

Letter to Senators Regarding Nomination of Dr. Elders

A copy of this letter was sent to all Senators on August 19, 1993.

Dear Senator——-:

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights is highly disturbed by the bigoted statements that Dr. Joycelyn Elders has made regarding the Catholic Church. It is not simply one statement that we find troubling, rather it is a series of comments that suggest an animus toward the Catholic Church.

For example, when Dr. Elders was serving as Director of the Arkansas Department of Health, she made a public statement charging that the Catholic Church was “silent” and did “nothing” about slavery, the treatment of Native Americans, the Holocaust and the disenfranchisement of women. This comment was made on January 18, 1992, at an address before the Arkansas Coalition for Choice.

Now it is entirely possible that Dr. Elders made this remark because she was misinformed about the historical response of the Catholic Church to societal injustice. But there was more than ignorance at work when Dr. Elders made the following statement (also made at the 1992 pro-choice rally): “Look at who’s fighting the pro-choice movement: a celibate, male-dominated Church...”

The point of such demagoguery, it seems plain, is to inflame, and not to enlighten. That Dr. Elders does not like the way the Catholic clergy is constituted is one thing, but it is outrageous to try to discredit the teachings of the Catholic Church by taking issue with the Church’s doctrinal prerogatives. Had someone tried to malign the pro-choice movement by questioning the composition of its leadership, it

surely would not be tolerated. Catholics expect to be treated just as fairly.

At the same pro-choice rally, Dr. Elders made her by now infamous comment on the pro-life movement: "We would like for the right to life and anti-choice groups to really get over their love affair with the fetus and start supporting children."

We submit that this remark was clearly intended to delegitimatize both the pro-life community and the human status of unborn children. And it is a gross mischaracterization of the efforts of millions of Catholics and non-Catholics alike to imply that those who have protested the killing of unborn children have done little or nothing about servicing the needs of infants and youngsters.

More recently, on January 11, 1993, Dr. Elders referred to people who oppose abortion as "non-Christians with slave master mentalities." This cannot be dismissed as just another occasion of hyperbole: Dr. Elders has repeatedly targeted her bombast at Catholics. Despite what Dr. Elders alleges, it is not a slave master mentality that Catholics evince when objecting to abortion, rather it is a deep-seated conviction that unborn children are human beings who deserve equal rights.

Taken as a whole, these remarks show Dr. Elders to be ill-disposed toward the Catholic Church, and to Catholics in general. If Dr. Elders has legitimate differences with the teachings of the Catholic Church, she should say so in a professional manner. What is uncalled for is the cant and calumny associated with Dr. Elders' statements. There is simply no place for bigotry in public office.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.

President

Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights