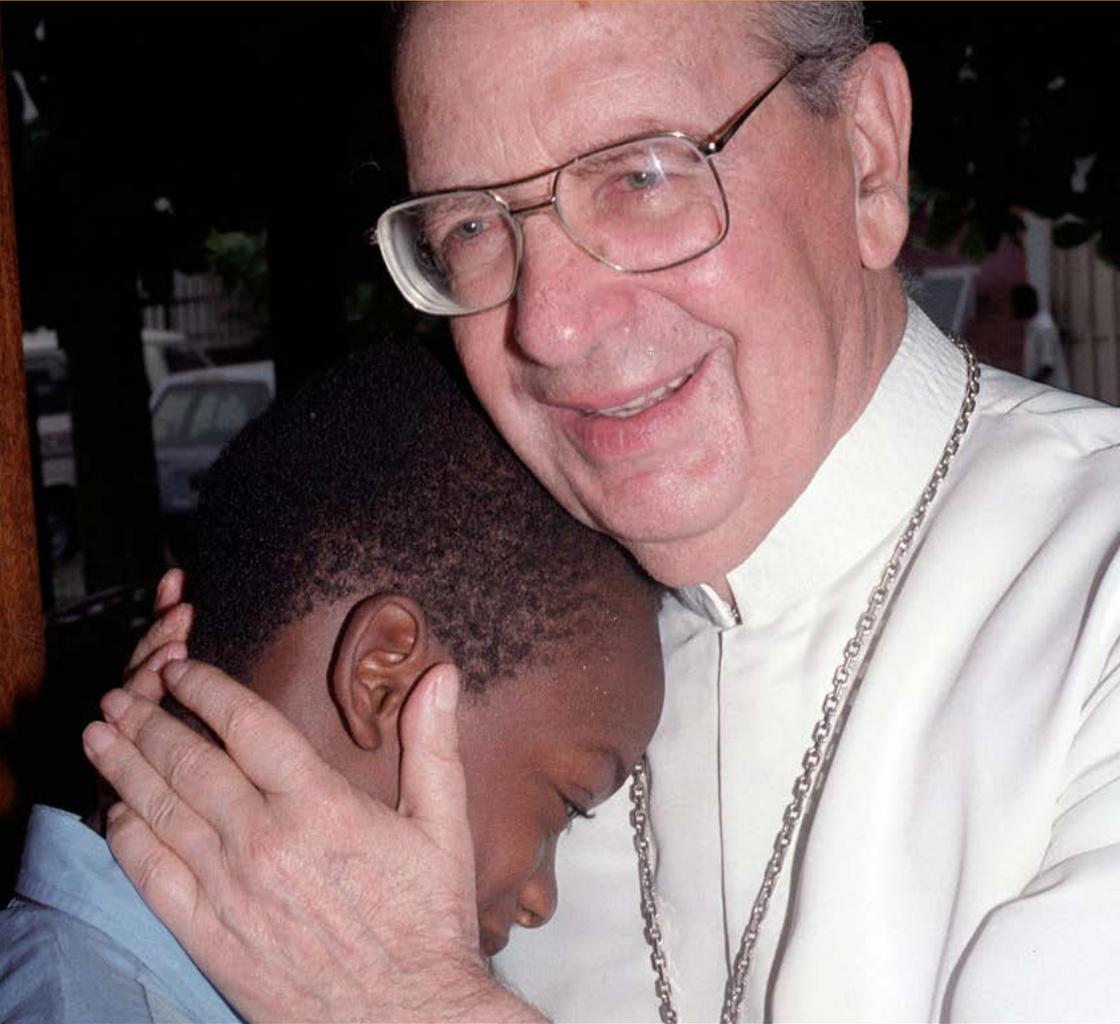


BLESSED
ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

Newsletter no. 7 - 2020



**PROMOTING
SOCIAL INITIATIVES**

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BIOGRAPHY

Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid in 1914 and joined Opus Dei in 1935, when he was a Civil Engineering student.

