

## 8 D. C. Wijewardena: *The Revolt in the Temple* (1953)

Introduced by Sven Bretfeld

### Introduction

Since its foundation in 1948, the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) has never formally declared itself to be a secular state – though, in fact, the constitution does guarantee the religious neutrality of the state, in full awareness of the fact that religious plurality and minority rights would be one of the most pressing challenges for years to come. Nevertheless, the term ‘secular’ was avoided in the constitution and in all subsequent amendments to the constitution, creating a back door for the installation and consolidation of a Buddhist supremacy within the legal and social fabrics of the state. This avoidance was no oversight, but a political concession to Buddhist nationalist forces. These had appeared during the anti-colonial struggle that started in the mid-nineteenth century, and gained momentum in the early years after independence, when it became clear that the disposal of the British yoke would not automatically turn Ceylon into the economic paradise and global beacon of morality and social happiness that people had imagined.

The following excerpts are from one of the most influential books voicing the ideology of Buddhist nationalism. Published in 1953, in a Sinhalese and an English version, *Dharmavijaya* by D.C. Wijewardena (published under the sanskritised semi-pseudonym Vijayavardhana; his name is also seen rendered as Wijewardene, or with various other spellings) evokes a new master narrative that is mirrored in many other publications in the period, including the Final Report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry (also known as the Buddhist Commission) of 1956. The main argument has three steps:

1. For more than two millennia, the Buddhist religion and the Sinhalese nation have been linked together, as a community of destiny predicted and consecrated by the Buddha himself. The Buddhist kings of the past were guided by Buddhist principles, and exercised power with the sole objective of providing for the social welfare, harmony, and happiness of a highly moral and profoundly spiritual society (sarcastic individuals may add: unless this peace was disturbed by foreigners!)
2. The British colonial system and the Christian missionaries riding its coat-tails distorted this harmony by exploiting the country’s autonomy and economy, nearly extinguishing Buddhism, and thus bringing the nation into a catastrophic turmoil that has not yet healed, five years after the country’s independence.
3. Buddhism needs to be restored to its former status and glory at any cost, and under the conditions of a modern democracy.

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The author – a member of the wealthy, influential Wijewardena family, a member of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, and the husband of the controversial politician Vimala Wijewardena – had already published substantial parts of the book in 1946, quasi-anonymously (he identified himself as the editor of the respective journal but not as the author of the text). The text is a blatant appeal for political action, formulated as an account of a national and worldwide crisis, and giving a bleak diagnosis of the state of moral decline all around the globe. As such, the book anticipates, and provides a theoretical basis for, the Final Report of the Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, of which the author was a member, and which would demand political measures for the restoration of Buddhism in 1956.

*Dharmavijaya* formally mimics the structure of classical Buddhist literature – it is a mix of a Pāli commentary and a Buddhist historiography of the *vaṃsa* genre. In terms of content, the evidently well-read author combines a rich repertoire of European philosophical, poetic, and historical literature, as well as social and political theory (especially Marxism), with traditional Buddhist philosophical and historical resources, to create a (re)vision of the Buddhist cultural memory. The timeline proceeds from a golden past (remote history), through an epoch of heavy decline (recent history, the colonial period), to a rock-bottom state (the present, post-colonial ruins of society). From here, the book appeals to the state to turn the tide, by working toward a bright future, in which righteousness will again prevail, and Buddhism will (again) be the light of the world. Here, we can vaguely discern the structure of the classical cosmic oscillation narrative illustrated above – whether or not this parallel was immediately evident to the Buddhist readers of the time (or even to the author); as a culturally embedded, familiar plot structure, it may at least have rung a quiet bell, and contributed to the popular success of the book's theses.<sup>1</sup>

Even the Sinhalese/Sanskrit title of the book, *Dharmavijaya*, alludes to the classical religio-political model. The publisher of the English version translates this term as “Triumph of Righteousness” in the preface. The term can, however, also be understood as “Triumph *by* Righteousness” or rather “Victory by Dharma.” This is the term denoting the peaceful policy of a wheel-turning monarch who conquers and rules by the application of religious principles, rather than weapons. The term appears in exactly this meaning in the famous thirteenth Major Rock Edict by King Aśoka, the prototypical *cakravartin* of Buddhist cultural memory. This perfectly matches the major demand of the book: the re-marriage of politics and (Buddhist) religion. The title of the English version, *The Revolt in the Temple*, is more martial in its expression.

Wijewardena revives traditional Buddhist ideas and narrative patterns in other respects too. These underlie his account, which, at the first glance, appears to be a modern

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<sup>1</sup> On the discourse-theoretical background of this assumption, see Willy Viehöver, “Diskurse als Narrationen,” in *Handbuch Sozialwissenschaftliche Diskursanalyse: Theorien und Methoden*, ed. Reiner Keller et al., vol. 1 (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2001), 177–206.

politico-philosophical treatise. A closer look at plot structure and argumentative arrangement reveals the hybrid nature of the text, as a modernised reformulation of the ancient narrative of the *sāsana*'s decline. Other elements of this hybrid texture are:

- Politics and the Buddhist religion are twins. They are different social spheres, but cannot prosper without one another. A new element is the modern concept of the 'nation,' which replaces much of what was expressed in classical texts with the term *loka*, but carries a semantic surplus: As in other nationalist ideologies, the nation of the Sinhala people is invested with a value and a meaning in itself. The ultimate purpose of the Sinhala nation has been to safeguard the Buddha's original teaching through the ages – a mandate given to the Sinhalese by the Buddha himself on his deathbed; the fulfilment of this mandate is now at stake.
- Religions need to be 'protected' – not only *from* the state but, especially in the case of Buddhism, *by* the state. The Sinhalese Buddhist kings of yore are depicted as having made this objective the prime motivator of their actions, and the ultimate legitimisation of their authority. The twin concept of *loka-sāsana* is thereby reinterpreted as a 'dharmocracy,' in which the ultimate reason of the state is to serve a higher, religious purpose. The British Crown failed to fulfil the role of a traditional Buddhist king, as will the modern republic if it continues to follow secularist ideals coined in the West.
- A secularist state, in the sense of a political system without religious principles – he calls it "ideology" – will have a catastrophic result not only in Ceylon (namely the complete annihilation of the Buddha's *sāsana*); it will lead to worldwide moral bankruptcy, and ultimately to the global collapse of society. Politics, societies, and individuals need to be 'tamed' by religion, just as the Sinhalese were 'disciplined' by the *sāsana* many centuries ago. Here, Wijewardena also leaves a space for non-Buddhist religions. Though the Buddhist *sāsana* would be the best option for securing worldwide social prosperity, any moral ideology can provide the essential requirements of a stable society. This parallels the old Buddhist idea of a moral restoration of humankind based on some "default ethics" (*kuśala dharma*) after the disappearance of the *sāsana* (see above).
- However, with Buddhism almost extinguished, and other religions (Christianity) corrupted by imperial interests, we are living in a world of moral decline. Times may yet become worse, if a religious (Buddhist) revolution does not save the day. This narrative of crisis directly parallels the 'endangered *sāsana*' motif that we so often find in premodern Buddhist historiography. But there are important differences: first, it is not only Buddhist Sri Lanka, but the whole world that is standing on the edge of the precipice. Second, while in historiography, the *sāsana* is always eventually saved by the great heroes of the past, such heroes have yet to materialise in the present situation (in 1956, some would interpret the election victory of S.W.R.D., Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party, as the 'Buddhist Revolution' Wijewardena was anticipating in his book, but this event would not bring the yearned for turning point [indeed, the opposite occurred]). Third, the moral decline of humanity is spelled out in great detail in *Dharmavijaya*, with criticism particularly

