

Going Deeper

Lecture by Fr. Peter Heers, 2018

–[Part III]–

Part 3: https://www.slocc.com/assets/files/audio/2018/Fr.%20Peter%20Heers_p3.mp3

Desire to pay us back... and sometimes without us realizing it, we're looking for that, we're looking for Him to show us something. And that's not bad, but it's dangerous. We have to be careful. So I would say that **the humble soul is always looking to do good**. If you ever read, anybody... you guys read Elder Paisios' discourses? The books that are out? You've heard the word 'philotimo' is there, it's used very often. **Philotimo is a good word to understand and to try to put into practice. What is it? It's doing good for the sake of God. For no other reason. Wanting nothing in return and outdoing the other** if you're in a relationship of hospitality, you're in a relationship of brotherhood. **Doing it for the sake of the other without anything in return. This is the kind of disposition you have to have.** And.... **part of this is also in prayer. When we go to pray... we're not looking for anything in return....**

Now, **you're praying for others, and things go well? Attribute it to God, not to yourself.** And if it's something that you need, God will show you fifteen times if he needs to. And then you'll always be far from delusion, if you have this stance.

Q: ...When a spirit of ecumenical movement starts manifesting itself in a parish, what does it look like? What are words people are likely to start saying?... What are comments people make?

Fr. Peter] Let's look at the essence of the problem of ecumenism. What is the heresy of ecumenism? **The heresy of ecumenism is a distortion of the nature of the church as a theanthropic organism.... We make it into a human organism or we distort it in a variety of ways. The variety of ways it is distorted but the bottom line is it ceases to be theanthropic.** God-human. It ceases to be the continuation of the incarnation. That's the answer to what ecumenism is.

It's essentially an attack on Christ.... If he can nullify the Church, he has ended the continuation and incarnation in the world and he has... and **you no longer have access to Christ through the Father.** The Church is the conduit, it's the way to the Father, so if he can nullify this in the world and make it a part of the world or he can make it something that's been defeated because it's been divided; the minute the Church is divided, it's defeated. Christ cannot be divided Saint Paul says. Is Christ divided? No, obviously. Never can be divided. So when, that is the idea then we have the heresy of ecumenism.

When that happens on the parish level in a variety of ways.... Before I say the variety of ways, let me say this: the other thing that it does **is it blurs or denies or overturns the boundaries of the Church. That's another way that it over comes or overturns this reality of the Church.** We use the term boundaries. You probably don't know that this term is the same term used when we talk about the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. In Greek it's called όρος. It means 'boundary'.

So what were the Fathers doing in the Ecumenical Councils? They were laying the boundaries and they were saying 'outside of these boundaries salvation is not possible.' You have to be within these boundaries. What are the boundaries? One God and three persons... mainly the divine-human nature of Christ. Well, the boundaries in terms of the Church are that the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. All of those together. Not One, but not Holy. Not Catholic, but not One. All four characteristics together. **Where do we find that? Only in the Orthodox Church. That IS the Orthodox Church.**

So the minute you deny one of those things, you've denied the boundaries, you've overturned the continuation and the incarnation and you're blocking the way to salvation for humanity. This is the temptation in the Book of Revelation that will come upon all the Earth. They will no longer be believing in the divine-human nature of Christ, in His Church. It's one in the same. **The Church is not anything but Christ Himself.** Christ is the head, and it's his body, the Church is Christ. So if you're denying the oneness of the Church, the catholicity meaning it has all the truth and contains all the revelation, there's nothing missing, nothing lacking, that it's apostolic. That means the preaching and the teaching and the life of the Apostles is the life of the Church. It's one, it's not divided. If you deny any of that, you're actually overturning the [] of Christ, the person of Christ. You're overturning access to the person of Christ.

So the boundaries that were laid down, were laid down precisely so that you know and I know in those is where I work out my salvation. And there I'm in communion with God. That's where you find Christ. That IS Christ, the true Church.

