

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter



Vol. 48

Fall 2011

News of the Society

2011 SBCS Annual Meeting

American Academy of Religion (AAR)

November 19-22, 2011

San Francisco, California, USA

Friday, Nov. 18, 9:00–11:30 am, 1-3:30 pm

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Board Meeting

Stockton Room, Intercontinental Hotel

Society For Buddhist Christian Studies

Friday 4:00 pm-6:30 pm

Cathedral Hill Room, Intercontinental Hotel

Theme: Constructing Buddhist Identities in the West

Terry C. Muck, Asbury Seminary, Presiding

This panel provides a critical look at the complex set of factors that come into play when Westerners of varying ethnicity, culture, and religion choose to adopt some sort of Buddhist identity.

James Coleman, California Polytechnic State University

Who is a Buddhist? The Problem of Identity in Western Buddhism

Jan Willis, Wesleyan University

Some African Americans Are Buddhist, Too

Paul Knitter, Union Theological Seminary
Christian and Buddhist

David Gilner, Hebrew Union College
Jewish and Buddhist

Society For Buddhist Christian Studies

Saturday 9:00 am-11:30 am

Union Square Room, Intercontinental Hotel

Theme: Christian Readings of Buddhist Texts

Miriam Levering, University of Tennessee,
Presiding

This panel provides a critical look at the theological and buddhological issues raised when Christians and Buddhists read one another's religious texts.

Catherine Cornille, Boston College
Reading the Religious Other

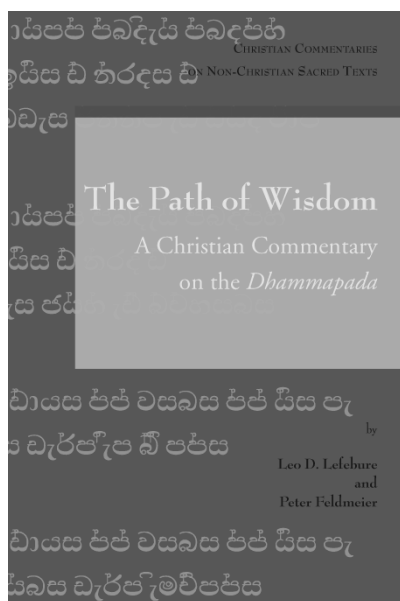
Leo Lefebure, Georgetown University
Reading the Dhammapada

Francis X. Clooney, Harvard University
Reading (Inter)religiously as a Theologically Necessary Act

Business Meeting: 11:00 am to 11:30 am

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Frederick J. Streng Book Award 2011

Congratulations to Leo D. Lefebure and Peter Feldmeier, whose *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*, Christian Commentaries on Non-Christian Sacred Texts series (Peeters Publishers, 2011), won the Frederick J. Streng Book Award for 2011.



Peter Feldmeier (PhD Graduate Theological Union) is Professor of Theology at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. He teaches courses in Christian spirituality, interreligious dialogue, mysticism, and Buddhism, and has published three other books: *Encounters in Faith: Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue* (Anselm Academic, 2011), *Christianity Looks East: Comparing the Spiritualities of John of the Cross and Buddhaghosa* (Paulist Press, 2006), and *The Developing Christian: Spiritual Growth through the Life Cycle* (Paulist Press, 2007).

Leo D. Lefebure (PhD University of Chicago Divinity School) is Matteo Ricci Professor of Theology at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Before his most recent appointment he taught at Fordham University. He has authored numerous articles and four previous books: *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*

(Orbis Books, 2000); *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Orbis Books, 1993); *Life Transformed: Meditations on the Christian Scriptures in Light of Buddhist Perspectives* (ACTA Publications, 1989); and *Toward a Contemporary Wisdom Christology: A Study of Karl Rahner and Norman Pittenger* (University Press of America, 1988).

2012 Streng Award Call for Nominations

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies is now receiving nominations for the 2012 Frederick Streng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies. Nominations must be received by Dec. 31, 2011. The winner will be announced at the annual meeting of the Society. The criteria for nominating and making the award are:

1. The subject matter of the book should be inspired by and relevant to Buddhist-Christian relations, but subject matter is not narrowly limited to books on dialogue or to books that are half on Christianity and half on Buddhism.
2. The scholarship must be original and the writing clear. The book must make an important contribution to issues relevant to the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue.
3. Books can be considered for nomination within five years of their publication date (i.e. the 2012 award must be for a book published in 2007 or later).

Nominations can be made by any person other than the author(s) or editor(s), using the [downloadable nomination form](#) or the [online form](#). The completed form may be sent electronically to ayong@regent.edu or a printed copy can be submitted by postal mail to Amos Yong, Chair of the Frederick Streng Book Award Committee, Regent University School of Divinity, 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach VA 23464. Self-nominations are not permitted. 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.

Society for Buddhist Christian Studies Graduate Student Essay Winner and Call for Submissions

We would like to announce that KYEONGIL JUNG is the winner of the first SBCS graduate student essay competition. Mr. Jung is a doctoral candidate in Ecumenics and Interfaith Studies at Union Theological Seminary. He is currently working on his dissertation, "The Bodhi Tree and the Cross: A Buddhist-Christian Theology of Liberation." A condensed version of his winning essay entitled, "A Buddhist Christian Story of Peace and Justice" will be presented during the SBCS session in San Francisco on November 19 at 10:30am.

The SBCS graduate student essay competition was started last year in the hopes of getting greater student participation in the Society. We congratulate Mr. Jung and we hope to continue student interest in the Society through this award. For information on the essay competition, please contact address emails to both Miriam Levering miriam.levering@gmail.com and Jonathan Seitz jaseitz@gmail.com.

2012 Call for Papers

As part of the effort of the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies to encourage the participation of graduate students, the Society is continuing its graduate student essay award competition.

We are currently accepting papers written by graduate students for one of their classes in the area of Buddhist-Christian studies. Faculty members are asked to recommend the students with the best papers to submit them for consideration of this award.

To submit a paper, please email it to. Together with your submission, please include a cover letter that includes your name, your program, your institution, email address, the class for which the paper was written, and the professor of that class. Deadline for submission is **May 30, 2012**.

The winner of the competition will receive a \$500 award and must present the paper during the annual meeting of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies in Chicago, IL from Nov. 17-20, 2012.

Further information on the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies can be found at:

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

For more information about the essay competition, please email: Miriam Levering miriam.levering@gmail.com and Jonathan Seitz jaseitz@gmail.com.



Report on 9th European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies Conference

“Hope: A Form of Delusion? Buddhist and Christian Perspectives”

June 30–July 4, 2011

Liverpool Hope University, U.K.

Can we hope in a world that is shot through with suffering? Should hope be shunned as a form of attachment? Should we affirm our hope or let go of it? And, if we embrace hope, what should we hope for and what can inspire us? Between 60 and 70 people, from 16 countries, came together to address questions such as these at the 9th conference of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies, held in glorious weather at Liverpool Hope University in England, between 30th June and 4th July 2011.

At the heart of the conference were ten keynote presentations on five crucial aspects within the theme of hope: Hope and the Critique of Hope; Hope in Pastoral Situations; Embodiments of Hope; Hope in Situations of Hopelessness: Engaged Buddhism and Liberation Theology; Eschatologies of Hope. Dr Sybille Fritsch-

Oppermann (Church of Southern Hesse) gave the introductory lecture, which suggested that hope can be seen both as a utopian ideal within and beyond living religions and a working hypothesis, through which humans can strive towards truth and transcendence.

Each theme was addressed from a Buddhist and a Christian perspective, followed by a plenary to enable dialogue between the speakers, and between speakers and participants. Addressing the first theme, Hope and the Critique of Hope, from a Buddhist perspective, Richard Gombrich (Balliol College, Oxford) robustly argued that hope was not a category that was relevant to Theravāda Buddhism, distinguishing between hope and confidence, and hope and expectation. Werner Jeanrond, (Glasgow University), taking the Christian perspective, suggested that a critical theology of hope, an inter-hope dialogue, was necessary, within a critique of other key concepts such as salvation, faith and love.

