

Richard H. Cox. *Rewiring Your Preaching: How the Brain Processes Sermons*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012. 182 pages. \$12.80.

In his book, *Rewiring Your Preaching: How the Brain Processes Sermons*, Richard Cox brings the world of neuroscience to bear on the contemporary task of preaching. Cox argues persuasively that it is imperative for preachers to familiarize themselves with the insights that science is revealing about the human brain. “Intentional, purposeful preaching can actually cause new neural pathways that cause the brain to change the way it thinks and how its owner acts. . . . Knowledge of how the brain works will enable preachers to be more effective” (19).

Cox offers insights into how neuroscience studies can be applied to preaching. One is a concept that he calls *religare*. This concept says the brain only retains any new stimulus if it connects with something already stored in the mind. Defining human learning as “listening, memory, and integration”(25), he asserts that, “Preaching must build on past knowledge by bringing that knowledge into the present, coupling it with new information and making it meaningful for our future need before we need it” (25).

He also emphasizes engaging multiple senses or “brain gates” in order to maximize the brain’s retention of sermons. Cox says, “The more sensory modalities are engaged in preaching the more likely it is the brain will remember” (37). Applications of this include using object lessons and integrating preaching with other elements of worship including: music, incense, sacraments, and the aesthetics of the worship space.

Cox also highlights the relationship between preaching and healing. This is one of the key convictions of his book and many pages are devoted to its explication. Healing the brain, the body, the soul, and the community are all connected, says Cox. Preaching has tremendous potential to heal at all of these levels because it is the point of contact between the brain and the Gospel. “The brain is accustomed to looking for hope. Hope and healing are inseparable. . . The basic premise of the entire Bible is healing” (61).

With these insights, *Rewiring Your Preaching* whetted my appetite for a rich treatment of preaching and neuroscience. However, as a preacher and preaching instructor, I found myself wanting a greater amount of specific advice about the processes of sermon preparation, delivery and gauging effectiveness in light of neuroscience. Cox passionately argues for the integration of preaching and neuroscience, but leaves largely unexplored the details of what that integration might look like.

The most helpful practical wisdom is found in the simple one-page appendix. Here Cox lays out seven questions a preacher should ask when preparing a sermon that will help her engage the brains of her congregants:

Does this sermon:

- Excite me and propel me in a specific direction?
- Change, affirm or reaffirm my beliefs?
- Provide foundation material for all listeners to tie back to?
- Offer multiple brain gates for those of all ages and educational backgrounds to understand?
- Lay the foundation for subsequent pastoral care?
- Provide a peak experience for the worship service?
- Prepare the way for the next sermon? (175).

These are excellent questions, and well worth careful reflection.

This book raised some additional questions for me; one is this: How might this book have functioned if Cox’s seven questions in the appendix were the outline of the book, with each question the focus of a chapter? It would be fascinating to read the neuro-scientific explanation of each question’s importance and then concrete examples of how to apply it in

various contexts. Also, what are the implications of mental and emotional illness for preaching? Furthermore, what would Cox suggest for how preachers can craft sermons that heal individuals and communities who have undergone trauma? Additionally, how might ministers coordinate preaching so that it compliments other healing ministries in the church (for example, counseling ministries or recovery groups)?

With *Rewiring Your Preaching* Richard Cox has thrown the door wide open to a very important conversation. I am in complete agreement with Cox when he writes: “Not knowing how the learning process of humans operates is no longer excusable. . . . Ministers who do not consider this knowledge may be less informed of their primary task than their parishioners are” (95). I am grateful for Cox’s work here, and it is my sincere hope that he and others will continue to offer more of their psychological and neurobiological knowledge for the benefit of preachers and the church.

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