He was ordained to the priesthood at the age of thirty and became Saint Josemaría's closest helper, working with him to guide and stimulate Opus Dei's apostolate throughout the world.

He was esteemed by Popes, from the Venerable Servant of God Pius XII to Saint John Paul II, who valued his Christian faith, his pastoral work, his intellectual ability and his social sensitivity. They entrusted him with tasks in the service of the Church on different occasions, especially during the Second Vatican Council.

He was elected as the first successor of the Founder of Opus Dei in 1975. He promoted the expansion of the message of the Work through different countries, encouraging people to start numerous educational, scientific and social initiatives. Saint John Paul II consecrated him as a bishop in 1991.

He died in a holy manner three years later, on 23 March 1994, just after making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Pope came to pray before his mortal remains at the Opus Dei headquarters, in acknowledgement of his service to the People of God. He was beatified in Madrid on 27 September 2014. His feast is celebrated on 12 May.

SOCIAL CONCERN

from his youth

When Blessed Alvaro was 19, he became involved in the activities of the Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul in the poorest neighbourhoods of Madrid. They provided donations and food, gave catechism classes and helped young people in disadvantaged areas. He helped with activities in the parish of Saint Raymond Nonnatus, in the Bridge of Vallecas district of Madrid.

In Opus Dei, prompted by Saint Josemaría, he continued this type of activity in the DYA Academy. The love he felt towards those in need, that emerged from his university experience, remained with him for the rest of his life. In 1981 he wrote: “All of us have to make contact with those who are suffering, who are sick, who are destitute, who are alone, who have been forsaken by all.”¹

During the 198 trips and pastoral visits

that he carried out while he was head of the Work, he took every opportunity to encourage social and educational initiatives. Don Alvaro inspired everyone to have wide horizons and set up projects to provide help and to remedy the many evils in the world. He carried in his heart a passion to help others and bring them close to the kind and merciful face of Christ.

He inspired and promoted more than forty social initiatives throughout the world.

He inspired and promoted more than forty social initiatives throughout the world, with different goals such as the advancement of women, development, education or medical research and health.

¹ John. F. Coverdale, Saxum, The Life of Alvaro del Portillo. Scepter, New York, 2014, p. 168.



LOOKING AFTER THE SICK

assistance and research

At the University of Navarre, Spain, of which Blessed Alvaro was the Chancellor for almost twenty years, they have fond memories of how, from 1989, he exhorted health professionals to push forward with research into biomedicine and contribute to the improvement of health and the dignified treatment of patients and their relatives.

Monkole Hospital. During his trip to D R Congo, and specifically to Kinshasa, he encouraged some people, in line with Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo's wishes, to initiate a project to improve healthcare. That project became Monkole Hospital, which offers medical consultations, hospital care and treatment of infectious illnesses, always including human warmth and respect as part of each patient's healthcare. See www.monkole.cd



Aid to the Family and Community Foundation (AFAC). Located in Quito, Ecuador, AFAC began in 1991 as a small dispensary as a result of Blessed Alvaro's call to help those who suffer, the sick and those

in need. In 1995, the completed building was inaugurated. It had dental services and laboratories; later it added medical care and maternity services to assist women during pregnancy and childbirth.



Niger Foundation Hospital and Diagnostic Centre. In 1989, Blessed Alvaro travelled to Nigeria. There he became aware that medical attention was scarce or simply unavailable to many people at that time, especially in the Enugu area. A year after his visit, the Niger Foundation Hospital and Diagnostic Centre was opened offering medical services to families. It provides around 40,000 consultations annually. See www.nfh.org.ng



EDUCATION AS PROFESSIONAL WORK

integral character formation

Blessed Alvaro was convinced that true teaching, the promotion of education in society, goes hand in hand with all-round character formation.² Education sustains the fundamentals of a professional vocation. This approach was patently clear in the many educational initiatives that he promoted over the course of his life.

