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Notre Dame reopens to the public, but pay to see

French Culture Minister Rashida Dati's proposal to charge an entrance fee to Notre Dame, shortly before its expected reopening, is raising controversy. According to the scheme, the proceeds could be used to preserve religious heritage.

Nearly a month before the expected reopening of Notre Dame, controversy has arisen following a proposal by French Culture Minister Rachida Dati to impose a ticket fee on future visitors to the 12th-century Gothic architectural masterpiece.

The Paris cathedral has remained closed for nearly five years following a devastating fire in 2019 that destroyed the bell tower and the wooden roof, among other things. A mammoth sum estimated at around [700 million euros](#) was spent on the restoration, and its reopening is scheduled for December 8.

However, shortly before the grand re-opening of Notre Dame, the French culture minister, in an interview with Le Figaro, argued that charging a 5 euro ticket to visitors of the popular attraction could help preserve the religious heritage. It could also maintain other cathedrals around the country.

The proposal appears to be opposed by the Catholic Church. As reported [by the Guardian](#), in a stern statement the Diocese of Notre Dame said that “churches and cathedrals should welcome everyone unconditionally and therefore access should be free.”

In a statement on social platform X, Dati claimed that the entrance fee would apply to cultural visitors and not to those attending mass or other religious services. But the diocese of Notre Dame counters that, given the cathedral's design, separating between tourists and people visiting for private prayer is “extremely difficult.”

“All over Europe visitors pay a ticket to access the most remarkable religious sites. For 5 euros per visitor to Notre Dame de Paris, we could save churches all over France.” said the French [minister of culture in a statement](#).

The proposal to charge a ticket to Notre Dame may also face legal obstacles due to the 1905 law on the separation of church and state. “The government's proposal may not be able to be implemented as formulated,” Ariel Weill, the mayor of the central sector of Paris, told Radio France. The 1905 law states that “visitors to churches cannot be subject to any kind of tax or duty”.

“Churches can charge visitors for entering certain areas but not for entering the church itself,” Maëlle Comte, a professor of public law at Jean Monnet University, explained to the Guardian. Before the devastating fire, visitors paid a ticket of €8.50 to climb the towers of Notre Dame and enjoy the panoramic views and the famous gargoyles, but not to enter the church.

However, Dati's proposal seems to have resonance within the government. “If we can save our religious heritage for 5 euros, it's worth it,” argued French interior minister Bruno Retailleau on France Inter Radio.

Before the devastating fire, Notre Dame attracted around twelve to fourteen million visitors every year. By imposing an entrance fee of 5 euros, 75 million a year could be raised and earmarked for the preservation of the religious heritage.

According to France's national heritage charity, the Fondation du Patrimoine, the situation in many churches and cathedrals is currently very worrying. There are 42. 000 Catholic churches throughout the country. Around 5,000 of them are in danger and 500 are not open to the public for security reasons.

In the past, the French government has launched various campaigns to tackle the problem, such as the 'Loto du patrimoine', through which church restoration projects are funded. According to figures in 2022, the Ministry of Interior spent 57 million euros on religious heritage and in the last five years 280 million euros have been allocated to the restoration of over 8,000 sites.

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