
Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

Vol. 65

Spring 2020

News of the Society

Greetings from the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies! The fall was busy for us, including our Annual Meeting. As a group we have welcomed new board members and are continuing outreach efforts (check out our [website](#), [blog](#), or [facebook](#) page).



In this issue please find:

- Corona Virus Musings by SBCS Vice President, Mark Unno
- An overview of the 2019 Annual Meeting, including board and members meetings and panels
- Information on upcoming events, including the European Network Conference next year
- Streng award info
- Membership, contribution, and other contact info



In the Time of Coronavirus ...
Mark Unno, University of Oregon

When we look back upon this time, say a decade from now, it will likely have left an indelible impression on our minds, hearts, and unfortunately, even our bodies. For many of us living in ‘developed’ countries, as I do, the massive disruption due to the spread of Novel Coronavirus will have been the biggest societal shock we experienced. In response, we are in the midst of the greatest mass mobilization since the end of World War II. In hot spots like New York City, first responders and medical professional – doctors, nurses, orderlies – are exhausted, risking and sacrificing their lives. We all owe them a tremendous debt of gratitude for the rest of our lives. Ironically, the most important mobilization for the average citizen is: “patience.” Stay in place, place yourself in physical isolation from others, and practice public safety as much as possible.

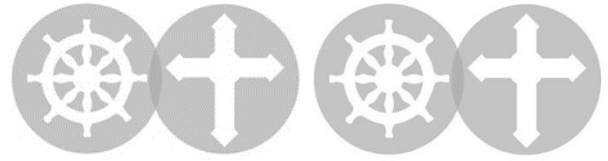
Yet, paradoxically, this relative physical and social isolation gives us a rare opportunity: the space to reflect, be contemplative, and go deeply inward. This does not necessarily mean just sitting on a meditation cushion, reading sacred scriptures, or chanting and bowing alone in front of a personal or home altar. It might be that we have time to take a walk and notice the beauty of nature because our minds are not focused on the destination, the busywork we need to complete, only to go on to the one after that. It allows us to become more aware of the undercurrents of our minds and hearts – thoughts and emotions – that we typically ignore or even suppress. What am I really thinking about, feeling, placing priority on? Am I agitated, anxious, fearful; allowing for feelings of concern, sorrow, joy to arise from deep within? It is within the spaciousness of our minds and spirits that we can become more fully aware of the flow of our lives, and thus to be more fully human.

In my own tradition of Shin Buddhism, this simultaneous awareness of the surface turbulence with the more spacious, deeper tranquility within is referred to as the dynamic of blind passions and boundless compassion, of the foolish being and Amida Buddha, the

awakening of infinite light, the ocean of limitless light of Great Compassion. Whereas in Zen Buddhism, one attains this awareness through silent, seated meditation, in Shin Buddhism, it is attained through chanting, *Namu Amida Butsu*, which means, "I, this foolish being filled with blind passions, is led to entrust myself in the awakening of infinite light." In this awareness, we can not only be more attentive to ourselves but others as well, other people, creatures, the sun, the stars, and the moon.

With this, I leave you with the following poem:

*In the Time of Coronavirus . . .
The vast shimmering sky blue
Outlines delicate pink petals
Cherry blossoms, early this year
So calm and beautiful
This day in March
Yet so eery and unfamiliar
In the time of Coronavirus
Streets empty of cars and people
Except the lonely few
In the time of 'social distancing'
We find ourselves turning within
Anxious thoughts, concerns
Unfurling against the background of
The limitless Ocean of Light of
Great Compassion
Home again, in deep silence
I am led to bow, palms together
All beings are one with me, I am led to become
one with all beings
Amida Buddha
Her Heart of Great Compassion opening,
Illuminating, enveloping, and dissolving
Deep within
My heart, in Her heart
Namu Amida Butsu*



**The Annual Meeting of the Society for
Buddhist-Christian Studies**

**Concurrent with the American Academy of
Religion
Annual Meeting
San Diego, November 2019**

***Powerful Resources for Victims of Sexual
Violence and for Dual Religious Practitioners***

The highlight of SBCS's 2019 annual meeting was our extremely powerful sessions. The Friday session was "Buddhist and Christian Resources for Addressing Sexual Violence." All the panelists focused on violence in sanghas or churches in which they'd been engaged. Each panelist in the Saturday session, "Buddhist-Christian Dual Practice and Belonging," described dynamics in their own dual practice, sometimes linking these dynamics with data on the overall phenomenon.

