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Preparing the Way

When Garabandal awoke on the 19th of June, one topic monopolized all the conversations in the kitchens⁽¹⁾ and on the streets.

You haven't heard? . . . What they saw? . . . Yes, that's what they said; but you'll have to find out for yourself! . . . Anyhow, something strange must have happened to the children because . . . What happened? . . . I am going to ask María and Aniceta . . .

What Would An Angel Be Doing in Garabandal?

When we got up, the people had begun to talk:

—Those four girls saw something since they came down with such expressions!

—It could have been one of those big birds, since it was dark . . .

—Or perhaps some little boy surprised them while they . . .

—Or they were dreaming . . .

—Well, everyone had his own idea about the thing.

It was a day in which they talked about nothing else.

Not surprising! Nothing like it had ever happened at San Sebastián de Garabandal. While the people there were used to thinking about God, they never would have thought that they would come in contact with Him beyond His mysterious veil—on a streetcorner! Every Sunday, while reciting the Credo at Mass, they alleged their belief in an all powerful God Who had created not only the world of visible things, but also another world of invisible ones. But how could anyone expect something that had never happened before to happen suddenly now? How could they comprehend that four children of their village were able to view the light of His invisible world?

1. In villages and towns like Garabandal, the kitchen is the most utilized room in the home; here visitors are received, here the entire family congregates. During the winter months this is especially the place for talking or working.

If what the girls said were true, it could have the most unexpected consequences for everyone . . .

They asked us to describe what we had seen.

And very happy with the beautiful figure, we were glad to tell them, since there were some people who doubted that it was true.

We told how he was, how he was dressed, very brilliant . . .

Most of the people laughed at us; but it was all the same to us because we knew it was true.

As the young girl described, the conversations were animated in the early hours of the morning. And the girls could hear the people talking as they walked to school,⁽²⁾ where the doors opened at 10 o'clock.

When we arrived at the school, the schoolmistress asked us, *My children are you certain about the things you said yesterday?*

We answered together: *Yes, Señora. We saw an Angel!*

The other children from the school who surrounded us were amazed at what we were saying.

I can imagine that there was great excitement among the other young girls accustomed to the monotony of their day to day life. Who would not envy their four schoolmates? Of, if they could be part of such a thrilling thing too!

It is doubtful that there was much studying done on that morning in the young girls' school at Garabandal. However, Conchita writes, **We acted the same as always, undisturbed.** If tranquility resulted in them from the apparitions, it should be recognized that this is a sign it had a good origin. Neither the devil, neuroses, nor hallucinations leave peace.

When we left school (a little before dinner hour), each one went to his own home.

2. The schoolhouse is not in the center of the village, but on the perimeter near the church.



Fr. Valentín with visionaries

Jacinta and Mari Cruz went together and met the parish priest, Father Valentín Marichalar.⁽³⁾

—Very alarmed, he said to them: *Look here, look here! Is it true that you saw an angel?*

—They answered together: *Yes Father, it's true.*

—Perhaps . . . Perhaps you may be mistaken.

—Smiling they said to him: *No. Don't be afraid that we saw an Angel.*⁽⁴⁾

3. Father Valentín resided in Cossío where he was the parish priest, but he had to go up to San Sebastián frequently since he was also in charge of that parish.

4. Although Father Valentín did not hold the same feelings as the old Israelites for whom it was impossible *to see an angel of Yahweh, and not die*, he certainly could not exclude the possibility of an angel's supernatural intervention in the village. What consequences that could cause!

Then they went toward their homes.

The parish priest walked around to see where he could find me.

Finding me near my home,⁽⁵⁾ he became very nervous and said to me, *Conchita, be honest. What did you see last night?*

I explained everything to him . . . and he listened very closely, and finally said to me:

Well, if you see him tonight, ask him who he is and why he is coming.

See what he answers.

The priest's reaction was perfectly logical. He

5. Conchita's house was at the extreme edge of the village, directly opposite the church and school, with a view upwards towards the Pines and downwards toward the valley where the Molinos River flowed.

knew that what the girls said was completely possible. God concerns himself deeply with His human creatures, especially within the church. Although His concern comes to fall almost always within what we call *ordinary providence* (that is, without recourse to spectacular intervention), there is no difficulty for Him to go beyond the ordinary when it suits His pleasure and is helpful to His creatures. And the angels are His ministers above all to protect and aid mankind. Father Valentín could not have forgotten those beautiful texts from the liturgy of October 2nd that set down so highly the ministry of the angels on our behalf.

Yes, what the girls say is very possible, although not so easy to believe. Why would an angel come to Garabandal? And did he really come? That was the most important: to establish the truth of the matter. It would be just as foolish to believe everything right away as to close one's mind in an obstinate *It cannot be*. Father Valentín had to know the first lines of the last book of scripture: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to make known to His servants the things which must shortly come to pass: and signified, sending his angel to His servant John.* (Apocalypse 1: 1) He must have read too that passage from the book of Exodus: (23: 20-21) *Behold I will send my angel who shall go before you, and keep you in your journey, and bring you into the place that I have prepared. Take notice of him and hear his voice.*

The girls were talking about remarkable things; however Father Valentín knew them well, and it did not enter his mind that they invented this. Before anything else, he had to find out what had happened.

Conchita promised that she would try to get the answer to his two questions. Then he directed his footsteps to Loli's home.⁽⁶⁾

Loli responded the same as the rest of us.

And so he was more and more impressed because the four of us agreed in everything.⁽⁷⁾

6. This was a typical ancient village house, looking out over a little square. Later the Mazón family moved into the house next door which also faced the little square; here their small business was continued.

7. Through a careful interrogation, conducted separately on each girl, it would have been impossible to find such agreement if all this had been only *a game*, and even less would there



Loli in her home

Finally he said: *Good, we are going to wait two or three days to see what he will tell you and whether you are going to continue to see this figure that you call an Angel . . .*

Then I will go to the Bishop.⁽⁸⁾

The girls ate, probably in a hurry as is the custom in the village, and with no more ceremony than to say grace. Then they went back to school which re-opened at 3 o'clock.

Toward 5:00 the classes finished and the girls were free to play or do their housework.

I went to the house of the woman from whom we buy milk, and she said to me, *Is it true that you saw an Angel? Or is this a thing that the people are saying?*

have been agreement if these things had been staged or fabricated by the girls. Furthermore, Father Valentín knew them well, and was aware of their sincerity and great reverence for everything religious.

8. At this time, Bishop Doroteo Fernández, the former auxiliary bishop under the recently deceased Bishop José Eguino y Trecu, was the head of the diocese of Santander. Bishop Doroteo had been born in León and was a professor at the major seminary there where he was named the Apostolic Administrator for the Santander Diocese. Certainly neither his assignment nor his arrival in the Capital of Santander could be called *warm* among influential ecclesiastics. In spite of the fact that he had the rank of a bishop, he was placed somewhat out of the way, with his actions limited to being rector of the seminary of Corbán, not far from Santander. Here after a few years the situation was in turmoil; these were the first advance signs of what later would become the general open confusion in the Church.

—I answered, *It's certain that we saw an Angel!*

—She continued to question me, *How did you see him?*

—I explained it to her in such a way that she listened very closely.

—And then smiling, she said to me, *Since I have a good opinion of you, I believe that you saw the Angel. But the others: No!*

—Then I said to her, *But all four of us saw him — Loli, Jacinta, Mari Cruz and I myself!*

When I came home with the milk, I said to my mother, *Mama, I'm going to pray in the Calleja.*

This was heard by a stonemason named Pepe Díez,⁽⁹⁾ who was there working to repair our house, and also by my brother Aniceto, who was helping him.

—Then Pepe said laughing: *Yes, Yes, let her go. Why not let her go pray?*

—My brother objected to this: *Conchita, don't let it happen!*

9. This man is worked as a stonemason in the village; he is one of the best informed witnesses of the *Garabandal events*. His wife is Clementina González, from whom he had four children at the time.

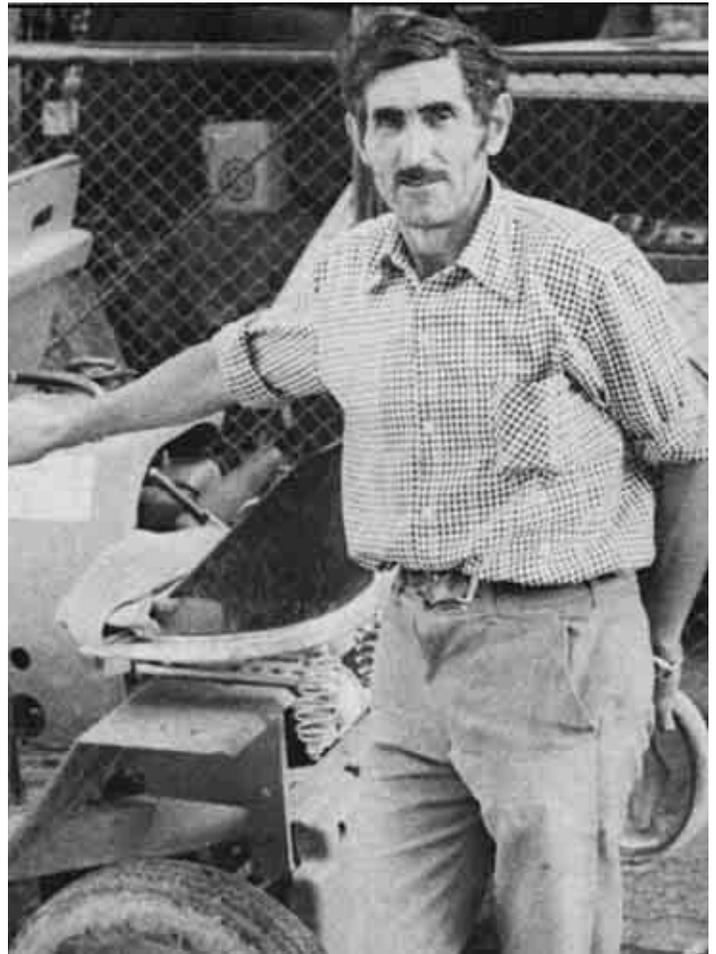
Conchita wrote these things in her diary more than a year after they happened. And perhaps, as they were side-lights to the really important events, she did not record them accurately.

Concerning the conversation with the stonemason Pepe Díez, we have information from his wife Clementina which complements and enlarges on what Conchita gives. Clementina states that on that day Pepe tried to prevent the girls from what could have been a dangerous *episode* by threatening them . . . He spoke to Conchita in this manner:

Listen, child, what kind of tale are you telling about the apparition of an angel? Don't you know how serious this is? . . . Don't go on with this foolishness.

If you continue with this, I'll report it to the police, and they'll come, take statements, and submit you to questioning . . . And you might end up in jail . . . And the trouble might involve your families . . . Embarrassment . . . Shame . . . Disgrace . . . You are not the type of girl that plays around with such things . . .

Then in a similar tone, in a way to intimidate them, he spoke to the other three girls when they came looking for Conchita. They listened, a little frightened, but didn't reply. Finally they said what they were going to do, and that they had not made up anything. And could they be allowed to go in case the Angel came back?



Pepe Díez

The people will laugh at you and at us too.

They will say that you are going around saying that you are seeing an Angel.

And that you are lying.

But the desire of meeting the marvelous apparition again attracted the girl too much, and she did not leave her mother in peace until she obtained permission to go to the calleja.

Soon she met the other three, and joining arms, they went in the direction of the calleja. They encountered an unbelieving and hostile crowd that questioned them and made jokes about them, since no one believed in the apparition; or rather no one wanted to expose himself to ridicule before the more *sophisticated* villagers by showing any belief in the strange story of the four little girls.⁽¹⁰⁾

10. The population of La Montaña (Santander) are intelligent by nature and not easily taken in. They are serious people, hardly naïve, and cautious to the extreme in not being taken advantage of in business or in assuming a stance that would have to be abandoned later.



Conchita's brother Aniceto and mother Aniceta

But people followed them secretly, especially some rude young boys who wanted to show their beginning manhood by vulgarly interfering with the girls. The four girls began to pray in the calleja; but it wasn't possible to concentrate on their prayers because of the little band of ruffians with disheveled hair and dirty faces, who started throwing stones at them, accompanying their missiles with laughs, insults and other words.

It was a dark evening, overcast. **The sky was full of clouds and it was very windy.**

Things finally quieted down and the girls prolonged their prayer, hoping to see the Angel come. But the Angel did not come. The calleja, which a little while later would be for them **a little bit of heaven** (as Conchita referred to it) was on the evening of June 19th, under a cloudy sky, with the derisive laughter, the stones, and the blowing wind above, an unpleasant scene of painful disillusion.

Why didn't the Angel come? Would he perhaps come at another time?

When it became late — it was 8:30 — they lifted their bare knees off the stones of the rocky road, and went down toward the church.

