

Forty-Three Years Ago

by Sangharakshita

Windhorse Publications

© Sangharakshita 1993

The right of Sangharakshita to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

ISBN 978-0-904766-64-6

To enable text searching, this web edition has been prepared without the Pali and Sanskrit diacritics that appear in the paper version.

www.windhorsepublications.com

Foreword

My lunch companion in the vegetarian section of the Buddhist Society's Summer School refectory dropped his voice to a concerned murmur: 'Of course, Sangharakshita is not a *real* bhikkhu.' Perhaps he had heard about the length of Sangharakshita's hair, of his more than one meal a day, or of his tendency to wear 'civilian' dress upon non-formal occasions. I felt a little uncomfortable with the comment, but did not pursue the matter; even by 1976 I must have imbibed enough of Sangharakshita's spirit and approach to suspect that the comment was based upon assumptions that were irrelevant to the practice of the Dharma, and a possible distraction from the business of bringing Buddhism to the West.

Although I had been calling myself a Buddhist for several years, it had taken a friend several months of dedicated badgering to get me along to a talk being given by his teacher, the venerable Maha Sthavira Sangharakshita. The reason for my reluctance to make contact with Sangharakshita and the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order – or indeed with any monk, priest, or religious organization – lay in an intuitive, and probably arrogant, conviction that such things were inevitably, more or less by definition, worldly distortions of the pure, undifferentiated Truth, or Oneness, that I had once glimpsed in a mystical experience. Although I found the words in which Buddhism expressed itself closer to the heart of that experience than any others I had encountered, I had no intention of going beyond the experience, and perhaps a few inspirational words, to get caught up in all the structures, power games, and compromises that, I believed, characterized religious communities and institutions.

When I met Sangharakshita, however, my fears were allayed. Although dressed in the orange robes of a Buddhist monk, he did not seem to be submerged in them: his strong, highly individual personality shone unmistakably through. Although his talk displayed a broad knowledge of, and reverence for, many strands of the Buddhist tradition, his overriding reason for giving the talk seemed to lie in an engaged concern for the spiritual welfare and nourishment of his audience. To put it another way, he was relating to Buddhism as a means rather than as an end. It took me a few more months to do anything about it, but I realized that evening that this man, whoever and whatever he was, had made me feel like an absolute fledgeling, and had something to teach me.

Indeed he did, and indeed, I hope, he has. Twenty-three years later I can honestly say that he has changed my life, and in changing it, has helped give it a meaning of which I never dreamt it possible. I am by no means alone. Instructed and inspired by him, first tens, then hundreds, and now thousands of people are learning what it means and feels like to practise, live, and teach the Dharma in the modern world. It has all been an extraordinarily rich and creative experience, not least because of the extent to which Sangharakshita has allowed us, or rather encouraged us – above all by his example – on the one hand to uncover and honour certain essential principles, and on the other to experiment and explore. With so much going on, I must admit that it has never felt very necessary to pause and wonder whether Sangharakshita is actually a ‘real bhikkhu’. It has seemed enough that he has been willing to help us become real Buddhists engaged in the development of an authentic Buddhist movement.

The great majority of people who come along to the FWBO’s public centres have very little – if any – previous experience of Buddhism. Actually, most of them come along to learn meditation. Those who go on to develop an interest in the Buddha-Dharma usually do so because they find the advice and insights contained in its treasury helpful to the process of unfolding and exploring the implications of their meditation practice. For some, interest turns to involvement, and involvement deepens to commitment, without their feeling the need to know very much about their place in the traditional Buddhist world. Others may wonder from time to time, for understandable if sometimes vague reasons, quite where the FWBO and the WBO does ‘fit in’ to the wider Buddhist communion. But it never seems to be a pressing matter.

Perhaps beyond the FWBO there are a few more people like my old dining companion for whom the issue looms with greater moment. The FWBO, which of course includes a substantial Indian wing known as Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gana, is one of the largest and most active Buddhist movements around. It is growing and spreading, both in size and influence, all the time. Although many people in the Buddhist world are showing considerable interest in and enthusiasm for this promising new arrival, there are probably a few who would feel more at ease were they clearer about the precise nature of Sangharakshita’s – and therefore his Order’s – link with the traditional Buddhist world.

Then there is Sangharakshita himself. You are about to learn that, for him, the question of whether or not he is a real bhikkhu has concerned him for much of his life. Indeed, it is an issue that has concerned him so deeply and with such creative effect that, when circumstances allowed, he decided to establish a new movement and a new Buddhist Order.

That Order is one with no bhikkhus or bhikkhunis, no samanneras or samanneris, no mighty gulf between the lay and non-lay followers, in fact with very few of the outward and obvious distinctions, divisions, rules, and regimes

that are usually taken as essential characteristics of a Buddhist Order. It is instead, very simply but very crucially, an Order in which the act of Going for Refuge, of wholehearted commitment, to the Three Jewels, has been given the overriding importance that Sangharakshita believes it deserves and demands, yet of which the traditional Eastern Buddhist ordination tradition seems to have deprived it.

As this paper clearly demonstrates, Sangharakshita's new movement and Order are a heartfelt and exact response to a powerfully, if gradually, perceived need. The unfolding of that perception has been chronicled before, notably in a paper given in 1988 and published as *The History of My Going for Refuge*. In the present paper the perception, and the conclusions arising from that perception, are laid out more tightly and comprehensively than ever before, while the special emphasis placed on the relationship, or lack of it, between the Going for Refuge and the bhikkhu ordination – still held to be the most important step that one can take in much of the traditional Buddhist world – makes it an important, even historic, document.

The following pages offer a moving insight into Sangharakshita's intellectual and spiritual honesty, as well as into his considerable courage. They also eloquently demonstrate the extent of his desire to see the Dharma alive and effective in the modern world, and his willingness to explore any avenue that will conduce to its greater health. To this end he has founded and nurtured a new Order, now twenty-five years old, world-wide, and almost six hundred men and women strong. To this end too he is offering the present paper for the consideration of a wider Buddhist readership. It is not a case of one explaining the other, so much as both being aspects of the same magnificent project, one in which all Buddhists of whatever school, sect, or ordination tradition, who truly go for Refuge, are engaged.

Dhammacari Nagabodhi
Vimalakula Community
April 1993

Forty-Three Years Ago

When I was twenty-five I received ordination as a bhikkhu or Theravadin Buddhist monk. The time was 24 November 1950, a full moon day, the place the Burmese temple at Sarnath, only a few score yards from the spot where, two-thousand- five-hundred years earlier, the Buddha had taught his first five disciples. The ordination gave me immense satisfaction. As I wrote many years later: 'Whilst the ceremony was in progress I experienced an extraordinary sense of peace, satisfaction, fulfilment, acceptance, and belonging. It was a feeling such as I had not experienced before, and in subsequent years I was never surprised when an elderly monk told me that receiving the monastic ordination had been the greatest experience of his whole life.'¹ I had become a Buddhist, or rather realized that I was a Buddhist and in fact always had been one, some eight years earlier, after reading the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Sutra of Wei Lang*; had come to India (with the army) in 1944; had spent two years as a freelance wandering ascetic; had been ordained as a samanera or novice monk in Kusinagara, the site of the Buddha's 'great decease'; had studied Pali and Buddhist philosophy in Benares; and finally in May 1950 had founded a Buddhist organization in Kalimpong, a town in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, to which I was to return after my ordination and which would be my headquarters for the next fourteen years.

Ordination as a bhikkhu was thus for me the culmination of a process of spiritual discovery and development that had been going on for a number of years, a process which may well have antedated not only my realization that I was a Buddhist but even my birth in South London in 1925. Yet if bhikkhu ordination represented the culmination of a process of spiritual discovery and development it was also, at the same time, the beginning of a further stage in that same process. After my return to Kalimpong I continued to meditate and study the Dharma, to write, to teach, to give lectures and, in short, to 'work for the good of Buddhism', as I had been directed to do by my teacher the Venerable Jagdish Kashyap, who was responsible for my being in Kalimpong in the first place and who had taken part in my ordination. And of course I observed the Vinaya or Monastic Code as strictly as I could.

In the autumn of 1956 I received a rude shock. I discovered that there had been a serious flaw in my ordination ceremony, that really I had not been ordained, and that technically speaking I was not a bhikkhu. According to the Theravadin

Vinaya, in the Middle Country (i.e. north-east India) a bhikkhu has to be ordained by a chapter of at least ten bhikkhus (outside the Middle Country, at least five) and the ordination ceremony has to be conducted within a specially demarcated and dedicated area known as a *sima* (literally, 'boundary'). The bhikkhus constituting the ordaining chapter, and present within the *sima* and taking part in the ordination, have moreover to be *parisuddha* or 'completely pure' in the sense of being guiltless of any major breach of the *sikkhapadas* or rules of training, such as would render them liable to expulsion or suspension from the Order.² What I discovered that autumn was that one of the bhikkhus taking part in my ordination had rendered himself so liable, as at least some members of the ordaining chapter were aware. He had been guilty of a breach of the training-rule prohibiting intentional sexual intercourse, and in fact had a 'wife' and son living with him at his temple, the former being officially his cook.

The discovery left me in a quandary. If the supposed bhikkhu was not really a bhikkhu then I was not really a bhikkhu either, his presence within the *sima* having invalidated the entire proceedings and rendered my ordination ceremony null and void. What should I do? It was not really open to me to seek re-ordination, since I would have no means of knowing whether the members of the reordaining chapter were *parisuddha* or not and could hardly go round making enquiries. In any case, seeking reordination (or rather, again seeking to be ordained) would mean having to explain why I considered this to be necessary, and I already knew that questioning a bhikkhu's 'complete purity' was something that was rather frowned on in Theravadin monastic circles. In the event I did nothing about my discovery. I continued to meditate and study, continued to work for the good of Buddhism, and observed the Vinaya or Monastic Code to the best of my ability, just as though I *had* been validly ordained and was technically a bhikkhu. My confidence in the Theravadin branch of the Monastic Order may have been undermined, but my faith in the Dharma and the spiritual life, and in the monastic lifestyle, remained unshaken.

