

FRANÇOIS TURNER, O. P.

(1915-1995)



ON JULY 30, 1995, REVEREND François Turner, O. P., passed from this life to the next. He had spent the last two years of his life in a nursing home in Bloise, the same nursing home where he had been chaplain for many years. Only recently he was transferred to a convalescent home run by the Little Sisters of the Poor at Tours and that is where he died. He had been a Dominican for 53 years and a priest for 49.

His death closes yet another chapter in the story of the worldwide spread of the Garabandal Message. He and Father Alfred Combe (R.I.P., 1993) were at the vanguard of the movement in France for almost a quarter of a century.

Robert Turner was born of American parents in Paris where his father was a practicing physician. He was baptized and raised in the Episcopal Church. By the time he was

fourteen, he had lost his faith and remained that way for four years until he spent a two week vacation in the Dordogne region of France with a Catholic friend and his family. He accompanied them to Mass on the first Sunday after Easter, when, as was customary in France at the time, priests were required for their sermon to give a complete synopsis of the Church's teaching from A to Z. For young Robert Turner, it was a startling revelation and the many false impressions he had had of Catholics and their Church suddenly vanished. He thought to himself, "If there is a true religion it is Catholicism." He recalled what happened later in the evening: "In my bedroom, I spent some time meditating on the trees I could see from my window. These trees, I thought, either reason out their growth or else there is a Being reasoning out their growth. But could one say 'Being?' Is it a person? I then

came to the decisive point. If it (or It) is a person, it hears one's prayers, a demand from a person to a Person. So why not act? I decided to kneel and ask this eventual Person that if my demand is heard to let me know that He hears me. This is the prayer of the unbeliever. My prayer was heard. The world suddenly became mysteriously peopled with this nameless Person Who, during that long night of prayer, became for me the Peaceful One, the peace-giving One. What more could I have asked for?"

Very soon thereafter, he began taking instruction in the Catholic Faith.

One year after having entered the Church, he had yet another experience as he was walking along a sidewalk not far from his home in Paris. "I felt a presence, that of the Lord Jesus telling me, but without audible words: 'Come follow Me.' In spite of the lack of words, the meaning was clear. I didn't speak of this to anyone but I felt I had to go and tell the Jesuit priest that I thought I was receiving a call to the priesthood."

This feeling stayed with him while he earned his baccalaureate in France, studied physics at Harvard for two years, and served in the French Army during the Second World War. After the war was over, he entered the Dominican Order. He was ordained in 1946. The former Robert Turner was now Father François Turner.

His priestly ministry was greatly varied: missionary in Iraq, patient, chaplain of patients, of scouts, of older boys, of Bible study groups, of engaged couples, of the aged, and of Spanish immigrants.

Garabandal

In the summer of 1966, Father Turner happened to be spending a few weeks



Father Turner joined other members of the French Garabandal movement for their annual meeting at Candé in 1968. From left: Fr. Turner, Fr. Baillencourt, an unidentified man from the north of France, Fr. Matorne Laffineur, Suzanne Laudot, White Father Bishop J. Bretault, Fr. José Alba, S.J., of Spain, Fr. Alfred Combe, Madame Teresa la Pelletier.

Father Turner in 1994 with Dr. Jean Caux (left), witness to the Garabandal events, and Jacques Serre, his close collaborator.

at the seminary of Tarragona in Spain. He wrote at the time: "I was having my *desayuno* (breakfast) with a few professors when my attention was drawn to a leaflet giving an account of the facts of Garabandal. I had no idea that, four months later, a complex series of circumstances was to carry me into a spiritual adventure, one of the most beautiful of the century."

