

# WHY I BELIEVE IN GARABANDAL

By Dr. Ricardo Puncernau  
(Barcelona, Spain, 1975)

*If I had to tell all that I experienced at Garabandal, this report would become as long as Dr. Zhivago.*

*That is not my purpose. Most of the facts of Garabandal have already been published in Spain and abroad in a great many works. My purpose is to record a series of facts which, being very personal, have not been told to anyone except a few members of my family. I've waited almost fifteen years, but now I think these things should be said.*

*I am, thank God, a man of faith. A faith strengthened by my scientific observations of the events which took place in Garabandal. Each time that a scientific explanation seemed to shake the foundation of religion, I noticed that with a little time and patience a new explanation showed up which reversed the prejudice.*

*Being a Christian obliges me to state the truth strictly without embellishment. Consequently, although this narration is more from the point of view of a doctor, as such, I have written as simply as possible with absolute sincerity. I have not deviated, at least not consciously, one iota from what I remember of the events I witnessed at Garabandal.*

## Dr. Puncernau's Story

Why did I go to Garabandal during the apparitions? Why did I make so many trips? Actually, I don't know.

Garabandal is a good 800 kilometers from Barcelona, the city where I normally live and where I have my office for neuropsychiatry consultation.

It was a friend of long standing, Jacinto Maristany, who urged me to go to Garabandal. But I thought, "I'm not one to make that journey just to observe hysteria! I see enough of it as a doctor."

And yet . . .

One night after supper he phoned me that Mercedes Salisachs, the eminent writer, was leaving for Garabandal the next morning at 4 a.m. (I didn't have a car then). She would wait in her car for me at the corner of Paris and Enrique Granados Streets. I said I would think

seriously about it, but that if I were not there she should go ahead.

I don't know what motivated me to want to get up at 3:30 a.m. the next morning for a trip to see what I thought would be hysterical little girls.

That night as we were preparing to retire I told my wife about the curious events I had heard were taking place in Garabandal. As was our custom, we knelt down at the foot of the bed to recite a short prayer. Afterwards she got up and opened the armoire, took out the camera, gave it to me and said,

"Take it . . . go to Garabandal and take a lot of pictures."

My wife's unusual interest surprised me. It left me undecided. It was strange.

"You could take Margarita with you."

Margarita is the older of our daugh-

ters. She was about eight years old then.

"But . . ."

"No more, I want you to go to Garabandal."

When little Margarita heard of this surprise trip she was overjoyed, and the next morning, without pausing for breakfast, we hurried to keep our rendezvous with Mercedes Salisachs. She arrived sharply at four, as arranged. We got into her car and were on our way to Garabandal. It turned out that this was to be the first of ten or twelve trips that I made to that village.

The traffic was light, we were making good time.

What delightful countryside! How enchanting! What pure air! As we drew closer to the village, Margarita and I decided to walk the rest of the way. We strolled leisurely enjoying the rustic and mountainous countryside which was restful and peaceful after the long car ride.

While still a distance from the village, in a field on the left some 300 meters away, I saw a little girl dressed in white seated on a flat stone. She was near an older person I took for her mother who appeared to be cutting or gathering something from the field. I looked at the child who seemed about thirteen. She looked at me without moving. It was, at least for me, a special look. And I, without knowing her, became instantly aware that she was one of the little girls of Garabandal who 'experienced the vision'. I don't know why I knew, but I knew.

Later, when I met her and found that she was the most important protagonist of the strange facts I had been told about, I told her I had seen her in the field. She answered me in a disarmingly direct manner,

# WHY I BELIEVE IN GARABANDAL



*The eminent Dr. Ricardo Puncernau (right), whose paper entitled, Neurophysiological and Parapsychological Study of the Events of Garabandal, was presented at the International Congress at Lourdes in August, 1978, is shown addressing an Academy of Medical Sciences Conference in Barcelona, Spain.*

erino was a dignified man, he appeared to me self-assured and a little shrewd, but later I discovered that, like most of the people of Garabandal, he had a heart of gold.