That I did nothing about my discovery meant that the memory of it came to be pushed to the back of my mind, and I ceased to think about it very much. Indeed I must admit that for a number of years I did not really allow myself to think about it. Eventually, however, after I had founded the Western Buddhist Order and developed my conception of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha as the central and definitive Act of the Buddhist life, I not only allowed myself to think about it but started trying to fathom its implications. This has led to various reflections, some relating to me personally, others to the Sangha or Spiritual Community in the widest sense. Now that the Western Buddhist Order is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary I believe the time has come for me to communicate these reflections to the WBO and FWBO and to the rest of the Buddhist world.

I

I do not regret being 'ordained' at Sarnath. Indeed I am glad there was a flaw in my ordination ceremony, glad that really I was not ordained, glad that technically I was never a bhikkhu, for in the long run this contributed more to my spiritual development, and more to my understanding of the Dharma, than any amount of correctness and technicality could have done. The bhikkhu who had a wife and son living with him at his temple may have been a bad monk, but he was a good Buddhist. He was kind to me, and took the trouble to help me, and I knew he had for many years striven, under difficult circumstances, to disseminate a knowledge of the Dharma. Later on, in the course of the eight years between my 'discovery' and my return to England in 1964, I came to know that most of the bhikkhus who had taken part in my supposed ordination were in much the same position as he was. They were either guilty, like him, of a breach of the training-rule prohibiting sexual intercourse, or guilty of a breach of one or more of the training-rules prohibiting actions of a sensual nature other than intercourse, and thus were permanently or temporarily self-excluded from the Order. Leaving aside the two Burmese bhikkhus from Rangoon, with whom I had no contact after the ordination ceremony, the only bhikkhu in whose parisuddhi I had complete confidence was my teacher Jagdish Kashyap, with whom I had lived for eight or nine months and who was a model of personal integrity. Yet though most of the bhikkhus who had taken part in my ordination were, like the bhikkhu with a wife and son, bad monks, they were, like him, good Buddhists. They looked after pilgrims, edited Buddhist magazines, published books on Buddhism, ran schools and dispensaries, organized Buddhist festivals, gave lectures, and received new converts into the Sangha or Buddhist Spiritual Community, besides observing the basic ethical precepts and practising a little meditation. In the case of some of them, at least, these activities were the expression of a deep and genuine devotion to the Dharma, for whose sake they had, despite their sexual peccadilloes, made many sacrifices. I am therefore glad I was ordained by them, and in the case of two or three of them cherish fond memories of our subsequent association.

I am glad I was ordained by them not only because they were, in varying degrees, good Buddhists. I am also glad because they represented, between them, four different nationalities, two of them being Indian, three Burmese, one Nepalese, and the rest Ceylonese. All were Theravadins, but sitting outside the sima (since he belonged to a different tradition of monastic ordination) was a Tibetan, strictly speaking Ladakhi, tulku or 'incarnate lama' who was, of course, a follower of the Mahayana. My bhikkhu ordination not being a bhikkhu ordination at all, there was in reality nothing to exclude Kusho Bakula from the proceedings, despite appearances to the contrary, and it is therefore possible for me to rejoice in the fact that I was ordained by bhikkhus who represented, between them, the two major divisions of Buddhism.

II

Not all the bhikkhus in the ordaining chapter were really bhikkhus, technically speaking. The ceremony they performed was not really a bhikkhu ordination. What, then, did take place when, as I thought, I was being ordained as a bhikkhu? Were the words then spoken and the actions then performed no more than a sacrilegious mockery of the Vinaya, an empty charade, totally devoid of meaning and significance, so that the truth of the matter was that *nothing at all* took place and I was left in exactly the same position as before? The clue to the answer is in the words in which, writing many years later, I described the ceremony, and which I have already quoted: 'Whilst the ceremony was in progress I experienced an extraordinary sense of peace, satisfaction, fulfilment, acceptance, and belonging. It was a feeling such as I had not experienced before, and in subsequent years I was never surprised when an elderly monk told me that receiving the monastic ordination had been the greatest experience of his whole life.'³ This feeling it is impossible for me to doubt or deny. Since reading the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Sutra of Wei Lang* some eight years earlier I had been very much on my own as a Buddhist. I had certainly been on my own as a Buddhist in the army, while my two years as a freelance wandering ascetic had been spent in a Hindu environment with a companion who was oscillating between Buddhism and Hinduism. In Benares I had been surrounded by Hindu orthodoxy, and in Kalimpong had founded a Buddhist organization the members of which were either Hindus sympathetic to Buddhism or more or less nominal, 'born' Buddhists. But now I was no longer on my own. I had been accepted into the Sangha or Buddhist Spiritual Community, was a member of that community, belonged to that community. My heartfelt desire not just to be a Buddhist but to have the fact that I was a Buddhist recognized and appreciated by other Buddhists had at last been fulfilled. I felt satisfied and at peace.

At the time, and for six years afterwards, I was of course under the impression I had been ordained as a bhikkhu. I was under the impression that the Sangha into which I had been ordained was not the Sangha in the sense of the Buddhist Spiritual Community but the Sangha in the much narrower sense of the Monastic Order, for I tended to identify the Sangha with the Monastic Order. Only much later, after I had realized that the Going for Refuge was the central and definitive Act of the Buddhist life, and that commitment to the Three Jewels was primary and lifestyle, whether lay or monastic, secondary, did it become possible for me, taking the feeling I experienced during my ordination ceremony as a clue, to understand what really happened and acknowledge to myself that I had been ordained not as a bhikkhu by bhikkhus but, in reality, as a Buddhist by Buddhists, and welcomed not into the Monastic Order but into the Buddhist Spiritual Community in the widest sense. I had been welcomed, moreover, not only by the yellow-robed and red-robed representatives of five different nationalities and the two major divisions of Buddhism but by their white-robed counterparts as well, who from their position immediately behind Kusho Bakula participated in the proceedings spiritually to no less an extent than anyone else did.

As I look back at my ordination in Sarnath over an interval of more than forty years, it strikes me that the feeling I experienced then was the kind of feeling experienced on the occasion of their 'public' ordination by members of the Western Buddhist Order, though the latter are much clearer about the significance of their ceremony than I was about the significance of mine. Would it be too fanciful to suggest that this is not the only parallel between my own spiritual journey and theirs? In 1943 or 1944 I 'took Pansil' from the Burmese monk U Thittila in London.⁴ The parallel to this in the FWBO is becoming a Friend, which one does simply by turning up at an FWBO centre and joining, perhaps, in the chanting of the Sevenfold Puja without understanding what it is all about, just as I found myself repeating the Three Refuges and Five Precepts in Pali at a meeting of the Buddhist Society without a real appreciation of what I was doing. Six or seven years later, in a town in the Punjab hills, I 'went forth' from the household life into the life of homelessness.⁵ Having left the army eight months earlier, I disposed of my remaining possessions, said goodbye to friends, and with a single companion set out on foot for the plains and, as it turned out, two years of wandering. A Friend parallels this 'going forth' of mine, it could be said, by becoming a Mitra, when he starts separating himself from conventional society and its values and turning in the direction of Enlightenment. He is one who has finished 'shopping around' other groups and religions and settled for the FWBO, who is willing and able to keep up regular contact with Order members, who meditates regularly, and who is willing to help Order members with the running of the local Centre or some other aspect of the Movement to the best of his ability.⁶ My 'going forth' fulfilled only two of these criteria, the first and the third, so that it is paralleled by a Friend's becoming a Mitra only to a limited extent, the limitation being entirely on my side. In May 1949 I was ordained as a samanera or novice monk in Kusinagara, the site of the Buddha's final teachings and 'great decease', my preceptor being the Burmese monk U Chandramani.⁷ This is paralleled by a Mitra entering into a relation of Kalyana Mitrata or spiritual friendship with two Order members, who take an active and sincere interest in the Mitra and his development and are able to give him any criticism, guidance, support, and advice that he may need. In my case there was only one 'Kalyana Mitra', but a few months later I acquired a second in the person of Jagdish Kashyap, by whom, as was customary, I was in fact reordained as a samanera immediately prior to my bhikkhu ordination proper – a sub-ceremony paralleled by the 'private' ordination which in the case of members of the Western Buddhist Order precedes 'public' ordination. Being a samanera, and having U Chandramani and Jagdish Kashyap as my 'Kalyana Mitras', enabled me to fulfil the two other requirements of FWBO Mitrahood. Besides having as much regular contact with them as I could, I helped U Chandramani by visiting his Newar disciples in Nepal and preaching to them, while at Jagdish Kashyap's behest I stayed in Kalimpong to 'work for the good of Buddhism'. Thus there is more than one parallel between my own spiritual journey and the spiritual journey of members of the Western Buddhist Order, and it is not surprising that the feelings experienced in the course of those journeys should be of much the same kind.

On 12 October 1962, six years after my discovery that technically speaking I was not a bhikkhu, I received the Bodhisattva ordination in Kalimpong from my friend and teacher Dhardo Rimpoche, a Tibetan 'incarnate lama' whom I regarded as a veritable embodiment of the Bodhisattva ideal.⁸ This ordination I took partly in order to give formal expression to my acceptance of the Bodhisattva ideal, and partly as a means of progressing from the 'Hinayana', to which belonged the tradition (or rather, the traditions) of monastic ordination, to the less monastically orientated Mahayana. Though I did not fully acknowledge this to myself at the time, I also wanted to feel that I had a stronger formal connection with Buddhist tradition than was provided by an invalid bhikkhu ordination. Later I came to see that the Hinayana and the Mahayana are not, in fact, the lower and higher stages of a single path. My experience of the Bodhisattva ordination is therefore paralleled in the spiritual life of members of the Western Buddhist Order by the realization that the Bodhicitta or Will to (Supreme) Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, the arising of which makes one a Bodhisattva, according to the Mahayana,⁹ is actually the altruistic dimension of the 'Hinayana' Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. It is in this Going for Refuge, as recognized and formally acknowledged by the Sangha or Spiritual Community of those who themselves go for Refuge, that samvara or ordination really consists.

