

La Salette

*Apparition, Public Message,
and Contested Secrets*

The 1846 encounter, the Grenoble judgments,
the sealed manuscripts, and the ministry of reconciliation

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1 What the Church Judged—and What It Did Not

Governing thesis

La Salette is most securely received where its public message is most evangelical: return to God, honor the Lord's Day, cease profaning Christ's name, pray faithfully, do penance, receive material want as a summons to solidarity rather than as a weapon against sufferers, and carry the Gospel of reconciliation to all God's people. The positive Grenoble judgment concerns the reported 1846 event and authorized cult. It does not authenticate every later prophecy attributed to either witness, make Mélanie Calvat's expanded 1879 text part of the public message, or convert a private revelation into an article of faith.

La Salette is unusually vulnerable to category error. A single reported encounter produced a public discourse, two separately spoken private communications, many early witness records, sealed manuscripts five years later, later rewritings, a positive diocesan judgment, an authorized shrine and religious institute, several Roman restrictions on secret literature, and a worldwide spirituality of reconciliation. These are related realities. They are not one undifferentiated "apparition text."

2 Mountain, Crisis, Witnesses, and Sources

2.1 A local event in a continental subsistence crisis

La Salette-Fallavaux lay above Corps in the southern part of the Diocese of Grenoble, in the Isère Alps. The reported site on Mont Planeau was a high summer pasture, roughly 1,800 meters above sea level. The children were not on pilgrimage or at a devotional gathering. They were tending cattle for farming households near the hamlet of Les Ablandins.

The date, 19 September 1846, fell amid a severe European subsistence crisis. Potato disease, grain failure, rising prices, undernourishment, and insecurity were not images imported into a comfortable society; they belonged to the children's world. The Missionaries' documentary chronology dates the crisis from 1845 and describes the winter of 1846–1847 as famine across France and Europe. The exact local impact varied, and the catastrophe in Ireland must not be treated as interchangeable with conditions in the French Alps. Still, spoiled potatoes, wheat turning to dust, fear of next year's bread, walnuts, grapes, and children dying in famine were immediately intelligible rural realities.

France was still under the July Monarchy. The Revolution of 1848 had not yet occurred, though economic distress, social division, and political instability were building. Religious practice likewise cannot be reduced to a slogan. Catholic institutions and popular devotion were vigorous in many places; anticlericalism, religious indifference, irregular Sunday observance, and uneven catechesis were also real. The public message's complaints about Sunday labor, mockery of Mass, profanity, and Lenten abstinence belong to this concrete pastoral setting.

Historical context performs two necessary tasks and no more. It explains why the reported message used these images and why hearers responded intensely. It does not prove that the children fabricated them; neither does contextual fit prove supernatural origin. A private revelation, if genuine, is received through the language, material fears, and religious grammar of its time.

2.2 The two children

Pierre Maximin Giraud was eleven. Born at Corps in 1835, he had lost his mother as an infant, received little schooling or catechesis, and was energetic, distractible, and socially more outgoing than his companion. He was tending cattle for Pierre Selme. Françoise Mélanie Mathieu Calvat was fourteen, approaching fifteen. Born at Corps in 1831 into a large poor household, she had long been hired out for seasonal work, received little formal education, and was tending cattle for Jean-Baptiste Pra. Contemporary descriptions regularly present her as guarded and taciturn.

Both ordinarily spoke the local vernacular and possessed limited French. That matters because the reported speaker began in French, noticed their failure to understand the expression *pommes de terre*, and continued the crop warning in their local speech. Any polished French or English edition is therefore already a translation and an editorial

presentation. The children's reported words passed through vernacular retelling, a writer's French, later copies, and modern translation.

They were minors, poor laborers, and newly exposed to intense religious and public scrutiny. Those facts do not make their testimony either automatically pure or automatically worthless. They require child-sensitive historical reading. Repetitive interrogation can test consistency while also shaping vocabulary; admiration can reward elaboration; hostile questioning can produce defensiveness; separation can help test collusion but cannot recreate the event. The record must be evaluated, not romanticized.

Witness: Maximin and Mélanie are the only reported visual and auditory witnesses to the encounter. Each says the other could see the Lady's lips moving during a private communication but could not hear the words.

What it establishes: Their agreement and differences, examined across early separate interviews, are the direct human testimony to the event and public message.

What it cannot establish alone: No second observer independently saw or heard the Lady. Witness sincerity does not by itself determine the cause of an experience, and a positive global judgment does not confer verbal inerrancy.

2.3 The Pra relation: near the event, not the event itself

The first written account is dated Sunday, 20 September 1846. That evening Jean-Baptiste Pra, Mélanie's employer, worked with Pierre Selme and Jean Moussier to put the discourse into writing in Mélanie's presence; Maximin had returned to Corps. Its traditional title begins, "Letter dictated by the Blessed Virgin to two children on the mountain of La Salette-Fallavaux." The original has not survived. The text is known through a copy made by Abbé Lagier on 28 February 1847, which he certified as conforming to the original Pra had shown him. Earlier derivative documents agree with important features of it.

That chain gives the relation exceptional value without making it a stenogram. It is next-day testimony, but one child's account is being rendered by adults into French, then known through a later copy. Its awkwardness may preserve proximity; it is not proof that every word came directly from the reported speaker. Jean Stern gives it the first place in his chronological dossier and compares it with the rapidly multiplying early records.

Early documentation soon included the parish priest's and archpriest's reports, interrogations of each child, letters from clergy and lay visitors, reports about the site and claimed favors, and both favorable and hostile press. By October 1846 the existence of a separately spoken communication to each child was present in the dossier. The detailed public narrative became more polished as publications standardized it. The correct method is to identify a stable core and disclose later expansion, not to choose one late seamless text and label it "the transcript."

2.4 The critical dossier

Jean Stern, M.S., edited the principal modern chronological corpus in three volumes:

1. volume 1 covers September 1846 through early March 1847 and contains the first relations and initial reception;
2. volume 2 continues from late March 1847 through April 1849, including inquiries, pilgrimages, publications, and controversy; and
3. volume 3 covers 1 May 1849 through 4 November 1854, including the Curé d'Ars episode, the 1851 secret manuscripts and judgment, and Ginoulhiac's act.

The title *Documents authentiques* describes documentary provenance, not a claim that every allegation in every document is true. A hostile letter can be an authentic hostile letter; a witness deposition can authentically record what a person said while leaving the underlying fact disputed. Stern's chronological arrangement is especially important at La Salette because later polemic repeatedly moves a late text backward in time.

Official Shrine and Missionaries pages supply a living custodial narrative. They accurately preserve the event's public center and the continuing devotion. Their brief timelines are pastoral summaries, however, not substitutes for primary acts. In particular, a current Shrine page compresses Ginoulhiac's role into a "new inquiry" and attaches the familiar

shepherds-and-Church maxim to 1855. The primary sequence is more exact. His substantive formal *Instruction pastorale et Mandement* is dated 4 November 1854. A near-contemporary 1855 printed report says that, on the eve of the anniversary, he described the children's mission as completed and new instruments as taking up the work; his published anniversary allocution then sent the pilgrims themselves out as missionaries of reconciliation. The polished epigram is therefore used here as a later custodial synthesis of an attested pastoral theme, not as a stenographic juridical formula.

2.5 How the study handles disagreement

Three distinctions govern the narrative that follows:

1. **Early attestation and later fullness.** A detail found in the next-day relation has a different historical weight from one first printed decades later. Later testimony may still be true, but its date must travel with it.
2. **Content and cause.** A historian can establish that a discourse was reported, repeated, and judged credible without directly observing its transcendent cause. The bishop's office made the ecclesial judgment; historical criticism maps the human evidence.
3. **Public and personal speech.** The reported commission to communicate the public message is not a license to publish every private communication. A text's sensational interest cannot enlarge the object the bishop judged.

The sources sometimes vary in punctuation, exact wording, the order of minor narrative details, and Maximin's dating of his 1851 manuscript. This study publishes consequential variations and does not manufacture certainty from typographic uniformity. Modern translations are paraphrased except where a short phrase is needed to identify the received message. The underlying French and, where preserved, vernacular witnesses control.

3 The Reported Encounter and Its Public Message

3.1 The scene on 19 September 1846

On Saturday afternoon Maximin and Mélanie were with their cattle on Mont Planeau. In a shallow ravine near a small spring they reported a globe of intense light, "as though the sun had fallen" there. Within it they gradually perceived a woman seated on a stone, elbows on knees, face in her hands. She was weeping.

The figure stood and addressed them: "Come closer, my children; do not be afraid. I am here to tell you great news." They approached. The received description presents a tall woman in local mountain dress: long gown, apron, crossed shawl, and bonnet. A broad chain lay along the shawl; roses surrounded her head, clothing, and feet. A large crucifix hung at her breast. The children placed a hammer to the left of the corpus and pincers to the right. They repeatedly located the radiance in the crucifix, from which light enveloped the figure and themselves.

The witnesses initially called her the *Belle Dame*, the Beautiful Lady. The public speech refers to "my Son," and the children and adults soon identified her as the Virgin Mary; Bishop de Bruillard's act judges an apparition of the Blessed Virgin. The narrative should retain both levels. The reported figure did not supply a title such as "Our Lady of La Salette," "Reconciliatrix," or "Mother of Sorrows" during the encounter. Those are legitimate names of reception, not quotations from 19 September.

3.2 The public discourse in its reported order

The following map preserves every consequential element of the received public message while avoiding the fiction of an English verbatim transcript. The official Missionaries' narrative and the early documentary corpus control; translation and punctuation vary.

Movement	Reported content	Historical and theological boundary
Warning and intercession	If “my people” will not submit, the Lady says she will be forced to release her Son’s heavy arm; she has long pleaded for them, while they pay no heed.	Prophetic warning is conditional, not a deterministic sentence. Marian intercession is wholly dependent on Christ and cannot mean that Mary is more merciful than he.
The seventh day	Six days were given for work and the seventh retained; refusal to honor it weighs upon the Son’s arm.	The grammar voices God’s command through the reported speaker. Mary is not creator of the week or legislator apart from God.
The holy Name	Cart drivers swear while inserting the Son’s name; this joins Sunday neglect as the two named offenses that make the arm heavy.	The target is profanity and practical contempt, not a magical taboo or contempt for working people.
Spoiled crops	The ruined harvest is linked rhetorically to the people’s conduct. A prior warning through spoiled potatoes was ignored and answered with curses; the potatoes will continue to fail and may be gone by Christmas.	The warning speaks into actual blight and hunger. It cannot authorize blaming an individual victim for illness, poverty, or disaster.
Change of language	When the children do not understand <i>pommes de terre</i> , the Lady asks whether they understand and continues in their local speech.	This is a central witness-memory and evidence of linguistic mediation; polished translations remain translations.
Famine images	Seed will be eaten by vermin; surviving grain will become dust at threshing; a great famine approaches. Young children are described trembling and dying in caregivers’ arms; others undergo penance through want; walnuts become worm-eaten and grapes rot.	These are the message’s hardest images. They are warning and lament, never permission to call dying children guilty or to romanticize famine.
Two unheard communications	The Lady speaks privately first to Maximin and then to Mélanie; each reports not hearing what was said to the other.	The narrative itself marks a corpus boundary. The public commission does not automatically cover these words.
Conditional restoration	If the people are converted, rocks and stones will become heaps of wheat and potatoes will appear abundantly in the fields.	Prophetic hyperbole expresses mercy and renewed fruitfulness; it is not an agricultural formula or a dated prediction.
Daily prayer	Asked whether they pray well, the children answer, in substance, hardly ever. They are told to pray morning and evening, at least an Our Father and Hail Mary when unable to do more, and more when able.	The witnesses are included among those needing conversion. The request commends existing Christian prayer; it institutes no esoteric rite.
Mass and Lent	In summer only a few older women attend Mass while others work on Sundays; in winter some young people attend merely to mock religion; in Lent people frequent the butcher shops.	This reflects nineteenth-century Latin discipline and local complaint. Present observance is governed by the Church’s current law and pastoral judgment.