Within the session on 'Hope in Pastoral Situations, Dr Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano (Rissho Kosei Kai, Japan) focused on Rissho Kosei Kai's pastoral work, most movingly its response to the recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Notto Thelle (Oslo University), speaking from a Christian viewpoint, sensitively explored pastoral situations caused by life experiences that seem to question and make a mockery of hope, drawing on decades of Buddhist-Christian encounter. Peggy Morgan (Mansfield College, Oxford), addressing the third theme, 'Embodiments of Hope' concretized her brief by focusing on a contemporary embodiment of hope capable of emboldening Christians: Rosemary Radford Ruether and her listening dialogue with Buddhism. Mitsuya Dake (Ryukoku University, Japan), on the other hand, chose Amida Buddha as his empowering embodiment of the wisdom, compassion and non-dualism that lies at the heart of Buddhism, focusing on Shinran's understanding.

The theme, 'Hope in Situations of Hopelessness' was opened to the public in an evening session. Sallie King (James Madison University, USA), using examples such as the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka and the Dalai Lama's peace work, argued that Buddhism was 'loaded' with hope

from an Engaged Buddhist perspective. Buddhist hope, at one level, was an amalgam of acceptance, lawful change and effort. At another, it was the conviction that everyone had the potential to change and that truth had power. Sathianathan Clarke (Wesley Theological College, Washington DC), movingly examined Dalit liberation theology, suggesting that hope within this context could be seen as a proxy topos that extended faith into life, an alter-wisdom where love could enrich life, and an energy, a verb, leading to transformative action.

Addressing the last theme, Eschatologies of Hope, Anthony Kelly (Australian Catholic University) recognized a contemporary crisis of hope and, distinguishing between hope as an emotion and hope as a virtue, explored a paradox: that Christian hope is rooted in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus but that this event is described in a varied rhetoric of negations. Justin Ritzinger (Oberlin College, USA), noting that endings are hard to find in Buddhist literature, examined the coming of Maitreya, the future Buddha, as a possible candidate for a Buddhist eschaton, concluding that the similarities to Christian eschatology were superficial, with the exception of a contemporary reinvention of the Maitreyan tradition in China.

In addition to invited keynote speakers, a range of other researchers responded to a call for papers. These were presented in three time slots. In the first, a session for postgraduate research students and recognised researchers, twelve papers were given, including: *The Fullness of the Present in Zen Buddhism and Christianity* (Raquel Bouso Garcia, Universitat Pompeu Fabra); *Imitatio Christi and the Tantric Way: Prolegomena to a Comparative Study of the Hagiographical Works of Bonaventura and GTsang Smyon Heruka* (Massimo Rondolino, Bristol University); "Interreligious Monks": *Transformative Aspects of Intermonastic Encounter* (Timon Reichl – Muenster University); *The Sangha Acts in Thailand* (Venerable Ratan Jyoti Barua – Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University). The second was a Forum for Practitioners, in which the main speaker was Elizabeth West of the British-based Contemplative Consciousness Network. The last, containing six papers on the theme of Hope and Buddhist-Christian Relations, included: 'Loss, Memory and Hope in Sri Lanka; Buddhist-

Christian Perspectives' (Jude Lal Fernando, Irish School of Ecumenics), 'Is Birth into Amida's Pure Land a Delusion?: an inquiry into strategies of ascertaining, and a comparison with, similar problems in Christianity' (Martin Repp, Heidelberg University) and 'Masao Abe's Hope for Buddhists and Christians in Thirty Five Years of Dialogue' (Annievroom, VU University, Amsterdam). These three sessions were incredibly rich and varied.

The conference was not all work! In the opening session, The Hope Quartet made sure participants knew they were in Liverpool through a Beatles-inspired jazz interlude. On Saturday afternoon, there was a cultural tour that included Liverpool Cathedral (Church of England), the Metropolitan Cathedral (Roman Catholic), the Slavery Museum and the Beatles Museum (Beatles World). This was followed by a meal overlooking the Mersey. The Chaplaincy at Liverpool Hope opened its doors for informal conversation after the evening sessions and they were not closed until the early hours of the morning. And those who were both academics and practitioners could participate in meditation sessions before breakfast led by Karl Baier, Kurt Krammer, Br. Josef Götz and Venerable Sonam Dorje.

The European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies is thankful to the following organisations who sponsored the conference through grants of money, enabling it to take place: Areopagus; Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland); Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Liverpool Hope University; Risho Kosei Kai (Japan); Swedish Missionary Society; The Corless Fund; The Spalding Trust (UK). A volume that includes all keynote addresses will be published by EOS Publishing (St Ottilien). The Network is also grateful to the four members of the Buddhist monastic Sangha in Asia who were successful in gaining their visas and to the Liverpool Hope administrative team.

