

Garabandal Visionary Experiences

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Introduction

Five years of regular and sporadic apparitional occurrences challenge the materialistic views of mind currently prevailing in cognitive sciences, pointing towards a spiritual dimension co-existing with the human mind. Voice phenomena observed during Marian apparitions have analogies with externally controlled recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (RSPK activity), and visionary experiences involving RSPK-like activity may be instances of apparitions at the physical site. The voice extinction and sensory disconnection demonstrated in the Garabandal percipients could be explained as probably due to psychokinetic-like activity of the apparition. The alleged apparitional experiences at Garabandal are probably going to challenge the corollary of materialistic sciences, ushering us into new theoretical models of mind.

In the past, transcendental experiences have been reduced to neurophysiological anomalies but medical tests on Garabandal percipients prove their neurological health. Investigations into the circumstances of apparitional events in general have been focused on Marian manifestations. They present us with an opportunity to substantiate a correlation between science and religion. The events at Garabandal in particular reveal significant elements of paranormal phenomena. We need to suspend our scientific scepticism towards the apparitions occurred there and instead implement a more directed approach. Ostensibly, an active apparition inserted herself harmoniously into our three dimensional world, manifesting at Garabandal. Unlike with the generic apparitional experiences reported in the scientific literature of parapsychology, there was two-way communication between the percipients and the apparition at Garabandal for extended period of time. Scientifically minded investigators have had the opportunity to follow up these events as they relate to current world events and they offer an opportunity for sceptics to gain fresh insight into mystical-cum-paranormal phenomena.

All such apparitional claims need to be investigated, for most of them are alleged rather than validated. Even if only two percent are validated, they can be the driving forces for a paradigm shift. Marian apparitions are clouded with the Christian folklore and it is time to establish them on a normal scientific basis. There is conceptual and linguistic impoverishment in apparitionology. This paper is an attempt to describe an approximate scientific model of the alleged Garabandal apparitional experiences, one of the longest Marian apparitional occurrences of 20th century.

From studies of Marian apparitional experience, I have found that the controlled RSPK manifestations or RSPK-like activity is a more important scientific sign than the multiplicity of percipients sharing the experience. An apparitional experience does not have to be collective for scientific approval if it is associated with the manifestation of para-physical or para-physical-like activity. Garabandal apparitions are rich in paranormal phenomenon and they have been well documented by credible scientifically minded investigators. By applying the criterion of apparitional experience (AE) published elsewhere,

one is able to confront the scientific scepticism surrounding Garabandal apparitions¹

The events at Garabandal

In general, Marian apparitional occurrences are preceded by a discrete preparatory phase, after which the apparitions themselves occur. Garabandal is a mountain village near Santander in the north-west of Spain. Maria Loli, Maria Cruz, Conchita Gonzalez and Jacinta Gonzalez were the percipients who became renowned for their involvement in the visionary occurrences there. At the time, Maria Cruz was eleven years old and all the others were twelve. The events at Garabandal have been well documented.^{2,3,4,5} They began with the preliminary events of Sunday, 18 June 1961, which took place at 8 o'clock in the evening. The four young girls were playing as usual in the calleja (the sunken lane) in a rocky area on the edge of the village. Suddenly there was a flash of light and allegedly a shining figure appeared to them. The next day, they returned to the calleja where the first occurrences had taken place. They did not experience anything out of the ordinary that day. They met again the following day, when a bright light blocked their way and then quickly disappeared. On 21 June, the luminous figure of the first day reappeared. It seemed to them to be that of a very young person who wore a long blue robe.

From then on, they saw the figure for thirteen consecutive days. It identified itself as St. Michael and announced that it had come to herald Mother Mary. On the fourteenth day, he duly escorted Mary, who allegedly appeared together with another angel. By this time large crowds were gathering daily in the calleja. Initial scepticism was beginning to evaporate, and there was a flurry of publicity.

The percipients began to claim that Mother Mary was appearing to them. They reported that the apparition was about seventeen years old, and wore a white robe with a blue mantle and a crown of golden stars.⁶ The percipients did not all have a vision of her at the same time; sometimes they saw her individually and at other times collectively.⁵ The apparitions did not always take place at the same time of day. Many of them happened at night, and some were early in the morning.

