

IN 1984, CARDINAL JOSEPH RATZINGER dropped by New York City. He was heading home to the Vatican from a conference in Dallas and had saved a day to tour what was then still regularly called the Big Apple. According to Father James O'Connor, who was acting as his chauffeur, Ratzinger sat in the front seat, the better to take in the hustle and buzz of the city. They visited the (Episcopal) Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the mediievally furnished Cloisters museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On the way to Kennedy Airport, the car stalled halfway through the Midtown Tunnel, between Manhattan and Queens. O'Connor trudged to the Queens side, where he found a mechanic, who happened to be a Jordanian Catholic. The mechanic recognized the Cardinal and rushed to his aid. O'Connor recalls Ratzinger, up and running again, saying "There is every sort of person in New York, and they're all helpful." A few minutes later, just after he stepped out onto the curb at J.F.K., someone rear-ended the car, shattering the back window.

Despite such sweet and sour experiences (including one in 1988 that produced the memorable tabloid headline GAYS PROTEST VATICAN BIGGY), the Pope likes New York and what it stands for. "I think he's really fascinated by the city and what it represents," says Raphaela Schmid, a Rome-based German with the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, who knows him. "It's about people being two things at once, like Italian Americans or Chinese Americans. He's interested in that idea of coexistence."

That observation captures an often ignored side of the German-born Pope Benedict XVI, 80, on the eve of his first pontifical visit to the U.S. The trip, which begins in Washington on April 15 and ends in New York City on April 20, will present most Americans with their first opportunity to take the "new" Pope's measure. Some American Catholics already feel they are familiar with Benedict and his values and coexistence is not an association that immediately crops up. Benedict clearly lacks his predecessor's charismatic affability and sense of the dramatic gesture. His conservative writings suggest a divergence from a large part of the U.S. laity, whom he regards as victims of the moral relativism he feels pervades Western culture. Given his past role as the Vatican's enforcer of orthodoxy, he might not seem to have any particular affinity for the democratic, pluralistic

Westward, pilgrim *This will be Benedict's sixth trip to the U.S. and his first as Pontiff*

RELIGION

The American Pope

On the eve of Benedict XVI's first papal visit to the U.S., a revealing look at his long fascination with America and how it is shaping his vision for the world

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