

文論學佛

TOPICS ON BUDDHISM

Buddhism And The Ideal of Education

by

The Venerable Phra Sumangalo

(Continued from last issue)

The Buddhists of Burma have almost completed a large university city on the outskirts of Rangoon and they plan to make it an international centre for Buddhist learning. I am reliably informed that the Buddhists of Ceylon plan to inaugurate a Buddhist university in their country. Recently I visited Cambodia and was very pleased to see the beautiful buildings of the Buddhist College that have been erected in Pnom Penh. The Buddhists of Laos are also active in education and are starting a series of Pali High Schools throughout the kingdom. On Taiwan there is a new institute for training monks and they have radio broadcasting stations for Buddhist programmes. The standards of Buddhist education are rising in almost all the Buddhist lands. Japan is the leader in Buddhist education and has a total of thirteen Buddhist universities. It is well to state that these universities are not just small colleges or academies with a few monks as students. They are for both monks and laity and each such university has many thousands of students. At the Buddhist University for Women at Kyoto there are 8,000 girls enrolled as students. Even in America where there are comparatively few Buddhists, there is now a Buddhist college in New York City. All over the world we see that wide-awake Buddhist leaders now realize that our religion cannot continue to exist unless we return to the ideal of Lord Buddha and make our religion the system of education he meant it to be. By **education** I mean not only the training one gets from listening to sermons by well-educated monks, but also education from childhood at Buddhist schools, ranging from grade-school through university. It is a sad commentary that some of the Buddhist countries are so shortsighted that they send their children

to missionary schools for their education. Of course many of these children cease to be Buddhists and the direct cause of this sad state of affairs is that there is no Buddhist educational system in some of the Buddhist countries.

It is encouraging to note that Thailand has come some forward-looking schools for training monks. Maha Makuta Academy, Maha Chulalongkhorn Academy, and Bhikkhu-Training Institute are in the lead and are doing excellent work. It is good to see that a start is now being made in this direction at Wat Sam Pleum and elsewhere. We need many such schools for giving the best training to monks. To be properly trained, a monk of nowadays needs to be well-instructed in psychology, sociology, history, public-speaking, philosophy, ethics and a number of other subjects, without knowledge of which he cannot hope to cope with the modern world. If the monkhood is allowed to remain uneducated, then the days of the Buddhist religion are numbered. To be able to chant Pali ceremonies and read palmeaf suttas is no longer sufficient. Public education is now general in Thailand and it is quite noticeable that the educated section of the public stays away from the wats. Why is this? The real reason is not hard to find. It is because the monks are the only part of the nation that do not have modern education. In some parts of Thailand more than half of the monasteries are closed; many have not even one monk in residence. Why is this? It is because young men are ashamed to become monks and to be labelled as uneducated. They know that the educated people keep away from the temples and only the peasants go to the monasteries. If this state of affairs continues for another fifty years, then it will be impossible to preserve Buddhism. But I believe that the new schools now starting all over Thailand for giving modern education to monks, will make a complete change in the scene and save the day. What worries a great many people now is the fact that education under Buddhist auspices for the laity is not now available in Thailand. However, a start in this direction has been made by The Founda-

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tion for Education in The Art of Right Living. They have a school in Bangkok and now enroll about 100 children. Soon they must move to larger quarters because so many parents wish to send their children to a Buddhist school. My good friend Luang Prinva and the board of managers of this school are worthy of much praise for their efforts to establish a system of Buddhist schools for children. May their efforts prosper! It is my firm belief that education of this type is one of the very best guarantees that Communism can never overrun this kingdom. But if Buddhism is allowed to die in Thailand, then anything can happen, because without the Buddhist religion there can be no real Thailand, The Buddhist faith is the very heart of Thailand.

Next year the nation will celebrate the Buddhajayanti, or the anniversary of 2500 years of Buddhasasana. Many acts are planned for this auspicious occasion. It is my deep conviction that the best way to celebrate this anniversary is to give strong support to any and all schools that seek to train monks or to give Buddhist education to the laity. If such schools are adequately supported, then the future of Buddhism in Thailand is secure. This country will then remain the "Land of the Free". Let us not forget that Buddhism is a religion for free people, not slaves or robots in a totalitarian state. Wherever Buddhism is strong, Communism has no chance to gain a following. Wherever Buddhism becomes weak, there Communism has a chance to grow strong. If we wish to build forts to hold back the enemy, then we must remember that the temples are the strongest forts of all, if the monks are well-trained in the Dhamma. Well-educated monks are better soldiers against Marxism than battalions armed with guns and tanks. Where the light of the Dhamma prevails, there the darkness of Communism cannot enter. Let us do all in our power to promote Buddhism education and preserve the light of Buddhasasana. This is the only sure way to guarantee that Muang Thai, the Land of The Free, will always be free!

May all beings be happy.

This lecture was given at the Progressive Bhikkhu College at Wat Chakrawad-irajavas (Sam Pleum) on 10th November 2499/1956.

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