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“Two Plus Two Plus God”

Abel Albino is a doctor and founder of CONIN (Cooperative for Infant Nutrition) in Argentina. He often remembers St. Josemaría’s words: “Two plus two is four, but two plus two plus God...”

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CONIN (Cooperative for Infant Nutrition) was founded in the city of Mendoza, Argentina, on September 4, 1993. Currently more than 500 children with advanced malnutrition

and some 1,500 with a less serious condition are being treated there. Moreover, a CONIN network has been created, with 12 centers in different parts of the country and in Paraguay, and four new centers that will open soon.

Abel Albino, founder of CONIN, has received help from the business sector and other institutions to extend the work of CONIN to places that badly need assistance.

How did this project start?

I studied medicine in Tucuman, did my residency in Pediatrics in the University of Chile, and then went to Mendoza. I married at 32 and began working to support my family. Then, I started on my doctoral thesis, wrote a couple of books, and I went to Europe to work in molecular biology. And there is where this story started.

Did you decide to work on molecular biology in Europe as a solution to the problem of child malnutrition?

In Europe, I saw many small countries that are powerful in the world and I could not believe that Argentina, a big country rich in resources, should be suffering from poverty. When you're out of your own country, you get a better perspective; you miss it and you appreciate it more. Besides, you start to realize that somehow it also depends a little on you....

One day, while walking in the corridor of the faculty and thinking how bad the situation was back in Argentina, I noticed a newspaper lying on the floor. Out of curiosity, I picked it up. It had an interview with Mother Teresa of Calcutta in which she was asked what peace was. Since I was not feeling at peace, I thought I

should see what this woman had to say about it.

Mother Teresa replied, "The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of faith is love; the fruit of love is service and the fruit of service is peace."

Those words fascinated me.

Eventually, I told my boss: "Look, I'm going back to Argentina. I know that my work here will contribute to the future of molecular biology but, in reality, I am the son of a country that has yet to solve its problems. At the bottom of my heart I am a doctor, and it will be good for me to return." So I returned to Mendoza. I knew that I had "to serve," but I didn't know how or where.

A few years later, I went back to Europe on a short trip. There I had a chance to hear Pope John Paul II's wonderful homily during the beatification Mass for Josemaría

Escrivá on May 17, 1992. Among many other things, he said, "Be concerned for the poor, for those in need." These words struck me, like the words of Mother Teresa had. And I turned to my wife, "Who are the poor?" I started thinking about children with neurological problems and learning difficulties, and decided to dedicate myself to caring for them.

Once back in Mendoza, we organized a course about these issues and invited Professor Ignacio Villaelizar from Spain. He told us, "Get in touch with Monckeberg." Professor Monckeberg had been my professor at Luis Calvo Mackenna Hospital when I did my training in Pediatrics in Chile from 1973 to 1974. We invited him and he spoke to us about the only case where low I.Q could be prevented and reversed, and was created by human beings—malnutrition. It was then that I got involved in this project.

How did you get acquainted with the message of St. Josemaría and how does it affect your personal and professional life?

His message had made a big impact in my life. St. Josemaría was behind the two significant moments that led me to finally follow this path. First, I was studying in the University of Navarra when I read the words of Mother Teresa, and St. Josemaría was the founder of that university. Then, I was in Rome for his beatification when I heard Pope John Paul II's words.

That's why I can say that CONIN is God's work. In reality, what I wanted to do was molecular biology: this is what man proposes. But I ended up dedicating myself to trying to alleviate poverty and malnutrition: that is what God disposes. And it was shown to me through Mother Teresa

of Calcutta, Pope John Paul II and St. Josemaría.

How do you keep up a close relationship with God, while being a father of 5 daughters, with a clinic to run, and as the founder of CONIN with centers in Argentina, Paraguay and Gambia?

St. Josemaría taught us to love being Christians in the middle of the world, like someone with a made-to-measure suit. It is a message that I easily understand because it fits my personality.

And then, God wanted me to remain a widower. I feel like Don Alvaro del Portillo, successor to St. Josemaría, who used to say, "I am the baton in the hands of the conductor or the brush in the hands of the painter." It may be that God wants to do some good work through me. So I throw myself into doing the things that come my way with love and

affection, and with passion, trying to serve the best that I can.

How do you envisage CONIN's future?

When I think of the marvelous growth that lies in CONIN's future, I remind myself of St. Josemaría's words: "Two plus two is four, but two plus two plus God..."

What spurs you to continue working day after day in this project?

Every day I offer up my day at Holy Mass, and I pray the Rosary, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and find some minutes for spiritual reading. The interior life is like a plant that needs to be watered and fertilized, so that it will continue to bear fruit, and one's enthusiasm will be maintained. Because if you rely only on your own strength, if you only look at things humanly, you

become frightened. But if one strives to keep a supernatural outlook, one goes forward with enthusiasm because God is helping us. As the popular saying goes: God helps the early riser.

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