

The Meaning of Orthodoxy in Buddhism: A Protest

by Sangharakshita

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Buddhism consists of a transcendental essence and a mundane expression which, though incapable of exhausting it, may yet in practice serve as the basis for the realization of that essence in its fullness. One of the most important parts of the mundane expression is the various collections of words which, after existing for centuries as oral traditions, were committed to writing and preserved in the form of sacred Scriptures. Buddhism being universal, in the sense that its mundane expression constitutes the Means to Enlightenment for all sentient beings, it was inevitable that the question of translating these Scriptures from the original Sanskrit and Pali into other languages should eventually arise. While it is doubtful whether any language is intrinsically more capable of designating transcendental verities than all other forms of human speech, the importance of rendering the words of the Scriptures by their truest possible equivalents in other languages was from the very first widely recognized in Buddhist circles. Speaking of the Tibetan translators working at the beginning of the 9th century CE, Dr George Roerich says "The translators had to follow, of course, the rules laid down by the early Tibetan translators and embodied in the Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionaries, two of which are included in the Tengyur Collection of the *Tripitaka*, which enjoined translators not to change the order of words in verses, unless this was absolutely necessary. When translating Sanskrit prose into Tibetan, the translators were permitted to give free translation of the Sanskrit original, but were explicitly forbidden to coin new terms. When this was unavoidable, they were directed to report the matter to a special Tribunal, called "The Tribunal of the Doctrine of the Blessed One" attached to the royal palace."¹ Closely connected with the question of finding or inventing Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongolian words which would accurately render the doctrinal terms of the original Sanskrit texts, was that of the propriety of utilizing already existing religious and philosophical terms of rather broad connotation, not only for the work of translation but for the more general purpose of describing or defining Buddhism as a whole in relation to the culture and civilization whereto the language into which its texts were being translated belonged. The more ancient the civilization, and the more highly developed its language, the more acute was the form in which this latter part of the question arose. But since, with the exception of China, Buddhism spread to countries with a standard of culture much lower than that of India it was the problems of translation rather than of interpretation and evaluation that demanded attention. Buddhism and Buddhist culture were so obviously and incontestably superior to anything of indigenous origin that they were simply swallowed whole. In modern times the situation is almost exactly the reverse.

While the translation of Buddhist texts into modern, especially Western, languages, and the interpretation of Buddhism from the modern, which is to say the scientific and secular, point of view have proceeded hand in hand, one and the same person frequently performing both offices, it certainly cannot be said that their qualitative improvement has been equal. There is a world of difference between Müller's and Conze's translations of the *Vajrachhedika Sutra*, for example, or between Bennett's and Rhys Davids' renditions of the *Digha-Nikaya*, but there is *not* a corresponding difference between the average general popular book or article about Buddhism of 1889 and its counterpart of 1959.² Translators are now almost as wary in their choice of words as their Tibetan and Chinese predecessors, and very recently, in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, an attempt has been made to systematize and co-ordinate the terms used in translating from six Buddhist canonical languages which recalls the conscientiousness of Dr Roerich's 9th century Tibetan translators. But writers of books and articles on Buddhism continue to be inexcusably careless in their use of general religious and philosophical terms. Whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, they do not hesitate to fling about them the most ambiguous expressions without pausing to explain, or apparently even to reflect, in what sense they are using them, or if they are applicable to Buddhism at all. Hardly one such writer has been able to advance beyond a little inconclusive discussion as to whether Buddhism is or is not a 'religion'. Strange to say, even those whose conscientiousness as translators is beyond reproach can become shockingly careless when called upon to generalize about Buddhism. A particularly glaring example of such a lapse occurs in an article published in the (at the time of writing) latest number of *The Middle Way*, journal of the well known London Buddhist Society. In taking this example as the starting point of our enquiry into the Meaning of Orthodoxy in Buddhism we intend no disrespect to the very distinguished authoress, from the greatness of whose achievement in the field of Pali Buddhist studies it is beyond our power to detract. We take it for two main reasons. Firstly, because of its intrinsic importance, involving as it does a failure to comprehend the very nature of The Dharma, and secondly because it reflects a misunderstanding extremely widespread even in quarters ostensibly Buddhist.

At the beginning of an otherwise unexceptionable paper on *Women in Early Buddhism* Miss I.B. Horner, speaking quite incidentally of the Theravadins, says of them that they 'probably form the oldest and certainly the most orthodox school of Buddhism'.³ With the purely historical question of the relative antiquity of the Theravada we are not now concerned. Our concern is with a much more vital question. What exactly does Miss Horner mean when she describes the Theravadins as the 'most orthodox' school of Buddhism? Why is it that whereas while still in her own field, the linguistic and historical, she ventures a cautious 'probably', no sooner does she trespass on doctrinal preserves than she boldly comes out with her 'certainly'? Has she pondered long and deeply all the implications of 'orthodox' as well as the doctrinal position of the Theravadins before deciding, with full awareness of the momentousness of the step she was thus taking, that the one was the best possible qualification for the other? Does

she realize that in describing the Theravadins as ‘certainly the most orthodox’ school of Buddhism she has in effect asserted, with equal decision, that the non-Theravadin schools are less orthodox, or unorthodox, or even positively heretical? Could she, if questioned, tell us in what the greater orthodoxy of the Theravada consists, or what it is that the Yogacara and the Madhyamaka – to name no other schools – lack that they should be considered less orthodox? In other words, did Miss Horner really think before transferring the term in question from a Christian to a specifically Buddhist context? We believe it can be shown that she did not think, or even if she did think, that she thought wrongly.

Before this can be done it will be necessary for us to have a clearer understanding of the meaning – or meanings – of orthodoxy and of the nature of Buddhism than generally obtains even among those who are most accustomed to use these terms. If reliance can be placed upon dictionaries, ‘orthodox’, from the Greek *ortho*, right, true + *doxos*, opinion, can be used within its immediate context of Christian tradition and Western culture to express three distinct though not unrelated groups of meanings:

‘1. Sound in opinion or doctrine, especially in religious doctrine; hence, holding the Christian faith as formulated in the great church creeds and confessions; – opposed to heretical and heterodox; as, an *orthodox* Christian. 2. According to, or congruous with, the doctrines of Scripture, especially interpreted in some standard, as the creed of a church, the decree of a council, or the like; as, an *orthodox* opinion, book, etc. 3. Conventional; as, an *orthodox* greeting.’

Since the implications of these definitions will be more fully unfolded when we come to enquire whether anything corresponding to them can be discovered in Buddhism we refrain from amplifying them now. The less easily determined question of the nature of Buddhism will no doubt be advanced at least one degree towards solution if, dropping the modern Western coinage, we revert to the original Buddhist usage (still the rule in Buddhist lands) and speak simply of the Dharma. It then becomes possible for us to go straight to the Scriptures and find out what the Buddha himself had to say on the subject. That we go to the Pali *Tipitaka* rather than to the Sanskrit canonical texts is not due to any prejudice in favour of its relative priority or superiority but only because the Hinayana scriptures are revered by the Mahayanists no less than by the Hinayanists themselves and we wish to arrive at a definition of the Dharma acceptable to all from sources which all regard as authentic. Three passages will suffice for our purposes. The first is the discourse in which the Buddha relates the well known Parable of the Raft:

‘Just as a man, brethren, who has started on a long journey sees before him a great stretch of water, on this side full of doubts and fears, on the further side safe and free from fears: but there is no boat to cross in, no causeway for passing over from this side to the other side. Then he thinks thus: “Here is a great stretch of water ... but there is no boat....

How now if I were to gather together grass, sticks, branches, and leaves, bind them into a raft, and resting on that raft paddle with hands and feet and so come safe to the further shore?"

'Then, brethren, that man gathers together sticks ... and comes to the further shore. When he has crossed over and come to the other side he thinks thus: "This raft has been of great use to me. Resting on this raft and paddling with hand and foot I have come to the further shore. Suppose now I were to set this raft on my head or to lift it on to my shoulders and go on my ways?"

'Now what think ye, brethren? Would that man in so doing have finished with that raft?'

'Surely not Lord.'

'Doing what then, brethren, would that man have finished with that raft? Herein, brethren, that man who has crossed and gone to the further shore should think thus: "This raft has been of great use to me. Resting on it I have crossed to the further shore. Suppose now I haul up this raft on the shore, or sink it in the water and go my ways!" By so doing, brethren, that man would have finished with that raft.

