

## Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat

### And the Congregation of the Religious of the Sacred Heart: Belonging to the Ignatian Family

*Madeleine Sophie's relationship with the Jesuits began when she was a teenager. It shaped the Ignatian dimension of the Congregation.*

Louis Barat, who gave Madeleine Sophie an exceptional education for a woman of the 19th century, entered the Fathers of the Faith, a congregation that served as a 'substitute' for the Society of Jesus, which he joined upon its restoration in 1814. He had a decisive influence on his sister, notably by introducing her to Father Varin, who was responsible for the Fathers of the Faith. Father Varin convinced Madeleine Sophie, aged 21, to sacrifice her attraction to the Carmelite order and to work to bring about the intuition of one of his Ignatian companions, Father de Tournely: a congregation based on the interior life, dedicated to discovering and manifesting the love of the Heart of Jesus through the service of educating young people. Father Varin then became Madeleine Sophie Barat's spiritual director, the superior of the nascent congregation, and the principal author of the Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart, whose governing structure was inspired by that of the Jesuits in order to promote international growth by freeing itself from excessive dependence on local bishops. 'When you see the Constitutions and Rules that have just been drafted, you will have no trouble recognising that they have been brought as close as possible to those of Saint Ignatius, and that everything that could be of use to us has been drawn from them,' said Madeleine Sophie in a Conference on December 17, 1815, shortly after the Constitutions were approved by the General Council.



Madeleine Sophie put her own stamp on them and throughout her life she never ceased to affirm that the Congregation's vocation and essence was not to be a female version of the Jesuits.



**Madeleine Sophie's charism sprang from the Ignatian, Carmelite and French School traditions.** 'You know', she said in her later years, '[the Heart of Jesus] is the founder of this little Society. Long before it existed, he made known to his servants that [the Society] was to bring together the interior spirit of Saint Teresa, the humility and gentleness of Saint Ambrose, and the zeal of Saint Ignatius.' (Adele Cahier, *Life of the Venerable Mother Barat*, Paris, 1884, Vol. II, p. 425)

**The purpose of the congregation is to glorify the Heart of Jesus and focus all on his love. The Jesuits left their mark on the four means mentioned in the 1815 Constitutions for achieving this end:** 'the education of children as boarders', 'free instruction for poor children as day pupils', 'contacts with people outside our communities as spring necessarily from its work,' which includes Ignatian spiritual conversation, and 'retreat offered to persons living in the world.'

From the beginning, the sisters benefited from the pedagogy of the Exercises and shared it, not only during retreats: 'In the Circular [addressed to the entire congregation] that we sent you after our last Council, we urged you to use the method of Saint Ignatius for prayer and examinations; today we are facilitating its practice by placing in your hands a book of meditation that will teach you how to do it according to the Rules prescribed by this great master of spiritual life' (Conference of July 28, 1835).

The influence of the Jesuits in the life and work of Madeleine Sophie Barat is an illustration of their fidelity to their mission, recorded in 1883 at the 23rd General Congregation (Decree 46): 'We declare that the Society of Jesus accepts and receives with a spirit overflowing with joy and gratitude the very sweet charge entrusted to it by our Lord Jesus Christ to practise, promote and propagate devotion to his most Divine Heart' ([link](#)).

It was also a Jesuit, Father Favre, who helped Madeleine Sophie to free herself from the fear of God that was deeply ingrained in her as a child in Joigny where Jansenism was rife. This was in the 1830s, when Madeleine Sophie was in her fifties. He accompanied her in living the charism of the congregation she had founded: the gentle and humble love of the Heart of Jesus.

It so happens that this centenary year of the canonization of Madeleine Sophie Barat coincides with the publication of the fourth and final encyclical of Pope Francis, a Jesuit, on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus ([He loved us](#), October 2024).

It also coincides with the jubilee year of the 350th anniversary of the Apparitions of the Sacred Heart to Margaret Mary Alacoque in Paray-le-Monial, whose propagation was entrusted to [Saint Claude La Colombière](#), a Jesuit.



We celebrated these jubilees in a special way, in the midst of the Jubilee of Hope, during the Eucharist on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, June 27, 2025, in the Church of Saint-Francois-Xavier in Paris, where the incorrupt body of Madeleine Sophie rests. Jesuits concelebrated and were present among the congregation of 400 people. The legacy of Madeleine Sophie Barat remains very much alive, Ignatian with its own distinctive nuance of the Sacred Heart.

Claude Deschamps  
[Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, BFN Province](#)

