

UF RELIGION

NEWSLETTER

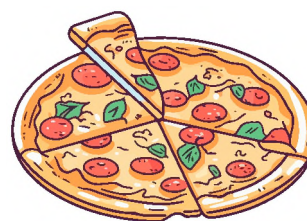


NEWS

- Alumnus **Dr. Brahim Afrit** has been offered a position at **Tulane University**. See the *News* section on Page 2 for more information. He also recently contributed to a publication. Please see the *Publication* section on Page 4 to learn more.
- **Dr. Bron Taylor** has published an essay in *Ritual, Personhood and the New Animism: Essays in Honour of Graham Harvey*. See the *Publication* section on Page 3 for more information.

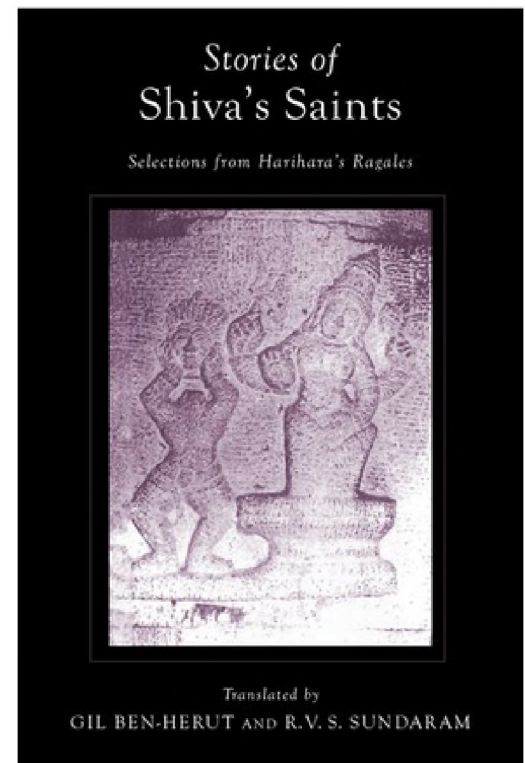
EVENTS

- Early registration for the Spring semester begins **October 27th**. Make sure to check out our courses!
- There will be a **Pizza Study Break** for undergraduate students on **October 29th** at the Pugh Hall Ocora from 12:30 to 1:30pm. The event is co-sponsored with Jewish Studies and serves to meet with students in a relaxed environment while discussing Spring course offerings. *Free pizza will be offered to event attendees.*



NEWS

- **Dr. Brahim Afrit** has recently been offered a Visiting Scholar position at Tulane University in the Middle East and North Africa Studies Program. He earned his Ph.D. in Religion from the University of Florida in 2024, specializing in Global Islam, and has focused on the role of religion in modern society. After completing his doctorate, he returned to Algeria, where he worked as a social entrepreneur in education. Academically, he has contributed chapters to three edited volumes and published two journal articles based on his dissertation.
- On October 14th, the University of Florida's **Center for the Study of Hindu Traditions (CHiTra)** hosted a virtual launch of *Stories of Shiva's Saints: Selections from Harihara's Ragales* (Oxford University Press, 2025) by Gil Ben-Herut, a professor at the University of South Florida, and R.V.S. Sundaram. Following Ben-Herut's presentation, the book was discussed by Laurie Patton, President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Paula Richman, William H. Danforth Professor Emerita of South Asian Religions at Oberlin College; and Harshita Mruthinti Kamath, Visweswara Rao and Sita Koppaka Associate Professor in Telugu Culture, Literature, and History at Emory University.

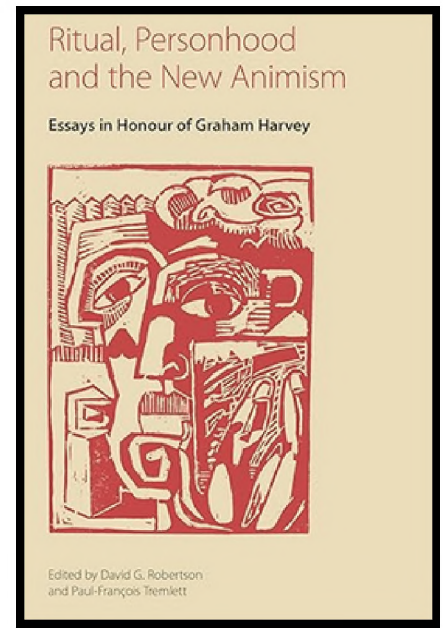


PUBLICATIONS

- **Dr. Bron Taylor** has published his essay “Gaian Animism: Ritual Innovation and Nature Spirituality in Radical Environmentalism and the Global Environmental Milieu” in *Ritual, Personhood and the New Animism: Essays in Honour of Graham Harvey*, edited by Paul-François Tremlett and David Robertson (Equinox, 2025, pp. 147–168).

In this contribution, Taylor explores how radical environmentalism, especially in the U.S. but with global reach, has developed a spiritually infused worldview he terms “Gaian animism.” This perspective blends animism (attributing agency or personhood to non-human nature) with Gaian spirituality (seeing Earth as a living, interconnected organism).

Taylor shows how this worldview takes shape through ritual innovations, from direct-action ceremonies to earth-based rites, and reflects a broader shift toward more-than-human relationality within global environmental spirituality. He argues that these practices challenge anthropocentrism, propose new forms of personhood for non-human nature, and illuminate how “Gaian animism” operates as both ecological critique and spiritual affiliation with the living Earth.

