

Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies

NEWSLETTER
No. 35 - Spring, 2005

News of the Society

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

**Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles,
California**
Dates: June 3-8, 2005

The conference is fast approaching and excitement is in the air! If you've not already registered, the program schedule is below to get you motivated! As you can see, there is a wonderful balance of different types of activities. For more information and on-line registration for the conference, housing, and meals, go to:

<http://www.lmu.edu/pages/11789.asp>

Friday, June 3, 2005

12:00pm - 4:00pm	Registration
5:00pm – 6:00 pm	Official Welcome and Memorial for David Chappell
6:00pm – 7:30pm	Dinner
7:30pm – 9:30pm	Special Performance: Dance of Siddhartha – Viji Prakash

Saturday, June 4, 2005

7:00am – 8:00am	Morning Meditation/Prayer
8:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast
9:00am – 10:15am	Plenary Session #1: “Varieties of Religious Practice” Fr. Laurence Freeman
10:15am – 11:15am	Spiritual Practice Workshops (Buddhist/Christian)
11:15am – 11:30am	Break
11:30am – 12:30pm	Spiritual Practice Workshops (cont.)
12:30pm – 2:00pm	Lunch
2:00pm – 3:30pm	Dialogue on Spiritual Practice A panel comprised of the workshop leaders with guided Q and A session
3:30pm – 4:00pm	Break
4:00pm – 6:00pm	Plenary Session #2: Buddhism, Christianity and Prisons "Response to Torture and Prison Abuse"

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6:00pm – 7:30pm	Dinner	2:30pm – 4:00pm	Academic Papers/ Working Groups
7:00pm – 7:30pm	Screening: <i>Doing Time, Doing Vipassana</i> A Film on Kiran Bedi's work with prisoners in India	4:00pm – 4:15	Break
Sunday, June 5, 2005		4:15pm – 6:00pm	Youth Program
7:00am – 8:00am	Morning Meditation/Prayer	6:00pm – 7:30pm	Dinner
8:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast	7:30pm – 9:00pm	Plenary Session #4 Greg Boyle, SJ
10:00am – all day	Full Day of Reflection for Youth "Day of Mindfulness"	Monday, June 6, 2005	
9:00am – 12:00 pm	Academic Papers	7:00am – 8:00am	Morning Meditation/Prayer
12:00pm – 1:00pm	Lunch	8:00am – 9:00am	Breakfast
1:00pm – 2:30pm	Plenary Session #3 "Inspiration for Reconciliation"	9:00am – 10:30am	Academic Papers/ Working Groups
1:00pm – 2:00pm	Academic Papers	10:15am – 11:15am	Spiritual Practice Workshops (Buddhist/Christian)
2:00pm – 2:30pm	Break	11:00am – 11:30am	Depart for Field Trip: Wat Thai
2:30pm – 4:00pm	Discussion Group Meeting for Korean Buddhists and Christian A Korean language session dedicated to healing among Korean Buddhists and Evangelical Christians Dr. Jongmae Park; Other speakers to be confirmed.	11:45am – 1:30pm	Lunch and Program
		1:30pm – 3:00pm	Field Trip
		3:00pm – 4:30pm	"Remembering Camp" Japanese Buddhist and Christian leaders reflect on religious resources for healing in light of the internment
2:30pm – 4:00pm	Discussion Group Meeting for Vietnamese Buddhists and Catholics A Vietnamese language session dedicated to healing among Vietnamese Buddhists and Roman Catholics Fr. Peter Phan; Other speakers to be confirmed.	4:30pm	Depart for Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
		5:30pm – 6:00pm	Tour of the Cathedral
		6:00pm – 7:00pm	Dinner
2:30pm – 4:00pm	Workshop Dialogue with Muslims	7:30pm – 8:30pm	Interfaith Prayer Service Fr. Alexei Smith
		8:30pm	Return to LMU campus

