

Lecture 136: A Vision of History

The Venerable Sangharakshita

Upasakas and Upasikas,

I need hardly tell you, on this, the third day of our Convention, that there are many advantages in our coming together in the way that we are doing at present. Coming together in this way, we get to know one another better, see one another, perhaps, in slightly unexpected lights. *[Laughter]*. We deepen our knowledge of the Dharma, both theoretically, and practically, we strengthen our commitment, our common commitment, to the Three Jewels, we intensify our positivity. Even if we did come to the Convention trailing a few clouds, not of glory, but of gloom, they soon get dissipated. And of course, we renew our inspiration, we find, as it were, in the midst of the Convention, in the midst of the Order assembled here, a sort of perpetual fountain of inspiration rising and falling, rising and falling, ever higher and higher. And for these three days, four days it soon will be, then five, six, up to ten days, these ten glorious days, we shall be living, we are living, a purely spiritual, or almost purely spiritual, life. We live in Sukhavati, not the Bethnal Green Sukhavati, of course, but another Sukhavati, another Happy Land, a land of bliss. We live, for the time being at least, for the moment at least, in the Dharmadhatu, the Realm of the Dharma, the realm of the spiritual, even the realm of the Transcendental, where we've nothing to do except listen to the Dharma, nothing to do except talk about the Dharma, practise the Dharma, and enjoy the Dharma in silence together.

There's another advantage, too, in our coming together in this way, however infrequently it may be. Coming together in this way, we learn to see things in a wider perspective. After all, we've come together to this place from many different places, we've even come from different countries. We've come from different chapters, different local chapters of the Order. We've come from different Centres of the FWBO. We've come from different communities, both large and small, and a few of us have come from situations in which we're relatively on our own, that is to say relatively on our own as Order members. And in many cases it might be that we've been connected with our particular local chapter of the Order, or connected with our particular local centre of the FWBO, or our own community, for quite a long time, and we might not have had very much contact with other Order members, or with the rest of the Movement. And not having much contact with other Order members, or with the rest of the Movement, we might have started thinking, or feeling, at least insensibly, that our own chapter **was** the Order. Or that our own centre **was** the FWBO, or at least, very, very representative and characteristic of it. We might even have forgotten, at least sometimes, that we "belonged", inverted commas, so to speak, to something bigger than any one individual chapter, than any one individual centre or community. We might have forgotten, at least forgotten in any real sense, that we "belonged", again inverted commas, to the Order as a whole, as a totality, belonged to the Movement. More poetically speaking, we might have forgotten that we ourselves were just one single jewel in a whole vast network of jewels, forgotten perhaps that we were a jewel which should reflect all the other jewels in the net, and be reflected in them and by them. I remember, not so very long ago, that one Order member from a very distant place so far as this place is concerned, told me that when he was in his own centre, and I won't mention any names, he felt like a big fish in a small pond. But when he came to London, he said, and stayed at Sukhavati, he felt like a small fish in a big pond.

So this is a very positive experience, a very worthwhile experience, because it means that in this way we widen our experience. But even Sukhavati, I mean **the** Sukhavati, big and important as it undoubtedly is, is only one community, and when we come together, on convention, like this, we widen our perspective still more. We see how many Order members there actually are in existence, or at least begin to see, because they aren't all even here on this occasion. We see how different they are from one another in so many different, almost inexhaustible, ways. And yet, they're all committed, all committed, in their different ways, from their different standpoints, their different angles, within their different contexts, situations, circumstances, all committed to

the Three Jewels, all committed to their own personal development, not only individually, as it were on their own, but as it were, together, as members of one single vast all-embracing spiritual community. And we must never forget that the Buddha compared the Sangha, the Order, to the great ocean. The Order is a great ocean. The Buddha compared it with a great ocean in a number of different ways, as some of you may recollect; we've gone into this in the course of one of the study seminars. And one of his comparisons is particularly relevant, particularly apt. He says that just as the great ocean contains all kinds of marine monsters, so the Sangha contains spiritual monsters of its own, contains Arhants, Non-Returners, Once-Returners, Stream-Entrants, and so on. Now in the ocean of the Convention we may not have met so far many monsters of that kind, spiritual monsters of that kind, but we've certainly met a lot of other fish! *[Laughter]* From little tiddlers *[Laughter]* to big whales! *[Laughter]*. But who the tiddlers are, and who the whales are, is sometimes quite difficult to tell! *[Laughter]* But, in any case, by coming here together on convention our perspective is widened. And if ever we had thought that our own little pond was the ocean, the ocean of the Order, then that impression should surely, by this time, have been corrected.

