Desiring Appreciation: Common Worship as Multicultural Theory/Praxis in Christian Education

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Introduction

Christian education stands as the fulfilment of the teaching component of the Church's mission to serve the needs of the world. Within this context, common worship exists as an exercise in theory/praxis that frames the nature of inquiry that Christian education exhibits across the various academic disciplines. This experience brings the modern self into contact with an understanding of God that resides beyond false distinctions such as mental abstraction and pragmatic consequence. God exists in time as neither theory nor praxis. By contrast, God's existence is found at the nexus point between the acts of creation and redemption. As an entity created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), the modern self is reconstituted through the redemptive experience found in the body of Christ (*corpus Christi*). Through common worship, this self is formed by its participatory experience in a discursive reality shaped by these narratives. While common worship impacts communicants in a variety of ways, experiencing this reality also reshapes the nature of the self in relation to the presence of cultural difference. As a result, the participatory experience of common worship serves as multicultural theory/praxis for Christian education by fostering a sense of charity as justice that is premised upon a desire to appreciate multicultural difference.

Confronting the Modern Self

By fostering a desire to appreciate multicultural difference, the experience of common worship comes into immediate confrontation with the various frameworks that define the modern self. These frameworks do not necessarily surface in the particularities of any given argument or form of discourse. Their presence is more pervasive as they methodologically shape the ontological and epistemological contours that give rise to such arguments. Charles Taylor cautioned

that these "frameworks today are problematic."[1] The problematic element of their nature resides in the inconsistent nature of their societal presence. By way of explanation, Taylor argued that "What is common to them all is the sense that no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as the framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact."[2]

While no singular set of frameworks proves to be definitive, a brief discussion of this phenomenon indicates that at least three separate frameworks or sources often manage to manifest themselves in some capacity in the modern self. First, the modern self often operates in accordance with an atomistic or isolated sense of self-understanding. In its original form, this framework was brought to life through the words of René Descartes when he wrote, "Here I find: it is cognition; this alone cannot be rent from me. I am, I exist; it is certain."[3] As a result of the efforts of Descartes, the cogitating self is now able to posit and establish its own existence.

Second, the modern self often operates by implementing a framework that allows the individual to apprehend the empirically observed qualities of the external world. In words written by Francis Bacon, "Now among the senses, vision clearly holds the first place for providing information, for it is chiefly for this sense that we should seek out aids [for one's vision]."[4] For Bacon and for the modern self, one's vision stands as the surest sense of apprehending reality.

Finally, the modern self often operates by enacting reason as a means of processing rational forms of evidence. While reason was once thought of as the logos or the ordering principle that sustained the world, this understanding was replaced in favor of one that emphasized a power of rationality that was perceived to be universal in its appeal. John Locke wrote that "whatever truths Reason can certainly discover to us, and make us firmly assent to, those are all naturally imprinted upon the mind."[5] As a result, the modern self is one, in its varying capacities, that individually appeals to reason to verify the nature of empirically obtained information. The underlying rationale behind the work of Locke, along with the work of Bacon and Descartes, was the belief that these frameworks were able to apprehend a universalized rendition of reality.

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[1] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989): 17.

[2] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 17.

[3] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. and trans. George Heffernan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990): 105.

[4] Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, eds. and trans. Peter Urbach and John Gibson (Chicago: Open Court, 1994): 225.

[5] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979): 51.

While no consistent sense of presence exists in terms of how these frameworks manifest themselves in the modern self, their mere existence points to a reality with which current concepts such as justice must contend. In an attempt to define this political reality, Louis Dupré contended:

> Looking back at the complex development of political thought at the dawn of the modern age, we notice a shift in the function of law from constituting a realm of right to protecting rights that precede law. Although the right of nature appears limited by the law of nature . . . it is left to the individual interpretation to decide what the law of nature demands.[6]

While the law once preceded the rights of the individual, the rights of the individual were now left to precede the law. As the bearer of the means and the ability to apprehend reality, the modern self comes to bear the burden of coming to terms with rights that are perceived to inherently belong to them and to them alone. While this line of rationale is sufficient in radically privatized contexts, the modern self still faces the challenge of determining how it works with other individuals to determine the demands of the law of nature in the public sphere.

