

To the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod of the True Orthodox Church of Greece

It is with great sadness that we, the Presbyters of the Parishes of Toronto, St. Nektarios, Mother of God of Proussa and St. Joseph of Arimathea, make this second appeal for the examination of a serious problem that has caused much confusion among members of our Church and has given our enemies another opportunity to attack us. The Presbyters of the three Toronto parishes in the past had expressed their concerns about this problem and later asked His Eminence, Metropolitan Makarios, to present this problem at the May, 2010, meeting of the Holy Synod. Our Synod was not able to come to any decision and the problem became more pronounced. Although this problem arose in April, 2009, our Synod has been incapable of addressing it.

In April, 2009, Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston published an article entitled *The Neutralization of the Netherworld*. This was the first of a series of articles in which he developed a novel interpretation of our Lord's *Descent into Hades*. These articles developed a teaching that not only deviates from what the Holy Fathers teach concerning our Lord's crushing the Gates of Hades, but also reveals a predisposition toward the *secularization of Theology*.

The teachings of the Church present Divine Revelation as the mystery it is. None of the Holy Fathers sought to form a rational analysis of Divine Revelation. In the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic theologians abandoned the teachings of the Holy Fathers and turned to deductive rational thought to explain their Faith. Deductive rational thought was for them a divine gift bestowed upon all humans. As such it was placed on an equal rank with faith. Accordingly, Plato and Aristotle were valued as much as the Holy Apostles. Thomas Aquinas, the great Roman Catholic theologian, referred to Aristotle as, *the Teacher*.

The shift in theology from Faith-based to reason-based can be labeled *The Secularization of Theology*. Theology is no longer the proclamation of the Mysteries of God, but an academic science using worldly methods of study. Secular Theology uses material gathered from secular sources as guidelines. Atheist archaeologists, Roman Catholic and Protestant secular theologians, as well as Jewish scholars, become authorities in understanding the Christian Faith. Academic secular theology, which was first developed by Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages, has now become the way that *Ecumenist-Orthodox* theologians deal with the teachings of the Church. Living continuity with the traditions of the Church is broken when we look to those outside the Faith for guidance. We come dangerously close to falling away from the *mind of the Fathers*.

Most Americans who call themselves Christians, say eternal life is not exclusively for those for whom our Saviour is the Eternal Spring. According to a survey released on December 18, 2008, by the *Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, two-thirds (65%) of American Christians say that many religions can lead to eternal life. Of the 65% of people who held this open view of heaven's gates, 80%

named at least one non-Christian group - Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists or people with no religion at all – as people who also may be saved. An earlier *Gallup Poll* found that 77% of Americans were optimistic about making it to heaven. Very few saw themselves as headed to hell. A recent *Beliefnet.com* poll of 10,567 respondents had similar findings - 72% listed "unlikely" or "not a chance" when asked what their chances are of ending up in hell. For many of these people there is even a “Dog Heaven” and a “Cat Heaven”.

Understandably, this prevalent attitude in North America influences many Orthodox Christians and causes them to agonize over the possibility of their non-Orthodox loved ones not going to Heaven. We believe that Metropolitan Ephraim attempted to quell the anxieties of these people with this series of articles. The contents and structure of these articles lead one to believe that Metropolitan Ephraim wrote specifically for this audience without giving careful thought to what he was saying. This superficial examination of the subject caused Metropolitan Ephraim to come to conclusions that are contrary to what has been taught in the past by our own Synod.

We believe that His Eminence was also influenced by heretical authors. Metropolitan Ephraim’s lectures and articles, in the past, were outstanding because of his faithfulness to the teachings of the Holy Fathers. In this series of articles, we hear an unfamiliar voice. It is not the voice that we heard in the past:

Basically, what is needed in preserving and cultivating the liturgical arts is the same thing that is needed in maintaining and upholding the Orthodox Faith itself: great care and reverence. Furthermore, as in matters of faith, we must always ask the question: does this truly reflect the Church’s tradition? In short, we must always go back and check our primary sources. Here our own personal interpretations, and opinions, and tastes must recede. A great deal of humility is needed here. At the same time, we should be aware that, just as in matters of faith, so in this matter also, it is possible that distortions of the Tradition can and have taken place, and it is our duty as Orthodox Catholic Christians to protest politely and respectfully at first - and if that doesn’t work, to shout and stamp our foot until we finally get results. Chocolate soldiers do not make good Orthodox Christians. (Saint Nektarios Orthodox Conference, 1980, p. 169)

In the second article of this *Awake Sleeper* series, ***Sheol Delenda Est!***, Metropolitan Ephraim reveals that he had found some *important insights* concerning the Lord’s Descent to Hades by reading an article written by Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev of the Patriarchate of Moscow. One of these *important insights* is Alfeyev’s claim that those who were not taught the true faith during their lifetime can come to believe when in Hades. Alfeyev credits the infamous heretic, Serge Bulgakov, with helping him come to this conclusion. This *insight* has led Metropolitan Ephraim to deviate from the mind of the Holy Fathers even to the extent of advocating a *Prayer*

for Departed Heterodox.

