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# The Bells of the Last Council

**D**uring the autumn days of 1962, the main topic of conversation in the Catholic Church—and also in other Churches called Christian—was the inauguration of the Ecumenical Council that His Holiness John XXIII had convoked.<sup>(1)</sup>

It was to be called *Vatican II* because of the site of its celebration; it was to be the most *ecumenical* of all those celebrated until then, both by the number and by the variety of its participants.<sup>(2)</sup>

The proceeding had enormous expectation; it was being accompanied with enormous hope . . . And so anticipation for the Council was resounding throughout the world long before the heavy bronze bells of St. Peter's rang out their symphony over Rome on the morning of October 11th.<sup>(3)</sup>

Garabandal could not withdraw from the impact of such an event. Because of this, attention to what was being prepared in Rome intertwined at the mountain village with the course of its own proper *affairs* that were so marvelous all the time, so unusual from time to time. From the latter, we know some particularly intriguing happenings which still have not been made clear.

## Strange Phenomena

In a letter that María Herrero wrote to her sister on September 24th, this sentence can be read:

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1. On the 25th of January, 1959, in the basilica of St. Paul outside the walls of Rome, John XXIII publicly announced his proposition to convoke a new Ecumenical Council. Then he immediately began with the preparations—preparations that were foreseen to be long and complicated.

There was first a period *anti-preparatory*, which lasted a little more than a year. Following this on June 5th, 1960 began the *preparation* properly called, with the formation of Commissions, Sub-Commissions, and Secretariats. Finally on December 25th, 1961, the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* convoked the Council for the fall of 1962. The exact date of the opening was fixed a little later for October 11th, the feast of the Maternity of Mary.

2. Approximately 3,000 Fathers of the Council, bishops for the most part, came to Rome — men of every race, language and condition. Without the spectacular development in the means of communication during the past decades, the assembly of such a widely dispersed congregation would not have been possible.

3. It has already been mentioned that the solemn opening of the Council took place on this day.

«I told you on the phone about the fire; they have taken the earth to analyze it.»

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From this brief remark, we have no idea what she was referring to; but fortunately this woman used the occasion to send a report in French to the Holy Office at Rome about information that she had heard from Fr. Valentín:

«One day there were many people in Garabandal. Some of the visitors made a fire under the Pines to cook or keep warm. They left, thinking that they had put out the fire. Days passed, and that fire could not be extinguished, in spite of doing everything that was possible to put it out.

I myself, on coming to the village during those days, could notice the strange brilliance that was there above the Pines. It was because of this that I asked the pastor about it. And Father Valentín explained to me the origin of the phenomenon and what had been done to end it. He added that the thing had lasted for weeks; and that seen from afar, it seemed during the day to be a column of smoke and during the night a diffuse of brilliance.

*There were not lacking the learned in geology — he concluded, smiling with a certain gracious slyness — who were determined to give an explanation for the phenomenon. We will see. For the moment, they have taken some samples of this earth that burns to examine them in the laboratory.»*

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This is all that I can say about this undeniable and curious phenomenon; and this is rather little, since I was not able to obtain more information.

Some passages from the bible come to mind here:

**And the Lord went before them to show the way,  
By day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire:  
that He might be the guide of their journey day and night.**

**There never failed the pillar of cloud by day,  
nor the pillar of fire by night, before the people.**

(Exodus 13:21-22)

**And I will show wonders in the heavens,  
and on earth blood and fire and columns of smoke.**

(Joel 2:30)

Every person can have his own considerations about this . . . One thing is certain: in Holy Scripture, the column of smoke and the column of fire, the dark cloud and the devouring flame, are always used in connection with manifestations of the Divine Presence.

And I might add that these were not the only cases of unexplainable fire reported in Garabandal. The people there speak about what had mysteriously happened to a man in the village on a night that he was passing by the Pines; and also about what happened to the son of Simón and María on an early morning before dawn when he was going down toward Cossío to catch a bus.

Mrs. Herrero de Gallardo was speaking with Mr. Illera (a person well known in Santander) in the Hotel Real of that city, on September 2nd, 1965. From his lips she heard this utterance:

«I'm not the person to say if the events of Garabandal are true or false; that's the task of the Church. But I'm able to give testimony of what I've seen, since I followed the things that were happening there in 1961 and 1962 with great interest. What I'm going to tell you now took place in 1964, when the apparitions had already ended.<sup>(4)</sup>

I had gone up to the village and was walking back and forth when suddenly, in a completely clear and cloudless sky, a very thick black cloud came forth and hovered above the Pines. I was looking at it, very astounded — not knowing how to explain where it had come from. The cloud seemed to grow bigger, became darker, more threatening . . .

I was looking at it, very astonished on my part, when suddenly the cloud broke in half. And as if coming forth from within it, appeared a little brilliance, or if you will, a little white cloud, very bright, which increased in size and increased in size again, until it engulfed and made the imposing black cloud disappear. For a length of time that I could not say for certain—several minutes anyhow—the brilliant white cloud stayed there, crowning the Pines; and suddenly, unexplainably, disappeared, leaving a sky as blue and transparent as though nothing

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4. The *apparitions* did not end until November of 1965; but an almost complete eclipse occurred after the winter of 1963.

had passed through it.»

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The fact seems undeniable, and it could be a basis for many comments and interpretations. Was all this a prophetic announcement of something that was going to happen? And if so, to whose future was it referring? That of Garabandal, so despised by some *clerics*, so rejected by many bishops? Or the Church after the Council, according to some revealing words of Paul VI that we will quote later.<sup>(5)</sup>

Concerning this enigma, only God can give satisfactory answers.

## Congregation at Rome Siege at Garabandal

In the village, the final days of September were used to prepare for the coming Council. We know this from the writings of Luis Navas, the attorney from Palencia, who came again on Tuesday, September 25th. His first night there was a night of *vigil*, particularly difficult. And so he took advantage of the following day to sleep:

«I awoke at 3:00 in the afternoon. I used the afternoon to arrange my notes, and towards 7 o'clock I headed toward the church, since the time for the rosary was coming.

There was a sermon at the end; the pastor had enjoined Father Eliseo<sup>(6)</sup> to preach for several days on the Council. I remember on that day he spoke to us about the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and he said that He would come forth in our souls as a *fountain of living water that flowed to eternal life.*»

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With the Council being discussed in their environment, and since the girls talked in their ecstasies about the things that drew their attention each day, it is no wonder that Conchita was heard to say in a trance:

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5. Homily on the feastday of St. Peter, given in the Vatican basilica on June 29th, 1972.

6. This seems to have been a Passionist Father, that is, a member of the Congregation of the Passion founded in 1720 by St. Paul of the Cross.



“Will it be a success?”

