Innocent suffering

By Chaplain John Swanson

In the face of evil we are often haunted by the questions, "Why God do the innocent suffer? Why does evil seem to have free reign in our world?"

Often, when faced with tragedy, we hear things like, "It was God's will." or "This was God's judgment." While pat answers may work for some, they don't work for me. Whether it is a toddler drowning in a pool or horrific events like Sept. 11, Hurricane Katrina, or the massacres at Virginia Tech and Fort Hood, how can we think that God is somehow responsible? Is God the author of evil and human suffering? What is the difference between tragedy and judgment? What is evil and what is its role in human tragedy and suffering? I don't pretend to have all the answers, but here are some thoughts.

We don't often say it, but we think it. That is, we often assign a cause and effect relationship to victims and their suffering. In the Old Testament book of Job, Job's three friends had a cause and effect theology. Bad things don't happen to good people (and Job is described in the prologue of the book as blameless and upright, one who feared God and shunned evil), so therefore, Job's friends thought there must be some secret sin Job hadn't confessed, otherwise he wouldn't have been suffering. The best thing Job's friends did was to sit in silence with him for seven days and nights because they saw how great his suffering was. It's when they opened their mouths and tried to explain Job's suffering that they failed.

We at times are very much like those well meaning friends. While some things are certainly God's will, and there is clear biblical evidence that God does indeed cause judgment to come upon individuals and entire nations, including his people of Israel, these explanations seem hollow in the face of national tragedies. While it may be easy to ascribe recent horrific events to God's will or even his mysterious judgment, I think that borders on intellectual and theological laziness.

The Bible tells us that God is a God of grace and compassion who withholds judgment so that we have the opportunity to repent and be saved:

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." - 2 Peter 3:9

Though we have God's promise and vision of a new day, evil and sin are still on the loose. While I can think of many words in response to events previously mentioned, only one adequately describes those events: "demonic." Yes, Virginia there is a Satan. While many religious teachers and institutions downplay or even deny the existence of Satan, there is no doubt in my mind that demonic forces are at work. We live our lives on a spiritual battlefield. The brokenness and shattered lives strewn around us are a result of that ongoing battle. Perhaps violence and brokenness has affected your life. If so, you know the pain that I'm talking about.

We never seem to have adequate answers in the face of tragedy and innocent suffering. While God is indeed transforming lives and creation, the Bible reminds us that there is at the same time evil in the world. St. Paul in his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus wrote, *"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground."* - Ephesians 6:10ff

As the spiritual battle rages around us, pray for one another, for our nation and for the family and friends of those who are victims of evil.

CFAY PWD conducts important safety briefings with contractors

By Ronald Inman, NAVFAC Far East Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Public Works Department (PWD) Facility Engineering and Acquisition Division (FEAD) conducted safety briefings for Japanese contractors at the Fleet Theater Jan. 7. The FEAD is responsible for ensuring that all contract projects on board CFAY are performed safely.

"The purpose of the briefings was to communicate our safety expectations to all contractors," said Lt. Cmdr. Christine Cawayan, CFAY PWD FEAD officer. "We wanted to thoroughly go over (Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Far East Commanding Officer and Regional Engineer for Japan, Korea and Singapore) Capt. (Robert) McLean's guidance on safety with the managers of companies which have active contracts, and discuss recent preventable accidents which have occurred so that contractors can strengthen their preventative measures and avoid such accidents in the future."

During two one-hour briefings, NAVFAC Far East Safety Program Administrator Kenji Kumakiri presented 'lessons learned' and 'best practices' information to approximately 100 attendees. Contractors were also briefed on the FEAD process for safety violations and how the contractor's safety performance is reflected in their performance evaluation.

"I think it was a good opportunity for us to know about the accidents that actually happened at the job sites," said Tsunenori Matsuura, Urayasu Kogyo Co., Ltd. president. "Although the contractors and sub-contractors have safety meetings on a daily basis, this is an opportunity to reinforce our safety culture with Navy leaders. I would like this to be a recurring briefing."

"After attending these briefings, I expect contractors to understand the information presented so that they can continually reinforce safety policies to their workers and subcontractors," Cawayan added.

Safety is the Navy's top priority and CFAY PWD, in cooperation with NAVFAC Far East and Japanese contractors, will work together to accomplish the joint goal of 'zero lost time incidents' in 2010.

New law allows spouses to keep residency while under orders

By Samantha L. Quigley, American Forces Press Service

A new law protects military spouses from being taxed for work performed in states where they're living outside their home states as a result of military orders.