Over the next two years, the AE occurred every day and there has been to-and-fro communication between the apparition and the percipients more than 2000 times. The length of the experiences ranged from a few minutes to eight or nine hours. During the time that they were having the AE, they were completely oblivious to pain in their legs and to the flash bulbs of cameras going off before their eyes. Many of the distinctive phenomena associated with Garabandal have been photographed, and the pictures have been reproduced in books about the events that were published at the time.² By late 1962, regular apparitions had mostly ceased. They continued with scattered visionary events for Conchita into 1965. Conchita's last AE was on 13th November, 1965 and marked the end of Garabandal apparitional occurrences. The messages of the apparition are simple and familiar -repent, convert, pray, receive more sacramental nourishment and live good lives.

The young percipients reported that a warning would be vouchsafed to the World.^{2,3,5} This would incorporate both some form of awareness of our spiritual state and a miracle, which would be revealed in an area of nearby pine trees. A permanent sign of this miracle would be presented, one that

could be photographed but not touched. They also revealed that some form of terrestrial punishment was possible if the signs that were made apparent did not result in a sufficient number of spiritual conversions.

A Jesuit priest by name Fr Luis Andreu who came to visit the village was unexpectedly swept into the visionary occurrence, and was then himself caught up into the experience of the promised miracle, which was presented to him; this experience convinced him of the authenticity of the apparitional phenomenon. He was overcome with joy and peace, and quietly expired on the following day. The apparition is alleged to have told the percipients that Fr Andreu's dead body would be found uncorrupted following the promised miracle.^{7,8} In later years there was an attempt to exhume his body, but higher church authorities prohibited such an endeavour.

Voice phenomena

In the Garabandal apparitions, a voice phenomenon was recognised.⁵ The inaudibility of the voices of the percipients was not consistent; they were only periodically and partially inaudible. The conversations with the apparition were heard, as a husky whisper by witnesses, normal voices recovering in between and this anomaly was tape-recorded.⁴

Three components of voice production are involved in the production of the 'spoken word'. They are the voiced sound, resonance and articulation. The basic sound produced by vocal fold vibration is called 'voiced sound'. This is frequently described as a 'buzzy' sound. Voiced sound is amplified and modified by the vocal tract resonators, namely the throat, mouth cavity, and nasal passages. It is the resonators that produce a person's recognisable voice. The tongue, soft palate and lips are the vocal tract articulators which modify the voiced sound resulting in recognisable words. A 'buzzy sound' has been reported to have heard in Fatima, as well as by close observers at the Garabandal apparitional site. The diaphragm is involved in the production of voiced sound and recording of the muscle movements of diaphragm showed the same movements as in a person that is speaking. In other words, voiced sound is produced at the time of the visionaries conversing with the apparition and articulation is also taking place, but without the resonating part. The visionaries themselves have described hearing their own voices as normal during the AE, and surprised that others cannot hear them. Film footage recordings and photos demonstrate that during certain periods of the AE, a number of the percipients converse together and hold different conversations simultaneously.

During verbal communication, we have an auditory control of our voices, which in turn affect the speech movements including the movements of lips.⁹ This is one of the reasons why the lips movement of deaf and dumb people are different from normally speaking persons. Even though the voices of Garabandal visionaries are inaudible during their verbal communication with the apparition, their lip movements appear to be as if they have auditory control of their voices.

Not a psychopathological state

A thorough examination of the original film footage of Garabandal occurrences is enough to rule out conscious and unconscious fraud: the Garabandal visionary experiences have a different pattern in comparison to

other commonly cited apparitions of Our Lady. Hysteria colloquially refers to the extravagant displays of emotions, but clinically it refers to dissociative and conversion disorders, which suggest that symptoms are produced through unconscious psychological mechanisms. The prevalence of this disorder varies from countries to countries and is less in industrialised societies.

During the trance state of Garabandal seers, there was loss of tactile, thermal and pain sensation, but these are also noted in hysterical states to some extent. A hysterical person reacts to pain stimuli and also shows the corneal reflex, which was, absent in the Garabandal percipients. Nor were there any hysterical paroxysms with Garabandal visionaries; their expressions were that of serenity and peace. They emerged from the AE smiling and gentle as though everything happened in an ordered and serene way.¹⁰

Catalepsy is a condition characterised by lack of response to external stimuli and by muscular rigidity, so that the limbs remain in whatever position they are placed. It is known to occur in physical and psychological conditions such as epilepsy and schizophrenia, and can be induced by hypnosis. This condition is poorly defined in the psychiatric literature. Strong emotions sometimes precipitate catalepsy. The cataleptic symptomatology has no relation to the Garabandal AE. Garabandal percipients were sometimes immobile, but most of the times they demonstrated normal and clearly goal-directed movements. Physical and neuropsychiatric evaluations of the seers were unremarkable and there are no indicators of pathological hallucinatory experiences.

Not a hypnotic phenomenon

Self-hypnosis, like hallucination and hysteria, is another term used by sceptics in connection with true apparitional experience. In the Garabandal visions there was no evidence of any prodromal altered state of consciousness prior to the visionary experience. The percipients also came out of the experience equally suddenly. Under hypnosis, subjects show flaccidness of feature, inexpressive and mask-like facial features; they are generally slowed down and sleepy. The many photographs and original films of Garabandal percipients during AE demonstrate the vivacity of emotional expressions. Significantly, the apparitional experiences do not occur on the demand of the visionaries or the witnesses. The Garabandal apparition offers a gentle input on the apparitional experience of the visionaries but one that is not under their control. Hypnotic tests with other children were conducted to induce artificial AE suggesting pleasant and unpleasant visions to compare with the Garabandal AE but the characteristic behavioural and emotional changes of the Garabandal seers could not be obtained.⁷ These observations effectively rule out the probability of unprecedented cases of autohypnosis and auto-apparitions on the part of the percipients.

Externally controlled phenomena?

Garabandal has been rich in controlled parapsychical phenomena but ignored by the scientific community. In addition to experiencing the phenomenon of an externally controlled voice, when the Garabandal percipients were in their visionary mental state, an unprecedentedly wide range of inexplicable attributions ensued. These encompassed such

paranormal manifestations as telepathy, being capable of extraordinary physical speed, imperviousness to climatic conditions, inexplicable increase in weight, total physical insensibility, absence of fatigue after prolonged sleep deprivation, synchronicity of gestures and levitation, some of which were recorded photographically.^{7,8,9,10} All these are apparent examples of externally controlled phenomena. The percipients also demonstrated enhanced extra-sensory perception, which was limited to the period of their apparitional experience and ceased altogether when the apparitions themselves terminated.

According to informants who witnessed the events, whenever the vision appeared to them, the percipients fell instantaneously on their knees, striking the sharp rocks with a loud noise without sustaining any injury. The expressions on their faces changed as they became totally engrossed in the rapture of their vision. They were oblivious to everyone and everything in the vicinity.¹¹ A number of (somewhat antiquated) tests were conducted on the percipients while they were having the apparitional experience. It was demonstrated that they did not react to pricks, burns or blows. All attempts to distract them failed. Beams of strong light were focused at them; their eyes neither flickered nor blinked, although they remained wide open. On the other hand, when the visions ended, the seers would immediately shield their eyes from bright light. On several occasions it was noted that they remained immobile in an off-balance position, their eyes looking up while they knelt on the rocks. In winter, sometimes they knelt barelegged in the snow.

As the events progressed, the percipients began to present unusual behaviours during the visionary mental state. The observing investigators described these as 'ecstatic walks or ambulatory ecstasy'.⁶ Apparently guided solely by what they were experiencing, they would walk throughout the village, up and down stairways and in and out of homes, at all hours of the day and night. Throughout this they avoided every obstacle they encountered without faltering in their progress. Very often they ran at great speed down the precipitous mountainside, even backward – so fast that it was impossible for the spectators to follow them closely. When they eventually stopped, they would come to an abrupt halt without tripping or slipping – whereas those following in their wake were often carried on by their own momentum and found it difficult to stop. While they ran, the eyes of the visionaries appeared to be riveted to the sky and they gave no indication of awareness of the direction in which they were going. Whether the percipients were kneeling, walking normally or moving backwards slowly or rapidly; whether they were on level ground or climbing up to the pine trees above the village; whether going over stones, through bushes, in snow or mud; whether climbing or descending stairs – they all moved around with an ease that astonished those who beheld them.

During their high-speed running, objects entrusted to the percipients were sometimes lost, and it seemed to onlookers that the apparition directed them to where they would find those objects again. They were reported to sing charming, simple hymns, though they were rural children who hardly knew how to write. According to the witnesses' reports, the harmony of their voices was enrapturing.