Pedreira Professional Educational Centre. Pedreira is part of the metropolitan area of São Paulo, one of the biggest cities in the world. In 1985 Pedreira started to give classes to young people in the area to help them avoid falling into crime. Blessed Alvaro promoted the beginning of this initiative which has already given help to more than ten thousand young people. See www.pedreira.org



Banilad Center for Professional Development. During his trip to the

²Cfr. M. A. Vitoria, *Impronta educativa de la vida y enseñanzas de Mons. Alvaro del Portillo. Notas y reflexiones*. Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, Roma, p. 596.

Philippines in 1987, Blessed Alvaro suggested to over a thousand people that there was a need to set up a centre to help the people of Cebu City to acquire education and training. Two years later the Banilad Center was built, which provides training and management courses.



Kinal Technical Training Centre. Kinal opened in Guatemala City in 1961, and in 1985, under the impetus of Blessed Alvaro, it acquired a permanent base, enabling underprivileged young people to finish their secondary education and gain technical training. See www.kinal.org.gt



ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

an ever present aspect of his social work

One of Blessed Alvaro's constant concerns was to encourage the advancement of women in society, especially those in developing countries and deprived areas. A direct outcome of this concern was the launching of eight institutions focused on education and skills training for women. The four described below are a representative selection.

The Junkabal Skills Centre was founded in Guatemala in 1964 to train women in professional skills. The facilities and courses offered were increased in 1992 at Blessed Alvaro's prompting. To date, over 100,000 women have attended courses there. See www.junkabal.edu.gt



The Centre for Alternative Basic Education (Centro de Educación Básica Alternativa) in Lima, Peru, provides courses for women and teenage girls who have not had access to basic schooling, offering them the general education they need to enable them to become independent professionals.



The **Metro Achievement Center** in Chicago, Illinois, U.S. offers after-school and summer programmes. Blessed Alvaro pressed for this association to be set up to help young girls become successful women. See www.midtown-metro.org/metro-for-girls



Blessed Alvaro encouraged the advancement of women, especially those in deprived areas.

The **Sirama Professional Training Centre for women (Fundación Siramá)** in San Salvador opened in 1971 to offer professional training courses. Following the destruction of its premises by an earthquake in 1986, Blessed Alvaro inspired the building of a new centre which opened two years later, followed by a second centre in 1998 in the Soyapango neighbourhood.



DEVELOPMENT

the works of mercy are like the keys to Heaven

In a pastoral letter dated 1 July 2014, Bishop Javier Echevarría wrote that, for Blessed Alvaro, one of the conditions for obtaining grace from heaven “was to serve others through the works of mercy”. In March 1988, Blessed Alvaro remarked that “Contact with poverty, with destitution, produces an enormous spiritual impact. It makes us realise that we often worry about ridiculous things that are nothing but our own selfishness and pettiness.”

Family Cooperation Health Services Foundation (FAMCOHSEF). Visiting the Philippines in 1987, Blessed Alvaro encouraged many of the people he met to work together to eradicate poverty. This gave rise to the FAMCOHSEF. Ever since, it has offered a variety of courses, mainly around basic health-care training, to the community of Metro Manila. See www.famcohsef.org.

The **Navarre Organisation for Aid to Peoples (ONAY).** Following the beatification of St Josemaría, a number of university students at the University of Navarre in Spain, with the support of Blessed Alvaro, set up this body to coordinate their efforts to promote cooperation and solidarity. It enables them to undertake development initiatives in deprived neighbourhoods in countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. See www.onay.org.

Social Forum: This undertaking, based in Valladolid, Spain, an outreach activity of the local university, also owed its origin to Blessed Alvaro’s concern for social projects. It was set up to cooperate actively with community development programmes in under-privileged areas of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.



