

Some Thoughts About Social Role Valorization Evoked by Events Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of D-day

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The 50th anniversary of the invasion by allied forces into German-occupied France on 6 June 1944 was marked by numerous television programs and much reportage in the print media. Each of the US weekly news magazines carried cover stories on the invasion and the anniversary, as well as stories in each issue over a several week period. Each of the major US television stations carried at least one special or documentary on the invasion and the anniversary. Presumably so did television in Canada, Britain, Australia, and perhaps other countries as well.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, all the coverage helped me to think more clearly about an important issue in both SRV teaching and application. This issue is the fact (and its implications) that SRV is limited in its ability to address the wounds that get inflicted on devalued people because they are devalued, that so often come to define their lives, and that in some instances wreak life-long havoc on the wounded people and those who are close to them and committed to them. In many ways, many devalued people are "walking wounded," as they say in the military parlance.

While SRV is a very high-level strategy of universal applicability that does address the problem of social devaluation, and does help to prevent and heal many of these wound, it is insufficient to address the wounds. This gap between the extent and profundity of the woundedness of devalued people, and the ability of SRV to address it, has been a source of tension during SRV training workshops, and in discussions among SRV trainers. For instance, for some trainers, it has raised the question whether SRV (or any other schema) is valid if it fails to adequately address the wounds. For other trainers (including this one), it is quite clear that no schema—human service-related or not, secular or religious—will ever be sufficient to address the problem of societal devaluation and the woundedness that this generates. The reason is that we live in a very dysfunctional world—or as some of us would put it, a fallen world—in which devaluation and suffering will be ever present until the world ends. This neither invalidates the need to address devaluation and suffering, nor negates the merits of a valid address even though that address will never be able to put an end to the suffering in even one life.

What is the relevance of all this to the marking of the 50th anniversary of D-Day? I was struck by the fact that a number of soldiers—both allied and German—who were in combat on D-Day, and who were interviewed for the 50th anniversary, said that not a day goes by that they do not remember D-Day and what happened to them and their buddies. Some of them said this outright, some others said words to that effect. Many of them saw friends, commanding officers, and many others butchered. Many were more frightened than they had ever been before or since. Even 50 years later, many could not talk about what had happened without starting to cry. One man said he could never hear the US national anthem played, even just at a baseball game, without thinking of his brother who had been killed in the fighting.

Thus, in many ways, these were wounded men, some of them deeply wounded, and of course, here I am referring primarily to emotional, spiritual, and psychic wounds rather than physical ones. They apparently continued to carry these wounds with them throughout life. And yet, the vast majority of the survivors led valued, integrated lives and held many valued roles. As the interviews brought out, they were, almost without exception, husbands, fathers, and grandfathers; they either still were, or had retired from being, in productive work roles ranging from blue-collar labourers to business and professional men. One became one of the most knowledgeable historians of D-Day. They were often members of

some veterans group, and met regularly with other veterans. But even as their ordinary lives and valued roles had no doubt helped to heal them in at least some respects, many of their wounds still remained. I was therefore struck that even though actually holding valued roles and leading a valued life did not heal all or even many of their wounds, their valued identities and valued roles nonetheless did help them to get along in life, to get past D-Day and the war, to cope with what had happened and what had been done to them, and to get on successfully with the business of living. Their valued roles and identities probably also helped them to cope with the wounds that remained. For instance, at least some of their wives, children and grandchildren, must have loved at least some of them at least some of the time—and being loved does help one to bear one's hurts, and even helps to heal some. But would they have found wives, would they have raised families successfully, if they had not been participants in valued roles in valued society? Similarly, their membership in veterans groups must have helped some of them to cope with their woundedness, by providing a place to be with other people who had undergone the same experience, and a way to receive honor for their massive sacrifices.

I thus took away from the D-Day celebrations yet another way of appreciating the importance of valued roles, even while remaining mindful of their limits vis-à-vis the depth of human suffering.

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