

## Obituary

Parichart Suwanbubbha (1958-2016)

The European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies shares in the mourning over the death of Professor Dr. Parichart Suwanbubbha on 6 December 2016, after a brave struggle with cancer. Since the beginnings of the Network, she followed, and contributed to, the European dialogue. As a doctoral student of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago under William Leshner, she was the first Thai Buddhist to do a degree in Christian theology. Her expertise in inter-religious studies was sought upon her return to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Mahidol University, Bangkok, in 1993, when she joined the Center of Human Resources Development under Dr Pinit Ratanakul. There she was an outstanding colleague in the group of Muslim, Christian and Buddhist lecturers at the Center. She represented the significant value of inter-religious study, in method, approach and subject matter, and in her own publications. Throughout her life, she continued her work at Mahidol University.

Given her interest in understanding and dialogue between Buddhists, Muslims and Christians, she fulfilled a special role in the academic landscape of Thailand, and even in Southeast Asia. She was invited to contribute to study and dialogue in her country, in her part of the world, and abroad. In 1997 she was invited for a guest lectureship at the Academy of Mission, Hamburg University, Germany. She was also a Research Fellow at the United College of the Ascension in Birmingham for a year. Towards the end of her life, her treatment prevented her from accepting invitations to speak at the 2016 ENBCS conference or to be a guest professor, in the summer of 2017, at the Academy of World Religions, Hamburg University. One of the last things she completed, however, was a contribution to the ENBCS book on the theme of the 2016 Conference – Buddhist-Christian Relations in Asia.

It was clear to her that religious study needed to make a difference to daily life. That is why she was keen on women's studies in her Buddhist and inter-religious field, at home and abroad. At the same time she joined activities on peace and reconciliation between Muslims and Buddhists in her own country, seeing herself as a 'bridge', at first between Buddhists and Christians and then between Buddhists and Muslims. She suffered deeply from the hatred and mistrust she saw in interreligious relations in Thailand and, when challenged later on by students who spoke of a chasm between academia and the reality of interreligious violence in the South, felt a responsibility to contribute at the grassroots. She, therefore, engaged in dialogue at the village level, and sought to bring religious leaders, ordinary people and activists together to seek mutual understanding and ways to break cycles of violence. In this way, she sought to be a bridge between academia, and both the victims of violence and the joy of steps towards understanding. With this experience she was asked for her advice in many international contexts of dialogue.

She regretted that there were few learned monks in Thai society who could relate their deep Buddhist knowledge to the world of ethics, cultures, politics and other religions. She was the one who, in effect, pioneered this role for Thai Buddhism with great commitment, wisdom and compassion, and she was eventually encouraged by the appreciation that was shown to her by political authorities.

The European Network is deeply grateful for her long-standing support of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Europe and the world. Colleagues and friends from different cultures and religions speak of her personal warmth, her humbleness and her sincerity, with great affection. At many places in the world, at universities and projects of peace-making, they are mourning over a great loss. Dr Suwanbubbha was a person whose deep Buddhist spirituality flowed into every part of her life

Gerhard Köberlin, Kenneth Fleming and members of ENBCS  
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