So how is it overturned in the parish life? Well, when you... let's go from the most extreme example to the most subtle example. **The extreme example would be communing the non-Orthodox. Obviously you're overturning the boundaries because you're saying that you don't have to be initiated into this reality, you could hold doctrines that are not of this faith.** You could not be initiated into the mystery of baptism and you could be a member of the Church. So you're... overturning in different ways the catholicity of the Church, that it has the whole truth because you're saying the he, the person who's outside the Church is also a part it, but he doesn't believe the Orthodox faith. You're overturning the Orthodox faith as a presupposition for being a member of the Church. So that's the most extreme example. **You're admitting that beyond the Orthodox Church there's also church and therefore it's divided.** Because usually what we mean in contemporary context is Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the various theories are what, that we have 2 lungs and one body, or we have incomplete communion but mysteries that exist among the Roman Catholics. **These are all expressions of**

this delusion that the Church is not one, or the Church does not have the whole truth or you can be a part of the Church without confessing the whole truth.

I mean, it's dizzying the variations of denial of this truth. And so it's hard for a lot of people to get their head around it. What exactly is this? **That's why St. Justin Popovich called it the heresy of heresies, or pan-heresy because in one fell swoop it essentially destroys the Church and the path to salvation for the people.** So the extremist example would be communion.

But **another example... would be identifying the mysteries outside the Church,** would be an example of ecumenism on the Parish level. How do we do that? We... this is a little hard. I don't want to mislead anybody. There is of course *economia* in the church, to receive people by methods besides baptism that is a part of the history of the Church and the Ecumenical Councils.

The problem is today the presuppositions for this *economia* to be salvific don't exist. Therefore, the application of *economia*, meaning receive people by other means beside baptism, is really not warranted. Now, some people could apply *economia*, thinking that it IS warranted, without them submitting themselves to this delusion of heresy. There are many people who say 'no, we should receive by chrismation because – without recognizing the mysteries – it's possible but according to St. Paul, today it's not possible to receive by any other means besides baptism. Why? Because **we're undermining the boundaries of the Church and we're undermining what it means to be baptized because the heterodox don't baptize. They don't immerse, that's what baptism means.** They sprinkle, pour, or they baptize with one immersion like the Baptists, which follow the eunomians in the ancient church.

So, in a roundabout way that... **if you have an ecumenistic mentality and you look at the Church as divided, you recognize per se the mysteries among the heterodox, you are and therefore say, 'well we don't baptize you because you're already baptized.'** If you hear that on the parish level, and that's the perception, of people coming into the Church, and that's the implication for a lot of people, 'I was already baptized outside the Church.' I was already living the life of Christ, **if that's the case, and you believe that, then you're overturning the doctrine of the Church and you're making the Church accessible by degrees.**

This was the Second Vatican Council doctrine, that we have a church that's full, like they said the Roman Catholicism is the complete, one church, it's totally full, but there's also Orthodoxy that doesn't quite have the fullness that we have but it's still the church and then they go on and they have these degrees of initiation. There's levels or, what's the word they use... incomplete communion. We have complete communion and incomplete communion.

All this terminology, this whole mentality, is at odd with our doctrine, our understanding of Christ. When we say we've come to the fulness of the truth, the fulness of the faith, we don't mean that there are other groups out there that have 99.95% and there are others that have 45% and others that have 65%. Fulness is only full – it's Christ! Christ can't be a little less full.

To use an expression that you've heard, you can't be a little bit pregnant. Remember how we talked about the virtues and, the virtues that are theanthropic, the virtues that are salvific are the fruit of the holy spirit. Well, and that's one – the holy spirit is simple, it's one. And that's how it is in the life of the Church, it's one and simple. It's not... you don't have levels. That's how it is with the Church. The Church can't be envisioned or exist in degrees. **Our participation in the Church, of course, is by degrees because of our limitation. But the Church is not limited. Christ is not limited in any way and neither is He half full anywhere.** And that's how they present it – the Baptists, the Roman Catholics... some might say 'well the Baptists are incompletely part of the Church; you know, somehow a part of the Church, they're a little bit a part of the Church... It's impossible.

