



## G-O-D IN THE 21ST C

### RELIGION GETS A MODERN MAKEOVER

Through pop culture, entertainment and design, God and religion are getting a 21st century extreme makeover. In the film and television arenas, comedy seems to be playing a significant role in this process. Last month, Lions Gate released *Religulous*, a humorous and skeptical documentary on religion in America by outspoken political comedian Bill Maher. *God, Inc.*, a web series described as a combination of *The Office*, *Dead Like Me*, *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*, has been picked up by the Sci-Fi Channel for development. The series

depicts a corporation run by God, consisting of such sectors as "The Miracles Department" and episode titles like "In the Beginning There was Paperwork."

A 2008 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey found that religious life in America today is more "freelance" than in previous times: a quarter of adults have pulled away from their religious roots to join another religion or no religion at all. For those who haven't yet been convinced to give up their faith, one atheist group has come up with what it believes to be an effective method of persuasion. In time for the holidays, The American Humanist Association has pumped \$40,000 into a Washington DC area bus ad campaign that showcases slogans like, "Why Believe in God? Just Be Good, For Goodness Sake." A similar bus ad campaign cropped up in London, using taglines like "There's Probably No God. Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life."

Not all the focus on religion is negative, however. Some architecture projects are ensuring that church on Sunday is both mindful and artistically inspiring. In Los Angeles, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa sponsored the "Green Sanctuaries" initiative to help houses of worship get with the eco program. Leading eco-architect William McDonough is designing the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, while LA's Lehrer Architects fashioned the green Temple Bat Yahm in Orange County. Further afield, plans for the Wuensdorf Church in Germany portray a futuristic holy masterpiece-in-progress. With design books like *Houses of God: Religious Architecture for a New Millennium* and *Contemporary Church Architecture* cropping up, it's clear that a new design style could well be emerging: Neo-Theo.

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