

The pope can visit the Grand Duke but should 'leave us in peace'



Critics of Pope Francis' visit to Luxembourg, including secular organisations, argue that the event raises questions about the involvement of the state and whether it serves religious or political purposes.

When discussing the criticism surrounding Pope Francis' visit to Luxembourg, the conversation quickly shifts to the separation of church and state – a convention formally signed in January 2015. This move marked one of the first and most significant societal reforms implemented by Luxembourg's blue-red-green coalition during their initial legislative term.

For some, this separation is what makes the Pope's visit, and especially the way the visit is being handled, controversial. Bob Reuter, President of AHA* (an association promoting secularism), sees the visit as a "symbolic

step backwards" concerning the separation that was firmly established by the convention. Reuter raises the question, "What is the purpose of this visit, of this invitation? Is it political or religious? None of this has been clarified."

According to Reuter, the absence of clear reasoning behind the visit invites speculation about its intent. He even suggests the possibility of a subtle effort to reverse the separation of church and state. The organisation "Liberté de conscience" shares this concern, questioning whether the large turnout of attendees (presented as religious followers) could be used to undermine the secular stance of the state.

Despite these concerns, both organisations are not opposed to a bilateral visit between the Pope and figures like the Archbishop or the Grand Duke. In fact, AHA is preparing to host around 100 international representatives from humanist organisations in the summer of 2025 for their General Assembly, which they will organise and finance independently.

Reuter emphasises that they support freedom of religion and agree that individuals should have the opportunity to meet with their religious leaders. The main issue for both AHA and Liberté de conscience is the framework of this visit and the involvement of the Luxembourgish state, which they find troubling.

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De Bob Reuter, President vun der Asbl "AHA". / © David Winter/RTL



De Jean-Jacques Ruppert, President vun der Associatioun "Liberté de Conscience". / © David Winter/RTL

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Ruppert has voiced sharp criticism of Pope Francis' upcoming visit, calling the event "cynical" and describing the Pope as a "Monarch with divine right." He expressed frustration with the extensive accommodations being made by the state for the visit, suggesting that if the Grand Duke wanted to meet the Pope, "he should host him privately at the castle." Ruppert finds it difficult to justify the mobilisation of so many resources for the occasion and speculates that even Prime Minister Luc Frieden of the CSV (Christian Social People's Party) may not be entirely pleased with how the situation is unfolding.

Ruppert also pointed out that most countries engage with the Vatican as the "Holy See," rather than the Vatican as a state. In his view, this distinction underscores that the visit is personal rather than an official state event. He stressed that if the Pope wished to visit the Grand Duke, "he should do so and leave us in peace".

Humanist associations, such as Liberté de conscience, have similarly questioned the nature of the event, particularly whether it will attract true "believers" only. Archbishop Jean-Claude Hollerich referred to "people" visiting the Pope in a social media video, without explicitly mentioning "Catholics" or "believers." Ruppert believes that curiosity will likely draw many into the city, likening it to the public interest if King Charles were to visit. He added: "It's a show [...] He's not even holding a mass."

The AHA shares Ruppert's view, suggesting that the visit is less about a genuine engagement with a religious leader and more about participating in a spectacle. They argue that for many, the event may simply serve as an opportunity for social media content, further reducing its significance.

*[AHA Luxembourg](#) stands for Alliance of Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics.