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Garabandal's First Winter

From my schooldays a passage from a play still remains etched in my mind:

*In winter God disposes
that mysteries be fulfilled,
and seeds take root,
and grow strong under the ground,
to develop in such a way
as to bring forth fruit later on.*

It appears that God also had His *winter* plans for Garabandal . . . Under the frigid inclemency of the wintry season, He aimed to give silent root to the many things that He had sown. In this way, through a period of *tests* and week after week of lethargy, He protected and favored the slow germination that would bring forth the most luscious fruits. The appearance of the meadows in winter is bleak; but that is the time when mysteries are accomplished in the womb of mother earth.

With October 18th, 1961 began the first *winter* in the history of the great events of Garabandal, a winter which goes beyond the simple meteorological extent.

The icy wind of disillusion from October 18th had cut down and scattered many enthusiasts and well-wishers of Garabandal. And now the publication of a new «*Nota*» from the bishop of Santander arrived with telling effect.

From Warning to Discredit

The chief Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, Bishop Doroteo Fernández, with a precipitation that we are not able to explain and which history will judge, immediately made the feeling of the Commission his own, and spread it to the four winds through a «*Nota Oficial*» published in the *Boletín del Obispado* in November:

Most beloved sons:

It has been some time since you were told what our attitude must be in the face of the

public rumors that attribute to the Most Holy Virgin certain marvelous events, especially revelations, apparitions, oral locutions, and other more or less extraordinary signs.

We⁽¹⁾ would like to see in all of you the highest discretion and prudence with which the Church judges the supernaturalness of such phenomena. Powerful is the Lord, Who gives us revelation when it pleases Him to manifest Himself, and speaks to us when it is in accordance with His goodness. But it would be a great lack of wisdom in us to accept every wind of human opinion as coming from the Lord. When God wishes to speak, He does it in terms that are clear and unequivocal. When He wishes to tell us something, His words do not allow tergiversation (evasion) or obscurity. And it is the Church founded by Jesus Christ — not by public opinion, and much less by any particular person — that is competent to judge definitively on such allegedly supernatural events. Let no one arrogate and attribute to himself functions and powers which God has not entrusted to him, for such a one would be a usurper and an intruder.

In what concerns the events that have been happening at San Sebastián de Garabandal, a town in our diocese, you should be told that in the fulfillment of our pastoral duty and to avoid the unfounded and bold interpretations of those who venture to give a definitive judgment where the Church does not believe it still prudent to do so; also to guide souls, we have to come to declare the following:

1. It is clear that the above-mentioned apparitions, visions, locutions and revelations up to now cannot be presented or held to have a serious foundation for truth and authenticity.

2. Priests should absolutely abstain from whatever would contribute to create confusion among the Christian people. Thus they should cautiously avoid, as far as it depends on them, the organization of visits or pilgrimages to the place referred to.

1. The use of the word *we* in place of *I* is what could be called an authoritarian plural or a royal plural. Up until recently it was the standard form used, almost obligatory, in documents from the ecclesiastical hierarchies. I point this out, since readers may wonder at the use of the expression.



“Do not allow yourselves to be seduced.”

3. Priests should instruct the faithful with wisdom and charity concerning the true feeling of the Church in these matters. They should make them understand that our faith does not require such aids of supposed revelations and miracles to maintain it.

We believe that God has revealed Himself to us and that the Church teaches us: in this category belong the clear and authentic miracles of Jesus Christ. He gives them to us as a proof of His doctrine, to which there is nothing more to add. If He — by Himself, or by means of His Most Holy Mother — wishes to speak to us, we should be attentive in listening to His words and saying like Samuel: “Speak Lord, your servant hears.”

4. Priests likewise should instruct the faithful that the best disposition for hearing the voice of God is a perfect, complete and humble submission to the teachings of the Church; and that no one can hear with fruit the voice of God in heaven if he rejects with pride the doctrine of Mother Church, who welcomes us and sanctifies us on this earth.

5. As for you beloved faithful, do not allow yourselves to be seduced by any wind of doctrine. Hear with submission and trust the teachings of your priests, placed at your side to be teachers of the truth in the Church.

I know that you have been impatiently waiting, and that confusion has burdened many minds in the face of the events that have recently occurred. I would wish to bring to your conscience the peace and tranquility that is the basic foundation of a calm and rational judgment. Let no one take away the precious gift of peace that rests in God and “do not be alarmed, either by the spirit, or by words, or by writing,” as St. Paul said to the Thessalonians.

Having these our sentiments, most dearly beloved sons, let us hope that the Virgin, whom we hail under the title of Sedes Sapientiae — Seat of Wisdom — will enlighten us to know everything that is useful for the glory of her Son and our salvation.

*Doroteo,
Apostolic Administrator*

The *timeliness* of this «Nota» could be disputed; but I think that no one would deny two excellent qualities in it: the pastoral zeal that inspired it and the general tone of discretion that it shows.

With all this everyone can see too — without sufficient cause in my judgment — it increases the negative attitude against the events of Garabandal. It advances from «*Nothing obliges us to affirm the supernaturalness of the events*» in the first «Nota» to stating in the second «Nota» that «*The apparitions, visions, locutions, and revelations up to now cannot be presented or held to have a serious foundation for truth and authenticity.*»

And the Apostolic Administrator had not personally seen or observed anything. He has based his opinion completely on the Commission, which also had not seen or observed the matter sufficiently.

Furthermore, it had not taken the precaution of proceeding with a legitimate investigation, questioning in an adequate manner the girls and the main witnesses: the girls' families, the village priest, and the honest people who closely followed the affair.⁽²⁾

It seems proper to have official regulations of a disciplinary character to avoid possible abuses or excesses. But why was there such a hurry to pronounce, even though provisionally, upon the character of events that were still going on and still had not been adequately studied? We can remember that at Lourdes and also at Fatima, the local diocesan chanceries waited until the end of the events — and until an authentic canonical process was concluded — before speaking out officially on the

2. What I am stating in this paragraph has already been shown in the preceding chapters.



“Nothing obliges us to affirm the supernaturalness of the events.”

character of what had occurred.⁽³⁾

In the case of Garabandal there has always been an extreme rush on the part of the officials to speak out about what was going on . . . *That* was rather obscure . . . *That* was not convincing . . . *That* gave reasons for serious distrust . . . All *that* could be explained naturally . . . *That*, supernaturally, was nothing . . .

Well, let us return to the second and last «Nota» of Bishop Doroteo Fernández.⁽⁴⁾ I have previously recognized the two values that it seems to hold: good pastoral zeal and a general tone of prudence; but I ought equally to point out some things that take away its value:

● The ambiguous use of the term *Church*, leading many people to mistake the chancery for the Church, as if the Church were confined to the chancery . . . as if all faithful Catholics were not also the Church, the same Church as the chancery, although with a different function.

● The usage of a similar ambiguity in appropriating to the chancery the exclusive right to a *definitive judgment*, thus excluding all individual judgments . . . as if in the Church of God those who are not of the chancery were not entitled to make a judgment on matters of opinion; that is to say, on matters upon which the ultimate authority has not pronounced an absolute decision.

● The bishop speaks of usurpation and intrusion . . . but to deny the legitimate rights of other persons, and to attempt to take away the rights that legitimately belong to them, is also usurpation and intrusion.

● There is also in the «Nota» a third discrepancy: placing in front of the faithful certain truths so that they would easily be led to believe that the diocesan chancery was *the Church*, and because of that to accept what the chancery said with «*perfect, complete and humble submission.*» This type of submission is due only to teachings that explicitly and unquestionably come from the

3. In Lourdes, the ecclesiastical verdict came after four years of waiting (1858-1862); in Fatima, after thirteen (1917-1930).

4. Months later, Bishop Doroteo Fernández was reassigned from Santander — where, according to what had been said, he hoped to remain as the titular and residential bishop — to Badajoz, where he was the Apostolic Administrator until 1971.

Higher Magisterium. At the diocesan level, the charisma of infallibility does not apply; at the low level of a bishop, the final word in questions and teachings of the faith cannot be made. As a consequence, in front of the episcopal dictates — the dictates of one single bishop — we can be called upon for practical obedience and respect, but in no way are we required to give «*perfect, complete, and humble submission*» in our way of thinking . . .

● The «Nota» also says that the priests are placed at the side of the faithful as «*teachers of truth in the Church*». That is a very important part of their high mission; but it can be observed that they do not always fulfill it . . . We should accept them as such teachers when they give us the teaching and doctrine *of the Church*; but we do not owe them the same submission and trust when, concerning other matters, they give us their own *personal opinions*.

● Finally, it is impossible to accept this solemn double statement: «*When God wishes to speak, He does it in clear and unequivocal terms; when He wishes to tell us something, His words do not allow tergiversation or obscurity.*»⁽⁵⁾

It is hard to understand how a bishop, and moreover one who was an expert in Scripture as Bishop Fernández was, could sign his name to this. If anything appears clear in the Bible, it is that God is not accustomed to speaking like this . . . His words end in being clear and unmistakable to those well disposed souls who search wholeheartedly and apply themselves to meditation on His word, even

5. God does not ordinarily speak in the way that Bishop Fernández mentions in his «Nota» in order to permit us to walk always on the difficult but meritorious path of faith. How difficult faith is!

With regard to this, very frequently things are at the same time:

1. Sufficiently clear so that souls who are basically good end up seeing them.

2. Sufficiently obscure so that those who always find reasons for not believing — souls with bad dispositions — may not see.

For judgment I came into this world;
That those who are blind, may see;
And those who see, may become blind. John 9:39)

The same miracles of Our Lord, that Bishop Doroteo points to in his «Nota» as the prototype of *clear and authentic* supernatural actions, do not have a result so *clear* for everyone . . . This can be seen in those trying today to *demyth* the Gospel, finding in it the stone that crushes them to powder as Scripture states.

though it is obscure and difficult. But the sayings of God begin almost always in the form of an insinuation or mysterious call that upsets, and even serves to cause the badly disposed to stumble, and because of this is the cause of the fall, and of the resurrection of many. (Luke 2:34)

The words of God to men are ordinarily a process of progressive communication that only becomes sufficiently clear in the end, and this only to souls with good will. It is like the coming of light at dawn; some hazy beginnings and dim rays that do not allow the distance to be viewed or shapes and profiles to be made out, going on to become the full splendor that shows us everything around us in detail.

— *«When God wishes to speak, He does it in clear and unequivocal terms.»*

Yes, like the ancient prophets in the Old Testament. Read any one of them, and you will see how clearly and unequivocally they are understood from the first reading . . . Yes, as in many other passages of the last prophecy of the New Testament, the Apocalypse, where whole chapters are still waiting a substantial clarification.

Jesus Himself, the Word from the Father, communicated certain things with immediate and crystal clearness; but in many others . . . How did He answer Nicodemus? (John 3: 1-14) Or the woman of Sicar? (John 4: 4-14) Or those hearing His parables of the kingdom of heaven? (Matthew 13: 10-15) Or those who were listening to Him in the synagogue at Capernaum on the day following the multiplication of bread? (John 6: 60-66) Or how did He answer those who surrounded Him at the end of His life, with the vehement demand: **How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are really the Messiah that we are waiting for, tell us one time plainly.** (John 10: 24)⁽⁶⁾

6. Anyone want another example? Here is one described in Matthew 11: 2-15 and in Luke 7: 18. John the Baptist called two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus with this question, **Are you he who is to come or do we look for another?**

The question was stated in clear and unmistakable terms to put Jesus in the position of affirming Himself openly as the Messiah or the Christ. But how did Jesus answer?

He put before those sent a series of prodigies saying to them: **Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the gospel is preached to the poor. And fortunate is the one who is not scandalized in me.**

This was no *clear* and unmistakable answer, but a very

— *«When He wishes to tell us something, His words do not allow tergiversation or obscureness.»*

Yes, because of this, in the Church there have never appeared heretics and teachers of error, who always try to base their doctrines on texts of the Word of God . . .

What the bishop says in his second note should be compared with what St. Peter wrote centuries ago in his second epistle (3: 15-16):

Think of Our Lord's patience as your chance to be saved. Our brother Paul, who is so dear to us, told you this when he wrote to you with the wisdom that is his special gift. He always writes like this when he deals with this sort of subject, and this makes some points in his letter hard to understand; these are the points that unlearned and unbalanced people distort, in the same way as they distort the rest of scripture — to their own perdition.

It seems then that the Bishop of Santander errs notably when he writes, or puts his signature beneath the statement that *«When God wishes to speak, He does it in clear and unmistakable terms; when He wishes to tell us something, His words do not allow tergiversation or obscureness.»*

If the bishop and his commission members wish to use this double statement as a doctrinal basis to arrive at the disqualification of the events of Garabandal, since all the things there are not very clear, it would have to be said that the disqualifiers do not shine like brilliant stars.

Its mysterious and obscure beginning can be a good sign in favor of Garabandal, as it would make us see Garabandal in the pattern that God is accustomed to use when He unveils Himself to men. Only at the end of a certain process will what He wishes to tell us become sufficiently clear; and then not to everyone, but only to those who do not obstruct His many mercies; who do not **prefer the darkness to the light.** (John 3: 19)

mysterious one. It was sufficiently clear so that certain souls would understand it, and sufficiently obscure so that those without a good disposition toward the light would be confused.

How significant is the final sentence, **Fortunate is the one who is not scandalized in me.** Or according to a more literal translation from the Greek, **Fortunate is the one whom I do not cause to stumble.** Evidently, in the works and in the sayings of Jesus, the badly disposed are able to find a cause or basis for turning away and being repelled.



"The girls were walking in ecstasy."

Confusing Affairs

Not all those who are in favor of Garabandal journey without hurdles on the road to its destiny.

We have already seen what happened to Fr. Ramón when he returned to the village after the unexpected death of his brother, and what further happened to him during the somber hours of October 18th. María Herrero de Gallardo experienced the same on that day. And it was seen what Fr. Lucio Rodrigo of the University of Comillas experienced . . . But they were not the only ones. Here is a report from Plácido Ruiloba, the businessman from Santander:

«I had been struck by the first message of October 18th that spoke so seriously of the necessity of sacrifices and penance, since the cup was filling up and there would come upon us a great chastisement.

