

MAGNANIMITY AND THE LAW OF SUPERABUNDANCE

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE RADIANCE OF A FAITH LIVED OUT IN LOVE

The Founder of Opus Dei described himself as a man who knew how to love and this description also fits his successor, Álvaro del Portillo, who tried to emulate the Founder in everything, knowing that in doing so he was following God's will, doing Opus Dei by becoming himself opus Dei. It is love which characterizes the Christian, for to follow Christ is to love as he did, and Christ loves even unto death on the cross, giving his very self for the redemption of mankind. Love then is a serious matter, for it is the only way to true happiness¹. At the end of an interview with Peter Seewald, Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus, said that what God really wants from us is that «we become loving persons, for then we are his images. For [God] is, as Saint John tells us, love itself, and he wants there to be creatures who are similar to him and who thus, out of the freedom of their own loving, become

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¹ Virtues of course are the true way to happiness, but it is interesting to note that both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas speak of virtues in terms of love, that is, in terms of the ordering of our loves. So the virtuous person is the one who knows how to love. It should be added nevertheless that it is ultimately grace that enables us to love as God loves.

like him and belong in his company and thus, as it were, spread the radiance that is his»². There is no doubt that the life of Don Álvaro, a life lived in loving service to the Church, spread the radiance of God around him. Every saint does so and because of this it is not surprising that the beauty of the lives of the saints, in addition to the beauty of the art nurtured by the faith, is, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, the most effective apologia for Christianity³. The splendor of holiness bears witness to a faith fully thought out, fully lived, and so it is no wonder that in recent times – times in which the faith has been expelled from the public square – the Church has raised to sainthood so many men and women⁴, whose lives can make us reflect on how we live our own faith and can also motivate us to take our faith more seriously. Don Álvaro’s imminent beatification calls all of us then to a deep self-examination.

2. THE SUPERABUNDANCE OF GENEROSITY VERSUS THE CALCULATING ATTITUDE

I consider that the life of Don Álvaro is an example of magnanimity, the jewel or adornment of all the virtues, as it has been called⁵, and of the law of superabundance, a term used by Cardinal Ratzinger in his book *What It Means to Be a Christian*. I wish to begin by explaining first of all what is meant by this law of superabundance. I think it will be clear that this law is intimately related to magnanimity. Christ tells us that unless our righteousness “exceeds” that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:20). The original Greek of this text uses an even stronger expression that captures more forcefully what Christ actually meant; the literal translation of the text says that our righteousness must have “more superabundance” than that of the scribes and Pharisees⁶. According to Cardinal Ratzinger,

² J. RATZINGER, *Salt of the Earth*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, p. 283.

³ Quoted in J. SAWARD, *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, p. 8.

⁴ John Paul II beatified 1,340 persons and canonized 483 saints, more than the combined number of his predecessors in the five preceding centuries.

⁵ See *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 129, a. 4, obj. 3. Hereafter cited as *ST*. See also J. PIEPER, *Faith, Hope, Love*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, p. 101.

⁶ J. RATZINGER, *What It Means to Be a Christian*, translated by H. TAYLOR, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2006, p. 78.

when this notion of superabundance is applied to the Christian life, we are to understand that the Christian is not a calculating person; he is rather the one who goes out of his way to do “something extra”. The Christian cannot be content in merely being righteous or in doing solely what is correct. «The Christian, [rather], is the one who simply seeks what is good, without any calculation»⁷. He is generous, recognizing his own indebtedness and dependence on the generosity of God and of others in his life; because he is so indebted he realizes that he can never make strict payment in return for all that he has received. He does not therefore calculate in giving because there is no “correct” sum for what he has received and continues to receive, but on the contrary gives superabundantly⁸. In this way the Christian avoids being merely righteous or correct in his actions, and begins to adopt God’s way of acting which is characterized by the superabundance of generosity. This lavish way of acting on the part of God is evident in both his creative and redemptive activity: he creates an ordered universe with a multiplicity of beings as a fitting dwelling place for that most fragile of creatures, man. He sends his only begotten Son to live among men, showing them in so many instances how he works through the law of superabundance, a law which is no doubt «an application of the principle of love»⁹: instances such as the miracle at Cana, the miraculous feeding of the five thousand, the miraculous catch of fish, clearly demonstrate God’s generosity to man. In the Son’s total emptying of himself on the cross we see and understand how God acts according to the law of superabundance, of that love which, as Cardinal Ratzinger says, «can give nothing less than itself»¹⁰. God gives freely and generously so that we may follow his way, which is the way of love. We are being called to «adopt the attitude of the lover, who does not calculate but simply loves»¹¹.

