

# A Memorable Interview with a Great Bishop about Garabandal

Conducted by Fr. Alfred Combe, leader of the French Garabandal movement

*His Excellency, Joao Pereira Venancio, Bishop of Leiria, Portugal, was called back to God on August 2, 1985. He was a great Bishop whose renown will be due forever to his relationship with Fatima. It was during his pastoral charge that the 'third secret of Fatima' was brought to Rome. Well known for his profound piety, he often had the privilege of speaking with Sister Lucia, the sole surviving seer of the Marian apparitions at Fatima.*



*A los Caros amigos,  
Sra. y Sr. Patrick Keena  
Con mucho cariño!  
Que el Corazon Inmaculado de Maria,  
sea su refugio y camino para Dios!  
+ Juan, antiguo Obispo de Leiria*

On July 21, 1983, while accompanying a group of pilgrims from Saint-Etienne, France, to Fatima, I had the joy of being received by Bishop Venancio and of having a long private conversation with him. I can now publish this unforgettable interview but, there are a few things that should be mentioned beforehand.

First, my initial meeting with this holy bishop, of which I will mention later, took place at the Leiria Chancery Office in 1961.

Second, I knew that on the occasion of two trips to the United States, he had twice visited Conchita, the principal visionary of Garabandal who has been living in New York since her marriage [in 1973]. These visits were not mere chance since Conchita was well known by Sr. Lucia.

Third, an important detail: I wore on my right hand a ring that the great apostle of Garabandal, Joey Lomanigino, gave me in 1977 when I visited New York. He had given the same present to Conchita and to a few priests and lay people, all workers for the Blessed Virgin, as a sign of our "communion" and collaboration in spreading the message of Our Lady.

**Father Combe:** Your Excellency, you have agreed to allow me this private audience. I am most grateful. This is our second meeting.

**Bishop Venancio:** Dear Father, my memory fails me. Please refresh it.

**Fr. C.:** The first was in 1961. I had come from France to beg of your generosity a statue of Our Lady of

*Bishop Venancio gave Conchita as a memento, this formal portrait bearing the inscription: "To my dear friends, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Keena, with much affection! May the Immaculate Heart of Mary be your refuge and way to God!" (signed)*

*+ Juan, former Bishop of Leiria*

*"This message, given by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Garabandal is the same one given at Fatima, but updated for our times."*

Fatima for the great Franco-Portuguese Festival I was organizing that year in the Lyons district, an event which made a resounding impact throughout the entire region, since the group consisted of more than 10,000 people.

**Bishop:** I remember perfectly. I gave you, and specially blessed, a statue, one of four which made the 'Journey of Peace' after the Second World War. On that Day of Worship I sent you the Rector of the Fatima Shrine with orders to leave you that statue of Our Lady. On his return to France he told me of this great and magnificent Franco-Portuguese festivity, the aesthetic quality and religious program of which impressed him greatly.

**Fr. C.:** But all this success, Your Excellency, was by God's grace and the fruit of your benevolence. Did you know that this statue of Our Lady of Fatima was the 'carrier' of many spiritual and temporal blessings? It is still venerated today in my private chapel.

As for our second meeting, it was very far from here and only in photographs, at the home of a young woman you went to visit in New York. I saw you in the photos with her husband and children. She was someone who knew Sr. Lucia.

**Bishop:** (without hesitation) At the home of Conchita of Garabandal, yes. Dear Father, I have noticed that you wear on your finger a ring that tells me more than you realize. As a matter of fact I did go to visit Conchita in New York. I was enchanted in the hours I spent at her home with her family. And, I'll tell you something. She had the touching notion to take the ring from her finger—the same as the one you wear—and giving it to me said, "Your Excellency, I give this to you only until your death." I accepted it and, like you, I wore it through the years, next to my

pectoral ring. As you can imagine, this aroused no end of speculation—not always discreet either—even on the part of some of my brother bishops. I wore that ring until this year (1983). But, as I am advanced in age, I wanted it to get back to its owner before my death. I therefore sent it back to Conchita several weeks ago, with a letter of thanks and my most hearty benediction.

**Fr. C.:** Your Excellency, what you have told me comes as a new revelation and I thank you for sharing it with me.

**Bishop:** My dear Father, you are the French priest then, who works to diffuse the Message of Our Lady of Mount Carmel's apparitions at Garabandal in Spain?

