

Progress Made at Colorado High School

In the November issue of *Catalyst*, we notified League members of the disturbing situation in a school district in southern Colorado. Gary Benson, in his Cultural Geography class at Centauri High School, had been engaged in the propagation of misinformation about the Catholic Church to his students. He was quoting material directly from a William C. Brown textbook, *World History: Book I*. What's worse, despite the fact that the administration was supposed to be reviewing all classroom materials and subject matter, and that all lessons plans were supposed to be submitted for review, Mr. Benson had been misleading his students for at least ten years without the knowledge of anyone in the school or board administration.

The initial response from administrators to Mike Cyrus, who initially raised the concerns, included the excuses that Benson was a tenured instructor, that this class had originated before their appointment, and that he was the head of a department. However, upon receipt of a letter of complaint from the League, as well as a detailed account of classroom teachings prepared by Mr. Cyrus, a La Jara resident whose daughter is in Benson's class at Centauri, Superintendent Kurt Cary assured us that they "take matters of this nature very seriously and will investigate the matter to the fullest extent possible."

On December 15, Mr. Cyrus received a letter from Gary Shawcroft, Assistant Superintendent, to notify him that the book Mr. Benson had been using would be removed from classroom use during the investigation. "Concomitant with academic freedom is responsibility, accountability and, very simply, good judgment," Mr. Shawcroft wrote. At that time the board of education expressed concern for further review of the book as instructional material and said "until such time as further

study can be made to determine the appropriateness, relevance, value, student maturity level and other related concerns, the book will not be used.”

On January 25, Mr. Cyrus received a letter from Mr. Cary, Superintendent of North Conejos County Schools, informing him that further review had been made of the book in question. Mr. Cary determined that due to the age of the students, and because the materials present information “about the development of particular religions in a manner that unnecessarily create(s) discomfort for some students,” the book should not be used in the future in North Conejos County schools.

Superintendent Cary also addressed Mr. Cyrus’ other concerns, namely a) the competency of Mr. Benson, b) the academic liberties taken with classroom instructional materials and activities, and c) the lack of enforcement of administration policies. Cary assured Cyrus that “appropriate steps are being pursued to address the issues you have brought to our attention. “

While other matters still remain, the League is pleased to note that progress is being made. We salute Superintendent Cary for acting responsibly .