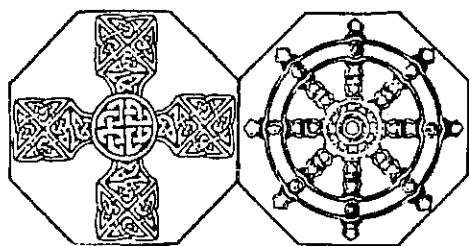


Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies



NEWSLETTER

No. 33 - Spring, 2004

News of the Society

THE 2003 MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Atlanta, Georgia, November 21-22, 2003
Frances S. Adeney, Secretary

This year's theme was "Overcoming Greed: Christians and Buddhists in a Consumeristic Culture." During the first session panelists Paula Cooley, Valerie Karras, and John Cobb, whose paper was read by Jay McDaniel, presented Christian views and Stephanie Kaza gave a Buddhist response. The second session mirrored the first with panelists Kenneth Kraft, David Barnhill, and Judith Simmer-Brown presenting Buddhist views on the theme and Paul Knitter responded with a Christian analysis.

Cooley began the discussion by outlining her thesis that overcoming greed depends on overcoming fear. She asserted that people buy out of fear thus perpetuating a system of greed. The consequences of fear support the cultural myth of upward mobility--there is no way to go but up. The exploitation of fear then produces goods, benefiting those at the top of the economic system. This system also produces consequences for human rights as cultural fear leads to laws that thwart due process, e.g. the Patriot Act.

An alternative Christian view understands desire to be culturally produced--sin upsets the natural order; God redeems. Christian transformation requires dissent against the underlying greed that supports the cultural system. Christianity arose as a movement of dissent, a counter cultural movement. That trajectory of dissent has continued through the centuries. Although early Calvinists were noted for linking personal wealth with election, the Mennonites and Anabaptists created better

models for practicing dissent. Those communities are based in an economy of grace, supported by an underlying ethic of the ability to give as a gift of grace. This economy, for Christians, is mediated by Jesus of Nazareth and allows for transformation towards becoming greedy for God.

Valerie Karras illumined the differences in Christian traditions by her analysis of the difference in anthropology between Eastern and Western Christian theologies. The community model of Eastern Christianity is hostile to the individualism of Western consumerism. Instead, in this model, greed is recognized as a fallen passion, the consequence of separation from God. The two aspects of greed in this view are acquisitive lust--the desire for control, and desire for the physical acquisition of things.

Karras used Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom as examples of theologians that criticized the rich and encouraged Christians to use their wealth for the poor. In this view, overcoming greed involves a spiritual process. Virtue can be cultivated by a proper use of wealth, which in itself has no moral content. It is the misuse of wealth that indicates deeper spiritual problems. Some of those spiritual problems can be alleviated by asceticism: celibacy, almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. Such exercises can provide a means to master the vices, greed, in this case, being the vice at hand.

John Cobb's paper argued that a theology of consumerism is deeply embedded in our culture. That theology runs counter to traditional Western Christian teaching that consuming more deprives others. The question one must ask is, "Does consumption enhance or detract from the common good?" Traditional arguments that too much consumption deprived others were rendered obsolete by the industrial revolution. The new

2 - Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

problem is how can demand keep up with production. The argument here is that increased consumption benefits others by preventing down turns in the economy.

Unfortunately, Cobb argues, the spiritual costs to this pattern of consumption are tremendous. A class of exploited peasants now produces more goods, but has a better society been created? Increasing poverty in the two-thirds world, global warming, dehumanizing advertising, and the unsustainability of keeping production at current levels press the issue. Human survival depends on changing consumption patterns. The elite must be forced to give up control and we must recover and emphasize the traditional Christian interpretation of greed as a cardinal sin. To accomplish this, Cobb recommends rejecting consumerism in our personal lives, developing local sustainability projects, and demonstrating another world possibility--another way to live that leads to human flourishing. Buddhist and Christian emphases on overcoming consumerism are complimentary and together can make possible the deep changes that are needed to overcome greed.

Stephanie Kaza's response to the panelists stressed the Buddhist interpretation of greed as more psychological than moral. Greed, in this view, is part of being human. Rather than condemn greed, we should investigate it, looking for hints of the process of enlightenment and challenging the mental formations that contribute to greed. Along that line, she responded to Cooley by noting that Buddhists might see fear and greed as opposites, yet reinforcing one another. To Karras, she noted that Buddhists do not see wealth as a bad thing, but understand committed giving as a responsible act. And to Cobb, Kaza agreed that spiritual harm has resulted from the industrial revolution and suggested a number of Buddhist practices that presented alternatives to consumerism. Finally, Kaza gave a challenge to each presenter, reminding us that religions can shape worldviews, present moral alternatives, and model restraint.

