

HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Eithne D'Auria : 10 December 2007

1. What are the institutional structures of your religious organisation?

Legislative Bodies: Supreme Pontiff; Congregations of Roman Curia by special mandate; Bishops' Conferences (assemblies of bishops of a territory - for their own territories); Diocesan bishops (for their own territories); Institutes of Consecrated Life (for their own members, with approval of the Holy See).

Administrative Bodies: Pope has supreme authority. College of Bishops = all bishops in communion with Pope, also has supreme authority (cannot act without Pope). College of Cardinals assist Pope collegially; obligation to cooperate closely with Pope; prerogative to elect Pope; presided over by Dean, who is 'first among equals'. Synod of Bishops (representatives of bishops throughout the world) discusses matters presented to it by Pope and makes recommendations. Roman Curia: (Government of the Holy See) = Secretariat of State + 9 Congregations + 3 Tribunals + other Institutes. Without special mandate by the Pope, the Dicasteries (departments), usually headed by cardinals are administrative, not legislative, bodies. Papal Legates/delegates represent Pope at particular churches/State governments. Bishops' Conferences: teaching and pastoral authority. Bishops: have 'all ordinary, proper and immediate power' required for governing the diocese. Diocesan curia consists of priests and laity who assist bishop in governing entire diocese, especially in directing pastoral action.

Judicial Bodies: Pope (no appeal against a judgement or decree of Pope); Tribunals of Apostolic See = Apostolic Signatura (supreme tribunal); The First Section of the Apostolic Signatura serves as watchdog - ultimate responsibility to oversee the proper administration of lower courts and has judicial competence. Second Section handles all controversies arising from administrative acts. Roman Rota has appellate jurisdiction (2nd and 3rd instance). Interdiocesan (Metropolitan) tribunals hear appeals from diocesan, first instance tribunals.

2. What are its sources of internal rules or other regulatory instruments?

Sacred Scripture; Natural Law; Custom; Church Councils; Fathers of the Church; Popes; Bishops; Rules of Religious Orders; Civil Law; Concordats.

3. What are the subjects dealt with by your internal rules?

In the Code of Canon Law: General Norms; People of God; Teaching Office; Sanctifying Office; Temporal Goods; Sanctions; Judicial Procedures. In liturgical Books: Liturgical law.

4. What are the purposes of your internal rules?

Inherent need of Church as community. Guidance of faithful to virtuous life. Supreme goal = salvation of souls.

5. What benefits or challenges does civil law provide?

Benefits: Recognition as voluntary association, protection for practice, recognition of charitable trusts. Challenges: equality issues, eg marriage, adoption etc.