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"AVOID . . . CONTRADICTIONS" (1 TIMOTHY 6:20): A REPLY TO JOHN DAHMS

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Perhaps never has the need been greater to heed Paul's exhortation to avoid "contradictions" (*antitheseis*) than in the recent *JETS* article by John V. Dahms.[1] In the May 10, 1977, issue of *Christianity Today* I suggested that one of the problems behind the denial of inerrancy was the unwillingness of some Biblical scholars to apply the law of noncontradiction to all of the statements in Scripture. At the time I had no idea that this would smoke anyone out, but the article by Dahms confirmed the truth of my observation. Dahms gives one of the most honest and forthright statements of what many NT scholars imply or tacitly believe—namely, that the law of noncontradiction does not apply to all Biblical truth claims.[2] Further, he shows clearly that the implications of his conclusion lead to unorthodox conclusions that have serious (even disastrous) implications for the doctrine of inerrancy and for evangelicalism in general.

I. SOME MISTAKES

First, let me point out some mistakes in Dahms' article. He both misquotes Van Til and leaves out another part of the quotation: "Unity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another" (p. 373).[3] What Van Til actually wrote is this: "Unity in God is no more fundamental than diversity and diversity in God is no more fundamental than unity. The persons of the Trinity are mutually exhaustive of one another."[4]

Secondly, Dahms misrepresents my view by asserting that I claim that "the rationally inescapable is the real" and that this means "logically" necessary (p. 369). If he had read a few pages earlier in the same book[5] he would have seen that I put a question mark (?) before that statement: "Is the Rationally Inescapable Real?" Further, he overlooks the fact that the context here is that we know by *actual* undeniability (but not by *logical* necessity) that something exists (e.g., it is

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[1]J. V. Dahms, "How Reliable is Logic?", *JETS* 21/4 (December 1978) 369-380.

[2]I venture the suggestion that many honest but philosophically unsophisticated evangelical scholars are subtly (almost unconsciously) indoctrinated in an "existential" view of language (which is notoriously antirational) via their graduate linguistic studies and that this is at the basis of their distaste for the laws of logic.

[3]All page numbers in this article, unless otherwise noted, refer to Dahms' article.

[4]Perhaps if Dahms had not taken this quote from the fine print of Carnell's footnote about Van Til (rather than looking up the primary source) he would have avoided these mistakes.

[5]See N. L. Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 92.

undeniably true that I exist). From this we argue that, based on the fact that there is undeniably some reality, it follows that there are certain "rationally inescapable" conclusions we must come to about it.[6] What is more, a little later we argue that it is "*logically possible* that nothing ever existed including God."[7] How, then, could Dahms conclude that we held that the existence of anything is logically necessary? In another place[8] we emphatically say: "Contrary to the central claim of traditional rationalism, *the rationally inescapable is not the real.*" It should be noted that these very words are exactly the opposite of the ones Dahms attributes to me.

Another mistake is his affirmation that I hold that self-stultification is a result of the failure to employ the law of noncontradiction (p. 376). What I hold is that self-stultification on this point results from the impossibility of denying logic without using logic in the denial. This is something very different from saying that it results from a failure to use logic. In fact, this kind of self-stultification results from the *inescapability* of using logic.

II. Some Confusions

Besides outright mistakes, Dahms involves himself in a number of confusions. First, he confuses "cause" and "motive" by insisting that "if a choice is motivated, it is not free" (p. 371). If true, this would mean that because one's motive in buying an ice cream cone was to satisfy his hankering for a cold delicious chocolate delight he was not free to pass by the ice cream parlor. This would mean that obesity is a necessity as long as one desires any delicacies. Ends desired do not *cause* free acts any more than the desire to have a garage actually builds the garage. As anyone knows, it takes a carpenter (a cause) to build the garage.

Second, Dahms confuses a necessary condition with a result. He argues that if permitting evil is a necessary *condition* for producing some good *results*, this thereby pronounces the evil conditions to be good. He writes: "And there is no other reason to suggest this but the rationalistic conviction that evil is necessary, a view that makes evil ultimately good" (p. 373 n. 21). The fact that God can and does bring good out of evil (Rom 5:20) does not make the evil good. Joseph said to his brothers who had sold him into Egypt, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Gen 50:20). Indeed, it is often the case that we must permit pain as a necessary means to attain pleasure (e.g., a trip to the dentist). This does not mean that the pain of the dentist's chair is thereby transformed into a pleasure. The pain remains pain, as does necessary evil remain evil, when it is used by God to bring about a good result.

Third, Dahms confuses "discord" and "contradiction." He uses musical discord as a proof that there are logical contradictions in the world. Discords may be *contrary* to an accepted set of musical rules, but they certainly are not logically *contradictory* to them. A musical contradiction would be to call for two different notes at one and the same time in one and the same place. Likewise in a painting

[6]Ibid., pp. 98-100.

[7]Ibid., p. 160.

[8]N. L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) 43 (emphasis added).

the discordant element is not an actual contradiction but a *contrast* or interruption of the basic symmetry. A real contradiction in a painting would be to have both darkness and light in the same place at the same time or, better, for a given painting both to exist and not to exist at the same time. (One of Dahms' problems with the law of noncontradiction appears to be that he does not seem to understand what a logical contradiction really is.)

Fourth, there is a confusion between "paradox" and "self-stultification" (p. 376). We argued that it is "self-stultifying" to use the laws of logic to deny the laws of logic. Dahms confuses this with a "paradox." A logical paradox, however, is a logical contradiction. What we would argue is that one can deny logic without contradicting himself, but he cannot deny logic without using logic. There is no logical contradiction in saying that "logic does not apply to everything," but there is a contradiction in saying that "there are square circles." However, it is self-stultifying or self-defeating (as even Dahms admits, p. 376) to deny logic without using logic in that very denial. If this is so, then a self-defeating endeavor is not, as Dahms suggests, the same as a paradox or contradiction.

III. Self-Defeating Statements

Throughout the article Dahms engages in a self-refuting procedure by using logic often in the very same way that he is denying it should be used. He uses the principle of excluded middle (either A or non-A) by distinguishing a "complex whole" from the "sum" of all its parts, arguing that the former is more than the latter (p. 370). On the next page he asserts that an act must be either free or determined but not both. Elsewhere he rejects the distinction between an essence and a mode in God because it cannot be true "without involving contradiction" (p. 374). A few lines later he speaks approvingly of the Arians because they were "more logical than orthodox Christians." Immediately following this Dahms approves of being "quite" logical (p. 374). On the next page he speaks against "fallacious reasoning." But how, we may ask, could one know correct from incorrect reasoning apart from the law of noncontradiction?

Surprisingly enough, Dahms admits the self-defeating nature of his assertions (pp. 375-376) and uses a strange means to justify himself. He seems to admit that (1) we cannot escape self-stultification in denying that logic applies to all of our statements about reality, and yet that (2) when we apply logic to *all* of reality it too ends in self-stultification. But how can he have it both ways?

The reasons Dahms offers in support of his position are the alleged "paradoxes" one gets into if he assumes logic is universally applicable. These alleged paradoxes will be examined in a moment, but first we must take careful note of apparently opposed positions he takes within one paragraph. (1) He agrees with me that "the principle of noncontradiction . . . is at least linguistically or humanly necessary for meaningful statements and arguments" (p. 376). (2) But then he proceeds to argue that I fail to see that "the univeral application thereof sometimes involves one in a kind of self-stultification." But Dahms cannot have it both ways. If logic is universally inescapable for all nonstultifying meaningful statements, then how can he also hold that a universal application of logic will lead to self-stultifying statements?