*«The Council, is it the greatest of all? . . . Will it be a success? . . . How good! . . . That way they will know you better, and you will be very happy . . . Why do they paint you so ugly, when you are so beautiful?»<sup>(7)</sup>*

It would be extremely interesting to know the words that came from the Vision in those intervals of silence that separated the girl’s questions and statements. Perhaps we could know that way how God appraised the activities and the end result— at that time unforeseeable— of the last Council of the Church. Today, many years later, the people’s

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7. The words that follow were transcribed by Louis Navas from a tape recording made by a Basque priest who was in Garabandal on those days. (Fr. Valentín places the girl’s ecstasy on the morning of September 26th.)

«The whole night (between the 25th and 26th) they passed in vigil at Conchita’s home, until six in the morning. And when at that time a priest—there were six from outside the diocese—was reciting the Angelus, the girl fell on her knees and presented the crucifix to be kissed, starting with all the priests. She went outside into the village, she went to the Cuadro. It lasted about an hour. She was heard to say something about the Council . . .»

opinions are tremendously varied. Some think that the Council was the starting-point of an authentic Church, of a Church that finally had found itself. For them only the *post-conciliar* has value. Others say, or at least think, that the Council has provoked the worst revolution and the greatest crisis in the history of the Church.

What the girl said concerning the Council was not all questions; there was an exclamation which lends itself to diverse interpretations: *«How good! . . . That way they will know you better, and you will be very happy . . .»*

From this, I presume that the Virgin was saying something about what was going to happen in the Council with regard to her.

From the beginning it was planned to dedicate a complete *document* to the subject of the Blessed Virgin. The document was in time elaborated by the Commission in charge, and in time given to each of the Conciliar Fathers for his prior study. But before the time for its debate came to the

assembly itself, there came a decision to . . .

On October 24th, 1963, during the second session of the Council, the dogmatic constitution of the Church was being debated. The question was brought to the floor as to whether a whole conciliar document should be dedicated to the Virgin, proper to her and her alone, or whether just a chapter should be dedicated to her within the dogmatic constitution that was then being debated.

The unexpected question caused a tremendous reaction, and was heatedly debated with unusual vigor. Five days later, on October 29th the decision came by vote. By a narrow margin the majority decided that there would not be a conciliar document to speak about the Virgin alone; what the Council allotted to her was a chapter within the dogmatic constitution on the Church.

In Garabandal one year before this, on the early September morning about which we have just been speaking, well could the Virgin talk to Conchita about what the Council was thinking about doing for her, and also of what would actually take place. There would be no more than a chapter for her; but although brief, it would be substantial, and as a consequence, a good basis for excellent Marian instruction. Perhaps it was this that made the girl exclaim: *«How good! That way they will know you better and you will be very happy.»*



“They will know you better.”

Nevertheless, there has been a feeling in certain Catholic circles that the Council was the origin of a chill or halt in traditional Marian devotion. Does this feeling correspond to the facts? There are many who affirm it does. Is such a feeling without basis? Others maintain it is. And there are some who say that a chill or halt had to come, and that it

was coming at the right time.

Let us return to our story, where we find ourselves still in the days in which the Council was not a *fait accompli*; when it was for the hierarchy only a matter of preparation and conjecture, and for the faithful: expectation, prayer and hope.

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During the last days of September and early days of October, 1962, an ancient saying was re-enacted: *All roads lead to Rome*. All the roads saw the passage of Catholic bishops with their retinue answering the call of St. Peter's successor.

The Bishop of Santander was leaving for Rome too. But before departing, on a day as distinguished as October 7th, the feastday of the Most Holy Rosary, he signed his name to a new «Nota» on Garabandal, influenced by the Commission. It pronounced the following:

*The Special Commission, which has studied the events that have been happening in the village of San Sebastián de Garabandal, ratifies its previous declarations, judging that the phenomena lack all sign of supernatural character and have a natural explanation.*

*As a consequence, and with our desire that all the people of our diocese be properly informed, and that all who have any connection with the events have secure direction, in fulfillment of our pastoral obligation, and in making use of our authority:*

*1) We confirm in all its statements the official «Notas» of this bishopric of Santander dated on August 26th and October 24th of 1961.*

*2) We prohibit all priests, both in the diocese and outside the diocese, and all religious, even those exempt, from going to the location mentioned without express permission from the diocesan chancery.*

*3) We repeat to all the faithful the warning that they should abstain from fomenting the atmosphere created by the display of those events; and because of this, they should refrain from going to the village for this reason.*

*In a question of such seriousness, we hope*

*that you will all be prompt in complying with these regulations.*

*Eugenio, Bishop of Santander*<sup>(8)</sup>

It can be seen how the Commission in charge of Garabandal continues singing the same song in the same key. ***“The phenomena lack all sign of supernatural character, and have a natural explanation.”*** Brilliant deduction! A double affirmation that the Commission pretends to impose, without ever giving evidence or explanations. The members of the Commission would demand that we trust absolutely in their word, that is to say, in their competence and authority.

We would be glad to do so, if there were not so many indications of the inadequate way of procedure in which they carried out this matter. We would do so if we did not have the evaluations of others; who as for quality are on the same plane as they; and as for quantity leave them far behind. And furthermore, these others have followed the progression of the phenomena much closer at hand and with greater attention.

We can observe that if the *official* evaluation of the phenomena continues on the same key, the disciplinary announcements are accentuating in hostility. What Doroteo Fernández stated in his last «Nota» of October 24th, 1961: ***“The priests should abstain absolutely from whatever could contribute to creating confusion among the Christian people,”*** is changed in this first «Nota» from the new bishop to: ***“We prohibit all priests . . . From going to the location mentioned.”***

The 1961 statement: ***“The faithful should not let themselves be seduced by every wind of doctrine,”*** has progressed into: ***“They should abstain from fomenting the atmosphere . . . They should refrain from going to the village.”***<sup>(9)</sup>

With such pronouncements began the siege of Garabandal. Or perhaps it could be said that they

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8. Bishop Eugenio Beitia Aldazábal was the new titular bishop. It had been several months since he had succeeded the apostolic administrator Bishop Doroteo Fernández as head of the diocese. And so Bishop Beitia was the second of the Bishops from Santander who had to face the question of Garabandal. With what result? On being nominated for the bishopric of Santander, a long and fruitful episcopate was expected, perhaps due to the holy memory of Bishop José Iguino Treco; but the hopes did not last long.

were coming to close in the circle already existing, since for many months, there had existed a situation very much like a *state of siege*.

The effects of that third episcopal «Nota»—the first by Bishop Beitia—certainly did not give complete satisfaction to the Commission; but it was sufficiently derogatory so that there could be noted a considerable drop in the number of visitors and interested people coming to the village. On the back of a postcard, which was dated October 25th, Mari Loli wrote to the pastor of Barro:

**«Many fewer people are coming than came before the publication of the Nota from the bishop; but every day someone comes.»**

And Fr. Luis López Retenaga, from the seminary of San Sebastián, remarks in a report written two months later:

**«The Nota from the bishopric of Santander on October 7th has plunged many eyewitnesses of the phenomena into unusual confusion, since they had come to the conclusion that the phenomena were caused by supernatural intervention. It has instilled in them an interior struggle, in which the conclusions of their reasons have to yield to the requirements of a life of faith. »**

This statement from the distinguished priest seems a little exaggerated to me. No *life of faith* coerces us to share the opinion of the diocesan chancery in matters not *defined*—in this case, not definable—where different points of view can be held for different reasons.

What is obliged by a life of faith is to comply with what is legitimately commanded. Neither priests nor faithful have the obligation to think like their bishop in what refers to Garabandal; but they do have an obligation to obey the specific regulations that—within his authority—he establishes.

The harsh Episcopal «Nota» produced the result

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9. I do not know what the bishop from Santander feared for the faithful who were going there. The testimonies that we have indicate that the visitors never suffered any peril. Here is what Luis Navas said on Friday, September 28th, 1962:

**«It was a day of thick fog at the base of the mountains, which was degenerating into rain. In the afternoon we assisted at the rosary and Father Elísio spoke to us about the Virgin. At that time I had no desire to be at Lourdes or Fatima. I had the sensation of being under the direct influence, immediate and maternal, of Our Lady.»**

intended. In Spain during those days, when a bishop spoke, it was as if he spoke with the voice of infallibility. A bishop was, for a vast majority of people, the Church itself. As a consequence, the matter of Garabandal was placed in a situation of suspect and quarantine.

But what importance did this have? In Rome they were turning on all the lights: the Catholic spectacle of the century was about to begin.

The night of October 10th, the great vigil, was a night of waiting and excitement. I do not know if the pope slept much, or if those responsible for the Council slept well that night.

But I do know that far from the Eternal City, in little Garabandal, poor and now suspect, a vigil was being held on that night too. An excerpt from the *Memorias* of the pastor of Barro summarizes it:

«I passing the night of October 10th to 11th in a vigil in Conchita's kitchen. On the 10th, the press had published the *Nota* of the bishop, signed on October 7th.

I had come to Garabandal with the Spanish ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Alberto Mestas. That night we were waiting in the kitchen of the house. For amusement during the long vigil, we were playing 'educational questions' with Conchita. *Let's see who comes the closest to giving the time the Virgin will come*, she said. Each of us gave a time; Conchita herself gave hers. For my part, I said it would be 8 o'clock in the morning, since that was the time when the Council was going to start.

Everyone's time was passing, even Conchita's. And everyone was succumbing to sleep; some even retired. I decided to stay awake, intending to advise the others when the girl's ecstasy came. And actually sleep didn't come to me that night . . .

Conchita's radio was playing, and when it began to broadcast the solemn ceremony of the inauguration of the Council with the procession of the Conciliary Fathers, I noticed that the girl started to go into ecstasy. As I had foreseen, the trance coincided exactly with the time for the Council . . .»



“coincided exactly with the time for the Council.”

discussed in those minutes of converse with heaven. After the ecstasy, the visionary was questioned. Had she asked the Virgin any questions? Yes, she had asked *«why the bishop had given the Nota that had come in the newspaper on the previous day.*

—And what did the Virgin answer?

—*The Virgin didn't answer, she only smiled.»*

Perhaps the pretensions of some, the fears of others had made her smile . . . The pretensions of those seeking to end this, the fears of those who were thinking that this could end . . . How many of our activities make God laugh! Indulgently, and at times not so indulgently. *Why have the gentiles raged: and the people devised vain things? . . . He that dwells in heaven shall laugh at them, and the Lord shall deride them.* (Psalms 2:1-5)

Well could it be that the Virgin smiled on that occasion, seeing the future of Garabandal, above and beyond all the episcopal *«Notas»*, so full of zeal.

Would she be smiling also, viewing the future of the Church, beyond the grandiose and sometimes agitated conciliar sessions?

We do not know. But we do know that the Holy Father certainly smiled at that time, and with unbounded optimism, before the unparalleled change

But it was not only this great event that was

that he expected in the Church as a result of the Council. On that Tuesday morning, at the inaugural ceremony, October 11th, 1962, the feast of the Maternity of Mary, John XXIII spoke to the Fathers of the Council:

*Venerable Brothers: Today the Holy Church rejoices, because by virtue of a special gift from Divine Providence, the longed for day of the solemn inauguration of Ecumenical Council Vatican II has come.*

*It seems necessary for us to say that we do not think as prophets of doom who only foretell catastrophic events . . .*

*Here we are united, in the Vatican Basilica, at a turning point in the history of the Church, where heaven and earth are united in these difficult times . . . The Council now starting appears in the Church as a guide promising a brilliant light. Now it is only the dawn, the first announcement of the day to come. With what joy our heart is filled!*

Certainly good words and good sentiments. Years later, what we now have in the Church, does it correspond to what an optimistic pontiff was expecting from the Council on its inaugural day?

I do not know how to answer that. And within the Church, many conflicting opinions are found.

The immediate successor to that pontiff, Pope Paul VI himself, bursts forth in praise of the Council's work as he laments the many things that have occurred in the time after the Council . . .

Among his complaints, certainly none is more disturbing and more spontaneous than that of June 29th, 1972 on the feastday of St. Peter:

*We regret to have to stave off the wave of profanation, desacralization, and secularization which arises, which oppresses, which seeks to confound and surpass religious sentiment, and even make it disappear . . .*

*If one were to ask us what the Church is today, could one calmly compare its situation with the words that Peter has left us in heritage?<sup>(10)</sup> Can we be calm?*

*It was believed that after the Council would come a day of sunshine for the Church. What has come is a day of clouds, of storms, of darkness, of groping, of uncertainty . . . We*

*predicted ecumenism, and each day we separate more one from another. We are digging abysses, instead of filling them.*

*How could this have occurred? We confide to you our thought: a power has intervened, an adverse power. We have mentioned his name: **the devil** . . .*

*It is said that a satanic breath has entered through a crack in the Temple of God. There are doubts, uncertainties, problems, restlessness, dissatisfaction, confrontation. People do not have confidence in the Church. They have more confidence in the first worldly prophet who speaks through a newspaper or social movement . . . To follow him . . . Doubt has entered into our conscience, and it has entered across windows that should have been open to the light. Doubt has come with respect to everything that exists, to everything that we know . . .*

All this was unforeseeable on that morning of October, 1962, when in Rome the bells of St. Peter's were ringing joyously, and in Garabandal the young girl was asking the Virgin about the Council.

Yes, completely unforeseeable . . . to men; but not to Her who was coming to that lost mountain village because she saw what was going to come.

## A New Miracle

In spite of the episcopal *quasi-interdict*<sup>(11)</sup> that bore down on the phenomena and the location that served for the scenario, the flame was not quenched.

The girls, influenced by the Virgin, respected the ordinances of legitimate authority better than anyone else. We read in an excerpt from Fr. López Retenaga:

**«Although they were aware of the Nota from the bishop, they continued to have the unalterable peace that characterized them; and this peace was aligned with a clear understanding of the obedience that was required from others. I have a letter from Conchita in which she points out the presence of four priests in the village, making it known that — although she was pleased in seeing the priests there — it would have been better for them to obey the bishop.»**

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10. This refers to words from the first epistle of St. Peter (2:9) that he had mentioned at the beginning of his homily.

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11. The *interdict* is one of the grave penalties that the Church formerly used to punish major trespasses of its members.





“Her face was truly transfigured.”

Yes, the girls showed themselves totally submissive to legitimate authority; but they had no reason to share that authority’s opinion on the events. It was evident to them that what was happening did not depend on them, nor on anything or anyone that they knew. Everyone who talked to them could observe this. María Herrero de Gallardo, for example, was speaking with Loli on the vigil of that same October 7th on which the bishop of Santander, before leaving for Rome, put his signature on the official «Nota» that we have just mentioned. During this conversation, the woman asked the girl:

«—Tell me, Loli. Which Virgin do you see?

—*There’s only one Virgin*»—replied the girl—*«although she can have different names, like the Virgin of Mount Caramel, the Virgin of the Rosary, the Virgin of the Pillar . . .*

—Well then, which Virgin do you see?»

Loli described once again the Virgin that she and her companions had seen so many times, and concluded with enthusiasm:

«—*But there is nothing like her eyes. They are not like anything or anyone in the world.*

*I’m not able to describe them, I can only say that they are so very beautiful that one cannot do anything except look at them.»*

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Hours after this conversation, toward 1:30 in the night, Loli’s ecstasy came. María Herrero de Gallardo observed:

«She fell on her knees there in the kitchen, leaning against the left wall. Her face was truly transfigured, and her hair fell on her shoulders in a very lovely way. Her eyes were absorbed, looking up toward the ceiling where stacks of garlic, onions, and sausages were hanging.<sup>(12)</sup> It was a totally domestic scene, but nevertheless, full of charm and supernatural elevation.»

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During the ecstasy, as on many other occasions, Loli stood up and was presenting many articles that the visitors had placed there for the Virgin’s kiss. On that night there was special attention to Mass missals. Let us listen again to María de Gallardo:

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12. I do not think that anyone will be surprised by these things hanging in the kitchen of a village house.

«It was thrilling to see how the Apparition seemed to be kissing these missals page by page, pausing specially on some of them. She also kissed the holy cards that were in them . . . We learned later that the Virgin had spoken to the girl about the owners of the articles that she was kissing, even giving some personal messages, as in the case of a young Mexican who was there, for whom there was something about the death of his father . . .

When the long ecstasy ended, I came up to Loli and told her:

—Loli, when you were turning the pages of the missal, you turned them somewhat in a hurry. I'm afraid that the Virgin kissed them somewhat in a hurry too.

—Oh no!—the girl replied at once, very energetically—the Most Holy Virgin didn't do it in a hurry. **SHE DOES EVERYTHING WELL.**»

Magnificent praise! The highest there could be. Could there be something superior in moral quality to doing what has to be done always in the way it should be done?

In considering the Virgin's *style* of doing things, Loli could only repeat what had long ago been said of Jesus' style by the multitudes from Galilee who had seen him act: **Full of admiration, they exclaimed: He does all things well!** (Mark 7:37)



“She does everything well.”

The girls had no reason to doubt the genuineness and origin of what was happening to them; but the spectators were not satisfied and wanted a spectacular miracle.

Amid predictions, waiting and hoping for the Miracle, the weeks of the second autumn slipped by.

On October 25th, 1962, Thursday, a fortnight after the inauguration of the Council, Loli wrote to Fr. José Ramón García de la Riva on the postcard previously mentioned: «*We already know the date of the miracle; but I'm not able to tell about it; when I can, I'll tell it.*»

And on October 30th, there is a resumé in the brief notes of Fr. Valentín:

«After the rosary, the three (*Loli, Jacinta, and Conchita*) fell into ecstasy, and as usual went to the Pines. They came down on their knees most of the way, praying the rosary . . . On the 30th, they gave a written card to their parents upon which they foretold what comprised the miracle that the Virgin was going to perform. And for days they have been talking about it.»<sup>(13)</sup>

13. Thanks to Maximina's letter (from the many written to the Pifarré family in Barcelona that Mrs. Asunción Pifarré treasures), we can know exactly when the prediction of Loli and Jacinta's "miracle" first began. The letter dated October 10th starts like this:

«Today there was a notice read in all the churches of the diocese that no priest or religious should come to the village: a notice put out by the bishop saying this is not true.

And perhaps it is a coincidence that today I am writing to the bishop and yesterday Jacinta and Loli said that there was going to be a miracle very soon. They didn't know that the bishop had given this order. Jacinta has gone over a month without an apparition and hasn't said more about the miracle than Conchita . . . They say that it is going to be very soon; they certainly will say the day. It is to be seen if I am given time enough to advise you! As I find out, I'll tell you . . . So we don't all miss seeing the miracle clearly! Loli's mother said that it was going to be during the Council. I don't know if that is what she heard from Loli . . .»

Twelve days later, on October 22nd, Maximina wrote another letter:

«Well Asunción, everything remains the same concerning the apparition. Now I am going to tell you (but don't you tell anyone) what Conchita told me. She said that Loli and Jacinta's miracle was going to be very soon, that to see this miracle the girls would have to be seen too. But Conchita's miracle is different. It is going to be very great, and everyone who is here will see it, even though they don't see her . . . The other two girls told me that theirs would probably be no later than a month.»

On November 2nd, Friday and the day dedicated to the departed (All Souls Day), Dr. Celestino Ortiz, his wife, a brother of hers called Fernando, and their friend Plácido Ruiloba were in Conchita's house in Garabandal. They were discussing the bishop's return to Santander. Then Conchita intervened:

—*The Virgin told me that I can tell the bishop, Fr. Valentín, and my mother about the Miracle.*

—Have you already told it to the bishop?

