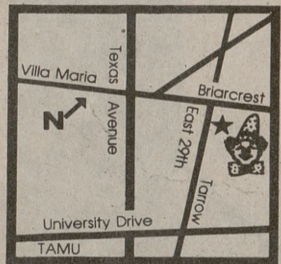


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Cults offer religious alternatives

(continued from page 1)

"moonies," after their leader, the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

By understanding creation, the church says, the infinite God can be known.

Church members believe that because God is the substantial being of goodness and the eternal idea in accordance with his purpose, humans also are created to become ideal in embodiments of goodness, in whom sin and suffering would be a contradiction and an impossibility.

Some time ago, a student from The University of Texas tried to start a group to practice Satanism at A&M, Stadelman said.

"Evidently he didn't have much luck here at A&M, because I haven't heard anything about them since," Stadelman says.

Melton says that Satanism is the worship of the Christian personification of evil and was revived in the mid-1960s by Anton LeVey, who founded the Church of Satan on April 30, 1966. Satan is identified as Lucifer, called the light-bearer, and is identified with the snake in the Garden of Eden, who destroyed innocence by bringing knowledge.

According to Melton, "Satanists see themselves as developing the self to the fullest and upholding personal values as opposed to altruistic virtues.

"Because of the very nature of Satanism, it is a short-lived phenomenon and rarely involves individuals for more than a few years."

Many religious organizations are officially recognized by the University, but the majority of them probably wouldn't be considered cults.

Consuelo Trevino, a student development specialist at UT, says that about three years ago, a few cults such as Hare Krishna were active as off-campus organizations, but the recent trend seems to indicate an increase in different Christian organizations who are taking new directions in how they study the Bible.

The group's full title is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and it takes its teachings from the Bhagavad Gita, one of several sacred Hindu books. Members worship Krishna as "the eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, and all-attractive personality of Godhead." The main act of devotion is the repetition of the Hare Krishna mantra.

Krishnas are one of the few cults who have received negative criticism for their fund-raising in airports and other public facilities.

Dr. David Snow, professor of sociology and cult specialist at UT, says, "Traditionally, college campuses have been a recruiting ground of cults because there are many

young people who want to escape from competition, pressure and trying to fit in.

Adolescents are in a stage of disengagement from their families and trying to strike out on their own. These groups can offer a certain degree of comfort in terms of the structure and certain alternatives they offer.

"The groups also offer emotional support, a sense of belonging that doesn't focus on accomplishment as does so much of life."

Snow says that cults are seen by conventional religion members as false prophets and competitors to the mainstream religions, thereby becoming highly threatening.

Dr. Jon Alson, professor of sociology at A&M, teaches a class on the sociology of religion.

Alston says he sees a trend developing where the extreme cults are experiencing a loosening of their memberships.

"People just aren't searching for that kind of thing anymore," Alson says.

However, he says, the United States is one of the most religious nations in the world; therefore, cults will always be in existence.

"People get interested in one certain aspect of their religion and then break away from the mainstream," Alson says.

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Personal interview will be held in New Orleans in January, 1986.

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