

Vatican divorces from Italian law

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By David Willey
BBC News,
Rome

The Vatican City State, the world's smallest sovereign state, has decided to divorce itself from Italian law.

Vatican legal experts say there are too many laws in Italian civil and criminal codes, and that they frequently conflict with Church principles.

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With effect from New Year's Day, the Pope has decided that the Vatican will no longer automatically adopt laws passed by the Italian parliament.

All Italian laws will be examined one by one before they are adopted.

Under the Lateran treaties signed exactly 80 years ago between Italy and the Pope, and the Italian Parliamentary system, Italian laws were applied automatically.

Government confession

A senior Vatican Canon lawyer, Monsignor Jose Maria Serrano Ruiz, has gone on record as saying that Italian laws are too many, too unstable and too often conflict with the moral teachings of the Catholic Church.

The reaction from the Italian government has been that from a technical point of view, the Vatican may well be right.

An Italian government minister admitted Italian laws are often badly written and are sometimes difficult to understand.

An Italian parliamentary commission is at present working out how to delete tens of thousands of obsolete laws from Italy's civil code.

The Vatican has also decided to scrutinise international treaties before deciding whether or not to adhere to them.

It has recently refused to approve a United Nations declaration decriminalising homosexuality.

The wording went too far, Vatican officials said, in placing different sexual orientations on the same level.

Some legal observers believe that the Vatican is simply trying to assert its legal independence in cases involving for example, civil unions, divorce, living wills, or euthanasia.

If Italy were to legalise same sex marriages or euthanasia, for example, the Vatican would now be able to refuse to recognise that.

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