

MOTHER NIEVES GARCIA'S TESTIMONY

Spanish translation by Pablo A. Gonzalez Herrera

This testimony by Mother Mary Nieves Garcia, director of the boarding school in Burgos that Conchita attended in 1966-67, was given at the presentation in Madrid on May 13, 2013, of the book *Madre de Dios y Madre Nuestra Fatima, Amsterdam, and Garabandal*.

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I was director of the boarding school that Conchita attended, and in that capacity let me tell you a piece of trivia. At that time the director had to meet with the parents of the students to address them some words at the beginning of the school year. It was my first time and I had at my side the school's chaplain. The parents who had attended were just a few and I said to them: "The Scripture says: many are called, few have come." They laughed at this and I lost my fear to speak before an audience. Today, fortunately, it is possible to say: "many are called, many have come."



Conchita with Mother Nieves at the school.

As far as I am concerned, there are three main reasons to believe in Gara-bandal. First of all, getting to know Conchita, the main visionary. Let me explain myself. Conchita came to our boarding school under the guidance of Francisco Sanchez Ventura, professor of Economics at the University of Zaragoza, who had witnessed the apparitions from the beginning, and accompanied by her mother and Chon de Luis [a woman from Burgos who witnessed many of the ecstasies at Garabandal]. Eventually she was accepted and I then found out that Conchita

was one of the four visionaries of Garabandal. We agreed that in order to protect her she was to be called Maria, otherwise we would have had to deal with the curiosity of many people. Only three or four people were allowed to see Conchita; for the rest of the world she was Maria.

I have taught teenagers for many years and as a teenager who came from an isolated village from rural Spain in the sixties, I can tell you that Conchita's formal education was quite poor. I was in charge of her education, and despite being very smart, she nevertheless had to make a great effort to catch up with her classmates. However, she always found time to come voluntarily at one of the entranceways of the school to speak with me. I never forced her to come. She talked freely, and I realized that she was going through a period of great darkness. The apparitions had already ceased and many people were talking about the apparitions as being a figment of the imagination of the girls or else that it was the devil who had really appeared, and that the girls should then be exorcised. People were also reminding her of her denials and doubts. All that caused her a lot of suffering. As a teenager you can imagine how all this made her suffer. She had been badly hurt and she had doubts. Have I really seen the devil? How could that be?

As it happened, a Claretian father, Joaquin Maria Alonso, who had been commissioned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to study Fatima, being the only authorized person to speak with Sister Lucia, found out about Conchita, and after speaking with the Mother General, he told me that the conversations I had with Conchita should be written down and not destroyed even if 100 years went by. That's why I kept my own journal and my own archives where I gathered every single word that Conchita pronounced about Garabandal, following Father Alonso's advice. My diary covers our conversations while in the school, but I also have the diaries that she wrote during that time.

What was Conchita like? Everything is written in my journal, and I have a well-rounded opinion of her. She was a teenager who enrolled in our boarding school, smart but with a low academic level. In general, she was remarkable with her strength of character, her sense of humor being even a bit of a prankster. I remember a letter she wrote me when on holidays at home in Garabandal and when I opened the envelope a butterfly on a spring popped out. Besides she was humble and charitable, and quite mature for her age. She never complained about anybody or anything in spite of the bad treatment she had received by members of the Commission. She rather complained about herself. She used to dwell on her supposedly moral flaws: vanity... reading frivolous magazines...but I never saw her doing anything of the sort! On the contrary, she was always looking how to fulfill the will of God. You can realize that in both her diary and in mine. It was incredible that she kept silent while the world was talking about her. When Conchita's real identity was revealed, I introduced her to four formal classmates to accompany her. Two of them eventually became Conceptionist Sisters and even one of them, in Africa for many years, assured me that she owed her religious vocation to Conchita.