Movement	Reported content	Historical and theological boundary
The Coin memory	Asked whether they have seen spoiled wheat, both initially say no. The Lady reminds Maximin of visiting Coin with his father: ears crumbled to dust, and on the return his father gave him bread while wondering who would have any the next year. Maximin then remembers.	An intimate memory links the warning to family fear. It is reported recognition, not independent proof of the speaker's identity.
Commission	Returning to French, the Lady twice directs the children to make the message known to all her people.	This repeated mandate identifies the public corpus and the children's limited public mission. It does not command publication of every later text.

The sequence is theologically important. Judgment is not the final word. Conversion opens into abundance; accusation becomes instruction in prayer; public failure is brought into one child's memory of bread received from his father; and the message ends in mission. The same children who admit they scarcely pray are entrusted with communicating a call to prayer. The message is not flattery of visionaries.

3.3 The departure

After repeating the commission, the Lady reportedly crossed the stream and climbed the nearby rise. The children followed. She rose above the ground, looked upward and downward, and progressively disappeared into light. The received account says the figure "melted into light," after which the light itself vanished.

The children brought the cattle back to Les Ablandins and told their employers. Maximin spoke first to Pierre Selme and then at Pra's household; Mélanie, initially silent while working, joined the retelling. Adults concluded that the Beautiful Lady was the Blessed Virgin and urged them to tell the parish priest. The next evening's written relation began the documentary trail.

No physical object was reportedly handed to the children. The message did not request a chapel, institute a new sacramental, name a religious order, reveal a dogma, set out a geopolitical program, or command the publication of a long apocalypse. A shrine and mission later became ecclesial responses; they should not be inserted into the spoken corpus as if dictated on the mountain.

3.4 What is stable across the early dossier

The early records support a remarkably recognizable core: two children in a mountain pasture; a luminous weeping woman; an invitation without fear; a discourse about the Son's arm, Sunday, profanity, spoiled potatoes and wheat, famine, prayer, Mass, Lent, and Coin; a separate private communication to each; conditional abundance; and a twice-repeated public commission. Not every clause appears with identical spelling or sequence in every document. The switch into the local language is remembered and helps explain differing French versions.

Three cautions follow:

1. **Completeness is analytical, not stenographic.** The map above accounts for the received public discourse; it does not claim that a modern edition reproduces acoustic data from 1846.
2. **Prediction must remain conditional.** The message uses the biblical grammar of warning—"if" refusal continues and "if" conversion occurs. It is not fatalist forecasting.
3. **The public message has an internal boundary.** At the point where one child's hearing ceases, the historian's public corpus also changes. Later knowledge of a manuscript cannot remove that original distinction.

Witness: The Pra relation and other near-event records, compared in Stern's volume 1.

What it establishes: They establish that the main public themes, a language switch, two separate communications, and the final commission were being reported close to the event.

What it cannot establish alone: They do not make the surviving Lagier copy an autograph, prove that every later polished clause was present in exactly that form, or decide supernatural causation without the competent ecclesial judgment.

4 Investigation, Judgment, and Ecclesial Mission

4.1 From rapid publicity to structured inquiry

News traveled immediately from Les Ablandins to La Salette, Corps, Grenoble, and beyond. Pilgrims reached the mountain; newspapers and pamphlets multiplied; reported cures and favors were collected; critics proposed fraud, confusion, imitation, or clerical manipulation. Rapid publicity was itself ambiguous. It furnished many witnesses to what the children were saying and how the place was received, but it also surrounded minors with suggestion, partisanship, money, and expectation.

Bishop de Bruillard did not issue an immediate public authentication. Diocesan clergy gathered relations and questioned the children. In 1847 Canon Pierre-Joseph Rousselot and seminary superior Jacques-Philippe Orcel investigated; materials favorable and adverse were considered. Eight conferences of discernment met at the Grenoble bishopric in November and December 1847. The Missionaries' chronology estimates at least 30,000 pilgrims on the mountain for the first anniversary. Large attendance demonstrated extraordinary reception, not the event's supernatural cause.

The inquiry evaluated the children's agreement, the early relations, the content's relation to faith and morals, objections, circumstances of the place, and claimed fruits and prodigies. Nineteenth-century categories and procedures should not be rewritten as a contemporary DDF process. Nor should they be dismissed because they were not a modern laboratory. The competent ordinary made a pastoral and ecclesial judgment from testimony available to him.

4.2 The act of 19 September 1851

De Bruillard waited five years before issuing the act whose Article 1 is quoted in the opening section. Its three operative movements must remain together:

1. the reported apparition of 19 September 1846 is judged to bear the characteristics of truth, and the faithful are said to have grounds to believe it indubitable and certain;
2. spontaneous pilgrimage and numerous reported prodigies are invoked as an added degree of human certainty; and
3. the cult of Our Lady of La Salette is authorized, with permission to preach it and draw practical and moral consequences.

The bishop identifies the object by date, place, and the two shepherds. This gives the act real event-level scope. At the same time, the formula is global rather than a critical edition of every word. It does not list an approved secret, certify a translation, or make each later recollection irreformable. Article 2's appeal to prodigies likewise does not make every cure-story in the dossier an ecclesially recognized miracle. Article 4 forbids publication of any particular prayer formula, hymn, or devotional book without de Bruillard's written approval. Article 7 recognizes the apparition's principal evangelical purpose and its call back to the duties of religion. Those articles govern reception and identify a received public center; they do not canonize a critical transcript.

The two children wrote their private communications in July 1851, and the sealed texts were delivered to Pius IX before the September act. Temporal proximity has sometimes been used to claim that the secrets supplied the hidden ground for approval. The documentary chronology points the other way. De Bruillard's favorable conviction had emerged from the completed 1847 discernment conferences, years before the sealed texts. The act itself identifies the

public event, testimony, concourse, and prodigies; it does not cite the secret manuscripts as its reason. Delivery to Rome is a fact of custody, not an unpublished papal supernatural-origin decree.

4.3 The foundation act of 1852

In a pastoral letter and mandement dated 1 May 1852, de Bruillard announced a church and lodging for pilgrims on the mountain. The cornerstone was laid on 25 May. More important than buildings, he wrote, were ministers who would preach God's word, exercise the ministry of reconciliation, administer the Eucharist, and serve pilgrims. He established diocesan Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette for that work.

This act gives institutional form to the reception of 1851. It establishes neither a second apparition nor a newly enlarged message. The shrine and missionaries are the Church's response to a judged event: word, sacrament, hospitality, and reconciliation. Their authority comes through ecclesial foundation, not through a secret instruction allegedly hidden in the 1846 discourse.

4.4 Ginoulhiac's 4 November 1854 act

Jacques-Marie-Achille Ginoulhiac succeeded de Bruillard at Grenoble. Opposition had not ended. Abbé Jacques-Joseph Déléon published *Affaire de La Salette: Mémoire au Pape*, attacking the process, persons, and devotion. Ginoulhiac answered with the forty-seven-page *Instruction pastorale et Mandement de Mgr l'évêque de Grenoble, portant condamnation du livre intitulé: Affaire de La Salette, Mémoire au Pape, etc.*, dated 4 November 1854.

This is the substantive second diocesan act. It condemns the book as injurious to the Holy See, the previous bishop, respected diocesan priests, and a devotion legitimately established and authorized. It reaffirms the foundations of the 1851 decision while answering objections in detail. It also supplies a durable critical principle: the event is not proved principally by whatever later moral profile the children may exhibit, and later denial or instability would not retroactively alter what happened in 1846.

Ginoulhiac sharply separates the event from later predictions assigned to Mélanie. He says such predictions and the meanings imposed on them have no foundation, are without importance in relation to the fact of La Salette, are certainly posterior, and have no connection with it. The exact target belongs to the polemical dossier of 1854; the principle reaches further. A later seer's expansion does not inherit the event judgment by association.

Witness: Ginoulhiac's *Instruction pastorale et Mandement*, Grenoble, 4 November 1854.

What it establishes: It formally defends the legitimately established devotion and predecessor's judgment, condemns Déléon's published attack, and distinguishes the 1846 fact from posterior predictions.

What it cannot establish alone: It is not an act dated 1855, not a new apparition, not an authentication of later secret texts, and not evidence that a witness's subsequent life is irrelevant to every prudential question.

4.5 The 1855 maxim in its documentary setting

The familiar synthesis—"the shepherds' mission is finished; the Church's begins"—belongs to La Salette's custodial tradition, but its exact polished French should not be passed off as a stenographic quotation. A third-edition pilgrimage journal printed in 1855 reports that, on the eve of the anniversary, Ginoulhiac said the two children's mission was completed and that God had substituted new instruments to make the event known. Its "Souvenir" of his 19 September allocution then records him sending the pilgrims down from the mountain as missionaries of Mary Reconciliatrix. The Shrine preserves the shorter epigram today. Together these sources establish the pastoral substance, while leaving the maxim's exact textual formation open.

The force is pastoral: the message no longer belongs to the children's personal control or to partisan entrepreneurs. The Church receives what she has judged, interprets it by the Gospel, celebrates the sacraments, and protects the faithful from accretions. Some modern summaries describe an 1855 "new inquiry" that confirmed de Bruillard. That compression conflates the formal 1854 act with the anniversary preaching. The distinction identifies which text actually answers objections and prevents a later epigram from being treated as a nonexistent dispositive formula.

4.6 Objects of the principal acts

Date and authority	Act	Affirmed or regulated object	What it does not do
19 Sept. 1851, Bishop de Bruillard	Diocesan mandement, especially arts. 1–4 and 7	Positive legacy event judgment; supporting human testimony; cult and preaching authorized; prayer, hymn, and devotional-book texts require de Bruillard’s written approval	No modern <i>Nihil obstat</i> ; no inerrant transcript; no approval of later secrets.
1 May 1852, de Bruillard	Pastoral letter and mandement	Shrine, pilgrim service, diocesan missionaries, reconciliation ministry	Does not enlarge the reported 1846 speech or create another event judgment.
4 Nov. 1854, Bishop Ginoulhiac	<i>Instruction pastorale et Mandement</i>	Condemnation of Déléon’s book; defense of prior judgment and authorized devotion; separation of posterior predictions	Not an 1855 act and not an approval of Mélanie’s later apocalyptic corpus.
18–19 Sept. 1855, Ginoulhiac	Near-contemporary report and anniversary allocution	Pastoral transfer from the children’s finite mission to the Church’s ministry and the pilgrims’ mission	Not a new canonical inquiry, operative decree, reclassification, or verbatim source for the later polished epigram.
17/19 May 2024, DDF	Current discernment norms and presentation	Current six-category process; historical explanation of older formulas, explicitly including La Salette	No retroactive change to the date, words, authority, or bounded object of the 1851 act.

4.7 The current status

Under the norms effective 19 May 2024, the ordinary process ordinarily concludes with one of six prudential determinations, the most favorable being *Nihil obstat*; it does not ordinarily declare supernatural origin. La Salette is a legacy case. No located DDF act has converted the 1851 formula into one of the six current categories or superseded it. The current Diocese of Grenoble–Vienne and Shrine continue to present the event and its public message positively.

The resulting statement is exact but deliberately modest: the 1851 diocesan positive judgment and authorized cult remain the controlling legacy reception of the 19 September 1846 event. Current doctrine confirms freedom of assent and the subordination of private revelation. Later Roman restrictions concern secret discourse and specified books. They must be added to the dossier, not used to erase or inflate the event judgment.

5 Symbols and Theology under the Rule of the Gospel

5.1 The crucifix is the source of light

The most important visual claim is not the mountain, clothing, tears, roses, or instruments. The children say the light radiated from the crucifix on the Lady’s breast. The reported apparition is therefore iconographically Christocentric before any interpretation begins. Mary is visible in light received from the crucified Christ. Her speech points to “my Son”; her mission is intelligible only within his Paschal mystery.

This accords with Catholic doctrine. Christ is the one Mediator and Redeemer (1 Tim 2:5–6). Mary’s cooperation is created, graced, maternal, and wholly dependent on him (LG 56, 60–62; CCC 970). She neither adds saving merit to an insufficient Cross nor controls access to an unwilling Savior. The DDF’s 2025 *Mater Populi Fidelis* insists that Marian language must preserve this order. Any reading of La Salette that leaves Christ at the edge while turning Mary into an autonomous ruler has inverted the reported sign.

5.2 The Son's arm and the mercy of the Judge

The “heavy arm” is La Salette’s most theologically dangerous image when detached from Scripture. Biblical “arm” language can signify divine power to save, govern, and judge: the Lord brings Israel out with an outstretched arm; Isaiah sings of the Lord’s holy arm; Mary’s Magnificat praises the strength of God’s arm. It is not anatomical information about the risen Christ.

The reported sentence combines judgment and intercession. Persistent contempt for God and neighbor has consequences; grace does not declare evil unreal. Yet Mary cannot be cast as the compassionate party restraining a cruel Son. The Son whose judgment is serious is the same Son who became flesh, wept, forgave enemies, bore sin, and gave himself for the world. His “arm” is not only the power before which sin is exposed; it is the strength by which the sinner is rescued.

John Paul II’s 1996 letter for the 150th anniversary reads the message as hope. He interprets Christ’s arm through mercy: it does not condemn those who walk humbly and reaches toward the sinner. He describes Mary’s prayer as continual intercession that brings her children toward the Son. This papal reception does not rewrite the historical words; it establishes the Catholic theological horizon in which they may safely be preached.

Interpretive key: No rivalry within divine mercy

Mary does not persuade Christ to become merciful. Her intercession is itself a fruit and instrument of the triune God’s mercy. The Son freely wills his Mother’s prayer and the communion of saints; she freely participates in his one mediation. “Holding the arm” can express the urgency of maternal intercession, never a contest between a tender Mother and a vindictive Redeemer.

5.3 The tears

The figure is seated, face in hands, and reportedly weeps throughout the discourse. Tears place warning inside lament. Scripture permits this grammar: prophets mourn the people; Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and at Lazarus’s tomb; Paul writes with tears. Sorrow does not deny hope. It reveals that sin wounds communion and that warning can be an act of love.

Devotion may call Mary the Weeping Mother or recall her compassion at the Cross. It should not construct a physiology of heavenly grief or imply that the glorified Mother of God lacks beatitude. The vision is symbolic mediation. Its tears translate maternal compassion into a form the children and Church can contemplate. Nor are they emotional leverage: fear or guilt that isolates a person from Christ is not their proper fruit. Their authentic fruit is compunction joined to hope and mercy toward other sufferers.

5.4 Hammer, pincers, chain, and roses

The children described a hammer and pincers beside the corpus. They did not report the Lady explaining them. Later iconography often reads the hammer as sin driving the nails and the pincers as repentance, reparation, or charity removing them. That is a coherent devotional contrast, provided it is labeled as interpretation rather than reported speech. No creature literally repeats Calvary, and Christian reparation does not complete a deficient sacrifice. The faithful allow Christ’s once-for-all gift to bear fruit by turning from what wounds his members and by repairing harms they have caused.

The heavy chain and garlands of roses admit several spiritual readings. A chain can suggest bondage to sin, solidarity with labor, or the weight of suffering; roses can suggest grace, beauty, prayer, and the life that surrounds the Cross. The local dress makes the figure near to Alpine working people. None of these meanings was verbally assigned in the early public message. Their theological value depends on conformity to Scripture and the Church, not imaginative certainty.

Reported sign	Responsible theological reading	Overclaim to reject
Light from the crucifix	Christ's Cross and Resurrection are the source and center; Mary shines by received grace.	Mary as an independent source of salvation or revelation.
Tears	Maternal compassion, prophetic lament, and a call to compunction.	Manipulative terror or a claim that heavenly beatitude is defective.
Arm	Divine power, the seriousness of sin, judgment ordered to conversion, and saving strength.	Mary protecting humanity from a Son or Father less merciful than she.
Hammer and pincers	Later devotional contrast between sin and grace-enabled repentance or repair.	A divinely dictated symbol-key or human works completing Calvary.
Chain and roses	Bounded typology of bondage, solidarity, beauty, prayer, and grace around the Cross.	One mandatory decoding or proof of a later devotion not named in 1846.
Mountain and ascent	Biblical place of encounter and an image of transcendence and mission.	Geography as supernatural proof or pilgrimage as a condition of salvation.

5.5 Sunday: gift before obligation

The reported complaint about six days and the seventh echoes the Decalogue (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15). Because the speaker is Mary, “I gave you six days” must be read as prophetic representation of God’s claim, not a declaration that Mary created time or promulgates divine law on her own authority. Biblical messengers frequently voice God’s word in the first person. The Church’s law and doctrine, not a private revelation, establish the obligation.

For Christians the Lord’s Day is the weekly Pasch: the day of the Resurrection, the Eucharistic assembly, worship, joy, rest, family, and works of mercy. La Salette’s complaint is not merely about a breached attendance rule. It exposes a life in which production crowds out worship, the sacred Name becomes verbal debris, and Mass becomes spectacle. Conversion restores relationship.

The warning cannot be used against those compelled by poverty, care, essential services, illness, disability, persecution, or absence of accessible ministry. Catholic teaching itself recognizes necessary family and social service. Employers, consumers, and communities share responsibility for conditions that prevent rest. A La Salette spirituality of Sunday asks not only “Did you work?” but also “Whose labor makes my leisure possible, and do the poor receive rest?”

5.6 The holy Name, Mass, and Lent

The second named offense is profaning Christ’s name. This belongs to the command not to take the Lord’s name in vain and to the New Testament discipline of truthful speech (Mt 5:33–37; Jas 5:12). The message names cart drivers because their oaths were concrete and audible, not because one occupation is uniquely sinful. Modern application includes casual blasphemy, religious speech used to threaten, false oaths, and invocation of God to sanctify hatred or deceit.

The complaints about Mass and Lent reveal practical unbelief. Going to church merely to mock, or treating penitential discipline with contempt, disconnects culture from conversion. Yet private revelation cannot freeze 1846 French discipline. The faithful follow the Church’s present calendar, precepts, fasting and abstinence law, legitimate dispensations, and pastoral care. A sick person, child, pregnant person, laborer, or person with an eating disorder must never be coerced into harmful fasting by appeal to La Salette.

5.7 Famine, judgment, and the innocent sufferer

The crop and famine passages can be read irresponsibly in two opposite ways. One can remove moral agency entirely and hear only primitive meteorology. Or one can assert that every blight, illness, or dead child is a direct penalty for identifiable personal sins. Scripture permits neither simplification.

Biblical covenant and prophetic texts connect communal injustice and idolatry with the unraveling of life. Human conduct truly can worsen hunger: hoarding, exploitation, war, neglect, unjust land arrangements, disregard for creation, and indifference to the poor have material effects. A community's spiritual disorder can become social and ecological disorder. La Salette's agricultural language preserves that moral seriousness.

Jesus, however, refuses the inference that particular sufferers are necessarily worse sinners (Lk 13:1–5), and he rejects the attempt to assign a man's blindness to his or his parents' sin (Jn 9:1–3). Job dismantles easy retribution. The child trembling in a caregiver's arms is first a neighbor to protect, feed, mourn, and love—never an exhibit in someone else's moral argument. The reported tears stand over the famine warning and forbid cold blame.

The message's "if converted" turn also places prophecy in the biblical field of conditional appeal (Jer 18:7–10; Jonah). Its aim is not to satisfy curiosity about a fixed future but to change the present. Failure to map every image to a later statistic is not failure of faith. Conversion, providence, weather, human freedom, and economic systems cannot be reduced to a private-revelation equation.

5.8 Prayer small enough to begin

When asked whether they pray, the chosen witnesses admit that they scarcely do. The prescribed minimum—an Our Father and Hail Mary morning and evening when they cannot do better—is pastorally gentle. The message does not require immediate spiritual virtuosity. It gives a beginning that a child can remember.

The Our Father orders desire to God's Name, Kingdom, will, daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from evil. In the context of La Salette, "daily bread" is not metaphor only. The Hail Mary joins Scripture's greeting to a request for intercession now and at death. More prayer is encouraged when possible, but quantity is not a currency that purchases immunity from suffering (CCC 2111). Prayer opens the person to grace, truth, endurance, and love.

5.9 Reconciliation as the mature synthesis

The title "Reconciliatrix" was not spoken in the encounter, but it became a recognized devotional synthesis. The Holy Office's 1915 decree expressly preserved devotion to the Blessed Virgin under the title commonly called Reconciliatrix of La Salette even while prohibiting discussion of the secret. The Missionaries define their charism as service of Christ and the Church in the mystery of reconciliation.

The title must be governed by 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 and Colossians 1:19–20: God reconciles the world to himself in Christ and entrusts the ministry of reconciliation to the Church. Mary participates as the Mother whose *fiat* receives the Redeemer, whose intercession is maternal and subordinate, and whose reported message sends sinners back to her Son. She is not a second author of the Atonement.

Reconciliation is therefore more demanding than sentiment. It includes confession and absolution where appropriate, restitution, truth-telling, repair of scandal, forgiveness that does not deny justice, food for the hungry, protection of children, Sabbath rest for workers, and reunion with the Eucharistic body of Christ. It never requires a victim to return to danger, suppress evidence, forgo safeguarding, or call abuse peace. The Cross exposes evil as it forgives sinners.

Interpretive key: The public message has no apocalypse to decode

Its urgency is already complete without the later secret literature: worship God, reverence Christ's Name, pray, repent, honor Sunday, take hunger seriously, and communicate hope. The public message gives conditions and practices, not a calendar of popes, nations, Antichrist, or the end of the world. Those themes belong to separately dated texts and must be judged there.

6 The Secret Corpus: Two Witnesses, Several Texts

6.1 A boundary inside the encounter

The narrative marks the transition plainly. The public crop warning pauses; the Lady speaks to Maximin while Mélanie sees her lips move but hears nothing, then to Mélanie while Maximin does not hear. Public speech resumes with conditional abundance and prayer. Whatever one concludes about the communications, they are individually received and acoustically private within the witnesses' own account.

The early dossier attests that each child claimed such a communication and guarded it from ordinary questioners. It did not initially supply the wording. For nearly five years, therefore, the ecclesial inquiry could examine the event and public message without possessing a public secret text. This fact alone prevents the later apocalypse from being treated as the hidden original center of the 1846 preaching.

6.2 The sealed writings of July 1851

In July 1851 the children agreed to write separately for Pius IX. Maximin wrote at the episcopal residence under adult observation; the surviving clean text is dated Grenoble, 3 July. Some chronologies call the procedure 2 July because an earlier draft or session began then. The displayed manuscript date controls this study, while the one-day discrepancy remains recorded. Mélanie first wrote at Corenc and then rewrote at Grenoble to clarify that two predicted city disasters were successive; her extant text is dated 6 July.

