

Atheists challenge “City of Churches”

Chicago chapter executive director Tom O’Connell drove out to the village of Evergreen Park a few weeks back at the invitation of Mayor Anthony Vacco to observe a council meeting called because of atheist objections to the centennial slogan: “Village of Churches.” Rob Sherman, head of the American Atheist party was scheduled to appear. Here is Tom’s colorful report on his field trip:

It was a pleasant evening. One look at the sky and trees told you there was a God. On the Village Hall the words “Village of Churches” stood out and some of those coming to the meeting wore centennial buttons bearing the same slogan.

No one greeted me as I came in. Some looked with curiosity thinking I was the “special guest.” I quietly took a place in the rear of the room. The benches – which looked like they’d come from a courthouse – were hard and uncomfortable, but tolerable, as in toleration of others.

The room filled quickly as we approached the 7:30 start time. An older woman and her husband came and took a seat across the room. He walked with a cane, the lines in his face and snow white hair indicative of a life fully lived. Her eyes followed him with admiration – nice to see in this world.

A full room turned almost as one when “the guest” appeared. He had with him his own photographer and an assistant who carried a placard that read “Separate Church and State.” The council members took their places and Mayor Anthony Vacca called the meeting to order.

The first order of business was a letter requesting that a citizen make a statement. That “citizen” was the man with the two cohorts about to bring atheism to a strongly Christian

community. Rob Sherman's name and reputation are national symbols of disbelief in God. He stated his name and title to the boos of those gathered. Mayor Vacca asked the speaker to keep his remarks to the three minutes allowed. I didn't time him but it seems that he did.

The Mayor asked Sherman to name the person in the village who had asked him to come. Sherman would not tell the mayor, despite repeated requests. The mayor finally asked Sherman to sit down.

One man got up and told Mr. Sherman to go back to the town he came from. This brought loud clapping and cheering from the three hundred people that filled the room. Another person thought that it was not a religious argument at all.

I asked to speak and told the council members and the audience that the Catholic League was there to help in any way we could. I then looked at Sherman and told him that he was a "stalker, " stalking Christians and attempting to take their rights from them. The crowd cheered.

Sherman was given a chance to make closing remarks. He did and sarcastically asked the mayor if there was anything he could do to help the village. Mayor Vacca responded, "Yes, go home," to which the crowd cheered and we all walked out. Outside, the waiting evening warmth and an occasional cool breeze mixed with the sounds of the village and whispered God's love.