

New Roots Review

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**NEW ROOTS
MINISTRY**

Ignorance a Good Thing.? by Fred Wilgenburg

Somewhat ignorant, interested, well-enough grounded. That's a description I write of myself in this stage and in this role within my life. Would others agree, and if so, what do they think of that? More importantly, would my God affirm that?

It's partly why I wrote *A Search for Common Ground: Let's Talk* (on Amazon) last year, and largely why I love my work with former refugees and their churches through New Roots Ministry.

Here are a few other examples of my interest/ignorance: I was emailed a paper titled, *"Islam, a Religion of Peace?"* There was a list of twelve verses of the Quran, mostly encouraging violence against infidels. I suppose I am considered an infidel as a non-Muslim, and especially as a Christian. With some hesitation, I visited Abdul, a Somali merchant in Sioux Falls who is orthodox Mus-

lim—well-versed, serious about his Islamic faith. Abdul was happy to visit with me about this. He said those twelve verses, like many others, were written by Muhammad—the founder of Islam—in the context of his day, 600AD, when the Muslims were having violent conflicts with Christians in the Middle East. Abdul explained that only a tiny minority of Muslims, including the radical terrorist groups, read those passages literally for today. Our visit was a few days after a bomb exploded in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, killing over 300 Somalis. Abdul said those radical groups would also view him as an infidel.

As we are both serious about our faiths and we both believe in eternity, though from different perspectives, Abdul and I have discussed the fact that because we care about each other as friends, naturally we both hope that the other becomes enlightened to what we believe is Truth. We agree that we wouldn't be much as friends if we didn't care about that. My point in writing about Abdul? To be sure people like me don't think all orthodox Muslims are out to get us.

Asmira is a South Sudanese merchant in Sioux Falls and she is also Muslim. (Most South Sudanese are Christians.) Different from Abdul, Asmira, like many Muslims, is ignorant of her faith, and especially of her 'bible,' the Quran. Many, like her, do not read it. The practice of her faith includes praying in the proper direction a few times a day, and fasting the month of Ramadan. Asmira tries to convince me that her understanding of Jesus is similar to mine. Well, not according to the Quran. The Quran mentions Jesus often, with high regard as a prophet, but not as the Great Prophet—Muhammad, nor as God the Son, the Savior. Asmira and I have friendly conversations over coffee about this. Asmira also has the understanding, like many people, that all faiths ultimately lead to the same result—to heaven and God. My point in writing about Asmira? To be sure people like me don't think Muslims are all against faith-discussion. (→)



Mission speaking in the Fall is a lot more fun, for me and congregations, when I can share the pulpit/the stage, with guests like Innocent & Jeanne, and Melke & Alex, and Kedir.



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Ernesto, me, and Ongee in class together. We are missing Nicolas, another student.

Continued...

Ongee, originally of South Sudan, is in our Timothy Leadership Training (www.tlti.org) program which trains Christian leaders. At our first session, Ongee told us he is a Jehovah's Witness (JW). It has always been impressed on me that JW(s), like other "cult" members, are not Christians. Well, personally I regard Ongee as my friend/brother in Christ. Yes, his theology is different than mine in some major areas—he does not accept the Trinity (God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); he loves Jesus as his Savior, as the divine Son of God who effectively died on the cross for his sins, but not equal to the one Jehovah; he is quite legalistic and

works-oriented, but he is a strong example to me of being intentional about evangelism. Those things noted, I need to ask, "compared to Ongee, how many of our next-generation Christians, many of whom are receiving less or weaker Christian education in churches and less Bible/devotion time in the home than in the past, will have greater misunderstandings of who Jesus is?"

In the TLT class, the other students, Ongee, and I, will continue to have discussion, and friendly debate, about Jesus. My point in writing about Ongee? To be sure we don't just assume all JW(s) are far from Truth.

Hassan, originally of Iraq, works at the meat packing plant where I am chaplain. He admittedly is Muslim mostly by name. Recently, he approached me as chaplain, concerned about a dream that he had about Jesus. I don't have space here to elaborate on our conversations, but to note that dreams of Muslims about Jesus are fairly common, as this link describes: www.catholic.org/news/international/middle_east/story.php?id=72675. My point in writing about Hassan? To be sure we remember that all conversions, including ours, happen by the Holy Spirit, "who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Leaving Islam is difficult for various reasons, which God, our "Heart Surgeon" knows, so He sometimes gives vivid dreams.

This last example might make you think, "wow, you are ignorant!" The western African country, Liberia, began in the 19th century as a settlement for freed black slaves sent back to Africa. Liberia got its name as a place of "liberty"—freedom. There are quite a few Liberians in Sioux Falls, and one of them, my friend Solomon, was surprised that I didn't know that history. My point in writing about Liberia? To save some of you US-born Americans, who like me, have limited knowledge in languages, cultures, and world geography, from the embarrassment of seeming quite ignorant to the rest of the world. 😊

Thanks for learning with me. God bless your journey!

What is New Roots Ministry? It's "a springboard for immigrants & their churches." That is done through workplace chaplaincy, Timothy Leadership Training, special educational seminars, and empowering immigrant pastors and other Christian leaders.

Here's something new: We are training bi-lingual Hispanic chaplain-candidates, through TLT, to be placed at Christian owned businesses with mostly Hispanic employees. In Feb. 2018, we hope to place a chaplain at about 3-5 hours/week at a large commercial dairy farm, with more to follow!