

Testing the waters of faith

Religious minorities have trouble finding acceptance at Texas A&M

BY JULIA RECINDUS
The Battalion

The stereotypical Aggie is assumed to be a conservative Republican, have Southern pride, have the desire to "beat the hell outta t.u." and are Christian.

However, not all Aggies fit this description, as evidenced by the fact that out of the 52 religious organizations on campus (not including religious fraternities and sororities), six are non-Christian.

"I'm white and I'm male, so I've never felt like a minority until I came to Texas A&M. I don't want to come across as someone who's complaining about being a religious minority, that's my choice."

said Nathaniel Rich, president of the Texas A&M University Buddhist Association and a senior philosophy major.

Some members of these groups say they have had flyers torn down and thrown in the trash or found their flyers covered up. Members of these religious minorities' organizations say this is a common occurrence.

Rich said the acts of tearing down flyers and the sometimes aggressive efforts used in attempting to convert religious minorities to Christianity can give the impression that Aggies are insensitive and have no desire to learn more about those minorities.

Buddhists learn about the teachings of Buddha. They do not worship him, but rather pay reverence to him and show respect. The goal of Buddhists is to achieve enlightenment—a state of spiritual, moral, emotional and intellectual perfection. In Buddhist teachings, the purpose of enlightenment is to help others and to free the individual of all ignorance and negative emotions.

ly not "Biblical" and the organization does not condone it.

"As Christians, we are commanded to go around and talk to people because we do have the truth and we want to share that with other people. I'm sure we do come off as offensive, but we try not to," she said.

"I could see them doing it [tearing down flyers] out of anger and frustration. Frustration because they don't understand how [non-Christians] can't see the truth. It's a high possibility that they have a fear of these groups and what these groups are involved with doing, whether it's rumors or not," Appleton said.

Amy Moore, a co-chair for the Pagan Student Organization (PSO) and a junior history major, said the PSO has not experienced verbal or physical confrontations, but had its organization's flyers torn down.

"Many think we are anti-Christian, which is not true; we're just non-Christian. We don't pervert Christian symbols and use them to worship the devil. We don't believe in the devil; we don't believe in Hell," Moore said.

Moore said she converted to Wicca, one of the most common of the pagan religions, when she was 13. Jennifer Evans, a co-chair of the PSO and a senior biology major said paganism includes many beliefs that are not encompassed by the three major religions: Christianity, Judaism or Islam.

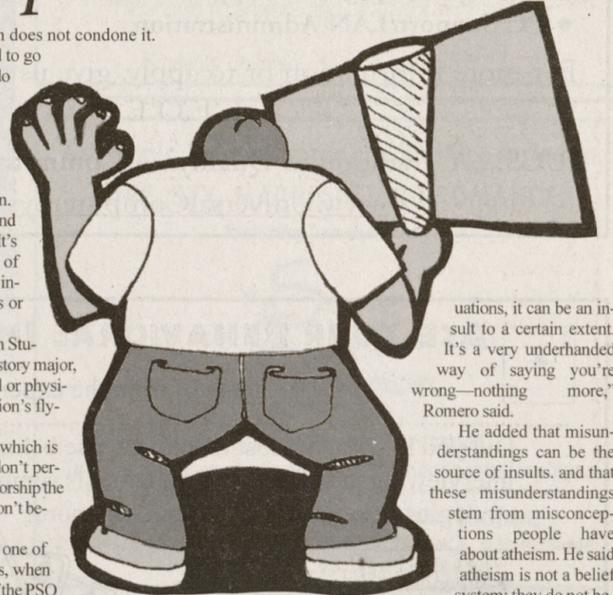
She said pagans revere life and nature, and to them, divinity is found in everything, from trees to grass as well as in people. They do not specifically worship or believe in a god, but they do believe there is a higher power.

"The thing [people] need to keep in mind is, just like Christians, pagans are normal people," said Carissa Brown, a co-chair of the PSO and a senior animal science major. "They have normal lives, they go to school, they have jobs, they have friends and family. They don't do anything really weird. The only thing that's different about them is how they worship and who they worship."

Jason Romero, president of the Agnostic and Atheist Student Group (AASG) and a senior psychology major, said he has been approached by those who disagree with the organization's point of view.

Romero said when he spoke in front of the Memorial Student Center on one occasion to make students aware of the organization and to let other atheists know of their presence a fellow A&M student walking by shouted out the words "Jesus loves you!" during Romero's discussion.

"You really have to listen to their tone and the situation. Even though it's a statement of love on a superficial level, in certain sit-



uations, it can be an insult to a certain extent. It's a very underhanded way of saying you're wrong—nothing more," Romero said.

He added that misunderstandings can be the source of insults, and that these misunderstandings stem from misconceptions people have about atheism. He said atheism is not a belief system; they do not believe in God.

Atheism does not tell one how to lead one's life and there is no definition of right or wrong. Agnostics believe that God, if he exists, is unknown and probably unknowable.

"Atheism is not anti-God or anti-religion. An atheist is not an atheist just to piss people off. It's just an aspect of us as individuals that fits into all the other things that we believe or don't believe in," Romero said.

Deborah Benisch, vice president of the Hillel Student Association (HSA) and a senior poultry science major, said she does not feel like a minority nor does she feel threatened because HSA has a large number of members and is close-knit.

