

# Justice Department Exceeds Its Reach

On January 20, the *Boston Globe* reported that Attorney General Janet Reno announced that the Justice Department “will be monitoring antiabortion rhetoric.” The Catholic League sought verification of this report and found that it was accurate. On January 17, the Justice Department released a statement that opens with the following sentence: “The Justice Department is reviewing statements and writings which seem to condone or encourage violence against clinics and providers of reproductive health services.”

The Catholic League issued the following press release on this matter:

“The real story behind Janet Reno’s remarkable statement is that most of those in the media, and virtually all civil liberties organizations, felt that it did not warrant their attention. In the past, when the government has monitored the speech of black militants or antiwar activists, we have heard cries of outrage. Now we hear nothing, even though the targets of surveillance include writers who ‘seem to condone’ violence.

“As a general rule, an element of imminence must prevail before speech promoting violence can trigger a response from the authorities. But that rule is not satisfactory to the Justice Department. Yet surely there is a difference between someone who, however wrongheaded, writes an article that says killing abortionists is justified on the grounds of ‘an eye for an eye,’ and someone who stands across the street from an abortion clinic urging a frenzied crowd to charge the clinic. It is the difference between advocacy and incitement.

“Will Janet Reno authorize the Justice Department to monitor

the speech of the Nation of Islam? What about Hollywood? Or how about radio talk show hosts? Or will she instead confine herself to those activists who oppose the Clinton administration's policies?

"So as not to be misunderstood, the Catholic League approves of law enforcement agencies doing everything it can *within* the parameters of the law to stop violence against abortion providers. Not within those parameters is the January 17 directive of Janet Reno. The Catholic League is requesting that the Justice Department make public all of its communications on this subject so that it can be determined whether a suit should be filed against it."

The League sent a letter to Attorney General Janet Reno on January 31 requesting that it turn over all material related to this case. At press time, it was awaiting a reply.