

From: Fr. Constantine Parr
Subject: Open Response to "Awake Sleeper"
Date: December 15, 2009 6:10:45 PM PST
To:

Dear Metropolitan Ephraim,

Master Bless!

As a convert from a heterodox (Episcopalian) sect, I am deeply disturbed in the content of your recently distributed paper titled "Awake, Sleeper". I, with prayerful and heartfelt effort desired and sought out the truth. I found that truth in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church that is Orthodoxy. Nowhere in the process of my catechumenate, private study, preparation for ordination did I encounter anyone who claimed to be legitimately Orthodox teach as you do in this treatise regarding salvation of those outside the Church.

Saint Paul wrote that we "see through a glass, darkly" and "know in part" (1Cor 13:12) concerning certain spiritual things and I am afraid that you have attempted to pierce the veil of what has been left to mystery and have drifted into rationalism by speculating with too much detail concerning things that the Holy Fathers have not delved into.

In "Awake, Sleeper" you make the claim that, "*Essentially, what Saint Philaret (and the Church Fathers) say is that, in order to judge mankind fairly, our Saviour will **give every person who ever lived** on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching. Whether this happens while the person is still living or in Hades — whenever it happens — he or she will have the opportunity to make that choice.*"

In all fairness it must be said that the quotes you provided in "Awake, Sleeper" in order to assert your claims were truncated and taken out of context. Even your very use of an abbreviated quote from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians for the title of "Awake, Sleeper," was misleading and inappropriate. Your article was about the reposed and, according to Saint John Chrysostom, Ephesians 5:14 refers to those who in this life are "dead in sin." To quote from Saint John's Homily 18 on Ephesians:

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee" (Eph 5:14).

By the "sleeper" and the "dead," he means the man that is in sin; for he both exhales noisome odors like the dead, and is inactive like one that is asleep, and like him he sees nothing, but is dreaming, and forming fancies and illusions. Some indeed read, "And thou shalt touch Christ "; but others, "And Christ shall shine Upon thee "; and it is rather this latter. Depart from sin, and thou shalt be able to behold Christ. "For every one that doeth ill, hateth the light, and cometh not to the light." (John iii. 20.) He therefore that doeth it not, cometh to the light.

Now he is not saying this with reference to the unbelievers only, for many of the faithful, no less than unbelievers, hold fast by wickedness; nay, some far more. Therefore to these also it is necessary to exclaim, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee." To these it is fitting to say this also, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matt. xxii. 32.) If then he is not the God of the dead, let us live.

[See <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf113.iii.iv.xix.html>]

The quotes you supplied from Saint Ephraim's "Hymns On Paradise" were also misleading. In "Awake, Sleeper," your quotes from the "Hymns On Paradise," jumped from Hymn I Stanza 16 to Hymn 2 Stanzas 10 & 11, thus:

Hymn One

Stanza 16

*May my audacity stretch no further!
But perhaps another will be found who will dare to say:
"When the ignorant and the foolish, who sin unknowingly,
Must undergo punishment as ones guilty,
The Good places them at the foot of Paradise,
Where they graze in those blest grasses to find some small morsel."
Praise be to Thy justice which exalts the victorious!*

Hymn Two

Stanza 10

*When He fashioned Paradise, He made there a diversity of beauty,
For the splendor of one degree is greatly surpassed by the next;
And further, as one degree is higher than another.
Thus He allocated the nether region to those below,
The middle region to those of the middle degree, and the summit to the most exalted.
Blest is He, Who being pierced in His side, removed the sword from Paradise!*

Stanza 11

*When the righteous ascend the degrees of Paradise to receive their inheritance,
Then each according to his toil shall be justly raised up,
Being held to that degree of which he was deemed worthy.
Her degrees offer room for all:
Her floor for the repentant, her middle region for the
righteous,
Her heights for the victorious, and her summit for the
Divine Majesty.
Blest is He, Who being pierced in His side, removed the sword from Paradise!*

If one reads Hymn I Stanzas 16 & 17 as they were written one after the other, the context of what Saint Ephraim actually meant becomes clearer:

Hymn I

Stanza 16

*May my audacity stretch no further!
But perhaps another will be found who will dare to say:
When the ignorant and the foolish, who sin unknowingly,
Must undergo punishment as ones guilty,
The Good places them at the foot of Paradise,
Where they graze in those blest grasses to find some small morsel.
Praise be to Thy justice which exalts the victorious!*

Stanza 17

*Even this place, which the citizens of Paradise regard as vile and abhorrent,
Is a cause of hungry yearning and desire for those who are burned in the heart of Gehenna,
And their torment is made twofold by the sight of the fountains
Whose strong voice rises up before them.
The rich man also made entreaty for these, but he found no one to moisten his tongue.
In their midst is fire; before their eyes is water.
Praise be to Thy justice which exalts the victorious!*

