

IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?

If Regis Philbin wants to stump someone on “Millionaire,” we suggest he ask the following: “Which ethnic and religious group believes we should be generous in funding programs for the mentally retarded but not for the mentally ill?” Irish Catholics. ” Are you sure? Is that your final answer?”

If Regis had asked this question of Ellen Story, a Massachusetts lawmaker, you can bet that would have been her answer. To be exact, that’s what she would have said before she was embarrassed into apologizing for her remarks.

In January, the *Boston Globe* reported that Rep. Story had recently told about 75 legislators and state officials that Irish Catholics were not supportive of programs for the mentally ill. Irish Catholics, she contended, had come to see mental retardation as “determined by God and that, therefore, there is an obligation to make sure those people are taken care of.” But there’s no such corollary for the mentally ill. “If you’re mentally ill there’s a sense that you’re not trying hard enough,” she said.

The *Boston Globe* printed the following response by William Donohue to this issue: “We hear a lot of things around here, but this is brand new. What’s amazing about it is it doesn’t seem to be based on any stereotype. It’s out of the sky.”

It didn’t take long, however, before Rep. Story came to regret her comments. She apologized for “a generalization I should not have made.” In doing so she not only put the issue behind her, she also deprived Regis of using this one as a real ringer.

Incidents like this convince us that some anti-Catholic bigotry is the product of sheer stupidity, not malice. That, however, can never affect our response.