III

But what of the bhikkhus who ordained me at Sarnath? What did *they* think had taken place in the sima that morning in November forty-three years ago? A few of them no doubt thought that a valid ordination had taken place, that I was now technically a bhikkhu, and that the Monastic Order in India could congratulate itself on the accession of a new member to its ranks. Others, perhaps the majority, knew perfectly well that one of their number was not really a bhikkhu, and that his presence within the sima invalidated the proceedings, so that in fact no ordination had taken place and that 'the novice Sangharakkhita' was no more a bhikkhu at the conclusion of the ceremony than he had been at the beginning. Did the bhikkhus deceive me, then? Did they connive at, indeed actively participate in, a conscious and deliberate imposture? I cannot really believe this to have been the case. From the evident satisfaction with which they participated in the proceedings, and the warmth with which they congratulated me afterwards, it was clear that they felt nothing but goodwill towards me, that they were ready to accept me as one of themselves, and that for them too that morning something had taken place, as I now believe, that was not explicable in terms of the letter of the Vinaya.

Not that they actually *thought* this. They did not think anything. Or if it did occur to them that at least one of their number was guilty of a major breach of the sikkhapadas or rules of training, and that his presence within the sima at the time of my ordination vitiated the proceedings, then they automatically thrust the thought to the back of their minds. As I was to learn before I had been many months a bhikkhu, there were quite a lot of thoughts of this inconvenient nature

that members of the Monastic Order thrust to the back of their minds. Happening to meet a very senior monk from Ceylon who was well known for his 'orthodoxy', i.e. for his strict adherence to the letter of the Vinaya, I asked him whether something could not be done about a certain prominent bhikkhu who, as I had known since long before my ordination, was notoriously guilty of major breaches of the sikkhapadas. The monk, who had just been lamenting the shameful laxity of bhikkhus who took solid food after midday (actually a minor offence entailing simple confession), muttered something about it being none of his business, and changed the subject. Admittedly he belonged to another nikaya or 'family' of monks, and admittedly the guilty bhikkhu occupied a position of some influence in the Buddhist world, but even so I found the monk's unwillingness to do anything about a matter affecting the parisuddha or 'complete purity', and hence the very existence, of the Monastic Order, rather surprising. What he was saying, in effect, was that it was simply 'not the done thing' to call a bhikkhu's parisuddhi into question. If one had doubts, one kept them to oneself.

Both before and after my ordination I had doubts, and more than doubts, about the parisuddhi of quite a few of the bhikkhus with whom I was in contact, and though I kept these doubts to myself it was difficult for me not to think about them. Some bhikkhus, I was forced to conclude, were not bhikkhus at all, usually on account of their being guilty of the same major breach of the sikkhapadas as the bhikkhu whose presence within the sima had, as I subsequently discovered, rendered my ordination invalid. Others, while still technically bhikkhus (assuming *their* ordinations to have been valid, which was quite a big assumption) had either rendered themselves liable to suspension or observed the letter of the Vinaya in the excessively formalistic manner I have criticized in *A Survey of Buddhism*, written during the year prior to my 'discovery'.¹⁰ In those days I tended to think of all such bhikkhus simply as bad monks or, what amounted to the same thing, as laymen who were masquerading as monks for the sake of worldly advantage. Only many years later, after I had realized the supreme importance of Going for Refuge in the Buddhist life, and the *relative* unimportance of all lifestyles, including the monastic, did it become possible for me to adopt a more positive attitude and to think of some of them, at least, as good Buddhists rather than as bad monks. If they had also been good monks, in the true sense, it would have been better. But the fact of their being bad monks had not prevented them from being deeply and genuinely devoted to the Dharma, nor had it prevented them – as it had not prevented the bhikkhus who ordained me – from giving expression to that devotion in a variety of ways.

Yet though it is possible for me to think of some of them, at least, as good Buddhists rather than as bad monks, I sometimes wonder how they actually felt, those bhikkhus who were not really bhikkhus, and who, though wearing the yellow robe and receiving the offerings of the faithful, were living (in the case of the 'worst' of them) in a state of *de jure* expulsion from the Monastic Order. In particular I wonder how the bhikkhus who had taken part in my ordination felt,

that is, those of them who were guilty of major breaches of the sikkhapadas and who knew, somewhere at the back of their minds, that the ceremony in which they were so happily participating was not a valid ordination at all. Did they not have reservations about the part they were playing? Did they feel no uneasiness? Now that it is possible for me to think of them as good Buddhists rather than as bad monks, I believe I could go to them and raise the matter in a way that would have been inconceivable thirty or forty years ago. How did *you* feel, Venerable K—, when you had a wife and son living with you at your temple, only yards away; or you, Venerable D—, with your young wife in a distant city; or *you*, my old friend Venerable S—, whose exploits were eventually chronicled in the local press for months together, as you confided to me the last time we met? How did you and your colleagues in expulsion and suspension feel, sitting in the sima together on the morning of 24 November 1950, and ordaining, as it appeared, the young English Buddhist whose dearest wish was to be a bhikkhu and who had, in good faith and with implicit trust in your credentials, asked you to make him one? Alas! you are all long since dead, and unless you can revisit the Earth from some other realm of existence I shall never obtain an answer to my question.

But if I do not know, and may never know, whether or not the bhikkhus who ordained me in Sarnath had reservations about the part they were playing, or felt any uneasiness, there were certainly bhikkhus elsewhere in the Buddhist world who, both before and after that time, felt not just uneasiness but positive anguish at the thought that they were, or might be, living in a state of *de jure* expulsion or suspension from the Monastic Order. In *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, which I read soon after its publication in 1983, there is a fascinating account of some of these bhikkhus. One of them, conscious that he had repeatedly violated the training-rules prohibiting actions of a sensual nature other than intercourse, went to great lengths to revive the complex and difficult procedure whereby one in his position could be purified of his offence and re-accepted into the Monastic Order, a procedure that had fallen into abeyance in the nikaya to which he belonged.¹¹ Another bhikkhu, convinced that the Monastic Order in Ceylon was utterly corrupt, and that no monk was ‘completely pure’, left the robe and took ordination at his own hands as a tapasaya or ascetic, just as the Bodhisattva or Buddha-to-be had done in the Jataka tales.¹² In my own case, I eventually ceased to think in terms of monastic ordination. What *really* mattered was that one went for Refuge to the Three Jewels, after which, as an expression of that continuing Act, one could live either as a ‘monk’ or as a ‘layman’.

IV

After discovering that I was not really a bhikkhu, i.e. not a bhikkhu in the technical Vinaya sense, I could, theoretically, have sought re-ordination. Though there were practical difficulties, even if re-ordination was out of the question I could still have disrobed and gone to Burma or Thailand to seek ordination there. But this alternative was not really open to me. Whether in India, or Burma, or Thailand, or anywhere else in the Buddhist world, I had no means of knowing whether or not the members of the ordaining chapter were parisuddha or

'completely pure' and no means of knowing, therefore, whether or not an ordination conferred by them was valid. Only one possessed of paracittañāna or '(telepathic) knowledge of the minds of others', the third of the five (mundane) abhiññas or higher knowledges, had the means of knowing that. And even if all members of the ordaining chapter were parisuddha, in the sense of being guiltless of any breach of the sikkhapadas, this would not necessarily mean that they had been validly ordained and were, therefore, really bhikkhus and able to confer valid ordination. They might easily be in the same position that I had been in before making my discovery, i.e. might be non-bhikkhus without knowing themselves to be such. In order to be quite sure that I was receiving a valid ordination I would therefore need to know whether or not the members of the chapters which had ordained each of *them* were 'completely pure' and had been validly ordained – and so on back to the very beginning of the coenobitical Monastic Order. Logically speaking, I could not be sure that any bhikkhu was validly ordained unless I could be sure that all his predecessors in monastic ordination had been validly ordained. Nor was that all. Not only did the members of an ordaining chapter have to be 'completely pure'. Not only did they have to be validly ordained. The ordination itself had to be conducted in strict accordance with the requirements of the Vinaya, otherwise it was no ordination at all, and since these requirements extended to the minutiae of the ceremony mistakes – and disputes – could easily occur. In *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka* there is an amusing example of the sort of thing that could happen. A certain plank, it was alleged, had impinged on the boundary of the sima, so that the ordinations conferred on that occasion were not valid, and those monks no monks at all. 'By the time this exercise in frustration petered out twenty years later, it had drawn into it chief monks from as far away as Burma and Thailand, most of whom tried to calm the contestants and bring them to an amicable settlement.'¹³ All this goes to show that technically valid ordination is virtually impossible of attainment and that if one did, miraculously, obtain it, one could not know that one had done so.

Thus a bhikkhu can never really know that he is a bhikkhu. He can only believe that he is one, and the strength of his belief – considerations of temperament apart – will be in inverse proportion to the extent of his awareness of what it is necessary for him to know in order to be able to know that he is a bhikkhu. He can, of course, know whether or not he is observing the sikkhapadas or rules of training; in the case of some rules, he is the only person who can know whether or not he is observing them. But even the strictest observance of the sikkhapadas is not, by itself, sufficient to make him a bhikkhu in the technical Vinaya sense, though a major breach of the sikkhapadas is enough to unmake him as a bhikkhu, assuming him to have been validly ordained in the first place. According to the *Dhammapada*, he is a bhikkhu (and a brahmana and a samana) who, though well dressed (*alankato*), is calm, controlled, assured (of release from mundane existence), and chaste (*brahmacara*), and refrains from inflicting injury on anyone.¹⁴ According to the Vinaya, however, he is a bhikkhu who is ordained, i.e. who has been accepted into the Monastic Order in the prescribed manner. Thus

there is a tension, even a conflict, between Sutra and Vinaya, or, as one might also express it, between the spirit of the Dharma and that *stressing* of the letter (not the actual letter itself) which constitutes legalism, in this case pseudo-monastic legalism, and which is ultimately self-defeating.

