THE SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES · 2026 AAR NOVEMBER ANNUAL MEETING

Program Details

Two sessions on Saturday, November 21, 2026, both at the Sheraton, Director's Row E.

SESSION 1 · P21-111

Honoring Judith Simmer-Brown: Scholarship, Contemplation, and Interreligious Friendship

This panel honors the life, work, and enduring legacy of Judith Simmer-Brown, whose scholarship, teaching, and leadership have profoundly shaped the fields of Buddhist studies, contemplative education, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Convened to celebrate her many contributions to the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and the wider academic and contemplative communities, the panel will bring together colleagues, students, and friends to reflect on the impact of her work.

Date: Saturday, November 21, 2026

Time: 9:00 AM–12:00 PM

Venue: Sheraton

Room: Director's Row E

Session ID: P21-111

Moderator: Grace Song

Respondent: Judith Simmer-Brown

PRESENTATIONS

“A Buddhist-Benedictine Friendship” Revisited: In Honor of Judith Simmer-Brown

Gregory Perron

In 2012, as part of the book *My Neighbor’s Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation*, Judith Simmer-Brown contributed an essay that was devoted to our friendship entitled “The Solitude of Contemplative Life: A Buddhist-Benedictine Friendship.” To honor her, I briefly revisit this essay to highlight some of the salient lessons of our decades-long friendship that is rooted in our experience of the contemplative life and the practice of interreligious dialogue.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Gregory Perron, OSB, PhD, is a past president-chairman and a current member of the Board of Directors of the North American Commission for Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID), which is “an international monastic organization that promotes and supports dialogue, especially dialogue at the level of religious experience and practice, between Christian monastic men and women and followers of other religions.” He is the author of several articles on monastic interreligious dialogue and has served as a consultant for the Vatican’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

Judith Simmer-Brown in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue and Beyond

Mark Unno

Judith Simmer-Brown is a founding faculty member of Naropa University, and Distinguished Professor Emerita of Contemplative Studies and Religious Studies. She is an expert in Tibetan Buddhism and high-ranking teacher as Acharya. She has served as a founding board member of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, has served on the Steering Committee of the Contemplative Studies

Group of the American Academy of Religion, and has contributed to interreligious dialogue throughout her career, including through teaching at Naropa, as a member of the Lilly Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter, and the Fetzer Institute Shared Sacred Story Project as a co-leader of the Buddhist-Sacred Story group and the Shared Sacred Story group. She is widely published in such fields as women and Tibetan Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhist practice, interreligious dialogue, and contemplative studies.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Rev. Dr. Mark Unno is Professor of Buddhist Studies in the Dept. of Religious Studies at the University of Oregon, specializing in Pure Land, Zen, and Shingon Buddhism. He is the author of *Shingon Refractions: Myōe and the Mantra of Light* (2004), editor of *Buddhism and Psychotherapy Across Cultures* (2006), and author of articles on Buddhism, comparative religion, interreligious dialogue, and Buddhism and psychotherapy. He has been President of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and currently serves as its Secretary. His Buddhist essays are published in such Buddhist journals as *Tricycle*, *Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly*, and *Lion's Roar*. mtunno5.weebly.com

---

"The Ḍākinī's Breath—As Warm as Ever"

Holly Gayley

Twenty-five years ago, Judith Simmer-Brown published *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*. Therein, she elucidates the female tantric symbol of the ḍākinī and the enlightening intimacy of her "warm breath" in visionary experience, meditative insight, and the oral transmission of esoteric teachings. As an early and comprehensive study of the topic, her book has served as a crucial bridge between academic scholarship and the burgeoning community of Buddhist practitioners in the West. Still today, practitioners (especially women) turn to the *Dakini's Warm Breath* for a treasure trove of resources from Indian and Tibetan traditions of Vajrayāna, with which to understand the feminine principle and its expressions in Buddhist literature, art, and ritual. This paper revisits Simmer-Brown's foundational presentation of gendered symbolism in the Vajrayāna and discusses the ways in which subsequent researchers on women in Tibet have approached the ḍākinī.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Holly Gayley is a scholar and translator of contemporary Buddhist literature in Tibet and Associate Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her research explores gender and sexuality in Buddhist tantra, literature by and about Tibetan and Himalayan women, ethical reform in contemporary Tibet, and theorizing translation, both literary and cultural, in the transmission of Buddhist teachings to North America. She is author of *Love Letters from Golok: A Tantric Couple in Modern Tibet* (2016) and editor of numerous translation anthologies. On the founding team of the Contemplative Resource Center at CU Boulder (now CALM: Contemplative Arts, Learning, and Meditation), she is spearheading a new interdisciplinary Contemplative Studies Certificate on campus.

Contemplative Education and Interreligious Dialogue: Judith Simmer-Brown's Legacy at Naropa University

Netanel Miles-Yépez

For nearly 50 years, Dr. Judith Simmer-Brown dedicated herself to the growth and flowering of the Naropa Institute (later Naropa University), which she served as a founding full-time faculty member and Chair of its Department of Wisdom Traditions. Though an anchor of Naropa's Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies program, Simmer-Brown's most lasting contributions to the university may be in Contemplative Education and Interreligious Dialogue, being a co-founder of the Center for the Advancement of Contemplative Education (CACE) and an innovative, skills-based course in Interreligious Dialogue that is still in existence today.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Netanel Miles-Yépez, DD, is an artist, philosopher, religion scholar, and the current Chair of the Department of Wisdom Traditions at Naropa University. He is the author of *The End of Religion and Other Writings* (2022). Miles-Yépez was a graduate student under Judith Simmer-Brown and was later honored to take over various courses that she created.

RESPONDENT

Judith Simmer-Brown

SESSION 2 · P21-200

Life-Changing Encounters: What Buddhist-Christian Dialogue Does to Who We Are

This session explores a question at the heart of interfaith encounter: how does sustained, meaningful dialogue with another tradition shape who we are? What happens to our own religious identity and lived practice when we engage deeply with another faith—especially when that engagement does not involve conversion?

Date: Saturday, November 21, 2026

Time: 1:00–4:00 PM

Venue: Sheraton

Room: Director's Row E

Session ID: P21-200

Moderator: Alaina Keller

Respondent: Leo Lefebure

PRESENTATIONS

Hybridity, Multiple Identities, and Buddhist-Christian Double Belonging

Julius-Kei Kato

For many years now, I have been working on the themes of hybridity, the immigrant experience, and diaspora, and how those themes impact the perception of religious-spiritual identity. By hybridity, I mean the experience of having multiple “worlds” and “identities” within oneself and the effort to live in integrity with this complex identity. This presentation will be a reflection, based on this scholar-teacher’s personal experience and research, on how the abovementioned themes apply specifically to Buddhist-Christian double-

belonging. It will compare Buddhist-Christian double-belonging to how a person acquires a complex, hybrid identity through the experience of multiple ethnicities and the exposure to different cultures through immigration and diaspora. Just as the experience of hybridity adds a new identity to the subject but does not make the older, original identity disappear, in parallel fashion, immersion through study and practice in another religious tradition (i.e., Buddhism in this scholar-practitioner's case) adds a new spiritual-religious identity, as it were, but does not make the older, original spiritual-religious identity disappear. Both identities will have to be integrated into the same person. This presentation will also further elaborate on how those multiple dynamics come together to produce a rich spirituality and religiosity that could offer a significant contribution to our contemporary world and epoch, one that is sometimes insightfully described as an "interspiritual" age.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Julius-Kei Kato, a proud Filipino-Japanese-Canadian, is full professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at King's University College-Western University, London, Canada and currently (2026) the president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies (SBCS). He earned a Licentiate in Sacred Scriptures (SSL) from the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome and a PhD in Theology (with a focus in Hermeneutics) from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. He is the author of *How Immigrant Christians Living in Mixed Cultures Interpret Their Religion* (2012), *Religious Language and Asian [North] American Hybridity* (2016), and *Reading the Bible in a Secular Age: The New Testament as Spiritual Ancestry* (2023). He has previously taught at Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan, has been a visiting professor at Kwansei Gakuin University, Nishinomiya, Japan; and guest professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, Manila, Philippines. He is engaged in exploring how the Christian and Buddhist traditions, as well as the various spiritual-wisdom traditions of the world, could be in conversation with current realities in our hybridized and globalized world.

