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Laurence COX and Mihirini SIRISENA

Early Western Lay Buddhists in Colonial Asia: John Bowles Daly and the Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon

ABSTRACT: The first westerners recorded as becoming lay Buddhists on Asian terms were members of the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Ceylon who took *pansil* (refuges and precepts) between 1880 to 1907 or later, tied to their work with the BTS' modernising Buddhist schools. This article uses the life of Dr John Bowles Daly as a lens to explore these "conversions" and the BTS' educational turn. Daly (c. 1844 – c. 1916), an Irish writer and ex-Anglican curate, played an important role in Buddhist schooling in Ceylon in the early 1890s. The article discusses why western BTS members took *pansil* and how this was understood, as well as the lack of western *bhikkhu* (monk) ordinations in Ceylon. The new lay-run schools slowly became established as a suitable object of *dana* (Buddhist donations) in competition with the traditional temple-run schools, leading in time to the formation of a new lay Sinhala Buddhist elite. These histories show the strong predominance of this elite as against the agendas not only of Daly but the international Theosophical Society.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist modernism; Ceylon; Theosophy; Buddhist Theosophical Society; education; John Bowles Daly

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Introduction[1]

Our understanding of the first *ordained* western Buddhists has been the subject of much recent research (Turner et al., 2010). Meanwhile, western *lay* Buddhists have been considered less systematically: we have studies of the first westerners who declared themselves to be Buddhists in western countries (Tweed, 2000) as well as individual accounts of westerners who received initiation but not ordination in Mahayana contexts (Bocking et al., 2014). Elsewhere Cox has argued that there is every reason to assume a certain number of westerners 'gone native' in Asia who either practiced Buddhism for local and family reasons (2013a); it is the later nineteenth century intensification of colonial colour lines, together with the centralization of national sangha power, that drew attention to those conversions which we do find recorded in this period.

However, one concrete point of reference is Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky's very public taking of *pansil* (the refuges and precepts taken by Buddhist laity) in Galle, Ceylon in 1880. This was a very high-profile event, often seen as a turning point in the Buddhist Revival. There can be little doubt that it was widely understood as the first lay conversion, and the absence of rebuttals to this claim indicates that Buddhist modernizers, and western sympathizers, were not aware of earlier lay conversions[2] in the Theravada world.

Olcott's conversion in particular initiated some decades of energetic transnational work for Buddhist organizations (for example, he was a key speaker for Anagarika Dharmapala's Maha Bodhi Society). In Ceylon, he created a 'Buddhist Theosophical Society', the only one of its kind.[3] Over the subsequent years, at least 8-10 further ceremonies and probably more were held for western BTS members and associates, enabling a valuable insight into aspects of early western conversion to Buddhism.

The ceremony was also, as Olcott wrote,

> the beginning of the second and permanent stage of the Buddhist revival begun by Megittuwatte, a movement destined to gather the

[1] This article draws on research from the Irish Research Council Advanced Collaborative Research Project "Early western Buddhists in Asia". Earlier versions of parts of the article were presented at the ISASR conference (2013) and the Heidelberg University conference *Theosophy Across Boundaries* (2015).

[2] This paper uses "lay conversion" as a translation for "taking *pansil*". Below we explore how the ceremony can best be understood.

[3] A Jewish TS was later formed (Huss 2015), but this was initiated by existing Jewish members of the TS internationally and so took a very different form to the Ceylon BTS, which was directed at Buddhists in a single country who were not (yet) members of the TS at all.

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> whole juvenile Sinhalese population into Buddhist schools under our general supervision[4]

As we shall see, this educational development would be the main legacy of the BTS, and most *pansil* ceremonies were for BTS educationalists.

This article explores this particular moment in the development of global Buddhism through the figure of Dr John Bowles Daly (c. 1844 – c. 1916?) Daly's experience offers an insight both into the politics of lay conversion within the BTS and the BTS' emerging focus on lay-controlled education. Following an examination of Daly's pre-BTS life, the article discusses the nature of the BTS and its 'educational turn'. It explores the emphasis on lay conversion rather than *bhikkhu* ordination for western supporters and examines the politics of modernist lay Buddhist education in Ceylon. The general picture is one of lay Sinhala agency taking the lead as against not only Daly but the international TS.

John Bowles Daly[5]

John Bowles Daly was born c. 1844[6] to a presumably Anglican family.[7] He held a doctorate in law from Trinity College Dublin but by 1869 was working as a curate in Monkstown, Co. Cork. In that year the Anglican church was disestablished; his compensation equalled about 20 years of what was presumably a modest salary, allowing some freedom of manoeuvre but not enough to start a family; he remained a lifelong bachelor.

Disestablishment may have marked the first break in a conventional middle-class Protestant life played out against the backdrop of Famine and Fenianism. According to Olcott, Daly held another post as curate as well as one as an army chaplain. 'One good position he threw up to go and labour in the East-End' [of London].[8] This apparently began in the later 1870s:

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[4] Olcott 1900, 166.

[5] This section draws on the overview of Daly in Cox (2013b, 229 – 236) as well as more recent findings.

[6] Olcott thought Daly was about 45 in 1889 (*Madras Mail,* 28 December 1889: 7). He can hardly have been much younger if he had completed his studies by 1869.

[7] Not to be confused with the Bowes Daly family: Tadhg Foley, pers. comm. Bowles is a long-standing Anglican name in the Cork area and Daly may have retained the name for its prestige value. A William Bowles (1720-1780) from Cork travelled widely and became a leading figure in Spanish science (Reville 2001).

[8] *Madras Mail*, 28 December 1889: 7.

> The author, a London clergyman, while ministering among the poor during the last thirteen years, had, at different times and in various parishes, drawn round him a number of young men desirous of learning something of the history of their country.[9]

Later, Daly wrote 'I have had 10 years of managership in London Schools'; if so, he brought some practical experience with him to the BTS.[10]

The Irish Buddhist Charles Pfoundes (Bocking et al. 2014), who crossed paths with Daly in London spiritualist circles (Cox 2013b, 229), would later contrast the situation of Christian missionaries abroad with that of 'the worker at home (say the curate of an East End parish)'. He was probably thinking of Daly's experience (and resentments?):

> [The missionary's] conditions of life are infinitely superior to those of the poor curate, ill paid and overworked, neither too well clothed nor too well fed, working amongst the lowest of his race, amidst constantly harrowing scenes, squalor, want, wretchedness of the most abject kind, where indescribable filth accumulates, and sickness, contagions, and infections abound. ... The poor curate, too often [falls] an early victim to the life led during his apprenticeship, as a worker in slums. And of the two which has been the most useful?[11]

Daly became increasingly disillusioned with the church during this time (Cox 2013b, 229-30):

> The President [Olcott] is bringing out an ex-padri [sic] who was captured at his first lecture in London, and is to be broken into harness theosophical at Head-quarters under the Colonel's own eagle eye… [I]t is reported that even before he had heard our President speak, his own naturally large heart and clear head had made him throw off the shackles of the church, and devote himself to the cause of humanity, in the shape of religio-philanthropic work among the poor of London.[12]

Olcott noted "He considers that as a Theosophist he will have a more ample field for altruistic work than he has at present'.[13] Olcott's lecture,

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[9] Daly (1892, iii). As he was busy in Ceylon by 1892, he had probably delivered this MS before leaving England in 1889.

[10] *The Buddhist* 16 January 1891: 26.

[11] Pfoundes 1895.

[12] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, January 1890: lxxi.

[13] *Madras Mail*, 28 December 1889. In light of their later falling-out it is worth noting that Olcott first described Daly as "A gentleman of first-rate ability and high character … a historian and journalist, and formerly a Christian clergyman" (Supplement to *The Theosophist*, January 1890: lxiv). By the next month he had been further promoted (in the

incidentally, was at the freethinking South Place Ethical Society, in September 1889.[14]

Daly also explored the power of secular writing in this same period. By the mid-1880s he was writing for the *Illustrated London News* and, perhaps, the *Telegraph,* and starting a career as the author of the novel *Broken Ideals* (1884) as well as *Radical Pioneers of the Eighteenth Century* (1886), *Glimpses of Irish Industries* (1889) and *The Dawn of Radicalism* (1892, Czech translation 1910). He also edited *Ireland in the Days of Dean Swift: Irish Tracts, 1720 to 1734* (1887) and *Ireland in '98: Sketches of the Principal Men of the Time* (1888).

Together this body of work gives a picture of Daly as broadly liberal and reformist, praising the French Revolution which 'freed [France] from a corrupt ministry and a profligate Church, thereby restoring the land to the people and liberty to the subject' (1892, iii). It also shows something of the faith in economic self-reliance and education as routes to modernity which would characterize his work in Ceylon.

His wider politics were liberal and Home Rule: *Ireland in the Days of Dean Swift*, for example, is dedicated 'To the Right Hon. John Morley, M.P., the first Chief Secretary of Ireland, whose unflinching courage and outspoken sympathy has secured him the gratitude of the Irish people…' Morley was a Gladstonian Home Rule supporter, while *Ireland in '98* was an edited version of unpublished papers by the anti-slavery agitator and historian of the United Irishmen Richard Robert Madden.

Daly brought these perspectives with him when trying to understand and engage with Asian realities, a practice shared with other Irish Buddhists of the period (Cox 2013b, ch 5) and with imperial civil servants (Nagai, 2006). He shows consistency in his acceptance of a reforming empire and a paternalistic commitment to education and national industrial and agricultural development, paralleling perhaps most clearly the approach of William Gregory in Ceylon (Cox 2013b, 118-21). As we shall see, participants in the BTS schools would provide ministers to both the elected State Council (1931-47) under British rule and the independent state. The paradox, perhaps, is that in 1890s Ceylon there was even less space for a middle ground than in Ireland: Daly found himself allied with the radical wing of Buddhist nationalism and in opposition to Christian missionary education.

Daly was initially intended to join the TS headquarters staff at Adyar[15] and was named as part of the editorial staff of *The Theosophist*;[16]

Madras Mail) to "Professor of Political Economy" (reprinted in supplement to *The Theosophist*, February 1890: lxxxviii)

[14] Olcott 1910, 181-4.

[15] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, January 1890: lxxi.

[16] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, March 1890: cv.

however he followed Olcott to Ceylon, arriving in late January or early February.[17] According to *The Theosophist* he then

> arrived at the Head-quarters, Adyar, on the 13th April, after a short tour in *Ceylon*. Dr. Daly came out on the German Lloyd's steamship *Kaiser Wilhelm* and expresses himself greatly charmed with Ceylon, its people, and the promise of the future. Between himself and the Sinhalese it seems to have been a case of 'love at first sight'.[18]

The practical consequence was that in May Olcott wrote

> At the unanimous request of the leading Branches in the Ceylon Section, Dr. J. Bowles Daly, LL.D, F.T.S., is hereby detailed for duty in that Island as General Secretary of the Ceylon Section, and as such will represent the President-Founder and, in the absence of the latter from the Island, exercise the various executive powers and fulfil the duties reserved to the President-Founder…[19]

Daly was thus catapulted into an unusual position: although captivated by Ceylon and anointed by Olcott, he nonetheless knew far more about Irish and British realities than he did about Ceylon or Theosophy – or for that matter Buddhism. If on the face of it this is a typical colonial situation, here reproduced within the framework of an international religious organization, Daly's relative effectiveness – and indeed Olcott's – rested on the presence of a strong local organization which, as we shall see, had an agenda of its own.

The Buddhist Theosophical Society and the Educational Turn

The BTS[20] was both a key location for western conversion to Buddhism and for Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism, as well as a pioneer of education reform and hence elite formation. It found itself in increasing tension with its parent body as Annie Besant's Hindu nationalism came to the fore.[21]

Olcott and Blavatsky's historical 1880 visit to Ceylon was not only notable for their public 'taking *pansil*'; in the nearly 2 months they spent there Olcott was very active in Theosophical organising. The visit deepened previous connections with Migettuwatte Gunananda, the Buddhist polemicist victorious in the 1873 Panadura debate. Olcott used

[17] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, February 1890: lxxxviii.
[18] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, May 1890: cxxxiii.
[19] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, June 1890: cxxxviii.
[20] This acronym unfortunately also covers the various Buddhist Tract / Text Societies of the period.
[21] By 1892 *The Buddhist* carried the notice "The Theosophical Society is responsible for nothing whatever herein, save official documents." (e.g. 11 March: 84).

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these connections well, founding both a Buddhist Section and a non-Buddhist Lanka Theosophical Society 'composed of freethinkers and amateurs of occult research' (1900: 188), chaired by Daly, which according to Malalgoda (1976: 246) failed to take off. The distinction between the two was implicitly ethnic.

The Buddhist Section was split into a lay sub-division with multiple branches, as well as a monastic sub-division (to overcome *vinaya* rules against monastic involvement in worldly organizations with laity: Olcott 1900, 179). The latter, chaired by Hikkaduve Sumangala, included monks of the various *nikayas* but made little progress (Malalgoda 1976:,246-7). By contrast, the lay branches proliferated:[22] a convention held on 5 July[23] had representatives from Kandy, Colombo, Panadura, Bentota, Galle and Matara, with a subsequent branch formed in Welitara.[24] As Malalgoda writes:

> [T]he lay division of the B.T.S. came to provide Buddhist laymen with what in the preceding decades they had been unable to create, a strong and unified organisation. Its original membership was drawn mainly from Sinhalese Buddhist laymen who had already been active in religious work in some capacity or other…
>
> Under the auspices of the B.T.S., these laymen found an opportunity not merely to collaborate more closely with each other but also to work shoulder to shoulder with foreign Theosophists and new local recruits in the movement.[25]

In this sense, lay Buddhist activists appropriated the TS, or more exactly the lay BTS, for their own purposes, while the (non-Buddhist) Lanka TS failed to take off and the Buddhist sangha had little interest in the clerical BTS. Conversely, from the mother organization's point of view, the situation in Ceylon seems to have been rather anomalous and was, perhaps, never fully resolved. Olcott's diaries for 1889 note

> An attempt was made to form a [non-Buddhist] Ceylon Section, under, first, Mr. Leadbeater, next, C. F. Powell, and lastly, Dr. Daly, but it proved impracticable, and was finally abandoned. ... Although Branches which we organised in 1880 are still active and turning out excellent work, it is altogether within the lines of Buddhism. They neither understand nor wish to understand the contents of other religious systems; and when they speak of

[22] Hence here and elsewhere reference to the BTS, and to the TS in Ceylon, refers to the lay BTS.
[23] Misdated 5 June in *Old Diary Leaves* but actual date clear from context.
[24] Olcott, 1900, 202-3. In 1897 Olcott would note that the Colombo, Galle and Kandy branches were the most active (*General Report*: 8).
[25] Malalgoda 1976, 247-8.

> themselves as Branches of our Society, it is always with this reservation, that they do their best for Buddhism and acknowledge the President-Founder as their principal adviser and leader—when anything particularly knotty has to be solved, or any great obstacle has to be cleared away.[26]

This 'abandoning' was perhaps not communicated very effectively in Ceylon, or it did not resolve the problem from Olcott's perspective. In 1891 he would write to *The Buddhist* noting

> The practical working of the scheme of a Ceylon Section of the Theosophical Society having proved unsatisfactory to me, *even in the modified form in which it was constituted*, I do hereby suspend the Charter of the Section until my return from Australia, when I shall endeavour to group the Branches in a way more practicable, because more consistent with the purely Buddhistic nature of the work in this Island. Meanwhile, the Branches shall be given the opportunity of expressing their preferences in the matter…[27]

We have not yet been able to establish if this initiative was followed up on, but it did not lead to any substantial changes in what the (lay) BTS meant in practice. Its programme, laid out at the inaugural 1880 convention, had covered

> the desired secularizing of schools; the rescue of Temple endowment lands from spoliation; the proper way to restore discipline of senior over junior priests – destroyed since the Native Dynasty had been replaced by a Christian Government; the preparation of propagandist literature and its circulation, etc., etc.[28]

By 1890, if some details had changed, its broad modernist Buddhist programme had not:

> (1) Preach Buddhist teachings; (2) establish centers of learning to accustom Buddhist *monks* to religious texts, as well as schools for the religious education of *children*; (3) publish texts for instruction in Buddhism and to declare the superiority of Buddhism to the false religions established in Lanka; (4) establish a newspaper… (5) establish Buddhism in other countries; and (6) develop the technical sciences (*sastras*) written in "Eastern" languages …. and assist the development of Buddhism in Lanka by people opposed to Christianity and by foreign Buddhists…[29]

[26] Olcott 1910, 209.
[27] *The Buddhist* 10 April 1891, p. 128; our emphasis.
[28] Olcott 1900, 202.
[29] Blackburn 2010, 110-11.

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While it did publish newspapers - *Sarasavi Sandarasa* and *The Buddhist*[30] – thus fulfilling the 'propagandist literature' brief, as well as organising preaching events (Blackburn 2010: 112), the BTS' primary activity would prove to be in education (Corea 1969). This had little to do with the international Theosophical Society's primary goals, but everything to do with the politics of Buddhist revival in Ceylon.