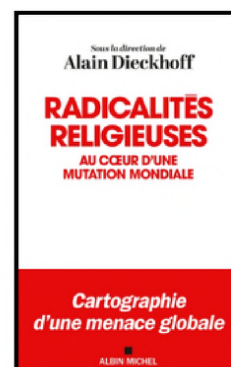
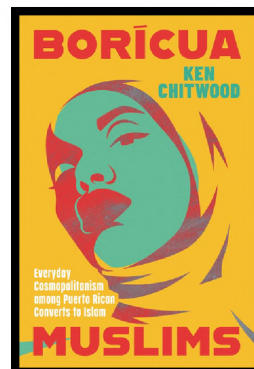


PUBLICATIONS

- Alumnus **Ken Chitwood**'s book "*Boricua Muslims: Everyday Cosmopolitanism Among Puerto Rican Converts to Islam*" has officially been published by the University of Texas Press. The book examines the experiences of Puerto Rican converts to Islam, both on the island and throughout the diaspora, as they grapple with questions of identity, faith, and belonging. It reveals how Islam has taken root within Puerto Rican communities and how Puerto Rican Muslims, in turn, redefine what it means to be Boricua, Muslim, and American.
- **Dr. Brahim Afrit** recently contributed his first edited volume on religious radicality in *Religious Extremism in Politics*, ed. Alain Dieckhoff. Paris: Albin Michel, 2025. The contribution is titled "*Salafism and Evangelicalism in West Africa*" and examines how globalization and secular postcolonial nation-state models have facilitated their regional prominence. He will present his research at SciencesPo/CERI in Paris on November 6th before a panel of religion scholars.
- **Dr. Terje Ostebo** gave a presentation for the British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office on Friday, October 16th, on the topic "*The Religion of Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed: Pentecostalism, Prosperity Gospel, and the Power of Positive Thinking.*"

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's approach to religion marks a clear shift from the policies of his predecessors under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which intentionally kept politics separate from religious discourse. This presentation explored Abiy's involvement in religious affairs, his ideological framework, and the evolving religious dynamics of the Abiy era, highlighting both significant changes and important continuities from the EPRDF period.

Rather than overstating Abiy's Pentecostal background or links to the prosperity gospel, the presentation examined how these beliefs intersect with the broader principles of Positive Thinking ideology.



Dr. Terje Ostebo



**Ethiopian Prime Minister,
Abiy Ahmed**

PRESENTATIONS

- **Dr. Yaniv Feller & Dr. Rachel Gordan** recently presented at the international conference “Transatlantic Jewish Publishing: The Legacy of Schocken books” from October 8 to 10, which took place at the German Literary Archive in Marbach am Neckar, Germany. Dr. Feller presented his paper “Paperback Judaism” while Dr. Gordan presented her paper “The 1940s-1950s Opening of American Publishing to Jewish Stories.”



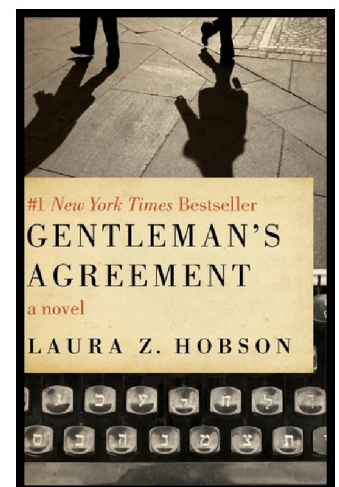
Dr. Yaniv Feller



Dr. Rachel Gordan

- On November 12th, **Dr. Rachel Gordan** will be giving a presentation at Barnard College on “Moving from Race to Religion in Laura Z. Hobson’s *Gentleman’s Agreement* (1947)”. The bestselling novel and Academy Award winning film follows a Gentile journalist, Philip Green, who pretends to be Jewish to write a series of articles exposing the pervasive anti-Semitism in post-World War II America. By adopting a Jewish identity, he and his son experience prejudice firsthand, revealing the subtle social and economic forms of discrimination that respectable society often overlooks. His experiences and the resulting conflict with his fiancée, who is forced to confront her own prejudiced attitudes

Laura Z. Hobson’s bestselling novel confronted the issue of nonviolent antisemitism in American society. Beyond challenging prejudice, Hobson aimed to break down racist stereotypes by situating Jews firmly within the broader American religious landscape.



PRESENTATIONS

- On October 20th, **Dr. Vasudha Narayanan** gave a talk to the Visitor Experience, Retail Staff, and Guides at the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MIA) in conjunction with the museum's upcoming major exhibition on Cambodian art, opening October 24. The exhibition features approximately 250 Khmer bronze objects from the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Its centerpiece is a 14-foot bronze reclining Vishnu, assembled by the Musée Guimet in Paris, where the exhibition was first inaugurated. Dr. Narayanan, who has been researching reclining Vishnu imagery in India and Cambodia, will return to Minnesota in November to speak to donors, visitors, and members of the Cambodian community about the connections between these images and classical Indian dance.



Dr. Vasudha Narayanan



14-foot bronze reclining Vishnu

- On October 22nd, **Dr. Narayanan** was invited to give a “state of the field” address on Hindu Bhakti studies at the Bhakti Studies Symposium, held at the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s South Asia program. Building on twelve years of collaborative research across languages, regions, and traditions—through symposia, workshops, publications, and the Bhakti Virtual Archive (BHAVA)—the event aims to define the contours of bhakti scholarship.

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Want To Contribute to the Newsletter?

If you have any information that you would like featured in the newsletter, please email **Ashley Tisher** (a.tisher@ufl.edu).

We look forward to hearing from you!