Echoes of Scriptures in Josiah Royce’s *The Problem of Christianity*

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Echo:  
(1a) The repetition of a sound caused by reflection of sound waves
(1b) The sound due to such reflection
(2a) A repetition or imitation of another
(2b) Repercussion, Result
(2c) Trace, vestige
(3d) Response

The question this study will address is how Josiah Royce uses scripture in his philosophy. It is not whether Royce accurately repeats or seriously distorts scripture in his philosophical reasoning. What something *is* cannot be precisely ascertained by describing what it is not; sometimes, what something *is not* focuses attention on what is most important about what it is.

A more comprehensive study of how and why Royce used scripture would provide deeper insight into the use of scripture by philosophers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This task, however, is beyond the scope of this essay. This essay will examine Royce’s uses of scripture in his last great work: *The Problem of Christianity* (PC). Moreover, this essay will not analyze the secondary literature on Royce’s use of the Pauline writings. The absence of any real appreciation of Royce’s use of Paul illustrates a deep difficulty in the understanding of Royce’s philosophy of religion. Traditionally Royce appears to be too scriptural to be philosophical and too philosophical to be Christian. Through a description of Royce’s dilemma this essay will provide reasons for a reevaluation of the relation of scripture to philosophy and the nature of a Christian philosophy of religion. One additional boundary needs to be named. This essay will not be an introduction to Royce’s philosophy. Other philosophers have already, admirably, accomplished this task.

But if this essay is not any of the above, what is it? This essay is a part of a larger project of a close reading of Royce designed to answer three questions: (I) how does Royce use scripture in his middle and later works, and does his use of scripture in PC differ from the way he used scripture before his appropriation of Peirce’s theory of interpretation? (II) How does his use of scripture in PC

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contribute to his project of writing a modern philosophy of religion? (III) What are the implications of Royce’s use of scripture in PC for future work in the philosophy of religion?6

Answering these questions in regards to PC parts I and II will require, at least, two separate essays, so the first of these essays is devoted to PC I, (the way he used scripture before his appropriation of Peirce). These questions and their answers are complexly interrelated. However, in order to simplify and clarify the mutual implications of these questions and their answers, bullet points will be provided to highlight the ground covered and the paths still to be taken.

Standard introductions to the philosophy of Josiah Royce will note that, late in his career, Royce profoundly appropriated the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce.7 Royce writes:

…I must summarize in my own way some still neglected opinions which were first set forth, in outline, more than forty years ago by our American logician, Mr. Charles Peirce, in papers…which, in my mind, remain of very high value, as guides of inquiry in Logic and the Theory of Knowledge…These ideas of Charles Peirce about interpretation to which I shall here refer, never as far as I know, attracted William James’ personal attention at any time. I may add that, until recently, I myself never appreciated their significance. In acknowledging here my present indebtedness…I should have never have viewed (matters) without his direct or indirect aid. 8

This quotation raises two questions in its wake: in what ways does Royce appropriate Peirce, and how does this appropriation shape Royce’s use of scripture?

In PC I and II, Royce clearly appropriates the categories and interpretation theory of Peirce. Though Royce more directly addresses Peirce’s categories of “Firstness”, “Secondness”, and “Thirdness”, 9 as well as Peirce’s triadic theory of interpretation in PC II, it is less noted how Peirce’s logic shapes the argument of PC I.10 In this volume, Peirce’s categories of Firstness (origin, newness), Secondness (resistance), and Thirdness (regularity) constitute his justification for using scripture as the origin (a First) of the church (also a First) which both had histories in varied reception through resistances (Seconds) and in interpretations (regularities, Thirds). This appropriation of Peirce by Royce is fundamentally grounded in Royce’s appropriation of James’ attention to experience as the

6 If the question asked by those who analyze the way philosophers use scripture is whether they truly repeat or whether they only echo traces of scripture, distorted in various ways, then this dichotomy makes any useful investigation impossible. If an investigation is directed to how philosophers interpret scripture, some progress is possible. The simple dichotomy between use and misuse constituted much of the theological debate in nineteenth century America. Denominations and their representatives were often judged as orthodox or unorthodox according to their standard or nonstandard uses of scripture. In this context and in ours, Royce’s work is important because he believed that scripture could be interpreted. It need not be echoed perfectly to be true to it’s context.
8 PC II, 114-117.
9 Peirce, “Phenomenology,” 144-226.
10 William W. Elkins, “There is Something (Someone) in Between” (paper presented at the Grass Valley Conference on the work of Josiah Royce, Grass Valley, California, August 2013). Available at www.betterangels.us.
foundation of James’ appropriation of James’ attention to experience as the foundation of a philosophy of religion.\textsuperscript{11}

Following James, Royce connects the meaning and truth of religious concepts to experience, but, following Peirce’s categories and triadic logic of interpretation, Royce makes human experience essentially social rather than individual. It is this double pattern of appropriation that makes sense of Royce’s acknowledgment of Peirce and his appreciative yet critical acknowledgment of James:

I of course owe a great deal to the inspiration that I long ago obtained from William James’s “Varieties of Religious Experience”... Yet in one very important respect the religious experience upon which, in this book, I most depend, differs very profoundly from those “varieties” James described. He deliberately confined himself to the religious experience of individuals. My main topic is a form of social religious experience, namely, that form which, in ideal, the Apostle Paul viewed as the experience of the Church. This social form of experience is that upon which loyalty depends.

This [limitation to individual experience], to my mind, was a profound and a momentous error in the whole religious philosophy of our greatest American master in the study of the psychology of religious experience. All experience must be at least individual experience; but unless it is also social experience, and unless the whole religious community which is in question unites to share it, this experience is but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.\textsuperscript{12} This truth is what Paul saw. This is the rock upon which the true and ideal church is built.\textsuperscript{13} This is the essence of Christianity.\textsuperscript{14}

For Royce, one aspect of modern experience is the experience of the difficulty of being both modern and Christian at the same time, and this dissonance results from the conflict between science and religion. This conflict inclines those who experience it to focus upon evidence of the senses rather than the requirements of historical traditions.

Unlike James, who focused on how different individuals experienced and experimented with this dissonance, Royce offers a reinterpretation of Christianity that is designed to correlate the essence of Christian doctrine with social experience. This results in Royce correlating the religious concepts of (A) the church, (B) sin, and (C) atonement and the Holy Spirit with universally shared social experiences. These are, respectively, (A\textsuperscript{*}) the experience of community, (B\textsuperscript{*}) the moral burden of the individual, and (C\textsuperscript{*}) the experience of loyalty and the spirit of interpretation.

\textit{Point I}

One way of reading PC I is that it is an extension of Peirce’s logic into the philosophy of religion in response to James’ \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}. For Royce, modern Christians can remain Christians in creed through validating in their social experiences how the church


\textsuperscript{12} It is important to note that Royce often uses scripture without providing an exegesis of its meaning. This practice presupposes a public that is both familiar with scripture and also acquainted with standard interpretations of particular passages. Here, “sounding brass and tinkling cymbal” and “if I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1) suggest the meaninglessness of individual experience that is not socially shared. But for those who are familiar with this passage, it also suggests the fundamental ideal of social experience: without love, all that we say or do it is like sounding brass and tinkling cymbal: meaningless.

\textsuperscript{13} Matthew 16:18

\textsuperscript{14} PC I, xiv-xvi; italics added.
(community) resolves (redeems) human sin (the moral burden of the individual) through acts of loyalty (acts of atonement) guided by the spirit of interpretation (the Holy Spirit).

**Point II**

Peirce’s categories and triadic theory of interpretation, in combination with Royce’s social transformation of James’ attention upon individual religious experience leads Royce to use scripture as a First in a triadic interpretation.

**Point III**

Royce interprets Christianity and scripture triadically in a correlation of social experience and the social experience of Christian doctrine.