Before arriving there, they met the schoolmistress. She tried to raise their spirits with a child-

ish explanation that they probably did not believe at the time:

***Do you know why he hasn't come?
Surely it's because it's so cloudy.***

In the church they made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

The girls themselves could not explain the unusual connection that seemed to unite the calleja with the church. In the calleja nothing had been said to them, not a word of explanation, nor a command, nor even a simple request, and they were uneducated children; but a mysterious instinct brought them from the one place to the other. Yes, what they had seen with their eyes of flesh, surrounded by light in the calleja, had guided them firmly and gently to the One there in the church, Who can only be found with the eyes of faith amid the shadows of mystery. In the former place was the wonder of the vision, within the latter was the true security of Him Who is always a Refuge, Who cannot deceive.

A Light in the Way

After their visit to the Blessed Sacrament, the girls walked home. As night fell over Garabandal, darkness fell over the spirits of the four little peasant girls.

As soon as her daughter appeared in the kitchen, Aniceta asked: **Did you see the Angel?**

The same question must have been heard in the homes of the other three; and the answers must have all been the same as Conchita's response to her mother:

No. Today we didn't see him!

Then I went about my work as usual.

Yes, **work as usual** was what remained. As if the day before had been no more than a meaningless flash of light in the somber life of a village child. Everything would be forgotten little by little, and finally there would only remain the dismal monotony of her poor daily surroundings and **work as usual**.

No wonder that after supper as she went to bed

at a quarter to ten she was not able to sleep. Her adolescent mind was filled with dejection:

Since I couldn't sleep, I started to pray. And then I heard a voice that said to me, Don't be troubled; you will see me again.

The voice left a deep impression and Conchita continued praying, although with a much different state of mind. She went on praying for a long time until finally she fell asleep. And so with a finale of prayer the day of June 19th, 1961 ended; a day of excitement in Garabandal, full of contrasting feelings and contrasting words, varying between hope and fear, between disbelief and desire.

On the next day, Tuesday, the village attitude was about the same, although the number of suspicious and hostile comments was increasing.

Since we hadn't seen anything on June 19th, they thought that he wouldn't appear to us again.

But they didn't know what had happened to us during the night — what we hadn't told anyone.

While going to school Conchita learned that during the night her three companions had received the same assurance as she, *You will see me again*. And so they were full of secret joy and predisposed to face the various incidents of the day.

The day passed like all the others, without anything worthy of special mention, until the mid-afternoon hour came when the children, having left the classroom, asked for their lunches.⁽¹¹⁾ The four visionaries, besides asking for their lunches, also asked with much more insistence for a special permission—to go together to pray in the Calleja.

But they ran into difficulties.

My mother, and also the parents, brothers, and sisters of the other girls were worried.

They had a very great conflict, for if

11. The lunches taken in the afternoon almost always consisted of bread and something to go with it. The children did not ordinarily stay home to eat. They came home, asked for lunch, got it, and went back to eat with their schoolmates.

they leaned to what was true, they also thought the opposite.

And there was above all the burden of human respect, the fear of being ridiculous that is so constraining in the small towns.

At first Aniceta showed herself completely intractable.

If you want to pray, go to the church; the calleja isn't the place.

Conchita implored, but without result. Fortunately Loli, Jacinta, and Mari Cruz then arrived, and they had already obtained permission to go.

—Please, Señora. Let Conchita go. Let her go!

—But why do you want to go make fools of yourselves?

—We aren't going to make fools of ourselves! We are going to pray, and to see if the Angel comes!

—No. Conchita isn't going. You can go if you want.

They left, but very slowly, until they no longer could be seen because of a wall in the way.

I remained, very sad.

My mother suddenly changed her mind, and with a loud voice called: Loli. Tell the other girls to come here.

Soon they arrived, and my mother said to them, If you do what I tell you, I'll let Conchita go.

A simple strategy had occurred to Aniceta to protect herself from insult and ridicule in case things did not come out as the girls expected:

You three go alone now, as if you were going to play there, without saying anything to anyone.

And when you arrive at the calleja, Conchita will go secretly, so that no one will notice.

Loli, Jacinta, and Mari Cruz were not very convinced, afraid that Aniceta was not speaking seriously. But they began to walk . . . slower and



Left to right: Loli, Conchita, Mari Cruz, Jacinta

slower. Conchita had to reassure them that she would come. And a little later she did come. She found them complaining about her being late. But their displeasure soon passed and the four, **very happy**, knelt down on the rocks of the calleja and began to recite the rosary. Very hopeful in the beginning, their anxiety increased as the beads passed through their fingers.

When they had finished, the Angel had not come.⁽¹²⁾

We decided to go to the church.

And when we got up, since we were on our knees, we saw a very brilliant light surrounding the four of us.

We saw nothing else except the light.

And we screamed with fear.

The light, though blinding, did not blind them; but it encircled them resplendently, isolated them from everything, and blacked out the road. From

12. In Conchita's diary the **Angel** is always written in capitals, so as to make it understood that she is discussing a very important and distinguished angel.

this came a sensation of constriction—**fear**—that left them lost and floating in mystery, adrift in something completely unknown that they could not comprehend.⁽¹³⁾

The second day, Monday the 19th, they were made to pass through the experience of, **It is not he who wishes or he who runs.** (Romans 9:16) That is to say, it did not depend mainly on themselves whether or not this series of miraculous contacts with the Infinite Unknown would occur. Everything depended on Him Who is high above all things. At the same

13. Prudencio González was one of the residents of the village who did not take the four girls' story seriously. She laughed at the *foolishness* that the people were talking so much about. But that evening she was coming down the *calleja* with a herd of sheep, and suddenly coming out of the shadows, she had before her eyes the group of four young girls completely alone and outside of themselves. The scene impressed her.

Her sheep were going toward the village, closing off her path between the rocks that formed the sides of the *calleja*. As well as she could, she slid carefully between two of the girls. She had to lean on one of the girl's shoulders and her impression—as she admitted later—was tremendous, as if she were touching a mystery. The shoulder did not seem to be soft warm flesh, but rather something rigid and cold, trembling.



A small monument now marks the site of the Angel's first appearance.

time, so that they wouldn't fall into anxious dejection, He gave them a pledge that what they had seen on the previous evening was something very real — with a reason and a meaning — and that it was only the beginning of something more.

From this they were specially prepared for the third day, June 20th, with the phenomenon of the blinding light surrounding them, blacking out the road and isolating them from everything. Their spirit and eyes had to be made ready to pass with a form of natural agility from the dull world of day to day living to a higher world of wonders flooded with brilliance. In this world of light they would have to encounter —alone— elements extremely far above all those things that made up their daily existence.

For this, even the calleja —the path previously

seen by the four village girls — would be blocked out by the mystery of the light, revealing a new destiny, at the time well hidden in the secret designs of God. So the children's startled reaction of fear can be understood — and their screams, which seem to be an unconscious pathetic call for help and explanation. It is never painless to be brusquely taken away from one's normal way of living.

The People Become Aroused

When the four girls found themselves again, as if nothing had happened, upon the normal ground of

the calleja, it was already night —**9:30**— and so they did not make their intended visit to the church.

They were hardly able to talk about the effect on them. On separating, they agreed not to say anything to anyone. For this reason their answers to their families' questions in their homes were evasive. They carried their secret undivulged to the silence of their beds.

But soon they became aware that they could not keep it hidden like this. The request of the parish priest had to be carried out: **If we saw something again, we should tell him right away.** They wanted to obey. But how? He lived in Cossío, six kilometers down a seldom traveled and treacherous road. **Our parents would not let us go alone.** There was no other solution except to reveal to their families what had happened; and so they did, on the morning of June 21st.

This information, strictly confidential, was passed right away to Fr. Valentín, although something must have filtered down to him as the day wore on and the expectation in the village increased. The first extraordinary phenomenon of the calleja had not had any witnesses; they had been there

alone, as Conchita said, **We five: the Angel, Loli, Mari Cruz, Jacinta, and myself.** But on the evening of Wednesday, June 21st, 1961, for the first time there would be other observers.

In the evening, after having done what we had to do, (*This is a very important observation. Heaven always teaches us to fulfill our duties since this is the way all order is maintained.*) **we asked permission from our parents to go to the same place where the Angel had appeared to us.**

But while going to the calleja, seeing that the people did not believe, we told a woman named Clementina González that if she wanted to come with us . . .

But she didn't want to come alone since she had her doubts, and she went to call another woman named Concesa.

Noticing us going together, other persons joined us also, and arriving at the calleja, we began to pray the rosary.

We finished it, and the Angel had not come.

“We five: the Angel, Loli, Mari Cruz, Jacinta, and myself”



The people were laughing hard and said to us, *Now say a Station!*

And so we did, and on ending it the Angel appeared to us.

In their rapture, the girls did not forget the request of the parish priest:

We asked him who he was and why he had come.

But he didn't answer us.

The works of heaven follow their own cadence and its mysteries are not ordinarily immediately unveiled. It is necessary to prepare, wait, and merit.

What happened at that time to those who had come there just to look? The persons, who on that night of June were the first to view the girls' ecstatic transport, were carried away with emotion. A strange and sweet trembling seized them. They didn't know whether to shout or cry, or whether they should call for the rest of the villagers.

Weren't the four transfigured girls the same ones that they knew? Weren't they just like the other children of the village? Weren't they the same ones who walked around town with the other young girls, who ran and played every day in the little streets of San Sebastián?

How they held themselves! And what expressions on their faces! Positioned on their knees on the rocky ground of the trail,⁽¹⁴⁾ their faces turned upward toward something or someone that held them enraptured, their lips parted in a slight smile that gave a charming beauty to their expressions.

Such a limpid look in those eyes! And how those eyes gazed at something that no one else could see! Those present were certain that not even the best photographs could capture the scene completely.

When the four returned to normal, they saw with surprise that some of the people around them were crying and that others were striking their breasts, and one of them, Clementina, was ready to run to the village to call all the people there.

14. Although rocks and stones are scattered all over Garabandal, it is hard to accept the remark in *The Star on the Mountain* from one pilgrim who states, *This town is the rockiest in all Spain.*

Oh my children, exclaimed someone, expressing the feelings of the rest, When you see the Angel again, tell him to forgive us for not believing!

A woman said to my aunt (*Aurelia*) who was among the people:

—*Did you see the Angel?*

—*No, I haven't seen him; but if you don't believe in this, you don't believe in God.*

Clementina González gives another version of this episode. The discrepancies between her report and Conchita's can be easily explained, since Conchita was only able to learn what happened around her and her companions during the ecstasy from what she was told by others later on, while Clementina González experienced it first hand. According to the latter, it happened this way:

She had gone to the schoolmaster's home and was talking with his wife, Concesa, seated at the entrance of the old house. (The house is no longer standing, as Conchita's brother built his little hotel *Mesón Serafín* on its former site.) The women saw the four girls coming, and Conchita came up to Clementina and asked her to accompany them to a place in the Calleja where they wanted to pray. Clementina agreed and Concesa went with them too.

They started praying with the girls, and only a little later, on noticing that *something was going on* in the Calleja, did other people begin to come, such as Angelita, Conchita's aunt Aurelia, Clementina's 12-year-old eldest son, etc . . .

Those who had come, moved only by curiosity, did not take the matter seriously. Seeing that nothing was happening in spite of the girls' prayers, they were talking and laughing . . . But the girls' sudden entrance into ecstasy made quite an impression on them.

They were not able to see the transfigured faces well as they were in back of the visionaries. They wanted to go ahead to look at their faces but Angelita, the first one who tried it, came back trembling as she felt a mysterious obstacle that *«prevented her step and held her back»*. Then from their positions, leaning forward and stretching their necks, they were able to see the sides of some of the girls' faces and to hear some of their speech . . .



The *calleja* was a rocky trail leading out from the village.

Clementina soon became very excited by this inconceivable spectacle. And certain that something was happening there — something from God — began to speak out like this, «*Conchita, my child, pray to Our Lady of Mount Carmel . . . Pray to the Sacred Heart to help us . . . Let them tell you what they want from us . . .*» She was talking of going to call a priest — of calling the whole village. What could this be? All of those present did not share her tremendous excitement, and even continued laughing. It was at this time that she, and not Conchita's aunt, said, «*Oh children! If you don't believe in this, you don't believe in God.*»

All those who saw us went down to the village telling everyone about it, since they were very impressed.

For they had never seen or heard anything like it.⁽¹⁵⁾

15. It can be easily understood what upset and upheaval came upon the good people of Garabandal as a result of the things happening in the village. Mari Cruz's mother, Pilar, illustrated this in her conversation recorded on the occasion already mentioned:

It can be imagined how the news spread through the village, and what was talked about in the houses on that night in June, a night of grace.