But even coming on Convention is not enough. We have to widen our perspective still more, at least in imagination. We have to go beyond the present place, even beyond the present time. We have to so widen our perspective as to include the whole world. We have to widen it to include the whole of human history, especially the history of civilised Man, and this is what we're going to do, or attempt to do, tonight - to widen our perspective in this way. Tonight we're going to try to achieve what I call 'A Vision of History', and I use the word 'vision' advisedly, because I want to convey just a vivid, general impression, and I can't do more than that. What I'll be giving you, as it were, or trying to give you is not so much a finished picture, to change the metaphor, but just a very rough sketch, drawn in with very broad, even crude, strokes, and leaving out quite a lot of detail.

Now, speaking of history, there are many different ways of looking at history. Most people, in their rather naive, unsophisticated fashion, that is, most of us, see history, or think of history as just a plain straightforward account of what happened in the past. But historians tell us that this is really incredibly naive, history is hardly ever that. Facts are often very difficult indeed to ascertain. Did King Alfred **really** burn those cakes? Nobody knows. Did King John **really** lose his jewels in the Wash? *[Laughter]* Nobody really knows. Did King Richard III **really** do away with those two dear little princes in the Tower? Again, nobody knows. They're still **discussing** the matter. And very often accepted legend takes the place of real history. And even when it is possible to ascertain the facts, even when the facts are agreed upon, there are so many different ways of interpreting them, so many different ways of looking at them, so many different, as it were, philosophies of history. For instance, one can see history in terms of biography, history as consisting of the biographies of great men. You all know the little schoolboy saying, 'Geography is about maps, but History is about chaps' *[Laughter]*. And there are all sorts of chaps who are called 'great men'. History is about great men, history consists of the biographies of great men, of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charlemagne, Ghengis Khan, Cromwell, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Hitler. *[Short Pause]* *[Laughter]* So this view of history was very popular during the Victorian period, and many people do still think of history in this way. They see a particular period of history as the lengthened shadow of some great man, usually a military conqueror.

And then, there's the Marxist view of history. Marxism sees history in economic terms, sees it in terms of class interest, even class conflict, class war. Marxism sees history as passing through four great stages, stage of theocracy, feudalism, capitalism and then communism, in accordance with who controls the means of production. And the Marxist view of history, of course, is derived from the Hegelian view of history. Hegel saw history at once more abstractly and more concretely, in terms of the progressive manifestation of what he called 'Spirit', with a capital 'S', in the world. He saw history as a process moreover, that moved from East to West. He saw it as beginning in China, in ancient China, and as reaching its culmination in America. But what would happen after that, Hegel didn't say.

And then there's Toynbee's view of history. Toynbee sees history as the story of the rise and fall of civilisation, or rather of civilisations, in the plural, and he enumerates more than two dozen distinct civilisations. Some of these civilisations disappeared centuries ago, after a long and glorious history, for instance, the ancient Egyptian civilisation, the monuments of which, at least the architectural monuments, still do exist. Other civilisations, for instance the Hindu civilisation, are still with us. According to Toynbee, moreover, some civilisations survive in what he called a 'fossilised' form, and according to his, Tibetan civilisation, as it existed before the Chinese invasion of 1950, was a fossilised civilisation. Buddhists, perhaps, wouldn't altogether agree with that.

So all these views of history have their merits, all contain certain elements of truth. But tonight I'm going to take a rather different view. I'm going to pursue a line of thought which I started some years ago, I think it was in 1972, in a lecture which I gave entitled, 'Current World Problems - a Buddhist View'. In this lecture I spoke of the 'Axial Age', as indeed I'd spoken many times before, and also quite a number of times since. The 'Axial Age' is a term coined by the modern German thinker, existentialist thinker, Karl Jaspers, and it indicates the period of history from 800-200 BC. And Jaspers called this period of history the 'Axial Age' because it was, in fact, the turning point in human history. All over the civilised world at that time, great changes took place, took place especially in Greece, in Palestine, in Persia, in India, and in China. There's no need for me to go into details tonight. In any case, some of the things that I've said on various occasions, in various contexts, about the Axial Age, have been brought together in the current 'Mitrata', No. 17, on 'The True Individual'. But the great point about this period, the great point about the Axial Age, the point I wish to stress tonight, is that it saw the appearance, for the first time in history, of a number, a great number, of outstanding individuals. That is to say people who stood out from the group, who were not just part of the group, whether that group was the family, the tribe, the nation, or even an empire. These people were individuals who were self-aware, who were emotionally positive, autonomous, and responsible. They were people whose energies flowed freely and harmoniously. They were people who thought for themselves, thought independently, and who were free from group conditioning, not psychologically dependent upon the group, able to stand, if necessary, alone. And they were people who, moreover, directly or indirectly, encouraged, even exhorted, others to become individuals too. Some of these outstanding individuals were poets and sculptors, others were prophets, mystics, and thinkers, and a few, including the greatest individual of them all, the Buddha, were spiritual masters, and spiritual teachers.

So, from the Axial Age onwards, we see in history a new, a novel tendency, a tendency for the increased appearance of individuals, that is to say, of **True** Individuals, not just the strongest and most dominant, and dominating, members of the group, but an altogether different type of being, a new mutation, as it were, of humanity. From the Axial Age onwards, therefore, we see, in history, two different factors at work, or even two different forces at work.

First of all, there is the group. The group, of course, was present even before the Axial Age began. It was present from the very dawn of humanity, in the form of the extended family group or tribe. But it's grown since then, and since the Axial Age in particular, the group has tended to become bigger, and bigger, and bigger, so that we now have global groups, global organisations of different kinds. But that's another story. I'm not going into it this evening. And then secondly we have, in addition to the group, as well as the group, we have the individual. And very often the individual had to remain on his own. Perhaps there was only one individual in any given group, and perhaps that individual had no contact with any other individual, he was quite isolated, quite alone. But sometimes it did happen that there were several individuals in a single group. And it happened, sometimes, that several individuals in the same group came into contact with one another, came into living relationship with one another, and formed what we now call a 'Spiritual Community'. We could therefore say that the two factors, or the two forces, at work in history are not so much the group and the individual. We could say that they are rather, in reality, the group and the spiritual community.

Now the group and the spiritual community are trying to do two quite different things, in fact they are trying to do two opposite things. The group is trying to produce good group members - good family man, dependable employee, loyal citizen, obedient soldier, line-toeing party member, etc. But what is the spiritual community trying to produce? The spiritual community is trying to produce individuals, more individuals. The group insists on conformity, the spiritual community encourages freedom. The group is based on power, which is always the power of the strong over the weak, the power of the physically powerful over the physically weak, of the economically powerful over the economically weak, of the strong in cunning, the strong in resource, the strong in knowledge, over the weak in cunning, the weak in resource, the weak in knowledge. The spiritual community is based on metta, its principle is metta; I suppose I ought to say in plain English that it is based on love, but I don't quite like the sound of the word "love". I think "metta" is much better. "Metta" we may say is simply **friendliness raised to the highest conceivable pitch of intensity**. In English, friendliness is a rather weak, a rather tepid word but that really won't do, we've got to inject into it, as it were, the strong and positive, even dynamic, content that it has in the Pali, in the form of the word "Metta" and in the Sanskrit, in the form of the word "Maitri". In the spiritual community there is no power, there is no such thing as power. In the spiritual community there is no authority, in the spiritual community there is no coercion, in the spiritual community there is no violence.

These things are absolutely incompatible with the spiritual community, they're compatible only with the group, in fact they're necessary in the case of the group. The group as such can hardly get on without them. In the spiritual community everything is achieved through the influence of friendliness, through the influence of metta, everything is achieved through the influence of sympathy, through the influence of understanding. If you have to get things done by force then it's not the spiritual community, but of course for that to be possible, for things to be done in this friendly way, the spiritual community must be a **real** spiritual community, that is to say, it must consist of individuals. In fact it can **only** consist of individuals and only individuals can practise true friendliness. And if friendliness is present then force is unnecessary. Each individual sees for himself what needs to be done in any given situation, or else he sees it as soon as it's pointed out to him, in a friendly manner, and seeing it, either with his own eyes or with the help of somebody else's eyes, seeing that it is to be done, he's only too glad just to go and do it.

