

Injustice Perpetrated on the Dead

A Christian Perspective on Body Worlds

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Abstract: At a Body Worlds exhibition, human corpses are displayed as museum pieces for educational purposes. The bodies are preserved by plastination, a technique invented by Gunther von Hagens and engineered at the Institute for Plastination in Heidelberg, Germany. Because of the wide controversy surrounding the displays, it is necessary to study how justice obtains. Understood from a Thomistic perspective, the use of a plastinate by Body Worlds is unjust because it dishonors the donor. The goodness of that use fails in terms of object, end, and circumstance. *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 10.4 (Winter 2010): 667–676.

Body Worlds is advertised as “an exhibition of real human bodies.”¹ The specimens range from whole bodies (dissected in some fashion) and whole systems (such as the circulatory system) to individual organs (such as the heart). The stated purpose of the exhibitions is to educate the general public about anatomy, physiology, disease, and prosthetics. The internal anatomy of a corpse is revealed by removing its skin or slicing it into cross sections to make an exploded view. Physiology is taught by arranging the bodies in various athletic or dynamic postures that can be viewed from all sides. Specimens are displayed in a museum-type setting with explanatory placards. The shows are designed for adults and for children as young as eight.

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¹In the company literature, “Body Worlds” is written as BODY WORLDS. For promotional materials, see www.bodyworlds.com.

The specimens are preserved by a process called plastination. This patented technique, invented by Gunther von Hagens, MD, at the University of Heidelberg in 1977, halts decomposition by replacing the water and fat in the body with plastic. The process has five steps: First, the body is embalmed by conventional techniques and dissected. Second, the body is dehydrated by use of acetone to dissolve water and fat in the tissues. Third, the body is soaked in a “reactive polymer solution,” which contains the precursors to plastic. The solution will be turned into plastic in the last step. Fourth, the body is anchored in the desired pose. Finally, the polymer solution is cured, e.g., by heating which causes the polymers to form a hard plastic. The final product is called a plastinate. It is odorless and durable like plastic, but has the color and shape of living tissue.

Von Hagens works under the auspices of the Institute for Plastination, which he founded in 1993 to continue the development and use of the method. He is the institute’s science director and the promoter of Body Worlds exhibitions. As such, he is responsible for the institute’s body donation program and for preparation of the plastinates displayed at Body Worlds exhibitions.² Advertisements for Body Worlds always bear his name. In publicity photographs von Hagens always sports his trademark hat. The entire enterprise, the Institute for Plastination and Body Worlds, is his creation and is marked by his philosophy.

Despite appearances of serving the public interest, Body Worlds exhibitions have been marked by controversy. Bishops, curators, and segments of the general public have raised serious objections to the shows and the industry.³ Bishop Frederick Henry of Calgary recently reported that

when a Body World exhibit came to Cincinnati, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk stated: “The public exhibition of plasticized bodies, unclaimed, unidentified, and displayed without reverence is unseemly and inappropriate.” In Kansas City, Bishop Robert Finn and Archbishop Joseph Naumann complained: “It represents a kind of ‘human taxidermy’ that degrades the actual people, who, through their bodies, once lived, loved, prayed and died.” Thomas S. Hibbs, distinguished professor of ethics and culture at Baylor University, not only questioned the tastefulness of the shows, but asserted that the exhibits purvey a “pornography of the dead.”⁴

²Among certain emulators of Body Worlds—such as Premier Exhibitions, the organizer of “Bodies . . . The Exhibition”—there is considerable evidence that corpses have been procured by illicit means. See Jody Silliker, “Plastinated Displays of the Human Body,” *Ethics & Medics* 35.2 (February 2010): 1–2. The Institute for Plastination’s body donation program is discussed in more detail below under the heading “The Enterprises of von Hagens.”

³Michael Humphrey, “Body Exhibits: Issues More Than Skin Deep,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 27, 2008, <http://ncronline.org/node/1260>; Carol Smith, “Museum Proprietors Protest ‘Bodies’ Show,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 28, 2006, http://www.seattlepi.com/local/290350_mystery28.html; and Tom Buckham, “Lifelike Body Parts to Highlight Museum of Science Exhibit,” *Buffalo News*, May 22, 2009, <http://www.buffalonews.com/incoming/article155590.ece>.

