Books on Neuroscience and Pastoral Care and Counseling


Many of us today owe a small debt to Jim Ashbrook for dipping his toe in the neuroscience waters. In this text, probably the most widely known, Ashbrook claims that understanding brain research “relates the objective knowledge of neurocognitive processes with the subjective knowledge of experiential awareness” (p. xviii). While much has changed since the writing of this text, both in the field of pastoral theology, care, and counseling, as well as the neurosciences, we do well to remember the roots of our field from time to time in order to walk again on sacred ground. Ashbrook’s focus on remembering still speaks today as neuroscience hones in on the process of remembering and its importance for identity. – *Jason C. Whitehead*


Kirk Bingaman examines the impact of a contemplative-neuroscientific approach on pastoral and spiritual care and counseling. His work describes contemporary research on neuroplasticity, and how this diverse body of knowledge can help care-givers and therapists in the practice of counseling, mindfulness, and meditation. As Bingaman notes about the promise of neuroplasticity, “Through the regular use of mindfulness meditations, reflective exercises, and contemplative practices, we see it is possible over time to use the mind to rewire the brain” (p. 122). Whether calming the anxiety of a client, helping them recreate, reframe, and reimagine experiences, or normalizing specific brain functions, Bingaman’s work puts forth helpful theoretical and theological thoughts about neuroscience and the impact it has on pastoral and spiritual care now and in the future. – *Jason C. Whitehead*


David Hogue explores the ways in which memory and imagination impact how we interpret the world. Utilizing neuroscience as a foundation for understanding the creation of narratives, Hogue examines how we build stories, react to the world around us, and even experience the sacred. For Hogue, “Memory and imagination are not separate processes. Rather, they are linked in a vital and dynamic way. Our imaginations are as essential when we are recalling the past as when we are speculating about or planning for the future” (p. 4). His neuroscientific work leads him to explore ritual experiences and how we can utilize connections between theology and the neurosciences to better understand pastoral counseling and the practice of faith. – *Jason C. Whitehead*


In this work, Andy Lester explores how “our capacity for anger is one of God’s good gifts, intentionally rooted in creation and serving important purposes in human life” (p. 3). To do this

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he appeals to theological, historical, cultural, and neuropsychological evidence to reconstruct what it means to be angry and how we can authentically experience this emotion in constructive ways. His challenge is to move beyond the sense that anger is sinful to understanding how anger can provide creative and passionate potential when engaged in ethical and practical ways. – Jason C. Whitehead


In our current culture of fear, Jason Whitehead’s book is important and timely. Relying on neuroscience, sociology, psychology, and theology, Dr. Whitehead presents an integrated and sophisticated analysis of the constructive and destructive aspects of fear. From this discussion comes a sound theological portrayal of fear that points the way forward to the possibility of redemptive hope. – Ryan LaMothe