Now although the group and the spiritual community are trying to do two very different things they are nonetheless quite closely, one might say even intimately connected. There is a sort of dialectical relationship between them, between the group and the spiritual community, and each influences, even strongly influences, the other. The spiritual community has a refining and a softening influence on the group: we could even say that the spiritual community has a **civilizing** influence on the group. Very often for the group, the spiritual community is the bearer of culture, certainly the higher, more developed, more refined culture. It may be possible to say a little more about this in a minute or two. In other words, the spiritual community, by its presence within the group, helps the group to be what I call a "**positive** group", that is to say, a group which, even though it is a group, is at least respectful of, considerate towards, spiritual values, at least **open** to spiritual values. The positive group at least gives space to the individual, even though it isn't a spiritual community. It doesn't insist on the individual being wholly and completely and exclusively at the service of the group or wholly, completely and exclusively a group member. The influence of the group on the spiritual community, one has to admit, is usually less fortunate. The group always tries to turn the spiritual community into another group, even into a sub-group, even into a part of itself, and very often, unfortunately, it succeeds, and the spiritual community then has to be refounded, and of course it is refounded, re-established by individuals, by individuals who realise what has happened. Yet unfortunate though the effect of the group on the spiritual community only too often is, the spiritual community cannot cut itself off from the group entirely or completely; this is where the dialectical relationship, as it were, comes in. After all it is from the group that your potential individuals are recruited. Where else are you going to get them from? They are not going to come dropping down from heaven. That is where you get your potential 'members', inverted commas, of the spiritual community

from. You could, of course, try to produce your recruits yourself, that is to say, biologically, but if you did that you'd become a group.

We can say, in aphoristic fashion, that a hereditary spiritual community is a contradiction in terms. The spiritual community has to be recruited afresh in every succeeding generation. There is its weakness but there also is its strength. Now I said that during the Axial Age great changes took place all over the civilised world - took place in Greece, took place in Palestine, Persia, India, China, in all these places individuals started appearing in relatively large numbers. Therefore it is only to be expected that in these same places, in these same areas, sooner or later, we should find spiritual communities appearing, spiritual communities developing, and that is, on the whole, what we do actually find.

In Greece, in ancient Greece, we see the appearance of the Pythagorean brotherhood, as well as various philosophic schools - the Platonic school, the so-called Platonic succession, the neo-Platonic, the Stoic, the Epicurean. We mustn't think of these as schools of philosophy in the modern academic sense. In reality, at least originally, they were in fact spiritual communities of masters and disciples, searching for truth, trying to practise the truth together. They were spiritual communities at least in certain respects. And they were found, these philosophic schools, not only in Greece proper but in what was called Magna Graecia (Greater Greece) and subsequently they were found throughout the whole of the Hellenic - that is to say post-Alexander the Great - world, especially in centres like Alexandria. Then turning to Palestine what do we find there? We find the Essenes and similar communities, about which, until recently, we didn't really know very much. And then of course in the same area we find Christian churches, churches not in the sense of buildings or ecclesiastical organisations but in the sense, the primitive early sense, of spiritual communities. Communities trying to understand, trying to practise the teachings of Christ and these churches spread rapidly all round the Mediterranean. And then in the Middle East, in Iraq and Persia what do we find? We find Manichean spiritual communities, that is to say, communities of those who followed the teaching of the prophet Mani who was born in the 3rd century AD. And, at a later date we also find in this same area and beyond, various Sufic brotherhoods. And then in India, what do we find there? In India, of course, we find the Buddhist spiritual community which we call the Sangha. And this eventually spread all over Asia. We also find the Jain spiritual community, the Jain Sangha, but this was much smaller than the Buddhist one and of much less historical importance. The only place in which individuals did not form themselves into spiritual communities was China. However the Buddhist spiritual community was introduced there later from India and from Central Asia. But we could say in the case of China that there the literary elite took the place, to some extent, of the spiritual community.

Now out of these various spiritual communities I have mentioned, arising in these different places - in Greece, in Palestine, in Iraq and Persia, in India, in China - there are three, as it were, families of spiritual communities, three, as it were, groups - if one can use that word in this connection - of spiritual communities which were, and still are, of particular importance, on account of the number of individuals involved in them, the length of time for which they lasted, and also the extent of the effect which they had, the influence which they had, on the groups in the midst of which they arose or into which they were introduced. And these are, these families of spiritual communities, as it were, are: the Buddhist communities, the Christian communities, and the Sufi communities, and I'm going to say a few words on each of them.