- levied at the imperial greed of colonialism, Christianity's failure and corruption, and the global escalation of materialism and the American way of life, which propagates happiness through material consumption, instead of inner peace.
- The term *sāsana* is prominently featured in the book, and in the general political discourse of the time. The old *cakravartin/dharma-rāja* concept did not take other religions into account. The twin concept of *loka-sāsana* exclusively referred to the *Buddha-sāsana*. Non-Buddhist religions, if mentioned at all, *passively* enjoyed 'protection' by a *dharma-rāja*, but played no *active* role in morally guiding his actions. This asymmetry is mirrored in the modern language use. Significantly, the term *sāsana* was not widened into a general term for religion in the modern discourse. Religion as a comparative or classificatory concept is expressed by the word *āgama*, including in legal language. In the guarantee of religious freedom of the original constitution, Buddhism was one 'religion' (*bauddha āgama*) among many, such as Christianity (*kristiyāni āgama*) and Islam (*mahammad āgama*). When later reworkings and amendments granted more and more privileges and special roles to Buddhist institutions, Buddhism was no longer the *bauddha āgama* but *the sāsana*. As *the sāsana*, Buddhism was no longer just a legally protected asset like the other religions, but a specially fostered, declared national goal – and more and more an active player in national politics.<sup>11</sup>

In passage A, the author warns the Buddhists of Sri Lanka that their sacred mission to protect the *sāsana* is more endangered than it was in any other period of history. He then accuses the British Crown of having broken its promise to protect and defend Buddhism. With the British failing to fulfil the religious duties of a traditional Buddhist king, the *sāsana* was betrayed, plundered and destroyed. The final report of the Buddhist Commission would dwell on this argument in much greater detail three years later.

Passage B emphasises the importance of religion – any religion – for the sustenance of civilisation. Colonialism is, again, accused of having caused the destruction of this indispensable condition in Ceylon. Vijaya, mentioned in the first sentence of the passage, is the mythical first king of Sri Lanka. His appropriation of the island is believed to have happened at the very same moment in which the Buddha achieved *parinirvāṇa* (that is, died). Before his death, the Buddha is believed to have assigned the god Sakka (Indra) to protect Vijaya and his scions, as Sri Lanka would play a special role for the *sāsana*'s duration in the future. Wijewardena restyles this story into a nationalist core idea, inferring a notion of unity of race, land, and faith.

In passage C, the author discusses the general requirements of a happy society. Material provision is essential, though a materialist ideology – a strictly secular soci-

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<sup>11</sup> See also Sven Bretfeld, "Equality in Hierarchy: Secularism and the Protection of Religions in Sri Lanka," in *Religion and Secularity: Transformations and Transfers of Religious Discourses in Europe and Asia*, ed. Marion Eggert and Lucian Hölscher (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 175–92.

ety, lacking a religious superstructure – can only fail. In a rather bold mental leap, he links the moral corruption of Christian Europe to the USA, which has replaced religiosity by the gods of consumerism.

Passage D first continues the preceding argument, then provides a counter-image. Mankind has advanced greatly in the field of technology and the provision of material resources, but has lost the ability to control its inner nature. Buddhism offers itself as an antidote.

In passage E, the author argues that the principles of Buddhism should guide and govern the individual, as well as the instruments and organs of the state. The harmony of religion and politics should be the ideal of any state, with the happiness of the people as its ultimate goal.

## Bibliographical Information

D. C. Wijewardena (Vijayawardhana). *Dharmavijaya: The Revolt in the Temple*. Composed to Commemorate 2500 Years of the Land, the Race, and the Faith. Colombo: The Daily News Press, 1953; 494–95, 514–15, 520–27, 530–34, 547–52, 554–59.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition. Section titles reflecting the contents of the paragraphs presented here have been added in square brackets.

## Revolt in the Temple

### [SB: A. Buddhism Endangered]

The Sangha of Lanka, if they are not to be traitors to the charge entrusted to them by the Master on his deathbed, must be on the alert more than ever now. The intolerance shown by the Church Fathers to our religion and to our national aspirations make it only too clear that we have indeed a very hard struggle ahead. The past record of our relations both with British statesmen and Christian churchmen has been very significant indeed.

Let us go back to the day on which King George the Third of England entered into the heritage of Vijaya and his successors. For 2000 years the Kings of Ceylon had been the Defenders of the national faith of Lanka. What did General Brownrigg mean when he pushed the King of England to this position on March 2, 1815? Every British sovereign, on succeeding to the Throne, has to take an oath to defend the national faith of England, which is, Protestant Christianity. Can he conscientiously be defender

of both Buddhism as well as Christianity? During the course of its discussion, in the State Council, the Dominion Status Bill was characterised both by a Sinhalese and by a British member thereof as a “fraud and a hoax.” No truer words were ever spoken in that august chamber since it came into being.

[p. 494/495] By Article 5 of the Convention of 1815 the British Government declared Buddhism inviolable, and promised the “maintenance and protection of its rites, priests and temples.” Was this promise fulfilled? What happened to the numerous benefactions of land and property gifted to the Temples and *Devalas* by Sinhalese Kings and pious Buddhists? Who defended and protected these, during the last one and a quarter centuries, whilst they were being confiscated, robbed and despoiled?

### [SB: B. Religion and Civilization]

The Buddha’s blessing of Vijaya and his band of followers and the land which they “went forth to possess,” foreshadowed an intimate connection between the Race, the Land and the Faith. The Faith gave to the Land a culture of her own and to the Race a stimulus to action. T. S. Eliot, in his book *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, argues that a culture cannot come into being, or maintain itself, without a religious basis. In the abstract he would admit that such a religion need not necessarily be Christianity, but, given the historical situation in Europe, he argues that it must be Christianity. He does not “overlook the possibility that Britain, if it consummated its apostasy by reforming itself according to the prescriptions of some inferior materialistic religion, might blossom into a culture more brilliant than we can show today.” But “that would not be evidence that the new religion was true, and Christianity was false. It would merely prove that any religion, while it lasts, and on its own level, gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the framework for a culture, and protects the mass of humanity from boredom and despair.”

The advent of Western adventurers in Ceylon disrupted the pursuit of the ideals of the Sinhalese. The destruction of the temples, the relegation of the Sangha to the background, the replacement of the national king with an alien one professing an alien religion, [p. 514/515] have been among the root causes of the decay and deterioration of the Sinhalese race. “The century of British rule over Ceylon,” declared Lord Soulbury, the Governor-General of Ceylon in a recent speech, “seriously disrupted the threads of her national life. The same thing has happened throughout history in almost every country that has fallen under alien control. It could scarcely be otherwise, for it is very hard for people of another race and climate to comprehend and value intimate and subtle features of thought and expression different from their own.”

In the set-up of Ceylon as a “little bit of England,” the Sinhalese found no stimulus to action beyond the universal urges of hunger, sex and anger, and the gift of Dominion Status was received with cold indifference and almost with resentment. Enormous sums were spent by the new rulers on “Independence” celebrations, to rouse enthusi-

asm among the people and as propaganda for the new set-up. The Duke of Gloucester was invited to be present in person on the occasion, to stand before the people as the representative of the new symbol of freedom. But it was a stonily silent, almost a sullen, people who received him. The manner in which they greeted the Duke's procession along the Colombo streets was devoid of those elements of spontaneous and excited rejoicing that should mark popular feeling in a celebration of freedom.

"In nature, an evolutionary process is difficult to reverse once it has gone too far." With the human species also the same law is true. The Sinhalese have been disciplined by a religion, the fundamentals of which – the denial of a Supreme Being, the soul and immortality – are even today accepted as scientific truths. The attempt, from Portuguese times, to convert them to a religion, the fundamentals of which are the reverse, and hence unacceptable to the Sinhalese, can only end in the disintegration of the race. The clamour of the missionaries that they are out to "win Ceylon for Jesus Christ," howsoever remote of realization, is not an objective favourable to the nation's survival. And Bishop Lakdasa de Mel really precipitated himself into the company of "brutal destroyers" when he declared that the task of the Church in Ceylon would not be finished till the remaining ninety per cent of the population were converted to Christianity.