On thinking about this message — completely orthodox — my conscience was pricked, since I understood that we actually had a great need to be better . . . And I didn't lack the good will to attain this. Nevertheless, I was always attacked by doubts, and when I went up to Garabandal — a thing that I did frequently — I went in search of a possible negative aspect; not exactly because I had something against it, but in order to clear up the matter, with the purpose of evaluating the truth better.

Well then, on one of those days in the fall of 1961 — I don't remember the exact date — I came to the village greatly concerned about everything that was happening there . . . This was due to some negative thing that I had seen, and which I can't accurately recall now; I only know that it was tormenting me . . .

I came to the village at night — the days had shortened considerably — and on my arrival the girls were walking in ecstasy. I stayed purposely at a distant place, a place that was not accustomed to be the path of the girls' usual ecstatic marches. And constantly tortured by doubts, I began to say mentally, *Most Holy Virgin, the number of people who are coming*

to see this can be seen! And to think that, if it were a lie! . . . How much harm it could do! Our Lady, so that I can see that all that is happening is from you, while being far away as I am, I request that one of the girls come from where she is to give me the crucifix to kiss.

From the place where I had positioned myself behind the fountain, I could observe — without being noticed — many of the things that were happening. And so I noticed that the girls' ecstasies had ended, with the exception of Conchita who continued in ecstasy, whom I could see going toward her home, near the location of my hiding place. I saw perfectly how she went into it . . . And at the time I felt a tremendous disappointment in seeing that my prayer hadn't been heard, and that as a consequence my doubts had a basis.⁽⁷⁾

I was pondering over this bitterly, when suddenly I saw that the people who had entered the house were beginning to come out rapidly and behind them was the girl still in ecstasy. That surprised me, but I was having an intuition of what could be the reason. Conchita actually came right toward me, as always holding her head incredibly tilted backwards, which completely



7. Psychologically the actions and attitude of Mr. Ruiloba are easily understandable; but we ought to be aware, that not having received the sign that he desired, he could not conclude against the truth of what was happening there. We are certainly free to ask for signs from God . . . But He has no obligation to respond to our petitions, regardless of how reasonable they appear to us. If He does respond, He is to be thanked; if He does not, we should put our trust in Him without being upset.

In one way or another, by one means or another, we will not lack what is necessary to know what we should accept.

In Garabandal there was seen to a tremendous extent that attitude of mind that Jesus mentioned in His public life: *Unless you continually see signs and prodigies, you do not believe.* (John 4: 48)



"She gave me the crucifix to kiss."

prevented her from seeing what was in front and around her. She came to the place where I was hidden; she stopped in front of me, and she gave me the crucifix to kiss three times!

The response was so clear that all my doubts disappeared . . . at least for a while.»

Mr. Ruiloba does well in adding that final remark, since it seems that doubts and questions continued to plague him for the slightest reason, although he had come to be more than most others a witness of the countless astonishing things at Garabandal.

«On another day — I remember that it was a foul night with torrential rain — Jacinta fell suddenly into ecstasy, and I volunteered to accompany her alone. I thought that I would have an occasion that way to make new and useful tests. A woman from the village had lent me a big umbrella. I opened it over Jacinta's head, and the two of us continued alone through the muddy streets . . . The arm with which I supported the umbrella was wrapped around the girl's shoulders, leaning lightly on them. I seemed to have her completely at my mercy, and thus she presented me with the best opportunity to make new tests about the reality of those trances, concerning which the most diverse doubts were assailing me.

I set out with the intention of leading her; I was *not going to permit her to lead me*. This seemed rather easy, since the girl couldn't see where she was walking because of the position of her head, the dark night, and the umbrella that I held low in order to block her view. On repeated occasions, using the arm that I had put around her shoulders, I attempted to lead her in this or that direction . . . It was all useless; without any violence it was she who irresistibly led me. It was obvious that, with her gaze upwards, in spite of the night, the rain and the umbrella, she continually saw something that I wasn't able to reach or prevent, something wondrous that held her and led her . . .

The ecstasy lasted a long time. The streets were hard to travel, and there came a time when I was extremely exhausted and could barely hold

up the umbrella. Then I closed it, although it continued to rain. But I didn't have the courage to leave the girl by herself . . . Shortly after closing the umbrella, I felt myself completely drenched, and water even oozed out of my shoes. On passing under a little light bulb — they had the smallest ones in the village streets — it appeared to my observation that the girl was completely dry. Amazed, I passed my hand three times over her shoulders and hair. True enough she was completely dry under the rainstorm, so that I dried my hand passing it through her hair, although the hand was very cold and wet.

I could swear the truth of this in front of the Holy Evangelists. And no one can suggest that I suffered a hallucination at the time . . . because I am much more susceptible to doubt than to delusions, of which I don't remember having had a single one during my life.»

This same man, so hard to satisfy with regard to believing unreservedly, was then able to witness another marvel. The weather continued bad — *«the village was all mud»* — and he went on the trail of an ecstasy that Jacinta, Loli and Conchita were having together. Conchita was marching between the other two and suddenly the crucifix, which she was carrying in her hands over her chest, fell . . . Nevertheless, the march of the three girls continued for some 25 or 30 meters farther on; then Conchita was heard to say, *«Oh! What should I pick up? Will you tell me where it is?»* Without changing their attitude, the three girls backed up to the point where the little crucifix had dropped.

«Conchita, while continuing to look upward, began to stoop down with her arm extended downwards. She stopped this movement when her hand was about a half meter from the ground . . . And all those who were there were able to see, overwhelmed with excitement, how the crucifix came out of the mud and rose up to the hand of the girl. She grasped it, and lifted it again to the level of her chest, holding it there devoutly in her two hands. Afterward they began their march, again.

As soon as the ecstasy had ended, I looked closely at Conchita's hands; and I was able to verify that neither in her hands nor on the crucifix could be found the slightest trace of mud.

I am willing to testify to this anywhere; and I think there are others willing to testify besides myself since there were several other people there who saw it as I did. I remember specifically a woman from Los Corrales in Buelna (Santander) named Daniela Cuenca.»

Speaking about all these things many years later with a friend from Santander, Mr. Ruiloba said this:

«Many were the signs that the Virgin gave me to dissipate my doubts; nevertheless, as you know well, and as Conchita predicted to me, I came afterwards to doubt more than ever, even to the point of not going up anymore to the village.»⁽⁸⁾

At times we are more demanding than the Apostle St. Thomas himself, and we want to be continually touching the miraculous action of God in order to believe in it.

And the words of God, in spite of all their clearness — at times at least, if not always — have confusing matters so that we do not lack meritorious tests.

One of the obscure matters or *negative* signs that contributed to the skeptical or *opposed* attitude against Garabandal were the feigned ecstasies.

8. This alludes to a period of doubts and general confusion, even denials — all the visionaries included — with regard to the events of Garabandal . . .

Conchita foretold it:

At the beginning of everything the Virgin told the four of us, Loli, Jacinta, Mari Cruz and myself,

— that we were going to contradict one another,

— that our parents would not get along with one another,

— and even that we would deny that we had seen the Virgin and the Angel . . .

It surprised us very much, obviously, that she said these things to us.

We have these words from Father Ramón Andreu, recorded on tape:

«Even at the beginning they — Loli and Jacinta — told me one day, *Listen Father, what does this mean that the Virgin told us, that there would come a time in which we would doubt that we had seen her and the Child . . .*

And furthermore that we would contradict one another, and that we would deny, that is, that we would say that we hadn't seen either the Virgin or the Child?»