The argument over the 'desired secularizing of schools' had a complex history (Cox 2013b: 230-4) but the crucial point is that traditional (temple-based, monastic-led) education had been increasingly supplanted by Christian missionary education. The latter was perceived as 'modern' (in terms which enabled the colonial government to fund it, and which made it attractive to families wishing to direct their children to credentialized, primarily state, employment) and was carried out through English.

Hikkaduve Sumangala had taken the lead since the 1870s in the provision of monastic-controlled education for lay Buddhists through *pirivenas*, following a largely traditional curriculum (including Buddhist study, ayurvedic medicine and astrology). This had failed to bridge the gap between traditional temple education and its missionary competitors and had become enmired in a constant battle with the colonial administration over curriculum and examination procedures (Blackburn 2010, ch 2).

The BTS would become central in the provision of Buddhist education which was simultaneously modern as well as lay-controlled (as against traditional monastic education and the *pirivenas*). A modern, state-approved curriculum would also open the door to grant support.[31] Its key organizational task thus created a new, educated, Buddhist (and nationalist) middle class and elite. In the process, its own members constituted themselves as leading figures in this elite.

It faced a number of hurdles in this task, structurally related to its innovative character. In distinguishing its educational role from that traditionally held by monks, it had to establish its own funding as a lay Buddhist organization, a subject to be considered further below. In time it would also face competition and conflict with other lay Buddhist organizations, not least the Maha Bodhi Society from the mid-1900s on.

In the 1880s and 1890s, more immediate problems presented themselves. The most prestigious BTS schools were to teach through the colonial language of English, but this required English-speaking teachers,

[30] The latter represented itself modestly as "The Organ of the Southern Church of Buddhism", ie the official voice of the whole Theravada world.

[31] In this respect the project resembled the situation then emerging in Ireland, where state support was (and is) provided to schools operated by different religious denominations and with a marked religious character, but where the curriculum (other than religious elements) is laid down by the state and enforced through inspection. The parallels would have been clear to colonial civil servants and to Daly.

and it is here that the role of convert members of the BTS became strategically significant.

Pansil and Lay Conversion for Westerners

As noted above, the BTS is not only notable for its role in modernist Sinhalese Buddhism. Its *pansil* ceremonies for westerners stand in contrast to the monastic ordinations better attested for this early period elsewhere in the Buddhist world (and indeed to self-proclaimed Buddhists in Europe and North America). An incomplete list of *pansil* ceremonies associated with the BTS runs as follows:

- Col. Olcott and Mme Blavatsky, 1880
- Rev. CW Leadbeater, 1886[32] (founder of the Buddhist English School, later Ananda College, Colombo)
- AE Buultjens, 1888[33] (principal of the Buddhist English School; later editor of *The Buddhist* and General Manager of BTS schools)
- Charles Powell, 1889[34] (General Secretary of the BTS)
- JB Daly, 1890 (General Manager of BTS schools, founder of Mahinda College, Galle)
- ED Fawcett, 1890[35] (Theosophist based at Adyar)
- Kate Pickett, 1891[36] (Principal of Sanghamitta Girls' School, Colombo)
- *Possibly* Mr Banbery and Miss Rodda, Principals of the Buddhist boys' and girls' schools in Kandy as of 1898
- Gordon Douglas (later Bhikkhu Asoka, Principal of Mahinda College), 1898[37]?
- FL Woodward, c. 1907?[38] (Principal of Mahinda College)

Olcott had also been 'empowered' to give pansil, and held ceremonies for at least two TS members outside Ceylon:

- Dr Franz Hartmann[39], 1883
- William Quan Judge

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[32] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, August 1890: clv.
[33] Buultjens 1899. Born a Burgher (Sri Lankan Christian of Dutch descent), Buultjens had become a freethinker while studying at Cambridge. His *pansil* ceremony was not organized by the BTS but took place in his local temple.
[34] *Daily Telegraph* 7 December 1889, p.2.
[35] Olcott 1910, 226.
[36] *Catholic Messenger,* cited in *The Tablet* 15 August 1891, 26.
[37] We have not found any contemporary record of the ceremony, but multiple reports of his later ordination mention a conversion to Buddhism around this period.
[38] Simpson 2001, fn 15.
[39] De Zirkoff 2013, 7.

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It is worth noting the discrepancy in perceptions around these latter ceremonies: Kirthisinghe and Amarasuriya write

> *Quite a unique document* was granted to Colonel Olcott from the principal chief priests of Buddhism in Ceylon, to empower him to admit converts to Buddhism….
>
> Till the giving of this commission to Olcott, no Buddhist layman ever considered himself authorised, as are the monks, to give the Pancha Sila.[40]

By contrast, Olcott's account of Hartmann's ceremony runs

> An interesting, *though not very important*, feature of the meeting was my giving the Five Precepts of the Buddhist religion to Dr. Franz Hartmann, in the presence of H.P.B., four Buddhist Delegates from Ceylon, Damodar, "Bawaji," Tookaram Tatya, and Balai Chand Mullik, of Calcutta. By Dr. Hartmann's request I procured by telegraph the High Priest Sumangala's authority to act for him in the matter.[41]

As an outlier to both BTS ceremonies in Ceylon and Olcott's ceremonies elsewhere we can also mention Alice Leighton Cleather, who had abandoned organized Theosophy and was associated with the Maha Bodhi Society: her ceremony took place in Bodh Gaya in 1920 with a Tibetan lama officiating (Johnson 1995, 179).

Focussing specifically on the BTS ceremonies in Ceylon, how should we interpret them? In Sri Lankan (and other) Buddhism the 'refuges and precepts' are regularly 'given' to Buddhist congregations, but these *pansil* (five precepts) or, as occasionally described, *tisarana* (three refuges) ceremonies are significant for being their recipient's first.[42] We can start with Daly's:

> *Following in the wake of all his Theosophical Society colleagues who have had to do with the Sinhalese*, Dr. Daly has embraced Buddhism... Shortly before the public meeting commenced the High Priest Sumangala... catechised the candidate in the tenets of Buddhism...

[40] 2009 (1981): 7-8, our emphasis. The document was signed by Hikkaduwe Sumangala and W Subhuti among others; it *may* have emanated from the otherwise-inactive clerical branch of the BTS.
[41] 1904, 68, our emphasis.
[42] On the usefulness of "conversion" as a category in Buddhism, see Cox (2013b, 19ff).

> Mr Boultjens introduced Dr. Daly to the audience in a few words,[43] and the High Priest following him said that his task to-day was a very pleasant one, that of giving Pansil to Dr. Daly, a gentleman of no mean attainments and position. This was not the first European whom he had the pleasure of initiating but *many others too before*, in this very same place... [After the ceremony] Dr. Daly then addressed the meeting at length.[44]

The public talk, in English, was a regular feature of such events:

> The proceedings took place under the direction of the Buddhist high priest [Sumangala?], assisted by eleven yellow-robed monks. The convert knelt before the assembled priests and intimated his desire to be admitted a member of the Buddhist Church. The high priest then catechised him and the assembled monks satisfied themselves that he was fitted to be a follower of Buddha. The gentleman, whose name was Powell, then begged of the high priest 'to give him the Pansil', which the latter did, the candidate repeating it after him with the palms of the hands brought together uplifted. Having explained to the candidate the responsible duties of a Buddhist, the high priest gave him his blessing. A meeting was afterward held, at which Mr. Powell explained his reasons for having embraced Buddhism, and described the mental process which he had gone through before he arrived at the conviction of the truth of Buddhism.[45]

Another such ceremony, for Leadbeater, was semi-private, 'on the shore in the temple of Buddha' the same evening as he had made the request. Leadbeater recited the pansil after Sumangala and a lock of hair was cut from his head (Tillett 2008, 147-9).

In the hostile reading of the *Catholic Messenger*,

> The Theosophists, who are all Christians by birth and impregnated with Christian ideas, have imagined to turn this practice into a kind of Buddhistic baptism, the want of some outward form of admission into Buddhism being sorely felt by them.[46]

The *Messenger*, the *Theosophist*'s report of Daly's ceremony and Sumangala's comments all attest the semi-routine nature of these events, and imply that the *pansil* ceremonies recorded above should be read as a

[43] The *Catholic Messenger*'s account of Kate Pickett's ceremony similarly represents Olcott as bearing "testimony to her being a staunch and true member" of "the Buddhist faith", suggesting a form of sponsorship.
[44] *The Theosophist,* 1890 August supplement, civ. Our emphasis.
[45] *Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 1889, p.2.
[46] *Catholic Messenger,* cited in *The Tablet*, 15 August 1891, 26.

high-profile sample of such ceremonies, regularly associated with or indeed expected of western BTS members (perhaps particularly those involved with schools).

