



Bishop Del Val Gallo Interviewed

Former Santander Bishop
Juan Antonio Del Val Gallo
speaks candidly about
the Garabandal events.

Bishop Del Val was a canon of the cathedral in Santander when he first went to Garabandal to witness the girls' ecstasies. He is behind the doctor checking Loli's pulse. Jacinta is on the left.



*This June 1992 interview first appeared in a special 1992 edition of *The Vicar*. The questions were prepared by publisher, Maria Saraco of St. Michael's Garabandal Center, Pasadena, California, and translated into Spanish by visionary, Mari Loli. Loli's sister, Sari, asked the questions during the interview which was video taped by New Zealand press photographer, Michael Tabberty. It is reprinted here by kind permission.*

Q Where were you born and raised?

A. Something happened in the family and as a result, I was born in Burgos, but when I was fifteen days old I was taken to Santander, and have lived here ever since.

Q. What made you decide to become a priest?

A. When I was four years old, the pastor of my church asked me if I wanted to become a priest. I said "yes" in a way that such a small child would answer. But then, when I was nine years old, an aunt who was my father's sister and a nun in the order of The Daughters of Charity, died in the odor of sanctity. There had been an epidemic of a very contagious disease among the children and in spite of it she was taking care of the sick. She was told to be very careful because she could become contaminated and die, but she said, "My whole life has been consecrated to God by serving the poor and I'm not going to stop now when they need me the most, and that is what I will continue to do." She eventually became sick during the epidemic and died.

This was being discussed and talked about in my home when I was nine years old and it made a great

impression on me. This heroic action that my father's sister did as a Daughter of Charity made me think, "Could I, myself, do this if I were a priest?" That's when I made my decision that I wanted to be a priest. I was nine years old. Then when I was twelve years old, I entered the Pontifical University of Comillas until I became a priest in 1944.

Q. How old were you when you were ordained? By whom and where?

Bishop Del Val with villagers outside the church in Garabandal during a pastoral visit on December 21, 1977.



A. I was twenty-eight years old when I was ordained by Archbishop Parrado of Granada. He died many years ago. The place where I was ordained was the church belonging to the Pontifical University of Comillas.

Q. When did you first go to Garabandal village and why?

A. I went eight days after the first apparition. I went there because Bishop Doroteo Fernandez called me. He was actually the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese. Since I was a priest whom he trusted, he wanted me to go there as an observer and to report back to him my impressions of everything that I had seen. So I went there about eight days after the first apparition because the Bishop told me to go.

Q. How many times did you visit the village during the years of the reported apparitions?

A. I went only twice after that by order of the same Bishop.

Q. Did you witness any of the four girls in ecstasy? If so, please describe what you saw and heard. What were your impressions?

A. Yes. Yes, I saw them in ecstasy. That is what they were calling a psychological trance. I believe it was a trance but not as deep as one's first impression because they were going in and out of ecstasy. I said that I believed that it was a trance and this is what astonished the people and made them believe it was supernatural. My impressions were that of a spectator. We'll see. We'll see what happens because with this type of thing we

cannot be rushed.

Q. When were you assigned to the Santander diocese? Was this your first diocese as Bishop?

A. I was given the diocese on December 4, 1971, and came here on January 16, 1972. This was the first and last diocese that I had as a resident bishop. I was here for 20 years. Before that I was in Jerez de la Frontera in the area of Cadiz which belonged to the diocese of Sevilla. I was put in charge of that region of Cadiz by the Cardinal of Sevilla performing my duties as would any other bishop. Today it is its own diocese.

Q. Since the beginning of the reported apparitions, how many Bishops preceded you?

A. Many. There were many if we consider that some were Bishops and some were Apostolic Administrators because during those years, there was a lot of movement in the diocese of Santander. There was Doroteo Fernandez, Eugenio Beitia, Vicente Puchol, Enrique de Cabo, acting Bishop but titular vicariate, and then came Jose Maria Cirarda who at the time was taking care of the diocese of Bilbao as Auxiliary Bishop and Apostolic Administrator. Another Bishop came called Rafael Torrija de la Fuente, and then I came in 1972.

Q. Isn't it true that out of all those

Bishops, you are the only one who actually witnessed the girls in ecstasy?

