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# Society for Buddhist- Christian Studies



Vol. 53

Spring 2014

## *News of the Society*

### In this Newsletter

Greetings from the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies!

In this newsletter you will find:

- An in-depth summary of our November 2013 annual meeting in Baltimore.
- Updates on our journal, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, and how to submit a paper or recommend a book for review. We're also seeking new co-editors.
- Calls for book and student prizes awarded by the Society (the student prize is due May 30).
- Recent and upcoming conferences and retreats.
- How to update membership status.

Thank you again for your participation in the Society. *Newsletter Editor*

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### **2013 SBCS Annual Meeting**

**Baltimore, Maryland, USA**

**November 22-23, 2013**

The SBCS is one of more than two dozen scholarly societies that have been formally recognized by the American Academy of Religion as a "Related Scholarly Organization." The pattern for many years has been for the SBCS to hold its annual meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of the AAR. On the Friday before the AAR's annual meeting begins, the board meets in the morning and early afternoon, followed by an AAR-advertised session late that afternoon. On Saturday, another paper session or panel is followed by the annual members meeting.

### **Friday Business Meeting**

The Friday Business Meeting included reports from each of the SBCS officers and award committees. Guy McCloskey gave the treasurer's report which was unanimously accepted. Guy McCloskey concluded his service on the Board with this meeting, and at a later time Denise Yarbrough was accepted as his replacement. The Journal report by Wakoh Shannon Hickey and Denise Yarbrough, along with an extended discussion of the overall state of the Journal, dealt with issues related to SBCS's long-term relationship with the University of Hawaii Press and the current issue. Another topic for discussion included outreach (website, facebook page) and the need to reach potential new members. SBCS communicates with its whole membership through

biannual newsletters. The Newsletter is now distributed electronically, with hard copies available at the annual meeting. The decision was made to update the website also. Nominating committee reported that three members (Brown, Seitz, Tanaka) will conclude their terms as board members, but all three will remain on because they serve in other capacities. The Graduate Student Award Committee reported that despite several interesting submissions it did not choose a paper this year. The Board spent some time discussing ways to encourage graduate student involvement. Possibilities for increasing graduate student involvement include: prioritizing student participation in panels, working with AAR's efforts to include graduate students, promoting essays on H-net or other listserves. The SBCS typically has a graduate student representative (currently Glenn Willis).

### Saturday Members Meeting

The Saturday Members Meeting on November 23<sup>rd</sup> was called to order at 11:40. The nominating committee proposed a slate which was unanimously approved. John Makransky was elected to the vice-presidency, and Sallie King, Judith Simmer-Brown, and Abraham Velez were chosen as board members. Elizabeth Harris, president of the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies, reported that the papers from their 2011 conference at Liverpool Hope University, titled: *Hope a Form of Delusion?: Christian and Buddhist Perspectives* will be published. She announced their upcoming 2015 conference: "Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia – Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, China, Korea" on June 21-29 at the Arch Abbey St. Ottilien near Munich, Germany, which has been very involved in monastic interreligious dialogue. She called our attention to the plans being made in Sri Lanka for a centennial celebration of the birth of Lynn de Silva, a pioneer in Buddhist Christian dialogue and Christian theology of religions. Vice-president Alice Keefe and vice-president-elect John Makransky led us in a discussion of potential session topics. At 11:55 Terry Muck handed over the presidency to Alice Keefe, who adjourned the session.

### Panels

The two panels this year were "Deep Listening and Spiritual Care" and "New Perspectives on Buddhism and Multiple-Religious Belonging." Chaired by Alice A. Keefe, the deep listening panel included a contemplative exercise by Judith Simmer-Brown and papers by Duane Bidwell and Sandra Costen Kunz. John Makransky responded. The multiple-belongings panel was cosponsored with the Buddhism in the West Group and included papers by Harold Kasimow, Richard Payne, Emily Sigalow, and Kristin Johnston Largen. Wendy Cadge presided and Donald Swearer responded. In 2014, SBCS is to meet concurrent with the AAR in San Diego.



### European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies

Oude Abdij, Ghent, Belgium  
 June 27 – July 1, 2013  
 John O'Grady and Elizabeth Harris

The 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies (ENBCS) brought together between 60 and 70 people at the Oude Abdij, Drongen, Belgium, between 27 June and 1 July 2013, to examine the theme, "History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity." It was a collaborative effort between the ENBCS and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. The 2011 ENBCS conference had focused on whether 'hope' was a relevant concept for Buddhists and Christians. The choice of history as a theme complemented this. It also resonated with a research concern of both KU Leuven and the Network.

Five key themes were chosen for examination: the traditional Christian and Buddhist conceptions of history; Jesus and the Buddha: fact and fiction; Buddhist and Christian historiography; dangerous memory in Christianity and Buddhism; permitting historical consciousness in Buddhism and

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Christianity. Each was approached from a Buddhist and a Christian perspective. An opening lecture addressed the theme, 'Modern Historical Consciousness and the Challenge to Religion.' In addition, eighteen research papers on Buddhist-Christian relations were given in parallel sessions on Friday evening and Saturday morning. These covered topics as various as the writings of Edmund Pezet (Pierre Gillet), Paul Knitter's understanding of Buddhist-Christian Double Belonging (Achim Riggert), Keiji Nishitani and the Death of God (Jonatan Navarro Estrada), the Encounter of Zen Buddhism and Christianity in the Works of D. T. Suzuki (Mariusz Rucki), Buddhist-Christian Encounters by Han Yong Woon (Seung Chul Kim) and "Liberating the Conflict from 'History' in Sri Lanka" (Jude Lal Fernando).

Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Münster, Germany), in the opening lecture, discussed seven challenges that modern historical consciousness was posing to religion: the challenge of falsification (when historical evidence, for example, showed some doctrines cherished by believers were not taught by the founder); the challenge of uncertainty or methodological doubt; the challenge of methodological naturalism (should a natural explanation be considered more probable than a supernatural one?); the challenge of the distance between past and present; the challenge of change (religions are not static); the challenge of demystification; the challenge of relativity (the writing of history is perspectival, conditioned by context). He stressed that it would be a blessing to religion if these challenges were faced and, throughout the conference, encouraged other speakers to face them.

The first theme was tackled by Mark Blum (Berkeley, USA) from a Buddhist perspective and Jan-Olav Henriksen (Norwegian School of Theology) from a Christian perspective. In a magisterial historical and geographical survey of the Buddhist tradition, Blum first noted that no one had unearthed a traditional notion of Buddhist history in the early texts. The theme of decline and re-formation had been taken from Indian cosmology but with a Buddhist twist and the conviction that it was pointless to talk about beginnings. And in the growth of the Mahāyāna tradition, a de-historicization of the Buddha had

occurred in the belief that the Buddha's dharma-body was his only "real" body.

Henriksen argued that Christian salvation history had its origin in the narrative of the fall, an event for which there was no historical evidence, and developed into a history of God's call (election) to all people that they should be brought together in community. It was a history that was linked with the divine logos, a force that Christian theology has seen as deeply interwoven into creation from the beginning of time and that was made human in the Jesus.

Terrence Merrigan (KU Leuven, Belgium), giving a Christian perspective on the second theme, distinguished three quests or attempts to reach the historical Jesus. The first, from 1774-1906, sought to uncover the Jesus that had been obscured by dogma. It imploded with the realisation that separating "core" from "myth" was impossible, and conditioned a reactive "no-quest" in the first half of the twentieth century. A "new quest" arose in the 1950s, initiated by Käsemann's reaction to the theologies of Barth and Bultmann. A further quest that appealed to archaeology and the non-canonical followed in the 1980s, leading to a multiplicity of portraits that presented Jesus, for instance, as the sage, the cynic or the revolutionary. He asked whether Christians, therefore, were located between a rock and a hard place, when it came to the facts and fiction surrounding Jesus.

