

“The Violent Brain” and the sins of the fathers – some comments:

On my way to hospital I picked up a magazine to read – “Scientific American” – and the lead article was “The Violent Brain - How biology and trauma prime the criminal mind”. I found it to be an interesting read. A copy is attached together with a few comments from me.

The article claims that;

Abnormalities in the frontal cortex may cause deficiencies in emotional control that fail to stop impulsive criminals from acting. Anomalies in the limbic system may hinder communication between the hippocampus and amygdale so that emotional information is not processed correctly. Irregular neurochemistry, too, may cause increased aggression in some violent offenders.

It also raises the issue of responsibility for actions, and states that, “some legal experts now question whether a violent offender can truly exercise free will ...”

The article is well worth reading, and obviously raises some interesting theological issues for chaplains, not the least being the question of free will. Theologically I find myself wanting to argue with the “legal experts”!

Whilst reading on “Acquired Brain Injuries” [ABI] some years ago, I was struck by the parallels in behaviour between people suffering from ABI and my paternal grandfather who suffered a major head injury in WWI when struck by a bullet. Whilst ultimately released physically fit (and lived until 85), there is no doubt that today he would be diagnosed as suffering from both ABI and PTSD, and that in turn had many impacts on family life for his children. Many of the traits I saw in him, I recognized again in this article. Clearly there is a link between the two – in this article the process of acquisition of these abnormalities is not discussed, and to me that is the flaw in the article. It seems to assume that the abnormalities noted in the brains of the subjects are primarily causal, and does not seek to investigate the cause of the abnormalities themselves in any real depth. It does acknowledge that such people seem to always have a childhood background of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. To me that raises a primary question, “Is it possible that such abuse in fact causes improper brain development in early childhood, thus resulting in the abnormalities noted?” And thus theologically, the “sins of the fathers” impact on the children – a biological explanation of a theological truth?

Further, does this mean that a lack of love in early childhood, or inappropriate love, actually causes brain mal-development?

A thought-provoking article that is worth reading.