Beat: Politics

POPE LEO XIV MACRON&THE REPUBLIC, 4 DAYS OF FAITH ETHICS & PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

POWERFUL FAITH Vs FRENCH SECULARISM

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USPA NEWS - Pope Leo XIV's four-day apostolic journey to France, from 25 to 28 September 2026, was more than a pastoral visit. It brought the Holy See and the French Republic into direct conversation on peace, the ethical limits of technology, education, human dignity, the protection of vulnerable people and the place of faith in a secular democracy. The political centre of the visit began on its first day at the Elysée Palace, where President Emmanuel Macron and Brigitte Macron welcomed the Pope before meetings with French authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps.
The visit did not erase differences between a secular Republic and the Catholic Church. Instead, it revealed a serious exchange between two institutions that do not share the same role but do confront many of the same global crises. Macron's government defended laïcité (Secularism) as a guarantor of liberty of conscience; Pope Leo argued that a just secularism should not exclude religious voices from public reflection. Our Handyjournalist Field Reports from Paris, Saint-Denis, Lourdes and Metz, and sources from Elysee, French Presidency, Vatican, Lourdes Sanctuary

The Elysee Palace (French Presidency) reception gathered around 500 guests, including senior state officials, ministers, parliamentary leaders, diplomats, religious representatives and figures from civil society. President Macron, Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu, Senate President Gerard Larcher, National Assembly President Yael Braun-Pivet, Culture Minister Rachida Dati, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau, Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, former presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany and the Apostolic Nuncio were among the leading figures associated with the occasion.
The official discussions covered climate change, artificial intelligence, the war in Ukraine, peace and stability in the Middle East, and cooperation with African partners. The Elysee described the encounter as an opportunity to address bilateral relations and major global challenges on which France and the Holy See seek dialogue and cooperation.
In welcoming the Pope, Macron presented France as a nation committed to peace, effective multilateralism and the defence of international law.

MACRON'S LAICITÉ (SECULARISM): DIALOGUE, NOT EXCLUSION
Macron's central reply was a defence of an inclusive and peaceful French secularism. In his Elysée address, he argued that the Republic does not fear free consciences and is strengthened by dialogue among differing convictions, so long as it remains faithful to human dignity, science and the protection of vulnerable people.
"The Republic does not fear free consciences, because our Nation is strong from the necessary dialogue between all opinions."
He linked the Republic's vision of fraternity to the Pope's concern for the vulnerable:
"This fight for peace is inseparable from the fight for human dignity and the struggle against injustice."
"The Republic and the Church often come across the same faces: the face of those we must look straight in the eye, the face of those whose voices struggle to be heard."
These words established the political significance of the visit. Macron did not offer a merger between religion and state; he proposed a relationship of dialogue, in which a secular Republic can recognise the social contribution of faith communities while retaining its independence.

THE POPE'S ETHICAL CHALLENGE
Pope Leo XIV's response was respectful but direct. He did not try to govern France from the Elysee or deny the legitimacy of its secular institutions. However, he insisted that public policy cannot be separated from moral questions when human lives, suffering and dignity are at stake.
On end-of-life legislation, the Pope reaffirmed that the right to life is the indispensable foundation of every other human right. In his address, he warned against treating death as an answer to suffering, calling instead for accompaniment and care for people facing illness, frailty and isolation.

“The right to life is the foundation of all other rights.”
“True compassion does not consist in accelerating death, but in accompanying life until its natural end.”
The Pope’s statement inevitably entered France’s active political and legislative debate over end-of-life policy. Yet it should be read as a moral intervention, not as an attempt to replace Parliament. His argument was that a society’s legal choices must continue to ask whether they protect those whose dependence or suffering makes them most vulnerable. Sources: Elysee, French Presidency, Vatican, Lourdes Sanctuary,

AI: AGREEMENT ON HUMAN CONTROL
On artificial intelligence, the Pope and the President found significant common ground. Pope Leo warned against a “paradise of machines” in which people lose moral discernment and technology shapes daily life without adequate ethical limits. He argued that technology must serve human beings, not measure their worth or become an instrument of domination.
“Let us beware of transforming our world into a ‘paradise of machines’ without a soul.”
“Technology must serve humanity; it must never replace it or dictate its value.”
Macron similarly called for international oversight so that the most advanced systems are not controlled by a small number of powerful actors or used to oppress people. The shared message was clear: innovation matters, but human judgement, democratic rules and the defence of rights must remain in command. Sources: Elysee, Vatican, Lourdes Sanctuary, npr, thenationalnews, Euronews

UNESCO: PEACE BEYOND DIPLOMATIC WORDS
At UNESCO, Pope Leo moved from France’s domestic debate to the international stage. He argued that peace cannot rest only on treaties or political bargains; it must also be built in human conscience, education and ethical formation. UNESCO, he suggested, has a vital role because culture, science and education should advance truth, dignity and peace rather than domination.
“Peace cannot be guaranteed by treaties alone or by mere political compromises.”
“Education does not mean training people to simply serve technological industries.”
“The highest mission of education is to elevate the human soul, ensuring that new generations strive ‘to be more’ rather than to ‘have more.'' The Pope also warned against international institutions becoming theatres for power rather than instruments of the common good. His defence of multilateralism was not naïve: it was a demand that countries renew their commitment to dialogue, law and the dignity of every nation. Sources: Elysee, Vatican, Lourdes Sanctuary, UNESCO

POLITICAL REACTIONS AND A CLEAR LIMIT
The Pope’s remarks on life, technology, secularism and France’s Christian heritage generated contrasting reactions across the political spectrum. Some left-wing voices criticised the prominence given to religious arguments at the heart of the Republic and rejected any perceived challenge to legislative sovereignty. Conservative figures welcomed the Pope’s intervention as a moral reminder on end-of-life policy and the human consequences of unregulated technology. National Rally figures praised his references to French spiritual heritage, while his emphasis on refugees, international cooperation and the dignity of vulnerable migrants complicated any simple political appropriation.
The lesson of the four days was that no political camp could fully claim Pope Leo XIV. He spoke in terms that resonated with different audiences, tradition, social justice, peace, human dignity, family, solidarity and technological responsibility, but he did not offer a partisan program.

The Pope’s defence of multilateralism was not naïve: it was a demand that countries renew their commitment to dialogue, law and the dignity of every nation. Sources: Elysee, Vatican, Lourdes Sanctuary

HERE ARE FRENCH POLITICAL REACTIONS FOLLOWING THE ELYSEE STATEMENTS
The Pope’s uncompromising stance on the defense of life and artificial intelligence sent shockwaves across the French political spectrum:
• The Left (La France Insoumise & Socialists): Leftist leaders expressed severe frustration regarding the prominent exposure given to religious viewpoints in state palaces. They accused the Pope of trying to intervene directly in French legislative sovereignty, specifically targeting his remarks on the recently approved "End-of-Life" (euthanasia) laws.
• The Far-Right (Rassemblement National): Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella highly praised the Pope's references to France's traditional roots and spiritual history. However, his firm remarks at UNESCO defending the reception of refugees and vulnerable migrants left them noticeably quiet and critical of his geopolitical stance.
• The Right and Conservatives (Les Républicains): Consistently supportive, right-wing leaders viewed the Pope's condemnation of a "paradise of machines" and programmed death as a necessary moral wake-up call for the executive branch.

A CONVERSATION, NOT A CONFRONTATION

Pope Leo XIV's journey through France did not resolve France's disagreements over end-of-life legislation, secularism, artificial intelligence, migration, peace or international diplomacy. It did something more durable: it brought these questions into public view through a language of dignity, responsibility and concern for the most vulnerable.

Macron's response set out the Republic's conviction that freedom of conscience, scientific reason and secular institutions are essential safeguards. The Pope's response reminded France that moral reflection, solidarity and the human person must remain at the centre of technological, legal and political decisions. Their meeting was not a fusion of Church and state. It was a conversation between two traditions of public responsibility one republican and secular, the other spiritual and universal.

That conversation continued well beyond the Elysee: at UNESCO, at Notre-Dame, among 80,000 young people at the Stade de France, at Lourdes and in Metz. The political force of the visit lay precisely in that balance: the Pope entered the public debate without seeking to own it, and the Republic welcomed him without abandoning the principles that define it.

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