

Society for Buddhist- Christian Studies



Vol. 57

Spring 2016

News of the Society

In this Newsletter

Our Newsletter includes information that will appear later in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*:

- An overview of the 2015 Annual Meeting, including panels and special the special event (this year to Atlanta Shambhala)
- Obituaries and memorials
- The Japan Society report

In this issue we also include:

- Updates on our website, membership, and announcement of a new communal blog
- A short report from our Journal
- Calls for the Streng Prize
- Information on a retreat near Cincinnati



The Annual Meeting of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

Atlanta, GA, USA, November 20-21, 2015
Sandra Costen Kunz

Each year the SBCS, as a “Related Scholarly Organization” of the American Academy of Religion, holds its annual meeting concurrently with AAR’s annual meeting. For many years the pattern has been to hold our board meeting on Friday morning and early afternoon, to offer at least two panels, paper sessions or other type of presentation (sometimes in conjunction with other scholarly organizations), and to hold our annual members meeting following one of these sessions. Usually a

session is scheduled for late Friday afternoon, followed by a dinner gathering, often hosted by a local Buddhist or Christian community.

Governing Board Meeting

This year's Friday board meeting began with member Ruben Habito's leading us in a moment of silence for Rita Gross, who had died nine days prior. One of the Society's founders and a clarion voice within AAR, Rita served as co-editor of the Society's journal, and in almost every other capacity.

After the agenda and minutes were approved, the board approved the report from treasurer Glenn Willis, who noted, happily, that the new online renewal system is working well and that members would be emailed renewal reminders. The journal co-editors' report from Carol Anderson and Thomas Cattoi was followed, first, by thanks for their fine work during their first year and then by discussions about copy-editing, the role and tasks of the editorial board, and how to memorialize Rita Gross.

Sid Brown was approved for another term as book review editor, with much gratitude for her work. Editor Jonathan Seitz's thoughtful newsletter report suggested ways to get new members onto the mailing list and to facilitate communication within the society and preserve our institutional history. After brief consideration of alternatives, it seemed wise to stick with the current newsletter format.

The Nomination Committee reviewed officer, board and committee vacancies and needs, followed by discussion of which scholars might be approached to fill these positions. (Society officers are ex officio board members.)

Much of the meeting was devoted to the report of the new Social Media and Website Committee, which was greeted with kudos for the lovely new website, esp. for the work of board member Judith Simmer-Brown and her daughter, Alicia Brown. After some brainstorming about website images, the board's Executive Committee was authorized to allocate funds for these. Judith's summary of the new site's traffic noted 1600+ visitors, including many Asian, European and young visitors and followers. Fifty-two memberships were processed

online. In light of this committee's importance for the society's future, the board initiated the process to amend the bylaws to make it a standing committee with ex-officio board membership for the chair. The board gratefully accepted Ayo Yetunde's offer to do website housekeeping, pending the members meeting's approval.

David Gardiner, chair of the Streng Book Award Committee, announced that this year's award went to former board member Amos Yong's *Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Dialogue*. Committee member Tom Hasting's insightful newsletter review of the book was noted. David Gardiner was approved for another term as the committee's chair. John Makransky, chair of the Program Committee, noted that everyone was invited to their lunch meeting to discuss session topics for next year. The Membership Committee, co-chaired by the treasurer and secretary, discussed how its composition might be reworked to best foster the society's growth. The board suggested bylaws changes to effect that. Final Governing Board business included potential bylaws changes to clarify the role of international advisors. Discussion of an international conference was postponed until this role is solidified and such leadership needed for conference planning is in place.

2015 Sessions and Shambhala Visit

The board meeting was followed by the society's session "What's Wrong with Us? What's Wrong with the World?" chaired by Alice Keefe with Thomas Cattoi, Glenn Willis, Roger Haight, and Hsiao-Lan Hu presenting and Kristin Lagen responding. A lively discussion followed their consideration of how Buddhist and Christian understandings of the human condition and its flaw/s might address each other and current global sufferings.

After this session, the SBCS had a field trip to the Atlanta Shambhala Center. This included a dinner followed by a Sukhavati service for Rita Gross led by Acharya Judith Simmer-Brown.

Saturday morning, at a session titled "Buddhist and Ignatian Spiritualities: Points of Intersection and Dialogue," Ruben Habito reviewed what he has

learned, from teaching Zen and the *Spiritual Exercises*, about what practitioners of each might learn from the other about spiritual growth. Sarita Tamoya-Morago and Andre Delbecq described a curriculum they developed and led during a religiously plural retreat that meditated upon Ignatian and Zen wisdom using Ignatian and Zen approaches. Sandra Kunz presided and Karen Enriquez responded.

