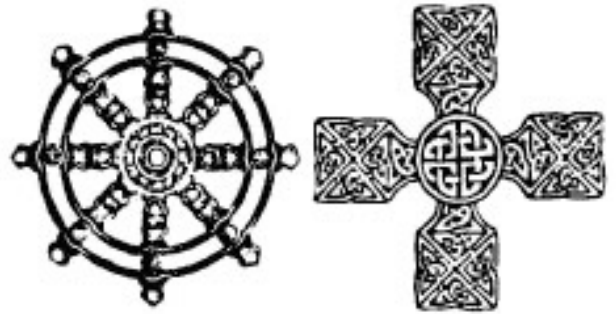


# Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter



Vol. 43

Spring 2009

## *News of the Society*

### **Report on 2008 Annual Meeting**

**October 31-November 1, 2008  
Chicago, Illinois, USA**

Sandra Costen Kunz,  
*Phillips Theological Seminary*  
Peter A. Huff,  
*Centenary College of Louisiana*

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS) sponsored two sessions in conjunction with the 2008 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). The first session addressed the fertile topic of religion and science. The second session focused on the life and legacy of Trappist monk, spiritual writer, and interfaith pioneer Thomas Merton (1915-1968).

The theme of the well-attended first session, moderated by Sandra Costen Kunz (Phillips Theological Seminary), was “Cognitive Science, Religious Practices, and Human Development: Buddhist and Christian Perspectives.”

Paula K. Arai from Louisiana State University presented “The Body and the Mind: Buddhist Bowing and Neuroscience,” co-authored with Sascha du Lac from The Salk Institute. Dr. Arai explained that while neuroscience research on “the meditating brain” is fascinating, most Buddhists globally don’t meditate regularly. Ritual bowing, however, is pan-Buddhist and part of a healing paradigm for Soto Zen laywomen.

Prostration is a vulnerable position which usually elicits biochemical threat/flight/fight responses that shut down the immune system. Bowing slowly, repeatedly, and fluidly with gratitude and relaxation “rewires the brain so that what once felt unsafe becomes an occasion to feel safe and connected,” that is, safe enough to expend the energy to heal.

Ruben Habito Roshi from Southern Methodist University read “Who Hears?” written by Robert Aitken Roshi, founder and retired Zen master of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu. Acknowledging that neurological research has indeed measured a settled state of samadhi, Aitken noted that “the great masters of Zen, Zhaozhou and Deshan, didn’t talk about being settled, any more than neuroanatomists discuss the importance of the alphabet.” Instead, in koans and haiku, they pointed toward intimacy – intimacy with both the self and “the thrush singing on the railing outside.” Aitken suggested that the “views of intimacy” and connection with all things that neuroanatomist Jill Bolte Taylor offers in her book *Stroke of Insight* record the same harmony between linear and nonlinear experience recorded in Zen koans, and that science should study this harmony.

Noreen Herzfeld, who teaches theology and computer science at St. John’s University in Minnesota, warned about the risks of online multi-tasking and violent computer games in her paper entitled “Your Cell will Teach You Everything: Old Wisdom, Modern Science and the Art of Attention.” Citing studies on the time it takes to refocus attention after a shift, she argued that multi-tasking “eventually eats away at traits such as patience, tenacity, judgment, and problem solving.”

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Research on violent video games indicates that they compromise the neurological bases for empathy, which other research indicates may be enhanced by Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices.

Thomas Cattoi from Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley presented “Verbal Imagining: Scientific Reflection on Visual Cognition in Light of Traditional Tibetan and Christian Theologies of the Image.” He outlined “points of contact” between the eighth- and ninth-century Greek monk Theodore the Studite’s reflections on “the significance of icons” and contemporary Tibetan Kagyur master Bokar Rinpoche’s teachings on “the purpose of visualization exercises.”

Cattoi suggested that icon veneration in which the boundaries between the deity and humanity are not blurred is more imaginatively dynamic than veneration that identifies the meditator with the deity.

In “Cognitive Error and Contemplative Practices: The Cultivation of Discernment in Mind and Heart,” Wesley J. Wildman from Boston University outlined seven common types of cognitive error. He then reviewed five potential strategies for detecting and ameliorating such errors and explored how meditation practices, psychotherapy, and rigorous intellectual training can mitigate the potential for cognitive error.

Wildman contended that while cognitive biases play a significant role in supporting some erroneous religious, economic, and political beliefs, practices of discernment and contemplation developed in religious communities – and through advanced education – can help people detect cognitive biases and resist their occurrence.

The theme for the Society’s second session, chaired by Alice Keefe (University of Wisconsin), was “Thomas Merton Forty Years After His Death: Buddhist and Christian Perspectives.” Four presenters examined and evaluated Merton’s distinctive contributions to Buddhist-Christian relations, theological reflection, and interreligious dialogue.

In her paper “Self-Surrender in Merton’s Writings and Contemplative Psychology,” Daijaku Judith Kinst (California Institute of Integral Studies) concentrated on the place of subjective transformation in Merton’s thought, describing his “great gift” to the literature on the contemplative life as the “fearless” rejection of self-centeredness in the practice of prayer and spiritual formation.

“Thomas Merton Meets Tibetan Buddhism” by Judith Simmer-Brown (Naropa University) shed new light on the impact of the *dzogchen* (“great completion”) tradition on Merton’s evolving spirituality, particularly as expressed in the letters, speeches, and private documents included in the posthumously published *Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (1973).

In “Non-dual Wisdom as Feminine: Sophia and Prajnaparamita in Merton’s Poem ‘Hagia Sophia,’” Paula Hirschboeck (Edgewood College) explored suggestive parallels between Christian mystical experience and Buddhist *madhyamika* teaching in Merton’s long dream-like Marian hymn from the early 1960s.

Kristin Johnston Largen (Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg) concluded the session with an analysis of the role of Buddhism-inspired insights in Merton’s approach to soteriological questions, especially as seen in his changing attitudes toward traditional Christian doctrines of hell, purgatory, eschatology, and the human person.

## AAR Field Trip to SGI-USA Cultural Center in Chicago

Between sessions of the 2008 AAR meeting, members and friends of the Society participated in the annual SBCS field trip to a local site significant for its relevance to interdisciplinary Buddhist-Christian studies.

This year members visited the Chicago Cultural Center of Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), the Buddhist association for peace, culture, and education based on the teachings of thirteenth-century Japanese monk and reformer Nichiren Daishonin.

Located at 1455 South Wabash Avenue in downtown Chicago, the Cultural Center serves as the primary facility for SGI-USA activities in the Midwest. Mr. Guy McCloskey, senior vice president, publisher, and member of the board of directors for SGI-USA, organized the event.

The evening’s program included a tour of the Center’s award-winning architecture, an informal overview of the aims and initiatives of SGI-USA, and a delicious dinner prepared and served by members of the organization.

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Thanks, Guy and SGI-USA members, for your hospitality and generosity!

## 2009 Annual Meeting Program

**American Academy of Religion (AAR)  
November 7-10, 2009  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**SBCS Board Meeting: Friday, Nov. 6, 9:00-11:30 AM, 1:00-3:30 PM**

**SBCS Session 1: Friday, Nov. 6, 4:00-6:30 PM**

**Theme: The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity, and Science**

Through a review of *The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity and Science* (2008), this session will address Buddhist, Christian, and scientific insights into the inadequacies of conceptualization and language for understanding reality. The book's editor will give an overview, followed by chapter reviews by two contributors, two responses, and open discussion including other contributors to this Templeton project.

Panelists:

Paul Numrich, Theological Consortium of Greater Columbus

Paul Ingram, Pacific Lutheran University

Dennis Hirota, Ryukoku University

Responding:

Sandra Costen Kunz, Phillips Theological Seminary

Amos Yong, Regent University

Other contributors:

John Albright, Lutheran School of Theology

Roger Blomquist, Argonne National Laboratory

Tom Christenson, Capital University

David McMahan, Franklin and Marshall

Mark Unno, University of Oregon

**SBCS Session 2: Saturday, Nov. 7, Time TBA**

**Theme: Discussion of Paul Ingram's *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science***

Advanced registration for the AAR annual meeting is \$135 (member) and \$275 (nonmember). To register and to arrange housing, go to [www.aarweb.org](http://www.aarweb.org).

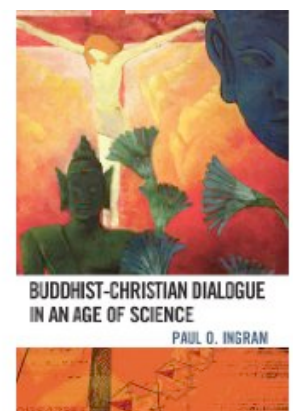
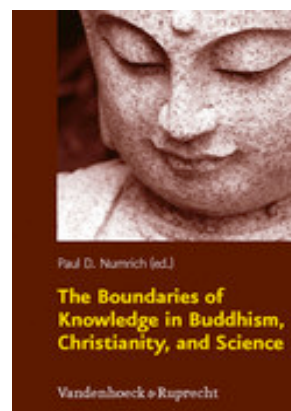
For more information, contact the AAR at 1-800-575-7185 (USA & Canada), 1-330-425-9330 (outside USA & Canada), or [aarreg@experient-inc.com](mailto:aarreg@experient-inc.com).