—*No . . . But . . . Do you want to take it to him?*

Those present showed indecision. Finally Plácido said: *Yes, I'll go with it. Why not!* And actually, on the following day, November 3rd, Plácido Ruiloba presented himself at the bishop's residence in Santander with a rather bulky envelope that Conchita had entrusted to him. He wanted to give it to the bishop with his own hand, but in order not to have to wait too long or annoy the bishop, he ended up handing it to his personal secretary Father Diego, for him to forward it on.

Twenty days later, Dr. Celestino Ortiz and Mr. Plácido Ruiloba returned again to the village. On the night of the 24th to the 25th there were several ecstasies that Mr. Ruiloba recorded on his tape recorder. On the last with Conchita, at six in the morning, there were things concerning the miracle that the girl later confirmed in the normal state:

● *That the miracle will be at 8:30 in the evening, as on the first apparition.*

● *That it would last a quarter of an hour.*

● *That it would be seen in the sky, and so clearly, that there would be no doubt that it was coming from God.*

● *That the sick who came with faith on that day would be cured.*<sup>(14)</sup>

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14. I have further confirmation of this from Maximina's letter to the Pifarré family on November 25th:

«At seven-thirty this morning, Conchita had an apparition. And the Virgin told her that the miracle would be at eight-thirty in the evening, and that the sick would be cured, and that all of us in the village would see the Miracle, even though we were away from it, provided that we were in sight of the village, since Conchita's Miracle, as I already told you, will be seen in the sky . . .

We are white with snow, and if you could see how the girls walk on their knees to get to the Pines, backwards, through all the ruts and all the snow! It frightens me to see them; and furthermore, it is snowing very much with a terrible freezing wind.»

«After the ecstasy»—said Dr. Ortiz—«the girl was radiant with joy. We insisted that she tell us the day of the Miracle; but she said that the time hadn't come, and that we should have patience. She could only say the date eight days in advance, but that the Miracle would definitely come, since the Virgin had said it, and she could not lie.»

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These remarks from the two men from Santander are confirmed by what can be read in the notes of Fr. Valentín:

«In the early hours of the morning (November 25th), Conchita had an ecstasy in which she said that *her miracle*<sup>(15)</sup> would take place at 8:30 in the evening, the same hour on which the first apparition of the Angel had occurred on June 18th, 1961. She said also that during her miracle the sick would be cured.»

## Stories with a Message

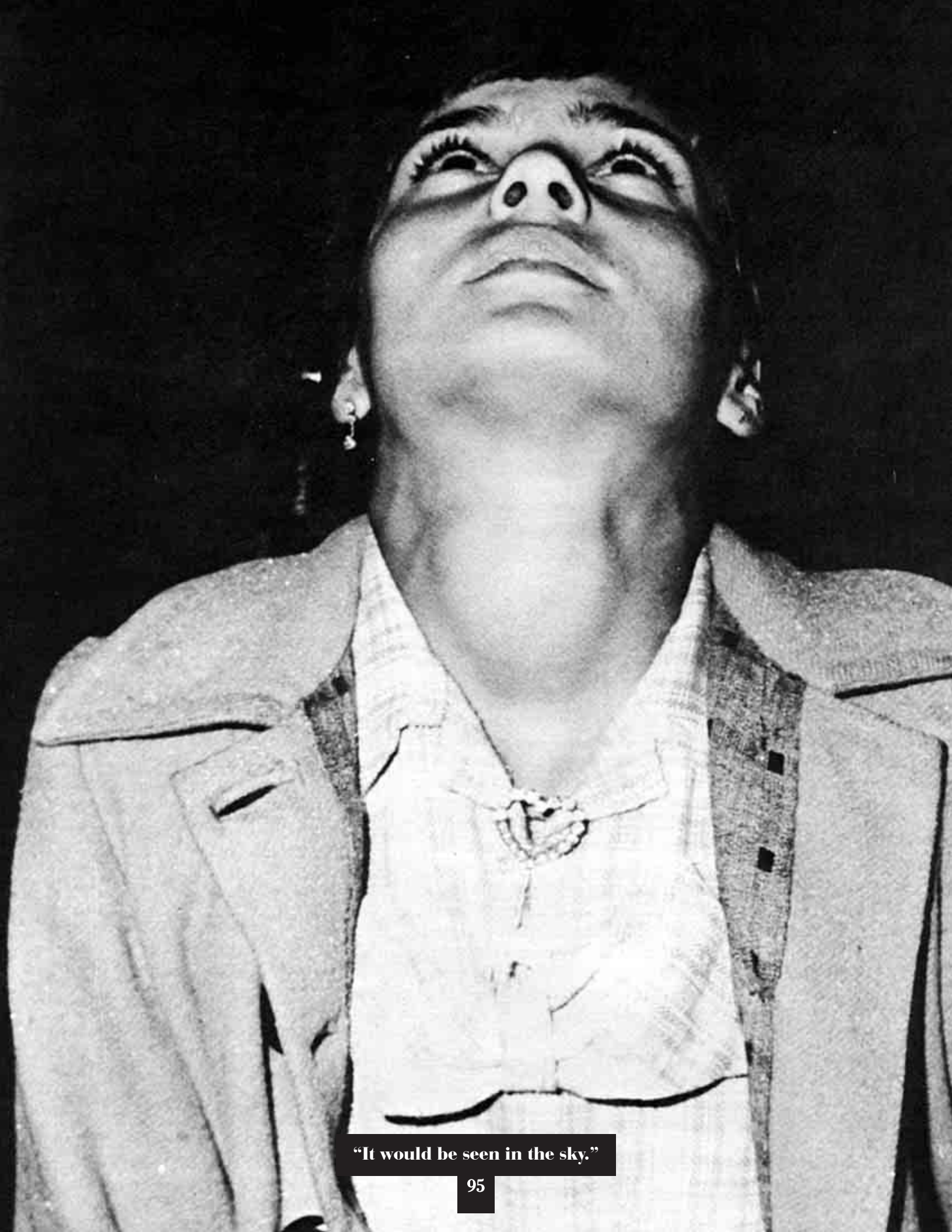
If the Miracle drew much attention during those autumn days in 1962, it did not slow down the march of events. Neither the natural nor the supernatural life can be lived only with expectation.

The weather was stormy on the night of November 4th. In Loli's house there was a vigil, waiting for the time of the apparition. Toward 3:00 in the morning, the wind began to blow fiercely; there was threat of a rainstorm. At that time Loli's mother told her to gather the laundry that had been left hanging outside. Loli was inclined to obey; but there could clearly be seen in her the resistance or dread that was caused by having to go out of the house at that hour. She was heading toward the door with a flashlight shining in her hand when she fell into ecstasy. She made the sign of the cross repeatedly, held out the crucifix to be kissed by those in the area, and went outside. A little later, and still in ecstasy, she returned to the house with the laundry gathered up.

