

## Catholics Decline 20% in Brazil

Contributed by Daisy Nascimento  
Friday, 22 April 2005

Brazil remains the world's most Catholic country, but over the past 20 years the Catholic Church has been losing sizable ground, especially to the evangelical faiths. Still 126 million people, or 74% of the population, consider themselves Catholics. The number of people without religion has also increased.

These data are part of the "Portrait of Religions in Brazil," released on Wednesday, April 20, by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV). The study was based on the most recent demographic census, conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2000.

According to the director of the center of Social Policies (CPS) of the FGV's Brazilian Economics Institute, Marcelo Neri, the Catholic portion of the country's population declined 20% between 1940 and 2000.

According to the economist, the study reveals that, among the many socioeconomic variables, such as marriage, fertility, occupation, income, and inequality, that are covered in the most recent censuses, none has changed as much as the religious composition of the Brazilian population.

In Neri's view, this situation may be related to the economic stagnation of recent years.

"Perhaps the Church is presently seen, on the one hand, as a form of upward social mobility, while, on the other, the new emerging churches play an essential role in terms of the social protection network. A social protection network that substitutes the State," the economist explained.

The study also shows that over the last 30 years women are becoming less Catholic, even though they are still more religious than men. According to the "Portrait of Religions in Brazil," the female presence outweighs the male in 43 of the 50 religions that are listed.

For Neri, the conservatism of the Catholic Church constitutes another likely factor behind the growth of other religions, chiefly the evangelical Pentecostals.

"In the past 30 years of feminist revolution, in which women have gained ground in the labor market and the educational system, to the point of surpassing men, perhaps the Catholic religion has not provided the space women need for this reinsertion in society," Neri affirmed.

Agência Brasil