

Correcting the Scales: Strategic Stewardship for Liberty and Prosperity

“Those who have less in life should have more in law.”
- President Ramon Magsaysay

This oft-cited legal adage has long served as a guiding principle for legislators and policymakers in crafting laws and policies intended to favor the people – especially the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Yet today, more than seven decades after President Magsaysay gave life to this grassroots slogan, those people who have less in life continue to have less in law. Concomitantly, those who have more in life now wield not only a greater share of the nation's economic resources but also disproportionate influence over how these resources are allocated and distributed. In light of this reality, one cannot help but wonder: Is the principle that once fervently championed the welfare of the poor still relevant, or even effective, in a world increasingly tainted by pervasive inequality, political instability, and economic uncertainty?

Liberty and Prosperity as Unfulfilled Promises

Growing up in Tacloban City, Leyte, I witnessed firsthand how those who have less in life often continue to have less in law. Tacloban—a city known both for its resilience and its tragedies, especially after the devastation brought about by Typhoon Yolanda—bears the deep and lasting marks of socioeconomic inequality. This reality became even more evident through the research study I conducted during my final year of Senior High School, which focused on informal settlers living in no-build zones (e.g., coastal areas) who were evicted by the local government. Most of the responses from my interviewees revealed that they had been relocated to government resettlement areas without adequate consultation, compensation, or any meaningful discussion of their rights and entitlements—rights that would have allowed them to participate fully in the decision-making process. Even within the relocation sites, disputes over ownership and housing rights arose, yet these families struggled to assert their claims legally, either because they were unaware of their legal options or because they lacked the resources to seek proper legal assistance. Many of the relocated families also relied on informal work for survival and sustenance—as construction workers, market vendors, street hawkers, and fishermen, among others. These workers often faced underpayment, lacked formal contracts, and endured unsafe working conditions. Despite this, they tolerated such injustices, not out of acceptance, but because they

saw no viable means of resisting them. As a result, these issues persist not for lack of laws, but for lack of representation and lack of empowerment.

Pursuing an undergraduate Management degree at the University of the Philippines Tacloban allowed me to deepen my engagement with the community, particularly in understanding the plight of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Tacloban City in times of disasters. In a study I conducted, I found that MSMEs in the city tend to adopt reactive measures, rather than being adequately prepared to face a variety of crises. Moreover, in the face of disasters, notably during the onslaught of Typhoon Yolanda, majority of governmental and private assistance failed to reach the affected MSMEs, severely impeding their ability to develop proactive recovery and adaptation strategies.

This dilemma was further underscored when I was given the opportunity to serve as a delegate to the Harvard College Project for Asian and International Relations (HPAIR) in the year 2021. One of the keynote speakers, Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, emphasized that one of the massive problems experienced by nations is extreme wealth concentration – 99% of the wealth of the world is in the hands of 1% of the population, while 99% of the population has only 1% of the wealth of the world. This stark reality reflects how the current economic system is flawed since it mirrors a mechanism built to benefit only a select few and, in effect, enables them to generate income and accumulate wealth at the expense of the many. It was through these early experiences that my commitment to the philosophy of liberty and prosperity took root — not merely as abstract academic ideals, but as critical tools for survival, empowerment, and human dignity.

Liberty and Prosperity under the Rule of Law

Liberty, prosperity, and the rule of law are not only theoretical beliefs — they are living, breathing imperatives grounded on history, human experience, and the collective aspirations of societies across generations. Liberty is a fundamental right enshrined in Section 1, Article III of the Bill of Rights, which provides that no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law. However, the concept of the right to liberty provides no precise definition and does not delineate its exact metes and bounds. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court in *Rubi v. Provincial Board of Mindoro*¹ emphasized that “the right to liberty guaranteed by the Constitution includes the right to exist and the right to be free from arbitrary

¹ G.R. No. L-14078, March 7, 1919.

personal restraint or servitude. The term cannot be dwarfed into mere freedom from physical restraint of the person of the citizen, but is deemed to embrace the right of man to enjoy the faculties with which he has been endowed by his Creator, subject only to such restraints as are necessary for the common welfare.” Pursuing my law studies at Dr. V. Orestes Romualdez Educational Foundation, Inc. has strengthened my understanding of liberty as a lived experience. The institution, through its various initiatives and academic programs, taught me that liberty is not merely enshrined on paper — it is embodied in discourse, debate, and the relentless pursuit of truth and justice.

Prosperity, meanwhile, refers to the condition of being prosperous, successful, or thriving.² It transcends mere accumulation of economic wealth as it encompasses holistic societal development where opportunities are genuinely accessible, and success is within reach for all individuals, not just for the privileged few. In an address delivered during the 12th General Assembly of the Asean Law Association (ALA), Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban espouses the view that the best way to conquer poverty, to create wealth and to share prosperity is to unleash the entrepreneurial genius of people by granting them the freedom and the tools to help themselves and society. And liberty, ethics, justice, freedom and peace are what create the most suitable environment for private entrepreneurship to flourish.³ My experience engaging with students and professionals across Asia during the HPAIR Conference in 2021 reinforced this truth: resilient societies do not simply rebuild after crises—they innovate, adapt, and grow within legal frameworks that ensure rights are respected and prosperity is distributed equitably. These observations reaffirmed my beliefs that economic and legal empowerment must go hand in hand.