As soon as she came out of the trance, she was asked what happened. And the girl explained

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15. Note the expression *her miracle*. For some time Loli and Jacinta had been speaking on their part of a miracle, and it did not coincide with the one announced by Conchita. Further on we will return to this topic.



**“It would be seen in the sky.”**



**“I’m certain that I’m really seeing the Virgin.”**

that it had been very hard for her to obey her mother with regard to the laundry, since she was afraid to go out alone . . . The Virgin had seen two things: her good will, and her fear. And she had come to accompany her, as a Mother.

This story gives a basis for many considerations: the Virgin’s goodness; the convenience of relying on God for all our needs, even the smallest; how it pleases God when we do our duties in spite of difficulties and our natural repugnance . . .

During the vigil on that night, a conversation took place in front of Loli concerning peculiar phenomena that appeared at first glance to be supernatural, yet could have a natural explanation due to hidden abilities that the human mind might have . . . When it was finished, someone asked the girl if the conversation had made her doubt that she was really seeing the Virgin:

***«Oh no! I’m certain that I’m really seeing the Virgin. What has been said doesn’t disturb me.»***

A few days, or rather a few nights afterward (on the morning of November 8th), Loli was asked what she felt when kissing the Virgin.

*«It is difficult to explain . . . I don't feel the warmth of the Virgin on my lips or any other sensation of her face. I only notice that my lips come to her and from there they can go no further . . . but it is marvelous.»<sup>(16)</sup>*

\* \* \*

During the month of November, the girls were naturally concerned about the faithful departed. Because of this, they visited the cemetery in ecstasy. Conchita was especially outstanding in this. To illustrate, here is an excerpt from Maximina's letter to Dr. Ortiz on November 6, 1962:

*«The apparitions, as you know, continue as usual. Now on many days the rosary is sung through the village. Conchita goes to the cemetery very often, and the other day she and María Dolores went. They walked singing the rosary— now they've told us all to sing it—and we went with them to the cemetery. There they stopped singing it and recited it with great devotion. They had never entered within, but on that day, Conchita opened the gate and we went in. Oh! You couldn't understand how*

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16. These details are taken from the notes of Fr. Valentín and Fr. de la Riva.

great was the reverence that inspired in us!

First they went to the place where Conchita's father was. They knelt down with tremendous devotion, placing the cross on the ground; and afterwards, they gave it to the Virgin to kiss. What the one girl did, the other did also. Afterwards, they went to the tomb of my husband. They also knelt down . . . This affected me . . . From there they came to me and gave me the crucifix to kiss many times. Then they went to another tomb. And then to the place where my mother . . . You know how they hold their heads in ecstasy without seeing anything. And how they found the graves!

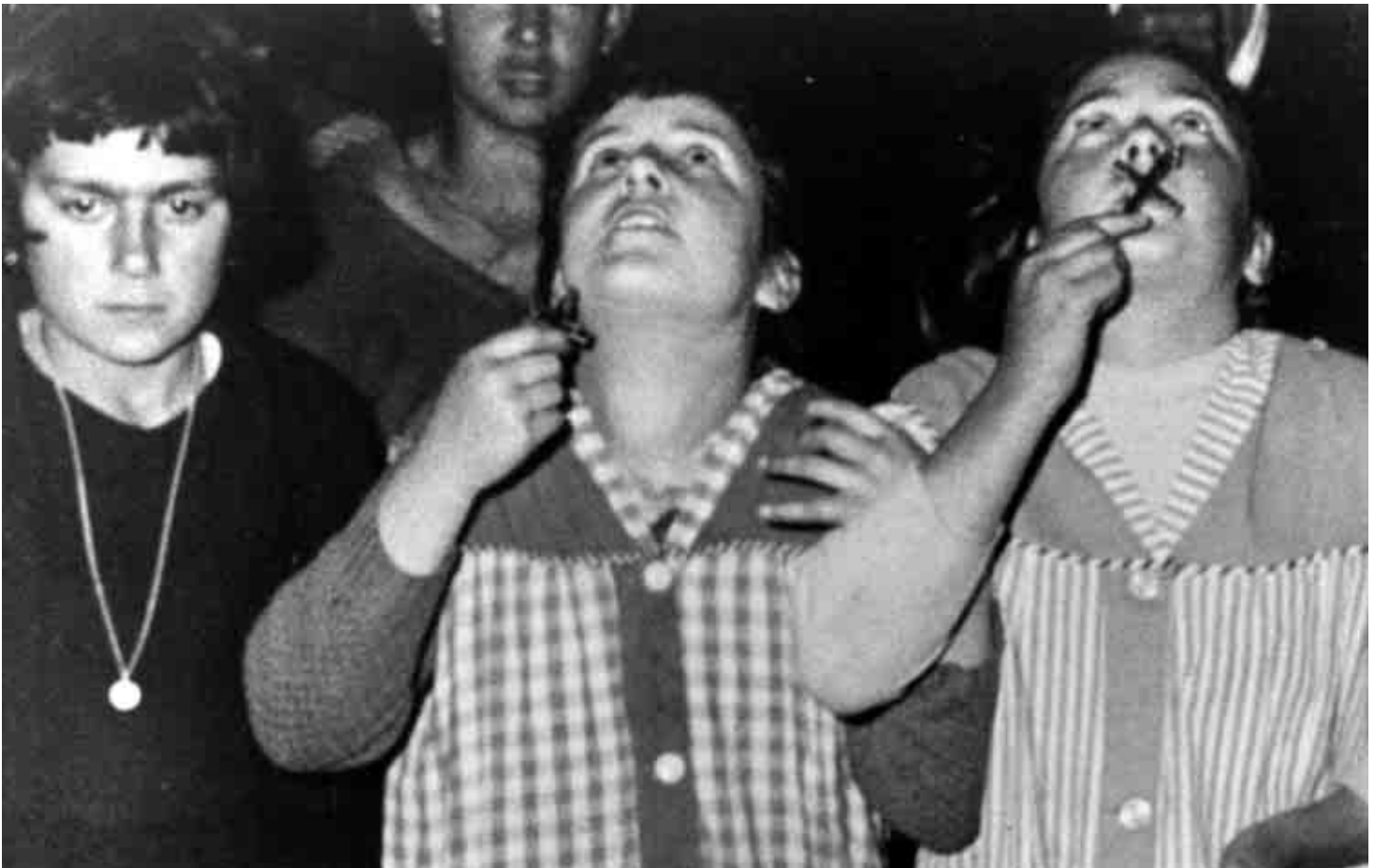
We don't know what this means. I can only say that my husband, in the two years that he was with me, was very good to me. And my mother suffered very much in this world. She was very devoted to the Virgin. I almost always saw her with the habit of Our Lady of Sorrows;<sup>(17)</sup> and while living, I never saw her in a quarrel with anyone. So we don't know what the girls' going to their places in the cemetery means . . .»

