



STUDIES IN SALESIAN SPIRITUALITY

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Salesian Spirituality and Stemming Anxiety during Combat Operations

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Catholic pastoral praxis during combat operations takes into account that soldiers confront tactical situations that demand resourcefulness and optimum integration of their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual components. The enemy, fueled by a virulent mix of conflicting religious ideologies, pseudo-patriotism and tribal imperatives that honor revenge and violent aggression, are adept and adaptive in killing and inciting follow-on cadres. Meanwhile, the soldier's tour of duty ranges from boredom to adrenaline pumping combat. The brutal geography saps energy and boasts minimal aesthetic inspiration. In growing numbers Arabs regard Americans as occupiers not liberators and regardless of national goals or personal attitude, an occupier bears the burden of proving its intentions are in the interests of the occupied. Thus the soldier faces the task of spiritually adapting to the experience of war.

Our soldiers are spiritual; many are Catholic and will face a cycle of deployments in the years ahead. It is appropriate then that Catholic chaplains provide a spirituality that mitigates the

anxieties which stem from war so that an authentic and devout life can flourish. Salesian spirituality offers to maintain and restore spiritual resilience, contributing to a sense of self that serves survival and negotiation of post-conflict transition.

I argue that soldiers can place the experience of war into the context of their own faith story without yielding to two dangerous extremes: despair as articulated in Anthony Swoford's *Jarhead* and hubris as trumpeted in Stephen Mansfield's *The Faith of the American Soldier*. Catholic praxis demands balance and perspective. War is evil and unequivocally antithetical to authentic living. On the other hand, it is not worthy of despair because God's grace overcomes evil and restores human flourishing.

Anthony Swoford paints a despairing picture of war's impact on the human person. A veteran of the First Gulf War, he grieves his shared responsibility in the death of several Iraqi soldiers. The story of their anonymous deaths is told in the context of his dark experience as a Marine and is saturated with unrelenting cynicism and unyielding hopelessness. It is indicative of a malnourished spiritual life but is nonetheless an important spiritual manifest. He offers savvy warning of those who come home from war and tell, "What they call good news, the good news about war and warriors." The truth is that war is not "good news." Swoford writes,

I am entitled to despair over the likelihood of further atrocities.... In crowded rooms and walking the streets of our cities, I am alone and full of despair, and while sitting and writing, I am alone and full of despair—the same despair that impelled me to write this book, a quiet scream from a buried coffin. Dead, dead, my scream. What did I hope to gain? More bombs are coming. Dig your holes with the hands God gave you. (Anthony Swoford, *Jarhead* [New York: Scribner, 2003], 254)

Inspired, Swoford's message is impoverished for evidence of a God who loves and heals. Many have had exposure to combat and have experienced spiritual restoration. They successfully celebrate God's love for them and place war in the larger and richer picture of how God is at work in the world even as we grieve war's sorrows.

Though I mourn Swoford's despair, Stephen Mansfield's thesis is more problematic. Recounting an experience of young Marines praying before a mission in Iraq; he writes, "They know there is a spirituality to war, that warriors should trust in something beyond themselves to be of any use. So in the barrens of Iraq they build an altar of faith and ask their God to make them the warriors He has called them to be."¹ Mansfield argues for a "faith based warrior code."²

Warriors must trust in something greater than themselves, but Mansfield claims that soldiers, "Have been given no code, no moral or spiritual framing for the profession they now find themselves in or the war they now face death to win."³ It *is* unfortunate that many soldiers do not own their faith, but the "code" already exists in the Gospel and its' message is well amplified in our tradition. Many military Catholics, no different than their civilian friends, lack a substantive spirituality. Though Mansfield offers insight into the shortcomings of religious support on the battlefield, he seems to celebrate war as a spiritual act. While he captures the elegant dilemma found in serving Millennial Christians, he deifies the American Christian soldier as righteous by virtue of his or her identity as such. Like all "Gospels of Prosperity," this theory suffers Gnostic influence.

