

A psychobipolar counselee of mine has a pneumatobipolar relationship with Jesus, whom he's long refused to convert to. In the depressive phase, he has a high christology: Jesus is the true & living way. In his manic phase, a low christology: as he put it today, "Jesus was a manic biological bastard who led his followers on history's most destructive path." This polar-compensatory ambivalence roughly parallels the current struggle, in culture & church, between **plurality** (the recognition of difference within & between groups) & **pluralism** (the dogmatic refusal to entertain the possibility that one group is the primary bearer of truth to all humanity). The justification for restricting "pluralism" to the meaning I've given is that the plurality/pluralism distinction is real & needs lexical representation to overcome the present confusion caused by using "pluralism" for both meanings.

1 "Plurality" is a descriptive word for a fact, "pluralism" is a prescriptive word for a doctrine, the doctrine taught in our public schools & preached in our liberal churches (which, ironically, is a factor making for the cultural invisibility of liberal churches, & their decline in numbers & influence). Of course we all want to say yes to Rodney King's question "Can't we all get along?" In the plurality/pluralism debate, that democratic desideratum is not in question.

2 When a new planetary word appears around a solar domain, it affects prior planetary words. The new word (to change the analogy) may be on a different stem: "plurality" (14th c.) included the meaning of "majority" (2 cs. later) till the latter word claimed our modern political meaning, leaving the former to mean less than the latter. Or the new word may be on the same stem: "plurality" (14th c.) was modified by the appearance (5 cs. later) of "pluralism," one of those 19th-c. philosophical terms created by adding to an old stem the Gk.-Lat. penultimate abstraction "-ism"--first in philosophy & then in science. (A fascinating current "ism" battle: Fundamentalists toned up their creation literalism by giving it the pseudoscientific moniker "creation-ism," which in 1987 the U.S. Sup. Ct. forbade the use-&-teaching of in public-school science. So the word was not used when this year the Vista CA schoolboard added this to the non-science curricula: "discussion of divine creation, ultimate purposes or ultimate causes [the 'whys']". Now notice the effects of adding "ism" to describe the viewpoint of the writers of that early-20th-c. pamphlet series, "The Fundamentals.")

3 Thought & word color each other like two children painting each others' faces. In this Thinksheet I'm sensitive to the paint job "pluralism" has done on American cultural & religious thought. Let's put it in window context:

	plurality	pluralism
culture	A	B
church	C	D

A is purely descriptive. A 1993 CUNY survey shows the USA, while still predominantly Christian, as having ½ million Hindus, 1 m. Buddhists, 1.4 m. Muslims, 4.3 m. Jews, and rising numbers of other-&-new religionists. Surely the registration at the current Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago will reflect this plurality (distributively called "diversity")....B makes a virtue of necessity. The necessity is civil order, that we variegated Americans live nondisruptively with one another. That demands some virtues--patience, forbearance, forgiveness--& we should all perceive some values (variety, cultural richness, creative stimulus, training in global citizenship, love of "enemies") in the situation; but is the situation in itself a virtue, as "B" thinks? I think not, but relativists & permissivists think so (Cole Porter's "Heaven knows, / Anything goes!"). Escapists from the question of truth batten themselves on the philosophical & pop fodder of "nonjudgmental" cultural products, "fault-free" divorce & insurance, "value-free" religionless public education (with, however, "politically correct" [offenseless] speech)....C The church has been & is more culturally plural than any other religion. Most congregations, like most communities, are unicultural; some, reflecting their communities, are bicultural or multicultural; some, by active intent, have more cultural diversity than do their communities....D Pluralistic churches are in general agreement with "B." No reli-

gion can claim to have the one salvific message, all have equal standing face-to-face with truth-reality. (In #2631.6, I called this position "egalitarian pluralism.")

4 Let's get a few more **terms** in play, RHD² being the source of the definitions: ethnocentrism (1905-10) is belief in "the inherent superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture," & "a tendency to view alien groups or cultures from the perspective of one's own." The second phrase is panhuman: everybody does it, must do it. The first phrase does not include the classic Christian claim: Christians are not an "ethnic group" or of a single "culture."....Multiculturalism came in a score of years after "multicultural" (1940-45) & in meaning parallels "cultural pluralism," "a condition in which minority groups participate fully in the dominant society, yet maintain their cultural differences"; "a doctrine that society benefits from such a condition."....Cultural relativ-ity, -ism: "cultural norms and values derive their meaning within a specific social context."

RHD rightly records that that last definition applies to two words as they are generally used. For particular use, "cultural relativity" states the fact that only the insiders experience the fullness of meaning, as only those inside a room experience the fullness of the sounds therein. This should make us modest when speaking of how others experience-understand their belief-worlds. And "cultural relativism" should bespeak the rejection (as in linguistic positivism, Chomsky's grammar of grammar, & Derrida's deconstruction) of any transcultural meanings, meanings beyond "a specific social context." The philosophical underpinning of the latter is Jamesian pluralism (v. dualism & monism [incl. monotheism]).

5 "D" is **inimical to monotheism**, not just to the Trinity. C.N. Ikuta, one of the church pluralists on the UCC national staff, illustrates my statement (Winter 1991-1992, THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST EDUCATOR). She's embarrassed by the First Commandment's making the "condemnation of other gods" "painfully clear." While that commandment enjoins us to "condemn the injustices wrought by society's false gods and work for social transformation," its downside is that it "denies the validity of other religions," which to monotheism are "idols." "We must acknowledge and repudiate the blatantly parochial and xenophobic aspects of our tradition before we can honestly affirm pluralism as central to the emerging understanding of our faith." (From ethical evolution [eg against slavery], she argues for theological evolution against monotheism.) She thinks Josiah's reform was a Bad Idea: "the Bible came to equate sin with religious toleration" of, eg, the goddess Asherah (wife of El, consort of Baal). "The Yahwists [falsely] claimed that their perception of God...was the only true one." As a Japanese-American for whom, she says, the melting pot didn't work, though she wanted it to, she complains that by what sociologists of knowledge call "the social construction of reality," "the dominant culture snuffs out opposing viewpoints." So it does--eg in Japan. So it did in the Bible, which is Jews' & Christians' literary instrument for maintaining our two religions' social construction of reality & retrieving it when it's been lost.

What Ms. Ikuta, a Harv.Div.School graduate, is proposing is that "Christ The Transformer of Culture" (a chapter title she quotes from H. Rich. Niebuhr's classic) yield to "Christ, Buddha, and lots of others trying to make a dent" (where she has the gall to suggest that "perhaps" HRN "were he to write it today" would have called it). In biblical light (eg Ro.12.2), this is conformity, not transformation, & degeneration, not regeneration. Of course I agree "that we have something to learn from as well as to teach to others": nothing new there: at the World's Parliament of Religions a century ago, Christian leaders rejoiced in it. But (to refer to this Thinksheet's title), her acculturation to humanistic pluralism, in rejection of evangelical plurality with its monotheism & christocentrism, should be condemned as antibiblical heresy.

But (in 6.1 of the same publication), Ansley Coe Throckmorton, gen.sect. of the BHM Division of Education and Publication, instead of condemning Ikuta's viewpoint as heretical, recommends it as within the range of "genuine conversation among Christians." This is antibiblical **neo-henotheism**: all religions are valid but mine is mine ("I was born in it" was Sallie McFague's recent reply to "Why are you still a Christian?"). Such broadmindedness cannot but have a chilling effect on Christian education, which Throckmorton heads in the United Church of Christ.