

To: Renate Behrens, Chair, RDA Steering Committee  
CC: Anne Welsh, RSC Secretary  
From: Robert L. Maxwell, NARDAC representative to RDA Steering Committee  
Subject: Formal response to RSC/ReligionsWG/2023/1 – Religious titles

NARDAC does not support this proposal.

NARDAC is sympathetic to the attempt to address Western and Christian bias in RDA, but the approach of simply removing these instructions does not address the problem in a helpful way. The proposal—choosing to delete coverage rather than expand or generalize—also seems odd given the WG’s charge, which includes the phrase “A specific and more immediate goal is to expand the non-Christian coverage in RDA.”

First, the options are not specific to one religion (Catholicism) as claimed in the proposal. Terms of religious rank (e.g., Bishop) are common in many if not most religions and denominations, Christian and non-Christian, and they certainly aren’t confined to “the tenets of Catholicism.” Similarly, many religious traditions recognize Saints, or similar beings. And the concept of “spirit” representing an entity is hardly unique to Catholicism. Indeed, in cataloging usage, the term as a qualifier is commonly used for entities channeled by mediums, an idea that may in fact be contrary to Catholic dogma. Even the term “Pope”, while closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, is not exclusively used by that denomination, at least in popular usage (e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope\\_of\\_the\\_Coptic\\_Orthodox\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_of_the_Coptic_Orthodox_Church)).

Second, dealing with terms of rank for religious officials is a common cataloging problem. Catalogers will be faced with resources that deal with popes, saints, Dalai Lamas, rabbis, imams, yogis, patriarchs, bodhisattvas, purported spirit communications, and many others in the course of their work. Titles, such as those given to ecclesiastical figures, are important points of differentiation and identification for persons and are important aspects of these individuals. Simply removing instructions for dealing with this problem is not helpful.

While we acknowledge that only matters dealing with religion are within the WG’s purview, we are puzzled by the idea of excising instructions for religious terms from Additional elements and designations in access points for person (22.74.37.64), but leaving behind other, secular, terms of rank or honour or office in the main body of RDA. Removing instructions for religious titles while leaving instructions for similar non-religious contexts could easily be perceived as not merely an attempt to deal with western bias, but as anti-religious.

We also point out that these instructions are referred to, or are paralleled, in other parts of RDA. For example, Entities > [Person](#) > [term of rank or honour or office](#) refer to these same terms.

It would be preferable from our standpoint to attempt to generalize the instructions and expand the examples to include non-Christian (and Christian non-Catholic) traditions so that there is some guidance on their continued use to identify persons when a cataloging community deems it important.

In sum, we feel that while the proposal is well intentioned, it needs further thought and reworking.

**Recommendation 1:**

NARDAC does not support this recommendation.

Comment: As noted in our introductory statement, we feel it would be better to generalize this instruction rather than eliminate it to encompass spiritual leadership in a broader fashion such that Patriarchs, Dalai Lamas, and the like are addressed equitably.

There was also some concern at losing the keywords "pope" and "bishop" if the instruction disappears, as many people navigate the Toolkit by keyword searching. If the instruction is eliminated, the keywords will also disappear, and navigating to applicable instructions would be impossible.

**Recommendation 2:**

NARDAC does not support this recommendation.

Comment: This option could easily be expanded to include non-western contexts by either listing a few other titles aside from "bishop" or removing the term and amending the text so something along the lines of "Include a term or part of a term of religious rank or other religious vocation that appears frequently ..."

**Recommendation 3:**

NARDAC does not support this recommendation.

Comment: The concept of "Saint" is not exclusively Christian, although other religious traditions may use other terms to describe such an entity. We would prefer generalizing the instruction rather than removing it.

Note that instructions for "Saint" also appear in the Preferred Name of Person element. There are three instructions starting at

[https://access.rdatoolkit.org/en-US\\_ala-08a3dcc9-4cb0-355c-bf4f-ada2c63e5f6/div\\_gpv\\_xrc\\_lhb](https://access.rdatoolkit.org/en-US_ala-08a3dcc9-4cb0-355c-bf4f-ada2c63e5f6/div_gpv_xrc_lhb)

Included are references to the access point for person instructions with regards to recording "Saint". If the instructions for "Saint" are generalized then some editorial work will also need to be done for "Saint" in Preferred Name of Person.

**Recommendation 4:**

NARDAC does not support this recommendation.

Comment: The religious concept and term “spirit” are neither exclusively Catholic nor Christian and this instruction does not represent an example of western bias in RDA.