Now, that doesn't mean that God is not working in all of creation in bringing all of these people and loving every last one of them and calling them all to Himself. Of course, He is. The Holy Spirit, and this is key, key doctrine that has been also confused within contemporary ecumenism. The Holy Spirit works throughout all creation. He's the providential divine energy. We have the creative divine energies, we have many manifestations and energies of the Holy Spirit outside the Church. **What we DON'T HAVE outside the Church are the purifying, illumining and deifying energies which are the Life in Christ.** That happens when you begin the Life in Christ, that happens at Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist. And those have presuppositions; repentance and faith. That's necessary. And purification.

So, if we allow this relativization, disintegration of the Church, into parts, and we think of the Church as full among the Orthodox and half full among other groups, we have decimated the presuppositions for the mysteries. We've done away with the need for purification, faith and repentance to enter into the mystery.

So anytime on a parish level we're thinking in those terms, we're entertaining them geniuently... **Another expression of ecumenism on the parish level would be not requiring even the faithful to recognize and struggle at fulfilling the presuppositions of fasting, prayer, repentance, confession – that's a kind of ecumenism. Why? Because we're not recognizing that there is this need for initiation into the spirit of the Church and have to go fully and deeper. It's not a disintegration of the Church doctrinally, but it's the kind of spirit that is behind the same thing.** I mean it's... if you applied that to others outside the Church, you'd have the same kind of spirit. It's a continuum. We do it, we think of it as for those outside, that they don't have to do much to participate in the mysteries, right, the mysteries of the Church is kind of just given to anyone.

[Inuadible]

Yes, everyone needs to come and fulfill the presuppositions of faith and repentance, to participate... you can participate but you're not going to have any fruit. So that's the difference between one who is in the Church and one who is outside the Church. **It's impossible outside the Church to participate in the mystery of Eucharist and the incarnation. Whereas in the Church, of course, you can participate, but the fruits will be not forthcoming without this**

repentance and this faith. So it's different. I don't want to imply that in the Church there is any kind of doctrinal relativism. But it's a kind of laxity that does along with the spirit of ecumenism generally.

Mixed marriages would be a problematic... possibly, possibly. There is an extreme *economia* and it has existed in the Church for about 100 years for mixed marriages. However, **there's no theological, dogmatic basis for mixed marriages.** Any time I've asked anyone who's a theologian in Greece, please give me the basis for mixed marriages, there is none. **It is simply *economia*. That. Can't. Be.**

Now, I'm going to tell you the akrivia of the Church and *I'm not going to call into question any practice of your priest or your bishop, that's their call. Economia is in their hands. They have to wield it and they will account for it and I'm not accusing any of them.* But as a theologian, I'm telling you in a theoretical way, what is going on with this question of mixed marriages.

Mixed marriages are really problematic from a doctrinal standpoint because to be married in the Church, and it's obvious in the very sacrament of marriage, the implication is that they're communing, right? You are united in Christ. How are you united in Christ if you are not communing? How are you united in Christ if you are not both of the [inaudible] communion of the Church? How are you united in Christ... *the mystery of marriage like all the mysteries took place at one time IN THE EUCHARIST.* When that was happening nobody could say 'let's have a mixed marriage' could they? Because they would have communed together. When it was taken out of that context, suddenly it's possible to have a mixed marriage because they're not communing in the mystery of marriage. So there it's obvious that it doesn't work. **No mystery can be separated out from the other mysteries. All the mysteries are one: the mystery of the incarnation. They're all expressions of the one mystery of the Church. **So doctrinally there is no answer to the question 'on what basis do we do mixed marriages?' They don't exist.****