There are a number of other glaring self-defeating statements that Dahms engages in. He insists that logic does not apply to becoming, but only to being. But

the assertion that "logic does not apply to becoming" is itself offered as either (1) a logical (i.e., noncontradictory) statement about becoming or else (2) a contradictory statement about becoming. If it were contradictory, however, it would be a false statement. But if it is noncontradictory, then it is self-defeating.

This same argument applies to Dahms' claim that (to paraphrase) logic applies only to the abstract but not to concrete reality (p. 378). Dahms fails to recognize that the very statement that logic does not apply to the concrete is itself a logical (i.e., noncontradictory) statement about the concrete. This too is a self-defeating statement because it implies that logic does apply to the concrete in the very attempt to deny it of the concrete.

Another argument implied in Dahms' limitation of logic to what is "humanly necessary" is that logic does not necessarily apply to God. In reply we would point out several things. First, the very statement that "logic does not necessarily apply to God" is a logical (i.e., noncontradictory) statement about God. Hence it is self-defeating. Second, we mortals do not have any kinds of statements other than "human" statements. Even Dahms' own epistemological model, which he claims transcends the universal applicability of logic, is given in human statements. What is more, everything God has said to us in Scripture is in human language. Hence every statement in Scripture is subject to logic.

In an ingenious but futile attempt to evade the force of the above criticism, Dahms pleads that "our reliance on logic in this paper is justified by the fact that we only use it of the existential and the aesthetic when we are considering them in the abstract" (p. 378). This excuse will not suffice for several reasons. First, it is special pleading. Those taking the opposing view could make the same point but insist that logic undeniably applies to *all of reality* (which Dahms denies), insofar as it is being considered intellectually (i.e., in the abstract). Stated this way there would be no real disagreement with those (whom Dahms opposes) who would say that the statement "logic applies to all of reality" is equivalent to "being (all being) is intelligible." If this is the case then all of Dahms' efforts are futile, for he would have to admit that logic does apply to all reality insofar as it can be thought or expressed in words, which is all his opponent needs to claim to prove Dahms wrong. Second, if Dahms assumes a complete disjunction between "reality" and "thought" (or "being" and the "abstract"), then he is subject to the criticism that he is using the logical principle (of excluded middle) of reality (and thought) in order to disjoin them.

Finally, Dahms does indeed use logic of reality (not *merely* of the "abstract") when he gives his own "model for our understanding of the nature of truth" (p. 376), which is built on the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Trinity. In elaborating this model of the way things *really are* he uses all of the three basic laws of logic. He contends that this doctrine "is sound and there is unity in truth" (p. 376). But how can there be "unity" in truth unless A is A (principle of identity)? Further, Dahms writes that the Chalcedonian formula speaks of "the generation of one Son, and not of an infinite number (or of a great number?) of sons" (p. 376). But does he not here use the logical principle of excluded middle—namely, it must be either A (one Son) or non-A (more than one) but not both? Likewise, Dahms uses the principle of noncontradiction when he contends that anything not of any epistemological significance (which he claims this "Chalcedonian" model of real-

ity has, p. 376)[9] does not "participate in truth but in error" (p. 376). But is not this the law of noncontradiction, which holds that no statements can be true and false at the same time and in the same sense?

Another example where Dahms applies logic to the way things really are (viz., according to his "Chalcedonian" model of reality) is where he writes (p. 372 n. 20) that "the Father's sending of the Son is *compatible with* the 'Christian' epistemology outlined later in this paper." [10] Surely this must mean *logically* "compatible with." If it does not, then how would one know that this statement was not incompatible with his epistemology? For unless there is a difference between A (compatible) and non-A (not compatible), one could not know that they were not compatible. But if he means logically "compatible with" (which it seems he must), then here again logic is being used of reality in order to deny it of reality, which is a self-destructive assertion.