"If [the members] ever had a problem, the Rabbi is the person to go to," Benisch said.

Charles Greenwald, president of the HSA and a senior genetics major, said, "It doesn't matter what goes on outside [of the group], but what goes on inside."

"It would be wrong for people who are Christian to assume that the lives of those of us who are not are somehow without meaning."

"I live a life that is filled with meaning and joy because of the teachings of the Buddha. It is definitely possible to live a very meaningful and happy life without believing in Jesus; you don't have to," Rich said.



EMILY HARRELL/THE BATTALION

"So that in itself is offensive, not so much that [Christians] believe it's their God-ordained right to convert people to Christianity."

"If that's what you believe, I respect that, but the way they approach that, the really aggressive way they want to push it on you other than saying, 'If you're interested, come talk to me.' The whole approach implies a lot of disrespect," Rich said.

Penny Appleton, president of the A&M Christian Fellowship and a senior animal science major, said the destruction of flyers is obvious-

Stagecenter presents Albee's 'Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?'

BY JEFF WOLFSHOHL
The Battalion

George and Martha are a married couple whose relationship is on the brink of disaster. This situation, ripe with tension, is the focus of StageCenter's production "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?," which explores the relationship between two couples whose unions are in trouble.

The younger couple, Nick and Honey, are newlyweds and are visiting George and Martha at their home. During the course of the play, the characters entangle each other in a web of lies and deceit.

Amy McLaughlin, who plays Honey, said her character is the "plain Jane," mousy-type wife who is financially secure but has a sinister side.

"She is deceiving her husband because of the fact that she lied about being pregnant to get married," McLaughlin said.

McLaughlin added that Martha is a more

evolved version of Honey, who says what she wants when wants.

Cathy McWhorter, who plays Martha, said this is has been her most difficult role.

"It is complicated because of the huge range of emotions," she said.

Though Martha is a character who can tend to carry a heavy load of emotions to the stage, McWhorter said she wants to construct her own interpretation.

"I tried to not make her so heavy," she said. "I want the audience to know why Martha does what she does."

McWhorter said she has a great appreciation for the author of the play, Edward Albee.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" is not just a story, but a study of human nature," she said.

Charles Pitman, who plays Martha's husband George, said he believes Martha's character is crucial to the full understanding of the play.

"[Martha] is the central figure, and Cathy has the most important role," he said.

"Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" is not just a story, but a study of human nature."

— Cathy McWhorter
StageCenter actress

Pitman said his character would provide the comic relief if "Virginia Woolf" were a comedy.

"[George] bears the brunt of her [Martha's] criticism and her disappointment in both of their lives," Pitman said.

George is an associate history professor at a col-

lege, but is constantly berated by his wife because of his lack of advancement in the department.

"He views his life as a failure and his marriage as a failure," Pitman said.

Kurt Swick, who plays Nick, sees the character as a snob.

"He is a young husband who got his master's at 19 and now is a biology professor," Swick said. "This is a hard character to play because I am nothing like him."

Leah Fletcher, vice president of StageCenter Board of Governors, said much of the cast has known each other for a while.

"Cathy and Charlie have been doing shows a long time and have been around each other for a long time which makes them believable [as a couple]," Fletcher said.

She said George and Martha's relationship is not unlike the relationships that occur in the real world.

"You have a relationship, you have an ideal of what it is, then reality sets in," Fletcher said.

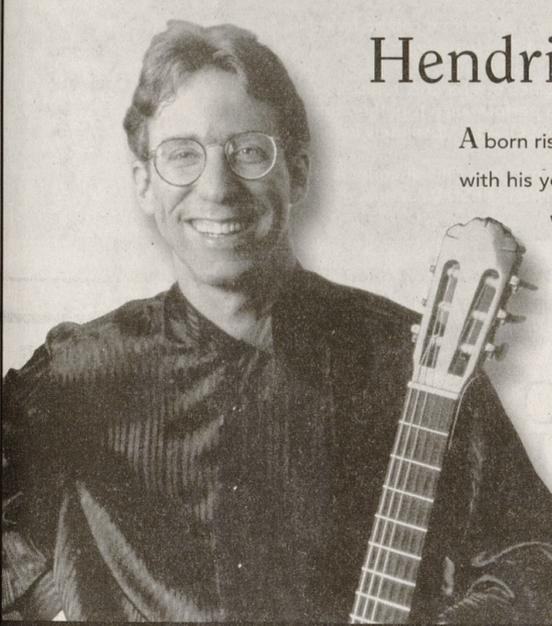
Sometimes, as in George and Martha's case, people in the relationship are blinded by fantasy and memories of the past.

"If you have something you want to achieve in life and you put it on the other person you are in the relationship and expect that person to follow through, you are not being honest [with yourself]," Fletcher said.

Pitman said the meeting with George and Martha is a catharsis and purging of the souls for the younger couple.

"Edward Albee is an incredible playwright, he put [the play] together like clockwork," he said.

Performances run Thursday through Saturday for the next three weeks at 7:30 p.m. at The Theatre. Tickets are \$5 for students and seniors, \$6 for adults and \$4 for children. Call 823-4297 for more information.



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