

Doctor's Cache of 2,200 Unborn Babies' Remains Shows Moral Cost of Practicing Abortion

By now there's a good chance you've heard of the horrific discovery at the home of the recently deceased abortion provider, Dr. Ulrich "George" Klopfer. His family came across more than 2,000 corpses of "medically preserved" prenatal children, most of whom were apparently killed at his South Bend, Indiana, clinic.

These kinds of stories are often covered by local media and get serious attention in pro-life circles—but then, as happened with the similarly disturbing discoveries about the abortion practices of Dr. Kermit Gosnell, major media are slow to catch on to their newsworthiness.

Not so with this story. Major media from *The Washington Post*, to *The New York Times*, to *USA Today* were all over it, and understandably so.

Implicit in the coverage of this story is a single question: What could have possibly led to this physician's depraved behavior? Were these, as National Review writer Alexandra DeSanctis suggested, "ghastly trophies" of the OB-GYN's work?

Whatever the explanation, this was clearly the work of someone who had lost contact with his humanity.

A running theme through my new book on the ethic of Pope Francis is how violent acts, like the killing and discarding of a prenatal child, often lead to the killing and discarding of the humanity of those who perform such violence, especially when it is repeated over and over again. Participating in our

violent throwaway culture leads to serious moral injury.

Not surprisingly, there were warning signs that Dr. Klopfer might have been heading down a destructive path. In a 2016 public hearing that led to the loss of his medical license, it was revealed that Klopfer had failed to report the rape of a 10-year-old girl, refused to give pain medication to women over 15 years old (until they could “pay extra”) and failed to meet other reporting and documentation standards.

The fact that those who regularly participate in prenatal violence do moral injury to themselves has become an increasingly important focus for the pro-life movement. Abby Johnson, a former abortion clinic manager who became a pro-life activist, for instance, founded a group called “And Then There Were None,” with the goal of helping people leave an industry that so often damages those who participate in it.

Writing at the Consistent Life blog, Sarah Terzo highlights the effects of “Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress” (PITS) in the abortion clinic. She cites the story of “Gail,” who said the following about what repeated viewings of the “little arms and little legs” of prenatal children and wondering “who they would have grown up to be” did to her:

I used to be really happy, loved life, saw beauty everywhere before I started working there. Then, I started working at Planned Parenthood, and I was always sad, always tired, and really depressed ... How I felt coming home each day from the abortion center was like a soldier who had come back from war. The emptiness. That's how I felt. Empty. I don't believe we were created to see so much death.

It is significant that Gail compares her PITS to that of soldiers. The effect of wartime killing on the killer is so strong that it can even dramatically wound drone operators who perpetrate deadly violence from thousands of miles away.

And one need not stop at war. Similar kinds of PITS happen to those who administer the death penalty. Sometimes participants in a violent throwaway culture don't need to be actively killing at all in order to sustain substantial moral injury.

Consider the inhumane treatment of families and children at our southern border. What must it do to someone's humanity to repeatedly separate desperately screaming children from the arms of their parents—especially when that child's suffering is explicitly being used by the administration as a means of immigration deterrence?

It would not be surprising if such actions, over time, produced the kind of moral injury that leads one to discard one's basic humanity. Perhaps border agents will eventually begin to see migrants as Klopfer saw prenatal children: as less than human. Perhaps they already have. Maybe the bodies of 2,246 tiny human children can end up in jars for the same reason that migrant children can be denied basic sanitation and medical care. In repeatedly discarding the vulnerable, one discards one's own humanity as well.

The primary focus of our political debates about issues like abortion, migration, war and the death penalty is on the damage done to those at whom the violence is intentionally directed. And that is as it should be. But there are many instructive things to learn from a secondary focus on what happens to agents of violence, especially when they are agents of violence again and again and again.

Doing so can not only help us identify and even predict from where more violence is likely to come, but it can also help us identify what counts as violence in the first place—especially when that violence is hidden by our political commitments.

Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, who was mayor of South Bend during several of the years Klopfer was practicing abortion there, refuses to see abortion as an act

of violence against a vulnerable child.

Holding that position, frankly, may be the only way Buttigieg could respond to Klopfer's horrific acts by worrying that the story of Klopfer's store of human remains might "become political." What other evidence of mass violence, pray tell, does Mayor Pete believe ought not to become a political concern?

The profound moral injury Klopfer received after performing so many abortions over his lifetime should cause South Bend's mayor—and all those who would prefer to overlook the violence of abortion—to rethink their position. {eo}

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