

Good morning everyone!
Greetings to our audio and youtube listeners!

Several weeks ago we spoke of the public message of LaSalette and the character of Maximin. Today we'll talk about the character of Melanie, the primary bearer, guardian and publisher of the great Secret. The children were loyal to one another until the end, although they were separated within five or six years after the apparition when Melanie was pushed out of the diocese and sent to a Carmelite convent in England. I'm not sure they ever met face to face again. Many of Melanie's letters are published, but since I can't read French I can't tell you right off if she and Maximin corresponded much. In any case, they always spoke well of each other and would not listen to calumnies. They should be the patron saints of abused children. We spoke of Maximin's childhood, his life in the streets, his alcoholic father, his poverty-stricken and embittered stepmother, the neglect of his education, yet despite everything he never indulged in petty thievery or the least impurity. He bore the emotional signs of psychological insecurity in his extraordinary restlessness and inability to concentrate yet he was good-natured and shared what he had with anyone he met.

Melanie's upbringing, however, was much darker. Her parents were not alcoholic, nor extremely poor. They were selfish, greedy, irreligious and emotionally uncontrolled. Melanie's father, Pierre, would take stonemason jobs far from home and be gone for long periods. Melanie was born sometime after three older brothers. The mother had become accustomed to going out. She did not like being home with a baby. One day when Melanie was only three years old, Julie had enough. Pierre was away. She lost patience with the child, shook the tiny girl and told her: "You are utterly impossible! I've had enough of you. I will not be mother to a child like you. You mustn't call me 'Mama' anymore. You can call me 'Julie.' And I will call you 'She-Wolf.'" Julie shoved her daughter out the door saying "You can go live in the woods with the foxes and wolves. I will have no more of you. Don't come back!" Melanie ran down the path into the woods, sat down under a big tree and cried. But she remembered the silent Christ on the cross "And I started thinking: Christ does not weep, his eyes are closed and He is silent, I love Him, I want to be like Him, I shall cry no more." She fell asleep. The Child Jesus appeared to her from that time forward. She would not learn his name for a long time. He said he was her brother, and he called Melanie "sister." He gave her delicious nectar to drink from open flowers. How long was she in the woods? When Pierre came home and discovered his daughter was missing, he frantically went searching for her. Just then Melanie was emerging from the woods. Pierre calmed down when the child prattled that her brother had taken care of her. He assumed it was one of the older siblings.

From the age of six, against her father's wishes, Julie would make arrangements to hire out her daughter for months at a time. Other siblings were allowed to attend school, but not Melanie. She was left alone in the wind and the rain on the Alpine slopes to care for animals. But her Brother came often to instruct her, and sometimes He brought "our Mother." Melanie was accustomed to suffering so she eagerly drank in lessons of the Passion of Christ and the value of offering up one's sufferings. Souls from purgatory would visit her and ask her for prayers and sacrifices. Once her employer insisted that she sleep in the family bed. In her innocence she had no idea that he planned to molest her, but heaven instructed her to sleep in her own bed. This made the employer very angry and he became violent, but young Melanie stood firm. Just as he was about to beat her, she found herself out in the barn.

We know about her childhood because after the great Apparition of LaSalette when Melanie was fourteen, she was told to write her biography. Decades later she wrote to Fr. Roubaud (October 1893) when she saw a copy of her childhood biography, "I do not understand how I can possibly have written some of these things. It makes me blush to the roots of my hair. Truly at the time I was an open book, for I believed I was like everybody else, or that everybody else was like me."

Her parents wouldn't take her to Church, but her "Brother" brought her Holy Communion from time to time. At the age of ten Jesus asks her what favor she desires. She asked to share in his crucifixion. She is the youngest stigmatist on record. After awhile she asked the Blessed Virgin to take away the outward signs but leave her with the pain. This was granted, but not always, until the end of her life, the wounds would bleed from time to time. Thus we have witnesses.