The writings were placed in separate sealed envelopes. Canons Jean-Baptiste Gérin and Pierre-Joseph Rousselot delivered the episcopal letter and the children's packets to Pius IX on 18 July 1851. Later recollections describe the pope reading and reacting to them. No dispositive papal act authenticating their divine origin has been located. A pope's receipt, reading, or archival preservation is not equivalent to approval.

The manuscripts later became difficult for scholars to locate. Michel Corteville found the early texts in the historical Holy Office archive in 1999; he and René Laurentin published facsimiles and transcriptions in *Découverte du secret de La Salette* (2002). That discovery establishes a major primary-source fact: the short 1851 documents can be compared with later versions. The book is scholarship, not an official DDF critical edition or doctrinal judgment.

Witness: The 1851 manuscript facsimiles and transcriptions published by René Laurentin and Michel Corteville, compared with public facsimile reproductions.

What it establishes: They establish what the children separately wrote for Pius IX in July 1851, including their divergent content, handwriting, dates, and closing requests for a blessing.

What it cannot establish alone: They do not establish that every sentence was spoken by Mary, that Pius IX approved the predictions, or that a much later text is identical merely because the same witness signed it. The project did not independently inspect the archival originals.

6.3 Maximin's 1851 text

Maximin begins with an unexpectedly careful distinction. He says that on 19 September 1846 they saw a Beautiful Lady, that they had not themselves originally said she was the Blessed Virgin, and that he now believes she was. He then introduces what the Lady allegedly told him. The content can be mapped completely:

1. fulfillment will come sooner if the people persist and somewhat later if they change;
2. France has corrupted the world and will be punished; religious faith will become nearly extinguished there, with most not practicing and the remainder practicing badly;
3. afterward nations will convert and faith revive;
4. a large northern European country then Protestant will convert and help lead other countries to conversion;
5. before this, great disturbances will occur in the Church and elsewhere; the pope will be persecuted, and an unexpected pontiff will succeed him;

6. a great peace will come but not last, because a “monster” will disturb it;
7. all this is placed in the following century, no later than the year 2000; and
8. a parenthetical note says the Lady told him to disclose it some time beforehand; he asks the pope’s blessing.

This is not the public message and not the familiar 1879 apocalypse. It does not contain the sentence about Rome losing the faith, a corrupt-priest opening, a rule for an order, 1864 and 1865 demon chronologies, Enoch and Elijah, or a detailed biography of Antichrist.

The terminal date has passed. A northern Protestant country’s conversion leading all nations, a universally recognizable sequence, and the final “monster” have not received a competent ecclesial identification. Broad parallels to wars, secularization, conversions, persecuted popes, or short peaces are too elastic to demonstrate fulfillment. The initial condition may affect timing, but a condition cannot become permission to reinterpret any outcome indefinitely. The intellectually honest conclusion is that the prediction, read in its ordinary chronological sense, is not transparently fulfilled. This limits confidence in the private text; it does not retroactively erase the separate public event judgment.

6.4 Mélanie’s 1851 text

Mélanie’s two-page text begins with a command not to tell anyone and with an explicitly conditional warning: if, after the public message, people do not convert, do penance, cease Sunday work, and stop blaspheming God’s Name, divine anger will be manifested. Its complete content is:

1. Paris will perish and Marseille will soon be destroyed amid widespread disorder and impious passions;
2. the pope will be persecuted and shot at, but attempts to kill him will fail and he will triumph “this time”;
3. priests, women religious, and faithful servants of Christ will be persecuted, and some will die for the faith;
4. famine will occur at the same time;
5. afterward many will recognize God’s hand, convert, and do penance;
6. a great king will reign for several years; religion and abundance will flourish, after which prosperity will lead again to disorder;
7. some ministers of God and spouses of Christ will fall into disorder;
8. an infernal period follows, with Antichrist born from a woman religious and deceiving many by claiming a heavenly origin;
9. not “twice fifty years” will pass; and
10. Mélanie must say nothing further until told, and asks the pope’s blessing.

The date language has also passed in its ordinary sense. The opening is conditional, so one must not isolate its threats from the possibility of repentance. Yet neither conditionality nor symbolic apocalyptic language authorizes arbitrary claim-matching. Paris and Marseille did not undergo the plainly described annihilation within one hundred years; no competent act has identified the predicted great king, Antichrist, or sequence. A pope’s survival of an attack can recall one line, but resemblance does not authenticate the entire text, and no located Holy See act applies the manuscript to a specific pope.

The 1851 wording about clergy is balanced: priests and religious are persecuted and some die for Christ, while some fall into disorder. It does not open by condemning priests as a class. That difference becomes decisive when comparing 1879.

6.5 The 1878 manuscript and 1879 Lecce publication

More than twenty-seven years later Mélanie prepared a long retrospective narrative at Castellammare, dated 21 November 1878. It was published at Lecce in 1879 as *L'Apparition de la Très Sainte Vierge sur la montagne de La Salette le samedi 19 septembre 1846*, with local printing permission dated 15 November 1879 associated with Salvatore Luigi Zola, Bishop of Lecce. The booklet embeds the expanded secret inside a full first-person apparition narrative, then claims that a rule for a new religious order was given before the public discourse resumed.

The local imprimatur means that permission to print was given under the discipline and judgment then applied. It does not mean that the Bishop of Lecce became competent to enlarge Grenoble's 1851 event judgment, that the Holy See authenticated the speech, or that historical predictions became revealed doctrine. Later Roman actions must be read alongside the imprimatur.

The expanded secret is not merely a stylistic copy of the 1851 document. It begins by saying the material may be published in 1858—a release date absent from the July 1851 manuscript—and contains extensive new matter:

- a sweeping and graphic indictment of priests for corrupt life, money, honors, pleasure, and irreverent celebration;
- warnings to Pius IX, Napoleon, Italy, and rulers, with specified political and ecclesial conflicts;
- dates such as 1859, 1864, and 1865, and a sequence extending for decades;
- demonic wonders, false resurrections, religious houses losing faith, and ecclesiastical crisis;
- international wars, destruction of Paris and Marseille, earthquakes, slaughter, a short era of peace, and ten kings;
- an elaborate parentage and childhood of Antichrist, cosmic disruptions, Enoch and Elijah, and final purification;
- the statements that Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of Antichrist, and that the Church will be eclipsed;
- an appeal to “apostles of the last times”; and
- the assertion that a rule for a new order was separately dictated.

Many themes have loose analogues in the 1851 text: persecution, clerical disorder, famine, a ruler, relapse after prosperity, and Antichrist. Continuity of motif is not identity of document. The scale, tone, chronology, political names, ecclesial accusations, and new-order claim are materially different. The famous Rome sentence belongs to this expanded layer; it must never be quoted as if it were in the public message or the sealed 1851 manuscript.

Several date-specific claims had already become difficult by publication. The asserted release year 1858 had passed; the warnings attached to 1859, 1864, and 1865 were being narrated retrospectively; and later editions and marginal additions introduced further textual questions. Apologists sometimes turn precise dates into indefinitely symbolic eras, while critics sometimes attribute every later printed word to conscious fraud. The evidence warrants a narrower conclusion: this is a late, expanded, unstable private-revelation text outside the positive judgment's bounded object and subject to competent disciplinary caution.

6.6 Four documents that must not be collapsed

Corpus item	Date and witness	Distinctive content	Status boundary
Public message	19 Sept. 1846; two witnesses; early written core from 20 Sept.	Son's arm, Sunday, Name, crops, famine, prayer, Mass, Lent, Coin, conversion, mission	Within the event judged in 1851 at the level of a global message; no secret timetable.
Maximin manuscript	3 July 1851; sealed for Pius IX	France, northern Protestant country, pope and successor, short peace, monster, deadline by 2000	Authenticated as a historical manuscript, not as divine prophecy; not included in public commission.

Corpus item	Date and witness	Distinctive content	Status boundary
Mélanie manuscript	6 July 1851; sealed for Pius IX	Conditional disasters, persecuted pope and faithful, famine, king, relapse, some clerical disorder, Antichrist, under a century	Historically primary for her 1851 wording; delivery to Rome is not approval.
Mélanie booklet	written 21 Nov. 1878; Lecce 1879	Long anti-clerical and apocalyptic expansion, political dates, Rome sentence, Church eclipse, new-order rule	Local imprimatur only; materially beyond 1851; later Roman withdrawal and proscription history.

6.7 Authorship is not inspiration

The rediscovered manuscripts correct two extremes. Against those who claim the children never wrote secrets for Pius IX, the facsimiles establish that they did. Against those who claim the 1879 apocalypse is therefore guaranteed, the same documents establish how much changed. Documentary authenticity answers “Who wrote this, and when?” It does not answer “Did Mary say it?”

Visionary mediation permits memory, interpretation, later spiritual reading, and error. The Church can positively receive an event’s evangelical center while declining to authenticate a later text. Ginoulhiac’s 1854 separation of posterior predictions, the Missionaries’ explicit statement that the secrets were not included in approval, and Roman discipline all reinforce that possibility.

The prudent reader therefore refuses three habits:

1. **Backdating:** quoting the 1879 Rome sentence as “Our Lady’s approved message of 1846.”
2. **Vatican-by-custody:** treating an archive shelf, papal delivery, or local imprimatur as a Holy See supernatural-origin act.
3. **Prophecy by resemblance:** selecting one elastic phrase after an event while ignoring deadlines, conditions, mismatches, and the unfulfilled whole.

Nothing essential to Catholic faith, La Salette’s public call, or the ministry of reconciliation depends on solving these private texts. Their proper historical study is possible precisely because Christ has already given the Church everything necessary for salvation.

7 Roman Discipline Concerning the “Secret”

Roman action at La Salette is often summarized in two incompatible slogans: “Rome condemned La Salette” or “Rome never acted against the secret.” Both are false because each suppresses the object. The Holy See did not revoke Grenoble’s event judgment or forbid the authorized devotion. It did take concrete action against publication, discussion, and particular books associated with the expanded secret.

7.1 The archival Holy Office measures of 1880

The 1879 Lecce booklet quickly provoked controversy in France and Italy. Michel Corteville and René Laurentin later published and discussed an archival Holy Office dossier from 1880. On their account, an internal process led to practical measures against distribution of the booklet: copies already circulated were to be withdrawn as far as possible, and Mélanie was not to continue similar writing or explanation. Cardinal Prospero Caterini conveyed the action to relevant ecclesiastical superiors and bishops.

This was real reported Roman discipline, even though the internal material was not a public AAS text and the correspondence did not offer a proposition-by-proposition doctrinal analysis. This project did not inspect the archival

originals, and the available secondary locus is too broad to make subsidiary dates, addressees, and decision mechanics carry independent argumentative weight. The intervention cannot fairly be described as Roman authentication of the booklet. It also should not be enlarged into a condemnation of Marian devotion, the mountain event, or the public message. The archival source and its scholarly publication status must travel with the claim.

7.2 The universal decree of 21 December 1915

The first controlling public Roman text in this sequence appears in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 7 (1915), printed page 594, under the title *Decretum circa vulgo dictum “Secret de La Salette”*. The Holy Office notes that some persons, including clergy, continued to publish books, pamphlets, and periodical articles about the so-called secret, its different forms, and its application to present or future times, without or against their ordinaries’ permission.

The decree commands all the faithful not to discuss or treat the subject under any pretext or form. It prescribes serious penalties then applicable to clergy and laity and invokes existing publication discipline. Its last sentence is indispensable:

Hoc autem decretum devotionem non vetat erga Beatissimam Virginem sub titulo Reconciliatricis vulgo de la Salette nuncupatam.

Thus the decree itself distinguishes secret controversy from devotion to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Reconciliatrix, commonly called La Salette. One cannot obey the first half by erasing the second, or honor the second by denying the first.

