



There are many roads to Texas

Commentary by Col. Lela Holden
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7/12/2005 - **BOLLING AIR FORCE BASE, D.C. (AFPN)** -- As my husband and I prepare for a transfer to another base and mission, we have been making plans to take leave in Texas.

As we're looking at the map and discussing the options of flying versus driving, the short route versus a longer route to see more sites, and how much time we want to take for the trip, I'm reminded of the many choices and possibilities involved with decisions. For any trip there are truly many alternatives based on individual needs, preferences, and priorities. There are many roads to Texas.

In a similar vein, there are many roads to success. I was privileged to attend a retirement ceremony recently for a mid-level Airman who addressed the question of "am I successful?" He then went on to eloquently describe coming home late one evening and watching as his three kids ran down the stairs to hug and welcome him home from the office. Recounting this event brought a big smile to his face, as he stated without any hesitation, that having a loving family was indeed a sign of success in this life.

On the other hand, I know of examples of famous, accomplished scientists who have many publications and much prestige and recognition within the scientific community who bemoan the fact they have not yet received a Nobel Prize. It seems by their definition of success, they have failed to measure up. There are many roads to success.

Where am I going with this, you ask? Well, as the discussions and charges of religious intolerance at the Air Force Academy swirl in the news, and our senior leaders engage to address the concerns, I am reminded about these simple comparisons of travel and success.

It seems that much in life offers us multiple choices and roads, regardless of the arena. And if there are many roads to Texas, or to success, how is it possible there are not truly many roads to God? For those of us who believe in an omniscient, omnipresent, loving Creator of our magnificent universe, and the source of our individual beings, how is it possible that any human can limit that Creator to only one road to understanding, loving, and worshipping Him?

If human life is richly diverse and varied, is it not reasonable to say that critical matters related to God are as varied as well? Does it make sense to say that only one religion offers the definitive road to God? I think not.

Religious tolerance, including tolerance of those who choose not to relate to formal religion at all, is critical for teamwork in the Air Force. But a deeper level is that of genuine respect -- respect that others' roads to God are valid. Indeed I would emphasize that all the world's major religions have not only much to offer, but much in common.

For example, they all have some version of the Golden Rule. I would also suggest that a thin layer of tolerance that barely conceals the underlying belief that one's own religion is superior is not sufficient to truly build the teamwork our Air Force and country need. We need respect for the rich complexity and variety of possibilities for us as humans, in relation to all aspects of life, and in relation to God. After all, there are many roads to Texas.

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