I won't summarize each paper this year, since we're hoping to publish all of them in the journal and since past president Kristin Largen has commented on the Friday papers on our blog at: <https://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/topics>.

What made these sessions powerful - and useful - were:

- a) The careful, practical and long-term way each panelist had been engaged on the ground with the issue under discussion,
- b) the practical resources each paper provided to help listeners become more helpfully engaged with the issue

themselves: resources which could be passed on to students and others,

- c) the Friday panelists' use of their tradition's scriptures and founding rituals as powerful, practical resources.

The papers exemplified scholarly depth and precision, but none was merely an academic exercise. Each one struck me as an exercise in passing on hard-earned wisdom to help heal this planet.

In her blog post about the Friday panel, Kristin wrote: "Frankly, it was hard to process all of the information by the end, and we didn't allow enough time for conversation and reflection [that's on us]." None of the papers seemed to go over time, and current president Leo Lefebure, who put together this brilliant panel, moderated it brilliantly, too. Instead, the problem was that, unlike most years, none of "us" on the board arranged a Friday evening dinner gathering. *Nostra culpa; mea culpa!* Jonathan Seitz has often organized these, but he was unable to attend in 2019.

Reflecting on Kristin's comment reminded me that, when I've asked long-term members how the SBCS has strengthened their teaching and other vocations, they've often mentioned past international conferences that offered:

- powerful, experience-based presentations,
- time and space for listeners to reflect upon, and then discuss together, how to apply in their own contexts the resources these presentations offered,

I don't think the SBCS should, or could, organize a conference now! But perhaps we could consistently organize, during our annual meeting, Friday post-panel dinner gatherings and/or Saturday post-panel lunches. During

these gatherings we could "process" together the resources the panelists offered us with an eye towards application in our teaching and in our religious communities. Since academic scholars in religion and theology are working more hours for less pay, often with no travel allowance, and since few monastic scholars in our fields can travel much, perhaps we should also consider streaming or recording some of our gatherings in venues without steep conference media fees.

The past conferences, annual meeting panels, and journal articles of the SBCS have documented, and in some cases shaped in positive directions, many local and global religious phenomena, and the ways these phenomena have been researched. SBCS members have deeply shaped the field of comparative theology to highlight the current relevance of disparate ancient texts reflecting seemingly similar wisdom. One of our founders, Rita Gross, helped reshape the field of religious studies to value the work of women scholars and of practitioner-scholars. She drew on conversations within the SBCS as she clarified the ways the research perspectives of religious insiders and outsiders can mutually inform each other in socially beneficial ways.

Our planet is experiencing increasing environmental instability. This includes – and affects – its political, economic and educational environments. I'm hoping the current SBCS can, like our predecessors, utilize resources of *upaya*, grace and scholarly discipline to provide scholars of religion, who have increasingly less money and time, with a bit of time and space for conversation with each other. I'm hoping such conversations might shape our planet's current instabilities in ways that eventually benefit all living beings, and honor their source.

One way SBCS members could foster such discussions is to send the board names of sanghas and churches that might donate a venue for such meetings and perhaps offer an inexpensive meal, especially when AAR plans to meet near you. You could use our contact page: <https://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/contact>

Friday Board of Directors Meeting

Mark Unno Elected Vice-President

President Kristin Largen called the meeting to order at 9 AM. After her agenda and last year's minutes were approved, we unanimously, and gratefully, approved Mark Unno (University of Oregon) as the vice presidential candidate to be presented on the slate at the Saturday members meeting. After two years in this role, SBCS vice presidents then serve on the board as president for two years, and then two years as past president.

Officers' Reports

Treasurer's Report

John Sheveland reported on our account balances and then suggested we appoint a second person who can access the accounts if the treasurer cannot, as a contingency plan. Since this will require a bylaws change, which must be announced prior to the meeting that makes it, the change will be made official at the 2020 board meeting.

