

## 'We would like to see Jesus'

**Y**ou just never know who is looking for Christ on any given day.

I was speaking last fall alongside a number of presenters from Europe, North America and Latin America. As far as I know, of the 40 or so speakers and performers that weekend, only one was not Catholic. He is a Jewish man whom I shall call "Aaron," a dance instructor for a Catholic ministry that performs musicals depicting key Christian events. I was blessed to sit next to Aaron at the closing dinner. He shared that he is not a Christian, though his mother is Catholic, and added, "I would like to learn more about Jesus, for if he is the expected messiah, I will give myself totally to him."

Wow! What was I to say? "Catholics shouldn't be evangelizing Jews?" "It's wrong to 'impose' our faith on people of other creeds?" "You're fine being a Jew?"

No, I was simply to comply with his implicit request and share about Jesus Christ, the messiah and savior of the world. Respectfully. Caringly. Openly. Joyfully. And that is what I did.

I shared how I, a cradle Catholic, came to know Jesus Christ in a personal, intimate, life-giving and life-changing manner at the age of 15. I shared with him the claims Christ made and the proofs he gave to substantiate his claims to divinity. He asked if I knew any Jewish people who had encountered and accepted Christ. I shared with him the names of several, from the first disciples to Edith Stein, now known as St.



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Benedicta of the Cross, the Jewish convert to Catholicism killed in Auschwitz. I mentioned the Association of Hebrew Catholics and authors Rhonda Chervin and Rosalind and David Moss.

Aaron listened attentively, for he was interested in knowing as much as possible about Christ so as to be sure — before making such a life-changing decision — that Christ is indeed who he said he is. And he was full aware that a lot was at stake here: Aaron explained that he is the firstborn — and a male firstborn. Therefore, his interest in Christianity would be more than frowned upon by his family and closest kin, the members of the Jewish community to which he belongs. He is expected to honor the name and the heritage of his deceased Jewish father, and hold fast to the traditions, customs and beliefs of his ancestors. If he became Christian, he risked losing his inheritance and being cast out of the community. The material possessions were of little importance to him, but breaking family and community ties was. This would not be an easy journey of faith nor an easy decision to make. If he discovered Christ as the promised messiah of God and chose to follow him, he risked losing quite a bit. But

if he discovered Christ as the messiah and did nothing about it, he would lose even more. One day he would have to make the choice of a lifetime and assume the consequences of his choice. And though, little by little, he was preparing himself for that day by taking small steps in the right direction, it was still a great challenge.

For most of us the journey has been much easier. Being an actively practicing Catholic entails ongoing conversion and growth, dying to self and sin, learning to love and to follow, and maybe even severing ties with certain people in order to be true disciples. But it has not entailed severing all ties with family and friends, and being considered dead by them. Aaron's situation should give us reason to pause and think. Our faith is a precious gift which we cannot take for granted. Likewise, we should not underestimate the longing for Christ experienced by people of varied faith backgrounds. And we need not shy away from sharing the good news with them.

Christ died so that "all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth" (cf. 1 Tm 2:3-4) and he is now counting on us to share his salvation with the eager Aarons of the world — the men and women who come to us and say, as some Greeks in Jerusalem said to the apostle Philip: "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." (cf. Jn 12:20-22) Like Philip, we should immediately bring them to Jesus — and to the community of believers where he can be experienced in word and sacrament.



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Aaron returned home after the event and so did I. I e-mailed him a few times. I still pray for him: that the Lord may reveal his love to him in a profound manner and continue to work in his heart, so that he might discover Jesus as the messiah, as his personal Lord and savior.

My hope is that you too will decide to accept any and every "divine appointment" the Lord

arranges for you — and be ready to be used as his messenger. And that you, as a good Catholic evangelizer, will learn how to address the concerns of non-believers, persons of other faiths and inactive Catholics, and know what resources are available to each.

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## Pope Benedict XVI and bioethics

**O**n Jan. 31, Pope Benedict XVI met with Cardinal William Levada and his associates in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the congregation headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger before he was elected pope. It was a business meeting at which Cardinal Levada gave a report to the pontiff on the topics reviewed during the past year by the congregation and on topics that were still under consideration. The pope used the occasion to make some remarks of his own.

Pope Benedict first commented on the doctrinal clarification concerning the role of the church made in two documents from the congregation. The one document ("Response to Some Questions") stated again the teaching that the fullness of Christ's church subsists in the Catholic Church and that the essential unity of the church is not invalidated by various separations and divisions among Christians. The second document

("Doctrinal Note on Aspects of Evangelization"), said the pope, reiterated the truth that in a world marked by inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, the church still needs to continue her evangelizing and missionary efforts. The Catholic Church recognizes elements of truth and good in other religions. Yet this should not be a deterrent to the church's continued efforts at preaching Christ as the way, the truth and the life.

But what attracted my attention in this talk of the Holy Father was this request, "I ask you to pay special attention to the difficult and complex issues of bioethics." This was an invitation to Cardinal Levada and the other members of the congregation to respond to the many developments taking place in the fields of medicine and medical research. The pope noted, as so many others have, the research being done is broadcast immediately through the media to the world. This



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gives rise to expectations which many times cannot be met and to questions which cannot be answered, at least not right away. But the role of the church is to continue reaffirming the basic values and principles from which moral judgments can be made.

Pope Benedict noted the two basic criteria for judging the morality of scientific developments: 1) unconditional respect for the human person, from conception to natural death; and 2) respect for the transmission of human through acts which are proper to married couples. There is a world of wisdom in these words. Yet many scholars continue to

criticize the church as being an obstacle to science. The secular scientist often believes that he can operate in a moral vacuum and that the only question to ask is whether a project *can* be done not whether it *should* be done. The secular scientist then becomes the obstacle to true progress. (The pope did not say this, but he implied it.) The pope reminded the congregation of some of the problems which have arisen in bioethics: freezing of embryos, selective abortion of implanted embryos, research on embryonic stem cells, attempts at human cloning, other artificial fertilization attempts.

"The barrier that served to protect human dignity has been violated" are the pope's ominous words. Human beings in their weakest and most defenseless stage of life are selected and killed and used as mere "biological material."

This is to make them into "something" not "someone" and call into question the basic

dignity of human life.

Toward the end of his talk, the pope wrote of his appreciation for the many ways that biomedical sciences have given benefits to the world, such as, through *adult* stem-cell research, which has produced multiple cures of people from various problems. (A list of some 80 cures has already been compiled.) There are also the attempts that have been made — through legitimate means — to restore fertility and to cure genetic diseases, notes the Holy Father.

I am convinced that the 21st century will go down in history as the "age of biomedicine."

And so it is reassuring to hear the Holy Father encourage the Congregation for the Faith to focus on this field, to keep giving guidance based not on relativistic principles but on eternal verities.

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