At sporadic intervals when Melanie lives at home, Julie constantly calls her a wicked child. Melanie, who never lies, believes

her mother and is always praying for the grace to be good and stop causing her mother pain. Melanie had almost no opportunity for social interactions with children her age. She did not know how to play. She is profoundly psychologically abused and she will be socially inhibited the rest of her life, always apologizing for herself. Jesus does not heal her of these wounds which actually works very well for dealing with the abuse from clergy that she'll suffer the rest of her life on account of the Secret. As she grows older, and gains some education from the nuns, she becomes intellectually astute, but her natural demeanor is always to abase herself, to feel worthy of abuse, not to expect to be treated well. Abuse doesn't shake her or take her by surprise. It doesn't send her into depression or into fits of rage. Emotional illness, and there is no question that Melanie was neurotic, had no more effect on her spiritual and intellectual development, than a physical illness like asthma or diabetes. Sick persons can carry their cross with virtue or with vice. Melanie reached the mystical marriage a few months before the apparition of LaSalette. She was spiritually ready for a life of fruition and combat.

I have read the lives of dozens, maybe hundreds of saints. There are only two that come anywhere close to the abuse that Melanie endured: St. Germaine and Bl. Francis Libermann. Libermann lost his mother very early and was raised by his brilliant and fanatical Jewish father who trained his near genius son in Hebrew from early childhood to succeed him as chief rabbi in their German city. But the boy's superb knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies helped him to instantly recognize Jesus as the true Messiah when some Protestants showed him a New Testament as a teenager. He was obliged to flee to another country to become a Christian. Entering a French Catholic seminary he encountered great prejudice and abuse by snobbish students. Young Libermann would undergo fits of shaking each time a letter from his father reached him. In the nineteenth century they called it epilepsy. He ended up in charge of a whole religious order, but he was so neurotic that he did 90% of his spiritual direction in letters because he was too shy to meet people face to face. But Melanie's emotional abuse was far more severe, and furthermore she is on a par with saints who endured martyrdom and torture because she took on the stigmata, extraordinary fasting, chains and continual penances throughout her long life, hardly eating anything at all in the last few years.

For herself and her own reputation she cared nothing, but she would not spare any effort to defend the truth of Mary's words in the Apparition. Fr. Gouin, an expert on LaSalette, rightly regards Maximin as merely a witness to Melanie's apparition of LaSalette. It is Melanie who had been prepared in advance with many private apparitions and with many penances to be able to proclaim what will be the absolutely least popular, most apocalyptic and bitterly contested of all the messages of the Mother of God. There isn't even a runner up. Nothing can compare with the message of LaSalette. Only a giant among saints would have the virtue and the stamina to spend decades at a desk answering letters and refuting distortions of the message. Melanie has to be placed in the lofty category of great prophets with an unpopular message such as Elijah, John the Baptist, Ezekiel, Jeremiah. They bore the prophetic message, standing up to kings and fellow countrymen, utterly confident that they had been entrusted with the truth of God. Sooner or later, Melanie will be canonized. It might take five centuries like the trial of St. Joan of Arc, for history to sift out the facts and for the Church to admit her guilt in persecuting one who was utterly innocent.

The amazing thing, to me, is that Melanie was bitterly persecuted by bishops *before* she had released the Secret. They feared it with a diabolical fear. It was as if they were possessed by Satan the snake who dreaded any word from the Woman who was destined to crush his head. Clerical Freemasonry was an epidemic in nineteenth century France. This is the way men advanced in the Church. It is now open knowledge that the French revolution of 1792 that overthrew the Catholic royalty was perpetrated by Freemasons. Many educated upper class men, among whom were many Churchmen, welcomed the ideals of a nation of tolerance, equality and liberty, particularly liberty from moral obligations. What better way to influence the common people than to become pastors and preach from pulpits this new quasi-religion in the name of God? It was also an easy career, a comfortable desk-pulpit job; it came with respectability, freedom from manual labor, a generous pension, and if one was careful to hide it well, one could have women too.