President Barack Obama recently signed the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act, which is an amendment to the 2003 Servicemembers Civil Relief Act.

"This act, among other things, would provide that when a service member leaves his or her home state in accordance with military orders, the service member's spouse may retain residency in his or her home state for voting and tax purposes, after relocating from that state to accompany the service member," the president said in a White House statement.

According to Army Col. Shawn Shumake, director of legal policy in the office of the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness, the new law means a change for military spouses.

"If a spouse accompanies a military member to a state that is not the spouse's [state of legal residence] and does so solely to be with the service member under military orders, then the income the spouse earns from services performed in that nondomiciliary state cannot be taxed," said Shumake in a Pentagon Channel interview.

But, he warned, some states interpret the act to apply only if the military service member and the spouse live under the same roof. "A number of states believe that to get this tax break, or tax exemption, the spouse and the service member must have the same domicile," said Shumake. "Different states interpret this possible requirement differently."

The law does not necessarily mean that someone who makes their permanent home in one state will never be taxed in the state they're living in because of a service member's military orders, Shumake said. He explained that the act states only that income earned from work performed in the nondomiciliary state is not taxable. That doesn't mean the spouse wouldn't have to pay income tax on such income to the state of legal residency.

"There are those states that don't have any income tax at all," Shumake said. "If the spouse were a legal resident of those states, they would likely not pay income tax from [work] performed in any state."

But, understanding the meaning of "domicile" and knowing how to prove it are keys to understanding the law.

"First, the terms domicile, and legal residence, are synonymous. A person can have only one domicile at a time. It is one's primary home or permanent residence, and it's formed by being physically present in a state and simultaneously forming the intent to remain there for the indefinite future," Shumake said.

"You have to prove your intent by establishing certain contacts with the state, such as voting there, buying property there, registering a vehicle or obtaining a driver's license there," he said. "Voting may turn out to be the most important for proving your domicile for the purposes of this law."

The act also has an effect on personal property taxes.

"The [act] now says that a nondomiciliary state cannot tax personal property such as automobiles and boats if that property is in the state only because the spouse is with the servicemember in that state in compliance with military orders," said Shumake.

For all the positive benefits the law offers military spouses, it can be confusing, Shumake acknowledged.

The Military Spouses Residency Relief Act addresses only tax law concerning income earned in nondomiciliary states and doesn't change the rules for establishing and proving legal residency.

"One common misperception is that the new law allows a spouse simply to 'choose' his or her spouse's domicile. This is not true," he said. "Domicile must still be demonstrated or proven under the rules that have always been in place. Likewise, a spouse does not 'inherit' the domicile of the military member through marriage."

Spouses also should be aware that the law doesn't allow them to recapture or regain a previously abandoned domicile.

"For example, if the spouse established a Texas domiciliary status and then moved to Virginia under orders with the [service member], and while in Virginia the spouse registered to vote and bought property in Virginia and got a real estate license from Virginia, then it looks like the spouse has established Virginia as the new domicile," Shumake said. "The [law] is not likely to allow the spouse to abandon Virginia and resume or recapture Texas domiciliary status while still in Virginia."

It seems the matter of how the law affects driver's licenses has left some in a bit of a quandary, as well. Whether a spouse needs to obtain a new driver's license in each new state the spouse lives in is a matter of state law and completely unaffected by the Military Spouses Residency Relief Act.

According to Shumake, while the new law can be confusing, help is only as far away as the nearest legal assistance attorney. He also suggested checking with appropriate state tax authorities for any rules they may have put out, especially with respect to refunds for tax year 2009.

The Chief says:

"Did you know, in October of 1940, the blue collar and cuffs were deleted from the enlisted dress whites because there were continuing problems with the blue dye running? This change left the Sailor with dress and undress blues and undress whites which could fill the functions of dress as well.

"January of 1941 saw the passing of another old tradition with the abolishment of the hat band ribbon which bore the unit's name on the flat hat. Security appears to be the factor for its demise and it was eventually replaced by the shoulder unit identification mark.

"The Uniform Regulations of 1949 abolished the wearing of rating badges on both the left and right arm, making it only worn on the left arm.

"The flat hat ceased issue in 1962. It had been supplanted by the more popular white hat and since there appeared no need for two hats it was abolished.

"If you didn't know, now you know." – MCC Eric Hannah, CFAY Public Affairs