

World & Nation



As Pope John Paul II began his May 7-17 South American tour, he confronted church-state conflicts in Uruguay. In a later stop, he is expected to denounce the illegal drug trade running rampant in Bolivia, where this woman reads coca leaves — the raw ingredient for cocaine — for sale at an open-air market.

Pope battles church-state division in opening of South American tour

By Agostino Bono

Montevideo, Uruguay (NC) — Pope John Paul II barnstormed through Uruguay, boosting religion as a public activity and urging Uruguayans to improve their personal morality.

The pope related the two efforts, saying Catholics need a healthy interior life if they are to help solve the nation's social ills.

"A spiritual struggle develops within each person, but it is one which has an exterior reflection and affects the complex social reality," the pope told the Uruguayan bishops May 8, urging them to improve the spiritual life of their flock.

The pope spoke in one of the few Latin American countries where the Church is not a major social force.

Although almost 80 percent of the country's 3 million inhabitants profess Catholicism, Uruguay has strict separation of church and state. The founding fathers who formed its government and political structures were influenced by early 19th-century agnostic and libertarian views regarding religion as a private matter.

Before his visit ended May 9, the pope attacked that view, outlining the need for a "public profession of Christianity."

He backed up his assertion by engaging in a whirlwind of public religious activities unknown to the tiny country, about the size of the state of Washington. The pope's

schedule called for him to celebrate two outdoor Masses, ordain priests, and participate in other public ceremonies in less than 48 hours before heading on to Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay.

The pope's approach met with initial success when, in an unscheduled move May 8, President Julio Maria Sanguinetti — who does not have a religious affiliation — flew 200 miles to the interior city of Melo to join a crowd of about 20,000 gathered to hear the pope speak on labor rights.

The previous afternoon, the two men met during a welcoming ceremony at the international airport serving Montevideo.

The pope spoke mainly to Catholics, however, asking them to strengthen their sacramental lives and their commitment to marriage and family life. He called attending Mass on a Sunday a "sweet obligation," something families should do together.

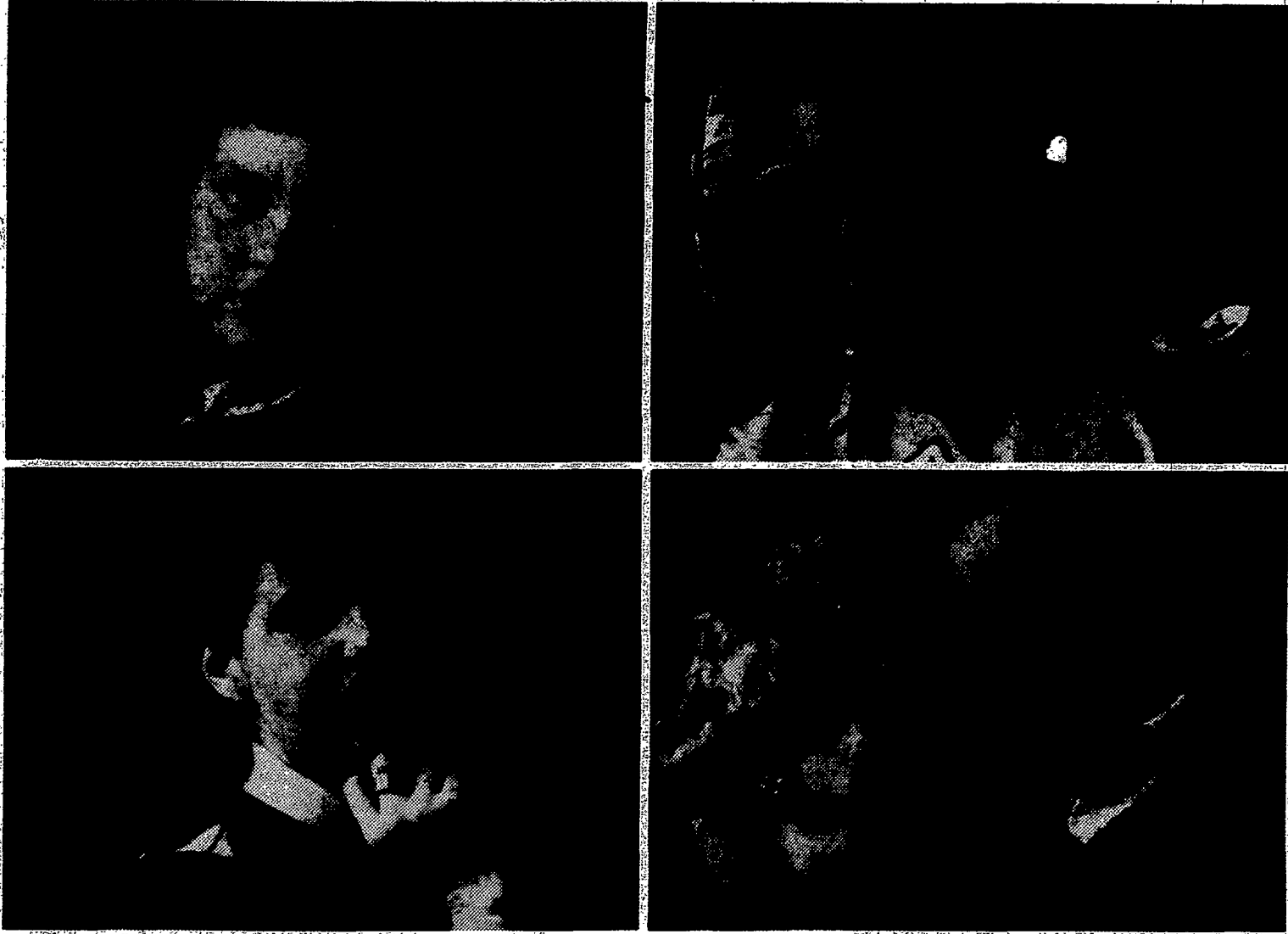
This was coupled with a strong attack on "the plague of divorce."

Divorce "has awakened the sense of the perpetuity of the marriage commitment," he said.

"This is translated into numerous cases of family disintegrations and spousal separations, with lamentable consequences on children," he added.

The pope blamed "mistaken ideas" which make young people "doubt if it is possible to remain mutually faithful for a lifetime."

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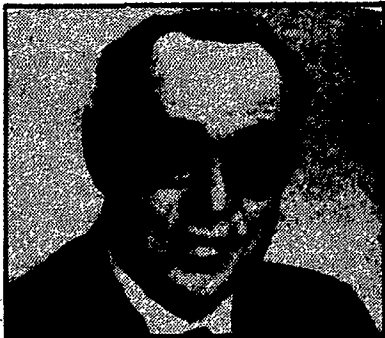
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