The second session was as rich, with Buddhist panelists presenting and Paul Knitter giving a Christian response.

Kenneth Kraft began by giving a visual presentation of slides of ads and commenting on their consumerist implications. His presentation gave a force to all of the presentations, lending a

sense of urgency to the theme of overcoming greed in consumerist culture.

David Barnhill presented two dilemmas of engaged Buddhism around consumerism and its effects. First, What can one normal person do about environmental problems? Second, How can we criticize what we participate in? He illustrated this dilemma by quoting Wendell Berry who said, "A gathering of environmentalists is a convention of the guilty." The problem of complicity cannot be avoided, Barnhill argued, by deflecting blame to our fellow beings. Nor can complicity be avoided by the doctrine of mutual co-arising--not my own avarice but the ubiquity of the structures are to blame. Rather, we must accept our real complicity while rejecting consumerism.

Responses to the problem of greed and our complicity in the system of consumerism included meditation, a practice that can center us in the middle of craving, taking responsibility to work toward change, and fighting our complicity. No individual is called to save the world, but even small actions can become a spirituality of resistance as we enter into the communion of those working for the good. Barnhill concluded by noting the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness that remains and must be validated by combining our sorrow with tranquility and speaking truth to power.

Judith Simmer-Brown noted that in a Buddhist view, no first cause or divine creator was responsible for evil but multiple causes, both external and internal contributed to what we perceive as evil. The process of globalization has led to a world of homogeneous consumption and a network of power centered in corporations and financial institutions that control the flow of capital to the betterment of an elite and the detriment of all others. The effects of this process are the destruction of cultural and ecological diversity. The multiple causes and multiple effects of this process cannot be simplified. Nor are they one-directional. Our temporary existence relies on that vast network of external causes such as the doctrine of the free market, the commodification of land, and growth through state funded capitalism that favors some industries and protects some corporations. From a Mahayana perspective, those external causes are fragile, depending on inner factors, patterns of desire and ignorance. As such, Simmer-Brown argues that these phenomena have no inherent existence and are

vulnerable to change.

The implications of this analysis suggest that we should not be intimidated by this strong phenomenon but take a more confident view, making this problem a matter of meditation. We can be confident that no phenomenon is evil and resistant to change but rather hollow and false. Suffering is inherent but no problem of human life is intractable. To see them as such gives those problems more power than they have. The cultivation of the wisdom to see clearly the dependent origination of these phenomena and identify their causes can lead to change and give us energy to work for compassionate change in the world.

Paul Knitter responded from a Christian liberation perspective, arguing that the inner and outer must be kept together--the inner drives the outer, taking shape in institutions. Inner change is necessary but not sufficient to overcome greed and the structures surrounding and supporting it. Active organized resistance and social/political revolution is needed. We must overcome the old and rebuild new structures in solidarity with the marginalized. Thich Nhat Hanh warns us about taking sides, but Christians have to take the side of the poor without taking sides against the rich. While Buddhists emphasize wisdom, enlightenment, and change, Christians stress the individual spirit, love of neighbor, and the centrality of justice in the reign of God.

Taken together, these two sessions gave participants much food for thought as well as many suggestions for actions as Buddhists and Christians work together to overcome greed in a consumeristic culture.

(NEW DATE!)

**THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL
BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE:
"HEAR THE CRIES OF THE WORLD"**

Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles,
California

Dates: June 3-8, 2005

Call for Proposals: Working Groups, Full Panels,
and Individual Papers

The Society for Buddhist Christian Studies will hold the Seventh International Buddhist Christian Conference at the Loyola Marymount University

campus, Los Angeles, California, from June 3 to 8, 2005. (This was earlier posted to take place in August 2004, but was postponed for various reasons.) The overall theme will remain as previously announced: "Hear the Cries of the World: Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue Toward Global Healing."

The Program Committee welcomes proposals for:

*Working Groups, scheduled to meet in three successive morning sessions for two hours each, addressing a specific theme or issue, with one or two coordinators and five or more core-group members.

*Full panels, to be presented in one two-hour session, on a specific theme, with a moderator, three to four speakers, and one or two respondents.

*Individual papers on a specific topic related to an issue or issues in Buddhist Christian dialogue.

Proposals for Working Groups on themes as Religion and Ecology, Human Rights and Social Justice, Women and Religion, Toward a Global Ethic, Practice Across Traditions, Catholic-Buddhist Relations, Religious Responses to Violence, Religion and Globalization, and other relevant themes, are welcomed. Working group proposals should include the title or theme of the Working Group, a short 200-300 word description of the goal(s) of the Working Group, and the names and contact addresses (including phone, fax, and email) of the coordinator(s) and at least five other core-group members.

Proposals for Full Panels for a two-hour time slot, addressing specific themes, including issues in doctrine and theory, ritual, religious practice, methodology, and others, are encouraged. Full panel proposals should include the title of the panel, a short 100-200 word description of the theme and intent of the panel, and the names and contact addresses of the moderator, and three or four panel participants.

Individual paper proposals for a 30-minute presentation on various themes, including doctrinal, ritual, practical, ethical and other issues relevant to Buddhist Christian dialogue are also encouraged.

In addition to the working groups, panel, and individual paper sessions, there will be opportunities for participation in various forms of meditative practice, prayer, and/or ritual in the morning before breakfast and early evening before

4 - Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

dinner. These will be led by spiritual leaders and teachers of various Buddhist and Christian traditions.

Further, Los Angeles being known to be one of the most religiously diverse cities in the world, there will be opportunities to visit religious sites in the area, and meet with leaders and members of different Buddhist and Christian communities.

Proposals should be sent preferably by email to LA2005@mkzc.org, with a copy to rhabito@mail.smu.edu OR else by postal mail c/o Prof. Ruben Habito, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX 75225, USA. Deadline for submission of proposals is set at January 31, 2005, but early submissions are encouraged.

Lodging and meals will be available at the Loyola Marymount University campus in Los Angeles, as well as in area hotels nearby. Registration fees and costs for lodging and meals will be announced at a later date. For queries regarding site facilities and registration, please email the Conference Director, Prof. James Fredericks, jfrederi@lmu.edu.

Officers and Board of Directors

In an effort to encourage members to contact officers and board members with information, suggestions, or concerns, email addresses are listed below according to position held.

Ruben F. Habito
President
Southern Methodist University
rhabito@mail.smu.edu

Stephanie Kaza
Vice-President
Program Committee Chair
University of Vermont
skaza@zoo.uvm.edu

Peggy Starkey
Past President:
University of the Incarnate Word
thereligionfactor@msn.com

Frances S. Adeney
Secretary
Membership Committee Chair
Louisville Seminary
fadeney@lpts.edu

Gene Reeves
Treasurer
Membership Committee Chair
International Advisors Chair
reeves@gol.com

Paul Ingram
Nominations Committee Chair
Pacific Lutheran University
ingrampo@plu.edu

Don Mitchell
Book Awards Committee Chair
Purdue University
dmitch@purdue.edu

Rita Gross
Journal Co-Editor
grossrm@uwec.edu

Terry Muck
Journal Co-Editor
Asbury Theological Seminary
terry_muck@asburyseminary.edu

Harry Wells
Newsletter Editor
Humboldt State University
hlw2@humboldt.edu

Claude Welch
Executive Liaison
Graduate Theological Union
claudew2@juno.com

Don Luck
At-large
Trinity Lutheran Seminary
dluck@trinity.capital.edu

Paul Swanson
At-large
Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture
pswanson@nanzan-u.ac.jp

James Fredericks
At-large
2005 Conference Director
Loyola Marymount University
jfrederi@lmu.edu

Judith Simmer-Brown
At-large
Naropa University
jsb@naropa.edu

Valerie Karras
At-large
University of California at Irvine
vkarras@uci.edu

Mark Unno
At-large
University of Oregon
munno@darkwing.uoregon.edu

Miriam Levering
At-large
University of Tennessee
mleverin@utk.edu

Jose Cabezon
At-large
University of CA Santa Barbara
jcabezon@religion.ucsb.edu

FUTURE EVENTS

Ireland

**RELIGIONS AND THE POLITICS OF PEACE
AND CONFLICT**
An International Interdisciplinary Conference
June 15-17 2004
Irish School of Ecumenics
Trinity College, Dublin

The connections between religion and violence are complex and multifaceted. From the conflicts in Middle East and the Balkans to those in Southeast Asia and beyond, religion frames and legitimates political violence. Moreover in international relations post-9/11 religious language and metaphors have acquired a new significance. In this context the

emerging consensus appears to be not only that violence is intrinsic to religion, but also that religions incite, legitimate and intensify political violence. However, such an unambiguous indictment of religions is incomplete in that it fails both to appreciate the significant counter examples and to recognize the diversity that exists within religions on the issue of violence. Moreover, it ignores the particularly religious roots of pacifism and the ethics of non-violence. This conference will examine the nexus of textual, historical, symbolic and ethical factors that underlie this ambivalence of religion vis-à-vis violence. The focus will be on the three monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, with attention given to religious belief and praxis. Speakers Include: Haleh Afsher, Scott Appleby, Mary Condren, Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem, Stanley Hauerwas, John Kelsay, Mark Levene, David Tombs, Nira Yuval-Davis, George Wilkes. For conference schedule, including paper topics, conference booking, and accommodation, see the URL for the conference at http://www.tcd.ie/ise/events/rlgn_pce/; contact email is religions.peace@tcd.ie.

Scotland

University of Glasgow Centre for Inter-Faith Studies announces The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures on Buddhism and Christianity. Eight public lectures in prospect of the visit of HH the 14th Dalai Lama to Scotland, May 2004.

University of Glasgow, Boyd Orr Building, Room 412, 7:30 PM, All welcome.

I Life and Death

5/5: The view of Human Existence in Buddhism and Christianity- A Christian Perspective (Dr. Elizabeth Harris)

5/6 The view of Human Existence in Buddhism and Christianity- A Buddhist Perspective (Dr. Kiyoshi Tsuchiya).

II. Ultimate Reality

5/12 The Understanding of Ultimate Reality in Buddhism and Christianity - A Christian Perspective (Prof. Karl Baier)

6 - Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

5/13 The Understanding of Ultimate Reality in Buddhism and Christianity - A Buddhist Perspective (Prof. Minoru Nambara)

III. The Mediators

5/19 Buddha and Christ as Mediators of the Transcendent - A Christian Perspective (Prof. Perry Schmidt-Leukel)

5/20 Buddha and Christ as Mediators of the Transcendent - A Buddhist Perspective (Prof. John Makransky)

IV. The Quest for Peace

5/26 Buddhism, Christianity and their Potential for Peace - a Christian Perspective (Bishop Kenneth Fernando)

5/27 Buddhism, Christianity and their Potential for Peace - A Buddhist Perspective (Revd. Alan Senauke).

For more information, contact Professor Perry Schmidt-Leukel at the University of Glasgow. His e-mail: <P.Schmidt-Leukel@arts.gla.ac.uk>.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Iran

The "International Conference on Motahari's Thoughts" will be held in Tehran, Iran, from April 25 - May 1. The conference organizers have invited Dharma Master Hsin Tao of Ling Jao Monastery in Taiwan to form a panel of Buddhists to talk about interreligious dialogue. The Dharma Master has asked SBCS Board member Jim Fredericks, a Christian, to accompany him so that together they can use Buddhist-Christian dialogue as a model.

United States

The Faiths in the World Committee of the National Association of (Catholic) Diocesan Ecumenical Officers, The New York Sangha Council, the Graymoor Spiritual Life Center, and the Buddhist Association of the United States--Chuang Yen Buddhist Monastery co-sponsored a **Buddhist-Catholic dialogue** from October 9-12, 2003 at Graymoor's center in Garrison, NY, and at

Chuang Yen Monastery in nearby Kent, NY. The central focus was "**From Suffering to Liberation**"; topics addressed included the recent history of Buddhist-Catholic relations, each tradition's understanding of the sources of suffering, perspectives on creation and dependent co-arising, the awakening of Shakyamuni Buddha and the grace of Jesus Christ, Buddhist training and meditation and Catholic prayer and spirituality. The event concluded with a consideration of mutual enrichment through dialogue. Each day began with quiet meditation and included ceremonies of each tradition, attended by practitioners of the other tradition.

RESOURCES FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER

Editor's Note: Resources listed have not been reviewed; listing does not imply endorsement, but rather serves only as an announcement.

2004 STILLNESS AND KNOWING RETREATS

A Retreat Experience in Christian Insight Meditation featuring the Teachings of Carmelite Mystic St. John of the Cross and Insight (*Vipassana*) Meditation Instruction and Practice with optional *Loving-Kindness Practice (Metta)* before some retreats.

May 21-24 (S & K only)

Mount Carmel Spiritual Centre

Niagara Falls, Ontario

Mary Jo Meadows

July 16-17 (Metta) and July 17-25 (S & K)

Prior Lake Minnesota (south of Twin Cities)

Mary Jo Meadows OCDS with Marge Terhaar-

Yonkers and Fr. Tom West OFM

August 6-7 (Metta) and August 7-13 (S&K)

Wappinger Falls New York (Newburgh airport)

Susan Mickel with Roddy Cross and Fr. Raymond

Tetrault

This retreat, based on the teachings of Christian mystics and *vipassana* (insight) meditation, comes from Theravadin Buddhism and Christian

spirituality. Each day offers Eucharist, an integrative conference, group meditation sittings, and walking practice, Communal Reconciliation once, and a Q & A session. Interviews are available daily for consultation, instruction, and guidance. Meditation instructions occur twice daily. Reconciliation is also available. Retreatants do not interact during retreat in order to foster deep stillness and awareness. For all levels of practice experience, including beginners.

