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Benedict in Barcelona

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Distinctly Catholic

Two things jump out at me from the reports of the Holy Father's trip to Spain. The first is that he chose the extraordinarily modern Sagrada Familia basilica in Barcelona to be the first church he has consecrated as Pope and the rites themselves seemed to be perfectly emblematic of the dominant theme of his pontificate: The Church must re-evangelize Western culture and beauty is one of its principal means of doing so. Gaudi's masterpiece is both specifically religious and distinctly avant-garde. It is rooted in both its Christian significance as a church and in the architectural sensibilities of the twentieth century. The church with its soaring arches harkens back to gothic times, but transforms the gothic idiom even while it embraces it. The embrace of natural architectural motifs, the columns that look like trees and the moss-like stone of the facade, the use of natural light, and the strange oculi where, in a traditional gothic edifice, the arches would meet, all indicate in architectural form what Benedict is trying to achieve in theological forms: We renew the Church and make Her ever new by reaching back into her rich roots, and build upon those roots our answers to the conundrums of the day.

The second thing that jumped out at me was Benedict's way of addressing the secular culture. He is right to insist that some secularists are as dogmatic as any Inquisitor. He is also right to put forward the Christian faith as a proposal, not as an edict, to invite people in, not build the barricades higher. We saw this during his visit to the UK as well. Benedict's style is not Bill Donohue's style and, just so, Benedict gets a hearing from the culture that is denied to those who pursue a more in-your-face approach to evangelization.

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