Are there GPS coordinates to get us to God?



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

There are billions across the globe who confidently point the way to God – as they understand "God." The path always seems to be the same path as theirs, so it tends not to be pointing so much as precisely leading the way. Follow the believer and you will believe. Yet, is this the right approach to finding faith, to discovering a God worth following? Could there be a GPS (God Positioning System) to direct us to the correct location? Is religion claiming to own that device? Let's investigate.

Does God have an address? That sounds like a ridiculous question, though the way religious faith is often presented and preached, we might conclude God has a specific location. If only we could arrive there – wherever "there" is – God will greet us at the door. Most religions have directed us to look up; God is "up in heaven" or someplace above and beyond our senses. Some religions point inward – look inside yourself to "find the divine." Some mystical traditions see "the sacred" all around, in everyone and everything. Social justice-oriented groups sometimes "seek the holy" in the most vulnerable people – those who are unhoused, unwell or unwelcome. One Catholic saint claimed God was present in "distressing disguise," in poor and outcast persons.

So where might a god be found? We could begin our quest by looking for signs of a deity in those places called "God's House." A physical building is referred to as a "sanctuary" which means it is a holy place where the divine dwells. Yet, when we go, all we see are people and pews, rituals and symbols. This reminds me of the great temple of King Solomon. Commanding the forced labor of many slaves he constructs a massive building for the Lord, then steps back and realizes "no house can contain You!" The Almighty will never fit in there, no matter how big the structure.

"My Father's house has many mansions (rooms)," said Jesus of Nazareth. So, we might ask him where that is and how to find it. He prays for God's home to be "on earth as it is in heaven." But we still don't know where that is and how to get there. Jesus claimed no one has seen the face of God, and yet Moses "met with the Lord face to face." Moses should be able to tell us where to go, but all he had was a tent in the wilderness. Is that a hint? Is the divine "out there" in the wild places, in the natural world? What a radical concept.

What if the most accurate GPS is something we already have in our possession? Perhaps the only true system we have has always been ready to be plugged in and energized: our mind, reason, critical thinking. Many are quick to point out that we can't "get there – get to God" by using our mind; thinking is not the way. But if that's true, what are we left with? We stand on the trail with many possible directions to go, but is faith the only means of deciding? Who will guide us, who will read the GPS for us? Why would we allow anyone to tell us how to "read the signs" and follow their personal interpretation of our own GPS?

It looks like this whole question simply leads to the same spot every other question of faith leads: We arrive at more questions! This may not satisfy the map-makers, but the wise lesson could be: the search for God (the sacred, the divine) is a search for meaning and belonging, with an unwritten map. There is no final destination.

What if there is no location, no address, no coordinates guaranteed to lead directly to God?

If there is a God, maybe that being is everywhere, which means, that being is nowhere in particular – has no address. Which leaves us with serious questions about religion itself. What is religion for?

Is this simply a matter of perspective, how we read the clues?

You may have seen this line of linked words: "Godisnowhere." It can be read in two ways. "God is now here" would be the believer's reading. "God is nowhere" would be the nonbeliever's reading.

Whichever way the connected phrase is read, we're left holding our GPS, left with the responsibility to work it out for ourselves, to calculate our own orientation. Is there a God here, now? If so, who's God are we talking about? If there is no God – if a God is neither here nor there – the God Positioning System becomes the more familiar Global Positioning System, so we find our way as best we can, to a place of belief, or our own humanity, in the present place and time.

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