In practice the tension or conflict is not much felt. A bhikkhu generally *believes* he is a bhikkhu in the technical Vinaya sense, and he believes this not so much on account of his observance of the sikkhapadas as because he has been accepted into the Monastic Order in the prescribed manner. That it is ordination, not observance of the sikkhapadas, that really makes one a bhikkhu and worthy of the veneration of the faithful, is demonstrated by the kind of situation that came to my notice long before I discovered that my ordination was invalid and which gave me considerable food for reflection. A certain bhikkhu might be working as a college lecturer, drawing a salary and living with his servants in a bungalow equipped with every comfort and convenience. While avoiding any major breach of the sikkhapadas, he might be worldly-minded and ambitious, having no real interest in the spiritual life. He might, furthermore, be ill-natured, abusive, and overbearing. Yet this bhikkhu would be treated with the utmost respect by the laity, who would prostrate themselves before him, spread white cloths for him to sit and even walk on, and address him, or refer to him, in a special honorific language. A certain layman, however, might be teaching meditation, accepting no remuneration and living alone in a simple hut. Though wearing a white robe, he might be observing the additional (samanera) precepts of abstention from non-chastity, from untimely meals, from dance, song, music, and unseemly shows, from personal adornment, and from handling gold and silver. He might, furthermore, be good-natured, courteous, and unassuming. Yet he would not be treated with the same profound deference as the worldly-minded bhikkhu. The bhikkhu has been *ordained*, and he has not. That it is ordination, and not the kind of life one leads, that really makes one a bhikkhu, is also demonstrated by what happens when a bhikkhu leaves the yellow robe, i.e. resigns his ordination, which the Vinaya allows him to do and for which there is a special procedure. Even though there may have been no change in his way of life, the laity stop showing him any special respect, while he, for his part, now shows bhikkhus who had been his pupils the respect that formerly they had shown him. There is a third kind of situation that demonstrates how it is ordination, not the kind of life one leads, that makes one a bhikkhu (or a bhikkhuni), but this has come to my notice more recently and I shall deal with it separately later on.

If a bhikkhu does not know whether or not he is really a bhikkhu, and if his spiritual life depends on the fact that he *is* a bhikkhu, then his spiritual life has a very insecure foundation. Strictly considered, it has no foundation at all. As the author of *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka* observes, 'The rigid separation of monk from layman is a bedrock on which the edifice of Theravada spiritual life is founded.' What separates monk and layman (and monk and novice) is ordination, i.e. bhikkhu ordination, which the former has received while the latter has not. In Theravada, however, though not in its own Pali canon as a

whole, the spiritual life is identified with monastic life, i.e. with being a bhikkhu, for, as the same author also points out, 'it is a firmly held view in Theravada ... that it is only monks who attain liberation.'¹⁵ Since spiritual life is identified with being a bhikkhu, and since a bhikkhu is one who has been ordained, it follows that in Theravada spiritual life is based on ordination. But if spiritual life is based on ordination, and if one does not, even cannot, know whether one is really ordained, one cannot know, either, whether or not one is really leading a spiritual life and moving in the direction of liberation. Spiritual life is based not on what one believes about oneself but on what one knows, even if what one knows is no more than the simple fact that one suffers. Unless it is so based there can be no question of our being self-reliant, and without self-reliance there can be no question of our being able to follow the Buddha's dying exhortation to us to abide islands unto ourselves, refuges unto ourselves, taking refuge in none other.¹⁶

That a bhikkhu does not know whether or not he is really a bhikkhu has implications not only for his own spiritual life but also for the spiritual life, such as it is, of the laity. Not being a bhikkhu, i.e. not being ordained, a layman strictly speaking has no spiritual life. He does not seek to attain vimutti or liberation from mundane existence. Instead, he seeks to attain a state of greater happiness *within* mundane existence, both here and hereafter. Such a state is attained not by means of pañña or 'wisdom', which is the means to the attainment of liberation, but by means of puñña or merit. 'Making merit' thus comes to be the principal religious activity of the Theravadin layman, and the best and easiest way for him to make merit is by supporting the bhikkhus, in the sense of providing them with food, clothing, accommodation, and medicine (the traditional 'four requisites') and, in modern times, many other things besides. Supporting bhikkhus is the best and easiest way of making merit because bhikkhus are leading the spiritual life and because, according to tradition, the more spiritually developed is the person to whom offerings are made the greater is the merit that accrues therefrom. But the layman does not actually *know* that the bhikkhu is a bhikkhu. He only *believes* him to be such, his belief being based on the bhikkhu's own belief that he *is* a bhikkhu. Thus the foundation of the layman's spiritual/religious life is doubly insecure. He is even less sure that he is actually making merit, and thus earning for himself a state of greater happiness within conditioned existence, than the bhikkhu is sure that he is really leading a spiritual life and moving in the direction of liberation.

Some lay people indeed seem to have an obscure awareness of how insecure is the foundation of their religious life. At any rate, they are anxious that the bhikkhus whom they support should be strict observers of the Vinaya, and keep as close an eye on them as possible. Should they come to know that a bhikkhu has been guilty of a breach of the sikkhapadas (and lay people do not always know what constitutes a major and what a minor offence) they will feel extremely disappointed, even angry. They will feel disappointed not so much on account of the breach itself as because of what it means, namely, that the bhikkhu is not really a bhikkhu – and money spent supporting one who is not a bhikkhu does

not make merit. It is money wasted. While such an attitude may not encourage bhikkhus to be actually hypocritical, it certainly encourages them to be more circumspect in their behaviour when under the surveillance of the laity than when they are on their own. A few bhikkhus may even flaunt the strictness of their own observance of the Vinaya, as compared with the laxity of the observance of other bhikkhus, in order to win the laity's favour. Generally speaking, however, bhikkhus are well aware that they are all in the same boat and are anxious not to rock it by drawing undue attention to one another's shortcomings. During the fourteen years I spent in India after my supposed ordination I did not once hear of a monk being actually expelled from the Monastic Order, though I did hear of a senior Thai bhikkhu being arrested and forcibly disrobed by the (Thai) police for the alleged possession of Marxist literature.

Whether or not because of the difficulty of being sure that a bhikkhu *is* a bhikkhu, in the strict Vinaya sense, in the Theravadin countries of south-east Asia the actual ordination *ceremony* has in practice come to assume, for bhikkhus and laymen alike, a quasi-magical character that gives it a kind of inherent validity of its own. A bhikkhu is a bhikkhu, for all practical purposes, because he has undergone this quasi-magical ceremony and himself assumed a quasi-magical character, something of which will remain with him should he ever choose to leave the robe, that is, leave it honourably or without having been guilty of a breach of the sikkhapadas, as it is possible for him to do in Burma and Thailand. His quasi-magical character is reinforced by the highly ceremonious, even ritualistic, way in which he is treated by the laity, as well as by the fact that both he and the laity tend to regard the sikkhapadas as taboos rather than as rules of training. The bhikkhu ordination ceremony proper, as laid down in the Vinaya-Pitaka, is far from possessing a quasi-magical character. Anything less 'magical' could hardly be imagined. The ordaining chapter, being of course 'completely pure', assembles within the sima. The chairman, as he may be called, puts to the monks the motion that the novice monk X wishes to receive the bhikkhu ordination from the chapter with the Venerable Y as his preceptor and that the chapter should, if it so wishes, grant him the ordination. Three batches of three monks (if the chapter consists of ten or more members, as is usually the case, even outside the Middle Country) then request the chapter to agree to the motion, each batch repeating the request in unison once. The chapter remaining silent, the motion is declared carried. To outward appearances, at least, it is all much more like a board meeting than a religious ceremony.

V

In the early days of the Western Buddhist Order I was sometimes asked whether our ordinations were recognized by other Buddhists. The question was based on two assumptions. One assumption was that the 'other Buddhists' constituted a unitary, monolithic body, rather like the Roman Catholic Church, which had the power to grant – or not grant – formal recognition to new Buddhist groups. The other was that being so 'recognized' somehow conferred on our ordinations a

validity which otherwise they would not possess. What form such recognition normally took was not made clear. If I thought the question was a *bona fide* one, and not simply an expression of hostility towards the FWBO, I would try to explain that Buddhists were in fact divided into as many different sects as Christians. Even monks were divided. To begin with, monks were divided into those who followed one or other of the different Sarvastivadin versions of the Vinaya and those who followed the Theravadin version, the former being found in Mahayana countries such as China and Tibet, where monks combined observance of the Vinaya with commitment to the Bodhisattva ideal, while the latter were found in Theravadin countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. In each of the Theravadin countries the Monastic Order was divided into independent nikayas or 'families' of bhikkhus, some of which had, over the years, given birth to nikayas of their own. Thus the Amarapura Nikaya of Sri Lanka, which had split off from the fifty-year-old Siyam Nikaya in 1803, had since become divided into more than a dozen nikayas. Which of these different sects and nikayas, comprising at least six hundred independent bodies, was supposed to 'recognize' the WBO's ordinations? Did they *all* have to recognize them? Or would recognition by only a few of them suffice?

