

Launching of Honora Medicum



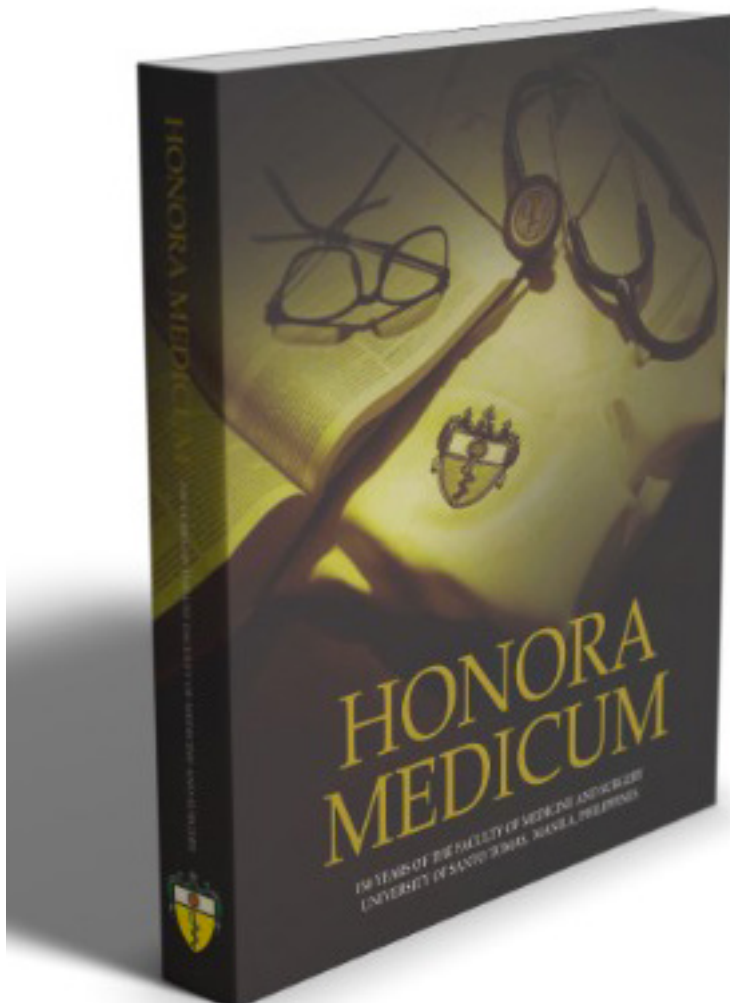
We read in an editorial of the Philippine Star of last November 12, 2022:

The nation welcomes the 3,826 medical school graduates who have passed the physicians licensure examination. The pandemic has highlighted the lack of doctors in the country, which has been aggravated by the death of many physicians on the frontlines of the battle against COVID.

More efforts are needed, etc.

Out of those 3,826 graduates, 416 come from the UST Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. Our faculty gives to the country an average of 500 graduates every year, without any assistance from the state. Can you beat that?

One hundred and fifty years of experience, labor, sacrifice and effort warrant the achievements of



a multitude of scientists, researchers, professors, students, administration, staff and services that constitute the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Santo Tomas of Manila.

In his book "Segundo Abecedario," (Second Alphabet), a kind of diary or personal notes published in 1992, Jose Jimenez Lozano, one of my favorite writers in Spanish, tells an anecdote of his visit to Madrid to the launch of one of his books.

Jose Jimenez Lozano lives in a little village, in the province of Avila, one hour away from Madrid. He holds a national award on narrative and the Miguel de Cervantes, the highest award of Spanish letters, the equivalent to the Nobel Prize of Literature.

He is a master of the little things in the world surrounding him, that unveil the inner beauty: from the first flower in spring to the sweet song of the cuckoo; a movie, or the impression of a painting, a conversation with a village lady, or the silence of the stars in a chilly midnight winter.

The book took him several years to accomplish; the presentation, just a fleeting moment. He seems not to give much importance to that event. On his entry in the diary for that day, he does not even mention the title. Instead, he writes about an exhibition of paintings of the famous Jewish painter Marc Chagall, a Russian-French artist known for his characteristic abstract style that explores his Jewish identity and life in the Russia of his childhood.