“At the beginning of everything the Virgin told the four of us . . . that we would deny.”



“You faked an ecstasy.”

Let us listen to Father José Ramón García de la Riva:

«I remember that during the early times in 1961, I was there one day in a state of consternation since, to my way of seeing it, Jacinta and Loli had pretended to be in ecstasy — at some time at least — in the trances during the day . . .

I became aware of this since there was a youth with a good sense of humor in our group who made everyone laugh, *including the visionaries*. Furthermore, if he told the girls to turn to the left, and I would say the opposite, the girls would always listen to my advice. My companion was amazed. He couldn't have been aware of how I was hurt by what I was observing. He finally asked me, *How did you know that?* I said to myself, *If you'd pay more attention, you'd understand.*

After the ecstasy, the two visionaries and I were at Mari Cruz' house. She was sitting on her bed with a cold. Then when they expected it the least, I told them point blank:

Today you faked an ecstasy.

Loli became red as a beet and hid her face in her hands, her elbows leaning on her knees. All she could say was, *Oh! What a thing!*

Jacinta started crying and said to me, *I'm going to tell my mother that you don't believe that we are seeing the Virgin.*

— *It isn't that*, I said to them. *Yes, I believe that you see the Virgin; but right now you have pretended to be in ecstasy . . . Because of your age, that doesn't have too much importance, since you aren't aware of the harm that you can cause. But suppose that some day a theologian or an important doctor would come here to study the events. And if he would see you — as I have just seen you — pretending an ecstasy, and if he couldn't come later, what impression would he take away? And what report would he make?*

Mari Cruz' mother also scolded them for their conduct.

Three months later I was with Loli. It was then possible to verify that the girls had sometimes feigned ecstasies. I said to the girl, *Now then, have you been faking or not?*

Laughing, she answered, *Do you know what Conchita said that day when you left Mari Cruz' house? "What a rascal! How he caught us!"*

Conchita speaks of these faked ecstasies in her diary. She writes: **We did not fake all of them**, which allows it to be supposed that some of them were faked.⁹ She confidentially recounted to me one of the false ecstasies for which *God punished her*, according to what she told me, for on coming down from the Pines, she had such a terrible fall that she thought she *was going to die of pain*. *I supported the suffering as well as I could*, she added. *And I thought that no one noticed it. Then the Virgin came for real. And then I was truly in ecstasy.*

She told me then that they only pretended when there were trusted people and residents of the village present. And also, that they had only done it when they knew for certain that the Virgin was going to come later, like a half hour

9. Our friend Fr. de la Riva is mistaken here. Conchita's actual text does not say this, although it seems to say it, but something very different. It will be shown later on.



"We never faked the entire ecstasy."

before the apparition. And that the Virgin was accustomed to punish them by coming later than that time. And that she always reproached them.»

The text from Conchita's diary is this:

At times the three of us wanted to be together. (*she, Jacinta and Loli*)

As our parents didn't allow us to be out of the house at night, sometimes when we went outside after the rosary — having already had two calls — we looked upwards as if we were seeing the Virgin.

And so we went together down the street with our parents and the people.

And later, the Virgin came and we were together.

**We always ended up seeing the Virgin.
We never faked the entire ecstasy.**

From the preceding, this is clear:

- That there are *obscure matters* about Garabandal which are more than just subjective opinions and pertain to the actual facts themselves.

- That the last matter that we have mentioned is mainly or almost exclusively the fault of the girls, who at various times treated with levity some-

thing that merited tremendous respect. Because of this, they are deserving of rebuke. But we should take this into account: that they did not suspect the importance of what they were doing, having come to such familiarity with the mystery that they easily were able to fall into the mistaken belief that it was *theirs*, that they could almost play with it. Here was fulfilled the dictum, *familiarity breeds contempt*.⁽¹⁰⁾

What is very clear is that these rare and isolated *black spots* cannot be balanced against the fantastic display of proofs and testimonies in favor of the supernatural authenticity of the events at Garabandal *as a whole*.

Although this does not have a definite relation with the preceding, I am putting here what Conchita wrote in her diary following this:

When we were together, when one of us lost her shoe, the Virgin would say to the other: *Put her shoe on.*

And one of us would put the shoe on the other.

And when we were alone, if we lost our shoe, we went the whole apparition without it.

And at the end, the Virgin would tell us where the shoe was outside of us.⁽¹¹⁾

10. It appears that an *obscure matter* resulted for some because the girls sought to avoid the questions with which they were often assailed by the inquisitive. Besides the annoyance of such questioning and the outright imprudence of so many, the attitude of the girls could have been brought on by what St. Therese of the Child Jesus wrote in her autobiography, as a result of having confided to some people — there was no other solution — the marvelous intervention of the Virgin to cure her of the unusual disease that she suffered when ten years old:

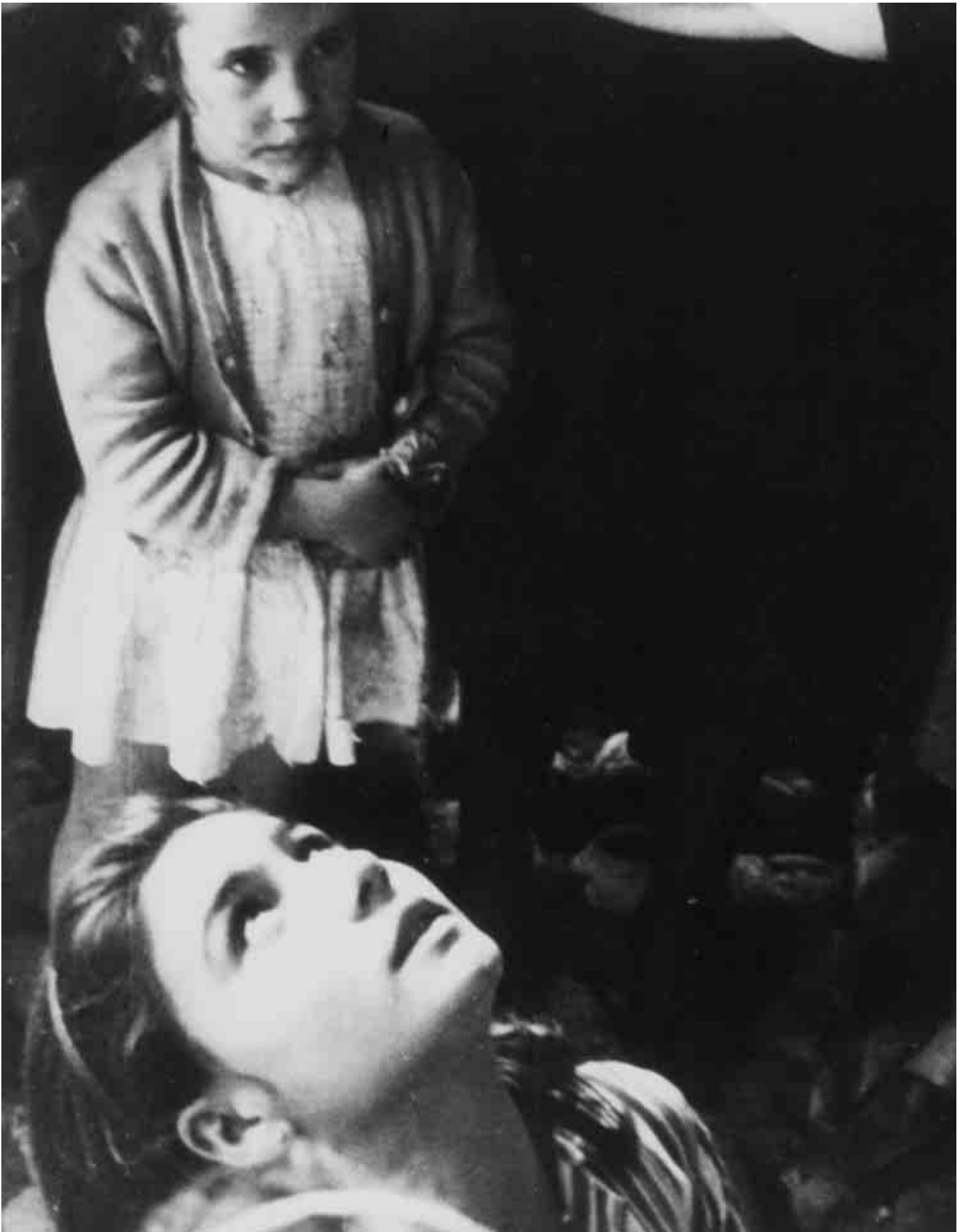
"As I had sensed, my happiness was going to vanish, changing to sorrow. The remembrance of the ineffable grace that I had received was for me a true interior pain for four years . . . In the waiting room at Carmel they questioned me about the grace that I received, asking me if the Virgin was carrying the Infant Jesus, if she was very resplendent, if . . . These questions troubled me and made me suffer. I was only able to say this, *The Most Holy Virgin appeared very beautiful and she smiled at me.* Only her face impressed me. Seeing that the sisters were imagining almost anything, anguish came upon me in thinking that I had lied . . . Only in heaven will I be able to say what I suffered."

