The End of the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue

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On 19 October 2017 an International Symposium of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic scholars was convened to discuss the way forward with interreligous dialogue. The following is an English version of one of the presentations.

The Christian-Buddhist dialogue is come to an end, and it is not the end its promoters had hoped for. The high idealism with which the dialogue began has largely evaporated witin the structural establishment of both traditions and there seems little interest in reviving it there. Outside, those who cling to the remnants of a once vibrant formal dialogue have grown weary of the decline in their numbers and the quality of the results. There are those who hold out hope that the Buddhist world, where the enthusiasm for dialogue has been dominated from the start by the Christian initiative, might reverse this turn of fortunes. Perhaps, but it seems to me that the hour is ripe for a more momentous challenge to Christian—and perhaps also Buddhist—identity.

I

The story of Roman Catholicism's dialogue with Buddhism in the final decades of the twentieth century can serve here as a paradigm of how things have gone across the Christian world. A few weeks before the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, a document was approved exhorting Christians to engage in discussion and to collaborate with those of other religious traditions. A door was opened to a new relationship with Buddhism and those who rushed to embrace it represented all levels of the church. No one was quite sure what lay on the other side, but there was a spirit of adventure in the air.

Unaccustomed to have its voice muffled by innovative theologians, let alone by ordinary believers emboldened to familiarize themselves with Buddhist ideas and practices, the Vatican bureaucracy tried to institutionalize control of the dialogue. The largely symbolic Secretariat for Non-Christians established in 1964 was restructured as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue but had a difficult time implementing official Vatican policies and imposing doctrinal strictures intended to rein in the passion for interreligious thinking. The Council was later downgraded for a brief period, but by the time it was restored, those in the church most immersed in the dialogue had ceased to give it serious attention.

That eagerness for dialogue with Buddhists was stronger and purer at the fringes of Catholicism than it ever was among the ruling bureaucracy is hardly to be wondered at. The Council's proclamation resonated more forcefully with believers choking on the musty air of ritual and doctrine. It was not the core of the establishment who were turning to other religions for fresh air but those already teetering on the edge of the faith. Pope John confessed to the same suffocation when he decided to throw open the windows to the spirit of the age and call the church to *aggiornamento*. Within twenty years of his death, his successors to the papacy had set to work shuttering the windows and closing the doors again. The dialogue with Buddhism either had to find a way to skirt official censure or simply ignore it.

What at first seemed like a bold step forward by the Vatican ended up something of a nuisance. As the practical consequences of the Council's declaration became clearer, the keepers of the tradition grew more anxious. The church as a whole was of two minds about the promise of its dialogue with other religions. At one extreme were those who had set off, as Christians, to claim the religious wealth of Buddhism as their rightful inheritance and took heart from the words of the Council, vague and timid as they were. At the other were those determined to resist essential reform and to squeeze the life out of the Vatican's declaration by promoting a reactionary "theology of religions" in order to justify their repression of potentially dangerous discontinuities with the past. As the debate between these opposing extremes heated up, those engaged actively in the dialogue felt pressured to take a stance somewhere along the spectrum. In time, the debate cooled down, but not because one side had capitulated to the other. To those pursuing dialogue the reaction of the establishment had simply ceased to be very interesting or relevant.

It should be obvious by now that the interreligious dialogue among Christian and Buddhist believers we are talking about here is the disciplined refinement of the religious ideas of one's own tradition through personal engagement in respectful but critical discussion with those of another tradition. There are other forms of interaction for which the bell has not yet tolled and for which expecta-

tions still run high in some quarters. Meantime, formal *dia-logos* has withered away to a slouching shadow of its original self: an epoch-making endeavor in the history of two great world religions on which the epoch has now turned its back. The dwindling number of "dialogue" events, publications, and programs, along with the dwindling number of participants, make it clear that the novelty of sitting down with members of another religion to rethink one's own religious identity has lost much of its shine.