"Everything Seems To Be Coming from God"

Of course the news came quickly to Fr. Valentín. And not only to Fr. Valentín. The chief of police, Juan A. Seco, wrote in his memoirs:

«When I saw my daughter for the first time in that way (*in ecstasy*), I was very frightened. I thought she was having an attack. I point out that I had never heard talk of apparitions. Well, perhaps apparitions; but not ecstasies. I was unaware of those things. I didn't know anything at all about them. Now I have learned something. And finding my daughter like that—and going to touch her—and she was so rigid—and going to lift her up—and I couldn't. I said to myself, *This little girl is going to die; she is having an attack!*»



Fr. Valentín (arrow) was the first priest to see an ecstasy.

«On June 21st, I was informed that something miraculous had occurred in my district. On that day I had gone to consult with a doctor of the area in Puente Nansa. And Dr. José Luis Gullón, who was very amazed, mentioned to me what had just been told to him by two women who had come down from Garabandal, *that an angel had appeared to four young girls from the village.*

I think that at the time I forgot to ask the doctor for the prescription that I needed for my ear, because it struck me that I no longer needed it, since I was hearing perfectly what the women had informed him. I went directly to the headquarters of the Civil Guard and ordered Officer José Fernández Codesido to go up to San Sebastián and carefully investigate everything that happened. On his return, the officer reported to me that he had been with each of the supposed visionaries individually; and that they coincided completely: *that they happened to be playing marbles at the entrance to the calleja which is named Campuca Street and that suddenly . . .*

After that day I felt satisfied, and ordered a

pair of guards to remain permanently in Garabandal. The news spread throughout all the neighboring towns and every day people made the journey to Garabandal, which required increasing the size of the guard. Soon there came to be crowds of 500 to 3,000 persons a day.»

But let us return to Father Valentín.

The good priest must have been so impressed by what was told him that he had already decided to go to Santander on June 22nd.⁽¹⁶⁾ to completely inform the Bishop. Someone made him hold off, observing correctly, *Why don't you wait to see for yourself what's going on? Surely something will happen this evening and then later you can give a*

16. Although I cannot give the exact date that Father Valentín went to Santander to inform his superior, I know that Ceferino Mazón, the father of Loli, went with him as a civil official of the village, accompanied by two other men of some importance in the area: the *indiano* Eustaquio Cuenca and the professor Manín. (The term *indiano* is generally given in Spain to emigrants who have returned from America after having made their fortune there.)

Father Valentín spoke alone behind closed doors with Bishop Doroteo Fernández. After listening to him, the bishop said that for the moment, obviously, there was only one thing to do: *Watch and wait.*

better report about everything. Thanks to this intelligent observation, that Thursday, the day of the week dedicated to the Eucharist, which in 1961 had more daylight time than any other day in the year, was the first to have a priest in the *calleja* at Garabandal as a witness of the communication that God seemed to want established from on high with men.

At the usual time of the evening, at 8:30, *Te lucis ante terminum*, fervent prayer rose up from the community on the stony path to the pines, a path that was already radiating the miraculous. A calm fell on the surrounding plains, and spread through the ravines to the mountains above. The soft fragrance of summer, the scent of fields in bloom and new-cut hay pervaded the air.⁽¹⁷⁾

Around the girls gathered an assembly of almost all the people in the village, presided over by its pastor. One by one the beads of the rosary were counted out with the thrill of expectation . . . And at last the ecstasy of the girls!



This is certain! Shouts of enthusiasm mixed with sighs of emotion.

But not all resistance was vanquished. Among the onlookers was a certain Professor Manín.⁽¹⁸⁾ Surely out of a desire for more complete information, this man took the girls to a neighbor's house after the ecstasy to interrogate them tenaciously about what they had seen. Some of the people got

17. Planting and harvesting hay is a principal occupation for the peasants in the mountains, who gain their living mainly from their cows. The countryside of the whole Santander region, not only the area near Garabandal, is almost a continual succession of fields of hay and woods of Eucalyptus. During those June days to which we are referring, the hay harvest was in full swing.

18. This professor was in San Sebastián tutoring the son of an *indiano* of the village. His name was Manín or Manuco (a nickname of Manuel). He recently lived in Santander.

the idea that he had *prepared* the girls for their visions in the Calleja; the Civil Guards were suspicious of him, and even considered throwing him in jail.⁽¹⁹⁾

On that Thursday evening, Fr. Valentín was satisfied with being no more than a witness. But on the next day, June 23rd, he began to act as the person mainly responsible for what was happening.

At the same time of the evening there was an ecstasy in the Calleja again after the usual prayers. But the number of onlookers had increased markedly, since the news of what was occurring in San Sebastián had already traveled to the surrounding villages: Cossío, Puente Nansa, Rozadío.⁽²⁰⁾

The ecstasy finished, the people showed their feelings by rushing to embrace the girls.

That day the guards did not want the professor to take us for questioning.

We went with the parish priest to the church sacristy where he questioned us, calling us in one by one, to see if we agreed.

The examination must have completely satisfied Father Valentín, since on coming out into the courtyard with the girls, he said to the people waiting there:

Up to now everything seems to be coming from God.

19. The police chief mentions in his memoirs:

«In the village there was a teacher or professor who had come to give lessons on assigned courses to the son of the *indiano* Taquio. (*Eustaquio Cuenca*) And the teacher accompanied the girls during the apparitions to hear what they said, and to take notes. The people began to talk about whether he was hypnotizing them, and whether he was giving them pills or other things of that type. One day after the apparition, one of my sergeants informed me that the teacher had taken Conchita to the home of the *indiano* and that it was true what the people were saying . . . I went immediately and actually found the teacher with the girl in a room. I asked him what this was about, and he answered that he was doing work for Father Valentín, gathering information that they could later present in a report to the bishop.»

20. These are all small riverside towns on the banks of the Nansa River. Puente Nansa is on the river below Cossío; Rozadío, on the river above. This latter town is the 'Robacio' of the book 'Penas Arriba,' the childhood country of Neluco, the young and dedicated doctor of the novel.

We can imagine the happiness of those good people. How could God have so distinguished Garabandal? What did He want from us? From now on people will look with envy on the village which up to now they had regarded with pity.

* * *

The first Saturday since the beginning of events had come, falling on the last Saturday of that memorable month of June. Would something special happen on that day of the week especially consecrated to the Virgin? Would only an angel come without speaking? Or would he bring something from her, who was so much invoked there with the petition of the Hail Mary and the salutations of the Litany of Loretto!

