

Brazilian catholic church losing ground to evangelists, atheists and agnostics

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The Brazilian Catholic Church continues to loose ground to the evangelists and those who declare to have no religion, according to the latest survey released by the Social policies centre from the Getulio Vargas Foundation in Rio.

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According to the new religions map of Brazil, coordinated by sociologist Marcelo Neri, Catholics have dropped from 73.8% of the total Brazilian population to 68.4% in 2009, which represents a fall of 5.4 percentage points.

Simultaneously evangelists now represent 20.2% of the population compared to 17.9% in 2003, and those with no religion (atheists and agnostics) have jumped from 5.1% in 2003 to 6.7% in 2009.

The report was based on data collected from 200.000 interviews under the Family Budget survey undertaken by Brazil's geography and statistics institute, IBGE.

The fall in the number of Catholics has been gradual but sustained from the start of last century, but had remained reasonably stable in the previous 2000/2003 survey by FGV.

"In 2009 we have arrived to the lowest level of Catholic adepts in Brazil's documented history", says the report. "We observe the fall in the percentage of Catholics is extensive to all age groups. The change was lesser for the older age groups and greater among the young generations".

Such a reduction opened space for other beliefs as well as atheists and agnostics.

The evangelist "Assembly of God" has become the second strongest church in Brazil (in numbers) with great influence in D and E income sectors" said Marcelo Neri, who added that it is clearly advancing on sectors A and B.

Evangelists have advanced in all age groups but penetration is much greater among the young. In the emerging class C, evangelists represent 21.5% of the population, above the national average (20.2%).

Catholicism is the religion with greater presence in the extremes of the income spectrum (72.7% in class E and 69% in AB), while the evangelist and Pentecostal have become more popular among the mid lower half of income distribution (15.3% in Class D). Traditional evangelists are concentrated at AB (8.35%) and C (8.7%).

Regarding geographical distribution the greatest concentration of Catholics is in the north east of Brazil with the state of Piauí having 87.9% Catholics compared to the national average of 68.4%.

“Data shows that the long standing Brazilian poverty, in rural areas of the north-east, which are also the most supported with social programs, remain Catholic while the new poverty (like the non aided urban periphery of the large cities) seems to be migrating to the new Pentecostal churches and non religion, according to FGV.

At the same time family per capita income of evangelists is 6.9% lower to that of Catholics, precisely because Catholicism still has a relevant presence among the Brazilian economic elite.

As to gender, Brazilian women at the same time they are more religious than men, they are also currently less Catholic: among those declaring a religion, 75.3% of men say they are catholic which compares with the 71.3% for women.

“While men simply abandon beliefs, the women change church, preserving more than men their religiosity”, says the FGV reports.



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