(*History of a Soul*, end of Chapter III)

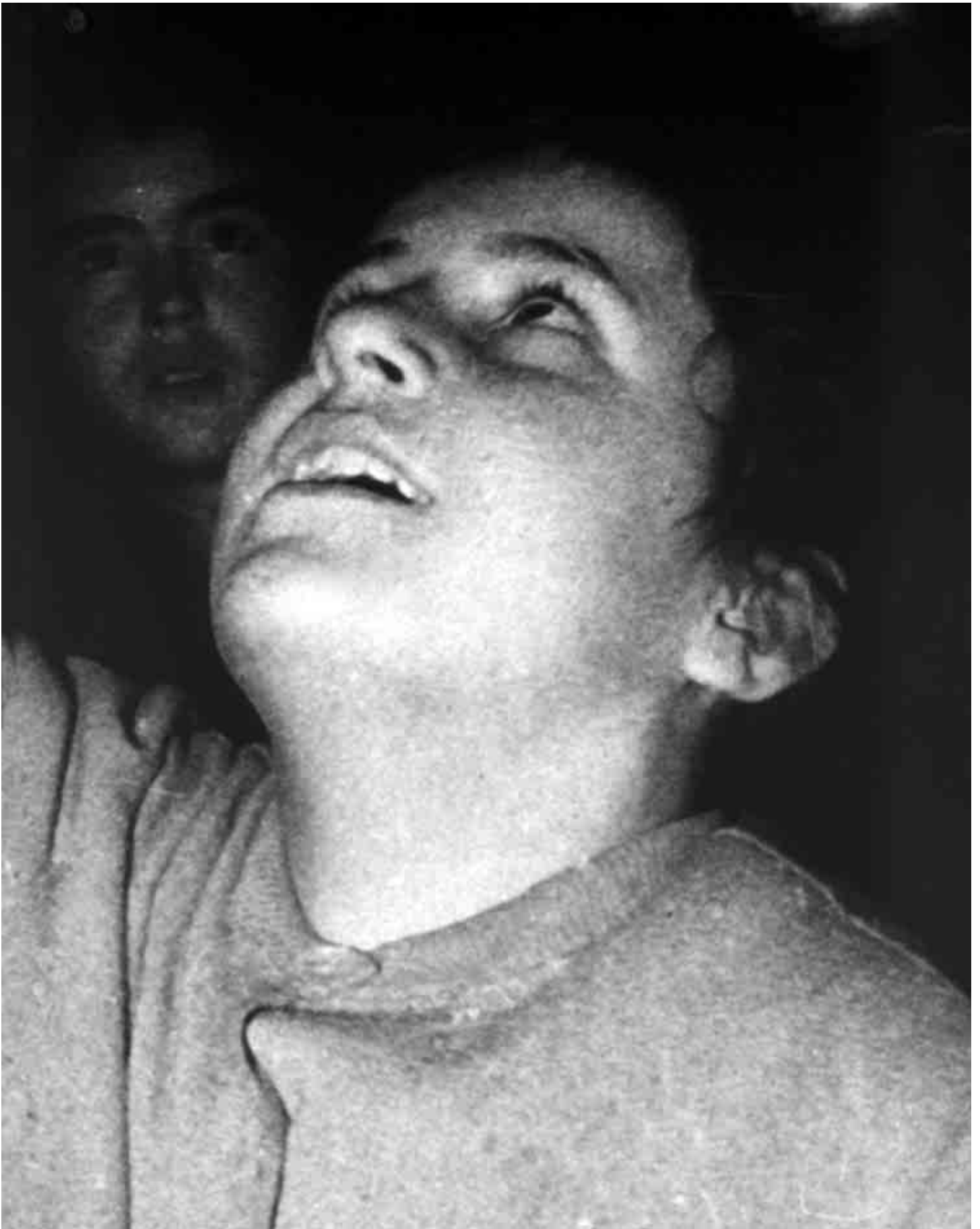
11. There are many testimonies from the spectators that confirm what Conchita said here. Those watching the ecstasies could not intervene in what was occurring in the *other world* of the trances.



In our apparitions, we asked the Virgin to perform a miracle.



And she didn't say anything to us; she smiled.



And we told her:
Perform it so that the people will believe, since no one believes.

And she smiled.

Charming details, which indicate that a real mother was speaking with her children.

Letters in the Wintertime

In spite of the current disappointment flowing out from October 18th, people continued to go up to Garabandal. The flame had not smoldered out in everyone's heart, and the steady flow of remarkable phenomena was continuing.

We have presented some, but we can speak of many more. For example, an ecstasy occurred slightly after October 15th during which the girls descended a stairway backwards and almost upside down . . . and made their way on their knees through puddles of water that covered the streets without getting the least bit wet, as many eye-witnesses could observe.

A memorable date was November 4th, and still more so, the 18th of the same month.⁽¹²⁾

On November 4th the ecstasies began at eight o'clock in the morning. This was primarily because the Virgin had ordered the girls to get up every day early in the morning to say a rosary at dawn in the *calleja*. No one could understand better than Our Lady what was entailed in getting up so early during the winter season for those four normal young girls, prone to sleeping in like all young children. But she asked it for the express purpose of aiding poor sinners this way.⁽¹³⁾ (The serious minded souls who cannot accept the Virgin's *games* with the girls should not object to this.)

