

# The Pope Tours Uruguay, Chile and Argentina

He addresses crowds of more than half a million people

In his 33rd trip abroad since he became Pope nine years ago, Karol Wojtyla visited Uruguay, Chile and Argentina for two weeks early in April.

In his pastoral addresses to mass gatherings, Pope John Paul II called upon trade unionists to defend their legitimate rights, while he asked businessmen to see themselves as brothers, not enemies, of the working class. He asked women in Chile to dedicate their tenderness to rebuilding community spirit among all Chileans, and told the indigenous Mapuches to fight against injustice, without allowing themselves to be trapped either by passive conformism or by violence.

The Pope called upon Argentinians to receive migrants

in their country (thousands of Chileans, Bolivians and Paraguayans who have fled political repression or economic duress in their countries) with an open heart, and he stated that migratory currents are "intimately a part of the plans of God."

Pope John Paul II visited Montevideo, capital of Uruguay; Santiago, Concepción, Temuco, La Serena, Punta Arenas, Puerto Montt and Antofagasta in Chile; and Buenos Aires, Corrientes, Mendoza, Paraná, Córdoba, Tucumán, Salta and Viedma in Argentina.

## "Torture Dishonors Its Perpetrators"

Of all his activities in the southern cone of America, the

most noteworthy was John Paul II's meeting with General Augusto Pinochet, dictator responsible for nearly 14 years of brutal repression in Chile, who personally met the Pope in Santiago's airport when he arrived, and personally saw him off when he left. Pinochet obviously saw fit to justify his regime, for he received the Pope with the words: "You know well, and can appreciate as few can in all its dimension, the very serious aggression and seige that Chile has suffered and is still suffering, due to the foreign expansionist actions of the most extreme materialistic ideology that humanity has ever known."

## Human rights groups condemned the blessing the Pope gave dictator Pinochet

The Pope's visit to Chile, his public handshakes with dictator Pinochet, his 40-minute long, private audience with the General in the National Palace (known as La Moneda, where President Salvador Allende died in September 1973 defending his socialist government against Pinochet's coup d'etat), were acts repudiated and condemned by human rights groups and left political parties. On the grounds that the

General is responsible for the deaths and suffering of many thousands of Chileans, these groups condemned the blessing the Pope gave the dictator.

As befits a well behaved guest, Karol Wojtyla did not publicly condemn human rights violations in Chile. He witnessed a scene of violent repression during a mass he officiated in Santiago's O'Higgins Park on April 3rd, where one person died, 600 were wounded and 42 arrested; the Pope himself felt the effects of the tear gas used by security forces against part of the crowd.

The pontiff met briefly with Carmen Quintana, a young

student who was doused in gasoline and set on fire by police in Santiago last year, during anti-government demonstrations and whose companion died in the same incident. He also listened to descriptions of poverty and repression among the working class and the unemployed in the shanty towns around Santiago, and saw huge banners denouncing "Pinochet murderer" raised by the crowd during rallies. Members of the Chilean Church announced late in April that Luisa Riveros, the woman who dared relate her life conditions to the Pope, has since received anonymous death threats.

During his visit to Chile, Pope John Paul II also met with opposition political leaders and with members of the Vicaría de la Solidaridad (the Solidarity Vicariate), a Church-related human rights organization. However, he later denounced the so-called Popular Church, which he said is "not of Christ."

The Pope visited cities in the north and south of Chile, travelling as far as Punta Arenas, the world's southernmost city, and it was here that he



A Country Full of Crosses: "Pinochet's a very devout Catholic."

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denounced torture, moral or physical, as degrading for civilization. He declared that torture dishonors its perpetrators more than it does its victims.

denounced that the principal conspirators in the 1976 coup, General Videla and Admiral Massera (both now in prison for human rights violations during their administra-

Papal visit, could indeed indicate that such a hope had existed; the rebellious soldiers' main demand was amnesty for Armed Forces members of all ranks for crimes committed during the dictatorship.

As Pérez Esquivel pointed out, Karol Wojtyla did not meet with any human rights group in Argentina, not even with the famous *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, a group of women whose relatives, most-

rights violations: "that there be no more kidnappings nor disappearances, that there be no more place for hate and violence, and that human dignity be respected always." In an oblique reference to Argentina's recent past, the Pope asked the youths "to overcome the painful experiences of your country." The Papal recognition of past violence was greeted by the crowd with thunderous ap-

### The Pope came out against human rights violations in Argentina

This is not a very radical statement in a country where human rights groups have denounced the disappearance of some 2,500 persons, the torture and death of some 30,000 for political reasons and the existence of concentration camps, clandestine prisons and detention centers where more than a million people have been imprisoned during Pinochet's regime.

#### No More Disappearances

While Chile has progressive Catholic Church officials, sympathetic to the dictatorship's victims, this is not the case in Argentina. While in Chile there are Bishops who are outspoken opponents of the military regime, the Church hierarchy in Argentina is accused of complicity with the past military dictatorship. 1980 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, told the press that the Church hierarchy in Argentina blocked every possibility of an interview between the Pope and human rights organizations during the Papal visit. Pérez Esquivel said that Church officials in Argentina planned "a beautiful tourist trip, not a pastoral visit."

The Spanish newspaper *El País* was quoted in press reports from Buenos Aires during the Papal visit as saying: "The Argentine Church will tolerate just about anything pertaining to the dealings of men, so as not to compromise its social power...The power of the Argentine Catholic Church is overwhelming, comparable only to that of the Armed Forces." The newspaper also



Protests.

tions) met with heads of the Catholic Church in Argentina the night before the coup d'état of March 24, 1976.

The Pope's visit to Argentina in April coincided with the final stage of trials dealing with human rights violations by military officers during the so-called "dirty war." If there was hope in the Armed Forces that the Pope's visit could lead to an amnesty for past crimes, it didn't happen. The military uprisings against the democratic government of Raúl Alfonsín in Córdoba, Salta and at the Campo de Mayo barracks in Buenos Aires in the fortnight following the

ly sons and daughters, were abducted during the military regime. The Madres have denounced the disappearance of some 15,000 persons.

In the city of Mendoza, the Pope called upon Argentinians to take a clear stand against drugs, abortion, torture, terrorism, divorce, marxism and materialism, and also against degrading work. He called for tolerance, understanding and healthy pluralism in the nation.

It was in a speech to some 500,000 young people in Buenos Aires that the Pope finally came out against human

plause.

The press reported from Buenos Aires that the Pope personally added the comments on human rights violations to a text prepared by members of the Argentine Church.

In Buenos Aires Karol Wojtyla also met with leaders of Latin America's largest Jewish community, which reportedly asked for the Vatican's recognition of the State of Israel. He also had a warm meeting with a numerous group of people from his own homeland, Poland. ★

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