

Interview with Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes - 2

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(Previous publication:...)

But of course it also took some scholarly side work in order to facilitate such forced entry. When the journal started in 1995, the only ever available and reliable Orthodox contributor the journal could count on was – Engelhardt himself. There was, of course, Father John Breck, from St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary. Beyond that, Herman worked with priests who had experience in hospital-based ethics committees, such as Fathers George Eber, Dimitrij Cozby, Paul D. O’Callaghan, Alexy Young, Thomas Joseph, and Edward Hughes. These priests understood the need for a specifically Orthodox account. Only in 1998, the Engelhardts’ efforts of love (and a miracle of God) had brought me around, as his first Orthodox author from philosophy. A crucial turning point was reached in 2000, when Engelhardt’s *The Foundations of Christian Bioethics* appeared.



This comprehensive Orthodox manual engages the Holy Tradition much like the works by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos and by Claude Larchet have done for psychotherapy. But in addition, this work draws on Herman's combined philosophical and medical expertise. Thus Herman could show that the guidelines which orient a proper Christian use of medicine, as laid down by Fathers of the Church like St. Basil of Caesarea, are quite sufficient to solve the moral quandaries inherent in the most advanced technology, health care policy and social engineering projects in bio-medicine.

The project of introducing these guidelines into the Western academic discourse could succeed only because of Engelhardt's qualities as a shrewd business man, his already established credentials as a professor in both philosophy and in medicine, and his faithful absorption of the entire compass of the patristic literature. His post-conversion works offer a model of how to safeguard the integrity of the theological language of Orthodoxy within a Western scholarly environment. He even managed to negotiate for exceptions to a publisher's politically correct, but theologically misleading imposition of a gender-neutral language.

In that sense, our journal also offers a signal to all those Orthodox theologians who believe that an academic reputation in the West requires strewing the incense of political correctness. Such compliance invites serious temptations. Initially, an author may merely wish to display his acquaintance with the moral norms proclaimed by the secular prophets of the West, such as John Rawls and Jürgen

Habermas. But in the process of integrating such foreign ideas into his own account, such an author may insensibly be led to use a language that suggests endorsement of those ideas.

This, after all, will render his work more acceptable for Western publishers. Readers and students of such scholars will then in turn be tempted to take that endorsement as ratified by their teachers' otherwise impeccable Orthodox faith. They will then frame their own theological work in terms of that endorsement, thus ever more profoundly misleading their own students and readers. Our journal's critical commentaries on Christian contributions which pay such improper homage to the spirit of this time are meant to issue a warning: Those secularity-compatible values to which even Orthodox Christians sometimes appeal in their public pronouncements or their scholarly work may surely allow for a proper Christian interpretation. It is just that these same values are equally open to the quite non-Christian, even anti-Christian interpretations which dominate our life world.

“Pemptousia”: In the extended title, *non-ecumenical studies in medical morality*, what is the meaning of “non-ecumenical”? Is there any special goal behind including it in the title?

“Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes”: When Engelhardt conceived of the journal, he also wanted to offer an important service to the other Christianities. The ecumenical movement tries to pursue Christ's own command “that all be one”. But, as Engelhardt realized, this movement frames that pursuit in a misguided, and thus also misguiding, way. To be sure, the movement has in the past done much good service. During the cold war, it presented a public forum and offered generous support for the persecuted Church. Its activities also helped to overcome much inter-denominational ignorance and prejudice. Some institutions, such as Chambésy, have allowed non-Orthodox Christians to experience the Church and to become converted.

And yes, there are always prayer sessions. But these inescapably involve (un-canonical) inter-faith prayer. At bottom, the ecumenical movement pursues unification as a primarily human project: There is no recognition of the fact that the one true Church of the Apostles, which had encompassed all of Christian Europe during the first millennium after Christ, is still alive in Orthodoxy. There is conspicuous silence about the circumstance that those who are separated from that Church can be truly unified with her only by “turning around”, by *metanoia*. That silence in particular covers the need to renounce the heresies which disrupted Christian unity.

In spite of many years of dialoguing, cardinal differences in ecclesiology and (what

the West calls) sacramental theology persist. Those dialogues have surely nurtured personal friendships over the years, and these friendships may surely have strengthened participants' human yearning for unanimity. Painfully aware of the scandal Christian disunity presents to those outside, participants tended to ignore those remaining, discursively irresolvable problems. A supposedly agreed upon "common Christian ground" was used as a basis for strategic alliances. In this way, common "Christian projects" could seek to promote attractive goals like peace, charity, and ecological sustainability. Even more, a supposedly common "Christian opposition" could be offered against the moral evils besetting a God-forsaken world, evils such as abortion and euthanasia, unlimited consumerism and a culture that rewards greed and ambition.