Divine Providence ordained that LaSalette was in the territory of a saintly and exceptional bishop. Philibert DeBruillard was a hero of the French revolution. As a young priest he risked death to stand near the carts of those being taken to the guillotine to give them absolution. He refused the famous oath and offered Mass in hiding places for devout Catholics. Sixty years later, in 1846, he was an old man in his 82nd year. Marian apparitions "for the world" was a new phenomenon

but Philibert is an imperial canon and knows how to conduct a proper investigation to find out the facts. He immediately issues a letter to his priests telling them not to take sides and not to preach on the Apparition from the pulpit. He consults the Holy Father. He himself believes the children immediately but he is careful not to rush to conclusions. After five patient years of study and fact-gathering, on the September anniversary, he issued a solemn recognition of the authenticity of the Apparition of LaSalette. The following spring, the 87 year-old ascended the mountain on muleback to bless the cornerstone of the future basilica. His mission is accomplished. He submits his retirement, and he dies three years later, asking that his heart be placed in the choir of the basilica on the mountain of LaSalette.

During his brief tenure after the Apparition the holy bishop took paternal care of the children. He had inquiries made of their family circumstances. By now Melanie's father was in debt. Neither of her parents believed in her or her apparitions. It's all mysterious to them. The bishop persuaded the parents to allow the children to stay with the Sisters so that the parents would not be bothered by all the pilgrims and visitors. The bishop provides a pension to cover their boarding expenses. Melanie loved the Sisters and expressed her desire to become a nun. Her father Pierre became furious. He went down and fetched her. He wanted her to give up her plans—but she was resolute. For four days she went without food and sleep. During the night she waited for the right moment—to make her escape. So great was his anger that he took his loaded gun, stormed out of the house, seized his own daughter, stood her in front of him and shot. An angel must have guided the bullet which passed between her arm and her chest and hit the dirt. In his fury he grabbed her and shut her in a cellar for six days.

A visitor from Paris heard about it. Pierre owed this man six hundred francs. The gentleman told him, that if he would sell Melanie to him, he would cancel the debt. Her father agreed to this. The sale took place on the first Friday of the month at three o'clock in the afternoon. Melanie was very happy to have this small resemblance to our Lord. From this moment on she was a little more free. The next day she left for Grenoble to visit Bishop Philibert who sent her to the Sisters in Corenc.

Bishop Philibert was prepared to pay her dowry. It seems the Sisters, like the Daughters of Charity, took annual vows, rather than lifetime vows. We don't have a lot of records, at least not in English. Some books say that Melanie was a novice, others that she was a professed Sister. All of them say she was held in high regard by the local people, by her religious community and by the pilgrims who came to listen to her recount the apparition.

Bishop Philibert also wanted to provide priestly ministry for the growing influx of pilgrims, had some small buildings erected on the mountain and asked for volunteers among his parish priests who would be willing to serve the visitors. Was it an actual religious community of men? Not quite yet. Melanie judged that some were holy men and she confided to a few of them that the Blessed Virgin had dictated a new Rule. The Rule was not strictly part of the Secret, but Melanie talked about it very discreetly. The formation of a priestly community fell to the next bishop, Jacques-Marie-Achille Ginoulhiac. But he wasn't interested. He had a reserved attitude towards the message of the visionaries. Rumors circulated that the secret involved critical opinions of Napoleon III which convinced Bishop Ginoulhiac that the apparition was a movement to restore the Catholic monarchy. It will be Emperor Napoleon III who will appoint him as Archbishop of Lyons. These Masonic bishops were all about careers. In 1870 when Vatican Council I convenes to discuss the possibility of proclaiming papal infallibility a dogma, Bishop Ginoulhiac is opposed.