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17. In the Spanish towns at the time, people frequently promised to wear the *habit* for a specified time. These promises were made as an act of penance and devotion to obtain special graces by the intercession of a saint or the Virgin Mary. The habits worn most frequently in the honor of the Virgin were those of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (brown) and those of Our Lady of Sorrows (black).



“How they found the graves!”



“absolutely insensible to what was around them . . . their faces always looking upwards.”

Witnessing the things done by the girls in those November days were some people from France who were in Garabandal for the first time, and who worked very hard afterwards in defense of its authenticity. Among them was Father Materne Laffineur — at times also called José — well known by the pen name of *Doctor Bonance*. What they observed at the time can be found in the widely read book *L'Etoile dans la Montagne* (Star on the Mountain):

«During the days of November in 1962 when we watched the group ecstasies, they started after the recitation of the rosary in the church.»

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The book goes on to describe one of the ecstasies in detail:

«As soon as they left with the spectators to return home, the rapture caught three of them: Conchita, María Dolores and Jacinta. The three young girls ran through the village, holding on to each other's arms with crucifixes in their hands. With their faces looking upward, they seemed unusually beautiful by the illumination from the flashlights. Absolutely insensible to what was around them, unconscious even that

they were moving, the girls were followed by the townspeople who recited the rosary with them or sang hymns.

They went up swiftly to the Pines which overlook the village, and descended backwards down the incredibly rocky trail, their faces always looking upwards, risking being killed a hundred times!

Returning to the church, they made a circle around it, and suddenly let out an astonishing laugh — a laugh that was luminous, and at the same time like the tinkling of little bells, a laugh that scandalized us at first . . . How could one actually laugh in the presence of the Virgin, even with a laugh so beautiful?

Up to five times on that night, they set out across the village, always in ecstasy, drawing with them the gathering crowd. They made a stop at the cemetery, undoubtedly out of compassion for the souls in purgatory.

Then, after a last detour in front of the closed door of the church, they lifted each other up to

give a kiss to the Virgin, whom they were seeing above them, and to receive her kiss. Finally, they fell on their knees more sharply than at the start. Without a transition, they became abruptly the simple and smiling children that we knew. The mysterious reflection that transfigured their faces in ecstasy had disappeared . . . Later we asked Conchita the reason for the laugh that had disturbed us:

—*Because the Virgin herself laughed!*

—Why?

—*Because we were singing so badly!*

That was correct; our tape recorders testified to it!»

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If by this report from the French witnesses, we can get an idea of what the group ecstasies were like at that time; by another report of theirs, we can picture what the individual ecstasies were:

«One morning in her home, having recited the Angelus,<sup>(18)</sup> Conchita fell suddenly on her knees. She was transformed with a glowing beauty, supra-terrestrial. Her face, naturally pleasant, was as if refined; a type of interior light glowed from it. She seemed to be nothing more than love, drawn toward Her who was attracting the girl's gaze above her. Nevertheless, her body had a weight so extraordinary that one of the watchers, a muscular man, taking her under the elbows, couldn't lift her up!

On standing up by herself, she held the crucifix in her hand, and made a majestic sign of

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18. The recitation of the Angelus seemed especially indicated to precede the apparition.

We have seen Fr. Valentín's notation on September 26th:

«At six in the morning when a priest—there were five from outside the diocese—was reciting the Angelus, the girl (Conchita) fell on her knees in ecstasy . . .»

And from the following month, October, there is a reference from María Herrero de Gallardo:

«I was alone with another person in Conchita's house, since all the others had gone to see Loli's ecstasy. Conchita was waiting impatiently at the time, since she already had two calls . . . At 2:30 in the morning I said to the girl, *Let's pray the Angelus*. She said to me, *You say it*. The three of us got down on our knees and I began, *The Angel of the Lord announced unto Mary* . . . We finished the prayer and repeated three times the Glory be to the Father. On finishing the third Gloria, Conchita fell in ecstasy.

The same thing occurred in front of me on at least three occasions, which makes me think that the Angelus must be a prayer especially pleasing to the Virgin.»

the cross on herself; then she presented the crucifix to be kissed by Our Lady and then held it to the lips of each of us.

Then without looking around her, she went upstairs, gave the Virgin to kiss—on Her request—a statue of the infant Jesus of Prague, and came back down to the kitchen. It is impossible to describe the attitude of the young girl, her eyes raised up, not looking at the steps that she was descending with a majesty that one could call the comportment of a queen.

The apparition stopped as it had begun, abruptly. The child then approached one of the people present<sup>(19)</sup> and told her: *The Virgin gave me a message for you*. Then she went to look for a holy card on which she wrote several words that corresponded to the stranger's intimate problems, problems absolutely unknown to the child.» (*L'Étoile dans la Montagne*)

## Pleasure and Penance

The same French people to whom we are indebted for the previous reports, help us again with some brief notes to understand better how the exceptional mystery was lived in Garabandal during the days of November, 1962:

«When the Virgin announced her visit like this (*by calls*), neither the parents nor the visionaries went to bed. We passed the evenings with Conchita, her mother, her brother Seraffín, and other visitors . . . Who could describe the charm of those evenings, of those nights of waiting, interspersed with prayers, hymns and conversation, as each one thanked the Virgin for her infinite kindness.»

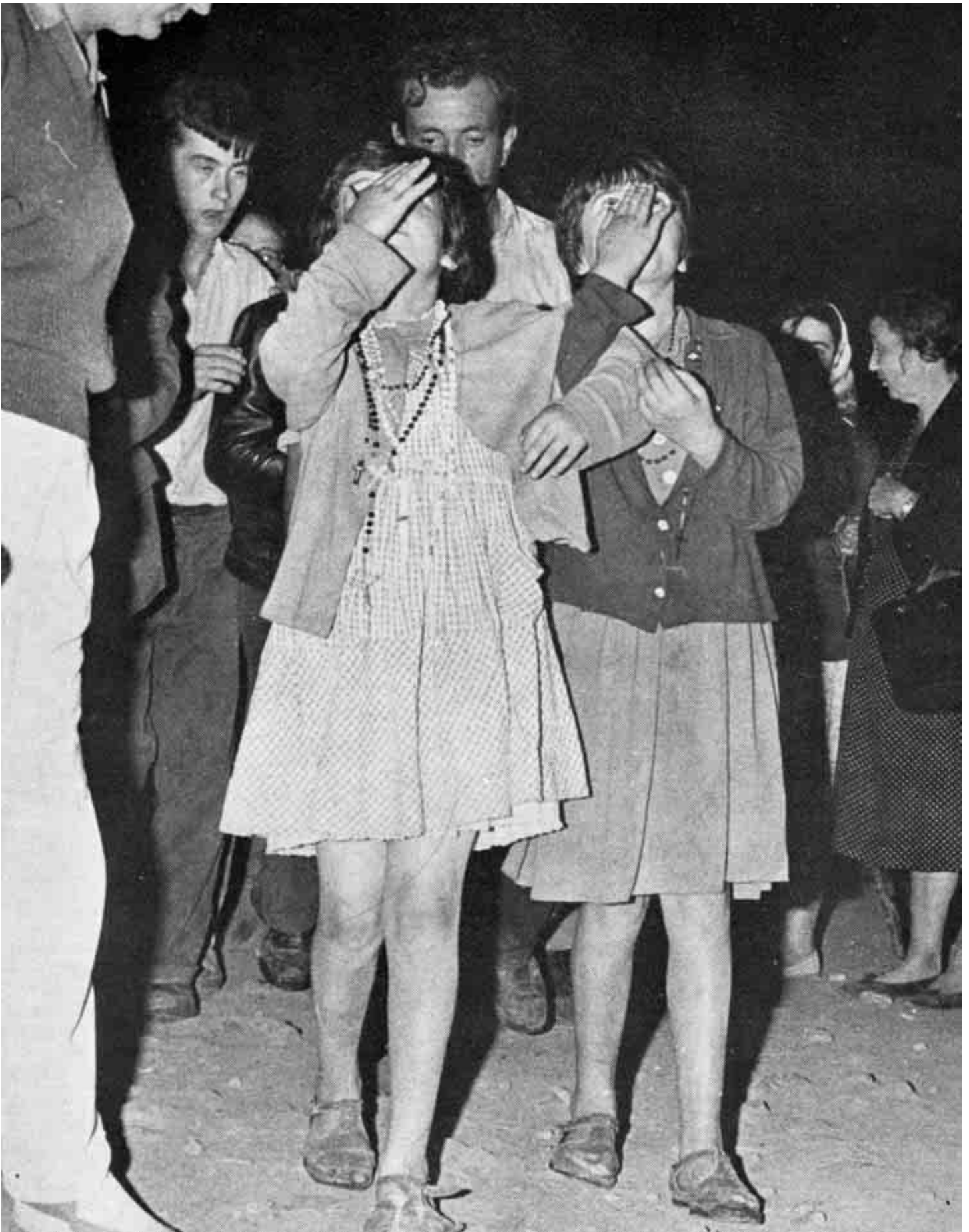
It is easy to understand why the vigils caused great joy in those who experienced them as an isolated and amazing novelty in their lives. But the people for whom the vigils were intermixed with the routine of daily life for a long time, felt fatigue increase night after night . . .

As an aid to understand better the penances

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19. This probably refers to Baroness María Theresa Le Pelletier de Glatigny, a collaborator with Fr. Laffineur.





**The raptures at Garabandal spanned the period of Vatican II. Does this have a significance?**

entailed in these nights at Garabandal during that season, here is an excerpt from a letter that Maximina wrote on November 22nd to Dr. Ortiz' sister-in-law Eloísa de la Roza Velarde:

«On Saturday we went up to the Pines, praying the rosary in pouring rain . . . Later we went to the cemetery, and there we were stuck in mud up to our ears. On Sunday, the same thing: we went up to the Pines. Everything was covered with snow; the people were sliding and rolling down, but they went up anyhow! Later the girls went down backwards on their knees, through all the snow and the roughest places; later, to the cemetery, under the hail and with a bitter wind . . . On Tuesday, the same thing, and through the same places. On Wednesday it was a better night, but freezing cold . . .»

Dr. Ortiz confided to me what the daughter of Tiva (Primitiva), a resident of Garabandal, told him:

«On the night of December 1st, I had a very painful toothache, on account of which I had not gone to bed. On that night at 3:00 in the morning, I heard a noise in Jacinta's house. I looked out and saw the girl go outside in ecstasy on an infernal night of ice and rain. I felt sorry for her and went down to keep her company. When I got there, her mother, María, was going out of the house in a very bad mood, while saying, *A night like this, another one like this . . . I'm not going to allow her again. I'll barricade the door shut . . .*

### In the street we met María Dolores, in ecstasy

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20. Maximina, in a letter to the Pifarré family on December 27th, also describes this fact:

«Look. If this isn't true, how do the girls do everything that they do these days when then weather is very bad and freezing? And up to now none of them has become sick. How is it possible that night after night for more than a year now they have been able to endure such cold and loss of sleep?»

We can picture those winter nights at Garabandal from Maximina's letter to the Pifarrés on December 13th:

«This morning at 5:15 I heard a knocking on the door of the house. I got up and went out. There was Conchita in ecstasy with her mother, her brother, and three other women . . . We went outside; we went through the whole village praying the rosary. Then we sang the Salve and several songs as usual. Look, our lips were freezing. I carried an umbrella, but I couldn't hold it up because of the cold and the weight of the snow. It was a terrible morning, snowing with thunder and a wind that blew snow into our faces and on our legs, making us shiver.»

too, and completely alone. Then I went to tell her mother, Julia. The two girls joined together with the three of us behind them. We went up to the Pines twice, praying the rosary; as usual we ran through the village . . . The night was really stormy and María's mood didn't leave her. Julia tried to calm her, *Woman, what are we going to do? These are the affairs of God . . . Today I have to console you; other times you have consoled me . . .*»

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The penitential aspect that these *charming* vigils in Garabandal had acquired could not be denied. Conchita wrote to Fr. José Ramón, the pastor of Barro, on November 29th:

«I have just received your letter, which I'm going to answer, although I didn't think I would be writing to you now, since I have to sleep! Yesterday I had two apparitions and the last one was at 4 o'clock in the morning; and so I didn't sleep at all.»

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It was no wonder that the girls occasionally made minor complaints such as that which Luis Navas heard from Conchita:

«*Why don't you let me eat? Before you prevented me from sleeping, now also from eating. In heaven, obviously, it isn't necessary to eat . . . with seeing God! . . . But since I don't see God I have to eat.*»

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Although the visionaries certainly were practicing penance, miraculously the penance did not affect their physical or psychological health in the slightest way. Doctor Ortiz wrote at the end of September:

«I am amazed by the girls, that in spite of spending the majority of nights without sleep—as a consequence, without sufficient rest for the body—their general and psychological state is better all the time.»(20)

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In the autumn of 1962, important matters for the Church were happening in the Council at Rome. But perhaps more important for the Church were those that were happening in *poor Garabandal of the apparitions*.

Only God can measure things that are immeasurable by human standards.