7.3 The 1916 book action and its printed name variants

On 12 April 1916 the Holy Office declared a two-volume work condemned and proscribed under the general rules. The AAS declaration at printed page 175 gives the title *La Leçon de l’Hôpital Notre-Dame d’Ypres – Exégèse du Secret de la Salette* and prints the author as “Dr Henry Mariam.” It identifies volume I as Paris, 1915, and volume II, *Appendices*, as Montpellier, 1915.

The Congregation of the Index then listed the work in its decree of 5 June, printed at pages 178–179. There the author appears as “Dr Henri Mariavé.” The difference is in the official volume and must not be silently harmonized. The safest catalog statement is that the April declaration’s “Dr Henry Mariam” and the June Index listing’s “Dr Henri Mariavé” refer to the same titled work.

This action is narrower than the 1915 subject-wide command in one respect: it identifies a particular book. It does not name the 1846 public message as erroneous or undo authorized cult.

7.4 The 1923 decree and the anomalous date

On 9 May 1923 the Holy Office’s general session proscribed and condemned a named booklet and directed that copies be withdrawn. Pius XI approved the resolution that day; the decree is dated 10 May. The operative bibliographic entry, printed in AAS 15 (1923), page 288, reads:

L’apparition de la très Sainte Vierge sur la sainte montagne de la Salette le samedi 19 septembre 1845 [sic]. — Simple réimpression du texte intégral publié par Melanie, etc. Société Saint-Augustin, Paris-Rome-Bruges, 1922.

The historical event occurred in 1846; “1845” is the official entry’s anomalous printed date and is preserved with *sic*. Correcting it invisibly would corrupt the legal bibliography. The named object is the Société Saint-Augustin 1922 booklet describing itself as a simple reprint of Mélanie’s full text. The decree therefore cannot reasonably be reduced to a generic warning against an unrelated appendix; neither should it be inflated into a condemnation of every sentence ever spoken at La Salette.

Later literature mentions additional Holy Office correspondence about the 1922 reprint. No sufficiently reproducible publication and page locus for that correspondence was established in this project, so it is not used to refine the

decree's object. The controlling conclusion instead rests on the 1923 AAS entry itself, which names the Société Saint-Augustin booklet and describes it as a reprint of Mélanie's text.

7.5 What changed in 1966 and 1983

On 14 June 1966 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued its notification on the status of the Index (AAS 58 [1966], 445). The Index no longer had the force of ecclesiastical law with attached censures, while the notification still appealed to the faithful's conscience under the demands of natural law. A decree of 15 November confirmed that the old automatic book prohibitions and penalties in canons 1399 and 2318 of the 1917 Code no longer bound as ecclesiastical law. The 1983 Code, canon 6 §1, 3°, then abrogated Apostolic See penal laws not retained in the new Code.

Those sources settle the old Index machinery and penalty schedule; they do not, without a further competent interpretation, settle the present juridic status of every standalone non-penal command in the 1915 decree. Consequently, this study neither presents the old censures as currently executable nor asserts that the subject-wide command remains binding today in its original breadth. It also does not call the 1879 or 1922 text "rehabilitated." A change in legal machinery does not transform a proscribed book into an authenticated revelation, reverse the historical act, or require the Church to promote it. Current readers remain bound by faith, morals, ecclesial communion, truthfulness, and current competent discipline.

No current DDF act located through 16 July 2026 republishes the old penalties, authenticates the expanded secret, or reclassifies the 1851 event judgment. Questions about a concrete contemporary edition or cleric's public promotion belong to current competent authority, not private canonical improvisation.

7.6 The acts compared

Date and source	Exact object	Action	Express or necessary limit
1880; archival Holy Office dossier as published in scholarship	Mélanie's recently published booklet and further similar explanations	Reported withdrawal from circulation and restriction of similar writing or explanation, conveyed through Caterini	Archival originals not inspected; not a public AAS decree; no prejudice to the authorized La Salette cult.
21 Dec. 1915; AAS 7, 594	Discussion of the so-called secret, its forms, and current/future applications	Universal prohibition with then-operative penalties	Expressly does not prohibit devotion to Mary as Reconciliatrix of La Salette.
12 Apr./5 June 1916; AAS 8, 175, 178–179	<i>La Leçon de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame d'Ypres</i>	Specific book condemned, proscribed, and listed	Author printed "Henry Mariam" and "Henri Mariavé" in the two notices; not an event decree.
9–10 May 1923; AAS 15, 287–288	Named 1922 Société Saint-Augustin reprint of Mélanie's text	Booklet proscribed and condemned; copies withdrawn	Title prints 19 Sept. 1845 [<i>sic</i>]; object is not the 1846 public message.
14 June 1966; AAS 58, 445	Legal status of the Index generally	Ecclesiastical-law force and attached censures removed; conscience still addressed under natural law	Not a declaration that every formerly listed claim is true or safe, or a ruling on the current force of every separate earlier command.

Interpretive key: Object before slogan

For every act ask: Who acted? On what date? On which text or practice? With what verb? Under what law? What was expressly preserved? At La Salette the answers yield a coherent pattern: positive reception of the 1846 event and cult, ecclesial appropriation of the public call to reconciliation, and sustained caution or restriction concerning the secret's expanded forms and apocalyptic application.

8 The Witnesses after 1846

The children did not disappear into a devotional tableau. They grew into adults beneath attention they had not sought and institutions that did not always know how to protect them. Their later lives contain courage, instability, faith, conflict, ordinary failure, manipulation by others, and competing posthumous portraits. A serious account neither canonizes them by association nor destroys them to simplify a controversy.

8.1 The Curé d'Ars episode

On 25 September 1850 Maximin met Jean-Marie Vianney at Ars. The journey was promoted by adults despite episcopal concern and was entangled with Maximin's vocational questions and the hopes of political enthusiasts who wanted the secret to support their causes. The conversation left Vianney believing that Maximin had admitted invention or lying. The saint communicated his doubt to others.

Maximin denied retracting his apparition testimony. In statements on 2 November he said Vianney had not asked him directly about the apparition or secret as later alleged, and he explained that difficulty hearing or understanding had led him to answer yes or no without grasping questions. Other accounts place a skeptical vicar and several exchanges around the private interview. There is no verbatim transcript.

The episode is genuinely adverse and cannot be erased by saying "a saint later believed." A discerning reader asks why Vianney understood a retraction and why Maximin's explanations took the form they did. Yet the same record does not permit conversion of a disputed, privately remembered exchange into a certain confession. De Bruillard knew of the controversy and still judged the event positively in 1851 after further inquiry.

Later reports say Vianney regained confidence in La Salette after prayer and a providential incident; their details and chronology vary. Neither a saint's doubt nor his reported reassurance is the competent act. Jean Stern's study *Le curé d'Ars et le message authentique de La Salette*, with a preface by Bishop Guy de Kerimel, treats the confusion as a lesson in returning to the public message and refusing secret-centered distortions.

Witness: Maximin's statements, Vianney's reported recollections, associated correspondence, and Stern's documentary analysis.

What it establishes: They establish a serious 1850 misunderstanding or contradiction that affected reception and was known before the judgment.

What it cannot establish alone: They do not furnish an agreed transcript, prove either man's bad faith, settle the apparition by sanctity, or authenticate a later secret.

8.2 Maximin: a witness without a stable public role

After the event Maximin was educated in several institutions and explored a priestly vocation without proceeding to ordination. His later path included studies, brief employment, an unsuccessful attempt at medicine, pharmacy-related work, travel, and dependence on patrons. In 1865 he enlisted for six months in the Papal Zouaves, first serving in a medical capacity and then as a soldier; his unit saw no major campaign that year. Political and devotional circles repeatedly tried to make his secret serve monarchist or apocalyptic programs.

Maximin could be impulsive and sometimes answered intrusive questioners flippantly. He was also subjected from childhood to thousands of questions and to adults who offered money, careers, travel, or ideological importance. Psychological reconstruction at a distance cannot replace evidence. His uneven life makes simplistic claims of a permanently serene "holy seer" untenable, but poverty and vocational failure are not evidence of fraud.

In 1866 he published *Ma profession de foi sur l'apparition de Notre-Dame de La Salette*, answering attacks and reaffirming the event. Later editions reproduced de Bruillard's 1851 act. Texts and predictions also circulated under or around his name, and he rejected at least some later attributions. The safe corpus remains his early testimony, the sealed 1851 manuscript, and writings with demonstrable authorship.

Maximin died at Corps on 1 March 1875, aged thirty-nine. The Missionaries' official chronology records the date. He died within the Church and continued to affirm the apparition. That perseverance matters as witness evidence; it is not a canonization, proof of every story, or fulfillment of his secret.

8.3 Mélanie: vocation, movement, and expansion

Mélanie entered the care of the Sisters of Providence at Corenc and used the name Sister Marie of the Cross. She desired religious profession. Ginoulhiac did not permit her to make final profession there, judging her insufficiently mature and seeking distance from further visionary elaboration. She then moved through religious settings in England, France, Greece, and Italy, at times under temporary vows or structured obedience but without one stable lifelong institute.

Her mobility has been narrated either as persecution of a saint or proof of pathological instability. The documentary reality is less convenient. Some clergy and religious testified to piety, poverty, courage, and charity; others found her visionary claims, independence, political associations, or plans for a new order imprudent. She experienced genuine vulnerability and depended on patrons. She also exercised agency and persisted in interpretations that competent authorities restricted.

From the 1850s onward she produced or authorized increasingly expansive secret texts and claimed a mission concerning apostles of the last times and a religious rule. She lived for years at Castellammare and received support from southern Italian churchmen, including Bishop Zola. The 1879 booklet gave her expanded account its durable printed form. She continued to defend it despite Roman withdrawal instructions, while admirers produced commentaries and political applications.

Mélanie died at Altamura in the night of 14–15 December 1904. Local devotion surrounds her memory, and advocates have collected testimony to extraordinary holiness. She has not been beatified or canonized. Titles such as “Blessed Mélanie” or the use of alleged childhood visions and stigmata as established facts are not warranted by a recognized canonization judgment.

8.4 Later character cannot bear the whole case

Ginoulhiac’s 1854 principle remains wise. An event in 1846 is not retroactively caused or uncaused by everything a witness does in 1879. A credible witness can later err, interpret, exaggerate, or become attached to a mistaken mission. A morally imperfect person can tell the truth about an earlier fact. Conversely, personal piety does not guarantee every recollection or prophecy.

The later lives remain relevant in proportion:

- sustained affirmation bears on sincerity, but not directly on supernatural cause;
- changing texts bear on confidence in exact wording and later claims;
- responses to legitimate authority bear on prudence, but require exact orders and circumstances;
- financial or political exploitation can explain distortions, but must be proved rather than insinuated;
- spiritual fruit in others may support pastoral reception, but does not validate every source layer.

The Church’s mission begins precisely because the witnesses cannot remain the permanent managers of a worldwide devotion. The public message enters preaching, sacrament, scholarship, and ecclesial oversight. The children are honored by telling the truth about their humanity, not by forcing them to carry an impossible charism of lifelong inerrancy.

8.5 Two opposite abuses of the witnesses

Abuse	What it does	Corrective
Devotional idealization	Treats poverty, lack of education, or later suffering as proof of sanctity and every text as Marian dictation.	Respect the children, date every source, and reserve judgments of heroic virtue to competent authority.

Abuse	What it does	Corrective
Polemical destruction	Collects rumors, failed careers, or conflict as if one flaw disproved every earlier statement.	Test each claim, distinguish sincerity from causation, and remember the bishop judged with major controversies already known.
Political capture	Makes a child's secret endorse a dynasty, party, nation, anti-clerical campaign, or theory of papal legitimacy.	No private revelation supplies Catholic political allegiance; expired and elastic predictions receive no privileged authority.