John Strong (Bates College, USA), in his survey of "The Buddha: Fact or Fiction", was remarkably similar. He began with attempts by orientalist such as T. W. Rhys Davids to reach the historical Buddha, after westerners realized that the Buddha was not a god or a solar hero. Casting these as the demythologizers, he claimed that their project contained the seeds of its own destruction. A remythologization occurred, such as that seen in Edwin Arnold's poem, *The Light of Asia*. Surveying movements in the text between fiction and apparent fact, he argued that few scholars today would admit that we can know much about the Buddha.

The Buddhist perspective on the third theme, historiography, focused on one fascinating case study: cultural shame and cultural pride in Tibet.

Robert Mayer (Oxford, United Kingdom) argued that perceptions of history can be experienced as a source of shame in one era and as a source of pride in another. For instance, a sense of shame had led to the manipulation of pre-Buddhist Tibetan history to force compatibility with Buddhist values. He demonstrated that historiographies owe their origin to diverse cultural and political factors.

Eve-Marie Becker (Aarhus, Denmark) presented a Christian perspective, arguing that the earliest shape of Christian historiography concerned remembrance of the past and a theological interpretation of this. She surveyed the New Testament to illustrate how a founding story for a community was created “for certain purposes.” Memory then became history, and history eventually became historiography. “Historical remembrance and theological interpretation go hand in hand,” she stressed.

The fourth theme, “Dangerous Memory”, arose because the Network realised that both Buddhists and Christians are heir to histories that are dark and violent, and that a failure to acknowledge this can cause tremendous harm. Catharina Stenqvist (Lund, Sweden) examined Simone Weil’s discussion of evil as her illustration of this. The story of Christianity was one of good and evil, she argued. It began in a “context of violence” and great brutality, and could transmit an idea of God that was productive of violence. Affirming Harald Ofstad’s “facts” concerning evil, such as the tension between equality and hierarchy, she added her own: evil as a life-view. She asked whether evil would cease if belief in God ceased.

Ian Harris (Cumbria, UK), in contrast, focused on the link between Buddhism and political violence in Cambodia. Contesting the view that Buddhism had remained innocent in Cambodia’s turbulent and violent history, he argued that the monastic Buddhist community had long been implicated in politics. Even the regime of Pol Pot had drawn from Buddhist principles. Parallels, for instance, could be drawn between its surveillance state and the India of Emperor Asoka. Implicit within his presentation was the question of whether Buddhists in Cambodia could own such a history and what the cost would be if they did. For what religions failed to acknowledge or, alternatively,

cherished in contradiction to the facts could have dangerous consequences.

The last theme, on permitting historical consciousness in Buddhism and Christianity was addressed by Rita Gross (Wisconsin – Eau Claire, USA) and Armin Kreiner (Munich, Germany). Gross eloquently recounted her view that “religious forms and teaching are always changing, not miraculously but culturally.” If Buddhists faced the challenge of modern historical consciousness – and she certainly believed they should – instances of Buddhist sectarianism would be undermined, such as the pejorative use of the term Hinayāna by Mahāyāna Buddhists. She identified a problem for the teacher of Buddhism: distinguishing the historical, with its “prestige of facts”, from the symbolic.

Kreiner wittily sought to grasp correctly the “snake” of historical consciousness. Whatever biblical narrative was about, he insisted, it was not history. He surveyed different moves made by thinkers such as Bultmann and Schweitzer to tackle the relationship between biblical narrative and history, but suggested that this had not found the real Jesus. It had, however, made Christianity more humble. He pointed out that Christianity was not united on the question of whether it was a curse or a blessing that Jesus was beyond our knowledge.

While no resolutions or formal agreements were sought or given, there was a consensus that, whatever the negatives, uncertainties and challenges that modern historical consciousness raised and raises, it “by and large, will be a blessing for the religions”, enabling healthy self-critique and providing a field for “doing religion comprehensively together” (Schmidt-Leukel).

The conference organisers are most grateful to the following donors: EMW; Areopagos; Rune Johanssons Fond, Uppsala University; Lund Mission; and KU Leuven. The papers on the main themes outlined above will be published as an edited volume on ‘History as a Challenge to Buddhism and Christianity’ by EOS Verlag (St Ottilien).

The next conference will take place from 25-29 June, 2015 at St Ottilien on the theme: Buddhist-

Christian Relations in Asia. It will examine six countries (China, Japan, Korea, Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka and Thailand) and will host speakers from these countries.

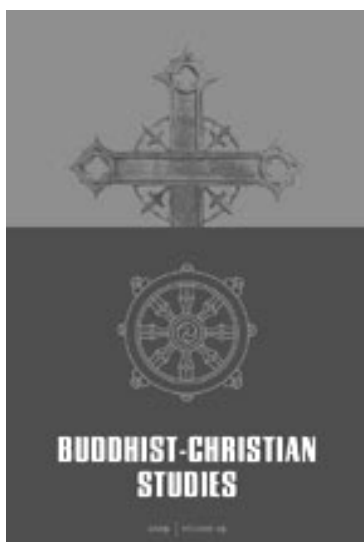


**Buddhist-Christian Studies Updates**

This year’s journal should be mailed by the fall. It features papers drawn from our AAR panels as well as from the recent Union Seminary Conference. Rita Gross and Terry Muck are acting as interim editors while we seek new editors.

**Call for Papers and for Books to Review**

The journal sometimes publishes independently submitted papers related to our annual meeting topics. The first panel at this year’s meeting will be on the theme “Liberation Theology and Socially Engaged Buddhism: Challenging Each Other, Learning from Each Other.” A second panel will gather several leading Womanist scholars who have been reading Buddhist texts together with Buddhist scholars. While the speakers for the panels are set, papers on engaged Buddhism or offering Womanist approaches are especially welcome. Contact the interim editors, Rita Gross (grossrm@uwec.edu) and Terry Muck (muckterry@gmail.com).



We are also seeking book reviews and nominations for books to approve. Submit recommendations for review to Sid Brown: [sbrown@sewanee.edu](mailto:sbrown@sewanee.edu).

**Call for Applications: Buddhist-Christian Studies Editorship**

The Journal has been under a period of review and reorganization. We are currently seeking solo or co-editors. Ideally, co-editors would reflect the composition of the broader membership of the Society, including a Buddhist and a Christian and ethnic and gender diversity. Nominations can be directed to Alice Keefe ([akeefe@uwsp.edu](mailto:akeefe@uwsp.edu)). Self-nominations are welcome. We welcome individual submissions or submissions for co-editors.

The Journal entails work year-round, including receiving and sending articles for review, reviewing subsections, and working with panelists from our annual meeting to revise papers; it also involves intensive periods of editing with a final journal submitted to University of Hawaii in mid-summer. Questions or concerns are welcome, and could be directed to the interim editors or the president, Alice Keefe.

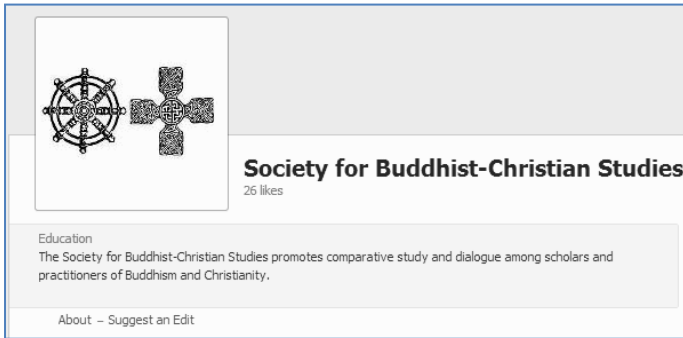


**SBCS Facebook Page**

Our facebook page is being updated and maintained by Glenn Willis. More than 140 of you have already “liked” the page. The page provides updates, offers an informal location for people to learn about our work, and allows us to share materials on conferences, calls for papers, retreats, and other events. (Some photos are up from our most recent panels.) You are welcome to post info there.