'Even so, brethren, using the figure of a raft have I shown you the Dharma, as something to leave behind, not to take with you. Thus, brethren, understanding the figure of the raft, must ye leave the Dharma behind, not to speak of what is not the Dharma.'⁴

No less decisive are the words addressed by the Enlightened One to Mahapajapati Gotami, his aunt and foster-mother, who had asked Him for a teaching hearing which she might dwell alone, solitary, zealous, ardent, and resolved:

'Of whatsoever teachings, Gotamid, thou canst assure thyself thus: "These doctrines conduce to passions, not to dispassion; to bondage, not to detachment; to increase of [worldly] gains, not to decrease of them; to covetousness, not to frugality; to discontent, and not content; to company, not solitude; to sluggishness, not energy; to delight in evil, not delight in good": of such teachings thou mayest with certainty affirm, Gotamid, "This is not the Dharma. This is not the discipline. This is not the Master's Message."

'But of whatsoever teachings thou canst assure thyself [that they are the opposite of these things that I have told you], – of such teachings thou mayest with certainty affirm: "This is the Dharma. This is the Discipline. This is the Master's Message".'⁵

Lastly, there is the conversation which took place, shortly after the Mahaparinirvana, between Ananda, the cousin and in his last years the constant companion of the Buddha, and the young Brahmin Subha. Subha says:

‘ “You Ananda, were for a long time the attendant of the Venerable Gotama, intimate with him, keeping near him. You would know what are the doctrines He extolled, the doctrines with which He aroused people and in which He established them. What are those doctrines?”

“Young man, there were three groups of that which the Exalted One extolled, with which He aroused people, and in which He established them: the noble group relating to morality (*sila*); the noble group relating to *samadhi*; and the noble group relating to wisdom and insight (*paa*, Skt. *praja*)”.’⁶

From these passages emerge a number of points which will be of assistance to us in establishing a definition of the Dharma. First and foremost, the Dharma is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. That end is Enlightenment (*sambodhi*), the ‘further shore’ of the Buddha’s Parable. To sacrifice the end to the means, by clinging on to it when it has served its purpose, is a procedure as foolish as that of the man who hoisted the raft onto his back after reaching the further shore. The behaviour of those who cling to the raft without even having made use of it to cross the river is by implication more foolish still. Both commit the mistake of endowing what possesses relative value with absolute value, and are thus prevented, the one from making further progress, the other from making any progress at all. Second, the question of what constitutes the content of the Means to Enlightenment – of what materials are most suitable for the construction of the raft – is to be determined not on theoretical grounds but in a strictly practical manner, by being submitted to the test of experience. Third, the experience of the Buddha, and of those who have trodden in His footsteps, reveals that neither the extreme of self-indulgence nor the extreme of self-mortification constitutes the Means to Enlightenment: that Means is made up of various moral and disciplinary observances collectively known as *sila*, Morality, exercises for concentrating the mind and raising the level of consciousness, *samadhi* or Meditation, and transcendental insight into the conditioned and unsubstantial nature of all phenomena, *praja* or Wisdom. The second and third of these ‘noble groups’ arise in dependence on the one immediately preceding, Meditation in dependence on Morality, and Wisdom in dependence on Meditation. Thus we see that the Dharma may be briefly defined as the Means to Enlightenment, ‘Means’ being understood to connote methods which have been tested by being put into practice and which have been found efficacious, i.e. Morality, Meditation, and Wisdom.

In Buddhism or the Dharma – to treat for the time being the modern coinage and the traditional term as synonymous – as thus defined is it possible to discover a term the denotation and connotation of which corresponds to the Western and Christian conception of orthodoxy as embodied in the definition given above? What, in other words, is the meaning of orthodoxy in Buddhism? The exact literal equivalent of ‘orthodoxy’ is not hard to find. As we have pointed out elsewhere,⁷ the word *sammaditthi* (Skt. *samyakdrsti*) – from *samma*, right, correct, true – *ditthi*, view, opinion, belief, doctrine – corresponds to it perfectly. But though the

denotation of the two terms is the same, their respective connotations differ as sharply as do Christianity and Buddhism themselves. In its natal European-Christian context orthodoxy means, as we have seen, '1. Sound in opinion or doctrine, especially in religious doctrine; hence, holding the Christian faith as formulated in the great church creeds and confessions; – opposed to heretical and heterodox; as, an *orthodox* Christian.' While *sammaditthika* does, of course, mean 'sound in opinion or doctrine, especially in religious doctrine' what is sound for one 'religion' is by no means necessarily so for the other. Just as in a Christian context orthodoxy implies being a Christian, in a Buddhist context it means being a Buddhist. From this point, therefore, the correspondence begins to break down. It is not possible to speak of the Buddhist faith as having been formulated in great church creeds and confessions. The Buddhist councils, unlike those of the Christian Church, were, as their name (*sangiti*, from *sam*, together + *gayati*, to recite) suggests, convened mainly for the recitation (in later centuries also for the recording) of the teachings recognized by one or another branch of the Sangha as authentic, that is, as being the very Word of the Buddha: doctrinal and disciplinary matters occupied a comparatively minor place in the agenda.⁸ Buddhism does, however, possess a number of formulae, of great antiquity and authority, and 'orthodoxy', i.e. *sammaditthika* is often defined in terms of belief in one or more of these. When enumerated as the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path, for instance, *sammaditthi* is commonly defined as the right understanding of the Four Noble Truths of Pain (*dukkha*), the Arising of Pain (*dukkha-samudaya*), the Cessation of Pain (*dukkha-nirodha*), and the Way Leading to the Cessation of Pain (*dukkha-nirodha-gamini-patipada*) which is, of course, the Noble Eightfold Path itself. Other definitions include *sammaditthi* as the understanding of the impermanence of the five *khandhas* – another well known formula – and as the understanding of the conditionality of all phenomena. But besides differing in accordance with the kind of object to which it is directed *sammaditthi* itself is of two kinds in accordance with whether it arises at the mundane or the transcendental level. In an interesting and important text the Buddha declares:

'I tell you, O Monks, there are two kinds of right understanding: the understanding that it is good to give alms and offerings, that both good and evil actions will bear fruit and be followed by results;... this, O Monks, is an understanding which, though still being subject to biases, is meritorious, yields worldly fruits, and brings good results. But whatever there is of wisdom, of penetration, of right understanding conjoined with the [transcendental] Path – the holy Path being [actually] pursued – this is called the transcendental right understanding (*lokuttara-sammaditthi*), which is not of the world, but which is transcendental and conjoined with the Path.'⁹

Just as an object may be lit up now by a beam of white light, now by a beam of red, so the doctrinal formulae of the Four Noble Truths, the five *khandhas* etc., can be the objects of both the mundane and the transcendental kinds of *sammaditthi*. According to the Theravadin commentarial tradition there are five kinds or stages of right understanding: *kammasakata-sammaditthi*, *jhana-sammaditthi*,

vipassana-sammaditthi, *magga-sammaditthi*, *phala-sammaditthi*. The first of these is identical with the mundane right understanding of the text just quoted, while the third, fourth, and fifth are subdivisions of transcendental right understanding. The second, *jhana-sammaditthi*, in a sense occupies an intermediate position, being defined by a modern expositor as ‘the right view held by those, who have attained the Jhanas which are worldly, that there are good resultant effects to be obtained from purity of morals and purity of mind which are based on the knowledge that good kamma produces good results’.¹⁰

