

Pope, in Spain, denounces gay marriage, abortion

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Benedict XVI denounced abortion, same-sex marriage and the absence of religion in public life during a weekend (Nov. 6-7) visit to Spain, a country he called the "focal point" of tensions between faith and secularism in Europe.

"The generous and indissoluble love of a man and a woman is the effective context and foundation of human life in its gestation, birth, growth and natural end," Benedict said on Sunday (Nov. 7), in a sermon at the Sagrada Familia (Holy Family) Basilica in Barcelona.

On his way to consecrate the 128-year-old (and still unfinished) church -- the iconic masterpiece of modernist architect Antoni Gaudi -- Benedict passed an estimated 200 demonstrators staging a same-sex "kiss-in" to protest Catholic Church teaching on homosexuality.

Church leaders have clashed with the Socialist government of Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero over its legalization of same-sex marriage and support for liberal laws on abortion and divorce.

Later on Sunday, Benedict visited a home for disabled children and youth in Barcelona run by Franciscan nuns.

"It is indispensable that new technological developments in the field of medicine never be to the detriment of respect for human life and dignity," the pope said, in an apparent reference to abortions chosen on pre-natal diagnostic data.

On Saturday (Nov. 6), Benedict celebrated Mass outside the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, Spain's national shrine, in the northwestern region of Galicia. The historic shrine draws millions of pilgrims every

year, a tradition that Benedict said had helped to foster Europe's "spiritual unity."

"By making pilgrimages here, people have discovered themselves, they have discovered a shared European identity," the pope told reporters accompanying him on the flight from Rome on Saturday.

Reviving Christianity in increasingly secular Europe has been a major theme of Benedict's papacy, and is a priority for the Vatican's newly established Council for New Evangelization.

In his sermon at Santiago, Benedict deplored the absence of God in Europe's public discourse.

"How can it be that there is public silence with regard to the first and essential reality of human life?" the pope asked. "How can what is most decisive in life be confined to the purely private sphere or banished to the shadows?"