

Hail to the New FLP Scholars and Winners¹

Retired Chief Justice Artemio V. Panganiban

Two “de campanilla” lawyers were lamenting how stupid their drivers were. So as not to lose the flavor of their conversation, I will quote it in its original Filipino.

Tale of Two Drivers and Their Bosses

Said the first lawyer, “Itong bago kong tsuper, napakatanga. Kahapon, sabi ko sa kanya, ‘Pumunta ka sa opisina ko at tingnan mo kung naroroon ako.’ Aba eh, humarurot ng takbo, iniwan ako, pumunta nga sa opisina at pagbalik niya nireport na wala daw ako doon.” (My new driver is so stupid. Yesterday, I told him, ‘Please go to my office and see if I am there.’ Well, he immediately scampered, left me, went to my office and when he returned he reported I was absent.”)

The other lawyer retorted, “Pare, walang kwenta yan. Mas tanga ang tsuper ko. Sabi ko sa kanya, “Ito ang isang libong piso. Pumunta ka sa Toyota at bumili ka ng kotse. Aba eh, iniwan ako agad, sumakay ng taxi at pumunta nga sa Toyota dealer sa kanto ng Roxas Boulevard at EDSA.” (“Friend, that is nothing. My driver is worse. I told him. ‘Here is one thousand pesos. Go to Toyota and buy me a car.’ Well, he immediately left me, took a cab and went to the Toyota dealer at the corner of Roxas Boulevard and EDSA.”)

Thank you for laughing at this story. But you have heard only one side. Let us accord due process to the drivers. Before condemning them, let us hear them first. Said the first driver, “Akala ko napakarunong nitong amo kong abogado. Aba eh, tanga pala. Kasi inutusan akong pumunta sa opisina niya upang tingnan kung naroon siya. Mayroon

¹ Closing remarks during the Awarding Ceremonies for the new 2017-2018 scholars and winners of the 2017-2018 Dissertation Writing Contest of the Foundation for Liberty and Prosperity held on March 23, 2018 at the Ateneo de Manila Professional Schools Auditorium at Rockwell Center in Makati City.

naman siyang cell phone. Sana tumawag na lang siya. At hindi na sana ako napagod!" ("I thought my boss was so smart. Well, I found out he is stupid. Look. He ordered me to rush to his office to see if he was there. He has a cell phone. He should just have called his office and I would not have been uselessly exhausted.")

The other driver retorted, "Pare, walang kuwenta yan. Mas tanga yong amo ko. Aba eh, binigyan ako ng isang libong piso at pinapunta ako sa Toyota upang bumili ng kotse. Kung hindi ba naman tanga, eh, hindi man lang sinabi kung anong kulay ang kotseng gusto niya!" ("Friend, that is nothing. My boss is more stupid. Imagine, he gave me one thousand pesos and ordered me to go to Toyota to buy him a car. If he is not so stupid, he should have specified the color of the car he wanted.")

Board of Judges for Scholars

After granting due process to the parties, what is your objective and independent judgment? Who is more stupid, the bosses or the drivers? I will allow you sufficient time to think about that pivotal question. Meanwhile, let me proceed to my assigned task of thanking the people behind our two projects, the Scholarship Program and the Dissertation Writing Contest.

Let us clap our hands and join me in saying "thank you" to Acting CJ Antonio T. Carpio, the longest serving current member of the Supreme Court, chairman of the Court's Second Division and the foremost advocate of our sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea. We owe him at least two things – first, as our guest of honor and speaker, for the wisdom he shared with us this afternoon and second, as the patient and distinguished chairman of the Board of Judges for the 2017-2018 FLP Law Scholarship Contest, for taking time out, together with the other judges, to interview each of the scholarship applicants at the Division Conference Rooms of the Supreme Court.

These rooms constitute the sacred inner sanctum of the temple of justice in our country where only the justices are allowed entry when they deliberate and decide Division cases. No secretaries, clerks or aides dare enter these rooms when the justices perform their rituals and duties. This is indeed a great privilege for our scholars, who even before passing the bar examinations were already allowed entry to the Supreme Court's inner sanctum.

Along with the acting CJ, we also applaud the four other equally hard-working judges who were already recognized earlier, but who I am still honored to call: former Education Secretary Edilberto C. de Jesus, who is also a former president of and a retired professor at the Asian Institute of Management, where my dear wife Leni taught together with him for 37 years; he is also president of the Far Eastern University, where I took up my basic law degree; Dean Sedfrey M. Candelaria of the Ateneo de Manila Law School, the incumbent president of the Philippine Association of Law Schools and one of the holders of the Chief Justice Panganiban Professorial Chairs; Ms. Elizabeth T. Alba, an executive of the Tan Yan Kee Foundation; and Companero Joel Emerson J. Gregorio, consultant of the Asian Development Bank and a trustee of the FLP.

Board of Judges for Dissertation Contest

Let me also sincerely thank Justice Presbitero J. Velasco Jr., the second longest-serving member of the Supreme Court, the chairman of the Court's Third Division and most important to us, the chairman of the Board of Judges for the Dissertation Writing Contest. Both he and Acting CJ Carpio were my contemporaries and were already serving the highest court of the land when I was the incumbent Chief Justice.

Together with Justice Velasco, we also hail the four other members of the Board of Judges for the Dissertation Writing Contest, Sec. de Jesus, Dean Candelaria, Companero Solomon M. Hermosura, the indefatigable general counsel of Ayala Corporation, and law Professor Tanya Lat, our esteemed FLP executive vice-president.