Jimenez Lozano picks up the words of Mark Chagal, who is 98 years old at the time:

"I am in doubt. I don't know when a painting is finished. I am afraid to present my paintings. Until my death I will doubt about my work. Nothing gives me the assurance that what I have painted has any value and that it will last beyond my death ..." "Poor old man," Chagal concludes, *"I only know that I am sincere."*

And Jimenez Lozano comments:

"That is how things are. We will never know, and nothing and nobody can tell us what will be important and what not. In the last analysis, only when we are honest to ourselves, and thus rely in

that honesty, can we escape total emptiness and everlasting damnation."

These are the words of a sober person.

We have gathered here for the launching of the book entitled HONORA MEDICUM. Do not ask how important this book is for us. Let me ask you, instead. What moved you to be here today?

At first sight, I view your presence to this event as a tribute to an institution that has contributed enormously to the Philippines, not only in the field of health, but also in the other areas of the commonwealth. This is our history. Very important! We are part of it, an army of about 40,000 doctors, which gives us a feeling of collective accomplishment, a reason to believe that we have not been wasting our lives. We rejoice to be associated with the USTFMS, our alma mater. Proud to be a Thomasian doctor!

Still, can this give us assurance that what we have done, what we are doing, not only collectively but also individually, has any enduring value and that it will last beyond our death? "Who knows" you may answer, or "who cares," – others may think – "We live in a cruel world." True. But our institution was founded to help heal the wounds of that world. You entered the medical profession to share in that mission. After 150 years, do we still need to pose and question our sincerity to ourselves and to our vocation as doctors? How faithful are we to the vision of our founders? I stand with Jimenez Lozano's comment that

"It is only honesty and sincerity that give us assurance to escape emptiness and obliteration."

Thankfully, the Congress of the Philippines has issued a letter of recognition to the USTFMS. We are waiting for the resolution of the Senate. Although restricted by the pandemic, the faculty was able to organize a few activities to mark this date. We have tried to reach out to all our alumni. All this while as well as continuing our academic responsibilities amid abnormal circumstances.

Could we still add the proverbial grain of sand? Would a book fittingly render tribute to our dear alma mater? To one who has been fully involved in



the university library for 31 years, this looked as the most natural thing to do. To publish a commemorative book.

- Books are like stars in a personal heaven: questions, riddles, answers, stories, wisdom distilled through the years.
- Books purvey solace; in the texture of their covers, through the luminosity of its paper, in the typographical distribution of words, lines, paragraphs; in the empty, blank margins and pages, etc.
- Books, Glorious books!

But who is interested in books? Who reads books today? How would one dare to undertake such a

task and not fear failure? What kind of book would command the attention of millennial students and senior faculty members?

If it took a historian of the caliber of Fr. Fidel Villaruel O.P. more than 20 years to write the history of the University, how could we, lacking the skills and devotion of Fr. Villaruel, consolidate a narrative that would make honor to the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery?

An alumnus of UST College of Fine Arts and design, Mr. Ramoncito Ocampo Cruz (Monching), (of Media Wise Communications Inc./Muse Books) offered to help us do a coffee table book, that is his business. He has published for the Ateneo, UP, and other institutions. Large books with many good pictures like

those found in trendy fashion magazines, intended for the alumni. USTFMS alumni could proudly place this book on a table in their clinic for visitors and patients to look at in a casual way.

Reluctantly, we settled for this option, not without insisting on the importance of content, aimed to stir the imagination of the casual reader and to reproduce or give an image of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery as it appears to the eyes of somebody who has spent eight years looking closely at it.

It was not difficult to find a title. The Latin inscription on the right-side facade of the Saint Martin de Porres building has become kind of a mantra. "Honora Medicum..." When you pass by and ponder at those words, they end by entering your system. Latin language possesses a certain aura even for people who do not understand it.

Honora Medicum. Opera ejus sunt necessaria, Etc.

Mr. Cruz recommended journalist-writer Mr. John Neri, opinion columnist of the Philippine Inquirer at the time, as our editorial partner. After a couple of exchanges, Mr. Neri proposed a well-designed structure that pays homage to the Thomistic paradigm of *faith and reason*:

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| I. Honora Medicum, | I. B – Art is Long |
| II. His works are necessary, | II. B – Life is Shorty |
| III. But God is the One, | III. B – Opportunity is
Fleeting |
| IV. Who has the Power over
Life and Death | IV. B – Experiment is Perilous |

Thankfully, there is a pool of good writers in the Faculty of Medicine, former editors of the *Varsitarian*, doctors who have given content to this structure, as well as many others.

Mr. Monching, always so optimistic, says this is a good book. I should be the last one to disagree with him.

It is not we, though, who will say whether this is a good or not so good book. Even consecrated writers, like the one quoted at the beginning of this message are never sure of the value or importance of their work. It is you, the readers, who will approve or condemn *Honora Medicum*.

I wish you can find the time to engage in a narrative of 380 pages. As students of medicine, you are accustomed to handle thick volumes. This is more entertaining, I guess. Buy it, read it, enjoy it, relish its stories, admire the pictures, and if you do not agree with it, exercise the virtue of tolerance. We will be contented even if only its title will be remembered.

On 400 years of the foundation of the University, the Miguel de Benavides Library published two volumes with the title "Lumina Pandit" (spreading the light). Not many people, I guess, have read those two volumes. However, "Spreading the Light," that simple phrase, has inspired many activities in the university. For example, the ceremony of lights every year at the end of the baccalaureate mass, *El Fuego Tomasino*, etc.

But there is more than its two words title.

Makati Medical Director, Dr. Saturnino Javier, for example, discussing on the diaspora of our doctors all over the world writes:

From Lanao del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines, all the way to Cameron in West Africa, or from Massachusetts, USA, to Erdinger in Germany, there is a link, a commitment that thrives and a pursuit that finds roots in some educational upbringing and Catholic orientation that now counts a hundred and fifty years.

Dr. Anniela Y. Soliven talks about the process to become an educator:

I did not intend to become a teacher because I did not have the genetic make-up the distinctive qualities and characteristics to work in a classroom.

- She writes.

Her picture among students in p. 114, tells you so much:

I learned, -she adds- something that can be loved, and something that we can have the passion for ... Metamorphosis shall never end, because we are better doctors when we become better educators. Our best is yet to come.

Metastasis, metamorphosis, symbiosis, osteogenesis and ossification, etc. There are a good number of medical lingos along the 384 pages of this voluminous book. It is not an ossified skeleton, though: there are

colorful stories, such as the famous medical missions, or the infamous revalida, interesting research on the development of the faculty, from an exclusive male dominated roster of professors in the first half of its existence to a female majority at present ..., and pictures, many pictures that reflect not simple facts and statistics, but beauty.

This book is a tribute to our alma mater, indirectly a personal testimony of the nobility of the medical profession that I have come to learn better and appreciate more. Despite numerous difficulties and frustrations due to the pandemic and other causes, we have found joy working with extraordinary people in this project.

Like Mark Chagal about his paintings, we could also say about our book:

Nothing gives us the assurance that what we have tried to portray with this book, that it has any enduring value and will last beyond the sesquicentennial.

Even if it doesn't, still the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery is what really matters here. As our dear Dean, Dr. Ma. Lourdes D. Maglinao puts it:

Beyond its sesquicentennial, the UST Faculty of Medicine and Surgery is ready to face the challenges that lie ahead. Flexibility in medical education is key. Receptiveness, openness, and willingness are essential attributes that will ensure stability and sustainability of institutional gains. It will be one with the world. It will continue to evolve with approaches that standardize and simplify using benchmarks that are technically sound, applicable, progressive, and compliant. It will continue to re-orient, re-align, and re-engineer to help create a detailed picture of what a medical curriculum should be – real, relevant, and responsive.

*Today was yesterday's future, but today, too, is more than the beginning of the future.
(Maglinao, p. 231).*

The book remains as a witness to a memorable event, the USTFMS at 150.

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