If a correlation of Peirce and James is the background and backbone of Royce’s project in PC, how, practically, does it work? Interpretations of Peirce can be complex, but, in Royce’s appropriation of Peirce, Firsts are unifying possibilities that, when actualized, are experienced as fresh and unifying. When actualized, however, Firsts encounter resistances (Seconds) to the full realization of their meanings. The interaction of Firsts (possibilities) and Seconds (resistances) result in regularities (Thirds), which form the patterns of human habit and the natural world. Thus, whimsically borrowing a phrase from Julius Caesar’s Punic Wars, the whole world (like Gaul) can be divided into three parts: Firsts, Seconds, and Thirds.

But as interesting as the categories are as a logical schema, it is most important to note that Royce also appropriates them in his use of Peirce’s theory of interpretation. For Royce, following Peirce, interpretation is a comparison. A French speaker, for example, communicates to a speaker of Farsi by being translated by a third party, an interpreter. The interpreter takes account of what is said by the speaker of French, the nuances of both French and Farsi, and the differences and difficulties in the circumstances between the speakers. He then translates French to Farsi and Farsi to French. This involves a comparison between a First (the possibilities of what is being said by the French speaker) and Seconds (the resistances of the present circumstances) in terms of Thirds (the regularities of communication that might be established between the two speakers). B’s translation of A’s message in French for C, who speaks Farsi, involves a triadic relation of Firsts, Seconds and Thirds. But what does this example have to do with Royce’s interpretation of scripture?

Though biographical facts do not justify a philosophical interpretation, they can provide insight into the general shape of a particular philosophy. In this regard, it is important to note that Royce was once a member of an American denomination, the Disciples of Christ. The Disciples believed that the writings of the New Testament, as compared to the writings of Paul, were already distorted by human traditions. So, given the rationale of Reformation, the Disciples preferred the earlier Pauline texts to the Gospels. This might provide an argument that Royce understood Paul as

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16 Royce does not note this directly. In PC II, Royce is more interested in explicating Peirce’s triadic logic of interpretation as patterns of comparison. However, in PC I, Royce appropriates Peirce’s categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness in his explication of the essence of Christianity. For Royce, the scripture of the church is a First, the moral burden of the individual is a Second, and the atonement through loyalty is a Third. This interpretation of Royce’s appropriation of Peirce’s categories has been argued in my paper “There is Something (Someone) in Between.”
17 PC II, 169ff.
18 PC II, 140ff.
19 Randall Auxier, interpretative comment at the Conference on the Work of Frank Oppenheim, Cincinnati, Ohio, 2014.
a template for interpreting the New Testament. Aspects of this will be discussed below, but it is clear that Royce had more than this ecclesial history behind his use of the Pauline writings. For Royce, Peirce’s categories justify treating Paul’s writings as Firsts, revelations of possibility, original and new, the foundation of the new church. Peirce’s interpretation theory justified Royce’s use of scripture to form and maintain a community of scriptural interpreters.

**Point IV**

For Royce, scripture is a First in a triadic pattern of interpretation in which the meaning of scripture is the result of interpretations by one person to another, and then to another.

**Point V**

This process is essentially social and, as many commentators have noted, theoretically infinite. Simplifying, this relation could be diagramed in the following way: A (scripture) is interpreted by B for C (A by B for C).

But if this is the logic of Royce’s appropriation of James’s *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Peirce’s categories in their relation to Peirce’s triadic theology of interpretation, how does it shape Royce’s use of scripture?

The first evidence is in Royce’s treatment of the sayings of Jesus, particularly the parables. Following in the tradition of Adolf Julicher, where each parable has one ethical or spiritual meaning; and Adolf von Harnack where the essence of Christianity is (mostly) simplified to its ethical content; and Ernst Troeltsch where one religious idea forms the essence of various complex historical developments Royce held that every parable was about the social nature of love in the kingdom of God. In contemporary biblical hermeneutics, however, where parables have multivalent meanings or where the multivalent meanings of the parables are distorted by complex ideologies, does Royce’s monologic focus on love in the kingdom of God appear to be a serious mistake?

