Out of the shadows of Osama

By Chaplain Norbert J. Karava

It seems that different passions have their seasons of fashion. What were acceptable and respectable feelings and emotional responses to the same things and circumstances in one generation are unacceptable in another. One of the passions that seem to have enjoyed a renaissance is vengeance. For those who remember the Age of Aquarius, vengeance was decidedly gauche and could scarcely be admitted to as a motive. Moving into the 90s this was to change. I remember many televised interviews of family members and friends of murder victims who freely admitted to vengeance as being a key motive for their intense desire for the death of those who murdered their loved ones. "I want him to suffer like we've had to suffer." It was no longer necessary to camouflage this raw passion and, or desire any longer with the altruistic theme of protecting society and the arguments about capital punishment as a deterrent, which at best were tenuous and unconvincing. The Lex Talionis was back – an eye for an eye, a life for a life – with a vengeance!

Whenever we individually or collectively are awash with any strong passion, it becomes all the more important to look for moral grounding. Vengeance is one of the many moral topics dealt with by Thomas Aquinas, who introduced Aristotelian ethics to the Christian and Western world. In the Summa Theologica, the first question on vengeance he poses is: whether or not it is lawful? Considering that he was a Christian writer, his answer comes as a surprise: vengeance, which is the punishment of offenses against justice, is "not in itself evil or unlawful." According to Aquinas, the moral quality of vengeance is dependent upon the intention of the avenger: vengeance is lawful if the intention of the avenger is directed at a good to be achieved by punishing a wrongdoer. If the intention is centered upon the evil done to the recipient, then the act is entirely unlawful. Clue: For vengeance not to have a negative moral meaning, it must somehow be about justice, which is something distinct from the pain and, or loss incurred by both the victims and the perpetrators. Vengeance is an act and, or a decision of the mind, not merely an emotionally based reaction.

The passion that is in the background of vengeance is anger, which desires the evil of punishment of the wrongdoer under the species of goodness, the goodness here being that of justice itself; the punishment of the wrongdoer serves the purposes of justice, no more, no less, than required by justice, if at all. It may be that the wrongdoer against whom we have the passion of anger turns out not to be a wrongdoer at all. What then? The anger that is motivated by justice seems to be only too happy to go away, and almost immediately morphs into a sort of relieved joy that life is burdened with one less pain. In other words, anger admits of being governed by a moral good entertained by the mind.

On the other hand, hatred knows no such limit; it intends evil to its target, whether the evil be a just punishment or not. This is why, according to Aquinas, the angry are capable of pity – when the punishment exceeds due measure, whereas the hateful are never content with whatever degree of punishment. The hateful will regret even the death of the hated because it places them beyond further punishment. That which is desired for the sake of itself is desired without measure, which is why, for example, for the avaricious, there is no such thing as "enough" money, and for the hateful, there is never enough punishment.

But here we find ourselves on treacherous waters: Ever so subtly what might have begun as righteous anger, governed by reason in pursuit of the good of justice devolves into mere hatred in pursuit of an unquenchable thirst for the pleasure of pain inflicted. Vengeance wills the evil of punishment for the good of justice and is thus divided, and by nature, hesitant. Hatred however, wills the evil of punishment for the good of pleasure, with justice being the mere rationale, and is troubled by no second-guessing.

And so, what do you think? As we emerged from under the shadow of Osama and watched the jubilation on our streets, was it really about justice?

Online directory links wounded warriors, families to resources

Elaine Wilson, American Forces Press Service

Washington - From benefits and compensation, to education and training, an online directory is providing wounded warriors, veterans and their families a direct connection to thousands of state, local and national resources.

"There's so much information on the Web right now; it's nice to have one place to access all of the content, the services, the information you need," said John R. Campbell, deputy assistant secretary of defense for wounded warrior care and transition policy. "It really permits the service member and family the ability to get information directly."

The Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs (VA) departments created the National Resource Directory, http://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/, to link wounded warriors, service members, veterans, their families and caregivers to nationwide resources that support recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration, Campbell explained.

Toward that end, the directory contains information on a broad range of topics, including benefits and compensation, education and training, employment, caregiver support, health, housing, and transportation and travel.

"With such a vast amount of information, a considerable effort went into creating user-friendly navigation tools to help people pin down resources quickly, whether it's local grassroots efforts or national-level initiatives," said Campbell. "People can search for a resource or program by subject, state or territory. A recent addition is a state widget that people can customize and embed in home pages, blogs and other sites. Once there, the information is updated automatically."

New programs and resources are added to the directory as quickly as agencies and organizations can roll them out. Experts always are working to ensure they're hitting on the hot topics for troops and their families, and as a result, the site is constantly evolving.

Campbell cited veteran homelessness as an example. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness is working with the VA and Housing and Urban Development departments to eliminate homelessness entirely by VAs goal of 2015.

The directory has devoted an entire section to homelessness, featuring resources that offer everything from emergency housing to employment assistance.

Spouse employment is another area of growth on the directory, Campbell noted, particularly with new programs and resources in the works. The Labor, Commerce and Defense departments and the Small Business Administration, for example, are working with members of the business community to expand career options for spouses. Officials will ensure new spouse employment resources are added to the directory as they arise.

"While officials always are on the lookout for new information to post to the directory, feedback from troops and their families plays an integral role in keeping the site current," Campbell said.

The site includes an easy-to-locate section where people can submit resources for consideration or pass on praise for outstanding service.

"We'll take that resource, and if we find out it's a good one, we'll put it up," he said. "Officials verify each resource before posting. A nonprofit organization, for example, must be in good standing with the Better Business Bureau before it can be considered for the directory. That's the idea: to make it easy, make it efficient, make it valuable."

To further that effort, a mobile version of the directory will launch in the spring for smart phone users.

"The target audience is younger service members and families," he added. "We're really excited about that."