Orthodoxy being negatively defined as ‘opposed to heretical and heterodox’ additional light may be thrown on the meaning of orthodoxy in Buddhism if we can discover the Pali-Sanskrit antonym of *sammaditthi*. Such an antonym is *micchaditthi* (Skt. *mithyadrsti*), literally wrong or false view. This is defined both negatively as absence of *sammaditthi*, as in the case of the view that phenomenal existence does not necessarily involve suffering (a denial of the First Noble Truth), and positively as the actual presence either of *sassata-ditthi*, the ‘Eternalist’ view, and *uccheda-ditthi*, the ‘Nihilist’ view. The first kind of wrong view is a general term for all such doctrines as posit the existence of an unchanging principle, be it *atman* or Brahman, which underlies and supports the changing psycho-physical phenomena which are all that really compose the so-called individual and the ‘world’ in which he lives. In *micchaditthi* so defined are also included all forms of Theism, the belief in a personal Creator God (*issaranimmanavada*) being according to Buddhism a positive hindrance to spiritual progress. The second kind of wrong view covers such beliefs as that there is no life after death, that actions are in reality neither good nor bad, and that everything happens by accident, that is, without a cause. Indirect confirmation of the tremendous importance which Buddhism attaches to doctrinal orthodoxy is supplied by the fact that according to the Theravadin Abhidhamma tradition confirmed wrong view (*niyata-micchaditthi*) is classified as a *garuka akusala-kamma*, or ‘weighty’ unwholesome volition. A weighty karma, which may be either wholesome or unwholesome, is one whose effects cannot be counteracted by any other karma: they are inevitable. The five heinous offences (*pacanantariyakamma*) – causing schism in the Sangha, shedding the blood of a Buddha, killing an Arahant, matricide, and parricide – are also classified as *garuka-kamm*s, but so terrible an offence is *micchaditthi* that its effects take precedence even of those produced by the ‘heinous offences’. What the effects of *micchaditthi* actually are the Buddha Himself has made sufficiently clear:

‘For him that hath wrong view, Punna, one of two things is in store, I declare: either rebirth in purgatory or in the world of animals.’¹¹

Again:

‘Whatsoever individual, brethren, follows perverted views (*micchaditthi*), perverted aim (*micchasankappa*), perverted speech (*micchavaca*) or acts (*kammanta*) or living (*ajiva*), perverted effort (*micchavayamo*), attention (*sati*) and contemplation (*samadhi*); whose

knowledge and emancipation are perverted, – for him every action of deed, word, or thought, performed and achieved according to such perverted views; every willed act, every aspiration, every resolve, all his activities, these things one and all conduce to what is distasteful, unpleasing, repulsive, unprofitable, and painful. And why so? Because of his evil view (*micchaditthi*’.¹²

These terrible words should be enough to jolt us into awareness of the crucial importance of right doctrine. They certainly make us feel that Swami Vivekananda’s famous remark that the Buddha taught simply ‘be good and do good’ is probably the silliest of all the silly things that have been said about Buddhism! But though *micchaditthi*, as the antonym of *sammaditthi*, has the same denotation as ‘heterodox’ and ‘heretical’ by no means does it have the same connotation. According to the dictionary, heresy means ‘religious opinion opposed to the authorized doctrinal standards of any particular church, especially when held by a person holding the same general faith, and tending to promote schism or separation.’ The Puggalavadins, an early Hinayana school now extinct – though their heresy seems to survive, especially among Western Buddhists – are rightly termed heretical because despite their disclaimers their doctrine that the individual was neither the same as, nor different from, the *skandhas*, nor yet both the same and different, nor neither the same nor different, amounted to a repudiation of the doctrine of *anatman*. But to translate – as even Conze and Suzuki do – the term *tirthika*, meaning a non-Buddhist ‘ford-maker’ or religious teacher, by ‘heretic’ is quite wrong; for the *tirthakara* does not hold ‘the same general faith’ as the Buddhist, and not being a member of the Sangha, nor even of the lay Buddhist community, there can be no question of his doctrines, however erroneous, ‘tending to promote schism or separation’. In other words there are really two kinds of *micchaditthi*. One is that of the man who, since he adheres to ‘the same general faith’ as the rest of the Buddhist community, despite his ‘wrong view’ on this or that point of doctrine remains a Buddhist, though a heretic. The other is that of the man who, without professing Buddhism, adheres to one or more of the ‘wrong views’ already enumerated. We avoid the second kind of *micchaditthi* by the mere fact that we are Buddhists. But from the first kind we escape only by being orthodox Buddhists. Just as when defining *micchaditthi* as ‘heresy’ we must be careful not to make the definition so wide that it includes the errors of non-Buddhists, so in defining orthodox Buddhism we should not make it so wide as to be merely a definition of Buddhism. Transferring the term ‘orthodox’ from the old Christian to the new Buddhist context more carefully than Miss Horner seems to have done, we may now define it, in its primary sense of doctrinally orthodox, as ‘1. Of Right Views (*sammaditthika*); hence, adhering to the Dharma of the Buddha as formulated in the stereotype formulae such as the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*) without inclining either to the extreme of Eternalism (*sassatavada*) or the extreme of Nihilism (*ucchedavada*); – opposed to Wrong Views (*micchaditthi*), both in the wider sense of the erroneous beliefs of non-Buddhists and the narrower one of a

misunderstanding of the Dharma by one who has taken the Three Refuges; as, an *orthodox* bhikshu’.

What we may call scripturally orthodox, the second of the three main senses in which in its original Christian context the word orthodox may be used, has already been defined as ‘2. According to, or congruous with, the doctrines of Scripture, especially interpreted in some standard, as the creed of a church, the decree of a council, or the like; as, an *orthodox* opinion, book etc.’ Between this kind of orthodoxy and the first there is in a Buddhist context not much difference, though at first sight the situation would appear to be complicated by the fact that, unlike the Christians and Muslims at least, the Buddhists possess not one sacred book but many. Whereas to all Christians the Bible is the Word of God, and to all Muslims the *Koran*, the Buddhists possess three great collections of sacred literature all of which have been invested, by their respective devotees, with canonical authority. In Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Cambodia, and Laos, the Pali *Tipitaka* is regarded as being alone the Word of the Buddha. Ignoring even the evidence of the *Tipitaka* itself, certain modern Theravadins insist that it contains the whole Teaching of the Buddha, and nothing but that Teaching, *exactly* as He delivered it personally to His disciples. The versions of the Dharma handed down by other traditions and preserved in other languages are contemptuously rejected, without examination, as being necessarily corruptions and forgeries. In Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Ladakh, as well as in the north-eastern and north-western Himalayan regions of India, the *Kagyur* and the *Tangyur* – translated from Buddhist Sanskrit originals and collected in the fourteenth century – occupy a similar position. The first, regarded as the Word of the Buddha, contains the *Tripitaka* and the Four Great *Tantras*; the second consists mainly of commentaries and treatises by distinguished *acaryas*. Both exist in a Mongolian version which enjoys canonical status within its own sphere of influence.

Still more voluminous than these three-hundred and odd volumes is the Chinese *Tripitaka*, which also consists of translations from Sanskrit Buddhist originals, though Tantric literature is less well represented. This collection is venerated as canonical not only in China, but also in Japan, where it underwent considerable augmentation from indigenous sources, as well as in Korea and Vietnam and the other cultural dependencies of China. In addition to these three great collections there exist numerous original Sanskrit texts, of various types, together with recently discovered fragments of *sutras* and other works in minor languages hitherto largely unknown, neither of which at present form part of any canon.

Under these circumstances it is inevitable that any attempt to define ‘orthodoxy’, in the sense of ‘according to, or congruous with, the doctrines of Scripture’, within the context of Buddhism, should be inextricably bound up with the question of what *is* Scripture. As already hinted, the difficulty is more apparent than real. Diversity of scriptures is no more disruptive of the deeply grounded unity of the Buddhist schools than the possession of a single Scripture is constitutive of a basis of genuine agreement among the Christian sects. One is a

case of essential unity underlying and indeed supporting superficial difference, the other of radical disagreement imperfectly concealed by factitious resemblance. Leaving on one side the question of the unity or disunity of Christendom, as having no immediate bearing on the topic at present pursued, let it be observed that, on a closer examination, it transpires that we have in the Pali 'Three Baskets', the Tibetan *Kagyur* and *Tangyur*, and the Chinese *Tripitaka*, not three mutually exclusive literatures, much less still three contradictory teachings, but three different recensions of what is basically the same material, three different presentations of what is essentially the same Dharma. Even a little analysis will suffice to make this quite clear. The Tibetan and Chinese canons are popularly supposed, for instance, to be the repositories of the Mahayana teaching, and the Pali Canon to be on the contrary the receptacle of the Hinayana doctrine. This is both near enough to, and far enough from, the facts to be misleading. Both the Tibetan *Kagyur* and the Chinese *Tripitaka* contain translations of the four *Agamas*, a collection of Buddhist Sanskrit texts closely corresponding to the first four *Nikayas* of the Pali *Sutta-Pitaka*. That the authenticity of the *Nikayas* is generally regarded as unquestionable greatly enhances the significance of this fact. On the other hand, scattered here and there in the Pali *Tipitaka*, and attributed to the Buddha Himself, are a number of texts, mostly quite short, which strangely anticipate what the Theravadins, ignoring even the testimony of their own tradition, regard as the heretical 'later' developments of the Mahayana schools. Such is the striking text in which the Buddha is represented as saying:

'This consciousness (*citta*) is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed average person does not understand this as it really is. Therefore I say that for him there is no mental development.

