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Vatican's point man for religious life: 'We've started to listen again'

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Brazilian Archbishop Joao Braz de Aviz is pictured in his office at the Vatican June 4. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

From time to time, Vatican officials are accused of living in a bubble, detached from the complex and sometimes harsh realities facing ordinary people. However accurate that may be in individual cases, it?s certainly not the story of Brazilian Archbishop João Bráz de Aviz, 64, appointed in January as the new prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

Consider these details from his biography:

- Bráz grew up in a poor family in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná, with four brothers and three sisters ? the youngest sister, today 47, has Down?s syndrome. His father was a butcher.
- His surroundings were so rural that when a child was born, the family had to travel by horse-drawn carriage for 25 miles to have the baby baptized. A priest visited their area once a month, so popular lay leaders were in charge of catechism, worship, and devotional life.
- As a young priest, Bráz was once on his way to a village to say Mass when he stumbled upon an armored car robbery. He was shot during the crossfire, with bullets perforating his lungs and intestines and one eye. Although he survived and surgeons were able to save his eye, he still carries fragments of those bullets in his body.

In a recent interview with the prestigious Italian journal *30 Giorni*, Bráz, who's very close to the Focolare movement and its spirituality of unity, spoke about his upbringing as well as the challenges he faces as the Vatican?s point man for religious life. The interview was conducted by veteran journalist Gianni Valente.

With striking candor, Bráz refers to a breakdown in trust between the Vatican and many religious orders because of "some positions taken previously." The reference is to his predecessor, Slovenian Cardinal Franc Rodé, who repeatedly decried a ?crisis? in religious life following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), related in part to what Rodé regarded as excessively liberalizing currents in some communities.

Without denying that there are problems, Bráz said, his main aim is to ?rebuild trust? by approaching issues in a new way ? ?without preemptive condemnations,? he said, ?and by listening to people?s concerns.?

For more, including *NCR*'s translation of some of the exchange with Bráz, see: **Vatican's point man for religious life: 'We've started to listen again'[1]**

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