Sustaining the Possibility of Life-Transforming Encounters: How Institutional Support of Buddhist and Christian Contemplative Practices Transforms Lives

Sarita Tamayo-Moraga

This paper will focus on the transformative impact of spaces and institutions

that allow Buddhist and Christian contemplative practices to happen simultaneously and allow them to inform each other in contemplative silent settings as well as in dialogue. Focusing on East West Zendo at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California (now closed), and on Santa Clara University, and my own personal experience in both settings, this paper will track the way in which the Sisters of Mercy and the Jesuits have sustained this informal and formal dialogue both through contemplative practice and academic study. This paper will also focus on the everyday impact of such long-term support of Buddhist and Christian contemplative practices, whether in the classroom or in small contemplative groups or in retreats. Finally, the ways in which both practices have traditions of radical acceptance, which then inform how suffering can be transformed into peace, joy, and liberation, will be examined both through the lens of my students' experiences and my own experience as a contemplative in both the Zen tradition and the Ignatian tradition.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Sarita Tamayo-Moraga received her B.A. from University of Texas and her Ph.D. in History of Christianity from University of Chicago in 2002. She taught at San Jose City College from Spring 2002-Summer 2004 and joined the Santa Clara faculty in Spring 2003. Her research focuses on comparative mysticism with a focus on Zen and Catholicism, the use of mindfulness in pedagogy, and transformative scholarship and learning.

From Vietnam to America: The Formation of an Interreligious Identity

Anh Q. Tran

This autobiographical presentation traces a personal and intellectual journey through Buddhist-Christian dialogue, beginning with a childhood in Vietnam and culminating in the formal study of Buddhism as a Catholic in the United States. By examining the unique joys, systemic challenges, and moments of intellectual conversion encountered along the way, this paper illustrates how deep engagement with another faith fundamentally reshapes personal identity. Ultimately, it offers a vision of hope for individuals living at the intersection of both traditions, serving as a bridge between East and West.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Anh Q. Tran, SJ, is Associate Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology and the Director of the divinity program at the Jesuit School of Theology, and a core doctoral faculty member at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, where he teaches Christian theology and interreligious studies. Besides the monograph, *Gods, Heroes and Ancestors* (Oxford, 2017), he has edited three volumes and contributed about 20 articles and book chapters in comparative theology, interreligious dialogue, and world Christianity.

Myself Another Country: Life As God's Empty Creature

S. Mark Heim

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue has produced many things in my life: friendships, new beliefs and convictions, courses taught and re-taught, and academic publications. I take this assignment to aim at a report on something distinct from these—deeper and harder to capture. It asks how that process shapes my continuing moment-to-moment reality. It seeks a kind of self-conducted spiritual x-ray, with all the liabilities that attend self-reporting.

The enduring impact of dialogue on my inner life has been to make that life itself a new country, where my own presence at times takes on alternative forms. In other writing, I have described three ways in which the Buddhist teaching of emptiness might interweave with Christian ideas of being a creature: what I have called diagnostic emptiness, therapeutic emptiness, and redemptive emptiness. In this essay I will try to address this not as a discursive argument, but as an account of my own experience.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

S. Mark Heim is the Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology Emeritus at Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School. He has written extensively on theologies of religious pluralism, comparative theology, atonement, and Christian ecumenism. His books include *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Theology*; *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*; *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross*; *Crucified Wisdom: Christ and the Bodhisattva in Theological Reflection* (winner of the Frederick Streng award in Buddhist-Christian studies); *Monotheism and Forgiveness*; and (most recently) *Theology and Medicine in Conversation: How the Healing Happens*. He is a member of the American Theological Society and has co-chaired the

comparative theology group in the American Academy of Religion. He has received a Henry Luce III Fellowship in Theology (2009-2010) and a Pew Evangelical Scholars' Research Fellowship (1997-98). An ordained American Baptist minister, he has represented his denomination on the Faith and Order Commissions of the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. and World Council of Churches.

RESPONDENT

Leo Lefebure

Leo D. Lefebure is a Professor and the inaugural holder of the Matteo Ricci, S.J., Chair at Georgetown University. He is the author of the award-winning *Transforming Interreligious Relations: Catholic Responses to Religious Pluralism in the United States*. His other award-winning books include *Revelation, the Religions, and Violence*; *True and Holy: Christian Scripture and Other Religions*; and *The Path of Wisdom: A Christian Commentary on the Dhammapada*, coauthored with Peter Feldmeier. Lefebure is co-chair of the Interfaith Coalition Conference for Global Citizens, a past president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, a research fellow of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a trustee emeritus of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.