*Report by Elizabeth J Harris,
President of the Network, September 2011*

Report on the 30th Annual Conference of the Japan Society for Buddhist- Christian Studies

In Japan, the disasters of the giant tsunami and the resulting crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant on 11 March have been grim reminders of the unprecedented tragedies of the nuclear bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki just sixty-six years ago. These are experiences in which one becomes speechless, when words are no longer able to convey what used to be their usual meaning.

At that time people were faced with basic and universal questions concerning the fundamental constitution of human existence. What is the ultimate basis for our thoughts and actions? Is there a way to know? If there is a way to know these answers, how do we attain them? The state of intellectual inquiry in postwar Japan, however, was not able to face these questions and come up with answers. Rather, there was a tendency to avoid facing these questions directly and instead rely on absorbing the pronouncements of Western thought.

Within this postwar intellectual environment in Japan, the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies has continuously attempted in an academic way to discuss comprehensive themes, based on Buddhist-Christian or Christian-Buddhist foundations, and is perhaps the only forum in Japan that has consistently sought answers to these basic and universal questions of human existence.

It was in this time of crisis that the 30th Annual Conference of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies met on 5-7 September 2011, at Hanazono University in Kyoto. Discussion of a recent book *Dialogue and Commentary: The Words of Jesus and the Words of Zen* (対談評釈 イエスの言葉 / 禅の言葉, Iwanami Shoten, 2010, in Japanese), a series of dialogues and discussions between Ueda Shizuteru and Yagi Seiichi, was chosen as an appropriate theme for this 30th meeting. This book was chosen because it is a splendid synthesis of the activity and discussion carried out by our Society over the past thirty years. Through the magnificent dialogue of these two men, we hoped to open a "living horizon" for a mutual understanding of "the words of Jesus and the words of Zen." The main

themes were “direct experience,” “self-awareness,” “place,” and “words.”

The two dialoguers—Ueda and Yagi—have not only both served and provided leadership for the Society over many years as President and in other capacities, but also share a basic sense of fundamental questions. They are also leading philosophers of religion who represent the attempt to seek answers to fundamental questions within the aegis of Buddhist and Christianity in postwar Japan. Ueda Shizuteru, a leading authority and internationally recognized scholar of M. Eckhart, is also known for his contributions on the philosophy of religion (especially the idea of “place”/basho) in the tradition of Nishida Kitarō, Nishitani Keiji, and Zen Buddhism. His basic philosophical statement is, “I am I when I am not I.” Yagi Seiichi, on the other hand, is known for promoting religion (philosophy) as “a logic of place” as seen in the New Testament, and for his historical and essentialist critique of New Testament thought. To Yagi, the essence of “the religion of Jesus” is religion as a “logic of place,” and if we return to this place we can (to borrow the exquisite phrasing of Yagi himself) “drink directly from the same fountain that was discovered by Jesus.” Through this experience we can transcend not only Biblical fundamentalism and the exclusivistic absolutism of Christianity, but also make it possible to have a true dialogue with other religions. For Yagi, the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity should not only deepen common understanding but also open the way to mutual reform, clarify the truth that flows at the basis of both religions, and probe into the fundamental constitution of human existence, and this is why he has constantly sought after dialogue with Buddhists.

Yagi Seiichi has stood out as a partner in dialogue for many years. His discussions with the Zen master Hisamatsu Shin’ichi (*A Religion of Awakening*, published in 1980) was an epochal event in intellectual history from the perspective of “Buddhism and Christianity.” Yagi has also been involved in important dialogues with Nishitani Keiji and Akizuki Ryōmin. And the time was ripe for this dialogue between Ueda Shizuteru and Yagi Seiichi.

As a book of dialogue, you can open to any page of this book and discover the theme of “oneness” and the reverberations of this theme. The aim of our Annual

Meeting was to explicate the meaning of this “oneness” at a deeper level. Sad to say, the discussions were not as successful as we had hoped. The theme of “oneness” all too easily disintegrated into a focus on the “two” different dialoguers. In other words, we seldom were able to go beyond the introduction and analysis of the individual ideas of each of the two men to focus on their “oneness.” I wish we could have celebrated our 30th anniversary more fittingly. The meeting itself may deserve a failing grade, but there remains no doubt that the theme and the publication we took up have great historical value. And something new will surely arise up from it.