For the Christian, to love, by giving himself generously as God does, requires, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, “a Copernican revolution”, that is, a shift from centering the universe on the self to centering oneself and all else around God,

⁷ RATZINGER, *What It Means to Be a Christian*, p. 78.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 78-79.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

so that God, rather than the self, is the center of all things¹². This Copernican revolution reminds us of what St. Josemaría would say about needing to turn from the orbit of the self to the orbit of God. Certainly, the life of Don Álvaro bears witness to that radical turn; he was truly a man centered on God.

3. MAGNANIMITY AND GIFT OF SELF IN THE REALIZATION OF ARDUOUS GOODS

Now that we have seen that the law of superabundance is a manifestation of that love which knows how to pour itself out generously, giving one's very self, we will turn to St. Josemaría's description of the virtue of magnanimity which shows the intimate relationship of magnanimity to a non-calculating, giving life, to the superabundance of generosity: «Magnanimity means greatness of spirit, a largeness of heart wherein many can find refuge. Magnanimity gives us the energy to break out of ourselves and be prepared to undertake generous tasks which will be of benefit to all. Small-mindedness has no home in the magnanimous heart, nor has meanness, nor egoistic calculation, nor self-interested trickery. The magnanimous person devotes all his strength, unstintingly, to what is worthwhile. As a result he is capable of giving himself. He is not content with merely giving. He gives his very self. He thus comes to understand that the greatest expression of magnanimity consists in giving oneself to God»¹³. Anyone who knew Don Álvaro or who has read his biography realizes that this description of magnanimity perfectly characterizes his life. He knew how to give himself generously in the service of souls, not thinking of his own comfort, of worldly honors or successes, for as the Pope Emeritus once said: «The ways of the Lord are not comfortable. But we were not created for comfort, but for greatness»¹⁴. Only the magnanimous man, the great-souled man, strives for greatness in proportion to his ability and in accordance with the gifts he has received from God. This pursuit of greatness simply means the sincere desire to give the very best of oneself so that God can use us to do

¹² RATZINGER, *What It Means to Be a Christian*, pp. 70-71.

¹³ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Friends of God*, Scepter Publishers, London 1981, no. 80.

¹⁴ Quoted in E.P. SRI, *Called to Greatness: The Virtue of Magnanimity*, in «Lay Witness» (November/December 2009).

wonderful things¹⁵. Don Álvaro put his many talents at the disposition of God for the glory of God, spending his life selflessly so that Christ reign¹⁶.

We can moreover see in the description of magnanimity given by St. Josemaría some of the elements which St. Thomas Aquinas notes in his own explanation of this virtue and which can be applied to Don Álvaro¹⁷. First of all, it is important to note that magnanimity is part of the virtue of fortitude, that virtue which enables us to pursue the good despite the difficulties and hardships involved. As St. Thomas says, «Magnanimity by its very name denotes *stretching forth of the mind to great [or difficult] things*»¹⁸. While it is the case that magnanimity regards honor, the magnanimous man does not think much of the honor accorded by men but rather «strives to do what is deserving of honor»¹⁹. Perhaps the greatest honor accorded to Don Álvaro during his lifetime was that of being named bishop, and yet this was not an honor which he sought for himself or which he prayed for. In fact, he thought that this honor, which is in accordance with the institutional nature of Opus Dei in the Church, would be for his successor²⁰. He did not see his elevation to the fullness of the Sacrament of Orders as a prize for his many years of service to the Church or as a recognition of his many merits and talents. He saw it rather as a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as “a great gift from God”,

¹⁵ SRI, *Called to Greatness*.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that Don Álvaro adopted as his episcopal motto *Regnare Christum volumus*.

¹⁷ My intention here is to follow what St. Thomas says in the various articles of question 129 in *ST II-II*, where he speaks of the virtue of magnanimity, and to see how this can be applied to the life and actions of Don Álvaro.

¹⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 1, resp. Emphasis is mine. These words clearly echo St. Josemaría’s description of magnanimity, which equates this virtue with “greatness of spirit” and “largeness of heart”, and opposes it to small-mindedness and the calculating attitude.

¹⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 1, ad 3.

²⁰ Á. DEL PORTILLO, “Words pronounced in a family get-together”, 8-XII-1990 (AGP, series B.1.4, T-901208), quoted in J. MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo. Un Hombre Fiel*, Rialp, Madrid 2013, p. 638. Throughout this paper, I will be making use of Medina Bayo’s extensive biography of Don Álvaro, which details the juridical solution of the Work and the beatification of the Founder—the two arduous tasks which Don Álvaro’s fortitude and magnanimity were able to see realized. Given the brevity of this paper, I will only highlight certain points found in Medina Bayo’s biography, and so I refer the reader to the actual book which is a wonderful, scholarly accomplishment.

on the head of the Work, whoever that might be, and on the Work itself²¹. Because of his deep humility, he did not at first wish to accept this honor. It was only after some time had passed that he recognized that this honor would be for the good of the whole Church and for the ecclesial consolidation of the Work as a prelature. He therefore accepted this honor, filled with joy, not for himself but for the prelature and the Church²².

