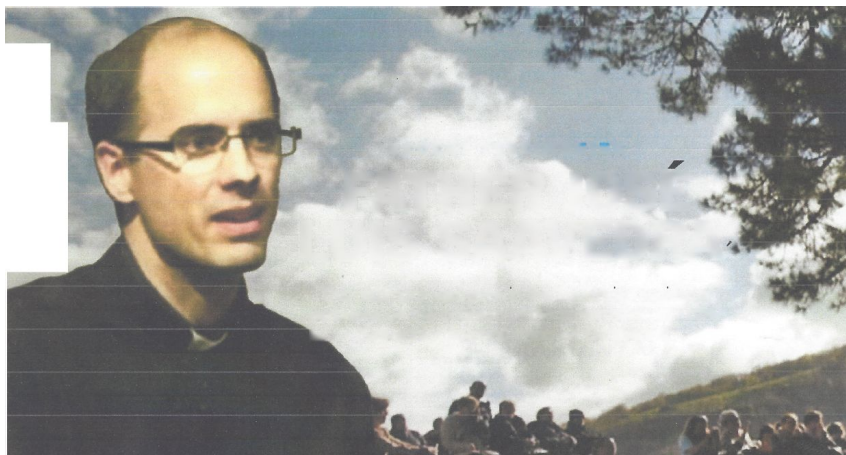


## FATHER JOSE LUIS SAAVEDRA

This testimony was given in the Equestrian Society of Barcelona on the occasion of the presentation of Father Saavedra's doctoral thesis on Garabandal.

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Translated from Spanish by Pablo A. Gonzalez Herrera



It could certainly be said that the Virgin is opening the hearts of many who go to see the movie so that Garabandal will once again be a household name for every Christian interested in the faith. The Director of my thesis had never heard the word “Garabandal”. And being a Spanish priest and Director of the Department of Historical Theology in the University of Navarra that seemed quite incredible.

Having said that he was honest enough to say to me: “If the Virgin has spoken, this fact is clearly more important than a Church Council.” Well, nobody is saying that a Council is not important but we know for sure that if the Virgin does speak, we are going the right way if we pay attention to what She is saying. Neither an apparition nor a Church Council nor a homily need to say something new. Instead they should lead us to the essential. They are supposed to help us in our daily life as they are a valuable aid for better understanding and living our Christian faith. In that respect we should be very careful when we hear some people talk about “the spirit of the Second Vatican Council” as if they were the true interpreters though what they are saying is normally the opposite of Church doctrine and of what the Council really says.

So when I met the Director of my thesis I said to him: “Don Miguel, with you I hit the jackpot! Please don’t die before I finish my thesis.” Unfortunately, on the 2nd of February he died unexpectedly during some spiritual exercises he was giving. He was 55 years old and my thesis was halfway through, however, I was very fortunate to have as his substitute professor Carmen Alejos, PhD, who insisted that everything should be proven, corroborated by witnesses, by confirmed sources. I have no doubt in my mind that having those two professors as Directors of my thesis has been a godsend to me that has facilitated my work enormously.



Let’s get back to the beginning of my talk. How is it possible that such an event like Garabandal, having remained almost anonymous during so many years, is now gaining momentum? The thing is, the apparitions began in June 1961 and after only seven days, as early as June 25, there was a crowd of 3,000 people mostly from the region. Access by automobile was difficult, since the only road leading to Garabandal was not asphalted at the time and many houses didn’t have running water. Well, in such an isolated place, five years after the beginning of the apparitions, people from many countries around the world were visiting Garabandal.

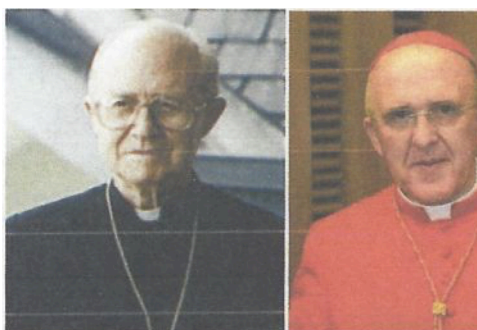
What happened in that lapse of time? The only explanation we can talk about is the wonders of Garabandal. Honest journalists, like Juan Pou Soler, were attesting the inexplicable episodes surrounding the apparitions: the insensibility

during the ecstasies, the ecstatic marches, the alteration of the children's weight, the wedding rings always returned to the rightful owners after being kissed by the Virgin and placing them on the corresponding finger according to custom, levitations, etc., all those wonders were taking place in Garabandal and were there for all to see.