As we said, the official church was disinclined ever to embrace interreligious dialogue wholeheartedly. Calls in Vatican II to replace the authoritarian and monarchical structure of the Church with a community of dialogue were quickly forgotten during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. One could hardly expect the official posture of the Church toward other religions to be more generous than it was toward its own community of believers.[1] To take the words of the Council to heart was to land oneself on the margins of the establishment. But institutional rigidity alone does not account for the recession of interest in dialogue. For that, we need to look more closely at the mindset prevalent among its promoters, the consequences of which bring us to a new and more radical turn of history.

II

The role the established churches played in subduing the original spirit of the Christian dialogue with Buddhism is trifling compared with the tranquilizing effect of academia. If anything, the register of disappointments, admonitions, and condemnations by doctrinal authorities were experienced as invigorating by those being taken to task.[2] It was the expropriation of the dialogue by the weary grind of scholarly culture that crushed the life out of it. Within twenty years after the Vatican Council a caste of specialists had stepped in to define, monitor, evaluate, and otherwise institutionalize the dialoguing habits and modes of thought of engaged Christians. Doctoral programs, university courses, dedicated journals, conferences, and books by the shelfful were produced to guarantee those in academia normative control over the engagement. Ensuing conflicts with church institutions were swept up in the familiar patterns of theological debate before the revolutionary nature of these encounters had time to assert an identity of its own.

1. See Marcel Heyndrikx, *Towards Another Future: On the Christian Faith and its Shape between Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), 252–63.

2. The mood is symbolized in the decision of the publisher of the Italian translation of Paul Knitter's *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian* to enhance the appeal and sale of the book by citing on the back cover Josef Ratzinger's accusations of heresy against it.

The more dialogue became recognized as a legitimate "field" of study within the Christian world, the less appealing it became to their Buddhist partners. Those who remained were by and large scholars who used their participation to advance their own interpretations of Buddhist teachings or to correct Christian misinterpretations. The deeper irony in this turn of events is that not even those Buddhists most devoted to the dialogue were stimulated to produce their own theories of dialogue or question the Christian assumptions behind the way dialogue was structured, let alone try to anchor it in their own academic establishments. Through it all, the initial reluctance to Christianity's invitation to dialogue never quite went away.

Well-intentioned Christians eager to break away from the exclusive, dogmatic triumphalism of the past went a long way toward allaying suspicions of a hidden missionary agenda. Still, the theological stamp on the actual meetings was indelible. Modern Buddhism had already asserted its commitment to universality in an outreach to the west that was already well underway by the time of Vatican II. Nevertheless, when it came to responding to the Christian call for serious rational discussion, Buddhist participants did not succeed in extending that commitment to the proposal of alternative models for interreligious dialogue.[3] "Buddhist-Christian dialogue" was a euphemism for what was and has remained, in essence and in practice, "Christian-Buddhist dialogue."

As the novelty of theological models cultivated in Christian academia began to wear thin and to attract fewer participants, the only solutions acceptable to the partners in dialogue were either to seek the neutral ground of philosophical abstraction or to divert discussions into more immediate ethical problems. This may be thought to mark a step forward in the evolution of Christian-Buddhist relations, but as the shift of focus from direct confrontation and mutual criticism between Buddhists *as Buddhist* and Christians *as Christian* gave way to speculative or ethical discussions on one or the other *tertium quid*, each side was effectively immunized against the creative clash of traditions that had marked the first stages of their dialogue. More importantly, the shift reinforced an underlying assumption which it shared with the institutional church and which has bedeviled the dialogue from the beginning. The overturning of that assumption is, I believe, the first step to the more momentous challenge I spoke of at the outset.