He is the one who will arrange to send Melanie away to a cloistered convent of Carmelites in Darlington, England. There is a tradition that he died in a lunatic asylum but I don't have resources to verify this. In any case, he doesn't stay long at LaSalette, and Melanie is far away. We'll return to her sojourn in England in a moment.

The next bishop, Amand-Joseph Fava, will reign for twenty-five years and act as her nemesis. He will calumniate her. He will not allow her back into her home diocese. He can't shut down the basilica but he will reinvent the apparition. He has a beautiful statue made for the basilica according to his own tastes which disregards the children's description of Mary's clothing and posture. He persecutes the priests who express a desire to follow the Rule of Mary and sends them away. He wrote his own constitutions and approved the text with his own authority and brought in men of his own frame of mind whose preoccupation was to make the basilica a tourist trap to attract donations. Even in 2017 the local people in LaSalette

are scandalized at the way the shrine is operated. I listened to several testimonies firsthand, in the presence of a translator. For 150 years this world-wide community has spread the rumor that Melanie basically invented the Secret to keep herself in the limelight. Here's an extract from a book published in 1995 which is extremely typical of the twisting of truth with falsehood to put this innocent women in a completely bad light:

Maximin never really reformed. Even after the apparition, he kept up his career as the village rascal. . . . Maximin was given the chance to prepare for the priesthood, but he had no vocation for it. He could never concentrate on his studies and never found a career that he could perform, and evidently he took to drink, just as his father had done. . . . Melanie's story is even less edifying. She was sent to school, first at the nearby village of Corenc and later with the Sisters of Providence in Corps. . . . She went eventually to Darlington England, about as far away from LaSalette as she could get, and became a Carmelite postulant, but she didn't make the grade. She transferred to another convent in Marseilles [France], but she had no more vocation to the religious life than Maximin did. Well, she seems to have thought that she did, but nobody else agreed with her. She never came to terms with the self-effacement and obscurity that are integral parts of religious life and she never embraced obedience. She wandered up and down Europe, attracting a lot of the attention that she felt she deserved. She poured out a continuous torrent of abuse against any prelate who didn't treat her like a celebrity. She settled at Castellamare, near Naples, and in 1879 she published her Secret, or what she said was her Secret, in a book of her own that somehow got the Imprimatur from the local bishop but was condemned by Rome. It also consisted largely of personal vituperations against clerics. [*Apparitions* by Kevin Orlin Johnson, PhD ©1995]

In the first conference on LaSalette we showed the true and sinister reason why Maximin was rejected from the seminary, and there is ample testimony that Maximin did not at all follow the alcoholic path of his father. As for being the village rascal, the only story for evidence of his awful behavior was a boyhood prank with a church bell. But the innuendos against Melanie are on a different level, profoundly vicious, because the publication of her Secret was truly a reproach to the lives of the clergy, religious and political leaders. However, it becomes rather comical when authors can't deny Melanie's prophetic gifts, so they try to divert attention from the supernatural to criticize her for how she expressed her knowledge, as if that too wasn't an impulse of the Holy Spirit. For example, twenty years before the Prussians invaded France and besieged Paris precisely on the anniversary of LaSalette, the teenager scratched on her school desk one day "Prussians 1870." Was this really vandalism, or was it an enduring testimony carved in wood that people would read two decades later and realize that if Melanie prophesied correctly in this matter, then her other prophesies should be taken seriously? Likewise these LaSalette Fathers find fault with her habit of blotting out the word "Paris" whenever she came across it in a book or on a map. She was a country child not trained in good manners. It was the impulse of a person swatting a cockroach and it made a lasting impression on those around her. Paris is mentioned several times in the Secret.