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Tuesday, June 7, 2005

12:00pm – 1:30pm

Lunch

7:00am – 8:00am Morning Meditation/Prayer

Conference Ends

8:00am – 9:00am Breakfast

9:00am – 10:30am Academic Papers/
Working Groups

THE 2005 MEETING OF THE SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

San Antonio, Texas, November 19-20, 2004

Frances S. Adeney, Secretary

10:30am – 10:45am Break

10:45am – 12:00pm Academic Papers/
Working Groups

This year's theme was "Dealing with Illness and Promoting Healing: Buddhist and Christian Resources." During the first session panelists Laura Habgood Arsta, Jay McDaniel, and Beth Blizman, presented Christian views on dealing with illness and Rita Gross responded from a Buddhist perspective. The second session focused Buddhist resources for promoting healing by panelists Francis Tiso and Grace Buford with Laural Curran presenting a Christian response.

12:00pm – 1:00pm Lunch

1:00pm Field Trip: Depart for
Hsi Lai Temple

2:00pm – 3:00pm Tour of Hsi Lai Temple

3:00pm – 5:00pm Plenary Session #5
"Women Hear the Cries"
Speakers to be confirmed

Laura Habgood Arsta presented research done by undergraduate students in border communities between the U.S.A. and Mexico. The topic was the connection between the Pentecostal movement and environmental health. Pentecostal Christianity (250-400 million members worldwide) emphasizes the signs that accompany the presence of Christ, evidenced by experiences of spirit baptism and faith healing. Their sample indicated that poor and minority people don't identify with the environmental movement until personal health problems emerge. One possible reason for Pentecostal religion thriving, according to this research, might be that exposure to toxins and poverty draws people to healing, a theological pillar of Pentecostalism. Religious services provide an emotional outlet and inspire self-confidence, which can become a mental health component of a healing solution. Women are free to share and lead services, finding leadership opportunities and a social group in churches. As an inexpensive alternative to medical care, healing in the Pentecostal church provides a sense of physical healing as well as help in overcoming addictions.

5:30pm – 7:00pm Dinner at Hsi Lai

7:30pm – 9:00pm Plenary Session #6
"Religious Landscapes in America Today"
Speakers to be confirmed

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

7:00am – 8:00am Morning Meditation/Prayer

8:00am – 9:00am Breakfast

9:00am – 10:30am Plenary Session #7
"Hear the Cries: Religion and Healing"
Dr. Christina Pochalski
Jan Chozen Bays
Dr. Jongmae Park

10:30am – 10:45am Break

10:45am – 12:00pm Academic Papers/
Working Groups

Beth Blizman informed the group of the toxicity of the Lake Erie area of Northern Ohio. Cancer is becoming normalized in this region which has the

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highest level of multiple cancers in the U.S.A. Beth feels called to heal her own body and become part of the healing process of that region. Beth argued that an attitude that disrespects the earth leads to disrespect of one another. "How can healing be found?" she asked. She discussed many Christian resources from ancient monastics to modern women religious; from process and feminist thought to new cosmologies. Finally she connected Audre Lourde's work on the rejection of difference to the bioregional studies that she has been doing on toxicity and illness.

Jay McDaniel followed by giving a Christian perspective on Alzheimer's disease as an ecumenical Christian influenced by Buddhism. He addressed three questions that Christians asked in this situation: The first question is "Where is God now? Is God inside my loved one? How?" In response to this question, Jay outlined an evangelical view of God that understands God as a transcendent being, "way up there, watching from a distance." He contrasted this view with a process view of God as an "umbrella of compassion that envelopes the world without smothering it." In this view, God is the great companion, sharing the confusion and anxiety of the ill person.

So where is the person as they experience personality changes caused by the disease? Jay addressed this second question through process theology, stating that in process theology the person is defined in Buddhist terms, inheriting from the past and contributing to the future. A person is constantly in flux or transformation, so the person with illness may be a different person than they once were but can be embraced as the person that they are now. The multi-dimensional universe of process theology allows for a person to live "with one foot on earth and one foot in heaven."

Help for dealing with Alzheimer's disease, Jay's third question, can be found in the Benedictine vow to obedience, stability, and ongoing conversion. The deepest need for those with Alzheimer's is to be with them, being available to others to listen. Stability is the vow to stay with the relationship through these changes. Ongoing conversion can come through Alzheimer's as those with this disease invite us into a space of creative imagination and a new kind of respect.

Rita Gross responded to the three presentations by arguing that how one perceives a situation changes it tremendously. Two Buddhist principles that apply here are the *amara* principle and the idea of compassion. In

our longing for non-duality and a healing of the mind-body split, we can recognize that every situation is a mixture of health and illness. There is always a choice of how to see it—how much positive and negative emphasis to make. Even when things are very desperate there is something healthy going on. But the negative and positive aspects of a situation cannot be separated. Compassion is a common principle of Buddhism that can aid in dealing with illness. Accepting a fundamental non-duality makes compassion as natural as breathing.

Responding to Laura's presentation, Rita emphasized that practices can heal; as people feel healed, it makes a difference in their physical health. In Tibetan practice, healing is central. As to how to be with the problem of illness, simply being there, as a Buddhist might sit at a nuclear waste site, simply to be present, as Jay suggests, contributes to healing.

Following up on the healing theme, the second session began with a presentation by Francis Tiso who "compared notes" between Catholic and Nepali Buddhist practices of healing. Early monks claimed that all tantric practitioners were exorcists who had "command over the power of *naktra* through retreat and yoga practice." In Nepal today ritual antidotes to curses are practiced as a way of overcoming negativities from both human and non-human sources. Curses can result from ancestral dissatisfaction or something brought into the house due to envy and destructive intentions. Determination of the difference between physical illness and evil spirits can be done through divination and studying the four signs of illness: pulse, urine, breathing, and facial expression. Purda rites can also purify negativities. The lama does rituals to get rid of curses and protect the community from evil karma. Enlightened beings can also offer protection. These practices are similar to Himalayan shamanism but their basis is different. Continued anthropological study of traditional exorcistic practices is needed.

Grace Buford gave the next presentation on healing without recovery. She asked, "What does healing mean in cases of terminal illness?" She shared her experience of her father's recent illness and death, explaining that in times of stress she doesn't "act" Buddhist but works on cultivating patience and universal love. During her father's last days she took on the role of a "stealth helper"—one who did things for the common good without recognition. Letting her father be "right" most

of the time taught her that it is possible to set ego aside. She learned that ego emptying feels good and when desire is set aside, healing occurs.

During the hour of her father's death, Grace felt angry at all the world's religions that presumed to know exactly what was happening to him. She realized that she didn't know that herself. This was a freeing experience and she was able to be present with her father at this important time. As events happened, they just were what they were. A Buddhist interpretation of her experience arose after the experience rather than during the experience. This interpretation was not necessarily Vipassana, Theravada or Zen, but Buddhist nonetheless. A kind of compassion grew up, a sense of not knowing as knowing. Letting go of the need to understand exactly what was happening gave her the freedom to be fully present. She understood this as a very different interpretation than a possible Christian interpretation of the experience.

Laurel Curran responded to the presentations by asking, "Is this Buddhism?" The same question, she said, could be asked about Christianity. She gave an example of Pentecostalism tying into other cultural practices of exorcism to show how healing can become a test of faith. The trial of one's faith then becomes the focus, rather than the healing itself. Psychological damage is done when this interpretation, focusing on physical healing as a test of faith leads to the idea of wholeness solely as wholeness of the body. The idea of conquering death and fleeing finitude becomes predominant. Another kind of healing has been emphasized in the presentations—a healing by coming into right relations. The self is in relation always. This leads to a different sense of death, not as failure or defeat but an occasion for grace. Quakerism taught her that laughter as part of the Christian notion of grace tells us that in any situation there is still a wellspring of joy. As we later interpret experiences our language changes and restructures the experience. So some religions feel like home—their explanations seem to fit, as Quakerism fits her. Musings on place are a wonderful way to deal with these issues. The more-than-human world heals us as we show a willingness to be in relationship again as earth creatures.

The diversity and particularity of the presentations and the responses brought participants to a place of reflection on their own experiences of illness and healing. Our communities of interpretation in both

Buddhist and Christian traditions can become home for each of us as we encounter illness and experience healing.

2004 FREDERICK J. STRENG BOOK AWARD

Paul Ingram, Pacific Lutheran University

The recipient of the Frederick J. Steng Book of the Year Award for 2004 is *Beside Still Waters: Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha*, edited by Harold Kasimow, John P. Keenan, and Linda Klepinger Keenan. This book provides the reader with a combination of reflection on the creatively transformative power of interreligious dialogue and documentation of that creative transformation in the lives of committed Jews and Christians in dialogue with Buddhism. The major bulk of this book consists of candid, autobiographical essays by seven Jewish and Christian scholars in the form of personal testimony, which taken as a whole, presents an extended argument for the value of interfaith dialogue in general and Buddhist-Christian-Jewish dialogue in particular. The final section of the book consists of four essays written from a sociological, Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist perspective by authors who have read the primary essays and reflect on interreligious dialogue more broadly in light of their own particular experience and research.

CONFERENCES

Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2004.

Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Glasgow University

In May 2004 the Centre for Inter-Faith Studies (University of Glasgow) had organized the second series of Gerald Weisfeld Lectures. (The first series had been held in 2003 and is now published as *War and Peace in World Religions*, ed. by Perry Schmidt-Leukel, London: SCM 2004). The lectures were part of the events leading up to the Dalai Lama's visit to Scotland by the end of May 2004. The topic was "Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue".

Over four weeks there were two lectures each week, one read by a Christian and one by a Buddhist, both of

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them speaking on the same topic and both of them speaking comparatively, but from the background of their own tradition.

The theme of week 1 was “Human Existence in Buddhism and Christianity,” the Christian speaker being Elizabeth Harris, London, and the Buddhist being Kiyoshi Tsuchiya, who teaches at Glasgow University. Harris pointed out that in their analysis of the human condition, Buddhism and Christianity show serious commonalities. For both, human existence is ambivalent. On the one hand, it is deeply permeated by the roots of evil - craving and ignorance according to Buddhism, sin according to Christianity. On the other hand, human existence also offers a way out--there is the possibility of salvation or liberation. However, said Harris, Buddhism and Christianity “converge and diverge”. Human self-centeredness is seen at the root of the problem according to both traditions, and there are convergences of their respective ways of salvation too. The differences are, so Harris, primarily located in the active function of God for the salvific process within Christianity and in the role of reincarnation within the Buddhist analysis of human existence which is without any parallel in Christianity.

Tsuchiya agreed that both traditions understand the self as the major source of the human predicament, but held that they understand this in a different sense. While the self is seen as sinful but nevertheless real in Christianity, Buddhism sees it as an unwholesome illusion. Resulting are two different or even contradictory forms of self-understanding, a “relational”, individualistic ego dominant in Christianity and a sort of cosmological ego characteristic for Buddhism, particularly within the Zen-Daoist tradition from which Tsuchiya speaks. He illustrated this point provocatively by a comparative analysis of Kafka’s story of Gregor Samsa’s metamorphosis into a beetle and Chuang tzu’s famous butterfly dream. This difference of self-concepts is, so Tsuchiya, crucial for the rival Christian and Buddhist understandings of transcendence and cosmos: personal transcendence versus cosmological transcendence, anti-naturalism versus naturalism.

In her response Harris raised the question whether Tsuchiya’s representation of Christianity is really comprehensive. Are there not dimensions in Christianity supportive of his non-dualist approach to nature and human existence? Tsuchiya, in his response, admitted that the ultimate religious goals might converge, but insisted on an at least “possibly contradictory” religious orientation with specific dangers on both sides, so that there is room for mutual constructive challenge.

The debate of Week 1 continued through Week 2 which was dedicated to “Ultimate Reality in Buddhism and Christianity”, the Christian speaker being Karl Baier from the University of Vienna, the Buddhist lecturer being Minoru

Nambara, Prof. Emer. from the University of Tokyo. Baier presented an admittedly selective view of Christianity following the line of the neo-platonic, mystical tradition. From here he offered a comparative analysis of the deconstructive efforts of Nagarjuna and Nicolas Cusanus who both employed the fourfold negation in order to introduce their non-dual and non-conceptual view of the relation between ultimate and non-ultimate reality. For Baier the obvious affinities between these two (sub-) traditions are getting even stronger in the present situation. For “by means of transformative encounter Buddhism and Christianity cease to be independent bodies of thought.”

Sketching the various transformations of Buddhism on its way from India to China, Nambara held that for Chinese Buddhism “this very world is in and of itself the ultimate subject, the ultimate reality.” Zen-practice, accordingly, is “a way where no metaphysical flowers blossom.” To live by the bottomless ground of everything, which is in itself no-thing, is to live as “neither masters nor slaves of nature.” The biblical God--understood as the one who can create and destroy nature--is at deep variance with the Buddhist view. However, Nambara--who is a specialist in the Christian mystical tradition--agreed that through the possibly Indian inspired neo-platonic tradition a Christian understanding of the ultimate is closer to Buddhism. Not necessarily only or primarily so in Meister Eckhart’s intellectual mysticism, but perhaps more so in Jacob Boehme’s Christocentric mysticism marked by a simple lifestyle celebrating the resurrection of nature in its true form before the “fall”, i.e. before its disturbance through self-centered desire. “Neither science nor civilization quenches man’s thirst nor heals its ills.” But true religion can. It is--said Nambara--living the truth and this in turn is the fruit of “the pure and simple soul”, found in people who often live in poverty and without the comforts of civilization. If we care for religion, it is their reality that we need to experience first.

Week 3 thematized the figures of “Buddha and Christ as Mediators of Transcendence”. Perry Schmidt-Leukel, from Glasgow University, presented a reconstruction of how the idea of incarnation developed in Buddhist and Christian thinking was triggered by the experience that the Buddha embodied the Dharma which he taught and Christ the kingdom which he proclaimed. Two structural similarities can be stated: Firstly, Buddha and Christ both mediate the transcendent by pointing away from themselves towards something different, thereby making the transcendent real-symbolically present. Secondly, the force behind this process of embodiment is regarded as stemming from the ultimate itself. This analysis inevitably throws up the question of the uniqueness of incarnation: Can Christians accept Buddhist claims of the Buddha as an embodiment of the ultimate and can Buddhists accept the respective claims made by Christians for Christ?

In his Buddhist presentation of the topic, John Makransky from Boston College acknowledged the basic similarity of Buddhist and Christian incarnation beliefs, but raised the question whether Buddha and Christ do not differ significantly in the salvific role, the first being seen as the one who teaches the way to liberation, the latter seen as the redeemer from sin through his atoning sacrifice. Despite this difference, Makransky appreciated Christ as someone who “indeed functions somehow as a mediation of ultimate reality as I, a Buddhist, understand that reality.” But what sense is to be made of this from a Mahayana perspective? In response to this question Makransky suggests a Buddhist version of Mark Heim’s “multiple ends” version of inclusivism. Through their mediators, Christianity and Buddhism are indeed related to the ultimate reality with a significant overlap in their liberating features. But this relation is differently conceptualized and--as seen from a Buddhist perspective--does not achieve in Christianity the same depth of insight into the empty, non-dual nature of the ultimate. Consequently Christian and Buddhist salvific ends are neither simply the same nor fully equivalent. There is room for further friendly debate over which of the two traditions provides the most adequate insight and practice in relation to the ultimate.

At least one aspect of Buddhist and Christian practice was addressed through the topic of the lectures during week 4: “Buddhism, Christianity and their Potential for Peace”. Kenneth Fernando, the former Anglican Bishop of Colombo, Sri Lanka, spoke out of his long experience of dialogue with Sri Lankan Theravada and his intimate involvement alongside leading Buddhist monks in efforts that led to a relative appeasement of the county’s ethnic conflict. Confessing a rather deplorable record of frequently violent behavior of Christianity in the past and a much more laudable Buddhist account, Fernando presented his interpretation of biblical motives that can efficiently nourish a Christian contribution to what has to be a multi-religious peace work.

As someone who has participated for many years in precisely that type of work, Alan Senauke of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship emphasized how, from a Buddhist point of view, the crucial task is to transfer the insight into the roots of evil within one’s own self-entanglement to the level of social and political activity and to do so without creating new unwholesome sentiments of aversion or hatred.

While there was much agreement on these basic points, an exciting controversy arose over the spiritual significance of hope and optimism on the one hand and non-attachment with regards to the outcome of our activities on the other hand. What if our peace efforts fail? Do we then need that sort of hope against all hopes, the kind of optimism that flows from the eschatological dimension of the Christian

faith in God’s kingdom? Or do we need the Buddhist equanimity that faces unshaken the reality of aggression as part of the permeating reality of dukkha? Is this a junction where Buddhist and Christian spiritualities diverge, or are both in need of particularly that sort of inspiration which is such a prominent feature in the spirituality of the respective other?

Over the last several years a lot has been written about “comparative theology” as being the way ahead in inter-religious reflection. The Weisfeld-Lectures 2004 have shown that this is indeed a promising prospect. However, comparative reflection needs to be integrated into open and serious dialogue, so that we are able to compare dialogically how we arrive at our specific comparisons. Thereby mutual understanding is considerably deepened and the process of re-conceptualizing the view of our own tradition in relation to the other’s view is significantly furthered.

The lectures--together with the mutual responses--are going to be published (with SCM: London) in 2005. Information on the Centre for Inter-Faith Studies (University of Glasgow) can be seen under “Centres and Seminars” at : <http://www.religions.divinity.gla.ac.uk>

Remembering David

It was December, 1986, and I was an ABD Christian graduate student returning from a year in Sri Lanka as a Fulbright scholar studying Buddhism. My Buddhist mentors at the University of Peradeniya had instructed me to stop by the University of Hawaii on my way home to meet someone that I didn’t know at all, a David Chappell. Arriving unannounced on a Friday afternoon in the middle of a party, David invited me into the festivities and then for a personal visit in his office where he eagerly sought to know about me and my emerging dissertation on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. His hospitality and warmth profoundly touched me, and I looked forward every year to seeing him at the annual SBCS meetings. He would always tease me about my “California sweaters” or “cargo pants”, saying “so that’s what professors wear out there!”, and then that same smile would embrace me the way it did that very first visit. I miss him right now...this moment...I smile.

The David Chappell Dialogue for Peace Foundation has been established in memory of David to provide grants to students who seek to attend Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Study Conferences and events, as well as to provide scholarships to international students in their academic pursuit to facilitate Interfaith Dialogue and Peace Studies.

Those with inquiries or who wish to make a donation may contact The David W. Chappell Dialogue for Peace Foundation, 25602 Alicia Parkway #203, Laguna Hills, CA 92653-5309, or send an email to DialogueForPeace@ChappellFamily.com.

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CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

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

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MEMBERSHIP

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

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

SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

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