

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Problem of Christianity* by Josiah Royce

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## BOOK REVIEWS

THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIANITY. JOSIAH ROYCE. 2 vols. The Macmillan Company. 1913.

Vol. I: The Christian Doctrine of Life; pp. xlvi, 426.

Vol. II: The Real World and the Christian Ideas; pp. vi, 442.

Lectures on the Hibbert Foundation, read at Manchester College, Oxford, January to March, 1913. The first series was previously delivered before the Lowell Institute, Boston.

The encounter of the powerful current of Royce's thought with the Christian tradition is an event of the first importance. It was inevitable, in the steady growth of views first announced in *The Philosophy of Loyalty* in 1908, that Royce should come to terms with Christianity simply as the most conspicuous germane fact in contemporary life. It was characteristic of him that he should meet this fact honorably and objectively, "not as the one true faith to be taught, and not as an outworn tradition to be treated with enlightened indifference, but as a central, as an intensely interesting, life-problem of humanity." It could have been foreseen that Christian thought would receive at his hands a radical sifting and restatement—a restatement for which we were partly prepared by the address, "What is vital in Christianity?" printed in this journal in October, 1909. But there is here a freshness of treatment, a vigor and clarity, an accurate sympathy, and a breadth of interpretative power, which has outrun anticipation. Whether or not we agree that Christianity is best conceived as "the religion of loyalty," of loyalty to a "beloved community" which is the invisible Church, Christianity must henceforth mean something greater to all interpreters; and what is more, it must mean something nearer, more vital, and more acceptable to the modern man, "for the strengthening of whose heart" this book, in large measure, was written.

The appeal of the work to the modern mind will be due in part to the angle from which Royce approaches his subject; namely, from experience rather than from metaphysics, and from universal human experience rather than from the peculiar experiences of

individuals here and there. Three ideas he distinguishes as essential in Christianity: that of sin, both original and deliberate, from which the individual is powerless to free himself, and whose penalty is endless; that of atonement for sin; and that of the divine community, through which the atonement comes, and in which man must win his salvation. Each of these ideas, Royce insists, is a product of human nature in its moral capacity, quite apart from Christian or other theology. "If there were no Christianity and no Christians in the world, the idea of atonement would have to be invented before the higher levels of our moral existence could be fairly understood. . . . The problem of atonement daily arises, . . . is daily faced, . . . and in principle and in ideal, daily solved." And as for salvation in the community, "these considerations are based upon human nature. They have to do with interests which all reasonable men, whether Christian or non-Christian, more or less clearly recognize, in proportion as men advance to the higher stages of the art of life." This method has the immense advantage of giving verifiable substance and actuality to these religious conceptions, which the contemporary mind in its joy of recovery from an overstrained inwardness is prone to regard as alien and outworn. On the other hand, the method is apt to carry with it a foregone conclusion which is critical for the problem in hand; for the only content of Christianity that could be reached through such a general appeal to human nature is a content which has no necessary connection with Christianity, and our interpreted Christianity is in some likelihood of becoming a purely "natural" or philosophical religion. The historically unique elements of the religion, if any such are essential, are likely to be excluded by the conditions of the inquiry. I shall recur to this matter later.

As to the actual origin of these ideas in our own tradition, Royce is not inclined to attribute any of them to Jesus. "All three appear to be due to interpretations of the mind of the Master which came into existence only after the earthly period of teaching had ceased." The reflective teaching about Christ, as the spirit of the Church, seems to Royce more definitively Christian than the teachings of the man Jesus; and while it is clearly the Pauline formulation which chiefly impresses him, the true founder of Christianity, in his view, is no one person, but the early Christian community itself. Only through the transformation of the object of devotion in this community from the particular person to the living spirit of the community did the motive of religion find its true centre; which is not in the "love" of the synoptic gospels, undeveloped as this is

in its social bearings, but in the "charity" of the epistles—a motive founded in the conception of the community, wherein Christianity becomes the religion of loyalty.

Especially illuminating, in the first volume, are the treatments of moral evil and its penalties. It is not the "sick soul" but the clearly self-judging soul that finds sin and damnation to be its portion on the natural level of moral events. Original guilt is no invention of an artificial theology; it is an expression of the truth that the individual, endowed with self-consciousness by the human community with its laws and standards, is in this process necessarily also endowed with a self-will estranged from the community which has called it forth. Individualism is a by-product of communality, on the human level; so that our "very consciences are tainted by the original sin of social contentiousness." Powerless to deliver himself from the body of this death, salvation must come to the natural man through union with a non-legal community on another level, an essentially lovable community, divine in its spirit; loyalty to such a community, if it can be found, is the "only cure for the natural warfare of the collective and the individual will." But there is a deeper stage of guilt. It is the sin of the man who has known the meaning of adoption, who has received the grace and assumed the obligation of loyalty, and who has become traitor to the cause which was his. This is the sin against the Holy Ghost; unpardonable; not in the sense that an alien Deity has set an arbitrary limit here to his indulgence, but in the sense that the traitorous person cannot forgive himself, and that whatever his further attitude, his deed remains irrevocable, he remains forever one who has been a traitor. The view that such treason is possible and actual is the free, the non-Platonic element in the moral vista of Christianity. It is precisely the man who knows the good who is able to play the traitor; and on this tragic possibility depends the entire worth of our world, as a world of continuous freedom in the re-affirmation of our loyalty. And it is, furthermore, the opportunity for an atoning act, which must come from the spirit of the wronged community itself, an act which apart from the particular deed of treason would not be possible, but which, when it comes, makes the world better than without this treason it could have been.

Atonement, in this view, must be a repeated or continuous process, meeting sin as sin arises. The idea of a single atoning deed which at one stroke anticipates all possible future treasons, can mean no more to this philosophy than a type or symbol. Atonement is,

for Royce, a temporal process; but it is not, in the strict sense, historical.

Salvation then depends upon the continuous work of the divine community; and the practical issues of religion turn upon the metaphysical issues, Is there such a divine community? and Where shall it be found? This inquiry is the burden of the second series of lectures; and the argument here is of extreme logical interest, both intrinsically and as a development of Royce's own metaphysical position. With characteristic skill, he singles out an aspect of cognition, which proves in the end to involve certain decisive judgments as to the nature of reality.

This aspect of cognition is interpretation; and Royce, following out suggestions made by Charles Peirce, wishes to set interpretation beside perception and conception, or rather above them, as a third fundamental process of knowledge. Empiricism has sought to know reality primarily by perception, rationalism by conception; Bergson, basing himself upon a Kantian dream, attempts to define a third species of knowledge which he calls intuition, but this Royce regards as merely a species of perception. Interpretation stands in sharp contrast to these operations. Both perception and conception are solitary, implying a simply dyadic relation between the thinker and his object; interpretation is a social cognition, triadic in structure, as when A interprets B to C. The objects of perception are things; the objects of conception are abstractions, universals; the objects of interpretation are minds, or expressions of mind, signs which the mind offers for the reading of an interpreter. And minds can be known only by interpretation; they cannot be perceived, nor can they be known by conception, for they are not abstractions. Perception and conception terminate upon their objects and give rise to no further processes; but an interpretation is itself a mental expression, and so offers material for further interpretation, defining a never-ending task. Thus the life of an individual is a continual reinterpretation of his own past, a perpetual inner conversation in which the present self interprets the past self to the future self.

The self is thus an object of interpretation, no mere datum of perception; and time itself has no other existence than as the object of this interpretative process. Whether within the mind or between minds, the motive of interpretation is to bring about a unity among differing elements, accomplishing mutual understanding without abolishing their distinctions. It creates a social structure which is as different from the indiscriminate merging or Bergsonian "in-

terpenetration" of elements on the one hand as it is from pluralistic independence on the other. It creates, in brief, a community, in which the problem of the one and the many is solved.

Now the real universe is such a community of interpretation—this is Royce's argument. For by "reality" I mean simply the true interpretation of the conflicts and antitheses which experience presents, an interpretation not in my possession, but which I must believe to exist as I believe in reality at all. "Unless both the interpreter and the community are real, there is no real world."

This universal community, a necessary object of my loyal interpretation of life, though not at all of my perception, whether now or at any future time, is the divine community; it is the City whose maker and builder is God. As the ultimate object of devotion and hope on the part of all loyal souls, this community is the invisible Church. The world is the perpetual process of its spirit; and the salvation of the world is the progressive victory over evil through the reconciling and atoning deeds which this spirit makes possible. This is also the supreme object of the Christian faith: I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints.

Of this conception of Christianity as a whole, it is inadequate to say that it is true; one must say that like every great interpretation it enlarges that which it interprets; and if I add that it is not the whole of essential Christianity, I am not forgetting that it must be received primarily as an enhancement of what Christianity may mean to us. I shall not dwell upon the tempting metaphysical discussions, though I must question in passing whether interpretation is a primary cognitive process. Interpretation is concerned with predicates, with the "what" of things; it has no original power over existential propositions. Further, as every interpretation, including a theoretical first one, presumes the existence of the minds addressed by the interpreter, the belief in the existence of minds beyond my present self cannot be a *product* of interpretation. The knowledge of other mind which, as Royce truly shows, cannot be completed without an infinite process of interpretation, must be present in some simpler and more immediate fashion before the interpretative process can begin; the goal in some diminished form must be present from the beginning. I mention this because it is entirely characteristic of Royce's thought; the infinite deferring of the goal is to him incompatible with its realization at any point in time. For this reason the essential can never become the historical, atonement can never be an accomplished fact, and the true Church can

never be found as an existent institution. Historical Christianity, for Royce, is the bearer of a true doctrine; it is not the continuator of any final historic deed. The memories of the Church, as an actual human community, go back to definite points of time, and constitute the Church what Royce calls a "community of memory"; these memories animate the particular historic statements of the creed as well as the commemorative acts of the Lord's Supper. But these particular elements disappear from the creed of the modern man who accepts our author's view; nor would he find in that creed a reason for identifying himself with the hopes and labors of any visible Church.

Neither the atoning deed nor the divine community is brought to earth by this doctrine in historically identifiable form, valid for all men as a common object. Christianity is left in the region of the universal; and thereby the foundation for a truly universal community, an historic unity of all particular spirits and their loyal endeavors, is not laid. If this is true, it may be because that one of all the characteristic ideas of Christianity which to many thinkers is most central has retreated into the background and at last eluded our author's grasp—the doctrine of the Incarnation.

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FOUNDATIONS: A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN TERMS OF MODERN THOUGHT. By SEVEN OXFORD MEN. The Macmillan Co. 1913. Pp. xi, 538. \$3.50.

It is sometimes supposed that the attempt to interpret the religion of a former day in terms of current thought is a modern endeavor. Yet this supposedly Broad Church aim produced one of the earliest documents of Christianity—the Epistle to the Hebrews. For that Epistle takes the doctrines and ritual of Judaism, and aims to show in them a deeper meaning than had been perceived. It declares they were originally figures for the time then present, and points out their "fulfilment" in Christ. In every age indeed, standing a step above the prosaic souls who make no distinction between the form of their belief and its spirit, are those who insist that faith must continually dress itself anew in order to be recognizable.

The last half-century has witnessed three such notable attempts. In 1860 *Essays and Reviews* created a storm of opposition through its affirmation that religious truth needed restatement. To many this seemed equivalent to the overthrow of Christianity. But