

New Roots Review

"Merry Christmas! At Least God's Got This."

by Fred Wilgenburg

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**NEW ROOTS
MINISTRY**

I hope this article is a blessing for you during this special season of Advent and Christmas. I am writing this while sitting for a few hours in a St. Paul, Minnesota medical facility. A co-worker/friend at Smithfield Foods, where we provide pastoral services, suffered serious burns last year and he is getting his laser treatments to continue to get more function from his damaged hand. For some reason, a children's song came into my head as I am sitting here: "My God is so big, so strong and so mighty, there's nothing my God cannot do....The mountains are his, the rivers are his, the skies are his handiwork too..." Maybe it came to my mind for a reason... Well, here I am, privileged to make this road-trip, and an overnight with my friend, including praying together as two hours into our trip, he realized he forgot his wallet (ID, credit card, etc). When the hotel and medical facilities raised no fuss over a lack of ID, he said, "God answered our prayers!" He is originally from a Mideastern country, he identifies as Muslim, and "he's done some time," all of which contribute to anxiety issues. We had good conversations, about God, and about coming to the US many years ago after he assisted the US military during war in his native country. At one point, I asked, "as you're now 50 years old, what do you see for your future?" He replied that he just lives day-by-day, with his cat, who is his best friend. He doesn't



Christmas lights shining in a misty morning can even make the 115 year old Smithfield Foods meat plant seem pretty. In reality, it's massive and quite ugly. But, it provides a decent living for over 3500 employees, and it is a big economic driver for this region.

like to make plans, besides working on his bucket list of adventures. Humm....interesting.

Earlier in the morning, before heading to the medical appointment, I was waiting in the hotel lobby, watching and listening to five Hispanic people clean the lobby. I don't know if they felt anxiety, but many Hispanic and Caribbean people in the US do presently. While all need legal documents to work at Smithfield, most Hispanic people who have come here in the past 30 years have 2-5 year work permits. They wonder, will they be renewed, especially if the date of renewal comes up during the present presidential administration's term? Many Haitians have "temporary protected status" (TPS), and they have had an understanding that they would get an adequate warning when its end may come in sight. Well, for about 30% of the Haitians working at Smithfield, according to the current administration, "temporary" abruptly means now. About 200 people had to be let go because their papers would no longer be good in a matter of a few weeks. Anxiety levels are high.

I write this article as an upper-middle aged white male in the US. You're right, "what do I have to worry about?" Not much compared to so many. Rather, I'm in the amazingly blessed position of personally knowing God and His grace, and the huge privilege that comes with that of being His ambassador of His goodness and love available for each person. Many of you reading this are in that same enviable position of blessing.

Sometimes, I hear people like me—American Christians—say, "well, come legally, then no problem." The ones I write about above have, or had, legal papers. But, that is a small percentage of Central Americans because it has been very difficult for them to receive legal papers to immigrate into the US in the past 35 years, though —> —>



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(continued) conditions in their countries have often been overwhelmingly bad. Regarding the above quote, consider this common scenario: a mother in El Salvador has a 10 year old son, and there is a very high probability that he will get sucked into drug gangs and either be killed or go to prison. Is it possible that God would primarily call her as a mother to keep her son from danger and give her family a future, which has meant going to the US? At the same time, God may be calling on the US government to administer the borders well. That's quite a balancing act. (Thankfully, since 2019, there has been much better security in El Salvador specifically. Prior to that, for decades, conditions were awful.)

That's my point in this article. Sometimes we seek to imagine that things are simpler than they actually are, leading to a couple of effects:

1) For those caught in complexities, we who downplay their reality, or focus only on things that affect us, can seem uncaring and idiotic. 2) Usually we do that with a black-and-white perspective, seeking to fit things as right-or-wrong,

and as good-or-bad, when there is a lot of "gray." This can cause us to be uptight and legalistic, instead of faith-filled and prayerful, especially when things are troubled.

Here is a case in point for #1 above: I had a wonderful meal recently, provided by some immigrant friends as their expression of thanks to New Roots Ministry for helping their family members get their driver licenses. I was surprised during our conversation that one quite educated person who had come from a challenging country, explained how he votes politically in the US. If a candidate seemed solid on biblical family values, then no other issues—economic theory, international affairs, climate care, immigration views—mattered much to him. I have learned that is not uncommon for people coming out of tough places; maybe they now want simplicity. That style of politics is also held by some of my American siblings in Christ. Personally, I place biblical family values high on my list politically, but those other issues are high on the list as well. Those other issues have huge impacts on people here and around the world, and if not actually impacting them physically, at least their perception of whether or not Americans, and specifically American Christians, care, is impacted much.

These words from Catholic priest, Richard Rohr, in his book, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, touch on the 2nd point above: "Many things are "gray" rather than black-and-white. They are both-and rather than either-or,.... Not everyone needs to think just like we do to be considered legitimate." Rohr encourages us to embrace and be present in the moment, even if it is messy, because God is right there with us.

May we not avoid the confusing, or hang out only with agreeable ones, but rather, go forward in faith, in the One on whom "the government will be on his shoulders." That is, on "our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." And, rest-assured that "of the increase of his government and peace, there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

What is New Roots Ministry?

We are all about "equipping immigrants & engaging the local church." This is done through workplace chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & places where immigrants have a large presence, through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering immigrant pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by immigrants, then hear their stories, through our Liaison ministry (English language training, helping to adapt to a new culture & community, sharing our Good News), through driver training for immigrant adults, and through Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum.



*These are some of the women whom our liaison, Ranee, gets to work with—English training, etc.. **If you want to join in, or receive ideas for Gospel ministry where you live, let us know.***