

Minutes of Regular Meeting – May 24, 2007

The fifth meeting of the board of the North Shore Chapter was held on May 24, 2007 at the Northbrook Public Library. The next meeting is scheduled for June 28, 2007 at the same location.

Matt Lowry gave an update on the status of Illinois legislation concerning a mandatory moment of silence before school classes begin (as contrasted to the current state law which provides for optional moments of silence). Our chapter, and possibly AU National, objects to this mandatory change because it could so easily evolve, once adopted, into moments of mandatory prayer and raise the question of conflating public schools and religion. There have been precedents which have demonstrated this problem.

As previously noted, Matt Lowry while recently in Springfield, met with House Majority Leader Currie. Ms. Currie stated that she would vote against the bill. However, House Sponsor Davis proceeded it through the Education Committee, and the bill will now be brought to the full House for the vote, within several weeks.

Matt called the Chapter's attention to a sample letter on our web site concerning this issue, which could be used as a model for letters to be sent to our Representatives.

David Robin then introduced the speaker for the evening, Rabbi Adam Chalom, Ph.D, of Kol Hadash Humanistic Congregation, and Associate Dean of the International Institute for Secular Judaism.

Rabbi Chalom began his talk saying that he is new to our area, having come 3 years ago from Birmingham, Michigan where the Humanistic Judaism tradition began. He went on to say that he has been a member of AU for several years, regarding AU's approach as good for the country.

He traced the history in the United States of the opposing forces of religious versus secular interests, beginning with the founding fathers to the present, and offered such examples as a contrast of religious references in John F. Kennedy's Nomination Acceptance Speech of July 15, 1960 with George W. Bush's Inaugural Speech of January 21, 2001. In the former, Kennedy sought to allay fears that his administration would be subject to religious pressures, while placating the religious minded with a quotation from Isaiah. In the latter, Mr. Bush's intent was to invoke religious institutions into serving the nation's needs, alongside government, and filling his remarks with religious references.

The Rabbi also cited the replacement of "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One), with "In God We Trust" in 1951 as the national motto. In the 50's and 60's, he stated. the mainstream belief was "all people believe in the same God, so what's the difference?" Others, seeing the encroachment of religion into government, sought to separate religion from government and "privatize" religion, and brought Court cases to press their views. Further examples were included in the handout the Rabbi had prepared.

The issue remains unresolved and is a continuing struggle. The difficulty lies both in attempting to understand just what the framers of the First Amendment meant, in the context of their times and conditions, when they couched it in the language they so carefully chose, and in trying to reconcile the continually opposing factions.

A lively question and answer period followed, with much interest being shown by the audience.

Because of the length of Rabbi Chalom's presentation, the normal AU board meeting was short and will be continued at more length at the next meeting on June 28th. At that meeting, Matt Lowry proposed that those of us who attended the Sunday Training Session in Chicago offered by AU National on May 20, 2007 (Bob Wilson, Eileen Cooper and Paul Cooper) brief the rest of the North Shore Chapter board on the material covered on "Grassroots Organizing" and "Chapter Fundraising". His proposal will be circulated by e-mail among the board members for a consensus.