¹ S. Mansfield, *The Faith of the American Soldier* (London: Penguin Books), 175.

² *Ibid.*, 157.

³ *Ibid.*, 142.

Swoford, experiencing spiritual anemia and Mansfield a spiritual hubris, are inadequate responses to soldiers whose anxieties undermine their spiritual health. Warriors *are* spiritual, not because they embrace a cult, but because they focus on their essential vocation of self-gift. The Catholic chaplain can offer a spirituality that neither despairs of, nor trumpets war. We are authentic neither in despair nor dance, but in an acceptance of God's love and our sequent resolution to embrace him and those he sends into our lives.

The Gospel Task

The tactical dynamic, compounded by numbing repetition, interaction with an ambivalent and unpredictable indigenous population and an uncertain sense of contributing to a discrete national victory tend toward exhaustion of soldier resilience. Numbers of troops leave the desert emotionally, physically, and/or spiritually depleted. Many engage the task of recovery, conscious and appreciative of available relational and professional resources. On the other hand, others struggle to regain their poise or passion for life, resulting in personal capitulation and manifested in an unhealthy sense of self. Even troops who recoup often suffer relational and professional setbacks. Thus those who command troops and those who provide them pastoral care face a multiform threat to their well being.

Military decision making is incomplete if it does not mitigate risk in its varied forms. Yet commanders and troops know that risk attends even routine operations. We also know that soldiers who are led by capable and honest leaders, receive challenging and realistic training, have strong morale and in units with a tested *esprit de corps* will face any threat and level of risk. Further, these warriors are more likely to survive war and help others do so. This includes setting positive conditions for recovery from the rigors of war after redeploying to the United States.

Every commander wants to bring their soldiers home alive and in tact and Chaplains share responsibility for safe homecoming, however, pastoral praxis envisions more than biological survival and physical integrity. Pastoral care in the war zone, not unlike in any apostolic setting, seeks to sustain and enhance the life of the soul. We refer to spiritual resilience when we reflect on this sense of self that marks authentic life in Christ. This resilience is essential to healthy transitions in key relationships, continuation of a military career or returning to civilian life. It really means nothing less than helping soldiers integrate their experience of war into their life's story in such a way that they can (still) celebrate God's love for them. This is the central task of the Gospel in the war zone.

Soldier Anxiety

The primary threat to a fighting man or woman's spiritual center of gravity is anxiety. I define anxiety in the Salesian tradition, following Francis DeSales' treatment of the topic in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Second, let's make some practical distinctions between a soldier's experience of anxiety and that experienced by those who are not soldiers. Then we will discuss the relationship between anxiety and spiritual resilience.

De Sales states that, "With the single exception of sin, anxiety is the greatest evil that can happen to the soul."⁴ Because anxiety saps the individual's strength, he has a diminished capacity for resisting temptation and practicing acquired virtues.⁵ The practice of virtue is the life of charity and is the disciple's organization of self toward God. Devotion is *superabundant*

⁴ De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. & ed. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 1972), 251. See Colossians 3.14, wherein love's relationship to other virtues is stressed.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

charity; it is the archetype virtue and accommodates all other virtues to a person's state in life.⁶ Francis correlates the disabling of virtue with greater susceptibility to temptation. This is the organization of self toward someone or something other than God.

This impacts the soldier, his unit and military operations. Contrasting the abuse of prisoners on the one hand, and professionally handling them on the other, demonstrates this. A sergeant, who captured a few insurgents after they had ambushed and killed three of his fellow soldiers, told me, "Sir, I just wanted to kill them all, but I knew it was the wrong thing to do." Virtuous conduct and turning temptation indicate the resilience soldiers need to navigate moral decision points, in ways consistent with proper conduct and which assure the soul's integrity.