Now to put it very simply, it seems to me that Dahms' elaboration of his own model of reality proves that the laws of logic are inescapable in any truth claims about reality. If this is so, his whole attack on the laws of logic boomerangs. He has neither offered us a way around logic nor succeeded in proving that logic is not universally applicable to all truth claims about reality. Indeed, he has provided us with an excellent personal example of the very view he attacks. He has shown clearly the inescapability of the universal applicability of the laws of logic. There is no reality anywhere that can both be and not be at the same time and in the same sense. And certainly no truth statements can be successfully made to affirm that something exists and not exists simultaneously in the same sense. For any claim that "there is some reality to which logic does not apply" is itself a logical (i.e., noncontradictory) claim about that reality, which is inconsistent and self-defeating. This shows that logic cannot be denied of any reality without using it of reality in the very denial. Even the statement that "logic does not apply to God" is an application of logic to God through language by the very fact that we cannot consider the statement true or false unless it is noncontradictory.

IV. FALSE DILEMMAS OR PARADOXES

The positive part of Dahms' argument consists of five (really seven, but he does not number the last two) alleged paradoxes.

1. *The alleged problem with "irrational numbers."* Dahms argues that irrational numbers ($\sqrt{-1}$) were derived from rational numbers (-1), which in turn were built out of real numbers (1), and there are further constructions of "logical statements." Thus, he says, these "irrational numbers pose an insurmountable problem for those who believe that the logically necessary is always real" (p. 370).

Dahms' problem here is in incorrectly asserting that I hold that "the logically necessary is always real." How could language be more clear and unequivocal

[9]Dahms writes (p. 376): "In our view the Chalcedonian doctrine of the Trinity (with the *filioque* clause added) provides a model for our understanding of the nature of truth, and so for epistemology (as indeed it must if the doctrine is sound and there is unity in truth)."

[10]Emphasis mine.

than the above quoted passages that (1) "it is logically possible that nothing ever existed including God" and that (2) "contrary to the central claim of traditional rationalism, the rationally inescapable is not the real"? No one who holds that logic applies to all reality need hold (and I do not) that logically necessary entities (such as irrational numbers) actually exist. Hence his first "paradox" fails to show that logic is not universally applicable. Dahms does not seem to realize that we hold that logic does not prove what is actual but only what is possible (or impossible).

2. *The problem of Zeno's paradoxes.* Zeno's "proof" that motion is impossible and that Achilles can never catch the tortoise, says Dahms, proves that "logic has led us astray" (p. 370). Perhaps *bad* logic has led some astray here, but certainly the law of noncontradiction has not led anyone astray. Besides the fact that Dahms never really specifies just what the alleged contradiction is, the alleged paradoxes of Zeno have been exposed long ago. Zeno wrongly assumes that the real empirical world of space and motion are infinitely (and mathematically) divisible. If this were so, then it would be impossible to get from point A to point B, because to go all the way one must first go halfway, and then half of halfway, and so on infinitely. But since an infinite can never be traversed, then one could never get from A to B. Notice that the problem is not in assuming that logic applies to reality but in assuming that *mathematical divisibility* applies to all of reality. Here then is another "confusion" to add to the above list: Dahms confuses logic and mathematics. All math may be based on logic (as Russell and Whitehead argued in *Principia Mathematica*),[11] but it does not follow that all logic is based on (or is identical with) math. This is another logical error called an illicit conversion of an A premise ("all horses have four legs" cannot be logically converted into "all four-legged things are horses").

3. *The problem of the whole and the parts.* Here, strangely enough, Dahms insists that the obvious fact that the "whole" is often "more" than the sum of the individual parts proves that logic is not universally applicable. But the very fact that he can differentiate "whole" and "sum of individual parts" shows that the logical law of noncontradiction does apply to this kind of situation too. How else could one know there was a *difference* unless A ("whole") is not non-A ("sum of individual parts")? In order words, we mean something different by "whole" (we mean wholeness) than the mere sum of individual parts. Anyone who has tried to drive away in *all* of the individual parts of his car (which are spread over the garage floor) knows that wholeness is more than the mere sum of all the parts. But this in no way violates the law of noncontradiction. It would be a contradiction to say that the exact sum of all the parts was both 2000 and 2100, or that the "whole" was both more and not more than the parts at the same time and in the same sense. Again the alleged dilemma is false, and the very fact that Dahms uses logic to distinguish "whole" from "mere sum of parts" shows that he too must use the law of noncontradiction in this situation (which is contrary to his claim that logic does not apply to this situation).

4. *Ethics involves alleged antinomies.* One of the more startling claims of Dahms' position is that "if one takes ethics seriously it is necessary to be illogical" (p. 371). Why? Because (1) "there can be no virtue where there is no choice"

[11]Published in 3 volumes (Cambridge: University Press, 1910-1913).

[agreed]. Further, (2) "to be virtuous a choice must be due to good motivation" [here, too, we could agree]. But (3) "if a choice is motivated, it is not free; it is determined by the motive" (p. 371). Here is the problem.

It was earlier pointed out that this kind of argument confuses a cause and a motive (or purpose). One's motive or purpose for building a garage is to have a place to park the car. But this *motive* or *purpose* does not produce a garage. One needs a *cause* (the carpenter) to produce a garage.

Furthermore, one would have thought just the opposite of Dahms' claim that "if one takes ethics seriously it is necessary to be illogical." In fact, the law of noncontradiction is so absolutely fundamental to the most basic of ethical assertions that an act (or intention) cannot be both good and evil at the same time and in the same sense. As Isaiah put it: "Woe be to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isa 5:20). In short, unless one begins with the premise that A is not non-A (all that is good is not nongood), how could he ever be anything but a total ethical relativist? If logic does not apply to all ethical statements, then when the Bible commands "love" it could mean "hate." And when the Scriptures say "be kind" they could mean "be cruel." The consequences of denying logic in ethics are disastrous, to say the least.

5. *Alleged contradictions in the aesthetics realm.* Dahms' point here is that "one who understands the aesthetic sense understands that the aesthetic often, if not always, involves what is contradictory" (p. 372). He gives discord in music and art as examples. We have already shown that this is a confusion between contrast and contradiction. A contrast is a conflict between two *possible* things, and so forth. Contradiction, however, involves what is impossible. For instance, one can have interrupting or asymmetrical factors in an artistic expression but he cannot have a given note both played and not played at one and the same time.

Another fascinating point is Dahms' contention that "one who understands the aesthetic" will see that it often involves contradiction. It would seem to me that if one "understands" it then it cannot involve a contradiction. How can one "understand" what is impossible? One can understand *that* a statement is contradictory—that is, that there are mutually incompatible elements in it (such as a square and a circle). But can one "understand" a square circle? Is a square circle as an entity (actual or mental) really conceivable or intelligible? If not, then in order to "understand" aesthetics (or anything) it must be noncontradictory, which is the very opposite of what Dahms claims.

6. *Alleged contradiction in the incarnation.* Here Dahms approvingly quotes Paul Tillich to show the "inescapable contradictions and absurdities into which all attempts to solve the Christological problem in terms of the two-nature theory were driven" (p. 373). The heart of Dahms' objection is that the "two natures but one person" orthodox solution necessarily entails "that one person can have two wills," and this "would seem to be contrary to the law of contradiction." (Why should this bother Dahms if the law of noncontradiction does not necessarily apply to these kinds of things?)

