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“Two plus two plus God”

Abel Albino is a doctor and founder of CONIN (Cooperative for Infant Nutrition) in Mendoza, Argentina. Thinking of the future, he often reminds himself of 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 on September 4, 1993, following Chile’s example.

Today there are 500 children from the city of Mendoza, Argentina, with advance malnutrition and some 1,500 with a less serious condition that are being treated. Moreover, a network of CONIN has been created, with 12 centres in different parts of the country and in Paraguay, and four new centres which will soon be operational.

Abel Albino was able to solicit support from the business sector and from different institutions to extend the work of CRONIN to those places that badly needed help.

How did this project start?

I studied Medicine in Tucuman, did my residency in Paediatrics in the University of Chile and then went to Mendoza. I married at 32 and was working to support my family. Then, I started on my doctoral thesis, wrote a couple of books and I went to Europe to work on molecular

biology. And there is where the story started.

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

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 in Argentina, I suddenly saw a newspaper on the floor. Out of curiosity, I picked it up. There was 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 lady had to say about it.

She 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 chief: “Look, I am going back to Argentina. I know that my work here will contribute to the future of molecular biology but, in reality, I am a son of a country that has yet to solve its problems. At the bottom of my heart I am a doctor, no more no less, and it will be good if I returned.” So, I returned to Mendoza. I knew that I had “to serve” but I did not know how or to whom...

I returned to Europe after some time. In this second trip I heard Pope John Paul II. In his wonderful homily during the Mass of the beatification

of then Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá on May 17, 1992, he said emphatically, “Concern yourselves with the poor, with those in need...” And those words struck me, like the words of Mother Teresa had. And I turned to my wife, “Who are the poor?” I started thinking of children with neurological problems; I thought that I could dedicate myself to care for the mentally ill.

Once in Mendoza, we planned a course about mental illness and invited Professor Ignacio Villaelizar from Spain. He told us, “Call Monckeberg”. Professor Monckeberg had been my professor at Luis Calvo Mackenna Hospital when I did my training in Paediatrics in Chile from 1973 to 1974. We invited him and he spoke to us of the only mental illness that could be prevented, the only one that could be reversed and that was created by man — malnutrition. It was then that I got involved.

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

I believe that his message made a big impact in my life. St. Josemaría was in the background of those two significant moments that lead me to finally follow this path. First, I was studying in the University of Navarre when I read the words of Mother Teresa, and St. Josemaría was the mentor of that university. Then, I was in Rome for his beatification when I heard Pope John Paul II.

That is 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 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 maintain a close relationship with God, while being a father of 5 daughters, with a clinic to run and is the founder of CONIN with centres in Argentina, Paraguay and Gambia?

St. Josemaría taught us to enjoy the fact of being Christians in the middle of the world, like a man with a suit tailored to fit. It is a message that I easily understood because it adheres to my personality.

And then, God wanted me to remain a widower... I feel like Don Alvaro del Portillo, successor of 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 the future for CONIN?

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

What moves you to continue working day after day in this Project?

Everyday I offer up the day, starting with Holy Mass, and then I pray the Rosary, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and spend some moments 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 so that one's enthusiasm is maintained.

Because if you rely only on your own strength, if you only look at things humanly, you will be frightened. But if you try to be more supernatural, you will go forward with enthusiasm because God is helping you. As the

popular saying goes: God will help
him who wakes up early.

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