On November 18th, one month after the unforgettable day of the message (a certain predilection is noted for this date of the 18th), there was announced, *officially* as some might say, a *winter* intermission in the events of Garabandal. The Virgin said farewell to the girls; not because they would not see her again, but rather because they would not see her with the same frequency as before. And to each one she indicated the date of

the next meeting to aid them to better support the hard course of the winter season.

I assume that tears were running down the cheeks of the little visionaries during the farewell kisses on that day. They had happily enjoyed the long months of paradise and suddenly winter was upon them! Now all that remained for them, just as for the others, was living in the obscurity of faith. Spread in front of them was the hard program of the message, sacrifices, prayers, their daily crosses . . .

*In winter God disposes
that mysteries be fulfilled,
so that seeds take root,
and grow strong under the ground,
to develop in such a way
as to bring forth fruit later on.*

12. The month begins with two days which, liturgically and religiously, are very special. November 1st is the feast-day of All Saints; November 2nd is the commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, known as All Souls Day.

The village of Garabandal, which traditionally had given special attention to prayer for the souls of the departed, experienced that double feastday vividly. There was united the liturgy of the church with the activities of the visionaries who went so often in ecstasy into the houses to pray for the deceased in each one, and also frequently went to the cemetery to there recommend to the Lord all those who had their remains in that simple burial place.

In the middle of the night between those two feastdays Dr. and Mrs. Ortiz were informed that Jacinta was in ecstasy in her home. Immediately they went there:

«The girl, after presenting some holycards to the Vision to kiss, made a sign of the cross most reverently with the crucifix, and went out on the street. She went first to Loli's house, and presented the crucifix to be kissed by her and also by two or three other persons; from there she went to the church and in front of the doors began a rosary which she continued later through the muddy streets of the village . . . It was truly a moving rosary. At that time, in that silence, illuminated only by some flashlights and lights from the houses!

After the rosary, the girl recited the Credo and later sang the Salve Regina and various songs to the Virgin, some of these to invite the people to pray the holy rosary.»

Toward 1:30 in the morning, when Dr. and Mrs. Ortiz said goodbye to begin their voyage back to Santander, Loli was in her house waiting for an ecstasy. As a continuation of Jacinta's *vigil* she prayed a Station to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and various other prayers for the poor souls in purgatory.

13. At Garabandal there were abundant proofs that the Virgin did not come for the congenial *discovery* of our latest teachers and *educators of the faith* who say, "Children should not be bothered, nor should any pressure be put upon them; they will receive when they feel like it, and concern themselves with God when it comes spontaneously from within!"

Fr. José Ramón García de la Riva, the pastor of Barro, has some letters in his possession that the girls sent him during this period. I have the original letters in my hands. This is the earliest written by Conchita:

«November 25th, 1961.

Dear Father José Ramón :

Right now I'm going to school, and my mother tells me that I should write what is happening. I'll tell you that we have a new priest, and in appearance he seems very good, and he gives us catechism lessons every day. He plays with us a lot. all the girls say that he was sent by the bishop. We aren't able to give you any news about Fr. Valentín, since they say that he is on vacation. On some days he is in Cossío; but he (*the new priest*) goes on some days to say Mass there too. And so we do not know how he (*Fr. Valentín*) is.»

Obviously they did not know, nor could they know, how Fr. Valentín was! Officially Fr. Valentín was on vacation. But the vacation had been imposed upon him by the diocesan chancery since the good father was sentenced to undergo a type of *forced vacation*. This was one of the decisions that came from the Commission back during the summer,⁽¹⁴⁾ for they accused him of being the instigator of the events.

The new priest would be expected to have been indoctrinated by the Commission . . . He was Fr. Amador Fernández González. In their letters, the girls spoke well of him. And I have no reason for speaking otherwise. Fr. Julio Porro Cardeñoso, in his *The Great Prodigy of Garabandal*, writes: *I think that he was a competent priest, if I am not badly informed*. But later on he brings out statements made by this priest which, to be exact, have to be classified as gross stupidity.

Continuing now with Conchita's letter:

«There were two priests here from Palencia who seemed very good. They were not together. One day one came; and another day, another. My mother asked one of them why they were

14. They had to wait until October 18th to see if anything would happen; after the *disaster* on that day there was nothing to prevent them from submitting Fr. Valentín to a *curative* treatment.

coming since it was said to be prohibited. He told her that the bishop of Palencia⁽¹⁵⁾ believed and didn't prohibit them from coming. The priest that we had (*Fr. Amador*) said that he didn't like them to come; but they said Mass here. One of them left rosaries for me — for when I would have the apparitions — and he was thinking of returning to get them; you know what I mean.

With regard to the apparitions, it has been eight days since I have had them. She told me that I'll see her on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.⁽¹⁶⁾ And if she doesn't come on that day, I won't see her again until the 27th of January. And Mari Cruz won't see her again until January 16th, and Jacinta until December 16th. I don't know about María Dolores, since she said that she doesn't see her — and she has seen her again.

I'm waiting for the feastday of the Immaculate Conception, which the Virgin told me about. She didn't say it was definite; she told me that I would see her on my feastday . . . And so perhaps I'll be with her. And if she doesn't come on that day, I'm not expecting her until the 27th (*of January*), if she doesn't tell me otherwise.»

Two days later, on December 27th, Jacinta also began to scribble⁽¹⁷⁾ a letter to Father José Ramón. After referring to something that he had written her about Sister Lucy of Fatima, she wrote:

«Now she appears to me less and less. On the 16th of this month (*November*) I had an apparition, and she told me to pray the rosary every morning at the Cuadro . . . that until the 16th of December, I wouldn't see her again. Conchita, María Dolores and Mari Cruz expect her in January. So every day we pray rosaries to see if the Virgin will perform a miracle for the world to believe. Now we have a very good priest. The bishop sent him to us. He gives us catechism.»

15. This was Bishop José Souto Vizoso, who retired in 1970 due to his age.

16. December 8th. In Spain this is a day of obligation of the first rank, one of those most ostensibly celebrated in honor of the Virgin. It was also the personal feastday of the countless Conchas and Conchitas in the country, the abbreviated names for María de la Concepción and the names given to honor the Immaculate Conception of Mary.

17. This word accurately describes the letter's penmanship.



“Every day we pray rosaries to see if the Virgin will perform a miracle for the world.”

It can be seen that the new priest was big news in the town. The people must have been really pleased, since besides what he personally was worth and could do, they had him there definitely among themselves as a resident in the village — not like Fr. Valentín who belong primarily to the people of Cossío since he had his residence there. This did not prevent the people of San Sebastián de Garabandal from appreciating Fr. Valentín. Mari Cruz mentions him in a letter in November: «He went because they blamed him. They said that he prepared us. The bad people said this because Father Valentín is very good. And he believes.»

Mari Cruz wrote again on November 30th to the pastor from Barro:

«Respected and Dear Father in Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Concerning the questions that you've asked me, some of them are difficult to answer, since it's hard to make a judgment on them. But with the protection of the Most Holy Virgin and

guided by her, I follow what she indicates to me. I go to pray the rosary every day at six in the morning at the calleja; Jacinta accompanies me. Conchita goes out at seven, and Loli at 8:30, but in the church.⁽¹⁸⁾

From the 19th⁽¹⁹⁾ of November our trances have stopped. We are expecting to have them again: Jacinta, on the 16th of December; Conchita, on her feastday, but not for certain,

18. Perhaps the difference in time schedule was influenced by the personal situation of each girl. Loli, for example, went to bed later than the others because of the little commercial enterprise and tavern that her parents had in her home.