John reviewed our major expenses, which include website management and our annual meeting expenses for renting rooms and audio-visual equipment. We're considering various ways of reducing the latter.

The board approved by acclamation John's hiring an accountant at \$45 per hour to help

with tax forms connected to our tax-exempt status and any other accounting issues.

Newsletter Editor's Report

Kristin announced that the nomination committee proposed John Becker (Lyon College) as the new newsletter editor. Jonathan Seitz, the current editor, is working worked with John on the spring issue to make the transition smooth. John was approved unanimously, and Jonathan was unanimously thanked for his excellent work for many years.

Book Review Editor's Report

Max Rondolino noted that, although publishers have been sending review copies, not all reviewers have been submitting their reviews in a timely fashion. Jay Ford suggested that he send out the list to the current SBCS board and membership.

Journal Co-editors' Report

Thomas Cattoi and Carol Anderson began with a plea that members asked to peer review submissions to the journal complete and return these expeditiously. They noted that the agreement with University of Hawai'i Press is working well, and UHP is taking care of all the copyediting.

The board applauded the now-finalized agreement from Routledge for Thomas and Carol to edit a volume titled *The Routledge Handbook of Buddhist-Christian Studies*. Society members will be heavily represented in the 35-40 essays.

Noting that Carol said we may need a new female editor before the end of her term, Mark moved that we appoint both co-editors for another term. John Sheveland seconded the motion. They were both unanimously, and gratefully, re-appointed.

Committee Reports

Joint Social Media and Website Committee and Membership Committee Report

Social Media and Website Chair Judith Simmer-Brown reported that our 2019 website traffic was about the same as 2018. The largest group of viewers is aged 35-45, with more men than women. The back issues of the journal, to which we offer free access on our website, are an important draw. New blog posts have been, too. Lots of people are following the link to each new newsletter that the newsletter editor emails both members and nonmembers who sign up for free newsletter access.

We've gained eighteen new members since 2018. Judith reminded us to remind our students about the \$10 student rate, which includes a hard copy of the journal. If you've had problems with membership renewal, please contact the board at <https://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/contact>

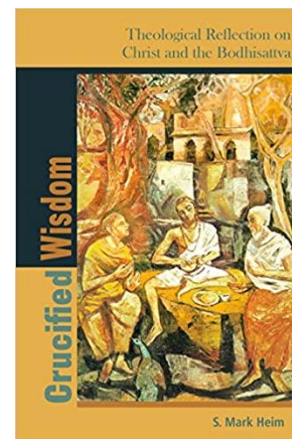
After March 2020, Alicia Brown will no longer be able to manage our online media. Judith will serve one more year as chair of social media, having helped skillfully shepherd the Society through the transition to using online media for almost all of our non-email communication except for the journal. This has contributed immensely to the Society's visibility and growth. Jonathan Seitz is slated to pick up these responsibilities as the committee's new chair. As the newsletter's editor, he's guided the transition from snail-mailing the newsletter to posting it on our website with an emailed link. In countless ways he's contributed to our overall media presence, including being coordinator-moderator of the news section of our blog.

The board voted unanimously to stagger the years when this committee's members rotate off, according to the following schedule:

Judith Simmer-Brown
(chair), term ending 2020,
Jonathan Seitz, term ending 2021,
and open to serving as
chair,
Miriam Levering, term ending
2022,
Mark Unno, term ending 2023.

Streng Book Award Committee Report

Since Abraham Velez, chair, was unable to attend, Kristin announced that Mark Heim's *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Bodhisattva*, published by Fordham University Press in 2018, was chosen for the award this year.



In order to stagger the years that current members rotate off the committee, Kristin suggested we adopt the following years for their terms to end after our annual meeting:

Massimo Rondolino, term ending 2021,
Andre van der Braak, term ending 2022,
Paul Ingram, term ending 2023,
Mark Unno (alternate), term ending 2023.

Nominating Committee Report

Kristin announced that, in addition to the nominations for vice-president and newsletter editor mentioned above, the committee proposed Julius-Kei (JK) Kato (King's College –

Western University) and Duane Bidwell (Claremont School of Theology) as new board members, pending approval by the members meeting. Both were unanimously approved by the board.