The Challenge of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism poses a serious challenge to the modern self when this apprehension of the self seeks to determine how it will work with other individuals. The frameworks contributed by figures such as Descartes, Bacon, and Locke that define the modern self leave one with the perception that each person can individually assent to the same position concerning the public demands of law. While Taylor cautions his audience to be wary of the possibility that these frameworks manifest themselves in the modern self at varying degrees, multiculturalism may extend this sense of caution to a new level. In multiculturalism, the challenge is posed to establish a law of nature in the public sphere that applies to individuals from a host of backgrounds. Multiculturalism, by its very nature, seeks to define and re-define the elements that give rise to the notion of a public sphere. It creates new social realities in places where cultural homogeneity previously operated as being theoretically normative.

Bill Martin contended that multiculturalism "must indeed be a matter of a 'gathering,' one that aims to, through the enactment of a radical diversity, bring together a radical confluence of possibilities

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[6] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1993): 142.

for all humankind."[7] Multiculturalism quickly escapes the privatized realm of the individual. While it operates in and through elements of local communities, its aspiration is to create a sense of possibility encompassing all of humanity. In light of the social reality, multicultural theorists are left to rethink "whether it is possible to imagine this community as made up of many, diverse cultures."[8] Notions such as possibility and impossibility must be brought to light. Theoretical assumptions deeply embedded in cultural practices must be brought to the level of conscious awareness. As a result, multiculturalism can begin to make the transition from the realm of the rhetorical to the realm of lived experience.

The modern self and the various compositions of frameworks that comprise it exist as theoretical assumptions that multiculturalism must contend with as it seeks to create societal possibilities for all of humanity. Multiculturalism forces the modern self to quickly come to terms with the manifestation of the demands of law in the public sphere. As a result, the inclinations of the modern self, in the face of movements such as multiculturalism, find expression in liberalism as a political reality.

For liberalism, justice is found in and through mechanisms that seek to establish a sense of fairness in which each individual operates. John Rawls established the notion that "As free persons, citizens claim the right to view their persons as independent from and identified with any particular [political] conception with its scheme of final ends."[9] This perception of the independent person translates into what Rawls referred to as the priority of right. While the individual is free to identify with any particular political conception, exercising this sense of freedom cannot come at the expense of another individual. For Rawls, the priority of the right is ultimately translated into a sense of justice manifested in the practice of fairness. In these terms, "justice as fairness includes an account of certain political virtues—the virtues of fair social cooperation such as the virtues of civility and tolerance, of reasonableness and the sense of fairness."[10] Through liberalism, the modern self and its various frameworks develop a desire to foster a social reality where various cultural manifestations coexist in a neutral spirit of toleration for one another. In this capacity, justice acts as a monolithic endeavor in which each individual is given equal access to various forms of opportunity.

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[7] Bill Martin, "Multiculturalism: Consumerist or Transformational?" in *Theorizing Multiculturalism*, ed. Cynthia Willett (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1998): 128.
[8] Bill Martin, "Multiculturalism: Consumerist or Transformational?," 128.
[9] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 30.
[10] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 194.

The Modern Self and Limitations to Multiculturalism

While the liberal virtue of tolerance may offer the modern self a means by which it can express itself in a multicultural context, this sense of expression also brings with it a set of limitations. These limitations begin to rise to the surface when multiculturalism efforts are prohibited from fully establishing Martin's "confluence of possibilities for all humankind."[11] This confluence would require that an individual do more on behalf of another individual than simply allow for or fail to prohibit equal opportunity on behalf of another person. In this context, one sees the presence of "a conception of the person on which the self is prior to its ends."[12] The demands placed upon it in terms of its interaction where matters of difference are present are minimal in nature. No serious forms of engagement or substantive encounters are required. At most, the desires of the modern self require it to work to establish a fair opportunity on behalf of another.

This minimal sense of engagement is determined by two limitations inherent in the operative context of liberalism. First, to exist within the context prescribed by toleration, the modern self must bracket or set aside some of its deepest convictions. The neutral spirit of toleration can only sustain the qualitative weight of so many issues. Michael Sandel lobbied that the modern self brackets "controversial moral and religious issues for political purposes, not for the sake of such 'comprehensive' liberal ideals such as autonomy or individuality, but rather for the sake of securing social cooperation in the face of disagreement about ends."[13] Tolerance comes with the price of even generating limitations to be placed upon the modern self that conceived of its very existence. Conversations concerning matters such as morality and religion threaten the neutral nature of the climate needed to allow for toleration to emerge.

Second, a modern self that lacks full presence is unable to completely engage other individuals in a multicultural context. The modern self is left incapable of completely coming to terms with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. The sense of commonality forged by toleration deprives all constituencies of some level of self-understanding. Sandel argued, "to see ourselves as deontology would see us is to deprive us of those qualities of character, reflectiveness, and friendship that depend on the possibility of constitutive projects and attachments."[14] As a result, the sense of justice that

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[11] Martin, "Multiculturalism: Consumerist or Transformational?," 128.

[12] Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996): 128.

[13] Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, 100.

[14] Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 181.

emerges within this context is one that is limited in nature. It lacks the desire for empathy and investment on the part of both parties needed to be able to create confluence and envision the possibility of the presence of true justice. Within the context of toleration, the modern self and those found to be culturally different from it exist in a realm where a neutered sense of justice permeates their mere life together.

The Reconstituted Self and Common Worship as Multicultural

Theory/Praxis

Common worship, as practiced in the context of Christian education, is the participatory experience that seeks to reconfigure modern perceptions of selfhood embedded in students, faculty, and staff members alike. Apart from this experience, the teaching mission of the Church that Christian education seeks to fulfil is left captive to the impulses of the broader culture. At best, the formative lessons that a student encounters in such a context translate into a sense of justice that seeks to establish and preserve toleration and equal opportunity for all people. However, common worship as multicultural theory/praxis seeks to establish a perception of reality that translates into a sense of charity as justice by transcending the modern self and the social realities it perpetuates.

At its essence, the participatory experience of common worship is defined by a discursive reality created by two Biblical narratives. This reality is reflective of Ludwig Wittgenstein's admonition that "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life."[15] In terms of the first narrative, common worship is established at the point in time where God is manifested in the act of the creation of humanity. The author of the Book of Genesis wrote in 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'"[16] In this narrative, the Hebrew term for man (*the adam*) is cumulative in nature. As a referent for humanity, man includes male and female. Within this context, humanity is created in the *imago Dei*. While humanity is not of the same creative substance of God, humanity does share in God's image. This relationship is manifested in the fact that humanity is created in freedom. Dietrich Bonhoeffer claimed, "Now God does not only command and his word comes to pass, he himself enters into creation and thus

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[15] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall/Macmillan, 1953): 8.

[16] *The Bible: Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1971): Old Testament 1.

creates freedom."[17] However, the context of this freedom resides in an understanding of humanity as a communal entity. For Bonhoeffer, "No substantial or individualistic concept of freedom can conceive of freedom. I have no control over freedom as over a property. It is simply the event that happens to me through the other."[18] In contrast to the frameworks that define the modern self, "The relation of creature with creature is a God-given relation because it exists in freedom and freedom originates it from God."[19]

In terms of the second narrative, the freedom established through the God-given relation of creature with creature is fulfilled at the point in time where God is manifested in the act of redemption of humanity. By collapsing freedom into a personal endeavor, humanity finds itself in need of God's redemption. The freedom that one finds in others becomes bondage to the self. As the *corpus Christi*, the Church lives out a sense of freedom reified by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. The Apostle Paul addressed this phenomenon in 12:4–5 of his Epistle to the Romans when he wrote, "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually are members one of another."[20] John Chrysostom emphasized the inextricable nature of the members that comprise of the *corpus Christi* when he comments upon the words of the Apostle Paul, "For he has stated two things that might take down their [members of the Church in Rome] haughty spirit; one that we are members of one another, not the small of the great only, but also the great of the small; and another, that we are all one body."[21] In the *corpus Christi*, distinctions between great and small become negligible. As a result of God's presence in time through the redemptive power of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, individuals present in the *corpus Christi* re-establish the freedom they once lost.

Common Worship as Multicultural Theory/Praxis

Inherent in the narrative constructs of the *imago Dei* and the *corpus Christi* resides the discursive reality that shapes and forms common worship as the definitive experience of the Church and the agents that carry on its work. God's presence in time is found at the nexus point shared by the acts of creation and redemption. As the agent charged

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[17] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, trans. John C. Fletcher (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965): 38.
[18] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 37.
[19] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 39.
[20] The Bible: Revised Standard Version, New Testament 149.
[21] John Chrysostom, *The Homilies of Saint John Chrysostom*, Volume VII, trans. Members of the English Church (Oxford, England: John Henry Parker, 1941): 370.

with fulfilling the teaching mission of the Church, Christian education seeks to shape its approach across the disciplines in light of the participatory experience found in common worship. Present in such practices is the conviction that the self is constituted and reconstituted by a pregnant sense of possibility inherent in language. Movements such as the recitation and exposition of Scripture and the presentation of bread and wine as the elements of the Lord's Supper announce God's manifest presence. As a result, common worship becomes neither theory nor practice. The manifestation of creation and redemption found through its participatory experiences defy these limitations. As an entity committed to the fulfilment of the teaching mission of the Church, Christian education finds in common worship the theory/praxis that reconstitutes the self and defines the nature by which human inquiry reaches across the span of the intellectual disciplines.