It might seem that the virtue just mentioned, humility, and magnanimity are contrary to each other, and yet it is evident in the life of Don Álvaro that this is not so. His untiring work toward the appropriate juridical solution of Opus Dei as a personal prelature is evidence on the one hand of his magnanimity – the “stretching forth” of his mind and heart to an arduous task for the benefit of the Work and of the Church – and on the other hand of his humility, his recognition of himself as an instrument in the hands of God. Despite the arduousness of bringing about what was called the special intention, that is, the erection of Opus Dei as a personal prelature, for which St. Josemaría had prayed and given his life, Don Álvaro had that “firmness of mind” which characterizes the man who has fortitude and also characterizes the magnanimous man who hopes to attain great goods²³, not simply for himself but rather for the benefit of all. He surely realized that with the grace of God the impossible could be undertaken and accomplished²⁴. And for this reason his humility led him to ask for help from God by praying himself, but also asking his spiritual sons and daughters to pray unceasingly for this special intention. According to St. Thomas, «Every man needs, first, the Divine assistance, secondly [...] human assistance [...]. Accordingly, [...], it belongs to the magnanimous man to have confidence in others»²⁵, and so Don Álvaro had confidence in the prayers of his children and above all confidence in God, knowing that if he did what was humanly possible, God would do the rest.

²¹ Á. DEL PORTILLO, “Words pronounced in a family get-together”, AGP, Biblioteca, PO1, 1990, 1270, quoted in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 639.

²² See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 647-649. Don Álvaro received the episcopal ordination on January 6, 1991.

²³ ST II-II, q. 129, a. 5, resp.

²⁴ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *The Forge*, Scepter Publishers, New York, London 1987, no. 216: «With God’s grace, you have to tackle and carry out the impossible [...] because anybody can do what is possible».

²⁵ ST II-II, q. 129, a. 6, ad 1.

This confidence that Don Álvaro had belongs to magnanimity, for if, as St. Thomas says, «magnanimity is chiefly about the hope of something difficult», then confidence denotes that «a man derives hope through believing the word of one who promises to help him»²⁶. And Don Álvaro believed that his sons and daughters in Opus Dei would pray and he believed that with God all things are indeed possible. It was his firm faith in God that nourished his hope and also his magnanimity.

In order to obtain the juridical solution foreseen by the Founder, Don Álvaro declared three Marian years from 1978 to 1980, during which the members of the Work had recourse to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. So much did he rely on the maternal assistance of Our Lady that in the last Marian year he visited hundreds of churches and sanctuaries with the assurance that his prayers and the prayers of his sons and daughters would be heard. His hope in the realization of the Founder's special intention did not falter, for he knew without a doubt that the Virgin listened to his petitions. During those years until the very date on which John Paul II made public his decision to erect Opus Dei as a personal prelature, Don Álvaro would go daily to different churches in Rome to pray the rosary with the hope and the assurance of a magnanimous soul to whom, through the mediation of the Virgin, great graces would be granted. As St. Thomas puts it, assurance or security belongs to magnanimity, for this virtue does not give way «to a troubled mind, nor to man, nor to fortune»²⁷. Certainly for many people, including ecclesiastical figures, the realization of the special intention of the Founder seemed an impossibility. In 1946 in Rome, the Founder had already been told that he and his message of the universal call to holiness in the middle of the world had arrived a hundred years too early for the Church. The way to the definitive juridical solution for the Work was to be long and arduous and any error on the part of Don Álvaro would jeopardize the Work and the service that it could offer to the Church. For this reason, Don Álvaro asked for prayers so that he would not make any mistakes along the way and would help the Founder in the transformation of Opus Dei into a personal prelature²⁸. Anyone in Don Álvaro's position would have experienced a certain

²⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 6, resp.

²⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 7, resp.

²⁸ On December 1, 1978 when Don Álvaro received indications from the Roman Pontiff to

fear or anxiety given the responsibility that the juridical solution entailed. But, as we said before, security belongs to magnanimity, albeit indirectly, and this security banishes the despair that is caused by fear. As St. Thomas says, «Security denotes perfect freedom of the mind from fear, just as confidence denotes strength of hope. Now, as hope directly belongs to magnanimity, so fear directly regards fortitude. Wherefore as confidence belongs immediately to magnanimity, so security belongs immediately to fortitude»²⁹.