During the first hours of the afternoon, the road going up to Garabandal saw a continual passage of people who were coming to the village in search of — they themselves could not even say. It took more than curiosity to make them come up the road perspiring and exhausted. Many of them were peasants who had left their urgent work in the middle of the hay harvest. But that which was said to be taking place at Garabandal was more important than all those pressing occupations. Nothing like this had ever occurred around here before, and besides . . . why lose the chance?

When the girls, **accompanied by the people**, arrived at the usual place, they met many strangers **who had come in advance to take a place and see us better**.

There wasn't time to start the rosary. The Angel appeared immediately, and the four girls were enraptured away from everything around them. They were alone with the Angel in the splendor of something wonderful.

Then they noticed something new about him. He continued gazing on them with a smile; he was still silent. But below the Angel today was writing that had some unknown meaning. The first line started, **HAY QUE . . .** and below was seen a series of capital letters, that the girls later learned were Roman numerals, designating a date.⁽²¹⁾

We asked him what this meant, and he smiled . . . but he didn't tell us.

When the apparition was over, the young men of the village took us away

in a cart, so that the people would not crush us, and so they would not kiss us.

They took us to the church, and Father Valentín, the parish priest, took us into the sacristy one by one so that we would tell him what had happened.

The pastor was anxious to assemble the greatest number of facts in order to bring an early and complete report to his Bishop. The apparition on that Saturday held particular interest because of the writing, which might be the key to the solution of the strange mystery of the calleja; but the girls were not in a position to satisfy the understandable curiosity of the priest. Absorbed in the contemplation of the Angel, who was above every wonder of this world, they had not understood the Roman numerals. And they had paid little attention to the strange writing which the Angel himself had refused for the moment to explain.⁽²²⁾

El Cuadro

As can be imagined, on the next day, Sunday, the last Sunday of June and the octave of the first phenomenon of the Calleja, the village was crammed

21. An article in the French edition of Conchita's Diary relates:

In a letter written to Mr. William A. Nolan of Illinois (U.S.A.) Conchita describes this in the following words:

«The first times that we saw him, he didn't say anything to us, up until the first of July. Before the first of July, he carried some writing at his feet, but we didn't understand what it meant. The words that we understood were these:

On the first line: "There must . . ."

And on the last line: "XVIII-MCMLXI".

This is what we understood.»

This is an allusion, as will be brought forth later on, to the message of October 18th, 1961.

22. In October of 1975, I questioned Jacinta:

—The inscription that the Angel carried at his feet on those days—was it difficult to read, or could you read it clearly?

—*I hardly remember. What I do recall is that the row of capital letters — whose meaning we didn't understand — greatly attracted our attention. Later they told us that these were Roman Numerals.*

—You didn't understand what the writing meant when you saw it. Did the Angel give you some explanation?

—*No, it was the Virgin who explained it to us later.*



Ecstasy in the Cuadro

with pilgrims, among them **the school teacher from Cossío,**⁽²³⁾ (I do not know why Conchita mentions him so specifically) **five priests,**⁽²⁴⁾ some of whom **did not believe,** and **many doctors.** The atmosphere in San Sebastián on that beautiful day in June was like a holiday. And the people **continued to be excited.**

And it was not without reason.

When the sun declined over the horizon, the whole mass of people came together around the now illustrious location of the *calleja*. Previously the village people had built a barrier there with wooden logs tied together with cords to protect the girls.⁽²⁵⁾ Because of its square form, it immediately received the name *El Cuadro*, a word which would come forth many times in the history of Garabandal. Thanks to this bulwark of defense, the girls were able to meet their vision without disturbance, away from the danger of the thoughtless, although explainable, avalanches of the crowd. And it also made it easy for those to be at their side who had more of a right or more of a reason to be there: their parents, their brothers and sisters, the doctors, and the priests.

It began as usual with the recitation of the rosary. And the Angel did not fail his appointment with the girls, nor the expectation of the multitude.

That day, while I was seeing the Angel, our family doctor⁽²⁶⁾ **grabbed me, lifted me up, and let me fall from a height of about a meter.**

And on hitting the ground, my knees made a sound as if they were broken.

My brother wanted to stop him from doing this, but a force inside him kept him back.

23. This teacher was still teaching in the same school in 1970; his name is José Gallego.

24. Father Pedro Gómez from Puente Nansa (a former Jesuit, now no longer a priest); Fr. Juan González Gómez (a native of Garabandal); Fr. Arsenio Quintanal from Celís, Father Alfonso Cobián of Rivadesella, accompanied by a Dominican priest. Father Juan González Gómez was later named pastor of Puente Nansa. After August 20th, 1972, he began coming to San Sebastián de Garabandal for religious services on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays.

25. According to the notes of Police Chief Juan A. Seco, this protective barrier had been constructed on the previous day, Saturday, June 25th.

26. Doctor José Luis Gullón, resident of Puente Nansa.

I was unaware of all this but the people told me about it later.⁽²⁷⁾

When the apparition was over, the people were very excited and they all wanted to see my knees.

And I didn't know why.⁽²⁸⁾

From the Cuadro, the girls and many other persons went to the church, there to piously conclude with a prayer to the Blessed Sacrament what they had experienced in the Calleja with such emotion.

The girls then went into the church sacristy **where there were doctors and priests** who assaulted them with questions that they answered with the ingenuous calmness of normal, honest country girls possessing quick intelligence, if poor education.

The result: **Some of the priests didn't believe; some did.**

And who would wonder? In the first place, it was still too soon to take a definite position. And secondly, the affairs of God are never convincing from the start, nor do they overcome all resistance right away. How were the sermons of Jesus received? And what were St. Paul's experiences in preaching the Gospel to the Jewish communities that he met on his apostolic journeys? A revealing fact was stated at the end of the mission work of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia: **And as many as were ordained to life everlasting believed.** (Acts 13: 48)

Besides there was no obligation to believe in this Garabandal affair; it was not a requirement to be in God's good graces. Here the question was above all to be more or less open to the unknown, to be spiritually receptive.

It was also on that Sunday night of June 25th

27. During the ecstasies, the insensibility of the visionaries was total. They neither saw nor felt anything that was outside of their *field of view* . . . And their field of view was completely removed from the spectators.

28. Juan A. Seco confirms the episode of the doctor forcefully lifting up Conchita and added:

«When it was over and the girl was examined, the marks from the fall were clearly seen; and also the marks from the pinching, scratching and punching, which as a form of test, some had done to the visionary without her showing the least reaction of pain. She didn't notice any of these things and none caused her pain; only the signs remained.»



