

In a society with conflicting claims for justice, whose 'justice' should stand? This is the dilemma in Omelas. The rights of many are elevated at the cost of one's misery. But here's the legal challenge: Invoking the due process clause may not work because it appears their people have affirmed the child's agony prima facie. But what will true advocates of justice do knowing their comforts rely on one person's unjust suffering? Behind the grandiose city are three dark clouds of ideologies:

First, the problem of those who stay. They immerse themselves in the images of their festivals until the bitter image of the tortured child is vanquished. They numb their hearts in the sensations of pleasures. They soak in charivari to repress the deafening silence. This dark ideology is not to "throw away the happiness of thousands..." at the cost of one 'small' injustice. This is called the 'greater good' ideology. It sounds noble sometimes but it undercuts the motivation for redemptive opposition. It generates apathy. It promotes that some putative evil is necessary for the greater good. It promotes wanton destruction. It downplays individual human suffering being offered at the altar of the common good. Such ideology leads to ethical paralysis.

Second, the problem of those who walked away. They processed and lamented but turned their backs to a mission. This is esoteric abandonment. They "walked ahead into the darkness" but did not scream against the darkness in Omelas. They let the dark cloud of this ideology shatter their inner conscience. For them, it was easier to retreat and ignore the confusion rather than to try to wrestle for a proper response.

Third, the evasive authority that no one dares to question. Note that "there was no king" and "no monarchy" but the citizens fear 'that day and hour when all the prosperity would be destroyed.' Who will destroy it? Who was in charge of this "city... bright-towered by the sea?" Who is this Big Brother? Who is this unspoken nemesis? He is the Respondent to this case. Knowing the respondent is critical to any legal battle. This person must be known so that petitioners can address the issue properly, argue, discuss, fight, pray, and lay down their pleadings in legal, moral, or philosophical forms.

How could battle be won? Action. Sadly, no one dared to move from the numbing ecstasy and lament to advocacy. To make bold acts of engagement animated with the vision of universal justice and emancipation such as: To empower others through speeches, writings, and ethical action; To have the audacity to question the Respondent through forms of pleas and prayers; To keep knocking; To expose moral incoherence; To cry out not merely as catharsis but to break the chains of injustice. Movement - the extralegal people movement - are weapons that no one dared to use.

Above all, these dark ideologies must be conquered by a greater ideology. There needs to be an enduring ideology so empowering that will animate action - an ideology that grants equal rights to the child and will compel the Big Brother Respondent to end its suffering. I submit that it's the theology of Imago Dei, the genesis of human rights. I submit that theology is the queen of all ideologies and sciences. It empowered the emancipatory civil rights movements of the past such as Martin Luther King's. "We are God's children", "all are made in God's image" and "all are created equal" are words that raised an army of nations. The child bears the image of the Creator, thus he must be freed. But why isn't this happening in Omelas? "One thing there is none in Omelas is guilt", the "unrestrained drug use" and "orgies" give a hint as to their moral condition. Could Omelas have erased the concept of God in their system? Or replaced him? Isn't this the tactic of autocratic regimes - to erase the concept of a Higher Being? Have they forgotten him, that's why they only resorted to suicidal abandonment? Is Omelas only heaven as to architecture but hell as to justice? Could there be justice without morality? Morality without revelation? Emancipatory revelation for all men without imago Dei?

Like Omelas, what excuses do we rehearse in ourselves to justify the suffering of the few for the "greater good"? What pleasures drown our guilt? What power dynamics drive us away? Do we have the audacity to question? To act? What are we afraid to lose? What ideology empowers us to act, to raise our voice, to challenge the comfortable? We may not be in Omelas but Omelas may be in us.