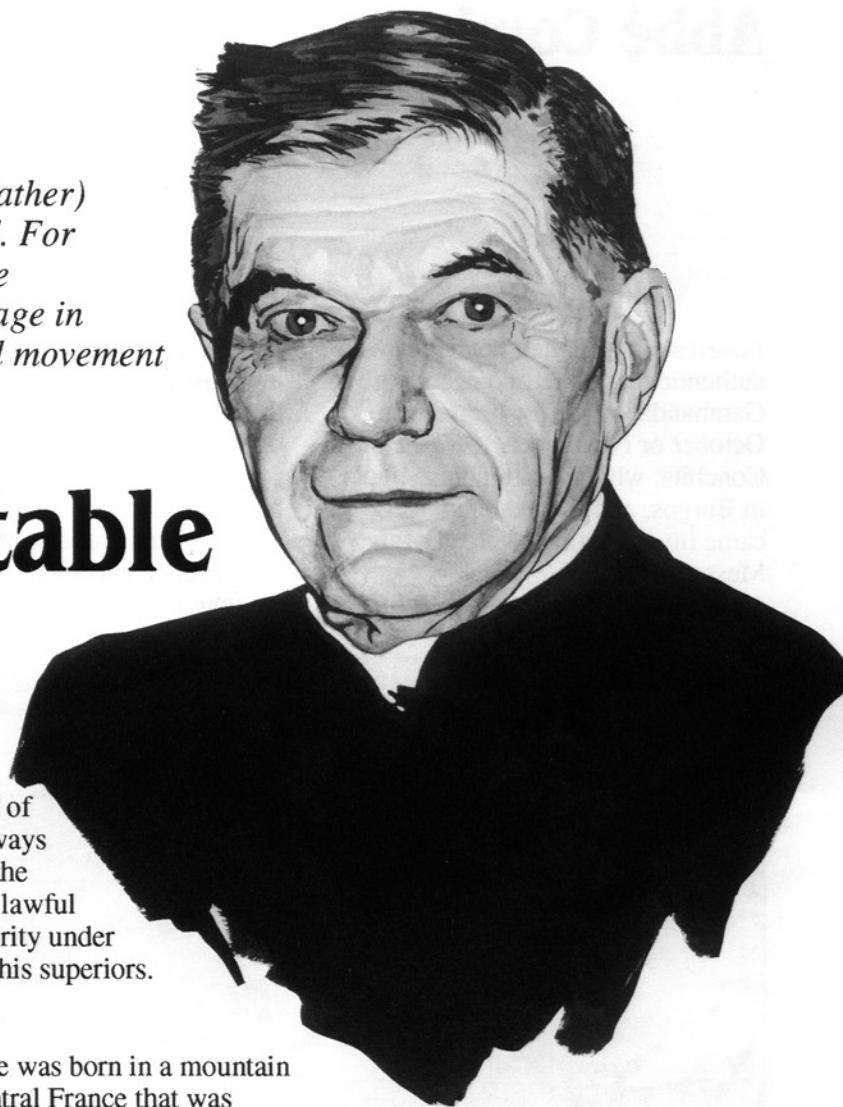


On Thursday, February 25, 1993, Abbé (Father) Alfred Combe passed to his eternal reward. For the last 25 years of his life, he had been the leading promoter of the Garabandal Message in France and his contributions to the overall movement were considerable.

The Unforgettable Abbé Combe



Father Combe was small of stature, five feet, five inches, active, congenial, devout, a born leader and always very faithful to the demands of his priesthood. The image we have of him is in his black cassock which he always wore except if he traveled abroad when he wore a clerical suit. He said Mass slowly and reverently and needless to say, had an ardent devotion to our Blessed Mother. In the parish church at Chazay d'Azergues where Father Combe had been pastor for more than 30 years, there hung a picture of the Madonna with an inscription written by St. John Vianney which read: "This parish will always have a holy pastor." Out of humility, Father Combe had taken the picture down.