'This consciousness is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed *ariyan* disciple understands this as it really is. Therefore I say that for him there is mental development.'¹³

This is obviously the Yogacara position. In the same way does the emphatic repudiation of all 'views' (*ditthi*) which figures so prominently in the *Atthakavagga* of the *Sutta-Nipata* – according to profane scholarship a part of the oldest literary stratum of the Pali Canon – 'anticipate' the Madhyamaka doctrine. The Mahayanist, for whom Hinayana and Mahayana are alike the Teaching of the Buddha, would of course maintain that the Pali *Tipitaka* contains vestiges of teachings which in his own tradition, both literary and oral, have been preserved in their completeness. Making systematic application of the same method of analysis it may be said that three types of texts can be distinguished: (1) Texts common, in one form or another, to all three Canons – the Tibetan, the Chinese, and the Pali. Such are the four *Agamas-Nikayas* already mentioned, and a great deal of *Vinaya* literature, besides other works. (2a) Texts common to the Tibetan and Chinese Canons, this category including practically all the great Mahayana *sutras*, such as the *Saddharma-Pundarika*, the *Lankavatara*, and the *Vajrachhedika*;

(2b) Texts common to the Tibetan and Pali Canons; and (2c) Texts common to the Chinese and Pali Canons, of which class the *Arthapada-Sutra*, corresponding to the *Atthakavagga* of the *Sutta-Nipata*, is an outstanding example. (3) Texts peculiar to one Canon, either to the Tibetan, like the *Guhyasamaja Tantra*, or to the Chinese, like the *Prajaparamita Sastra*, or to the Pali, like certain books of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*. The 'uncollected' original Sanskrit texts already mentioned may be divided in the same manner. They consist of: (1) Texts existing, in one form or another, in all three Canons. The *Mulasarvastivadin Vinaya* texts discovered at Gilgit are a good example of this class. (2) Texts of which versions exist in two Canons only, (3) in three Canons only, and (4) which are extant only in Sanskrit, no translations into Chinese and Tibetan, and no recensions of the same material in Pali, having so far been discovered. Thus it is obvious that between all three Canons, as well as between them and the 'uncollected' sacred literature, there is a good deal of mutual overlapping. Each group of texts, though as it were revolving in a different orbit and at a different angle to the others, nevertheless intersects the plane of each orbit with its own so that there is a nucleus of space which is common to all. This circumstance alone, we believe, is sufficient to demonstrate what has already been asserted, namely that the complications provoked by the fact that the Buddhists possess not one sacred book but many are more apparent than real. The first part of the definition of scripturally orthodox thus becomes, when transferred to a Buddhist context, '2. According to, or congruous with, the doctrines of the Scriptures common to all schools of Buddhism.' This is not to say, of course, that the Scriptures peculiar to each school are not orthodox. Once again it is merely a question of not making a definition wider than necessary. There is a difference between an orthodox Buddhist, as such, on the one hand, and an orthodox Mahayanist or an orthodox Hinayanist on the other. An orthodox Mahayana Buddhist would be defined as one who possesses Right Views not only with regard to the common doctrines of all schools of Buddhism but also in respect of those doctrines which differentiate the Mahayana from the Hinayana. An orthodox Hinayana Buddhist would be defined in similar terms. But at present we are concerned not with orthodoxy in this or that school of Buddhism, but simply with orthodoxy in Buddhism. Hence scriptural orthodoxy has been defined in terms of conformity with the Scriptures accepted as authentic by all schools. As in the case of the definition of doctrinally orthodox, the clause 'especially interpreted in some standard, as the creed of a church, the decree of a council, or the like' will have to be amended to 'especially as expressed in the stereotype formulae such as the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics (*tri-laksana*)'. For this reason, as already stated, there is in the Buddhist context not quite so great a difference between doctrinal and scriptural orthodoxy as there is in the Christian. Many of the stereotype formulae are embedded not only in the scriptures common to both the Hinayana and the Mahayana schools, but also in the scriptures peculiar to each. This is especially true of the great Mahayana *sutras*. As we have observed elsewhere, the scenes depicted by the Larger and Smaller *Sukhavati-Sutras*, with their rivers fifty miles wide and twelve miles deep, their jewel lotuses ten miles in circumference, and their myriads of golden-bodied Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, are very different

from the sober pictures drawn by the Pali texts; but the waves of the great rivers murmur, and the birds in the jewel trees sing, the same refrain as the Hinayana scriptures: *ducca, anicca, anatta*. Hence orthodox in its secondary sense of scripturally orthodox may be defined as '2. According to, or congruous with, the Scriptures common to all schools of Buddhism, especially as expressed in the stereotype formulae such as the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics (*tri-laksana*) which are found in both the Scriptures which are and the Scriptures which are not common to all schools; as, an *orthodox* opinion, book, etc.'

The third and last of the three main senses in which 'orthodox' may be used, '3. Conventional; as an *orthodox* greeting', will not detain us long. The means to Enlightenment, it will be remembered, is threefold, consisting of *Sila, Samadhi*, and *Praja*. According to the Theravadin tradition the first of these, *Sila* or Morality, is of two kinds, *pakati* or natural and *paati* or conventional. By *pakati-sila* is meant the so-called Morality of the Eightfold Path, that is to say Right Speech (*samma-vaca*), Right Action (*samma-kammanta*) and Right Livelihood (*samma-ajiva*). These three kinds of Natural Morality are 'right' in the sense that they are rooted in ethically wholesome states of mind (*kusala-cittani*) free from greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*); for, as we have sought to make clear in *A Survey of Buddhism*,¹⁴ Buddhist ethics being an ethics of intention the moral and spiritual value of an action is determined solely by the state of mind in which it was committed. Unlike certain other teachings, Buddhism does not deceive itself and mislead its followers by speaking in terms of committing 'bad' actions from 'good' motives. Action is the extension or prolongation of thought, thought the internal dimension of action. By *paatti-sila*, or Conventional Morality, on the other hand, is meant the purely external ecclesiastical and social observances which, since they are rooted neither in wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*) states of mind, are in themselves ethically or karmically neutral. Such being the case, it is obvious that *pakati-sila* alone constitutes part of the Means to Enlightenment, and that the observance or non-observance of *paatti-sila* is in itself devoid of ethical or spiritual significance. This radical difference between the two kinds of 'Morality' the *Sutta-Vibhanga* of the Theravadin *Vinaya-Pitaka* reflects in its division of the 220 rules binding upon the individual *bhikkhu* into eight groups, the first six of which deal with matters of natural, the last two with matters of conventional, morality. Of the first of these last two groups, which consists of the seventy-five Sekhiya rules, a modern student of the *Vinaya* writes:

'The Sekhiya rules are little more than a code regulating manners and behaviour, such as one finds in the boarding schools and barracks of Europe.... They refer to matters relating to daily procedure: how the robes should be worn, how to behave in public, how to accept food and how to eat it politely.'¹⁵

Rules of this kind obviously have a place in the life of the laymen too. But whether one enters a temple with one's shoes on, as in Tibet, or only after leaving them at the door, as in Sri Lanka and Japan, such observances are in themselves ethically irrelevant. This is not to say that they do not perform a useful, in their own

humble way even an indispensable, function, and it would be foolish to overlook the part they play in the maintenance of decency and social order. In Buddhist context the third of the three main meanings of 'orthodox' may therefore be defined simply as '3. Conventional, a matter not of natural (*pakati*) but of conventional (*paati*) Morality; as, an *orthodox* prostration.'

Having not only defined both 'Buddhism' and 'orthodoxy' separately, but also determined the meaning of orthodoxy in Buddhism, we are now in a position to investigate Miss Horner's claim that the Theravadins are 'certainly the most orthodox school of Buddhism', with its implied slur upon the orthodoxy of the other schools which, since the Theravada is the sole surviving Hinayana school, can only be those of the Mahayana. Students who are at all familiar with the Theravada and Mahayana teachings will doubtless have already anticipated our conclusions. But for the benefit of those who are less well versed in Buddhism we shall broadly indicate the outcome of the above discussions in its bearing upon the question raised by the distinguished Pali scholar's rather unfortunate assertion.