By your omission you give the impression that the "foot of Paradise" is somehow inside Paradise, while Hymn 1 Stanza 17 clearly indicates that the "ignorant and foolish" are not "citizens of Paradise" to use the imagery of Saint Ephraim. In fact, Saint Ephraim speaks of a rejection and separation at the beginning of Hymn 2

Hymn 2

Stanza 1

*Blessed is every man who shall be welcomed by Paradise,
Whose door embraces the good man with longing.
She caresses him in her bosom and upon her breast she lulls him with hymns;
By itself her door opens and receives him into her inward parts.
But if that door should feel abhorrence for any man, It casts him forth and spurns him.
This is a door of trial, a door that loves men.
Blest is He, Who being pierced in His side, removed the sword from Paradise!*

In his work, *On the Holy and Life-Giving Cross and on the Second Coming and Concerning Love and Almsgiving*, Saint Ephraim speaks of many levels or places of torment. As one informed priest said concerning your paper, "Awake, Sleeper sent visions of Plotinus and Origen dancing through my head."

You also attempted to conscript Saint Philaret as an ally for your new soteriology. For this you supplied no direct quotes from the writings of Saint Philaret. If you are attempting to use the paper written by Saint Philaret in the 1930's titled, "*Will the Heterodox Be Saved?*" It suffices to quote from the conclusion of the paper itself where Saint Philaret says,

With reference to the above question, it is particularly instructive to recall the answer once given to an "inquirer" by the Blessed Theophan the Recluse. The blessed one replied more or less thus: "You ask, will the heterodox be saved ... Why do you worry about them? They have a Saviour, Who desires the salvation of every human being. He will take care of them. You and I should not be burdened with such a concern. Study yourself and your own sins ... I will tell you one thing, however: should you, being Orthodox, and possessing the Truth in its fullness, betray Orthodoxy and enter a different faith, you will lose your soul forever."

Thus, Saint Philaret made allusions to the mercy of God in his paper, but admonished us to trust in God's mercy for the non-Orthodox and not burden ourselves with the details of exactly how God will provide for them.

In your second paper titled, "*More Heat Than Light*," you admitted that your theological speculations "created more heat than light," but then you attacked those that had problems with your assertions and lack of legitimate quotes by writing, "can anyone read English anymore?" Such *ad hominem* (against the person) attacks do not help the discussion.

In this second paper you stated that, “Universalism is the teaching that says that *people will be saved no matter what they believe.*” Once again, this is not entirely true, since there are many variations on Universalism. Origen’s doctrine of *Apokatastasis* is recognized as a form of Universalism and he believed that those who were estranged from God would suffer torment in the next life and, over a long period of time their suffering would free them from sin and instruct them to freely accept God and thus eventually there would be a “restoration of all things.” [See Origen’s *De Principiis*, at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.v.html>]

As mentioned above I left error for the truth. This world is the arena for our salvation. We encounter the truth through the Church and Her witness. All of the work of the Apostles, Fathers, confessors and teachers would be a labor of folly and unnecessary according to your theory is as stated in the centerpiece of the above statement, i.e., that after death, in hades, . . . *our Savior will give every person who ever lived on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching.*

Every person who ever lived? This does teach universalism (and yes I do understand plain English).

Every: All: -- that is, *Universal.*

The Origenists contended that it was appropriate to theologize and speculate about any and all things spiritual and that is precisely what caused them to drift into heresy. We must rely on the consensus of the Holy Fathers who have expounded the revealed truths of our Faith and cannot allow ourselves to fall into rationalistic speculation concerning things that have not been revealed. Your soteriological aberrations have unintentional negative consequences.

Benjamin Franklin is famously quoted as saying, “*As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, ... I have with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts as to his divinity: tho' it is a question I do not dogmatise upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the Truth with less Trouble.*”¹

Upon reading “Awake, Sleeper,” all of the well meaning deists of our own era will be all the more inclined to not seek the Truth in this life and wait until the future age to “know...the truth with less trouble.” This is a pastoral catastrophe.

In your efforts to expound God’s mercy do not contradict His words,
Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because narrow is the gate, and afflicted is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

We can cling to the doctrine of God’s love for mankind. We can accept Saint Ephraim’s teaching that for those who were not united to Christ in this life through ignorance or foolishness there can be consolation of some sort, but the image given is that there is a marked difference between those in Paradise and those outside of Paradise.

“More Heat Than Light” was merely an attempt to justify your original paper. The fact is, your treatise, “Awake, Sleeper,” has harmed the reputation of our Church. You have stepped beyond

¹ Benjamin Franklin’s March 9. 1790 letter to Ezra Stiles.

the boundaries of the Holy Fathers in your unsupported speculations. The appropriate remedy is a clear denunciation of the rationalistic errors that are found in this work from you, along with a declaration of the Orthodox teaching concerning salvation and the limits of what God has revealed to us.

In Christ,

Protopresbyter Constantine Parr