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The entourage accompanying the Pope on his September visit to the UK will be accommodated in a luxury hotel in central London – with eleven of them being funded by the taxpayer.

Rooms at the hotel can cost up to £920 per night, and the Government has stumped up for eleven cardinals and other flunkies to stay there. They will also receive a daily allowance of £150 courtesy of the public purse.

*The Tablet* reports that the entire hotel, which it is not naming “for security reasons”, has been block booked for 17 and 18 September.

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: “Isn’t this visit draining enough out of the hard-pressed taxpayers’ pocket without putting people up in quite unnecessary luxury? The pope himself will be staying at the papal nuncio’s house in Wimbledon – surely a few more of his flunkies could have been accommodated there at no cost? The Catholic Church has enormous amounts of property in London that these people could have used. This profligacy is all the more scandalous at a time of austerity when it is likely to lead directly to the sacrifice of people’s livelihoods.”