FAVOURS

Help with a business

I was in a really bad way due to big worries over my business. We had debts and our sales were down. Such was the concern and stress, that I was hospitalised on three occasions for chest pains and insomnia. It was then that I decided to do a novena to Don Alvaro because I heard that he was of great help in financial matters. I prayed to him for two outcomes: that he would help me become serene and that my business would improve. I had hardly begun the novena when I noticed that I was more relaxed and my heart was at ease. Though the problem continued, I

was able to sleep at ease. I was no longer physically unwell. Several unusual events took place in the following days that enabled the business to survive, such as a tax refund, a supplier literally gifted us some products for resale, along with a series of little favours that occurred almost every day. While the business is not out of the woods, Don Alvaro continues to assist. The novena was extended – I pray to him every day. I have no doubt that he is helping. I owe him a lot because he has helped me understand many things about love for God and trust in Him.

M.C.R. (Peru)



He arranged an exchange

Ever since I began university, I dreamt of being able to do an exchange for a semester. However, all that seemed unrealistic given that we were a family of eight women, including my mother who had been widowed almost fourteen years previously. The only way I could manage it was to get a scholarship or some other financial assistance. A friend mentioned that when she was looking for an exchange, she had prayed a lot to Don Alvaro and managed to obtain a sponsored flight. She told me to ask him for whatever I needed. I began to pray his prayer card every day. Four months later, I was told that I would receive a government grant. Although substantial, it would not be enough. So I applied for another grant. While continuing to seek Don Alvaro's help, I told him how much this grant would mean to me. Two months later, I heard that I would be given the second grant, while I also received help to pay for the flight. As I write, my exchange will start in a few days. I have not the slightest doubt that Don Alvaro helped me. I am very grateful for his intercession. M.F.R. (Mexico)



A change of country

A family with a child suffering from Down's syndrome lived in a country where they felt that she might not receive the proper treatment when she grew up. They decided to move to Spain to look after their daughter better.



I helped with the paperwork for the change of residence, though things were to become complicated due to numerous obstacles. The difficulties led me to ask Don Alvaro to resolve them, which he did. I am most grateful to Don Alvaro for this favour. I am very devoted to him. He was an exceptional man, and ahead of his time.

G.F. (Spain)

TESTIMONIES

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz *Personal Secretary to Pope St John Paul II*



Don Alvaro used to come frequently to lunch with the Holy Father. On the one hand, the Pope wanted to speak about different matters. But he also wanted to express his gratitude for Opus Dei's participation in the life of the Church. What struck me about Don Alvaro? Above all his great sense of responsibility for the life of the Church, for the Church itself; his wanting to accompany the Church, in all his actions, with his prayer, his faithfulness to doctrine.

Cardinal Carlos Amigo *Emeritus Archbishop of Seville, Spain*



I saw an unpretentious, pleasant, devout man. The sort of person you feel comfortable with, the sort you don't get tired of talking to. And most certainly a teacher, a teacher of many things. I think the lessons he gave us about knowing how to relate to different

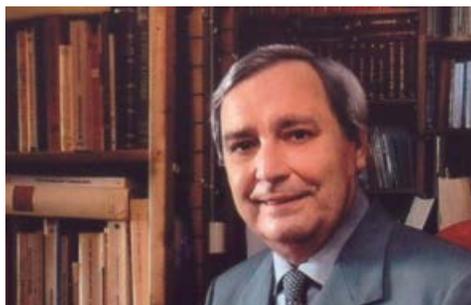
people, about staying very serene at difficult moments... I believe that is a lesson for which we have to be grateful in the Church.

Pat Anderson *Worked with him in the governance of Opus Dei.*



I remember when he travelled to the Holy Land, in March 1994. When he was about to depart, he told us among other things that the Holy Father wanted Opus Dei to go to Kazakhstan. He said: "My daughters, I don't know what will happen, we need a miracle, but the Holy Father wants this. Therefore, we should do it." This is one of so many manifestations of his service to the Church in his life.