Doctrinally orthodox has been defined in Buddhist context as '1. Of Right Views (*sammaditthika*); hence, adhering to the Dharma of the Buddha as formulated in the stereotype formulae such as the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhana*) without inclining either to the extreme of Eternalism (*sassatavada*) or the extreme of Nihilism (*ucchedavada*); – opposed to Wrong Views (*micchaditthi*), both in the wider sense of the erroneous beliefs of non-Buddhists and the narrower one of a misunderstanding of the Dharma by one who has taken the Three Refuges; as, an *orthodox* bhikshu.' One who has even a slight acquaintance with the contents of the *Kagyur* and *Tangyur* or the Chinese *Tripitaka*, wherein are scattered the same great doctrinal formulae as are found in the Pali Canon, can no more doubt that the Mahayana schools possess Right Views than one who has looked up at the night sky, however casually, can doubt that it contains stars. Besides the formulae of the definition, which are as it were the main constellations, there are the Triple Training (*traisyksa – sila, samadhi, praja*), the Five Spiritual Faculties (*paca-indriya*), the Four Logical Alternatives (*catur-koti*), the eighty major and thirty-two minor Signs of a Great Man (*mahapurusalaksana*), the Five Aggregates (*paca-skandha*), the Twelve Bases (*dvadasa-ayatana*), the Eighteen Elements (*astadasa-dhatu*), the Eight Holy Ones (*asta-arya-pudgala*), the Conditioned Co-Production (*pratitya-samutpada*) in Twelve Links (*dvadasa-nidana*), the Three Refuges (*tri-sarana*), the Ten Wholesome Actions (*dasa-kausalya-karma*), the Four Sublime States (*catur-brahma-vihara*), the Thirty-seven Wings (or Constituents) of Enlightenment (*bodhipaksika-dharmah*), – and many others. To all these doctrinal categories do the Mahayanists, whether Gelukpas or Nyinmapas, followers of the Zen or devotees of the Jodo Shin Shu – subscribe as heartily as their Theravadin brethren. They, too, recognize the distinction between the mundane Right Understanding (*laukika-samyak-drsti*) that 'it is good to give alms and offerings, that both good and evil actions will bear fruit and be followed by results' and the transcendental

Right Understanding (*lokuttara-samyakdrsti*) which consists in 'whatever there is of wisdom, of penetration, of right understanding conjoined with the (*transcendental*) Path – the Holy Path being (actually) pursued.' Even if it were insisted that the five kinds or stages of *sammaditthi* distinguished by the Theravadin commentarial tradition should be accepted as the criterion of orthodoxy, the Mahayana schools would almost without exception pass the test. Indeed, they would pass it better than most modern Theravadins. For whereas the latter are as a rule extremely sceptical about the possibility of attaining the *jhanas* or superconscious states, in the present age, some of them even taking a perverse delight in asserting that they are now unattainable by anybody anywhere, the Mahayanists are quite positive that for them the attainment of these states still constitutes a part of the living tradition of Buddhism. Though certain e that for them the attainment of these states Theravadins are so confirmed in their sense of superiority as to dismiss the claims of the Mahayanists with a sneer, no one who has been so fortunate as to establish spiritual contact with a qualified representative of one or another of the great Mahayana schools can possibly entertain any doubt about the matter. When even *jhana-sammaditthi* is, on their own admission, as good as unknown to the modern Theravadins, it is difficult to credit them with the possession of the three remaining kinds or stages of *sammaditthi*, which together constitute transcendental Right Understanding (*lokuttara-sammaditthi*). Some of them do, of course, especially in Burma, lay claim to have developed *sukkha-vipassana*, 'dry insight', that is to say Wisdom which arises without any of the *jhanas* as its support. According to the Pali *Tipitaka* such a procedure is in certain cases quite admissible. But they are the exception, not the rule. For the vast majority of people the Means to Enlightenment is *Threefold*, and any attempt to eliminate *samadhi* in the full sense from this scheme – as now seems to be the case in some Burmese 'meditation' centres – will only strengthen the suspicion that a mere rational understanding of the doctrinal categories of the Dharma, especially of the so-called *Abhidhamma*, has been mistaken for Transcendental Wisdom. Taking all these points into consideration, it would appear that, even according to the strictest Theravadin standards, the Mahayana schools possess Right Views in fuller measure than the modern Theravadins themselves and are therefore entitled to be considered not less but more orthodox than the latter! No less certain is it that, both in a general way and in their interpretation of the doctrinal formulae of Buddhism, the Mahayanists adhere to the Middle Path and avoid both Eternalism (*sassatavada*) and Nihilism (*ucchedavada*), the two extremes which together constitute Wrong Views (*micchaditthi*) or heresy. In fact the two most prominent 'philosophical' schools of the Mahayana – the Sunyavada of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva and the Yogacara of Maitreyanatha, Asanga and Vasubandhu – are alternatively designated the Madhyamikavada and the Madhyantavada respectively, both terms meaning 'The Doctrine of the Mean'. This is in itself of the greatest significance. We were formerly accustomed to hearing the Mahayana schools upbraided, by both Western non-Buddhist scholars who had 'studied' a little of their literature and Theravadins who had studied none, for their alleged lapses into either Eternalism or Nihilism in one or another of their numerous metamorphoses. But

now, with fresh accessions of literature, and a more intelligent and sympathetic method of study, it would appear that the Mahayana schools, especially the Madhyamikavada, represent not a deviation into one or the other heretical extreme, but a systematic vindication of the principle of the Middle Path as the fundamental postulate of Buddhist thought. How thoroughgoing is Nagarjuna's repudiation of all one-sided views about Nirvana, for example, may be illustrated by the following verses from his *magnum opus* the *Madhyamika-Karika*, in which he objects to its being defined as being, as non-being, as both being and non-being, and as neither being nor non-being:

The Buddha has declared
That Being and non-Being should be both rejected.
Neither as Being nor as non-Being
Nirvana therefore is conceived.

If Nirvana were both Being and non-Being
Final deliverance would be also both,
Reality and unreality together.
This never could be possible!

If Nirvana were both Being and non-Being,
Nirvana could not be uncaused.
Indeed both Being and non-Being
Are dependent on causation.

How can Nirvana represent
Being and non-Being together?
Nirvana is indeed uncaused,
Both Being and non-Being are productions.

How can Nirvana represent
[The place of] Being and of non-Being together?
As light and darkness [in one spot]
They cannot simultaneously be present.

If it were clear, indeed,
What Being means, and what non-Being,
We could then understand the doctrine
About Nirvana being Neither Being nor non-Being

If Nirvana is neither Being nor non-Being
No one can really understand
This doctrine which proclaims at once
Negation of them both together.¹⁶

No less uncompromising is a passage in the *Lankavatara Sutra* which since this *sutra* is rejected by the Theravadins as uncanonical, will be in their eyes merely an expression of the 'heretical' opinions of the Yogacarins. The Buddha is represented as saying:

'I remember, Mahamati, when I was staying in a certain place, a Brahman Lokayatika approached where I was and having approached suddenly asked me, saying: Gautama, is all created?

'I said this to him: Brahman, if all is created, this is the first school of materialism.

'Gautama, is all uncreated?

'Brahman, if all is uncreated, this is the second school of materialism. Thus to state that all is non-eternal, or that all is eternal, or that all is born, or that all is unborn, this, Brahman, is the sixth school of materialism.

'Again, Mahamati, the Brahman Lokayatika said this to me: Gautama, is all one? Is all different? Is all characterized with bothness? Is all characterized with not-bothness? Is all to be regarded as subject to causation since all is seen as born of varieties of causes?

'This, Brahman, is the tenth school of materialism.

'Again, Gautama, is all explainable? Is all unexplainable? Is there an ego-soul? Is there no ego-soul? Is this world real? Is this world not-real? Is there another world? Is there no other world? Is another world existent or non-existent? Is there emancipation? Is there no emancipation? Is all momentary? Is all not momentary? Are space, Apratisamkhaya-nirodha, and Nirvana, O Gautama, are they created or uncreated? Is there the middle existence? Is there no middle existence?

'I then said this to him, Mahamati: If so, Brahman, this is materialism. It is not mine.'¹⁷

Even when confronted by such passages as these, which exhibit scrupulous eschewal of all extreme Wrong Views (*mithyadrsti*), some Theravadins may persist in doubting the strict doctrinal orthodoxy of the Mahayana schools. In most cases they will object that, whatever texts are quoted to the contrary, the Mahayana is in effect a theistic development of the Dharma and as such a deviation from the Middle Path of Right Views into the extreme of Eternalism (*sassatavada*), one of the two principal forms of heresy (*micchaditthi*). Responsibility for this misunderstanding, which is so widespread as to require a few words of refutation, can be laid fairly and squarely on the shoulders of the professional Orientalists, both European and Indian. At the back of the minds of these learned but far from enlightened folk there lurked, we suspect, the typically Semitic belief that worship and devotion are the prerogative of God alone, with its corollary that whatever is set up as an object of worship and devotion is necessarily regarded as God in the full theistic sense. When, therefore, in the course of their profane hence quite superficial study of the literary and other products of the Mahayana movement, they found the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas regarded with an intensity of love and devotion hitherto unexampled in Buddhist history they at once jumped to the conclusion that they had been

'deified'. This misunderstanding crystalized in particular around the persons of the Adi-Buddha and Amitabha, both of Whom, it was contended, were Creator Gods. A better acquaintance with textual sources, as well as a less confident application of Western conceptual categories to Buddhist spiritual experience, has now made it clear that, in the context of Buddhism, there is no necessary connection between an increase of faith and devotion and a tendency to endow the object of faith and devotion with theistic attributes. Both Govinda and Guenther have contested the idea that the Adi-Buddha represents an irruption of theism into the Mahayana. Protests the former:

'One cannot arbitrarily transplant the termini of a theistic system, centred round the idea of a God creator, into a non-theistic system which emphatically and fundamentally denies the notion of a God Creator. From such a confusion of terminology arises the mistaken idea that the Adibuddha, of the later *Tantras* is nothing but another version of the God Creator, which would be a complete reversal of the Buddhist point of view. The Adibuddha, however, is the symbol of the universality, timelessness and completeness of the enlightened mind....'¹⁸

Guenther is no less emphatic:

'The Adibuddha in the *Kalacakra-tantra* is not a theistic hypothesis, but the bold statement that we are the Buddha from the very beginning and that Wisdom has never ceased lovingly and bliss-conferringly to embrace us, which we failed to realize because of our deep sleep in ignorance. Naropa declares that "the word *adi* (commonly translated by 'beginning') means without beginning and end; *buddha* means one who has awakened to the fact that all things are in harmony; *adi* and *buddha* together form *Adibuddha*. The Meaning is: without origination and annihilation; omniscient. As has been said in the *Namasangiti*, 'Without beginning and end, awakened (is the) Adibuddha without any distinctive parts.' " '¹⁹

Even as long ago as 1927 Evans-Wentz, on the authority of his Sikkimese Guru, Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdub, stated:

'The opinion commonly held by men not initiated into the higher *lamaic* teachings, that Northern Buddhism recognizes in the Primordial or Adi-Buddha a Supreme Deity, is apparently erroneous.'²⁰

As regards Amitabha, Japanese scholars writing in English and other Western languages have shown that, however great the devotion He attracts, He is never regarded as a Supreme Deity in the Semitic sense. Kenryo Kanamatsu, a modern scholar and devotee of the Jodo Shin Shu, defines Amitabha as 'a personification of the Infinite in the enlightened spiritual consciousness of the Shakyamuni'.²¹ So invincible is learned ignorance, however, that in the same volume in which

appears Govinda's article on *Principles of Tantric Buddhism* appear the following prize specimens of scholarly imbecility:

'They [the Mahasanghikas and their offshoots] were the first school to deify the Buddha and the Bodhisattva, which ultimately led to the complete deification of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva in Mahayana, and to the consequent popularity of the religion among the masses.'²²

And again:

'Mahayana Buddhism turned the human Buddha, Shakyamuni, into an eternal and supreme deity presiding over the world, ready to grant boons to devotees.'²³

Since one misunderstanding leads, sooner or later, to another, we are not astonished to find, on the next page, the learned author hastening to develop one of the favourite theses of Hindu scholars in Buddhism:

'It may therefore be assumed that the evolution of the original atheistic Buddhism into theistic Mahayanism was a result of the religious fervour of its adherents under the dominating influence of theistic Hinduism through the centuries.'²⁴

The more militant modern Theravadins may open fire on the Mahayanists for alleged heresy, but it is obviously the Orientalists who manufacture the bullets! A little reflection might, however, convince these champions of orthodoxy that, if the grounds adduced by the Orientalists are correct, they are themselves open to the very accusation which is hurled against the Mahayana schools. As we have shown in *A Survey of Buddhism*, the Pali *Tipitaka* contains some magnificent outbursts of devotion to the Buddha,²⁵ but from this fact the Theravadins have never drawn the conclusion that they were committed to Theism. Like all other schools of Buddhism, including those of the Mahayana, they have ever combined uncompromising adherence to atheism with staunch devotion to the person of the Buddha as Teacher of Gods and Men. To those who, consciously or unconsciously, accept the Semitic conception of a Supreme Deity, this is a contradiction. But it is not a contradiction for Buddhism. Why, then, can the modern Theravadin not realize that, by endorsing the Orientalists' conclusion that because the Mahayana is devotional it is necessarily theistic, he is in fact looking at Buddhism from the Christian point of view, a point of view from which his own combination of atheism and devotion, too, stands condemned as no less self-contradictory than that of the Mahayana? Why should he be unable to see that the Mahayana schools eschew the extreme Wrong Views and follow the Middle Path of Right Views no less uncompromisingly than he does himself? The militant Theravadin, in his blind fury against the Mahayana, resembles a man so mad with rage that in his eagerness to hurt his opponent he wounds himself.

By way of reinforcement of our vindication of the full doctrinal orthodoxy of the Mahayana schools it may be recalled that historically speaking the Mahayana in

general, and its spearhead, the Madhyamikavada, in particular, originated as a reaction against the extreme, not to say heretical, views of the Hinayana. One of the most important stereotype formulae of the Dharma is that of the *tilakkhana*, the three 'signs' or 'characteristics' of existence. The first two, *dukkha* and *anicca*, 'painful' and 'transitory', apply merely to what is phenomenal or mundane (*lokiya*). The third, *anatta* or 'egoless', is of universal application, being a characteristic of both the mundane and the transcendental (*lokuttara*). For this reason it was regarded as being more important than either of the other two. Broadly speaking, the doctrine of *anatta* denies that in the absolute sense there exists in any object, whether transcendental or mundane, an eternal, unchanging principle of individuality or selfhood. Logically it amounts to a repudiation of the ultimate validity of the principle of self-identity. From almost the beginning of the revelation of the Dharma on the historical plane, however, there was a pronounced tendency for the application of the doctrine of *anatta* to centre more and more on persons and less and less on things, with a consequent restriction of the connotation of the term itself. In order to eradicate the wrong belief (*micchaditthi*) in absolute selfhood, the Buddha Himself, according to the best evidence at our disposal, had successively analysed the so-called person (*purisa*) into *nama* and *rupa*, the five *khandhas*, the twelve *dhatas*, and the eighteen *ayatana*s, and shown that apart from these psycho-physical phenomena, which were in a state of perpetual flux, there existed no unchanging psychic substratum corresponding to the *atta* or *atman* as conceived by certain non-Buddhist schools. This line of thought some of the Hinayana schools made it their special business to develop. Carrying the process of analysis even further than the Buddha himself seems to have done, they eventually arrived, the Theravadins at a scheme of 172, the Sarvastivadins at a scheme of 75, ultimate data of existence. In principle there was nothing wrong in this procedure, and the *Abhidharma*, as this development is called, is incontestably an extremely valuable contribution to our understanding of Buddhism. Though the Theravadins eventually persuaded themselves that their *Abhidharma Pitaka* contained the *ipsissima verba* of the Master Himself, this claim was vigorously contested by other early Hinayana schools, notably by the Sautrantikas, and is untenable even on the evidence of the *Tipitaka*. But though the *Abhidharma* was in itself a perfectly legitimate development of one aspect of the Dharma it very soon became an occasion for a deviation from orthodoxy of the most disastrous type. Both Theravadins and Sarvastivadins asserted, though the latter gave to the assertion a more systematic 'philosophical' form, that since the 172 or 75 *dharmah* into which they had respectively resolved the so-called person (*pudgala*) represented the limit of analysis they constituted absolute realities (*paramarthika-dharmah*).