Polemic aside, there is clearly some truth to the *Messenger*'s charge that *pansil* was understood as some kind of membership or initiation ceremony. The parallel to baptism is not exact, however, because these 'baptisms' did not necessarily entail a renouncing of Christianity and all its works. According to Blavatsky, Leadbeater had only agreed to the ceremony after she assured him that it would not involve renouncing 'the true Christian faith', although he did subsequently resign from the devotional Anglican confraternity to which he had belonged in London, and was apparently removed from the clergy list as a result (Tillett 2008, 147-9, 973 fn5).[47]

This fits with Olcott's interpretation that 'if Buddhism contained a single dogma that we were compelled to accept, we would not have taken the pânsil nor remained Buddhists ten minutes' (1900, 168). At the point when Daly travelled to India with Olcott he was still an Anglican priest and (according to Olcott) 'has not renounced Christianity' (*Madras Mail* 28 Dec 1889). In this same interview, however, Olcott describes Leadbeater as 'subsequently renounc[ing] Christianity for Buddhism. Just like Mrs. Besant, Mr. Leadbeater was 'converted' by our Theosophical literature.'

Daly, too, appears as 'Dr Daly' rather than 'the Rev Daly' in accounts of his time in Ceylon, indicating that like Leadbeater he no longer understood himself as an Anglican priest. If in 1889 he had asserted the compatibility of Buddhism and (at least Theosophical) Christianity, by 1890 he was quoting the *Dhammapada*: 'Purify the mind, abstain from vice, and practice virtue' (1890: 465-6) and by 1891 he celebrated the progress of BTS schools as meaning that 'The shameful apathy of Buddhist parents in allowing their sons and daughters to be trained as Christians, has come to an end' (*Lucifer*, March-August 1892, 82, citing *The Buddhist*).

Unlike Protestant Theosophists in Ireland – who might combine Anglican worship with magical beliefs – BTS converts could, apparently, retain a commitment to 'true' Christianity if not to formal membership in the Church of England or Ireland. This disjuncture between *pansil* ceremony and Christian or Buddhist (or Christian-and-Buddhist) identification is also indicative of a sense of these ceremonies as partly routine, almost organizational expectations.[48]

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[47] Powell had also been intended for a clergyman, but had become an agnostic before becoming Buddhist. *Daily Telegraph* 7 December 1889, p.2.

[48] Such expectations, in a more cynical form, remain common in the parallel system of Irish education today, where teachers in denominational schools are bound to uphold the school's ethos and when necessary to provide religious teaching, irrespective of their actual personal beliefs. School principals may have been expected to preside at religious

The BTS' missionary opponents took a different view. Rather distastefully, *The Tablet* – following the *Catholic Messenger* – seized the occasion of Kate Pickett's possible suicide to preach that 'if the Buddhistic system be carried to its extreme consequence, suicide is its natural upshot'. The *Messenger*'s polemic began thus:

> There was quite a blow of trumpets in the Theosophical camp over this new conquest. An English lady, highly accomplished, renouncing Christianity and embracing Buddhism, has come to Ceylon to preside at the English education of Sinhalese girls on Buddhist principles! This could not fail to give a strong impetus to the Buddhistico-Theosophical movement.

This kind of religious point-scoring (which was also associated with reports of deathbed conversions or backsliding by prominent converts) was presumably of value in the context of fund-raising for missionary (or Theosophical) activities in the UK.[49]

Returning to the interpretation of BTS *pansil* ceremonies as a regular event in the induction of westerners into BTS activities, this suggests that Olcott had some reason to see the situation as 'unsatisfactory' (1910, 209). The tone of his comment 'They neither understand nor wish to understand the contents of other religious systems; and when they speak of themselves as Branches of our Society, it is always with this reservation…'[50] and his reading of giving *pansil* to Dr Hartmann as 'interesting, though not very important' (1904, 68) all point in the same direction: the reality of Ceylon – or more exactly the reality that the lay members of the BTS, far from entering further into Theosophy, were using the structures of the TS for their own ends.

In terms of the meaning of the ceremonies, if Olcott as we have seen had his own theological interpretation (not only in terms of importance but also the lack of required dogmas and compatibility with orthodox Theosophy), so too no doubt did Sumangala, while the media representation fit within the logic of inter-religious polemic (on Daly's understanding of Buddhism, see Cox 2013b, 234-6).

From the BTS' point of view, perhaps, *pansil* ceremonies represented a moment of commitment to the project (for which, after all, most BTS

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assemblies in BTS schools; if so, taking *pansil* would add considerably to the credibility of this.

[49] Olcott devoted 14 pages of *The Theosophist* (vol. 13 no. 4, January 1892: 193-206) to statements from the coroner's jury and other witnesses, and apparently published these separately as "The Pickett Tragedy". Olcott's position was that the jury's verdict ("found drowned") was fair but that the coroner had no grounds to add the "malicious rider" that he believed the death a suicide. The controversy was intense; a letter from Daly apparently defending the coroner against Olcott was quoted in the *Overland Ceylon Observer* (18 February).

[50] *The Buddhist* 10 April 1891, p. 128.

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converts would be soliciting funds from Buddhists). They also represented, at least formally, a subjection of westerners to Asian religious authority, and as such a dramatic breach of the colonial lines of race and religion (Cox 2013a).

In this light the only known image of Daly is noteworthy, not so much for his incredible moustaches as for the apparently shaven head and what looks like a Sri Lankan or Indian formal jacket rather than western clothing, perhaps marking his Buddhist identity despite his role as representative of western educational practice:

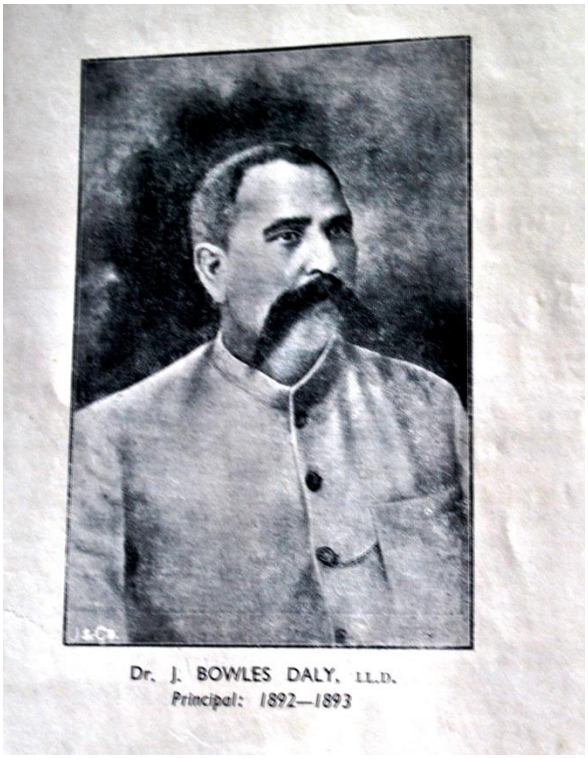


Figure 1: John Bowles Daly. ***Mahinda College Magazine*** **8/1 (March 1952), facing p. 4.**

This strange image, and the exotic accounts of *pansil* ceremonies, then, mark an important moment in the religious encounter between Buddhism and the west.

Excursus: Western Buddhists and **Bhikkhu** *Ordination in Ceylon*[51]

The BTS' lack of interest in monastic ordination for westerners was part of a wider Ceylonese pattern, contrasting with other Theravada countries.[52]

[51] This section draws on work carried out in conjunction with Brian Bocking and Alicia Turner.

We can mention Anagarika Dharmapala, and his arguments for the centrality of lay commitment and the barriers to this-worldly activism posed by monastic rules. Dharmapala carried out a number of lay ordinations in America, including that of Countess Canavarro / Sister Sanghamitta (*JMBS* 6/7, Nov 1897, 55) and CT Strauss in Chicago, immediately following the World's Parliament of Religions (*JMBS* 10/8&9, Dec 1901 – Jan 1902, 73) as well as attempting to establish an anagarika order (Kemper 2015, 43). Chronologically, this follows Sumangala's empowerment of Olcott to give *pansil*.

We also have records of a number of western Buddhists who travelled to Ceylon seeking ordination but were eventually ordained in Burma or by Burmese monks. This was apparently too obvious to explain at the time:

> The *Ceylon Standard* now learns that [Gordon Douglas'] example is to be followed by another European now in Colombo, Mr. Allan McGregor, who will go over to Burma to get admitted into the priesthood…. Dr. Fuhrer, who is shortly expected at Colombo on his way to Burma, is also, says another Colombo paper, to be ordained as a Buddhist priest.[53]

Another figure in this category is Anton Gueth, ordained as Nyanatiloka. There are a number of possible explanations for this pattern, most revolving around the figure of Hikkaduve Sumangala, often represented by European writers as the 'High Priest' of Ceylon and certainly a key gatekeeper[54] (on Sumangala more generally, see Blackburn 2010). This much is said explicitly in relation to Asoka:

> Eventually he decided on taking the robes and joining the order of Buddhist priests, and with this object applied to the High Priest Sumangala to be admitted into the ranks of the Buddhist monks, but the High Priest declined. Soon after this a number of Burmese came over from Burmah with offering [sic] for the Dalada Maligawa, Kandy, and among the party was the High Priest Vijirarama of Burma, who is, we believe, nephew to the Kind of Siam. This was about the beginning of last year, and soon after the arrival of the pilgrims Gordon Douglas was ordained by the High Priest Vijirarama at the Kuppiyawatte Temple at Temple-road in the presence of thousands of Buddhists, a great deal of interest being imparted to the ceremony by the presence of hundreds of Burmese

[52] On the role of the laity in modern Sinhalese revivalist Buddhism, see Swearer 1970.
[53] *The Pioneer*, 28 November 1901: 6
[54] Sumangala may have ordained a Scotsman, Mr Macmillan, who arrived in 1892 and was associated with the BTS (*Daily Advertiser*, 25 June 1892, 3): if so, perhaps the experience was an unhappy one.

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> pilgrims. Some time after his ordination, Asoka, which was the name given him by the High Priest, went over to Burmah.[55]

It is possible that the caste restrictions of the various *nikayas* played against Europeans – or that Sumangala feared that the multiplicity of *nikayas* might be used to undermine the validity of such ordinations (Burmese ordinations held considerable prestige in Ceylon). It is also possible, following Sumangala's own difficulties with Olcott and Dharmapala (Blackburn 2010, ch. 4[56]) that he felt unsure of his ability to exercise effective control over white *bhikkhus* and preferred to have them at a distance[57]. His presiding at BTS *pansil* ceremonies may suggest a certain desire to retain control even over the lay conversion process.

Conversely, at least some European converts like Daly were 'Protestant' in the sense of being hostile to ritualism and monastic leadership; in this sense lay conversion and the activist Buddhism espoused by lay Buddhist organizations was certainly a more congenial orientation. The BTS itself was in practice a lay organization and its *Sandaresa* commented 'unfavourably' on Gordon Douglas' ordination.[58] The BTS *pansil* ceremonies, perhaps, indicate not only the negative agency of Sumangala but also the positive agency of the BTS: both, of course, relativizing accounts which treat western agency as causally central.

This question of the routes and gatekeepers through which European and American converts became lay Buddhists or monks bears further research. While it was relatively easy to declare oneself a Buddhist in Europe or North America, westerners in Asia – where the imperial and racial lines crossed by doing so were much starker – typically sought the legitimacy of monastic support for their ordinations, *pansil* ceremonies or initiations, so that we have to pay attention to the politics of sangha involvement in such events and not simply read them as a western story.

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[55] *JMBS* vol. 9 no. 1, May 1900, p. 3, citing "Ceylon Paper".

[56] Anne Blackburn also notes that controversies had arisen over nationalism and sovereignty in the late 1890s a propos of the Sri Lankan ordination of the Siamese prince Jinavaravamsa and the Siamese king's visit to Ceylon (pers. comm; cf. Blackburn 2010, ch. 5) and that this might have caused Sumangala to be cautious about ordaining westerners.

[57] Some of the individuals concerned were indeed problematic, such as the disgraced archaeologist Führer. The *JMBS* reports the *Ceylon Standard* as writing "Much interest has been excited in Buddhist and other circles at the prospect of Dr. Führer coming to Ceylon to join the Buddhist priesthood. The Press notices recently made regarding this gentleman have given rise to grave suspicion. We understand that Dr. Führer will have an opportunity given him of refuting the charges made against him before he is accepted by the leading Buddhists here as an exponent of the religion of Buddha." (vol. 10 / 8&9, Dec 1901-Jan 1902, 71).

[58] *The Times of India* Jan 28 1899, 5.

'Unity, Industry and Spirituality': Funding and Developing the BTS Schools

The BTS' educational programme faced two challenges. One was that

> embracing 'English' education entailed embracing a different definition of 'education', with different methodology and ideological intention.[59]

The other was funding: implicitly in competition with traditional processes of donation to the monastic sangha and in tension with the latter,[60] the BTS struggled to establish itself as a worthy object of donations.[61] Writing of his first visit, when these tensions had not yet emerged, Olcott noted

> [A]bout every priest of any influence in Ceylon had come into our league and pledged themselves to our movement. I suppose the fact is that they were borne in on a wave of popular enthusiasm and could not have held back anyhow. My greatest mistake was not to have taken advantage of this feeling to have collected – as I easily might – a fund of two or three lakhs of rupees for the founding of Buddhist schools, for the printing of Buddhist books, and for propaganda generally. By delaying this indispensable business until the following year, my work was infinitely harder and the aggregate of collections infinitely less.[62]

From 1881 onwards, Olcott and other BTS members (including Leadbeater,[63] Daly and Dharmapala) were engaged in constant fundraising efforts, primarily geared towards education and facing an uphill battle which seems to have burnt out the first generations. As the *JMBS* noted in 1894:

> For several years [following Olcott's 1881 fundraising tour] the work had to be suspended for want of workers, but in 1886 Colonel Olcott deputed that ardent English Buddhist, Mr. C. W. Leadbeater of London to re-open the campaign. He was joined afterwards by

[59] Powell 2001, 168.
[60] Malalgoda (1976, 250-2) discusses the 1887 conflict between Olcott and Megittuwatte.
[61] A pattern of schools being first opened and then closed (Powell 2001, 167) may also have had to do with the greater prestige attached to donations that founded institutions as against those maintaining them.
[62] Olcott 1900, 203-4.
[63] Leadbeater, co-founder and first principal (1886-89) of the English Buddhist Academy (later Ananda College) is a deeply controversial figure. In 1906, he was forced to resign from the TS for giving advice about masturbation to boys under his care. For his defenders, he was a sex educator; for his critics a paedophile.

> the late Mr C. F. Powell, of America. In 1889 Dr. J. Bowles Daly, of London, was appointed by Colonel Olcott to take the place of Mr. Leadbeater and he worked in the island in the cause of Bhuddhist [sic] education for several years. Dr. Daly retiring from the field, Mr. A.E. Boultgins, B.A., was appointed by Colonel Olcott to the managership…[64]

These tours – which typically included modernist *bhikkhus* in the early years, and lay BTS members subsequently – used Olcott's own invention, a sort of Heath Robinson-esque camper van:

> So great was my discomfort that at last I set my Yankee ingenuity to work, and had built for me a two-wheeled travelling-cart on springs, which could give ample sleeping accommodation for four people; had lockers projecting from the sides, for holding table-furniture, tinned provisions, a small library, and my bathing kit, two large ones under the floor for baggage, sacks of vegetables and curry-stuffs; a tight canvas roof on hoop-iron ribs, a chest in front for tools and spare ropes, hooks underneath for water-bucket, cattle-trough, etc., a secure shelf over the axle for the driver's cooking-pots, and rings behind for attaching a led bullock. After we got that, our troubles were at an end, and I lived in that conveyance for weeks at a stretch. It weighed less than a country cart, and was as comfortable as need be. By a simple change of longitudinal seat-planks inside, I could, at will, have a writing room, dining room, sleeping room, or an omnibus-like arrangement, with two cushioned seats running fore and aft, to accommodate eight sitters. It was as much a novelty to the simple country folk as the Buddhist Catechism, and priests and laity used to flock around to see its mechanical wonders. After the lapse of fifteen years the cart is still in serviceable condition, and has been used by Dhammapala, Leadbeater, Powell, Banbery, and various other workers in Ceylon. I have travelled many miles in the best Indian bullock-coaches, but not one compares for comfort and convenience with this.[65]

Sumangala assisted with fund-raising in the early years, but this was problematic given the competition that ultimately became visible between BTS schools and *pirivenas*. Hope of alternative funding appeared with the

[64] Vol. 3 / 6, "Education in Ceylon". Here and elsewhere Sanghamitta Girls' School is treated as a sister organization; Daly spoke at its opening ceremony and "dwelt on the benefits of female education" (*Lucifer* vol. VII/40, 15 Dec 1890, p. 343). More substantively, he addressed a meeting of its parent body, the Women's Educational Society in Colombo, and proposed the establishment of a Sinhalese-language journal for women, to be called *The Sanghamitta*, with support from himself and Olcott (Supplement to *The Theosophist*, August 1890, cliv).