The second main reason for believing in Garabandal is the quality of the witnesses. For instance, Father Eusebio Garcia de Pesquera, who wrote the most objective book about Garabandal, *She Went in Haste to the Mountain*. He found out about Conchita's Diary and asked me to lend it to him and he published some fragments in his book not telling me anything by the way. Others were Fr. [Materne] Laffmeur and Jacques Serre, professor at the University of La Sorbonne, both of them great promoters of Garabandal in the French-speaking world. I exchanged as many as fifty letters with them. I was also in contact with Fr. Ram6n Andreu, whom I asked about how to educate Conchita. "You don't have to ask me; just pray and do your best" was his advice. Fr. Lucio Rodrigo, who had a reputation for being a wise and saintly man. I keep at least 50 letters from him. And Fr. Nieto, who is today a candidate for beatification.

My personal Garabandal archive comprises 23 folders. I am sort of a keeper and tend to keep and put away everything. In this case from the very first telegram sent by Sanchez Ventura announcing the purpose to enroll Conchita in our school, to this day, I've kept literally everything related to Garabandal.



Mother Nieves with Conchita in Garabandal circa 1971

Among those witnesses I should also mention Doctor Puncernau, a renowned psychiatrist, who after conducting a study on the visionaries, concluded: "I have never met more normal girls than those." He tried to hypnotize Conchita in one of the en-tranceways and the stronger he tried, the more she laughed. Suggestion seemed to have no power on her, so he said.

Last but not least, we all know that Padre Pio and Mother Teresa had a strong link to Garabandal. Mother Teresa was a very good friend of Conchita, who even asked her opinion about being interviewed. Mother Teresa insisted on obtaining the Bishop's permission but at the same time encouraged Conchita to talk about the events as nowadays people talk about everything. By the way, one of her nuns was the godmother in the baptism of one of Conchita's children.

Although there are many more, those already mentioned are enough to prove that the Garabandal events were supported by very remarkable people in many fields.

The third main reason is the apparitions themselves. The Virgin comes as a mother who plays with the girls [of hide and seek], who laughs with them, who understands them, and she doesn't speak idly—she gives two straightforward formal messages the content of which in some aspects shocked many people. The first, make sacrifices, perform penance, visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently. The second, with that part about priests, bishops, and cardinals was very controversial.

I once met a priest who was a bit contemptuous about Garabandal, "All these girls running back and forth..." he used to say. But during one of my visits to Garabandal I went up to the Pines. When I reached the

top there was a young girl on her knees, deep in prayer. I asked her if she had witnessed the apparitions. She happened to be Conchita's cousin. She then stood up and approaching the border of the mountain, she pointed downward towards the village, "Do you see that? I have seen the girls walking backwards at full speed without touching the ground," she said. And what about the ecstasies? Ecstasies for hours and hours without any sleep, and those faces beautiful to behold. "Don't go away, stay with us," they used to say to the Virgin, who had already spent several hours with them.

Conchita related to me something that was uplifting at least for me. Three of the girls (all of them except Mari Cruz) were wearing a hair shirt; some people had recommended they wear it as a way to perform penance. They told the Virgin about that, saying it was quite loose. The Virgin said, "What pleases me most is faithfulness to daily duty." This doesn't rule out penance and sacrifice as stated in the Messages but it puts the focus above all on the maternal sweetness and kindness of the Virgin towards us, towards Her sons, insisting on being told about them, "Talk to me, talk to me about my sons."

Finally, I am going to recount something that Aniceta told me. On their return from Santander after a visit to the doctor, Conchita, still suffering from a high temperature, asked her mother if they could go to the Pines. Up there alone with her mother, she fell in ecstasy. She was on her knees and the snow was falling, and it began to cover her legs. Aniceta was trying to brush the snow away from Conchita's legs, but it was impossible. Aniceta thought that the Virgin wanted it that way and she stopped trying. When the ecstasy ended, she told her mother not to go down immediately, but to stay a little more in order to pray a Station [a local prayer] to the Blessed Sacrament. They both prayed it on their knees. Remember, Conchita was running a fever of 39° centigrade (102° fahrenheit) If you think that this is a silly thing, I don't agree! □

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