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*Extending the Hand of Fellowship: The Relations of the Western Buddhist Order to the Rest of the World.* By Sangharakshita. Windhorse Publications, 1996. Pp. 48. ISBN 0-904766-62-4, £2.99; \$5.95.

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Sangharakshita's pamphlet is the third in a series of what might be termed "position papers" that have been delivered to members of the Western Buddhist Order at anniversary events over a period of eight years. These papers, beginning with his "History of My Going for Refuge" in 1988 and followed by "My Relation to the Order" in 1990, mark an era in which Sangharakshita, as founder and head of the Order, has overseen the reorganization of his movement (which also includes the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order). Having passed his seventieth birthday, Sangharakshita is in the process of handing over his responsibilities to a team of Order members. These papers represent a synthesis of ideas contained in his prolific output over several decades.

The papers are aimed primarily at the more than six-hundred members of the Western Buddhist Order, most of whom are to be found in Britain, with others in India, Europe, America, and Australasia. As succinct statements setting out the basic principles of the WBO, the papers are also clearly intended for external consumption. The approach in all three is systematic and didactic. Sangharakshita is a well-known critic of what he regards as erroneous, or misplaced beliefs and practices. He regards the Buddhist movement that he founded in London in 1967 as a force for correcting these deficits and adopts a radically reformist position.

Given his critical stance, it is not surprising that Sangharakshita and his followers have not always been received with universal popularity. Certainly, this latest pamphlet represents a stringent position and contains certain contentious views that will undoubtedly upset some Buddhist practitioners. For example, he believes that in the West there is "a wholesale commercialization and vulgarization of Tibetan Buddhism in general and the Vajrayana in particular" (35).

The central message of the pamphlet is a restatement and elaboration of Sangharakshita's perennial point that the only real Buddhist is one whose primary act is to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. He refers to his 1957 essay entitled "The Meaning of Orthodoxy in Buddhism," written in reply to an article by I.B. Horner in *The Middle Way* claiming that Theravāda represents the "most orthodox form of Buddhism" (24). In the 1957 essay Sangharakshita defined orthodoxy in Buddhism as meaning Right Views (*sammādiṭṭhika*), a term that can be applied to the erroneous views of non-Buddhists as well as the mistaken views of Buddhists who considered themselves to be orthodox. He declares that in the previous piece his main concern was to defend the Mahāyāna as orthodox and to "show that the orthodoxy of the Theravāda was not a matter of so much certainty as had been supposed" (24). Though at the time he did not connect the principle of orthodoxy with "the fact of the absolute centrality of the act of

Going For Refuge,” (25) he does so now:

An orthodox Buddhist is one for whom Going For Refuge is primary, observance of the precepts (and practice of meditation etc.) secondary, and life-style tertiary. From this it follows that one for whom the act of Going For Refuge is *not* the central, definitive act of the Buddhist life is not an orthodox Buddhist, even though they may have formally “taken” the Three Refuges and be professed adherents of orthodox Buddhism as defined in my essay (25).

Sangharakshita is in fact more concerned with orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy, and for him the monastic vocation is not a sign of true practice. Indeed, for Sangharakshita traditional monasticism is a contradiction of orthopraxy, because it gives priority to life-style and creates an artificial division between those who live according to the sangha’s regulations and those who do not.

Sangharakshita insists that members of the Western Buddhist Order are to be considered neither as monks or laypeople, but in meetings with monks this is rarely understood and the Order member is assumed to be a layman. It is interesting to note that Sangharakshita does believe it possible for members of the WBO to relate to monks on the basis of their mutual Going For Refuge. However this magnanimity is tempered by the remark that they are more likely to do so when meeting Western monks, even though “there are incomparably more Theravādin monks in the East than there are in the West” (28). Sangharakshita argues earlier in this essay that all forms of Buddhism in Asia are currently in decline, undermined both “from without and within” (18). His arguments require to be taken seriously as they open important questions for Western Buddhists who often look to Asian practice through a rosy lens. However, his implication that only a tiny proportion of Buddhist monks in Asia are real monks sets a tone that could cause doubt to be cast on what is otherwise a challenging, yet reasonable, subject for debate.

Reading Sangharakshita’s comments about what might happen when a monk encounters an Order member brought to mind an occasion when I took two members of the WBO to meet some monks from the British Forest Sangha at their monastery at Harnham in Northumberland. The Order members took flowers and books for the monks and they gave me flowers too. There were four monks present and the assembled company spent an lively hour or so drinking tea and exchanging experiences. We all then attended evening *pūjā* and meditation before taking genuinely warm farewells. In the car on our way home the Order members declared the good feelings that the visit had generated for them. During the meeting commu-

nication was open and plentiful. No serious differences arose and I could not help but reflect how on the extent to which these young men appeared to hold certain fundamental attitudes and spiritual aspirations in common.

Such rapprochement is desirable because even though the expansion of Buddhism to the West has succeeded to a degree that might have seemed surprising even forty or thirty years ago, it still faces difficulties in increasing and maintaining numbers of active followers. Recruitment to the sangha is even more problematic. The British Forest Sangha has certainly grown, and developed branch monasteries beyond Britain, but in recent years it has lost several of its senior monks who, on reaching middle-age, decided to disrobe. Life-long commitment as a monk in the West is as yet rare. For the United States, Paul David Numrich's book *Old Wisdom in the New World* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996; reviewed in *JBE*, vol. 3) indicates that among American-Asian communities and among American converts to Theravāda Buddhism, there is little enthusiasm for taking the robe. One response by monks at the Dharma Vijaya Temple of Los Angeles has been to initiate various levels of ordination for laypeople. Numrich invites his reader to view this experiment, and the four stage ordination procedure introduced at the International Buddhist Meditation Centre of Los Angeles, within the wider context of Western Buddhism as a whole (126) and mentions the example of the FWBO.

The occurrences alluded to by Numrich add to other signs that if Buddhism continues to thrive outside of Asia it will develop new institutional forms. These new forms, of which the FWBO is a striking example, may not entirely usurp the presence of monasticism, but will certainly create unusual and autonomous structures of authority. Sangharakshita's pamphlet clearly defines the position of the WBO as one which brooks no compromise with individuals or institutions who fail to accept the commitment and sincerity of its members as a legitimate expression of the Buddhist life. Order members are, however, urged to extend the hand of fellowship to all, but particularly to seek association with other Buddhists who recognize the centrality of the act of Going For Refuge. These are the "true Buddhists" with whom it is possible for Order members to relate to "individually and spiritually," rather than "collectively and politically." Sangharakshita does not explain his placing of the term politically in quotation marks, though he seems to imply that the conjoined concepts "individual" and "spiritual" are more desirable than the twin terms "collective" and "political." Yet surely, in a situation where types of Buddhist institutions in the West are likely to proliferate, recourse to the Aristotelian art of politics could deter the potential for clamorous sectarianism.