

# **.Catholic Beats .Bible, .Islam to Domain Name Punch**

The Vatican has come out in first place in a long-awaited draw to expand the Internet address system with new domain names that go beyond the usual .com, .org or .net endings.

ICANN, the corporation that oversees the Internet address system, announced this week the domain name .catholic written in Chinese characters will be the first bid it considers in a drive to expand and reorganize sites on the World Wide Web.

The same extension in Arabic letters ranked 25th in the random draw and the Vatican's application for a version in Cyrillic for Russian and other Slavic languages came in 96th.

Ranking high means the applicant could get approval early next year to operate the new domain and approve addresses using it. In the Vatican's case, Rome could then ensure only genuine Roman Catholic institutions get to use that domain name.

"This is a way to give a coherence and authentication to our presence in the digital arena," said Monsignor Paul Tighe, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

"Anyone looking online will recognize the site belongs to an institution that belongs to the Catholic Church," he said, adding the new, so-called top level domain names (|TLDs) could also help speed online searches.

## **.Bible and .Islam**

For online retailers such as Amazon, whose application for .store in Japanese came in second, early approval could mean a competitive advantage and prompt a quick introduction of the new name.

But the Vatican did not enter the draw for commercial reasons

and would not rush to launch its TLDs, Tighe said. In addition, the main TLD in Latin letters— ended up in 1,366th place and may take months before it is approved.

Website owners are now restricted to a few dozen TLDs such as .com and country code domains such as . or .fr. Many of the 1,930 applications for new TLDs came from companies, including Internet giants such as Amazon and Google.

Several other faith-based groups applied for other TLDs such as .bible or .islam. The extension .mormon was the next-highest religious application drawn, coming in at 118th place.

ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, has stressed that assigning a certain TLD does not imply any endorsement of the religious group seeking it, just recognition it is the best suited to use the name.

Tighe said the ICANN draw handled applications for TLDs in non-Latin alphabets first, which explained why the Vatican's Chinese, Arabic and Cyrillic extensions came out far ahead of its main TLD in Latin letters.

## **Internet Imprimatur**

ICANN invited comments on applications earlier this year. The Vatican's application for exclusive use of .catholic drew criticism from members of several Protestant churches that also use the term, which comes from the Greek for "universal".

"This request is a move by a powerful group to squelch the voices and rights of other Christians," Dave Daubert, pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Elgin, Illinois, wrote on the ICANN webpage for comments on the applications.

Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, apparently saw no hope of a consensus on religious TLDs and opposed them all.

Some religions seem to have kept out of the fray entirely. There were no applications for .buddhist, .hindu or .jewish.

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*Reporting By Tom Heneghan; Editing by Michael Roddy.*

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