The assumption, in its bare essentials but with no evidence to sustain it, is that the Christian-Buddhist dialogue began as the initiative of the religious

3. My colleague Kim Seung Chul has drawn my attention to how differently the formal, rational dialogue we have had between Buddhists and Christians would look if conducted on a Huayan model of interaction. See "How could we get over the monotheistic paradigm for the interreligious dialogue?," Interreligious Studies 13 (2014), at http://irstudies.org/ category/journal/issue13/.

establishment and, in the case of Roman Catholicism, was given the highest level of official approval at the Vatican Council. As we have said, it was not very long before the rosy mood of relief at the cessation of hostilities and open competition turned dark and fearful as numbers of those who took up the call to dialogue were judged to be flirting with a dangerous compromise of tradition. Yet even as official support weakened and the guardians of church authority began to nip at the heels of the doctrinal strays, the assumption went unchallenged. For the establishment, it gave grounds for claiming the right to define the boundaries of the dialogue; for adventurous intellectuals caught up in the encounter with Buddhism, it justified the counter-claim of a fidelity to the Christian spirit expressed through criticism of the dogmatic triumphalism of the pre-Vatican church.

In fact, the Christian establishment and its mainstream theologians were reluctant latecomers to the dialogue. But then again, so were the wayward theologians who were exonerated at the Council and whose works became the cornerstone of new theological approaches to other religions. It was not anything or anyone *within* the Christian tradition that sparked the dialogue with Buddhism, but those who, in response to a vague but stubborn sense of spiritual urgency, had turned *away from* the Christian tradition in which they were raised. It was not just the moral and doctrinal teachings of the churches that failed to speak to them. Beginning from the early years of the twentieth century, significant numbers of young Christians sought to enrich their spiritual lives under the guidance of Buddhist meditation masters. They were not just a self-serving, countercultural horde of infidels. Their religious motivations and degrees of seriousness varied wildly, reflecting the same diversity among the community of the faithful from whom they had lapsed, but they shared a sense of spiritual excitement, something almost tangible that made the step over into Buddhism feel natural and right. Without anyone having to preach it to them, they knew that the religious wealth of humanity belonged to them as their rightful inheritance. They were not sure how to begin to claim it, and with little encouragement from the churches, they had no choice but to make their own way.

As more and more Christian theologians, popular spiritual writers, and contemplatives began to feel the same wind at their backs and cautiously to express themselves, the resistance and even open condemnations from the established church softened reluctantly into a recognition that the clamor for dialogue with Buddhism might after all be in the best interests of Christianity. The thought that the church might actually be trying to catch up to a religious force that had only became apparent when those in its pursuit had left the church behind never found its way into the official narration of events. Similarly, academics specializing in dialogue quickly settled down in doctrinal questions rather than chase the wind for themselves. Church officials appointed to oversee the dialogue

took it for granted that no matter what one's stance towards Buddhist teachings, the dialogue with Buddhism had to be seen as having evolving organically out of the Christian past—even though clearly it had not. To turn Nietzsche's quip on its head: "I did not do that," says my memory. "I must have done that," says my pride, and remains inexorable. Eventually—memory yields.[4] In this way, the expectations that Christians brought to the encounter with Buddhism, often at unawares, left its stamp on the structure and content of the dialogue. Questioning the standard accounts of what led up to Christianity's engagement in dialogue with Buddhism is more than just a matter of untwisting the facts. It exposes the pretense of self-accreditation that marginalized the vital presence of religious and spiritual movements outside the walls of the church.

A dialogue is not a conversation that two parties sit down to the table and start up with nothing but their good will. As Gadamer was fond of saying, conversation is rather like a stream of prejudgments we step into. The fact that Christians and Buddhists were often standing cross-stream to one another is clear from the amount of time spent trying to instruct one another in their fundamental standpoints. This is as true of the cautious, half-hearted commitment of participants representing the institutional church as it is of free-thinking academics engaged in actual conversation with Buddhists or in their preferred activity: writing about dialogue with Buddhism. Understandably, to those who found themselves already standing in a spiritual stream that Christianity could no longer claim as its own, attachment to Christian expectations of Buddhism was looser, and indeed often prompted the same misgivings that Buddhist participants had toward Christianity's intentions in entering into dialogue.