Melanie is probably reproaching me from heaven right now, for talking about her and not about Mary's message. But the more credible the messenger, the more credible the message. What happened in the Darlington Carmel? In a pastoral letter to his clergy dated November 4, 1854, Bishop Ginoulhiac wrote: "Although surrounded, since the apparition, with every mark of special attention ... Melanie remained several years unaffected by such excesses of admiration. But would it not be surprising if she did not finally become imbued with attachment to her own ideas, which is one of the greatest dangers threatening souls favored with extraordinary graces? ... (A)lthough the Community spoke highly of her piety and zeal, we yet deemed it our duty to refuse her admission to the annual vows in order that she might be more efficaciously exercised in the practice of Christian humility and simplicity which are the necessary and surest preservatives against illusions in the religious life."

Archbishop Newsham, an English Roman Catholic priest, a prelate of his Holiness, had come on a pilgrimage to LaSalette. He dines with Bishop Ginoulhiac who asks him to take Melanie to England to "protect her humility."

Three days later (20th September 1854), Mlle. DesBrulais, quite beside herself, wrote to her friend of the new "event" of the day:

Within a few days, the shepherd-girl will be living in England! For how long? . . . This departure was so unexpected, so hurried, that I am utterly bewildered by it. It was only after the celebration (of the 8th anniversary of the apparition) that the poor child learned of the trip planned for her. At the time when she was about to leave LaSalette, yesterday

evening, Fr. Burnoud called her to him and acquainted her with the letter from Bishop Ginoulhiac which permitted Archbishop Newsham to take her . . . she said, she would have preferred to go back to her beloved community of Providence at Corenc, as she had requested on several occasions of her bishop.

The Archbishop takes her to the Carmelites in Darlington. They are eager to meet the visionary. How much French does Melanie understand? How many nuns speak French? Melanie knows no English. Melanie meets them in the parlor several times. At one point she falls into ecstasy. The nuns bring her inside. Even though she has no dowry they want her to stay. She is made a lay Sister since she can't master Latin and they can't really form her with a proper novitiate. She spends her time in deep prayer and practices extraordinary penances. We find this out at the end of her life when her confessor puts her under obedience to relate certain things. After a while Bishop Ginoulhiac says that if she returns to LaSalette he will excommunicate her. The nuns urge her to pronounce vows. She is willing, but not the vow of enclosure, since she must leave in 1858 to release the Secret. But when 1858 arrives the nuns spend a full year trying to convince her not to leave the enclosure. What went on here? Were they ignorant of the reservation about enclosure when she pronounced her solemn vows? Or did she reveal to them the Secret and ask them to publish it and then she would be free to remain a Carmelite? Did they fear it was too harsh? Did they fear public opinion, the loss of benefactors, the disfavor of bishops.? Did they want to lock up both Melanie and her message? Did they lack faith in this aspect of the apparition? Is Melanie too charitable to disclose what went on in that year that must have been a nightmare for her? In the end she wrote a letter to the bishop and threw it over the wall. A passerby delivered it. The bishop promptly arrived and said that Melanie was free to go.

But where will she go? No one in England was evidently prepared to help her publish the Secret. It's September 1860. Melanie is 29. She is welcomed as a free boarder at a convent in Marseilles with the Congregation of the Sisters of Compassion. She was asked to replace a Sister who was sick, and ended up teaching catechism to boarders and giving lessons to novices. She is asked to help out with one of their convents on an island between Greece and Italy which was undergoing a scandal. When she arrives she instantaneously speaks Italian with a perfect accent. An Italian bishop goes there to take lodging when his diocese was under siege by Masonic forces. He and Melanie become well-acquainted and he pledges to help her publish the secret as soon as they can get back to his diocese. She was to live seventeen years there from 1867-1884.

In 1867 Bishop Petagna went to Rome, and in the audiences he had with his Holiness Pius IX, he spoke to him of Melanie, and how she was in his diocese. The Holy Father told the Bishop that Melanie must not remain in a cloistered convent, that she remain free to accomplish her mission. She was given an entire floor of a spacious house. She had a "workroom" and a private chapel. Bishop Petagna provided her with a chaplain in the person of an Italian Redemptorist, Fr. Fusco. From there she wrote out the Secret and from Italy it was published to the world. Meanwhile the Bishop kept recommending Melanie to various convents of nuns in his diocese. She gave instructions and counsel, even reforming some convents.