Unfortunately, preoccupation with such pursuits suggested that issues of doctrine (and of doctrinal disagreement) are "practically" irrelevant. Those Christian participants whose culture had long since left the integrity of the original faith behind had learnt not to worry much about new teachings being added here and old ones dropped there, as opportunities (or "present needs") seemed to require. These Christians no longer notice the profound dis-orientation that comes with compromised doctrinal integrity. After centuries of having separated dogmatic theology from its pastoral and liturgical context, they regard "dogma" as merely academic.

They believe, for example, that a Christian "love of one's neighbor" needs no guidance from a dogmatically anchored life of prayer that seeks Divine support through a rightly oriented glorification of God. Their own offer of guidance instead appeals to moral ideals like justice, equality, fairness, beneficence, respect for freedom, security, or every one's opportunity to partake of technological progress. Such ideals are indeed affirmed by all Christians. But the unanimity thus attained is contingent on the general, abstract mode of their affirmation. Once the mutual competition, even incompatibility of those ideals surfaces in the course of their application to specific situations, the hoped-for consensus evaporates.

Such moral disunity comes as no surprise to Orthodox Christians. They know that differences in ecclesiology lead to different views about the source of moral guidance. A love of neighbor that is inspired by a teaching of a Roman *magisterium* authorized to ratify "theological developments" will determine what is obligatory, permissible or prohibited (e.g. in end of life care) in profoundly different ways than a love of neighbor that is inspired by any one of the many readings of the Holy Scriptures, to which Protestants of all persuasions turn.

A love of neighbor, on the other hand, which is informed by the way in which Holy

Tradition conceives of both Church and Scriptures will safeguard coherence in general guidelines, while at the same time leaving space for therapeutic diversification. Such differentiated coherence requires spiritual fathers, in whom, as in Spirit-bearers, Tradition comes to life. Thus, different ecclesiologies will frequently give rise to different moral conclusions. Orthodox Christians also know that different dogmatic accounts of the mysteries of the Church ultimately turn on the acceptance or rejection of uncreated Divine energies.

Where such energies are not recognized, the ways in which a believer can render himself receptive to the grace of God, as transmitted by those energies, remains opaque: The holistic, body, soul, and mind encompassing therapy which comes with an ascetic and liturgical life, and which can burn away fallen humans' egoism, cannot be fully appreciated. Without such therapy, the un-biased selflessness with which Christians are called to love their neighbor remains unattainable. Here again, outside of proper dogma Christian charity is fated to remain merely emotional, or else to degenerate into a kind of care-taking that renders efficiency, and thus political implementation, desirable, even obligatory.

The ecumenical movement has generated a smallest-common-denominator-morality framed in a language which is also shared by well-meaning secular philanthropists. Identifying what it means to "be Christian" with "doing good", and using that secular language for defining "the good", that movement has weakened its "Christian profile": Even where projects involve the local parish, their design renders the Christian "surplus-value" of Sunday services hard to explain. For all its efforts to keep Christianity in the public forum, the ecumenical movement has depleted the meaning of what it publicizes.

Given this sorry development, our journal takes a stand against the trivialized haziness of ecumenical morality. It encourages all Christian thinkers to recapture the particular ways in which their particular faiths provide guidance in bioethics. The goal is to rediscover the moral salience of theological differences, both on the level of personal conscientiousness and sensitivity, and on the higher levels of institutional integrity and public policy. Those in charge of this journal contend that only clarity about the existing differences provides a basis for fruitful efforts at unification.

But there is still a deeper motivation for the "non-ecumenical" focus of our journal. True ecumenism encourages Greeks and Russians, Rumanians and Hungarians, Macedonians and Serbians, assorted Ukrainians, Antiochenes and OCA Orthodox to bear one another's' burdens, to suffer under their divided calendars, to get their tones coordinated for common singing on Sunday of Orthodoxy, and to cultivate

their cross-cultural love. But the term has been hijacked by an “ecumenist” project that transcends the Church. I think one can safely claim that this project today presents the most dangerous heresy.

It discounts the very concept of truth. Even though the movement keeps invoking Christ, its gestures of openness to a wider inter-faith ecumenicity discount the fact that Christ is The Truth in person. Even among its divided Christian members, that movement has systematically disregarded the fact that Christ Himself taught the Church, and has protected that teaching in her life. The call for self-made unity invites us Orthodox to give away what we do not own, but received as a trust, to be planted all over the world. Our journal understands mutual respect for each other’s divergent Christian faiths in a way that encourages serious dispute about the one Truth in Christ, and competition in view of keeping out those wolves in sheepskin who confess allegiance to Christ while tearing His body apart. In all these years, such disputes highlighted the extent to which we differ, even in areas which seem far removed from theology, such as bioethics, and how absurdly improper it would be to gloss over that difference.

[To Be Continued]