Security or assurance is, according to St. Thomas, a condition of both fortitude and magnanimity. The security, the “firmness of mind”, that Don Álvaro experienced enabled him to put aside all care and fear, trusting in the supernatural means while simultaneously engaging in indefatigable work for the attainment of the juridical solution. Those with whom Don Álvaro collaborated were able to witness his fortitude, as well as other components of this virtue, such as patience and perseverance³⁰. From his constant patience also radiated cheerfulness and serenity of spirit in spite of the difficulties, delays, and the contradictions which took place to impede the juridical transformation. Certainly, the contradictions would have disheartened anyone: On June 28, 1979 the Congregation of Bishops met and determined almost unanimously that there were no sufficient reasons for erecting Opus Dei as a personal prelature, as had been requested. This decision did not in any way cast down the spirit of Don Álvaro. On the contrary, he tenaciously moved to have the decision reconsidered, trusting as always on prayer and sacrifice³¹. But one contradiction would follow another: Opus Dei was even accused of wanting to turn itself into a “parallel church” or a “universal diocese”. Such an accusation was an offense against God, and moreover, an attack not only directed against the Work but also against the Church and against the Pope³². These contradictions were obviously a source of suffering for Don Álvaro – suffering which he bore with fortitude, serenity, and

start working on the special intention, he told Marlies Kücking, then the central director in Rome, the following: «Pedid por mí para que no me equivoque y ayude a nuestro Padre a lograr que salga», quoted in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 485.

²⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 7, resp.

³⁰ See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 486.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 488-489.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 494-95.

patience, and which led him to live an even greater abandonment to divine providence and enabled him to help his children in Opus Dei to see everything that was happening with greater supernatural outlook³³. His mind and heart which were intent on seeing accomplished the special intention, because he knew it was God's will, never gave way to impatience. Since the attainment of the special intention would indeed be a great good not only for the Work but also for the Church, he continued to work and to pray with the hope of the magnanimous man and with the assurance or security that fortitude and patience bestow on a man. What St. Augustine says regarding patience is significant here: «A man's patience it is whereby he bears evil with an equal mind, that is, without being disturbed by sorrow, lest he abandon with an unequal mind the goods whereby he may advance to better things»³⁴. The calumnies labeled against the Work at this time were borne by Don Álvaro with serenity; he prayed and forgave, just as the Founder had done before him and had advised his spiritual children to do, drowning evil in an abundance of good. As a magnanimous man, Don Álvaro did not complain by letting his mind give way to the external evils befalling the Work. He had that strength of character which comes from fortitude, which enabled him to avoid being overcome by grievous evils. Such an attitude, according to St. Thomas, is the attainment of a great good and therefore belongs to magnanimity³⁵.

After a more sustained analysis of Opus Dei's request to be transformed into a personal prelature, a special commission of bishops voted in favor of the request and this was followed by the Pope's official communication of the erection of Opus Dei as a personal prelature. After so many years of praying and working for this special intention, Don Álvaro was filled with joy and gratitude, which he communicated in a letter to John Paul II, stating among other things that the attainment of the special intention was an affirmation, as it were, of the effort of all the members of Opus Dei «to spend their entire life

³³ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 495.

³⁴ *De Patientia* II, cited in *ST II-II*, q. 136, a. 1, resp.

³⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 5, ad 1: «[...] not to be overcome by a grievous evil, such as the danger of death, is looked upon as though it were the obtaining of a great good, the former belonging to fortitude, and the latter to magnanimity: in this sense fortitude and magnanimity may be considered as identical". While St. Thomas does maintain a certain identity of these two virtues, he does distinguish between the two, saying that magnanimity is to be considered a part of fortitude, "because it is annexed thereto as secondary to principal».

in the service of the universal Church and of the local Churches»³⁶. With the humility and the magnanimity that characterized him, Don Álvaro multiplied his pilgrimages to Marian sanctuaries so as to put under the Virgin's protection the last stage of the special intention. He even began a special novena of pilgrimages to the Virgin on August 12, 1982. Given John Paul II's decision to erect Opus Dei as a personal prelature, a declaration to this effect was to be prepared by the Congregation of Bishops and dated August 23, 1982. There was however a delay in the publication of the decree – another contradiction which Don Álvaro bore with faith and serenity – recognizing, as the Founder had recognized before him, that our joy has its roots in the form of the Cross³⁷. Other obstacles and new calumnies arose, but these did not bend Don Álvaro's spirit. On the contrary, he was motivated to pray more and to ask for more prayers from his children in Opus Dei. On November 18, 1982 Don Álvaro began his eleventh novena of Marian pilgrimages. He knew that the special intention would be obtained because God wanted it, and so it was just a matter of time and of prayer. As Don Álvaro said on the feast of Christ the King of 1982, «These are the last centimeters of the hundred meter race. If the special intention is not obtained at the end of this novena, it would be a sign that we have to continue to pray: *fiat voluntas tua* (Matt. 6:10). We will continue to pray and say: How good God is, that he makes us pray more»³⁸.