⁴Bishop Frederick Henry, “Plasticized Bodies Raise Troubling Questions,” *Calgary Herald*, February 21, 2010, <http://www2.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/story>

In spite of the negative publicity, the shows remain popular. Ticket prices are high, and the demand is so overwhelming that exhibitions are often extended. Body Worlds has three different exhibitions on tour in North America, Europe, and Asia. Since the shows opened in 1996, over twenty-nine million tickets have been sold. The success has spawned several competitors, some of which have been the subjects of recent litigation.⁵

Justice and the Deceased

The part of justice that concerns proper treatment of the body after death is “observance,” which consists of honor and obedience. *To honor* a person is to witness to his excellence or dignity.⁶ Before God that witness can simply be internal; before people that witness must be manifest in word or deed. Although we typically think of honoring someone who is above us in stature, a certain honor is owed to everyone.⁷ Because each person is unique, we must acknowledge in humility that in some manner he bears a dignity in the eyes of God that we ourselves lack. Even if that dignity is unknown, we may still bestow honor in simply knowing that he is a person made in the image and likeness of God. Thus, we owe strangers a certain honor: a smile, a handshake, or general courtesy. Likewise, we pay honor to the deceased through external actions surrounding his corpse. We also honor another by obedience. *To obey* another is to carry out his will. Typically, obedience is owed to a superior.⁸ In the case of the deceased, he is the superior over the executor of his last will and testament. If the last will and testament is lawful, then the executor owes the deceased obedience.

If the corpse is thought of as having no intrinsic relationship to the deceased person, then the corpse will be treated as a mere thing. In the words of von Hagens, “The dignity of the deceased . . . is a sense of traditional values that resides in the mind of the mourner. It is not an inherent aspect of the decaying corpse, the urn full of ashes or a plastinate.”⁹ Indeed, this would seem to be the case if a corpse

.html?id=533c2433-a605-4cf2-b89a-42a3b516e33b&p=1. See also “Gunther von Hagens Exhibition Criticized over Corpse Sex Display,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, May 7, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/5289311/Gunther-von-Hagens-exhibition-criticised-over-corpse-sex-display.html>.

⁵David Barboza, “China Turns Out Mummified Bodies for Displays,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/08/business/worldbusiness/08bodies.html>; and Sewell Chan, “‘Bodies’ Show Must Put Up Warnings,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2008, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/05/29/bodies-exhibit-must-put-up-warnings/>. See also “French Judge Shuts Down Exhibition of Human Bodies,” *Telegraph.co.uk*, April 22, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/5195848/French-judge-shuts-down-exhibition-of-human-bodies.html>.

⁶Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 103, a. 1.

⁷Ibid., a. 2.

⁸Ibid., q. 104, a. 1.

⁹D. Gareth Jones and Maja I. Whitaker, “The Tenuous World of Plastinates,” *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 29.

were placed on par with a rock, below beasts and humans. While rocks and beasts do bear a likeness to God, they are not made in the image of God, as is the human person.¹⁰ By the reasoning of von Hagens, a lifeless body has no inherent dignity and thus is not owed any honor.

Nonetheless, honor can be shown to a person through an inanimate object that brings to mind that person (e.g., a photograph, a personal effect, or a relic).¹¹ An inanimate object can be honored because it represents a person or because it is united to a person.¹² Thus, it is appropriate to reverence the bloodstained glove of St. Pio of Pietrelcina because it both represents him and is united to him. To treat the relic or effect in a careless manner would be to dishonor the person.

Similarly, a corpse is honored by virtue of the person it represents and by virtue of the person to whom it is united. The corpse bears a continuity with the actual body of the deceased because both share the same matter.¹³ The corpse also bears some sort of continuity with the future glorified body. The word “resurrection” implies that the soul will be reunited with the body. The resurrected body will be particularly special in that it will be like Christ’s own body. It is for this reason that the body of the person is not only able to be honored but is *owed* honor.

Here I speak about the relic or corpse being united to the deceased, united in the present tense, not the past. That union is neither physical nor merely sentimental. The union is real, though, because through the relic or corpse the person himself can be honored or dishonored. We see this most vividly in Jesus Christ crucified. Although He sustained four wounds while alive, He sustained the fifth when dead. His pierced side from which flows blood and water is so central to John’s mysticism that John insists on the witness to it (John 19:34–37, 1 John 5:6–8). It is through that wound that the lance pierced Jesus’s heart. The Sacred Heart of Jesus remains an object of devotion not only because Jesus lives, but also because when it was pierced, He was dishonored to the very depths of his being.

The Enterprises of von Hagens

Given that a corpse is effectively a subject of justice, let us examine whether the enterprises of von Hagens are just. How does justice obtain among the interested parties? The Institute for Plastination owes a certain justice to donors and to the public. Similarly, Body Worlds exhibitions owe a certain justice to the donors.

Commutative justice obtains between the Institute for Plastination, represented by von Hagens, and the donor, because they sign a contract. Besides the obligation of both parties to honor the contract, the moral issue is whether the donor has given free and informed consent. The donation appears to be free. The donor volunteers and receives no compensation. In fact, his estate may incur an additional expense because of the contractual obligation to have the corpse transported to an embalming

¹⁰ *Summa theologiae* I, q. 93, a. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 103, a. 4; III, q. 25, a. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, III, q. 25, a. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, a. 6.

facility that cooperates with von Hagens. The donation appears to be informed. According to the consent form, the donor signs his body over to “the Institute for Plastination (IfP) for the purpose of anatomical research and education, preferably by plastination. Education shall involve anatomical teaching for students and especially for the general public. I do not wish to be cremated or buried.”¹⁴

On the basis of this statement, the donor knows that his corpse will be used for research and education, probably by becoming a plastinate that may be viewed by students or the general public. The donor also knows that his corpse will not have a grave. It could be argued that the terms quoted above are so broad and vague that the donor does not know exactly how his corpse will be used. Although this is true, the fact remains that the donor is informed of the breadth of possibilities. In fact most, if not all, donors sign up after visiting a Body Worlds exhibition. Thus, it is hard to imagine that a donor would be unaware of exactly what he was doing.

Whether all Body Worlds plastinates do in fact originate from the donor program has been challenged. However, the program has stood up to the scrutiny of ethics review boards.¹⁵ Nevertheless, some critics remain unconvinced. “Since the bodies are deliberately rendered anonymous in processing, there is no way to prove that *this* particular body goes with *this* particular set of papers.”¹⁶ Once a corpse is received, it is decoupled from the donor consent form. Although this policy leaves room for obtaining corpses by illicit means, the Institute for Plastination has more than six thousand donors,¹⁷ so it seems that von Hagens lacks a motive to procure corpses illegally.

Concerning the Institute for Plastination and the general public, there are two major justice issues: whether the donor program is legal and whether the Institute is trafficking in human bodies.

According to attorneys Evelyn Tenenbaum and Jenean Taranto, the donor program is legal in the United States because the educational value of Body Worlds meets the requirements of the Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA); these authors also hold that the entertainment value of the exhibits does not undermine their educational value, and that the donors are not disrespected in any of the several ways recognized by the law.¹⁸ The UAGA makes no provision for whether a corpse (or parts not used for transplant) is to be interred. However, it seems to envision only three possibilities: embalming, burial, or cremation.¹⁹

¹⁴Institute for Plastination Body Donation Program, “Donor’s Consent Form” (N. America), 2009, http://www.bodymobil.de/Downloads/Englisch/BD_Consent_US_081209.pdf.

¹⁵Charleen M. Moore and C. Mackenzie Brown, “Experiencing Body Worlds: Voyeurism, Education, or Enlightenment?” *Journal of Medical Humanities* 28.4 (December 2007): 233.

¹⁶Silliker, “Plastinated Displays of the Human Body,” 2.

¹⁷Moore and Brown, “Experiencing Body Worlds,” 233.

¹⁸Evelyn M. Tenenbaum and Jenean M. Taranto, “Body Worlds: Choosing to Be Immortalized as an Educational Specimen,” *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 40.

¹⁹National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, “Uniform Anatomical Gift Act,” 11(i) and 14(h), <http://www.anatomicalgiftact.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabindex=1&tabid=63>.

Because Body Worlds is a commercial enterprise, it has been suggested that von Hagens is trafficking in human bodies. “Allowing one’s body to become part of a commercial display . . . [turns] the precious gift of one’s body into a commodity to be bought and sold.”²⁰ This claim seems to be inaccurate. When someone buys a Body Worlds ticket, he pays not for a product but a service. In contrast, the donor consent form acknowledges the possibility that a specimen will be sold.²¹ Whether specimens are sold simply for the preparation cost is unclear, but the form acknowledges revenue: “Revenue will cover the costs of preservation, preparation and plastination, fund research into new developments in plastination and enable the establishment of a plastination museum.” Thus, it seems there is a profit motive associated with the sale of specimens. For this reason the Institute for Plastination could be accused of trafficking in human bodies. (The extent to which Body Worlds cooperates with that activity is another question.)

Finally, one additional issue comes to light. Is the body donation program of the Institute for Plastination a long-term threat to public health? It could be argued that the success of the program is detracting from the more conventional donation of bodies to medical schools. “There is an uncontestable need for more advanced students and medical residents to learn surgical and emergency medical procedures on soft, i.e., *non-plastinated*, cadavers.”²² Whether the Institute for Plastination helps serve or thwart that need, particularly in Germany, has not been studied.

From a legal perspective, the institute is not trafficking in human corpses, and the body donation program is lawful. In terms of commutative justice, those who wish to donate do so with free and informed consent, and the directors of Body Worlds obey the wishes of their donors. From a Christian moral perspective, however, Body Worlds dishonors the donors, and this constitutes an injustice. The injustice comes to light in an analysis of the three fonts of morality (the object, the end, and the circumstances) as applied to how Body Worlds uses corpses. Based on the following analysis, I conclude that Body Worlds is morally unjust with little room for rectification.

Object, End, and Circumstances

What is done constitutes the object of the act. What is done with the donated corpse? It is turned into a plastinate.²³ By making it a plastinate, the donor’s wishes are obeyed but the donor is not honored. *The very possibility of honor is denied*, because the personal identity associated with the corpse is obliterated. The corpse is stripped of its face, the primary mode of identification. The corpse is stripped of its name by being disassociated irreversibly from the donor consent form. A plastinate, no longer

²⁰Silliker, “Plastinated Displays of the Human Body,” 3.

²¹Institute for Plastination Body Donation Program, “Donor’s Consent Form,” http://www.bodymbil.de/Downloads/Englisch/BD_Consent_US_081209.pdf.

²²Richard Wassersug, “Awesome and Captivating, But Is It Really Educational?” *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 46.

²³Technically, Body Worlds simply displays the plastinates made by the Institute for Plastination. Since the institute does many things with donated bodies, in this section I limit the scope of the discussion to the venue known as Body Worlds.

a corpse, is not due any honor. In the words of von Hagens, “A corpse still bears a direct relation to the deceased’s memory and is in the process of decomposing. By contrast, the plastinated specimen is a ‘dry’ cadaver that does not decay and cannot be the object of mourning because the individual’s identity is erased from the body.”²⁴

Plastination renders interment of the corpse defective. By being made into a plastinate, the corpse is only partially interred. While the water, fat content, and skin, constituting some 80 percent of the body mass, are disposed of, the remaining cellular structure is preserved. Ironically, each of those cells contains the person’s unique DNA. Some think that this scenario is more dignified than interment. “The immortalization of the plastinated bodies and the display of their individual bodily interiors is a greater celebration of personal identity than decay underground.”²⁵ This sentiment equates personal identity with the matter alone, an inhumane perspective. Personal identity cannot be celebrated when it has been erased.

Why is the corpse turned into a plastinate? The answer to this question gives us the end. Although the stated reason is to educate, two other purposes are evident: to make art and to entertain. Each plastinate exhibit is presented as a work of art made from a human corpse. Something similar is done by the American sculptor Andrew Krasnow, who tans human skin to make flags, boots, lamp shades, and maps. The hallmark of a piece of art, the artist’s signature, is on every plastinate. Each one bears the signature of von Hagens. A corpse enters with a consent form signed by the donor and exits as a plastinate signed by von Hagens. He makes himself the owner as well as the creator of the plastinate.

Von Hagens admits that there is an art to creating the plastinates, but he denies that he is an artist. He is an anatomist; his “aim is to reveal the body as it is, in all its beauty but with an instructive aim.”²⁶ He says, “Plastinated specimens are not works of art, because they have been created for the sole purpose of sharing insights into human anatomy.”²⁷

The plastinates are posed in artistic rather than educational ways, however. Viewers have noted that “many of the poses emulate drawings by famous anatomists from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century,”²⁸ such as *The Praying Skeleton* and *The Reclining Pregnant Woman*. Other poses are fantastical creations, such as *The Mythical Plastinate* and *The Winged Man*. Even the athletic poses can be questioned: “When plastinates are depicted as running, swimming or playing chess or poker, what functional information is being conveyed in the absence of explanatory commentary? One gets the impression that this depiction is the point where artistic goals replace scientific ones.”²⁹

²⁴Lawrence Burns, “Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds: Selling Beautiful Education,” *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 14.