On Sunday morning the SBCS and Society for Hindu-Christian Studies co-sponsored a session named “*Thomas Merton at 100: His Influence on the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism.*” Francis Clooney, Thomas Forsthoefel, Judith Simmer-Brown and John Keenan presented papers and John Kilcourse presided. Two themes in the intense discussion following were Merton’s ongoing influence on western views of Asian religious practices and questions raised by new material and perspectives on Merton’s life and new readings of his writings.

Members Meeting

President Alice Keefe led the members meeting followed the Saturday morning session. With gratitude, Kristin Largen was approved as Vice-President, and John Sheveland and Hsiao-Lan Hu were approved as new board members. It was announced that the board had appointed Sid Brown for another term as book review editor and Carolyn Jones Medine for the unfinished board term of Rita Gross. Alice reviewed the discussion about the new website and the role of international advisors. Amos Yong received the Streng Book Award. David Gardiner’s approval for another term as that committee’s chair was announced. At the conclusion, Alice handed over the society’s leadership to John Makransky, the new president, amid thanks for her excellent leadership during the past three years.



At the Annual Meeting we asked Terry Muck, Professor Gross’s friend and colleague to write a short reflection for us on her death.

A Deploration for Rita Gross

Fellow travelers, professors of disciplines, deep thinkers from all nations,
transform and utilize your super powers to make lamentation and musement.
For death has taken one of us, one of the best of us,
Rita Gross,
she of the generous mind, pointed voice, and unfathomable spirit.
With golden words remove both sting and delusion from Rita’s long journey;
With soothing verbal signposts, guide her to the harbor of new life.
As you join Streng and Abe and Chappell and countless others in the beyond,
dear Rita, *requiem aeternam*, boon companion.
Amen.

I heard the news about Rita’s stroke on Sunday, October 25, 2015. I was flying home to Wood Hill, our Wisconsin retreat, from a lecture I had given in California. I was to stay overnight with my sister Brenda in St. Paul before driving home the next day. I immediately realized I could easily drive through Eau Claire, Wisconsin where Rita lived and was in hospital. I asked Rita’s good friend, Mary Ellen Strand, if it was okay to visit Rita. She said of course it was okay, and I made plans to arrive between 10:30 and 11:00 the next morning.

Rita was a very good friend. We had known each other since the founding of the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies in the early 1990s. I served on several committees with her before we became co-editors of the Society’s journal, *Buddhist Christian Studies*. During our decade long co-editorship, we met at least three times a year to plan and execute issues of the annual publication. We met once at the annual meeting of the Society in November, once in the spring at her home in Eau Claire or at my summer retreat at Wood Hill. and we usually found ourselves together for at least one common scholarly meeting somewhere in the country where we did some editorial work. We worked well together.

We worked well together in spite of the fact that we were polar opposites in almost every way. Rita was Buddhist, I was Christian. She was socially and theologically liberal, I was conservative. She knew

everyone in the scholarly Buddhist world, my contacts were mostly Christian. But we agreed on the nature of editorial work, helping authors do their best work and resisting the temptation to insist they say what we wanted them to say. We liked and respected one another's positions, and found ourselves able to agree to disagree when differences arose. It was an excellent partnership.

Rita was a model scholar. She was a master at discerning and stating the core question on any issue, insisted on basing her eventual conclusions on facts that she moved heaven and earth to discover, and she was a beautiful, clear writer. Although she was not a polemicist, at least to the degree many in her fields of study were, she had a way of presenting her conclusions and their implications in such a compelling way that it was almost as if she were looking you in the eye and saying, "Really, is there any other way to see this?"

Rita liked most to work in areas of overlap among her primary areas of expertise, Tibetan Buddhism, feminism, and religious diversity. She wrote and edited several books and scores of essays. Among the books my personal favorites are *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, a feminist critique of traditional Buddhist teaching, and *Religious Diversity*, a compelling statement on why and how men and women, and members of different religions, could and should work and live together in peace.

Rita was a mainstay in the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies. She was an indispensable part of the core group of scholars who founded the Society, and over the years she held every position of leadership. Our international meetings held every four years were organizational nightmares, and no matter what her official leadership position at the time, Rita pitched in to make sure the meetings worked. They invariably did, due in no small measure to Rita's great store of practical wisdom on which plenaries and what panels should be included in order to properly cover the theme.

Rita was a ferocious gardener. And she was good at it. During the summers in Eau Claire her outdoor garden was extensive and beautiful. For the rest of the year her house was filled with plants. Hospice workers who cared for Rita at the end, in addition to their caregiving duties for Rita, were expected to

water hundreds of plants—and, of course, feed and pet Rita's two Abyssinian cats.

Rita passed on November 11, 2015 at 6:45 pm. She was at peace and did not appear to suffer. The body was washed and perfumed with saffron in the traditional Tibetan manner. Friends sat with the body for three days before it was cremated. In accordance with her wishes, Rita's ashes were sprinkled at the Lotus Pond at Mindrolling Lotus Garden Retreat Center in central Virginia where Rita was one of the senior teachers.

