

MELANIE OF LA SALETTE

From time to time, booklets circulate which claim to provide the 'full story' of Melanie Calvat, who lived 1831-1904. At other times, excerpts from the 'full story' are provided. These include the alleged words of Our Lady prophesying that Antichrist would rule in the Papacy, and most bishops and priests would go into apostasy. It is even said that the Cure of Ars accepted them.

Apart from undermining the authority of the Magisterium and the hierarchy, this 'prophecy' brings the true message of Our Lady of La Salette into dispute.

SO WHAT IS THE STORY OF MELANIE AND HER PROPHECIES ?

On 19th September 1846 fourteen years old Melanie, accompanied by eleven years old Maximin Giraud, were on a hillside near La Salette in France. On returning to their homes they said they had seen a 'Beautiful Lady' crying. 'The Lady' said her Son was offended by the way people were not keeping Sunday as a day of prayer and rest from work. He was also offended by the blasphemous misuse of his name. The Lady told them that, unless people changed their ways, there would be a great potato famine and the failure of the crops of nuts and grapes. Following this, she took a few steps and faded away.

The children had not met one another until two days previously and had been alone together for only few hours. Yet, although questioned separately about the minutest details of the vision, discrepancies could not be found in their stories. Pilgrims thronged to the site, and there were claims of spiritual and physical miracles.

At one time during the vision, Maximin saw 'The Lady' speaking to Melanie but could not hear the words. Melanie was repeatedly asked to divulge this 'secret', but said she was not free to do so.

Six years later on 19th September 1851, bishop Brouillare of Grenoble, after accepting the findings of his Commission, and following consultation with Rome, issued a Pastoral Letter recognizing the visit of the mother of Christ.

The Bishop and Maximin stated that once the Church had accepted the accounts of the apparition as true, the task of the children was complete. Maximin had become wearied by the constant questioning and was pleased when the enquiries came to end. He could then continue with his normal life. He died in 1875.

Melanie reacted to the events in a completely different manner. During the first years of the investigation, she boarded at a school in Corps run by the Sisters of Providence. In 1850 she became a postulant with this Order at Corenc close to Grenoble, and in October 1851 she took the veil.

While at Corenc she was known to sit down surrounded by enthralled listeners, as she related stories of her childhood. She told how she would lead wolves, foxes, snakes and other animals in procession through the woods chanting praises to God, with the wolf carrying the cross. Yet it was known that as a child she had been completely irreligious and woods did not exist on those mountains.

In May 1853, Bishop Brouillare died and the Abbe Ginoulhiac replaced him. In early 1854 Ginoulhiac refused to grant permission for her to be professed because she was not spiritually mature. Melanie was very angry and claimed that the real reason for the refusal was that Ginoulhiac was aiming to gain the favour of the emperor Napoleon.

Following the bishop's refusal to permit her to be professed, Melanie moved to the Sisters of Charity. This Order was dedicated to hard practical work in helping the poor, and Melanie met brisk common sense, not flattery or adulation. She was told: "the sisters had neither ecstasies, visions nor extraordinary temptations or spiritual disturbances. If they should have such troubles, they kept quiet about them."

When nobody at the convent believed her stories and claims, she became hysterical. She refused to eat for nearly two days, tried to bite the Reverend Mother and caused a crowd to gather outside the convent. After three weeks she returned to the school at Corps but, having been educated and taught cultivated manners, was not happy living with those of her original social class.

The emperor Napoleon was ruling France but royalists were working for the restoration of a king. This political controversy dominated conversation throughout France, with the Church trying to maintain neutrality. But the royalists claimed that Our Lady had mentioned the king to Maximin, although he denied this publicly. The bishop, aware of Melanie's instability, fervid imagination and royalist sympathies, was worried that she would become involved and thereby implicate the cult of Our Lady of La Salette in politics.

Melanie agreed to the suggestion of an English visiting priest that she move to the Carmel at Darlington in England, where she arrived in 1855. This removed her from the French political controversies, so the bishop was pleased.

While at Darlington she spoke of a variety of strange events and 'miracles'. Her bishop had forbidden her to utter any more prophecies. But on entering the convent she considered herself free of his jurisdiction. She wrote many letters claiming she was hearing voices. They told her of a forthcoming calamity which would rain down on the evil clergy of France. When informed that she did not have a vocation, she started to attack the convents. Soon afterwards, in 1860, she returned to France.