Metropolitan Ephraim has included in this series of articles an article by Fr. Sergius, a monk at the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, and an article by Fr. Seraphim Johnson of beloved memory. Both these articles reveal a secularized theology that deviates from the *mind of the Holy Fathers*.

It is quite evident that Fr. Sergius' article also relies on heretical sources. Fr. Sergius does not hide the fact that he depends on Jeffery Trumbower, Professor of Religious Studies at the Roman Catholic St. Michael's College in Vermont, and Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, a staunch Ecumenist. He refers to Trumbower's *Rescue for the Dead*, as *fascinating*. He relies on Ware's interpretation of the prayers of the Vespers of the Holy Spirit to draw the conclusion that: *It is significant that in this prayer on Pentecost, Christ's harrowing of Hades is seen as an open-ended process.* The phrase, *open-ended*, is understood as our Saviour's ongoing teaching in Hades. This is truly a novel teaching. The Holy Fathers teach a unique descent and teaching and destruction of Hades. The *effect* of the unique *Descent into Hades* is eternal, not the process. Christ is not continuously descending and teaching in Hades.

Why does Metropolitan Ephraim allow the voice of these heretics, Alfeyev, Bulgakov, Ware, Androustos, Trumbower and Harnack to be heard? What sort of guidance can we derive from them? Taking in their words is the same as drinking wine from a goblet that has a dead rat at the bottom. The wine may appear good but nonetheless, one is taking in the poison from the dead rat.

Metropolitan Ephraim has been lecturing and writing for forty years. Why did he take so long to reveal this unheard-of teaching - that one who does not believe in our Saviour, while he is alive, will be instructed by our Lord when he dies and may repent once he sees the truth?

Why does Metropolitan Ephraim allow the use of terms that are contrary to the Orthodox Faith? In the article written by Fr. Seraphim, reference is made to *Baptism of Desire*. Thomas Aquinas defines the *Baptism of Desire* in the following manner: *Forasmuch as someone's heart is moved by the Holy Ghost to believe in and love God and to repent of his sins, not only without Baptism of Water, but also without Baptism of Blood, one receives the effect of Baptism by the power of the Holy Ghost (Summa Theologica, III, Q.66 A.11).*

A contemporary Uniate bishop, Archbishop Elias Zoghby of Baalbeck-Lebanon, developed this thought to support Ecumenism: *Recall, that just as, in cases where baptism cannot be administered, 'baptism of desire' is a real baptism, and equally produces salvation, the same may be said for an ecclesiastical 'communion of desire.' In cases where the Churches who share the same faith substantially, do not want or could not achieve full communion, this desire is equally a real communion and removes the schism for the one who wants it.*

Concerning *Baptism of desire*, Fr. Seraphim writes: *This teaching, although phrased differently, has similarities to that of Orthodoxy.* What are these similarities? A person is either baptized or not. Elsewhere in his article Fr. Seraphim quotes a *speculation* of Bishop Gregory Grabbe. *Speculations* do not belong to the Orthodox Faith. We believe only what has been revealed to us. This has been stated by his Eminence so many times in the past. One may ask, why did His Eminence use this article by Fr. Seraphim? Are *speculations* now acceptable? Metropolitan Ephraim even attempts to give this *speculation* some respectability by labeling it a *Theologoumenon* in his article *Not A Second Opportunity*. The term *Theologoumenon* is not to be found anywhere in the writings of the Holy Fathers. This term was made popular by the liberal Protestant theologian, Adolf von Harnack, who used it frequently in his *History of Dogma, circa 1885*. This seven volume study became the definitive study for the history of dogma among Protestants.

We cannot speculate about Hades. Our Faith firmly believes that our Lord's triumphant descent to Hades destroyed the power of death. Metropolitan Ephraim misinterprets this tenet of the Faith to support his theory of repentance after death. In the fifth article of this series, *Not A Second Opportunity*, he writes:

Saint John Chrysostom, in his 'Homily on the Cemetery and the Cross,' writes:

So Christ, by His death, bound the chief of robbers and the jailer, that is, the devil and death, and transferred their treasures, that is, the entire human race, to the royal treasury...The King Himself came to the prisoners...(Homily on the Cemetery and the Cross, PG 49:395-396)

The 'entire human race'? Even the Hawaiians?

This quote from St. John Chrysostom, and the many other quotes from the Holy Fathers on the destruction of death, have nothing to do with any theoretical future preaching and revelation in Hades of our Lord. These Holy Fathers speak about those who believe in the Gospel of our Incarnate Lord and receive eternal life in Christ.

St. John Chrysostom in the above quotation says: *The King Himself came to the prisoners. Came not will come.* For those who believe, and only for them, has the power of Hades been destroyed. St. John Chrysostom in *Homily 39 on First Corinthians* says: *in the case of each one at his Baptism it (death) has been destroyed perfectly.* It is an injustice to these texts to twist them around and to make them appear to say something which they do not say.

When an attempt is made to simplify the Church's teachings there is always the danger of distortion. Metropolitan Ephraim, in his second article, *Sheol Delenda Est!*, tries to simplify what transpires once the soul has left the body. In this article he comments on St. Romanos' *Third Kontakion on the Resurrection, Strophe 9:*

... we **assume** that St. Romanos means all in Hades who assent to Christ's teaching when He proclaims the glad tidings of His Resurrection. One might ask: which soul could possibly refuse to accept Christ's teaching? It seems quite possible that the soul of someone like Lenin, or Hitler, or Stalin, or of a number of some such individuals would react to Christ's teaching by saying, "Resurrection? Bah! Humbug! What utter nonsense! The opium of the masses!"

In the above quote, I placed the word *assume* in bold in order to draw attention to what can happen when we oversimplify. His Eminence writes: *we assume that St. Romanos means all in Hades who assent to Christ's teaching when He proclaims the glad tidings of His Resurrection.* However, St. Romanos speaks of those **who assented** at the time of the *Descent of our Lord*, not to those who **will** assent in Hades in the future. The *Descent* and preaching in Hades is not ongoing. Our Lord descended once and was resurrected once. We should not assume or speculate concerning the nature of the Destruction of Hades. The Holy Fathers have taught us all we need to know.

In matters of Faith, can we *assume* and *speculate*? Is this what really takes place after the soul leaves the body? Metropolitan Ephraim, in his haste to show that the preaching of the Gospel by our Saviour in Hades extends to the future, did not pay careful attention to what St. Romanos actually said but attempted to illustrate his *assumption* with the scene of our Lord preaching the Gospel to Hitler and others in Hades. Such an image appears nowhere in the writings of the Holy Fathers.

Metropolitan Ephraim attempts to bolster this *assumption* by quoting from a work that has been attributed to St. John of Damascus. Even if we accept that this work belongs to St. John, we must take a closer look at its title, that speaks of those *who died in the Faith*, not *outside the Faith* and for whom *Memorial Services and Prayers are Offered* (Του Μακαρίου Ιωαννου Περι Των Εν Πιστει Κεκοιμημενων Οπως Αι Υπερ Αυτων Γινομεναι Λειτουργιαι Και Ευχουαι Τουτους Ονινησιν). A careful reading of this work will reveal that it does not speak about any preaching in Hades after the Resurrection of our Lord. The quotation which His Eminence uses: *They were those whom the Steward and Master of all drew and captured in His divine nets, and persuaded to believe in Him, illuminating them with His divine rays and showing them the True Light* refers to those virtuous people, who at the time of the Resurrection had not received the revelation from the Holy Prophets. This quote does not say anything about a supposed ongoing preaching.

Metropolitan Ephraim, in his attempt to teach that all generations of people will be instructed in Hades by our Lord, diminishes the essential understanding of the *Descent into Hades* as the **destruction** of death. Prominence is given to the novel theory that upon death all unbelievers will receive instruction by our Saviour and that if they believe, they will be saved. If this is true, then what benefit does prayer for deceased unbelievers have? Supposedly, unbelievers will be given an opportunity to believe as soon as they die. Of what use will prayers for them be after their death?

Since according to Metropolitan Ephraim, those who did not know our Saviour while they were alive will, upon dying, be shown the truth and believe or not believe. Why bother printing a prayer *For Reposed Heterodox*?

His Eminence quotes many sources that speak about the destruction of the power of Hades, but not even one source speaks about an *assumed future* preaching of our Lord in Hades. Even the title *Awake Sleeper* does not refer to any future preaching in Hades. When St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: *Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ will enlighten thee* (Eph 5:14), he was not speaking of Hades, but was exhorting the Ephesians to pay attention and *walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour* (Eph 5:2).

If we were to take Metropolitan Ephraim's teaching of salvation in Hades to its logical conclusion, we would come to ask, *why then did our Lord become man?* All of us simply could wait to die and then our Lord would reveal Himself to us and we could choose to be with Him. If this applies to Methodist ministers, then it applies to everyone.

There are many enemies of our Church who look to distort what our clergy say. We must use extreme caution when we speak on the Faith. Our sermons and articles should bolster the faith of this and future generations of faithful and proclaim the teachings of the Holy Fathers to all those who may benefit. We look to our Hierarchs to guide us. Silence does not benefit us in matters of the Faith.