²⁵Jones and Whitaker, “Tenuous World of Plastinates,” 29.

²⁶Burns, “Gunther von Hagens’ Body Worlds,” 15.

²⁷Jones and Whitaker, “Tenuous World of Plastinates,” 28.

²⁸Moore and Brown, “Experiencing Body Worlds,” 236.

²⁹Jones and Whitaker, “Tenuous World of Plastinates,” 28.

Some people dismiss von Hagens' mixed motives: "Whatever the mix of von Hagens's motives, the exhibit exalts the humanity and human worth of both these bodies and their viewers. . . . The whole human body, and not just its surface, is an object of astounding complexity and overwhelming beauty."³⁰ Although it is true that the plastinates reflect the complexity and beauty of the human body, this does not equate to exalting humanity. "Humanity" as such does not exist; it only exists in individual persons—persons whose identities are erased by plastination. Nor do the exhibits exalt the human worth of bodies. The human worth of a body begins with the embodied person. Again, though, the person has been erased by the plastinate. It would be more correct to say that the exhibits exalt the material worth of bodies.

Many of the plastinate exhibits are designed for entertainment.³¹ This, too, dishonors a corpse, because it has been mutilated to make an object for voyeurism and laughter. Visitors describe the "shocking and macabre spectacle"³² of certain exhibits, such as "the ghoulish one of a flayed person standing and looking down at his entire integumentary system, his skin all in one piece draped over his arm like a pallid coat."³³ Others say that those exhibits are like a "freak show: the spectator pays to stare at the 'abnormal' bodies (i.e., the dead, flayed, and posed bodies) that have been collected by the impresario whose name gets top billing."³⁴ Everyone is struck by the "radical nudity, both literal and metaphorical,"³⁵ most especially the sexual postures, such as that of two plastinates copulating.³⁶ One visitor notes, "Most obscene was the whore house posing of the pregnant woman's body."³⁷ At the other extreme, some exhibits are designed to make people laugh, such as the family "with [a] child on the shoulders of the 'dad' with a thumbs-up looking position and the hat on the head."³⁸ These sorts of tasteless exhibits ultimately dishonor the people who donated their corpses.

The educational value of a plastinate is undeniable. Muscles, blood vessels, and organs appear in their native colors of reds and blues, browns and yellows. One can see the relationships of parts to the whole in three-dimensional, life-size clarity.

³⁰Jane Maienschein and Richard Creath, "Body Worlds as Education and Humanism," *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 27.

³¹Although this is not the dominant motive, it is an expectation of visitors. See Moore and Brown, "Experiencing Body Worlds," 233.

³²Burns, "Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds," 16. See also Anita L. Allen, "No Dignity in Body Worlds: A Silent Minority Speaks," *American Journal of Bioethics* 7.4 (April 2007): 25.

³³Silliker, "Plastinated Displays of the Human Body," 3.

³⁴Burns, "Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds," 15.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶See "Gunther von Hagens Exhibition Criticized over Corpse Sex Display," *Telegraph* (U.K.), May 7, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/howaboutthat/5289311/Gunther-von-Hagens-exhibition-criticised-over-corpse-sex-display.html>.

³⁷Moore and Brown, "Experiencing Body Worlds," 248.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 234.

The beauty, complexity, and delicacy of the body's architecture become evident in stunning clarity. The experience is memorable. Although we cannot know just how much anatomy and physiology visitors actually learn, the exhibits do provide an opportunity to marvel and reflect.³⁹

In and of itself, the educational purpose of a plastinate is morally neutral. Unfortunately, the educational purpose is rendered null by the circumstances, namely, the postures and vestition of the plastinates. Paradoxically, these circumstances turn the plastinates back into "people"—that is, the plastinates appear to be generic people representing "humanity." This is a false anthropology. When a corpse is made into a plastinate that represents a generic person, the corpse is robbed of its individual identity. When it is made into a plastinate that represents "humanity," it is reduced to a kind of machine without a soul; again the personal identity is lost. Thus, in the circumstances, the viewer is educated in a lie.