In the letter on November 21st, Conchita states to a daughter of Eloísa de la Roza Velarde, the sister-in-law of Dr. Ortiz:

«I tell you too that last Saturday I finished seeing the Virgin until the feastday of the Immaculate Conception or until January 27th. This hurts me! Anyhow, time will pass. We go to pray the rosary every day at 6 and at 7 in the morning where she appeared to us the first time.»

19. I do not know whether Mari Cruz is confused on the date, and put down 19 instead of 18, or whether she wishes to say that they were from the 19th inclusive without an apparition.



Mari Cruz

without doubt. Conchita will see her on January 27th; Loli, on January 13th; and I, on January 16th, God permitting. Besides this, we lead our lives like the other girls: at the classroom, playing, and making our prayers every day . . .»

There is also a letter from Loli written during this period, to the same recipient, dated December 3rd:

«A few words to answer your letter. I would say that it is about time. But pardon me, since time passed without my realizing it. Besides, I'm sad because I'm not seeing the Virgin.⁽²⁰⁾ As you know, the Virgin doesn't deceive. I expect to see her again in January. I don't know if in the meantime she will visit me some day again. I don't know. I'm rather bad; perhaps she takes that into account.⁽²¹⁾ I don't think so, since I act like this without realizing it. I have nothing to say about the photographs that you sent me, since I have not shown them to the Virgin.»

Although Loli had not been promised that she would see the Virgin again until January, she hoped that She would visit her before then.

And the Virgin returned. Mrs. María Josefa Lueje, from the little Asturian town of Colunga, says in a letter:

«I went to Garabandal for the second time on December 18th of 1961. I went with some friends, the family of Manolo Lantero from Gijon. There were about 14 persons and we took up three cars. From Cossío we went up by foot, since the weather was fierce and the road impassable.

Shortly after coming to the village, we gathered

20. The girl's spontaneous statement, in a confidential letter, can be placed side by side with some of the statements made — later approved *episcopally* — that this was *a game of children*, that is to say, something staged by the girls to get away from their boring life, or to accomplish some goal.

Could there be any stronger proof that the girls did not invent this *game*?

Fr. Valentín wrote down on October 10th, 1961:

«Loli told me with the greatest sorrow on her face that at least until the day after next she would not have an apparition. We noticed that she was sad since the last apparition; but in answer to my question at the time, she said that nothing had happened.»

21. This shows again that apparitions cannot suddenly transform weak human creatures into angels . . . The apparitions had placed the girls on the road to continual moral improvement, and that was no minor matter.



“Loli leaped up from where she was sitting and fell on her knees.”

together in a plastic case everything that we had brought to be kissed by the Virgin: rosaries, medals, crucifixes . . . As soon as we saw Loli, we gave them to her. But she wasn't sure that she was going to have an apparition. This left us somewhat dejected, but we had to resign ourselves. And we prepared to spend the night without sleeping, as we ordinarily did. On seeing that there weren't many of us, Ceferino took pity on us and invited us into his kitchen so we would-

n't suffer so much from the cold.

Early in the morning, about 4 a.m., Loli leaped up from where she was sitting and fell on her knees upon the floor, making a loud thud. But that was nothing compared to the change in her face . . . For the young girl's face — plump and what might be called a peasant face — transformed and refined itself into an indescribable form, almost appearing to be an angel.





“Loli made the sign of the Cross with her crucifix.”

She went out later through the village, accompanied by her father and all of us. She went up to a house where they told us there was an old man near death, unconscious for several days. When Loli made the sign of the Cross with her crucifix on him, the man recovered consciousness and recognized his sons. (So they told us). We saw her go down the steep uneven stairway without rails, with her head completely turned backwards, and we couldn't explain why she didn't fall and hurt herself . . . Then she led us to the courtyard of the church where we recited a rosary, as I think I have never recited one in my life.

When we returned to the house we met Jacinta and her father going to pray the rosary at the Cuadro as they early every morning. It was something to see those lightly dressed young girls with their knees on the snow in the freezing temperature during the middle of the night . . . In Garabandal at the time, there was real devotion and real penance was done.

I can never forget all these things: they did me much good; they brought me closer to God.»

* * *

On January 13th, the feastday of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, Mari Cruz and Conchita wrote again to Father de la Riva. Mari Cruz mentioned certain personal matters, and afterwards interjected this brief remark:

«On the feastday of the Immaculate Conception, Conchita alone saw the Virgin. As I have told you, I won't see her until January 16th. I would like to see her always, always, but when she doesn't concede this gift to me, it is because I don't merit it. And so I resign myself to her holy will.»

Conchita naturally mentions her *grace* of December 8th:

«On the feastday of the Immaculate Conception the Virgin came to congratulate me, as she had told me that she was going to come. And when she came, she came smiling very much. She laughed very much.⁽²²⁾ The first thing that she said to me was, *Happy Feastday*. And so the



“I don't merit it.”

day passed very well . . . But I won't see her again until January 27th.

She came in the evening. They said that it lasted a long time, but it seemed very quick to me. Afterwards she said that I should go eat. And after I ate, she came back another time . . . And they said:⁽²³⁾

- that I went to the place where we had the first apparition,
- and that I went backwards to my home,
- and that afterwards I went out and prayed the rosary through the streets,
- and that I visited all the sick.

22. The girl expressed according to her abilities the joyful attitude of the feast — full of light and serenity — that she saw in the Mother of Heaven. But no one should imagine that her way of laughing was frivolous or loud as occurs so often with humans.

23. The girl wrote all these things down one after the other. They have been separated into lines here to simplify understanding the many things that happened in that trance, the last one for Conchita in 1961.



—and that I gave them the crucifix to kiss.

You know that I am unaware of this, that it's what they tell me. And so I know that I will not see her again until the 27th . . .»

What a beautiful evening the people of Garabandal had on the feastday of the Immaculate Conception! It was for everyone, the healthy and the sick alike. And again graces from Our Lady spread through the houses and streets.

Only one celestial visit remained for 1961, the year that had known so many marvels. It occurred on December 16th — the evening before the official prayer of the Church starts the splendid “*Oh*” antiphons⁽²⁴⁾ that are the immediate preparation for the feast of the Coming of the Lord.

And now it was Jacinta's turn to be the privileged one. I could not obtain much information about the grace given her. All that could be found in a letter from Mari Cruz dated December 16th was a terse reference:

«Today Jacinta saw the Virgin.»

There is also some information in a letter that Maximina González wrote to Doctor Ortiz, dated December 26th:

«While you were away, Jacinta had an apparition. It was very sad; it lasted a short time, but all the time tears were streaming . . .»

They are still going out for the rosary: Mari Cruz and Jacinta at six in the morning, and Conchita and María Dolores at 8 o'clock. Dawn is breaking when we come to pray. So see if we aren't making sacrifices! For me, getting up in the morning is the greatest.»