## Featured Books for 2009 Meeting

The sessions of the SBCS at the 2009 AAR annual meeting in Montreal will focus on two recent publications in Buddhist-Christian studies.

Paul D. Numrich, ed., *The Boundaries of Knowledge in Buddhism, Christianity and Science* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). ISBN: 978-3525569870.

Order at [www.v-r.de/en/](http://www.v-r.de/en/).



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Paul Ingram, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007). ISBN: 978-0742562158. Order at [www.rowmanlittlefield.com](http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com).

## SBCS Book Award for 2010

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies is now receiving nominations for the 2010 Frederick Streng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Nominations must be received by December 31, 2009.

The winner will be announced at the annual meeting of the Society on October 29, 2010.

The criteria for nominating and making the award are:

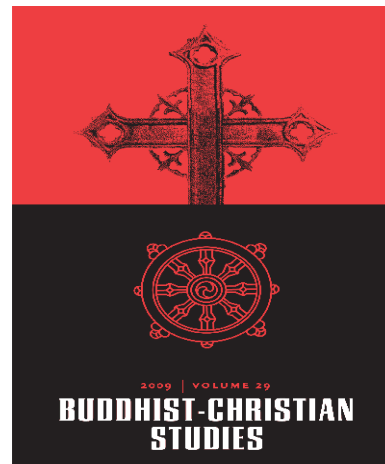
1. The subject matter of the book should be inspired by and relevant to Buddhist-Christian relations, but subject matter is not narrowly limited to books on dialogue or to books that are half on Christianity and half on Buddhism.
2. The scholarship must be original and the writing clear. The book must 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 2010 award must be for a book published in 2004 or later).

Nominations can be made by any person other than the author(s) or editor(s), using the [downloadable nomination form](#) at <http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/BookAwardNominationForm.doc>.

The completed form may be sent electronically to [ayong@regent.edu](mailto:ayong@regent.edu) or a printed copy can be submitted by postal mail to Prof. Amos Yong, Chair of the Frederick Streng Book Award Committee, Regent University School of Divinity, 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464 USA.

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.

## BCS Journal Gets New Look



## CONFERENCES & DIALOGUES

### Ch'an/Zen-Catholic Dialogue Spreads "Welcome Table" at 2009 Annual Meeting

Francis V. Tiso

*United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*

A retreat program designed by the participants in the ongoing Ch'an/Zen-Catholic Dialogue explored the dialogue of religious experience and the dialogue of life, set amid the redwoods of Guerneville, California. The January 28-31, 2009 meeting was co-chaired by the Rev. Heng Sure of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery and the Institute for World Religions, Berkeley, California, and by Most Rev. John C. Wester, Bishop of Salt Lake City, Utah.

Sr. Mary Ann Donovan of the Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, led an experience of *lectio divina* based on John 15:1-17, Jesus' simile of the Vine and the Branches.

Rev. Victoria Austin of the San Francisco Zen Center gave an "encouragement talk," which would typically be delivered to Zen retreatants. She referred

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to the Gospel passage, noting: “We don’t prune the vine because it is dead, but because it has the capacity to be fruitful. We don’t purify the mind to get rid of dirt, but to return to the mind’s original purity, which is the source of our conscience and is the true life within us.”

Rev. Jan Chosen Bays of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon observed that “Vows make our life energy more focused, keeping us from losing purpose and meaning. Vows prune away unnecessary things. When we ask for help with the challenge of being faithful to our vows, we call up and encounter unexpected sources of support and ‘grace.’”

The Ch’an Buddhist presentation focused on meditation experience, which was described as “recovering the natural state of the mind.” Prof. Martin Verhoeven of the Pacific School of Religion pointed out that in meditation “we are returning to the origin, not moving forward to ‘gain something.’” Linking ethical engagement with contemplation, he said, “When the mind of a meditator is motivated to act out of genuine compassion, its action is accurate and correct. Action is neither driven nor obstructed by ego or sentiment.”

These comments resonated with Rev. Heng Sure’s presentation on the statement on the environment from the recent Gethsemane III conference, “Simple and Sufficient,” in which Buddhist and Christian monastics embraced an ecologically valid way of life.

