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More Than a Brain (The President's Page)

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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.

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.

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 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.

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).

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
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The story of David and Goliath has captured the imagination of millions of Bible students through the ages. It is the story of the faith of a vulnerable young boy withstanding an armored Philistine champion. It is the story of an Israelite army cowering in the Valley of Elah while the Philistines taunt them and their God. Five stones against iron shields, helmets, and sword.

But what is the history behind the story? Was there a Goliath and a David? Recent critical scholarship questions the historicity of this biblical story. In 1992, Philip Davies, professor of biblical studies at the University of Sheffield, appealed to archaeology and wrote, “The biblical ‘empire’ of David and Solomon has not the faintest echo in the archaeological record—as yet.” He concluded that David and Solomon are no more historical than King Arthur of the Round Table.

But his argument is one from silence. In the view of Davies and other postmodern scholars, the characters and stories of the Bible must have a historical (archaeological) counterpart. “Unless this is done, there can be no real basis for claiming that biblical ‘Israel’ has any particular relationship to history.” The Bible is considered guilty until proven innocent. But such arguments from silence are dangerous in any discipline. In archaeology—with hundreds of archaeologists working in the Middle East today—it can be devastating.

Just this past summer, an exciting archaeological discovery was made that sheds new light on the story of David and Goliath. According to the Bible, Goliath came from Gath, one of the five cities of the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:4). Modern excavations at Gath (Tel es-Safi) directed by Aren G.

Michael G. Hasel*

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