Mélanie's expanded accusations against clergy require an additional safeguard. The Church must confront clerical sin and abuse with truth, justice, safeguarding, and care for victims. A sweeping private-revelation denunciation is neither evidence against a particular person nor permission to distrust the sacramental priesthood. Conversely, invoking the public message's approval can never silence credible allegations. Reconciliation depends on truth.

9 Shrine, Mission, Liturgy, and Papal Reception

9.1 A mountain becomes an ecclesial place

Pilgrimage began before judgment. The first anniversary drew a crowd estimated in the Missionaries' chronology at least 30,000; by 1849 the confraternity of Our Lady Reconciliatrix of La Salette reportedly had 15,000 enrolled members. Such figures document rapid reception and the need for pastoral order. They do not count votes for supernatural origin.

De Bruillard's 1852 act made the response durable. Construction began on the mountain, with facilities for pilgrims as well as a church. The church was consecrated and the image crowned in August 1879. The present basilica, chapels, paths, hospitality buildings, and sacramental schedule transform a remote pasture into a place where the Church, not the visionaries, carries the message.

Pilgrimage can embody the narrative without reenacting it as spectacle. The ascent requires effort; the site recalls tears, speech, and departure; the Eucharist prevents the apparition from becoming the liturgical center; confession gives reconciliation sacramental form; hospitality tests whether devotion receives actual people. The shrine is most faithful when a visitor leaves with deeper participation in parish, Sunday Mass, prayer, justice, and charity.

9.2 Missionaries of reconciliation

De Bruillard founded the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette as diocesan clergy in 1852; the first religious vows followed in 1858, and Roman recognition developed in 1879 and afterward. The institute spread beyond France into Europe, North America, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Sisters, laity, parishes, and other communities also live a La Salette spirituality.

The Missionaries' Rule provides an authoritative statement of charism within the institute. Animated by the Holy Spirit who led the Son to assume the human condition and die on the Cross to reconcile the world to the Father, they seek to serve Christ and the Church in the mystery of reconciliation. The order is exact: Spirit, incarnate Son, Cross, Father, Church, ministry. The apparition illuminates the vocation; it does not replace its Trinitarian and ecclesial source.

That ministry has two necessary edges. Reconciliation heals division, receives penitents, preaches mercy, and seeks unity. It also exposes the false peace produced by denial. The public message names profanity, neglect, mockery, hunger, and indifference before promising abundance. A reconciler therefore tells the truth, protects the vulnerable, repairs harm, and works for just relationships.

9.3 Pius XII at the centenary

Pius XII’s letter *Notre dévotion*, dated 8 October 1945 and published in AAS 38 (1946), 155–156, addresses the superior of the Missionaries in preparation for the centenary. It refers to a favorable diocesan canonical process and recalls that, as reported, the weeping Virgin called the children and people to conversion and reparation. It commends the shrine, missionaries, centenary observance, and devotion to Mary Reconciliatrix.

This is substantial papal reception. It shows that Roman restriction of secret polemics did not extinguish the event’s evangelical and devotional reception. It is not a new judicial inquiry into the 1846 cause, and it does not mention the 1879 expansion as authenticated. The pope receives the same public center preserved by the 1915 decree’s devotional exception.

9.4 John Paul II: warning as hope

John Paul II’s letter of 6 May 1996 to Bishop Louis Dufaux for the 150th anniversary is the richest papal theological interpretation. He places the message amid nineteenth-century famine, injustice, religious indifference, and hostility. The tears are not sterile sorrow. The call to prayer, penance, Sunday fidelity, and communication of the message is a summons to hope.

The pope refuses a fatalist arm. Christ does not abandon those who humbly seek him; he grasps the sinner and gives life. Mary, called Reconciliatrix, remains in prayer and accompanies her children toward conversion. The promised transformation under the condition “if they are converted” shows that history is open to grace and responsible freedom.

In his 4 May 2000 address to the Missionaries’ general chapter, John Paul II again presents La Salette as a message of hope founded on Christ’s reconciliation. He praises their work in divided societies and calls the whole Church to the mission of reconciliation. Neither intervention promotes a secret chronology. Their silence about sensational elements, combined with their concentration on the public message, is pastorally significant without being turned into an unstated juridical decree.

9.5 Liturgical reception in France

The French bishops’ national liturgical service directly lists the Blessed Virgin Mary of La Salette as an optional celebration on 19 September in its official 2026 calendar. The French Church’s *Nominis* service reports that the national Proper rests on a decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments dated 18 March 2016. The underlying decree or printed Proper was not independently inspected for this study, so the current observance is directly verified while the decree date remains a transparently attributed report. The Diocese of Grenoble–Vienne identifies the day with the mission of the Virgin Mary, Reconciliatrix of sinners.

Liturgical reception is real and carefully bounded. The Church prays within the Paschal mystery using approved liturgical texts; she does not read a secret as Scripture or make attendance at a shrine obligatory. An optional memorial proves authorized cult and ecclesial fruit. It does not independently adjudicate the historical cause or enlarge the corpus.

9.6 Reception without maximalism

Received reality	What it establishes	What it fruitfully teaches	What it cannot establish alone
Basilica and pilgrimage	Stable authorized cult and diocesan pastoral care	Penance, Eucharist, confession, prayer, hospitality, mission	Every cure, legend, visionary interpretation, or private promise.
Missionaries and associated communities	Ecclesially structured charism and worldwide apostolate	Reconciliation through Christ in the Church	A divinely dictated institute rule in the 1846 secret.

Received reality	What it establishes	What it fruitfully teaches	What it cannot establish alone
Pius XII, 1945/1946	Papal centenary encouragement of public-message devotion	Conversion, reparation, Mary Reconciliatrix	New event judgment or approval of expanded secret.
John Paul II, 1996 and 2000	Papal theological reception and missionary encouragement	Hope, freedom, mercy, Sunday, prayer, conversion, justice	Prophecy timetable, party program, or authentication of every phrase.
French national observance, current; 2016 decree date reported	Optional liturgical celebration in France	Marian discipleship ordered to Christ's Pasch	Universal obligation, direct inspection of the underlying decree, or event-level scientific proof.

Current Shrine materials continue to present the Beautiful Lady's public call to conversion and the 1851 judgment; the Diocese continues pilgrimage and feast-day ministry. The Shrine's 2026 program shows ordinary ecclesial life—Mass, reconciliation, retreats, professions, family and youth gatherings, and the anniversary celebration. Continuity of cult is therefore not an archaeological claim but a present pastoral fact, checked through the study's as-of date.

The global spread of churches and communities named for Our Lady of La Salette is an authentic history of reception. It should produce humility rather than competitive ranking among Marian shrines. Mary is one person; her mission is always to form disciples of the one Christ. Devotional titles serve that communion when they resist becoming brands or rival jurisdictions.

10 A Pastoral Rule for Receiving La Salette

10.1 What a Catholic may and must hold

A Catholic may accept the 1846 event with prudent human faith because the competent bishop issued a positive legacy judgment and authorized cult. A Catholic is not required to do so with divine and Catholic faith. One may visit the shrine, honor Mary as Reconciliatrix, and live the public message; one may also refrain from this devotion without defect in Catholic faith.

The doctrines echoed by the message bind for a different reason. God's Name is holy, the Lord's Day belongs to Christian life, prayer and penance are necessary, Christ will judge, the hungry must be served, and reconciliation comes through the Cross because these truths arise from public Revelation and the Church's teaching. La Salette may recall them vividly; it does not create their authority.

No Catholic must believe Mélanie's 1879 expansion, assign current events to its imagery, or treat its predictions as a test of fidelity. The 1851 manuscripts are historically important but not included in the public message's approval. A reader may suspend judgment or conclude that their date-specific predictions include human error while retaining respect for the event judgment.

10.2 The hierarchy of reception

1. **Christ and public Revelation.** Begin with Scripture, Tradition, the Creed, liturgy, sacraments, and moral teaching. These interpret the apparition, never the reverse.
2. **The competent act.** Preserve de Bruillard's exact 1851 formula and object, Ginoulhiac's 1854 distinction, and later Roman discipline. Do not create a composite judgment more favorable or negative than the documents.
3. **The early public corpus.** Receive the reported call to conversion in the form attested near the event, with linguistic and memory limits.
4. **Ecclesial interpretation.** Let Pius XII, John Paul II, the diocese, shrine, liturgy, and Missionaries orient the devotion toward Christ, hope, sacrament, and reconciliation.

5. **Later private texts.** Date, compare, and test them. They have no authority to reverse the first four levels.

This order is not a method for suppressing difficult evidence. It is how Catholic theology protects both evidence and faith from a secret-centered inversion.

10.3 An examination shaped by the public message

Message theme	Concrete conversion	Distortion to refuse
“Pay heed”	Make time for Scripture, conscience, truthful attention to suffering, and counsel from the Church.	Anxiety-driven monitoring of rumor and prophecy channels.
The Lord’s Day	Participate in Sunday Eucharist when obliged and able; cultivate rest, joy, mercy, family, and justice for workers.	Condemning those prevented by illness, care, poverty, persecution, distance, or necessary service.
The holy Name	Speak truthfully; reject blasphemy, false oaths, religious threats, and use of God to authorize hatred.	Policing vocabulary while tolerating deception, contempt, or spiritual abuse.
Morning and evening prayer	Begin faithfully, even with the Our Father and Hail Mary; grow according to vocation and capacity.	Measuring worth by quantity or treating prayer as catastrophe insurance.
Mass and Lent	Enter Christ’s sacrifice and the Church’s current penitential discipline; fast safely and give to the poor.	Antiquarian rigor, harmful fasting, contempt for dispensations, or private law.
Spoiled bread and famine	Support food security, just labor, responsible care of creation, almsgiving, and relief for victims.	Blaming hungry people or claiming to know why a particular disaster occurred.
“If they are converted”	Trust that grace can redirect persons and communities; make restitution and seek sacramental reconciliation.	Fatalism, date-setting, despair, or presumption that devotion cancels consequences.
“All my people”	Communicate the Gospel with accuracy, gentleness, and willingness to be corrected.	Viral forwarding of an expanded secret mislabeled as the approved message.

10.4 Penance without harm

At La Salette penance means conversion before it means chosen hardship. Its ordinary Catholic forms are prayer, fasting under legitimate discipline, almsgiving, confession, restitution, patient fulfillment of duties, and freely accepted sacrifices compatible with health and vocation. It never authorizes self-injury, starvation, refusal of medicine, neglect of dependents, or coercion.

The famine imagery heightens rather than cancels this safeguard. A person with a history of disordered eating, trauma, scrupulosity, or illness should seek appropriate pastoral and clinical guidance. A parent or superior cannot use a private revelation to impose practices beyond legitimate authority. Christ’s yoke is not spiritualized violence.

10.5 Reconciliation with truth and justice

Reconciliation is not the restoration of appearances. The offended person may forgive without immediate contact, trust, or removal of lawful consequences. Abuse allegations require safeguarding, civil reporting where required, competent investigation, and care for victims. Confidential spiritual direction cannot substitute for emergency or professional action. Mary’s tears cannot be enlisted to pressure a victim into silence.

The perpetrator's conversion includes confession, truth, restitution, acceptance of consequences, and durable change. Communities repent by correcting structures as well as intentions. The Eucharist forms one body precisely by exposing indifference to members who suffer (1 Cor 11:17–34).

At the social level reconciliation asks why some work without rest, why God's Name is attached to violence, why food systems leave children hungry, and why religion becomes an object of mockery. The message's rural details become universal not by predicting every crisis but by training moral attention.