In any case, interreligious dialogue began with a shift in a spiritual climate whose clearest manifestations were outside of organized religion and those origins are part of its essence. Established religion, for its part, has shown no sign of wanting more from dialogue than a *pax romana*, a cessation of hostilities guaranteed by a theological rearmament. Accordingly, from the start, the most one could expect of church-sponsored "interreligious encounters" was a basic civility and mutual tolerance. Let there be no mistake: that newfound tolerance of itself marked a clear step beyond the competitive antagonisms of an earlier age, but it did not endorse religious diversity because ultimately it did not matter to Christianity if the Buddhist religion were to flourish or slowly vanish from the face of the earth. The soul of dialogue is bound to a spirit of adventure that is not only open to religious diversity but views it as a grace and, as such, is better suited to directing dialogue to its proper end—the transformation of perspective and the recovery of mystery in the present age.

4. See *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage,1966), sec. 68.

III

The established churches undoubtedly had a hard time adjusting to the changes in spiritual culture that had reached a broad part of the population in Europe and the United States by the time Pope John issued his call for *aggiornamento.* In the aftermath of the Council, the standards of religious affiliation and trust in religious authority had relaxed to the point that the Christian establishment began to talk of inaugurating a mission to re-evangelize the very lands where their financial and institutional presence had long been dominant. The target was identified as an epidemic of irreligiosity that had infected Christian lands. It soon became clear that it was meant to include the faithful who had begun to identify with other religions. The fact is, the pattern of "religious conversion" taking place within their own ranks was not the one to which the Christian West was accustomed and on which it had based its mission around the world, namely, persuading individuals, if not whole cultures, to forsake one religion to join another.

The Franciscan monk Richard Rohr speaks of two kinds of outsiders: those looking in from the outside and those looking from the inside out. The borderlands where these two kinds of outsiders meet is often taken as the ideal locus for dialogue among religions. But the truer end of dialogue comes to light only when we are driven to redefine what it means to be "inside." It is one thing to face another religion across a clearly defined border, each side of which represents a distinct tradition. It is quite another to embrace more than one tradition into a single religious *mestizaje*. I am not talking about an undisciplined stroll down the buffet of religious ideas and practices, picking and choosing what suits one's fancy, but rather about supplementing the resources of one's own tradition with those of another. By accepting the social reality of religious diversity not as a fact of life but as an opportunity for a different kind of conversion, the nature of dialogue itself is transformed.

I have chosen to call this a religious *mestizaje* rather than adopt the current label of "multiple religious belonging." As a carefully nuanced description of the ambiguities of this latter term shows, it is almost meaningless without a great deal of qualification.[5] The idea of identifying oneself as "belonging" to a particular tradition and then consciously deciding to "belong" to another as well suggests an identity modeled after dual citizenship. The *mestizaje* I am referring to is more in the nature of a deliberate transgression of that model. Raimon Panikkar—more than anyone I have known in my life, the archetypal

5. See Catherine Cornille, "Multiple Religious Belonging," in David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, eds., *Understanding Interreligous Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 324–40.

image of religious *mestizaje*—spoke of the need for an "intrareligious" dialogue. His intention was to make the encounter of specialists representing different traditions answerable to the more important dialogue that has to take place in the religious interiority of individuals, whatever tradition or traditions may have shaped it. He knew that once the novelty of the representational dialogue had worn off, it would be in those transformed individuals that the dialogue would live on.

Mestizaje of this sort shows up in all facets of religious identity: ritual, practice, doctrine, and ethics. Buddhist-Christian *mestizos* include affiliated Christians of every sort, from ordinary believers to monastic superiors to theologians and even established church leaders. I am speaking of those who have not forsaken the faith outright but chosen to enhance it with the resources of another tradition. In one sense, theirs is a conversion like that effected by Matteo Ricci's discussions with Confucian scholars in the sixteenth century, where the philosophical and doctrinal resources of two traditions were shared in such a way as to stimulate each side to recast its self-understanding. But the encounter between Christians and Buddhists had come to expect more than that.