### **[SB: C. Failure of Materialism]**

Not the least important function of an ideology is to hold society together and lubricate its workings. And in this guise at least ideology reacts on technology and material equipment. For, like spiritual equipment, material equipment is a social product and not only in the sense that it springs from social tradition. In practice, the production and use of tools also requires co-operation between members of a society. Today it is self-evident that modern societies get food, housing, clothing and satisfaction for other needs only as a result of the co-operation of a vast and highly complicated productive organization or economy. Cut off from this, we would be very uncomfortable and should probably starve. Theoretically "primitive man," with simpler wants and more rudimentary equipment, could shift for himself alone. In practice even the rudest savages live in groups organized to co-operate in getting food and preparing equipment, as well as in performing ceremonies. Among the Veddahs of Ceylon, for instance, we find a division of labour between the sexes in hunting and gathering, as well as in making implements. There is also a division of the product of this co-operative activity.

Even the student of material culture has to study a society as a co-operative organization for producing means to satisfy its needs, for reproducing itself – and for producing new needs. He wants to see its economy working. But its economy affects, and is affected by, its ideology. The "materialist concept of history" asserts that the economy determines the ideology. It is safer and more accurate to repeat in other words what has been stated already: in the long run an ideology can survive only if it facilitates the smooth and efficient functioning of the economy. If it hampers such a pro-

cess, then society – and with it its ideology – must perish in the end. But the final reckoning may be long postponed. An [p. 520/521] obsolete ideology can hamper an economy, and impede its change, far longer than Marxists would admit.

Ideologies find their most effective expression, not in logical propositions, but in suggestive symbols and slogans. In countries where the economy is controlled by the national State, the ideology of progress is symbolized by the Plan. “You may be wretched now, but our Six-Year, Ten-Year, n-Year Plan is positively guaranteed to bring future happiness in exchange for present misery.” The symbols of the ideology of capitalist society are to be found in the advertising pages of the popular magazines. Here, for example, are the four members of the ideal family gazing rapturously, and in full colour, at their newly acquired ice-box, piano, radio set or automobile. They are having, the advertisers assure us, “the thrill of their lives.” Every face is smiling, every dentition is perfect. The father is young, handsome, broad-shouldered; the mother looks as though she were modelling brassieres; the children are like angels. Cheeks glow, eyes sparkle, health radiates from every pore. And what an atmosphere of domestic happiness! How right-feeling, kindly-feeling and devoid of ill-will everybody is! What a civilization that has such people in it! And what mechanical gadgets that have created this new civilization and must inevitably, as they are improved, create ever newer and greater worlds inhabited by ever happier people!

Translated into cold prose, the message of this and all the other symbols of our mechanized world may be expressed in some such words as these: “All happiness, all virtue, all that has value in human life, come not, as the Buddha and all the philosophers erroneously taught, from within, but from without, through changes in external circumstances. Radio sets and the techniques, of organization are being improved; therefore, our children will be better and happier than their parents, while we ourselves, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, are happier and better than we used to be before radio and moving pictures were invented. Advances in technology can be actually experienced by individuals as a felt increase in personal well-being.”

Now it is obviously true that the passage from anarchy to almost any kind of order, from general starvation to plenty for all, will be felt by every member of the community in question as a personal blessing. But where the advance is from a not intolerable condition to another that is only a little better, the direct experience of progress as an increase of personal happiness will be largely non-existent. There are two very simple reasons for this. The [p. 521/522] first is that, physiologically speaking, human life is the very reverse of progressive. To an old man, whose friends are all dead, who is deaf and suffers from arthritis or high blood pressure, the fact that the local standard of living is twenty-five per cent higher than it was when he was a boy is only moderately consoling. In spite of the greater wealth and efficiency in the midst of which he lives, this man is in all probability a good deal less happy than he used to be in the bad old days when he was young and healthy.

In spite of this anti-progress within the organism, some people undoubtedly go on becoming happier and better to the end of their days. But these are the men and

women who have learned something of that wisdom which the old philosophers declared to be more precious than rubies. In other words, personal progress takes place in the inner world, and is independent of advancing technology and the changes in external circumstances which it brings about. True human progress consists in increase of aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual experience and satisfaction.

Of course, increase of control and of independence is necessary for the increase of these spiritual satisfactions; but the more or less measurable and objective control over, and independence of, external environment is now merely subsidiary mechanism serving as the material basis for the human type of progress; and the really significant control and independence apply to man's mental states – his control of ideas to give intellectual satisfaction, of form and colour or of sound to give aesthetic satisfaction, his independence of inessential stimuli and ideas to give the satisfaction of mystic detachment and inner ecstasy.

The civilization of the West, the civilization which churchmen and statesmen prefer to call the "Christian civilization," originated in Greece, travelled to Rome, was highly corrupted out there by the Empire, went underground in the darkness of the Middle Ages, was rediscovered in England and emigrated to the American colonies. The home of civilization in Europe has been torn to pieces. The torch first lighted in Athens is now, for good or ill, in the hands of the American people.

The United States can lead the free world, for a time anyway, on its own terms, and two choices are before it. It can follow the example of other newly rich empires of the past, which entered the world only to dominate it and fatten on its resources. Or it can enter the world to serve it and save it, serving and saving itself in the process.

[p. 522/523] The United States is the first dominant World power in history which, because of its own natural resources, has no need to control any other nation, which requires no foreign territory, nor reservoir of slave labour. History has never before presented such a clear opportunity for the physically greatest World power to become also its greatest moral power.

Assuming that the United States will use its leadership for the benefit of the world, and not to establish an American empire, there still remains the question of American morality. This will overshadow every other question, because the paramount issue of humanity in our time is a moral, not a political or economic one.

The American people are the first who have ever had the chance of general prosperity, of ample goods for everybody. In the past, such an opportunity has been confined to a few small areas of the world and to a few privileged classes. The American people possessed half a continent, replete with nearly all essential resources, at the moment when invention made it possible to convert these resources into goods and equipment. By this unique combination they have built the highest standard of living ever known, and this they have called the Pursuit of Happiness.

But the world's highest standard of living has not produced the highest standard of happiness. Many poorer nations are far happier; and by all the indexes of American life – by its literature, by its crime, by its divorce rate, by its desperate efforts to

escape the reality of its life through a huge and shallow industry of entertainment, by the restlessness and discontent which sends people hurtling over its highways away from home – we can see that the Pursuit of Happiness has not succeeded.

The reason is not difficult to find. Instead of seeking happiness within, the American people have been dazzled by the paraphernalia of outer happiness, the glittering, thin satisfactions of unexampled luxury, which threaten to drug them. Former President Herbert Hoover, in lightsome vein, once said that “the aspiration, of the American people seem to have advanced from two chickens in every pot to two cars in every garage.” Some Republicans adopted this as a serious slogan. Today the chief drive of American life and politics is to create more things, in the belief that they will create better men. The philosophy preached by each political party, by every successful politician, by business and by labour, holds that if enough goods are produced and distributed all the ills of human life will be cured.

[p. 523/524] The conquest of self has been interpreted to mean the conquest of Nature and the provision of material conveniences. The search for truth has become for millions a search for a new kind of bath-tub rather like the one Caligula used in Rome just before the unwashed barbarians arrived. The gods currently worshipped closely resemble the Roman deities, which were then created by the Senate and are now created by Hollywood.

The American conviction that progress is to be measured by the increase of material conveniences and creature comforts is an idea that is very important in their national life. An insistent and expensive advertising campaign has connected it with the calendar; the average American is apparently convinced that all mechanical contrivances automatically improve every three hundred and sixty-five days, and under the spell of this illusion he has bought millions of cars and radios and refrigerators which he did not need to the profit of those who fostered the illusion.

