

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Planned Parenthood and the Trivialization of Life

As she feasted on a luncheon salad and sipped wine, Dr. Deborah Nucatola, Planned Parenthood's senior director of medical services, nonchalantly discussed how she methodically conducted late-term abortions to collect and preserve key fetal tissue and body parts. She declared that there is a great demand for fetal livers, but "A lot of people want intact hearts these days." To preserve intact fetal organs, Dr. Nucatola stated that "We've been very good at getting heart, lung, liver, because we know that, so I'm gonna crush that part. I'm gonna basically crush below, I'm gonna crush above, and I'm gonna see if I can get it all intact." Nucatola also vividly described how she seeks to ensure the viability of the calvarium (incomplete skull of the child) by moving the fetus into a breach position so that the head comes out last. She also declared that she carefully avoids grasping the torso where valuable organs are located. Dr. Nucatola suggested that the cost of \$30 to \$100 would be a likely range of charges for organs and tissues harvested from the aborted babies. This chilling video was released by the Center for Medical Research, an activist group seeking to expose Planned Parenthood for its abortion work and its nefarious disregard for prenatal human life. Two members of this group posed as medical-research representatives and conducted the interview with Dr. Nucatola.

Columnist Kathleen Parker cynically writes of Planned Parenthood that "At least donating one's tissue to research is a way of casting abortion in a somewhat positive light, sort of like donating the organs of a deceased child. Except for all the obvious differences . . . Basically, the volume of older fetuses at some of Planned Parenthood's locations is so great that they have a disposal problem. What do you do with all these bodies? Environmental laws prevent throwing fetuses in the trash, and even if they could, some garbage collection companies refuse to pick them up. The middleman, who, through sanitized packaging and clinical language, can clean up such a mess, and, for a price, contribute to science is God-sent." Planned Parenthood's response was predictable, blaming the accuser and refusing to even comment on the ghastly nature of Dr. Nucatola's graphic description of her abortion techniques. Instead, the organization clarified that no fetal parts are sold for profit. They only seek to recoup the cost of doing business. Planned Parenthood has always argued that what they do is ethical because the only charges levied are for shipping and handling, which bring "no financial benefit." However, as columnist Michael Gerson correctly maintains, "Charging a fee certainly improves the finances of a clinic compared with not charging a fee for the same work, even if a profit isn't made." Kathleen Parker adds: "Eventually, profits will be made—perhaps with medications enabled by research on a 24-week old fetus's brain stem. Just think: No unwanted baby; no burden to society; plus treatment for someone's dementia—a perfect trifecta, made in hell . . . the dead may cost nothing, but the livers of terminated fetuses are selling like hotcakes." Theologian Albert

Mohler appropriately concludes that “Planned Parenthood stands at the epicenter of the Culture of Death and receives about half a billion dollars a year in government support. They are not going to explain this video away . . . [It] reveals their senior medical director enjoying a conversation over a meal in which she describes tearing apart the bodies of unborn human beings in order to get the desired organ.”

What does this ghastly business of Planned Parenthood teach us as a society? What conclusions should we draw from the exposure of procedures Dr. Nucatola so enthusiastically details in the video? Gerson suggests at least three:

- First, Nucatola and Planned Parenthood demonstrate the appalling trivialization of life at the heart of “extreme pro-choice ideology. If a developing life is really the moral and medical equivalent of a cyst or tumor, there is no limit on how it may be exploited.” Since this is a human being, is it not disturbing to treat this human being as rubbish or raw material for experimentation? Harvesting of body parts for money is supposedly illegal in the United States, but what Nucatola describes is a blatant disregard for human life, treating that life as nothing more than something of monetary value—between \$30 to \$100!!!
- Second, what Nucatola describes is nothing less than dehumanization. Gerson: “Whenever we start down the path of saying that some lives have diminished (or nonexistent) value, we harden something about ourselves that should be soft . . . It is always a source of serious ethical risk when we categorize a group of human beings as different or worthless. It leads, over time, to a callousness that can be shocking and dangerous.”
- Finally, the ethical issues raised by the Nucatola interview demonstrate a deep tension and a profound inconsistency within American culture. American civilization has always been known as compassionate and generous. America is regularly one of the first nations to respond to human disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods or other such disasters. How do we square careful, methodical late-term abortions to preserve body parts with this compassion and generosity? The progressives who defend such atrocious acts assign no value to the fetus until it exits the birth canal. However, this is both medically and morally implausible and unacceptable. Gerson writes that “Human beings have a biological instinct and a moral imperative to care for their young. And in this calling, birth is an arbitrary dividing line. Most people think of a zygote as something different from a child. But particularly as technology has allowed us to peer into the womb, human instincts for protection have engaged earlier than nine months.” Dr. Nucatola and Planned Parenthood manifest a profound disconnect from the values of “a compassionate society.” If you find yourself repulsed by the Nucatola interview and Planned Parenthood’s response, this is evidence of your God-given compassion and innate sense of right and wrong. But a callous and hardened heart can develop—and this is apparently what has happened to Dr. Nucatola and to Planned Parenthood.

God's view of prenatal life is very clear from Scripture. When King David was meditating on God's magnificent role in his life, he declared, "Even when I was an unformed substance in my mother's womb, Oh God, you knew me" (Psalm 139:16). For God, life is a continuum, beginning with conception and going on into eternity. This video of Dr. Nucatola and Planned Parenthood's response evidence an arrogant disregard for what God regards as precious and valuable. They treat with contempt what God declares is of infinite value and worth.

See Michael Gerson in the *Washington Post* (16 July 2015); Kathleen Parker in the *Washington Post* (17 July 2015); and www.albertmohler.com (15 July 2015).