But first of all I want to say something about Manicheism. I don't know how many of you have heard about Manicheism, but if you haven't heard about it, it's high time that you should. Manicheism arose in the Third Century AD and very broadly speaking, characterising it in very broad and general terms, Manicheism was a very gentle, a very pacific, that is to say, very peaceful, and a very tolerant, almost eclectic teaching. Philosophically speaking it was a form of dualism, that is to say it believed in the existence of two ultimate principles - the principle of Light and the principle of Darkness. It did not believe that the principle of Light had

originated from the principle of Darkness, nor did it believe that the principle of Darkness had originated from the principle of Light. However far back one went, it believed you would always find these two - a principle of Light and a principle of Darkness - independent of each other but sometimes in conflict with each other. And the task of man, according to Manicheism, was simply to liberate the Light in him from the Darkness in him, or the Darkness that surrounded him. And one of the most interesting features of Manicheism, again in a very general sort of way, is the fact that it stressed the importance in the spiritual life, of beauty. The Manicheans, including Mani himself, were very sensitive to beauty, and they stressed especially the importance of spiritual beauty. They seem to have been particularly sensitive to this, and they encouraged the visual arts, including - perhaps especially including - calligraphy, the art of calligraphy. And tradition has it that Mani himself, the founder of Manicheism, was a painter. In fact I'm told that in modern Persian even, the word 'Mani' does mean, even now, just "a painter". And the Manicheans set up spiritual communities which were in many respects similar to those of Buddhism. There is a possibility, according to some scholars, that Mani was influenced by Buddhism to some extent. Mani had certainly heard about the Buddha and his teachings, and refers to them in some places in his own.

Now Manicheism, arising in the Third Century AD spread very quickly, very rapidly. Its success in a way was really quite phenomenal. During Mani's own lifetime it spread throughout the Middle East; it spread throughout Iraq, throughout Persia and so on, and it very quickly spread throughout the whole Roman Empire. It even spread up into central Asia, all over central Asia. It began to spread even down into India and it spread further still right over into China. It practically reached Japan, and some scholars believe, some scholars in Buddhism, that central Asian Manicheism exerted some influence on the development, the later development, of the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. In the life of Padmasambhava, for instance, here and there you find little traces, little touches of Manicheism. But there is a very strange thing about Manicheism - about the spread of Manicheism and the fate of Manicheism. I've mentioned that it was very gentle, very pacific, very peaceful, very tolerant, very eclectic. But what was the result of this? What was the result of its gentleness, its pacifism, its tolerance? The result seems to be that wherever it went, it was extremely unpopular, everywhere it went it was hated, everywhere it went it was persecuted, and eventually it was wiped out. In the West, in the Roman Empire, it was wiped out by the Orthodox Christian Church, mercilessly crushed. In the Middle East it was exterminated by fanatical resurgent Zoroastrianism. And Mani himself was martyred by the Zoroastrians. He died a martyr's death. And even in China, faraway China, the wretched Manicheans were persecuted by Taoists and Confucianists alike.

Now I mention the case of Manicheism, not only because the tradition itself, the Manichean religion itself, is intrinsically interesting and valuable, but also to illustrate an important point which is that a spiritual community **can be destroyed**, even though it may spread as widely as Manicheism spread. In the case of Manicheism even its literature was destroyed by its enemies, and very little indeed was left. And scholars now in the Twentieth Century, from scraps and fragments, and from scrolls discovered in the desert, are painfully reconstructing the history and the teaching of Manicheism.

All right, now for just a few words on each of the three, as it were, families of spiritual communities - that is to say, the Buddhist, the Christian and the Sufi. There's no time to say very much on any of them, and in any case as I've already indicated, I'm only attempting tonight only a very rough sketch with very rough, broad, crude strokes.