Normally, all of the seers weighed between 35 and 36 kilograms (77 – 80 lb). Yet during the visionary state, two or three strong men, whose

standard workload included lifting 100 kilograms, found it almost beyond their power to lift one of the child seers off the ground. However, all the visionaries could easily lift one another without any sign of effort. A person whose foot or hand happened to catch in the bent knee or elbow of one of the children when she fell into a state of trance generally could only release it with great difficulty and would have to use all his or her strength to do so. Most were obliged to wait until the end of the visionary experience to release themselves. Anyone caught beneath a seer was unable to break free for the duration of the vision. One reason for this was undoubtedly that the percipients' physical bodies became rigid, and no one could force them to move. Witnesses compared them to cement or marble. Reliable witnesses swore that they had seen the visionaries in a state of levitation, and there was photographic evidence to that effect.¹² Overall, it seemed that their physical bodies were no longer subject to the laws of gravity while in their non-ordinary state of consciousness.

Medical reports

Medical scientists at the time took a respectful attitude towards the Garabandal events, realising that they went beyond ordinary medical parameters. Some mainly quantitative tests were carried out, based on observations made at the scene. Dr Ricardo Pancernau, a Spanish neuropsychiatrist performed neuropsychological studies on the seers over twelve days, and was able to rule out the most common psychopathological causes for their experiences.⁷ He noticed several synchronicities in the behaviour of the seers during AE.¹⁰ Even though four of them did not pay any attention to each other, yet they would change facial expressions of sadness to smiling simultaneously. Pancernau remembers that while holding a conversation, suddenly in the midst of a sentence, the seers would simultaneously fall to their knees with a loud thud.¹⁰ There was a time when Maria Cruz was not having the visions and another time Jacinta became ill from not seeing the apparition; they wanted intensely to see the apparition but could not. This speaks in favour of fact that the percipients were not able to produce voluntarily the AE, which happened when they least expected it. Pancernau concluded that he could find no natural explanation for the Garabandal events.⁷ He has published a parapsychological study on the apparitional occurrences of Garabandal.¹³

Dr Celestino Ortiz Perez, a paediatrician living in Santander, spent fifty-two days at the apparitional sites and declared that the youngsters' experiences were indicative of a healthy state.¹¹ The same view was confirmed by Dr Honorio Sanjuan Nadal, a neuropsychiatrist and microbiologist who later presented his findings to a number of professional organisations.⁵

Dr Alejandro Gasca Ruiz, who was working in Santander at the time of the apparitions, was present during the great many of the events. He drew up a cautious report, which was co-signed by one of his colleague, Dr Ortiz Gonzalez. They stated that two features had caught their particular attention: the 'supernormality' of the seers in spite of their prolonged trance states, and the accompanying parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy, premonitions, clairvoyance, retroversions, hierognosis, absence of falls while in ecstatic walks and also levitation on the part of one of the visionaries.¹¹ A team of French doctors studied the events in 1968 and concurred with the

view that the apparitions were the products of a force beyond human capability.

High grade psychokinetic-like phenomena

The percipients at Garabandal demonstrated unusual psychical abilities at the time of their alleged apparitional experiences. There is evidence of remarkable psi ability on their part, manifesting itself exclusively during their observance of apparitions. That leads to the postulation that those abilities were activated by the power of the apparition because it was demonstrated that the percipients could not manifest psychical ability in non-apparitional circumstances. Weight anomalies, levitation, speed of movement and voice phenomena, sensory disconnection, and temperature anomalies were observed. All these may be external indicators of psychokinetic activity. The mechanism involved in the increase of weight is the reverse of levitation: both these manifestations are gravitational anomalies. There were also enhanced telepathy, clairvoyance, xenoglossy, heirognosis and precognition, all of which may be attributed either to the apparitional power or to the percipients' powers of extrasensory perception under the control and augmentation of the apparition. Parapsychologists are so far accustomed to only observing and reporting RSPK activity on physical objects. Sound production is also a physical phenomenon and the vanishing of the voices of Marian visionaries is another externally generated and controlled psychokinetic-like phenomenon: a transcendental type of psychokinetic activity. Without recognising the externally controlled psychokinetic nature of Marian apparitions, McClure has argued that these transcendental occurrences are psychical phenomena on the part of the percipients.¹⁴ But such a view is not tenable, because – contrary to common expectations regarding Marian visionaries – the Garabandal visionaries did not demonstrate nor claim any unusual psychical ability. Alternative parapsychological explanations of Marian visionary experiences and their counter-arguments have been discussed in detail elsewhere.¹

By adopting this model of mind to analyse happenings at Garabandal, one could state that the ESP and psychokinetic powers of the percipients, along with their psi-like faculties, were augmented by apparitional power.

