



“The Ultimate Guaranty of Truth”: God and His Word¹

*by His Grace,
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IT HAS BEEN very aptly observed that the passage from the Acts of the Apostles² which is read at the commemoration of the three hundred eighteen Holy and God-bearing Fathers of the First Œcumenical Synod in Nicæa

has a theological density and a perduring timeliness that render it a cornerstone of the whole of the teaching of the Apostles and, by extension, of the teaching of the Church throughout the ages.³

In his celebrated oration to the Shepherds of the Church in Ephesus, the Holy Apostle Paul prophesies (“for I know”) that the local Church will be assailed by heretics (“men speaking perverse things”), who will provoke schisms (“to draw away disciples after them”).

These heretics and schismatics will come forth, the Holy Apostle stresses, from among yourselves, from you, the Bishops appointed by God (“of your own selves shall [they] arise”), and the fall of these Shepherds will be not only most tragic, but also most perilous for the Church, for her inner identity, and for her soteriological mission.

Since, therefore, not even Bishops are exempt from a “fall from within [the Body of the Church],” St. Paul’s firm exhortation, “Therefore

¹ Translated from “«Τὸ ὕστατο ἐχέγγυο τῆς ἀληθείας» ‘Ο Θεὸς καὶ ὁ λόγος Του” in *Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐνστασις καὶ Μαρτυρία*, Series 3, Number 2, April-June 2008, pp. 3-4.

² Acts 20:16-18, 28-36.

³ Archbishop Stylianos of Australia, *Στὸ Περιθώριο τοῦ Διαλόγου* (1980-1990) [On the Peripheries of Dialogue (1980-1990)] (Athens: Ekdoseis “Domos,” 1991), p. 79.

watch,”⁴ assumes pan-ecclesiastical dimensions; that is, it is directed both to the Shepherds and to the flock.

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THE FAITHFUL bear an equal responsibility before the Truth and ought likewise not relax their vigilance or have blind confidence in their Shepherds; indolence and spiritual drowsiness have no place in the Living Body of Christ.

For this reason, “the Orthodox Christian should always seek with perspicacity the dividing line that separates Orthodoxy from heterodoxy; and one’s concern in this instance should be all the more deep and intense, since he is dealing with a matter of eternal life and salvation.”⁵

The spiritual content of the injunction “Watch!” pertains not just to the safeguarding of our personal integrity from the machinations of unclean spirits through our passions, but also to the safeguarding of Apostolic and ecclesiastical Tradition, since right Faith and Truth are identical with salvation.

Prayer, as a personal and collective exercise in the Church, as a fountain of—and pathway to—purification, illumination, and deification, cannot be permitted to function at the cost of attentiveness to the integrity of the Faith and the integrity of those who transmit that Faith.

The charismatic life in Orthodoxy has always been indissolubly bound up with charismatic zeal for the preservation of the sacred legacy of Orthodoxy, and it is because of this connection that the Confessors of our Faith have always been *par excellence* monastics.

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CONSEQUENTLY, a crucial question arises: If even Shepherds are subject to “falls,” to heresy and apostasy, does this entail some “sense of general insecurity” within the Church? If such is the case, what, for the faithful, should be “the ultimate guaranty of Truth”?⁶

The Holy Apostle Paul is crystal-clear in his response: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His Grace.”⁷ I com-

⁴ Acts 20:31.

⁵ Archbishop Stylianos, *Στὸ Περιθώριο τοῦ Διαλόγου*, p. 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷ Acts 20:32.

mend you to God and to the word which His Grace has revealed to us. This word of His will safeguard you from every error and deviation.

The word that derives from revelation is for the Church a foundation and a yardstick: God, through the word of His Grace as it is revealed to us in the sacred texts of the Church (Biblical, Synodal, and Patristic), constitutes for the faithful the ultimate guaranty of Truth, grounds us unshakeably in the Body of Christ, and guides us unerringly to the “inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”⁸

Therefore, for the God-Bearing Paul, the highest and sole hope and, at the same time, our totally infallible criterion of Truth is God Himself and His word, which authoritatively judges, assays, and appraises the theologies, the theories, and the actions of the fallen ecumenists, who in our age speak and do perverse things.

Absolute fidelity, in deed and word, to this ultimate guaranty of Truth demonstrates who is truly keeping watch in the Holy Spirit....

*May 26, 2008 (Old Style)
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⁸ *Ibid.*