Vittorio Messori *Writer, author of "Opus Dei. An Investigation"*



I remember Don Alvaro as a fatherly figure, a courteous and affectionate figure. I remember him as a true priest.

TESTIMONIES

Joaquín Navarro-Valls
Spokesman for the Holy See 1981-2006



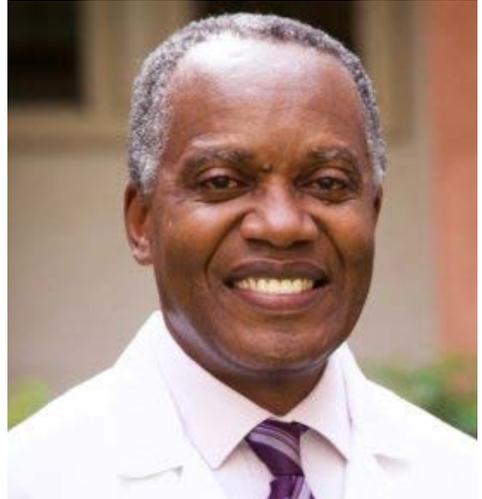
One could say that Don Alvaro's presence was continuous, from the pontificate of Pius XII to the pontificate of St John Paul II. That presence, together with his moral and intellectual stature, was a constant from which all those pontificates benefited.

Colette Kenmogne
Cameroon housewife



I am sure he is in heaven. Because he fought the good fight and taught us to place Our Lord everywhere, at the heart of our activities, at the summit of our activities. I am sure that he deserves today the reward that Our Lord has prepared for us all.

Leon Tshiolo
Medical Director of Monkole Hospital, Kinshasa, Congo



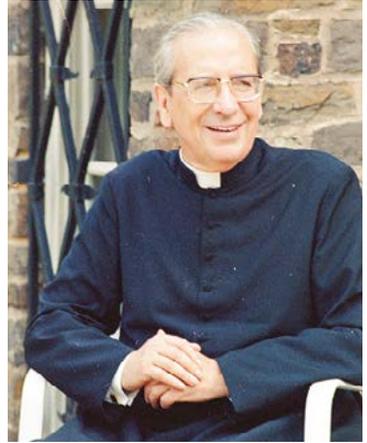
Monkole Hospital's origin goes back to a pastoral trip Monsignor Del Portillo made to Congo in August 1989. That is why we like to say that it is a present from Don Alvaro. It is currently in the final phase of construction of a new wing, with 160 beds. One of the Monkole centres, the CTA (Centre for Outpatient Treatment), has the specific mission of fighting against the AIDS virus, from its prevention to the care of those affected.

For more information: www.alvarodelportillo.org

PRAYER

O God, merciful Father, you granted your bishop Blessed Alvaro the grace of being, with our Lady's help, an exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and a most faithful son and successor of Saint Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei. Grant that I also may respond faithfully to the demands of the Christian vocation, turning all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and to serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Deign to grant the canonization of Blessed Alvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favour I request... (*here make your petition*). Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Since his beatification, the **feast of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo** has been celebrated on **12 May**.
- In Guayaquil, Ecuador, the church of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo was opened in 2015. This was the **first church dedicated to him**.
- You can pray with Blessed Alvaro, using the book, *Journey with Jesus, through the Liturgical Year*, which is **available on the internet**.
- The vestments used at Blessed Alvaro's beatification ceremony were afterwards donated to **persecuted Christian communities in Baghdad, Iraq**.

Those who have obtained favours through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo are asked to let us know by writing to us at the address shown below.

This Newsletter is issued free of charge. Those who wish to give alms to help its publication may send donations by direct transfer or by cheque or postal order to: Prelature of Opus Dei, Office for the Causes of Saints, 4 Orme Court, London W2 4RL. Email: ocs.uk@opusdei.org

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