

Our Responsibilities Towards Others

“and the Lord said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.' To the others He said in my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.'” (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

Thus has the Lord equated with evil doers all those who were not concerned about the sins of people or do not sigh and cry over all the abominations of the sinners! He subsequently permitted sentencing them to death.

Woe to us then if we do not become concerned about sinners nor moan and groan day and night before God in sadness and tears as our forefathers had done and were delivered. We need to cry painstakingly for a sinner as if he is the only child. Woe to us if instead of wailing and beseeching for those who are hastening along the path of destruction, we remain satisfied with our own salvation closing our eyes and deafening our ears in order not to see or hear the number of those who perish daily in the arms of drug dealers and sex. We recklessly detour our minds trying to perfect playing the role of the Good Samaritan while being worse than the priest and the Levi.

Consequently our God calls us through the prophet Joel declaring, *“Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord”* (Joel 1:14).

God makes us responsible for sinners by saying *“I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth”* (Isaiah 62:6-7).

One might say, “Who am I to guard the church and the world? How would millions benefit from the prayers of a sinner? This task is beyond the human power. Is not it the job of heaven?” But the Word of God responds with Elijah’s experience *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit”* (James 5:17-18). Would then heaven respond regarding rain for the sake of vegetation and lactation but disregard prayers for the sake of human salvation and eternal life?

+ There is no salvation for us unless we feel responsible for the salvation of others. How can we feel comfortable within us while our brethren have no rest? Besides, God warns us that *“And if*

you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?" (Luke 16:12).

+ Here is the secret of the agonized prayer that Jesus Christ has founded in Gethsemane so that it might become the live setting for carrying the cross; because there is no cross without Gethsemane. Whoever has accepted to become a disciple of the Savior and embarked upon carrying the cross has first and foremost to accrue Gethsemane (the meaning of which is 'oil presser') wherein to practice the prayer of blood sweat in order to reach the level of the cross.

When the hour came after the conspiracy had been completed, and the price of the treachery agreed upon and received by the traitor, Jesus Christ entered Gethsemane to pour Himself agonizingly in prayer, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me"* (Matthew 26:38). It seems as if He had entered the cross before time, piercing the nails in His body with His own hands.

How amazing is our Savior who teaches us to reach death willingly through bleeding prayer! *"And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Luke 22:44). Jesus Christ entered the garden as if entering a presser. His soul was literally compressed and His sweat mixed with blood. He faced that temptation in bitter cries and bending of the knees to dust. Every time He rose up He did so to entreat His disciples to be watchful in order to receive the mystery of Redemption.

+ In Gethsemane, through the squeezing prayers, the prayers of struggling, Jesus Christ has instituted a city of refuge. Listen to Him saying, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful"* (Matthew 26:38) through the grieving prayers He entered into the depth of the cross and death. Through hardships and terrible wailing and tears His sweat turned voluntary into drops of blood. This is the secret of the Gethsemane prayers, the secret of victory over death. Would He fear death, the One who, through His prayers had reached death? Would He fear the cross, the One who, through His bending anguish, have attained the bleeding of death?

We do not enter Gethsemane for our sake. Did Jesus Christ struggle and sweat for His own sake? Fellowship with Jesus Christ's pain and anguish starting at Gethsemane down to the grave passing by all the incidents of the cross is the best heritage to those who are concerned with the salvation of others, burdened with the destiny of sinners, weakened in their bodies and robbed of sleep for the sake of the deprived, the belittled, and the outcast. Those are the ones who have accepted the honor of completing the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ in their bodies and souls for the sake of the church.

+ Yes to the ones Jesus Christ has instituted the painful, tearful model of the soul wringing Gethsemane prayer so that they might have a chance to be heard for their righteousness and have their case justified by the Lord who would save with His mighty arm those for whom they have been praying and supplicating. Joel commands, *"Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, 'Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"* (Joel 2:17).

+ How would we strive in a pressing and compressing prayer for the sake of souls we do not know the value thereof nor does their life or death concern us?

No one would feel the value of the human soul and get anxious about its loss except the one who has the spirit of Jesus Christ; and he who does not have the spirit of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is not his.

+ Our prayer in Gethsemane secures testimony before Pontius Pilate, guarantees victory on the cross, encourages the disciples and the far and near congregation. This is the route of the cross designed by our Lord in Gethsemane and the best one to follow in our time.

Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century

The Thirteenth Article

The Illegal Council of Tyre

Complaints to Emperor Constantine from the Arians against Pope Athanasius increased. In the year 334, in the city of Tyre, the Arian and Meletian so called bishops convened a council with the one unified intention of destroying the reputation of St. Athanasius before his people and arousing the ruling power against him. However, that council is considered illegal by all measures because it included followers of Miletus and Arius the heretics, who had been excommunicated during the ecumenical Nicene Council and remained so even during the Council of Tyre. At first, Pope Athanasius chose not to attend, but under the pressure of the Emperor's royal command he was forced to do so. Along with fifty bishops among whom the apologetic Bishop Younamon and the apologetic Bishop Pafnotious, Pope Athanasius courageously defended his Orthodox faith ignoring all the personal offenses and allegations. Unfortunately the number of the Arian bishops outnumbered the Orthodox ones. They offended the pope extensively and presented against him many allegations among which were the main four grievous charges: murder, rape, treason and defiling of consecrated utensils. Each time God would rescue him in a divine manner.

