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CATHOLIC ECCLESIASTICAL HERALDRY IN USE TODAY

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Summary (in English)

Heraldry in the Catholic Church is still very much in use today. The Catholic Church in its dioceses, parishes, chapters, monasteries, religious and military-religious orders, fraternities, hospitals, etc., possessed its own religious symbols since the pre-heraldic period such as sacred figures, instruments of crucifixion, animal figures and the icons of saints. These symbols became part of coats of arms and seals used since the end of the 13th century. Even today, ecclesiastical heraldry is utilized and beneficial because a coat of arms can be used to identify the buildings, documents and holders of ecclesiastical authority. Through the insignia and the external ornamentation of the shield, the office, dignity, rank and hierarchical position of the owner can be understood: it is a graphic expression, synthesis and message of his ministry.

Differences occur in ecclesiastical coats of arms depending on the particular type of heraldry. For example, the law of primogeniture is not applied to the coats of arms of prelates therefore, the brisure, is absent. Furthermore, the same prelate can adopt a different coat of arms during his pastoral life depending on the dignity received – a cardinal that become a pope – changing also the external ornaments.

The recent evolution of ecclesiastical heraldry concerns its style, which is often expressed in the modern transformation of old figures, in the creation of new figures or even in the modification of the family coat of arms by adding or removing an element.

Within the Catholic Church no office specifically deals with heraldry and taking on the own coat of arms is a private decision. Often the assumption of some elements is the expression of the religious experience lived and which led the holder to his current position.

This report presents ecclesiastical coats of arms currently in use by clergy and Catholic Church institutions. They were collected from recent correspondence and, therefore, the autograph signature on the letterhead containing the coat of arms determines its value.

Ecclesiastical Catholic heraldry in the XXI century is alive, contemporary and widely used.

CV: Fabio Cassani Pironti (1961) is a heraldist, genealogist and chivalry orders expert, born in Venezuela of Italian descent. He graduated from the University of Naples Federico II in International Political Science, undertook a Master in Economy and Politics of Transport at Sapienza University of Rome and then a European Studies diploma at Grenoble Alpes University. He achieved a postgraduate degree as Archivist at the Vatican Apostolic Archive, followed by studies in genealogy and heraldry. Finally, a PhD in International Relations. A former Venezuelan diplomat and a lecturer at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, currently he is an Official of the Holy See Secretariat of State (Vatican). He is the author of a number of works on chivalric orders and protocol. He has also published most articles on family history, genealogy, heraldry, etc. and belongs to many institutes worldwide related to these topics. The Venezuelan National Assembly commissioned him to reorganize the state coats of arms (7 March 2006).