

Learning from other religions can offer eternal benefits

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wake up on judgment day and find out that I was wrong about God all of my life," said Zagore. "But after deciding to become a minister, it became an important part of my vocational training. People have a right to expect their clergy to have a thorough understanding of the religious character of the world. They need to understand their faith and part of that understanding is the need to know in what ways you are in agreement with or acting contrary to the religious teaching of other groups."

Both Terrell and Zagore say there are many different ways to learn about other religions and that one of the most fruitful paths is where the history of one religion intersects with another.

An example of that is Christianity, Judaism and Islam. All claim common roots and grow out of a common region. The formal study of Christianity includes delving into the Old Testament and Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament. In doing that, it is often necessary to learn the language and culture of the people of those communities.

As a graduate student, Zagore learned the Aramaic and Syriac languages so he could study an ancient translation of the New Testament known as The Peshitta.

"To understand the development and history of the Christian community, you have to know what they were responding to in their lives and teaching," said Zagore. "It's helpful in our modern context, too. We tend to be chronological snobs, think-

ing that things are different today than they ever have been. But as you study the history of religions and the world, you find that many of the challenges and forces they faced, we face. It's comforting and enlightening."

Most authorities on world religion and clergy members believe that a layperson or regular churchgoer can be helped on their own spiritual path by learning about other religions, especially if

they go about it sincerely.

"A superficial study can do more harm than good," Zagore concluded. "I've known too many people in my life who really don't understand their nominal religion or the ones that they claim to be intrigued by. Genuine, sincere study of religions as a search for truth holds eternal benefits."

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