He also had the flair of a romantic, which is apparent in his writings. This trait, combined with the strength of his character, made him a rather unique individual, the "one of a kind" type.

To promote the Garabandal Message on the scale that Father Combe did, especially in the early days, it took a person with mettle to persevere in the face of adversity and Father Combe really filled the bill. He was a fighter and pressed on for *le cause de Garabandal* as he put it, trying to bring an urgent Message to a world

badly in need of it. And he always did it within the guidelines of lawful Church authority under obedience to his superiors.

A Farm Boy

Alfred Combe was born in a mountain village of central France that was higher, smaller and just as poor as San Sebastian de Garabandal was at the time of the apparitions. At the age of ten, while reading a book on the Cure of Ars, he heard an interior voice, the sweetness of which he remembered all his life, that said: "If only you would like to be a priest. Wouldn't you like to be My priest?"

Young Alfred's studies for the priesthood began shortly thereafter and he was ordained at the age of 23, the youngest in his class, after receiving special permission from the Pope. He was immediately named a professor in a seminary for late vocations with some of his students being his elders. He had just been named vicar when the Second World War broke out.

The horrors of war brought a new life for the young Father Combe as an officer of an elite infantry troop and his men had great admiration for him because of his military capabilities.

"There's a guy for a tough assignment. He always gets us out of a fix," they would say.

In 1940, when the French army was defeated, he became a prisoner of war in Austria but managed to escape nine months later and fight in the secret army. He was awarded the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme* (Cross of War with Palm) for his military bravery.

For 33 years, up until his retirement, he had been pastor at Chazay d'Azergues in the Burgundy district of southern France famous for its wines. Among his parishioners were some direct offspring of a brother of the Cure of Ars, something of which he was understandably proud.

Garabandal

Father Combe first learned of Garabandal in 1963 from Father Materne Laffineur, leader of the French Garabandal movement at the time, and be-

Abbé Combe

lieved so totally that the events were authentic that he felt no need to go to Garabandal to see for himself. In October or November, 1967, he met Conchita, who was attending school in Burgos, and from then on he became involved in the spread of the Message.

After Father Laffineur died in No-

vember 1970, leadership of the French movement fell into the hands of Father Combe and another priest who has since died.

In 1971, Dick Everson produced his documentary "The Events of Garabandal" and Father Combe arranged for a French narration of the film to be done by his friend and close asso-

ciate, Dominican Father François Turner.

With film in hand, Father Combe began to give lectures and film showings on Garabandal the length and breadth of France and even into neighboring countries. In addition, he published a newsletter which at its peak had 10,000 subscribers.

Through the years, Father Combe put many miles on his Peugeot for *le cause de Garabandal* and some of those miles were logged back and forth to Rome where he went to speak with friends and officials at the Vatican about Garabandal.

First International Congress on Garabandal

Although Father Combe's activity was centered in France, he became an international figure in the movement as well. He was the chief architect for the landmark First International Congress on Garabandal held at Lourdes, France, in 1978, which he co-sponsored with the New York Garabandal Center. The event brought together leading promoters of the Message from 26 countries and five continents. Guest speakers included eyewitnesses to the Garabandal events such as Father Valentin Marichalar, pastor of Garabandal during the time of the apparitions, Juan Alvarez Seco, Chief of the Civil Guard and Placido Ruiloba Arias who was present at over 1,000 ecstasies. A bishop and 13 priests were in attendance, two of whom were consultants at Vatican II. A letter signed by the priests on behalf of the more than 200 delegates asking for the gathering of eyewitnesses' testimonies was hand delivered to the Bishop of Santander who had his own representative at the Congress in the person of Dr. San Juan Nadal.

Father Combe receiving the "Croix de Guerre" in ceremonies after WW II





Left, Father Lucio Rodrigo, S.J., was rector emeritus of the Pontifical University at Comillas when Father Combe met with him. Below, Father Combe in action, giving a conference during the "early days" in the summer of 1970.

An Eminent Theologian

It was through Father Combe that prophecies made at Garabandal, previously undisclosed, became part of the rich patrimony of the Garabandal apparitions.