**Fr. C.:** Yes, Your Excellency, and it is because of this distinction that I have the joy of meeting with you today.

*Then, dear readers and friends, there occurred something so unexpected, so astonishing that I hesitate to relate it. Nevertheless, I must say it with simplicity: Bishop J. Venancio Pereira got up and knelt at my feet. He then took my hands in his and looking me straight in the eye, said:*

*"Bless you and thank you, dear Father, for the wonderful apostolic work you are doing for Our Lady of Mount Carmel of Garabandal."*

*Then the Bishop sat down again, facing me.*

**Fr. C.:** I am bewildered by your gesture, Bishop, but very happy at your words; not for myself but for the Message of Garabandal.

**Bishop:** This message, given by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Garabandal is the same one given at Fatima, but updated for our times.

**Fr. C.:** I have always thought so, Your Excellency, but you emphasized the word "updated." Could you elucidate?



*Fr. Combe with the Pilgrim Virgin statue given to him by Bishop Venancio.*

**Bishop:** It is very simple. In 1917 at Fatima, the Blessed Virgin Mary did not warn us of the crisis which now sorely tries us in the heart of the Church: the crises of doctrine, of catechism, of morals, of the liturgy, of discipline, the priesthood and the religious life, etc., and the resulting great confusion of the faithful. Why? Because there was no reason to warn us of these dangers in 1917. Actually, on the aforementioned points, the situation was quite normal, if not perfect. Remember how it was at that time: the Eucharistic piety, Marian devotion, the Christian sense of sin, the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance, the Liturgy, the faithfulness to the Pope as successor of Peter?

At Garabandal in 1961 and afterward, the situation was completely different. We didn't see the great dangers that were impending. But the Blessed Virgin Mary saw them. And

# A Memorable Interview

because she is Mother and Prophet, she came to this little Spanish village to give us an explicit warning and to call us once again to prayer, sacrifice, penance and conversion.

In other words, at Garabandal she came to update her Message of Fatima for the Church of today.

**Fr. C.:** Conchita of Garabandal has often said that the Message of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was a 'Message of Salvation'. We can therefore add 'Message of Salvation for our times'.

**Bishop:** This is obvious to me.

**Fr. C.:** What you are saying on the crises and resulting confusion in the very core of the Church recalls to me something once said by another, a great theologian, Fr. Lucio Rodrigo, Rector Emeritus of the old Pontifical University of Comillas in the Diocese of Santander. After the apparitions of

Garabandal, around 1967, I made the acquaintance of this Jesuit priest and we became great friends. One day he said to me, "At Garabandal the Blessed Virgin foretold of a priestly crisis and confusion in the Church. This prophecy has come true, alas!, with a scope, a gravity and a swiftness no one in that little village could have foreseen. Not even we theologians with our vast knowledge had the slightest suspicion." And this eminent theologian added, "For me, that alone was sufficient enough proof that the Message of Garabandal was of supernatural origin."

**Bishop:** That is justifiable and very illuminating, although Garabandal does not lack for other proofs of credibility as you well know. But now tell me, dear Father, have you heard any recent news of Conchita and her companions? Can you tell

me, in your opinion, how the Bishop of Santander and Rome feel about Garabandal?

*At this point, I made known to this illustrious prelate the little news I had. I am not mentioning it here because the news is dated. Besides, I would have to name persons alive today and to do so would go beyond the limits of discretion. Here is how our conversation ended.*

**Fr. C.:** I thank you most sincerely, Your Excellency, for having granted me this interview. I will keep your words in my heart as a source of joy and peace. Before taking leave, could I ask you one more favor, that of your blessing for myself and for my group of French pilgrims?

**Bishop:** With all my heart, dear Father. First for you, then for your group.

*I knelt before the Bishop and he gave me his blessing. Arising, I said "Thank you, Your Excellency."*

**Bishop:** As for the blessing of your group, you yourself will give it in my name. I give you special permission. I empower you to give my episcopal blessing to your group in my name. In return, I wish to receive yours.

*I demurred at some length. However, at the insistence of the Bishop (who was already kneeling before me) I complied. And so it was that with great emotion, I blessed with all my heart, this great and holy, eminent Bishop of Fatima. What a memorable interview! I certify before God as to the accuracy and faithfulness of this account.*

*I dedicate this to all the good workers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel to encourage them as well as to all the bishops and priests of the Church. □*

*It was during one of Bishop Venancio's two visits to Conchita that she gave him a ring kissed by the Virgin at Garabandal.*



## COPYRIGHT CLAIM

This website's content is copyrighted and protected by U.S. and worldwide copyright laws and treaty provisions. In addition, this website's content is protected by trademark laws, the laws of privacy and publicity, and communication regulations and statutes.

You may print or distribute a copy of the information contained herein for your personal non-commercial use only, and any such reproduction or distribution must not contain any changes whatsoever in content or otherwise be used in a manner which in any way distorts its meaning.