A Year of "Epiphany"⁽²⁵⁾

From the girl's letters we can imagine how the first winter of the *mystery* passed at Garabandal. At least, how it passed for the girls.

Each new day was inaugurated with sacrifice and prayer: breaking away from the comfort and pleasant warmth of their beds to go out into the

darkness and cold, searching for early morning contact with heaven. The *calleja* — that had so often known the waiting and the footsteps of the crowds — now welcomed in intimate silence and freezing cold those girls, shivering at times, who were quietly coming to give to God through Mary the first moments of their daily life. Sometimes there were two or three more persons, but no other company or protection than their Guardian Angels.

The passage of cold fronts over the savage mountain terrain had covered the nearby peaks with the white snows of December. Frequently the snow also blanketed the area of the Cuadro with a strange brilliance in the vanishing darkness. And the murmur of prayer seemed to shiver in the air.

On those icy mornings, silence reigned; only an occasional distant sound could be heard. During the rainy mornings the pattering of raindrops sounded monotonously, mixing with the whirring wind . . .

— *Hail Mary . . . The Lord is with you . . . Blessed are you . . .*

— *Holy Mary, Mother of God and our mother, pray for us sinners . . .*

Sinners! SINNERS! How much should be done for them! Imploring the mercy of God. Doing penance for those who would not even think about penance.

ALREADY THE CUP IS FILLING UP

In a letter on January 11th, Mari Cruz wrote to Fr. José Ramón:

«Yes, I go every day at six in the morning to the Cuadro; the Virgin told me to pray the rosary every day at this time, up until January 16th, when I'll see her again. You know that the Virgin wants us to be very good, and to visit the Blessed Sacrament.»

24. These are called the *Oh* antiphons since they start with this exclamation. Seven in number, they express in biblical language the ardent hope of humanity while waiting for the Savior. Formerly they were chanted one each day at the end of Vespers during the last week of Advent, from December 17th to December 23rd.

25. *Epiphany* comes from the Greek and signifies manifestation or unveiling. The word is used to indicate the arrival and revelation of something distant and hidden.



“The Virgin wants us to be very good, and to visit the Blessed Sacrament.”

The day — beginning painfully and piously like this — had to continue for God, through daily work,⁽²⁶⁾ through docile obedience, through the faithful fulfillment of duties. And so they responded to the Virgin's desires and instructions. And to prevent possible discouragement, they had the hope of seeing her again and the remembrance of those heavenly hours in which they had seen her.

26. In ending her letter of December 11th, Mari Cruz wrote:

«Now we don't go to gather firewood, since we have to go to school, and the vacation has ended. Well, we brought a lot of wood, but it will soon be burned up.»

This shows that if the schoolwork had an intermission during the Christmas vacation, another harsher work came to occupy her time: The work of going to the mountains to gather wood for the fireplace.

And so these children of the Virgin — in days that for so many other children are strictly vacations and parties — had to spend their time in the difficult task that I had personally think Mary had in her days in Nazareth.

The remembrance had to be wonderful, especially at certain times. Even when those years were over, and with a great darkness of doubts upon her,⁽²⁷⁾ Conchita could answer like this, with her typical moderation, to a series of questions that had been made to her in writing:

— The first time that we saw the Virgin, she appeared to us suddenly. She came with two angels and the Child Jesus, and there was an Eye above everything, with great light.

— She always appeared suddenly, only sometimes she brought the Child and other times she didn't.

— Her posture, was it always the same? Or different? What was it usually?

— Her usual posture was with her arms open and extended, looking at us; but she also moved her arms. She looked toward the village, and at times she smiled more than others.

— What was the background of the vision?

— Brilliant light.



“Sometimes she brought the Child.”

27. This characteristic phenomenon of Garabandal will be discussed later.



“soft and merciful”

— *What were her eyes like? Did she blink during the conversation?*

— **Her eyes were dark, very soft and merciful!**

Rather large. It seemed as if she didn't look at the face, nor at the body, but at the soul! I don't remember if she blinked; but she did look from one side to the other.

— *Did she weep sometimes? Or was she only sad?*

— I never saw her weep, or completely sad.

— *What was her expression?*

— Her expression is difficult to describe. It makes one love her more and think more about her. Looking at her face made us totally happy; and her looking at us, even more so. When she spoke to us, she looked at us, and her expression changed during her conversation.

— *What did you feel when she looked at you?*

— Many things!

— *What was her voice like? A real voice corresponding to the movements of her lips? Or only a voice heard interiorly without sounds?*

— Her voice is very sweet and melodious. It was heard through the ears, although her words penetrated into the heart; it was as if she put her voice inside us. And as she spoke, she moved her lips with the sounds like other people. She spoke with a very clear voice!

— *Did she laugh sometimes or did she limit*

28. St. Theresa of the Child Jesus mentions a similar thing in her autobiography in reference to the *miracle* by which she was cured of an extremely unusual illness at 10 years of age:

"Suddenly the statue of the Virgin became alive! The Virgin Mary became beautiful, so beautiful that I would never be able to find words to describe this divine beauty. Her face shone with a gentleness, a goodness, an ineffable tenderness; but what penetrated deep into my soul was her smile."

(History of a Soul)

29. Extract from *Garabandal 1967* by A.M. de Santiago. (Edition Circulo-Saragossa)

Conchita added these lines to her answers:

«July 18, 1966 — Forgive the poor writing, but I don't have much time . . . Today there is a fiesta going on in the village.»

What Conchita says corresponds admirably with what the liturgy for the feast of the Immaculate Conception proclaims:

**You are all beautiful, Mary.
And there is no stain of sin in you.
Your robe is white as snow.
And your face is luminous as the sun.
You are the glory of Jerusalem.
You are the joy of Israel.
You are the honor of our people.**

herself to smiling?

— Yes, sometimes she laughed in addition to the smile that was habitual with her. Her laugh could be heard like her words; but the laugh was more than the speech. I don't know how to explain her laugh! I could never explain it.⁽²⁸⁾

— *Did she kiss you frequently? Did you ask her to kiss you, or did she do it on her own?*

— She kissed us almost every day, and it came from her. They were kisses of farewell on both cheeks. Sometimes I asked her to permit me to kiss her, and at other times I kissed her without asking.

— *Did she sometimes carry a rosary or some other noticeable article on her?*

— I saw nothing except the scapular.

— *What did you feel during the ecstasies?*

— A very great peace and happiness!

— *If after a call you would have said, "Today I don't wish to see the Virgin," what do you think would have happened?*

— Oh! I never thought of doing that! Nor would I have thought of doing it for any reason.

— *What did you feel after a vision?*

— When I finished seeing the Virgin, it was as if I had left heaven . . . with a great desire to love Jesus and Mary, and to speak about them to people, which is the only thing that can give us joy: hearing and speaking about the Virgin.⁽²⁹⁾



The year 1961 was to be marked as a great Year of Grace.

During it, from secluded San Sebastián de Garabandal, God presented to his Church — and through the Church, to the world — a resplendent **MARIAN EPIPHANY**.

Words cannot adequately express our gratitude. But let us address the one who came to make this new **VISITATION**:



Holy Mary
Heed the wretched; aid the weak,
Comfort the weeping; pray for your people.
Protect the clergy; intercede for your children.
And give your assistance to all who turn toward You.