The idea of progress is one of America’s great national investments. The amount of money spent in the schools, in the newspapers and on the radio to protect it exceeds computation. It is part and parcel of “boosting,” of that mass optimism which has made the Americans, for good and evil, what they are today. Nothing is more treasonable to the basic American spirit than to doubt that they have improved and are improving – every day in every way.

And, for reasons which the social historian can perhaps explain, the bath-tub has become an especial symbol not only of their material progress but of their spiritual progress as well. For the Americans set great store by things of the spirit. Nothing is more warmly rejoiced in than their superiority to the grimy Europeans in the matter of bath-tubs. Cleanliness is far ahead of godliness.

No argument against public housing has been used more consistently than the assertion that if you give bath-tubs to the poor, they will only dump coal in them. To point out that most housing projects are centrally heated and supplied with gas and electricity so that their occupants have no need of coal, is to earn the reproach of being frivolous. It is absolutely “known” that all occupants of housing projects put

coal in their bath-tubs. And their so doing indicates such depravity that to build houses for them is practically contributing to moral delinquency. The poor have been weighed in the bath-tub and been found wanting.

To the Americans the standard of living appears to be their ideal of life, the answer to every riddle, the secret to happiness. But the standard of living is only the first beginning of a true [p. 524/525] standard of life. Prosperity is useful only if it creates a climate in which the happiness of the mind and spirit can grow, but generally, in all past civilizations, this happiness has withered just about the time prosperity began to appear.

No Golden Age lasts long, says Haverfield in his *Roman Britain*. The happiest period of the British, the Victorian Age, lasted only sixty-three years. "No one yet knows," writes Professor Burkitt, "why the Roman Empire fell." "If you want to know why the Roman Empire fell, read Finlay," wrote John Morley. There is another, that caustic comment of Scott's when he came on board ship after seeing Knossos in Crete: "The moral of Knossos is that good plumbing will not save a civilization."

Whether the "savages" of the past were as "happy" as the people of today, there is no means of judging. We have more conveniences, more diversions, more delicacies; they had better health and greater contentment. We should say the amount of happiness among men is a constant. Sometimes there is more of this, sometimes more of that. The total does not vary much, at any rate in civilized communities. For the civilized, if they are not plagued with real troubles, plague themselves by inventing artificial ones. Civilization cannot rightly be called either a boon or a bane. It may be made either. All depends on the use that is made of it. But it does seem that so far it has not been used with much wisdom, seeing that all civilizations have destroyed themselves.

The earth is the grave of civilizations. They embodied the achievements of Man in society over roughly 8,000 years, and all alike are extinct. Some have left only fragmentary remains, while others have excited the modern mind by wonders of architecture and public works, literature, and evidences of skill and social amenity. Professor Arnold Toynbee makes a list of something over twenty vanished systems, and in his ambitious *Study of History* he discusses at length the various theories concerning their decline and dissolution.

First among these is the concept of an inevitable cycle, the assumption that the biological law of growth, maturity, and decay must be applied as inexorably to societies, however extensive and elaborate, as to the individual organism. This theory was elaborated afresh by the late Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*. Spengler did much more than adopt the cycle. He argued that it was possible, in a given case, to mark the stage reached in the decline by examining the phenomena of governments, economics, and culture. As developed by Spengler, the theory is the bleakest [p. 525/526] pessimism, for, while the cycle force in society, as in Nature and common life, is undeniable, the mind refuses to believe in an all-inclusive predestination.

It is not difficult to enumerate causes which have been powerful agencies of destruction. Among these are continental changes of climate, drought, pestilence and the destruction by Man of the bases of life, as in deforestation and systematic exhaustion of the soil.

Toynbee, again, gives importance to loss of command over the environment, which is plainly to be seen in the failures of the Greek City-States and, still more, in the complex troubles throughout the Empire which accompanied the prolonged decline of Rome. With this powerful cause of disintegration, he suggests, we may well consider “the intractability of institutions,” the clinging to “semi-dead tissues of the social body” – in a word, political and social conservatism.

Gibbon put the Christian religion and the barbarian invasions high among the causes that were destructive of Rome, and it is manifestly impossible to confute him. Nor need we contest one of Toynbee’s more emphatic assertions – namely, as to history’s overwhelming demonstration that they who take the sword shall perish by the sword. War and conquest are the supreme enemies of civilization. From the deadly consequences of greed and aggression, there is no escape.

Historian Gibbon was not the only eminent scholar to view Christianity as a menace to civilization. Anthropologist Sir James Frazer, the author of *The Golden Bough*, regretted that the “unselfish ideal” of Greek and Roman society, which subordinated the individual to the welfare of the State, was superseded by the “selfish and immoral doctrine” of “Oriental religions which inculcated the communion of the soul with God and its eternal salvation as the only objects worth living for . . .” The result, said Frazer, was “a general disintegration of the body politic.”

Toynbee also discusses, in the light of history, the crisis which has arisen because Man has achieved control of Nature before achieving control of himself. He looks back to the rise and fall of other civilizations, and declares that one lesson runs through history. “Nothing fails like worldly success.”

Civilizations, like individuals, become besotted by it, and the particular form of worldly success which they are most prone to idolize is that of technical efficiency. Blinded by worship of [p. 526/527] their past successes, they fail to meet a new crisis with a new and creative response. So – they fall.

At each decisive moment of history, he maintains there comes a moral choice. And, looking back over the vanished civilizations he has studied, Professor Toynbee is not sanguine about man’s ability to choose wisely now – if he persists in omitting spiritual values.

If civilization, as we know it, is to continue at all, then it will have to be built on ideals more enduring than those of mere material abundance. Civilization cannot be built to last on the theory of two cars in every garage, for such a civilization will be no better than a Hollywood scenic set, with the glitter of chorus girls in front of it and nothing behind it. The paramount question is not whether we can solve the political and economic problems of the world, but whether we can solve the problem of our own life, the problem of finding inner happiness in a world clamouring for luxury which has invariably sapped and destroyed all groups of men who enjoyed luxury in the long past.

### [SB: D. Buddhism as an Antidote]

Progress is a moot point. Have we progressed? Technical, certainly, in our power over things. Thanks to the scientific method, we have more knowledge, and that is increasing hourly, formidably. Socially there is less poverty, illness, drunkenness: there is more consideration for the under-dog. Social reform is in the air, and almost equally fashionable with all the political parties. Water is cheap, plumbing is good and cleanliness is the commonest of all the virtues. And yet one wonders whether fundamentally mankind is really better for all this material gain. We have the power, but not the wisdom to use it well. We lack a moral sense, in spite of our social progress and kindness to animals. The crime and torture, the burning and destruction of life and property, the wrecking of homes and the turning of men, women and children into wanderers in a wilderness, which has taken place in our own life-time – and been accepted as a matter of fact which may even shortly be repeated – has outstripped in magnitude of crime the darkest ages of world history.

[p. 530/531] Man's control over his own nature has not increased commensurately with his control over external nature, and that improvement in the quality of his life has as a result failed to keep pace with the improvement in his opportunities for living. In the last half century, the degree of man's control over himself has definitely diminished. One who looks back from the world of today will find it difficult to gain-say this view. Men today are crueller, more predatory and more unprincipled; they have less consideration for justice, less compassion for the helpless, less tenderness and less tolerance than they had fifty years ago. What is the reason for this recession?

There has been a vast increase in human power, and consequently a vast release of human energy, but there has been no proportionate increase in ethical insight. To make good the deficiency, men have embraced the worship of the State and the philosophy of militarism, which combine to ensure that power shall be used most destructive way. Evolution there must be, but there is no need for the methods of that evolution to be war, revolution, and violence. Mankind has other capacities for solving problems of development, however difficult they may seem, and it is these capacities which distinguish him, or should distinguish him, from the brute beast.