We would point out the following by way of response. (1) Dahms does not *prove* that there is a contradiction here. He claims merely that it "would *seem to be* contrary to the law of contradiction" (emphasis mine). (2) He admits that some "conservatives" have answered the objection by denying there are two wills in Christ but passes on without refuting this, saying only: "Be that as it may . . . " (p. 373). (3) He then jumps to a new objection—namely, "by what

logic is it possible for a nature that cannot be tempted to be united with a nature that can be tempted . . . ?" (p. 373). Here there seem to be two problems. First, "united" seems to be equivalent of "identical with" or "assimilated to." If so, he is going contrary to the very statement of Chalcedon (A.D. 450) that says the two natures should be viewed "without confusion."[12] Second, Dahms confuses "what" and "how." The fact that one cannot explain *how* the two natures unite in one person without contradiction has nothing to do with the obvious fact that *what* happens when they do is clearly not a contradiction. A contradiction would result if two natures were uniting in one nature, but not when two natures are united in one *person*. The mystery of the incarnation (and there *is* mystery) does not lie in any contradiction about *what* but more in our inability to comprehend *how*. But incomprehensibility is not the same as impossibility. If this were so, then the fact that one does not really know *how* human birth takes place would mean that it is impossible for anyone to be born.

7. *Alleged contradictions in the Trinity.* Dahms contends that "the doctrine of the Trinity also provides a problem for those who hold to the universal applicability of the law of contradiction" (p. 373). After misquoting Van Til and dismissing the legitimate distinction between essence and person (by rejecting Shedd's distinction between essence and mode), Dahms moves triumphantly to the conclusion that "all attempts to show that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity does not involve contradiction fail" (p. 374).

But this conclusion is unjustified, premature and self-defeating, and it would ultimately be destructive of orthodox Christianity (if carried out logically). (1) All the orthodox need do is show that there is a legitimate distinction between essence and person to avoid contradiction. The burden of proof is on the opponent to show there can be no such distinction. (2) Dahms seems to fallaciously assume that if we do not have an explanation (p. 374) then there is no explanation. (3) He fails to recognize that (a) showing *that* three persons and one essence are not contradictory is not the same as (b) the inability to show *how* they are complementary. (4) Further, Dahms himself cannot avoid making logical assertions about the Trinity (as was shown above). (5) Finally, if the doctrine of the Trinity is contradictory, then it is not even intelligible. But what is not even intelligible is not believable (at least not by a rational being). From this it would logically follow that no rational being should believe in the Trinity. But this conclusion is contrary to orthodox Christianity.

The conclusion from Dahms' positive arguments against the universal applicability of the laws of logic is twofold: (1) All his examples are at best only apparent contradictions, not real ones. In fact, the examples are often only conflicts rather than real contradictions. They are all "straw men" manufactured to prove a point. (2) By his own admission and even more so by his own usage, Dahms proves that logic is inescapable in all our thoughts and statements about reality. But if this is so, he refutes his own claim that "logic does not have universal applicability."

V. Some Heresies or Near Heresies

Dahms makes some claims that seem heterodox and others that are highly

[12]See H. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: University Press, 1961) 73.

questionable. First, he states that "there is a sense in which it is only the Father who is absolute" (p. 376). Does this mean that the Son and Spirit are in some ontological sense *less* than absolute in their nature? If so, this is heresy. Second, Dahms holds that the Holy Spirit's relation to the other two members of the Trinity is that he is "almost the very Godhead of the Two" (p. 377). He continues that "it is his function to unify and to preserve the Unity unbroken" (p. 377). Now in what sense do two Persons who are eternally and unchangeably one by their very *essence* need to be brought together ("unified") by the third Person? Is not this an implied denial of the unchangeable unity of the one essence in God? Speaking of implied (or *logical*) denials, all Christian truth is *logically* denied when you deny the laws of logic, because if noncontradiction does not apply then anything and everything follows. If it is not contradictory to affirm that God is both love and hate, then he could be both. And the same is true of everything that Christians affirm (or deny) of God. In short, all orthodox doctrine would be undermined if Dahms' conclusions were correct.[13] Dahms is engaging in the most dangerous *methodological* heresy a professed Christian can offer, for if the logical basis for determining truth from falsity is denied, then all Christian truth is at one and the same time false.