First of all the **Buddhist** spiritual community. This of course is quite familiar to us, so I need not say very much about this, about this particular family, as it were, of spiritual communities. It was of course founded by Gautama the Buddha, in India, and in the course of a thousand years it spread all over Asia. And the Buddhist spiritual community, the Buddhist family of spiritual communities, consists of all those who Go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. All those who accept the ideal of Enlightenment as the highest ideal

for each and every man; those who follow the Dharma or teaching, as a means for realising the ideal, and to follow it together as fellow members of the spiritual community helping one another to tread the Path. All this of course is very familiar ground to every one of us. But what we don't always realise, perhaps, is that the Buddhist Sangha is, so to speak, the classic form of the spiritual community. Buddhism, after all, was a spiritual community from the beginning. Spiritual community didn't come in so far as Buddhism was concerned as a sort of afterthought. Buddhism, we may even say, is essentially a spiritual community. If it's not a spiritual community, it is nothing. The Sangha is an integral part of the Three Jewels at every level. And the Buddhist spiritual community, the Buddhist Sangha, the Buddhist Order, exists in two great, in two main forms - that of the Hinayana, and that of the Mahayana.

In the Hinayana, or better Theravada, countries of south east Asia, the spiritual community tends rather to be identified with the monastic community, but in the Mahayana countries of the extreme North and the East of Asia the spiritual community is identified rather with monks and lay people alike, and here the great unifying factor is not so much historically speaking the Three Refuges, as the Bodhisattva Ideal. Again this is well known I think to everybody. I've gone over this ground before, I need not repeat what I've said on previous occasions.

So secondly the Christian spiritual community or the Christian family of spiritual communities. This was originally, of course, the Church, that is to say, originally, in the sense that at the very beginnings of Christianity, as far as we can see - they are very obscure - the Church or Churches. That whole period is shrouded in darkness and controversy. But in the Fifth Century, we know, Christianity became the official religion of the whole Roman Empire, and when it became established in this way, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it virtually ceased to be a spiritual community. It became an aspect of the group, the ecclesiastical wing of the State. It became even, eventually, a political power in its own right, claiming political authority, political control, and increasingly, through the centuries, it became, especially in the form of the Roman Catholic church, authoritarian, intolerant, coercive and persecuting. And one must even confess that the seeds of this development were present in Christianity from the very beginning, perhaps present in, implicit in all forms of monotheism. However, within official Christianity itself, there was a new development. Spiritual communities arose within official Christianity, to some extent almost in protest against it and these were the monasteries, the monastic communities, and there one tended to find the real Christians, the real individuals, the real spiritual communities. And the monasteries, as everybody knows, played a very important part in European history during the Dark Ages, that is to say, from the collapse of the Roman Empire up to, say roughly, the time of Charlemagne. The monasteries, it was, that were the centres of civilization and culture. They preserved much of the ancient classical Latin and even Greek literature, and in this connection, the Benedictine Order is of particular importance. The Benedictine Order was founded by St. Benedict, in the Sixth Century in Italy. It wasn't so much an order, it was more a loose association of autonomous monasteries, each under its own abbot, and some of these monasteries and some of these abbots eventually became very, very powerful, even economically and politically powerful. So again the same sort of thing happened as had happened in the case of the Church. The original spiritual community, the monasteries themselves, ceased to be spiritual communities. This is by about say, the 9th, 10th or 11th Century - they became groups, they became part of the Church in the narrow socio-political, ecclesiastical sense, and once again there arose a need for reform. And in the Twelfth Century there came the Cistercians, the Cistercian monastic movement; in the Thirteenth Century there came the Franciscans and the Dominicans, the Mendicant Friars and various other spiritual movements at the same time. Very often we don't realise what a tremendous spiritual ferment there was in the Europe of those days. And some of these other spiritual movements that arose at that time, in the Twelfth Century, the Thirteenth Century, even the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, were quite heretical by orthodox Christian standards, like for instance the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and they were persecuted ruthlessly and relentlessly by the Church and eventually, in many cases, stamped out. In fact we may say that from the Thirteenth Century onwards the Christian Church in Europe became almost entirely, almost exclusively, a repressive force.

But in the Sixteenth Century (as you see we're having a very, very rapid survey of European religious history indeed) in the Sixteenth Century there came a great explosion, as one might have expected, especially in Central Europe and Western Europe. And this explosion we call the Reformation. And this great explosion gave birth to many spiritual communities, both large and small, all more or less Christian. Some of them lasted only a few months, some lasted for years, in a very, very few cases even for centuries. And then in the Seventeenth Century there came another great explosion, this time in England, what we call the Puritan revolution and this gave birth to still more spiritual communities, but few of these again, lasted very long. The best known of them, perhaps, though one of the shortest lived, being the Diggers. Those that did survive, those spiritual communities of this period that did survive became, in the end, virtually churches, for instance, the Quakers.