In other words the followers of both schools, though differing in matters of detail, were unanimous that there existed a certain fixed number of material and non-material elements, themselves irreducible, to which all the phenomena of existence, both transcendental and mundane, were capable of being reduced. While the so-called *pudgala* or *atman* was unreal, being nothing but an assemblage of evanescent parts, the parts themselves were real; in fact they were absolute

realities. This psycho-physical atomism of the *Abhidharma* has been correctly termed, by a distinguished historian of Indian Philosophy, 'Pluralistic Realism'. As the Madhyamikas saw, it is in effect a repudiation of the doctrine of *anatman*, for the conception of selfhood, of permanent individuality, has not been superseded, but simply transferred from the whole to its parts. In order to counteract this tendency on the part of the Theravada and Sarvastivada to deviate into the heretical extreme of Eternalism (*sasvatavada*) the Madhyamikas brought forward their doctrine – in reality a reversion to the Buddha's own position – of *sarva-dharmah-sunyata*, 'emptiness of all elements'. While not denying the Abhidharmika's thesis that the so-called person or individual, being reducible to a series of transitory physical and mental states, was in the ultimate sense unreal, they nevertheless insisted that since those states or *dharmas* were not self-existent but arose in dependence on conditions they too could not rightly be regarded as absolute realities. The first view, of the emptiness or unreality, in the ultimate sense, of the so-called person, is known as *pudgala-sunyata*; the second, of the emptiness or unreality of its constituent psycho-physical phenomena, is known as *dharmah-sunyata*. For the Abhidharmikas the first constitutes the absolute truth. But to the Madhyamikas – in fact to all Mahayanists – it is only relative truth. For them the ultimate truth – at least on the level where the distinction between relative and absolute truth obtains – is represented by the *dharmah-sunyata*.

As we have shown in detail in *A Survey of Buddhism*,²⁶ this regrettable lapse from orthodoxy on the part of the Theravada and the Sarvastivada was only one of the consequences of the Hinayana's literal-minded conservatism, its adherence to the letter at the expense of the spirit of the Teaching, its utter failure to appreciate that the Dharma, especially in the sense of its stereotype doctrinal formulae, was not an end in itself, but only the Means to Enlightenment. Though the Sarvastivada no longer exists as a separate school, its vast apparatus of scholasticism having been appropriated by the Mahayana, the Theravada continues to flourish. Unfortunately, however, though philosophically far less explicit than the Sarvastivada it continues to propagate the quite heretical view that the 172 *dharmas* of its school constitute not merely methodological categories but ultimate realities. This deviation from Right View is seen in classic form in the *Abhidhammatthasangaha*, or Compendium of the Abhidhamma, a 14th century work which is still required reading for bhikkhus in all Theravadin countries. In verse 2, immediately after the salutation to the Buddha, this text-book enumerates the four groups or classes of *dhamma* – *cittam cetasikam rupam Nibbanam* – and designates them as *paramatthato*, that is to say, ultimate realities. Commenting on this word with special reference to *rupa paramatthas*, or ultimate realities of the material order, a modern expositor observes, 'These Rupas are identically the same whether they are found in a vessel or a vase. They preserve their identity in whatever combination they are found – hence the commentarial interpretation of *Parama* as immutable or real.'²⁷ But surely this preservation of identity in the midst of change is just what the Buddha's doctrine of *anatta* is intended to deny! Though loud in their protestations of orthodoxy, and louder

still in their condemnation of the Mahayana schools for alleged deviations into heresy, it would appear that from its very inception the Theravada has been guilty of holding thoroughly unorthodox views regarding a doctrine which all schools, including the Theravada itself, have ever recognized as being of absolutely fundamental importance.

Scripturally orthodox has been defined as meaning for Buddhism '2. According to, or congruous with, the Scriptures common to all schools of Buddhism, especially as expressed in the stereotype formulae such as the Four Noble Truths and The Three Characteristics (*tri-laksana*), which are found in both the Scriptures which are and the Scriptures which are not common to all schools, as, an *orthodox* opinion, book, etc.' While no school of Buddhism has even been guilty of the systematic text-torturing, the wholesale dislocation of text from context, that distinguished Christianity in its best days, it cannot be denied that between the Mahayana schools on the one hand and the modern Theravada on the other, there exists considerable difference of opinion regarding in what accordance or congruence with the Scriptures consists. In round terms, the difference is that for the Mahayanist it consists in accordance with the spirit, for the modern Theravadin in accordance with the letter, of the Scriptures. Not that the Mahayanist is unmindful of the letter, or the Theravadin altogether indifferent to the spirit of the sacred texts. But whereas for the former the letter depends on the spirit, for the latter the spirit depends on the letter. The difference between the two attitudes may again be expressed by saying that if the Theravada is more concerned with what the Buddha said, the Mahayana is more concerned with what He meant by what He said. Thus it comes about that the modern Theravadin is so prone to insist, not only in the face of profane scholarship but even in despite of the evidence of the *Tipitaka* itself, that the *Tipitaka* contains 'the complete unabridged teaching'²⁸ of the Buddha; for, as in the case of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, – which official Burmese Buddhism more and more strikingly resembles, – once the authenticity of the textual foundation is questioned the dogmatic superstructure comes tumbling down. Not so is the position of the Mahayanists. They, on the contrary, as the example of Japanese scholars like Suzuki shows, are able not only to accept but even to contribute to the factual findings of historical scholarship without detriment to their faith in Buddhism as the Means to Enlightenment. That this should be so is directly due to the fact that for the Mahayanist the letter of the Scriptures is subordinate to the spirit. Which of these two attitudes is more truly orthodox will not long be a matter of doubt to anyone who has followed our definition of Buddhism, or more correctly the Dharma as Means to Enlightenment, given at the beginning of this essay. The Hinayanists, as we have shown in detail in *A Survey of Buddhism*,²⁹ having identified the Truth with its conceptual formulations, proceeded to equate those conceptual formulations first with their verbal expressions and then, after the oral tradition had been committed to writing, with the very words of the written text. In other words they committed, at successively lower levels, the mistake of treating the constituents of the Means to Enlightenment as ends in themselves. At the conceptual level this mistake resulted in doctrinal

unorthodoxy of the type discussed in the immediately preceding paragraphs. At the next lowest level, the literary, it resulted in that unintelligent exaltation of the letter above the spirit of the Scriptures which is so marked a characteristic of the more conservative modern Theravadins.

We have not yet reached the rock bottom of Theravada 'orthodoxy', however. In the next paragraph, descending to the lowest level of all, that of conventional orthodoxy, we shall see how it treats even things which are not part of the Means to Enlightenment as ends in themselves. Meanwhile we must insist that inasmuch as the Dharma as the Means to Enlightenment is an essential element of *sammaditthi* the Mahayana schools, which seek an accordance not only with the letter but also with the spirit of the sacred texts, are in truth more scripturally orthodox than the Theravada which rests satisfied in congruence with the letter alone. Much more than this it is hardly necessary to say. For the subject of doctrinal orthodoxy, with which scriptural orthodoxy is closely intertwined, has already been fully discussed, and the greater part of what has been said of the one may be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the other. We should, however, guard against leaving the reader with the impression – certainly a very wrong one – that their awareness of the primacy of the spirit above the letter of the Teaching causes the followers of the Mahayana schools to underestimate the importance of scriptural studies. The works of Tsongkhapa are no less replete with scriptural quotation than those of Buddhaghosa, and each of the great schools of Japanese Buddhism is associated with a particular *sutra* or group of *sutras*. Indeed, the monk-scholars of Tibet and China frequently have a much wider range of scriptural reference than their counterparts in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, the great majority of whom are not acquainted even with the entire Pali *Tipitaka*. These instances, which are merely illustrative, should suffice to show that for the Mahayanists exaltation of the spirit of the Scriptures by no means excludes regard for their letter. That the Scriptures constitute part of the Means to Enlightenment is never misconstrued as meaning that as such they are not indispensable. Here, as elsewhere, the Mahayana shows its profound awareness of the all-important principle that the relative truth, for all its relativity, is not to be discarded, for it constitutes the basis for the realization of the Absolute Truth. In their application of this principle to the whole body of sacred texts consists the perfect scriptural orthodoxy of the Mahayana schools. Similarly, their failure either to understand or to apply this same principle once again precipitates the Theravadins, for all Miss Horner's protests, into the outer darkness of unorthodoxy. We should also be on our guard against leaving the reader with the wrong impression that for the Mahayanists the spirit of the Scriptures is to be arbitrarily determined by each one for himself. Alongside the written tradition, like a river beside a road, flows the stream of oral tradition, of directly transmitted spiritual experience, whereof the written tradition is as it were a condensation or crystallization. In the light of the spiritual experience, transmitted from teacher to disciple since the days of the Buddha, are the sacred texts to be studied and understood. So much so is this the case in Tibet, for instance, that no one would dream of taking up the study of a scriptural text without the necessary 'authorization' (*lun*) from his preceptor. Though the letter