In 1877, Pius IX named Abbot Zola, the bishop of Lecce, an important diocese in southern Italy and a "Marian" city where every church, under various titles, is dedicated to Our Lady. A great believer in mortification, he never slept in a bed, being content with a short nap in an armchair. A musician at heart, he took pleasure in standing in occasionally for the church organist. He would improvise tunes on his harmonium, as a means of giving voice to his mystical aspirations. A few hours before his death, he opened up his piano and started playing to celebrate the divine mercy! He died at Lecce on the 5th April 1898. The cause for his beatification has been put forward to Rome. The aging Bishop Petagna recommended him for Melanie's confessor. Bishop Zola never ceased to encourage her to fulfill her mission.

After the publication of the Secret, Pope Leo called Melanie to Rome and urged her to begin the Order of the Mother of God. It all proved impossible however due to the intrigues of the French bishops and the political instability of Europe. Melanie never felt called to be a foundress. She understood that the Order was meant for Latter Times, far in the future, after her death.

Melanie underwent many vicissitudes in trying to serve her dysfunctional family, to obtain a good death for her poor mother and to deal with various priests who wanted to help start the new Order. She was continually praised or vilified throughout Europe and was kept busy with correspondence. In February 1903, she was visiting France and told a lady how she

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An improved "chapter" version is in preparation for a book publication.

would die. "I shall die in Italy—in a place I do not know—where I don't know anybody—an almost savage place—but where people do not swear—and where they love the Good Lord—I shall be alone. One fine morning—they will see my shutters all closed—they will force open the door—and they will find me dead."

On July 13th 1904, she left France and arrived in Altamura on the feast of Mt. Carmel, at ten p.m. It was dark. Fr. Fusco had been unsure of the exact time of her arrival, and had not informed Bishop Cecchini, who was out of town. No one was present to meet her at the station. Quite exhausted, her [stigmatized] feet and hands badly swollen, Melanie painfully made her way alone up the long road to the town, looking in vain for a hotel.

Bishop Cecchini sent a dispatch recommending the greatest care to be taken of her. Priests and notable figures of the town came to visit her at the home of Signora Emilia Giannuzzi. At the end of August, she moved into a little house at the foot of Montecalvario (Mount Calvary). The rumors of the world still reached her ears. Her family had come to realize that the shepherdess of LaSalette could serve as bait for donations and gifts. One of her sisters was making prophecies in Melanie's name! But the touching piety of the inhabitants countered melancholy and filled her heart with a peaceful joy. Every morning she walked down to the Cathedral. But on the 15th December 1904 [five months after her arrival in Altamura] Melanie did not appear during the whole morning. Bishop Cecchini sent his manservant to her. The house was locked. The authorities were informed and came to break open the door. Melanie was dead, lying peacefully, fully clothed, on her bedroom floor.

Two citizens of Altamura were ready to swear on oath that they heard, from the bedroom of this pious French lady, when the evening Angelus rang on the 14th of December 1904, a heavenly chorus singing the melody of the Tantum Ergo, and the tinkling of a bell, as if Holy Communion was being brought to someone. It is probable that Melanie received Communion from Jesus Christ Himself.

Canon Annibale DiFrancia, recently canonized, delivered the eulogy of the Shepherdess of LaSalette in the Cathedral of Altamura on the first anniversary of her death, 14th December 1905. Melanie had stayed a year helping his young community of Sisters who claimed her as co-foundress. On the 19th of September 1918 they transferred her bones to a beautiful tomb in their new convent and orphanage. At Taormina, one of the orphan-girls was cured instantly of a stomach ulcer: Melanie appeared and touched her, "I am Melanie. I have come to cure you." The girl was cured immediately and the recovery was duly confirmed by the two doctors treating her.

Dear Melanie, pray for us!