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Beauty Inside the Beltway

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 15, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Many people deride Washington but it has its perks for those of us who live within the Beltway.
One of those perks is getting to use the Library of Congress. A few days ago, I needed to find a citation and went to the Adams building. This is far less famous than the Jefferson building with its fantastic Beaux Arts architecture, its low copper dome, the magnificent Main Reading Room and marbled grand foyer. The Adams building opened in 1939 and it is all Art Deco. In the fifth floor reading room, there is magnificent iron and brass work above the doors. The portals are lined in marble. There are stainless steel bookshelves with carefully crafted owls at either end. Mosaics adorn the walls.
We don't build buildings like that anymore, which is a shame. I understand that our nation has financial responsibilities it did not have in 1939, when most of what we now know as modern health care did not exist, nor did the costs associated with that health care. I would prefer that we take care of our elderly and their medical needs than build beautiful buildings. Nonetheless, something fine and bracing has gone out of a culture that no longer produces great architecture like that found at the Adams building, or Grand Central station in New York, or the terminal at Dulles airport.

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