

Padre Pio and Garabandal



By Fr. Joseph A. Pelletier, A.A.

Just as Padre Pio was himself the object of much controversy, so too, were his views concerning the apparitions of Our Lady of Garabandal. Some claimed that the venerable stigmatist favored these visions. Others said that he did not. What is the truth of the matter?

I attended the First International Blue Army Seminar at Fatima in July, 1968, and was amazed to hear a number of people say that Padre Pio looked unfavorably on Garabandal. Prior to leaving for the Seminar, I had spent some time with Joey Lomangino, the great American apostle of Garabandal, and he assured me that Padre Pio believed in the apparitions that took place in that Spanish mountain town from 1961 to 1965. Joey had good reason to affirm that Padre Pio accepted these apparitions as authentic.

JOEY LOMANGINO AND PADRE PIO

In 1963, Joey went to Europe with a friend. Joey wanted to see Padre Pio. His friend was interested in Garabandal. It was decided they would spend a week at each place. Joey's stay at San Giovanni Rotondo proved to be a turning point in his life. Some fifteen years prior to this visit, he had lost his sight and sense of smell through an accident. The bones of his lower forehead had been crushed and the olfactory nerve severed. Through Padre Pio he recovered his sense of smell. When the week foreseen for the visit at San Giovanni was over, Joey was so happy there that he did not want to leave. Not only had he been cured of a bodily affliction, but his soul had been spiritually refreshed in a way that he had never believed was possible. He did not want to give up this precious pearl he had found for what to him at that time was an unknown quantity, namely, Garabandal. But Joey's friend insisted that he

Joey Lomangino reaches for statue of Infanti Jesus which Padre Pio has in his hand during one of the blind apostle's many visits to the famed stigmatist. Inset shows Joey as he appears today.

honor his agreement and go to Garabandal. Finally, it was decided to put the matter to Padre Pio for arbitration. "Is it true that the Blessed Virgin is appearing in Spain to four girls?", they asked him. "Yes," he replied. "Do you think we should go to Garabandal?", they pursued. Again he gave the same answer, "Yes."

So Joey and his friend went to Garabandal. This was Joey's first trip there. He discovered that Conchita had a deep and abiding affection for Padre Pio. When he returned to Garabandal in 1964, he brought Conchita framed pictures of the Capuchin stigmatist and also rosaries that has been blessed by him.

CONCHITA'S VISIT TO PADRE PIO

My first trip to Garabandal was in 1968. Conchita's mother told me about

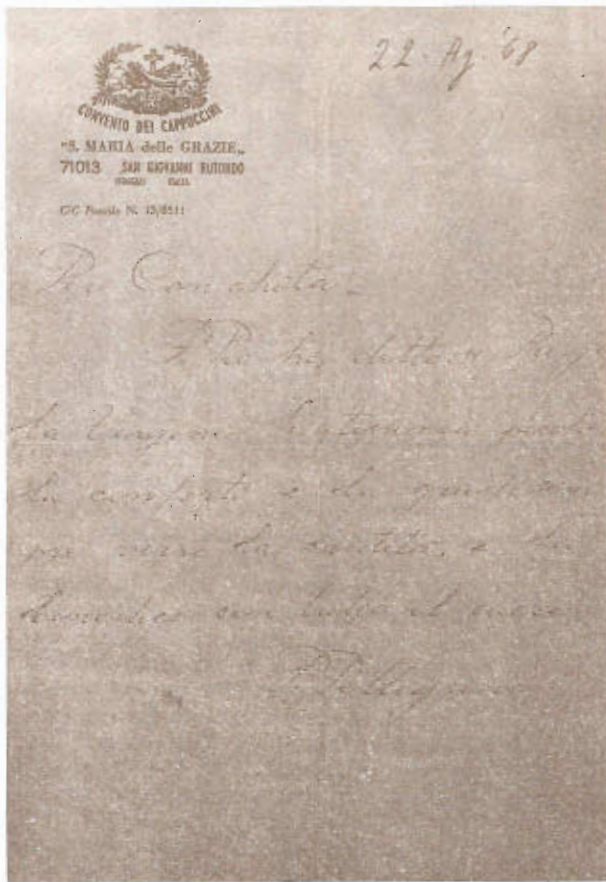
the visit she and Conchita had with Padre Pio in February, 1966, after their voyage to Rome where Conchita saw both Cardinal Ottaviani of the then Holy Office and Pope Paul VI. Aniceta insisted that Padre Pio had been very friendly—"my simpatico"—and she proceeded to show me how he had given Conchita an affectionate tap on the side of the neck just below the ear. Conchita told Joey Lomangino that during this visit with the Capuchin priest, she had carried with her a crucifix which Our Lady had kissed during one of the apparitions at Garabandal. She said that Padre Pio took the crucifix and her hand and held both of these in his own hand.

Joey, who has been to Garabandal nearly twenty times and lives in Conchita's house when there, knows Conchita as few people do. He affirms that Padre Pio is the only mystic of our day whom she has unhesitatingly accepted as authentic.

AN IMPORTANT LETTER

As I write this, I have before me a photostatic copy of the original Italian letter sent by Father Bernardino Cennamo, O.F.M., Superior of Padre Pio's





Photograph of the original letter presented to Conchita at Lourdes in October, 1968, by Father Pellegrino (top). It is dated August 22, 1968 and reads: "For Conchita, Padre Pio has said:—'I pray to the Most Holy Virgin to comfort you and guide you always toward sanctity and I bless you with all my heart.'" Above, Conchita in 1965.

Convent in San Giovanni Rotondo, to a gentleman whose name I have, but feel there is no purpose in revealing. This letter, written on July 4, 1969, has, with the recipient's permission, been translated into English and circularized to some degree so that I feel free to quote from it, making my own translation from the original Italian. Here is the pertinent part of the letter:

"While he was living, the same Padre Pio guaranteed the authenticity of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin. He met Conchita at San Giovanni Rotondo. Even during the last days of his life he talked about this to his brothers in religious life and left a personal message for the principal personage of the apparitions. This message, which was confided to his religious brother, Father Pellegrino, was delivered to Conchita at Lourdes in October of last year, in my presence."

Father Pellegrino was one of the Franciscans who personally watched over Padre Pio during his last illness. He was in Padre Pio's room during the night in which he died. (He actually expired in the early hours of September 23, 1968.) Father Pellegrino is the present Superior of the convent where Padre Pio died, having replaced Father Cennamo.

I have spoken to a Canadian

gentleman who was in San Giovanni Rotondo when Padre Pio passed away. He told me that Padre Pio was layed out in Church at about eight o'clock on the morning he died. He was exposed in an open casket. People wanted to touch his face and this created such a problem that, at about eight o'clock in the evening of that same first day, a simple white veil was placed over his face. It remained there for some four hours. The next day a glass cover was placed over the casket. Now, it is quite significant that the white veil which covered Padre Pio in death was given to Conchita. This shows that those close to Padre knew of his strong feeling for Conchita, since they felt that she was the one Padre Pio would want to have this important memento.

THE CENSORSHIP OF PADRE PIO

To help us have a proper perspective in the matter of pronouncements emanating from certain organs of the Church, it might be good to know, that the then Holy Office issued five decrees against Padre Pio between March 31, 1923 and May 22, 1931. Deliberate and malicious rumors were spread to the effect that there was nothing supernatural in Padre Pio's stigmata or in the fragrance that emanated from them. This was all artificially produced, it was claimed. A

bishop would have seen, under Padre Pio's bed, bottles of nitric acid which he used to provoke the stigmata and bottles of eau de Cologne with which he perfumed them. An investigation made by Capuchin bishops proved the falsity of these claims, which were traced back to the Archbishop of Manfredonia who eventually was deposed on charges of immorality and scandalous conduct.

On July 13, 1933, Pope Pius XI annulled the decrees against Padre Pio that had been issued by the Holy Office. But in the meantime, for a period of ten years, Padre Pio was not allowed to receive any visitors. He could not say Mass in public and could not even write to those who sought his spiritual advice and direction. When Padre Pio learned of the first decree issued against him by the Holy Office, he wept in the presence of a young man who was very devoted to him. The young man tried to comfort him. Padre Pio replied: "You must understand, my son, I am not weeping for myself, for I shall have less work and more merit. I weep for all the souls who will be deprived of my witness by those very ones who should be defending it."

Padre Pio was humble and obedient and submitted without ever criticizing anyone. But his humility did not blind him to the authenticity and the utility of his mission and the harm done to souls by the ban placed on him. There is a tremendous lesson for all of us in this. God's ways are simply not ours. He does permit erroneous and harmful decisions to be taken by those in authority in his Church. For ten years obscurity and silence was imposed on a man whose charisma the Church needed so much!

PERSONALLY HE BELIEVED

Although Padre Pio personally believed in Garabandal and was not afraid to express this belief privately among his brothers in religion and his friends, he was careful not to take a public stance in regard to them. He knew that he was regarded as a prophet of a kind, that many people had implicit faith in him. He did not feel it was proper for him to speak out publicly concerning Garabandal as though he were a spokesman for the Church. This explains how it is that his religious superiors at San Giovanni could issue statements to the effect that Padre Pio should not be quoted in favor of Garabandal. He certainly believed in it personally. But he did not feel that it was proper for him to make a public announcement about it.

Padre Pio's cause of canonization has already been introduced. But during his lifetime things were different. He was a sign of contradiction, marked by the sign of the cross, as are all of God's authentic works.

For a complete list of materials available on the apparitions of Garabandal; films, slides, books, leaflets, etc., write to The Workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Inc., P.O. Box 606, Lindenhurst, NY 11757.