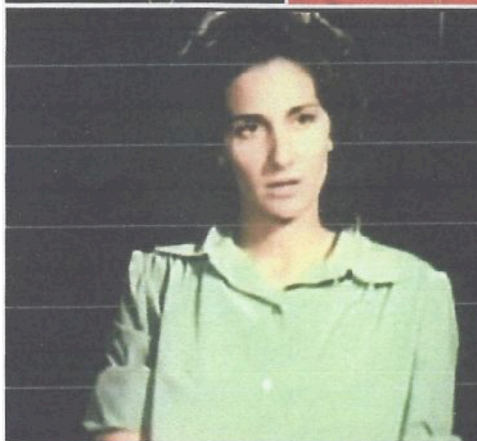
At a very early stage, however, those phenomena were viewed with suspicion, even if the girls seemed unconcerned about public opinion. Doctor Morales, a member of the original bishop's commission appointed to study Garabandal, tried at the time to hypnotize Conchita to no avail. They also threatened to take her to an asylum and her family to prison if she didn't sign a blank paper. Don Doroteo Fernández, then Apostolic Administrator, thought that everything was over when Conchita chose to become a young lady instead of a shepherdess when she was asked to choose, but she fell into ecstasy as soon as she arrived home [to Garabandal].

All those wonders though went hand in hand with what we could call the simple familiar spirituality of Garabandal. Father Laffineur in his book *Star on the Mountain* (1967) relates that one day, on the court yard of the church, the seers suddenly broke into laughter. He thought that couldn't come from God so he asked Conchita about it when the ecstasy ended. Conchita explained that the Virgin had burst out laughing at how badly they were singing the Salve Regina. Father Laffineur and the French pilgrims realized that that was certainly true. Simplicity and innocence were a disconcerting feature of the apparitions at Garabandal.

From the beginning, the intimacy of the relationship between the seers and the apparition was remarkable. At a very early stage, the girls were heard in ecstasy: "Holy Mother, Mother of God and Our Mother. In the Second Message, the Blessed Virgin defines herself precisely: "I, your Mother...." That maternal closeness is experienced for instance by Loli, who was asked by her mother to bring in the clothes which were hanging outside. As she was afraid due to the howling of the strong wind she fell into ecstasy, and like a Mother, the Virgin came to accompany her. This maternity of Mary is very disconcerting for rationalists.



Bishop Puchol [Montis] said: God reveals Himself only in the Gospel. Well, what should we make of Lourdes, what should we make of Fatima?



What about the denials? Bishop Puchol declared that after interviewing the seers, they had denied to him that they had ever seen the Virgin and that all of the events that had occurred had a natural explanation. It had been simply a matter of some girls' innocent game. After the NOTE Bishop Puchol published in March 1967 Garabandal seemed dead; the denials before the Bishop had been absolutely devastating. However, today we possess more data which allow us to affirm that those retractions were far from being spontaneous. For instance, a young priest who gave a retreat to the students of Conchita's school in Pamplona, threatened not to give her absolution if she didn't deny the apparitions [see page 10]. In this same time period Jacinta was also threatened with excommunication.



That the seers didn't make a complete retraction is a significant fact. They remained firm, at least partially, in the truth of the apparitions. They declare it all a lie except "the *llamadas* (interior callings for the ecstasies) and the miracle of the Sacred Host, that part was true" as they put it. Jacinta will be the first to retract the denials of 1966 in writing to the authorities and the others will follow her steps. We shouldn't forget that the Virgin had foretold them from the beginning that they would deny [having seen] Her.