Urging the group to notice the connections between contemplation and ethical action, Bishop John C. Wester commented: “This work embodies mercy by lifting people up; it embodies justice as it arises out of our common humanity.”

Because of the financial challenges that all three sponsoring institutions are facing, it was decided to conclude formal sponsorship of the Ch’an/Zen-Catholic Dialogue with this meeting.

However, participants agreed to work together to reconstitute the dialogue regionally. A steering committee was designated to undertake new logistical arrangements and to draft a narrative of the previous seven years of dialogue for posting on our respective web sites.

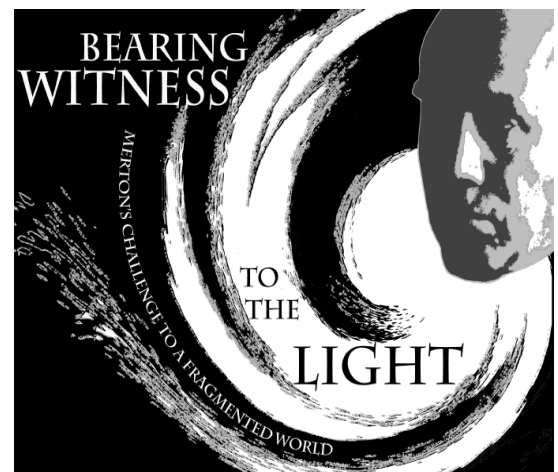
Bishop Wester summarized the convictions of participants, both Buddhist and Catholic, by observing: “It is impossible not to be affected by this experience. Dialogue in this atmosphere has had an impact on my

own way of ministering to others. I feel that my faith, sensitivity, compassion, and reverence have been enhanced by participating in these meetings.”

Participants in the 2009 dialogue meeting included Rev. Heng Sure, Berkeley Buddhist Monastery; Bishop John C. Wester, Salt Lake City, Utah; Dr. Snjezana Akpinar, Dharma Realm Buddhist University; Rev. Gigen Victoria Austin, San Francisco Zen Center; Rev. Jan Chosen Bays, Great Vow Zen Monastery; Sr. Phyllis D’Anna, S.N.D., Zen Center, Palo Alto; Sr. Mary Ann Donovan, SC, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley; Dr. Ron Epstein, Dharma Realm Buddhist Association; Mrs. Lorraine Moriarty, Society of St. Vincent De Paul; Bhikshuni Heng Jiao, City of 10,000 Buddhas (CTTB); Bhikshuni Heng Liang, CTTB; Rev. Canon Francis Tiso, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB); Rev. James Massa, USCCB; Rev. Thomas W. Devereaux, Diocese of Santa Rosa ecumenical and interreligious officer; Dr. Martin Verhoeven, Pacific School of Religion; and Ron Brown, observer (Cloverdale, California).

## Thomas Merton Society Conference

June 11-14, 2009  
Nazareth College  
Rochester, NY, USA



The International Thomas Merton Society holds its Eleventh Conference and General Meeting this summer. The conference theme is “Bearing Witness to the Light: Merton’s Challenge to a Fragmented World.”

Speakers addressing Buddhist-Christian themes

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in Merton studies include Tyson Anderson, William Apel, James Beckman, Matthew John Cressler, Robert King, Mark Murray, and Judith Simmer-Brown.

For additional information, contact Christine M. Bochen, Nazareth College, 4245 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14618-3790 USA: [cbochen4@naz.edu](mailto:cbochen4@naz.edu).

## European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies

June 11-15, 2009  
Munich, Germany

Despite formidable financial challenges, the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies holds its 8th Conference this summer.

The location is the Benedictine Arch Abbey of St. Ottilien (near Munich, Germany).

The theme of the conference is "Authority in Buddhism and Christianity."

Speakers for the conference include Rita Gross (University of Wisconsin), Kajsa Ahlstrand (University of Uppsala), Shi Zhiru (Pomona College), Reinhold Bernhardt (University of Basel), Shenpen Hookham (Wales), Karl Baier (University of Vienna), Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (Thailand), Terrence Merrigan (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), Whalen Lai (University of California), and Michael von Brück (University of Munich).

One evening of the conference is devoted to student research papers.

Information regarding booking, student/research papers, travel details, speakers, and cultural programs are available on the European Network website: [www.buddhist-christian-studies.org](http://www.buddhist-christian-studies.org).

Send inquiries to Dr. Martin Rotting at [enbcs2009@occurso.de](mailto:enbcs2009@occurso.de).

