

WORLD & NATION

Brazilian prelate, advocate of poor, dies at 90

OLINDA, Brazil (CNS) — Retired Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara of Olinda and Recife, a defender of the poor and world-renowned human-rights champion, died of cardiac arrest in Olinda Aug. 27. He was 90 years old.

Branded the "red bishop" by the Brazilian military dictatorship he opposed, Archbishop Camara was known to his people by the familiar title, "Dom Helder."

He was buried at his cathedral Aug. 28 following a wake attended by thousands of mourners. On Aug. 29, Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso declared three days of national mourning.

At the Vatican, Pope John Paul II expressed sadness and called Archbishop Camara an "energetic pastor." The pope praised the archbishop for his role in creating the Latin American bishops' council and the Brazilian bishops' conference.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state, sent a telegram Aug. 30 offering condolences on the pope's behalf to the archdiocese and to the archbishop's family.

In an interview published Aug. 29 in the Italian Catholic daily *Avvenire*, Brazilian Cardinal Lucas Moreira Neves, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, said he hoped Archbishop Camara would have imitators, "not only followers of his commitment to social issues, but of the spirituality in which he always lived."

Archbishop Camara was nominated four times for the Nobel Peace Prize, but never won. He received scores of other honors and awards, including more than 30 honorary doctorates. At least 27 countries have named him an honorary citizen.

At home it was a different story. His advocacy of land reform and human rights in the impoverished Brazilian archdiocese he led from 1964 to 1985 earned him death threats and the lasting enmity of the military government then in power.



Mourners walk past the casket of Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara in Recife, Brazil, Aug. 28.

"When I feed the poor," he said, "I'm called a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, I'm called a communist."

As archbishop he lived the humble life he preached. For the past 35 years his home had been a single back room of the Church of the Frontiers in Olinda. The room was sparsely furnished with bare necessities: a sink, a little stove, a table and his bed — a hammock hung from the ceiling.

More than any other Latin American church figure of his time, Archbishop Camara symbolized the fight for human rights and the effort to get the church involved in the political, economic and social struggles of the poor.

He advocated nonviolent social change as the only permanent way to improve life

for the poor, whom he said must be allowed to participate in the economic, political and economic decisions of the country.

Born in the Brazilian port city of Fortaleza Feb. 7, 1909, Helder Pessoa Camara entered the seminary in 1923 and was ordained a priest in 1931, at the age of 22.

Stationed in Fortaleza as a young priest, he became active in the Integralists, Brazil's anti-communist fascist party also known as the Green Shirts.

His transfer to Rio de Janeiro in 1936 marked the beginning of a profound transformation. Working in church charities, he encountered millions of poor people living in miserable shacks, underfed and without medical care, and was shocked to find that any suggestion to alleviate their misery was

immediately dismissed as "communist."

Made an auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro in 1952, and given the title of archbishop three years later, he organized the Brazilian bishops' conference and for 12 years was its first general secretary. He was also instrumental in forming the Latin American bishops' council.

When he was named archbishop of Olinda and Recife in 1964, he renounced use of the archbishop's palace and took up residence in the plain back room of the church in Olinda. At the Second Vatican Council the previous year he had urged the world's bishops to forgo fancy titles and replace the gold and silver crosses they wore with simpler, less expensive ones.

An army revolt in 1964 marked the start of 21 years of military rule in Brazil.

Archbishop Camara regularly angered the government with denunciations of torture and human-rights violations by its security forces, and with arguments that the style of capitalism practiced in Brazil hurt the poor. He received many death threats and once, when he was away, his home was riddled with machine-gun bullets.

In a speech to a special disarmament session of the U.N. General Assembly in 1982, the archbishop said, "The North continues to hold onto its riches, always increasing its wealth, oppressing the South by injustices perpetrated through the politics of international trade."

After his retirement in 1985, he launched an international campaign to renegotiate and reduce Third World debts.

He argued that the poor had no say in contracting the debts, but that repayment was forcing governments to divert resources from social needs, "oppressing people who are already poor and grinding them down even further."

Three years later a Vatican statement on Third World debt made similar arguments.

National Meeting of the Catholic Medical Association

Ethical Directions For the Third Millennium

Supported by the St. Luke's Medical Association and the St. Thomas More Lawyer Guild

Medical Ethics Seminar

Thursday September 30 – Sunday October 3

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Buffalo NY

PROJECT RACHEL • ASSISTED SUICIDE

HOMOSEXUALITY • FAMILY PLANNING

ABORTION • HOSPICE CARE

22 Hours of Category

1 Credit for Physician

Open to Everyone

SPECIAL DISCOUNT TO ALL DIOCESAN EMPLOYEES

Cost: Lay people, clergy and students: \$25 per day (does not include meals)

Physicians and attorneys: \$375 total (includes meals)

For further information, call toll free 1-877-CATHDOC

A Brand New Reason to

Smile in Fairport

Announcing LifeTimes' newest location

LifeTimes Adult Day Health Care

On the campus of the Fairport Baptist Homes

Tours and trial visits available

NOW Open!

LifeTimes
Adult Day Health Care

Offering a full range of

◆ Health Care Services

◆ Social Activities

◆ Community Involvement

LifeTimes Adult Day Health Care

is managed by

fbh+

Fairport Baptist Homes Caring Ministries
Extending our hearts to yours

LifeTimes at Fairport • 4646 Nine Mile Point Rd. Fairport, NY 14450 • 716.388.2370