Any summary judgment on Royce’s approach is seriously inadequate without taking into account the following arguments.

First, in contrast to various historical or current denominational interpretations of Christianity, PC I offers none of its historical forms (Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant) as the Truth of Christianity, but affirms that there is an “essence” of Christianity. Following Harnack, the essence is the vital kernel of a varied and indifferent husk. Despite all the differences in how parables have been

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22 “[T]he modernist interpreter wishes to protect the integrity of the narrative (and the gospel) by insisting on the singularity of meaning. The modern antagonism to the multivalent reading of the parables began with Julicher in the late nineteenth century. He reduced each parable to a single moral or spiritual principle, whose truth was capable of the widest possible application. The only way to understand a parable is to discover the one thing it means to say (or do) (he tertium ‘third thing’ that connects the abstract theological idea with a vivid picture), and to disregard its peripheral or alleged allegorical elements.” (Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables: Interpretation; Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church*, [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014], 58).
25 Harnack, 12.
interpreted, their true meaning is, for Royce, the nature of love in the kingdom of God. Can something so essentialist be both reasonable and right? The arguments that address this question will be developed in the second essay of this two-part study. It is important to ask the question, however.

The second argument is an extension of what was noted above. Though Royce appropriates Peirce’s categories and James’ emphasis upon experience (for Royce it’s social experience) Royce appropriated Peirce and James as an idealist. This appropriation, in combination with his constitutive and continuing idealism, committed Royce to two positions. The first, following Peirce, is that interpretation is social, i.e. interpretation forms communities. The second is that each new interpretation, a First, is limited by being guided by and through a context formed by resistances (Seconds) which shape regularities (Thirds). However, for Royce, limited regularities are not permanent in content or form. Royce’s idealism, most fully expressed in *The World and the Individual*, posits that Thirds, (regularities) tend towards a progressive realization of their one true intrinsic meaning, despite their tendency to be fragmented in realizations.

**Point VII**

Royce, in essence, is a Peircean Idealist. But how, particularly in Royce’s use of scripture, does this triadic idealism work?

As noted above, Royce, guided by Peirce, used the writings of Paul to define the essence of Christianity in the social experience of the Pauline church. But beyond Royce’s use of Paul and the parables of Jesus, Royce’s most extensive and continuous use of scripture in PC I is his Pauline interpretation of the Gospel of John.\(^{26}\)

The exegesis that follows illustrates Royce’s uses of scripture, and begins to prepare the preliminaries for an appreciative and critical appropriation of Royce’s use of scripture for philosophical theology. As a note, the translation used by Royce is, as yet, unknown.

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What is most significant is the direct and vital grasp of the new problem, as it appears in the Fourth Gospel. The Spirit of the infant church is here expressed with such unity and such pathos that all the complications of the new ideas vanish; and one only sees the symbol of the perfectly literal a perfectly human triumph of the human spirit—a triumph which can appear only in this form of the unifying of the level of individuality with the level of perfect loyalty.\(^{27}\)

**Commentary:**

*It is important to note Royce’s language. Philosophically the problem of relation between individual and the community is not new. However, the experience of this problem by the infant church (a First) is commonly shared (unified) and powerfully expressed with pathos. Moreover, when expressed by John, his understanding of this experience and its solution is “direct” and “vital”. John’s gospel is, without complications and qualifications, “life giving”. Each verse is more than words: it is a symbol, “Word of God made flesh”. So there is a difference between the Word of God and gospel. The gospel is a simple proclamation*

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\(^{26}\) A careful biblical scholar would like to know the translation that Royce used or whether he directly translated from Hebrew or Greek into English. This information, which would be greatly appreciated if found or communicated, is, as of yet, unavailable.