At first glance, the twin philosophies of liberty and prosperity may seem to embody separate aspirations: one belonging to the political sphere, the other to the economic. However, in reality, they are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. These twin beacons must always go together as one is rendered meaningless without the other. In spreading the gospel of liberty and prosperity, Chief Justice Panganiban echoed the goals of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in alleviating poverty and propelling economic growth which, according to these agencies, cannot be attained unless there is “a well-functioning judicial system that enables the State to regulate the economy and empower private individuals to contribute to

² “Prosperity.” Oxford English Dictionary. Retrieved from https://www.oed.com/dictionary/prosperity_n?tl=true.

³ Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban, Unleashing Entrepreneurial Ingenuity. Retrieved from: <https://cjpanganiban.com/2015/02/26/unleashing-entrepreneurial-ingenuity/>.

economic development by confidently engaging in business, investments and other transactions.”⁴ Therefore, a stable judiciary and a firmly established rule-of-law system are indispensable prerequisites for achieving both liberty and prosperity in any democratic society.

The rule of law, as defined by the Department of Justice, is “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards. It requires, as well, measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision-making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness and procedural and legal transparency.”⁵ Simply put, the rule of law is not merely a mechanism for resolving disputes or maintaining public order; it is a manifestation of a society’s commitment to justice, fairness, and accountability. More importantly, it demands that no one—regardless of status, wealth, or political power—stands above the law. It serves as a reminder that governance must be centered on principles that protect and empower every individual equally.

Given all these, the pursuit of liberty and prosperity under the rule of law is more than just an aspiration; it is a pressing moral imperative, one that must govern personal conduct and collective action. Liberty and prosperity are not luxuries reserved for the privileged few; they are birthrights rooted in human dignity, essential for achieving sustainable development, democratic resilience, and genuine social progress. The duty before me is clear: in both my present journey as a law student and my future path as a legal practitioner, I must aspire to lead beyond the technicalities of law, embracing a vision of strategic stewardship that safeguards liberty while nurturing the prosperity of my community.

Liberty and Prosperity through Strategic Stewardship

It is my firm belief that in both my present journey as a law student and my future career as a legal practitioner, the philosophy of liberty and prosperity under the rule of law must not merely be understood — it must be lived, championed, and defended. This vision can only be realized through concrete action: (1)

⁴ Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban, Spreading the Gospel of Liberty and Prosperity. Retrieved from: <https://cjpanganiban.com/2006/08/25/spreading-the-gospel-of-liberty-and-prosperity/>.

⁵ RULE OF LAW Defined. Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.doj.gov.ph/philippine-development-forum.html>.

championing access to justice; (2) promoting good governance and ethical business practices; and (3) engaging in policy advocacy and legal reforms that prioritize the public good.

As a law student, I recognize that genuine passion for justice must be anchored on a deep understanding of the law's principles and real-world application. By committing to lifelong learning — reading beyond prescribed materials, studying landmark cases, attending public lectures and legal fora, and immersing myself in the lived realities of ordinary citizens — I strengthen my capacity to use the law as a tool for empowerment, especially for those who need it the most. Thus, my primary commitment is to help bridge the enduring gap between the law and the marginalized. Access to justice remains a significant issue in the Philippines, where socio-economic disparities continue to hinder many individuals from asserting or even understanding their rights. Whether through pro bono legal work, public interest lawyering, or policy advocacy, I intend to dedicate a meaningful portion of my future legal practice to ensuring that liberty is not a privilege of the wealthy but a right equitably enjoyed by all. Indeed, living out the Foundation's philosophy requires more than academic excellence — it calls for continuous self-examination and growth. The legal landscape evolves, and so must the lawyer who hopes to remain an effective steward of the law. I therefore pledge to pursue lifelong learning, not merely to advance my career, but to remain an effective and proactive advocate for the rule of law.

Leveraging my management education, I also aim to contribute to promoting good governance and ethical business practices. This commitment stems from the belief that good governance and ethical entrepreneurship are essential pillars for nurturing prosperity and strengthening the rule of law. Many injustices in society arise not only from broken laws but from broken institutions that fail to serve the people they were required to protect. In this light, I aspire to work collaboratively with businesses to ensure that their employees receive fair wages, just benefits, and safe, humane working conditions, while also advocating for stronger governmental support systems that assist enterprises and workers, particularly during times of adversity and economic uncertainty. Moreover, as I advance in my legal career, I hope to participate in policy reform efforts aimed at strengthening institutions, whether by contributing to research, offering legal expertise to reform movements, or eventually helping craft legislation. A robust democracy requires laws that are not only just but also responsive to evolving societal needs. I intend to support legislative initiatives that enhance transparency, protect fundamental civil liberties, promote inclusive economic policies, and establish stronger mechanisms for accountability and good governance.

As a future lawyer, I carry the burden and the privilege of helping correct the imbalances of our justice system – to ensure that those who have less in life may finally have more in law, and, through the empowering force of law, more in life itself. This mission calls for more than technical competence; it demands strategic stewardship anchored in ethical leadership, profound compassion, and unwavering integrity. By safeguarding liberty – ensuring that rights are real, protected, and accessible – and by nurturing prosperity – building systems that empower the marginalized and foster widespread opportunities for growth — I commit myself to breathe life into the promises enshrined in our Constitution. I will strive to make liberty not a fragile privilege reserved for the few, but a living guarantee for all, and prosperity not a distant dream, but a shared reality that uplifts the many. In every case fought, every law shaped, every institution strengthened, and every voice amplified, I will seek to tilt the scales toward justice — not for a select few, but for every individual who dares to hope for a better future.