*Reported by YAGI Yōichi
English translation by Paul L. Swanson*



Retreat at Union Theological Seminary

Union Theological Seminary and the Foundation for Active Compassion are hosting a “Retreat for Social and Environmental Activists, Peacemakers, and All Who Serve Others.” The event will be at UTS on November 4-5, 2011, Friday 7 PM to 9 PM and Saturday 9:30 AM to 5 PM. The teachers are Lama/Prof. John Makransky and Prof. Paul Knitter.

According to the organizers: “Meditation training can help ground us more fully in the spirit of our work for others. This retreat is for new and experienced meditators who serve others in family or community life, social service or social justice work. This retreat is intended especially, though not exclusively, for people who are working for social-environmental justice and peace or in social service and who want to revitalize their inner or spiritual resources for their work. Participants learn powerful meditations from Tibetan Buddhism that can bring out latent powers of compassion and wisdom from the ground of our being. Such meditations, adapted for people of all

backgrounds and faiths, help make us more fully present to self and others by awakening an unconditional attitude from within that nourishes all, while also challenging us to see more potential in all. Included are connections to social perspectives of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Dalai Lama, the relevance of these practices for becoming more fully present, healing inner wounds, challenging injustice. By making contemplations from Tibet accessible to people of all faiths, this retreat is also an exercise in deep mutual learning across religious boundaries—comparative theology in action. Sessions will consist of guided meditations, questions and discussion.”

Ms. Julie Forsythe & Ms. Cathy Cornell serve as the resource persons. Ms. Conrell can be reached at 646-648-0731 or cathy@cathycornell.com to register. The Friday session is \$10, the entire retreat is \$50, but scholarships are available. The website for the retreat is: <http://www.utsnyc.edu/activecompassion>

New Document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World”

The World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance have recently released a joint document, “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World.” The three groups represent or speak to nearly 90% of the world’s Christians. The Preamble to the document states:

“Aware of the tensions between people and communities of different religious convictions and the varied interpretations of Christian witness, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and, at the invitation of the WCC, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), met during a period of 5 years to reflect and produce this document to serve as a set of recommendations for conduct on Christian witness around the world. This document does not intend to be a theological statement on mission but to address practical issues associated with Christian witness in a multi-religious world.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices and to use the recommendations in this document to prepare, where appropriate, their own guidelines for their witness and mission among those of different religions and among those who do not profess any particular religion. It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.”

The full document may be downloaded here: http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf

Greetings from the New SBCS Newsletter Editor

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Newsletter’s new editor, following Don Mitchell, Harry Wells, and (most recently) Peter Huff. I look forward to the opportunity to meet you in the years ahead.

My introduction to interreligious work came via my study abroad director, Michael Saso, during a junior year in Beijing in 1995-1996. Saso had been a Jesuit and was one of a few westerners ordained as a Daoist in the 1970s. He straddled the uncomfortable line that often divides practitioners and academics and introduced me to new worlds. I later precepted Buddhism at Princeton for two years. My parents are both Presbyterian pastors and I teach at Taiwan Seminary in Taipei with the Presbyterian Church USA. Perhaps a quarter of the students here are first generation Christians, and they come from a variety of local religious backgrounds. In the spring, I will teach the Seminary’s required class on Taiwanese religions, something about which I am very excited. I’m still fairly new to the Society and very grateful for the community that has been created over the years.

If you have recommendations, suggestions, complaints, or corrections, feel free to write me, Jonathan Seitz, at jaseitz@gmail.com.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

The *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter* is published two times annually: in the spring and the fall. Please contact the Editor 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. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and length. Send items to Jonathan Seitz jaseitz@gmail.com.

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MEMBERSHIP IN THE SBSCS

To enroll as a member of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, complete the form at <http://society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/appform.html> or send your name, address, and membership fee to:

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies
c/o Guy McCloskey
1720 S Michigan Ave #3303,
Chicago, IL 60616-4865

Enclose a check for \$45.00 (\$10.00 for students, \$25 for senior citizens) payable to "Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies." 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.

Members receive the Society's *Newsletter* and our annual journal *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.

SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST- CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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