It is at this point that Buddhism offers itself as an alternative. Although the Buddhist way of life still embodies an ethical creed far in advance of the world's development today, it does offer in the present anarchy of ethics a creed to live for, and a principle to live by. The creed is Righteousness; translated to the ideal of the Brotherhood of Man; the principle, Justice. The measure of that justice is the good of humanity, and not the good of this or that section, class, or nation. Buddhism is a doctrine of the brotherhood of all men. Frontiers of nationality, race, religion or colour have no place in it. We cannot claim to be enlightened or tolerant if our virtues extend only as far as the members of our own family, creed or race.

Jawaharlal Nehru, in his *Mahatma Gandhi*, says how hurt he was when he first learned that the Pope had refused to interview Gandhiji when he was returning from

the Round Table Conference in December, 1931. That refusal had seemed to him an affront to India, and there could be no doubt that the refusal was intentional: "The Catholic Church does not approve of Saints or Mahatmas outside its fold, and because some Protestant churchman had called Gandhiji a great man of religion [p. 531/532] and a real Christian, it became all the more necessary for Rome to dissociate itself from this heresy." The Catholic Church has created a vested interest in sainthood, and it does neither "approve of saints outside its fold" nor recognise righteousness outside its own creed: it prefers to worship saints in stained glass windows rather than living ones.

Hardly a person will be found today who will deny the brotherhood of man as a sound moral, ethical, or religious basis for judgment. The Buddhist faith definitely lays it down that we should regulate our relationships on that footing. If we are right in the foregoing diagnosis of the causes of our ethical bankruptcy this creed and the principle which it enshrines have a topical relevance have, in fact, an urgency of a quite peculiar kind.

For it is the worship of the State which, in the absence of such a creed, is accepted as its substitute, just as it is the power of the State, resulting from such worship, which threatens our civilization with destruction. Thus the ethics of Buddhism prescribe the duty of enlarging the sentiments of brotherhood and patriotism, which now embrace the welfare only of those who are of the same creed and who are born within the same territorial area as oneself to cover a wider horizon. For, once it be admitted that it is the individual's duty to subordinate his interests to those of a larger whole, and to sacrifice prejudices and comfort and happiness to the good of others, then there can be no logical reason for not extending these sentiments to all mankind.

When the day comes when men of all creeds and colours accept as their religion the common brotherhood of man and obey the Buddhist teaching that they should love one another and hold as their highest ideal the continuous search for, and love of truth mankind will be well on the way to the millennium.

There is no sphere in which the gulf between the quality of our technical accomplishment and the nature of the uses to which it is put is so marked as in that of religion – so marked indeed that at times it seems as if man's sense of purpose and value in the world declines as his power over the world grows. The suggestion we make is that Buddhism is the bridge that can be thrown across the gulf.

The connection between the State and Religion arises in this way. Religion may be advocated, not only as a means of averting war, but as a means of preserving liberty. The modern State is an enemy to liberty, and, while continually asserting its independence, deprives its citizens of theirs, treating them not as ends [p. 532/533] in their own right, but as instruments to the ends which it imposes upon them. With its prisons and concentration camps for the confinement of men's bodies, its censorship and laws against sedition for the stifling of their minds, the State impedes that development of the free personality which it exists to promote. Nor, while the State retains its powers, will the individual ever again enjoy the liberty to vote as he pleases, to speak and to write as he pleases, and to hear the words and to read the writings of others.

Now it has become open to serious question whether democracy can be maintained in the modern world, except it be regarded as a corollary of religion. When the foundation of ethical and religious principle began to crumble, one of the first and most noticeable effects was the destruction of democratic forms and individual liberties. It is no accident that the decline of Christianity should have coincided with a monstrous invasion of the rights of man. Could the totalitarian regime of Spain and of those behind the Iron Curtain have successfully imposed their claims upon the bodies and minds of their members, save in the twilight of Christianity?

If you look back into the history of modern civilization, you will find that our finest institutions were primarily moulded by ideals of righteousness and justice such as those which Buddhism inculcates. But as peoples gained increasing power over their material environment, they have lost, in the process, many of these qualities. There is not among those in high office the same conscious sense of duty which prevailed in earlier days; and there is not among peoples the same sense of duty to their fellow men. For we must remember that freedom cannot exist unless the individuals who possess it have the qualities of self-control, self-restraint and self-sacrifice which alone make freedom tolerable.

During the past 30 years, we have seen a new power rise to great eminence in the world – the Soviet State. How has that come about? The power of the Soviet Union, and particularly of the Soviet Communist Party, is due to the fact that, while in a sense the Soviet State has moved into a power vacuum in Europe and Asia, the Soviet Communist Party has moved into a moral vacuum in the world.

What has given Soviet Communism its tremendous influence over men everywhere? It is the moral slogans which the Marxists have adopted. They profess to stand for an end of economic [p. 533/534] exploitation of man by man. They profess to stand for the equitable sharing of the wealth of a country amongst all its citizens. They profess to stand for an end of colonial exploitation. They profess to stand for the dignity of the individual, irrespective of caste, colour and race.

Their slogans are nothing but an expression of the same principles for which religion has stood. But recognizing that religion had failed to stand militantly for those ideals, the leaders of Soviet Communism took them over and professed them to the world as the principles for which Marxism stood. The leaders of the Soviet Communist Party have been shrewd enough to see that the way to obtain influence in the world is to sponsor great moral principles, although they themselves do not necessarily conform to these principles in practice.

Democracy in the modern world cannot, in fact, resist the claims of totalitarianism by a vague and tepid belief in human rights and human decency; it can stand only if it is successful in strengthening that belief with the conviction that only religion can command and with the enthusiasm which only religion can generate. It is because Communism has come to take the place of religion in the minds of so many of its adherents that it can command this conviction and enlist this enthusiasm. Democracy, if it is to survive, must draw upon a like energy and evoke a like enthusiasm.

The connection, then, which we are suggesting, is reciprocal. Religion can only survive in the modern world if it addresses itself to the problems of the day and shows how they can be solved consonantly with the maintenance of the religious way of life. It must, in fact, be interpreted anew in the light of the existing situation. It may well be that democracy can only be maintained, and the rights of the individual preserved, if the enthusiasm which religious faith can generate can be harnessed in its service.

### [SB: E. Harmony of Religion and Politics]

Whatever be the aspect of religion we may consider, it is always true that man is its pivotal point. The essence of religion is the emancipation from dependence on the unknown. The more man advances in culture, the more does he depend on himself to get over his dependence on the unknown. Religion is essentially, a means, a mode of action, to realise man's hope of salvation, of deliverance from unhappiness, be it due to poverty, ignorance, disease, old age, or death. The end of religion is always salvation: a larger, freer, more satisfactory, and more abundant life. It does not consist in the profession of a belief in God, the soul and immortality, as recorded in a scripture, or condensed in a creed. God, soul and immortality are the illusions that have crept into religion and, without their suppression, religion cannot appear in its true colours. Lack of confidence in his own powers, engendered by ignorant self-seeking, has made man an abject slave of these illusions. These delusions have turned life into a vale of tears.

Life as the Buddha saw it was full of *dukkha* or suffering. Nirvana was the elimination of this suffering. Much has been made of the emphasis by the Buddha upon the statement, "existence is suffering," but although He did emphasise it, it was not His own, but the world-negating conclusion of the other Upanishadic thinkers. To say that existence is bound up with *dukkha* (sorrow), *anicca* (evanescence), and *anatta* (unreality), is not original. What is original is the remedy which the Buddha proposes – extinction of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), *moha* (ignorance), and this is practical (not speculative), ethical, and free from extremes. It means, among other things, the evolution of a social order which aims at perfection of mankind and doing full justice to the rights of man. The Buddha's doctrine aims at perfection of man so that he may lead a happy life in this world itself. It is not, as in the case of some other religions, to prepare him to meet his Maker in another world.