A. I think so. I think I am the only one. I have heard it said that Conchita fell into ecstasy in front of Bishop Puchol but I am not sure. Yes, I think that I was the only one who saw the ecstasies.

Q. Did you ever imagine that God would place you in such a unique situation?

A. I have always tried to be in the hands of God. I always try regardless of whether it is a difficult situation or a joyful one, and this one (Garabandal) is both hard and joyful at the same time.

Q. When did you remove all the restrictions that the previous Bishops imposed on the priests and why?

A. I don't remember clearly the exact date. It was done step by step. I told the pastor to start [removing the restrictions] and then it was announced publicly. But I don't remember the exact date. I think it was about six years before I retired which was last year in September.

Q. Have the Garabandal apparitions ever been condemned by the Church?

A. No. The previous Bishops did not admit that the apparitions were supernatural but to condemn them, no, that word has never been used.

Bishop Del Val

Q. *When did you reopen the study of the apparitions and who did the study? How was it conducted and when was it concluded?*

A. It was finished in April of 1991 during a reunion we held in Madrid but it was not opened on a specific date. It was commenced about six years earlier, taking notes of the circumstances here and there. In the beginning, we were going little by little so it took about six or seven years before the study was concluded.

Until then I had gone by what the other Bishops had done. They had said no, but it seemed to me that I should personally do something myself. I needed to do a personal investigation because the responsibility demands this of oneself. I had to do something about it because I thought something serious had happened in Garabandal. It seemed to me that because it was so serious, I had to find out for myself exactly what happened there.

Q. *What has become of the results?*

A. The results were taken to the Holy See, to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. That is where you have to take things like this so that is where the documents are. They were given to Cardinal Ratzinger.

Q. *Were the Garabandal Messages found to be theologically correct and in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church?*

A. I think yes. Theologically correct, yes. But one of the details bothers me: "Many bishops and cardinals are walking the path of perdition." It seems to me to be a bit severe. However, the Messages do not say anything that is against the doctrine of the Church.

Q. *When and why did you retire?*

A. I retired because of my age. The Church requires all the bishops of the

world, and we are more than 4,000, when we reach the age of 75 to write a letter to the Pope telling him of the date we became 75 years old so that the Holy Father can start looking for a replacement. That's what I did. My 75th birthday was June 13 of last year [1991] and I retired on September 29.

Q. *Do you have any special plans for the future?*

A. Yes. My first plan is to pray more than before because now I have more time and so that is one of my first plans, to dedicate much more time to prayer. My second plan is to help the underprivileged. My third plan is ... well I used to write before becoming a bishop and then after I became a



Bishop Del Val during the interview.

bishop, I didn't do it anymore because there wasn't any time for that. If you want to be a good bishop, there is no time to write because you have too much work. But that's what I plan to do now. At the time I was Bishop, I didn't do it because if you spend time writing books you aren't going to do your job well. I used to think that someday when I retire I will become a writer again. So I am writing a book which will take another year and a half before it is finished. I am thinking that the title can be, "The Christian in the Year 2000." It will be a book about today's culture in Europe and how it influences our Christian life and how as Christians, this cul-

ture has to respond to God and to the service of man.

Q. *As "Mother of the Redeemer" and "Mother of the Church" what kind of effect do you believe Our Blessed Mother will have on the life of humanity?*

A. In response to this question, the first thing that comes to my mind is the life of Cardinal Wyszyński from Poland. You know he was a cardinal there during the times of the most difficult conditions. With imperial communism the Church was so oppressed with so much persecution, there was no freedom, yet in his worst moment, Cardinal Wyszyński entrusted his flock to the Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Czestochowa. In that extreme moment, the Cardinal in his faith found his refuge in the Blessed Mother because she is the one who is going to save the faith. In this question I am able to identify with Cardinal Wyszyński since I think, like he did, that the Blessed Mother is the one who will save the faith.

Q. *Do you believe that the Messages are the most important part of Garabandal?*

A. For sure I consider the Messages important, because they are important in the area where it is similar to Lourdes and Fatima. It is important for us Christians to live what the Messages of the Blessed Mother are saying, if we consider that she could have said them—but I'm not saying that she did, since this would be admitting that the apparitions are true and I cannot do that because the Church has not yet said so. The Church is the one that has the last word.

At the close of this question and answer session, Bishop del Val Gallo added this interesting comment: I am grateful for your visit, it has been very meaningful. ☐

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