A Christian Morality of the Dead

In the Jewish tradition the dead are honored by burial. This is reflected in Scripture. For example, Abraham buys a plot of land with a cave in which he and his family are to be buried (Gen. 23:4). Isaac's sons bury Isaac there, "gathered to his people" (Gen. 35:29). Jacob's sons, led by Joseph, bury Jacob there as well (Gen. 50:13). Tobit risks his life to bury his kinsmen (Tob. 1:16–18). Not to be buried is a mark of disgrace. In fact, the families of Jeroboam and Ahab are cursed with non-burial, their bodies left as food for dogs and birds (1 Kings 14:11, 21:24). We can see that the dead have been honored by burial since ancient times.

Early Christians adopted the Roman practice of burial.⁴⁰ On care of the dead, St. Augustine writes,

But as for the burying of the body, whatever is bestowed on that is no aid to salvation, but an office of humanity, according to that affection by which "No man hateth his own flesh" (Ephesians 5:29). Whence it is fitting that he take what care he is able for the flesh of his neighbor, when he is gone that bare it. If unbelievers in the resurrection of the flesh do it, how much more beholden to do the same who do believe; that so, an office of this kind bestowed upon a body, dead, but yet to rise again and to remain to eternity may also be in some sort a testimony of the same faith?⁴¹

Thus, Christian burial is "a fitting testimony to the resurrection, declaring that the faith does not condemn the body or devalue it to the position of a disposable cartridge."⁴²

³⁹Burns, "Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds," 15; and Wassersug, "Awesome and Captivating," 45.

⁴⁰William F. May, "Attitudes toward the Newly Dead," *Hastings Center Studies* 1.1 (April 1973): 11.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 12, quoting St. Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis*.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 12.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the dead are owed respect: “The bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity, in faith and hope of the Resurrection. The burial of the dead is a corporal work of mercy; it honors the children of God, who are temples of the Holy Spirit” (n. 2300).

This statement distinguishes between the deceased person (“the dead”) and the corpse (“the body of the dead”). By treating the corpse with respect, the deceased person is shown respect. He is owed that respect for two reasons: he is a child of God and he looks forward to the Resurrection.

This transition can be most evident as one prepares for death. To submit to death and burial can be like an offering that expresses both humility and hope.⁴³ By surrendering to the inevitable fate of death, one acknowledges one’s mortality as a consequence of original sin. “*Remember man that you are dust and unto dust you shall return.*” In spite of the curse on Adam and one’s inability to save oneself, one can have faith and hope in God and in the salvation that He promises to those who believe in Jesus Christ. “*Repent and believe in the Gospel.*” For the Christian, death and burial are transformed from a point of finality into a new beginning.

Cremation, an alternative to conventional burial, is permitted as an appropriate form of interment because it preserves the dignity of the person by returning his remains to the earth.⁴⁴ It is not permitted for the Christian if the deceased intends it as a denial of the resurrection of the body.

From a Christian perspective, a corpse bears a special relationship of union with the deceased person that demands honorable treatment. Body Worlds fails to do this. Through affiliation with the Institute for Plastination, Body Worlds turns corpses into plastinates, erasing the personal identities of the corpses.

The alleged purpose, education, is contaminated by ulterior purposes, namely art and entertainment. As art, the corpse is treated as a found object or raw material. As entertainment, the corpse is turned into an object for voyeurism. If certain changes were made, Body Worlds might be able to be rendered morally neutral for education; however, Body World’s treatment of corpses as objects of art and entertainment remains morally wrong.

⁴³This paragraph is inspired by a statement by William F. May in “Attitudes toward the Newly Dead,” 12: “A person could not claim salvation for his own possession or desert, but neither could he face life—or death—as though he were denied communion with God. He could only make his offering. He need not make it anxiously or tentatively, but rather, with some measure of gratitude, confidence, and hope for its acceptance.”

⁴⁴USCCB, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2301. Alkaline hydrolysis is another alternative, which may eventually be permitted for the same reason; see Renée Mirkes, “The Mortuary Science of Alkaline Hydrolysis: Is It Ethical?” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 8.4 (Winter 2008): 683–696.