Here's the revised program:

Friday morning: *The Crisis of Authority in Modernity and Postmodernity*

Professor Rita Gross  
Professor Kajsa Ahlstrand

Friday afternoon: *Scriptural Authority*

Professor Shi Zhiru  
Professor Reinhold Bernhardt

Saturday morning: *Spiritual Authority*

Lama Dr. Shenpen Hookham  
Dr. Karl Baier

Sunday morning: *Institutional Authority*

Professor Chatsumarn Kabilsingh  
Professor Terrence Merrigan

Monday morning: *Political Authority*

Professor Whalen Lai  
Professor Michael von Brück

## Parliament of the World's Religions

December 3-9, 2009  
Melbourne, Australia

Plans are now in full swing for the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions. An estimated 8,000-12,000 religious leaders, scholars, artists, and activists will gather in Melbourne, Australia for seven days of interreligious encounter, dialogue, and celebration.

The theme for the meeting is "Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth."

The conference venue will be Melbourne's new Convention Centre, recipient of a Six Green Star environmental rating.

The Dalai Lama is scheduled to address the multi-faith gathering at the Parliament's closing ceremony on December 9. The following day will mark the 20th anniversary of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama.

Other major speakers and performers will include: Prof. Joy Murphy Wandin, Sri Ravi Shankar, Chief Oren Lyons, Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, Dr. Natesan Ramani, Rabbi David Rosen, Dalia Mogahed, Dr. Ishmael Noko, Dr. Kim Cunio, Heather Lee, Prof. Wande Abimbola, Rev. Tim Costello, Manjiri Kelkar, and Hugh Evans.

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The original Parliament was held in 1893 as part of the World's Fair and Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois, USA. A variety of Christian traditions participated. Buddhist delegates represented Theravada, Zen, and Nichiren traditions.

The definitive narrative history of the original meeting is Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Indiana University Press, 1995).

Subsequent Parliaments have been held in 1993 (Chicago), 1999 (Cape Town), and 2004 (Barcelona).

The international events are organized by the Chicago-based Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

Information regarding registration, fees, accommodations, program details, the call for abstracts, and pre-Parliament events can be found at [www.parliamentofreligions2009.org](http://www.parliamentofreligions2009.org).

Within Australia, contact: Office of the Parliament of the World's Religions, Melbourne 2009, The Hub, 17 Waterview Walk, Docklands, Victoria, 3008 Australia.

Outside Australia, contact: Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, 70 East Lake Street, Suite 205, Chicago, IL 60601 USA: 312-629-2990.

## Tiananmen Square 20th Anniversary 1989-2009

"Great changes have taken place in the People's Republic of China since 1989. Today, it is a global economic power poised to become a superpower. It is my hope that the Chinese leaders have the courage and far-sightedness to embrace more truly egalitarian principles and pursue a policy of greater accommodation and tolerance of diverse views. A policy of openness and realism can lead to greater trust and harmony within China and enhance its international standing as a truly great nation."

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama  
[www.dalailama.com](http://www.dalailama.com)

**New On-Line Journal Launched**

The on-line, peer-reviewed *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* published its inaugural issue in April, 2009.

According to its website, the Journal "is a forum for academic, social, and timely issues affecting religious communities around the world. Published online, it is designed to increase both the quality and frequency of interchanges between religious groups and their leaders and scholars. By fostering communication, the Journal hopes to contribute to a more tolerant, pluralistic society."

The Journal's editorial staff includes Joshua Stanton, Stephanie Hughes, Stephen Butler Murray, Aimee Upjohn Light, Hannah McConnaughay, Marinus Iwuchukwu, Matthew Dougherty, Jason Levine, and Mark Beitman.

For more information and calls for papers, explore the Journal's website at <http://irdialogue.org/>.



"Dialogue presents infinite possibilities; it is a challenge that can be taken up by anyone--any time--in order to realize the transformation from a culture of violence to a culture of peace."

Daisaku Ikeda

"What we need . . . is respect for the beliefs of others and the readiness to look for the truth in what strikes us as strange or foreign."

Joseph Ratzinger

"You love the apple; yes, you are authorized to love the apple, but no one prevents you from also loving the mango."

Thich Nhat Hanh



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**Visit the SBCS Website**

**[www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org](http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org)**

## **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 as MS Word attachments to Peter Huff: [phuff@centenary.edu](mailto:phuff@centenary.edu). All other correspondence may be sent to:

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## **SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER**

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## MEMBERSHIP IN THE SBCS

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

SBCS Membership  
c/o Dr. Harry Wells  
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Humboldt State University  
Arcata, CA 95521 USA

Enclose a check for \$45.00 (\$25.00 for students, senior citizens, and monastics) 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*.