

Largest-ever donation made to Swiss university

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Atheists launch their own bus campaign

"There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." That message, on British buses for just over a month, is coming to Switzerland.

The Swiss freethinkers' association launched a campaign to collect donations to "give a voice to those people who feel plagued by the missionary slogans" plastered around the country.

"We did it because so many people asked us to do it," Reta Caspar, spokeswoman for the association, said. "We hadn't planned it - we had our own campaign in which we invited people to 'out' themselves on our website, saying they were non-religious and why." One of the aims of that campaign was to give faces to the 11 per cent of Swiss who are non-religious.

"When we saw what happened in London and how people were so happy to have a campaign like this and how much support they got, we said we had to do it."

The Swiss freethinkers' association, which celebrated its 100th anniversary last year, guarantees that all donations will be used only for the bus campaign.

"People called us and emailed us saying 'finally - someone is standing up for non-religious people. We're so fed up with religious advertising in Switzerland everywhere'," Caspar said.

As an example she cites the biblical quotations on walls and newspapers in Switzerland paid for by the Christian organisation Agentur C.

The Atheist Bus Campaign, which has spread to the United

States, was launched by British journalist Ariane Sherine in response to a Christian bus advertisement which led people to an internet link saying non-Christians would spend "all eternity in torment in hell", burning in "a lake of fire".

The campaign's original goal was to raise £5,500 to run its own counter slogan on 30 buses across London for four weeks. Within three days more than £100,000 had flooded in.

Caspar says their initial target is Fr50,000. It would cost about SFr5,000 to take out one advert on a tram or bus for one year in a city. It's a bit cheaper in the countryside.

"We want to show that there really are a lot of people, internationally, fed up with not only religious advertising but also the religious speak of politicians," she said. *from swissinfo*

Pleureuses in Romont

The ceremony takes place in the afternoon of Good Friday. It begins with a reading from the Bible of the Passion of Christ. When the funeral procession is mentioned, the congregation begins their procession through the streets of the upper village. The mourners, clothed and veiled in black, slowly follow the Virgin Mary, portrayed by a young girl; she walks behind the large cross carried by a penitent wearing a black hood. On scarlet cushions, the mourners carry the symbols of the Passion: a crown of thorns, a whip, nails, a hammer, tongs, and St. Veronica's shroud.

During this time, the town resounds with chants and prayers, spoken by the entire congregation. This custom dates back to the fifteenth century when the carrying of the Cross was celebrated as a live representation of the Passion of Christ.

Largest-ever donation made to Swiss university

Swiss businessman Adolphe Merkle has donated SFr 100 million to Fribourg University to encourage research and teaching. The donation will partly be used to set up an institute of nanomaterials.

The 83-year-old, who graduated from the university in the 1940s, said he wanted to "give something back to Fribourg". The Adolphe Merkle Institute will be attached to the faculty of sciences at the university. It will invest its annual budget of some SFr5 million in interdisciplinary research into nanomaterials.

The institute will allow Fribourg University to build on its expertise in nanomaterials, a field which has been researched there since the 1980s.

The institute will consist of four research groups led by newly hired professors. This is not Merkle's first donation to the

university in this area of study. He already supports the Fribourg Center for Nanomaterials, created in 2006, which will work closely with the new institute.

The funding will be administered by the Adolphe Merkle Foundation. One of the other initiatives to be supported by the foundation will be a new chair of innovation management, which will teach students how to bring an idea to a commercial fruition.

Merkle explained his affection for the university. "Fribourg gave me a lot as a student. Equally as an entrepreneur, I chose to develop my business in Fribourg because the region offered me the scientific, economic and human environment that I needed. The canton and the people of Fribourg have given me great support. Today I want to give them something back."

from swissinfo