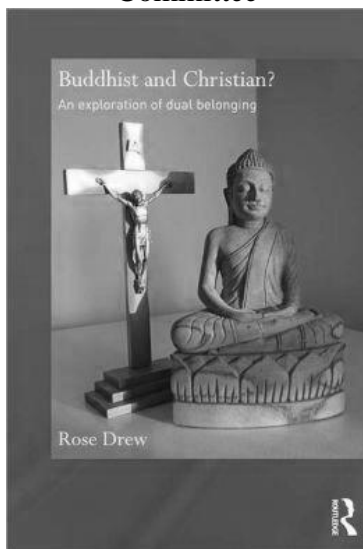
You can just search for “Buddhist-Christian Studies” in facebook, or the static page is: <http://www.facebook.com/BuddhistChristianStudies>

Keep an eye out also for a website update in the months ahead.



### Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Frederick J. Streng Book Award 2012

David Gardiner on behalf of the Streng Committee



Rose Drew's book *Buddhist and Christian?: An Exploration of Dual Belonging* (Routledge 2011) is this year's award winner. The book focuses on the question of how it might be possible for one to be authentically both a Buddhist and a Christian. Interviews with scholars who self-identify as practitioners in both traditions form the basis of the study. While the title and cover might suggest the book is aimed at a more popular audience, it is decidedly not and offers a bounteous feast for the scholarly audience as well.

Drew's book is primarily theological, yet it contains many insightful psychological and sociological dimensions. Her account is fascinating and engaging, and brilliantly articulate. She takes extensive pains to develop her theoretical framework and her analyses are

exceedingly detailed and subtle. The book is very relevant to thinking about practice on the ground, both for Christians leaning toward Buddhism and for those Buddhists who want to understand why there is Christian interest. I think what is so special about this volume is its deep relevance to both theory and practice. It offers theoretical aid from multiple dual believers and from scholars who are not such, and it gives powerful foundations for thinking about, and even for feeling one's way through, this rich realm. It also offers courage to people who are exploring dual Buddhist-Christian belonging, while at the same time providing abundant suggestions for thinking very carefully about how to discuss the general phenomenon itself. Considering the growing numbers of people who are entering this domain of faith/practice, I think this is a very unique, stimulating, complex and powerfully encouraging book on multiple levels. A great read for serious religious pluralists, whether merely thinkers or actual practitioners.

Rose Drew holds a PhD from Glasgow University (2008). She has long expressed passion about interfaith dialogue and cooperation, an interest first nurtured when she lived with a Hindu family in Nepal in 1998. Drew later took a BA in Theology and Philosophy at Bristol University and then an MA in Inter-religious Relations at Birmingham University. Since receiving her PhD from Glasgow, she has held lecturing and research posts at Glasgow and Uppsala (Sweden) universities, focusing on interfaith dialogue. She has worked actively in various capacities to promote interfaith dialog in Glasgow, and now manages a project for the UK charity Interfaith Glasgow (funded by the Scottish Government) that supports and develops positive interfaith relations.



### 2014 Streng Award Call for Nominations

The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies is now accepting nominations for the 2014



Frederick Streng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies. Nominations must be received by Dec. 31, 2014. 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 2014 award must be for a book published in 2009 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 Abraham Vélez de Cea ([abraham.velez@eku.edu](mailto:abraham.velez@eku.edu)). Abraham will respond to all electric nominations. 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.



### Conference Announcement:

#### [Meditation and Interfaith Learning Day-Long Retreat](#)

Led by Lama-Professor John Makransky and Reverend-Professor Melanie Harris

**Saturday, April 19, 2014**

9:30-5:00 at the Colgate Inn

This day-long retreat is for those new to contemplative practice as well as those experienced in it, who serve others in family or community, or who work in social service, healthcare, education, or for social-environmental justice. Participants will learn powerful meditations of compassion and awareness adapted from Tibetan Buddhism for people of all faiths and backgrounds. Such meditations from Buddhism can freshly illumine elements of our own spiritual formation (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or other), generating new insights into the nature of relationship, service and spiritual activism. Guided meditations will be interspersed with dialogue between Professors Makransky and Harris on fresh possibilities of Buddhist-Christian learning in connection with contemplation, service, and action. Time will be provided for questions and discussion.

