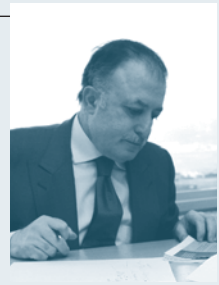


The Tent Part 7



I was a member of the Court of Illicit Wealth since 1953. The media published cases of corruption but no one was indicted. The political system does not want to fight corruption.

(Abdel-Baset Ghandour (1924 – 2008), former Chief of the Judicial Investigation Committee)

A presiding judge decided to tell his views of what is happening with the Lebanese Judiciary or the so-called “Palace of Justice”, or for our purpose the tent of Justice. The following is an abridged version of what he said:

“It has been generally assumed that the pillars of wisdom are seven, but we all know that justice is the only pillar that can hold a society together. That’s how it is in Plato’s Republic. Societies and states that do not aspire, strive or even pretend to seek justice are doomed. To be a good judge in Lebanon is a constant challenge. Politicians, bankers, friends and relatives create impediments that obstruct the course of justice. But the worst of all are the colleagues who fail to do their job; and here we have four specimens:

The first judge adores money and fame and is not ashamed to say that “Christian aristocrats” must not be prosecuted. He is now content and secure that those “aristocrats” are now in alliance with the “Sunni aristocrats”.

The second allows others to take advantage of his wisdom and knowledge in legal affairs.

The third is busy serving the first and second judges, hoping that they will recommend him for a higher position; and in the meantime, he is fostering his relations with banks and financial and insurance companies.

The fourth judge, unwilling to compromise his conscience and unable to make a difference, he has taken a pause.

“The first white man to visit the Eskimo was thought to be a god; but at night, when he asked for a woman to sleep with, they knew he was nothing but a dirty old man,” said Sa’id Taqieddine⁽¹⁾. In Lebanon such dirty old and young men are numerous, but should they be allowed to roam in the Judiciary?

What if our judges had the courage of Martin Luther King and announced their dream for change?

What if the first judge proclaims that money and power are not eternal?

What if the second judge refuses to sell his wisdom for the highest bidder?

What if the third judge said that he would rather retire poor than become a rich and unjust man?

And what if the fourth judge said that he will bring to justice the corrupt clerics and politicians from all confessions?

What if Italy’s Operation Clean Hands was implemented in Lebanon?

Let us imagine that suddenly, judges and citizens decide to do the following:

- ⊙ Challenge and abolish amnesty laws
- ⊙ Abolish confessional civil status laws
- ⊙ Implement the Illicit Wealth Law
- ⊙ Uphold Human Rights laws
- ⊙ Resolve all pending cases
- ⊙ Hold the directors of a company which violates environmental and consumer laws personally accountable

This list can go on...

It is time for wise judges to dream, decide and save themselves as well as their country. We are only human and suffer, like the rest, from fear of persecution, the constant strive for a higher position, as well as greed and desperation; but we can make a difference.

These were the thoughts that crossed my mind at the funeral of Abdel-Baset Ghandour and in his memory.”

Yes, it takes one judge to light a candle.

Jawad N. Adra

⁽¹⁾ Lebanese writer (1904-1960)