So from all this we can see that spiritual communities have played quite an important part in European history, though largely an unacknowledged part. Quite recently I was reading a very interesting book entitled 'Communalism' by the American poet and critic, Kenneth Rexworth, who has also produced some versions in English of Chinese and Japanese Ch'an and Zen poetry. In fact I found this book 'Communalism' so interesting and so relevant in many ways to the FWBO that I've reviewed it for the next issue of "the Newsletter". It's a history of communes and what he calls "intentional communities" from the earliest times down to the Twentieth Century, mainly as occurring in Europe and the North American continent. And reading through this book, "Communalism", one gets a very definite impression - at least I got a very definite impression, a very strong impression - it's a very rich, a very fascinating book with lots of detail, lots of information, also very popularly written - but I got a very strong overall impression nonetheless, and the impression that I got was that for hundreds of years, for a thousand years, two thousand years in the West, a great battle had been going on, a battle between the so-called religious group, i.e. the official Church on the one hand, and on the other the various spiritual communities. And this was a battle between power on the one hand and metta on the other. Between authority on the one hand and spiritual freedom on the other, between stagnation on the one hand and growth on the other; between reactivity on the one hand and creativity on the other. So it's not very difficult at this point to see just where the WBO comes in. But before I make the connection I must say a few words about our third family of spiritual communities, that is to say, the Sufi.

So thirdly, the Sufi spiritual community or family of spiritual communities. I need not say very much about this family of spiritual communities I think, not that it isn't important spiritually speaking, historically important, it is very important indeed, but it's not so immediately relevant as the others are, to us. There are many Sufi brotherhoods scattered all over the Islamic world, and they usually have rather ambiguous relationships with orthodox Islam. Some orthodox Muslims don't like the Sufis at all, and no doubt the Sufis are sometimes, or even very often, from the orthodox Islamic point of view, somewhat heretical. Some Sufis have even been executed by the Muslim authorities for heretical statements. Probably the Sufis inherit some ideas from neo-Platonism, even from Manicheism, even from Buddhism and Hinduism. Anyway enough about Sufism, back to the WBO. *[Laughter]*

Let me make the connection with what I was saying about the so-called religious group, that is to say the Church and the spiritual communities. Then let me conclude. I've time only for a few words. I was going to say quite a lot on this subject, quite a lot more. I was going to say something about the nature of the WBO in relation to Eastern Buddhist tradition, the Eastern Sangha, but I've decided to leave all that to my fourth lecture. So let's just stop for the time being and see where we are because we've gone a long way, we've covered quite a lot of ground, so where are we? Well, perhaps, now we see our own place in wider perspective, perhaps we see our own place in the vision of history - when I say "we" of course I mean the WBO. And clearly we are on the side of the spiritual communities, we ourselves are a spiritual community, and since we are a Buddhist spiritual community, we can say that we are a spiritual community in a particularly pure and uncompromising form, and it is important that we remember this. It is important in fact that we remember that we are engaged in a battle. We are engaged in a battle with the group. So far as we are concerned of course it is a non-violent battle, though

that's a bit of a contradiction in terms, a non-violent battle. But the enemy, however, to use that term, will not be so particular. He never has been very particular, in this particular respect. And in this battle with the group we should not be always on the defensive - we should take the offensive too. And what does this mean? It means we should be more outward-going, we should go out and **meet people**, we should talk to them, should encourage them to become individuals, tell them about meditation, tell them about the FWBO. Don't be shy, don't hide your light under a bushel as the saying is, talk to them, tell them about everything, invite them along to the centre or the community, invite them to come on retreat. Don't just sit at your centre, like the proverbial spider in the middle of its web, just waiting for people to come along. Some **will** come along but there are lots and lots who won't come along, not in that particular way.

So we need more and more individuals, not only in the Order but in the world. We need more and more spiritual communities, and eventually the spiritual communities should, as it were, outweigh the group; light should overcome darkness; creativity overcome reactivity, and when this happens, when the spiritual communities outweigh the group, then there will be an even greater change in the world than that which took place in the Axial Age. The world will be transformed - the world will be transformed. The world will be the veritable Sukhavati.

Well, that we may say is my Vision of History and I can only hope the WBO will play its part.