The ESP-PK theory of apparitions appears to fit better in explaining apparitional occurrence with the accompaniment of abundant psychokinetic activities and demonstration of unusual ESP, as in the case of the Garabandal visionary occurrences. Accordingly, the psychokinetic-like powers of the appearer and the ESP powers of the seers, resulted in the actual sighting of the apparition. There was both paranormal perception and perception through the normal sensory channels of the percipients. We can never fathom out what degree of psi effect the percipients contributed to the sighting as well as the magnitude of the apparitional power. It is analogous to a mother giving a hand to the child who is trying to lift a heavy weight. There was both ESP (psi gamma) and psychokinesis (psi kappa) on the part of the percipients and they never demonstrated these powers during the non-apparitional situations.

Discussion

There is no evidence in these events under consideration to suggest the incidence of autohypnosis and auto-apparition. True visual hallucinations

are not shared but the Garabandal visionary experiences were collective, involving four percipients. True visual hallucinatory experiences are generally frightening whereas Garabandal experiences are pleasant, a joyful experience even for the witnesses. The neuropsychiatric assessments conducted on the percipients showed they were healthy individuals for their age. The associated psychokinetic phenomena readily rules out the possibility of pseudo-hallucinations and pseudo- apparitions; the possibility of perceptual disorders can also be ruled out. Collective percipience, powerful motivation on the part of the apparition, the quasi-physical features of the apparition, the integration of the apparition with the natural environment, the utmost loyalty and obedience on the part of the percipients to the apparition observed, and the controlled psychokinetic-like manifestations all point towards a series of true apparitions at Garabandal.

Super-psi is a theoretical extension of ESP and PK that could accommodate all the best evidence of post-mortem existence. However, witness selectivity during nearly four years, the abundance of apparitions, the extremely unique and matchless voice phenomena and variable predictions of future events given to the percipients, with a visible sign predicted well in advance, argue against the super psi hypothesis. Only the kinetic aspects of apparitions fit the fabric of para-physics.

Generic apparitions have to be ruled out before considering apparitions of a higher order. In spontaneous appearances, to-and-fro verbal communication does not take place. Generic apparitions are taciturn or rarely speak.¹⁵ Dr. Ian Stevenson reports, 'even though the ghost of Hamlet's father and some other ghosts of fiction communicate freely, the apparitions experienced in what seemed to be authentic cases are taciturn and rarely speak'. Auerbach reports a case where the apparition communicated freely by projecting the thoughts to the percipient; these thoughts included visual and verbal information that the apparition projected into the minds of others so they could see and hear the apparition.¹⁶ In Garabandal, the vanishing of the voices of Marian visionaries appears to be an externally generated and controlled psychokinetic-like phenomenon: a mystical type of psychokinetic activity. The term RSPK when used to refer to cases involving discarnate agents can be a misnomer as it would only delay the process of finding a convincing explanation; the usage of the word 'RSPK-like activity' is, however, justifiable.¹⁷ Most of the RSPK cases could be explained by physical and psychological processes, yet there are recently investigated cases that defy such an explanation and would support a survival hypothesis.¹⁸ RSPK-like activity with abundant visions, including the percipients conversing with the apparition for prolonged periods in silence, fulfils the criteria for a genuine apparition at Garabandal. From a parapsychological perspective such an observation points towards the manifestation of an apparition of the highest order.

The transcendental dimension of AE cannot be explained but nevertheless should not be denied. The percipients belong to our space-time dimension whereas the alleged apparition belongs to a dimension of a different time scale. It must be conjectured that it is 'transcendental duration' permitting the communication with the apparition by more than one percipient at the same time.¹⁹²⁰ The percipients could not specify the duration of their apparitional experience. The transcendental aspects of the Marian

apparitional phenomenon are beyond the parameters of parapsychological research. There is a danger that parapsychologists run the risk of trivialising the transcendental by merely classing it as a paranormal event; however, using words like 'psi-like phenomena' might help to open the frontiers of parapsychology to the spiritual or mystical.

Marian apparitions complement our scientific understanding in relation to post-mortem existence. They also offer cross-fertilisation of religious and scientific approaches. In these days of epidemic addictions such as alcoholism, the recognition of a power greater than ourselves has a profound bearing on their motivation to become and to stay well. If parapsychology is to play its part in helping people in crisis, it would do well to accommodate such phenomena as terrestrial visitations of the mother of Jesus.

Equally, in this technological era, theologians should be more willing to subject Marian apparitions to scientific analysis. Co-operation between science and religion would have far-reaching effects on the global community, notably within the fields of medicine and education. Given the world-wide significance of Marian apparitions, proof-oriented research is urgently needed.

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