—Terry C. Muck
Wood Hill, Fall 2015



Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

Report on the Annual Meeting (2015)

Hanaoka Eiko, professor emerita of Osaka Prefectural University

The 2015 annual conference of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies was held at the Palace Side Hotel in Kyoto on 5–7 August. Four lectures and two papers were given on the theme of Nishida's Philosophy and Christianity.

Lectures:

1. "Absolute Nothingness and Creativity: Nishida's Philosophy and the Theology of Creativity," by Tanaka Yutaka (Commentator: Hanaoka Eiko). Discussed the difference between J.S. Eriugena's process philosophy based on absolute nothingness, and A.N. Whitehead's philosophy of creativity, from the perspective of Nishida's denial of self in absolute nothingness.
2. "Nishida's Thinking concerning Freedom," by Katayanagi Eiichi (Commentator: Mori Tetsuro). Discussed the topics of awareness among common people, the limits of awareness in nothingness, and the theory of religion in Nishida's *Study of the Good*.

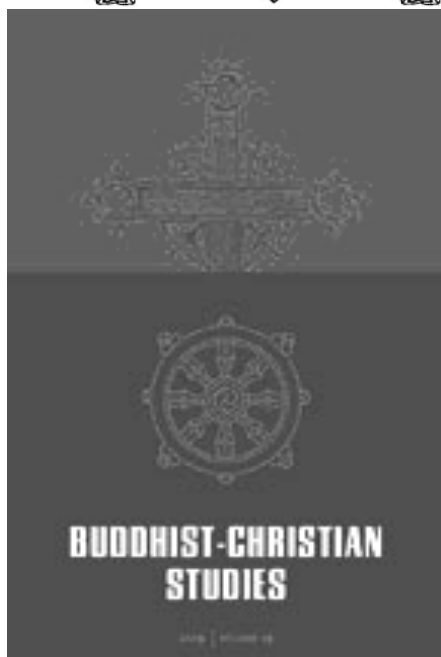
3. “Old Testament and Philosophy: A Philosophical Interpretation of the Story of Abraham’s Offering of Isaac in Genesis 22: 1–19,” by Sekine Seizou (Commentator: Keta Masako). Discussed the interpretations of the story of Isaac by Kierkegaard, von Rad, and Nishida, resulting in the philosophical interpretation that Abraham was able to truly meet God through his decision to “return” Isaac to God.

4. “Nishida’s Philosophy and Christianity” by Nagamachi Yushi (Commentator: Inoue Katsuto). Discussed the logic of place and the logic of logos, Nishida and Christian spirituality, and the contact between self and Christ.

Papers:

1. “Nishida’s Philosophy and Christianity: On Freedom and Love,” by Ishii Samoa (Commentator: Imataki Norio). Compared the idea of love in Nishida’s *Study of the Good* and his idea of the limits of awareness in nothingness with the idea of love in Christianity.

2. “Does Christianity accord with Formal Logic? Christianity not Discussed in Nishida,” by Takahashi Katsuyuki (Commentator: Tsuruoka Yoshio)



Buddhist-Christian Studies

Updates and an Invitation from the Editors

We have successfully ushered our first issue of the BCS Journal into print, and have just sent off the articles for the 2016 issue. At this point in the year, we would like to share a bit about the time line and process that we go through to produce each issue of the Journal. We work together quite closely as Co-editors, sharing all e-mails and submissions. As we receive an article, we read it through ourselves and then send it out for blind review to members of our Editorial Board (no more than two, depending on the topic of the submission). We ask our reviewers to get articles back to us within a month or two, and are then in communication with the author. We also invite those who presented at the SBCS meetings, held concurrently with the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, to submit their papers for publication. Since we publish one issue a year, we try to get all of the articles, newsletter information, and book reviews to the University of Hawai’i Press by the end of February. Barring any extensive delays in the production of an issue, we anticipate seeing the issue out by the end of the calendar year. In practical terms, this means that the 2016 issue is already in the hands of the Press and we should see it in print by the end of 2016 at the latest. We accept submissions at any point in the year, but if we receive a submission late in the calendar year (generally, this would mean after July 31st), it may not come out until the following issue.

We have recently updated our Editorial Board, and we are in the process of adding a few more members in particular areas of expertise. We would like to thank members of the Editorial Board for their diligence and thorough reading of submissions, and also send a big shout out to Jonathan Seitz and Sid Brown for their work on the newsletter and our book reviews.

We would like to invite all SBCS members to submit work to the journal. Authors need not be a SBCS member to submit an article, but members of the Society are often those most in touch with recent developments in the field. Guidelines for manuscripts may be found at the University of

Hawai'i website for the Journal (<http://www.uhpress.hawaii.edu/t3-buddhist-christian-studies.aspx>). Should you have any questions about whether a submission is appropriate, please do not hesitate to drop us an e-mail, to Thomas Cattoi at tcattoi@jstb.edu or Carol Anderson at anderson@kzoo.edu.