Program Committee Report

Outgoing chair Leo Lefebure and incoming chair Mark Unno sparked a lively discussion of topics for next year. The first was differences between US Buddhists with an ethnic Buddhist heritage and those who are converts, taking into account similarities, differences, and ways of negotiating this divide. Mark noted that lots of condescension goes both ways and that US Buddhist approaches to ritual practice and practical theology are often related to the differences between convert and natal practitioners. In light of the fact that “dreamers” will probably be gone by next year, John suggested migration. Other topics suggested were:

- approaches to nationalisms, perhaps with the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies,
- inter-religious religious studies,
- the question “Are meditation and other contemplative practices rituals?”,
- practical theological approaches to ritual studies,
- interactions with animals.

International Advisor Report from Europe

Elizabeth Harris announced that the next conference of the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies is slated for July 1-5, 2021 in Salzburg, with the theme “Euro-Buddhism and the Role of Christianity.” Participants will explore the role Christians have played in the development of European Buddhism through antagonism and hospitality, focusing the discussion around issues related to three themes: secularism, gender, and

creolization-hybridity. Kristin suggested an SBCS panel that could share a North American perspective on Christian influences on the development of Buddhism in Europe and/or share American experiences of how Buddhism here has been formed by a majority “other.”

Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Muenster) is the new European network president, having succeeded Liz.

She reported that she was involved in a project initiated by the International Committee of the Red Cross on Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law. The project held its first conference in Sri Lanka in September, 2019 titled “Reducing Suffering during Armed Conflict: The Interface between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law.” The Red Cross sees this as a long-term project. When the working group met in London, she attended, and they hope to meet next in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The conference brought together military personal such as Buddhist military chaplains into the discussion of compliance with the Geneva conventions. The emphasis of the project is Buddhist doctrinal frameworks for approaching international humanitarian law, for instance issues connected with the protection of women and children.

The European Network will be publishing, in the UK and in Sri Lanka, the papers from its 2019 conference near Munich titled “Buddhist-Christian Encounter – A Visionary Approach: A Conference inspired by Lynn A. de Silva (1919-1982).”

Announcements and Adjournment

Leo updated us on the work of the European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies, which has a heavy emphasis on practical peace-building. They meet every other year, most recently in Sarajevo in 2019. They’ve sponsored books and book series.

There being no further business, Kristin adjourned us at 2:47.

Saturday, Nov. 23rd Members Meeting

After we enjoyed four moving testimonies at our 9 AM session “Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging and Practice,” President Kristin Largen called the meeting to order at 11:36 and then presented the Streng Award to Mark Heim. In his brief response, he mentioned that our long-time members Ruben Habito, Catherine Cornille, and John Makransky had been important for this book which, in part, considers the question, “What is God doing with Christians becoming engaged with Buddhism?”

Kristin then presented the slate that the board had agreed upon for new officers and board members. Mark Unno was unanimously approved as vice-president and John Becker as newsletter editor, with thanks to Jonathan Seitz for his long editorship and that he’ll work with John throughout the transition. Jay-Kei Kato and Duane Bidwell were unanimously approved as board members. Carol Anderson and Thomas Cattoi were unanimously approved for another term as co-editors of the journal, with much gratitude for their ongoing fine work.

As outgoing program chairperson Leo Lefebure and incoming chairperson Mark Unno led the members present in discussing potential topics for next year’s panels, the following were mentioned:

- convert versus natal belonging in Buddhism and Christianity,
- Buddhist and Christian religious nationalism, populism and ethnocentrism (perhaps as a joint session with the Eastern Orthodox studies unit),
- practical theological methodologies as tools for analyzing religious practices on a

spectrum from contemplative practices to ritual practices,

- What can we do in the face of unrecoverable climate change?

After Kristin was applauded for her excellent two years of leadership, and Leo Lefebure was thanked for stepping into the presidential role, we adjourned at 11:59.



European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies

Upcoming Conference of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies (Salzburg, Austria - July 1-5, 2021)

The [European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies](#) (ENBCS) will have its 13th international conference in Salzburg / Austria from 1st to 5th of July, 2021. The topic will be “Euro-Buddhism and the Role of Christianity”.

Since the late 19th / early 20th century Buddhism began to be practiced in Europe and was often presented by its European followers as a persuasive alternative to Christianity which had come under heavy attack from various sides. Buddhism in Europe was less a result of missionary activities from Asian countries but arose, to a significant extent, out of the propagation by Europeans who studied Buddhism through various literary sources. However, European Buddhists sought connections to Asian countries from a comparatively early stage onwards, and organizations such as the Mahābodhi Society came to play an important role. Tensions between Buddhism and Christianity in the West’s Asian colonies and the critique of Christianity in the West had their reciprocal impact on each other.

Whereas in the early days of European Buddhism the focus was predominantly on Theravāda, after the Second World War Western interest shifted to Japanese Zen-Buddhism and, somewhat later, to Tibetan Buddhism. Increasingly also other forms of Buddhism (such as Pure Land or Nichiren Buddhism) became present in Europe. Immigrants from Asian countries such as Thailand and

Vietnam brought along their local forms of Buddhism and established their own centers. While some of these immigrant communities kept largely to themselves, other forms of Asian Buddhism, as for example “Inter-Being”, opened their home traditions and adopted distinctly European and even Christian elements. Today, then, Buddhism in Europe exists in a large variety of forms and with different degrees of individual belonging and/or commitment. Nowhere in Asia are so many different types of Buddhisms present in one particular society as is now the case in a number of European countries.

Invited speakers (among them Rupert Gethin, Francisco Díez de Velasco, Carola Roloff, Kajsa Ahlstrand) will address the history and diversity of Buddhism in Europe and its different attitudes to Christianity, with a particular focus on issues such as Buddhism between idealization and reality, the challenge of secularism, gender justice, and Buddhist-Christian hybridities. In addition, there will be open panels for paper presentations on any current research in Buddhist-Christian relations.

Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ENBCS-President



If you haven't renewed for 2020, please do so now. Membership includes our newsletters, our journal, and other benefits. [You can renew via our website.](#)

Some of you have asked about how membership works. Here is a brief Question & Answer

What are current dues?

Dues range from \$10 for students to \$25 for Adjunct Professors, Independent Scholars, and Assistant Professors and \$45 for Associate and Full Professors.

What are the terms of membership?

You may join or renew at any point during the calendar year, although it is more convenient to join at the start. Membership is for the current year (2020), but regardless of when you join you receive the same benefits for that year.

What is included in annual membership?

Membership includes an annual print copy of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, inclusion on our email list (two e-newsletters), and voting rights in member meetings.

How does membership contribute to broader Buddhist-Christian cooperation?

Our dues support a variety of recent efforts. We have worked to make the Journal more easily available, have added to our webpage (for instance, it includes the last 12+ years of newsletters), and continue to work on ways to connect scholars.

Website, Facebook, Blog

Our blog is up and can be found on the website, and we are now doing monthly entries. If you'd like to contribute an entry write to us and we will happily include it.



Membership

Our website is:

<http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/>

Check out our Facebook page and give it a like:

<https://www.facebook.com/BuddhistChristianStudies/>

To Nominate a book for the Streng Award

The book must have been published within the last five years. Nominations can be made by any person using the [downloadable nomination form](#) or the [online form](#). The completed form may be sent electronically to Massimo Rondolino, (mrondoli@carrollu.edu), who will respond to all nominations.

Nominations are welcomed. Publishers of books must be willing to supply review copies to members of the committee for evaluation in order for the book to be considered.

CONTRIBUTE A REPORT TO THE NEWSLETTER

The *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter* is published twice annually: in the spring and the fall. Please contact the Editor to share information with our readers. The deadline for the fall issue is September 1.

In addition to reports on our annual meeting (concurrent with the American Academy of Religion) and calls for the Frederick Streng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies and for the Graduate Student Essay Prize, the *Newsletter* also publishes information on conferences, retreats, lectures, and other events. We welcome obituaries and reports on major figures in the field of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

We are always grateful for information, news, or other submissions that members and others can share with the Society. Submissions may be edited for clarity and length. Send items to newsletter editor John.Becker@lyon.edu.



SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Editor: John Becker
John.becker@lyon.edu