

The FWBO FILES –

**a
response**

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*It is difficult to know which is worse:
not to be believed when you speak the truth,
or to be believed when you tell a lie.*
Sangharakshita

Those interested in procuring a copy of this Response should write to
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1. Introduction

The FWBO Files is a 20,000 word document about the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, published in May 1998 on an Internet web site¹ and subsequently distributed by post to a variety of Buddhist groups, government departments, businesses, politicians, and journalists. It is long and detailed, and its accusations against Sangharakshita and the FWBO are serious and manifold. The document claims to be researched and written by a British Buddhist, alias Arthur Rimbaud, an 'ex-monk with twenty years training in an orthodox tradition, who wishes to remain anonymous at present.'² It is now clear that the *Files* is just one element in a sustained campaign by an anonymous group to discredit the FWBO, and that the individuals responsible for it also contacted *The Guardian* in 1997 and stimulated its critical article on the FWBO's work.³

The author claims that his motive is not malice but a desire to question the activities and doctrines of the FWBO and its founder in the light of 'true Buddhist doctrine'. (*Files* p.3⁴) His stated hope is that this will bring to an end the suffering of Buddhists practising in the FWBO which has resulted from its harmful teachings. Another concern appears to be for the future of Buddhism in the West, within which the FWBO has played and is currently playing a significant role.

The FWBO is a significant presence within Britain's Buddhist community. It is therefore quite proper that its activities should be the subject of public debate and scrutiny, and were the charges in the *Files* true, its activities would rightly be a cause of concern. This *Response* is written because some readers of the *Files* have understandably been worried by its claims and have told us that they need to hear the FWBO's reply.

Rebuttal can be a wearisome and difficult business. It risks degenerating into 'denial' and a shouting match, or else dignifying an attack beyond its merits. The intention of this *Response* is not to malign the authors of the *Files*, or to suggest that the FWBO is wholly without flaws. The writers on behalf of the FWBO (Kulananda, Cittapala, and Vishvapani) have sought, however imperfectly, to follow the Buddha's advice:

'If outsiders should speak in dispraise of me or of the Dharma or of the Sangha, you should not on any account bear malice, or suffer heart-burning or bear ill-will... you should unravel what is false and point out what is wrong, saying: 'For this or that reason this is not the fact, that is not so, such a thing is not found among us, is not in us.'⁵ (*Digha Nikaya* 1)⁵

The *Files*' main allegations are that:

- Dennis Lingwood (Sangharakshita) - masquerading as an authentic Buddhist teacher but using false credentials - is in fact a predatory homosexual. He has a history of disastrous sexual encounters, using his leadership of the FWBO, which is in fact a 'religious' cult of the worst type, for his own gratification and aggrandisement. His ambition is to subvert all genuine schools of Buddhism and replace them with his own concoction of 'Buddhism'.

¹ It was initially posted at <http://www/pallas3.demon.co.uk> but withdrawn by Demon, the Internet provider, on the grounds that its material was possibly libellous. It can now be viewed at <http://www.ex-cult.org/fwbo/fwbofiles.htm>.

² See the last page of the web page version of *The FWBO Files*.

³ *The Dark Side of Enlightenment*, *The Guardian*, 27/10/97. See also Vishvapani's response following an acknowledgment by the writer, Madeleine Bunting, that the FWBO deserved a right to reply: *Buddhism Distorted*, Face to Faith, *The Guardian* 28/11/97; also a comment on the debate in the same column the following week by Elizabeth Harris 5/12/97.

⁴ Hereafter our unattributed page numbering refers to the printed version of *The FWBO Files*, distributed anonymously by post.

⁵ Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, Wisdom, 1987.

- Amongst other abuses in the guise of spiritual training such as alienating members from their families, this cult procures young men to provide homosexual satisfaction for Lingwood and senior cult members. This abusive exploitation causes its naive victims great pain.
- While claiming to teach Buddhism, and even seeking to represent Buddhism as a whole, the FWBO in fact teaches a spurious, non-Buddhist ideology of Sangharakshita's own invention.
- Its present financial success is built on past systematic abuse of state welfare provision and charitable status.
- The FWBO, which regards Christianity and the heterosexual nuclear family as 'enemies' to be eradicated, has insinuated itself into the unsuspecting confidence of many educational authorities, thereby gaining a false legitimacy.

The aim of this *Response* is threefold: to set the record straight in matters of fact; to clarify the true nature of Sangharakshita's teaching and the approach of the FWBO, which in many cases has been misrepresented or misunderstood in the *Files*; and thirdly - in the hope of raising the level of debate - to indicate some of the underlying issues which the *Files* has touched on. In doing this we will follow the structure of the *Files* itself, so that its points may be answered systematically.

Each of these aims raises difficulties. Some matters of fact cannot be proved one way or the other, in which case we shall seek to clarify the nature of the uncertainty. The burden of proof rightly lies with an accuser, and if they are unproved, accusations will rightly be dismissed as slander. This *Response* is not, for example, going to discuss the details of any individual's sexual relationships. It is not uncommon to find the two parties to such a relationship telling entirely different stories about its nature, and outsiders cannot know where the truth lies. There is little point, therefore, in entering into an inconclusive exchange of claim and counter-claim. That said, we do need to address the specific issue of sexual coercion, and suffice it to say that all the individuals charged in the *Files* with having behaved coercively deny the accusations.

There is also the question of context. It is easy to distort the significance of a quite innocent 'fact'. In such cases we shall suggest the context in which we ourselves understand it, and leave the reader to decide their preferred interpretation. A connected issue is establishing the true context of quotations that have been selectively quoted or misinterpreted.

Some people have asked that Sangharakshita himself comment on the accusations in the *Files*. On some of these issues he has spoken in the past, and we will present his statements here; in some other cases we have asked him ourselves, and pass on what he has said. But there are many, many accusations in the *Files*, and the only way for Sangharakshita to have answered them all would have been for him to write this *Response* himself. He has not done this, but he is currently writing a volume of memoirs about his life from 1964 to 1972, the period to which many of the allegations in the *Files* relate. These will be published as soon as they are ready, and in the meantime he asks people to be patient and to bear with him.

Secondly, it will only be possible to summarise Sangharakshita's teachings, not to present full arguments for them. However, there are references to the many works by Sangharakshita and others that explore these issues in greater depth. Similarly, we will not be able to address all the points raised in the *Files*. To do so would require a book of considerable length which, in any case, we doubt many would want to read. We shall not attempt to show that the FWBO's teachings are better than others, or even that they are incontrovertibly true,

merely that they are reasonable and in keeping with the Buddhist tradition as a whole.

There are naturally differing views on the broader doctrinal questions, and our arguments are offered respectfully as a contribution to a debate. We hope that this *Response* will stimulate a frank and open discussion between concerned parties regarding such questions as what constitutes legitimacy in a Buddhist teacher or organisation, and how one ascertains the authenticity of a teaching, all of which have a bearing on consideration of the FWBO itself.

This would elevate the debate from the level on which it has unfortunately been conducted by the author of the *Files*. He remains anonymous for no stated reason and in phone-calls to people in the FWBO and others in their professional capacities, he has used various pseudonyms. At times his argument appears to be disingenuous, or at least deeply misinformed.

We would like to extend an invitation to the author of the *Files*, and any others who have doubts, questions or criticisms of the FWBO, to discuss these with us directly, or in an appropriate public forum, so that we may together seek to establish the truth in accordance with the Buddha's teaching of Right Speech.

In the *Aranavibhanga Sutta*, the Buddha says:

'One should not talk covertly about people; face-to-face with them, one should not speak provocatively... knowing covert talk to be untrue, unjustified, and unprofitable, one should not speak it of others... If one knows that it is true and justified, but unprofitable, one should train oneself not to speak it. If one knows that it is true, justified, and profitable, one should know the right time to tell it.'⁶

2. Sangharakshita

I. Sangharakshita's Place Within the Buddhist Tradition

The first section of the *Files* concerns Sangharakshita himself and seeks to discredit him as a prelude to discrediting the movement he founded. It portrays him as a self-taught charlatan, who is certainly not an authentic teacher of Buddhism, and has acted unscrupulously in various respects.

This chapter will attempt to establish the facts firstly of Sangharakshita's training and secondly of his subsequent career.⁷ However, behind these factual matters, lies the question of what constitutes legitimacy in a Buddhist teacher. The *Files* appears to take the position that in order to be a valid teacher of Buddhism one must have been authorised to teach by a single, pre-existing religious authority or tradition, and that one's teaching must primarily comprise passing on the teachings one has oneself received from that tradition. Sangharakshita, however, has never shown an exclusive allegiance to any one Buddhist tradition. His teaching and practice draw on several Buddhist traditions, rather than just one; his writing shows a persistent desire to discern what all Buddhist traditions have in common, rather than to expound a single strand of it; his teaching is an attempt to articulate the underlying principles running through the tradition as a whole, rather than to train students in an Eastern form; he describes himself as

⁶ David. W. Evans *No. 139 Aranavibhanga Sutta Majjhima Nikaya Discourses of Gotama Buddha*, Janus, London, 1992 p.419; see also Bhikkhu Nanamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi *The Middle Length Sayings of the Buddha* Wisdom, Boston, 1995 p.1083.

⁷ See also Subhuti, *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1995, a biographical outline of Sangharakshita's life. Sangharakshita himself has written a series of memoirs of his time in India, up to 1958: *The Rainbow Road*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1997; *Facing Mt. Kanchenjunga*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1991. There are useful accounts of Sangharakshita in Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West*, HarperCollins, London, 1993; and Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, Open Court, Chicago, 1997.

a ‘translator’⁸ rather than a representative; in founding the FWBO he has drawn freely on the Buddhist tradition as a whole within a system that has its own coherence yet differs, not in spirit but in various particulars, from the systems from which he has drawn.

The *Files* is plainly outraged by this approach, but its justification is the history and example of the Buddhist tradition itself. Buddhism has always manifested in different ways under different conditions. Its history shows continual reformulation and development, often at the instigation of a single figure. Furthermore, these adaptations have rightly been the subject of controversy - consider, for example the doctrinal disputes surrounding such figures as Nagarjuna and Bhaviveka in India, or Tao-Sheng, Chih-I, and Hui Neng in China, Tsong-ka-pa in Tibet, Shinran and Hakuin in Japan, and more recently Buddhadasa in Thailand. The point is not that Sangharakshita claims the status of all of these figures, but that their examples illustrate the way that attempts to reformulate the teachings have often been attended by controversy. One might say that a tension between over-rigid conservation and necessary reformulation runs through the Dharma’s spread and has been particularly intense at every crucial juncture. The encounter of the Buddhist tradition as a whole with the West is generally recognised to be such a juncture, and so it is perhaps to be expected that Buddhists in the West should debate how much of what is practised as Buddhism in Asia needs to be imported, and what may be discarded. Numerous aspects of Sangharakshita’s response to these issues will be discussed throughout this *Response*. However, a crucial issue in understanding Sangharakshita’s relation to the Buddhist tradition is that the encounter has been between the West and the Buddhist tradition as a whole, all of whose branches have become available to Westerners at the same time. We are therefore heirs to that tradition as a whole, at the same time as being Westerners with our own cultural legacy. Similarly, Sangharakshita’s training included experience of various Buddhist schools, and was supplemented by far broader reading in Buddhist canonical literature than would be usual in any of those schools.

His conviction (and, indeed, his argument) is that there are values, goals, teachings and practices which define the core of the Buddhist tradition, as it has existed across Asian cultures, and which, naturally enough, can be expressed in many ways. His aim has been to remain true to this core and, by doing so, to be flexible and creative in re-expressing it in a new context. Sangharakshita’s approach is that in introducing Buddhism to the West we must steer a course between a superficial eclecticism and a narrow and unrealistic sectarianism. He claims that, as well as being innovative in some of its formulations, his teaching is in keeping with the principles and spirit of the Dharma as a whole and is, in this sense, wholly orthodox.⁹ It is a *radical* orthodoxy:

‘The FWBO’s role ... is radical, in the sense of being a return to the spiritual roots of Buddhism, and creative, in the sense of not allowing itself to be determined by the immediate past of British Buddhism, or, for the matter of that, by the immediate past of the eastern Buddhist world.’¹⁰

The FWBO, similarly, sees itself as wholly traditional and orthodox. It is not so in the sense of following all the observances, customs and practices which have become traditional in Buddhist countries, but in the sense that it seeks to apply the essential, traditional, principles of Buddhism to the circumstances in which it finds itself.

Thus the concerned reader who asks of the FWBO (or indeed any Buddhist tradition), ‘Is this real Buddhism?’ will not find an answer by simply looking at other Buddhist traditions,

⁸ ‘I was trying to communicate the spirit of the Dharma in terms of Western rather than in terms of Eastern culture. I was thus a translator, with all that that implies in the way of seeking to fathom the uttermost depths of what one is trying to translate so that one may translate it faithfully...’ *The Journey to Il Convento* published in *The Priceless Jewel*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1993.

⁹ Indeed he argues that this is the only meaningful sense of Buddhist orthodoxy: *The Meaning of Orthodoxy in Buddhism: a Protest*, France-Asie, Feb-June, 1957; *Extending the Hand of Fellowship*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1996, p.24-37.

¹⁰ Sangharakshita *The FWBO and ‘Protestant Buddhism’ - an Affirmation and a Protest*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1992 p.93.

and expecting it to be exactly the same. If pushed to extremes (as, we would say, has occurred in the *Files*) such a position would be fundamentalist. As an innovator, Sangharakshita, by definition, cannot be easily fitted into pre-existent sectarian categories. However, this is not because he is by nature a maverick in relation to the Buddhist tradition, but he has felt that the nature of the tradition itself demands a fresh and creative response to a unique and complex historical situation. As more Westerners gain maturity as Buddhist teachers, an increasing number are following his example, with the result that a new methodology is required to make sense of how Buddhism is developing in the West. Academic commentator Andrew Rawlinson, for example, locates Sangharakshita within ‘the ecumenical Sangha’ of non-sectarian western Buddhist teachers.¹¹

However, we must first consider the nature of Sangharakshita’s own Dharmic training, so as to show, firstly, that Sangharakshita has given a faithful account of it, and secondly how this is the basis for his translation of traditional Buddhist principles into the creation of a new Buddhist tradition, the Western Buddhist Order.

II. Sangharakshita’s Training

‘what we are left with after the removal of falsities and exaggerations from Sangharakshita’s biographies is a list of experiences... dressed in a rich and colourful robe of poetic hyperbole... If Lingwood had told the truth from the beginning about his status and activities instead of lying for almost four decades, he would never have accumulated as large an entourage as those who now, in their ignorance, follow him.’(p.9¹²)

a) Sangharakshita as a wandering ascetic and in the Theravadin Tradition

‘He claims to have lived the life of a wandering ascetic in India. We are presented with little evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, in one publication he openly admits to never having been alone during this particular period of his life, and to have spent fifteen months in the same place...’(p.5)

In *The Rainbow Road*,¹³ Sangharakshita gives a detailed account of his life from the time that he went forth in 1947 until his sojourn with Bhikkhu Kashyap a few months after his *sramanera* ordination in 1949. This life is principally characterised by wandering and asceticism and, as Sangharakshita has always said, he followed it in the company of the friend who was ordained as Ven. Buddharakshita.¹⁴

‘We are told: ‘he studied Abhidhamma, Pali and Logic at Benares University with Ven. Jagdish Kashyap’, a Buddhist teacher of the Theravada tradition with whom Sangharakshita claims to have had a deep and meaningful relationship. Yet, according to Sangharakshita’s own writings, his whole relationship with Kashyap lasted a total of seven months, a thoroughly insufficient period of time for any such relationship to develop.’(p.5)

The Rainbow Road describes how the two lived together from mid-1949 in Kashyapji’s small house at Benares University. Under Kashyap’s guidance Sangharakshita ‘embarked on a

¹¹ *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, pp.255-6. Rawlinson includes Ven. Dharmapali, Miao Kwang Sudharma and Karuna Dharma alongside Sangharakshita.

¹² Page references to *The FWBO Files* are to a bound version that was distributed postally. As an anonymous production, no publication details are available.

¹³ This material was initially published under as *The Thousand-Petalled Lotus*, Heinemann, London, 1976, and has been incorporated into *The Rainbow Road*.

¹⁴ It is true that his life at this time was not one of literally, from day to day, ‘wandering from tree root to tree root’ as Dharmachari Abhaya’s introduction to the first edition of *Peace is a Fire*, a collection of Sangharakshita’s aphorisms, poetically puts it. None the less Sangharakshita was clearly an ascetic: he had very few possessions, did not handle money, and he did wander in the time-honoured fashion.

course of study that was to keep me busy without interruption - for seven of the quietest and happiest months I have ever known.’ Although subsequently he rarely studied with such intensity under such ideal conditions, prolonged and deep reflection on the Dharma has been a lifelong habit. The success of these studies may be assessed by considering Sangharakshita’s subsequent writing and teaching.¹⁵ In February 1950 Kashyap and Sangharakshita went on tour together through Bihar, eventually arriving in Kalimpong, where Sangharakshita was left to ‘work for the good of Buddhism’. They remained in touch for many years: Kashyapji participated in Sangharakshita’s full ordination (*upasampada*), 18 months later, acting as teacher (*acharya*) at the ceremony.¹⁶ Kashyapji and Sangharakshita continued to correspond and visit one another until 1964, when Sangharakshita returned to Britain.¹⁷ This appears to have been a relationship of genuine *kalyana mitrata* (spiritual friendship).¹⁸

The *Files* cites two Theravadins who questioned Sangharakshita’s knowledge of their tradition.¹⁹ Bhikkhu Brahmavamsa’s view that Sangharakshita’s *43 Years ago: Reflections on my Bhikkhu Ordination* displays ‘the misunderstandings of an outsider’ (p.5), is a personal opinion, stated in a polemical book review.²⁰ More broadly, the fullest evidence for Sangharakshita’s understanding of Theravada teaching lies in the many books he has written expounding the Pali Canon, and teachings drawn from it by the Theravadin tradition. He has likewise maintained friendships with Theravadin monks and lay people over the years who would not share Brahmavamsa’s opinion.

Sangharakshita’s memoirs recount in great detail his involvement with other Theravadin bhikkhus. Theravadin bhikkhus are not required, as the *Files* suggest, to undertake ‘systematic training in textual and contemplative curricula’ (p.8). What is required is strict adherence to the bhikkhu *pratimoksa* and rules of the *Vinaya*. Sangharakshita asserts that he scrupulously followed this disciplinary code in all its major requirements for more than twenty years. He was fully accepted by the Sangha as a fellow bhikkhu; indeed he was entrusted with responsibilities, such as the editorship of *The Maha Bodhi Journal*, which would only have been given to a bhikkhu in good standing.

b) Sangharakshita - the Triyanist

To understand Sangharakshita’s subsequent training it is necessary to understand his

¹⁵ Sangharakshita’s knowledge and understanding of the Buddhist tradition is formidable by any standards and is easily attested by his principal works, *A Survey of Buddhism* op. cit.; *The Three Jewels*, An Introduction to Buddhism, Rider & Co., London, 1967, *The Eternal Legacy: an Introduction to the Canonical Literature of Buddhism*, Tharpa, London 1985. Between them, these books outline the development of the three major schools of Indian Buddhism and their subsequent transmission throughout Asia. The author of the *Files* appears to be unfamiliar with these works. Sangharakshita’s knowledge of the Pali Canon and the teachings found within it is additionally attested by *Who Is The Buddha?* Windhorse, Glasgow, 1994; *The Buddha’s Victory*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1991, among other books. Sangharakshita has also conducted numerous seminars on texts from the Pali Canon, available from the FWBO Transcriptions Project.

¹⁶ *Facing Mt. Kanchenjunga* p.116.

¹⁷ For instance, they shared the same Dharma lecturing platforms; Kashyap helped secure financial support for Sangharakshita; Kashyap sent some of his later disciples to stay with Sangharakshita in Kalimpong; they were part of the official delegation accompanying the Sacred Relics of the Arahants Shariputra and Maudgalyayana on their tour in Nepal, Sikkim and northern India.

¹⁸ The source cited for the claim that this was a ‘deep and meaningful’ relationship is John Snelling’s *The Buddhist Handbook*. But there is no mention in John Snelling’s book of Sangharakshita claiming a ‘deep and meaningful relationship’ with Kashyap; and there are no such words in Sangharakshita’s own memoirs.

¹⁹ The other Theravadin is Dhiravamsa, a Thai monk resident in England in the 1960s. These are second-hand comments, with no citation of a reference, regarding a subject - *vipassana* meditation - on which Sangharakshita has never written or lectured. Those wishing to assess the understanding of *vipassana* practices in the FWBO are referred to Kamalasila, *Meditation: the Buddhist Way of Tranquillity and Insight*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1992.

²⁰ Similarly, Sangharakshita’s critique of Theravadin formalism, which argues against what might be called ‘the misunderstanding of the insider’, also deserves serious attention in its own right. Quoting one side of a debate is surely inadequate. Sangharakshita, *Forty-Three Years Ago: Reflections on my Bhikkhu Ordination*, Windhorse, 1993; Sangharakshita, *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?* Windhorse, 1994.

approach to Buddhism at the time. His earliest encounters with Buddhism came through wide reading across the tradition, and particularly the Mahayana texts *The Diamond Sutra* and *The Sutra of Wei Lang* (Hui Neng), which at the age of 16 convinced him that he was a Buddhist and always had been. His earliest published article, aged 19, was entitled 'The Unity of Buddhism' in 1946, and was printed in *The Middle Way*. His affiliation to the Theravada therefore always had a context of a broader commitment to the Buddhist tradition as a whole. When he came to write *A Survey of Buddhism* between 1954 and 1957 he was concerned 'to see Buddhism in its full breadth and in its ultimate depth'.²¹ This approach, along with his relative autonomy, enabled Sangharakshita to develop a broad and inclusive engagement with the Dharma while he was in Kalimpong (1950-1964). His friendships, which had a bearing on this, indeed included a close connection with Lama Anagarika Govinda. In this period Sangharakshita described himself as a 'triyana Buddhist' - his Kalimpong base was called the Triyana Vardhana Vihara - and his approach provided a basis for his subsequent connections with lamas who were themselves followers of Tibetan *triyana*. While this approach may be unacceptable or incomprehensible by the standards of the *Files*, his endeavours to establish a *triyana* approach were widely applauded and won the support of figures such as the Dalai Lama²² and Govinda, who wrote:

'Probably for the first time in the history of Buddhism the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana have found a common centre in the Triyana Vardhana Vihara. This is an important step forward on the road towards the unification of Buddhism... a creative cooperation, in which the best of each [*yana*] contributes to the attainment of the highest aim and helps us to see the Buddha-Dharma in its whole depth and width.'²³

An important figure for Sangharakshita was Yogi Chen who spent twenty-five years in a single-room hermitage in Kalimpong practising and studying. *The Files* claims that 'no independent confirmation of the relationship [between Sangharakshita and Yogi Chen] exists.' (p.6) However, a book entitled *Buddhist Meditation: Systematic and Practical*,²⁴ comprises transcriptions by Bhikkhu Khantipalo of teachings given by Yogi Chen to Sangharakshita and Khantipalo in Kalimpong in 1962. It is clear from this account that Chen respected Sangharakshita as a fellow Dharma-practitioner.²⁵ The *Files* makes various attacks on Chen's reputation because 'he was not an authorised teacher of any of the Japanese or Chinese Buddhist systems' (p.6) in the same way that it disputes Sangharakshita's legitimacy, and without argument or investigation.²⁶ Alternative views may be obtained from some of Chen's many disciples.²⁷

III. Tibetan Buddhism

'there is little evidence in the founder's work, teaching, or the activities of the FWBO that

²¹ *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1988.

²² Message from H.H. the Dalai Lama: 'I heartily congratulate the Triyana Vardhana Vihara which has completed five years. The harmonious practice of the doctrinal theories of Hinayana and Mahayana including Mantrayana Schools, and the service that it has rendered for the good of others, are to be deeply appreciated. May the pure teachings of Lord Buddha flourish forever!' (*Triyana Vardhana Vihara, Kalimpong Report 1957-1962*, Kalimpong, 1963, p.30.

²³ loc.cit.

²⁴ C.M. Chen (ed. Khantipalo) *Buddhist Meditation: Systematic and Practical*, Free Distribution, 1967.

²⁵ *ibid.*, Introduction, pp.viii-xxvi.

²⁶ Chen's account of his life shows that he had extensive training in Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Vajrayana. He stayed in Tibet for five years, within which period he did a one-hundred-day retreat with Gelu Rimpoche (Gelugpa); stayed with Lola Rimpoche (Nyingmapa) in his hermitage; received special teachings from Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche, receiving permission to pass these on; spent one month with Kalu Rimpoche; and became a holder of Shenba Kagyu Lineage and qualified to pass it on, also completing a three-year solitary retreat for these latter teachings.

²⁷ see <http://www.freenet/~jj/medita.htm>

betrays any real connection with Tibetan Buddhism.’(p.6)

Sangharakshita is not a follower of Tibetan Buddhism, nor is he a Vajrayana teacher, and the FWBO is not and does not claim to be a Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Rather, it bases itself on the Buddhist tradition as a whole, drawing upon that tradition for whatever may aid practitioners in the process of Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, whether in the East or West.

The FWBO’s engagement with Tibetan Buddhism is not eclectic, but is carefully moderated by the FWBO’s own system of practice, and the study of texts from the Tibetan tradition. Sangharakshita’s principal engagement with Tibetan Buddhism in his teaching is in the many seminars he gave during the 1970s and 1980s on texts from many traditions, including Tibetan Vajrayana.²⁸

However, Sangharakshita does claim to have sufficient experience of Tibetan Buddhism to draw on it in this way, and it is in this respect that the *Files*’ charges need to be addressed.

a) Tantric initiations

‘in the tantric tradition, it is a universally recognised fact that successful practice depends on receipt of an initiation from a qualified and authorised donor.’(p.7)

Sangharakshita received numerous initiations from highly respected Lamas, as outlined below. It must be admitted that much of this is not provable in all of its details, although it is demonstrable in sufficient detail to be entirely believable. The *Files* does not discuss these details, and makes the unsubstantiated claim that Trungpa Rinpoche said Sangharakshita had ‘definitely received no higher initiations, unless by false pretenses’,(p.7)²⁹ and it argues that Sangharakshita could not have communicated with them in Tibetan (in fact he spoke in Hindi or Nepali, with translators as necessary).

In 1956 Chattrul Sangye Dorje Rinpoche gave Sangharakshita the initiation of Green Tara, the *sadhana* of which he says he faithfully performed every day for seven years.³⁰ In 1957 Kachu Rinpoche introduced Sangharakshita to his guru Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lhodro, one of the greatest figures of Tibetan Buddhism this century. Sangharakshita asked Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche for the Manjughosa initiation. However Rinpoche decided to give him the initiations of Avalokitesvara, Vajrapani and Green Tara as well. Jamyang Khyentse commissioned for Sangharakshita a thangka depicting the four Bodhisattvas and nineteen great Buddhist teachers,³¹ Sangharakshita himself was shown twice, once teaching the Dharma and again meditating in a cave.³² Rinpoche explained that through this initiation he had transmitted to Sangharakshita the essence of all the teachings of all the gurus in the thangka.

²⁸ There are seminars on *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, *The 100,000 Songs of Milarepa*, *The Door of Liberation*, Gampopa’s *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, *The Precepts of the Gurus*, and *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* (FWBO Transcriptions Unit). He also gave many lectures on aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, some of which have now been transcribed as *An Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1997; and as a series of eight booklets, *The Tantric Path*, Mitrata 73-80, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1978-80.

²⁹ The *Files*’ evidence is a letter from the late Maurice Walshe, referring to a statement Trungpa had allegedly made in the late 1960s, some twenty years previously. There is no external verification of this claim and Trungpa Rinpoche is sadly deceased. For him to have said this would have been a serious breach of etiquette, but even if he had, the question would remain of how he knew, and whether he might be mistaken. In any case, as quoted, Trungpa Rinpoche’s statement is self-contradictory.

³⁰ *Bringing Buddhism to the West* p.70. Chattrul Sangye Dorje Rinpoche’s approval of Sangharakshita’s approach to Dharma practice found confirmation when, at his own instigation, Rinpoche named Sangharakshita’s Kalimpong Vihara the Triyana Vardhana Vihara (The Vihara where the three yanas flourish).

³¹ These include Atisa, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, Padmasambhava, Dromtonpa, Tsongkapa, Buton Rinpoche, Milarepa, Jonang Taranatha, Kanchen Bodhisattva and Sakya Pandita.

³² Sangharakshita left this in the keeping of his friend Dr. Mehta. It can still be seen at the Society of Servants of God, Malabar Hill, Bombay.

Sangharakshita was now, he said, their spiritual heir and successor.³³ Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche insisted that Kachu Rimpoche give Sangharakshita the initiation of Padmasambhava; this occurred in 1962, and he was given the additional name 'Urgyen',³⁴ At the same time he received instruction in the Tharpe Delam and especially its *mula yoga* practices from Kachu Rimpoche and Dhardo Rimpoche. Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche and Dudjom Rimpoche also gave Sangharakshita initiation into various practices.³⁵ Thus his teachers included some of the leading Nyingmapa Lamas of the time, and this is the basis of his 'close personal connection with the Nyingmapa tradition.'

Sangharakshita spent most time, and developed the deepest connection, with Dhardo Rimpoche, a Gelug lama and Lharampa Geshe, which continued from 1953 until Rimpoche's death in 1991.³⁶ They became friends during a trip together as 'Eminent Buddhists from the Border Areas' on a trip organised by the Indian Government to celebrate Buddha Jayanti in 1956.³⁷ He became closely involved with the Rimpoche's teaching of Tibetan Buddhism through rewriting a contribution by one of the Rimpoche's Tibetan disciples to a book eventually published 1956 as *The Path of the Buddha*.³⁸

Eventually Sangharakshita took the Bodhisattva ordination from Dhardo Rimpoche and received from him a detailed explanation of the sixty-four precepts taken at the time of ordination. For Sangharakshita the spiritual significance of this occasion was immense.³⁹ In an interview many years later, Dhardo Rimpoche (speaking in Hindi, the language in which he and Sangharakshita usually conversed) had this to say:

'If you are asking whether Bhikshu Sangharakshita is the reincarnation of a Rimpoche or not, that I cannot say straight out. But I am a hundred percent sure that he is a truly remarkable and outstanding, deep-minded person. I say this because when we used to talk about the profoundest aspects of Buddhism, Bhikshu Sangharakshita had no difficulty at all in understanding them with ease. That in itself is proof that he has a natural inborn ability to understand the higher things which ordinary people cannot understand easily... I did not have any other disciples like Sangharakshita. He was unique in the sense that he used to learn from me and at the same time practise it and then he used to teach it to other people. Only a few people can do this - learn and teach at the same time - because most students do not understand what they have learnt and so can't teach it to others.'⁴⁰

Sangharakshita's attitude to initiations

The *Files* concedes that Sangharakshita did receive a number of initiations, but argues

³³ *Bringing Buddhism to the West* p.82ff.

³⁴ *ibid.* p.83.

³⁵ Dilgo Khyentse Rimpoche gave Sangharakshita the initiation of Amitabha (with the *po-wa* or Consciousness Transference empowerment), Kurukulle and Jambala. Sangharakshita studied with Dilgo Khyentse and remained in contact with him for many years. Dudjom Rimpoche gave Sangharakshita the Vajrasattva practice.

³⁶ A biography of Dhardo Rimpoche gives an account of this relationship *inter alia*: Suvajra, *The Wheel and the Diamond*, the Life of Dhardo Tulku, Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1991.

³⁷ *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel*, Ch.22.

³⁸ Kenneth W. Morgan (ed.) *The Path of the Buddha*, New York, 1956, Ch. 6. Sangharakshita's account is given in *The History of My Going for Refuge* p.48.

³⁹ 'What effect did the taking of the Bodhisattva Ordination have on me? At the time it gave me a definite sense of spiritual progression, for I still thought of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as representing successive phases or stages of development and still, therefore, thought of the Bodhisattva ordinations as being 'superior' to the bhikkhu ordination, just as the bhikkhu ordination was 'superior' to the *upasaka* ordination. In the long run, however, the taking of the Bodhisattva ordination had the effect of making me think of myself not as a monk who happened to accept the Bodhisattva Ideal but rather as a (triyana) Buddhist who happened to be a monk. Since the arising of the Bodhicitta - and becoming a Bodhisattva - was in fact the altruistic dimension of Going for Refuge, this in turn had the effect of making me think of myself simply as a monk who went for Refuge, or even as a human being who went for Refuge and who happened to live in a monastic or semi-monastic fashion. Commitment was primary, life-style secondary.' *The History of My Going for Refuge*, pp.71-2.

⁴⁰ Interview with Dharmachari Suvajra, January 1988, WBO Tape Archive.

that these are merely 'a few minor initiations bestowed by high lamas who routinely bestow such initiations on hundreds, even thousands of people' (p.8). Whatever the exact status of these initiations within their respective systems of tantric practice, the issue is really one of interpretation - how one sees the *significance* of these initiations.

Sangharakshita holds that 'there are no higher teachings, only deeper realisations'. The implication is that the significance of a practice is not the formal status it holds in a system, but the success with which it has been practised, and the depth of the practitioner's realisation.⁴¹ This is in contrast to the view expressed in the *Files* which says, for example, that 'the average Tibetan would probably feel as excited about the possibility of receiving the Bodhisattva ordination as the average Westerner would feel about the possibility of receiving a new National Insurance number.' (p.8)⁴²

While Sangharakshita plainly is experienced in aspects of Vajrayana, his authority to draw inspiration from the Tibetan tradition in his teaching, and to pass on some of its insights and practices, is based not on the number of initiations he received, or their formal status, but on the sincerity and effectiveness of his practice, the clarity of his understanding, and the depth of his realisation. In other words it is based on the depth and extent of his Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels.⁴³

Passing on initiations

'In the tantric tradition, it is a universally recognised fact that successful practice depends on receipt of an initiation from a qualified and authorised donor. Whether Sangharakshita has the authority or ability to give tantric initiations is therefore an issue of utmost importance... Not only are there strict rules governing the authority to bestow initiations but it is unthinkable that anyone would give them without the express authority of their teacher... One can be sure, that if he had received such authority, Sangharakshita would proclaim the fact. So we can assume that he does not have the authority to give initiations... Sangharakshita's claim to teach Vajrayana (tantric) Buddhism is bogus.' (p.7)

As has been said, Sangharakshita does not claim to teach Vajrayana Buddhism,⁴⁴ simply to derive inspiration and learn from it. He certainly does not identify himself with a single school, nor does he claim to have fulfilled the syllabus of any of these traditions, nor to represent them in any sense.⁴⁵ He presents himself as a Buddhist who goes for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, who has learnt from these traditions and who draws inspiration from them in his own task of formulating an approach to Buddhism that is relevant to the modern world.⁴⁶

⁴¹ 'Though planted by the guru in the heart-soil of the disciple, it is the latter's duty to tend and water [a practice] by constant practice of the appropriate *sadhana* until, having grown into a mature tree, it bears the fruit of *siddhi* or spiritual success.' Sangharakshita, *Ordination and Initiation in the Three Yanas*, Middle Way, November 1959.

⁴² The average Tibetan does not take the 64 precepts of Bodhisattva Samvara Sila on numerous occasions - they recite a verse before initiations which stands in place of more elaborate Bodhisattva vows. Sangharakshita took the 64 precepts in a spirit of great seriousness. Many Tibetan Lamas likewise regard them as serious. For instance Geshe Kelsang Gyatso and Dudjom Rimpoche have both written books on the subject.

⁴³ On the connected issue of lineage Sangharakshita comments: 'I have discouraged [emphasis on] this because it seems to lead to a sort of spiritual snobbery. So I don't like to speak in terms of lineage or lineage holder; though I suppose, if I wanted to, I could quite legitimately say that I was a lineage holder in that sense. But I would rather not mention that or stress that, for the reasons I have mentioned. I think it is so, in a way, childish.' In *Sangharakshita in Seminar*, Unedited Transcripts - Tuscany 1985 Questions & Answers, FWBO Transcriptions Project.

⁴⁴ Note that in this matter of 'utmost importance' the *Files* presents no evidence that Sangharakshita does claim this.

⁴⁵ The *Files* quotes Maurice Walshe as alleging that Sangharakshita 'virtually claimed to be the Dalai Lama's representative in Britain.' No evidence is offered for this 'virtual' claim, and Sangharakshita says he has never said any such thing. *The Files* also suggests that the FWBO frequently speaks of a friendship between Sangharakshita and the Dalai Lama to gain legitimacy. However, there are no such claims in any FWBO literature or any other evidence for such a policy. Sangharakshita and the Dalai Lama met on several occasions in India, but have not met since 1966.

⁴⁶ For a summary of Sangharakshita's approach to Vajrayana see Subhuti, *Sangharakshita - a New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1994, Ch.2 'The Unity of Buddhism'.

Secondly, Sangharakshita had the approval of his teachers in his general approach to practice. It should be remembered, firstly, that he came to them as a Theravadin Bhikkhu, albeit with a long-standing involvement with Mahayana teachings, and that they accepted him as such. And the approach of these men to Tibetan tradition appears to have been more inclusive, and less formalistic than that of the *Files*. Several of these Lamas were leading members of the Rime movement, which sought to overcome sectarianism, and to bring the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism into greater harmony. Sangharakshita's approach may be seen as an extension of Rime to the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Dhardo Rimpoche commented in 1988:

'From the beginning I encouraged Sangharakshita to go back to the West to spread the Dharma. I never gave Sangharakshita just the teaching of Gelugpa. Whatever its outward form, the Dharma is one. The Tantra is the same. The Mahayana is the same.'⁴⁷

Sangharakshita says that he consulted his teachers about his proposed move back to Britain and his decision to start a new Buddhist movement, and received their blessing for this. Dhardo Rimpoche continued to take great interest in Sangharakshita's work, and initiated a number of Order members into various practices.

Thirdly, Sangharakshita has been given permission to initiate, but such matters are private between guru and *chela* and are not the subject of public discussion.

The FWBO is not a school of Vajrayana, nor has it ever claimed this status, and members of the Western Buddhist Order are not tantric practitioners. Sangharakshita and the FWBO respect the integrity of the *tantra* as a system and claim no status within its terms. The meditation practices given to members of the Western Buddhist Order may well derive from tantra, but they are not conceived as tantric practices. They are seen as expressions of going for Refuge to the Three Jewels in relation to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The 'initiation' at the ordination ceremony of the WBO is not seen as a tantric initiation,⁴⁸ nor does it resemble tantric initiation or empowerment.⁴⁹

b) The Approach to Texts

'the necessity of studying the very terse root texts of classical Mahayana, such as Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* with the aid of a traditional commentary, as insisted on by the four Tibetan schools, is completely unknown.'^(p.8)

As a western Buddhist movement the FWBO does not follow the approach to studying Dharma texts that was developed by Indian or Tibetan scholasticism. Westerners naturally bring a different sensibility to bear on such texts, and have different resources open to them. Sangharakshita emphasises the need to draw on a range of commentarial material in study, including the findings of modern scholarship, the Buddhist commentarial tradition, and even comparative literature.⁵⁰ Above all he emphasises the need to approach texts in the context of Dharma practice.

Dharma study is taken seriously within the FWBO. One retreat centre - Vajrakuta, in North Wales - is devoted solely to this purpose, and many texts are studied across the

⁴⁷ *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, p.80, quoted from interview with Dharmachari Suvajra, above cit. note 37.

⁴⁸ Dhardo Rimpoche knew how practices were being passed on in the WBO and spoke in specifically approving terms of this. Interview with Suvajra cit.

⁴⁹ For more on the FWBO's approach to these practices, and to the Mahayana Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, see Vessantara, *Meeting the Buddhas*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1993; Kulananda, *Magic and Realism*, in *Dharma Life* 7, Spring 1998.

⁵⁰ The *Files* disparages Sangharakshita's recommendations of various contemporary books. In the interests of cultural awareness and intellectual enquiry Sangharakshita has always encouraged his disciples to read and study Western literature and philosophy, and as in any thinking community, he sometimes recommends books he has found valuable. It should also be noted that the range of books he recommends is far broader than that of those cited in the *Files*.

movement.⁵¹ In common with most Buddhists in the West we would regard the masterpieces of Buddhist canonical literature as the common property of humanity, and rightful subjects of study and reflection for all, irrespective of the scholastic conventions of Tibet.

The *Files* asserts that ‘Sangharakshita would have great difficulty in finding any *bona fide*, knowledgeable Buddhists who would concur with his interpretations of the meaning of Buddhism.’ The facts of the matter, however, indicate just the opposite. Indeed, there are a number of respected and well-known Buddhist scholars within the Western Buddhist Order itself.⁵²

Summary of Sangharakshita’s Training

It should be clear from the above that Sangharakshita has not lied about his training. In its pan-Buddhist character this training is certainly unusual, and may be unacceptable by the standards of the *Files*. However Sangharakshita has presented a cogent, arguably compelling, alternative to these standards which by comparison appear stunted, not to say fundamentalist.

IV. Sangharakshita’s Career

a) Sangharakshita’s Involvement with Ambedkarism

The *Files* asserts that Sangharakshita makes a ‘claim that he officiated at a ceremonial mass conversion of [Dr. Ambedkar and] half a million Harijans (Untouchables) to Buddhism.’ This, it says, is spurious as Sangharakshita was in Sikkim at the time of this conversion. Neither the FWBO nor Sangharakshita has ever claimed that Sangharakshita conducted the conversion.⁵³ Indeed, the ‘meticulously documented account of the proceedings’ (p.10) cited by the *Files* in partial evidence of this claim, actually appeared in the *Maha Bodhi Journal* which was edited by Sangharakshita himself. It is a matter of historical record that Dr. Ambedkar asked Sangharakshita to perform the ceremony, and that Sangharakshita declined, and recommended U Chandramani as he was the most senior bhikkhu in India.⁵⁴

Sangharakshita personally initiated and instructed more than 200,000 people and his

⁵¹ These include many key texts from the Pali Sutta Pitaka; several of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras; the *Lotus Sutra*; the *Sutra of Golden Light*; the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*; the *Sutra of Hui Neng*; the *Songs* and the *Life of Milarepa*; the *Bodhicaryavatara*; the *Precious Garland*; the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, and many more. The *Bodhicaryavatara*, for example, might typically be studied with the aid of Geshe Kelsang’s commentary from the Tibetan and Prajnakara’s commentary from the Sanskrit, Sangharakshita’s own seminar on the text, and reference to contemporary scholarship.

⁵² These include Prof. Alan Sponberg (Dh. Saramati), specialist in the transmission of Buddhism from India to China who taught for over a decade at Princeton and Stanford before taking his current position at the University of Montana; Dr. Michael McGee (Dh. Vipassi), Lecturer in Philosophy at Liverpool University and co-editor of the forthcoming academic journal *Contemporary Buddhism*; Dr. Robert Morrison (Dh. Sagaramati) author of *Buddhism and Nietzsche* (Oxford University Press), now teaching at the Vajrakuta Buddhist Study Centre; Andrew Skilton (Dh. Sthiramati), author of *A Concise History of Buddhism*, co-translator of the Oxford Classics *Bodhicaryavatara*, now teaching at the University of Cardiff; and Dr. Anthony Tribe (Dh. Anandajyoti), a recent Oxford University D.Phil. in Buddhist Studies currently holding a visiting lectureship at the University of Montana. Aside from these ordained members of the WBO, there are also a number of academically active mitras in the FWBO including Prof. Richard Hayes, a leading scholar of Sanskrit Buddhism at McGill University.

⁵³ The accusation that Sangharakshita claims to have officiated at Ambedkar’s conversion ceremony would appear to derive from a similar mistake in Snelling’s *Buddhist Handbook*, which the *Files’* author has either failed to check against FWBO sources, or else has knowingly used as a basis for a smear. Sangharakshita has many thousands of ex-Untouchable disciples, including many who were present at the conversion, and could themselves give an account of it. The most charitable explanation of this blatant untruth is that the author of the *Files* is so convinced of Sangharakshita’s dishonesty that any apparent inconsistency is seized on; but in this case, there is no doubt whatsoever that Sangharakshita has never claimed to have been present at the ceremony. The less charitable explanation is that the *Files* author is himself lying. Neither possibility reflects well upon him and each raises questions about his motivation, and credibility.

⁵⁴ Christopher Queen, Dean of Harvard University, in his interviews with Mrs. Ambedkar, has independently corroborated Sangharakshita’s claim that he was asked by Ambedkar to officiate at the initial conversion ceremony, but declined. Sponberg, *Engaged Buddhism*, SUNY, New York, 1996.

work is presently being continued by TBMSG (as the FWBO is known in India) which has many thousands of adherents, and by its sister organisation, Bahujan Hitay, which runs educational, health and vocational projects across central India.⁵⁵ Whether this makes Sangharakshita 'a significant figure in an important Indian historic and religious event' is for history to determine.

b) Sangharakshita's involvement with British Buddhism in the 1960s

In 1964 Sangharakshita made a visit to England, his first for twenty years, at the invitation of the English Sangha Trust (EST) - whose overall aim was the establishment of an English Buddhist monastic Sangha. The EST was evidently impressed by Sangharakshita, and they soon invited him, as the seniormost English bhikkhu, to be the Chief Incumbent at their Hampstead Buddhist Vihara. But in 1966, while Sangharakshita was in India making a farewell tour, he received a letter from the EST informing him that they would be 'seeking elsewhere for an Incumbent to have charge of the religious life of the Vihara.'⁵⁶ In seeking to substantiate its defamatory portrait of Sangharakshita, the *Files* makes much of this episode, repeating unfounded rumours that have been a source of mistrust in British Buddhism for 30 years. The trustees of the EST subsequently attempted to stem the rumours when the situation had become riven with gossip.⁵⁷ But even now, over thirty years later, the unsubstantiated rumours persist. Sangharakshita is presently writing about this period in his memoirs, and this will be the first time that he has given a full and public account of his side of the story.⁵⁸

The Hampstead Buddhist Vihara

'[Christmas] Humphreys [the President of the Buddhist Society]⁵⁹ was... colluding with one of India's senior-most political figures, in a plan to get Sangharakshita out of India before a scandal erupted which would scar the face of both Buddhism and Britain in Indian eyes irretrievably. The senior official, a pro-Buddhist and confirmed Anglophile, had had to intervene personally in the case of a wealthy Indian family whose under-age son had been seduced into engaging in homosexual acts by a British Buddhist bhikkhu... They were determinedly pressing for charges to be brought against the bhikkhu. The bhikkhu in question was Sangharakshita... Recognising the potential disaster for Anglo-Indian relations, the official contacted Humphreys, and a deal was made to get Sangharakshita out of the country... The family agreed not to press charges if he left India immediately. Humphreys kept quiet and allowed the EST to believe Sangharakshita's credentials were impeccable.' (p.10).⁶⁰

The *Files* cites 'three independent sources' (p.11) for this accusation. Two of them are identified only by initials; the other quote is twenty years old. These accounts are anonymous hearsay, and in the absence of more substantial evidence must be regarded as rumours.⁶¹

⁵⁵ See Sponberg, in *Engaged Buddhism*, for a summary of this work.

⁵⁶ Letter from the EST Trustees to Sangharakshita dated 1 November 1966 (WBO Archives).

⁵⁷ 'The Ven. Sangharakshita - A Statement. The Directors of the English Sangha Trust Ltd. wish it to be known that in deciding to replace the Ven. Sthavira Sangharakshita in the office of Chief Incumbent at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara they are not making any charge of impropriety or misconduct against him. The Directors hope that whatever may have been said to the detriment of his character in the course of recent speculation and gossip may now be withdrawn and that all concerned may turn their energies to the study and practice of the Dharma.' *The Buddhist*, February 1967.

In November 1997 Lance Cousins, an academic and seasoned observer of these issues commented: 'I heard various claims that S[Sangharakshita] was asked to leave India in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I have never believed them, since they only surfaced after feelings had become both public and very bitter.' Internet Newsgroup uk.religion.buddhist, November 1997.

⁵⁸ In the meantime, there is a brief account of this period, in *Bringing Buddhism to the West* - a biographical outline of Sangharakshita's life pp.95-109.

⁵⁹ Founded by Humphreys in 1924, and with whose activities Sangharakshita came into contact in 1943, becoming a regular contributor to the Society's magazine, *The Middle Way*.

⁶⁰ Another version of this story was posted to Internet Newsgroups by Mark Dunlop (uk.religion.buddhist, November 1997), identifying the Indian official as Nehru, the Prime Minister of India. Dunlop also repeats a rumour that since Sangharakshita was allegedly working for British Intelligence in relation to Chinese activities in Tibet, potential publicity would have been a diplomatic disaster.

⁶¹ It is, of course, possible that there were rumours concerning Sangharakshita in Kalimpong. Sangharakshita's memoirs describes a

Bhikkhu Khantipalo, one of Sangharakshita's English colleagues in India, is also cited, allegedly having said that Sangharakshita's behaviour in India was 'off the rails for a celibate monk', and that they parted because he 'found the homosexual evidence a bit hard to fit in with my idea of being a bhikkhu.' (p.11). In 1997, however, Khantipalo (now Lawrence Khantipalo, living in Australia) wished to set the story straight:

'I regarded Sangharakshita as one of my Teachers and I was grateful to him for the insights I had gained from living with him in Kalimpong, Poona and Bombay. I have no evidence that Sangharakshita ever was involved in any homosexual relationship. There were, of course, a number of young men at the Vihara, visiting and occasionally staying but I saw no evidence of any sexual relations.'⁶²

The *Files* suggests that the threat of scandal was the real background to Sangharakshita's invitation to return to the UK. As with any conspiracy theory, this is impossible to disprove, but the *Files* account is highly improbable. The strongest argument against it is the inherent implausibility of an English High Court judge (Humphreys) and a senior Indian official colluding in covering up a criminal act, and that of Humphreys' risking his reputation and the harmony of British Buddhism through a possible repetition in the UK. The *Files'* alleged and unsubstantiated claim that 'shortly before his death in 1983, Humphreys spoke of his intense guilt and personal dismay over his role in Sangharakshita's invitation' (p.10), does not square with the high regard in which Humphreys publicly held both Sangharakshita and the FWBO, as is recorded in his autobiography where he gives both his 'full support.'⁶³ Indeed, Sangharakshita and Humphreys were in regular contact from the early fifties right up until Humphreys' death.

A more straightforward explanation of the EST's invitation to Sangharakshita is as follows. Prior to Sangharakshita's arrival the Vihara was under the direction of a Canadian bhikkhu, Ananda Bodhi. Disagreement between Ananda Bodhi and Christmas Humphreys was disrupting the small British Buddhist world, and Sangharakshita, as a senior English bhikkhu, ordained in the Theravadin tradition, was an obvious candidate to help heal the rift. He would also be able to advance the Trust's over-riding aim of establishing an English monastic Sangha. This is what Humphreys recommended to the EST, and Sangharakshita agreed to make a short visit for four months. Since his visit went so well, and as Sangharakshita saw the potential for spreading the Dharma in the West, this invitation was extended, and he decided to return to the UK permanently.⁶⁴ Reinforcing this refreshingly straightforward version of events, Maurice Walshe, then Chairman of the English Sangha Trust, simply writes: 'One not entirely satisfactory teacher was leaving us, we thought we were on to a good thing when the famous

small town that was rife with gossip. Sangharakshita had enemies, for example some Catholic missionaries, one of whom reported him as being a Communist spy. But the existence of rumours does not constitute evidence that they were well-founded (see *Bringing Buddhism to the West* p.52).