The fact is that these bodies do not always recognize one another. Leaving aside the sects, which are divided mainly along doctrinal lines, and leaving aside the Sarvastivadin nikayas, the Theravadin nikayas do not recognize one another inasmuch as they do not recognize the validity, in the technical Vinaya sense, of each other's bhikkhu ordinations. This is hardly surprising, some of the later nikayas having come into existence because their founders doubted the validity of the ordinations they had received from the earlier nikayas. That the Theravadin nikayas do not recognize one another, that is, do not recognize the validity of each other's ordinations in the technical Vinaya sense, certainly does not mean that they fight and quarrel among themselves, though tensions admittedly exist. What it means is that they do not take part in one another's sanghakammas or official acts of the Monastic Order (in effect, of the individual nikaya), since the presence within the sima, where all such acts take place, of one who according to them is not really a bhikkhu, would invalidate the proceedings. Otherwise, bhikkhus of different nikayas associate freely for socio-religious purposes, separating according to nikaya only for their respective sanghakammas.¹⁷

Should therefore a Theravadin nikaya refuse to recognize WBO ordinations it would be doing no more than it does when it refuses to recognize the ordinations of bhikkhus belonging to other nikayas in its own country. Nikayas are composed of bhikkhus, and bhikkhus can recognize – or refuse to recognize – only bhikkhu ordinations. Members of the Western Buddhist Order are not bhikkhus (or bhikkhunis) and ordinations in the Western Buddhist Order are not bhikkhu ordinations, so that there is no more question of nikayas being able to recognize WBO ordinations than there is of the WBO being able to recognize theirs. In the Western Buddhist Order samvara or ordination consists in

effectively Going for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and having that Going for Refuge formally recognized by others who themselves go for Refuge, that is, by existing members of the Order, as well as in undertaking to observe the Ten Precepts or *dasasikkhapadas*, corresponding *not* to the ten *sikkhapadas* of the *samanera* but to the ten *akusalakammamathas* or 'modes of abstention from unskilful behaviour'.¹⁸ Thus ordination in the WBO is based on knowledge, that is, knowledge of one's own effective Going for Refuge and its recognition by others. It is not based on belief in the technical validity of one's ordination.

The fact that *samvara* or ordination consists in effectively Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels is closely connected with the fact that, in the Western Buddhist Order, Going for Refuge is seen as the central and definitive Act of the Buddhist life, it being of secondary importance whether one lives as a monk or as a layman. In many parts of the Buddhist world Going for Refuge is not seen in this way. Particularly in the Theravadin countries of south-east Asia, where lifestyle is more important than commitment to the Three Jewels and where spiritual life is traditionally identified with monasticism, ordination as a *bhikkhu* has come to occupy the central place that really belongs to Going for Refuge. Theravadin lay people do 'take' the Three Refuges and Five (sometimes Eight) Precepts from a *bhikkhu* on special occasions, but such taking does not constitute an ordination, as it does in those Mahayana countries where monks follow the Sarvastivadin Vinaya and where, thanks to the universality of the Bodhisattva ideal, there tends to be a distinction rather than a division between the Monastic Order and the lay community. Theravadin lay people thus do not receive (lay) ordination in the way that *bhikkhus* receive monastic ordination. They are in effect second class Buddhists, their religious life consisting mainly in making merit for themselves by supporting *bhikkhus*.

This absence of lay ordination in the Theravada presented a difficulty when, in October 1956, the ex-Untouchable Hindus of western and central India started converting to Buddhism in large numbers. As their scholarly leader, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, well knew, one of the reasons for the disappearance of Buddhism from India, centuries earlier, was its over-identification with coenobitical monasticism. On the destruction of the great monastic establishments by the iconoclastic Turkish invaders there was nothing to prevent the Buddhist laity, who had been little more than supporters of the monks, from falling under the influence of Hinduism, by which they were eventually absorbed. Ambedkar did not want such a thing to happen again. His followers had to feel that they were *bona fide* Buddhists, not just supporters of monks and monasteries. They had to feel that they were full members of the Buddhist Spiritual Community. In order that they should feel this it was necessary for them to be formally accepted into Buddhism in the way that a monk was accepted into the Monastic Order. There had to be lay ordination. But within the Theravada, at that time the only form of Buddhism with an effective presence in India, lay ordination was not available. Ambedkar met the difficulty by creating a

ceremony of his own. Having taken the Three Refuges and Five Precepts from U Chandramani, who had made me a samanera six years earlier, and having pronounced twenty-two pratijnas of his own devising, he then himself administered all three – refuges, precepts, and vows – to the serried ranks of 380,000 of his followers, thus inaugurating the memorable and historic series of mass conversions of ex-Untouchables to Buddhism.¹⁹ He thus did two important things at a stroke. By creating a conversion ceremony for his followers he in effect revived the tradition of lay ordination, and by conducting the ceremony himself, instead of allowing U Chandramani to conduct it, he placed the layman on an equal footing with the monk and lay ordination on an equal footing with monastic ordination.

Twelve years later, when I founded the Western Buddhist Order, I took the process a stage further. As originally envisaged, the Order comprised a hierarchy of different degrees of ordination, from upasaka ordination up to bhikkhu ordination, corresponding to a hierarchy of different levels of commitment to the Three Jewels; but eventually, as I realized how necessary it was to emphasize that Going for Refuge is primary, and lifestyle secondary, these ordinations were all integrated into a single ordination, that of the Dharmacari (masc.) or Dharmacarini (fem.), an individual who goes for Refuge to the Three Jewels and who, as a means of giving expression to that continuing Act in his or her everyday life, whether ‘lay’ or ‘monastic’, undertakes to observe the Ten Precepts.²⁰ No longer were lay ordination and bhikkhu ordination even placed on the same footing. There was only one principal Going for Refuge, one ordination, one Spiritual Community.

VI

Probably there is in the Buddhist world not a single Buddhist monk whose ordination would be recognized as technically valid by all other monks, or even by a majority of them. This certainly does not mean that there are no virtuous monks, that is, monks who are guiltless of any breach of the sikkhapadas, whether major or minor, and deserving of the respect of all followers of the Buddha. Scattered throughout the Buddhist oecumene there must be thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of such monks, many of them living in comparative obscurity, their merits known only to a tiny band of disciples and supporters. Yet impossible though it is for a monk to be a monk *without* observing the sikkhapadas, even virtuous monks, and virtuous Theravadin monks in particular, believe themselves to be monks not on account of their observance of the (monastic) sikkhapadas, which can in any case be observed by the layman without his ceasing to be a layman, but because they have received monastic ordination and believe that ordination to be technically valid. It is the same with those bhikkhus who are not so virtuous. They too believe that they are bhikkhus, not indeed on account of their observance of the sikkhapadas, which may be quite lax, but because they have received bhikkhu ordination, at least in the sense of having undergone the ordination ceremony. This is by no means all. Those who have received monastic ordination not only believe themselves to be

bhikkhus, but practically all of them, not excluding those whose observance of the sikkhapadas is of the laxest, also believe that they are entitled to the support of the laity and should be treated with the utmost formal respect. In their eyes, only too often, the 'good Buddhist', i.e. the good lay Buddhist, is the one who is a lavish giver to the bhikkhus and treats them virtually like Arahats.

This brings me to a point I regret having to make. During my fourteen years as a bhikkhu in India, I came to the conclusion that the extreme veneration shown to bhikkhus by the Theravadin laity is really quite bad for them. I am not saying that respect itself is a bad thing. Neither am I saying that the showing of respect to others is bad for one. On the contrary, I believe parents, teachers, elders, and the *truly* great, ought to be shown more respect than is customary nowadays. What I am saying is that the kind of veneration shown by the Theravadin laity to bhikkhus, by prostrating before them, seating them on a higher level, serving them on bended knees, and giving even the juniormost of them precedence over the highest lay dignitaries, has a negative rather than a positive psychological effect on them. The effect is somewhat less negative in the case of a few of the more conscientious bhikkhus, for whom such veneration acts as an incentive so to live as to deserve veneration. In the case of the majority the effect is very negative indeed, serving as it does to reinforce their sense of the superiority of the bhikkhu to the layman and giving them, in some instances, a quite inflated idea of their own importance and even of their own spiritual attainments. Indeed bhikkhus of long standing may have become so accustomed to being treated with the kind of veneration I have described, that they are unable to imagine being treated in any other way and unable to relate to the laity except on the basis of such veneration. Should Western converts to Buddhism, for example, happen to treat them with no more than ordinary politeness, they are liable to become uneasy, disconcerted, or even annoyed. 'These people have no faith,' they have been known to remark on such occasions, by faith meaning, really, faith in the superiority of bhikkhus.

In making this criticism, as I am afraid it is, I am referring specifically to Theravadin bhikkhus. I am not referring to those Chinese and Tibetan monks who follow one or other version of the Sarvastivadin Vinaya, a Vinaya which is in substantial agreement with its Theravadin counterpart. Tibetan monks, in particular, are far less concerned to insist on the difference between the monk and the layman. They have no hesitation, for example, in returning the salutations of the laity, which Theravadin bhikkhus rarely if ever do. The reason for this difference may be that Tibetan monks are psychologically and spiritually more sure of themselves, or it may be that in Tibet the veneration that in Theravadin countries is shown to bhikkhus is (or was) directed towards the tulkus or 'incarnate lamas'. Most likely the main reason is that monk and layman alike accept the Bodhisattva ideal, which has been described as the 'Presiding Idea' of Tibetan Buddhism.²¹ Whatever the reason for it may be, the difference undoubtedly exists, Theravadin bhikkhus being not only more concerned to insist on the superiority of the monk but also more concerned that the layman

should give practical recognition to that superiority by supporting the monk and venerating him. Often one of the first things to be taught by Theravadin bhikkhus working in India and in the West is 'how to pay proper respect to bhikkhus'. A senior Ceylonese bhikkhu once related to me, with every appearance of satisfaction, how he had taught the Muslim waiter in the five star hotel where he was staying to cut and offer him bananas in the approved manner and repeating the prescribed Pali formula.