Finally, on November 28, 1982, *L'Osservatore Romano* announced that the Holy Father had erected Opus Dei as a personal prelature and that Don Álvaro was named its Prelate. Given the many years of prayer and sacrifice that God had willed in order to grant the special intention, it is interesting to note that in his humility and magnanimity Don Álvaro in no moment attributed this great grace to himself, to his talents, to his remarkable *sensus Ecclesiae*³⁹. His dependence on God for the many gifts that he had personally received and for the great graces conferred on the Work was total. His absolute confidence

³⁶ Quoted in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 496. Translation is mine.

³⁷ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 497. As St. Josemaría would say, “*Nulla dies sine cruce in laetitia*”. For a more detailed account of the contradictions that Don Álvaro had to endure for the juridical solution to be accomplished, see MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 488-499.

³⁸ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 499. Translation is mine.

³⁹ This expression, *sensus Ecclesiae*, was used by Cardinal Pietro Palazzini in referring to Don Álvaro's work for the juridical solution of Opus Dei, which the Cardinal saw in terms of Don Álvaro's desire to better serve the Church. See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 487.

in the help of God to accomplish the impossible is, as we noted before, a sign of his magnanimity. As he told his daughters in the Work after the public announcement of the attainment of the special intention, «We have not put [the last stone]: it is God who has done everything. If we have persevered, it is because He has helped us»⁴⁰. God always gives generously, especially when men and women give of themselves, when they act according to the law of superabundance, as Don Álvaro himself had always done in both favorable and unfavorable conditions. In his humility he followed the Founder who wished only to do and to disappear, so that Christ alone would shine forth. He never considered the special intention the success of his personal talents. On the contrary, besides attributing the juridical solution to God and to the prayers of so many people in Opus Dei and besides letting himself and his many gifts be used as an instrument of God, he fully recognized the work and intercession of the Founder and also John Paul II's keen understanding of the nature of Opus Dei⁴¹. Don Álvaro's humility, his total dependence on God's goodness, led him to announce in a pastoral letter to the faithful of Opus Dei a year of thanksgiving for the special intention, a year in which Our Lady as the mediatrix of all graces would hold a prominent place for the members of Opus Dei, as well as for the Prelate, who intended to visit Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico to thank her for her special intercession – a visit which was to recall the Founder's own pilgrimage to her in May 1970. Although Don Álvaro traveled to Mexico in April 1983 to make this special pilgrimage, he visited many other Marian shrines, as was his custom, to thank Our Lady and to implore her constant protection for the Work and for the Church. Finally, in March 1983 the papal bull *Ut sit*, which was to officially erect Opus Dei as a personal prelature, was prepared. And on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph, a date so significant for the Founder who had loving recourse to the father of Christ here on earth, there was an act of public execution of the bull. The ceremony took place at the Basilica of San Eugenio a Valle Giulia, where Don Álvaro preached the homily which was published with the title “The Last Stone”, for with the execution of the papal bull it could be said that the last

⁴⁰ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 500. Translation is mine. The “last stone” here refers to the completion of what had been sought for so many years, that is, the special intention.

⁴¹ See the words of Don Álvaro's close collaborator, Mons. Joaquín Alonso, in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 501.

stone of the special intention had been placed in the edifice of Opus Dei for the good of the Work and for the service of the Church⁴².

What is particularly interesting to emphasize here is that even in the many contradictions – the crosses – and in the calumnies involved in the attainment of the special intention, Don Álvaro saw all these difficulties in a supernatural light, as the way that divine providence was using to configure him and the members of Opus Dei into other Christs, Christ himself, for as the Founder would say, to have the cross is to have Christ, to be Christ. In this way they all learned to do the good for the sake of the good, not seeking human recompense or human glory, working rather for the glory of God and of souls. Therefore, not only was Don Álvaro magnanimous but he was also teaching his sons and daughters in Opus Dei to be magnanimous, entrusting the difficult and the humanly impossible to God's assistance which is never lacking⁴³. His continuous optimism, joy, and peace in the midst of the many contradictions which the juridical solution of the Work encountered can only be understood as the result of God's grace, with which as the Founder would say, the impossible could be realized⁴⁴. And so if Don Álvaro was able to work with magnanimity and according to the law of superabundance, it was due to the superabundance of God's own action in his life; he corresponded to God with a complete gift of self.

Once the special intention had been brought about, Don Álvaro centered his attention on the preparation of the documentation for the Founder's beatification. In his work for both the special intention and the beatification, Don Álvaro proceeded prudently and judiciously, not with calculation or with precipitation, but always living personal and collective humility and his usual magnanimity. As a faithful son and close collaborator of the Founder, he recognized the Founder's great holiness; but this holiness was corroborated by thousands of other persons within the Church and in civil society. Paul VI once said that the Founder of Opus Dei had received the most charisms of any man in the history of the Church. The message of Opus Dei was not in a sense

⁴² See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 501-506.