Now, **whether that economy, extreme economy is profitable... God will judge.** I would be very reticent to tread that path without any kind of doctrinal basis, any kind of theological explanation. **The fruits, generally, may be good for one or two or five or ten cases but you know what's happening?** We're missing the forest for the tree and the end of it is, as one theologian came to our diocese said, 'Look, prayer with heretics...' (which is forbidden by the holy canons, it happens all the time – it's another example of prayer with heretics and I'll explain why that's not possible. It's a kind of communion, there's presuppositions to communion.) But he came and he said to us, 'Well, we have mixed marriages and in mixed marriages we pray together so what's the problem if our hierarchs pray together?' You see what happens? **We open this door, we begin this path, and then the dissolution begins. Because there is no basis for mixed marriages, it becomes a precedent and it justifies other things that have no basis, and they become a precedent and the disintegration continues in terms of the identity of the Church.**

Q: One of the major dioceses in North America did a study on mixed marriages and they proved that almost, in the vast majority, that the Orthodox person ends up leaving the Church.

FP: Really?

Q: Typically, statistically, the majority of people who are marrying an Orthodox person and didn't want to become Orthodox had a strong religious orientation. Well, we extend *economia* to them, well, who's the spiritual center in the household? It's the person that stood for their faith.

FP: And didn't want to become Orthodox.

Q: And didn't want to become Orthodox, and *their* spirit ends up dominating the house and eventually the Orthodox.

I'll tell you another bad fruit that I see, I got statistics, but if I led a parish, let's say Greek Orthodox, this is probably where most of this is happening – they're the largest group and they're the most, I think, that have done inter-marriage in America. If I'm a Greek Orthodox priest, one of the reasons why I didn't go become a Greek Orthodox priest is – in America I mean – it's unfortunate – and I am really sympathetic to Greek Orthodox priests in America – it's a great struggle. But maybe it is applicable across the board. I don't know. But that's my point of reference. **If I'm in a parish and I have 10, 20, 30% of my people on Sunday who come and they're not baptized, chrismated, communing – they're actually committed Roman Catholics, or at least somehow still identify as Protestant, Roman Catholics. If that's a large minority of my congregation am I going to have any kind of anti-heretical preaching? Am I going to talk about the problem with heresy? Am I going to talk about the boundaries of the Church? Am I going to talk about all these sensitive things that actually shouldn't be heard by non-Orthodox?**

The Church didn't preach in their synaxis to those outside. There were clear boundaries. If you go back to the ancient Church, there was catechism, repentance, baptism and THEN you entered into the synaxis of the faithful. **So now we have people who are not initiated daily in our synaxis, what's going to happen to our own phronema? Our own mindset? It's going to be twisted. It's going to be perverted over time and we're going to stop saying things that need to be said... the faithful... The priest is the guardian of the flock, he's the shepherd and if he's not saying these are actually wolves, the wolves are going to eat the sheep. That's how it works.**

So **this is a fruit of not paying attention to the boundaries of the Church, another example of the spirit of ecumenism. People generally don't consider these things because we're looking at it on a human, personal level; we have friends, we have relatives, we might even be in the situation and we don't consider the larger picture on the basis of the dogmas of the church.** I don't mean to offend anyone who might be in this situation, I'm very sympathetic to this pastoral problem here but we cannot neglect these very problematic serious

and spiritual dogmatic problems it creates. It doesn't lead to salvation ultimately for these people...

Q: ...We've become generally become uncomfortable with saying things like 'only in the Orthodox Church do we have the fullness...' this little spirit of ecumenism.

FP: ...It's an identity problem it's an identity complex... we're afraid to say 'we are this'. We're beginning to doubt our own identity as Orthodox Christians, that's a fruit of ecumenism.

Q: What does the word ecumenism come from?

FP: The word ecumenism comes from the word 'οικουμενισμός' in Greek so you have... **universality** would be another translation. **Ecumenical means something universal. The ecumenical movement was the movement that was designed historically to bring all of these Christians together.** Oikoumenoi is the whole world, in Greek.