Justifications for the extreme veneration shown to bhikkhus by the Theravadin laity, and expected from the latter by the bhikkhus themselves, are by no means wanting. Respect is shown to the robe, one will be told, not to the wearer of the robe. But this is not very convincing. There is nothing about a piece of yellow cloth that makes it inherently worthy of respect. Whatever respect is shown it is shown on account of the ethical and spiritual qualities with which it has come to be associated. These qualities are human qualities, so that when one shows respect to the robe it is really these qualities one is respecting, not the robe itself. Should the wearer of the robe actually embody those qualities in his own person one ought to be able to respect him regardless of the colour of his dress; should he not so embody them, and even embody qualities of an opposite kind, one might as well hang a robe on a stick and show respect to that, without the necessity of supporting someone who wears the robe.

An important principle is involved here. It is natural that a particular colour, or cloth of that colour, should be associated with certain ethical and spiritual qualities, and as symbolism is an essential part of religion we need not regret this. It is also natural that there should be people who think that the wearing of a particular colour endows them with the ethical and spiritual qualities associated with that colour, and even people who adopt the colour for the sake of the material advantages to be gained from the respect shown to those qualities. At the same time – and this is the principle – there must not be too great a discrepancy between the qualities associated with a particular colour and the qualities actually possessed by the wearer of the colour, nor must such a discrepancy be allowed to become the norm, as it has become the norm in at least some parts of the Theravadin world. Should it become the norm, and remain the norm for too long a time over too big an area, the colour in question will inevitably lose its old associations and come to be associated with the actual qualities of the average wearer. The minority of conscientious bhikkhus might then find themselves in a rather odd position, with *disrespect* being shown to the robe, not to the wearer of the robe.

VII

Those who are ordained, in the technical Vinaya sense, are objects of extreme veneration to the Theravadin laity. Those who are not ordained, are not. The truth of these statements is borne out by the plight of the maejes (also spelt maechiis) of Thailand and their counterparts in the other Theravadin countries of south-east Asia. Maejes are sometimes spoken of, in English, as 'nuns', but they

are not nuns in the sense of being bhikkhunis, the approximate female equivalent of bhikkhus. They are women who permanently observe the Eight (or it may be the Nine) Precepts, who wear white (they are not allowed to wear yellow), and who devote themselves, to the extent that circumstances permit, to meditation and study and to the uplift of their lay sisters. Some maejes lead exemplary spiritual lives, practising the Dharma with a single-mindedness not equalled by all Thai bhikkhus. Yet many maejes – and there are tens of thousands of them – have to endure a good deal of hardship. Not being ordained, they are not venerated or supported by the laity in the way bhikkhus are (technically speaking, the maejes are laywomen), the reason for this being that supporting the unordained is less productive of merit than supporting the ordained. Maejes represent, if not money actually wasted, then a very poor investment. Usually they have to fend for themselves and find their own support, on occasion doing this by means of ordinary begging, as distinct from the bhikkhu's ceremonious 'going for alms'. Not only are the maejes not supported by the laity in the way bhikkhus are. They receive little or no encouragement from the Thai Monastic Order, some of whose members regard them as a threat to their own livelihood.

The tradition of bhikkhuni ordination having died out in Thailand, as it has in the other Theravadin countries of south-east Asia, the maejes are unable to improve their lot by becoming bhikkhunis. Unable, that is, to improve it by becoming bhikkhunis within the Theravada. In theory they could become 'Mahayana' bhiksunis, the Sarvastivadin (Dharmagupta) lineage of bhiksuni ordination having survived in China and Korea as part and parcel of Mahayana Buddhism, but in practice this is not really an option. For Western women who become Buddhists and want to lead a monastic life there are no such difficulties. Not only do they not suffer the social and educational disadvantages of the maejes. It is open to them to take ordination as 'Mahayana' bhiksunis, as a handful of them have in fact done in recent years. Some Western Buddhist women, adherents of the Theravada, would prefer to take ordination as Theravadin bhikkhunis, and are trying to revive the tradition of bhikkhuni ordination. In my view the attempt is misguided, representing as it does the same unhealthy emphasis on ordination, in the technical Vinaya sense, that we find in the case of bhikkhu ordination. It moreover betrays a preoccupation with socio-religious status rather than showing a concern for monastic life as such. After all, there is nothing to prevent a woman from observing the appropriate sikkhapadas or rules of training, even without being a bhikkhuni. That the attempt to revive the tradition of bhikkhuni ordination betrays a preoccupation with socio-religious status is evidenced by the fact that no Western Buddhist woman who wants to lead a monastic life ever seriously contemplates observing *all* the bhikkhuni sikkhapadas. In particular, she does not contemplate observing those sikkhapadas which subordinate the bhikkhuni-sangha to the bhikkhu-sangha and make the seniormost nun junior to the juniormost monk, with all that this entails in the way of making prostrations and giving precedence. Thus the Western Buddhist woman's wish for bhikkhuni ordination is a desire, at least to an extent, for socio-religious status, especially for parity of status with the

bhikkhu, and as such has its origins not in the idea of 'going forth' from home into the life of homelessness but rather in egalitarian notions that have nothing to do with Buddhism.

Western Buddhist women who want to lead a genuinely monastic life should stop thinking in terms of bhikkhuni (or bhiksuni) ordination. Instead, they should emulate the maejes of Thailand, taking no Precepts that they do not intend to observe, wearing simple clothing appropriate to their culture, and devoting themselves to meditation and study and other activities compatible with their vocation. It is unlikely that they will endure the kind of hardship the maejes have to endure (not that monastic life can ever be easy). Ideally, they will think of themselves not as nuns but as individuals who go for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and will see the monastic life as an expression of that Going for Refuge in terms of a particular lifestyle.

VIII

It has been said that Buddhism has been in decline for nearly a thousand years. This is an exaggeration, leaving out as it does important developments in Japan and Tibet, but it is an exaggeration of a truth. In the present century the process of decline has accelerated. The greater part of Buddhist Asia is now under Communist control, while the rest of it is subject to the unhealthy pressures of capitalist consumerism. The only really bright spots in an otherwise almost uniformly dark picture are the revival of Buddhism in India and its spread to the countries of the West. Both of these, the revival in India no less than the spread to the countries of the West, are attended by serious difficulties. In the course of its twenty-five centuries of history Buddhism has accumulated an enormous amount of cultural baggage, most of which will have to be shed if the Dharma is to be really established – or, in the case of India, re-established – in the new environment, as distinct from a branch of one of its ethnic expressions being kept artificially alive under hothouse conditions. Much of that baggage is associated with the Monastic Order, which even in Asia is in need of a thorough reformation – not, indeed,

A godly, thorough Reformation...
As if religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended,

but a reformation in the sense of a restatement of fundamentals and an expression of that restatement in more appropriate terms.

In the course of communicating these reflections on my bhikkhu ordination, forty-three years ago, I may have given the impression that I reject monasticism. This is by no means the case. What I reject is the identification of the spiritual life with the monastic life and the monastic life itself with pseudo-monastic formalism, an identification that has the effect of displacing the Act of Going for Refuge from its central and definitive place in the Buddhist life, creating a division between the Monastic Order and the laity, and relegating the latter to the

position of second class Buddhists, besides seriously undermining the whole structure of Buddhism, both theoretical and practical. Far from rejecting monasticism, I have a very high regard for it, but as an *expression* of commitment to the Three Jewels, not as constitutive of that commitment. For the greater part of my own adult life I have lived as a monk, and despite the flaw in my ordination ceremony, and despite the fact that it took me a long time to realize that commitment is primary, lifestyle secondary, I have no regrets. Indeed I rejoice that I could live in this way, regretting only that I was not a better monk. I would like to see a revival of Sutra-style monasticism throughout the Buddhist world. I would like to see more monks (and nuns) within the Western Buddhist Order, twenty-odd members of which already observe the training rule of chastity as anagarikas. But what *is* monasticism? What is a *monk*? Before saying anything more about WBO anagarikas I must deal briefly with this question.

A monk is one who is vowed to (a) chastity, (b) fewness of possessions, (c) simplicity of lifestyle, (d) careerlessness, and (e) community living.

(a) *Chastity*. This is what really defines a monk. Whatever other virtues one may possess, if one is not chaste one is not a monk, though it is, of course, possible to practise chastity without being a monk, i.e. without being *vowed* to chastity or living as a monk in other ways. Thus there can be no such thing as a 'married monk', the expression being a contradiction in terms, the more especially as the English word 'monk', like its equivalent in other European languages, derives ultimately from the Greek *monos*, alone. To speak of 'married Mahayana monks', as some have done, is quite inaccurate, and highly misleading. The traditional Buddhist term for chastity is brahmacharya (Pali *brahmachariya*), and the vow or training-rule of chastity is couched, in terms that are grammatically negative, as 'abstention from non-chastity'. Brahmacharya, sometimes translated as celibacy (really the state of being unmarried, especially as consequent upon the taking of a religious vow of chastity), means a great deal more than abstention from sexual activity. As I have explained elsewhere, brahmacharya means faring, practising, or living like Brahma, that is, like one of those sublime spiritual beings who, transcending sexual dimorphism, occupy a range of celestial realms correlative to, and accessible from, the dhyanas or states of superconsciousness.²² Since a Brahma has no gross material body, there is no question of his having possessions, or lifestyle, or career. He moreover lives in company with other Brahmas. Similarly, one who practises brahmacharya or chastity will naturally tend to limit his possessions, to live simply, and to do without a gainful occupation. He will also naturally tend to live as a member of a spiritual community. Thus chastity not only defines the monk but is also the *fons et origo* of his other vows.