VI. Some Dangerous Implications

There are some dangerous consequences of accepting Dahms' position on logic. Unbelievably enough, he seems to be aware of some of these implications himself.

First, he holds that the result of rejecting logic leads to the conclusion that Calvinism and Arminianism are both "half-truths." Technically he is wrong. If logic does not apply, then both views could be "whole truths." That is to say, even though Calvinism and Arminianism are mutually exclusive,[14] nonetheless they could both be completely true. This would be so because contradictories would both be true if the law of noncontradiction does not apply. What is more startling is that if logic does not apply, then both positions could be wholly false (as well as wholly true) at the same time and in the same sense!

Second, Dahms frankly admits that the law of noncontradiction is at the basis of ethical absolutism. In his own words, "an unqualified reliance on logic has commonly characterized the ethical doctrine of conservatives. As a result conservative ethics . . . has ordinarily been absolutist" (p. 380). What is wrong with absolutes, we may ask? If there is an unchangeably good moral Being at the throne of this universe who has revealed himself in an infallible and inerrant Scripture, then one would expect there to be some moral absolutes. Indeed, Dahms may be

[13]Dahms gives no real guidance on the most important problem emerging from his view—namely, how does one know when logic does or does not apply to reality? Here is the problem in dilemma form: Either logic does or does not always apply to our statements about reality. If it does always apply, then Dahms' conclusion (in the article) is wrong. If logic does not always apply, then what criteria can he offer to determine when logic does not apply? Further, if these criteria are objective or rational, would they not use the laws of logic (which would be self-defeating)? And if they are not objective or rational, how would one avoid being purely arbitrary or subjective about them (such as choosing aesthetic, existential or personal criteria)?

[14]This is to say that on any given point of the famous Five Points one cannot hold without contradiction that both the Calvinists and the Arminians are right.

revealing his hand a little too much at this point. Could there be some actual connection between the denial of logic and the basis for moral absolutes? Indeed, there is a very crucial connection. For in fact no absolutes are possible if the law of noncontradiction does not apply. For then if logic does not hold, any moral command could mean its exact opposite. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" could mean, as the "wicked Bible" misprinted it, "thou shalt commit adultery."

We may reverse the tables here and point out that if we give up logic in the area of ethics, then anything goes. Total antinomianism follows. What evangelical would deny that this is a serious danger?

Third, according to Dahms if one gives up the universal applicability of the law of noncontradiction then "some important adjustments in doctrine, ethics, apologetics, and so forth, will be necessary" (p. 380). This statement is a candidate for the understatement of the century. For if logic does not apply to all of these all the time, then we will need more than "some important adjustments"—we will have to give up believing in any truth in these areas altogether. But then he comes to what may be a "hidden agenda" in the last sentence of the article. At least it is a dangerous (but necessary) implication of his view. After claiming that the gain for giving up the dominance of Aristotelian logic[15] will be "enormous," Dahms adds that "not the least in the matter of gain will be the ease with which various Biblical passages that have occasioned long debate and strong disagreement will now be assimilated" (p. 380). But if logic does not epistemologically dominate all truth claims, then "ease" is not the word; all Biblical conflicts and difficulties will automatically disappear! They will not be "assimilated"; they will be instantaneously annihilated! Think of the newfound freedom a NT exegete will have. No longer will he have to labor to explain how Matthew has one angel and John two angels at the empty tomb. If contradictions need not bother the exegete, then he can believe there was only one angel at the tomb at one and the same moment there were two.[16] No longer need one concern himself with the fact that Mark places Jesus on the cross by the "third hour" (Mark 15:25) and John says he was yet before Pilate as late as the "sixth hour" (John 19:14). If these men are using the same time-reckoning systems,[17] Dahms would have no trouble believing that Jesus was still before Pilate at noon and yet he was on the cross at nine a.m., three hours earlier. This would certainly give "ease" in interpreting difficult passages in the gospels! But herein lies the great danger. For if the laws of logic do not apply to all truth claims found in the NT text, then there is no way to know whether there are any truths there whatever, because one