\(^{27}\) PC I, 210.
without complications and qualifications. It is “life giving” as the Spirit of community. Here the word “symbol” must be noted. For Royce, scripture is symbolic, a story or myth or picture that suggests interpretations. Scripture is often unclear and mysterious and cannot be taken literally. For Royce, scriptural symbols require interpretation (translation) into simpler statements that more directly communicate its content. John’s gospel translates Paul more directly; therefore, he will translate both Paul and John into simpler statements about the essence of Christianity (community, moral burden, the act of loyalty).

In the tale here presented, the dust of our natural divisions is stirred into new life (Genesis 2:7). From the tomb of individual banishment (Mark 15:46 and parallels) into which the divine has freely descended, from the wreck to which every human individual is justly doomed, the Word made flesh arises (John 1:14).

Commentary:
Royce is not only a philosopher; he is a reader and interpreter of the Bible. In interpreting Royce, this is a fact that must be given more weight. Royce lives in a culture that is biblically informed, where biblical interpretation and interpreters were prized and where scripture could be used as symbolic shorthand without fear that it would be misunderstood or rejected. For example, after suggesting that scripture is symbolic and requires translation, Royce uses Genesis, the synoptic accounts of Jesus’ passion and the resurrection of Christ, and the Logos doctrine of the incarnation from the first chapter of the Gospel of John, all without interpretation (echoes). In addition, he echoes doctrinal language of the atonement. Why would he ignore his own interpretive practice?

Royce’s use of scriptural and doctrinal language could only be effective if the Old and New Testaments were familiar to his readers and if their meanings were also well known. In using scripture or scripturally based language (doctrine), Royce does not sense that he could be misunderstood. But why not be more direct and plain? His point is to use scripture or scripturally based language to translate diverse scriptures into a simple claim that the Word of God brings life to the dead. In a sense, Royce reverses the standard preaching practice of three doctrinal points and a poem to return the hearer to the mystery of the Word. Royce uses three poems (symbols) to make one point: the Word of God gives life. This raises the question of what or who is this Word of God?

But “who is this King of Glory? (Psalm 24:8)” He is in this portrayal the one who says: “I am the vine. Ye are the branches.” (John 15:14) The Spirit of community speaks. The Pauline metaphor appears in a new expression. But it is uttered not by the believer, but by the being that has solved the mystery of the union of self and community. He speaks to individuals who have not yet reached that union. He confronts them:

Commentary:
Royce’s answer to the question: “Who is this king of glory?” is not anything that the Psalmist could have imagined. The Psalmist’s answer: “The Lord strong and mighty; the Lord mighty in battle (Psalm 24:8) and “the Lord of Hosts” (Psalm 24:10) is for Royce a symbol for the Spirit of Community that saves Israel from destruction. But the “Lord of Hosts” is more than

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28 PC I, 210-11.
29 PC I, 211.
this. The “Lord” rules the earth and requires purity. This is not all. For Royce, as for John, these symbols are embedded in each other, intertextually. Their meaning is communal: John’s symbol of the vine and the branches translates into Paul’s metaphor of the body and its members. (I Corinthians 12:12). Each is a metaphor that Royce can translate into a simple and clear statement of the philosophy of the community: “I am the vine. Ye (you) are the branches,” is spoken not by a person but by the Spirit of community. The members are the branches, so the person of Christ and the relation between the vine and branches is something that can be expressed and experienced more directly as “the Spirit of community.” And if the Spirit of community is of, by, and for the disciples, what else does this Spirit express?

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world giveth give I unto you.” John 14:27. This is the voice of the saving community to the troubled soul of the lonely individual.30

Commentary:
The “Spirit of community” creates community by offering peace to those who are divided by conflict. For Royce, conflict is created when an individual becomes conscious of his or her social obligations and then asks a self-interested question: For Royce, conflict is created when an individual becomes conscious of his or her social obligations and then asks a self-interested question: “What’s in it for me?” This conflict is between the ideal to which the group is loyal and the specific ideals of individuals. This is, for Royce, a social psychological explanation of conflict, but it also follows the meaning of Romans 7 and I Corinthians 12, in which knowledge of the law (Romans 7) and connection to the body (I Corinthians 12) make it possible to break the law and deny any one part of the body its connection to the unifying body. But how does this promise of peace work to resolve conflict?