Catherine Pickstock contended, "the liturgical fuses the most realistic with the most ideal."[22] In terms of the realistic, common worship comes into contact with the pre-conceptual assumptions or life world in which an individual operates. These elements emerged from "the realm of the pre-given mixture of natural and cultural elements into which an individual must pre-reflectively enter if he is to be capable of linguistic articulation and deliberate thought and action at all."[23] However, Pickstock also contended, "the ideal aspect of human life is not a kind of optional extra, but is essential to specifically human action."[24] In these terms, meaning in life emerges from the ability of an individual to connect with ideological constructs that one grants preference to over other constructs. As a result, the participatory nature of common worship conjoins these two realities and escapes the inescapable frameworks of the modern self.

By surpassing modalities of theory and praxis, the inescapable frameworks of the modern self are displaced in favor of a self reconstituted by the experience of common worship. In this context, Graham Ward wrote, "The I is born *in relation to* and that is intrinsic to its being made *in the image of God* [*imago Dei*], for God is always and in relation to. The I is given to the We for its own redemption (and perfection)."[25] These words only extend Michael Sandel's previously stated critique of the modern self. Descartes' framework of the cogitating self is found to be insufficient in light of the redemptive presence embodied in the inextricable relationship that the self now

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[22] Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy, Art, and Politics" 159–180 in *Modern Theology*, 16 no.2 (2000): 160.
[23] Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy, Art, and Politics," 160.
[24] Catherine Pickstock, "Liturgy, Art, and Politics," 160.
[25] Graham Ward. *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 176.

finds it shares with others. The marginalization of the cogitating self also destabilizes the modern self's ability to employ the frameworks of empiricism and reason in sovereign capacities. Empiricism and reason no longer reside in an agent that originally afforded them their privileged status. As a result, the ability that they afford the individual to apprehend reality is re-conceptualized in light of the context of relationship that the I shares with the we. Once sovereign, the frameworks of empiricism and reason must now validate their claims in light of the horizon of possibility in which the reconstituted self operates.

Inherent in the reconstituted self brought to life by this horizon of possibility is the nature of God's manifest presence across the diverse cultural spectrum of humanity. God's presence neither mitigates nor reduces differences inherent in humanity. By contrast, sequences such as the presence of diverse cultural norms come to be understood as essential if humanity is going to fulfil its obligation to serve as the manifestation of the *imago Dei* and the *corpus Christi* in time. John Milbank argued:

> God is the infinite series of differences, and what he knows is the infinity of differences; as Maximus the Confessor said, God is the 'distinction of the different'. And as the reality which includes and encompasses in his comprehension every difference, God is also the God who differentiates.[26]

For Milbank, true difference is made possible by God's infinite nature. God differentiates between cultural apprehensions that exist in the created order of humanity. However, God also encompasses each and every quality embodied in this sense of differentiation. As a result, the *imago Dei* and the *corpus Christi* find their highest expression through their ability to create a desire for appreciation that reaches across the expanse of difference that God creates and redeems. The modern self's aspiration of toleration is exceeded by a reconstituted self formed by the desire inherent in the participatory experience of common worship to appreciate genuine cultural difference.

In the context of Christian education, the participatory experience of common worship operates as multicultural theory/praxis that fosters a desire to appreciate difference. The God who differentiates and is present in each cultural manifestation is the same God that encompasses each and every distinction. The experience of common worship binds members of this community together in a unique manner consummate with the God's challenge of desiring to appreciate one another's cultural differences. According to Graham Ward, one learns through the participatory experience of common worship that "The love of the neighbor is correlative to the love of oneself. The desire for the neighbor's good is correlative to the desire for the

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[26] John Milbank. *Theology and Social Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1995): 423.

personal good. And God is the true correlative of both desire and the good . . . Becoming one flesh is the mark of participation itself."[27] By seeing what binds them together, members of the Christian educational community are also able to desire to appreciate the sense of differentiation that is present in each one of them. Common worship does not mitigate these differences. By contrast, it reconfigures them in the light shed by the *image Dei* and the *corpus Christi*. The participatory experience of common worship in the context of Christian education makes the reconstituted self aware of its own unique cultural sense of identity. However, such an experience also inspires the reconstituted self to desire to appreciate the sense of cultural difference inherent in individuals to whom it finds itself inextricably connected.

