsed by Beall. What, then, is the role of paraconsistent logic in theology, and how does it contribute to theological inquiry in its pursuit of truth and understanding? Clearly, paraconsistent logic expands the boundaries of logical space by allowing for the accommodation of contradictions without leading into logical explosion. This enables us to engage with the divine in its full and profound complexity, permitting it to exist and be understood as it is, even if it seems to challenge our common understanding of reality. The greater our efforts to eliminate contradictions in the doctrine of the Incarnation, the more we risk distorting the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ, thereby giving rise

41. Thomas McCall, *Analytic Christology and the Theological Interpretation of the New Testament* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 183.

to heretical interpretations. Despite its apparent contradictory implications, paraconsistent logic maintains the integrity of the Christological contradiction without devolving into logical incoherence. This enables theological reasoning to proceed without the risk of falling into logical explosion.

To conclude, Beall's contradictory Christology challenges our common epistemic assumption that any theology must always conform to the principles of logical consistency. Instead of attempting to resolve the logical tension between the full humanity and full divinity of Christ, Beall embraces this tension as a real and true contradiction. He argues that this approach remains more faithful to the traditional teachings of the Church than the rational attempts to reconcile the contradiction logically, such as those found in Arianism, Nestorianism, and Modalism, among others. Philosophically, Beall's Christology prompts a radical rethinking of the relationship between theology and logic, prioritizing doctrinal fidelity over logical consistency, especially when it is warranted by evidence. It insists that God's nature ultimately transcends the categories of human reason. While the full implications of constructing a theology based on contradictory Christology are yet unknown, such an approach invites deeper reflection on the ontological contradiction and dilemma presented by the metaphysics of the incarnation. After all, each of us, in some way, experiences inner conflict or contradiction. The fact that God Himself experiences contradiction and inner tension serves as a profound and beautiful foundation for theology. It is precisely through this inner contradiction, by embracing our broken humanity, that Christ encountered us and, through it, offered salvation.

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