⁴³ See the letter of Don Álvaro, dated November 28, 1982, of which are found pertinent excerpts in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 504-506.

⁴⁴ ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *The Forge*, no. 216: «With the grace of God, you are to undertake and realize the impossible [...], for the possible can be done by anyone», in *The Way, Furrow, The Forge*, Scepter, New York 2001. See also note 24 above.

new, for it had been lived by the first Christians, but it needed to be recovered and Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was a faithful instrument that God used to proclaim the universal call to holiness, leading countless souls now and in the future to identification with Christ in the ordinary circumstances of life, without needing to enclose themselves in a convent or monastery.

In preparing the cause for the Founder's beatification and canonization, Don Álvaro was prompted, then, not only by his own filial piety but also by the testimony of so many persons indebted to the Founder for his work on behalf of souls and the Church. Don Álvaro also considered that the preparations for the Founder's cause were to be realized in obedience to Paul VI, who had confided to him that it was fitting that the saintly life of the Founder be known so that many souls could have recourse to his intercession⁴⁵. The work involved to present the Founder's cause for beatification was immense, but Don Álvaro in his magnanimity took on this arduous task. Besides having a prayer card issued for private devotion to the Founder and keeping objects used by the Founder which could later serve as relics, Don Álvaro also needed to compile the documentation which was to be presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The preparation of this documentation was no easy task, for in addition to this work Don Álvaro also had to fulfill many other obligations as Prelate of Opus Dei and as Father to so many spiritual sons and daughters throughout the world. He had furthermore been charged as consultor to a variety of Congregations within the Holy See. In the diversity of tasks which he was able to fulfill with such serenity and patience, one can clearly perceive his fortitude, magnanimity, and his heroic mastery of self. His generosity with respect to his talents and his time is a manifestation of his ever-ready affirmative response to give his life for the Work and for the Church – a response which he recommended to Monsignor Fernando Ocariz by advising him to always say yes to whatever work was asked of him as consultor to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith⁴⁶.

As was his usual way of working, Don Álvaro relied on the assistance of God and of others. In addition to putting together the published and non-edited texts of the Founder and his letters, Don Álvaro asked the members of the Work who had lived more closely with the Founder to write their remembrances,

⁴⁵ See note 103 in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 507.

⁴⁶ See note 42 in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 530.

all of which would serve for the preparation of the documentation to be presented later for the process of beatification. Don Álvaro also had the initiative to ask notable figures within the Church and in civil society to write postulatory letters – letters which clearly gave witness to the interest had by numerous cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and religious in promoting the recognition of the Founder’s sanctity by the entire Church and the world. Two processes for the beatification of the Founder were held: one in Rome and the other in Madrid. The documentation obtained from these two processes, which included the declarations of witnesses, the research realized in different archives of both an ecclesiastical and civil nature, public and private, and the writings of the Founder himself, was immense, totaling twenty-eight volumes, with about twenty-four thousand pages⁴⁷. All of this work did not however constitute a substitute for Don Álvaro’s own work on behalf of the process of beatification. He had in fact two important tasks to realize. The first was to write the explanatory notes for the Founder’s *Intimate Notes*, and the second was to prepare his own testimony in writing for the tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome. Needless to say, both of these tasks would require much concentration and time – time which given his many other obligations he really did not have. For this reason, he would try to find time during the summer months in order to put together his remembrances, his notes, and other documents, all of which would lead to the writing of his testimony. Don Álvaro dedicated the second part of the summer of 1983 to his written testimony, although he did not bring it to completion until May 28, 1986. He submitted a very thorough work indeed, consisting of more than two thousand pages⁴⁸.

Once the tribunals in Rome and in Madrid had their closing sessions (November 8, 1986 and June 1984, respectively), then the *Positio* on the heroism of the virtues of the Founder had to be prepared. Again Don Álvaro relied on the assistance of others; in this case on a group of experts, among whom were theologians, canon lawyers, historians, specialists in archival work and in information technology. Of course, Don Álvaro oversaw this work with his advice and suggestions. With this group of experts, he was certain that the *Positio* would be done very well. In addition, he also made sure that the work was accomplished according to the deadlines set by him, which at times

⁴⁷ See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 511-512.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 512-513.

did not seem feasible but which were met thanks to Don Álvaro's continuous encouragement and motivation. The work was done both well and quickly, using the time needed, for the glory of God and the service of souls. When the *Positio* was finally completed in June 1988, it consisted of six thousand pages in four volumes. It was considered to be outstanding, the best that the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints had seen in the twentieth century⁴⁹. Once the *Positio* was submitted, Don Álvaro, with the patience and serenity that so characterized his magnanimity, awaited the date for the discussion of the Cause. The fact that there was already a cure attributed to the intercession of the Founder could in effect bring about a speedier resolution. And so on September 9, 1989 and again on March 20, 1990 the heroism of the virtues of the Founder was recognized. A decree was issued which proclaimed his heroism in living the virtues on April 9, 1990. The Church's official recognition of the Founder's sanctity gave way, as had the erection of Opus Dei as a personal prelature, to a profound act of thanksgiving on the part of Don Álvaro. Once again, in his humility and in his dependence on God he did not consider the decree a motive for self-glory, but rather a call to live the spirit of Opus Dei more faithfully, more responsibly, and so he told his spiritual sons and daughters that the decree should serve to bring about «an explosion in their desires for holiness»⁵⁰. In fact, cognizant of the role of the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of souls and of the importance of humility, which leads souls to depend not on their own strength but on the strength of God and so to be magnanimous, Don Álvaro wrote a letter to the members of the prelature based on the virtue of humility, which the Founder had lived and had taught

⁴⁹ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 513-514. Cardinal Pietro Palazzini, who had been Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints from 1980 to 1988, said in his homily in May 1992 at one of the Masses in thanksgiving for the beatification of the Founder: «I do not know of any document of this kind that is more complete, extensive, and analytical than this one: the fruit of the rigorous critical methodology with which the whole cause for the beatification of the Founder of Opus Dei has been carried out. I give thanks to God [...] for the quality of this work, which is at the height of the perfection required by every work of this kind», in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 514. Translation is mine.

⁵⁰ In words pronounced by Don Álvaro in a family get-together, he said «Pido a Dios que no nos envanezcamos; la declaración de las virtudes heroicas de nuestro Padre no debe dar pábulo a la vanidad, sino que ha de empujarnos a tener más sentido de responsabilidad. Ha de servir para que haya una explosión de deseos de santidad en todo el mundo, dentro de la Obra», in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 515, note 140.

others to live, and which as Don Álvaro put it, «leads the creature to open himself to the action of the Holy Spirit»⁵¹. The Holy Spirit who is love enables the humble and docile creature to love in his turn by giving himself to God and to others ever more fully. To act in accordance with the law of superabundance requires docility to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and so according to Don Álvaro the Founder had never knowingly said no to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, an example which Don Álvaro himself strived to follow.

Characteristic of his magnanimous spirit was therefore his desire to give himself with renewed vigor to God in the service of the Work and of the Church and to lead others toward greater generosity. The “stretching forth” of his mind and heart toward greater heights of sanctity was a clear manifestation of his magnanimity. As St. Augustine would say, the man who thinks he has already done enough does not progress in the spiritual life but rather goes backwards⁵². This was never the attitude of Don Álvaro – an attitude which would have been one of calculation – nor was it the attitude which he proposed to his spiritual children in Opus Dei. His example was always one of generous self-giving; he acted according to the law of superabundance and so was able with God’s assistance to bring about a torrent of graces for the Work and for the Church. To be able to patiently and tenaciously pursue the beatification of the Founder and to dedicate so much of his energy to the attainment of the personal prelature, the juridical solution seen by the Founder as appropriate for the Work – both exceedingly arduous tasks – manifests the magnanimous soul of Don Álvaro. Certainly, for anyone else the realization of these tasks would have been considered the culmination of a lifetime. This was not however the case for Don Álvaro; there was still more that he could do, more that he could love. The more he lovingly did, the more his heart was expanded in desires to love yet more.

⁵¹ Á. DEL PORTILLO, *Cartas de familia*, vol. 3, n. 83, quoted in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 516.

⁵² In his homily at the last Mass of thanksgiving for the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá, held at the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome on October 10, 2002, the Most Reverend Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, quoted from these words of St. Augustine, «Never be content with what you are, if you want to become what you, as yet, are not. For wherever you feel satisfied, there you will stop. If you say, ‘Enough’, you have perished. Always grow, always go forward, always advance» (Sermon 169, 18), in *Saint Josemaría Escrivá, October 6, 2002*, in «Bulletin», Spring 2003.

As we have noted several times, magnanimity is part of the virtue of fortitude, which not only endures dangers but also accomplishes difficult work. Don Álvaro's mind was furthermore moved by the Holy Spirit and by the gift of fortitude which makes a man labor to enjoy true goods, so that he not succumb to the love of merely material goods. We can apply here what St. Thomas says about the gift of fortitude to Don Álvaro's desire to accomplish arduous tasks for the love of God: «It is very difficult, not merely to do virtuous deeds, which receive the common designation of works of justice, but furthermore to do them with an insatiable desire, which may be signified by hunger and thirst for justice»⁵³. This insatiable desire to do the true good, to hunger and thirst after justice, certainly characterizes the life of Don Álvaro. In addition, since the virtue and the gift of fortitude are also referred to charity, which is the root of all the virtues and the gifts, it may truly be said that Don Álvaro was a man who knew how to love⁵⁴.