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful. Ye have heard how I said to you, I go away, and I come to you” (John 14:27). “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine: so neither can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).31

Commentary:
How are isolated individuals given peace? They are given peace when they are connected with and loyal to the “Spirit of community”. For Royce, communities are generated through the purposes that unite them in the past, present, and future. The metaphor of the vine and branches gives a vivid picture of the connection and a purpose that gives life. The vine produces branches; branches produce grapes, and the relations between good vines and branches produce good fruit and ultimately fine wine. In other words, when individuals are loyal to the community, good things happen. This is the truth of things. But it must be noted that what is true and good is a relation,32 a relation of interpretation in which the Spirit, through an act of loyalty, reconnects those individuals who have been isolated by the sin of

30 PC I, 211-12.
31 PC I, 212.
32 Oppenheim, Reverence for the Relations of Life. In his last great book, Oppenheim reconstructs the history of pragmatism and the relevance of Royce’s later philosophy of religion in terms of triadic relations and reverence that idealizes the promise of particular, life sustaining, relations.
self-will to a community gathered through its service to the ideal of the love that makes for a redemptive community, i.e., the Beloved Community.\(^{33}\)

“These things I have spoken to you in proverbs: The hour cometh, when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but shall tell you plainly of the Father (John 16:25) In the world you will have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.\(^{34}\)

**Commentary:**

As noted above, Royce believes that scripture is symbolic: the pictures and stories of scripture require simplified, philosophic interpretations. For Royce, this hermeneutic is supported by John’s gospel. For him the Gospel of John more clearly and directly explicates Pau’s metaphor of the member of the body of the church and simply and directly states the relation between the individual and the community. For Royce, the images and stories of scripture require translation into simplified, philosophic interpretations or wisdom teachings because the early church, through Paul and in the Gospels, received the teachings of Jesus in “proverbs” or parables.” The early church knew the Spirit of community, but only in part. But why? They are only hearing distorted echoes of truth. Royce, following John’s gospel, suggests that the reason the church receives teachings as “proverbs” is that the world is in conflict with the Spirit of truth. So, the truth must be hidden and struggled for until the world that opposes the Spirit is defeated. This is a paradigmatic example of the relation between possibility (a First), resistance (a Second), and regularities (Thirds) that forms the human context of life. It is also the foundation of one of Royce’s most characteristic statements of his absolute idealism.

In general, the risks of temporary disaster which great ideals run appear to be directly proportioned to the value of the ideals. The disasters may be destined to give place to victory; but great truths bear long sorrows. What humanity most needs, it most persistently misunderstands. The spirit of a great ideal may be immortal; its ultimate victory may be pre-determined by the very nature of things; but that fact does not save such an ideal from the fires of the purgatory of time.”\(^{35}\)

**Commentary:**

Philosophy can be written abstractly and coolly. It can also be written with passion. Each has its place, respectively, in tough minded or tenderhearted philosophers. It is, however, rare to find the cool abstract combined with passionate expressions. Royce is one who deeply desires to live a good and right life in an extremely difficult world, while simultaneously desiring to know the deepest metaphysical foundations of the ethical life.

The loyal alone know whose world this is and for whom. In the prayer with which this farewell closes, the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel prays: “Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.” (John 17:21-2).\(^{36}\)

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\(^{33}\) PC I, 107ff; 267ff.

\(^{34}\) PC I, 212.

\(^{35}\) PC I, 212.

\(^{36}\) PC I, 56.
Commentary:
There is a difference between what is prayed for and what is received. Here, however, Royce diminishes the difference. In this discourse, Royce does what Jesus did in his farewell address: he makes many one. Jesus gathered the disciples through the Spirit; Royce invites those who are loyal into the world constituted by loyalty. For Royce, this world is a community of interpretation that represents, through the Spirit of loyalty, the peace and love that makes humanity and the world one in God through Christ. But what is said is more than just a philosophical translation of the words of Jesus. Here, what is said is done. This is performative language.37 Jesus’ prayer for unity is enacted in the imagination of a world made one by loyalty. What is said in Genesis or John is made absolutely real by the Spirit; the Beloved Community is being called into existence. Here, the ideal shapes the real.