May I also publicly thank the Tan Yan Kee Foundation for generously funding our Scholarship Program? The foundation is named after the father of tycoon Lucio C. Tan. His group of companies adopted the TYK Foundation as the main outlet of its corporate social responsibility. From a holistic commitment framework, the TYK Foundation targets education, culture and sports, health and social welfare including environmental concerns, research, and manpower development.

I extend equal thanks to the Ayala Corporation for generously funding, and encouraging the FLP to sponsor the Dissertation Contest. When I advised Ayala Chairman Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala of this unique contest to provide content and substance to our advocacy for liberty and prosperity under the rule of law, he immediately and unhesitatingly agreed to fund the project, as an extra addition to Ayala's normal budget for philanthropy.

Hail to the FLP Scholars

I also greet, congratulate and thank the 21 scholars, the worthy recipients of this school year's grant. They come from all over the country, from the University of the Cordilleras in Northern Luzon, to the major law schools in Metro Manila, to the University of San Carlos and the University of Cebu in the Visayas, to the St. Thomas More College in Mindanao.

The scholars have been introduced earlier, but may I ask them and their parents to rise once more to be recognized: (for third year) Leo Francis Abot (Ateneo de Manila), John Anthony Almerino (University of San Carlos), Arvin Paolo Cortez (Ateneo de Manila), Mikael Gabrielle Ilaog (University of the Cordilleras), Kenneth Glenn Manuel (UST), King Anthony Perez (University of Cebu), Josiah David Quising (FEU), Jun Dexter Rojas (PUP), Julianne Therese Salvacion (San Beda - Manila) and Ma. Vida Malaya Villarico (PUP).

Fourth year: Karina Mae Badua (UST), Sean James Borja (Ateneo de Manila), Kaycelle Ann Castillo (FEU), Ervin Fredrick Dy (UP), Rexlyn Anne Evora (PUP), Katrina Monica Gaw (Ateneo de Manila), Nigel Carmelo Reago (De La Salle University), Jose Angelo Tiglao (De La Salle University), Summerson Macasarte (St. Thomas More), Althea Vergara (University of San Carlos), and Vanessa Gloria Vergara (Ateneo de Manila).

Allow me also to felicitate and hail once more the winners of our Dissertation Writing Contest: First Place and Grand Champion, Rafael Lorenzo Pangalangan of the Oxford University and University of the Philippines; Second Place, Tess Marie Tan of the University of San Carlos, who by the way was also the recipient of an FLP scholarship grant last school year; and the four other finalists, Rexlyn Anne Evora (Polytechnic University of the Philippines), Helen May Frias (Far Eastern University), Janine Faye A. Napoles (Centro Escolar University), and Joben Mariz Odulio (Ateneo de Manila University).

Incidentally, apart from the cash and plaque given to the scholars and dissertation winners, they also received two books that are no longer available in the books stores. The first is titled "Summa" which is a syllabi of all the over 1,200 full length decisions I wrote while I was sitting in the Supreme Court, and the second titled "With Due Respect" which is the first volume of the collection of my columns in the Philippine

Daily Inquirer. After its publication in 2012, it ranked third in the Amazon best seller list in the courts category, outranked only by the books of veteran legal author and CNN legal consultant Jeffrey Toobin (first place) and US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia (second place).

Relevant to our dissertation winners, during the last hearing of the Senate Committee on Public Information chaired by Sen. Grace Poe a few days ago, the liabilities of Internet intermediaries like Facebook was raised. The televised discussion reminded me of the timely treatise on the same topic of Tess Marie Tan, which as you already know, won the second place in our Dissertation Writing Contest. Thus, I will feature her piece in my column this Sunday, March 25, in the Philippine Daily Inquirer. In turn, I will write about Raphael Lorenzo Pangalangan's winning dissertation on the following Sunday, April 1, 2018. Abangan po ninyo.

Expectations from Scholars, Winners

Ladies and gentlemen, all our scholarship recipients and dissertation winners were chosen on strict merit. Only in case of a tie was the candidates' social status or financial plight considered, with the less-privileged candidates preferred. The main objective of the contests is to augment existing literature on the FLP's core philosophy of liberty and prosperity under the rule of law.

For this reason, all the scholars and winners are expected to be models, now and later in their professional careers, of the FLP's advocacy that we all need both justice and jobs, freedom and food, ethics and economics, peace and development, liberty and prosperity; that these twin beacons must always go together for one is useless without the other; and that the best way to conquer poverty, to create wealth and to share prosperity is to unleash the entrepreneurial genius of our people by granting them the freedom and the tools to help themselves and society.

Before I go any further with my thank yous, let me announce a new exclusive program for all our scholars and dissertation winners and finalists. The FLP will give extra cash awards for each of them who graduates with Latin honors, whether summa, magna or cum laude. Moreover, an even bigger cash prize awaits those who will be among the 10 topnotchers in the forthcoming bar examinations.

After that announcement, let me now hail the Ateneo de Manila Professional Schools for allowing us to use their facilities, especially the Ateneo Auditorium where we are holding these Awarding Ceremonies. Finally, I thank all of you ladies and gentlemen for attending today's ceremonies and for your enthusiastic claps and cheers.

To show our appreciation, I invite all of you to a simple merienda at the lobby outside this auditorium. Let us break bread and toast our scholars and winners, even as we wish our fourth year scholars and winners good luck during their graduation and forthcoming bar exams. Mabuhay!