#### Registration

Participation in Saturday's day-long retreat costs **\$35 per person. The fee is waived for Colgate students.** Registration fee covers continental breakfast and lunch at the Colgate Inn (Passover food available). An overnight stay at the Inn is not included with registration, and should be arranged directly with the Colgate Inn if desired.

#### Contact and Directions

**Clara Lantz**

*Administrative assistant at Chapel House*

E-mail: [clantz@colgate.edu](mailto:clantz@colgate.edu)

Phone: 315-228-7675

#### Other Conferences

John Makransky shares that a workshop on "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue and Comparative Scriptures" will meet at Minzu Unniversity of China, Beijing, from 10-11 Oct 2014.

He reminds readers that the next biannual international conference of the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies on "Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia" will be held in the monastery of St. Ottilien (near Munich) from 25-29 June 2015 (see announcement above).

### Meditation Center in Desio, Italy

*Long-term SBCS member Robert Magliola shares with us about a dialogic community he has visited, which will be of interest to readers.*

Contact him at [Robert\\_Magliola@hotmail.com](mailto:Robert_Magliola@hotmail.com) with questions:

A dialogic community based in Desio, Italy, and guided by Fr. Luciano Mazzocchi (of the Padri Saveriani, a Catholic missionary congregation), integrates Liturgy (hours of the Divine Office, Sunday Mass) and strict Soto-Zen meditation into its timetable. Fr. Mazzocchi is the chaplain to the sizable Japanese population in Milano, and leads zendos throughout Italy. If interested, and capable of conversational Japanese or Italian, find information at Vangelo e Zen's very active website: [www.vangeloezen.org](http://www.vangeloezen.org).

--Robert Magliola, Carmelite Tertiary; affiliate, Vangelo e Zen, Desio, Italy; and One Center (of Ling Jiou Shan/Ling Jiù Shān Buddhist Association), Flushing, Queens, N.Y.



### Graduate Student Essay Call for Submissions (Due May 30)

In order to encourage the participation of interested graduate students in the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, the Society is continuing its annual graduate student essay award competition this spring.

We are now accepting essays written by graduate students for classes related to the area of Buddhist-Christian studies. Faculty members are asked to encourage those students who have written excellent papers to submit them for consideration.

To submit a paper, students themselves should e-mail it to Glenn Willis at [willisg@bc.edu](mailto:willisg@bc.edu). Together with the essay submission, students should include a brief cover letter or paragraph

that includes the following: student name, program, institution, e-mail address, and any advising professor for the essay submission. The deadline for submission is **May 30, 2014**.

The winner of the competition will receive a \$500 award, and ordinarily are to present the paper during the annual meeting of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (this year to be in San Diego).

Please do not hesitate to contact Glenn at the e-mail address above with any questions. Thank you!



### Membership in the SBCS

Last year's efforts to expand our membership have had some promising results. The SBCS owes it strength to the friendships and cooperation of its members. Current members are encouraged to reach out to those who may be interested in participating in the SBCS.

If you have not updated your membership, please do so now. Keeping up to date on membership guarantees you will receive the journal and will be included in all of our mailings.

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

The Rev. Dr. C. Denise Yarbrough  
Director, Religious and Spiritual Life  
University of Rochester, Interfaith Chapel  
500 Joseph C. Wilson Blvd.  
Rochester, New York 14627

[dyarbrough@admin.rochester.edu](mailto:dyarbrough@admin.rochester.edu)

Enclose a check for \$45.00 (\$10.00 for students, \$25 for members over 65) 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. We also have a paypal account.

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

### **Contribute 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 or reports on major figures in the field of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

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](mailto:jaseitz@gmail.com).

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

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