In 1973, he visited Father Lucio Rodrigo Llanos, S.J. By that time Father Rodrigo was more than 90 years of age and died a few months later on May 30, 1973. He had been one of Spain's leading theologians and rector of the Pontifical University at Comillas. He was reportedly Franco's confessor and according to Conchita, as well known in Spain as was Bishop Fulton Sheen in the United States. He was also an eyewitness and believer in the Garabandal events and Conchita's confessor for a time.

In an interview with GARABANDAL Magazine (April-June 1984) Father Combe recounted what happened during his meeting with Father Rodrigo: "While we spoke, he suddenly rose, went to his desk and got an ecclesiastical notebook. He thumbed through it searching for a particular page, found it and showed it to me. Although I don't know Spanish that well, I read what was written on the left hand page and then translated it. Here is what it said: 'The Virgin has said to Conchita, first, that the Holy Father will go to the Holy Land.' And Father Rodrigo had written below, 'Done.' Next it said, 'The Holy Father will go to Fatima.' And Father Rodrigo wrote beneath it, 'Done.' And third, 'The Holy Father will go up to Garaban-

dal.' And Father Rodrigo wrote, 'We wait.'"

A Holy Bishop

On July 21, 1983, Father Combe met with another notable Church dignitary while accompanying a group of pilgrims from St. Etienne, France, to Fatima. He was warmly received by His Excellency, Joao Pereira Venancio who, before his retirement had been Bishop of Leiria, Portugal (he died on August 2, 1985). It was during his pastoral charge that the famous "Third Secret of Fatima" was delivered to Rome. Bishop Venancio often met and spoke with Sister Lucy.

By way of introduction, Father Combe reminded Bishop Venancio of their first meeting in 1961 when the Bishop had given him a Pilgrim Virgin statue of Our Lady of Fatima for a Franco-Portuguese festival that Father Combe was organizing in the Lyons district. Father Combe also mentioned the Bishop's visit to Conchita in New York. The Bishop recalled his visit—he had actually visited Conchita twice—and mentioned the ring Conchita had given him

which he wore next to his pastoral ring for many years. He then said to Father Combe, "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."

Father Combe responded, "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."

Father Combe then said to the Bishop, "I am bewildered by your gesture, Bishop, but very happy at your words, not for myself but for the Message of Garabandal." The Bishop answered, "This message given by





the Blessed Virgin Mary at Garabandal is the same one given at Fatima but updated for our times."

Father Combe then asked the Bishop what he meant by "updated." Bishop Venancio responded, "It is very simple. In 1917 at Fatima, the Blessed Virgin Mary did not warn us of the crisis which now sorely tries us

Above, delegates at the First International Congress on Garabandal held at Lourdes in 1978. Below, Bishop Venancio with Conchita during one of his visits to her home in the 1970's.



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 great resulting confusion of the faithful. Why? Because there was no need 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, the Marian devotion, the Christian sense of sin, the frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance, the liturgy, the faithfulness to the Pope as successor to 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 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."

A Milestone

Father Combe's passing marks a milestone in the French Garabandal apostolate because for two decades, he was the only one in that country

giving lecture/film presentations. Unlike their counterparts in the United States, local French "promoters" would not give a film or slide presentation themselves but rather would make the arrangements and have someone else come to give the presentation. And that someone was always Father Combe. There was no other. And since there isn't anyone to take his place, that phase of the apostolate could be ended. If the Message is to continue to spread in France, it will have to be done primarily through other means such as literature, audio and video cassettes—at least for the time being.

* * *

In the chronicles of Garabandal, Father Alfred Combe will go down as one of the movement's great promoters. Just as in his days in the military he was the leader of an elite infantry troop, so too, in Our Lady's army he was a great leader. Medieval Europe provides us with the image of the knight who is willing to do anything for his lady fair, even to the point of death. This image is not lost on Father Combe, the romantic with the fighting spirit who worked so tirelessly for his "Lady Fair" of Mount Carmel. May she be his everlasting reward. □

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