We spent the night in one of the houses on the edge of the village, which after several visits we facetiously referred to as the "Puncernau Hotel."

The next day we heard that Conchita had gone into ecstasy, joined by Jacinta and Mari Loli, and finally, Mari Cruz. The four girls were walking in ecstasy or "second state" reciting the Rosary with the group of people who followed them, answering. I observed this curious procession for a while then went into Ceferino's for a cool glass of soda.

In the inn was a young lady from Uruguay who was working at the Folies Bergeres in Paris. In the course of conversation she told me that not only did she not believe in these supposed apparitions, but that she did not believe in anything any more. She had come to Garabandal purely out of curiosity. After a few minutes I suggested we go outside to see what was happening to the "visionaries."

We stopped in the shade of a house and could see that they were headed toward the little village church, continuing to recite the Rosary. From this obscure point we watched the girls in ecstasy.

After a few moments, Conchita detached herself from the procession, walked normally but with unusual speed toward us as we leaned against the wall of the house, hidden in the shade.

She was holding a little crucifix in her hand.

I thought, "This girl has learned that I am a doctor and here she

comes to challenge me. But how could she have seen me in the deep shadow?"

But no. She headed for my companion and put the crucifix forcefully on her mouth for her to kiss: one, two, three times. Then, still in ecstasy, Conchita rejoined the others and all continued the Rosary.

The dancer began to cry without stopping, with big sobs as if unconsolable. I thought she was having an attack so I led her to the bench against the wall outside Ceferino's inn.

People gathered around as I tried to calm her down.

Finally she was able to explain. She said,

"I had thought deep down inside, 'if it's true that the Virgin appeared, one of these girls will give me proof'. Scarcely had the thought entered my mind when Conchita came running toward me to give me the crucifix to kiss. I didn't want it, I tried to push Conchita's hand away. But with unusual strength she put the crucifix to my lips and I could do nothing but kiss it, one, two, three times. Me, the unbeliever. Me, the atheist. Me, who believed in nothing. This has moved me greatly."

This was the first telepathic experience I personally observed in Garabandal.

I did not see the young lady again until we were on the train going back to Bilbao when I promised to keep in touch with her. She wrote later that she had left the "Folies Bergeres" and had returned to her family in Uruguay.

It was past midnight on this eventful day when I sent my sleepy little daughter, Margarita, to bed and sat down to keep her company at least until she fell asleep.

In a few moments she said,

"Father, if you wish, you may go.

*"It was very strange. They gave the impression of scarcely moving, flying a bit, as in a slow motion film or a pseudo-levitation; but the speed was unbelievable. . ."*

I have no fear here."

"Really?"

"Yes, don't worry."

I tucked her in, kissed her good-night and almost immediately she was sleeping peacefully.

I went out into the street. It was a cold, starry night. For a person from the city the stars shone with an unaccustomed brightness. It seemed as though the Mother of Heaven watched over and protected the inhabitants and visitors to Garabandal with her outstretched arms.

My children are not fearful. Nevertheless, it is another matter for an eight year old to be left all alone in an unfamiliar village. Somehow it did not surprise me that Margarita was able to fall asleep so easily. Walking through the dark and solitary little streets, I, too, felt protected.

In spite of the crowds of people who came to Garabandal, there never was, that I know of, any distressing or painful incidents. When a truck filled with workers fell into a chasm by the mountain stream, no one received more than a few scratches. Yet it was evident that that part of the road was so bad it was capable of killing a whole army.

I continued to visit Garabandal to observe the "visionaries" in their state of trance, but I always refrained from answering the Rosary. My role as a doctor was to remain aloof and coldly observe the facts. But what predetermined coldness of heart could resist the friendly warmth of Garabandal?

### **The Ecstasies Were Astonishing**

On one occasion I saw the "visionaries" facing the closed doors of the little village church. They remained fixed there as if they were asking permission to enter. Then without losing their "second state"



they turned around and extended their arms in the form of a cross.

"They're going to fly . . . they're going to fly," I heard the people around me whisper. This seemed a little ridiculous to me.

But to my astonishment, they began to race, their arms extended, throughout the little streets of the village.

