

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.

NEVER TOO LATE

In the state of Washington, there is a law that prohibits the issuance of a liquor license to any operation that is within 500 feet of a school. A public school, that is. So when the 99 Cent Smoke Shop in Seattle applied for a beer and wine license near a Catholic school, it was granted.

The Catholic League entered the case and found that the Washington State Liquor Control Board and has now agreed to "give substantial weight to the objections filed by a private school and not issue a liquor license within 500 feet of a private school if the school objects." This won't reverse the decision on the 99 Cent Smoke Shop, and it won't automatically prohibit the granting of a liquor license near a Catholic school in the future, but it does lessen the likelihood that this will happen again.

Unfortunately for our side, only one Catholic objected when the hearings were going on, Rev. James H. Gandrau. Had there been more, matters might have been different. But as our intervention shows, it is never too late to do the right thing.

CLINTONESQUE MOVE TENURES HORMEL

For the past few years, President Clinton has been trying to appoint James Hormel as Ambassador to Luxembourg. The U.S. Senate has deliberately held up this appointment, partly because Hormel still refuses to dissociate himself from the anti-Catholic group, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. During the 10-day Memorial Day recess, Clinton installed Hormel without congressional approval.

The league characterized this move as “quintessentially Clintonesque,” charging that “the president showed contempt for Congress by doing an end-run around the legislative process.” “That he managed to offend Catholic sensibilities as well is hardly a shocker,” the press release read.

The league then took its case directly to all the contenders for the 2000 presidential election. Letters were sent asking each candidate whether he agrees with President Clinton’s decision. The only person to respond thus far has been Dan Quayle, and he said he never would have appointed Hormel.

When Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma threatened to thwart all of President Clinton’s future nominations, the Catholic League publicly supported the move. We also wrote a letter to the *Luxembourg News* expressing our regrets that they got stuck with Hormel.

FOX GETS MESSAGE ON “SIMPSONS”

In June, Howard Rosenberg, media critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, provided an inside look into the controversy surrounding the Catholic League and its battle against the Fox TV show, “The Simpsons.” While no fan of the league’s (e.g. Rosenberg says that our “fanatical crusade against ‘Nothing Sacred’ helped drive that achingly noble ABC series off the air”), he nonetheless credits us with changing the prevailing thinking at Fox.

Rosenberg reports that “The Simpsons” executive producer, Mike Scully, is flaming mad at a Fox directive which says it’s time to lay off Catholics. When Scully complained to Roland McFarland, vice president of broadcast standards at the network, he was told that any future episodes that contain offensive lines should not be attributed to Catholics. He advised that it was okay to target “Methodists, Presbyterians or Baptists”—any group but Catholics.

One of the changes that Fox made was to delete from a rerun an offensive reference to Catholics that appeared in the initial airing of the show. The Catholic League had complained about the January 31 program that ran after the Super Bowl. When it was repeated at the end of May, the reference to “The Catholic church” was edited to read, “The church.”

Scully’s retort to this was revealing: “When I asked what would be the difference changing it to another religion, and wouldn’t that just be offending a different group of people, he [McFarland] explained that Fox had already had trouble with Catholics earlier this season.” This prompted *Los Angeles Times* critic Howard Rosenberg to question, “Different standards for different religions?”

Now consider this: all along we have been told by Fox that none of our complaints were valid because none of the material was truly offensive. But now we have a Fox executive producer disingenuously giving away his hand by protesting why it should be okay to offend another group of people with the same material he initially said wasn't offensive to Catholics! And isn't it striking that Rosenberg is upset with the fact that the double standard—which now, for the first time works positively for Catholics—is a real problem. Never do we remember Rosenberg protesting the double standard that allows “artists” to dump on Catholics while protecting most other segments of society from their assaults.

Rosenberg writes that Fox admits that the reason for the new sensitivity shown to Catholics comes from one source—the Catholic League. McFarland admits that they have been deluged with letters from angry Catholic League members.

It was the cover story of the March *Catalyst* on “The Simpsons” that was the final straw. Catholic League members made good use of the name and address that we provided, as they had on previous occasions. It only goes to prove what can be done when Catholics get actively involved.

WFOR TV, MIAMI, AIRS “NEWS” STORY ON CONFESSION

On May 16, the CBS affiliate in Miami, WFOR TV, featured a story on its late-night news that depicted the Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation in a most questionable way. All throughout the movie that preceded it, “Joan of Arc,” promotions for this “news story” were flagged.

The news segment informed viewers that many Catholics practice their faith in different ways and that some Catholics are choosing not to confess their sins to a priest. Confession scenes from the movies "Moonstruck" and "Mortal Sins" were shown, thus adding to the triviality of the report. If there was one statement made by the commentators that summed up the tenor of the report, it was this: "The fact is many Catholics never go to confession. They simply don't feel comfortable confessing their innermost thoughts to a priest. Yet these same people consider themselves to be good Catholics." The closing comment by one of the reporters was a musing, "Very interesting."

The Catholic League brought its case to the media:

"The real news about the WFOR news clip on confession was that there was no news in it at all. This begs the question, Why was it run? By flagging it during the two-hour movie, 'Joan of Arc,' the station hoped to lure the expected Catholic audience to tune in and learn what all the controversy was about. This kind of baiting is more appropriately the stuff of tabloid journalism, not serious news reporting.

"The point of this piece was to create controversy where none exists: Catholics either go to confession or they do not—what they don't do is sit around and moan about it. And, of course, we have the forced symmetry that is so popular with some segments of the media, namely the strategy that puts Catholics who reject Church teachings on the same ground as Catholics who are loyal to the Church. This smacks of an agenda—not an honest inquiry."

FOUL PLAY

We heard about a foul play on a college campus, registered a protest, and got a pledge that it won't appear again.

Some of our diligent members notified us that an anti-Catholic play, "Contagion of the Night," was staged in April at St. Louis Community College and was scheduled for another performance in the fall. We got a hold of the script, found it offensive, notified school authorities of our concerns, and got a polite and professional response pledging that the play will not run again.

The play was advertised as "one nun's crisis of faith and one antichrist's journey of self-discovery." We found it to be a blatant mockery of Catholicism and of nuns, in particular.

"Contagion of the Night" is a satire about the financial woes of a convent, the Sisters of Our Lady, set against the second coming of the Anti-Christ in 2000. In it, nuns are portrayed as greedy, insane and sexually repressed. Our Blessed Mother is held up for particular derision and mockery, and Christianity is trivialized as a contest between two "cosmic jokesters," God and Satan.

We are delighted that when the Chancellor of St. Louis Community College, Dr. Vivian B. Blevins, heard our concerns, she immediately apologized and said that the play would not appear in the fall.

THERE WILL BE NO DEBATE

On May 13, at the 92 Street Y in New York City, Rabbi Marvin Hier of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, took aim at Pope Pius XII.

Rabbi Hier said that making Pius a saint would “demean the meaning of sainthood” and “desecrate the memory of the Holocaust.” Pius was described as the “pope of the Holocaust” who “sat on the throne of St. Peter in stony silence, without ever lifting a finger, as each day thousands of Jews were sent to the gas chambers with his full knowledge.”

On May 19, William Donohue wrote a two-sentence letter to Rabbi Hier: “I read with interest your attacks on Pope Pius XII at the 92 Street Y. The next time you come to New York, why don’t we schedule a debate on this subject?”

Rabbi Hier, who has responded to other letters Donohue has sent, has not been heard from.

AMICUS FILED

The Catholic League has signed on to an amicus brief filed by the Becket Fund in the case of Kiryas Joel.

About 45 miles northwest of New York City lies the village of Kiryas Joel, a community of Satmar Hasidic Jews. At issue is whether this religiously- streamlined community can maintain its own school district for disabled children. It is the position of the Catholic League that fundamental religious liberties are at stake and that is why we are supporting this Orthodox Jewish sect.

On June 21, the Supreme Court blocked implementation of a New York State court order that would have closed the school district. The high court will decide in the fall whether to grant full review of this case.

DWI FILM NIXED

If you're caught driving while intoxicated, the police summon you with a DWI offense. Typically, offenders are required to attend education program. Some Catholics in New York who got nailed with a DWI were astonished to view a short film on the subject that included a priest sexually molesting a young altar boy. What this had to do with combating DWI offenses was as much a mystery to us as it was them.

When we registered our complaint, we were delighted to know that the person who handled the issue was a fan of the Catholic League. The movie has been withdrawn, but it is amazing that it was ever shown.