Carol S. Anderson

Thomas Cattoi



Loveland Zen Sesshin with Ama Samy

Sesshins with Zen Master Ama Samy, SJ

Ama Samy, Indian Zen master and Jesuit priest, has been offering annual Zen retreats (Sesshins) in Cincinnati for two decades. This year, he is visiting the US again to lead two silent retreats at St. Anne Retreat Center in Melbourne Kentucky, ten miles southeast of Cincinnati. There is a weekend retreat, Sept 16-18, and a five-day retreat, Sept 19-24. You can also choose to join Fr. Ama for his entire visit of eight consecutive days. Both newcomers to meditation and longtime meditators are welcome.

Sesshin Details

Sesshin (literally "touching the heart") is an intensive Zen meditation retreat. It is held in silence and consists of multiple twenty-five minute periods of seated meditation (zazen) throughout the day. These sittings are accompanied by walking meditation (kinhin), optional one-on-one meetings with Fr. Ama (dokusan), and a daily Zen lecture (teisho).

St. Anne Retreat Center is situated on 17 acres of park land. It is a quiet property, with beautiful

walking trails on the grounds and in the adjacent 100-plus acres of old-growth woods. The space is generous and accommodations include single rooms and vegetarian meals. The building has an elevator and is wheelchair accessible. Meditation mats (zabutons), sitting cushions (zafus) and chairs will be provided.

About Ama Samy

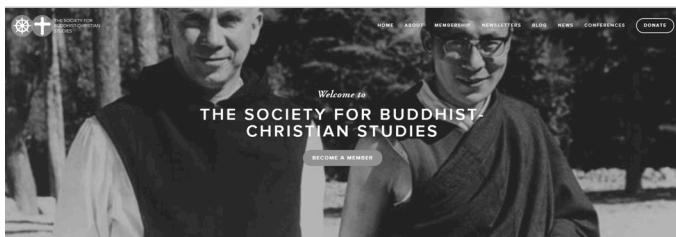
Ama Samy was born to poor Christian parents in Burma, 1936. Driven by poverty, his parents put him in the care of his maternal grandfather in India, a devotee of a Muslim saint. Soon after, his grandfather died in an accident, leaving him as a young boy without support and guidance. Nevertheless, he managed to finish school and joined the Jesuits. Still, his heart was restless after God. He began visiting Hindu ashrams and Buddhist meditation centers. He was introduced to Ramana Maharshi by Swami Abhishiktananda and was moved by Ramana's vision. His searching led him to become a wandering beggar for a period and to settle down as a hermit near a holy shrine where the village people fed him. In time, it was the Zen way which drew him most.

With the help of Fr. Enomiya Lassalle, he visited Japan and trained with Yamada Koun Roshi of Sanbo Kyodan. In 1982, Yamada Roshi gave him transmission and authorized him to teach Zen. Fr. Ama later founded his own Zen school, Bodhi Sangha. His method of teaching embraces both Soto and Rinzai Zen traditions and draws from the resources of Christianity and other religions. He remains true to Christ, true to Zen, and true to the human heart-mind. Fr. Ama lives and teaches at Bodhi Zendo in southern India and spends several months each year leading retreats in Europe, Australia and the US.

To find out more visit <http://www.lovelandzen.org>



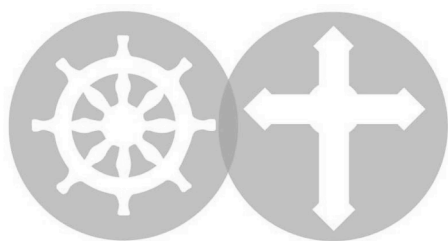
Membership, Website, FB, Blog



If you haven't renewed for 2016, please do so now. Membership includes our newsletters, our journal, and other benefits. [You can renew via our website.](#)

Our website is:

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



Check out our Facebook page and give it a like—it is becoming our best way to communicate news:

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

New Communal Blog Coming Soon

Our Board recently approved the creation of a new communal blog that is to offer regular posts related to work around Buddhist-Christian studies. In the past we have often sought ways to include graduate students in our work. With the blog, one hope is that we would be able to move towards including more voices and viewpoints, highlight work taking place, and develop or expand discussion on shared interests.



To Nominate a book for the Streng Prize

The book must have been published within the last five years. 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), who will respond to all 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.



CONTRIBUTE A REPORT TO THE NEWSLETTER

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

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

Your contributions ensure the continued existence of our newsletter. Submissions may be edited for clarity and length. Send items to newsletter editor Jonathan Seitz jaseitz@gmail.com.