⁶² Letter to Dharmachari Buddhadasa, 21.11.97. Copy in WBO Archive. Khantipalo continues: 'Before I went to Triyana Vardhana Vihara I had the misfortune to listen to a person in robes who told me stories - likely, I think, to be his own fantasies - about Sangharakshita's sexual predilections. Perhaps my youth and inexperience may excuse (not to speak of a fairly strong prudishness) my listening to this... Although I may have written to Mark Dunlop a letter in March '91 - quite possibly I did - the sentence [i.e. Mark's quoting of Khantipalo's alleged words], "But I found the homosexual evidence..." sounds phony. What evidence? Did I have evidence then that I do not now? I presume he is able to produce that letter. If indeed I did write such a sentence, though it seems unlikely, I should make it plain that I retract that remark entirely.'

⁶³ 'Bhante has tried to build up a new form of Sangha more appropriate to the West... This was his Western Buddhist Order, and I gave it my full support, for I never felt the least enthusiasm for an English branch of the [bhikkhu] Sangha. Bhante's... Order is spreading rapidly. He himself is a first-class lecturer, writer and meditation teacher and the prospects are good. May it encourage more and more who accept the basic principles of Buddhism to apply them constantly, at all times and in all places.' Christmas Humphreys *Both Sides of the Circle: The Autobiography of Christmas Humphreys*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1978 p.218ff. While it is true that for a period after Sangharakshita's departure from Hampstead there were difficulties between Sangharakshita and Humphreys, by the end of Humphreys' life these were long past. Sangharakshita's copy of *Both Sides of the Circle* is inscribed 'For Bhante Sangharakshita from a friend of many years upon the Way 19/3/78'.

⁶⁴ There is a short account of Sangharakshita's reasons for exploring the option of leaving India in *Bringing Buddhism to the West* p.92. See also Batchelor, p332.

“Sangharakshita” agreed to come.’⁶⁵

However, Sangharakshita’s incumbency at the Hampstead Vihara was to end abruptly in November 1966 whilst he was in India when he received a letter from the EST’s trustees. The *Files* ascribes the trustees’ decision to fear of sexual scandal. While such fears may indeed have prompted the trustees’ action, at the same time records of the period also point to fundamental differences in the approach to Buddhism of the parties concerned. The socially conventional and doctrinally sectarian members of the English Sangha Trust, in particular Maurice Walshe, interpreted Sangharakshita as dangerously innovative, emphasising as he did the unity of all Buddhist schools and teaching a socially-engaged, non-denominational approach to the Dharma. As Stephen Batchelor writes:

‘Sangharakshita recognised that there was tremendous potential for the Dharma in Britain. The English Sangha Trust, however, believed that the only acceptable form of *sangha* was the kind of traditional Theravada monasticism, of which he had been so critical in India, while the Buddhist Society seemed to promote Buddhism as a kind of spiritual pastime rather than a fully-committed engagement with the Dharma.’ (*Awakening of the West* p.333)⁶⁶

At Hampstead Sangharakshita was outspoken in his criticisms of the formalism, or else lack of spiritual seriousness, he saw in those around him (this is presumably why Walshe later called him ‘arrogant’).⁶⁷ Sangharakshita had always regarded himself as first and foremost a Buddhist - formal monasticism was a secondary matter.⁶⁸ While continuing strictly to observe the major rules of the monastic code, he was not willing to fall in with others’ ideas of the rigidly prescribed role to which they felt he, as a bhikkhu, should conform.⁶⁹ He was not the narrowly conventional bhikkhu they wanted. While being consistent with the traditions of the Mahayana, and with the more broad-minded elements within the Theravada, Sangharakshita’s approach did not live up to the expectations of the EST trustees. To their dismay, moreover, it proved hugely popular. He was soon busy with teaching engagements and other activities across the UK, and the English Sangha Association (ESA), the lay organisation associated with the EST, swelled as people who were attracted by Sangharakshita became involved and increasingly active within it.

Sangharakshita happily engaged with younger people themselves involved with the emerging hippie sub-culture, although its character was quite inimical to the more socially conventional members of the English Sangha Trust. This would appear to be the basis of Walshe’s mention of ‘a string of young men of ill repute.’ (p.11)⁷⁰ The Hampstead Vihara’s

⁶⁵ Letter from Maurice Walshe to Mark Dunlop, 16 March 1989, quoted on Internet Newsgroup uk.religion.buddhist, November 1997; Dunlop claims possession of original.

⁶⁶ Walshe, writing eight months after Sangharakshita’s dismissal, says: ‘This is a Theravadin Vihara, and all teaching will be given on this basis.’ Editorial in *The Buddhist Path* - Journal of the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, September 1967. In his January 1968 editorial Walshe adds, ‘There are far too many spurious “Buddhists” about, whose self-invented teachings at best spread confusion and at worst, when combined with drug-taking and other practices, lead to moral degradation and personal tragedy. It is not only the right but the duty of true Buddhists to proclaim the genuine teaching and denounce imposters and spiritual demagogues... This as we have frequently repeated lately is a Theravada Vihara. There are respectable and responsible Oriental representatives of other Buddhist schools in Britain and of these we make no criticism: indeed we hold them in the highest esteem. But such tolerance implies no indiscriminate permissiveness, as some in ‘robes’ or otherwise, having misread the signs, have found to their cost.’

⁶⁷ ‘His arrogance and sarcasm soon became intolerable’, letter to Dunlop above n.63.

⁶⁸ Nevertheless, ‘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, ... indeed I rejoice that I could live in this way, regretting only that I was not a better monk.’ Sangharakshita, *Forty-Three Years Ago*.

⁶⁹ ‘A few days after my arrival in England, I shocked some participants in the Buddhist Society’s annual Summer School (and surprised and delighted others) by actually eating at the same table as everyone else. It was on account of incidents like this that I eventually concluded that while there was a potential for the Dharma in the West the existing British Buddhist movement had already strayed from the right path in certain respects and that a new Buddhist movement was badly needed.’ *History of My Going for Refuge* p.75. The *Files* alleges: ‘On occasions Sangharakshita would dress in lay clothes and travel to Covent Garden Opera with his companions.’ In fact Sangharakshita went to the Opera once, with a woman friend, whilst wearing his robes.

⁷⁰ The subsequent history of Western Buddhism as a whole shows that members of the hippie generation were, indeed, to be vital to its future.

activities were developing around Sangharakshita in a way the trustees did not like and could not control.⁷¹

A further issue concerned the dispute about *vipassana* meditation which was the background to Sangharakshita's initial invitation to the UK. Sangharakshita had no quarrels with *vipassana* meditation per se - indeed, he had written warmly of it in *A Survey of Buddhism*. But in England he met a number of people suffering mental difficulties apparently as a consequence of engaging in the particular form of *vipassana* meditation practice they had been taught at the Vihara, and he visited several in mental hospital. Sangharakshita made the decision to end the *vipassana* class in the Vihara, effectively siding against Maurice Walshe in doing so.⁷²

The *Files*' allegation that Sangharakshita was sexually active at this time, and that 'as his fame increased, so did his sexual exploits', is entirely unsubstantiated. Nor does it name any individuals allegedly concerned. Sangharakshita has always strongly denied this rumour; no evidence for it has ever been produced and the *Files* merely repeats gossip.⁷³ If Maurice Walshe's own words were heeded, a great deal of misunderstanding might have been avoided:

'It is much to be regretted that temporary credence was given to certain damaging allegations respecting the moral character of Ven. Sangharakshita which are now known to be totally false. The exact source of these allegations, which seem to have been deliberately "planted" in several quarters, is not yet known, but their falsity is evident and they should be denied if further repeated.' signed: Maurice Walshe, Chairman English Sangha Trust (statement in *The Buddhist Path*, July 1967).⁷⁴

Sangharakshita's departure from Hampstead

In September 1966, after deciding with the concurrence of the EST trustees to settle in England permanently, Sangharakshita returned to India to set his affairs in order.⁷⁵ In the course of this visit he received a letter from the EST telling him that they would be 'seeking elsewhere for an incumbent.'⁷⁶ If he returned to England, the trustees 'would withdraw their support' from

⁷¹ As a founding member of the EST wrote, somewhat despairingly, a little later, the EST 'was never intended as a propagator of Buddhism in general for which there existed several other organisations, nor did it envisage a numerous following.' Letter from R.C. Howes on behalf of four EST settlers to the ESA Executive Committee, 8.6.67, WBO Archive.

⁷² c.f. *A Survey of Buddhism*: 'As taught by some teachers, at least, and as practised by some pupils, [the New Burman Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation] could lead to extreme nervous tension and to a schizoid state for which I coined the term "alienated awareness". On my return to England in 1964 I met twelve or fourteen people who were suffering from severe mental disturbance as a direct result of practising the so called "Vipassana Meditation". Four or five others had to be confined to mental hospitals.' Preface to *A Survey of Buddhism*, p.xiii. It should be noted that Sangharakshita has subsequently made it clear that he has no necessary objection to *vipassana* meditation practice *per se*, as practised in the Theravada in general, or as taught by the Insight Meditation Society.

⁷³ The *Files*, again without citing references, refers to similar stories having appeared on the Internet; but other participants in these same Newsgroup discussions recall no such testimonies; even if they had appeared, without being substantiated they would surely constitute the lowest grade of evidence.

⁷⁴ *The Buddhist Path* Vol. 1, 3, July 1967.

⁷⁵ The *Files*, whose grasp of the facts becomes particularly weak at this point, suggests that his trip to India was a 'capitulation' to avoid a 'public scandal'. A little reflection shows that this makes no sense in relation to other elements in the account given by the *Files* itself, such as Sangharakshita's subsequent quick return to the UK and the vehement opposition to his dismissal by his supporters in the ESA. The *Files*' confusion lies in a skewed chronology of these events. A further consideration that undermines the plausibility of this whole story is that Sangharakshita, in visiting India in 1966 and frequently thereafter without any difficulties, was clearly not *persona non grata* so far as the Indian authorities were concerned.

⁷⁶ 'I am asked by the Directors of the English Sangha Trust to inform you that during your absence abroad, the Trust has approved a series of Rules and Regulations for the better and more efficient government of the Vihara... your long absences together with your 'extra-mural' activities which have detained you from the Vihara do not coincide with or conform to the high standards of self-discipline and ethics of the Theravada and that you have failed to comport yourself in a manner fitting to the religious office that you hold in the Order. Thus it is considered that the best interests of the preservation of the Order will be served by our seeking elsewhere for an incumbent.' signed The Administrator, The English Sangha Trust, 1st. November, 1966 (original in WBO Archive).

him. In effect, he had been dismissed. Up to this point relations between Sangharakshita and the trustees had always been cordial, notwithstanding the underlying differences in their approach to the Buddhist tradition, and the letter came as a complete surprise. No charges were made directly to Sangharakshita, and the *Files*' citation of the letter's reference to 'grave indiscretion and conduct wholly unbecoming in a bhikkhu' (p.11) is a fabrication. The letter simply informs Sangharakshita that 'you have failed to comport yourself in a manner fitting to the religious office that you hold in the Order', without specifying in what way he had failed. Neither then nor later was Sangharakshita presented with any specific charges or given an opportunity to answer them.

The consequence of Sangharakshita's dismissal was uproar among the members of the English Sangha Association, who believed he was being treated unjustly.⁷⁷ A month later (while he was still in India) several of his supporters formed a committee to demand his reinstatement.⁷⁸ At the ESA's AGM on 31 December 1966 a large majority passed a motion opposing Sangharakshita's dismissal, demanding his reinstatement, and requesting his early return.⁷⁹ Sangharakshita has never said that 'he left the EST because they had strayed from the true Buddhist path' (p.12). He has always said that he left because the trustees expelled him, and he has always asserted his innocence of any indiscretion. Despite the overwhelming support of the ESA's membership, the EST trustees refused to be swayed from their original course. Two of the five trustees, Mike Hookham and Alfred Vial, resigned in protest. A new Incumbent for the Vihara was instated along with a new Administrating Director of the Trust, who set up a new lay organisation that was more compliant to the EST goals.⁸⁰

Suicides

Perhaps reflecting the acrimony of this period, the *Files* now makes the extremely serious charge that Sangharakshita was, in effect, responsible for two suicides. First:

'a young man, whom Sangharakshita had apparently been counseling through a drug problem, and with whom he had struck up a 'friendship', disappeared from the Vihara and was found dead in the Thames on the 1st of January 1967.'(p.12)

This story is a complete fabrication - and a highly implausible one at that. Attentive readers will observe that Sangharakshita was in India on this date; he himself has no idea what

⁷⁷ Jack Austin wrote an account of the episode in *The Western Buddhist*, 20th. Issue, Winter 1967. While this account is too long to quote in full, it concludes: 'Why this shoddy treatment for a leading bhikkhu, known throughout the Buddhist world for his work among the untouchables in India, his editorship of the Maha Bodhi Journal, and of the Vihara's magazine "The Buddhist", for his books, such as the "Survey of Buddhism," for his establishment of the Vihara in Kalimpong, for building up the Hampstead Vihara from a state of dereliction to one of busy activity, and for his innumerable lectures at the London Buddhist Society and many other groups throughout England? No reason has been offered, and the Trust has had to issue a statement to the effect that he is innocent of all suggestions of misconduct. Many people think that the attempt to banish him was due to plain jealousy of his growing following, and of the high standards he set.'

⁷⁸ The ESA Executive Committee, comprising Emile Boin, Sara Boin, John Hipkin, Mike Ricketts, Mike Rogers, and Rene Rudio. These individuals were to form the nucleus of the Friends of the Western Sangha.

⁷⁹ These motions are minuted in the Agenda for the ESA's extraordinary meeting of 11.3.67. Emile Boin's notes of the New Year's Eve meeting record that the Chairman, Maurice Walshe (Chair of both the EST and ESA), gave the meeting a report, including allegations against Sangharakshita of improper conduct. When challenged, he admitted there was no concrete evidence, but argued that the fact that rumours had arisen was sufficient ground for the EST trustees to hold to their decision. (Copy of minutes is in the WBO Archive). The *Files* wrongly says 'this meeting was that of the EST trustees, and that they passed a motion that Sangharakshita be removed from that moment on from his position of responsibility with the EST at the Vihara.' As a consequence of the ESA membership's complete disagreement with Walshe, he was voted out of the Chair at the meeting of 11.3.67.

⁸⁰ Richard Randall, the new Director, wrote in an Announcement: 'The Trust will continue in the functions for which it was founded, administering the Trust and increasing its holdings to maintain and support an English Sangha of Theravada bhikkhus, to maintain the Vihara where the bhikkhus live and instruct and to keep it a fit place wherein bhikkhus may live their lives in accordance with their strict Vinaya rules. So far as the Association [i.e. ESA] as it now stands is concerned, and in view of recent events, I feel that it serves no useful purpose and is in no position to assist in the original aims [of the EST]. I consider it therefore, from the Trust and Vihara standpoint, to be ineffectual... as an urgent necessity for the ideals and aims already stated, I have brought into being "The English Sangha Lay Buddhist Fellowship"... The Fellowship will be under the control and direction of the Theravada Bhikkhu Sangha... all instruction and practice will be Theravada.' (*The Buddhist Path*, May 1967).

this story refers to. Then the *Files* makes a similar charge (p.12) concerning Sangharakshita's friend Terry Delamare. Sangharakshita and Terry were close friends; they shared a flat and Terry accompanied Sangharakshita on his trip to India, but this was not a sexual relationship.⁸¹ The assertion that Delamare killed himself because he realised that he had been duped into a homosexual relationship is entirely without foundation.⁸²

The 'Real' Western Buddhist Order

'Despite Sangharakshita's claims... that he was the founder of the WBO and FWBO..., the WBO was actually founded in America in 1951 by Ven. Sumangalo (Robert Clifton, 1903-1963). That Sangharakshita should state he was the founder of the WBO & FWBO is a claim which can only be described as outrageously false, a complete fiction.' (p.13)

The *Files*' accusation that Sangharakshita is not the true founder of the Western Buddhist Order arises from a confusion of names and an ignorance of history. It is true that a Western Buddhist Order was indeed founded by Robert Clifton in 1952 and that Clifton ordained Jack Austin and others, as Sangharakshita has himself described.⁸³ By the 1960s this WBO was effectively defunct. Nonetheless, to avoid confusion with this previous body, the name of the new organisation Sangharakshita established on 4th April 1967 was the Friends of the Western *Sangha* (FWS). However, several people said they felt the name of the FWS should be expressly Western and objected to the Sanskrit/Pali term 'Sangha'; and so because the new organisation was so clearly different from what had gone before, and because the original WBO was no longer effectively operating, the name was changed to The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). This was registered as a charity on the 1st of April, 1968. Six days later twelve men and women were ordained into a new Western Buddhist Order, reciting the Three Refuges and taking the same Ten Precepts that Order members take today. As Andrew Rawlinson, perhaps the leading scholar of the development of Eastern traditions in the West, says the new organisation had 'exactly the same name as Clifton's organisation, but there was no formal link between them.'⁸⁴ Those responsible for the change had assumed that there was no possibility of confusion. However, they had reckoned without the author of *The FWBO Files*.

Sangharakshita did not, therefore, take over an organisation which had previously existed as the WBO. It is also clear from the founding document of the Friends of the Western Sangha that it was primarily the creation of Sangharakshita, and that it centred on his work.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Dharmachari Kuladeva is alleged to have said that Sangharakshita had 'more than just a friendship' with Delamare. Kuladeva says that he knows nothing of Sangharakshita's relationship with Terry Delamare and that he has never spoken to anyone in those terms. He asked us on his behalf to deny vigorously these claims.

⁸² The *Files* says that Sangharakshita gave an implausible explanation for Delamare's death: that it resulted from guilt around his father's profession as a butcher. No source is cited for this - Sangharakshita has never said anything of the sort. Whilst it is true that 'Sangharakshita took over the flat in Highgate which had been previously occupied by Terry' and himself (the *Files* omits the fact they were already sharing the flat), this was not *after* Terry's suicide, but nine months prior to it. Terry moved out to live with his girlfriend.

⁸³ A fact which, *pace* the *Files*, Sangharakshita mentions in his memoirs, *In the Sign of the Golden Wheel*, p.164, and *Facing Mt. Kanchenjunga* p.366ff. Austin was one of Sangharakshita's most faithful correspondents during his early days in India, so Sangharakshita knew of these developments from their inception. Not only that, but Sangharakshita was unknowingly co-opted into Clifton's Order, being informed by him that he 'recognised' his ordination as a Theravada bhikkhu; Sangharakshita subsequently received a certificate, signed by the Superior, attesting that he was a member of the Western Buddhist Order.

⁸⁴ *The Book of Enlightened Masters* p.503. Rawlinson has an entry on Robert Clifton which tells the story of his WBO. That the resemblance between the two organisations is entirely superficial is clear from reading the written aims and objectives of The Friends of the Western Sangha.

⁸⁵ *The History and Teachings of The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), and its leader, Sangharakshita*, a summary of the *Files* published anonymously and alongside the *Files* on the Internet, claims: 'Jack Austin's resignation allowed Sangharakshita to take complete control of the FWBO, effectively running it as his personal fief, and as a platform for his own personal views.' However, 'The Statement of Aims and Objectives' of the Friends of the Western Sangha includes item (ix) 'We also aim to maintain and support our teacher, Ven. Sthavira Sangharakshita, and his monastic disciples, as well as other members of the Sangha associated with them in their activities.' *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, p.114. In item (xx) it also says: 'The affairs of The Friends of the Western Sangha shall be administered and all decisions made by a Council of Friends appointed by the

3. Sangharakshita's Teachings in Theory and Practice

I. Sangharakshita's Actual Teaching

A substantial part of the *Files* is devoted to an account of 'the doctrines of the FWBO'. As the summary published on the Internet alongside the *Files* says:

'the actual goal of the Order which controls these Charities is the dissemination of a specious, non-Buddhist ideology, invented by Sangharakshita, which, *inter alia*, attacks family values and promotes homosexuality. Essentially, Sangharakshita has conflated traditional Buddhist teachings with his own personal views, to produce an amalgam which could be described as Lingwoodism.'⁸⁶

However the *Files'* account of FWBO teaching and Sangharakshita's approach to Buddhism is largely fallacious. Those wishing to know what Sangharakshita actually teaches should consult his principal works: *A Survey of Buddhism*, *The Three Jewels*, and *The Eternal Legacy*.⁸⁷ These works by Sangharakshita were published to critical acclaim,⁸⁸ and *The Survey* has been used as a study text by Buddhists of various traditions.⁸⁹ Subhuti's *Sangharakshita: a New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition*⁹⁰ is an authoritative presentation of Sangharakshita's teaching as a whole. However, none of these works is cited in the *Files* and the author does not appear to have read them.

This *Response* will not attempt to summarise Sangharakshita's *oeuvre*, although it will seek to correct the misrepresentations that appear in the *Files*, and to offer a context for those aspects of his work which are controversial.⁹¹ We shall also not attempt to persuade readers that Sangharakshita is right, or that his teaching is the correct interpretation of Buddhism, this being far beyond our present scope. In any case, these are perhaps matters of opinion on which there will never be complete agreement. The point is simply that what Sangharakshita says is a reasonable interpretation of the Dharma which is offered in good faith and on the basis of considerable knowledge and understanding of Buddhism.

a) The Question of Orthodoxy

It is apparent from the *Files'* account of Sangharakshita's training that it equates 'orthodox' Buddhism with the teaching and institutions of one or other of its various Eastern denominations. Sangharakshita disagrees with this approach for well-argued reasons which are thoroughly based on the canonical scriptures of Buddhism, and take into account the precedent established by Buddhist history. The *Files* does not address this argument. Indeed, whether through misunderstanding, ignorance or wilful distortion, it fails even to acknowledge the

President, the Ven. Sthavira Sangharakshita, with whom final sanction shall rest in the appointment and dismissal of Council Members... On the formal establishment of the Western Buddhist Order, which we hope will take place within the next two years, The Friends of the Western Sangha will become its supporting organisation, any necessary alterations being then made to this Statement.' Austin and others participated in the first ordinations into the new Western Buddhist Order; some time later Austin's involvement in the new movement ceased. The reasons for this are unclear and we shall have to await the publication of Sangharakshita's memoirs for his account.

⁸⁶ *History and Teachings* cit.

⁸⁷ See above Note 13; *A New Voice*, cit.

⁸⁸ For example, *The Eternal Legacy* received the Buddhist Society's 1985 Christmas Humphreys Book award; Edward Conze said of the *Survey*: 'I recommend Sangharakshita's book as the best survey of Buddhism.'

⁸⁹ *A Survey of Buddhism* has been a recommended study text at Naropa Institute (Shambhala) and in the Arya Maitreya Mandala. See Ken Winkler *A Thousand Journeys: The Biography of Lama Anagarika Govinda*, Element, Shaftesbury, 1990 p.153.

⁹⁰ See Note 4, *A New Voice*, op. cit.

⁹¹ This material draws substantially on the FWBO's response to *The Guardian's* recent critical article on its work *The Guardian's Article on the FWBO*, FWBO Communications Office, 31/10/97, <http://www.fwbo.org>.

principal strands of Sangharakshita's teaching. Instead it offers a distorted version of various subsidiary subjects, with no reference to their doctrinal context.

As scholarly accounts of Sangharakshita's work⁹² make clear, his teaching is an attempt to discern those aspects of Buddhism that are universal, and therefore are applicable in the West, as opposed to those that are specific to a single school of Buddhism which developed under particular historical conditions in an Asian culture. This approach has been described as 'integral Buddhism' (Baumann); or 'universal Buddhism' (Rawlinson).⁹³ As Sangharakshita says: 'Buddhism consists of a transcendental essence and a mundane expression.'⁹⁴ Far from being 'of an extremely sectarian nature' (p.16), as the *Files* says, this leads him to the non-sectarian position that there is a 'fundamental unity between all Buddhist schools.'⁹⁵ Andrew Rawlinson comments: 'If non-denominational Buddhism continues in the West, it will be largely due to the efforts of Sangharakshita.'⁹⁶

For Sangharakshita, the proper test of orthodoxy in Buddhism is whether a teaching is true to this timeless core, not whether it adheres to the doctrinal particulars of one school. He argues that this is, in fact, the character of the Buddhist tradition as a whole. Buddhism has evolved over the centuries as circumstances have changed, although its major schools have been characterised by a common endeavour - following the path to Enlightenment. In his later work Sangharakshita has articulated this common core in terms of the key Buddhist practice of going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, and he identifies this as the essence of Buddhist orthodoxy.⁹⁷

b) Translation and Adaptation

The *Files* holds that far from achieving a synthesis, Sangharakshita's approach is a 'pick'n'mix' eclecticism, which introduces fundamental distortions:

'The "Buddhism" propounded by the FWBO... is in fact, at its heart, not Buddhism at all. Rather it is Sangharakshita's opinion of what Buddhism is, his own reworking of it combined with a number of totally alien doctrines, sold as Buddhism.' (p.16)

A variety of approaches has been taken in bringing Buddhism to the West. One approach is to import an Eastern school wholesale. However in the process of making the transition, whilst preservation is theoretically possible as an idea, in practice change is inevitable given the need to accommodate to the new cultural and intellectual environment. Batchelor makes this point in considering the dynamics of the transmission of Buddhism to the West when he says, 'adaptation is not so much an option as a matter of degree',⁹⁸ for all Buddhists in the West.

A second option in bringing Buddhism to the West is to strip it down to a set of ideas and techniques that may be grafted on to an otherwise unchanged western lifestyle. This is not Sangharakshita's approach, although the *Files* appears to consider that it is. Sangharakshita is interested in something far deeper than the outer manifestations of Buddhism - the techniques of meditation, or Buddhist psychology. As Rawlinson says: 'Sangharakshita is equally critical

⁹² In addition to Rawlinson and Batchelor see also Martin Baumann *Buddhist Dissemination in the West: Phases, Orders and Integrative Buddhism*, Day Internacionales Asienforum 27/ 3-4 (1996): 345-62. Sandra Bell *Change and Identity of the Western Buddhist Order* Scottish Journal of Religious Studies vol. XVII no 2 (1996), pp.87-107. David Scott (Brunel University) *The Friends of The Western Buddhist Order: British Buddhism in Transition?*, unpublished paper.

⁹³ Bauman, *ibid.* p.337; *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, p.503.

⁹⁴ *The Meaning of Orthodoxy*, p.288.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.287.

⁹⁶ *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, p.507.

⁹⁷ *Extending the Hand of Fellowship*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1996.

⁹⁸ *The Awakening of the West* p.337.

of orthodox “cultural” monasticism and innovative “rational” non-monasticism. The FWBO is apart from - one might almost say, above - these extremes.’⁹⁹

Sangharakshita is a member of the first generation of Westerners to complete the circle of going East to study and practise Buddhism, and then returning to teach in the West. He is distinctive in combining broad knowledge of the canonical Buddhist scriptures with the awareness of the findings of modern scholarship on Buddhism. While Sangharakshita consistently maintained an unshakeable conviction that there was a ‘timeless core’ within Buddhism, he was also aware of the incompatibility of many of its claims with the findings of modern science and scholarship. Buddhist cosmology, for example, cannot be upheld in the face of astronomy; and the Mahayana’s view of the origins of its Sutras is equally contradicted by textual and historical scholarship. This means that it is necessary for western Buddhists to find a way to critique Buddhism. Not only do the particular schools need to be critiqued in terms of Buddhist teachings, but - as those teachings are manifold, and sometimes untenable in the face of modern scholarship - the great mass of the teachings themselves need to be understood in terms of the core principles of the Dharma. As these principles are universal and essentially irrefutable, a new Western Buddhism would then have a sound philosophical basis, that was in keeping with the Dharma as a whole. A similar process underlies Sangharakshita’s introduction of Buddhist practice to Western culture, principally through the work of the FWBO. Rather than seeking to westernise Buddhism, his ambition is for a genuinely Buddhist West.

Sangharakshita describes himself not as an adapter or innovator, but as a ‘translator’, who seeks to re-express the original meaning in a new vernacular, so as to make it available in a new way:

‘One who is a translator metaphorically brings a discipline, or a set of ideas, or a culture, from the obscurity and darkness of unfamiliar terms into the light of terms that are familiar. I myself am a translator because I elucidate, that is, elucidate the Dharma.’¹⁰⁰

This is what underlies his occasional restatement of Buddhism in terms drawn from Western sources. These elements are not ‘combined’ willy-nilly in his teaching, still less in the self-serving manner the *Files* suggests. New expressions of the teaching are carefully explored on the basis of a comprehensive and searching discussion of traditional Eastern formulations.

II. The Teachings of the FWBO

a) ‘Higher and Lower Beings’

‘Whereas some of what Sangharakshita and the FWBO teach is Buddhism, albeit somewhat distorted, a number of the doctrines they propound are not Buddhist at all. Indeed both rely heavily on numerous non-Buddhist sources to explain what they feel to be the real essence of Buddhism: Higher and Lower Beings.’ (p.16)

The basis for this sweeping characterisation of the FWBO’s interpretation of Buddhism is a public teaching centre’s publicity leaflet - the meaning of which has plainly been misconstrued.¹⁰¹ As reference to the sections in all of the principal texts cited above which discuss ‘the essence of the FWBO’s teaching’ will show, this essence comprises Sangharakshita’s exposition of the wholly traditional Buddhist concepts of going for Refuge to

⁹⁹ *The Book of Enlightened Masters*, p.504.

¹⁰⁰ *My Relation to The Order*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1990 p.22..

¹⁰¹ The absurdity of minute discussion of such a source is obvious, yet it is worth noting that the leaflet refers to meditation, not Buddhism, and is simply pointing out meditation’s developmental nature.

the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the Threefold Way of Ethics, Meditation and Wisdom, and so on. Indeed Sangharakshita has never spoken of 'Higher and Lower Beings' at all, in the way suggested.¹⁰²

Sangharakshita and Nietzsche

Notwithstanding this the *Files* suggests that this idea derives from Sangharakshita's conflation of Buddhism with

'the romantic super-humanism of Nietzsche and Nazi Aryanism... Sangharakshita's theory of evolution of the higher individual is unarguably Nietzschean.' (p.17)

The author cites three sources for this view. First there is an apparent verbal resonance between an aphorism of Sangharakshita's and one of Nietzsche,' which can perhaps be set aside as a literary curiosity. Second is 'the publication by Windhorse Press (sic) of Order member Sagaramati's work *Nietzsche and Buddhism*.' (p.17) Sagaramati's book, based upon his successful doctoral thesis, was published by Oxford University Press, and is a comparative study of the two traditions. As its sub-title suggests, this book is 'A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities,' a judicious examination of the relationship between the Dharma and a philosopher who has been perhaps the most important intellectual influence on the late Twentieth Century.¹⁰³ Sagaramati's book reflects Sangharakshita's own critical approach to Nietzsche. Sangharakshita's discussion of the German philosopher amounts to a single lecture given in 1969 and is a sceptical assessment of Nietzsche's thought.¹⁰⁴ Nowhere does Sangharakshita use Nietzsche's ideas as a validation for his own exposition of Buddhism, and Nietzsche is a minor presence in his thought. The reference to Nazism is plainly gratuitous, an attempt to malign Sangharakshita by a most tenuous strand of association.¹⁰⁵

'The Higher Evolution'

Sangharakshita's discussion of 'the Higher Evolution of Man' is invoked by the *Files* as the second piece of evidence that he is influenced by Nietzsche. In fact this teaching needs consideration in its own terms. Sangharakshita's employment of the notion of evolution as a means of expounding the Dharma is an example of his translating Buddhist ideas into a Western idiom. Closely paralleling the frequent use of images of growth which are found throughout the Buddhist Canon, Sangharakshita makes an analogy between the progressive nature of biological evolution ('the lower evolution') and that of the spiritual path ('the Higher Evolution').

There has been considerable exposition of Sangharakshita's use of the concept of 'the

¹⁰² So patently false and so easily disproved is this interpretation of the FWBO's teaching that one must question what purpose is served by entering into debate with so inept and transparent an interlocutor. Either the author of the *Files* is truly ignorant of FWBO teaching, or else the text knowingly misrepresents it for polemical ends.

¹⁰³ Robert G. Morrison *Nietzsche and Buddhism - A Study in Nihilism and Ironic Affinities*, OUP, Oxford 1997. The author concludes: 'as the Buddhist notion of *citta-bhavana* has been thoroughly worked out as a practical method, there is much that Nietzsche could have learned and borrowed from the Buddhists that would have helped him in his quest for a practical answer to nihilism.' p.224. Above all it is a critical examination of Nietzsche's view of Buddhism, (which Sagaramati finds to be largely mistaken), and which has been influential in the West.

¹⁰⁴ Sangharakshita, *Buddhism Nietzsche and the 'Superman'*, 'The Higher Evolution of Man' lectures. Dharmachakra Tapes No.82. Sangharakshita concludes that, while Nietzsche points in a general way toward a path of transcendence, he fails to provide any indication of *how* that can be achieved.

¹⁰⁵ And, incidentally to malign Nietzsche, whose work has underlain philosophical movements from existentialism to post-modernism, and whose work was appropriated by certain Nazis. One might equally malign Maurice Walshe as a scholar of medieval German literature which was similarly appropriated.

Higher Evolution' elsewhere,¹⁰⁶ and the present issue is simply what one thinks of his approach. Some may argue that no translation or reformulation of ideas is permissible - and the term for such a position is fundamentalism. If one does accept that such translation is permissible, two considerations arise. Firstly, the manner of the translation should be in accordance with Buddhist educational methodology. In this regard Sangharakshita says he uses 'evolution' according to Mahayana principles. He says that on returning to the West:

'I... soon felt the need, purely as a 'skilful means' (*upaya-kausalya*), of a principle sufficiently familiar to the modern mind not to require much explanation and capable, at the same time, of being generalised in such a way as to provide a medium for the exposition of Buddhism.'¹⁰⁷

Secondly, it should be demonstrable that the translation is true to the meaning of traditional Buddhist teaching. Sangharakshita's teaching is notable for its clarity of exposition and the transparency of the process that leads to his conclusions. Far from being based on the Renaissance 'Great Chain of Being', as the *Files* groundlessly asserts (p.17), 'the Higher Evolution'" is very clearly expounded by Sangharakshita in this way.¹⁰⁸ He both accounts for his translations in relation to specific Buddhist terms, and also in relation to the spirit that underlies Buddhism as a whole:

'The Buddhist scriptures, especially those of the Mahayana, quite clearly envisage a universe...in which, under the guidance of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas innumerable, all sentient beings are ultimately destined for Enlightenment... In this sense, one may therefore speak of Buddhism as a religion of evolution, of spiritual evolution, on a cosmic scale. Indeed, in texts such as the *Saddharma Pundarika* this is exactly how the Mahayana sees itself. No *tour de force* of interpretation is required.'¹⁰⁹

b. Support for Sangharakshita's Approach

'Sangharakshita would have great difficulty in finding any *bona fide*, knowledgeable Buddhists who would concur with his interpretations of the meaning of Buddhism... Such Buddhist would see through him and would be able to point out ways in which he distorts and falsifies traditional Buddhist teachings.'¹¹⁰(p.7)

Sangharakshita's disciples are not the gullible, ill-informed, ignorant and cloistered people the author of the *Files* appears to take them to be (as the many Buddhists and others outside the FWBO who meet and make friendships with Order members will testify). As has been said, FWBO practice includes a strong emphasis on study of both canonical and commentarial texts, and the encouragement of a searching, critical engagement with them - as, indeed, with Sangharakshita's own work.

Sangharakshita's approach has been appreciated by many who acknowledge the need for a new expression of Buddhism in the West. There is, for example, the 'full support' that Christmas Humphreys gave the FWBO, while Edward Conze, the leading western scholar of Mahayana in his day, described Sangharakshita in his autobiography as 'the only English Buddhist leader so far who has understood Buddhist doctrine.'¹¹⁰ Far from being absent from the FWBO there is a growing and well documented body of people now practising in the Order

¹⁰⁶ *The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism'* pp.179-184 gives an account of how Sangharakshita came to use the term and how he conceives its relation to Buddhist teachings; *A New Voice* pp.75-81 gives a summary his teaching on the subject; Cooper R. *The Evolving Mind*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1996, is a book-length expansion and development of these ideas by Dharmachari Ratnaprabha who trained as a scientist, and lectured in the Open University.

¹⁰⁷ *The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism* p.184.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* p.181-2. He relates the higher evolution to the notions of the path, the development of the *Arya Sangha*, and the universal aspect of the bodhisattva ideal.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p.181.

¹¹⁰ Edward Conze, *Memoirs of a Modern Gnostic*, Samizdat Publishing Co. 1979 p.71.

and FWBO who have previously been serious practitioners of other Buddhist traditions.¹¹¹

Of course these testimonials do not prove that Sangharakshita or the FWBO are right. They must stand on their own merits. But they do suggest that the *Files*' characterisation of them is wrong: that the FWBO's approach is reasonable, will withstand critical scrutiny, and is compatible with the Dharma in general.

III. Theory and Practice

After a few paragraphs on FWBO theory, the *Files* turns to how this alleged theory is instituted in practice. The present document is a *Response* to the allegations in the *Files*. However, it is not an attempt to depict the FWBO as being wholly flawless. Individuals in the FWBO have sometimes engaged in harsh or even unethical actions - and there is at least one example of the collective culpability, in this respect, of a group within the FWBO. We do not want to present a whitewash. However, the *Files* is not essentially concerned with individuals, other than Sangharakshita, but with the FWBO as a whole. It charges that teachings and practices in the FWBO have legitimised behaviour it considers unacceptable. While accepting that there may well have been lapses on the part of individuals, this *Response* will argue that, correctly understood, Sangharakshita's teachings do not legitimise abusive behaviour. Indeed, his teaching has perhaps placed a greater emphasis on the importance of ethics within an individual's Buddhist practice than any other contemporary teacher.

a) Men and Women

The *Files*' interpretation of Sangharakshita's teaching on the relative spiritual aptitude of men and women is based on a serious, though not uncommon, misunderstanding of his views on the various issues that men and women have to work with in the spiritual life. In asserting that Sangharakshita is a misogynist it cites Subhuti's *Women, Men and Angels*. However its quotes are inaccurate, and in some instances fabricated.¹¹²

The idea that birth as a female is less advantageous than birth as a male is a commonplace of Buddhism that has stimulated much critical discussion. Far from contradicting Buddhist teaching, Sangharakshita takes it as his starting point, and considers how to make sense of it in the modern world. Sangharakshita has observed, in his experience of thousands of students, that a significant proportion of women seem to find spiritual progress more difficult at the outset of their spiritual life than most men. In this sense he argues that men and women have different aptitudes for the spiritual life in the earliest stages.

However, saying that women's biological conditioning has an influence on their spiritual lives is not misogyny - that being a form of hatred. Sangharakshita's intention is simply to

¹¹¹ See for example the accounts by members of the FWBO of their extensive non-FWBO Buddhist experience: Alan Sponberg *A New World Buddhist Odyssey*, *Golden Drum* 34, August 1994; Tim O'Brien, 'Adoration of the Magi', *Dharma Life* 4, March 1997; Richard Hayes, *Land of No Buddha*, Windhorse, forthcoming, 1998.

¹¹² The *Files* has several apparent quotes from Subhuti, *Women, Men and Angels*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1995, which are inaccurate or incomplete.

1. The *Files* misquotes: 'Women are anchored in a "lower evolution" than men.' This is not found in *Women Men and Angels*, or any other book by Sangharakshita or Subhuti.

2. The *Files* quotes out of context: 'Women have less "spiritual aptitude" than men. Men are better able to actualize their potential for enlightenment than women.' *WMA* actually says: 'Men generally are better able to actualise that potential than women. It should be well noted that this does not say that women do not have the aptitude to actualise their potential.'

3. The *Files* says: 'On the occasions when Buddha did talk about the nature of female existence, he described it as "less advantageous." Subhuti however, translates "less advantageous" as "less aptitude", a discrepancy which goes unnoticed, even by himself.' *WMA* actually says: 'Whatever the manner of discussion of women occasionally found in Buddhist texts, the tradition seems universally to consider the female form less spiritually advantageous. This was sufficient starting point for Sangharakshita.'

communicate what he sees as a truth about the spiritual life, unpalatable as that may be in some contemporary contexts, in order to help people in their Dharma practice. Sangharakshita adds that women have the same spiritual potential as men - the potential to attain Enlightenment - and should be encouraged to realise that. As Subhuti says:

'Sangharakshita affirms that women can go for Refuge to the Buddha Dharma and Sangha, just as much as can men. This affirmation is witnessed by the fact that he has ordained women into the Western Buddhist Order... One must take each individual, woman or man, as one finds them, acknowledging and encouraging whatever spiritual aspiration they may have.'¹¹³

Sangharakshita's women disciples (of whom there are thousands) attest to his concern for their spiritual welfare. Women in the FWBO have created a vibrant, highly effective spiritual community. They have founded residential communities, right livelihood businesses, Buddhist centres and retreat centres,¹¹⁴ and taken leading roles in the FWBO itself.¹¹⁵

However, the *Files* is not impressed:

'the existence of a separate women's wing, in what is a non-monastic environment... indicates the existence of both apartheid and sexism in Order hierarchies... the relative ease with which one can find female ex-Order members who have left because of the above reasons being a clear indicator of the sexism and apartheid that goes on behind the egalitarian facade of the FWBO.'^(p.18)

This argument is one part prejudice and one part hearsay. Why should the FWBO's single-sex activities be termed 'apartheid' any more than other such activities in our society for men or women alone, that are considered quite normal? The insulting implication that people do not choose a single-sex environment freely ignores the range of lifestyles - from family life to monasticism - that people in the FWBO choose to follow, and the positive reasons that are asserted by those who choose to live with members of their own sex. As to the claim that one can easily find female ex-Order members who have left primarily for reasons of sexism, the writers of this *Response* know of none.

This is not to say that some people might not have experienced misogyny within the FWBO, or that misogynistic attitudes have never been held by individuals in the FWBO, and there may have been those who have left the FWBO for these reasons. However, sexist attitudes are wholly out of keeping with the purpose for which single-sex activities were established. This purpose was to create conditions for Dharma practice that are free from the tensions of mixed-sex environments, and to facilitate the development of friendships. There has been considerable discussion in the FWBO of how these aims gave rise to tensions between the sexes, especially in the late 1970s when they were new and untried. However, as the FWBO has matured, single-sex activities have increasingly fulfilled the aim of providing a strong, vibrant and supportive environment for both men and women Dharma practitioners.

b) Sex and Lifestyle

'Having alienated followers from their families, women and heterosexual relationships, Order members are encouraged to engage in homosexual relationships since, within the FWBO, such relationships are considered to be part of the path to enlightenment.'^(p.19)

¹¹³ *Women, Men and Angels* p.10.

¹¹⁴ See *The Moon and Flowers: A Woman's Path to Enlightenment*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1997; *Lotus Realm Magazine*, an FWBO magazine for women published thrice yearly. For an account of a response to *Women, Men and Angels* from a woman in the FWBO see 'Where Angels Need to Tread', interview with Maitreyi, *Dharma Life* 2, July 1996.

¹¹⁵ The College of Public Preceptors, the body that is assuming Sangharakshita's primary responsibilities, currently comprises three men and three women.

The *Files*' most serious allegations against the FWBO concern sex, and the associated area of lifestyle. However, its account is utterly wrong. The FWBO's approach to sex in theory and practice is readily attested by the heterosexual, homosexual, married and celibate Buddhists practicing in the FWBO. It has also been discussed very fully in numerous texts, yet these go unmentioned in the *Files*.¹¹⁶ It also makes no attempt to see the FWBO's experiments with lifestyle in relation to the FWBO's doctrinal position, or in an historical context - and this gives rise to grave misunderstandings. For a full account of the historical context see the article by Dhammadinna in Appendix 1.

Beyond the Monk-Lay Split

Sangharakshita concluded from his experience as a Theravadin bhikkhu that the rigid division between monks and laity was unhelpful to both parties.¹¹⁷ According to his interpretation of Buddhist history (which is reflected in scholarly views of the subject and an analysis of the textual evidence)¹¹⁸ this division developed in the early Buddhist sangha as the result of cultural processes which altered the nature of the community the Buddha himself established.¹¹⁹ Moreover he felt that the monk-lay split obscured the central issues of spiritual life which apply to all human beings - the need to overcome suffering through following the path to Enlightenment. This is the meaning of Sangharakshita's repeated insistence that going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the central Buddhist act for all practitioners. Translating this into a western vernacular, he says, 'Commitment is primary; lifestyle is secondary.'

In founding the Western Buddhist Order, therefore, Sangharakshita sought to get away from the division of the Buddhist community between monks and lay people. The WBO includes men and women who have made a deep commitment to the Buddhist path, but may be married, single, celibate or sexually active. However, discarding the division in the sangha between monks and lay people does not mean that issues around lifestyle, and particularly around sex, simply disappear. Indeed, if one removes the assumptions about how one should live that are implicit in the adoption of a formal role, the Buddha's critique of craving and suffering can be applied to all aspects of the lives of all serious practitioners. For this reason Sangharakshita has had much to say on the question of lifestyle and sex. Thus he qualifies the aphorism that 'commitment is primary; lifestyle is secondary' by saying:

'the lifestyle of a Buddhist, i.e. of one committed to the Three Jewels, is dependent upon, or follows on from, or is an expression of (being) thus committed... Very few lifestyles are truly neutral.'¹²⁰

Sex and Spiritual Life

In considering the appropriate Buddhist attitude to sex, Sangharakshita takes the wholly traditional position that the aim for one following the Buddhist path is *brahmacarya*, the state

¹¹⁶ *Golden Drum* 6; *Golden Drum* 7, November 1987, 'Sex and the Spiritual Life II - Aspects and Issues'; *Lotus Realm* 9, 'Sex and the Sangha', March 1998; *Dharma Life* 8, 'Sex, Celibacy and Spiritual Life', July 1998; Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1984, pp.63-68; Subhuti, *A New Voice*, pp.171-3.

¹¹⁷ 'The kind of veneration shown by the Theravadin laity to bhikkhus... has a negative rather than a positive effect... 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 spiritual attainments.' *Forty Three Years Ago*, p.45. 'Sangharakshita did meet Theravadin laymen who sincerely practised the Dharma, but he found that most considered their main religious duty was feeding and maintaining the monks.' *A New Voice* p.112.

¹¹⁸ See Ray R, *Buddhist Saints in India*, Shambhala, 1996 for a scholarly account of these issues articulating the viewpoint Sangharakshita himself holds.

¹¹⁹ See *A New Voice*, ch. 5 'The Spiritual Community,' pp.106-128.

¹²⁰ *The Ten Pillars* pp.45-6.

of transcending sexual desire which finds expression in a cessation of sexual activity.¹²¹ He comments that 'there is probably an irreducible element of craving in sex,' which makes it, in the final analysis, inherently unskillful. In addition, Sangharakshita has examined with considerable psychological acuity the process that enables people in our culture to reach such a state of freedom from sexual craving. For some the immediate adoption of celibacy may be best. But for most the transition can be - perhaps must be - more gradual. The question Sangharakshita poses is how one becomes more content, and overcomes craving and attachment. And this is surely the central issue of the Buddhist path.

An important consideration stressed by Sangharakshita is the need for emotional independence. Thus he speaks of developing the quality of 'individuality'. This implies freedom from neurotic dependence on any external source - whether it be a spiritual teacher, a religious group, or anything else. However it has a particular bearing on sexual relationships, because:

'When one comes into close physical or emotional contact with another person in the context of a sexual relationship, usually all sorts of psychological projections take place.'¹²²

While not enjoining celibacy on his students before they feel ready, Sangharakshita none the less asks them to address the emotional issues that underlie their attitudes to sex. It is important that they find a lifestyle that enables them to develop increasing emotional freedom. For those who remain sexually active this means minimizing the degree of emotional dependence upon one's sexual partner, and seeing one's sexual activities within the much broader context of the spiritual life as a whole:

'It is possible for a human being to develop spiritually while engaging in a certain amount of sexual activity. But that is provided that not too much importance is attached to that activity... (and) there is a strong spiritual ideal situated right at the centre of our lives.'¹²³

c) Families and Lifestyle

'the FWBO encourages the undermining and abolition of heterosexual, nuclear family relationships... Sangharakshita believes that heterosexual couples engaged in the creation and caring for such a family are "the enemy of the spiritual community".'¹²⁴ (p.18)

In 1986, in reviewing a biography of D.H.Lawrence¹²⁴ Sangharakshita considered why Lawrence's attempts to found a spiritual community foundered and, in the light of his own experience in founding the FWBO, he made four points:

'1) The spiritual community consists of individuals. 2) The "couple" is the enemy of the spiritual community. 3) The spiritual community is not a group. 4) The spiritual community must have a common ideal and a common method of practice.'¹²⁵

Sangharakshita used his review to reflect on the difficulties of trying to establish conditions for spiritual development - whether in an artistic context, such as Lawrence's communities, or a Buddhist one. Sangharakshita's uncontroversial conclusion in response to the destructive effects of sexual relationships within Lawrence's communities is that neurotic relationships - where either partner compulsively seeks to find in the other that which in reality they are lacking within themselves - are not compatible with spiritual community.

¹²¹ *ibid.* pp.63-67.

¹²² 'Buddhism, Sex and Spiritual Life', interview in *Golden Drum* 6, cit., p.8.

¹²³ *Golden Drum* 6 p.10.

¹²⁴ Keith Sagar, *The Life of D.H. Lawrence - An Illustrated Biography*, Methuen, London, 1980.

¹²⁵ Sangharakshita *Alternative Traditions*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1986 p.179.

For Sangharakshita a properly functioning *sangha* (spiritual community) will primarily be made up of non-exploitative and non-addictive connections between self-aware individuals. The question he faced in establishing the FWBO was how to ensure that such connections could develop, and his answer was that, for a spiritual community to thrive, its members need to be engaged simply as individuals and not as part of a 'couple'. As the inverted commas (dropped by the *Files*) suggest, Sangharakshita means the word in a distinctive way:

'By the couple, in this context, one means two people, usually of the opposite sex, who are neurotically dependent on each other and whose relationship, therefore, is one of mutual exploitation and mutual addiction. A couple consists, in fact, of two half-people, each of whom unconsciously invests part of his or her total being in the other: each is dependent on the other for the kind of psychological security that can be found, ultimately, only within oneself.'¹²⁶

This does not imply that all sexual relationships (or all heterosexual relationships) are neurotic, or that heterosexuality or family life are wrong. Neither is it an attack on heterosexuality as opposed to homosexuality for, as Subhuti comments, in Sangharakshita's sense, 'a homosexual couple is no less the enemy of the spiritual community than a heterosexual one.'¹²⁷

These considerations about the establishment of *sangha*, and the need to rethink traditional structures are the true context of Sangharakshita's comments on 'the couple' and the nuclear family which, once again have been quoted misleadingly in the *Files*.¹²⁸ Sangharakshita and the FWBO do not seek to undermine heterosexual relationships or family life. Rather, when he started teaching in the West, Sangharakshita sought firstly to understand the conditions of the modern world and secondly to develop creative responses to the issues it threw up.¹²⁹ In particular, he has been critical of the way in which the traditional extended family has decayed into the contemporary nuclear family. Lacking a wider range of connections in the society about them, members of the isolated nuclear family expect to find all of their social needs met within its restricted circle, and this produces intolerable strains.

Sangharakshita therefore presents a balanced critique of some aspects of family life in the modern world. On the one hand, Sangharakshita and the FWBO assert that emotionally positive family life is important. On the other hand, Sangharakshita insists that in seeking to apply Buddhist teachings to the West we should not ignore the scriptures' persistent criticism of the constraints family life imposes on one wishing to follow the Buddhist path. The Buddha of the Pali Canon speaks of family life as 'narrow, dusty, imprisoning', and urges his followers to go forth from it, if they can.¹³⁰ In applying this critique to the family as it exists in modern society, Sangharakshita additionally comments on the further strains that have been placed upon it by the breakdown of the network of supportive relations that once surrounded the extended family.

¹²⁶ *ibid.* p.180

¹²⁷ *A New Voice* p.74.

¹²⁸ 1. 'If you set up a community, you abolish the family at a stroke... the single-sex community is probably one of our most powerful means of assault on the existing social set-up.' This is asserting the existence of a positive alternative to nuclear families, but not suggesting that people who cannot or do not wish to pursue this alternative should feel obliged to do so.

2. 'a fragile and unwholesome unit. It offers little real stability and happiness and, by virtue of the clinging and delusion that it embodies, is antithetical to spiritual life.' In its original context, this statement does not imply that all families are bad. It describes a tendency families can exhibit. (Quotes from *Alternative Traditions*).

¹²⁹ The idea that Buddhists should critique modern society may be unfamiliar to some. However Sangharakshita's thought in this area may be seen alongside the growing movement of 'engaged Buddhists' which seeks to understand such contemporary issues as consumerism, human rights and environmental degradation from a Buddhist perspective. Sangharakshita additionally asks how such social structures impinge on Dharma practice.

¹³⁰ To cite a single example: 'Bhikkhus, there are two kinds of search: the noble search and the ignoble search. And what is the ignoble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth seeks what is also subject to birth... Wife and children are subject to birth... These objects of attachment are subject to birth; and one who is tied to these things, infatuated with them, and utterly committed to them, being himself subject to birth, seeks what is also subject to birth... And what is the noble search? Here someone being himself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeks the unborn supreme security from bondage, Nibbana.' (*Ariyapariyesana Sutta* of the *Majjima Nikaya*).

It is possible to reconcile these positive and negative views of the family in the Buddhist tradition if one sees both the virtues and the flaws of family life, and brings this perspective to bear on the practical issues confronting Buddhists today. *Pace* the *Files*' inaccurate quotation of a single aspect of Sangharakshita's critique, it is indeed balanced and - rhetorical flourishes notwithstanding - dispassionate.

On the basis of this critique the FWBO's positive response has been to establish situations that help people to develop a range of spiritually supportive friendships with members of their own sex, in the absence of romantic projection and sexual desire. This in turn has led to the development of single-sex communities, for those who wish to follow this lifestyle. However, Sangharakshita does not suggest that people who cannot, or do not wish to, pursue this alternative should feel obliged to do so. The FWBO's founding principle that 'going for Refuge to the Three Jewels is primary, and lifestyle is secondary' means that, in theory and practice, people involved in the FWBO are free to follow a variety of lifestyles. The FWBO nowhere encourages people to cut themselves off from their own families. Indeed, Sangharakshita has stressed the need for people to cultivate good relations with their parents,¹³¹ as he himself did - despite the *Files*' baseless assertion to the contrary.¹³²

There is no question of people in the FWBO being encouraged to leave their families; indeed many individuals, including many Order members, live with their families. Many FWBO Centres have families' groups, run crèches, and organise families' retreats; and FWBO literature reflects this balanced approach.¹³³ Arriving at this position has taken time, and in the early days the decisions of some individuals not to pursue a family-based lifestyle may well have been accompanied by an insensitive rejection of it. But, as those of his disciples who have brought up their own families will attest, this was never Sangharakshita's position.¹³⁴

Perhaps the tension between family life and 'going forth' from attachments will always be an issue for any community of practising Buddhists. However, the FWBO has sought to address these issues and, to a large extent, grown out of its initial difficulties, and it has been open in discussing them.¹³⁵

d) Sex and the FWBO

'Persons involved at a more superficial level might find it genuinely difficult to accept what goes on within the inner circle of the organisation, but the fact is that once a person becomes an Order member (and in certain cases, even before), efforts may be made to convert the said person from heterosexuality to homosexuality.' (p.19)

The *Files* makes two serious charges in relation to sex and the FWBO: firstly that it teaches that homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality, and second that members are

¹³¹ 'Not attending to one's parents is quite a serious matter. If you are on bad terms with your parents ... you can't make much spiritual progress. Your relationship with your parents is so deep that if it isn't positive, there's a lot in you that isn't positive.' Sangharakshita, *Transforming Self and World*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1995 p.78:

¹³² According to the *Files* (p.19) 'His contempt for his own family is evident from his complete lack of reference to them as well as his thoroughly hostile anti-family philosophy which is propagated throughout the FWBO world as the teaching of Buddha.' But see Sangharakshita's account of his childhood in *The Rainbow Road*, ch. 1-9. As many Order members will attest from personal experience of them together, he maintained a close and loving connection with his mother until her recent death.

¹³³ E.g. *Golden Drum* 27 on 'Buddhism in Family Life' 11/92; Srimala, *Breaking Free: Glimpses of a Buddhist Life*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1996; Vajrapushpa, 'Motherhood', in *The Moon and Flowers* op. cit.

¹³⁴ For a fuller account of Sangharakshita's position on Buddhism and parenting, see his talk: *Fifteen Points for Buddhist Parents*, Dharmachakra Tapes, Cambridge.

¹³⁵ As Vishvapani commented in the Face to Faith column in *The Guardian*, 28/11/97: 'Suggesting that some conditions are more favourable for spiritual practice can be misunderstood as a dogmatic rejection of the alternatives. (This) misunderstanding gives rise to a genuine difficulty within the FWBO itself. People with families can be left feeling marginalised, or implicitly criticised - even if this is not intended - and the FWBO is currently grappling with the challenge of finding ways to include people with families while still valuing the benefits of communal living.'

‘converted’ to homosexuality through coercive psychological means. Both of these charges are untrue. In the absence of evidence for these charges within the public domain, the *Files* constructs a wholly fictitious sense of an ‘inner circle’ where such attitudes are actually found, though remaining invisible.

Heterosexuality and Homosexuality

What Sangharakshita says:

In alleging that the FWBO teaches that homosexuality is superior to heterosexuality, the *Files* is unable to present a single quotation where Sangharakshita argues this allegedly central part of his teaching. Indeed, it quotes Sangharakshita as saying ‘We don’t say you should be homosexual, or you should have a wife or not.’¹³⁶ This is the position Sangharakshita has consistently taught. As Dhammadinna reports from the seminars Sangharakshita held in the 1970s:

‘In one discussion he was asked if he thought homosexuality was more spiritual than heterosexuality. He commented that we had to consult our own experience and be honest, and he was not sure that there was less psychological projection in homosexuality... Sangharakshita concludes that there is probably not much difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships and we need to be equally mindful in both.’¹³⁷

Where Sangharakshita differs from some traditions of Buddhism and, indeed, from the modern phenomenon of ‘homophobia’, is in his stress on the ethical issues that underlie sexual acts rather than on the acts themselves. As Subhuti writes:

‘So long as there is no infringement of the ethical principles enshrined in the Ten Precepts, Sangharakshita does not think that the particular way an individual gains sexual satisfaction is necessarily a moral issue. Masturbation, homosexuality, whether male or female, and heterosexuality are all, in themselves, morally neutral.’¹³⁸

What the Buddhist tradition says:

‘That such (homosexual) practices have nothing to do with Buddhism was confirmed by the Dalai Lama recently when he pointed out that, “From the Buddhist point of view, men to men (sex) and women to women is considered sexual misconduct” and “a sexual act is proper when the couple use the organs created for sexual intercourse and nothing else.” This outraged numerous gay Buddhists who demanded that the Dalai Lama re-think his views on the subject. These, however, are not solely the Dalai Lama's views but the teachings of the historical Buddha and, as the Dalai Lama pointed out, he does not have the authority to re-interpret Buddhist scripture. Sangharakshita, on the other hand, clearly does feel he possesses such authority.’ (p.23)

The Buddhist attitude to homosexuality and the attitudes of the historical Buddha are moot points.¹³⁹ Sangharakshita’s approach is to go back to first principles, and to consider

¹³⁶ *Files* p.19. Interview on ‘Going for Refuge’, BBC East TV, 12/11/92. The idea that the FWBO privileges homosexuality has been given recent currency by The Guardian. However, Madeleine Bunting, the writer of the article, was well aware that the FWBO rejected her interpretation of its teachings. In a written reply to her Subhuti said: ‘From the point of view of spiritual development, there are problems connected with all sexual relations, as there is an irreducible element of craving in all sexual activity. There may be a different loading of craving/attachment in heterosexual and homosexual sexual relations, but this cannot be understood in terms of one or other being more conducive to spiritual development. Neither can really be said to be conducive. Whatever one’s sexual orientation is, that will determine the type of relationship or sexuality which one needs to work with. I would certainly not suggest that anyone alters their sexual orientation on the basis of such a distinction.’

¹³⁷ *Dharma Life* 8; reprinted here as Appendix 1.

¹³⁸ *A New Voice* p 172.

¹³⁹ In Pali sources for example, there is little reference to homosexuality, as they are primarily concerned with monks who are required to refrain from all sexual activity whatsoever. J.G. Jones *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, London, 1979, suggests the presence of a relaxed attitude in Pali canonical sources to homosexuality, however it is not possible to draw substantive

the doctrines of particular schools in the light of them. The comments in the *Files* regarding the question of authority suggest one of its underlying objections to Sangharakshita's teaching - that his views are not wholly reliant on external precedents. Readers must decide for themselves whether they consider it legitimate for a modern Westerner to arrive at their own understanding of the Buddhist position on a subject such as homosexuality, taking tradition and canonical sources into account, and decide for themselves what they think about it; or if any divergence from the doctrines of particular schools is inadmissible. The Dalai Lama may well not be in a position to do the same, but his statement following the meeting mentioned above suggests that he is open to the opinion held by Sangharakshita in a way the *Files* is not, and wishes to find ways of reading his tradition in the light of modern understanding.¹⁴⁰ According to a Reuters' news report, the Dalai Lama

'urged those present to build a consensus among other Buddhist traditions and communities to collectively change the understanding of the texts for contemporary society.'¹⁴¹

The FWBO is happy to be part of that process.

The Charge of Coercion

'The next step is to convince people that their heterosexuality is the result of conditioning, apparently the main reason for our unenlightened state, as indeed equally, is the fear of homosexuality. Sangharakshita writes, "men find it quite difficult to experience physical contact with other men because of their fear of homosexuality" (i.e. 'conditioning'). In order to counter this, "They must break down their fear of homosexuality by facing it and by not being afraid of sexual contact with other men." Men, "have to realise that physical and even sexual contact between men is just physical or sexual contact between men. It is a quite ordinary thing and men's fear of that should not be allowed to get in the way of one's friendships." Why? Because fears of physical contact with other men, "very often limit the possibilities of friendships with other men. And so because they don't develop friendships with other men, they don't develop spiritual friendships with other men. And because they don't develop spiritual friendships with other men, they're not able to develop what the Buddha declared to be the most important element in spiritual life.'"(p.22)

The *Files* gives an account of FWBO practice which constructs an image of systematic coercion, not to say brainwashing, the aim of which is 'to satisfy the selfish desires of Sangharakshita and his retinue.' (p.25) This account is pure fabrication and bears no relation to what actually takes place in the FWBO. This fabrication is demonstrated by comparison of the above text with the original, noting the qualifications the *Files* excludes:

'For most people in the West it would seem that physical contact occurs in association with sex. We consequently seem to confuse the two, or to regard the two as being inseparable. Purely physical contact is therefore quite difficult for people to obtain, especially, I think, for men to obtain from other men. Normally, in the case of other men, there's no "danger" of sexual

conclusions from this limited material.

¹⁴⁰ 'His Holiness was greatly concerned by reports made available to him regarding violence and discrimination against gay and lesbian people. His Holiness opposes violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation. He urges respect, tolerance, compassion, and the full recognition of human rights for all. His Holiness discussed issues relating to Buddhism and sexuality with the gay and lesbian participants. Since these matters are complex and require careful consideration, His Holiness welcomes the invitation and suggestion for further study on human sexuality to be organised by some of the participants.' Statement from the Office of Tibet, 11/6/97.

¹⁴¹ Reuters press release: 'The Dalai Lama Meets with Gay and Lesbian Leaders' 11/6/1997. *Dharma Life*, which reports news from around the Buddhist world commented on this. The quotation in the *Files* is preceded by this contextualising sentence: 'As a religious leader in exile, one of whose chief priorities is to uphold and preserve his own tradition, the Dalai Lama cannot be expected to act as the radical moderniser some of his western disciples would like.' The same issue also gives brief news coverage to the revelations of the Nazi past of Heinrich Harer's which the *Files* considers an attempt to malign the Dalai Lama. There is no connection between the two stories, which appear on different pages of the magazine.

involvement. Even so, men find it quite difficult to experience physical contact with other men because of their fear of homosexuality... This is not necessarily to say that they should have sexual contact with men.'¹⁴²

Sangharakshita is suggesting that emotional freedom is an important aspect of spiritual friendship, and that physical contact can help this. This is surely a psychological commonplace and, while it remains a matter of opinion, it is none the less a reasonable opinion to hold.

The systematic coercion of men into homosexual acts does not occur in the FWBO. The *Files* cites references to 'conditioning' as if these were in some way deeply sinister, yet this is simply a way of articulating the central Buddhist notions of *anatta* and *paticca samutpada* (conditioned co-production) as they apply to individual psychology. The evidence that this idea has been used coercively is the testimony of Mark Dunlop. Sangharakshita did have an affair with Mark, who was in his mid-twenties at the time. It lasted for two years and stopped, at Mark's request, when they moved to Padmaloka together. Mark's account, however, gives a strong impression of victimisation which simply does not correspond to the recollections of those who knew him and Sangharakshita at the time. Mark struck his friends as independent, even strong-willed, and his friendship with Sangharakshita - which continued for several years after their moving to Padmaloka - always seemed close and warm. It is, of course, not possible to disprove the details of Mark's story (just as it is not possible for him to prove them) and there is little point in entering into a prolonged exchange of charge and counter-charge.

Coercion of any sort is anathema within the FWBO. There are many therapists, psychiatrists and psychologists involved in the FWBO, including senior members of the profession,¹⁴³ who testify to the sound psychology of its activities and ethical integrity in this respect. Academics who have studied the FWBO reach a similar conclusion. As Peter Clarke, director of the Centre for New Religions, King's College London, says: 'unfair advantage and manipulation do not have any place in my experience in the strategy of a considerable number of movements, among them... The Friends of the Western Buddhist Order.'¹⁴⁴

Sex and Kalyana Mitrata

Although the charge of systematic coercion is untrue, it is true that there have been instances in the FWBO when relationships of *kalyana mitrata* have included a sexual element. And as those relationships of *kalyana mitrata* are largely between members of the same sex, these instances have involved homosexuality. Some people will consider that there is no place for this, and may even regard it as inherently abusive. However, as this *Response* has sought to suggest, the FWBO is a genuinely Buddhist community; its members follow the Buddhist ethical precepts and in the main show a high level of integrity and spiritual commitment. In respect of this situation, which may appear paradoxical to some readers, this *Response* can only

¹⁴² *Golden Drum* 6 cit.

¹⁴³ Letter to The Guardian, 29/11/97, though unprinted by the paper:

'As members of the psychiatric profession who have experience of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order we were disturbed to see the article in Monday's *Guardian* which suggested that the FWBO had been partly responsible for one man's suicide and that its teachings 'can be used to legitimise sexual and emotional manipulation.' While it is impossible to comment on the particular case of Matthew's suicide some years after leaving the FWBO, we would emphasise that in our judgment no reasonable reading of the FWBO's teachings could see them as legitimising abuse. Indeed the overwhelming experience of each of us has been that the teachings and practices of the FWBO are generally beneficial to the psychological and emotional health of the people who come into contact with them. Yours Sincerely, (signed by) Dr. Roger Farmer FRCPsych (Senior lecturer) & Dr. Paramabandhu Groves MRCPsych (Senior Registrar).'

¹⁴⁴ Clarke P. *New Religions in Britain and Western Europe: In Decline?* paper presented at day seminar on the methods and aims of evangelization in contemporary society with special references to New Religious Movements, Kings College, London, June 14th 1985.

make several points to outline the FWBO's experience, the conditions from which this practice arose, and the current state of affairs.

1. The FWBO was born out of the social, cultural and sexual experiments of the 1960s. Many of the early Order members were in their twenties and shared their generation's interest in sexual liberation. Sangharakshita himself, following his rejection by the then British Buddhist establishment, was exploring the best way for himself to practise, and calling all precedents into question.¹⁴⁵ It is unjust to read back the more restrictive sexual mores of the present era into a very different period.

2. Some people found that sex was indeed an effective way of making close and intimate connections and therefore, they felt, it was a helpful aspect of *kalyana mitrata*.

3. By the mid-1980s, there was a growing body of experience suggesting that there were many potential dangers in combining a sexual and a spiritual connection. The *Files* makes much of Subhuti's statement in *Shabda* that:

'Sexual interest on the part of a male Order member for a male mitra [novice] can create a connection which may allow *kalyana mitrata* [spiritual friendship] to develop.'¹⁴⁶

As the *Files* acknowledges, this quote (p.23) comes from an internal discussion paper presented in 1986 which did not, in fact, advocate the combination of sex and *kalyana mitrata*, but expressed the idea in the interests of considering it. However the *Files* fails to mention that the conclusion of this discussion was that this practice is not a good idea and is best avoided. While in some cases it seemed that sex could help friendship, in other cases it clearly led to confusion - and even harm.

4. The current consensus among Order members is that sex is not to be regarded as a foundation for spiritual friendship. As a result of the explorations of the past it has been possible to bring increasing clarity to the relationship between sex and the spiritual life in the FWBO. While these lessons have been drawn and are commonly understood in the Order there are no rules telling people what they should or should not do. There is no body in the FWBO which legislates on people's lives. However, the ethical principle of not causing harm through sexual activity and of cultivating contentment is common to everyone in the FWBO. Some centres and many individuals come to agreements that sexual relationships should not have a place in the local sangha.

5. The specific allegations of abusive homosexual behaviour relate to the period before 1988. It appears that some people may have been hurt or confused by their experience prior to this date, and this is why views within the Order changed as described above. Nonetheless, we are confident that there was no systematic pattern of abuse in the FWBO.

6. The *Files*' author says 'I have yet to find an FWBO publication that clearly delineates what constitutes sexual misconduct in Buddhism.'(p.24) While FWBO publications do frequently invoke the Buddha's discussion of sexual misconduct for lay people, as it occurs in the Pali Canon,¹⁴⁷ in practice there are many situations not covered by its proscription of

¹⁴⁵ 'Order members started making a serious effort to organise their existence round the Three Jewels, and started experimenting with different life-styles... I too experimented with different life-styles, sometimes living more like a monk, sometimes more like a layman. Whatever the life-style, 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.' Sangharakshita *Forty-Three Years Ago* p.51.

¹⁴⁶ *Shabda* 9/86, p 125-126: extract from Subhuti's paper to 'The Conference on the Ordination Process for Men,' 9 - 10th July 1986.

¹⁴⁷ E.g. Sangharakshita, *Vision and Transformation* pp.88-9. 'The third Precept is abstention from sexual misconduct. In the Sutras the Buddha makes it clear that in the context of the Five Precepts sexual misconduct comprises rape, abduction, and adultery. All three are unskillful because they are expressions, simultaneously, of both craving and violence. The positive counterpart of abstention from sexual misconduct is *samtusti* (Pali *santutti*), or contentment. In the case of the unmarried, contentment means

kidnapping, rape and adultery. Thus there is also considerable discussion and debate in the FWBO of the underlying principles of sexual ethics, which are understood to be not causing harm through sexual activity, and developing contentment. In the fluid conditions of the modern world, the best safeguard against people being hurt through their sexual activity is maturity, awareness, and the cultivation of keen ethical sensitivity. This is what the FWBO seeks to encourage.

Sex and Sangharakshita

The early part of this *Response* described Sangharakshita's career up to the time of the establishment of the FWBO, and vigorously argued that he was celibate during this period. However, for a number of years subsequently he was not celibate. He was always open about his sexual activity and there was no element of deception.

Having returned to the West to establish a new Buddhist movement in a new culture, Sangharakshita entered a period of intense creativity and also of experimentation. It is worth quoting at length from Subhuti's description of this period in *Bringing Buddhism to the West*:

'Since he no longer felt himself to be bound by existing models and conventions he was free to experiment and explore. He did not know what form the new Buddhist movement was to take and he simply opened himself up to what was going on around him, seeing what could and what could not be used, without preconception. His own explorations coincided with a period of exceptional ferment in the surrounding culture, with the boundaries of what could be publicly said and done being pushed back day by day. Sangharakshita dipped into some of the new and exciting currents that swirled around him. He read widely in the ideas activating many people at that time. He became involved with a circle of experimental poets, went a few times to an avant-garde arts centre, saw a number of innovative films, and even went to a rock concert or two. Finding that many of the young people he met had taken marijuana and LSD, he too tried these 'mind-altering' substances on a few occasions, having interesting but not particularly significant experiences. In these and other ways he explored what was happening around him.

'Sangharakshita had now entered a no-man's-land between the old Buddhist movement and the new. He still wore the yellow robes of a bhikkhu on public occasions and still allowed himself to be referred to as 'Maha Sthavira', an honorific deriving from his fifteen years as a monk. However, although he still regarded monastic life as a very positive basis for spiritual progress, he had come to see that much traditional monastic practice was actually counter-productive since it elevated formal observance above genuine asceticism. He therefore no longer considered the traditional formalised monastic structure to be of relevance. He simply continued to use its conventions in his relations with other Buddhists in the absence of any alternative. As the new movement he created has become more established he has felt himself increasingly able to abandon the forms and styles of that old Buddhist world and to present himself exclusively in terms of the new. His has been a transitional role, between the old and the new, and it was at this point in his career, on his return from India, that he effectively stepped out of the old and began to create the new.'¹⁴⁸

This transitional role also accounts for his seemingly anomalous position of appearing to maintain some of the trappings of monk-hood (principally maintaining the title Venerable Maha Sthavira in his literary work) whilst no longer following the *vinaya*. From Sangharakshita's perspective, he was not becoming a layman, but establishing a new identity which was neither monastic nor lay, for which there was no immediate precedent to hand. While Sangharakshita's position at this time might certainly appear to be anomalous, to

contentment with the single state. In the case of the married it means contentment with one's recognized, socially accepted sexual partner(s). Here contentment is not just passive acceptance of the status quo.'

¹⁴⁸ *Bringing Buddhism to the West*, pp.110-111.

interpret it as deception suggests a failure of imagination in understanding Sangharakshita's process of exploration and discovery.¹⁴⁹

Some will undoubtedly be scandalised by his behaviour. However, it is surely in the nature of experimentation that it defies norms, and at this time Sangharakshita was prepared to experiment in all areas of his life, including sex. Sangharakshita has now been celibate for at least a decade. In an interview with *Golden Drum* in 1988 he commented on his period of sexual activity:

'One of my conclusions was that sex didn't really play much of a part in human communication. Bodily contact sometimes functioned as a *means* of breakthrough in communication, but didn't result in a permanent breakthrough: it only gave one a certain opportunity, which one then had to develop. Sometimes the breakthrough came to an end and things were as they were before. In fact, that was almost always the case. So I came to the conclusion that sexual contact wasn't really much help in developing human communication, and again I ended up celibate.'¹⁵⁰

The Croydon Buddhist Centre

Appendix 2 comprises an article by Vishvapani giving a personal account of the culture of the Croydon Buddhist Centre in the 1980s. Discussion of this Centre was indeed, central to The Guardian's article about the FWBO, which was based on three case studies, two of which concerned the CBC.

There is no intention for this *Response* to minimise the seriousness of the unethical behaviour that occurred at the CBC. However the *Files* is wrong to ascribe these problems to the teachings and personal example of Sangharakshita (p.24f). To do this it seeks to describe the tragic example of Matt Evans, the young man who committed suicide, in terms of its fictitious version of FWBO 'homosexual conditioning'. The *Files* appears to have fabricated the references to homosexuality in its account of him.¹⁵¹ It is harder to imagine anything more distasteful than such tendentious exploitation of a personal tragedy. While 'Tim' appears to have been the victim of genuinely abusive behaviour, the problems in Croydon were much broader than their sexual aspect and describing them solely in these terms is misleading. The *Files* claims that the FWBO sought to evade the sexual aspect of the CBC's abusive culture. In truth, it is hard, even now, to say how important the sex was, as the Centre's chairman was secretive about his sexual behaviour. Although several senior Order members grew increasingly concerned about the CBC, their focus was the CBC's strong group mentality rather than sex.

The *Files* claims the FWBO did not act sooner for fear of losing an asset:

'Clearly, the organisation's leader considered power and wealth to be more important than the happiness and well being of his followers.'^(p.25)

Like all FWBO centres, the CBC was legally and financially autonomous. Because the Chairman had developed such a strong personal following, there was a danger that he would

¹⁴⁹ 'I stopped using the title "Maha Sthavira" some years ago... mainly because an increasing number of Buddhist and Hindu teachers were awarding themselves such titles as "His Holiness" and "His Eminence" and I wanted to dissociate myself from a trend which, to me, smacked more of worldly ambition than of spiritual achievement. Friends and disciples of long standing, especially those in India, still address me as "Maha Sthavira", whether from force of habit or out of respect. In recent years some of my Western disciples have taken to addressing me as "Urgyen Sangharakshita", Urgyen being the name I was given by my teacher Kachu Rimpoche in 1962 on the occasion of my receiving the Padmasambhava abhisekha or "Tantric initiation".' Sangharakshita *The FWBO and 'Protestant Buddhism'* p.162

¹⁵⁰ *Golden Drum* 6 cit.

¹⁵¹ With the kind permission of Denise Watson, Matt's mother, we have had the opportunity to inspect his diary and other documentary accounts he left, and these make no mention of homosexuality.

simply take them outside the FWBO altogether, leaving no way for them to be influenced from the outside. Sangharakshita's concern was for the well-being of his followers and eventually he succeeded in changing the CBC.¹⁵²

IV. Buddhism and Christianity

'Christians will be treated with contempt due to their inferior beliefs and will be expected to blaspheme, both for their own well being and as well as that of society... and the doctrines of Nietzsche, with which Hitler hoped to rule the world, will finally have their day. Sangharakshita's views actually have nothing whatsoever to do with the Buddhist attitude towards Christianity.(p.32)

The *Files* alleges that Sangharakshita and the FWBO are strongly - indeed pathologically - anti-Christian. The first point that needs to be made in response is that Sangharakshita's insistence on the differences between Buddhism and Christianity is well-founded; secondly, the way he articulates these differences is simply an aspect of religious discussion and does not imply hostility to Christians.

'Sangharakshita's claim then, that "throughout its history Buddhism has rejected the notion (of a personal God) as detrimental to the moral and spiritual development of mankind" is simply not true.(p.29)

Sangharakshita's first suggestion here is that Buddhism has rejected the idea of a personal God. This is not the place for detailed theological disputation and it will suffice to say that many scholars of Buddhism, both Eastern and Western, would agree with him. Professor Dr. H. von Glasenapp's *Buddhism: A Non-Theistic Religion* is the standard text on the subject and cites numerous canonical Pali and Sanskrit sources¹⁵³ to suggest that 'Buddhism is atheistic'. In an accompanying volume of essays Glasenapp cites numerous leading Buddhist scholars who support this view.¹⁵⁴ Sangharakshita's view that Buddhism is non-theistic (no source is cited for the *Files*' assertion that he says it is atheistic) is wholly traditional, and shared by many other knowledgeable Buddhists. Ironically, the Dalai Lama, cited by the *Files* as an exemplar in such matters, has himself often publicly stated that the idea of a creator God is at odds with the Buddhist idea of dependent origination.¹⁵⁵

Secondly there is Sangharakshita's suggestion that the reason for the Buddhist rejection of the idea of a personal God is that such a notion is 'detrimental to the moral and spiritual development of mankind'. Glasenapp provides a useful summary of the canonical sources for this view:

'In the Pali Canon there are several passages in which (the Buddha) criticizes in a most outspoken way the opinion that the world may have been created by God or may be governed by Him. So he said according to *Anguttara Nikaya* 3, 61 (Vol I, p.74): "People who think that the will of God (*issara-nimmana*) allots to men happiness and misery, must think that men become

¹⁵² The *Files* claims that 'When the truth about Croydon emerged in the Guardian the FWBO admitted that at least 30 people had been left severely mentally damaged by their experiences there.' To get this in perspective, this figure was estimated as the number who were adversely affected by the CBC. However The Guardian stated that they had been 'badly damaged psychologically'. In reality, only a handful of individuals could accurately be described as having been 'severely affected'. As we sadly acknowledge, this was a handful too many.

¹⁵³ See for English translation of this book: Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Buddhism: A Non-Theistic Religion*, Trans. Irmgard Schloegl, Allen & Unwin, London, 1970.

¹⁵⁴ Glasenapp, *Buddhism and Comparative Religion*, Buddhist Publication Society, Wheel No. 111, Buddhist Publications Society, Kandy, Ceylon. The scholarly sources he cites are Malalasekera, 'Buddhism and the Enlightenment of Man,' *The Listener*, 7/1/54; *Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, Takakusu, 2nd ed. Honolulu 1949, p.45; L. de La Vallee Poussin, 'Atheism' (Buddhist) in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2, p.184.

¹⁵⁵ See for example his comments at the John Main Seminar in London, published in *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*, Wisdom Publications, Boston 1998.

murderers, thieves etc. by the will of God.” A similar argument occurs also in the *Jatakas* (no. 528, V, p.238; No.543, VI, p.208). In the *Brahmajala Sutta* (Digha Nikaya I, 2, 2 Vol I, p.17) Buddha propounds even a theory as to how the wrong belief in a creator has arisen.¹⁵⁶

The theoretical basis for this approach is that belief in a personal God is a false view (*micchaditthi*) and, according to all Buddhist schools, false views are detrimental to moral and spiritual development. The Buddha’s reasoning for this in the *Anguttara Nikaya* is that ‘Those who rely on the creation of a supreme god, those lack the desire, and the energy, to do what is to be done and to refrain from what is not to be done.’¹⁵⁷ More specifically, from a Buddhist philosophical perspective, belief in God is a form of eternalism (*sassataditthi*). As Glasenapp says, ‘Buddhism is a philosophy of becoming; consequently it cannot acknowledge the existence of an eternal, permanent, and personal God.’¹⁵⁸ One may disagree with Buddhist teaching, but one can hardly blame a Buddhist for repeating it, considering that it is important, or exploring its consequences.

The Manner of Sangharakshita’s Discussion of Christianity

‘Within (*Buddhism and Blasphemy*) Sangharakshita describes the Christian God as “despotic”, a “cosmic Louis XIV or Ivan the Terrible”. He describes Christianity as “oppressive”, “stultifying” and “coercive”, and declares that “Christianity - including the Church, especially the Roman Catholic Church - has done a great deal of harm in the world.’(p.28)

In 1977, in response to the first prosecution for blasphemy since the 1920s, Sangharakshita wrote a pamphlet entitled *Buddhism and Blasphemy*. He wrote this because, in Sangharakshita’s words ‘the conviction of the two defendants in the Gay News blasphemy trial left the standing law of blasphemy in an unsatisfactory and uncertain state’, and because of ‘the fear that it will once again be used to hinder the free expression of opinion about religion.’¹⁵⁹ Sangharakshita describes the background to his concern:

‘the judge stated that in order to establish that the offence of blasphemy had been committed there was no need to prove intention to attack Christianity [i.e. that the attack was vitriolic] or to cause a breach of the peace. Blasphemy was committed even if there was only a tendency to cause a breach of the peace. As the Committee Against Blasphemy Law points out... “The main effect of the law is to inhibit free expression about religion in a way which is elsewhere thought to be completely unacceptable.”’¹⁶⁰

Buddhism and Blasphemy is therefore a plea for religious freedom, although the *Files* presents it as a sectarian attack on Christianity. It is a rhetorically forceful (and highly ironic) polemic, best understood in the tradition of Shelley and Blake. It forcefully applies the general Buddhist critique of God to the particular experience of western Christianity, and draws on Sangharakshita’s experience of people who had found Christian ideas and influences to have been positively harmful to their Buddhist practice.¹⁶¹ In this respect - and again in the manner of Shelley - Sangharakshita even makes the somewhat scandalous suggestion that people overcome these particular emotional difficulties through ‘therapeutic blasphemy’. Those who are scandalised by this may consider that the point about therapy is not what it sounds like to an

¹⁵⁶ Glasenapp op. cit.

¹⁵⁷ *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, 5 Vols, Pali Text Society, London, 1933-36, Vols. I-III, Ch. 61,3.

¹⁵⁸ *Buddhism: A Non-Theistic Religion* p.35.

¹⁵⁹ Sangharakshita *The Priceless Jewel*, Windhorse, Glasgow, 1993, p.94.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.95; p.112.

¹⁶¹ cf. *The FWBO and ‘Protestant Buddhism’* p.164: ‘The FWBO consists of individuals. Some of those individuals were brought up as Christians, and not a few who were brought up as Christians have been psychologically damaged by the experience, in some cases to such an extent that during the early years of their involvement with the FWBO they have to spend much of their time trying to repair the damage.’

uninvolved third party, but whether it is helpful to the person who engages in it.¹⁶² These considerations, and the fact that the issue at hand was a matter of public debate concerning religious views, make *Buddhism and Blasphemy* an entirely legitimate, indeed valuable, contribution to that debate, for:

‘So long as blasphemy remains a criminal offence, Buddhists, like other non-Christians, do not enjoy freedom of expression in religious matters and are, in effect, penalised for their beliefs.

However, while Sangharakshita points out the distinction between Buddhism and orthodox Christian views, he emphasises that this does not imply hostility to Christians:

‘I didn’t judge Christianity by Christians... My experience of Christians has been quite positive. I judged Christianity by its teachings, and the reason I was a Buddhist and not a Christian (apart from the overwhelming appeal of Buddhism itself) was that I could not accept those teachings.’¹⁶³

Disagreement need not imply hostility. Similarly premature agreement, such as often characterises interfaith activities, does not necessarily imply genuine understanding. Sangharakshita’s approach to such subjects is rigorous and unsentimental, but this does not mean that it is deficient in tolerance or openness. In another paper, ‘Dialogue Between Buddhism and Christianity’, Sangharakshita outlines the basis on which, in his view, dialogue can meaningfully occur, and expresses his desire that a ‘truly fruitful dialogue’ does indeed ensue.¹⁶⁴ This engaged, interested and robust approach to religious dialogue informs the growing range of friendly interfaith contacts between the FWBO and other denominations.¹⁶⁵

4. Allegations against the FWBO

I. Finances

a) Supplementary Benefit and Housing Benefit

After describing something of the successful growth of the FWBO, the *Files* concludes

‘The FWBO, then, appears to be extremely astute in the realm of so-called ethical business projects... If however, one examines the content of the FWBO inner circle magazine, *Shabda*,¹⁶⁶ it is clear that the collateral used to establish these ‘ethical’ businesses was accumulated in an extremely unethical manner.’(p.14)

The FWBO has indeed grown steadily over its thirty-one year history into a substantial Buddhist movement. Its growth has paralleled that of numerous other Buddhist movements in

¹⁶² In practice, therapeutic blasphemy, while a provocative idea, seems sometimes to have received more attention outside of the FWBO than in it. It is rarely spoken of in FWBO circles today and is not a characteristic FWBO practice. It is very occasionally recommended as a possible aid to someone if it seems clear that they are suffering from the kind of feelings of guilt and inadequacy that are often associated with an unconscious belief in a tyrannical cosmic ruler and judge. It should also be noted that this practice takes place in private, with no intention of giving offence to any living person.

¹⁶³ *The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism* p.18.

¹⁶⁴ *The Priceless Jewel* pp.37-47.

¹⁶⁵ For example, the FWBO has been a member of the Interfaith Network since its founding and has involvement in local SACRES. The *Files*’ characterisation of *Dharma Life 5* as ‘10 pages devoted to vitriolic attacks on Christianity and God’, (p.30) bears little relation to the text. The themed section on ‘Life After God’ is 16 pages in length, and the *Files* ignores an interview with Harold Bloom on his positive (though heterodox) understanding of God. The other articles are considered and balanced pieces which are anything but ‘vitriolic’.

¹⁶⁶ *Shabda* is a monthly collation of open letters to and articles for other Order members only. It is unedited and its contributors’ views and opinions are their own - they cannot be taken to be representative of the FWBO as a whole. Points are often debated over several issues, with participants voicing substantially different positions. Decontextualised quotations from *Shabda* lacking the background that contributors and readers take for granted, easily misrepresent what was actually happening, and in this particular case they make things appear much more black and white than they really were.

the West such as FPMT, Shambhala, the Community of Interbeing, and so on, and has occurred for broadly the same reasons: the rising interest in Buddhism in the West, and the intrinsic value of its distinctive approach to Buddhist practice. The FWBO has succeeded in making Buddhism accessible and relevant in Western culture. All FWBO centres (in the UK) are legally autonomous charities, and their ability to establish themselves by teaching meditation and Buddhism, thereby generating financial turnover,¹⁶⁷ is simply a reflection of the demand for this to happen, and the determination and ability of individual Order members to respond. Many FWBO charities have been financially hard-pressed for much of their history, some struggling to survive. The same is true of the various Right Livelihood ventures that have been started over the years. Some have done well, but others, like many new businesses, have failed. Unlike some Buddhist organisations in the West, the FWBO has never received financial help from Asian donors, nor has it had wealthy Western sponsors. Indeed, Sangharakshita has always stressed the importance of self-sufficiency, having observed the undermining influence of patronage on Buddhism in the East.

The historically weak financial position of many FWBO charities has had implications for individuals who are drawn to working for them. There are widely differing degrees of involvement with the FWBO and only a few of the more fully committed are financially supported. In the 1970s many of those getting involved with FWBO Centres were young, and generally poor; often they were unemployed and, lacking skills, likely to remain so, particularly in a climate of high unemployment which prevailed in such depressed areas as East London, Glasgow, and Manchester, the sites of some of the FWBO's larger centres. As a matter of course, many such people would have claimed Social Security allowances. In the social climate of the day that was the norm.¹⁶⁸ As they became involved in FWBO activities such people often volunteered to help with the Centre's work. For their part, Centres are very happy to have offers of help with areas such as cleaning, maintenance, book-keeping and reception. The more people become involved in their different ways, the richer and more vital the Centre becomes. But a potential failing is that in their enthusiasm to make use of what volunteers have to offer, Centres may prematurely come to depend on such people's input before it can be financially underwritten.

The consequence was that Centres sometimes developed in such a way that they were to some extent run by people who were claiming state benefits. However, dependence on the state, although the legal entitlement of any individual who met the criteria, was never official or unofficial FWBO policy upon which financial growth was planned,¹⁶⁹ and a major aspect of the FWBO's 31 year history is the constant struggle to create the conditions for financial self-reliance. Each Centre being autonomous, meetings of FWBO Centre Chairmen, or Co-op Managers, although from time to time focusing on these issues, could only recommend to the respective Centre Councils the need to take action in these areas. But the detailed and often complex issues surrounding the financial standing of any particular Centre had to be left to that Centre's Council.

For these reasons, and because working with other Buddhists can be a valuable spiritual practice in its own right, as well as out of a desire to change society for the better, some Order members decided as early as the mid-1970s to establish Right Livelihood businesses. Many

¹⁶⁷ Not all FWBO Centres charge for classes; in many cases a 'Dana Economy' operates, where participants are encouraged to contribute as much as they feel able towards the running costs of the Centre or events from which they are benefiting, and there is no formal charge for events.

¹⁶⁸ Claiming benefit can be portrayed as an easy option for the socially irresponsible, but the actual money paid just covers necessities.

¹⁶⁹ The *Files*, in effect, suggests that the FWBO deliberately set out to defraud and exploit the taxpayer. To the extent that such dependence was relied upon institutionally, it was often in extenuating circumstances, and invariably legitimate. As the history of the Movement bears out, the various FWBO charities have succeeded in becoming financially autonomous.

businesses were started in the 1970s and 1980s - without capital, skills or business experience; somewhat predictably, several barely managed to get by and, being essentially unprofitable, eventually closed. A few were more successful. In particular, Windhorse Trading eventually prospered and has developed into a substantial concern, contributing very greatly to the development of the FWBO's financial security. As experience of Right Livelihood has grown, Windhorse and the other surviving businesses have learnt how to provide excellent conditions for Dharma practice.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, some of the larger Centres now generate sufficient income to support all those working within them.

The debate in *Shabda* during 1986 which was sparked by Vajraketu's exhortation to Order members to end dependence on state benefits marked a shift in attitudes as people came to realise that current tendencies were unsustainable.¹⁷¹ The *Files*' presentation of that debate, however, gives a false impression of the resistance to this view.¹⁷² Some only wanted to work in ways that were directly concerned with spreading the Dharma. Others espoused social attitudes which derived from the youth counter-culture of the 1970s. Some who claimed Social Security disclosed their voluntary work to the officers at their local DHSS office and received a favourable hearing. Others did so in the context of authorised DHSS job training schemes.¹⁷³

It must be admitted that some Centre Councils took the easy option for a number of years, of relying on people who resorted to these means of support, rather than launching other schemes for generating funds and some volunteers may well have worked more than 22 hours a week. None the less, the longer-term ambition of those in the FWBO to become financially self-sufficient has largely been achieved. There has been a considerable reduction in the number of people working in any FWBO context who claim state benefits,¹⁷⁴ and we are unaware of any who do so in contravention of the current regulations.¹⁷⁵

b) Phoenix Housing Co-operative

'In 1980, Phoenix Housing, a co-op set up by the FWBO and Hackney Borough Council, was created as a non-profit making housing body to provide accommodation for Hackney's needy. On the basis of this aim and in order to fulfill it, Phoenix received large amounts of public money. According to an article in *Shabda* [Dec. '86], the aim of Phoenix was "to provide

¹⁷⁰ See Subhadramati, 'Working Wonders', *Dharma Life* 5; Vajraketu, 'Marketing Values', *Dharma Life* 6; Martin Baumann 'Working in the Right Spirit: The Application of Buddhist Right Livelihood in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order,' published in the on-line *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 5, 1998. As investigation of FWBO Right Livelihood businesses will show, the *Files*' charge of exploitation of workers, is quite groundless. People are supported on the basis of their needs, and the general level of support in cash and kind is sufficient for a comfortable, though simple, standard of living. Where this level of support is above the tax and N.I. threshold these are paid. Windhorse Trading has produced a booklet giving the guidelines of its support policy.

¹⁷¹ Vajraketu, a junior Order member at the time, had just started working for Windhorse Trading; he was keen to promote the possibility that he believed this business held. The business then being quite small could only have offered a few vacancies. He admits his figures are a rough estimate; he does not take account of those participating in DHSS job creation schemes.

¹⁷² Bodhiraja's *Shabda* report has been garbled (missing elements in italics). 'Personally, I don't care *anymore if we are a little inept at business (Aryatara excepted)*, or if the UK wing is half living off the state. I've seen the world of wealth, power and influence, and frankly I don't want anything to do with it. *The Order, for all its faults, has many qualities amongst its members, qualities the world sorely lacks, such as honesty, patience and kindness... I hate to read these diatribes in the pages of Shabda, where Order members describe their fellow members as whimpish, or precious, or lazy.*' Bodhiraja is not advocating that people in the FWBO remain on state support. He is criticising what he considered to be Vajraketu's harsh response to that fact.

¹⁷³ A claimant was allowed to do up to 22 hours' unpaid voluntary work a week (subsequently reduced to 15 hours) so long as this was declared and the individual was available for work. In some areas and during periods of high unemployment, the likelihood of being offered work was small, but if an offer had been made they would either have had to take it or end their claim.

¹⁷⁴ Housing benefit is available to people claiming Social Security, or on low incomes; accordingly, many of those involved with the FWBO claim this too as they genuinely belong to the category for whom housing benefit is intended. The *Files*' comment on the level of rent, 'The housing benefit figure was again underestimated at £15 per person per week, a remarkably low rent by 1986 standards', suggests unawareness of the genuine poverty of most FWBO charities in the 1980s. This was, indeed, the level of assessed fair rent in Phoenix Housing Association.

¹⁷⁵ We do not have detailed statistics but, for example, none of the 179 people working for Windhorse Trading receive state benefits, including housing benefit.

permanent houses for communities in the London Buddhist Centre mandala”.’(p.14)

In the late 1970s many people became involved in the FWBO through helping to create the London Buddhist Centre (LBC) in the East End of London. They were mostly young and generally poor, and to meet their needs for housing they established the Phoenix Housing Co-operative.¹⁷⁶ The co-operative, like a number of other ‘Right Livelihood’ co-operatives set up at this time, was controlled and owned by the membership. Since its preamble enshrined Buddhist principles as applied to communal living, and tenancy required tenants’ assent to effective participation in these aims, this was essentially a co-op of Buddhists.

Phoenix got off the ground with loans from Hackney Community Housing for low-grade renovation of two properties on a short-life basis (i.e. they were to be handed back after six months). The project was financed through rent. Such schemes were favoured by inner-city councils as ways of preventing empty and poor quality housing stock from being squatted or becoming derelict. Self-help was an important dimension to the Co-op, and financing was available on the condition of the active participation of those housed.

Soon, other housing associations made short-life property available for use by Phoenix, as a readily identifiable group with a proven housing need.¹⁷⁷ In some instances, renovation of partially dilapidated houses was aided by small grants and Phoenix expanded rapidly.¹⁷⁸ The local authorities were happy to be meeting a real need to the mutual benefit of all concerned.

But since the properties Phoenix used had only short leases,¹⁷⁹ the Co-op was unable to provide any permanent housing. Members therefore decided they needed a more permanent arrangement, and this became increasingly pressing from the mid-eighties as the supply of short-life properties dwindled for various reasons. Lacking capital or collateral for mortgages, Phoenix looked for sources of grants.¹⁸⁰

Registration with The Housing Corporation in 1985 meant it now had to cater ‘for single, homeless people in housing need on low income, or unemployed’ in order to qualify for public funding. The allocations policy had to comply with supervised Housing Corporation guidelines. This meant applying an equal opportunities policy, as well as working towards a correspondence in the membership to the ethnic distribution in the local boroughs. Much tighter management procedures also had to be implemented.¹⁸¹ Monitoring by the Housing Corporation was a matter of course, and two thorough inspections were conducted, one in 1988, and another in 1993.

The vast majority of the existing membership met the new allocation criteria, as well as being Buddhists. In any case the supportive, family-like community housing largely available through Phoenix still allowed for members’ sharing similar interests, gender or workplace. Community-style living arrangements, Phoenix’s speciality, did not appeal to many non-

¹⁷⁶ It was registered in June 1980 and operated with a set of model rules provided by the National Federation for Housing Associations.

¹⁷⁷ Members were generally young, unemployed or on low incomes, homeless, often single people (and, in this case, Buddhists) and therefore fulfilled the criteria of being in housing need.

¹⁷⁸ Within 18 months fifty people were housed in twenty houses and flats within the local area. And within three years, this had approximately doubled. Increasing administrative costs continued to be met by rental incomes; accounts were audited as required by established good practice.

¹⁷⁹ Usually between six months to one year, although often renewed; the houses would then be handed back for substantial renovation and upgrading.

¹⁸⁰ E.g. GLC funding, or Housing Association Grants provided by The Housing Corporation, a government financed body, requiring demonstration of good management practices and sponsorship from an established Housing Association or secondary housing co-operative.

¹⁸¹ Employees of the co-operative could no longer be members of the committees but reported to and advised them; the sub-committees being run by the membership under the overall Management Committee, with its officers also made up of the membership, this meeting quarterly.

Buddhists. But because anyone who applied for membership fulfilling the Housing Corporation criteria, regardless of whether they were Buddhist or not, had to be housed (if space was available), the membership became increasingly non-Buddhist.

With the gradual departure of Buddhist members of Phoenix, and with substantial numbers of non-Buddhists becoming new members, the Buddhist predominance within Phoenix came to an end. Now with a small Buddhist minority in the Co-operative, there are very few other links between the FWBO and Phoenix, and members are usually housed in non-communal dwellings.

‘By 1986 however, Phoenix had managed to provide 35 houses around the London Buddhist Centre for a total of 92 Order members [actually 92 members of the Co-op, only perhaps a third of which were Order members.] At least one of these houses was bought for the FWBO wholly out of money provided by Hackney Borough Council, a substantial profit for the FWBO in this supposedly non-profit making enterprise.’(p.14)

From 1986-7, as the implications of the changing population of Phoenix became evident to the LBC Council, the question of meeting local Buddhists’ long-term housing needs became pressing. The increasing success of Buddhist businesses in the area meant that buying property was now a possibility. And this is indeed what happened.

At the same time there was growing recognition by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist members of Phoenix that the aims of the co-operative’s Buddhist communities and the aims of the co-operative were diverging. In 1994 four women’s communities living in the co-operative’s houses asked that their houses be sold to the London Buddhist Centre and their tenancies transferred. Eventually, in 1997, these houses were bought from Phoenix at the full market rate and certainly at no profit to the FWBO.¹⁸² No other Phoenix houses have come into FWBO ownership and all other permanent housing bought through Housing Corporation and local Council grants remains in Phoenix ownership.

The transition from what had been a ‘Buddhist housing club’ to a properly run public body was at times painful. Tensions, which arose between different Buddhist members over the application of allocations policy, centred on different understandings and interpretations of the Housing Corporation’s rules. For a time the FWBO did gain through establishing a housing co-operative, which housed a substantial number of those involved in Buddhist activities around the LBC. In leaving a legacy of an effective institution, which meets an important need in a deprived area, the FWBO can be justifiably proud.

II. The FWBO’s Education Work

The *Files*’ suggestion that the FWBO’s educational work is ‘child indoctrination’ (p.27f), and in particular an attempt to ‘validate the FWBO’s distorted version of Buddhism’, including its alleged propagation of homosexuality, is incredible. The *Files* makes no reference to the contents of the educational materials the FWBO produces through the charity, the Clear Vision Trust. Indeed there is no evidence that these have been inspected. And yet following the publication of the *Files*, these groundless charges appear to have been given credence in some quarters. An account of this, and responses to it, constitute Appendix 3.

Clear Vision Education was established to meet the need for educational materials

¹⁸² The process of consultation took three years. Housing Corporation consent had to be obtained, after the membership had voted in favor of the motion. Based on the recommendation of an independent consultant’s report as a mutually beneficial solution, four adjacent houses in Approach Road were sold at the full market rate. Phoenix, by this point wholly separate from the FWBO, in fact, made a considerable amount out of this purchase, because the houses had been originally bought from the Local Authority at half the market rate.

on Buddhism following the 1988 Education Act. Far from containing sectarian distortions of Buddhism, all Clear Vision educational material is based on the syllabus guidelines produced by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority in conjunction with a committee of Buddhists of various traditions (not, as it happens, including the FWBO).¹⁸³

Further testimony to the reliability of Clear Vision's material comes from various sources: senior Religious Education experts who have used or adjudicated upon the material,¹⁸⁴ the experience of various Buddhist traditions in the UK¹⁸⁵ and overseas,¹⁸⁶ who use the Clear Vision material in their own educational work; plus the evidence of the material itself, which is publicly available.

The sole evidence the *Files* presents is an account of a misunderstanding concerning the Agreed Syllabus of the Manchester Education Authority. People from Clear Vision took a leading role in drafting the Buddhist content, though other Buddhists were also involved, and the established procedures, which include extensive consultation and scrutiny, were adhered to.¹⁸⁷ Certain Buddhists subsequently objected to a line in the text on Buddhism's attitude to sex which spoke of 'avoiding over-identifying with one's sexuality,' which they appear to have interpreted as a covert attempt to promote homosexuality. This absurd conclusion says more about the atmosphere of mistrust engendered by the publication of some of the views expressed in the *Files* in the Guardian than the meaning of the phrase itself. The *Files* insists on reading a sinister meaning into this phrase, which simply means that Buddhism teaches that there is more to life than sex (and as any dictionary will state, 'sexuality' does not refer to gender preference, but to sex in general). The best gloss on the view behind the phrase is in the educational video that Clear Vision produces for children following this part of the syllabus. The video says:

'Sex isn't the most important thing in my life. The Buddha led a very simple life, free from the complications that sex brings.'¹⁸⁸

The Manchester Education Authority continues to be fully supportive of Clear Vision.

III. The Ambitions of the FWBO

'The principal ambition of the FWBO... is to become the only form of Buddhism in the West. To this end they represent themselves as 'Western Buddhists'. Whilst claiming strong links with Asian Buddhism they carry out, in their literature and classes, systematic attacks on Asian forms

¹⁸³ John Keast, RE adviser to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which advises the government on these matters, has told the FWBO Communications Office that he considers Clear Vision materials to be in accordance with these National Syllabus guidelines.

¹⁸⁴ Numerous senior figures in Religious education have vouched for its work; they have been favourably reviewed in the RE Press. *Buddhism for Key Stage 2* was 'Highly Commended' in the Sandford St. Martin Religious Education Awards, 1997.

¹⁸⁵ Throssel Hole Zen Monastery uses and recommends Clear Vision materials in its education work; Rigpa Tibetan Buddhist Centre uses Clear Vision materials for in-service training for teachers.

¹⁸⁶ Clear Vision videos have been shown on South Korean TV; they are sold to educational establishments in Malaysia and Singapore by a Malaysian distributor; they are used in the educational work of the Buddhist Library in Singapore (a substantial institution) for introducing Buddhism to adults as well as to children. The Library is planning a Mandarin translation of the material. The Abbot, Dhammaratana, a Theravadin Bhikkhu, is a vocal supporter of Clear Vision's work. See Appendix 3.

¹⁸⁷ Clear Vision comment: 'Draft outlines of the agreed syllabus were always submitted to all members of the conference of delegates from local religious groups and others before being accepted. There was no challenge from anyone as to any of the content of the syllabus. All of the agreed syllabus, for all the faiths, was voted on, and adopted by a full meeting of the conference (over 40 delegates).'

¹⁸⁸ *Buddhism for Key Stage 3*, educational video produced by Clear Vision. Padmasri expanded this in writing to Eira Meadowcroft, RE adviser for Manchester: 'Along with many other religious traditions, Buddhism would see an over emphasis on the sexual side of life to be not conducive to the spiritual life. If we over identify ourselves as a sexual being, rather than a human being, if we have sex and sexual activity at the centre of our lives, we are likely to create unhappiness for ourselves and others. The aim of the third precept - to abstain from sexual misconduct - is not only to avoid harming others, but also to be content with one's state, whether single, married or celibate.'

of Buddhism which, it is argued, are ‘merely ethnic’, as they manifest in both Asia and the West.’(p.15)

The claim that the FWBO seeks to be the only form of Buddhism in the West is entirely unsubstantiated. It is absurd to think that any single Buddhist movement could become the only form of Buddhism in the West. There are thousands of Buddhist centres affiliated to many Buddhist movements across the western world, and these will plainly continue to develop in their own way regardless of any actions of the FWBO. Paranoia aside, it is hard to see how the FWBO could threaten other Buddhist traditions.¹⁸⁹

For the FWBO to describe its approach as ‘Western Buddhism’ is entirely natural. The central project of the FWBO is developing a tradition of Buddhism that is rooted in tradition yet is appropriate to the modern world; one that speaks the language of Western culture, just as Japanese Buddhism speaks the language of Japanese culture, and so on. Understanding what of the Buddhist tradition is applicable in this way plainly involves a critique of former traditions. And all Buddhists who are teaching Westerners, whatever tradition they follow, must apply such a critique in their own distinctive way, in order to distinguish what in Asian Buddhism pertains to particular national (i.e. ‘ethnic’ cultures) and what is universally applicable. For example, the Dalai Lama insists that Westerners need not be concerned about wearing Tibetan clothes, playing Tibetan instruments etc. Sangharakshita has sometimes been critical of other attempts to apply Buddhism to the West because he has felt this critique has not been applied with sufficient thoroughness, but there is no need to interpret this as hostility.

‘Most aggressively, the organization name their centres as the definitive regional Buddhist centre, such as ‘The Birmingham Buddhist Centre’ or ‘The London Buddhist Centre’, despite the existence of numerous other Buddhist centres and groups.’(p.15)

FWBO Centres have never claimed to be the sole or representative centre in their area. To interpret their names as acts of aggression seems strange, as the same criticism could be made of ‘The Hampstead Buddhist Vihara’, ‘The Buddhist Society’ etc. As a rule FWBO publicity materials make it plain that the centre is a part of the FWBO, and outline its approach to Buddhism. The FWBO does not seek to subvert and incorporate local groups and University Buddhist societies and no evidence for this assertion is offered.

Nor does the FWBO ‘aggressively send out teams to missionise areas... in a fashion very similar to Christian Evangelicals’ (p.16), although like most other Buddhist organisations it does start up centres for the purpose of teaching meditation and Buddhism. These are generally advertised locally in a low-key way and people are invited to attend courses and classes. This is how most Buddhist centres in the West function. As academic commentator Peggy Morgan comments: ‘I have found something of a middle way in the styles referred to above in the activities of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, who do actively initiate contacts and discussion, and seek to inform people, but who have never been accused of putting any undue pressure on people.’¹⁹⁰

The FWBO has never claimed to teach “‘pure” Buddhism’ as the *Files* suggests (p.15). Clearly, there is no such thing. Any expression of the Dharma, including the FWBO’s, will be limited by its cultural context. The FWBO does, however, seek to remain true to the values of the Dharma, especially as these are expressed in Buddhist canonical literature. Sangharakshita

¹⁸⁹ *The Files*’ quotation from Sangharakshita is highly misleading: ‘Zen and Tibetan practitioners are just as likely to be narrow minded, bigoted, dogmatic and literalistic as any Theravadin.’(p.15) The following sentence qualifies this: ‘There is a tendency towards literalism in all schools of Buddhism because it is a tendency in the human mind itself.’ Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Windhorse, Birmingham, 1995. This is hardly a surprising comment to find in a commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom Literature, and plainly does not exclude the FWBO from its scope.

¹⁹⁰ *Methods and Aims of Evangelisation and Conversion in Buddhism with reference to Nichiren Shoshu-Soka Gakkai*, Centre for New Religious Movements Seminar 14/6/85.

expresses how he conceives the relationship of people in the FWBO with other Buddhists in *Extending the Hand of Fellowship*:

‘the Order and with it the FWBO is a branch of the mighty tree of Buddhism which for 2,500 years has sheltered a considerable portion of humanity... It is important that we should not only acknowledge this intellectually, but also feel it... to feel a sense of solidarity with the spiritual and cultural ecumene of which we form a part and with which, moreover we might be expected to be in communication.’¹⁹¹

For this reason the standard constitution of FWBO charities includes the aim of ‘working in harmony with Buddhists of all traditions’.

One medium of communication between Buddhists is organisational, and therefore the FWBO has been active in a variety of pan-Buddhist organisations. However, the *Files* has its own interpretation of this involvement.

‘For the last dozen or so years they have been joining and attempting to infiltrate and dominate national and international Buddhist organizations and conferences (e.g. The UK Network of Buddhists NBO), the European Union of Buddhism (EBU), the Network of Western Buddhist Teachers (NWBT))...¹⁹² in early 1992 Jack Austin wrote that Sangharakshita had wider ambitions to take over the Buddhist Union of Europe [29]. That year the FWBO became treasurers of the organization.’(p.16)

The principal functions of these organisations is that they enable Buddhist organisations to be in communication, in the interests of harmony and understanding, and for individuals from those organisations to get to know one another. It makes no sense to speak of any group dominating them. Indeed, the FWBO has been influential in the establishment of such organisations, for instance being a founder member of the NBO and the NWBT. The constitutions of the NBO and the EBU (which the FWBO was influential in framing) ensure that they will operate by consensus, so that they cannot be taken over any one organisation. Each of them has proved to be a valuable forum for overcoming misunderstanding and sectarianism in the Buddhist world, and the FWBO is proud of its contribution in this respect. Such accusations as the *Files* makes put the FWBO in a double bind. If it does get involved it can be said to be seeking power; if it does not it can be said to be isolationist. One or other such criticism could be applied to all Buddhist groups whatsoever, and if taken seriously they are capable of producing endless mistrust and recrimination. The FWBO is happy to be judged on its record in seeking to help these bodies, and the *Files* gives no evidence that its involvement has been anything other than friendly and supportive.¹⁹³

So far as Sangharakshita's ‘vitriolic attacks on the Japanese, Thai and Tibetan traditions in... *Extending the Hand of Fellowship*’ are concerned, those referring to the original text will find it a balanced and judicious account of the virtues and pitfalls of engagement with the Buddhist world at large. It is a plea for genuine dialogue between individuals in the FWBO and Buddhists of other traditions which seeks to be realistic about the difficulties that dialogue can bring.

The FWBO is happy to be a part of the broader Buddhist community and to engage with

¹⁹¹ *Extending the Hand of Fellowship* pp.13-14.

¹⁹² The *Files* might also have mentioned the International Network of Engaged Buddhists; the Network of International Buddhist Women's Organisations (NIBWA), Sakyaditya; the Buddhist Unions of Germany, Spain and Holland; and local groups such as the Bath and Bristol Buddhist Alliance. The FWBO has been consistently active in this field, in pursuit of its genuine goal of helping co-operation between Buddhists. It has never been accused of seeking to dominate any of these organisations by any individuals who have worked alongside people from the FWBO within them.

¹⁹³ It is true that in 1992 Kulananda became the Treasurer of the European Buddhist Union somewhat reluctantly, and mainly because no one else in the EBU would. He did his duty for a spell. But the document fails to add that in the same year Dharmachari Nagabodhi was asked to take the chair of that organisation and declined.

that community in friendly and constructive ways. Reference to any edition of its principal magazine, *Dharma Life*, will suggest the scope of this engagement.¹⁹⁴

5. Conclusion

As we said in introducing this *Response*, we have no desire to malign the author of *The FWBO Files*. However, having given prolonged and detailed consideration to the text of the *Files* we are able to draw some conclusions. Its main virtue is that it tells a plausible story well, and keeps the reader's interest through the accumulation of sensational details. However, it does not represent itself as a work of fiction, but as presentation of facts.

We have found that the *Files* contains numerous factual inaccuracies, which can easily be disproved, and inaccurate or misleading use of quotations, which are easily shown up. The quality of its research is poor and many of its claims are entirely unsubstantiated: while purporting to offer evidence for some of the claims, on inspection much of this evidence turns out to be rumour masquerading as fact, or else the questionable interpretation of an uninformed third party. Notwithstanding this flimsy basis the *Files* feels confident in making the most serious allegations against Sangharakshita and the FWBO; we feel that this confidence is woefully misplaced. On inspection we have found these allegations to be essentially false and we have no hesitation in designating them slanders.

The *Files* suggests that Sangharakshita's teaching 'is not Buddhism at all' (p.16). However, it demonstrates very limited knowledge of Sangharakshita's writing (not to say a circumscribed and partisan knowledge of Buddhism itself), heavily basing its interpretation of his teaching on a few highly unrepresentative and decontextualised quotations, some of which have been falsified. It presents a version of this teaching which barely resembles the understanding that we, the authors of this *Response*, who are experienced students of Sangharakshita and teach in FWBO centres, ourselves hold. On the question of what Sangharakshita actually teaches we take it that this *Response* can claim to be more authoritative than the *Files*, and furthermore, our understanding is borne out by the published work of Sangharakshita and members of the Western Buddhist Order.

Finally, it is apparent that the *Files* is informed by essentially formalistic views of what constitutes legitimacy in Buddhism. As a 'translator' Sangharakshita's formulation of Buddhist teaching necessarily differs in its mode of expression from some other formulations of Buddhism. But to suggest, in the manner of the *Files*, that these differences mean his teaching distorts Buddhism seems to us an example of sectarianism taken to the level of intolerance. Indeed the *Files* may justly be described as a sectarian attack, wholly out of keeping with the Buddhist tradition of mutual respect, tolerance, and open discussion. Buddhists of different traditions need not necessarily agree with one another on all points, but they should surely be prepared to deal straightforwardly with other traditions, and to present honest arguments for their disagreements with them.

Notwithstanding these points some readers may feel that the mere fact of controversy lends credence to the accusers: 'there's no smoke without fire!' We would ask readers to pause before making this essentially lazy assumption, and carefully consider what issues of substance actually remain, when the arguments of this *Response* are taken into account.

The FWBO seeks to address crucial questions facing all Buddhists in the West: what

¹⁹⁴ For example *Dharma Life* 7 (Spring 1998) on the theme of 'the Legacy of Tibet' included an article by Dargyab Rinpoche, an interview with Robert Thurman, pieces on the Tibetan community in exile, Ayya Khema, and developments in Sri Lanka, Thai and Cambodian Buddhism.

is primary, central, universal and indispensable within the Buddhist tradition? And what is secondary, peripheral, of localised relevance, and needs to be left behind in bringing the Dharma to our culture? It has addressed these issues with integrity, boldness, imagination, and a determination to stay faithful to the teaching of the Buddha. Over the last thirty-one years it has developed in many ways and been through many changes. There have been difficulties as people have over-zealously applied their partial understanding, but there has also been a process of maturation and growth. This *Response* has sought to speak frankly of some of those difficulties, and to understand them in their historical context. A just account of the FWBO will also commend its many successes, along with the general integrity and ethical probity of its members and institutions.

The FWBO has sometimes been the object of misunderstanding and consequently mistrust. It is our hope that a positive outcome of this present controversy will be that such misunderstandings, having been expressed, may perhaps be dispelled. The FWBO has already made a valuable contribution to the development of Buddhism in the West; it is our hope that, in an atmosphere of harmony, goodwill and co-operation between Buddhists of all traditions, this contribution will continue and grow. Those who have personal experience of the FWBO can easily see the falsity of the *Files* in the areas to which this experience applies. Other readers, who do not have such experience, are warmly invited to find out more about us through visits, discussion and open communication.

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Appendix 1:

Sexual Evolution, *Dharma Life* 8, Summer 1998

In 28 years as a Buddhist, Dhammadinna, has seen or done it all. She recalls experiments in the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order around sex, celibacy and lifestyle and discusses how its collective experience has matured.

In the late Sixties I lived in a large commune of ten adults and four children. Some friends lived in a much looser commune where people didn't even have a room of their own, but changed rooms and partners on a nightly basis. The Sixties was a time of both genuine idealism and great naivety. Some of us believed, at least for a while, that anything was possible and that we could change ourselves and the world through love.

This was the era of free love, jazz, poetry and drugs; the development of humanistic psychology and the cult of free expression; the re-emergence of the women's movement and the advent of gay pride; the greater availability of birth control, especially the pill; and, from a background culture of drugs, the explosion of LSD to a wider public. It was a time of exploration and experimentation in many areas of life – political, philosophical, mystical and religious, psychological, artistic, musical, social, chemical and not least sexual.

Sexual liberation meant hedonistic, guilt-free sex: heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual, with one or a number of partners. From both humanistic psychology and drug experimentation came attitudes such as 'letting it all hang out', 'going with the flow' and 'if you feel like doing it, do it'. The positive side of this was a willingness to explore and experiment, taking nothing for granted. There was also a darker side induced by confusion, bad trips and sometimes descent into addiction, alienation and despair.

When Sangharakshita returned to England in the early Sixties, after 20 years in India as a Buddhist monk, it was with people from this counter culture that he found himself working. As the incumbent at the Hampstead Buddhist Vihara, he encountered a much more respectable section of society. But increasingly, the people he taught came from the 'counter-culture', and their energy and radicalism seemed to offer a basis for engagement with the transformative teachings of Buddhism.

In 1967 Sangharakshita founded the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) with the aim of developing ways of practising Buddhism that were appropriate in the modern world. From these beginnings a Buddhist movement developed. During the 1960s and '70s, the numbers involved in the FWBO were small. We were a 'circle of friends' attempting to put our ideals into practice and develop a new society based on Buddhist principles. Many of us were young and were willing to question and challenge all areas of life.

But times have changed, and some of the things we did in the past have given rise to controversy. Perhaps it is time to take stock; to look back on those early experiments, and consider what was learnt and what has been left behind. This means understanding the attitudes and activities of previous decades in the context of their time. We should be aware of the tendency to see the past through the eyes of the present: a time affected by Aids and by discussion of sexual abuse, as well as by political correctness and gender politics.

When I first encountered the FWBO in 1970 I was 24 and a hippy. I was in an 'open marriage' and, although I had personal sexual difficulties, I subscribed to the ethos that sex was a form of communication and it was open to each person to decide what they wanted to do. In my commune people had changed or shared partners, and I was not prejudiced about homosexuality or lesbianism, having friends of both persuasions.

In the FWBO people were of differing ages but many were young like myself and shared my ideas. When I first met Sangharakshita, he cut an unusual figure. He was dressed in orange

robes, but had long hair and wore a Tibetan mala. He was also friendly and informal, although with an obvious air of spiritual authority and wisdom. Early retreats could be quite wild with people dancing and drumming on the lawns, engaging in drama or dream groups, forming and leaving relationships, as well as engaging in serious spiritual practice

Sangharakshita initially gave us a great deal of leeway, affirming our enthusiastic search for Truth, but he also knew when to begin to demand more. On the summer retreat of 1972 he introduced triple periods of meditation, long periods of silence, and an emphasis on mindfulness and reflection. After this retreat many of us decided to take our spiritual lives more seriously and formed the first residential communities around Pundarika, our centre in north London. And in 1973 I was ordained into the Western Buddhist Order.

Early in my involvement I wanted to go away and meditate for a few days and I chose a Tibetan Buddhist centre. The people there were friendly but referred to rumours concerning Sangharakshita and sex. I was not at all bothered; it didn't occur to me to check with Sangharakshita whether they were true. It struck me as a fuss about nothing. I had made a spiritual connection with Sangharakshita, and through him with Buddhism. He had befriended and guided me. I knew he wore robes for ceremonial reasons but less and less so otherwise.

I did not think of Sangharakshita as a traditional bhikkhu, and at that time I wasn't particularly interested in traditional forms of Buddhism. I trusted him. I had always found him willing to talk to me about all aspects of my life. He was sympathetic and helpful to me when my marriage broke up, encouraging when I practised celibacy, and understanding when I gave it up.

As our practice deepened my contemporaries and I in the WBO began to see that sex could cause a lot of confusion and be a distraction from Buddhist practice. Moreover we were beginning to realise that the romantic ideal – so prevalent in our western conditioning – could lead to dependency, and work against the development of friendships and a harmonious sangha (spiritual community). Reflections such as these led to the establishment of single-sex activities. This began with retreats for men and for women, but developed into the establishment of single-sex communities and 'Right Livelihood' working projects. By the mid-Eighties we came to feel that single-sex activities in all areas of practice were most conducive to spiritual growth.

Our decisions to practise within these single-sex situations and to question our sexual involvements and attitudes arose out of a desire to break our dependency on the opposite sex. This kind of exploration, however, was specific to the West; it arose from the need we felt to discover which lifestyles were most helpful at a time when conventions were being challenged. It wouldn't be appropriate in a more traditional society, where it might be unacceptable and undermine social stability.

My open marriage had ended amicably in 1972. Through forming other friendships and meditating I had realised how dependent I was on my partner, and I wanted to be more independent. I embarked on further relationships but soon became aware that I still had a tendency to emotional dependence. I wanted to experience myself single and alone, responsible for myself, with the time and energy to devote to my friendships and my spiritual practice. I also suffered from sexual guilt and I wanted some time free from that sort of conflict.

For me, moving to a single-sex lifestyle went along with giving up sex. For others it meant engaging in same-sex sex. Some people did this for a while, perhaps realising they were more bisexual than they had thought, while others discovered their true orientation was towards their own gender. Other people remained heterosexual, and still others became celibate. We were trying to break taboos, perhaps derived from Christian and social attitudes to sex, which sometimes resulted in irrational guilt. Some people began to speculate that homosexuality might be in some way more 'spiritual' than heterosexuality, because it was less likely to lead to domesticity and settling down. We also discussed whether spiritual friendship and sexual

involvement could go together.

To what extent did these ideas derive from Sangharakshita? In assessing this I have looked back at transcripts of the seminars he led between the mid-Seventies and mid-Eighties. These were intensive and intimate retreats when Sangharakshita led the participants through a Buddhist text, discussing its meaning and its relevance to our spiritual lives. Seminars also provided an opportunity to discuss anything of interest to us. Sexual relationships, sexual orientation, gender, friendship, community life, and lifestyle were all crucial issues as we set up our new Buddhist movement. They were discussed openly and frankly.

These transcripts show how careful was Sangharakshita's thinking. In one discussion he was asked if he thought homosexuality was more 'spiritual' than heterosexuality. He commented that we had to consult our own experience and be honest, and he was not sure that there was less psychological projection in homosexuality. However, he suggested, men often fear expressing their feelings for each other in case they are seen as sexual, and this fear can lead to a general emotional repression. He thought that a man having strong feelings towards another man, even if those feelings are tinged with sexual attraction, need not mean he is homosexual. Sangharakshita concluded that spiritually speaking there is probably not much difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships, and that we must be equally mindful in either. What is important, he said, is that we cultivate friendship, which will help us to leave sex behind.

In 1981 experimentation took another direction at one FWBO centre where a number of people decided to engage in friendly heterosexual sex outside committed relationships – in other words, promiscuity. This experiment involved very few people, did not last long, and soon people returned to being single, or celibate, or in settled relationships. Perhaps in response, Sangharakshita gave a lecture in 1982 on the virtue of fidelity. The lecture covered fidelity to oneself, to ideals and to other people. Under fidelity to others came the question of sexual fidelity and Sangharakshita outlined three possible modes: monogamy, promiscuity and celibacy. Each, he suggested, has a healthy form and a neurotic form. By promiscuity he meant non-continuity of sexual partners, in other words serial monogamy. He warned that people should be alive to the difficulties of each approach, and seek to avoid the dangers of neurotic attachment, distraction and so on.

Sangharakshita has always encouraged celibacy. He has stressed that people with a natural desire to be chaste should not be encouraged into sexual relationships by others who might think this more normal. He has also urged his disciples, as they get older, to start thinking of moving towards chastity. In an interview in *Golden Drum* magazine on 'Sex and the Spiritual Life' (autumn 1987), Sangharakshita discussed the powerful, sometimes destructive nature of the sexual drive and the need for those on a spiritual path to invest less emotional energy in sexual relationships.

He also expressed pleasure that more people were taking the Anagarika precept, which enjoins chastity. He never urges anyone to take this precept and Order members need not be celibate. 'One is only asked to keep one's sex life at the periphery, or towards the periphery ... But if one can be celibate ... in a positive and healthy way, I'm sure that will enable one – other factors being equal – to develop spiritually more rapidly.'

During the late 1980s and early '90s more men and women Order members took the Anagarika precept. Becoming an Anagarika does not constitute a higher ordination but it involves the precept of abstention from sexual activity (*abrahmacarya*). Some Anagarikas have maintained this precept while others have ceased to be chaste and reverted to their previous status. It seems that being celibate is not easy in the West, as the culture that surrounds us is so concerned with sex.

Sangharakshita maintains, however, that the extent to which we are caught up in sexual activity and craving is a matter of degree. In this sense we are all celibate or non-celibate to

some extent, and he said that he would like to see everyone in the FWBO progressively moving away from sexual craving, and becoming 'more and more celibate every day'.

These then were the attitudes and examples that informed my own approach to sex. When I decided to end my sexual relationship and give up sex, I initially saw this as a matter of taking 'time out', and the first couple of years were helpful. But as time passed I came to think sex was bad and unspiritual and that I should give it up for good. To do otherwise would have been to 'fall back'. But I had not taken a vow, so in reality I was free to choose whether or not to begin another sexual relationship. This became painful and confusing when I started to experience sexual desire again, but it was also illuminating as I began to understand the extent of my irrational sexual guilt.

Sangharakshita was understanding. He said it was important with any decision to keep the initiative and that perhaps I had lost touch with my reasons for choosing celibacy. Some time later I started a sexual relationship. Over the years I have had a number of sexual relationships, interspersed with sometimes quite long periods of being single. The periods when I was able to be alone and still feel contented and happy have been important to me and helped my relationships to become less neurotic. At the moment I am single and happy with this state.

These days the FWBO is much larger: at first the whole Order could sit in one room and discuss its future in terms of principle and practice. It is harder to see what sexual attitudes in the FWBO currently are, except that they're varied. The average age of Order members has risen steadily, many of us have been practising for many years. We also attract more people with families, which has raised further issues. The emphasis on single-sex activities, community living and team-based Right Livelihood work has sometimes led people with families to feel marginalised.

This is an area of continuing discussion but recent years have seen many more family groups around FWBO centres. There is a creative tension in this area. On one hand we emphasise renunciation and 'going forth' from worldly life (with the institutions of the FWBO offering a practical means of doing this). On the other hand we need to help people in families to find ways of deepening their Buddhist practice.

I find it is now much easier to work with this tension. When I was a young Order member trying to set up communities and projects with few resources, I was sometimes alarmed if a team-member expressed a desire to have a baby. I could see the whole project collapsing. Now I find my greater life experience and maturity enable me to discuss such issues much more openly than in the past, and I can understand the experience of people with families much better.

Although there is now an undoubted ability to address such matters in the Order, sex and sexuality will continue to be an issue for a community that is neither lay nor monastic. In the FWBO there has always been discussion of sexual ethics – both in general terms and on specific issues. One key area is sexual relationships between Order members and the people they teach. Are these relationships exploitative? Can sex and spiritual friendship ever go together, or are they mutually exclusive?