Ecstasy at the church door

that there began to appear — for the first time, I believe — a certain *explanation* that would go on to spread and which would play an important and deplorable role throughout the history of the events. It is almost lost in some lines from Conchita's diary:

**The teacher from Cossío was there;
but that day he didn't believe, and said,
—Everything was a farce.
And he said to my brother,
—Your sister puts on a good act!**

Yes, the four village girls, with a mentality (due to their remote isolation) of 8 or 9 year old children, who had never seen a motion picture, a television program, or a theater play, showed themselves right away such formidable actresses that during months and even years they were able to deceive thousands of people from Spain and foreign lands, among whom were hundreds of priests, doctors, lawyers, engineers, writers, and newspaper men. How unseeing must our show producers be not to have offered contracts to the girls that could have been for them a profitable venture.⁽²⁹⁾

When all the turmoil of that unforgettable afternoon had ended, the four girls came upon another surprise:

We looked at our legs, and they were full of punctures and marks from those who scratched us.

But they didn't hurt us, although the marks were there.⁽³⁰⁾

29. There came forward at that time the explanation—very easy to mention, but so difficult to prove that up to the present no one has done so—that all this was an effect of some disease or abnormality of the visionaries. Police Chief Alvarez Seco wrote down:

«The doctor in charge of the district, Doctor José Luis Gullón said that these were seizures and diseases, that all that was happening was due to an illness that the girls had. He never said what illness it was. But I could see that they were in good health, that each day they were looking better and more healthy, while their families, parents, sisters and brothers gave the appearance of exhaustion and their faces clearly showed the lack of sleep and rest.»

30. Father Ramón María Andreu (with the authorization of the Santander chancery and his own superiors) was one of the exceptional witnesses of the events of Garabandal. He compiled a report of exceptional value, and in it he points this out about the ecstasies of the children:

At Last the Angel Speaks

As if it was necessary for everyone to recuperate from all the frenzy and excitement of the previous days, on Monday (June 26th) and Tuesday (June 27th) **there was no apparition.** And what was worse, the girls began to fear that everything had ended.

We were very sad, since we thought that we would never again see anything.

Nevertheless the entire reason for the Angel's coming was to communicate what was contained in the *writing* seen on the last few days; but the girls had not given this the least attention. The letdown and the bitter reaction of disgust, which manifested itself in threatening words from the large crowd that had gone up on those two days with desires of seeing something, contributed to augmenting the unfortunate girls' dejection. No more than prayers had taken place in the calleja. And the crowd had not come precisely to pray. They went home saying, **It's obvious! Since there are many of us and the people in Garabandal are not used to this, they didn't dare to do those things in front of us!**

The four girls continued doing their work as usual, going to school, and visiting the Blessed Sacrament; but they could not hide the suffering that they carried within.

Their suffering must have been plainly evident, since the good people of the village felt it necessary

«The anesthesia to pain appears complete. Besides the tests that were done on them, like pricking them, I have seen them fall hard on their knees without any sign of pain.

What impressed me the most in this regard was when I saw Loli smack her head hard against a concrete walk. The noise was fearful; those present reacted by letting out screams; but the young girl, sitting on the ground, smiled and spoke with the Vision. On returning to normal, we asked her if she had felt any pain. She didn't remember any smack on her head. She said that could have occurred when she felt something like a cramp over her whole body, but without any pain. Nevertheless, there was a bruise on her head at the place of the injury.»



Typical village setting

to console them. Wednesday, June 28th was an ordinary school day.

When we got out, the people in the village, seeing us so sad, wept and kissed us saying:

Pray very much so that he will return!

When evening came, we went to the calleja and did as usual.

The people prayed the rosary with more faith than ever so that he would appear to us.

And on finishing the litany, he appeared to us and came smiling more than ever.

The girls pleaded with many questions, asking above all for him to tell them why he had come. They obtained only smiles.⁽³¹⁾ That is, they received no clarification; but such happiness that the duration of the ecstasy which was an hour, from

9:00 to 10:00 at night, seemed to them **a minute or less: So happy were we with him.**

The Angel did not make his visit to the girls on Thursday the 29th or on Friday, the 30th.⁽³²⁾

• • • • •

Faustino González was a cattle raiser and shepherd who lived in the old town of Obeso in the district of Rio Nansa on top of a hill where the ancient tower of the former lords of the area can be seen. However, he went many times to the mountains of Garabandal, for he had a cabin there surrounded by pastures for cattle grazing.

The things that were happening in the village at the time were naturally the subject of conversation between Faustino and the other men who lived in the neighboring barns. On the 29th of June, the last Thursday of the month and a feastday (Sts. Peter and Paul), they decided to go see what was happening. They were a group of ten or eleven, and by their crude dress and manner of traveling they appeared to be coming more to ridicule than to seek

31. Many people find the procedure in apparitions strange. The *ways of God* are not easily understood. Bernadette Soubirous, the visionary at Lourdes, (the Garabandal children knew nothing of Lourdes) said to P. Gondrand in a letter in 1861, "She didn't say a word until the third time she appeared to me." And at Lourdes there were many fewer apparitions than at Garabandal.

32. Perhaps it was during the apparitions on this day, the last Friday of the month of the Sacred Heart, that Jacinta saw Our Lord *«standing on what appeared to be a little white cloud, showing a bright red heart on the left side of His chest, from which white and gold rays irradiated.»* He did not speak to the girl. But with a gesture of His left hand, He presented her His heart, while motioning with His right hand for her to come near. Jacinta obeyed, and was overwhelmed by the beauty and splendor of His garments, and even more by His person . . . His brilliance was much superior to that which she had seen in the Angel, and even superior to that which she would later see in the Virgin.

Jacinta's vision took place in the Calleja, while her three companions, kneeling at her side, were looking at St. Michael. The vision lasted only, (or so it seemed to her) a few moments, but it left an indelible impression on her, although she kept completely silent about it for many years.

In the vision, two things especially impressed her: Jesus' look, and His majestic bearing.

His glance penetrated to the depths of her soul. She could not bear it for a long time! Nevertheless, the Lord's look *«was full of immense love.»*

As for His supremely majestic bearing, it should not be forgotten that Jesus is The Lord, before Whom **every knee should bend of those in the heavens, on earth, and under the earth.** (Phil. 2: 9-10)



Left to right: Mari Cruz, Conchita, Jacinta, Loli in trance

devotion. It could hardly have come into their minds that heaven would concern itself with insignificant creatures like the children of Aniceta, Ceferino, Simón and Escolástico.

In the village the people gathered at the Calleja at the usual hour, as the sun set beyond the horizon. Our herdsmen did not neglect to take an early place in the first row; thus they could observe what was going on at their leisure.

