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Cause of canonization to open for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

Cardinal Camillo Ruini will preside over the opening session of a tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome in the cause of canonization of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo on March 5, 2004. Bishop del Portillo was born in Madrid in 1914, succeeded St. Josemaría Escrivá as head of Opus Dei in 1975, and died in Rome in 1994.

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Alvaro del Portillo was an engineering student when he first met Josemaría Escrivá, Opus Dei's founder. With a sense of calling from God, he joined Opus Dei in 1935. He was later ordained as a priest in 1944, after further ecclesial studies. For many years he was St. Josemaría's chief support, and then succeeded him as head of Opus Dei upon the saint's death in 1975.

He moved to Rome in 1946, where he lived the rest of his life. Besides his pastoral work in Opus Dei, he is known for his contribution to the Second Vatican Council, where he served in various capacities. One of his chief interests in this work was to emphasize the role of laypersons in the Church: laypersons are called to bring Christ's message into family,

professional, and social life, turning all aspects of life into occasions for encountering God. He was the secretary of the Council Commission that prepared the decree, "Presbyterorum Ordinis," on priestly life and ministry.

Because of his kindness and humility people of all sorts had great affection for him. The writer and journalist Vittorio Messori interviewed him once and, after his death, remarked that Bishop del Portillo's simplicity and charity made one want to go to confession with him more than interview him.

The day Del Portillo died, Pope John Paul II went to his wake and prayed before his remains. The pope had ordained him bishop in 1991.

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints has established that, besides the tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome, a second tribunal of the same

canonical competence will be conducted by the Prelature of Opus Dei. The sessions of the latter tribunal will begin on March 20, 2004. These two tribunals will coordinate between them the first phase of the cause, that is, the diocesan investigation on Del Portillo's life, virtues and reputation for holiness. Once the tribunals have collected all the relevant testimonial and documentary evidence, it will be up to the Holy See to study the cause and issue its judgment.

Besides the cause of Bishop del Portillo, there are seven other causes open for faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei. These include Montse Grases (1941-1959), a Catalonian student who bore a painful illness with exemplary cheerfulness; Ernesto Cofiño (1899-1991), a Guatemalan pediatrician and father of a family, who exercised his profession with a spirit of great

service; and Tony Zweifel
(1938-1989), a Swiss engineer.

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