This retreat is for those who want a greater depth than most retreats offer. Experiences are sometimes intense, but the method manages this, and individuals "open" to different experiences as their capacity for them grows. No previous meditation experience needed to attend. Practitioners of many traditions find this practice helpful.

Vipassana meditation is a good way to empty out roles, voluntary experiences, and the other "trappings" of ordinary daily life to be available to God. It is an excellent help in being receptive to the purification and self-knowledge that mystics taught as necessary for spiritual growth--and to eventually "see" God.

2004 SILENCE AND AWARENESS RETREAT

England, Sept. 3-5

England or Scotland, Sept. 6-13, 22-29

Kevin Culligan OCD and Mary Jo Meadow OCDS

For costs and more information on any of the above retreats, contact Resources for Ecumenical Spirituality, 19235 Bender St NE, Forest Lake MN 55025; phone: 651-464-7489 or email <resecum@hotmail.com>.

For the Sept 3-5 England retreat, contact <helenmarquis@onetel.net.uk> or RES; for the Sept. 6-13, 22-29 retreats, contact <coletteodc@yahoo.co.uk> or RES.

Interreligious Studies in Japan Program at the NCC (National Christian Council) Center for the Study of Japanese Religions (Kyoto):

The NCC Study Center established the

"Interreligious Studies in Japan Program" in Fall 2002. In order to promote mutual understanding among people of different religions and cultures, the Center offers students a comprehensive teaching program on religions in Japan. The program targets especially students of theology and religious education, but it is also open to interested students of other fields. Undergraduate students from the 4th year onward may also apply, but they should have some basic knowledge of Religious Studies. This program is designed to train young people in cross-cultural and interreligious communication to counter tensions and conflicts in multireligious societies.

The Program contains the following classes:

Shinto and folk religion, Japanese Buddhism, Japanese new religions, Japanese Christianity and Theology, Theology of Religions and Theories of Interreligious dialogue, and Introduction to basic Japanese language. Classes will be held in English. The teachers are internationally qualified experts in their field. An exposure program is also included, such as visiting sacred places of various Japanese religions, and encounter with their representatives. A trip to Tokyo is planned.

Time: Spring semester: April - July, Fall semester: September - December (two weeks orientation plus 10 weeks classes). Library facilities: Apart from the NCC Study Center's library, the directors of the following institutes in Kyoto have offered their libraries to students participating in this Program: The Italian School of East Asian Studies, The Japan Foundation, and L'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient. The number of participants is limited. Participation fee for one semester (6 classes per week): Yen 100.000.

The NCC Study Center has been engaged in research of religions in Japan and interreligious dialogue for more than 40 years. Inquiry & application:

Dr. Martin Repp (Coordinator) or
Tomomasa Teramoto (Secretary)

NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions
Karasuma Shimotachiuri

Kamikyo-ku, Kyoto 602-8011, JAPAN

Tel. & Fax: (075) 432-1945

email: studycen@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp

<http://www.japanese-religions.org>

8 - Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

The *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter* is published two times annually: in the spring and the fall. Please write to the Editor whenever you wish to share information with our readers. The deadline for the spring issue is March 1. The deadline for the fall issue is September 1. Your contributions ensure the continued existence of our newsletter. Send any items (preferably email) to:

Harry L. Wells
Department of Religious Studies
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA 95521-8299
Tel: (707) 826-5750
Fax: (707) 826-4122
Email: hlw2@humboldt.edu

MEMBERSHIP

To enroll as a member of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, send your name and address to:

CSSR Executive Office
Valparaiso University
Valparaiso, IN 46393-6493

Enclose a check for \$45.00 (\$25.00 for students or senior citizens) payable to CSSR, indicating it is for membership in SBSCS. The Society cannot accept foreign currency or personal checks from foreign countries unless drawn on a U.S. bank. International money orders in U.S. Dollars are acceptable. These dues will entitle you to receive the CSSR *Bulletin* as well as our Society's *Newsletter* and our annual journal, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.

SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN
STUDIES NEWSLETTER
Harry Wells, Editor
Religious Studies Department
Humboldt State University
Arcata, CA 95521-8299