(b) *Fewness of possessions*. According to the Theravadin Vinaya a bhikkhu may possess only eight things: three civaras or 'yellow robes', an alms-bowl, a razor, a girdle, a needle, and a water-strainer (the Sarvastivadin Vinaya adds books and a

few other items), though he also has a share in the use of the collective property of his monastery such as furniture and buildings. The modern monk will find it difficult to limit his personal possessions to the extent that a bhikkhu is (or was) required to do, especially if he happens to live in the West. He will also find it difficult to do without money. Detailed legislation in this field is impossible, perhaps even undesirable. In principle the monk should limit his personal possessions to immediate necessities, resisting any temptation to accumulate, hoard, or save for the proverbial rainy day either belongings or money. He will bear in mind the example of the bhikkhus of old, who did not possess an extra robe, and who refused to keep salt from one day to the next. Perhaps he and his brother monks will be able to echo their song:

Happy indeed let us live, we who possess nothing.
Let us live feeding on joy, like the gods of sonant light.²³

(c) *Simplicity of lifestyle*. Traditionally, this is covered by the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth of the ten precepts observed by the samanera or novice monk, relating, respectively, to abstention from untimely meals, from worldly amusements and entertainments, from personal adornment, and from luxurious living conditions. The kind of spirit that pervades these four precepts is sufficiently obvious, and by no means to be regarded as limited to them. A monk living in our modern consumer society will formulate for himself hundreds of new precepts of this type, corresponding to the hundreds of different things he will have to give up if he wants to achieve simplicity of lifestyle. The simplicity of that lifestyle will not, however, be a sordid simplicity. It will be a refined simplicity, reflecting aesthetic as well as ethical and spiritual values, if indeed these can be separated. It will be a simplicity like that of a Greek vase painting or a Japanese 'Zen garden' of rocks and raked sand.

(d) *Careerlessness*. A career is 'a profession or occupation chosen as one's life work' (*Collins*) or 'way of making a livelihood and advancing oneself' (*New Oxford*). By careerlessness I therefore mean not having a gainful occupation that acts as the focal point of one's worldly ambitions and is the means by which one supports oneself and one's family. This is not to say that the monk does not work, or that (as in the Theravada) he will necessarily be dependent on the 'laity', i.e. on those who do work. If his monastery is unable to support him he will either work at or from 'home' in the way Zen monks do ('a day of no working is a day of no eating') or take an outside job of a kind that is not incompatible with his vocation. Should he take an outside job he normally will continue to live in the monastery and continue to be a full member of the community. The monk should never allow the monastic life itself to become a kind of career, as it has in many parts of the Buddhist world, with examinations, grades, titles, and financial incentives.

(e) *Community living*. The monks needs spiritual friends. This is not to suggest that those who are not monks do not need spiritual friends, but only that the

monk will probably feel the need for them more acutely. Spiritual friends are best found, and spiritual friendship is best cultivated, within the context of a spiritual community, that is, a group of people having a common spiritual commitment and living and/or working together in order to help one another strengthen that commitment and give it more effective expression. Since the monk is one who gives expression to his commitment by vowing himself to chastity and so on, he needs not just spiritual friends but spiritual friends who are similarly vowed, and since spiritual friends are best found, and spiritual friendship is best cultivated, within a spiritual community, he also needs to live and/or work with other monks. He needs, ideally, to belong to a monastery, or at least to a 'closed' residential spiritual community, that is, one that does not admit visitors of the opposite sex.

The reason the monk will probably feel the need for spiritual friends more acutely than those who are not monks is that, vowed as he is to chastity, he has no occasion to experience the emotional warmth and intimacy which, even when they happen to be spiritually committed, are bound up, for those who are not monks, with their sexual relationship or relationships. For such warmth and intimacy he will depend on his spiritual friends, but especially on those who are themselves monks and who, being in the same position, feel the need for spiritual friends no less acutely than he does. Without spiritual friends the monk is in danger of drying up emotionally, as appears to have happened with so many of the Roman Catholic priests who, in recent years, have left the priesthood to get married – not, indeed, for the sake of carnal indulgence so much as for the sake of close human companionship.

The fact that a monk is one who is vowed to chastity, fewness of possessions, simplicity of lifestyle, careerlessness, and community living, does not mean that he is vowed only to these things. He is a Buddhist, and as a Buddhist he also observes the sikkhapadas or rules of training undertaken by all Buddhists regardless of lifestyle, such as abstention from killing living beings, from taking the not-given, and from false, harsh, frivolous, and slanderous speech. Chastity and the rest do not, in fact, constitute a set of additional, specifically 'monastic' vows, so much as a more thoroughgoing application of the principles underlying certain of the rules of training observed by the laity, i.e. observed by monks and laity in common. A Buddhist monk, it must be emphasized, is not a monk who happens to be a Buddhist but a Buddhist who happens to be a monk, and as such he has infinitely more in common with a Buddhist who is not a monk than he has with a monk who is not a Buddhist.

This brings me back to the subject of WBO anagarikas. Being a member of the Western Buddhist Order, a WBO anagarika observes the same Ten Precepts as other members of the Order – precepts which they all took when they were ordained. The only difference is that the anagarika observes the Third Precept not in the form of abstention from sexual misconduct (*kamesu-micchacara*) but in the form of abstention from unchastity (*abrahmacariya*). This more 'monastic' version

of the Third Precept is taken some time after ordination (it may be a year or it may be twenty or more years after); it is taken formally, at a special ceremony in the course of which the new anagarika is given either a yellow robe or a yellow kesa, as he (or she) prefers, to replace the white kesa given at the time of ordination. The taking of a vow of chastity does not constitute an additional, higher ordination, and the status of the anagarika within the Order is no different from that of any other Order member. Whether in relation to one another or in relation to Mitras and Friends, all Order members have the same status, which is to say, they have no status, the concept of status being one that is meaningless from the spiritual point of view.

In the Buddhist world, however, and especially in the Theravadin part of that world, the (celibate) monk definitely does have status. He has a very high socio-religious status indeed, higher than that of even the most eminent layman. Consequently those who are desirous of status, but who are doubtful of their ability to achieve it by ordinary means, may be tempted to become monks, even though they do not really want to abstain from sexual activity. For them such abstention is the price that has to be paid for (monastic) status, just as for their counterparts in the Roman Catholic priesthood celibacy is 'part of the deal'. Since in the Western Buddhist Order no such status attaches to anagarikahood, inasmuch as the taking of the vow of chastity does not constitute an additional, higher ordination, there can be no question of an Order member being tempted to take a vow of chastity for the sake of status. An Order member takes a vow of chastity, and becomes an anagarika, simply in order to deepen his experience of Going for Refuge and to help shift the locus of his being from the kamaloka or world of (sensuous) desire to the rupaloka or world of (archetypal) form, that is, to the Brahma-realms. He takes it, moreover, only after consulting with his spiritual friends and making sure that his living conditions will be conducive to its observance. Thus he is unlikely to break this, the 'monastic' version of the Third Precept, in the way that it was broken by so many of my old bhikkhu friends in India, who, while they may not have become monks for the sake of status, certainly were not strongly motivated to abstain from sexual activity.

Though the WBO anagarika takes the vow of chastity he is not vowed to fewness of possessions, simplicity of lifestyle, careerlessness, or community living, and is not, therefore, a monk in the sense in which I define the term. Chastity being the *fons et origo* of the other vows, however, the anagarika will have a natural tendency to live in the kind of way that is envisaged by these vows, simply because he is practising chastity. He will have a natural tendency to live as a monk. When I say that I would like to see more monks in the Western Buddhist Order it is the fact that anagarikahood has this tendency that I have in mind, rather than the formal taking, by the individual anagarika, of (monastic) vows other than that of chastity.

IX

I am writing these reflections in the study of my flat in East London. Above the mantelpiece hangs a reproduction of Turner's 'Bridge of Sighs, Ducal Palace and Custom-House, Venice', with the pink and white façade of the Doge's palazzo gleaming from across the olive green water and the pink and white finger of the Campanile, in the centre of the painting, pointing into the pure cerulean sky. It has been my companion for the last four years, bringing back memories of my two visits to Venice, in 1966 and 1983, and serving to remind me that for hundreds of years Venice, the birthplace of Marco Polo, was Europe's gateway to the East.

Before the Turner I had a companion of a very different kind. This was Holman Hunt's 'The Scapegoat', described by a leading modern art critic as 'his most disturbing painting',²⁴ which hung above my mantelpiece for about ten years. Mine was a reproduction of a small study for this painting, which differs from the final version in that it includes a rainbow, the symbol of hope. Visitors were sometimes startled to see a picture of a goat occupying the place of honour in my study. Presumably they expected to see a picture of the Buddha. It is difficult to say why Holman Hunt's painting should have had such an appeal for me. Certainly I responded to the 'psychedelic' Pre-Raphaelite colour values of the work. But I must also have felt an inner connection with its subject matter, for shortly before purchasing my reproduction I wrote a poem entitled 'The Scapegoat: After Holman Hunt'. Indeed, looking through my files to check the date of the poem, I discovered that ten years earlier, in 1969, only one year after founding the Western Buddhist Order, I had written a poem on the same theme, though this first, much earlier 'Scapegoat' poem of mine was not 'after' the great Pre-Raphaelite artist in the way its successor was. Thus the image of the Scapegoat, especially as mediated by Holman Hunt's powerful painting, must have been of particular significance to me during this period. The second of the two poems, written in 1978, is in sonnet form and reads as follows:

Half hoof-deep in the salt-encrusted sands
Of the Dead Sea, he stops and hesitates
At last, perhaps because he understands –
Far from the rancid herd-loves and herd-hates –
What place it is his red eye contemplates
With head half turned. Beyond the bottle green
Of stagnant waters, mauve-pink hills serene
Border, and yellow sky commensurates.