That day an old woman from the village started to lead the rosary. The girls took their normal place within the Cuadro. And for a while the prayer continued without anything happening; it seemed that the Angel was in no hurry. Our men, who had not come there strictly to pray, lacking better entertainment, amused themselves by watching the old woman who was leading the prayer. Her face showed such compunction, such devotion, such an appearance that it made them howl with laughter. But their laugh froze abruptly; for suddenly with a quick seizure and a sharp thrust of their heads upwards, the four girls left their normal state.

«To see that transformation, while watching

their faces» — later confessed Faustino González to Dr. Ortiz of Santander — «we experienced such emotion that tears poured out from us, even though we were hard as stone.»

The return to the barns in the warm air of the night was made in a much different manner than the going. When they gathered together again in the cabin, they could talk about nothing else except what they had seen and heard. Sleep did not come; and then one of them suggested that they stop talking and pray the rosary, even though it would be no more than a reparation for the offense to God and the Virgin caused by their foolishness in mocking what was going on.

They all accepted the idea well — for one time their inveterate human respect did not matter — and in the solitude of the mountain night, with the light accompaniment of mooing from cows, the stable heard for the first time or as never before, a rosary from men who had felt near at hand the unexplainable presence of God.

That night must have left its mark on the herdsmen since a month and a half later when Celestino



“I come to announce to you a visit by the Virgin under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.”

Ortiz made his first trip up to Garabandal, he was «pleasantly surprised by the attitude with which those rustic men prayed the rosary in the streets, as they accompanied the girls with their heads respectfully uncovered.» He spoke about this with one of them, and received this response:

«Those of us who graze cattle in the mountains come down to the village on Saturdays to pray the rosary with the girls. We take care of the cattle earlier than on other days so that rosaries like these won't be missed. They are worth a thousand of those we've said before in the church.

—Isn't that a little exaggerated?

—No, doctor. No. In the church we are distracted many times; but here we pray and go on thinking.»

• • • • •

The month of July came. Its first day fell on a Saturday.

That day many people came; since it was the Virgin's day.

Perhaps she would appear to us.

In the Cuadro at the usual hour, the girls were counting out the Ave Marías on their rosaries, accompanied by the waiting multitude. And finally the Angel came. But this time he did not limit himself to smiling. This time, finally HE SPOKE! And his most important words were these:

I come to announce to you a visit by the Virgin under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, who will appear to you tomorrow, Sunday.

Outside of themselves with joy, the four girls cried out together:

Let her come right away!

The Angel smiled.

Finally, the reason for so many repeated visits by



“He spoke to us about many things.”
the mysterious celestial personage appeared clear: He had come to prepare the way.

And it could well be supposed that what he was preparing, what was about to come, was extremely important, since the introduction had been so long and intensive.

The girls, overjoyed with the great announcement that they had just received, conversed happily with that person whom they had seen so many times but to whom they had never yet spoken.

There was so much that they had to ask and say. And the Angel was in a mood to speak without restriction too. Conchita wrote later, **That day he spoke to us about many things.** The main part of these things will remain forever secret, since they were only of interest to those who were involved in that conversation. The Angel had come undoubtedly for all, or at least for many; but before all for those four young girls over whom surely the Lord held *special plans of love and mercy.*

The visionaries recalled with the apparition the various happenings and the most striking things that

had occurred during the previous meetings; for example, the fear that Loli, Jacinta, and Mari Cruz had felt on the first day when they saw Conchita swept up like a victim of an attack. While recounting this, now that everything had become clear, the girls laughed boisterously with the Angel. After so many meetings and so many hours shared together, a pleasant familiarity existed among **the five.**



“The Virgin will tell you about it.”

The most important question was related to the mysterious writing that the Angel had brought on the last days. He answered:

—The Virgin will tell you about it.

As in so many other things, it was necessary to wait. God brings everything with order; He has a rhythm which rarely coincides with ours, and which therefore so many times upsets us.

The Saturday interview on July 1st, the final interview of that first stage, lasted **two hours**; but it must have been stupendous to the girls—as Conchita stated—it seemed like **two seconds.** The parting was:

— I will come tomorrow with the

Virgin.

That made us sad.

Returning to normal, the visionaries were extremely surprised on seeing night around them, since they had come from a world flooded with brightness.

The people who had heard the long conversations in ecstasy crowded on top of them, asking them what had happened and what had been said to them. And the girls explained what they could, as well as they could. Their poor village vocabulary and undeveloped expression were not suited to speak of things about which even the most highly educated minds would find great difficulty in discussing.

With this in mind, we can better understand how to interpret the description that they repeatedly gave of the Angel:

He was dressed in a long flowing blue tunic without a belt.

His wings are rather long, very lovely, pink in color.

His face was neither long or round; his nose was handsome; his eyes dark; and the face tan.

His hands were fine with short nails; his feet weren't seen.

This description does not clash with the traditional representation of the angels in our Catholic Church; but it does not appear to say much. The most interesting thing the girls expressed about the Angel was that, in spite of his appearance as a child, they said: *«He gave the impression of great strength.»* Yes, the Angels of the Lord, although they can adopt a childlike appearance to

show the complete innocence of their being, are creatures of a higher nature, full of strength and light, close to the All High, *and powerful executors of His commands.*⁽³³⁾

What orders did the Angel come to accomplish among men in the Calleja at Garabandal?

At present he was preparing the way . . .

Someone was going to come!

33. Years later, how did the visionaries recall the Angel's series of apparitions at Garabandal? I was able to interview Jacinta in October, 1975. Here are some of the questions and answers:

—What impression did the Angel make on you? Did he seem simply a handsome child, or someone important and strong with a great mission?

—*I don't know how to answer that question. He always appeared like a child, although we felt great respect in front of him.*

(This means, according to what I understood by her explanations, that in spite of seeing him as someone of youthful age and small stature, she had the impression of being in the presence of someone very important, much higher than the girls.)

—How could you have enjoyed so many hours with him if he didn't speak to you?

(According to Conchita the Angel did not talk until the afternoon of July 1st.)

—*We were only with him a short time. It passed swiftly.*

—That was your impression. But the witnesses stated that your ecstasies at that time sometimes lasted very long.

—*It could be that way. I only remember that we passed them very well; the time seemed very short to us, seeing him . . . We were the ones who spoke. Sometimes we told him things, and other times we asked him questions. Then he answered us with signs and gestures. For example, if we would say, "Do you want us to pray more," he would incline his head as if to say "Yes." It was the same when we asked, "What do you want from us . . . That we should be better?"*