[65] Olcott 1900, 305-6.

long-promised Buddhist Temporalities Act of 1889, but this did not include provision for education as had been sought.[66] It is in this context that Daly's arrival is significant. As we have seen, his visit to Ceylon with Olcott led him to fall in love with the country and Olcott to invest him as his representative; he would also become General Manager of the BTS schools. He brought energy and enthusiasm to the task:

> No official report has been received since Dr. Daly's return to the Island, but from other sources we learn that he is actively at work, appealing to the people to help our work, encouraging the opening of Buddhist schools, pointing out their shortcomings, and urging them to live the lives of true Buddhists.[67]

Writing in *The Buddhist* (July 3 1891, 220-1), Daly saw the schools in an unsatisfactory situation 'owing to a want of unity among the people and insufficiency of pecuniary assistance'[68]. He outlined a strategy to deal with this, identifying the need for a general fund that would combine support for the development of existing BTS schools with the foundation of new ones, a plan for new schools coupled with a focus on establishing those already in existence, the need to use trained teachers only (even where volunteers were available), and for a technical focus to education that would enable the foundation of new industries rather than simply training young men for government jobs.

Daly announced that

> A new departure must now be taken to and the means hitherto utilised by the Missionaries must be appropriated by the Buddhists on their own behalf. With 90 percent of the population on our side, it is much easier for Buddhists to organise a plan of education than

[66] The *JMBS* for Feb-Mar 1895 (vol. 3 nos 10 & 11, 76) reports the *Ceylon Independent* as writing

> The most marked signs of activity, however, are those displayed by the Buddhists who are establishing broadcast in towns and villages schools and colleges of every grade, both for boys as well as girls…. The successful remonstrance also made by the Buddhists to the Secretary of State, regarding the ¼ mile clause, having a retrospective effect on schools established before the passing of the clause, has encouraged them to raise large amounts for providing for the support of existing schools and for additional schools in more remote parts of the island.

This clause prevented new schools from being built within quarter of a mile of an existing school and was the object of a successful campaign led by Buultjens (Bartholomeusz 1998, 172).

[67] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, August 1890: cliv.

[68] Daly was even less politic in his comments on traditional *pansala* schools (Powell 2001, 168).

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> to allow an alien body to come and sow the seeds of a 'dying faith' in the minds of our children ....

He himself would work for free (his accommodation and subsistence were covered) and aimed to contribute Rs 50-, suggesting that his writing was producing a certain income given that more than 20 years had passed since his compensation for disestablishment.[69] As general manager he saw his role as visiting different regions for fundraising, identifying where schools were needed and checking up on the existing ones.

The issue of technical education – which as noted fit with Daly's perspectives on Irish development – would prove a source of conflict with Olcott.[70] Daly collected money from the central province to establish technical schools, a project vetoed by Olcott on the grounds of insufficient funds. In a letter to *The Buddhist* of 10 April 1891 (p. 128) Olcott noted that Daly (who had resigned as BTS general secretary as part of the planned reorganization) would continue as general manager of schools, but not establishing technical schools. The immediate issue seems to have been that Daly was planning to use BTS funds for the latter;[71] on 12 June (pp. 199-200) Olcott withdrew his objections to technical education provided that it took place within the existing schools rather than in separate institutions. By 10 July (pp. 229-30) following a visit to the Kandy area, Daly would argue again for technical education for the Ceylonese poor on the basis of a comparison between local craft and industries and those of Germany and Switzerland. His real point of reference, however, was Ireland:

> My personal knowledge of the resources, or rather want of resources, of Ireland, has taught me to observe deficiencies here which might be easily remedied. A technical and not a literary education would do much for the people of Ceylon … Just as at home, young men rush into Government

[69] After their falling-out, Olcott claimed that Daly said he would be able to support himself on the proceeds of two houses in London which he would sell, but that he was in fact broke and "demanded a salary and allowances from the Sinhalese" (1910, 183). Daly lived at two different addresses (albeit in the same Islington street) in 1888 and 1889, which could mean that he owned them or equally that he was in precarious renting. Once genteel, Islington was now increasingly occupied by those displaced by inner-city slum clearance.

[70] Cox (2013b, 230) dated Daly's comments on industrial education in Ceylon at 1879; the piece in fact appeared in a supplement to *The Theosophist* for 1893 (vol 14, May supplement, p 57).

[71] Olcott was at pains to note in this letter that he supported the principle of technical education, but that Daly's scheme could not be attempted with the limited funds raised thus far. Moreover, fundraising in this respect had taken place "without consultation with me or my knowledge or consent", and hence Olcott would not "allow my name to be used in aid of it on the lines now laid out".

> offices for small pay, and the nobler arts are deserted for a literary education which presents too few outlets for talent.[72]

Fundraising remained problematic alongside this specific conflict (to which we return below); we catch glimpses of Daly touring the Central Provinces with Dharmapala and Abraham Perera[73] in 1890.

Mahinda College, Galle

Daly eventually focussed his efforts more locally – in Galle, perhaps because Ceylon's second port offered the prospect of some autonomy from BTS headquarters in Colombo. Olcott had founded 'Galle Theosophical Buddhist School' in 1880, managed by GCA Jayasekara, president of the Galle BTS. Matters had deteriorated, however, and a decade later Daly could write 'You remember the old Theosophical Society which [sic] is now practically dead, started a Buddhist school which came to an untimely end. The national fund collected by Col. Olcott is nearly exhausted' (cited in Samarapala n.d., 10)

On 1 March 1892 he refounded the school as Mahinda[74] College, with himself as principal.[75] By this time (according to *The Buddhist*) he had raised over Rs 3,000 by going door to door.[76] As an English-language school, Mahinda was destined not only for 'the better classes of Buddhists at Galle' (*The Buddhist*, 4 March 1892, 76) but for rising elites around the province; for example, Daly and others went on fundraising missions to Ambalangoda and Dodanduwa (*The Buddhist*, 29 January 1892, 39-40). He had also secured the help of a 'scholar of first distinction' and other trained assistants and plans to give the boys training in technical studies and fine arts along with a good moral training. Just before the school opened, Daly wrote that 'the real want of the Sinhalese people is a system of education spiritual and secular, which will promote unity, industry and spirituality' (*The Buddhist*, 26 February 1892: 70-71).

In launching the school, Daly 'promised to be tolerant to those of other faiths who choose to come under his instruction' and 'disclaimed all hostility to Christianity; the walls carried quotes from Buddhist, Christian and Muslim scriptures (*The Buddhist*, 11 March 1892: 84). Initially at least

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[72] 1890, 469-70.

[73] Supplement to *The Theosophist*, September 1890, clxi.

[74] Mahinda and Sanghamitta, son and daughter of the emperor Asoka, were the legendary founders of Buddhism in Ceylon.

[75] Daly's role has been progressively forgotten, not least because school records were deliberately destroyed in the 1960s (Powell 2001, 230-1).

[76] Samarapala (n.d.) notes the key role played by the figure of Thomas de Silva Amarasuriya, a close associate of Olcott and the first manager, whose brother, son and grandson were all important figures in the new elite.

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the school was supported particularly by the Muslim community in Galle Fort (Samarapala n.d.)

In July, Mr. Babu Aghor Nath Bannerjee from Calcutta University was appointed headmaster,[77] with around 100 children and 3 teachers. According to *The Buddhist* (7 October 1892, 316) the school fared well in an early inspection (praising 'the careful training in English that each pupil has received'[78]) and was registered for a grant from 1893 (*The Buddhist* 6 January 1893, 1).

Around this period Daly began to withdraw from the BTS. He resigned as General Manager of schools (*The Buddhist* 9 Sept 1892), handing over to Buultjens.[79] In the same issue, Olcott wrote that Daly had been relieved from the position because it required 'more active supervision' than Daly had been able to give in the past 12 months. Daly offered some parting advice: there were four good Buddhist schools in the country (evidently the English-language schools: Ananda and Sanghamitta[80] in Colombo, the Kandy school and Mahinda in Galle). The grant would make a school such as the Kandy one self-supporting: 'it now only wants a few rich men to endow it' (p. 283).

Shortly after this Daly would write again to *The Buddhist* that while he was 'not in sympathy with all Col. Olcott's policy … there can be no two opinions on the value of the services he has rendered to Buddhism', and announced the establishment of an Olcott Pension Fund (23 September 1892: 298-9). Olcott was only 60 at this point and still very active, and this may have been intended as a barbed joke; however Daly also wrote that *bhikkhus* were too complacent and the 'real missionaries of the gentle Siddhartha today are a handful of men of European blood'.

The circumstances in which Daly left Mahinda are not fully clear, although money certainly raised its head. Olcott wrote in *The Buddhist* that

[77] Confusingly, Mahinda had both principals and head masters (*Mahinda College Magazine* 8/1, March 1952, 22).

[78] *Mahinda College Magazine*, 53.

[79] Daly may also have become more interested in spiritual healing around this time: in 1893 he advertised in *The Buddhist* (23 June, 183) that he had cured epilepsy by mesmerism and clairvoyance; by 1894 *The Buddhist* would write "His fund of anecdotes of clairvoyance and clairaudience, offered wholesale and retail, in public and in private, instead of gaining for him the reputation of communication with the Spirits of the Borderland, only afforded subject for mirth and ridicule" (cited in *Ceylon Overland Observer*, 18 June 1894, 648).

[80] This is not the present-day Sanghamitta in Galle (founded 1919) but was founded by the Colombo-based Women's Education Society in 1889 (de Mel 2001, 69). Often struggling, it was merged in 1898 (with the support of the BTS and the Maha Bodhi Society) with the Sanghamitta Upasikaramaya, an innovative ten-precept nun's order run by Sr Sanghamitta (Countess de Canavarro). The school increasingly fell by the wayside, Sanghamitta was ousted by the MBS and both institutions closed in 1899-90 (Bartolomeusz 1994: 60 – 75).

'About two years ago, Dr. Daly, to my great regret took up a hostile attitude towards the managing members of the Colombo T.S. and used epithets against them in the public press which I could not excuse' (6 January 1893, 8). At a Galle TS meeting chaired by Daly, he brought up the state of the National Fund, saying that over £200 in interest had been lost due to Mr Weerakoon's bad bookkeeping (*The Buddhist* 23 September 1893: 281). The trustees indited a letter requesting the latter to transfer this money; it is possible that this was a toned-down version of the same charge and that it was this which had precipitated the breach.

W. K. Samarapala says that when Daly left the school it was in a good shape but that it was too early to leave it to manage itself (n.d.) The *JMBS*, similarly, wrote that he 'did good work during his four years residence in Ceylon in helping the Buddhists to open schools under Buddhist auspices' (vol. 3 no. 4, August 1894, 31). Daly, moreover, had the support of Amarasuriya, who would later work with FL Woodward to turn Mahinda into a leading school.

Cox (2013b, 232) suggested that Daly's personality did not help; for example, *The Buddhist* commented that 'Dr. Daly is a man of exceeding great energy and perseverance, and *with less impulsiveness and impetuosity, and a little more judgment and moderation,* he is bound to succeed' (4 March 1892, 76; italics ours). On his departure it wrote

> Of a fiery and impetuous disposition his temperament repelled rather than attracted the Sinhalese whose ideal of a sage is one who is well controlled in speech and action. Though outspoken, straightforward and honest, he was lacking in those essential qualities of tact and judgement which have rendered his work in the Island for over two years on the whole a failure.[81]

Daly's paternalistic racism, too, hardly helped in winning allies:

> The most heart-breaking feature of work in the Island is the slowness of the people to perceive their real wants and most apparent necessities. What is very obvious to a European takes a considerable time for a native to understand in all its bearings.[82]

It seems likely, too, that Daly's agenda ran somewhat counter to that of some at least of his key supporters: Daly keen to develop local craft and industry with an orientation towards 'the poor', the BTS tending towards developing a future Buddhist elite. This might fit with our suggestion that Daly found himself in a more radical context in Ceylonese politics than he was fully comfortable with. In opening Mahinda, he stated

[81] Cited in *Overland Ceylon Observer,* 18 June 1894, 648.
[82] *The Buddhist*, 9 September 1892, 283.

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> his desire was to place within the reach of the natives of the Island an education less literary and more practical than that already in existence. He pointed out the condition … prevailing in the villages... giving it as his opinion … can only be redressed by the introduction of sound religious teaching and simple industries, such as have been found effective in many European countries. Dr. Daly condemned the native tendency of pestering government for official employment, which was scarce and ill-paid, and advocated the cultivation of the land and more lucrative employment arising from trade and industry. All great fortunes made in England were by commerce and industry. In this direction there was more scope for talents and a better field for labour than in employments purely literary.[83]

As we have seen above, Olcott was conflicted on this point, which raised the broader issue of what a modern Buddhist school should look like and what its curriculum should be. This was an issue for the whole movement, understandably so as the traditional situation had seen Buddhist, traditional and Sinhala education (with some Pali) contrasted to Christian, modern and English-language education. As the slowness of initial fundraising efforts showed, it was by no means clear to all members of the Sinhala Buddhist elite that the credentialized employment which the schools were designed for (and the elite posts for those trained in English) was really the wave of the future: 'Some of our rich people whom he and his friends visited with hopes of receiving big money as contributions had the cheek to remind Dr. Daly … that there would be no one to pluck coconuts if all are taught English' (Samarapala n.d., 11).

The BTS movement was clear about the need for modern, Buddhist, lay-controlled schools but much less clear as to what shape those schools could or should take; something which was hardly helped by the multiplicity of local initiatives that formed the necessary backbone of the project. By definition their schools would be distinct from *pirivenas* and old-style village temple schools as from Christian missionary schools; but this said relatively little in terms of positive content.

Daly's call for technical education conjured up a strategy for industrial revolution which perhaps made more sense in the context of nineteenth-century Ireland, deindustrialized after the Act of Union but painfully aware of the development of British industry at its expense, than it did in Ceylon.[84] As it stood, the contrast between the majority of

[83] *The Buddhist*, 11 March 1892, 84.

[84] We should not overestimate this contrast, though: the call for more technical education, contrasted with the reality of a system providing a primarily academic education to the large majority of students, remains a familiar contradiction in twenty-first century Ireland. His comment "I claim the credit of having first sounded the tocsin in this battle and unsparingly condemned the existing system of Education…" (1896, i) makes it clear

vernacular BTS schools and the elite English-language ones marked a different sort of class distinction in terms of the kinds of employment for which their pupils would be destined.

Certainly there was a sharp contradiction between Daly's dedication to 'simple industries' for 'the villages' and the urban wealth on which he relied, as indeed there was between running an English-language school and disdaining 'official employment' and 'employments purely literary', and the tone of his comments can hardly have been comfortable for the would-be shapers of the country's new elite. In relation to the English-language schools in particular, it was this elite which would form the backbone of funders and organizers and which intended to shape the direction not only of education but – at this time implicitly – of the future autonomous Sri Lanka. Daly's battles and actions reflect these contextual complexities as well as his own idiosyncracies and points of reference.

Following his departure, Amarasuriya would keep the school going with a series of principals, up to the point where FL Woodward, later a noted Buddhist scholar, became principal from 1903 to 1919, a 'turning point' according to the school's historian (Samarapala n.d., 13). Gordon Douglas was also briefly principal in 1898[85] before ordaining as *bhikkhu* Asoka.

Establishing the BTS schools

Despite all these difficulties, the BTS slowly managed to assert lay schools – and the BTS itself – as an object of Buddhist *dana*. The 1890s were decisive in this respect:

> In 1892, the number of registered schools was 9, in 1893 the number rose to 25, in 1894 to 34, in 1896 to 54 and in 1897 to 64.
>
> The attendance of children in 1894 was 6,583, in 1896 the number rose to 11,070 and in the present year [1897] it is over 13,910.[86]

In the same report Olcott would claim 105 schools 'under the Society's supervision' with 17,000 children for 1897:[87] the difference consisted of schools not yet approved for grants. Beyond these 105, 'some fifty more

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that he understood his approach as innovative, at least within the British empire; or, put another way, there were no accessible models that parents and organizers in Ceylon could look to.

[85] *Mahinda College Magazine*, 53.

[86] *General Report of the 22nd anniversary of the Theosophical Society* (1897), 28.

[87] Similarly, the General Manager's report for 1894 had counted 58 BTS schools (*JMBS* vol. 3 no. 6, Oct. 1894, "Education in Ceylon", 49).