It was very strange. They gave the impression of scarcely moving, flying a bit, as in slow motion film or pseudo-levitation; but the speed was unbelievable, so much so, that the young people of the village, with all the vigor of youth, were not able to catch up with them in spite of exerted efforts.

After crossing the entire village they went back to a normal pace and a little later left their "second state," smiling.

It seems a good time to comment here about the visionaries going into and coming out of their trances.

They said that they felt three calls. The first was as if they heard

*Joining Mari Loli and Conchita in the recitation of the Rosary is Madame Julia Puncernau (right), the good doctor's wife, who, while slow to become a believer in the apparitions became convinced through a most unusual phenomenon and remains an ardent believer to this day.*

the word "come" accompanied by a joyful feeling. The second as if they heard "come . . . run, come," with a greater, more persistent joy. The third call coincided with the flashing entrance into ecstasy.

The little girls would say, "I already heard one call," or "I already heard two calls." The time between the calls varied.

Once when I knew that they had already heard two calls, I decided to try to distract them by talking to them and making them speak to me about things which interested them. Suddenly they fell into a dead trance on their knees in the middle of a sentence. This happened in spite of the fact that they were interested in what they were telling me.

I was particularly impressed. This

# WHY I BELIEVE IN GARABANDAL

is not the normal way of entering into a hypnotic trance, especially if the person is not conditioned by a signal; and there was no one in the crowd in a position to know about that sort of thing.

## Enchanted by the Children

Margarita and I accompanied Conchita several times to take lunch to one of her brothers working in the high meadows. Once we even stayed up there for a picnic. We had climbed high enough to see the neighboring village of Tudanca and had fun startling the wild horses so that we could admire them as they galloped away over the hills. It was such a pleasure to be with Conchita. It seemed as if we could never get enough of her company—we always wanted more.

Can you imagine a little girl to be so fascinating? Pretty and vivacious with a fine and intelligent sense of humor; virtuous without being hypocritical; well-adjusted; enjoying a joke; gracious and pleasant with a winning personality you would love. A rush of Christian love was always evident, authentic love, even of our Blessed Mother. I've seen many people, even priests, completely amazed by her.

The same could be said of Jacinta, Mari Loli and Mari Cruz. They all had the same Castilian pride and were incredibly nice. Mari Loli told me that in the early days of the apparitions she felt very discouraged because the people followed her everywhere night and day. She could not even visit the bathroom in peace for at that time there was only one water closet in the entire village.

Everything about the girls was naive and normal. I noticed no indication that they were striving to look like little saints. It was curious

to observe, as I've already said, that everyone sought their company: men and women, young and old, priests and lay people. The children exuded a love which was no doubt transferred to the Virgin whom they said they saw. In most cases, the love did not transcend but was focused on the girls themselves, which seemed to me very human and natural.

When the others had an apparition and Mari Cruz did not, I noticed that she was very sad. To console her, I gave her my wedding ring so that she might give it to the Virgin to kiss as was the custom. Mari Cruz, very happy, put the ring on one of her fingers. On this particular trip I stayed in Garabandal three and a half days.

Three days passed and Mari Cruz had no apparition, she did not go into ecstasy. The night before I was to leave I said, "You'd better give me back my ring because I must be on my way at 3 a.m."

"Let me have it a little longer, perhaps I'll have an apparition tonight."

I left it with her.

The three others went into ecstasy. They went ahead in that state, arm in arm with each other. Mari Cruz approached, took the arm of one of them, raised her head and walked along beside them for ten or twelve paces to see if the ecstasy would overtake her, too. But nothing happened. She gave me back the ring and went away sadly without saying anything, her head lowered. (The disappointment was not mine, however, as the ring had been kissed on another occasion while Conchita was in ecstasy.)

I relate this unfulfilled desire of Mari Cruz so that it can be understood that the ecstasy came when it came . . . not when the girls wanted.

The behavior of Mari Cruz would not deceive anyone. There was no pretense on her part at an ecstasy and her disappointment was obvious. As for me, I gave the child the ring out of affection because it hurt me to see her sad. There was no question of a trick on my part.