Some people wonder if such relationships need to be governed by rules. But this would fail to express the spirit in which we approach ethical practice: we seek to understand the underlying principle expressed in the Buddhist ethical precepts, rather than proscribing particular actions. Furthermore in a Buddhist movement of the size and diversity of the FWBO – which is active in cultures as different as the modern us, India and South America – any attempt to dictate norms of behaviour could become enormously complex.

It is a mistake to regard an Order member in the same way as a therapist or a priest. An Order member is simply an individual who has made a decisive commitment to Buddhism, and who may express this by leading classes and retreats. However, people coming to learn will have expectations; and if sex is in the mix, it can be confusing. So this area needs careful

scrutiny and discussion.

Personally I am convinced that the FWBO's exploratory approach to issues of sex and sexual relationships has been hugely helpful to me and my contemporaries. I have been involved in the FWBO for 28 years and have grown up within it. I have been both instrumental in and affected by its developing ethos. The FWBO's emphasis on spiritual friendship, going beyond emotional dependency, trying to make sexual relationships less central to one's life, thinking about ethics, and working towards celibacy have all had their effect on me.

I have been married, single, celibate, engaged in 'serial monogamy' and in periods of non-monogamy. I have tried to behave ethically and when I have failed I've tried to make amends. I have felt able to be open with my friends about sex and they have been honest with me. By working through strong feelings of irrational guilt about sex and Buddhist practice, I have freed up a great deal of energy. I certainly do not think everyone in the FWBO needs to experiment sexually. But I hope people feel they can be honest about who they are without incurring condemnation.

Particularly in the West, where there are so many options, we need to examine our sex-lives and make choices in accordance with our overall spiritual direction. As a result of our early explorations, we now have thriving single-sex teams and communities, which provide good conditions for serious Dharma practice. We have slowly – sometimes painfully – developed the maturity that enables people to discover their own path, and the lifestyle that best helps them to practise the Buddha's teaching.

Appendix 2

Learning the Harsh Way, *Dharma Life* 7, Spring 1998

What did happen at the Croydon Buddhist Centre during the 1980s? Vishvapani describes his personal experience there, and warns against simplistic conclusions.

Last autumn I read in *The Guardian's* article about the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order a long description of an FWBO centre that went wrong. It was 'a cult', I read, characterised by 'collective neurosis'. There was an account by one person who alleged he had been sexually abused by the centre's chairman, and there were quotes from the diary of another who killed himself some time after living there. Although the article did not specify where this had occurred, it was clearly a description of the Croydon Buddhist Centre (CBC) during the 1980s, where I had been involved for seven years. The alleged abuse victim was someone I consider a friend, and I had worked with the man who killed himself.

How strange and disturbing it was to see events that were an important part of my life presented with such horror and revulsion. How painful to see the difficulties and failures of something I had been deeply involved with paraded so publicly. Yet how oddly reassuring that the doubts and criticisms I had felt at the time were given a public legitimacy. And then the nagging doubt: was *The Guardian* right to suggest that what had happened at the CBC was somehow symptomatic of broader failings in the FWBO?

Since publication of *The Guardian* article many people have asked, 'what did happen in Croydon?', so I am pleased to have this opportunity to give my account. But I do so with trepidation. The truth as I perceive it is complex, elusive and the product of indefinable psychological forces. I am not sure whether I wholly understand it, even 10 years later, and what I do understand is painful to recall and difficult to communicate. So this is an account of my experience and reflections, not an 'official' FWBO version. It is subjective and fragmentary, and there could probably be as many accounts of the CBC as there were people there.

I first visited Aryatara, the Buddhist centre in the South London suburb of Croydon, in the summer of 1979, when I was just 14. It was a large house and the reception rooms were packed with people. They were mostly lively and young enough for me not to feel out of place. The building seemed to hum with energy; I was drawn by the Buddhists – by the ease of their body language and the sparkle in their communication. I went home exhilarated and I knew I wanted to be involved.

The values I encountered at Aryatara seemed to articulate and extend my own. There was the idea of 'growth and development', and meditation as a means of achieving this. Initially I struggled with meditation, but on my first weekend retreat I was overwhelmed by physical bliss, and a sense that my consciousness had become enlarged. I thought I had uncovered the secret of the Buddhists' quiet happiness.

I was also struck by their confidence that the FWBO possessed an answer to the world's problems. Buddhism, it seemed, was the way out of the West's cultural wasteland. The FWBO possessed a key to this transformation, and here in Purley were people who were able to put that into effect. Beside the notion of personal growth was the idea of social transformation. Over in West Croydon they ran a co-operative, including a wholefood shop and a vegetarian café. This seemed both the fulfilment of my socialist upbringing, and a challenge. Changing the world, these Buddhists said, meant changing people, and here were idealists determined to do both.

Aryatara had become a residential Buddhist community in 1969, and for several years it was a quiet FWBO backwater. But in 1976 a group of dynamic, experienced Order members moved there to wake things up. Led by the new chairman, Nagabodhi, they ran classes that attracted more and more people – especially the disaffected suburban youth, who were drawn

to their idealism and vitality. Nagabodhi also set up the businesses. He left in 1978 and was succeeded as chairman by Padmaraja.

The first time I spoke with Padmaraja I felt he was looking deep inside me. His manner was sensitive, gentle, steady, almost androgynous. He dressed in bright colours and his face radiated warmth. He seemed to possess a secret magic, and being with him I felt small. Padmaraja seemed aware of me in my wholeness: aware of my fears and anxieties, and of something else, something very precious and buried deep within me, of which I was barely aware myself. Many who encountered Padmaraja were similarly entranced by his aptitude for a certain kind of communication. It inspired gratitude, love, even devotion.

Over the following years activities developed apace. In 1981 the businesses were relocated to a large building in central Croydon that also housed the new Croydon Buddhist Centre. The café transmuted into a high-class vegetarian restaurant called Hockneys, and soon 30 to 40 people were working in the complex. The businesses made handsome profits, which allowed further growth. Rivendell Retreat Centre was opened in the Sussex countryside, and an arts centre (which became Independent Arts) was opened in 1984. It aimed to make links between Buddhist values and the arts through films and lectures. There was no comparable London venue for talks by writers and intellectuals, and Independent Arts programmes soon claimed proudly - and not wholly implausibly - that it was 'one of the five best literary venues in the world'.

This aspect of the centre's work attracted me greatly. In my late teens I read voraciously - literature, philosophy and Eastern religions - and Independent Arts fed this interest. I found spiritual nourishment on meditation retreats, and the Buddhist perspective on life gave me a sense of what I could potentially be, if I applied myself to practising it.

But my experience was different in Dharma study groups. When I first read the writings of Sangharakshita, founder of the FWBO, I found them hugely stimulating. I loved his rigour, intelligence and ability to make bold connections between Buddhism and western ideas. But if I raised questions about his teachings, or Buddhism in general, to Croydon Order members, I was met with perplexity or disapproval. I was expected quietly to take in what I was being taught and faithfully apply it.

When I was particularly troublesome, the leading Order members, including Padmaraja, would criticise me. I was 'arrogant' and 'emotionally blocked'. Sometimes the criticism extended from telling me what I was like to telling me why I was like that. I was psychologically bound to my mother and needed to break free; this meant entering into robust contact with men (which was to say with them, and on their terms).

There may, of course, have been something in those criticisms, but that is not the point. I respected these people - they were experienced Buddhists, with personalities far stronger than mine. The confidence with which they made their criticisms suggested a special insight that perhaps, I wondered, came from their meditation practices. I argued my case but I felt shaken, sometimes devastated.

The approval and encouragement I had first encountered at the centre now seemed to be highly conditional, and sometimes seemed like outright disapproval. I might be accepted if I was docile and obedient, otherwise - well, I was quite free to go off and 'disappear up my bum', as it was charmingly put. In particular, Padmaraja's affection, which could be so overwhelming, could also be suddenly withdrawn and replaced by withering sarcasm.

Even in 1982/3, aged 17, I was aware that something was very wrong at the CBC. How could Order members talk like this while claiming to follow the ethical precept on abstaining from harsh speech and practising kindly speech? I found that when people came to work around the CBC they grew less interesting, and more like the others. The centre seemed a self-enclosed world governed by group dynamics, and I considered breaking off contact. But I was also bound to it emotionally and I could not leave Buddhism without betraying something

deeply important to me. So when I finished school, at the start of 1984, I let myself be talked into moving into Aryatara, and working in Hockneys restaurant.

I stayed there for almost two years before going to university. The work was physically hard and I was busy most nights of the week, supporting Buddhist classes or helping at the Arts Centre. I enjoyed this intensity, and the camaraderie it generated. I learnt to be disciplined and to apply myself. But my experience was also cramped. I found the routine of restaurant work numbingly tedious (though this doubtless says as much about me as the work). There was little time for rest and relaxation; at Aryatara I shared a room with three, sometimes four, others, and no one had much space to themselves.

The intensity of life in the businesses came at a price. Padmaraja was in control. He would quietly dominate meetings with effortless charisma. People hung on his words: 'Is he a Stream Entrant?' I heard them ask. 'A Bodhisattva?' But his authority was not simply the consequence of his spiritual stature. The psychological double-bind that left me wanting approval and fearing rejection was reflected throughout the community.

Before starting work at Hockneys, I had felt an outsider, now I discovered there were spheres within spheres. An inner circle clustered around Padmaraja, and then there was a pecking order, in which the more senior parties ensured the conformity of the junior. This was enforced through teasing, sarcasm and undignified nicknames ('Roy the boy', 'Baz', 'Plonker' - it really was like school) as well as appeals to loyalty and idealism. We were, after all, 'building the New Society' - what undertaking could be more worthy? The sometimes vicious bullying was masked for perpetrators and victims alike by the idea that criticism or 'fierce friendship' was a form of spiritual practice.

This power structure was based on the subtleties of personal relationships and group dynamics, and so is hard to describe. For me, the most painful aspect was that one was assigned a role, and ridiculed if one stepped outside it. And to the extent one accepted this view of oneself, one's ability to think for oneself was effectively curtailed. This is the kind of process described in *The Guardian* by Matthew, the man who later killed himself (though I should add that I have no idea why he did so, and to what extent it was the result of his time at the CBC).

One friend of mine (now a writer) was told his problem was that he lived in a fantasy world in which he was a poet. This delusion was a sign that he was out of touch with reality and, unless he overcame it, he would go mad. What he needed to do was, well, to put himself into working in the restaurant. Conveniently, this was a cure for almost everyone's ills.

The tendency for Order members to give advice and point out people's psychological limitations was a most effective way of maintaining control. One of the FWBO's strengths is the emphasis on friendship, and sharing one's spiritual life; and it is surely true that some people have greater experience and insight than others. Certain Croydon Order members concluded that they were in a position to tell people what to do, and even what their experience was. Yet they were only in their twenties and early thirties. They forced their views on others, and lacked the humility to see their perceptions might exclude important aspects of life, or that their advice was a way of exerting power.

I do not think people were consciously manipulative, but they were blind to the ways their perceptions were compromised by self-interest. Independent Arts, Padmaraja's personal project, was overtly an attempt to make connections between Buddhism and western culture, but there was also personal ambition. Desire for prestige meant that Independent Arts was inexorably tainted by the commercially driven values of the arts world. Moreover arts activities were the pinnacle of a mini 'empire', including the businesses and Buddhist activities, which marked a huge increase in the professionalism and financial resources of the FWBO. Yet this could be sustained only with many people's help. The temptation to coerce people into remaining loyal must have been huge.

Then there was sex. In *The Guardian*, Tim claims he was coerced into sex with the

centre's chairman, and this kind of predatory homosexuality was depicted as a key characteristic of life at the centre. I know there was homosexual activity in the single-sex communities, but the curious thing is that I never once heard a discussion of it. It is hard to know how significant sex was in the psychology underpinning the CBC, though for Tim it was clearly traumatic. But I believe the secrecy surrounding it established a pattern of duplicity and confusion that corroded people's integrity.

In 1985 I took up a place at Cambridge University. I continued to meditate, and on one retreat I contemplated what was holding me back. I realised the effect of my time in Croydon was that I felt I had little potential to progress in the spiritual life. I saw how absurd and tragic this was. Whatever their intentions, the CBC Order members had surely gone terribly wrong if this basic human faith had been undermined.

I recalled one Order member responding to a criticism of mine by asking: 'Is it likely that you are right and everyone else is wrong?' And I realised they had been wrong, however unlikely it may have seemed. I recalled Padmaraja listening patiently to other criticisms and then, looking straight into me, asking: 'But what is really going on, mate?' I now realised my doubts had just been dismissed, and how manipulative this had been. The spell was broken.

In 1988 Manjunatha became men's 'Mitra Convenor' (responsible for the spiritual welfare of men at a novitiate level) at the CBC. In meetings with Mitra Convenors from other centres, who included some senior Order members, he encountered strong criticisms of the CBC. Many people had been concerned by the way the CBC was run and had tried to influence it. But FWBO centres are legally and organisationally autonomous, and the FWBO has no authoritarian structure in which a central body exerts power. It had proved impossible to influence the CBC from outside until Manjunatha, encouraged by the Mitra Convenors, started to voice his own criticisms. He demanded answers and urged others in Croydon to express their doubts. There was now movement from within for change.

This was the turning point. After great pressure, Padmaraja resigned as chairman, but his supporters were still refusing to acknowledge the criticisms. At this point Sangharakshita – who had refrained from comment, intending to let the Order sort out its problems for itself – threatened to close the CBC unless matters changed dramatically.

In the end commitment to Buddhism and the FWBO proved stronger than loyalty to one individual. Padmaraja resigned from the Order, and two people left with him. The great majority continued their involvement in the FWBO, and most have had to work through deep feelings of confusion, guilt and betrayal. Some are still doing so. For many of those Order members there has been much open discussion, soul-searching and shame. Often these reflections have dominated their spiritual lives.

Some people left the FWBO feeling understandably disillusioned. I've personally found it helpful to address the issues raised by my time in Croydon with others in the FWBO, and I am concerned that some people lack a context in which to address such emotions. For a long time after Padmaraja's departure the centre and businesses were in disarray, and have never fully regained their financial strength. But for many years activities have been on a sound ethical footing.

For the FWBO as a whole this was a crucial learning experience. We lost some of our innocence. But did problems at the CBC reflect broader failings? Firstly, the CBC is part of the FWBO, and its failings are therefore part of the FWBO's record. Beyond this, I see the CBC's flaws as an exaggeration of trends within the wider movement. The FWBO was born out of the social and spiritual idealism of the 1960s and '70s, and developed an assertive sense of the value of its own approach to Buddhist practice.

But idealism is dangerous. It can bring pride and narrowness, and leads people to reject ideas, emotions, and even relationships that do not fit in. This is precisely what happened at the CBC, where simple ethical considerations were ignored because activities were defined in

terms of the ideals they were seeking to live up to. The ends being so desirable, we were oblivious to the manipulation and exploitation in the means.

The idea that we were building a New Society blinded some of us to the ways our spiritual values were being sacrificed. A chief problem at the CBC was that to achieve financial and institutional success we were all working far, far too hard; and cruel behaviour was often the product of pressure and fatigue. In part the pressure to succeed came from the FWBO's imperative to show that its ideas of alternative lifestyles and new economic forms could be translated from theory into practice.

The CBC was very insular - the outside world, including other FWBO centres - was looked down on, and this made people blind to internal failings. It was as if the FWBO's philosophy was complete and there was no need to learn from others. Criticism was dismissed by maligning the critic's motives; people even denied themselves the possibility of thinking critically. This was an insidious form of totalitarianism and, when people could no longer contain their criticisms, they had to leave - often suddenly, sometimes in the middle of the night.

This was a distortion of Sangharakshita's ideas; it was the product of the naivety and literalism of young men and women who rigidly applied their limited understanding in translating Buddhist ideals into practice. Yet it seems that those ideas are open to such an interpretation. The only remedy is maturity. I stayed involved in the FWBO because I could see it becoming steadily more mature, individually and collectively. I saw a growing awareness of the sometimes painful gulf between our aspirations of what the FWBO might be and the reality - as well as a growing ability to work with these issues with patience, humanity and humility.

For example, activities in the FWBO are mostly on a single-sex basis. When this approach was introduced in the 1970s, it caused some friction between the sexes. At the CBC it was applied with astonishing rigidity: men and women working just a few feet apart would avoid eye-contact, and sometimes go for months barely exchanging a word. Over the years, in my experience, understanding of single-sex practice has become humanised, emphasising the opportunities it offers for developing friendships, rather than aversion to the opposite sex.

The FWBO has since instituted safeguards against a centre becoming so isolated. Every centre now has a president, a senior Order member from outside the situation, who has the respect of all involved and can intervene if necessary. Could it happen again? Of course it could, because a spiritual movement is only as good as its practitioners, and people are flawed. But at least there is now an awareness of the dangers, and a determination to prevent a recurrence.

Hindsight shows the extent of the CBC's flaws, but I don't regret my time there. I had the opportunity to practise Buddhism, however veiled it may have been. And I've learnt a great deal through reflecting on that experience. Indeed it has been the decisive experience in shaping my approach to Buddhism and the FWBO.

In particular I have often wondered about Padmaraja's psychology. It is wrong to blame one individual for what happened, though individuals must take responsibility. Many people acted unskillfully at the CBC. But when I think of Padmaraja's deep gaze, his gentleness and sensitivity, it seems that he exemplified the danger of believing too much in one's own intuition. I think he was convinced he was acting for the best, putting his ideals and Sangharakshita's teachings into practice; but he had no idea of how mixed were his motivations.

At university I often pondered my time at the CBC. Sometimes I felt angry; sometimes I wanted to give up Buddhism; sometimes I thought I was over-reacting. I wanted to understand what had gone wrong, but I came to believe the greatest danger lay in a simplistic interpretation. I found myself drawn to the sceptical thinkers of the 18th century who were so alive to the dangers of credulity. As Edward Gibbon observed:

‘As a wise man may deceive himself and a good man may deceive others, so the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud.’

Things at the CBC had been very good; they had also been very bad. People had been well-intentioned, yet they were unethical. Only by pondering such paradoxes can the lessons of maturity be learnt.

Appendix 3: Controversy over the FWBO's Education Work

1. Statement from the FWBO Communications Office, June 16th 1998

There has recently been public questioning of the FWBO's educational work, stimulated by the anonymous Internet document The FWBO Files. Lord Avebury, a Liberal Democrat Peer, raised the matter with the Department of Education; and Don Foster, the Liberal Democrats' education spokesman, issued a statement and tabled a parliamentary question. The Times Educational Supplement reported these developments on Friday 12th June.

The educational work of the FWBO (as carried out by the Clear Vision Trust) is, of course, a legitimate subject for public scrutiny, and we are confident that such scrutiny will vindicate its integrity. However, the mere fact that these questions have been raised publicly is potentially damaging to the reputation of the FWBO and Clear Vision.

On closer inspection the questions turn out to be insubstantial. The FWBO Communications Office has spoken to both Lord Avebury and the Liberal Democrats Press Office. Lord Avebury tells us that he has not investigated the educational materials produced by the FWBO, or indeed the FWBO itself, and does not have the competence to do so. The Liberal Democrats tell us that their only source of information was Lord Avebury, and that they had assumed he had investigated the matter.

Both of these cite the FWBO Files as the source of their concern, and a detailed response to that document is being prepared - though this will take some time to complete. However, the FWBO Files makes no reference to the educational materials produced by the FWBO and Clear Vision, its comments on this subject being restricted to a single, inaccurate anecdote.

The TES article exaggerates these claims and adds to them. The TES has acknowledged to us that they were remiss in their presentation of the material and that we have should have an opportunity to reply.

Far from containing sectarian distortions of Buddhism, all Clear Vision educational material is based on the syllabus guidelines produced by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority in conjunction with a committee of Buddhists of various traditions (not including the FWBO). John Keast, RE adviser to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which advises government on these matters, has told us that he considers Clear Vision materials to be in accordance with these national Syllabus guidelines.

Further testimony to the reliability of Clear Vision's material comes from various sources: the expert opinion of numerous Religious Education experts who have used the material; the experience of various Buddhist traditions in the UK and overseas who use the Clear Vision material in their own educational work; and the evidence of the material itself, which is publicly available.

The FWBO is currently the subject of a smear campaign, and Clear Vision - which is highly respected by those who have experience of its work - has been the victim of rumour and innuendo. The appropriate government advisers are currently looking into these claims, and we have complete confidence that they will conclude that it is a reliable and valuable educational resource.

b) Letters to the Times Educational Supplement

Dear Sir,

I was very disappointed to see in your article ‘Buddhist Group “Misleading” Pupils’ (TES 12/6198; p.10) accusations against the FWBO and the Clear Vision Trust which are both unsubstantiated and unfounded.

In my view it is wrong of your paper to repeat these damaging accusations, without attempting to establish their veracity. Neither Lord Avebury, nor the Liberal Democrats have produced a scrap of evidence to support them - and neither has the TES. Indeed both Lord Avebury and the Liberal Democrats tell us they have not seen any Clear Vision material. A responsible approach would have pointed out this lack of evidence.

The TES had a further responsibility to ask whether these claims were well-founded. In fact Clear Vision’s materials cover the key doctrines and practices common to all Buddhist traditions, as outlined in the SCAA model syllabus. Numerous leading figures in the RE field will vouch for the integrity and value of its materials, and its work supporting teachers dealing with Buddhism in response to their Locally Agreed Syllabus.

In addition to repeating the claims of others, the TES has exaggerated them.

1. The claim that the ‘FWBO is accused of ignoring spiritual tenets and inflating the spiritual importance of figures from its own leadership’ is unattributed and has no basis in any of the published material. It touches on the fact that what is happening here is a disagreement among Buddhists about the nature of the Buddhist faith. In its uncritical repetition of these views the TES risks supporting a sectarian stance.

2. ‘Orthodox Buddhists posted a critical dossier on the Internet.’ The Internet document is anonymous (a fact that is not mentioned). The effect of this statement is to contrast these ‘orthodox’ authors with the FWBO’s presumed unorthodoxy. However, the FWBO does consider itself to be orthodox. The TES has therefore taken it upon itself to judge what is orthodox in Buddhism - which is surely an abuse of its position.

3. Your article gives a strong impression that something is badly wrong with the FWBO and its educational work. However, it almost entirely fails to specify the nature of these concerns, the one exception being the claim that Clear Vision material ignores the Theravada school. I find it hard to see that in itself this would justify these concerns; and in any case it is quite incorrect. Clear Vision materials illustrate the variety and diversity of Buddhism and show Buddhists from a number of schools including the Theravada.

I hope you will do everything in your power to redress the damage you have done a respected and valuable educational body.

Vishvapani
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The above was published in the TES 20.6.98

Written to the Editor, the TES; published 3.6.98

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you as Secretary of the Association of Religious Education Advisors and Consultants (AREAC) regarding the article 'Buddhist Group "Misleading" Pupils'.

The vast majority of Local Education authority advisors are members of the association and know the work of the Clear Vision Trust and the educational materials it has produced. They find that these resources are of a high and professional standard, are well-regarded within the RE profession and have been effective in the teaching of Buddhism across the key stages.

Some of the members of the Clear Vision Trust are themselves teachers who have been employed in an advisory capacity by an LEA. They are well aware of the issues involved in non-confessional RE and the need to maintain breadth and balance in their materials. Of course they represent a particular view of Buddhism, but this is no different from Catholic or Quaker materials being used in the classroom.

Part of the process of religious education is to allow students to look at a variety of faith stances, both within a particular religion and through different religions. It is up to the teachers to ensure that students are presented with a range of evidence to enable them to make considered evaluations. The Clear Vision Trust resources make a valuable contribution to this process.

C.M. Howard
AREAC
Resource House
Kay St., Bury

Written to the Editor, the TES; but not published.

Dear Sir,

I refer to your article 'Buddhist Group "Misleading" Pupils' which appeared on June 12 1998. Allegations were made against the Clear Vision Trust for misrepresenting Buddhism in the educational videos it has produced. In the article a 'leading Buddhist' was quoted as saying that the material presented is fundamentally incorrect and varies dramatically from traditional Buddhist doctrine. One who has a clear understanding of the fundamentals of Buddhism will have difficulty in trying to fathom the basis of this allegation.

The material in the video is organised around the Three Jewels - the Buddha, his teachings and the spiritual community committed to the practice of these teachings. The Three Jewels represent the very heart of Buddhism and define what Buddhism is. Fundamental doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths, the practice of Buddhist ethics and compassion have also been highlighted in the video. They also constitute the basis of the Theravada school of Buddhism. I am therefore surprised that 'the video has been criticised for not dealing with a central tenet of Buddhism, the Theravada tradition.'

If 'tradition' here refers to the socio-cultural traditions associated with Theravada Buddhism, one would have to deal with its different variants, namely the Sri Lankan, Thai, and Burmese Theravada traditions - all of which are hardly relevant to Buddhism in Britain. Some Asian Buddhists have tried to plant the traditions of their respective countries when introducing Buddhism to the West. In many cases such traditions are more of a hindrance as it is difficult for Westerners to identify with a culture that is quite foreign to them. Buddhists need not be bound to such traditions. What is important is to distill the essence of Buddhist teachings and to apply it in the context of one's society and culture. This is apparent in the countries influenced by Buddhism in its 2500 year history. Western Buddhists should therefore evolve their own tradition of spiritual practice in a manner that is relevant to them, without having to compromise on the spirit of Buddhism. This is what I appreciate about the educational videos of Clear Vision Trust in particular, and the work of the FWBO in general.

I am a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk ordained in Theravada Buddhist tradition. I am presently residing in Singapore where I act as the spiritual advisor to the Buddhist Library, which is a Buddhist educational and resource centre. We have used the videos in question for teaching Buddhism to both children and adults. The videos are highly acclaimed by those who have watched them. Great appreciation is given to the presentation of Buddhism in a manner that is relevant to contemporary modern society, even to a 'traditional' Asian one like Singapore.

Venerable Bellanwila Dhammaratana
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