The inter-monastic exchange that brought Buddhist and Christian monks into one another's communities to participate in the prayer, meditation, rituals, and lifestyle of a different religious tradition has been going on since Jan Van Bragt set it in motion in 1979. It is not uncommon today to see Christian monasteries around the world practicing Zen meditation themselves or even opening their facilities to Buddhist retreats for the general public. Furthermore, recognition of the sacredness of other scriptures can no longer simply be dismissed as flirtation with heresy by an uninformed, disenfranchised fringe. Even within the Christian world, the idea that only one scriptural canon can be inherently "sacred" is being replaced by an awareness that scriptures only *become* sacred by entering into them and wrestling with the religious worldview they represent. The use of Buddhist scriptures among Christian theologians—and even a series of scholarly commentaries designed to assist such use—testifies to the reach of the *mestizaje*.

The most severe strictures by Christian officialdom have been leveled against those who, stimulated by Buddhist teachings, have dallied with traditional interpretations of doctrine. In this connection, we may note that a renaissance of enthusiasm for medieval mysticism in Christian lands has echoed favorably among Buddhist thinkers and helped lay stepping stones for Christian thinkers to commute back and forth between the traditions. Granted, official sanctioning of theological ideas is usually carried on at some distance from the things that most Christians actually believe. Despite the best efforts of catechesis and preaching, not many of the faithful would ever survive the doctrinal grilling of a formal inquisition, and debates over doctrine are, not surprisingly, of little

interest to them. But even within the conclaves where these debates are taken seriously, the singling out of errant theologians for condemnation has had little dampening effect on the *mestizaje*. The same can be said of the attempt to impose the study of the "theology of religions" on seminarians. There is something religiously perverse about trying to offer students a set of norms for how to approach Buddhist doctrine without at the same time allowing them to actually study those doctrines from teachers familiar with them. At the same time, the underlying bias that authorized doctrine occupies the same pivotal position in the Buddhist tradition as it does in the Christian only deepens the miseducation. In any event, except for a relatively small number of professional academics, a solid knowledge of Buddhist doctrine has never been taken by Christian-Buddhist *mestizos* as a prerequisite for gaining access to its religious practices and ethical ideals.

The trend to divert formal Christian-Buddhist encounters away from doctrine and toward cooperation in ethical concerns was due in great part to the excessive preoccupation with methodology that disheartened the initial passion for dialogue. Entanglement in discussions introduced by sideliners of the limits and promise of Christianity's approach to Buddhism had left out far too much of the spiritual motivation that prompted dialogue in the first place. Admittedly, that motivation caught fire most quickly among the theologically unprepared, but it spread as the attempt to mature interreligious dialogue intellectually lost sight of its origins and replaced it with a new agenda: the establishment of dialogue as a scholarly specialization submissive to the demands and restrictions of academia. In effect, Christian access to the Buddhist tradition was being cordoned off for experts. The subsequent swing towards moral questions of importance to society at large was a clear reaction against this scholarly expropriation of Christian-Buddhist encounters and, at least for a time, gave a new lease of life to international associations devoted to the dialogue.

Among the most important ethical questions engaging interreligious dialogue in recent years we may point to the role of religion in preserving the health of the planet. From a purely spiritual point of view, the earth is our most immediate and shared transcendence and the ground of fundamental religious symbolism. From the standpoint of the planet, however, that point of view, along with all of religion and indeed much of civilization, is a nonessential luxury. The story of the earth is not the property of any religious tradition. It is a heuristic lens through which to view our traditions and redefine what is "sacred" in the ideas, texts, rituals, and practices they embody. No doubt the dialogue has helped significant numbers of participating Buddhists and Christians recover an affiliation with the earth more fundamental than their affiliation to a particular religious tradition, but the cumulative effect on the religious establishments they represent has been negligible.