of the Scriptures can be passed from hand to hand in books, the spirit must be transmitted from heart to heart. Hence the far greater importance of the guru in the Mahayana. For the Theravadins, obsessed with the letter of the Teaching, he is generally little more than a teacher of languages.

Coming to the third and last main sense of the word orthodox, defined on this occasion as '3. Conventional, a matter not of natural (*pakati*) but of conventional (*paatti*) Morality; as, an *orthodox* prostration', we discover the root cause of Miss Horner's misunderstanding. Since this division of the subject lends itself less easily to generalization than those which have so far engaged our attention, we may be permitted to give, by way of illustration, a concrete example from personal experience. Some years ago we had the good fortune to be present at an important Buddhist function held in Katmandu, Nepal. Prominent among the representatives of the various Buddhist countries and organizations was a Thera from Ceylon with a great reputation for 'orthodoxy'. One day a group of Nepalese Buddhists came to pay him their respects, which they did in the for them (conventionally) orthodox way by first standing with joined palms, then kneeling, and finally touching the ground with their foreheads, the whole procedure being repeated thrice. Though pleased with their devotion, our Thera took them to task for prostrating themselves 'in the wrong way'. Turning to the present writer, he said with bland unconsciousness that there could be any other way of doing things than his own, 'Tell them to prostrate themselves correctly – in the Ceylon way.' We are not now concerned with deciding which form of prostration, the Ceylonese or the Nepalese, is the more 'correct'. Both obviously belong to the purely external in themselves ethically indifferent social and ecclesiastical observances which constitute 'Conventional Morality' and within their respective milieus both are equally orthodox. What concerns us is the attitude of the Thera. He was honestly convinced that the Nepalese form of prostration was wrong and the Ceylon form right and that it was necessary for the Nepalese devotees to change from the one to the other. In other words, he failed to comprehend the difference between the ethically neutral observances pertaining to *paatti-sila* and the ethically significant actions belonging to *pakati-sila*. He committed the mistake of regarding as ends in themselves observances which do not even form part of the Means to Enlightenment. Unfortunately the attitude illustrated by this incident is extremely widespread in all Theravadin lands. An incredibly exaggerated importance is attached to social and ecclesiastical observances which have no essential connection with the Dharma whatever. The cut and colour of the monastic robe, whether it is worn with one shoulder uncovered or not, whether or not the eyebrows should be shaved off, which type of umbrella should be carried, what kind of shoe worn, are still to the members of the Theravada branch of the Sangha burning topics upon the satisfactory solution of which the very existence of Buddhism depends. It is significant that a Theravada monk can with perfect impunity deny the doctrine of *anatman* but he ventures out in public wearing any kind of headgear at the risk of being stoned. It is this rigid adherence to matters of *paatti-sila*, Conventional Morality, which the modern Theravadins have come to look upon as constituting

the norm of Buddhist orthodoxy, and they have no hesitation in regarding followers of the Enlightened One who perpetuate a slightly different pattern of social and ecclesiastical observance as being at best imperfectly Buddhist. To such extremes is this attitude sometimes carried that even secular customs of obviously local origin, having nothing to do with the Dharma, are treated as indispensable Buddhist observances. We have ourselves met 'orthodox' bhikkhus who thought that by teaching non-Buddhists to write their names in Burmese and to eat dried fish they were really 'spreading the Pure Dhamma'! When what does not constitute part of the Means to Enlightenment is thus treated as indispensable, we ought not to be astonished to find that observances which do constitute part of that Means are actually neglected. The strict observance of *paatti-sila* is not unoften a screen for the lax observance of *pakati-sila*. Indeed, many bhikkhus seem to think of Morality almost exclusively in terms of Conventional Morality, a misunderstanding in which they would appear to receive the tacit connivance of the laity, for whom an orthodox bhikkhu is simply one who shaves his head regularly, wears robes of the prescribed pattern and who is not seen eating after midday. No doubt it was some such conception of orthodoxy as this, derived either directly or indirectly from Theravadin sources, which, lurking at the back of Miss Horner's mind, prompted her to speak, in a moment of unmindfulness, of the Theravada as 'certainly the most orthodox school of Buddhism'. We trust that enough has been said in this essay to show that if the word orthodox is correctly transferred to the context of Buddhism and understood in its full doctrinal, scriptural, and conventional sense the orthodoxy of the Theravada is not a matter of so much certainty as had been supposed..

Notes

1 'Introduction of Buddhism into Tibet' ii. *Stepping Stones*, vol.2, no.5, p.135 (Kalimpong, September 1951).

2 This should not be understood as meaning that there is no difference at all!

3 *The Middle Way*, vol.32, no.1, p.13 (May 1957).

4 *Majjhima-Nikaya* i.134.

5 *Vinaya Pitaka* ii.10.

6 *Digha-Nikaya* i.10. According to the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (*Digha-Nikaya* ii.3) these three groups had formed the substance of the farewell discourse delivered by the Buddha at the various places through which he passed in the course of His last journey.

7 'Orthodoxy', *Stepping Stones*, vol.2, p.98 (Kalimpong, August 1951).

8 This tradition was continued by the Theravadin council which sat in Rangoon, Burma, from 1954 to 1956. It merely recited the *Tipitaka*. No doctrinal or disciplinary question was raised.

9 *Majjhima-Nikaya* 177.

10 Dr C.L.A. de Silva, *The Four Essential Doctrines of Buddhism* (Colombo, 1940) p.102.

11 *Samyutta-Nikaya* iv.307.

12 *Anguttara-Nikaya* v.212.

13 *ibid.*, i.10.

14 p.458, 9th edition, 2001.

15 G.F. Allen (Ven. Y. Siri Nyana) *The Vinaya Rules of the Buddhist Monks*, *Maha Bodhi Journal* vol.62, p.259 (July 1954).

16 *Madhyamika-Karika* XXV, 10–16.

- 17 D.T. Suzuki, *The Lankavatara Sutra* (London, 1932) pp.152–3.
- 18 *2500 Years of Buddhism* (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956) pp.367–8.
- 19 ‘The Origin and Spirit of the Vajrayana (ii)’, *Stepping Stones*, vol.2, pp.53–4. (Kalimpong, June 1951).
- 20 *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, 1957) p.13.
- 21 Anukul Chandra Bannerjee, M.A., LL.B., Ph.D., Lecturer in Pali and Sanskrit, Calcutta University, *2500 Years of Buddhism*, pp.118–19.
- 22 *Amitabha: The Life of Naturalness* (Kyoto, 1949) p.34. See also Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, chapter 3, sections 6 & 7.
- 23 Pandit N. Aiyaswamy Sastri, Professor of Buddhist Studies, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, *2500 Years of Buddhism* p.349.
- 24 *ibid* p.350.
- 25 p.349 *et infra*, 9th edition, 2001.
- 26 Chapter 3, section 4, *Factors in the Emergence of the Mahayana* pp.249–68, 9th edition, 2001.
- 27 Narada Thera *Abhidhammattha-Sangaha: An Outline of Buddhist Philosophy Part I* (Colombo, 1947) p.7.
- 28 *The Sangayana* (Rangoon, April 1955). The editorial from which this quotation is taken provides an interesting statement of the modern Theravadin viewpoint. It denies that the Mahayanists are Buddhists.
- 29 pp.270–5, 9th edition, 2001.