

2006

Exceptional Youth Leader Award

Presented to:

Ma. Teresa Pangilinan

for showing us the moral and intellectual courage
the country needs in these times of national despair, when democracy
is under siege and the truth is buried under a pile of lies and deceit



*Awarded on April 26, 2006 by:
PhilippineUpdate.com
Talsik.com*

There's The Rub: Thank God for Theresa Pangilinan!

By Conrado de Quiros
Inquirer

IF YOU'VE begun to despair about this country recovering its wit and grit, its moral thunder and physical courage, despair no more. Maria Theresa Pangilinan has just shown us there's still hope for this country. Indeed, she has just shown us that Jose Rizal was right: The youth is the hope of the fatherland, or motherland, however it is called politically correctly these days.

Pangilinan, in case you don't already know (in which case your head must now be a permanent fixture of the sand from having been buried there too long), is the graduate of Cavite State University who shouted "Patalsikin si Gloria" and held up a banner that said, "No to Cha-cha!" ["No to Charter change!"] while Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was delivering a speech during their graduation. She was joined by several other students before they were silenced by cops and the Presidential Security Group. "Huwag kayong mambastos!" ["Don't be insolent!"], Police Superintendent Roberto Soriano ordered.

Their outburst stunned Arroyo who stopped talking for a while. She had just been telling the students about the importance of mastering English to land jobs in the Cavite economic zone. She subsequently recovered her composure and went on to finish her speech.

Pangilinan, the president of the Central Student Government, was later allowed to go on stage to get her diploma. She shook hands with Arroyo, but as the pictures on our front page showed, they studiously avoided looking at each other. Arroyo had on a smile that looked, well, fake.

As "pambabastos," or insolence, goes, Pangilinan's insolence ranks pretty close to the one Edgar Jopson showed 36 years ago (has it been that long?) when, during a visit of students to Malacañang, he asked Ferdinand Marcos to put down in writing that he would not run for office again after his second term. The infuriated Marcos ended the meeting abruptly. Jopson and company brought their case to the streets, and soon afterward a series of protests erupted. It would come to be known as the First Quarter Storm. History would show Jopson had every reason to do what he did.

Indeed, as impudence goes, Pangilinan's is nearly the same one the boy in "The Emperor's New Clothes" showed. That story tells of an emperor who agreed to wear magical clothes that only the wisest men and women in his domain could see. On the day the "clothes" were finished, by a con man masquerading as a tailor, the emperor went out to parade his apparent finery. All the spectators, who had lined up on the sides of the street and who did not wish to appear stupid, marveled loudly at the fineness and magnificence of the weave. Until the parade passed by a small boy who shouted, "The emperor is naked! The emperor is naked!" Pangilinan's shouts of "Fake! Fake!" while Arroyo was delivering her speech were not unlike that.

Soriano is right that people should show respect for others, particularly their superiors. He is wrong to address that injunction to Pangilinan and company. Who was insulting whom in that graduation? You are Pangilinan, you will wonder too what credentials your guest speaker has to lecture you on the subject of how best to get ahead in life -- the honest way. You know that you are a reasonably genuine future leader of the community while the person in front of you is an arguably fake current leader of the nation. You know that you at least won your diploma through hard work, the one thing your teachers taught you to value like life, while the person in front of you won the presidency through cheating, the one thing your teachers taught you to loathe like a plague.

Inferior and superior are tricky concepts. They have nothing to do with the trappings of the body, they have to do with the nakedness of the soul. They have nothing to do with positions of power, they have to do with conditions of being. You are Pangilinan, you will know that by all this country holds good and decent and wise, you are not your guest speaker's inferior, you are her superior. You have a right to say, "Huwag po kayong mambabastos."

Less than a month go, I wrote a column where I said that this year's graduations were occasions more for sadness than joy because of one thing. Graduations are normally a time for class valedictorians and guest speakers to talk about youthful idealism and driving oneself to excellence, about nobleness and reaching for things that lie beyond one's grasp. Not today. Today, graduates see all around them only resolute refutations of those beliefs. They see all around them only a world where mediocrity is accepted as a way of life and heroism deemed a folly, where meanness and wrongdoing are taken to be the normal course of things and truth and justice scoffed at as an indulgence. I asked how any graduation could be held this year without its spirit clashing violently with reality.

That the very source of this country's plunge into new lows of spiritual and moral abjectness should present herself as the source of inspiration for the one group of people known to resist gravity, who are the youth, well, what happened in Cavite State University was an embarrassment waiting to happen. That the one person who has taught by her example -- which is the most powerful pedagogy there is; you teach by what you do, not by what you say -- that the best way to get ahead in life is to cheat and the best way to not be found out is to suppress and oppress should deign to impress the one group of people who can still see when emperors are naked, well, what happened in Cavite State University was poetic justice waiting to happen.

Thank God, the kids still have the capacity to discern good and evil. Thank God, the kids still have a lot of wit and grit, light in their minds and fire in their bellies. Thank God for Theresa Pangilinan.