Where life's breath has gone out of dialogue, it is often because, in form and content, the open-ended, free atmosphere of dialogue has degenerated into the controlled effort to reinforce one or the other doctrinal position or to support one or the other ethical cause circulating in society at large. To make matters worse, meetings have had to cater to business models, which has only further restricted participation and cut it off from the wider social reality of the quest for spiritual identity in a multi-religious world. On the positive side, more and more Christian believers no longer feel the obligation to stand in the traditional stream of prejudgments when they come into contact with the teachings and practices of another religion. More and more of them know the blessing of having Buddhist and Christian traditions flow together and slowly converge. I remember thinking of this as I stood on the shores of the upper Amazon in Manaus, where the black waters of the Rio Negro and the muddy waters of the Rio Solimões flow along side by side, at different speeds, for more than three miles until further downstream they merge and lose their former identities as isolated rivers.

IV

At the outset I spoke of a more momentous challenge to Christian identity than that presented by the Christian-Buddhist dialogue as we have known it. What remains of the superstructure of institutionalized dialogue is now firmly outside the official church, which for its part has all but turned its back on the initial enthusiasm of Vatican II. In both cases, the dialogue with Buddhism has become a caricature of its former self.

That said, I believe it is time for the leadership in the Christian churches to welcome back cross-religious believers like the Christian-Buddhist *mestizos*, and that means finding ways to welcome access, for believing Christians who are so inclined, to the intellectual, scriptural, ethical, and ritual resources of other religions as an enhancement to their own faith. Encouraging access to and appropriation of those riches has always been the aim of interreligious dialogue. It is high time dialogue took its place—internally and communally—in ordinary Christianity. Nothing less than the survival of Christian self-identity hangs in the balance. There is no question of waiting for multi-religious societies in what were once considered Christian lands to fade away. The religious geography of the world will not permit a new missionary movement aimed at converting whole cultures and subcultures to the faith. Nor is there any advantage to aggressively going after the strays who continue to call themselves Christian while they incorporate resources from the Buddhist tradition. The *mestizaje* is not like a flock of birds that have stopped to roost in the towering oak of Christendom, which puts up with them for as long as they are there and then carries

on as before. It is already grafted to the roots of the tree and growing in the same soil. Change is upon Christianity. The only question is whether the institution itself will be attentive to what is happening and take up the challenge.

The fear that the shift to a new self-identity will be as radical as the structural shift from the early Christian communities to the Constantinian order is not unfounded. This fear has driven the official censure of Christians attempting to incorporate the resources of other religious traditions. Keeping the flow of tradition within its banks is important to Christian identity, but when the river freezes over, only a warm breath from outside can melt its hardness and restore it to life. Keeping a tradition pure and consistent even as it tries to adjust to the times has always to contend with the possibility that it will one day face a critical threshold beyond which keeping the tradition will mean corrupting it. Those alert to the flow of Christian history have long been predicting that the institutional church is fast approaching such a threshold. At the turn of the twentieth century William James had this in mind when he spoke of the two "wicked partners" that menace true religious identity: the spirit of corporate dominion and the spirit of dogmatic dominion.[6] Already from the time that the study of religion as a formal discipline had begun in the mid-nineteenth century, there has been a steady chorus of criticism against the excesses of organized Christianity and a call for a return to the simple ideals of its origin, the pillars of which had been firmly set during the European Enlightenment. In our own day, the pleonexy of the church's pursuit of property, wealth, and power has become a public embarrassment not because it draws attention to a few wicked functionaries but because it touches on habits deeply ingrained in the church's self-identity.