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schools have been opened by Buddhists, but not yet put under our management'.[88] In 1898 there were 40 other Buddhist schools (Malalgoda 1976, 250). [89]

The BTS had close relations with at least some of these, notably Sanghamitta girls' school in Colombo,[90] which loomed large in Annie Besant's 1893 tour. She and Olcott were met at the BTS headquarters by 'the boys from the English Buddhist school, and the head master, Mr Buultjens … the boys singing the Jaya Mangala'; visited Sanghamitta girls' school; distributed prizes at 'the Buddhist school'; travelled to Mahinda College in Galle; 'again lectured at another college'; back in Colombo, laid the foundation stone for the new Sanghamitta building; and made 'a farewell visit to the Sanghamitta schools.'[91] This same tour gives us a brief glimpse of Mahinda:

> [T]hey visited Mahinda College, over which Dr. Bowles Daly presides, and where Annie Besant lectured, and Colonel Olcott, Countess Wachtmeister, and Mrs. Higgins [Kate Pickett's successor at Sanghamitta] also addressed the students. It was here that the party saw the "devil-dance", of which a description has appeared … this was followed by fireworks in their honour.[92]

We have not been able to find full details of the gender breakdown of these schools, but an 1893 article gives these for schools at Panadura and between Colombo and Galle: 8 boys', 4 girls' and 2 mixed schools.[93]

The large majority were vernacular rather than English-language (in a ratio of 28 to 3: Theosophical Society 1897, 29). Probably most such schools were ultimately the initiative of local committees, at best inspired by action from Colombo and interacting with it around the inspection and registration process. (Indeed Olcott had argued that the BTS' role should be to provide a permanent framework which could grow with local support.) In 1891 Daly had written

> My work in the Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces is bearing splendid fruit. The people are now aroused to a sense of duty in regard to the

[88] Theosophical Society 1897, 2.
[89] For comparison, there were some 918 grant-aided Christian schools in 1892 (Samarapala n.d.: 9).
[90] This alliance would continue throughout the 1890s: in the rules for her ten-precept nuns' order, Sr Sanghamitta explicitly permitted membership of the BTS (Bartolomeusz 1994, 69-70).
[91] "Annie Besant's Indian tour". *Lucifer* vol. 13 (1893-4), 429-30.
[92] "Annie Besant's Indian tour". *Lucifer* vol. 13 (1893-4), 429.
[93] "Annie Besant's Indian tour". *Lucifer* vol. 13 (1893-4), 430.

> education of their children… I am literally inundated with applications from all quarters to open fresh schools.[94]

He laid out practical criteria for the process:

> Before a school should be open in town or village, a small committee, not less than three or more than five, should be formed. These should go from house to house to collect a sum not less than Rs. 150. This sum should be kept in the hands of a local treasurer, who should communicate with me at once. I shall advertise for masters and teachers. No teacher should be appointed by the local manager, (footnote says unless the manager is an acknowledged man of education and culture) until I am satisfied with his qualifications. My object is to prepare the school so as to secure the Government grant-in-aid.[95]

By 1909, the efforts of the 1890s had borne fruit; there were 225 BTS schools with a total attendance of 30,000, 206 qualifying for grants in aid (*Buddhist Review* vol. 1 no. 3, July 1909, 228), along with a significant number of other Buddhist schools. Across the period 1880 – 1900, the proportion of students in BTS schools rose from 0.4% to 15.5% (de Tollenaere 1996, 279).

In particular the English-language schools such as Mahinda were to become key locations of the formation of the new Sinhalese elite. This was true not only for the students but also for the organizers: Jayatilaka would become Minister of Home Affairs; another one-time General Manager, WA de Silva, became Minister of Health while S Bandaranaike, a committee member, would become Prime Minister (de Tollenaere 1996, 281). Other political offshoots were more immediate, in particular the Young Men's Buddhist Association, founded in 1898 by BTS members and eventually becoming the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (Frost 2002, 953). 'Unity' and 'spirituality' had perhaps won out over Daly's industrial vision; or put another way, if he was defeated it was not by 'the slowness of the people to perceive their real wants' but by the active assertion of a different definition of what those wants were.

Conclusion: Daly after the BTS, the BTS after Daly

While still working at Mahinda, Daly was appointed as commissioner for Buddhist Temporalities (*Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society* vol. 1 no. 10, Feb 1893, 3). This represented an attempt on the part of the colonial administration to at least secure some legitimacy for a reform which had

[94] *Lucifer* Mar-Aug 1891, 82, citing *The Buddhist*.
[95] *The Buddhist*, 16 January 1891, 26.

failed to satisfy the Buddhist schools. In the process of writing his report, published in November 1893,[96] Daly is said to have visited some thirteen hundred monasteries (Dennis 1897, 534). His conclusion was that there was no proper oversight or accounting of the funds and properties involved, that mismanagement was rife and that a permanent commissioner 'unconnected with the Civil Service' should be appointed to oversee Buddhist property in Ceylon.[97] This heavy hinting did not, however, result in his appointment.

Olcott was perhaps thinking of this report when he wrote that Daly 'denounced wholesale the entire Sangha' (1910, 183-4), and it certainly won him no friends: from the Buddhist side it provoked an unsigned series of articles criticising the report as simply an attack on monks, commenting that he seemed not to have benefitted from visiting 1300 monasteries and that perhaps his lack of Sinhala or Pali was an obstacle (*The Buddhist*, 12 January 1894). Daly responded to the articles (9 March 1894: 71-2), defending his work. The Temporalities Act would eventually be amended under Buddhist pressure in 1907.

Daly left Ceylon in June 1894 (*Overland Ceylon Observer* 18 June 1894) and moved to Calcutta, where he edited the *Indian World* and the *Indian Daily News*, ran a cramming school and wrote *Indian Sketches and Rambles* (1896) before disappearing from the Asian record. A John Bowles Daly appears in the electoral rolls for Melbourne (1903) and Henty, Victoria (1913 - 1916), fitting with Olcott's comment 'At last accounts he was in the Australian colonies'.[98] As noted in Cox (2013b, 235), Daly seems to have found India very difficult after the bruising experience of Ceylon; it is perhaps understandable that he seems to have had no further involvement in public life.

If Daly's personal vision for education was defeated, his contribution to the wider BTS project was not fruitless. In this light, perhaps, his conversion to Buddhism represents a broader subordination of western allies to local projects[99] – and his eventual abandonment perhaps a personal bitterness as to this outcome.

Indeed, far from being a western implantation the BTS was very successful in asserting its autonomy from the international TS. As Malalgoda observes, there was widespread scepticism about key Theosophical ideas, little interest in the international movement or involvement in the Society's splits (1976. 252-5).[100] It is not that there were

[96] It received positive mention from Max Weber (1967, 375).
[97] Cited in the *Overland Ceylon Observer* (29 November 1893, 1308).
[98] 1910, 184.
[99] As Cox (2013b, ch 5) argues, this subordination is an important feature of early western Buddhist converts in the context of colonial Asia.
[100] The distance from Adyar was not always evident to outsiders: a letter to the *Ceylon Observer* (29 December 1910, 5) chastised the BTS' *Sarasavi Sandaresa* for anti-Christian

no arguments around this: in 1897-8 Olcott successfully resisted an attempt by Dharmapala to remove the word 'Theosophical' from the society's name (Malalgoda 1976, 253), but overall Harris' conclusion seems justified:

> Theosophy, therefore, did not take hold in Sri Lanka. It was the Buddhist Theosophical Society not the Theosophical Society that survived. The former became a tool of the Revival; the latter could not.[101]

Put another way, what mattered in Ceylon was not the TS centre but the usefulness or otherwise of the BTS for local organizers. In this sense both western conversion to Buddhism and the establishment of Buddhist schools served a broader purpose in Sinhalese Buddhist revival. It is this reality that underlay the selective reception of Theosophy in Ceylon: not only the success of the lay BTS on its own terms, but equally the failure of the (non-Buddhist) Lanka TS and the clerical branch of the BTS.

Within the BTS, this paper has argued that the interconnected stories of the educational turn and *pansil* ceremonies for westerners both represent the local agenda rather than that of the international TS. Finally, we might see Daly's personal sense of defeat, perhaps particularly around the issue of industrial and technical education, as also marking in part the success of local Buddhist elites' definition of what Buddhist education should teach and for whose benefit.

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commentary, writing: 'It is a Society under the control and patronage of Mrs Annie Besant and it will be illuminating to contrast her latest deliverance on Jesus Christ with that of her Sinhalese editor. … One would be curious to know what the editor in question has to say in explanation – or Mrs Besant about him'.

[101] Harris 2006, 147.

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