4. CONCLUSION: DOING "SOMETHING EXTRA" UNTIL THE END OF HIS LIFE

The magnanimity which was so typical of Don Álvaro was practiced by him not only in great tasks, such as the attainment of the juridical solution for the Work and the process of the beatification of the Founder, but also in smaller tasks and initiatives which manifest the great soul of Don Álvaro. It is impressive to note that he would have had the presence of mind as a young man to make drawings of the room which he shared with the Founder and other members of the Work at the delegation of Honduras during the Spanish Civil War, or that despite his poor health and tremendous workload he would make the efforts needed to find money to pay for the acquisition of Villa Tevere, which was to be the central house of Opus Dei in Rome, and to always pay the workers for the renovation on a timely basis. Don Álvaro

⁵³ *ST II-II*, q. 139, a. 2, resp. According to both St. Augustine and St. Thomas, the gift of fortitude corresponds to the fourth beatitude: «Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice». In bringing about the juridical solution of the Work and in working toward the beatification of the Founder, Don Álvaro demonstrates the desire for justice, for what rightfully corresponded to the Work and to the life of the Founder.

⁵⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 139, a. 2, ad 2.

himself recognized that finding the necessary funds was indeed a miracle⁵⁵. While Don Álvaro was detached from material goods, he did, as St. Thomas says of the magnanimous man, “esteem them useful for the accomplishment of virtuous deeds”⁵⁶. Forgetful of self and detached from his talents, time, and even from his health, it is not surprising that the Founder would rely on the fortitude of this son of his, referring to him as “saxum”, that is, rock. Only the man of fortitude can be magnanimous, not deeming even health as indispensable in the accomplishment of the good⁵⁷.

Despite all the work and preoccupations of the early period of the Work in Rome, Don Álvaro’s great faith, his many talents, his great capacity for work, and his serene temperament nurtured his magnanimous spirit, which led him to always strive to do more. For example, when the Founder erected the Roman College of the Holy Cross and named Don Álvaro Rector of the College, Don Álvaro not only looked after the academic and spiritual needs of the students but also thought of ways in which the students could rest and occupy themselves in activities other than their studies. The solution to this was the purchase of a property situated in Salto di Fondi which would provide the students of the Roman College with a place to rest but also offered the opportunity for a vast array of social and apostolic activities⁵⁸. With this initiative, as with others prompted by Don Álvaro, the burden – a sweet burden of love lived with a smiling asceticism – would fall on him.

And so it is not surprising that the last years of his life would be characterized by his usual magnanimous spirit and the law of superabundance. Always thinking of serving souls more effectively, and never deterred by the lack of

⁵⁵ See MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 315-319.

⁵⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 8, ad 2.

⁵⁷ In the service of souls Don Álvaro never excused himself because of too much work or health problems; when the workers of Villa Tevere were to be paid, he went out in search of the necessary monies even when he was ill. For this reason, what St. Thomas says about the virtue of magnanimity as being a part of fortitude is especially relevant here: «For no one seemingly exposes himself to danger for the sake of a thing that he does not deem great. But for things that are truly great, a magnanimous man is most ready to expose himself to danger, since he does something great in the act of fortitude, even as in the acts of the other virtues», in *ST II-II*, q. 129, a. 5, ad 2. It may be said that according to the spirit of Opus Dei everything we do – whether small or large – becomes great when it is done from love of God and of souls, and there is no doubt that this love was the driving force of Don Álvaro’s life.

⁵⁸ MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, pp. 324-329.

human means, especially by the lack of financial resources, Don Álvaro was able to bring about the realization of another of the Founder's ideas, that is, the establishment of a center for ecclesiastical studies in Rome. This center, now known as the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, serves not only seminarians and priests but also lay men and women from around the world. Yet another initiative encouraged by Don Álvaro was the Biomedical Campus in Rome. His concern for others was not only spiritual but corporeal as well. The magnanimity of a man of faith, hope, and love knows no bounds, and so Don Álvaro was ever eager to serve the Work and the Church, seconding in everything the desires of John Paul II who, in recognizing the need for a new evangelization in Europe, prompted Don Álvaro to write a letter in December 1985 to his spiritual children urging them to take up the challenge of this new evangelization. Certainly, as Don Álvaro had witnessed the continuous self-gift of the Founder to do the will of God, it may be said that he, like the Founder, lived and died under the blessed weight of service to God, to the Church, and to the Roman Pontiff⁵⁹. It is not by chance then that the life of this "good and faithful servant" should be proposed to us today as an example of heroic sanctity. His life participates in the light of Christ that comes to illuminate our world.

⁵⁹ Don Álvaro had said of the Founder, «No podemos dudar de que ha muerto bajo el peso de este quehacer de servicio a Dios, a la Iglesia y al Papa», in MEDINA BAYO, *Álvaro del Portillo*, p. 446.