Baffled but undismayed, his horned head bent,
And threads of tell-tale scarlet on his brow,
He halts before the staring countershape
Of last year's victim, with salt sludge half blent.
Green, mauve-pink, yellow glow intenser now,
And throb insistent. *There is no escape.*²⁵

No escape for the unfortunate beast. He is the sacrificial victim. On the Day of Atonement the High Priest laid upon his head all the sins of the children of Israel and sent him into the wilderness to die. So now here he is, with all those sins upon him, waiting for death among the bones of the dead.

When I wrote this poem I too was in the wilderness, as I had been when I wrote its predecessor, and the Western Buddhist Order was in the wilderness with me. Indeed it was my being in the wilderness that made it possible for me to found the Western Buddhist Order. I had been sent into the wilderness by – but it does not really matter who sent me there. Unlike the goat in my poem I did not stop and hesitate: I did not die, as I was supposed to do. The wilderness is a wonderful place. In it many things become clear to one. What became clear to me was not the absolute centrality, in the Buddhist life, of the Act of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels (this had been clear to me for some time), so much as the need for the fact of that centrality to find ‘collective’ embodiment in a new Buddhist movement, and it was because this had become clear to me that I was led to found the Western Buddhist Order. What was less clear was the extent to which organizing one’s existence round the Three Jewels, as one did when Going for Refuge became the central Act of one’s life, was a disruption of the ‘normal’ pattern of that existence, both individual and collective, and even of many ‘traditional’ Buddhist attitudes and practices. Just how disruptive it could be became clear, at least to an extent, as soon as Order members started making a serious effort to organize their existence round the Three Jewels, and especially as they started experimenting with different lifestyles. Not being a bhikkhu, in the technical Vinaya sense, and having in any case been sent into the wilderness, I too experimented with different lifestyles, sometimes living more like a monk, sometimes more like a layman. Whatever the lifestyle, the Act of Going for Refuge remained central to my life, and I continued to spend the greater part of my time studying, writing, meditating, lecturing, and teaching.

The sending of the Scapegoat into the wilderness is an act of betrayal. He does not know he is being sent to his death. Perhaps he thinks he is being taken to greener pastures. Sending me into the wilderness was an act of betrayal on the part of those who sent me there, for I trusted them, just as I had trusted those bhikkhus who, knowing that one of their number was not ‘completely pure’, had nonetheless gone ahead with the ordination ceremony and made me, as I believed for six years, a bhikkhu in the technical Vinaya sense. But betrayal has been described as an initiation into a new kind of consciousness.²⁶ There is a creative stimulus in it, and the betrayed one ‘must somehow resurrect himself, take a step forward, through his own interpretation of what happened.’²⁷ Hence I do not regret being betrayed by those who sent me into the wilderness, for just as my betrayal by the bhikkhus contributed, eventually, to my spiritual development and my understanding of the Dharma, so my being sent into the wilderness led to the founding of the Western Buddhist Order.

Today I am not in the wilderness, neither is the Western Buddhist Order, except to the extent that the world itself is a wilderness. Working mainly through

the different FWBOs, the 500-odd members of the Order seek to further the spread of Buddhism in the world by means of an organic network of ideas, practices, and institutions, as well as with the help of imagination and experiment. As for me, I live as a monk, not because I have taken any vows but because that is the way I prefer to live, and with my Turner for companion devote myself mainly to literary work. The desert has been made to bloom as the rose. The promise of the rainbow has been fulfilled.

X

These reflections have been concerned with the past. But one also needs to look at the future. Not that the future can be predicted, but present trends may be indicative of possible future developments, and these can be encouraged if positive and discouraged if negative. According to a recent news item, the closest advisers of Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission, believe there is now a spiritual void in Britain and other EEC countries and that Mr Delors should fill that void by subtly turning European federalism into a semi-religious crusade.

‘Two internal commission reports lie on Mr Delors’s desk, one of them strictly confidential. They are written in the baffling style, replete with diagrams, of a French seminarian. But the gist is clear.

‘Ancient religious differences, say the authors, are at the heart of the conflict besetting the Maastricht Treaty on European Union; and religion – or at least some kind of peculiar new Euro-spirituality inspired by Brussels – is the answer to the Community’s political crisis.

“We are not fascists,” says one of the authors, from his eyrie in Delors’s personal think-tank, the “Cellule de Prospective” charged with producing radical answers to the president’s problems. “We do not want to manipulate the soul of anybody.”

‘But he believes only one cause is grand enough to transcend European popular disaffection with national political institutions; only one idea is big enough to restore faith in society: Europe – with spiritual knobs on.’²⁸

After referring to an encounter in Brussels between Mr Delors and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to the rise of economic and political nationalism across the Community, the news item goes on to reveal that one of the reports on Mr Delors’s desk, *Europe’s Vocation*, drawn up by Mr Marc Luyckx, a full-time EC official, speaks of a ‘crisis of democracy and a cultural change which has assaulted politics,’ and a consequent ‘hunger for spirituality’. Mr Luyckx concludes: ‘Europe will be meaningful if it is seen by Europeans, and by the rest of the world, as having a contribution to make to the search for a meaning for human life at the end of the 20th century.’ The other report, *Churches and Ethics After Prometheus*, gives a detailed analysis of the religious and cultural reasons for strife between the 58 per cent of the Community who are Catholics and the 28 per cent who are Protestant.

‘Catholics tend to be “vertical, hierarchical and centralised,” says the author; in other words, he says, they tend to be “corrupt”, “autocratic”, with more susceptibility to the mafia and maximum bureaucracy.

‘Protestant countries, on the other hand – such as Britain and Denmark – tend to be more democratic and open, with less tolerance of centralised control.

“This is vital for understanding the Danish rejection of Maastricht,” says the official.... They thought the Community was about trade, something they could understand. Now they feel trapped in a Community of Latins and continentals.”

‘But these differences can be overcome, he says. The exact recipe, frankly, is vague.... The revolts against Brussels in 1992, then, were caused not by an overweening bureaucracy, but by the failure of Brussels to match the spiritual needs of the age.’²⁹

I do not know if economic and political union with the countries of continental Europe will be good for the United Kingdom. I do not know if it will be good for those countries themselves, whether individually or collectively. But I am sure spiritual union would be good for both the United Kingdom and the countries of continental Europe, that is, good for all the people of Europe. For historical reasons, if for no others, neither Catholicism nor Protestantism can provide the inspiration needed for this kind of union, being in fact themselves – according to the author of the *Churches and Ethics After Prometheus* report – largely responsible for the differences within Europe that have to be overcome. They are part of the problem, not part of the solution. In effect, Christianity is part of the problem. What is needed, if the spiritual void in Britain and the other EEC countries is to be filled, and full economic and political union achieved (assuming this to be a good thing), is a spiritual ‘third force’. That Buddhism could be such a force it would be rash and simplistic to assert. But I am confident Buddhism could make an important contribution to such a force; that it could help fill the void, help match the spiritual needs of the age.

The Buddhism that could do this is not the traditional Buddhism of south-east Asia and the Far East. It would have to be a Buddhism that was not identified with monasticism, and that had shed all unnecessary oriental cultural baggage. It would have to be a Buddhism in which commitment to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha was primary, and lifestyle secondary. It would have to be a Buddhism in which there would be no need for Reflections such as these.

Notes and References

- 1 Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1991, p.117.
- 2 They must also be guiltless of any breach of the rules of training, but if necessary can purify themselves of such breaches, by confession, immediately before the ceremony.
- 3 Sangharakshita, op. cit. p.117.
- 4 Sangharakshita, op. cit. p.22 *et seq.*
- 5 Sangharakshita, op. cit. p.24 *et seq.* and Sangharakshita, *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, Alan Sutton, London 1988, p.97 *et seq.*
- 6 See Dharmachari Subhuti, *Buddhism for Today*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1988, p.138.
- 7 Sangharakshita, *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, p.256 *et seq.* and *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1988, p.31 *et seq.*
- 8 Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, p.71 *et seq.*
- 9 According to the Hinayana too, strictly speaking. For the Hinayana, however, the arising of the Bodhicitta is a very rare phenomenon, and the Bodhisattva a very exceptional kind of being, whereas for the Mahayana the Bodhisattva ideal is, or can be, the spiritual ideal for all (Mahayana) Buddhists, who are, to that extent, (novice) Bodhisattvas.
- 10 See Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, seventh edition, Windhorse, Glasgow 1993, Chapter 2,4.
- 11 Michael Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka*, OUP, London 1983, pp.147–157.
- 12 Ibid., pp.107–8.
- 13 Ibid., pp.79–80.
- 14 *Dhammapada*, 142.

15 Michael Carrithers, *op. cit.*, p.281.

16 Digha Nikaya (*Mahaparinibbana-sutta*). The Buddha also exhorts us to make the Dhamma our island and refuge, seeking refuge in the Dhamma and in none other. There is no contradiction. Abiding islands unto ourselves *is* making the Dhamma our refuge, the Dhamma being in principle the ‘cosmic’ law that makes such abiding possible.

17 Recent years have seen the occasional inter-nikaya bhikkhu ordination in Sri Lanka and India. My own bhikkhu ordination was, of course, an inter-nikaya one.

18 See Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, third edition, Windhorse, Glasgow 1989.

19 Sangharakshita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1986, pp.136–9.

20 See Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, chapters 16 and 20.

21 See Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*, third edition (revised and enlarged), Woburn Press, London 1974, p.299 *et seq.*

22 Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, pp.72–3.

23 *Dhammapada*, 200. The abhassara devas or ‘gods of sonant light’ are a class of Brahmas.

24 Peter Fuller, *Theoria*, Chatto & Windus, London 1988, p.82.

25 Sangharakshita, *Conquering New Worlds*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1986, p.55.

26 James Hillman, *Loose Ends: Primary Papers on Archetypal Psychology*, Spring Publications, New York and Zurich 1975, p.67.

27 *Ibid.*, p.75.

28 Boris Johnson, ‘Faithful urged to lead Euro crusade,’ *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 February 1993.

29 *Ibid.*