Accusations of "religious indifference" aimed at the religious *mestizos* are a distraction from a much more profound indifference within the churches themselves to their own disintegration. It is difficult to imagine what organized Christianity will look like if this process continues, but one thing seems clear: it needs to give more attention to spiritual forces at work outside its walls. To squander—in the name of fidelity to the establishment—the obvious grace of so many believers in so many corners of the church who have found their way to a multi-religious identity without forsaking their affiliation to Christianity seems self-defeating. To welcome the Christian-Buddhist *mestizaje* will mean a radical reshaping of the social fabric that unites Christians in a religiously plural world. This is not a process that can be monitored and controlled at each step of the way. It will have to begin in a return to the blessed chaos and invigorating experimentation that much of the Christian world experienced after the Second Vatican Council. It needs full rein to experiment with overturning the prefer-

6. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 14 and 15.

ence for the universal spread of "Christendom" with a universal reclamation of "Christianness."

Objections against the relativism and particularism of Christian thinkers who have drawn on Buddhist teachings and texts in their interpretations of traditional doctrine have generally been misguided and almost always logically curdled. The multi-religious diversity of religious resources does not compromise the universal aspirations of the Christian values and practices being elucidated, nor does it repudiate those aspirations in the Buddhist resources it adopts. It simply rejects the claim of any religion to be *transcendentally and universally* universal and replaces it with a recognition of the *historical particularity* of all universal ideas. It is not as if Christians were not aware of the limits of having to "see through a glass darkly" or as if they did not have a rich mystical and apophatic tradition to remind them. The encounter with Buddhist aspirations to universality has given many theologians the courage to consult that wider tradition and revive it in their own thinking. The persecution of those who did so under the former two papacies is not an act of faith but an indication of the attachment to Christendom. Indeed, it is precisely because the dialogue with Buddhism succeeded in reminding Christian thinkers of the need to recover the sense of mystery behind the surface language of the faith that it was possible to remain affiliated to a church whose officialdom had rejected them.

This way of speaking is not the empty romanticism of scholars insulated from everyday Christianity and with nothing better to do than broadside the institutional church. It is the heartfelt romanticism of a small but alert Christian-Buddhist *mestizaje*, shaped and tempered by the institutional failure of the church to live up to its own ideals of dialogue. To be sure, for the church establishment to alter the primary focus of the dialogue from discussions with Buddhists to a reappropriation of the Christian-Buddhist *mestizaje* will mean setting aside the implicit goals of its earlier attempts at dialogue. It can no longer be a question of joining hands with other religious establishments and doctrinal traditions to preserve basic human values of respect and openness to religious diversity in the hopes of each reinforcing the relevance of its own tradition, all the while remaining essentially unadulterated by the collaboration. This is not to say that the church should wash its hands of dialogue with Buddhism, but only that the Christian-sponsored dialogue with Buddhism has come to its natural end and left the church to face the greater challenge of adjusting to those transformed by it. If there is to be a next stage in the formal dialogue with Buddhism, it is probably better left to the initiative of the Buddhists.

I realize that the fragments of interreligious dialogue that I have arranged here to satisfy my own vision of the future are finally no more than colored stones inside a kaleidoscope that others may easily jumble into other patterns suited to their own visions and hopes. Perhaps, as many have tried to persuade

me, the Buddhist-Christian *mestizos* are parasitical on the institutional church and its authority, without which they would not be able to define themselves or even have an audience to address. I prefer to see them, or at least the best of them, as heirs of those who were taking in the spirit of the age outside the walls of church and academia, who turned to Buddhism not out of doctrinal doubts or institutional frustrations but out of a vague but felt sense of spiritual emptiness.

When one looks at an establishment as vast as the Roman Catholic Church, with its properties, its personnel, its wealth, its legal system, its educational establishments, and its political influence, the idea that its future might hang on something as scattered, disorganized, and overall powerless as what I have been calling the Christian-Buddhist *mestizaje* sounds fanciful, almost ludicrous. What great institution has ever undergone a serious reformation without ending up institutionally stronger? But, then again, what other great institution was founded precisely on the disarmament of wealth, institutional might, and political power? If the church is to be reformed on the basis of its own founding ideals, if it is to narrow the gap between Christianness and Christendom, it will need all the spiritual resources it can muster. And for that, those whose ideas of Christianity and practice of Christianity have been reformed through the dialogue with other religions may prove indispensable.