

INK: Humanist group to install billboard south of Moscow

By Vera White

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There is nothing the INKster enjoys more than a lively exchange of community dialogue like what's been taking place on Vision2020. It started earlier this month when Moscow's Bill London made a posting titled, "Godless Billboard comes to the Moscow/Pullman Area."

According to the post, this spring the American Humanist Association will announce an atheist/agnostic billboard to go up on U.S. Highway 95 just south of Moscow. It purportedly will beckon non-theistic people by reminding them they aren't alone and will also offer a Web site and toll-free number that will provide the public with further information about theism, free thought, humanism and ethical culture.

Roy Speckhardt, executive director of AHA in Washington, D.C., will provide context for the local billboard effort and similar ones across the country.

AHA Development Director Maggie Ardiente will talk about the mission of AHA and highlight its recent activities - legal, education, advocacy - to promote humanism in the United States. The talk will take place at 10 a.m. Tuesday in the Fiske Room at the 1912 Center, 412 E. Third Street in Moscow.

AHA hopes to target non-theists, atheists, agnostics and others who subscribe to no religion and may feel they have no voice in a time when traditional religions dominate the public discourse.

With apologies to the INKster's priest at St. James parish in Lewiston, the basic concept as she understands it is to provide non-believers a chance to change the public's opinion of the godless.

AHA was founded in 1941 and has more than 100 local chapters and affiliates across America.

As a journalist with liberal leanings, the INKster believes all Americans should have the right to voice their opinions. She listened to the ramblings of the religious right for eight years during the Bush administration and doubts those AHA folks could be much worse.

The INKster had a brilliant idea as she was putting together the above item on the atheist/agnostic billboard. Since Christ Church members thrive on lively community discourse, she thinks it a good idea if Pastor Doug Wilson and crew would sponsor a showing in their Free Friday Flicks Series of Bill Maher's film/documentary "Religulous." She's sure it would draw a crowd to the NuArt and that lively discussion would be sure to ensue.

The centerpiece of HBO'S "Real Time with Bill Maher" has been one of the INKster's favorites for years, even though he is one of the world's biggest detractors of organized religions. She has yet to see the film, but her Orthodox priest brother had this to say after his viewing:

"Be prepared for his brutal trashing of any and all religions," Robert reported. "Knowing how some people feel, it didn't particularly bother me, but it wouldn't be something one would recommend to just anybody. It would just give some folks more ammunition."

Last fall, film critic Roger Ebert reviewed the R-rated film written by Maher. He noted he wasn't going to "get into religion because he didn't want to fan the flames of a holy war."

From Judaism to TV evangelism, Maher takes all religions to task and believe all who participate are crazy.

"He fears they could lead us prayerfully into mutual nuclear doom," Ebert wrote.

Interestingly, again with apologies to the INKster's priest, Maher grew up as a practicing Catholic. His mother was Jewish. It's the INKster's guess that the guilt he inherited from both parents might have played a role in his anti-religion views as an adult.

From her understanding of the film, it sounds tailor-made for Wilson, who isn't shy about defending his beliefs to any and all who will listen. And that's how it should be.