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National Post Holy Post

HOLYPOST *get down on your knees & blog*

In world's largest Catholic nations, youth are turning away from faith

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National Catholic Reporter Oct 22, 2011 – 11:00 AM ET | Last Updated: Oct 23, 2011 6:24 PM ET

Two-thirds of the world's Catholic population today is in the southern hemisphere, a share that should reach three-quarters by mid-century. To discern where the church is headed, it's critical to keep an eye on what's bubbling down south, and two recent stories thus deserve to be on the global Catholic radar screen.

The first comes out of Brazil; the second, from the Philippines. Both are Catholic superpowers, among the top four Catholic countries in terms of population, and both are destined to be pace-setters in the church of the 21st century.

In Brazil, a respected national research institute, the Getulio Vargas Foundation, has published a new study suggesting that secularism — defined, in this case, as throwing in the towel on religious faith and practice — is making rapid inroads among Brazilian youth. Based on 200,000 interviews conducted for Brazil's 2010 census, the study concludes that the Catholic share of Brazil's population has dropped to 68 percent, its lowest level since census data began to be collected in 1872, in part because of the rising percentage of youth who disclaim any religious affiliation.

The key finding is this: The number of people under 20 who say they follow no religion is growing three times more quickly than among those over 50, with 9 percent of young Brazilians saying they belong to no religion.

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Posted in: Holy Post Tags: Brazil, Getulio Vargas Foundation, John Allen, Philippines, Secularization

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