News



Notre Dame Cathedral is pictured Dec. 1, 2024 in Paris, still under construction ahead of its Dec. 8 inauguration Mass. (NCR photo/Christopher White)

Caroline de Sury

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Paris — June 25, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Amid a record number of baptisms, turning the page on the abuse crisis and rapidly changing society, an "Observatory of Catholicism" was officially launched in June in Paris to produce regular, accurate and reliable data on Catholicism in France, thanks to the work of specialists, based on field surveys.

Set up by laypeople and financed by private investors — with the approval of the bishops' conference — it is an independent and autonomous structure. Among its founders and key players is Samuel Pruvot, who has advanced degrees in history and political science, and is senior reporter for the French magazine Famille Chrétienne and is an expert on contemporary Catholicism and politics.

For Pruvot, the creation of the observatory responds to a need that has been strongly felt for several years. "The French religious landscape is changing rapidly, and Catholicism is undergoing a period of profound transformation in France," he told OSV News.

"We see this every day. But we now need structured, scientific and up-to-date data to measure and better analyze these developments."

In concrete terms, the new observatory will carry out its work with the support of the French Institute of Public Opinion, known as IFOP, which is France's leading organization for opinion polls and electoral surveys. The institute's director, Jérôme Fourquet, is a renowned analyst of political and social developments in contemporary France.

"We developed this project in discussions with Jérôme Fourquet," Pruvot explained. "In his latest book on French 'metamorphoses,' published in October 2024, he talked about the decline of Catholicism in France in recent years. But he believes that there is also a revival of Catholicism now, with an increasing commitment from practicing Catholics, despite their minority status, and particularly among young people. Fourquet would like to conduct more detailed research on this new trend, which is of direct interest to us."

"Our idea is to work with a concern for objectivity and scientific accuracy, surrounding ourselves with the best experts, historians, sociologists, and journalists,

without any ideological bias," he explained.

The work of the new observatory is intended to address the general public as well as religious and civil leaders, actors engaged on the ground, as well as researchers and academics.

Advertisement

"The bishops are particularly interested," Pruvot told OSV News. "This can be a very useful tool to help them better discern where to invest their priorities and adjust their pastoral and missionary actions." The bishops' conference has entrusted Bishop Bruno Valentin of Carcassonne and Narbonne — the president of the council for communication — with monitoring the progress of the new observatory.

To accompany its official launch, the observatory has published the results of an initial survey on French Catholicism June 2. It was conducted in February and March with the collaboration of IFOP, under the direction of Fourquet. Its results were published under the title: "Identity, Practices and Perceptions of Catholicism in France."

According to this study, only 41% of French people today say they believe in God, whereas this figure was over 50% until 2021. Seventy-six percent of French people were baptized, but among 18- to 24-year-olds, this proportion is only 42% — compared to 91% of those over 65. Similarly, 46% of French people say they are Catholic, but this proportion is only 23% among 18- to 23-year-olds, compared to 62% of those over 65.

Other findings of the survey are that parents are much less likely to have their young children baptized and that attendance at Mass among those who are baptized is extremely low. Only 2% of Catholics go to Mass every Sunday, 32% go occasionally and 66% never go.

While the church's image has been tarnished by the abuse scandal in recent years, this seems to have affected older people more than younger generations. Only 1 in 4 people age 18-24 say the abuse crisis affected how they think of the church, while as many as 41% of people over 65 say that the abuse crisis most affected their image of the Catholic Church.

Finally, the survey revealed that 64% of French people feel a need for more silence, contemplation and meditation in society. The survey also shows that nearly 1 in 2 French people say they have practicing Christians among the people with whom they regularly socialize.

According to Pruvot, this initial survey is only an introduction to the work that the observatory will undertake. "Four other surveys have already been launched and funded, and will help refine these initial findings," he indicated.

For Pruvot, "Catholicism, of course, cannot be reduced to numbers and data," however "such a tool will make it possible to verify impressions about facts that we perceive in everyday life," he said. "In concrete terms, everyone has noticed a sharp increase in recent months in requests for baptisms and confirmations from adults, especially young adults. Rather than relying on impressions, the observatory's surveys will help clarify and better understand this kind of phenomenon."