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Obituary

Manuel González González (1928–2019)



On March 2, Prof. Manuel González González, Former President of the AEC, died in Zaragoza at the age of 91.

He had been Professor of Surgery of the College of Medicine at the University of Zaragoza since 1966 and Professor Emeritus since 1998. His resume overflows with the highest qualifications, distinctions and awards, mainly from the Universities of Salamanca, Valladolid and Zaragoza, as well as several academies and scientific societies.

With these few lines, my intention is to bear witness to the exemplary person Manuel was, in addition to my esteemed teacher and dear friend.

He was born in Salamanca to a family from who raised him to be the model of an honest work ethic, constant effort toward self-improvement and kindness.

During his initial studies and baccalaureate, he soon distinguished himself by his intelligent industriousness, collaborative spirit and sense of responsibility. Even then, he developed the quality of self-criticism, an exceptional privilege through which, unintentionally, he influenced the opinion of others as the result of a high moral category.

He completed his degree at the College of Medicine at the University of Salamanca with the highest honors, obtaining the Extraordinary End of Degree Award.

In a socioeconomic and academic setting full of disadvantages and difficulties, Manuel had lofty goals, which would become the main standards of his life.

He decided to become a university surgeon and, in the department of his first teacher, Prof. Cuadrado, he began his academic career as Assistant Professor of Practical Classes, an activity that he coordinated with that of Anesthetist in order to support his newly formed family.

Eight years later, he obtained a position in Valladolid as APD Physician (today, a General Practitioner), but his desire to become a surgeon soon led him to the Department of Surgery at that University, directed by his second teacher and also admired Salamanca native, Prof. JM Beltran de Heredia. After obtaining his degree as Doctor, he attained the position of Assistant Professor.

At that time, I met Manuel because I entered the Department as a Student Intern and soon discovered that behind a serious and austere figure was an exceptional person who embodied responsible and rigorous fulfillment of daily tasks, respect and kindness in dealing with others, willingness to teach and learn, closeness and sensitivity with patients and, in short, the effort and enthusiasm with which he tried to make up for shortcomings and difficulties.

For me, Manuel was a model person who attracted and drew deep feelings from one's soul, whose unpayable gifts as teacher were guidance and refuge.

In 1966, after brilliant examinations, he earned the position of Professor of Surgery at the College of Medicine in Zaragoza, which began a new, difficult stage of which I was a witness and collaborator. In that setting, there was no place for "convenient lamentations or useless complaints"; work and study were good antidotes against discouragement and pessimism;

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confronting problems was better than “wait and see”; and that “better to have tried and to have failed than never to have tried at all”. These phrases were frequently repeated by Manuel.

He also told us that, in dealing with patients, our decisions should be guided by reasoning and scientific evidence, even if the clinical reality surprised us with unexpected and painful changes. It was essential to then review our work or admit to a lack of knowledge and end up recognizing the “mystery to man”.

Those of us who were completing surgical training with Manuel as our teacher lived extraordinary experiences with increasing responsibilities (in care, teaching and research). Some of the members of that authentic school would later occupy relevant university and healthcare positions.

Prof. González actively participated in the governing bodies of the Spanish Association of Surgeons (*Asociación Española de Cirujanos* – AEC): Scientific Committee, Presidency (1986–1988) and Board of Trustees of the Spanish Surgery Foundation. During this time, our Association, as is well reflected in its history, evolved with important winds of change, adapting its organization to new ways and habits. Rigor and discipline in the administrative and regulatory aspects replaced what was the paternalistic leadership of earlier years. With extraordinary elegance and generosity, Manuel contributed toward maintaining the institutional dignity and elevating the doctrinal and scientific level.

I had the privilege of presenting him at an event where he was named an Honorary Member of the AEC. I ended my words by comparing the personality of Manuel with Romanesque art because of its solidity, inner richness, spirituality and theological sense. Today, the metaphor seems more timely because his life, full of success, was also full of difficulties and painful family events that did not prevent him from fulfilling his duties and commitments, which he faced with admirable strength of spirit and the brave acceptance of a man who was strong in moral principles and an unshakeable faith.

Today, with his death, Prof. Manuel González González will be remembered as a person of integrity who was honest, exemplary and committed to his time. As the university tradition says, ‘he knew how to fulfill his aim exercising his loyal knowledge and understanding’.

With these lines, I wish to express the pain and feeling of loss that I share with Manuel’s beloved family, with respect, gratitude and affection as his disciple.

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