

The big four get competition

# Religion fills spiritual and social needs in B-CS

By COLIN CROMBIE  
Special to the Battalion

Forty-two percent of American adults went to church in a typical week during the bicentennial in '76, according to the latest obtainable Gallup poll of church attendance. Nationally in 1972 more than 62 percent were church members but only about 36 percent of the Bryan-College Station population are church members.

Sixty-eight of the 94 Bryan-College Station churches and religious groups were contacted in a recent survey of church membership. Together with an estimated 100-member average for each small church that could not be contacted, they show a combined membership of about 36,000 for the 100,000 Bryan-College Station population (including Texas A&M University).

As membership can be higher than regular attendance the difference between local and national average weekly attendance may be as high as the 14 percent between the above figures.

In the other pew is the possibility of the Rev. Bob E. Waters of A&M United Methodist Church. He suggests that because of the area's transient population many local churchgoers may not be members.

And also, out taking their sabbath, may be the local "un-churches."

Humanist Edward L. Ericson, in his book "Religious America," states "The unchurched" are those millions of Americans who decline to join a church out of conviction, not those who are "merely indifferent or inactive."

For the unchurched," Ericson continues, "religion is a personal and nonsectarian matter rather than a question of church affiliation or ritual."

"One might say that humanity is religion and the great, wide

world is their temple."

However, no local organization or spokesman for the unchurched could be found.

For local churchgoers there are more than 25 denominations to choose from among the 94 religious groups. Most of them represent some form of mainstream Christianity, such as Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist faiths.

Other denominations include the Baha'i Faith, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

Thirty to 40 clergymen meet once a month as the Bryan-College Station Pastors' Association. The association represents about a dozen mainstream denominations, and is open to any local qualified cleric.

"The association is dominantly Christian," says Waters, president of the association, "but we would not be unhappy with the presence of others."

But the local denominations are only parts of the whole that is religion. Religion can be broader in its scope.

Be he member, attendant, unchurched or indifferent, religion in American society affects almost everyone at some time in his life, besides fulfilling certain social and psychological needs.

Religion, says Dr. Jon Alston, a Texas A&M sociology professor who has specialized in religion, offers a sense of community and answers the ultimate questions — questions including those about the meaning of life, evil and unfairness, immortality and "why I am here."

"It gives a general purpose in life," he says.

As society progresses and becomes more complicated, Alston explains, an evolutionary process of religion brings a change from

pantheism to the concept of a supreme being. Eventually, the idea is that modern societies would not need religion.

In 1970, a Gallup poll showed 75 percent of American adults to think religion as a whole was losing its influence on American life. Their main reason was that "people are

was losing its influence whereas 69 percent said its influence was increasing.

However, by 1975 the census appeared to be swinging back, as 31 percent said religion was increasing its influence.

Also, a Gallup poll in 1971 showed that Canada and the United

"one man's perspective," and not representative of his Methodist denomination.

"The function of religion," he says, "is to tell man of his inseparable, inalienable relationship to whatever name you call God. It is not merely to save the self, but to save the community."

More specifically, Waters says "the church is a symbol of the commonalities we all have. It tells us that the final form of humanity is in community."

And for Waters, religion does more than fulfill man's needs — it is a basic human need.

"All humanity is in one room, in essence, and religion is the foundation on which it all stands."

Pastor Hugh Beck of the Ulutheran Chapel says religion is a way to perceive the whole of reality and how everything interweaves to make the whole.

He also takes a theological stand when religion is specified as Christianity.

"The interweaving," Beck says, "finds its center in Christ. A person in knowing Christ can understand it better."

"The mystery of Christ is God's way of allowing man to focus, to center on the whole of reality."

The whole of religion, however, goes beyond Christianity and all of its denominations and sects. Nor does the remainder just comprise the other world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

There are also the cults. But what is a cult?

A cult is a group of people with a strong, charismatic and authoritarian leader. The leader is necessary for a cult to arise. His followers may be lonely or depressed when persuaded to join.

We should not let the Jonestown, Guyana massacre make us think all are "of borderline intelligence, misfits, castoffs or problem-stricken minorities," points out David Lee of the Houston Chronicle.



changing — religion isn't important any more."

Fourteen percent said religion was increasing its influence.

Thirteen years before, in 1957, the figures were almost opposite. Fourteen percent then said religion

States topped a list comparing church-going in seven countries. The closest was Holland and Greece, Australia, England and Uruguay trailed the leaders.

Waters takes a more theological view of religion, stressing that his is

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