

## SEMINAR ON NORTH AMERICAN THEOLOGY

### A. RAHNER AND ROYCE: HOW IDENTIFY A MOST ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN CREED

Presenter: Frank M. Oppenheim, S.J., Xavier University

The seminar in North American Theology studies the relationship between Catholic theology and the mainstream of North American culture by reading and discussing classic works in North American theology and philosophy of religion. This year we studied the first volume of Josiah Royce's *The Problem of Christianity* as an example of a systematic attempt to articulate the message of Christianity while drawing systematically on the North American philosophical tradition.

Frank Oppenheim, S.J., led our first discussion. He compared and contrasted Royce's identification of the central ideal of Christianity with Karl Rahner's. Royce identified three fundamental Christian ideas: the lost individual in need of salvation, the community that provides a saving realm of grace through the guidance of the Spirit, and the atoning love that redeems Christians' betrayal of the gospel. In *Foundations of Christian Faith* Rahner also spoke of three fundamental Christian ideas: one theological, another anthropological, and a third oriented toward the future. It was, however, suggested in the course of the discussion that Rahner's earlier theology of mystery provides a clearer identification of basic Christian ideas. In his theology of mystery Rahner spoke of three Christian mysteries: the trinity, the incarnation, and the church empowered by the Spirit.

One can compare and contrast Royce and Rahner in their method, in their metaphysics, and in their creedal context. Royce, schooled in the logic of C. S. Peirce used a method of musement, of fallibilism, and of pragmatic logic. Rahner invoked transcendental method. Royce developed a fallible metaphysics of community and discovered in the community our primary locus of access to God. Rahner developed a metaphysical anthropology that claimed universality and necessity. Rahner, moreover, discovered in the a priori structure of individual consciousness a privileged locus of access to God. Protestant and unchurched, Royce failed to discuss in any extensive way either christology or trinitarian theology and focused instead on the action of the Spirit in the Christian community. Rahner's account of the basic Christian ideas exhibits, then, more adequacy than Royce's; Royce, however, provides a better methodological and philosophical approach to Christianity and develops Rahner's third Christian idea—the church in the power of the Spirit—in creative ways.

In its first session the seminar discussed a broad range of ideas. (1) Does Royce's account of the moral burden of the individual reflect a traditional Ref-

ormation reading of the relationship of law and gospel or does it instead anticipate a contemporary, social conception of original sin? Royce's distinction between the moral burden of the individual and the betrayal of the gospel by believing Christians reproduces in a somewhat secular idiom the theological distinction between original and personal sin. (2) The superiority of Royce's account of the origin of the self to Rahner's: Rahner discovers the self in transcendental freedom before the divine mystery; Royce, in commitment to a cause in community. While Royce could have developed more his account of the interpersonal dimensions of experience, the seminar seemed to agree that he had provided a better account of the origin of the self than Rahner had. (3) Did Royce defend an essentialist position in his account of the fundamental Christian ideas? One does discover in Royce the idea that consciousness evolves and that Christianity represents the apex of historical religious consciousness as we know it. In espousing the logic of Peirce, however, Royce certainly did not reify essences as metaphysical principles of being. (4) Since Royce found evidence of the presence of the Spirit in all religions, would he allow a Christian to convert to another world religion? Royce clearly regarded the Christian religion as superior to Buddhism in some respects. The seminar seemed to feel, however, that the answer to this question would depend on the quality of faith of this or that convert. (5) What constitutes authentic loyalty in Royce? We discovered three criteria in his thought: (a) commitment to a universal community; (b) the refusal to prey on other persons; and (c) respect for the loyalties of other persons. The seminar seemed to agree that, while Royce's thought advances in *The Problem of Christianity*, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* contains at least in germ the ideas developed in his later works. (6) What role does Jesus play in *The Problem*? While Royce does not develop a systematic christology, still, one does discover the importance of the figure of Jesus in his account of Christianity.

## B. THE VICE OF OBEDIENCE, THE VIRTUE OF LOYALTY

Presenter: Elizabeth A. Linehan, R.S.M., St. Joseph's University

Elizabeth A. Linehan, R.S.M., focused the second discussion on Royce's understanding of loyalty. She argued that Royce's doctrine of loyalty offers a superior frame of reference for understanding the Christian's relationship to church authority than does the more traditional notion of obedience. For Royce, loyalty binds the Christian community together. Royce defined loyalty as "the willing and thoroughgoing devotion to a cause, when the cause is something that unites many selves in one, and which is therefore the interest of a community."

Linehan identified several essential points in the notion of loyalty: (1) The parallel of the self and the community: commitment to serve a cause in whose light one interprets both the past and the future creates both the self and the community. (2) Plurality of causes: One can commit oneself to many different causes; but causes limited in their scope (e.g., the success of the San Francisco Giants, the Confederate States of America, etc.) require no special grace and can easily degenerate into idols. (3) The universal scope of Christian loyalty: Christian loyalty takes us beyond such limited causes and demands a loyalty to loyalty that respects the causes

of other persons. Loyalty to loyalty creates a community universal in its scope and concern. It promotes the fullest self-development both by demanding that one cultivate one's personal gifts fully in the service of the universal good and by healing lives otherwise fragmented and filled with regrets. The loyal person respects every other person as a person and respects every legitimate cause out of loyalty to loyalty. Loyalty to the Christian ideal of community relativizes all human institutions which find legitimacy only to the extent that they promote universal loyalty. By demanding that one not make idols of any institution, whether secular or ecclesial, loyalty allows God to remain God and grace to flow freely.

Linehan argued that while obedience need not take vicious form, it can all too easily when one fails to contextualize obedience within a Roycean doctrine of loyalty. Bureaucracies can organize both evil and good. When obedience becomes blind through habit, it can betray one into supporting institutionalized sin. When, however, one sees Christian obedience as obedience to the cause of the kingdom rather than to this or that institutional church, the ideal which the kingdom upholds stands in judgment on the legitimacy of church institutions and the authority they wield. Needless to say, one cannot assume the purity of one's own loyalties or those of anyone else's. Royce's doctrine of loyalty takes this into account and demands a discernment of loyalties. In the last analysis, then, obedience makes sense, as Royce suggests, in a dialogic rather than hierarchical context and in an historical context where loyalty to a tradition relativizes any concrete historical attempt to incarnate the Christian ideal. Loyalty demands that commitment to persons take precedence over commitment to specific institutions; and the primacy of the cause over the institution keeps those in authority accountable.

The seminar discussed a variety of issues surrounding Royce's notion of loyalty: (1) Loyalty to loyalty: This notion makes commitment to the kingdom, to other persons, and to community the touchstone of all the virtues. Moreover, commitment to the cause of the kingdom demands more than an external relationship to authority. (2) Loyalty and self-interest: The seminar agreed that submission to peer pressure within community offers no guarantee of the morality of one's acts. For Royce only a cause that everyone can serve has moral justification. The universal scope of Christian loyalty also provides a context for the Christian assimilation of legitimate insights from other religions. (3) Loyalty and individualism: The seminar agreed that Royce offers a sounder understanding of individuality than William James: namely, self-cultivation as a gift to others. (4) The role of lost causes: The loss of specific cause to which one devoted one's life can cause one to reflect creatively on its adequacy and universality. (5) The ethics of leadership: The seminar agreed that loyalty to a universal cause did not prevent leaders on occasion from appealing to motives of legitimate self-interest.

DONALD L. GELPI, S.J.  
*Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley*