

[PASSING> Bardwell L. Smith, 1925-2022](#)

Discussion published by Janet Goodwin on Friday, December 2, 2022

Crosspost from H-Buddhism

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Discussion published by [Roger Jackson](#) on Friday, December 2, 2022

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Dear Colleagues,

I write, sadly, to report the passing, on November 28, 2022, of Bardwell L. Smith, John W. Nason Professor of Asian Studies and Religion, Emeritus at Carleton College. He was 97.

At Carleton, Bardwell was a legendary teacher who instructed and inspired generations of students. He also served as Dean of the College for five years and almost single-handedly established the college's outstanding program in Asian Studies, generating endowments that allowed the college to hire more Asian Studies faculty (including yours truly), bring in visiting professors (and the occasional Buddhist master) from both Asia and the West, sponsor Asian-related cultural events (from sitarists to Tibetan monks to Noh plays), and construct a world-renowned Japanese garden on campus.

As a scholar of Buddhism and other Asian traditions, Bardwell was a productive social historian over many decades, editing such seminal volumes as *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (1978), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos, and Burma* (1978), *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (1982), *Warlords, Artists, and Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (co-edited, 1982), *Essays on Gupta Culture* (1983), *Essays on T'ang Society* (co-edited, 1986), and *The City as Sacred Center: Essays on Six Asian Contexts* (co-edited, 1987). He also co-authored, with Eshin Nishimura, *Unsui: A Diary of Zen Monastic Life* (1973). In 2013, he published his definitive scholarly monograph, *Narratives of Sorrow and Dignity: Japanese Women, Pregnancy Loss, and Modern Rituals of Grieving*. And, in 2022, he brought out a collection of his essays on Sri

Lankan religion and society, *Precarious Balance: Sinhala Buddhism and the Forces of Pluralism*.

Bardwell was equally influential in promoting the growth of Buddhist studies as a field, both in the U.S. and globally. He was, with such figures as Donald Swearer, Lowell Bloss, and James Helfer, among the pioneers in the teaching of Buddhism and other Asian religions in American small liberal arts colleges. He supported such education not only in the stateside classroom but through such study-abroad ventures as the Associated Kyoto Program (AKP), Intercollegiate Sri Lanka Education (ISLE), and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) Indian Studies Program in Pune, in all of which he took leading roles. He was a founding member of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, serving on the editorial board, the board of directors, and, in 1980-81, as General Secretary. Further, as documented by José Cabezón in his 2020 American Academy of Religion presidential address, his efforts were vital to securing a foothold for Buddhist studies at the annual meetings of the AAR - which have become the main venue for scholarly communication about Buddhism in North America, if not the world.

Bardwell was born in Springfield, MA, in 1925. He attended Andover and Yale, overlapping at both, and playing some baseball, with future President George H.W. Bush. He served in the Marines during World War II, seeing action on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and had his interest in Asia stirred by visits to China and Japan after the war. He was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1954, and, while working on his Yale Ph.D., served in various ministerial roles in Highland Park, IL, and New Haven, while learning as much as he could about the languages and cultures of Asia. Upon arriving at Carleton in 1960, he inaugurated the study of Asian religions at the college. He retired in 1995. He was preceded in death by his wife, Charlotte. He is survived by five children (Peter, Susan, Laura, Brooks, and Sam) and numerous grandchildren, as well as countless friends, students, and colleagues - who will miss him greatly, but will continue to celebrate his lightly-worn erudition, his subtle wit, his rigor as a scholar and clarity as a writer, his lifelong love of both academic and experiential learning, and, far from least, his genuine human kindness.

Roger Jackson

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