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More Than a Brain (The President's Page)

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Larry L. Lichtenwalter

Imagine standing, looking up to something in the distance. Your face and entire body are peeled like a peach, with your entire rubbery organ of skin, flayed and intact, draped over your arm like a raincoat.

MORE THAN A BRAIN

swordsman, a swimmer, a basketball player—assume their normal poses to demonstrate the wonders of the skeletal and muscular systems. There are even two flayed corpses, all muscles and bones and bulging eyes, kneeling before a cross.

This is the essence of Günther von Hagens' "Body Worlds: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies." Dr. von Hagens has invented a vacuum process called *plastination*, which replaces individual cells of the human body with brightly colored resins and epoxies, much as minerals replace the cells of trees in a petrified forest. As a result, he can preserve a human body, whole or stripped away to reveal its inner parts, and display the cadaver in an eerily lifelike pose.

Dr. von Hagens' macabre exhibition of the naked and the dead has shocked and fascinated millions of people around the world. Is it art or anatomy? A ghoulish affront to human dignity or a way of understanding ourselves better? The German scientist believes his displays of real corpses can help us understand ourselves and our bodies better—as well as our corporeality and the reality of death (both of which our Western world tries to deny).

Body Worlds, an exhibition of 200-plus preserved bodies, includes a woman eight months pregnant, reclining as if on a couch, her abdomen and womb opened to reveal the fetus resting head-down inside. Skinned athletes—a runner, a

One of Body Worlds' vivid displays is a man sitting intently at a chessboard. In addition to the exposure of muscles, tendons, and ligaments, his back has been stripped of muscle to the nerves of his spinal cord and his skull removed to reveal the brain. The frontal lobe projects

above where the eyebrows would be. From behind, your eye naturally follows the spinal column from the medulla at the base of the brain down to the first lumbar vertebra, where it branches off in the sciatic rootlets and sciatic nerve reaching all the way down the back of each leg to the feet. It's a fascinating display, showing how intimately connected the brain is to every part of the human body.

Physiologically speaking, the three-pound brain is central to human existence and identity. In addition to running the almost infinite needs of the physical body, it also plays a central role in determining the nature and value of our lives. Scripture teaches: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2, NKJV). Here we are confronted with a world of intangible things that Body Worlds can neither dissect nor put on display: the mind, intellect, reason, imagination, emotions, values, beliefs, convictions, will, character, orientation to God and to one's neighbor. We are more than mere body, there is our inner world of the mind.

When Paul exhorts us to present our bodies a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1), he is not concerned about mere outward conformity to this age. He is worried about the inner

world of the mind and how it influences what the body does—how we think, what we think about. Our worldview. Our emotions and values. Our beliefs and convictions.

Earlier in the Book of Romans, he traces a downward spiral of thinking that leads to moral dysfunction and all sorts of body-oriented evils (1:18-32). But this downward spiral is reversed in those who consecrate themselves to Jesus Christ. Human beings are transformed as their thinking is altered. We become what we think intellectually, spiritually, and morally. The body follows the mind. Paul says that we should give ourselves wholly to God and not be shaped by the old world order, that we should let new thought patterns transform our lives.

No clearer insight into the stewardship of the mind can be found. It is our greatest resource—determining everything we are and do. When we seek to make the most of all that we are and all that we have for Christ, our inner world of thought takes center stage.

The billboard message "A mind is a terrible thing to waste" effectively reminds us of our greatest resource. This is as true in the spiritual realm as it is in the academic arena. Paul asserts that the Christian mind is a terrible thing to waste because moral, spiritual matters are of importance now. We can glorify God with our mind now. What we think

determines what we do with our body now. To waste a mind is to waste a person. To waste a person is to waste eternity. If the mind is our greatest resource, then we must ask how do we prevent its loss or renew a damaged or neglected mind.

The idea of a renewed mind implies that it has already been wasted. Scripture teaches such: the human mind has become “debased” (Rom. 1:28, NKJV), “hardened” (2 Cor. 3:14, NASB), “blinded” (4:4, KJV), “darkened” (Eph. 4:18, KJV), “hostile” (Col. 1:21, NASB), “delude[d]” (2:4, NASB), “defraud[ed]” (vs. 18, NASB), “depraved” (1 Tim. 6:5, NASB), “corrupt” (2 Tim. 3:8, KJV), “defiled” (Titus 1:15, KJV).

This does not mean that humans are reduced intellectually to the level of animals or that they cannot achieve extraordinary accomplishments. Nor does it mean that they cannot perform good deeds or live according to some set of moral values. It does mean, however, that the human mind has difficulty in understanding life from God’s perspective. That we are no longer alive to God, rather we are alive to self, alive to our world, alive to all that our world

offers. The words “Don’t let the world squeeze you into its own mold” (Rom. 12:2, Phillips), suggests just how alive we can be to our world and its point of view.

The idea that we are transformed with new patterns of thinking, however, implies that our mind can be reclaimed. Paul tells us that our mind can be renewed such that we will be interested in God. Interested in spiritual things. Renewed to the place that we can know, appreciate, and then choose what is pleasing to God (Rom. 12:2b). We can be alive to God and heavenly realities more than toward our world.

Stewarding our mind toward heavenly realities means keeping it redemptively focused on Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord and being renewed regularly by exposure to the thinking and will of God found in Scripture. Scripture is the mind of God. Not all of His mind, to be sure, but all that He cared to give us. To think like God, we must think like Scripture. That’s why Paul encouraged the Colossians to let the Word of Christ richly dwell within them (Col. 3:16). This is what *Perspective Digest* is all about.

