

Religion and Intellectual Freedom, Chicago 2005

Doug Archer

Several hundred people attended the joint IF program in Chicago, a panel titled “Religion and Intellectual Freedom: Divine Revelation in the Marketplace of Ideas.” The two main speakers were Martin E. Marty, the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago and Susan Jacoby, independent scholar and author of *Free Thinkers: A History of American Secularism*. Joining them as reactors were Mike Wessells, Timberland Regional Library System, and Doug Archer, University Libraries of Notre Dame. The latter are both intellectual freedom activists who are also ministers in their respective denominations.

Professor Marty began by cautioning the audience not to trust either the religious or the nonreligious when it comes to intellectual freedom. He followed this admonition by citing several historical examples of support and opposition to intellectual freedom from both points of view. Susan Jacoby, first noted her debt to America’s public libraries as an independent scholar and free thinker. She went on to stress the liberating value of free access to diverse library collections and the dangers of religiously motivated censorship to those collections.

Mike Wessells stressed the need for every library to contain a wide spectrum of views, values and attitudes even those which are personally offensive to us as citizens and librarians while Doug Archer emphasized the common roots, common values and common concerns of intellectual and religious freedom.

A sometimes spirited but friendly exchange of opinions took place among the panelists during the ensuing question and answer period. The most lively exchange came in answer to a question about allowing religious groups to use library public meeting rooms. Ms Jacoby gave a quick “no” to which Mike and Doug replied “yes” (as long as everyone was treated equitably) while Professor Marty jumped in with a resounding “maybe.” An edited transcript of the presentations is available in the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom*, November, 2005, v. 54, n. 6, pp. 270-272 and 308-314.