

## Is The Church Ready for a Brazilian Pope?

Contributed by Newsroom  
Saturday, 02 April 2005

Brazil is the country with more catholics in the world, with a population of 183 million, 150 million of which (82%) are catholic. Mexico comes in second with 125 million.

Brazil also has 267 dioceses, more than any other nation, including Italy, which comes in second place, with 226 dioceses.

Analysts seem to agree that the new pope might be a Latin-American depending on the project the conclave, who elect the pope and which is formed by all the Cardinals who are younger than 80, has for the Church.

If the Church decides that's time to concentrate in Europe where the catholic faith has been suffering losses, the new pope would be an European, most probably an Italian.

If the cardinals, however, believe Latin America should be rewarded for keeping alive and growing the ideals of the Catholic Church, a Brazilian might have a chance to succeed John Paul II. Five Brazilian cardinals are apt to vote.

Among the names most cited as a "papabile" is Brazilian Cardinal Dom Cláudio Hummes, archbishop of São Paulo, who is 70 years old and a conservative theologian. He is also known for his defense of the poor and for being a severe critic of human rights violations.

National Catholic Reporter Rome correspondent John Allen described Hummes in his weekly Word From Rome column as a "member of the 'Social Justice' current among the cardinals".

Cardinal Hummes, a Franciscan who was born in Brazil from German parents, in a recent interview declared that one of the great challenges of the new pope will be to conciliate the views of the Church with developments of science mainly those dealing with life and biotechnology.

"We are living in a very strong state of ebullition," he said. "The Church has as great challenge to dialogue with all this progress in order to find new answers to the new problems."

He didn't seem in a hurry to go to Rome:

"Going to Rome will depend on how the pope's health condition develops. I believe that the cardinals only will go to Rome after the pope dies", said Hummes when asked if he had already been called to the Vatican.

Dom Hummes confided that he always had a very cordial relationship with John Paul, who used to ask him about how things were going in Brazil. The pope was mostly interested in land reform questions and felt quite shaken by the fact that 10% of the Catholics in Brazil have left the Catholic Church in recent years, often to embrace evangelical denominations.

During mass celebrated Friday night in honor of the pope, Cardinal Hummes recalled that João Paulo II always preached about the need of the Church to accept other religions at the same time that he was worried about all those who abandoned Catholicism.

According to the cardinal, in the last ten years, there was a reduction of 10% in the number of followers of the Latin-American Catholic Church.

"We are not questioning others religions, we are questioning ourselves; what we should do, what we are not able to do and why we are not able to do it and still what should we do to revive the faith in the hearts of our Catholic population", said the cardinal, adding that this should be "the goal of the new pope as well".

About the choice of the next pontiff, the cardinal stressed that it will represent a new moment for the Catholic church.

"The popes are all different from each other and a new pope always brings a new era. We cannot want a simple continuity. There will be continuity in the essential, important things, but even the way of dealing with these things is different from pope to pope", said Cláudio Cardinal Hummes.

BRz