



266. May 1/14, 1979 Prophet Jeremiah

Categories : [Letters](#)

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Dear Father Roman,

CHRIST IS RISEN! Christ is in our midst!

We send our heartfelt congratulations on the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. May God grant you new strength for faithful labors in this holy season!

In your latest church bulletin there is an announcement of a talk by Fr. Lev Puhalo on the Orthodox Christian teaching on life after death." Fr. Lev's recent statements on this subject have upset us and quite a few other people, and I would like to share our feelings with you.

In recent issues of The Tlingit Herald Fr. Lev has put forth the rather startling doctrine that the soul sleeps, or at least is virtually unconscious, without any kind of knowledge or memory, after death, and several times he has indicated that the Orthodox teaching on the "toll-houses" encountered by the soul after death is not to be understood the way it is set forth by the Holy Fathers and in the Lives of Saints, but rather is to be thrown out entirely or re-interpreted as an "allegory." The Tlingit Herald, vol. 6, no. 2, has some rather unkind remarks about those who accept these accounts the way they have been handed down, as if these people are "overturning the clear teachings of the Church," and he even compares such people with Billy Graham and the Protestants. It is evident that in these words he is attacking (among other things) our own series of articles on "The Soul After Death." In private letters from Fr. Lev to other persons, which we have seen, he openly attacks what he calls the "Platina doctrine of the soul," as well as the "un-Orthodox" Jordanville teaching on life after death, and the "ghastly doctrine of Archbishop John Maximovitch" on this subject. In making these attacks he presents such a caricature of the Orthodox teaching on the "toll-houses" and other aspects of life after death (calling them "pagan"), and is so self-confident in dismissing all Patristic writings and Lives of Saints that disagree with his own opinions (calling them "spurious," "suspicious and dubious," or "apocryphal," etc.) that we are very much afraid that he will lead people astray concerning the very important teaching of the Church ;; life after death. When we noticed that both Fr. Nektas' bulletin from Seattle and your own bulletin announced Fr. Levs lectures on this subject, we were dismayed to find that he is receiving support from our parishes in spreading his teaching.

The teaching which he is spreading is not only un-Orthodox itself, it is also filled with a spirit of disrespect for everyone who keeps to the "old teaching" on this subject (whom I suppose he would accuse of being under "Western influence," not seeing how very Western and rationalistic his own teaching is), and what he is doing is to undermine respect for Lives of Saints and other basic



Orthodox sources, at the same time setting himself up as the “interpreter” of these sources for all of us who are not as modern and “sophisticated” as he is. This, to my mind, is something just as bad as what Fr. Schmemmann is doing in the OCA; but we never expected to see such modernism and rationalism in our Russian Church Outside of Russia!

I wonder what we can do about this? Recently Fr. Michael Pomazansky wrote a good article on the “toll-houses” in Orthodox Russia (1979, no. 7) as a direct answer to Fr. Levs attacks, and our own recent article in *The Orthodox Word* on this subject covers about the same material as Fr. Michael’s article. We thought that after seeing such articles Fr. Lev would stop and at least acknowledge that he had not looked carefully enough at all the Orthodox sources on this subject; but alas, he continues to confuse people and insist that he knows how to “interpret” these sources, and that the rest of us are anti-Orthodox, Protestants, etc.

We have no desire whatever to enter into a public debate with Fr. Lev on this subject, which we think would only confuse and upset people all the more; but what can be done to restrain his spreading of disrespect for Orthodox sources, as well as his setting himself up as an authority on questions which he obviously has not studied well? It is true enough that the question of life after death is one that is rather complex and involves images that sometimes are not to be taken “literally” (our own article on the “toll-houses” discusses this point—*Orthodox Word* #83, pp. 247-249); but Fr. Lev unfortunately uses this as an excuse to “throw the baby out with the bath-water,” and this can only have a bad effect on those who trust his words.

These are the feelings of both Father Herman and myself on this subject, and I am writing this at least to make you aware of them. I don’t know if practically you will be able to do anything about this situation; Fr. Lev himself seems so emotional about his opinions that I wonder if he will be restrained even by his best friends. I would be glad to hear your comments on all this.

Please pray for Fr. Herman. God willing, he is already on Mt. Athos, but we still worry that he will not be allowed to enter. Please give my greetings to Matuskha.

With love in Christ,
Unworthy Hieromonk Seraphim

P.s. Please pray also for our missionary labors here. Just in the last year we have been able to begin missionary parishes in Redding and Etna, Calif., and Medford and Woodburn, Oregon (three of them English parishes, and the last one Russian). Just last weekend Fr. Alexey Young was ordained priest to take care of Etna and Medford. We all feel very strongly the difficulties of preaching true Orthodoxy in these terrible times, but we also see very clearly Gods help in our humble labors.