Christian education's experience of common worship as multicultural theory/praxis reconstitutes the modern self in favor of one that apprehends reality in light of a desire to appreciate the sense of difference it shares with others. As a result, the experience of common worship contextualizes the manner in which Christian educators move across the discipline. John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock contended, "Since knowledge consists in desire, we must affirm that the aporia of learning is resolved all the time in the promise of everyday human practices. We are usually unaware of this recollection, and yet we have a certain inchoate awareness of it."[28] Common worship stands at the center of the experience of Christian education as the embodiment of these practices. Knowledge is no longer a reality apprehended and implemented in an individual capacity by the limited desires of the modern self. By contrast, the import of knowledge is broadened and deepened by the reconstituted self's desire to appreciate various manifestations of cultural difference. By reaching across the disciplines, the reconstituted self desires to encounter a reality where it finds itself by virtue of its ability to connect with the cultural sense of difference that it finds in others. In the reconstituted self, the borders that were once perceived to separate the modern self as subject and knowledge as its object are made permeable. By ordering the previously veiled desires of the modern self, common worship makes it possible for the reconstituted self to find itself as the embodiment of truth.

Charity as Justice

As the fulfilment of the teaching mission of the Church, the formative nature of Christian education's relationship with the experience of

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[27] Graham Ward. *Cities of God*, 175.
[28] John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock. *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 111.

common worship as multicultural theory/praxis comes to fruition in the sense of justice embodied by the reconstituted self. Validation for the existence of Christian education is manifested in the momentum it generates within the Church and within society. Past and present forms of injustice enacted in the name of culture challenge the Church to act. Catherine Pickstock claimed that the Church "bespeaks the sign which is also a person, and a people, a body which is dispersed through time as gift, peace, and the possibility of the future."[29] Person, people, and body come together in time and find their existence in the Church as the *corpus Christi*. However, the Church is not a passive entity. By contrast, its presence in time is one pregnant with the possibility of the transformation established by charity as justice.

The desire for an appreciation of multicultural difference fosters within the reconstituted self a yearning to employ the lessons of knowledge in an effort to establish a sense of justice as charity. Thomas Aquinas claimed, "Charity loves a goodness that our senses cannot perceive: God's goodness, which only our minds can know."[30] Framed by the experience of participation, knowledge is employed in an attempt to establish a reality where multicultural confluence can emerge. Through a desire for appreciation, the I is given to the we and the we is given to the I. D. Stephen Long argued that participation in common worship leads one to employ goods such as knowledge "in a life of charity ordered toward God and toward one's neighbor . . . Participation in the life of God is at the same moment a concrete, material participation in the life of one's neighbor."[31] As a result, multicultural appreciation is not simply an aesthetic call to embrace difference. The very nature of the act of participation also calls for sacrificial efforts to be made on behalf of difference. However, the Church's mission in this context is only found to be complete when the desire to appreciate difference leads to charity as a self-sacrificial act of justice.

Conclusion

Christian education is the institutional manifestation of the Church's effort to fulfil the teaching component of its mission. Within this context, the participatory experience of common worship serves as multicultural theory/praxis by fostering a sense of justice as charity that is premised upon a desire to appreciate genuine forms of cultural difference. Initially created in the *imago Dei*, the modern self is reconstituted through the redemptive experience it encounters in the

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[29] Catherine Pickstock. *After Writing* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998): 267.
[30] Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Timothy McDermott (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1991): 351.
[31] D. Stephen Long. *Divine Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 235.

corpus Christi. In common worship, these narratives forge a discursive reality that creates a sense of inquiry that reaches across the disciplines. Access to knowledge in this capacity allows the reconstituted self to work to advance the mission of the Church by establishing an aesthetic appreciation for cultural difference. However, charity as justice takes appreciation beyond the realm of the aesthetic by simultaneously fostering an inextricable relationship on behalf of the reconstituted self with God and with anyone facing the cruel wager of oppression.

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