## Still an Exciting Story

Writing as a Christian doctor, perhaps with more emphasis on the doctor than on the Christian, my aim is to record the facts and the circumstances under which I have collected them as clearly as possible, avoiding the opinions and influences of would-be fanatics.

Through observation and introspection one thing is clear: No one is ever bored when speaking about Garabandal. Conversations on the subject, although mostly repetitive of previous conversations, are never tedious; they are even accompanied by an inner joy for those who listen. My wife has heard often, very often, the same discourses, yet, she says, she could listen to them all her life.

I never tire in speaking of Garabandal. In fact, on the contrary, it pleases me and gives me an unaccustomed joy. It's as if I were experiencing a euphoria not only in conferences but also at meetings and private chats. It is easy to get carried away and discuss Garabandal into the small hours of the morning—and no one wants to leave. It's a rather curious fact.

I have given some ninety talks on the subject, most with the collaboration of photographer David Clua, without becoming weary. And I've always had to discipline myself and limit my discourses to the most important facts to avoid having them becoming weighty and interminable. The feeling of tenderness for everything about Garabandal has com-

municated itself spontaneously to all "Garabandalists," who appear to be very sensible and virtuous people dedicated to promulgating the facts of these strange occurrences. This includes the people of the village with whom I could have willingly stayed and lived. I was not the only doctor in Garabandal at that time. Someone else helped us—the good Dr. Sanjuan Nadal, eminent psychiatrist from Barcelona.

### An Unusual Happening

As I think back to my first trip to Garabandal I recall an unusual happening on the way home. Margarita and I had taken the train and we found ourselves sitting next to the dancer from the Folies Bergeres. Immediately the conversation turned to Garabandal and the strange events we had experienced there.

It was hot on the train and although I don't especially like perfumes, I was glad to take the cologne pad she offered to wipe the moisture from my hands and arms. The dancer left the train at Bilbao and Margarita and I had a three hour wait for our connection to Barcelona. We walked around the town and found a restaurant for dinner. It was during the meal that I noticed a sweet smell. It seemed to come from my left hand and arm. I thought it was from the cologne pad the dancer had given to me and paid no more attention to it.

But when we boarded the train for Barcelona, I noticed the scent again in our compartment. I realized then that it was coming in gusts. It was very intense, like sandalwood. Only my left side exuded the fragrance. It would last about two minutes then go away completely; there weren't any regular intervals.

I told myself that it was in my mind and did not mention it to



Margarita. The next gust seemed to be localized in my wedding ring which had been kissed by the Virgin. At least it was from there that it seemed the strongest. In my innermost heart I was ashamed of letting myself follow a suggestion like those attributed to hysterical persons. I said nothing, but the gusts of sandalwood (at least it seemed most like that) were very intense from time to time and came at the most unexpected moments. The next day the strange odor repeated itself at irregular intervals. It was extremely strong.

We left that day for Caldetas where my family spent the summer, and it was then that I decided to speak to my wife about it. Naturally she thought I was a bit mad.

However, that very night while we were preparing to retire, the fragrance came back. I put my hand near Julia and said,

"Take it, smell . . ."

She took my hand just to please me convinced that I was crazy and she told me she was about to say: "I don't smell anything."

Then I saw her become as pale as the wall in the room, overcome

*Dr. Puncernau, shown here with Conchita, found her to be absolutely above reproach, always behaving with proper decorum and remarked that people remained completely enchanted with her.*

with emotion and unable to say a word. Finally she whispered, "Yes, it smells . . . like sandalwood."

The next day, on the beach, the scent returned, stronger than ever. I was amazed that people weren't coming to ask what it was.

My son, Augusto, was with me. "Take this ring and smell it," I told him.

"Yes," he answered with his usual seriousness. "Yes, there is an odor, of what I do not know, but it's very intense."

He paid no more attention to it and went into the water.

That was the last time I noticed the strange scent, it never happened again.

As for Julia, she continued to have doubts in spite of the sandalwood episode, until an unusual phenomenon happened which I'm going to tell about right now.

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