

Catholic Church to make marriage annulment quicker and easier

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In a move aimed at modernising the Catholic Church the Vatican announced on Tuesday 8 September 2015, that it would be altering the rules on marriage annulment. The changes are the first to be introduced to the process to obtain an annulment in almost three centuries. They are intended to streamline the current process which is regarded by many as overly complex and lengthy due to the need for the filing of evidence, attendance at a tribunal hearing, and the requirement that the tribunal judgment be confirmed before it is final. The Vatican has announced that the changes are not intended to represent a shift in the belief of the Catholic Church that a marriage should not be dissolved. The reform simplifies the criteria required for seeking an annulment, which is currently only allowed under specific circumstances and which require the marriage to have been invalid when entered into. The new rules will take effect from 8 December. A new fast track procedure will be introduced which will be available in cases where the nullity of the marriage is 'particularly evident' and neither party objects to it. In those situations the case will be judged by a bishop and will not need a second church approval. The changes were agreed by the Pope following meetings with the Bishops. In announcing the changes the Vatican has emphasised that they do not represent an indication that the Church favours annulment of marriages, but that it is addressing the need to ensure that those who find themselves in such a position have the benefit of quicker and less complex trials. The changes may be viewed as representing the Catholic Church's aim to be more in touch with modern life, although the standard required to annul a marriage has not been amended. It will be interesting to see the outcome of a further meeting of the Bishops next month at which they will discuss the church's view of the modern family.

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