This is the idea that we're trying to unite worldwide all the Christians into one thing. It started with the Protestants in the 19th century. Actually it started long before the World Council of Churches was founded, it started among Protestants in the mission field in Africa, Asia. How did it start? Well, they were sent by their various denominations and they're in Africa and there's a Methodist over here and about 5 miles down the road there's an Episcopalian or Baptist and they're making converts, they're making progress. They did make MUCH progress in the 19th century. Amazing progress, the Protestants made in the 19th Century in mission. But what happens is that the people who have been missionized who are of one tribe or one nation, they start to look around and say 'well, you're not with me, we're not unified' and yet they're both Christians. And they start to say to the missionaries, 'well, what's wrong with you people, you're not united? You should be united. I don't want to be separated from my cousin down the road or my friend over here.'

So the Protestant missionaries turn around and say 'this is a disgrace we don't have unity' and they go back and send letters back to Edinburgh and Scotland and to London and to New York, and to the various headquarters and they say 'you have to start doing something. We can't do mission work this way. It won't work. Ultimately it's going to crumble. There's no unity, it's a disgrace and it's a bad witness.'

That's how ecumenism started, in the 1840's, '50's, '60's, '70's. It also started after that with the student union movements; the YMCA, and these other groups. These were also attempts probably initiated through the missionaries, I don't know the exact origin of all these groups, but it was this idea that 'We can't do mission. We can't do the work of the church if we're not united.' So **it was all about witness. It wasn't about truth. It was all about how are we going to witness. Truth was a secondary question among the Protestants because doctrinally they actually say it straight out, some prominent missionaries in the 1840's, '80's, '90's, they say 'Doctrine is an obstacle to unity.... Doctrine divides.'**

So here we are 1910 the first student youth union movement... I think it was called student unions YMCA.... First time in Constantinople. They go to the Orthodox and they get the

Orthodox involved. And they come back and they're just glowing. 'The Orthodox are with us. The Orthodox want to partake' And **it was the Ecumenical Patriarchate. And in 1920 we have the first Comity agreement. What does that mean? It's an agreement NOT to proselytize one another, between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Protestant missionaries.** And a prominent theologian from Athens... **that is one of the pillars of ecumenism, don't proselytize the others; we're all one.**

You can already see the problem here in terms of Orthodox doctrine of the church. 1920 we have the famous encyclical to all the Christians on the earth, all the churches of Christ, it's actually entitled. *Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to All the Churches of Christ in the World*. And in there, the author Metropolitan Germanos is believed to be the author. He was one of the Orthodox bishops who were doing a lot of work in the West, he's the main author, I think. He writes that using St. Paul's description of the body, there being many parts of the body. I'm not sure I'm quoting it correctly, but the idea here is that he likens every local church to a part of the church. **He implies that all these local churches, not the Orthodox Churches, he's writing to every... Protestant, Roman Catholic... are ALL a part of the church. That's the first time in an encyclical that it's implied that the Orthodox Church is not the catholic [meaning it has all the truth and contains all the revelation, NOT meaning Roman Catholic] Church.**

Now he might say that's not how we interpreted it, but that's certainly how the Protestants interpreted it. And that begins the Orthodox involvement essentially in the 1920's you have Orthodox theologians going to the Life and Works, and Faith and Order meetings in Europe. They're the precursor to the World Council of Churches which is the worldwide ecumenical body and they begin to dialogue with the Protestants and in the beginning for about 20-30 years most of the statements remain true to Orthodox ecclesiology except the main statement in 1948 which has a serious problematic aspect to it which seems to be very much akin with ecumenism.

So you see, I don't want to get too much into it because it goes on and on but the key here is that this movement that pre-existed among the Protestants, **WE entered in on THEIR basis, their basis they had already created. We didn't re-create, we didn't say 'change it and then we'll enter'. We enter in on their presuppositions which are Protestant presuppositions of a divided church and we work within those.**

And it's not at all surprising that after all these years we have a lot of problems and serious, serious problems created by our involvement in the ecumenical movement. Because from the beginning it was not on an Orthodox basis that we were involved. So the origins of ecumenism is among the Protestants and it's a movement not seeking first of all Truth, but unity for the sake of witness. And of course this basis and these presuppositions are not Orthodox. We can't work within that context....