Each Armed Service promotes virtue through core values.⁷ The cultivation of these values, from basic entry training through retirement, is essential to the spiritual fitness which characterizes good soldiering and a fulfilling career. But, the battlefield minister, proffering Salesian spirituality as a practical illumination of the Gospel, understands that the life of charity demanded by the Gospel is prerequisite to, and fruit of a healthy spiritual life. Anxiety is a spiritual pathology because it degrades spiritual health. It is a disordered desire to be free of an evil or to acquire some good.⁸ This contributes to disorganization of the individual's personal resources—not least of which is a positive sense of self. We can come back to this concept of disorder in a moment, but first let's see how anxiety enters the soul.

⁶ Ibid., 121-122.

⁷ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines virtue as the "habitual and firm disposition to do good" (§ 1803). The use of the word "value" in the armed services corresponds to this—Army: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage; Navy & Marine Corps: honor, courage and commitment; Coast Guard: honor, respect and devotion to duty; Air Force: integrity first, service before self and excellence in all we do.

⁸ DeSales, *Introduction*, 252.

When our soul perceives it has suffered an evil it is displeased. This displeasure, which we call sadness, is naturally something we want to be rid of as soon as possible. But *why* does the soul seek relief? DeSales suggests two answers that determine our spiritual deportment. One, the soul seeks relief out of love for God.⁹ In this case the person appreciates how sadness affects enjoyment of ones' relationship with God, and with all the good things God puts in ones' life. Thus the good, even God, may seem unattractive. Souls that find the good unattractive, let alone *The Good*, do not move toward it. The soul is unresponsive to God's grace—his life and presence. On the other hand, when a soul's response is shaped by love of God it will meet suffering "patiently, meekly, and calmly," depending on God's providence rather than its own effort.¹⁰

Alternatively, the soul seeks relief out of self-love.¹¹ Due to spiritual estrangement the soul works only through its own effort. There is an inadequate, if any, awareness of God as seeking relationship. Since this is so, all other goods, people or things, are free to be grasped or discarded without reference to God or his purpose. This results in a poor use of personal freedom and it is not uncommon for such distressed persons to choose inappropriate mechanisms such as sexually acting out, substance abuse and even violence. They discuss being "overwhelmed," inadequate or inauthentic. Their relationship with the spiritual is tentative, and a God who has a personal interest in them seems unimaginable.

⁹ Ibid., 251.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Spiritual resilience is diminished when there is no sense of God’s providence—that is, how God is “organized” toward our completion.¹² DeSales notes that anxiety breeds impatience and agitation. The soul “will excite and wear itself out in a search for escape,” producing a cycle of sadness—*anxiety*—sadness—*anxiety*... which is “extremely dangerous.”¹³

The soul desire to be free of evil or to acquire some good is not misplaced. God is good and has imbued in us the instinct for good. But anxiety *dis*—orders our relationship with God and others. It distorts the individual’s understanding of the good and the way to achieve it. An anxious soldier may stop eating, become sleepless and deport angrily. Although none of these behaviors are good the soldier prefers them as if they were good. His disordered view of the good leads to harmful behavior. A weakened soldier may fail when lives are at risk. If injury or death result, this leads to a crashed self-esteem—a sentinel spiritual and emotional crisis.

Every mission in the combat zone, without exception, demands a wearisome modulation of intensity that creates a “taut bow effect.” Like archers whose arrows remain notched the grip on bow and arrow is not eased until within the perimeter of a friendly camp. Even then the experience of mortar and rocket attacks, or person and vehicle borne bombings create a merited wariness.¹⁴ Keep the bow too taut for too long and ones’ ability to respond is abased; not have it taut enough and you may be too late. The effect is compounded by months in hostile territory and the inevitability of attack. The risk of casualties is at the heart of the soldier’s anxiety and is

¹² I have in mind the “the economy of salvation.” Providence is this effort on our behalf culminating in the Incarnation. “The promise made to Abraham inaugurates the economy of salvation, at the culmination of which the Son himself will assume that ‘image’ and restore it in the Father’s ‘likeness’ by giving it again its Glory, the Spirit who is ‘the giver of life.’” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§705).

¹³ DeSales, 251.

¹⁴ Insurgents fired Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), albeit poorly aimed, into an area of our FOB through which we had mapped a favorite running route. Our Intelligence Officer recommended we increase our pace in that sector. Everyone chuckled—“sort ‘a.’”

not a risk shared in our civilian community. Even firemen and policemen experience this risk differently. Let me suggest four themes based on my experience. Interestingly, it is not death that soldiers always fear most.

When we left an operating base to make sense of the animated population, super-heated weather and mystery that is Iraq, I made an Act of Contrition. Because I don't carry a weapon and my bodyguard and team mates did, I often drove so their hands were free to fire their weapons. I prayed that if attacked I would react as rehearsed—facilitating our escape or the enemy's destruction. I reviewed our plan, first aid procedures and radio procedures for calling in a medical evacuation helicopter (MEDEVAC). I thought through situations that might require these skills while simultaneously comforting the dying, administering the Sacrament of the Sick or honoring the dead. In short I asked God to strengthen me so that I would not let my buddies down. This concern motivated us to know our jobs, rehearse our mission and stay in shape. Despite the self-confidence that comes from good planning, tough training and solid leadership an error in judgment or even a moment of cowardice could jeopardize others.

My fear of letting others down was an anxiety mitigated by experience, training, practiced communication and common sense leadership. On the other hand, the fear of being maimed offered few practical remedies. The odd thought crossed my mind that losing one eye would not be too bad, but death was preferred to losing both. If it were a choice between losing an arm, a leg, my genitalia or some horrendous combination of these, I prayed for a quick death and one that would precede incineration in the burning fuel and exploding ordinance of my vehicle. Some risks seemed remote and conjured little anxiety. For instance death itself or capture by a sword wielding fanatic seemed unlikely to me; for others it provoked concern.

A third ground for anxiety is found in the fear leaders share in ordering others into combat. Leaders up and down the chain-of-command balanced concern for their troops with mission accomplishment. Yet, senior officers must trust their juniors to lead, *knowing* mistakes and losses are inevitable, because this is necessary to their maturing.

No less significant is anxiety that stems from family transition. No matter how solid a relationship may be it will be challenged by fear of loss. Although digitalization has enhanced information exchange, distance and absence conflate fear by denying family members embrace. Numerous counseling sessions confirm that digital mail and telephone are two edged swords. They allow a rapid exchange of information but do not permit the quality communication essential to intimacy. In fact, too much information can be transmitted, engendering distraction and kindling significant levels of anxiety until reunion is achieved. Reunion is celebrated but it also creates tension. Only by renegotiating roles, managing expectations and integrating the experience of the deployment into the family's story will the family flourish.

The four issues above provide soldiers grounds for appropriate concern but grist for anxiety. By "appropriate concern" I mean a savvy appreciation of the risks nuanced by confidence in God's providence. However, where concern has been displaced by anxiety healing is sought. A Salesian method can be summarized in three, though not discrete, stages. 1) Challenge the soldier to identify and articulate the sorrow that burdens his soul. 2) Aid her in consciously turning her sorrow over to God's providential care. 3) Encourage her to experience the devout life as compatible with soldiering.

War as the Source of Sorrow

Recall that anxiety is a disordered attempt to free the soul of sorrow. Many soldiers incorrectly identify the root sorrow that infiltrates the soul. Frequently they report as source what is actually a presenting issue. The marriage may be in trouble, the children may be acting out, a friend may have been wounded, she may have been attacked, or they may have killed a combatant or non-combatant or some combination of experiences common to soldiering. Yet, as tragic as the exigencies of the day may be they veil the source.

