

REGENTS REVISIONS

High school students in New York State have long taken Regents exams; they are standardized aptitude tests that are given in all the traditional subjects. Exam questions from previous years usually appear in the test-preparatory volumes used by Barron's books. When going over the 1998 Regents exam in Global Studies, Father Fred Marano of Cathedral Preparatory Seminary in Queens was troubled. There was a question he objected to and asked the Catholic League to take a look at it. We were troubled, too.

Students were asked, "Which statement best illustrates the contradictory actions of the Catholic Church in colonial Latin America?" They were then given four choices, all of which were negatively framed to make the Church look bad.

William Donohue wrote to Dr. Gerald DeMauro, Coordinator of Assessment in the New York State Education Department, explaining his concerns. "The question that was posed," he said, "is problematic for two reasons: a) the 'right' answer is historically debatable and b) the tenor of the question is itself contentious."

The "right" answer to the question—which dealt with the Catholicism and slavery—was contested by Donohue. He also said that "It is distressing to learn that a question that is so front-loaded with a political agenda was accepted for inclusion in a Regents exam." In the early 1990s, Donohue devised exam questions for the Foreign Service Exam, and so he knows how the process of question adoption is done.

Dr. DeMauro's response was quick and positive. He called Donohue to say that he completely agrees with his complaint and the question will not reappear. He further extended to the Catholic League the opportunity to serve as a "sensitivity reviewer" of future exam questions. On June 29, Catholic

League staffer Dennis Nilsen went to Albany representing the league.

The outcome was gratifying. But no sooner had Dr. DeMauro contacted us when we heard from Father Philip Eichner, the league's chairman of the board. He was calling to complain about a question in this year's English Regents Exam. And then Father Fred called about another question. Looks like they'll drive us to be the toughest sensitivity police on the beat. So be it.