

Brazilian to head Vatican Congregation for Religious Life

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Jan. 5, 2011



Archbishop Braz de Aviz in an undated photo from the website of the Conference of Bishops of Brazil. (CNS photo/Conference of Bishops of Brazil)

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI named Brazilian Archbishop Joao Braz de Aviz of Brasilia, not a member of a religious order, to head the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

The 63-year-old archbishop succeeds Cardinal Franc Rode, the 76-year-old Vincentian who held the post for almost seven years. The normal retirement age for curia officials is 75.

Since 1973, prelates ordained for religious orders and for dioceses have alternated in holding the post of prefect of the congregation overseeing religious life in the Catholic Church. In the past 100 years, 11 of the 18 prefects did not belong to a religious order.

Archbishop Braz de Aviz was born in Mafra in 1947 and did his initial seminary studies in Brazil before being sent to Rome, where he earned degrees from the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Pontifical Lateran University.

Ordained to the priesthood in 1972 for the Diocese of Apucarana, he served as a parish priest, as a professor of dogmatic theology in a seminary and as rector of the seminaries in Apucarana and Londrina.

For more on Bráz de Aviz, see John Allen's story: [New Vatican boss on religious life seems to come without agenda](#) [1]

In 1994, he was named auxiliary bishop of Vitoria. Four years later, he became bishop of Ponta Grossa. In 2002, he was named archbishop of Maringa and in 2004 was named archbishop of Brasilia.

Cardinal Rode's tenure at the congregation has been marked by strong support for religious congregations -- especially new communities -- that emphasize what many consider to be a very traditional style of religious life and by criticism of orders seen as having gone too far in adapting to modern life since the Second Vatican Council.

The Slovenian cardinal has blamed much of the drop in numbers of consecrated men and women on the secularization of society and of religious orders themselves.

"The secularized culture has penetrated into the minds and hearts of some consecrated persons and some communities, where it is seen as an opening to modernity and a way of approaching the contemporary world," he said in a speech in Naples, Italy, last February.

In January 2009, Cardinal Rode ordered an apostolic visitation of women's orders in the United States.

Cardinal Rode said the visitation was designed "to encourage vocations and assure a better future for women religious" in the United States by responding to concerns involving "some irregularities or omissions in American religious life. Most of all, you could say, it involves a certain secular mentality that has spread in these religious families and, perhaps, also a certain 'feminist' spirit."

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