

Along Came the Human Bean



A major feat in our household this year was cleaning out the attic. After 27 years in the same home it was interesting to find notebooks and journals as early as 1981. As I read through these journals and saw the prayer lists and thoughts entered there, I was overwhelmed. How God has worked since then!

Over twenty years ago I had the opportunity to begin a journey with a number of physicians and scientists in their exploration of the human brain. I was always interested in what it was that caused human behavior. As science and technology made it possible to explore the cerebral cortex by way of CAT Scan, MRI and PET scans, more was published and I had more to read. My colleagues at Children's Medical Services were also interested in some of the behaviors that their patients were exhibiting. I was the only psychiatric nurse among those in this pediatric program and my interest in the brain was common knowledge, so my supervisor asked me to make a presentation.

The easiest way to explain behavior, I thought, was to look at it as a symptom. In medicine, symptoms are the clue to whatever disease or dysfunction is occurring in the body. Behavior, I reasoned could be physical like a fever (something the body does when there is an infection of some kind) or it could be emotional (like crying or raging when the mind is upset or angry) or it could be structural (difficulty moving or speaking because of genetic or

birth anomalies). Explaining that behavior came from the brain was natural. Explaining what lies in the recesses of the brain is more complicated. Since all the information that enters our brains at birth comes through our senses (taste, touch, smell, vision and hearing), then it is the environment of the human that supplies our brains with content.

Most people could care less about all of this. They feel like I feel when a computer geek starts talking about gigabytes and software. So how could I explain this marvelous complicated organ that is the control center for the mind and body without being too complicated or fragmenting the amazing creation that God has wrought? What about the soul? Was there a physical site for this as well?

What evolved was a model to explain to patients, parents and colleagues that in spite of all of our differences - race, gender, age, appearance or status - we all start out the same: as human beings or HUMAN BEANS. What began as a doodle to explain the conception, growth and development process of the human organism in its environment grew into a philosophical way of understanding human behavior.

First among my colleagues at Children's Medical Services, then with caregivers for the Isaiah Foundation and now with my patient families in Child's Play Foundation, the HUMAN BEAN model has grown from a doodle to a flannel board, paper and colored drawing to a power point presentation for parents and grandparents, caregivers and professionals. The Human Bean looks like a kidney bean. Adding a whimsical eye, it is evidently thoughtful. Placing a smaller bean inside a larger bean gives clear understanding that Human Beans start out always inside another Human Bean. Knowing that the neural tube is the very first piece of tissue formed in the womb brings a triangle (spinal cord), a cloud (the limbic system) and a half circle (the cortex) if we look inside this 'Human Bean'. Color-coding each part made the drawing look more scientific and less like an ice cream cone.

Although this concept has been a part of my own professional growth and development, the reality and the mystery of God's creation can never be fully comprehended. As I begin to examine the published work of others' research (Shore, Damasio, Siegel) and I hear about

human cloning and DNA research, I wonder when mankind will start to believe that they can create themselves. Sometimes we think if we can explain something, we think we discovered or invented it. God made us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). We are His workmanship (Ephesians 2:10). So we are His. His creation for His purpose. This is the mission and philosophy of the work at Isaiah's Place in a postmodern world; helping men and women to know and to understand how unique and special each human is created in the image of God.

Please pray for us. Pray that as times get more difficult and the darkness obscures clear vision, that we will remember how we were created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10).