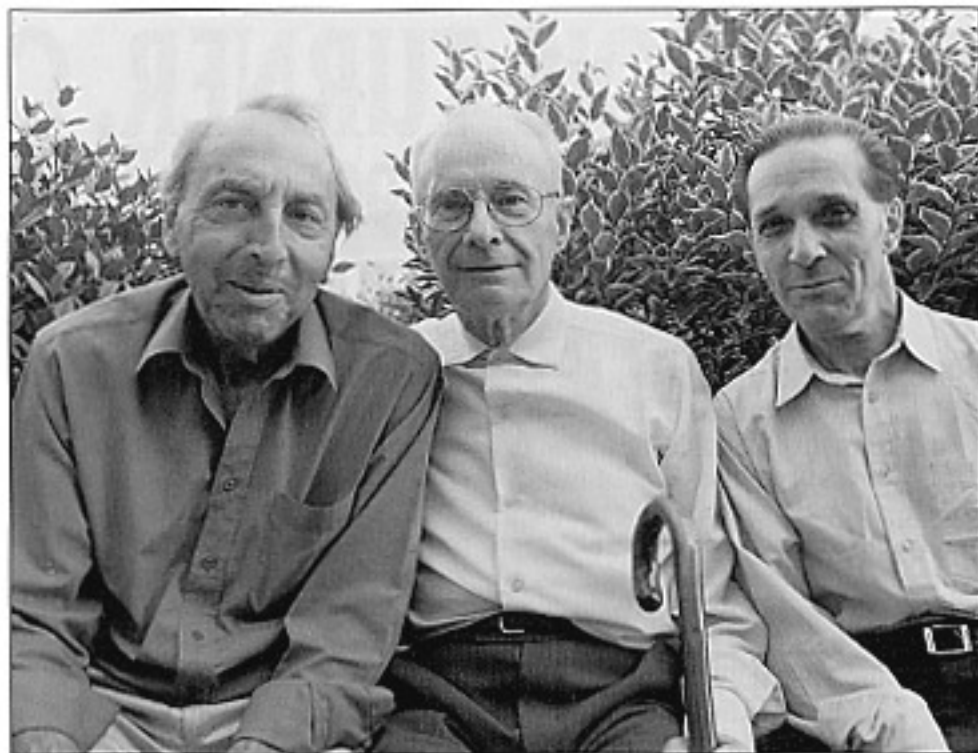
But Father Turner did not become an instant believer in Garabandal. His scientific mind required proof. He met Father Materné Laffineur, the first promoter of the Garabandal Message in France, and was given a copy of his book, *Star on the Mountain* which he read with interest but did not feel was an in-depth study of the events. Further study was required and he began to make his own inquiry. The more he studied the more convinced he became. He commenced to formulate criteria in defense of Garabandal, first seven, then fifteen and eventually twenty-four during which time he spent several weeks at a library in Poitiers studying the spiritual masters. "I studied the good authors, the ancient authors, on such facts as apparitions, revelations and mystical experiences in general and then applied these principles to the case of Garabandal I came to the firm opinion that it was genuine."

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The Apostolate

Father Turner did not arrive at full belief in Garabandal until 1978 although previous to that, he was already engaged in the apostolate. He befriended Father Combe and became his close collaborator right up until Father Combe's death in 1993.

In 1978, at Lourdes, was held the First International Congress on Garabandal sponsored co-jointly by Father Combe and The New York Center. Father Turner worked very closely with Father Combe in organizing the Congress which brought together over 200 delegates from 26 countries and five continents. The Congress was held in three languages, English, Spanish and French, and Father Turner served as one of the translators.

His other contributions to the movement were considerable: He authored one of the principal books on the events *O Children Listen to Me* which has been published in French, English and German; he was a regular contributor to *Garabandal Magazine*; he did the French translation and narration for the Dick Everson documentary film on Garabandal as well as for the New York Center Slide/Cassette Program. He was a guest lecturer on Garabandal at conferences in Australia and the United States. In addition he and his close

collaborator, Professor Jacques Serre of Paris, were the premier researchers of the Garabandal events. He had every intention of publishing his twenty-four criteria but was prevented from doing so by declining health. However, he asked Professor Serre to complete the work and it has been done. Publication should come either this year or in 1996.

Father Turner was a gentlemanly man and most accommodating. Whenever documents were requested or some fact of Garabandal or point of theology needed clarification, he willingly and promptly gave his assistance. And although Garabandal by its very nature has always been controversial, he never engaged in heated debates on the subject choosing rather a peaceful solution to differences through dialogue and understanding. He was also a friend of the former bishop of Santander, Juan Antonio del Val Gallo whom he had met practically every year from 1976 until his health prevented it.

We ask all Garabandalists, especially those who have been with us down through the years, to remember in their prayers and Masses, the repose of the soul of François (Robert) Turner, O.P., our dearly beloved father in faith and devoted brother in the apostolate. □

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