

Sacré-Cœur of Paris Empowerment



A "Power Place" Empowerment

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The Sacré-Cœur (Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Paris) is a Roman Catholic church and basilica, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. A popular landmark, the Basilica is located at the summit of the summit of Montmartre, the highest point in the city.

The inspiration for the Basilica can be traced back to the division in French society that arose in the decades following the French Revolution, between Catholics and royalists on one side and socialists and radicals on the other. This division widened after the Franco-Prussian War and the ensuing uprising of the Paris Commune of 1870-71.

Although the Basilica is officially dedicated to the honour of the 58,000 who lost their lives during the Franco-Prussian War, the decree of the National Assembly in 1873 specified that it was to be built to "expiate the crimes of the communards."

Montmartre had been the site of the Commune's first insurrection, and many hard-core communards were entombed in the subterranean galleries of former gypsum mines where they had retreated, by explosives detonated at the entrances by the Army of Versailles.

Hostages had been executed on both sides. The Communards had executed Georges Darboy, Archbishop of Paris, who became a martyr for the resurgent Catholic Church.

Financial support for building the church came from parishes throughout France. The project took many years to complete. A law of public utility was passed in 1873 to acquire the land at the summit of Montmartre for the construction. Architect Paul Abadie designed the Basilica after winning a competition over 77 other architects. After considerable delay, the foundation stone was finally laid in 16 June 1875.

However, that was far from being the end of the matter. Passionate debates concerning the Basilica were raised in the *Municipal Council*

in 1880, where the Basilica was called "an incessant provocation to civil war". It was debated whether to rescind the law of 1873 granting property rights, an impracticable proposition. The law was actually rescinded, but the Basilica was saved by a technicality. A further attempt to halt the construction was defeated in 1897, by which time the interior was substantially complete and had been open for services for six years.

The overall style of the structure shows a free interpretation of Romano-Byzantine features, an unusual architectural style at the time. Many design elements of the basilica symbolise nationalist themes: the portico, with its three arches, is adorned by equestrian statues of French national saints Joan of Arc and King Saint Louis IX, both executed in bronze by Hippolyte Lefebvre. The nineteen-ton *Savoyarde* bell (one of the heaviest in the world), cast in 1895, alludes to the annexation of Savoy by France in 1860.

Abadie, the architect, died not long after the foundation had been laid, in 1884, and five architects continued with the work. The Basilica was not finally completed until 1914, when war intervened. It was formally dedicated in 1919, after World War I, when its national symbolism had shifted.

Nevertheless, as recently as 1971 demonstrators pursued by the police took refuge in the Basilica and called upon their radical comrades to join them in occupying a church "built upon the bodies of communards.

Sacr -C eur is built of travertine stone which remains white even with weathering and pollution.

The basilica complex includes a garden for meditation, with a fountain. The top of the dome is open to tourists and affords a spectacular panoramic view of the city of Paris, which is mostly to the south of the basilica. A mosaic in the apse, entitled *Christ in Majesty*, is among the largest in the world.

The basilica contains a large and very fine pipe organ built by Aristide Cavallé-Coll for a private home in Biarritz, comprising 109 ranks and 78 speaking stops spread across four manuals. The organ was ahead of its time, containing multiple expressive divisions and giving the performer considerable advantages over other even larger instruments of the day.

Since 1885 (before construction had been completed), the Blessed Sacrament has been continually on display in a monstrance above the high altar. Perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament has continued uninterrupted in the Basilica since 1885. Because of this, tourists and others are asked to dress appropriately when visiting the basilica and to observe silence as much as possible, so as not to disturb persons who have come from around the world to pray in this special place.

This Empowerment is of a reflective, inspirational and self-empowering nature. It does not constitute medical or psychological treatment and should be used with common sense.

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