Having satisfied ourselves as to the nature of the original doctrine of the Buddha, we can now proceed to an examination of how best to translate that doctrine into the terms of a practical religion. [p. 547/548] "Religion is politics; and politics is brotherhood," said William Blake. Ultimately, any political question becomes a religious question. A nation which is permeated with evil ideas will inevitably tend to put those ideas into practice and will eventually succeed, unless its evil ideas are countered by others. What happened in Germany not long ago illustrates this viewpoint. So also a nation which is permeated with good ideas will put those good ideas into practice.

It is also true that the existence of evil conditions in a country is evidence of the existence of evil ideas in a people; and, in a country where bad conditions are prevalent, obviously evil ideas must be. It is, therefore, necessary, seeing that evil ideas underlie evil conditions, that evil ideas be supplanted by good ideas. For if we spend our energies combating evil conditions without combating the evil ideas underlying them, we can achieve at best but palliatives, and do nothing towards the development of personality, the real object of all political activity.

It is true that Governments are, properly, not concerned with ideas but with conditions; but, as ideas underlie conditions, it is necessary that Governments should be informed, and impregnated, as it were, by ideas. Religion exists to inspire human beings, enrich personality, stimulate action, and ennoble thought and motive. Governments exist to create, secure and preserve such conditions as are consistent with the attainment of this end. Lord Halifax once said, "Government is the instrument to secure conditions favourable to the fullest possible development of personality."

Nearly every one would in these times admit that the perfection of the citizen ought to be the end of government; and since politics is concerned with the provision of conditions most favourable for the attainment of this end, the perfection of the citizen may be said to be the end of politics.

Although different definitions of the term have been used, we may, broadly speaking, regard politics as concerned with the governance of communities, in themselves and among themselves – that is, with the laying down of definite rules or laws for the control of human conduct in individuals and in groups, and for determining the general conditions under which they live.

As politics is concerned with governance, we must first ask what is the reason and the aim of the control which it seeks to establish.

[p. 548/549] "To say that politics always exists for the sake of human beings, and not the contrary," writes C. A. Richardson in his *Strategy of Living*, "ought to be a truism, but the history of political development shows that it is a truism which must be constantly emphasized. The only intelligible reason for laying down regulative principles of conduct is, not that this is in itself a rather intriguing and stimulating game or contest, but that without such principles, human life would be anarchic and therefore self-destructive; and the only intelligible aim for a particular code of law and order is that in its own field it leads to, or renders possible, a form of life which is desirable to human beings for its own sake."

What is this desirable form of life? If the thesis which we have been developing is well founded, then it is for mankind to select a form of life which would lead to perfection, and thereby to the state of universal happiness. The perfection of the citizen is the aim of both religion and politics; and it is accomplished by the joint effort of religion, government and the citizen. We would therefore maintain that the practice of politics is significant and intelligible only if it is directed to the establishment of laws governing the life of communities of such a kind as to provide the most favourable conditions for the perfection of the citizen and the progressive attainment of happiness of all concerned.

Now, politicians will inevitably differ as to the best kinds of laws and regulations to achieve this end. But, among the great variety of individual opinions, there would undoubtedly be apparent a basic law not only acceptable to them but also in harmony with religion, as robust commonsense dilutes religion and reduces it with politics, into the common problem of the pursuit of a happy human life.

The aphorisms of great men look simple. At first sight they look like platitudes – to the point of being trite. Their significance lies in the difficulty of carrying them out. The Eightfold Path, embodying positive practice of virtues, may be somewhat difficult to follow, but how infinitely simple appear the three exhortations. “Renounce Greed! Renounce Hatred! Renounce Delusion!” Simple indeed, because they are mere negative imperatives.

The world would have had a different tale to tell, and Buddhism a different course to follow, if only its apostles, in the expounding of the Doctrine, had shifted the emphasis, from the speculative [p. 549/550] and world-negating Upanishadic doctrine of *anicca*, *ducca*, *anatta*, to the fundamental and practical Buddhist doctrine of the eradication of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), *moha* (delusion). While the moral and mental discipline and the spiritual aspects of Buddhism are highly important, they are not enough to constitute the thing itself. Buddhism, like Democracy or Communism, is a way of life, and has to be given practical shape as a social structure or a form of government, or, in other words, as a political system.

When Lenin, after the overthrow of the Tsarist regime in Russia, secured a free hand to put into practice the teachings of Karl Marx, he did not set up temples with images of the founder of Marxism and then ask the Russians to worship the images, nor did he stop at setting up preaching halls for the enunciation of the doctrine in *Das Kapital*; but he set up a State, the functions of which harmonised with the teachings of Marx, and made the people actually to live the way of life preached by Marx.

Similarly, the highest “worship” we can offer to the Buddha is to live according to His teaching. Buddhism is a way of life which supplies an antidote to the anxieties and anguish of the present, and makes possible the best approach to serenity that is available to an earnest mind in our tortured and uncertain world. As such Buddhism has to be lived and practised – merely worshipping the images of its Founder is not living up to or practising His teaching. In a religion in which there is no place for a Creator or ruler of the universe, there can be nothing corresponding to what is ordinarily called worship or prayer. “Worship consists in fulfilling the design of the Being honoured, not in offerings of perfumes, garlands and the like,” says the *Jātakamāla*. Therefore, true worship, in Buddhism, does not consist in the performance of genuflexions before the image of the Buddha but in being inspired by His genius, and bringing to fruition the ideas which immortalise Him. To the true Buddhist, Buddhism ought to mean, not the building of temples for the housing of images of the Buddha, but leading a life in accordance with the principles of His teachings.

The highest purpose of religion, declared Confucius, is to regulate the life of this world – “I know nothing of the next world.” This regulation begins with the investiga-

tion of life. "Our ancestors, having investigated life, increased their knowledge. Having increased their knowledge, they purified their thoughts. Having [p. 550/551] purified their thoughts, they rectified their hearts. Having rectified their hearts, they harmonised their characters. Having harmonised their characters, they adjusted their family life. And having adjusted their family life, they brought justice to the State."

This is at the core of the Confucian religion and the Confucian philosophy. The business of life is to advance from individual knowledge to social justice. A pure heart is the concomitant of an informed mind, and the Confucianists, unlike the Buddhists, try to follow the teachings of Confucius rather than to bow before his image.

The Buddha defined a way by which man could live a life in harmony with the cosmic laws, which is the only way to happiness, and which constitutes the ultimate aim of both religion and politics. The task of any government in any country, the population of which is predominantly Buddhist, is to harmonise the Buddha's way of life with the every-day life of the community; or, in other words, with the Functions of the State.

## Harmony of Religion and the State

The question remains: how to harmonise religion and politics? Both are fundamental necessities of life having one common goal. Both politics and religion are important factors of human civilization, and we cannot do without either of them. Politics, by itself, is not an evil, but when it is misdirected by unscrupulous people, it becomes evil. If there is no police to protect the people against thieves and robbers, if there is no army to guard the country against foreign aggression, one's very life is unsafe. So one should be thankful to those who hold the reins of administration. But if, sitting at the helm of affairs, they betray their trust, they deserve unequivocal condemnation. Those who are inspired by idealism, and actuated by a high sense of justice and equity, are alarmed at the trend of politics in modern times. Politics has become synonymous with fascism, imperialism, militarism, and the biological instinct of struggle and of elbowing out others for one's own enjoyment of power. These things cannot continue for long. If you fight on the plane of animal life, you have to die like animals, too. If you worship the brute in man, you descend to the level of brutes.

[p. 551/552] Here religion comes into the field, and sounds a note of warning. Religion, embodying the spiritual aspirations of the human race, says, 'If you want peace and happiness, base your life on high moral and spiritual principles'. The greater the greed or avarice, the less there is of real happiness. By dishonest means and unscrupulous actions you may succeed for a time, but you must remember that thereby you permanently imperil the cause of personal and national happiness.