Our original misuse of free will has left us flawed and in search of authenticity. When we experience anxiety fed by fear of letting buddies down, physical trauma, leading others into harm's way, suffering a ruined relationship or any other scenarios we experience sorrow that stems from our incompleteness. We grieve a loss suffered or anticipate one. War provokes a profound awareness of this inadequacy—our inability to control the events, circumstances and conditions that can destroy us or those we love and the things we value. While war can be legitimized and even benefit the community it is inherently destructive of the human person. Even winning does not make us more complete, more fulfilled or more human since war's brutality exhausts our intellect, emotions, physical being and spiritual life.

God responds to this suffering by providing the grace which completes us. This redemptive work helps us weave the experience of war into the cloth of our personal story and celebrate God's Reconciliation. The role of Salesian spirituality is to promote indefatigable optimism in this process and the human person. Many soldiers who receive God's grace *do* respond to his presence. They are resilient and they integrate their experience into their life's story. This being said, an authentic response to war begins with its experience as miserably depleting.

This either turns us inward or toward God and those wonderful others he sends to us. This brings us back to DeSales' observation that sorrow arises from either a love of God or a disordered love of self, thus reflecting our spiritual department. If we see only ourselves as that which can make us complete we set conditions for anxiety and the consequent disordering of our lives. However, if we acknowledge our incompleteness and see God as the one who can make us complete we live well.¹⁵ We *co-operate* with the Father who makes good our deficiencies through the grace which is Jesus Christ.

Yet all disciples stand in this gap between possessing Christ and possessing *fullness* in Christ. This is our pre-eminent sorrow. Because we do not yet possess this fullness, we want to hold on to the good things God gives us. Though they can not complete us they are evidence of his love. Our fear of loosing these is aggravated in the brutality and uncertainty of the war zone. Diminishment of spiritual integrity stems from this and is located in an event that is disordered, dehumanizing and destructive in its nature.

The resilience essential to addressing this lack of fullness is nourished in grace which in turn is characterized by a life organized for union with God. It begins when the soldier is encouraged to consciously recognize and describe the sorrow war places on his heart—this lack of fullness, adequacy or completeness. This is validated in confession, counseling and group process.¹⁶ It helps to verbalize our experience, have it validated and be challenged to engage the dilemma of discipleship in the “valley of the shadow of death.”¹⁷

¹⁵ A theme in Augustine's *Confessions*: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: University Press, 1991), 3. See also Psalm 62.2.

¹⁶ After Iraq's “capitulation” in 2003, I heard confessions of troops transitioning home. Penitents and I were in tears, moved by the events these good men endured.

¹⁷ Psalm 23.4 (*King James Bible*)

Turning the Sorrow of War over to the Father's Providential Care

Once the soldier is conscious of the sorrow stemming from the experience of war, has enumerated her palpable concerns, and has been validated it is appropriate to challenge her to turn her sorrow over to God's providential care. If she is aware that only union with God brings completeness, how will she organize her personal resources to turn toward God?

Salesian spirituality, like all spiritualities, explicates the Gospel so disciples can adapt it to their circumstances. It provides a way of responding to the gift of Jesus' life for us in a particular way. Let's highlight ways Salesian spirituality contributes to a healthy sense of self and the proper ordering of self toward God.

In the *Introduction* Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622) treats this search for authenticity, reflecting on the disciple's "devout life," defined as a careful, frequent and prompt response to God's love.¹⁸ This love or grace is God's relentless presence wherein he offers redemption in Eucharistic life. Here Jesus feeds, teaches, heals and forgives. Soldiers who receive this grace and explore the force of war on the soul are ready to turn their sorrow over to the Father at this location.

This is done with humility and gentleness. DeSales' own humble and meek lifestyle has resulted in these virtues becoming synonymous with his spiritual legacy. Another in the "gentleman saint's" spiritual patrimony is optimism. Under the master-virtue of devotion, and taken together, humility, gentleness and optimism form the "core" virtues essential to a balanced, authentic response to war. The humble, gentle and optimistic soldier is oriented toward the God who is ready to envelop him with a healing and life-sustaining embrace. This is God's gift of

¹⁸ DeSales, 40.

Reconciliation, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus' continuous gift of self promotes spiritual resilience and our vocation of self-gift.

Practicing these hallmark virtues and their ancillaries is Incarnational and Eucharistic. Jesus, real God and real man, who really died on the cross and really rose from the dead, really walks among his people now in our Eucharistic life, evidenced in a consistent, evolving, sagacious communion with God in personal prayer. This communion is essential to our disposition, because it is the location and activity for turning over the sorrows of war to the Father. The warrior is encouraged to see that the surrender of experience is a way of being disciple which is nourished in a life-time encounter with Word and Sacrament and in communion-fellowship. Healing comes by placing oneself under the waterfall of God's grace in these medium. The devout life is a viable response to war and the means for placing its burden into God's providential care.

The Soldier's Devout Life

DeSales published the *Introduction* in 1609, in a Europe that was conflicted. The Protestant and Catholic Reformations spawned persecution, acrimony and armed conflict. Intertwined with the evolving Reformation, competing visions for political, religious and economic society contributed to wars between sovereignties then morphing into modern nation-states. Inter-regional conflict shaped a complex and volatile international system, compounded by Islam's advance in the East through conquest, coercion and cultural assimilation.¹⁹

Francis was well respected and many sought his counsel. Though not an Army chaplain he was familiar to political and military figures and he faced rigorous service during the Catholic

¹⁹ The Battle of Lepanto stemmed the Ottoman advance in 1571. Francis was four.

Reformation. During his 1594 mission into the Calvinist Chablais near Lake Geneva he, “Lived in a fortress garrisoned by the Duke of Savoy’s soldiers, worked to some extent under their protection under conditions of intolerable hardship and poverty, ridiculed, persecuted, attacked even physically, saying Mass day by day in icy, half ruined churches, preaching to empty pews.”²⁰ His pastoral paradigm serves us well.

DeSales’ approach was to consistently and constructively engage those whose anxiety affected their self-worth or preempted their awareness of God. The *Introduction* guides the reader from her desire to live the devout life through fully resolving to embrace it. He offers insights into how this resolve is nourished in prayer and sacrament, the practice of virtue, in turning temptation and in refreshing ones’ commitment.

His concept of devotion is robust—even athletic. He uses phrases such as, “spiritual agility and vivacity,” and discusses devotion as a spiritual fire that “bursts into flames.”²¹ Its appeal rests in the celebration of the *vocation* of charity which we all share, soldiers included. It is a vocation that places suffering in the context of our story. This is clear in his “purgative” meditations. One that is meaningful to the soldier is “The Fifth Mediation—On Death.” He writes,

Consider the uncertainty of the day of your death. O my soul, thou must one day quit this body. When will it be? In a town or in the country? In the day or in the night? Will it be without warning, or with warning? Will it be the result of disease or of some accident? Wilt thou have time to confess or not? Wilt thou be

²⁰ E. Stopp, *A Man to Heal Differences: Essays and Talks on St. Francis de Sales* (Philadelphia: St. Joseph’s University Press, 1998), 4. This is similar to the experience of Catholic chaplains operating today out of Forward Operating Bases!

²¹ DeSales, 40-41.

assisted by thy confessor and spiritual Father? Alas! We know nothing at all about these things. We only know that we shall die, and always sooner than we expect.²²

The warrior is near death and it is unrealistic to imagine the situation on the battlefield otherwise, but anxiety is displaced by reflection on our vulnerability in the context of final fulfillment in the Father. The soldier's vocation is one of preparation, readiness, and most of all, action, even in the midst of uncertainty!

Action is emphasized because super-abundant charity is the action of God's incarnate love. Through the Holy Spirit, in the Body of Christ, we are Jesus' healing presence. The vocation of charity is our response to God's Incarnate Gift of Reconciliation and overlays our state in life. It is a way of being in the world modeling Jesus' own vocation of self-gift. This provides a healthy context for suffering. For the soldier, suffering while courageously doing ones' duty is an indicator of spiritual resilience. Francis writes, "Among these devout people those who suffer afflictions are not over-concerned about their sufferings and never loose courage. To conclude, look upon the eyes of the Savior who comforts them, and see how all of them together aspire to him."²³ This spiritual deportment is optimum.

DeSales sees prayer and sacramental encounter as epicenter for the devout life. God pours upon us the grace to live the vocation of charity in which we order ourselves toward him and others. This ordering occurs in prayer and sacrament which are loci for our spiritual transition, wherein our incompleteness is welcomed and filled by God's goodness. Francis emphasizes this

²² Ibid., 60.

²³ Ibid., 70.

when he writes, “We must pause here, Philothea, and I assure you that we can not go to God the Father except through this gate.”²⁴

When using phrases like Gods’ grace I mean God’s Presence. *He* is the gift that “orders” us through his teaching, feeding, forgiving and healing. Thus DeSales introduces one of the most powerful exercises in the Salesian repertoire—calling to mind God’s presence. While we may intellectually acknowledge that presence we may not take it to heart, and thus be more anxious than attentive to what is required of us in any particular time or place.²⁵

The importance of this is found in a special vision soldiers cultivate and which we call “situational awareness.” It signifies contextual vision because fear narrows vision and we lose our sense of the peripheral. Salesian disciples seek God as manifest in the world—even on the battlefield. Soldiers recount how, despite loss and suffering, “some little thing” restored their vision of God as present and rekindled their efforts to feed, teach heal and forgive. This grace does not originate in a God who sits outside of our reality and to whom we nod in deference from afar, but a real someone who chooses to walk with us in the dust and blast, and break the bread with us. The devout life improves this Eucharistic vision.

Our response to this presence is a virtuous life and DeSales teaches, “All men should possess all the virtues, yet all are not bound to exercise them in equal measure. Each person must practice in a special manner the virtues needed by the kind of life he is called to.”²⁶ For example, patience and chastity are virtues pertinent to a warrior. This promotes union with God and the turning away from things that distract us from him.

²⁴ Ibid., 81.

²⁵ Ibid., 84.

²⁶ Ibid., 122.

One of the most practical sections of the *Introduction* is Francis' treatment of temptation. In a world where risk and consequence attend choice, the optimum operation of free will is anxiety free. Our choices are grounded in a self-concept that models Jesus' own integration of his physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual components. This appeals to soldiers because Francis' anthropology respects our potential for giving God glory in the day-to-day effort to "be all that we can be."

The devout life is appropriate for the soldier and sets conditions for dissipation of anxieties that afflict those who serve in combat. In this freedom soldiers can recover spiritual resilience and refresh the imprint of the Gospel in their hearts.

Conclusion

Stephen Mansfield and Anthony Swofford's books are deficient in humility or hope, respectively. Catholic warriors need a spirituality which helps them adapt the Gospel to their lives' circumstances, not a Christocentric warrior's code. More, they must displace anxiety, which is spiritually toxic and replaces Eucharistic relationships with narcissism. If unchecked, it diminishes the capacity to deal in a healthy way with war and post-conflict transitions, because these events are not placed in the context of ones' faith journey. The ability to celebrate God at work in the world is disabled, as evident in Swofford's biography.

Salesian spirituality builds and sustains a spiritual resilience which mitigates anxiety. It supports conscious articulation of the sorrow which war imposes on the heart and the consistent turning over of this sorrow to God's providence. It reinforces commitment to the vocation of devotion which is practical and useful for Catholics on the battlefield and throughout the war

zone. This spirituality celebrates the optimism, humility, gentleness and super-abundant charity which characterize God's incarnate healing presence—Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace.