A sister Marie was appointed as her companion and soon afterwards they went to open an orphanage on the isle of Corfu. It was not a success, so they returned to Marseilles. Melanie asked to enter the local Carmel, but ten months later returned to the Sisters of Our Lady of Compassion. In October 1864 she was admitted as a novice on condition she kept her identity secret. In early 1867, after breaking her promise twice, she was dismissed. Melanie and Sister Maria then went to live in the Italian town of Castellammare under the protection of the local bishop, where she lived for 17 years.

Meanwhile, Religious Orders were being formed at La Salette, under the auspices of the local bishop. These were to provide for the pilgrims and spread the message of the vision. But Melanie claimed she had been authorized to provide the names of the Orders, their Rules and their habits. The one for men was to be entitled 'The Apostles of the Last Days'. When the bishop refused her demands, she appealed to the Pope and was granted an interview in December 1878. When the Pope did not accept her claim she came to see the clergy as plotting against her and hiding information from the Pope.

A year later she published a book which, not containing anything contrary to Faith or Morals, was granted an imprimatur by the bishop Zola of Lecce. But the book was an outlet for the frustration she felt towards the clergy who had refused to agree to her demands.

In the book she set down what she claimed was the full text of the secret delivered to her by Our Lady. For some years she had been writing to friends about her fantasies and prophecies. These included St. Michael succeeding St. Gabriel as governor of the world in 1908. This would take place as part of the tumultuous times prior to the end of the world. Henri Valois would be consecrated king of France by the Pope and as Emperor over Germany in the following year. She saw her guardian angel daily, received words from Our Lord and quoted from the works of Nostradamus. Over the years her letters, full of imaginings and rantings, were enough to fill three volumes.

In 1880 the Congregation of the Holy Office wrote to her local bishop asking him to forbid her to write anything similar in the future. Efforts were made to withdraw her book from circulation. Although she died in 1904, a new edition was published in 1922 and it was placed on the Index.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the rules regarding the discussion of visions have been relaxed and the Index abolished. Certain individuals, utilizing these decisions of the Council, have re-issued her book 'without comment'. Although this statement sounds unbiased, it is an attempt to confuse.

The Church accepted the short message of 1846. The same Church condemned the addition of 1873. To run together the original message with the bitter criticisms of the clergy Melanie uttered 32 years later, without making any distinction, shows a will to mislead. To quote passages such as: "Rome will lose the Faith and become the seat of the Antichrist", and then imply the Church in the 19th century approved of these words, is fraudulent.

Melanie accepted that the Pope was Christ's Vicar on earth, so in 1851 had agreed to send 'the secret' to Pius XI in a sealed envelope. The Pope disclosed to his aides at the time, that the message said that unless you repent you will all perish; that disasters threaten France, but the whole of Europe is guilty and deserve punishment.

While composing her letter she had ask how to spell 'corrupt cities' and 'Antichrist' and the meaning of 'infallible'. So even by 1851, her mind had started to look for ways to embellish the message. Apart from the word 'Antichrist', she did not include these words in her 1878 version

The people promoting Melanie's ant-clerical prophecies today are mainly to be found amongst those who left the Church following the Second Vatican Council. They claim that this Council was heretical. Some supporters of Melanie's phantasies even have their own 'pope'. They hope this book's talk of the Antichrist in Rome, and the collapse of goodness in the Church etc., will persuade people that Our Lady's alleged prophesy that Rome would go into error, has come to pass.

They hope their readers will not remember that the popes and bishops who condemned Melanie's rantings, and put her book on the Index, were pre-Vatican II Popes and pre-Vatican II Congregations. This was the Church, which they still hold to have been God's Church.

It is sometimes claimed that the Curé of Ars, Pius IX, Leo XIII and Pius X approved of Melanie's predictions. But the Curé of Ars and Pius IX were both dead before Melanie wrote her 1878 book. It was under Leo XIII that it was condemned; and his policy was continued under Pius X and his successors.

These Popes and the Curé approved of the original message only.

Those most vulnerable to this story are those unwilling to accept the non-doctrinal changes of Vatican II. Others have been scandalized by some clergy misusing the Council's decrees to propagate their own false ideas. Although disgruntled they have stayed within the Church, but the purveyors of Melanie's prophecy aim to encourage them to treat bishops as untrustworthy and to see the pope as disloyal to the desires of Christ and his mother.

The old imprimatur provides the publication with the appearance of being a sound Catholic book. But Catholics need to be careful not to be tricked into allowing it to be promoted under Catholic auspices.

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