In fact politics and religion, at their best, are but the obverse and reverse of the same force making for righteousness in the State. Religion does this by trying to de-

stroy all wickedness through changing the nature of man by teaching and preaching, and politics does it by changing the environment and by eliminating, by force, all wickedness. When these two processes are harmonised we have the set-up of the ideal State.

The ends for which a State exists are:

- (1) Protection of the citizen, whether external or internal: (a) against either the attacks of other States or of individuals within the State; (b) against being exploited by individuals from within or outside the State.
- (2) Justice: The establishment of laws which are just to various citizens within the State. In essence, it may be stated, the main end of the State is Justice.

Both these ends require the use of force. But the State is primarily an institution aiming at protection and justice, and uses force merely to carry out these ends.

There is also a third which may be regarded as a fundamental aim of the State, namely:

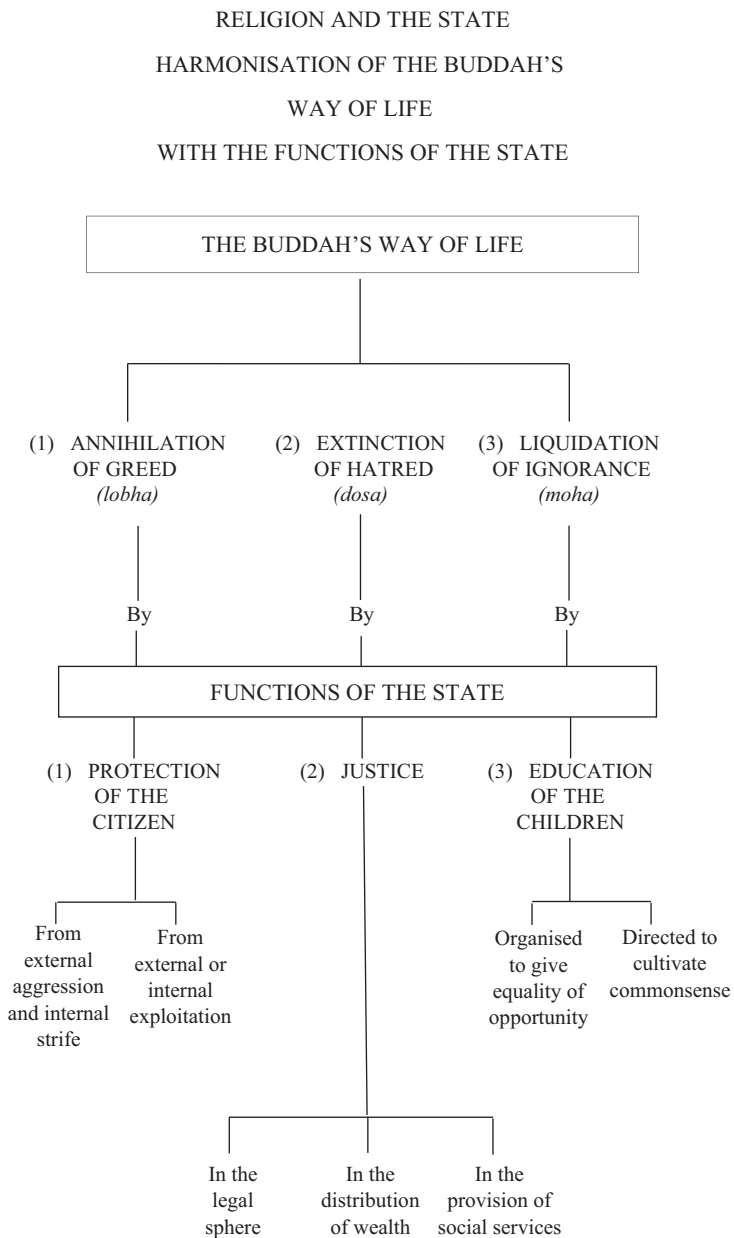
- (3) Education, which means civic education, aiming at the development of a child into a citizen. To this end his education should be organised to give him equality of opportunity and directed to cultivate common sense.

Of course, the individual is more than a citizen; he has interests other than the political interests which are, or should be, directed to the problem of government only that the life of all individual members of the community may be rendered more rich, more full, more free.

[p. 552–554] Buddhism is an ethico-religious social philosophy and, as such, it must be harmonised with a system of government. From time immemorial, religion and politics have gone together and have furthered the advancement of civilization. In the ancient days, politics was sustained by religion. In India we hear of Rishis guiding kings and princes with advice, and in Ceylon we had the Sangha guiding our rulers for over 2000 years. The king would wield temporal power, but behind him was a sage or a bhikkhu who was the moral and spiritual force preventing him from going astray. As such, the guiding principle and ultimate motive of statecraft was how to make the subjects better spiritually and morally, in addition to making them happier materially.

If we study European history, we find a similar combination. The remoter the past to which we go, the greater is the influence of religion on politics. For the Greeks, ethics and politics were two aspects of a single enquiry. It was the function of ethics to prescribe the good life to the individual; it was the business of politics to determine the nature of the community in which the good life, as I prescribed by ethics, could be lived. The *raison d'être* of politics, in other words, was to be found in an end beyond itself, an end which was ethical.

The great Empires of the ancient world – Assyria, Persia, Macedonia, Rome – had tried to build a universal State on the basis of power. The Buddha sought to found a wider community of mankind on the basis of love. Power meant the capacity to appropriate, to possess, to dominate: Love meant the capacity to share, to renounce, to sacrifice.



**Figure 4:** SB: Representation of the Buddha's way of life.

Good men, conscious that they are trustees for righteousness and truth and charged to defend others against the injuries of falsity and evil, are faced with the terrible task of reconciling power with love. Others, with less of goodwill, use power without scruple to enforce their own wills and compel others thereby to use power as a protection in self-defence – and so the bondage of evil grows.

When we must use power, or entrust power to others for them to use, we must wish that they and we may be preserved from the misuse of power which multiplies fear and resentment and injustice and strife, that they and we may seek and find that pure and peaceable wisdom which instils love and creates peace.

The big bullying empires of history, guarded by hosts of soldiers, ships and magistrates: scarcely one of them lasted longer than [p. 554/555] perhaps three centuries. In the Order the Buddha established you have a movement of deliberate paupers, who prized poverty more than wealth; who took vows not to harm or kill other beings; who spent their time in contemplation of the unrealities of this impermanent world; who despised whatever the material world valued, and who valued whatever that world despises—meekness, generosity, love, meditation. And yet, where these mighty empires, built on greed, hatred and delusion, lasted just a few centuries, the impulse of self-denial carried the Buddhist community through 2500 years.

The philosophies behind the empires founded on power are very shallow; they have their day – it is really a very short day, and not a very restful one while it lasts. Whereas the great and universal love preached by the Buddha goes deep down to the very roots, the very breath and rhythm of life. It is the meek that will inherit the earth, it is the meek that have inherited the earth – because they alone are willing to live in harmony with it.

Aristotle said that the State exists “for the sake of goodness” – in plain words, to make better men of its citizens. The Greek mind had realized that schools and teaching and temples and preaching are not the only means by which character is shaped. More decisive in this respect is the structure of society in which we grow up. The social and political structures in which we grow up are moulds into which our plastic natures are run. If the end and object of life is to make men better, an essential means to that end is to see that the moulds into which their natures are run are properly shaped. What men in the mass become will mainly depend on the kind of polity in which they are bred. The structure of the State is therefore of cardinal importance, as the Greeks had seen.

In the view of the Buddha, the end and object of life is to perfect the nature of men. Can we doubt that a mind so profound had seen that, to perfect men, you must perfect the social structure which shapes their characters? This cannot be done merely by teaching and preaching, by calling on men to be better. The political structure in which they grow up must be also improved, must be made consonant with realities, that is to say, with the Law of the Buddha.