In the final analysis, it is clear that Royce has deeply appropriated both Peirce and James. For Royce, the social experience of the church, the way it embodies love in the Beloved) Community is constituted through a triadic interpretation of scripture. Acts of interpretation correct (redeem) the experience of isolated, self-interested, and self-willed interpreters. Through the formation of social relations that redeem the lost ideal of the kingdom of God, the history of the church—particularly when the Pauline communities recover their influence—becomes the ground for a progressive realization of the Spirit. But, as important as this might be as a historical description of what Royce thought, the critical question is the value of Royce’s triadic interpretation of scripture and his assumption that acts of interpretation correct (redeem) the experience of isolated individuals.

One can note the way Royce correlates doctrine and experience to correct the isolation and suffering of isolated individuals. Royce’s reliance on the social experience of the church, and of communities of interpretation, is certainly an advantage to his readers. Royce is both practical and philosophically abstract. It was noted above, however, that Royce’s interpretation of scripture is somewhat monological. For Royce, the meaning of scripture is incomplete and mysterious (deliberately so in the case of the New Testament parables). This incompleteness requires interpretations that extend and simplify their suggested meanings. For Royce, a simple essence is always better than a multivalent metaphor or parable.

In a postmodern or postcritical context, this approach appears to be hegemonic and a critical shortcoming. This judgment does not take account of the historical context of PC II and I. For Royce, the deepest problem for Christians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the dichotomy and conflict between solidly dogmatic churches and the growing emphases upon individual diversities of religious experience. Modern men and women, those who had been educated in the sciences, were disenchanted with the church because it did not speak to their needs; they were liberalizing the church to the extent that it no longer seemed Christian, or, alternatively, they were seeking some form of transcendence in non-Christian religions or individual religious experiences. For Royce, the modern problem was how to reform the church while remaining true to the revelations received by Paul and John and other writers of scripture. In other words, Royce seeks to answer the question, “...in what sense, if in any, can the modern man (sic) consistently be, in creed, a Christian?”38 Royce’s answer is to connect the modern church to the ancient church through the creed as experienced and to connect modern men and women to the church through interpreting atonement as loyalty. Using Peirce Royce offered the possibility that a Christian has to pass through the resistance

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38 PC I, 14.
of unyielding, creedally constituted institutions without being scattered by the infinite refractions of individualized religious experience.

Royce, caught between reaction and rejection and the threat (radicalizing James) of an undifferentiated diffusion of religious experiences, follows the traditions of the best scholarship of his time and proposes a third way. He chooses the semiotics of Peirce and a modification of the psychology of James to constitute a scripturally identified community of faith. His difficulty is that the best biblical, historical, and doctrinal scholarship of his time guides Royce’s interpretation towards simple, essentializing statements that were in their time received as wisdom teachings, but to the current community of interpreters lack the deeper resonances, the echoes of multivalent mystery.

As noted above, this essay is focused on volume I of PC. What might happen to this criticism of Royce in the context of an analysis and evaluation of his metaphysics as developed in volume II of PC? How does Royce read and use scripture when, on the basis of his interpretation of the Christian doctrine of life in PC I, he develops his metaphysics of Christianity in volume II of PC? For those interested in and committed to investigating the relation between scripture and philosophy, Royce can be seen as an American Schleiermacher. In combination with Hans Frei’s work, “Types of Christian Theology”39 and Frei’s argument for a church-based hermeneutic of scripture, Royce’s scriptural hermeneutic could be used to extend Frei’s critical yet finally affirming interpretation of Schleiermacher. This approach will be the focus of my forthcoming essay on PC II, The Real World and the Christian Ideas.