**Thoughts for discussion on Sedgwick and Wright**

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**Socrates: “How ought we live?” Jesus of Nazareth: “Take up your cross, and follow Me.”**

**Sedgwick, *The Christian Moral Life***

General considerations:

1. Living a distinctively Christian moral life can be seen as a daily sacramental act
2. True piety is a “contact sport:” We encounter God, others, and ourselves, and through experiencing each, we encounter all three
3. Faith is both enacted and embodied

Chapter 5: The Practices of Faith

Worship is not merely a singular event, but also a reminder and reinforcement of the significance of the rest of the week; it is distinct, but not separable

Worship part of larger instruction in the Christian Way of Life

 Learning “art” of faithful and faith-filled living

 As “therapy” (i.e., a “treatment” for fallenness

Disciple: Learning, accepting, practicing, and disseminating a discipline or doctrine

Four formational disciplines:

1. Meditation and contemplation
2. Examination (self-examination)
3. Denial and simplification of one’s life
4. Action (*praxis*)

Meditation and contemplation

Imagistic, both visual and metaphorical: inner dialogue

1. Kataphatic (“affirming speech, imagery”) ; *via positiva:* Using familiar and religiously significant or distinctive images, symbols, metaphors to aid in encountering God
2. Apophatic (“denial”); *via negative*: Rejecting images, etc. as encouraging the image to become itself the object (idolatry); anything truly of God is beyond human comprehension, so there can be a danger in using some earthly object or symbol effectively becoming a spiritual substitute (Ex. 20.4-5)

Examination

Inner dialogue, self-examination, can and should lead to contemplation and meditation; confession of sin leads to confession of faith

*Confessions* of Augustine: Story of Augustine’s struggle to restrain his inner desires and turn toward and live according to a Christian life (“O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet!”); Four Noble Truths of Buddha

*Via analogia*: Explaining difficult, complex, or mysterious concepts in familiar terms, not to aid encounter, but rather to aid in understanding for further meditation. Parables of Christ as exemplars: Good Samaritan (Lk. 10.25-37)

Distinctiveness of Judæo-Christian tradition is personal focus. We stand before God as individuals, not merely a community. We address God personally, and grace is given to each

John Wesley: Christ did not come to save all of us, but rather *each* of us

Distinctive NT development: A move away from “economy of exchange” (*lex talionis*) and toward an “economy of sacrifice”

Denial and simplification

1&2 have no value unless they lead to change. We are both spiritual and physical

Denial and simplification aim toward both understanding and transformation

1. Purgation: Fasting, celibacy, mortification of flesh to demonstrate recognition of fallen condition and need to be rid of its influence. Presumption of essential “evil” of the body; relic of Essenes, Christian neoplatonists
2. Duties: Acting in accordance with “covenant of hospitality;” sacramental acts such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, freely forgiving others; demonstrating a refocusing from self-desire to desire to embody the covenant of hospitality

Action

Regular practice of spiritual disciplines in daily living.

Guard against making such disciplines an end in themselves (idolatry). Focus should not be on the discipline itself, but rather the purpose of it and all such disciplines

Balance of the four disciplines is a personal matter; there is no “rubric”

Worship

**Q: How does worship encompass all four formational disciplines?**

Sacrifice: To make sacred

Hospitality and Forgiveness

Bonhoeffer: Condemned German Christianity’s accommodation with, and embracing of, Nazism. Regarded it as cynical and self-serving, and, ultimately, complicit with Holocaust. First three formational disciplines largely ignored or suborned to state interests; acting became a matter of conformity to politics of the day. True Christian faith devolved into institutional religion, a human edifice acting according to needs of the state; called for a “non-religious” interpretation of Christianity (Kierkegaard).

**Q: Do Bonhoeffer’s observations sound familiar? What should be our response?**

Centrality of forgiveness to establishing and maintaining the covenant of hospitality. True forgiveness is not simply a letting go of a debt owed or a wring committed, but rather an act of restoration of the covenant.

**Q: Which is harder, forgiving or seeking forgiveness? Why?**

Chapter 6: The Call of God

We are called to live a Christian life. Our birth is simply a fact, completely out of our control; how we live the life we have is our responsibility. Living a Christian life is less existential than it is vocational.

Vocation is not merely “work.” Work is what we do, our vocation is who we are.

*Eros*, *agape,* and *philia*.

**Q: What is your “call?”**

**Wright, *After You Believe***

Chapter 7: Virtue in Action: The Royal Priesthood

Contemporary expression of a Royal Priesthood: Worship and Mission

Worship: Emotional expression of love of and for God; what is worship in the mind?

Beyond liturgy: Liturgy provides order, process, and direction, but the participant must do more than merely parrot the order of worship; this is equally true of the community gathered in worship. There is virtue in the doing. “[T]he life of Christian virtue is a team sport.” (p.230)

There is more to virtue than merely the habitual practice of “right’ behaviors.

**Q: What life-transforming purpose is there in worship? What is the role of the priest?**

“Rulers” as agents of transformation; the work of the Disciples continues, proclamation is ongoing. Called to rule in service to one another.

Justice: Dangerous decoupling of social justice from the Word of God. The Ministry of Christ as the paradigm of restorative justice. The world itself is the New Temple, and we all are its priests.

**Q: What is a distinctively Christian freedom?**

Myth of the subject/object distinction: We distinguish ourselves form the world and try to master it; instead, we need to remind ourselves that we are a part of that same world. To transform the world, we must transform ourselves.

**Q: Is there more to a Christian Theory of Virtue than merely Aristotle baptized?** **What may this mean for our roles as royal priests?**

Distinctively Christian virtues: humility, charity, patience, and chastity. Where do we find these virtues in today’s world? How can we model them and proclaim them?

Chapter 8: The Virtuous Circle (p. 260)

Virtue, finally, is not about what we do, but who we are, and about who we are AS we do what we do. Habit-forming is not the same thing as character-forming, despite what Aristotle thought; uniquely Christian virtues are enacted because they are embodied.Virtuous acting as “second nature.” Why “second?” Why not “first?” Christian virtue, finally, is life narrative. Grace is not an app; it is a way of life.