In any case, after Bishop Puchol's NOTE, it seemed that all was ended. Then, in 1971 Bishop Del Val is appointed to the See of Santander. He had



been a member of the Commission in the years of the phenomena and before being bishop he had recognized that the Commission's work had not been sufficient. In 1983 he supported Dr. Morales's conference in Santander, where he publicly admitted that they intervened to direct the Commission towards negative and preconceived conclusions. Before a packed auditorium he recognized the authenticity of the apparitions of Garabandal. This lack of impartial information led Bishop Del Val to set up a new Commission in 1989. Del Val, as a witness to the events knew that the NOTES of his predecessors were unfit to sustain objective judgment. Archbishop Osoro alluded to this in 2007 when he pointed to "new studies, so that the events of Garabandal may be examined in greater depth." During his reign, Bishop Del Val progressively relaxed or canceled the disciplinary measures dictated against Garabandal by his predecessors. He allowed priests to visit and gave express permission to Conchita to present the message of Garabandal in a BBC documentary. However, the conclusions of the new Commission were delayed until the time of his retirement in 1991 and the matter was left in the hands of his successor. Unfortunately, the new REPORT succumbed to defects like those of the first Commission: new investigations were not carried out, there was no genuine attempt to document the facts, and witnesses were not questioned. The new REPORT was thus negative but the retiring Bishop was not satisfied. With full knowledge of that REPORT, Bishop Del Val gave an interview in which he stated that the message of Garabandal was important and theologically correct. I have learned that Bishop Del Val used to say that his only doubt concerning the formal messages was that line about "many cardinals many bishops and many priests are on the road to perdition."



A 1961 ecstasy from left, Loli, Conchita, Jacinta and Mari Cruz. Standing behind the is Dr. Morales. Below he makes a visit to Garabandal in later years.

What about the Holy See? Up to this point, Rome has always avoided a declaration, delegating the study of the matter to the diocesan authorities, as was the case with the Letter from Cardinal Ratzinger in 1992 when he was requested by Bishop Vilaplana for a declaration regarding Garabandal. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith did not consider it opportune to intervene for the norms for evaluating presumed apparitions. The duty of vigilance and intervention falls to the Ordinary of the place and it was suggested to Bishop Vilaplana that if he deemed it necessary he could publish a declaration reaffirming that the supernatural nature of the said apparitions was not clear.

The letter of Cardinal Ratzinger permits mariologist Felix Ochayta to draw the conclusion that the phenomena are not rejected for it is not stated that they have a natural explanation or that they are of diabolical origin. The Holy See leaves things as they are which implies openness to a future recognition of their supernatural character. But the Holy See has had unofficial yet telling gestures towards Garabandal. In 1966, Conchita was received in Rome by Cardinal Ottaviani then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith who personally interrogated her for over two hours. The Cardinal seemed quite satisfied and he even went on to say that among the thirty or so apparitions of the Blessed Virgin being studied at the time, those of Garabandal seemed to him the most interesting one. We have also the testimony of Father Luna, who accompanied Conchita on that trip to Rome, who testified that Paul VI blessed Conchita with these words: "I bless you and with me the whole church blesses you." There are strong indications of credibility

about those words but they are far from the magisterium. Though positive, they do not constitute a formal pronouncement on Garabandal, but a personal opinion on the issue for to be accepted by the magisterium a declaration must be public and solemn.

So it is possible to affirm that Garabandal is open to revision in the light of a more solid scientific study or new information. Garabandal has never been condemned, on the contrary, successive bishops have repeatedly stated the perfect orthodoxy of the messages. And it must be added that Archbishop Osoro has pointed to the fruits of Garabandal, having learned about authentic conversions and recommending the apparitions as a positive influence for the faithful.

One of these fruits has been the recent cure of Montse Moreno, from Granada, who suffered from ankylosing spondylitis, a degenerative disease which condemned her to a wheelchair sooner than later. She was instantly cured in Garabandal. Montse used to take eight pills a day but from that day she needs no medication and doctors are unable to explain something that is medically impossible: the “remission” of a degenerative disease as they put it in the medical report, though they should say instead of a “total” cure.... Garabandal is very much alive because we have testimonies from all over the world like that of Montse. The Virgin is giving those graces and She expects that we correspond.

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