The task which the Buddha left to His followers was to create on earth a polity ordered in accordance with His teaching; a polity [p. 555/556] based, that is, on the infinite duty of each to himself and to his fellow-men, as set forth in His exhortation:

*Sabba pāpassa akaranan,  
Kusalassa upasampadā,  
Sa citta pariyodapanan,*

Refrain from evil,  
Cultivate goodness,  
Cleanse the heart.

It is this sense of duty which alone enables men to unite in an ordered and civilized polity, as that force of mutual attraction called gravity serves to unite innumerable particles and hold them together in the planet we live on. The mysteries, in which philosophers have clouded political theory, dissolve when the obvious truth is admitted, that the only force that unites men in a State is conscience, a varying capacity in most of them to put the interests of other people before their own.

To the Buddha the final reality in human nature was not self-interest, but a faculty in men, however imperfect, of putting the interests of others before their own – the virtue that distinguishes men from beasts. To develop this faculty is to perfect mankind. But a faculty, like a muscle, is developed by exercise. The right kind of polity is one which depends for its working on the sense of duty in men to each other, and so develops that sense by its repetitive operation.

The tragedy of the Buddha rises to a swift climax. The breath has; scarcely left the Master's body before He becomes enshrouded in myth. The Buddha, the Man, passes out of the picture: in His place there arises a god enmeshed in the polytheism of primitive religions, and celebrated in a score of pagan cults. Karl Marx once said of himself that he was not a Marxist: and of the Buddha one may say, without irreverence, that He was not a Buddhist. For little men, who guarded the Buddha's memory, took him drained off the precious blood of His spirit, mummified His body, wrapped what was left in many foreign wrappings, and over these remains they proceeded to erect a gigantic shrine. "The Diamond Throne of the original Enlightenment," Okakura Kakuzo has remarked, "is now hard indeed to discover, surrounded as it is by the labyrinths of pillars and elaborate porticos which successive architects have erected, as each has added his portion to the [p. 556/557] edifice of faith." The figure it holds is both greater and less than the Man who walked and talked on the foot-hills of the Himalayas: more indisputably a traditional god, more doubtfully an illumined man. But which figure holds the crystalline nucleus of truth? We have no hesitation in saying – the Man.

During the two hundred years that had elapsed between the Buddha's death and Asoka's reign, the Master's disciples had composed many books about Him; and their followers, becoming numerous, certainly believed already that He was more than a

man. Had He not discovered the secret of how to avoid being born again? No man had ever discovered that before. Where was He? What was the blissful state of non-personality in which He existed? These were mysterious and entrancing questions. Many people were occupied in trying to answer them. In the process, the Buddha became less human, more divine.

And it was left to Asoka to rescue the Buddha, the Man, from a place amidst the crowd of gods to which His followers had thrust Him. Asoka was the Lenin of Buddhism, as he was the first to translate the Buddha's Way of Life into a polity. Asoka made the people actually practise the way of life preached by the Buddha. And look at the result achieved! A Chinese traveller to India of those times has recorded that, "Theft was unknown; people were extremely honest and truthful; peace and happiness reigned all over the country; there was no fight between the rulers and the ruled, between the employer and the employed; and there was equitable distribution of wealth." Compare this with the present state of affairs. Which is better?

Amidst the tens of thousands of monarchs that crowd the pages of history, the name of Asoka shines, and shines almost alone, as a star. In its main lines the code of life which Asoka gave to his people, and tried to give to the whole world, by a unique campaign for righteousness, was just the simple standard of social conduct, preached by the Buddha, which is one of the conditions of the stability of a civilization. For the first and only time in history, Asoka established a Ministry for the Development of Human Character. Another official in his government was Director of Women's Welfare. He had his moral exhortations or Edicts carved upon stone pillars, twenty to seventy feet in height, which he set up in all parts of his Empire.

These celebrated Edicts of the greatest of Buddhist monarchs, and, if H. G. Wells be right, the greatest monarch of all times anywhere in the world, are but discourses of the Buddha. Asoka [p. 557/558] showed both in his personal life and in his administration that the Buddha's Dhamma was not a mere philosophical doctrine but a way of life to be cultivated. "How entirely compatible that way of living," says Wells in *The Outline of History*, with reference to the Eightfold Path of Buddhism, "then was with the most useful and beneficent activities his (Asoka's) life shows, Right Aspiration, Right Effort, and Right Livelihood distinguished his career." Those who criticize Buddhism as being just "other-worldly" and out of touch with real life, implying its so-called impracticability, would give up their misconception if they would only read these Edicts of Asoka.

"Asoka", says Joseph McCabe in *The Golden Ages of History*, "did not confine his improvement of the State to a correction of individual conduct. He built a number of hospitals and had large gardens of medicinal herbs which he distributed to the poor. He reformed the prisons and, anticipating our advanced ideas on the subject, urged officials to help prisoners to see the blunder of crime rather than punish them. He recommended the education and kindly treatment of slaves and servants. He built hostels, dug wells and planted trees along the roads for travellers. He opened "spinning-houses" (workshops) for widows and poor women and made provision for the

aged. He had thousands of vessels of water placed on the streets of his capital to meet the contingency of fire, and he imposed a fine upon any man who would not help to extinguish a fire in his neighbour's house. He made it a penal offence to throw dead animals or filth upon the streets. He instituted a department of State to attend to the welfare of the backward races in his Empire. And, above all, he denounced war and most ardently desired the friendly intercourse of all nations, sending his missionaries as far as Syria in the West to preach his gospel. His own people were his children, but all men were his brothers."

How very modern, you reflect! Yes, this is the outcome, the result, when a country gets imbued with the spirit of the teaching of the Master, and is ruled according to the Law of the Buddha.

It took over 1000 years for the Christian world to attain the level of culture and civilization which prevailed prior to the disintegration of the Roman Empire. A glance at the general state of affairs in the sixteenth century shows us that, even with Europe on the verge of the Renaissance, licentiousness and cruelty were still rampant in most countries.

[p. 558/559] They slaughtered and drowned in the Danube alone thousands of starving people. In France, Catherine de Medici ordered the horrible massacre of St. Bartholomew, finding thousands of loyal Frenchmen ready and willing to slay their compatriots. In Rome, Pope Bergia had brought conditions in the Vatican down to the level of Sodom and Gomorrah. In Spain, the Inquisition was blackening the pages of history with sadistic cruelty; while in England the common people were given the frequent spectacle of witches and so-called sorcerers being burned at the stake, and King Henry had no scruples about getting rid of his wives or his friends in the wholesale style of Nero.

But in India, soon after the Buddha's death, there occurred a social phenomenon which has not been duplicated anywhere else. The spiritual revolution brought about by the Buddha's teachings and the humanitarianism it inspired was quick in developing. Within two hundred years of the Buddha's death, we find in Asoka's India humane laws and a culture and civilization unsurpassed even in modern times.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, moving the resolution that, in the centre of the white band of the National Flag of India, there should be the design of the *Dhamma Cakka*, "The Wheel of the Law," the symbol of Buddhism, which appears on the abacus of the Sarnath Lion Capital of Asoka, said: "That wheel is a symbol of India's ancient culture; it is a symbol of the many things that India had stood for through the ages. So we thought that this *Dharma Chakra* emblem should be there, and that wheel appears. For my part, I am exceedingly happy that in this sense indirectly we have associated with this flag of ours, not only this emblem, but in a sense the name of Asoka, one of the most magnificent names not only in India's history but in world history. It is well that at this moment of strife, conflict and intolerance, our minds should go back towards what India stood for in the ancient days and what it has stood for, I hope and believe, essentially throughout the ages, in spite of mistakes and errors and degradation from time to time."