[15]"Aristotelian logic" is a catch phrase by proponents of this kind of epistemology. It implies wrongly that Aristotle's basic laws of logic are just one option among many. The truth is that all forms of logic or thought (deductive, inductive, symbolic, or whatever) must use the law of noncontradiction. Further, the phrase "Aristotelian logic" often implies that Aristotle invented it. He did not; at best, he was the first in the west to write systematically about it. God is the ontological basis for logic. It is based in his self-consistent and rational thoughts.

[16]It should be noted that Matthew does not say there was *only* one angel but that there was (at least) one. There is a very simple but basic rule of harmony that says: "If there were two, then there was one."

[17]This is the questionable assumption. John may be using a Jewish system of reckoning that makes "sixth hour" six o'clock (which would put Jesus before Pilate at six a.m.) and Mark is using the Roman system, in which "sixth hour" would be noon and "third hour" would be nine a.m. In support of this position is the clear testimony of Josephus that "sixth hour" means six o'clock for first-century Jews (see Josephus, *Life*, p. 54).

has lost (with logic) the very basis for distinguishing truth from falsity.

Finally, Dahms reveals another dangerous implication of his position when he writes that "the aesthetic sense often unites what is contradictory" (p. 378). He adds a few lines later: "It is also . . . beauty that unites the 'logic' and the discord [in a piece of music]." He continues: "The parallel with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and with the epistemology we have set forth is extensive" (p. 378).

What is this epistemology? It is, he claims, a Chalcedonian Trinitarian epistemology in which the Father is the counterpart of all "rational propositions" because the ideas of all things are in him. The Son corresponds to all "empirical observations" because he is begotten (i.e., flux) and incarnate. Both of these two Persons are united by the Spirit who serves as the "aesthetic appreciation" that brings both together. Now despite the fact that Dahms says "one must not *begin* with aesthetic appreciation as Schleiermacher does" nor "allow aesthetic appreciation to *precede* empirical considerations as John Calvin does" (p. 377, emphasis mine), nevertheless it is the aesthetic (the Holy Spirit) which/who provides the "unity between the rational and the empirical . . . [It is] not because the extended universe is logical" (p. 377).

Strange as it may seem, Dahms has (1) exalted the aesthetic *above* the rational by investing it with the final unifying power in the universe and (2) placed ultimate unity *beyond* the rational in the aesthetic. Besides the criticism made earlier—that even aesthetic "unity" implies the logical principle of identity—it is important to note here another dangerous implication of making the aesthetic feeling the ultimate determinative in one's system: It is a *subjective* criterion. It matters little whether one adopts Kant's moral sense or Schleiermacher's aesthetic feeling or Dahms' Chalcedonian aesthetic awareness—all are subjective. The fact that Dahms grounds ultimate "unity" of all truth in the aesthetic is an especially acute problem in view of his earlier statement that "the aesthetic often, if not always, involves what is contradictory" (p. 372). This reminds one of Hegel's famous quote about Schelling's identity of all opposites in the Absolute as "the night in which all cows are black."

If Christian truth is to find its ultimate epistemological unity in some feeling that goes beyond the law of noncontradiction, then the door of Pandora's theological (and epistemological) box is wide open. One would not have to be a prophet to forecast the exegetical and theological nonsense we can expect when this method is vigorously applied to exegetical and theological studies. It is difficult to conceive of how we could be faced with a more frank, fundamental and potentially disastrous epistemology to the cause of evangelicalism than the one expounded by Dahms. I personally am exceedingly grateful that what may be a hidden agenda with many NT scholars has been honestly brought out into the open by Dahms where all can examine its implications for evangelicalism, for the doctrine of inerrancy, and for Biblical and theological studies.