Here is a summary of the Council of Tyre false charges based on the book of the historian Theodoret:

Firstly: the Arians falsely accused Pope Athanasius of having installed himself ruler over Egypt and imposing a new tax for the sake of increasing the church's income and furnishing the clergy

with linen tunics. This charge got nullified by the two priests who had just arrived from Alexandria in Constantinople.

Secondly: Pope Athanasius was falsely accused for having offered assistance to Emperor Constantine's former enemy who wanted to usurp Egypt to pronounce it a country independent from the empire. The pope's presence and his self-defense nullified the charge.

Thirdly: The rape accusation was destroyed in a unique way. A woman came in during the convened council and in a loud unashamed voice allegedly accused Pope Athanasius of having defiled her purity and virginity which she supposedly had decided to consecrate for God. Pope Athanasius' disciple came forth and addressing the woman as if he were the pope, interrogated her whether he was the one who came to her house. She, not knowing who was who, replied flagrantly and more loudly "Yes you are the one who have robbed me of my virginity and defiled my purity." With this false testimony the accusers were defeated and embarrassed.

Fourthly: Pope Athanasius tried to convince them of the injustice in sending the woman off without inquiring about the true molester. But to cover up for their shame they presented him with yet another grievous criminal act of murder. They brought in a box in which they had put a mutilated, preserved human arm which they falsely claimed to belong to someone by the name of Arsenius who had been allegedly murdered and his body cut up in pieces. However, the accusation did not hold long because it was obvious to the attendants that the charge was a fake and false one. Pope Athanasius asked them whether anyone of them knew Arsenius in person. Some claimed they knew him very well. Then the pope ordered for Arsenius to come in. Arsenius' both arms still intact revealed the false allegation. Then Pope Athanasius derogatorily addressed his accusers saying "do not look for a third arm because God has created man with two arms only." Instead of being ashamed those Arian bishops shouted loudly "this is magic...Athanasius is a sorcerer." Those unashamed bishops, who conspired with the man called Arsenius, were so indignant that they wanted to kill him.

Fifthly: Though after thorough investigation the case of Ischyrras had been dismissed once before the emperor and another time before thirteen priests in Alexandria who had recorded his written confession and repentance; nevertheless, the Arians and Meletians defiantly presented this case at the Council of Tyre; and in sarcasm of Pope Athanasius they depicted as a basilica (big church) the hut in which Ischyrras had lived at his poor village 'Irene' located on Maria lake. Thus they convicted Pope Athanasius that he had defiled the church breaking the Eucharist cup, tumbling over the wooden table and burning the holy books.

Pope Athanasius contended before the council that Ischyrras was not a lawful priest; nor was there any church in that village. He further clarified that he personally did not meet with him. It was the monk Macarius who visited him (not on a Sunday) only to find him sick lying in bed in his hut made from straw. It was then that Ischyrras withdrew his charges against Pope Athanasius and wrote his confession declaring that he had conspired with the Arian bishops.

The End of the Illegal Council of Tyre

The sessions continued with exchanging accusations more vehemently and aggressively. The most prominent charge against Pope Athanasius was the alleged rude and merciless treatment of his opponents; and that he had beaten and imprisoned some of the Meletian bishops who had opposed his supposed unlawful ordination as pope and that he, by the power of the police had dethroned the Arian bishop of Pilozuim (then El Pharma east of Port Fouad) and installed another one in his place.

The Arians continued in their chaotic behavior and insisted on sending an investigating convoy of six Arians and Meletians together with Ischyrras while they kept Macarius. In doing so, their intention was to gain more time for more conniving and conspiring. On the other hand, Count Dionysius, though not totally approving of that procedure, yet was supportive of it because of the pope's denial of its legality. Suffice that both Ischyrras and Macarius were present at the council and they could have been interrogated about that already very old case.

Pope Athanasius was helpless before the judges' prejudice. All the Egyptian bishops' appeals, raised before Eusebius the chairman of the Council and before Dionysius the general consul in charge of the judiciary, were lost. Also, the contentions raised by Alexandros, Bishop of Thessalonica and his exposure of the conspiracy and all its threads, woven by the Arians and the Meletians together, were fruitless. Unfortunately the voices of the Arians were louder and stronger than that of Dionysius the ruler.

Thus the illegal Council of Tyre ended. Both the chairman Eusebius together with Count Dionysius, the emperor's deputy in charge of the Council presented a report to the Emperor explaining all that had taken place during the meetings.