10.6 How to read an apocalyptic claim

When a La Salette prediction appears in a sermon, video, or post, use five questions:

1. **Which document?** Public message, Maximin 1851, Mélanie 1851, Mélanie 1879, or a later attributed edition?
2. **Which date?** Was the text written before or after the event to which it is being applied? Does it contain a deadline?
3. **Which authority?** Who authorized printing, judged the event, restricted discussion, or interpreted the passage? These acts are not interchangeable.
4. **Which complete context?** Are failed dates, conditions, mismatches, and neighboring claims disclosed, or has one resemblance been selected after the fact?
5. **Which fruit?** Does the use lead to Christ, conversion, peace, sacrament, and charity, or to panic, contempt, political absolutism, and secret superiority?

Apocalyptic imagery in Scripture unveils God's sovereignty and sustains fidelity; it is not a cipher for private control (CCC 2116–2117). A private apocalypse has even less warrant to dominate conscience. Claims that a current pope is illegitimate, Rome has definitively defected, a party is divinely chosen, or the end can be scheduled cannot derive Catholic authority from the 1879 sentence.

10.7 Teaching children and vulnerable readers

The event involves children and frightening famine language. Catechesis should begin with the Lady's invitation not to fear, the light from Christ's Cross, prayer small enough to begin, care for daily bread, and hope conditioned by conversion. Graphic predictions about dying children or Antichrist are not necessary to teach the public message and may be pastorally harmful.

Adults should also notice what the historical children endured: repeated questioning, travel, publicity, ideological pressure, and promises from patrons. Modern safeguarding of an alleged young visionary requires privacy, independent care, protection from fundraising and media, psychological and medical assessment when appropriate, and obedience to the current diocesan–DDF process. Spiritual possibility never excuses exploitation.

10.8 For preachers, editors, and pilgrims

Preachers should identify the reported character of the message, state the freedom of assent, and avoid announcing disasters as divine explanations. Editors should reproduce the exact 1851 formula, label the 1879 text on every excerpt, preserve the AAS anomalies, and cite the Roman acts. Pilgrims should let the mountain return them to parish Eucharist and neighbor. Researchers should prefer chronological documentary criticism over collections arranged to produce a prophecy system.

No fundraising appeal, political campaign, healing claim, or new visionary receives credibility merely by attaching "La Salette" to itself. The title is not a transferable license. Under the 2024 norms, new alleged phenomena require competent ecclesial discernment; private promoters cannot inherit an old judgment.

Governing thesis

The mature fruit of La Salette is not possession of a secret but restored attention: attention to Christ crucified and risen, to worship, to the holy Name, to daily prayer, to bread and those who lack it, to sin’s real consequences, to mercy’s open condition, and to the Church’s ministry of reconciliation. The shepherds’ mission ends where the Church’s begins—not by forgetting the witnesses, but by freeing their testimony from the burden of becoming a second Gospel.

A Ecclesial Status, Corpus, and Method

A.1 The controlling legacy act

On 19 September 1851 Philibert de Bruillard, Bishop of Grenoble, issued his judgment after diocesan investigation. Article 1 states:

Nous jugeons que l’apparition de la sainte Vierge à deux bergers, le 19 septembre 1846, sur une Montagne de la chaîne des Alpes, située dans la paroisse de la Salette, de l’Archiprêtré de Corps, porte en elle-même tous les caractères de la vérité, et que les fidèles sont fondés à la croire indubitable et certaine.

The capitalization above preserves the checked legacy wording rather than silently recasting it in a modern formula. Article 2 adds the immense spontaneous concourse and numerous reported prodigies as supporting human testimony. Article 3 authorizes the cult of Our Lady of La Salette and permits its preaching and moral application. The act therefore contains both a positive judgment on the reported event and an authorization of cult.

This is not a post-2024 *Nihil obstat*; neither is it useful to replace the bishop’s own words with a generic *constat de supernaturalitate*. In its 2024 presentation of the current norms, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith itself cites La Salette’s phrase, “*les fidèles sont fondés à la croire indubitable et certaine*,” as an example of older episcopal language. The DDF immediately explains that such formulations could obscure the Church’s abiding conviction that the faithful are not obliged to accept an event’s authenticity. The historical act remains what it was; the current norms supply the proper doctrinal and procedural context without retroactively renaming it.

Event or tradition: The reported encounter of Maximin Giraud and Mélanie Calvat on 19 September 1846 at Mont Planeau, including the public discourse commissioned for “all my people.”

Ecclesial reception or judgment: Bishop de Bruillard’s judgment of 19 September 1851 says the apparition bears the characteristics of truth and that the faithful have grounds to believe it indubitable and certain; the same act authorizes the cult of Our Lady of La Salette. Bishop Jacques-Marie-Achille Ginoulhiac’s formal act of 4 November 1854 defends the legitimately established devotion and his predecessor’s judgment against a published attack.

Limit of that reception: No divine and Catholic faith is owed. The act does not make either child inerrant; does not authenticate every later wording, prediction, cure, or interpretation; and does not include Mélanie’s expanded 1879 secret or later apocalyptic compilations.

A.2 The status in one view

Object	Controlling witness	What may be affirmed	Necessary limit
Public Revelation	Christ in Scripture and apostolic Tradition	God’s definitive saving self-gift and the rule for testing every later claim	No apparition adds doctrine, completes the Gospel, or supplies a second economy of salvation.
1846 event and public message	Grenoble investigation and de Bruillard’s 1851 act	Positive legacy judgment; cult authorized; prudent Catholic reception is reasonable	Free human assent, not theological faith; no guarantee of word-for-word stenography.

Object	Controlling witness	What may be affirmed	Necessary limit
The two private communications	Each child's reported experience and sealed 1851 manuscript	Historically attested as a distinct textual dossier delivered to Pius IX	Delivery, archival custody, or papal reading does not prove divine origin or approve every prediction.
Mélanie's expanded secret literature	Her later redactions, especially the 1879 Lecce publication	A consequential chapter in reception history, once printed with a local imprimatur	Not the public message, not included in 1851, and subject to later Roman disciplinary action.

The local imprimatur attached to an edition, the consecration of a basilica, papal praise of a devotion, the approval of a religious institute, or the celebration of a liturgical memorial can establish genuine ecclesial reception within its own object. None of these acts quietly enlarges the apparition corpus. Likewise, a Roman condemnation of a book or a ban on discussion has a precise literary and disciplinary object; it does not negate the 1846 event, the authorized cult, or Marian devotion as such.

A.3 Six source strata

Stratum	Principal contents	Historical force and limit
Near-event records, 1846–1847	The 20 September Pra relation; early interrogations, letters, parish reports, and press	Strongest evidence for the early core; derivative and sometimes mediated, not a sound recording.
Diocesan discernment, 1847–1854	Conferences, commissions, inquiry materials, de Bruillard's 1851 act, 1852 foundation act, Ginoulhiac's 1854 act	Determines what Grenoble judged and authorized; each act must retain its own date and object.
Sealed personal texts, July 1851	Maximin's and Mélanie's separately written communications for Pius IX	Primary evidence for what each wrote in 1851; not identical to the public message or to later redactions.
Expanded secret corpus, 1858–1879 and after	Mélanie's changing presentations and the Lecce text; editions, commentaries, polemics	Reception and authorship history; no automatic extension of the event judgment.
Roman discipline, 1880–1966	Archival correspondence, the 1915 decree, 1916 book action, 1923 decree, and 1966 Index notification	Governs publication and discussion according to each act; does not abolish object distinctions.
Papal and ecclesial reception	Shrine, institute, liturgy, Pius XII, John Paul II, current diocesan ministry	Authoritative or pastoral interpretation according to the speaker and act; not a new supernatural-origin procedure.

Jean Stern's three-volume *La Salette: Documents authentiques*, arranged chronologically from September 1846 through 4 November 1854, is the principal modern documentary map. It does not relieve the reader of checking the dispositive texts themselves. The Shrine and Missionaries preserve a received public narrative and living pastoral interpretation; those custodial pages do not erase documentary differences or control the exact chronology when a primary act says more precisely what occurred.

A.4 Assent, language, and method

Public Revelation is complete in Jesus Christ (DV 2–4; CCC 65–67). An ecclesially received private revelation can help the faithful live that Revelation in a particular historical moment. Its acceptance is prudent human faith, proportioned to testimony and ecclesial judgment, never the divine and Catholic faith owed to God's revealed word. A Catholic may gratefully live La Salette's call to prayer and conversion without believing every reported detail or adopting its devotion. No one may use it to test another Catholic's orthodoxy.

This study calls the 1846 discourse the *public message* because the reported command was to make it known to all the Lady's people. It calls the separately unheard communications *private communications* or *the two secrets*. It uses "1851 manuscripts" for what the witnesses placed in writing for the pope. It reserves "1879 text" for Mélanie's much longer publication. "The secret of La Salette" appears only when naming historical usage or a Roman act, because the singular can conceal several materially different texts.

The DDF's complete document index, the current 2024 norms, official Holy See sources, and current Grenoble–Vienne and Shrine presentations were checked through 16 July 2026. No later competent act reclassifying or superseding the 1851 legacy event judgment was located. This is a dated negative-search result, not an assertion that the Holy See could never act later.

Interpretive key: Read the center from the Cross

The reported light radiates from the crucifix on the Lady's breast. That visual grammar supplies the safest key to the whole dossier. Christ saves, judges, reconciles, and completes Revelation; Mary receives everything from him and directs the people to him. The further an interpretation moves from the Gospel, the sacraments, and concrete conversion toward fear, secret mastery, or partisan prediction, the less faithfully it reads La Salette's received center.

A.5 Excluded sources and review

No anonymous prophecy compilation, flat "approved apparition" list, political apostolate, automatic current-event decoding, or posthumous sanctity claim supports a published conclusion. Independent human review by the Diocese of Grenoble–Vienne, DDF, Holy Office archivist, French historian, dialect specialist, canonist, mariologist, psychologist, medical expert, or safeguarding specialist remains outstanding.

A.6 Use boundary

This source-audited Catholic study instrument is not an act of the Magisterium, a new judgment on private revelation, an authentication of a secret or prediction, or a claim that any Catholic must adopt the La Salette devotion.

B Critical Timeline

This chronology records documentary, juridical, devotional, and biographical events without assigning them one authority.

7 November 1831

Françoise Mélanie Mathieu Calvat is born at Corps.

August 1835

Pierre Maximin Giraud is born at Corps; civil-date references vary between 26 and 27 August.

1845–1847

Potato disease, grain distress, high prices, and famine conditions affect France and Europe with substantial regional differences.

19 September 1846

Maximin, eleven, and Mélanie, fourteen, report the encounter with the luminous weeping Beautiful Lady on Mont Planeau. The public discourse, two separate private communications, and final commission belong to the reported event.

20 September 1846

The Pra relation, the first written account, is composed in Mélanie's presence. The lost original survives through Abbé Lagier's certified February 1847 copy and early derivatives.

October 1846

Early documents attest the children's claim that each received a separate private communication.

February 1847

Abbé Lagier copies the Pra relation and records early testimony.

July–October 1847

Bishop de Bruillard appoints Rousselot and Orcel to investigate; they gather testimony and report.

19 September 1847

The Missionaries' chronology estimates at least 30,000 pilgrims on the first anniversary.

8 November–13 December 1847

Eight diocesan discernment conferences examine the dossier at Grenoble.

1848

Rousselot publishes a favorable report; France undergoes revolution amid continuing controversy over La Salette.

1849

The Missionaries' chronology reports 15,000 persons enrolled in the confraternity of Our Lady Reconciliatrix.

25 September 1850

Maximin meets Saint Jean-Marie Vianney at Ars; their disputed exchange produces serious doubt and later contradictory explanations.

3 July 1851

The surviving clean manuscript of Maximin's communication is dated at Grenoble; some chronologies begin the writing procedure on 2 July.

6 July 1851

Mélanie completes the extant rewritten manuscript of her communication at Grenoble.

18 July 1851

Canons Gérin and Rousselot deliver the sealed manuscripts and episcopal letter to Pius IX.

19 September 1851

Bishop Philibert de Bruillard issues the controlling positive legacy judgment and authorizes the cult of Our Lady of La Salette.

1 and 25 May 1852

De Bruillard's pastoral letter announces the shrine and Missionaries; the cornerstone is laid on 25 May.

1853–1854

Jacques-Marie-Achille Ginoulhiac succeeds de Bruillard; he declines to permit Mélanie's final profession at Corenc.

4 November 1854

Ginoulhiac issues his *Instruction pastorale et Mandement*, condemning Déléon's *Mémoire au Pape*, defending the established devotion and prior judgment, and separating posterior predictions from the 1846 fact.

18–19 September 1855

A near-contemporary report says Ginoulhiac described the children's mission as completed; his anniversary allocution sends pilgrims out as missionaries. The later polished shepherds-and-Church maxim summarizes this pastoral movement but is not treated as a verbatim decree.

2 February 1858

The first group of Missionaries makes religious vows. The 1879 text later claims 1858 as its authorized publication year, a statement absent from Mélanie's extant 1851 manuscript.

1865

Maximin serves six months in the Papal Zouaves; the *Annales de Notre-Dame de La Salette* begins publication.

1866

Maximin publishes *Ma profession de foi sur l'apparition de Notre-Dame de La Salette*.

1 March 1875

Maximin dies at Corps.

21 November 1878

Mélanie dates her long retrospective apparition narrative and expanded secret at Castellammare.

1879

The Missionaries receive Roman recognition; the basilica is consecrated and its image crowned in August. Mélanie's booklet is printed at Lecce with local permission dated 15 November.

1880

An archival Holy Office dossier, as published in later scholarship, reports measures to withdraw Mélanie's booklet and restrict similar writing or explanation; no public AAS decree or independently inspected archival original controls this entry.

14–15 December 1904

Mélanie dies at Altamura, Italy.

21 December 1915

The Holy Office issues the AAS decree against discussion of the so-called secret while expressly preserving devotion to Mary as Reconciliatrix of La Salette.

12 April and 5 June 1916

The Holy Office and Congregation of the Index proscribe *La Leçon de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame d'Ypres*; the official notices print the author as "Dr Henry Mariam" and "Dr Henri Mariavé."

9–10 May 1923

The Holy Office proscribes and condemns the named 1922 Société Saint-Augustin booklet. Its AAS title prints the event date as 19 September 1845 [*sic*].

8 October 1945 / 1946

Pius XII's *Notre dévotion*, published in the 1946 AAS volume for the centenary, encourages the shrine, missionaries, and public call to conversion and reparation.

14 June and 15 November 1966

The CDF removes the Index's force as ecclesiastical law with attached censures while addressing conscience under natural law; it later clarifies the abrogation of old automatic book-law penalties. These acts do not by themselves decide the current force of every standalone earlier command.

1983

The current Latin Code takes effect; canon 6 abrogates Apostolic See penal laws not retained in the Code.

6 May 1996

John Paul II writes to Bishop Louis Dufaux for the 150th anniversary, interpreting La Salette as a message of hope, conversion, and reconciliation in Christ.

1999

Michel Corteville locates the sealed-era manuscripts in the historical Holy Office archive.

4 May 2000

John Paul II addresses the Missionaries' general chapter on their reconciliation charism.

2002

René Laurentin and Michel Corteville publish *Découverte du secret de La Salette* with the early texts and archival material.

2016

The French Church's Nominis service reports an 18 March CDW decree for the 19 September observance; the current French national liturgical calendar directly verifies the optional celebration, while the underlying decree was not inspected here.

2021

Grenoble–Vienne and the Shrine celebrate the 175th anniversary with a diocesan Marian year and pastoral program.

19 May 2024

The DDF's new norms for alleged supernatural phenomena take effect. Their presentation explicitly cites the 1851 La Salette wording as a legacy formula; they do not reclassify the case.

4 November 2025

The DDF issues *Mater Populi Fidelis*, supplying current safeguards for Marian cooperation, mediation, and intercession.

16 July 2026

DDF index, Holy See acts, Diocese, Shrine, public-message sources, and current reception rechecked. No later competent reclassification or supersession located.

C References

C.1 Public Revelation and doctrinal controls

1. Sacred Scripture: especially Exod 20:7–11; Deut 5:12–15; Jer 18:7–10; Jonah; Job; Lk 1:46–55; 13:1–5; Jn 9:1–3; 11:35; 1 Tim 2:5–6; 2 Cor 5:18–21; Col 1:19–20; and Jas 5:12.
2. Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 2–4, on Revelation’s completion in Christ: official text.
3. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 52–69, especially 56 and 60–62 on Mary’s graced cooperation and Christ’s unique mediation: official text.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 65–67, 970, 2168–2195, and 2683–2684: official edition.
5. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, 1700–1706, 1734–1735, 2111, and 2116–2117, exact USCCB English passage records verified 27 July 2026: official edition.
6. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024; effective 19 May), including the presentation’s explicit citation of the 1851 La Salette formula: official text.
7. DDF, *Mater Populi Fidelis*: Doctrinal Note on Some Marian Titles Regarding Mary’s Cooperation in the Work of Salvation (4 November 2025), especially the safeguards concerning Christ’s unique mediation and Marian intercession: official text.
8. DDF complete document index, searched for later La Salette action through 16 July 2026: official index.
9. Code of Canon Law (1983), canon 6 §1, especially 3° on earlier Apostolic See penal laws: official text.

C.2 The event, early documents, and Grenoble acts

1. Jean Stern, M.S., ed., *La Salette: Documents authentiques—dossier chronologique intégral*, vol. 1, *Septembre 1846—début mars 1847* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1980); vol. 2, *Fin mars 1847—avril 1849* (Paris and Corps: Cerf / Association des pèlerins, 1984); vol. 3, *Confirmation de la grâce de La Salette par l’Église: 1er mai 1849–4 novembre 1854* (Paris and Corps: Cerf / Association des pèlerins, 1991). Bibliographic controls: WorldCat record; volume 3 record.
2. Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, “Apparition,” received English public narrative, physical description, message, and 1851 formula: official institute page.
3. Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, “L’histoire,” current French custodial narrative and pastoral presentation: official shrine page.
4. Philibert de Bruillard, mandement of 19 September 1851, especially Articles 1–4 and 7, reproduced in Stern, vol. 3, and in Maximin Giraud’s scanned *Ma profession de foi*, printed pp. 70–72 (PDF pp. 71–73): public-domain scan. The exact final clause is independently quoted by the DDF’s 2024 presentation.
5. De Bruillard, *Lettre pastorale et Mandement* (1 May 1852), on the shrine, cornerstone, missionaries, Eucharist, and ministry of reconciliation: Missionaries’ transcription.
6. Jacques-Marie-Achille Ginoulhiac, *Instruction pastorale et Mandement de Mgr l’évêque de Grenoble, portant condamnation du livre intitulé: Affaire de La Salette, Mémoire au Pape, etc.* (Grenoble: J. Baratier, 4 November 1854), forty-seven-page primary edition: digital catalog and scan record; also Stern, vol. 3.
7. Marie Des Brûlais, *Suite de l’Écho de la Sainte Montagne* (Nantes: Imprimerie Charpentier, December 1855; reprinted 1904), printed p. 97 and its footnote for the children’s completed mission, and printed p. 106 for the “Souvenir” of Ginoulhiac’s 19 September allocution sending pilgrims as missionaries: BnF Gallica scan, PDF pp. 109 and 118. This near-contemporary report controls the pastoral substance, not every polished form of the later maxim.
8. Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, “L’Histoire de la Congrégation,” for the Pra relation, subsistence crisis, inquiry conferences, pilgrimage, 1851–1854 acts, institute, basilica, witnesses’ deaths, and reception chronology: official institute chronology.

C.3 The secret texts and Roman discipline

1. René Laurentin and Michel Corteville, *Découverte du secret de La Salette: Au-delà des polémiques, la vérité sur l’apparition et ses voyants* (Paris: Fayard, 2002), 263 pp., especially manuscript facsimiles and pp. 46–49, 253–278. Bibliographic control: catalog record. This is scholarship, not a DDF edition.

2. Public facsimile-based transcription of the Maximin and Mélanie 1851 manuscripts, checked against the Laurentin–Corteville publication: French/English transcription and images. The site’s theological claims do not control this study.
3. Mélanie Calvat, *L’Apparition de la Très Sainte Vierge sur la montagne de La Salette le samedi 19 septembre 1846*, manuscript dated Castellammare, 21 November 1878; Lecce publication with local permission dated 15 November 1879: public-domain booklet scan. Used as the primary expanded text, not as an approved message.
4. Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, René Butler, M.S., “Call to Integrity” (17 October 2017), expressly distinguishing the unapproved secrets, the rediscovered 1851 texts, and the much longer 1879 version: official institute reflection.
5. Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, *Decretum circa vulgo dictum “Secret de La Salette”*, 21 December 1915, AAS 7 (1915), 594: official AAS volume.
6. Holy Office declaration of 12 April 1916, AAS 8 (1916), 175, and Congregation of the Index decree of 5 June 1916, pp. 178–179, on *La Leçon de l’Hôpital Notre-Dame d’Ypres*: official AAS volume.
7. Holy Office decree of 9–10 May 1923, AAS 15 (1923), 287–288, proscribing the named 1922 Société Saint-Augustin booklet and printing “19 septembre 1845” [*sic*]: official AAS volume.
8. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, notification on the Index (14 June 1966), AAS 58 (1966), 445: official English text; and interpretive decree (15 November 1966): official French text.

C.4 Papal, diocesan, liturgical, and institute reception

1. Pius XII, letter *Notre dévotion* to Étienne Cruveiller, M.S. (8 October 1945), AAS 38 (1946), 155–156: official AAS volume.
2. John Paul II, letter to Bishop Louis Dufaux for the 150th anniversary (6 May 1996): official French text.
3. John Paul II, address to the Missionaries’ general chapter (4 May 2000): official English text.
4. Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette, Rule of Life, nos. 1–4, on the institute and Trinitarian ministry of reconciliation: official institute text.
5. Diocese of Grenoble–Vienne, current presentation of the Shrine as a principal diocesan place: official diocesan page; and 175th-anniversary Marian year: official pastoral page.
6. French bishops’ national liturgical service, September 2026 calendar, listing the Blessed Virgin Mary of La Salette as an optional celebration in France on 19 September: official calendar PDF.
7. French Church, “Notre-Dame de La Salette,” reporting that the observance in the Proper of France rests on a Congregation for Divine Worship decree of 18 March 2016: episcopal-conference service page. The underlying decree was not independently inspected.
8. Shrine of Our Lady of La Salette, 2026 program, used only to verify continuing present cult and sacramental ministry: official program PDF.

C.5 Historical interpretation

1. Jean Stern, *Le curé d’Ars et le message authentique de La Salette: La préhistoire des pseudo-secrets*, preface by Guy de Kerimel (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2018): publisher preview.
2. Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton University Press, 1991; later reprints). Used for nineteenth-century visionary culture and reception, not ecclesial status.
3. François Angelier and Claude Langlois, eds., *La Salette: Apocalypse, pèlerinage et littérature (1856–1996)* (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2000). Used as multidisciplinary historical context, not a competent act.
4. Laurent Gruaz, “Maximin Giraud, le berger de La Salette: de l’Apparition de la Vierge aux soldats du Pape,” *Chrétiens et sociétés* 17 (2011), 151–172, DOI 10.4000/chretiensocietes.2827. Used for Maximin’s documented 1865 service.

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