

UF RELIGION

NEWSLETTER

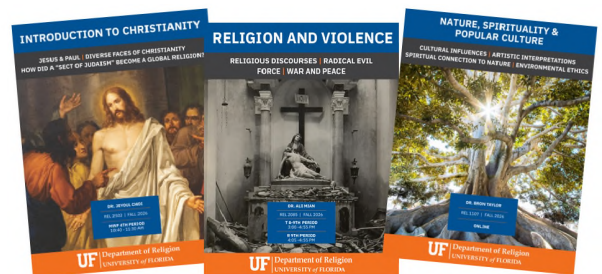


NEWS

- In a conversation-style event organized by **Dr. Yaniv Feller**, Professor **Dr. Rachel Gordan** spoke to Journalist and Historian **Joshua Leifer** about Jewish-American communities. See *Page 2* for more details.
- Professor **Dr. Bron Taylor** recently published a review article in JSRNC. See *Page 3* for more details.

EVENTS

- Starting next week, the Religion Department will begin promoting Fall 2026 courses prior to class registration. **Dr. Jeyoul Choi** and the department's student assistants will be tabling in the Plaza of the Americas to share information about courses being offered in the fall semester to undergraduate students!



- On March 23rd, DOEA Secretary **Michelle Branham** will be coming to give a presentation to several religion classes and various faculty. See *Page 4* for more details.

PRESENTATIONS

On February 23rd, Professor **Dr. Rachel Gordan** participated in a conversation-style event hosted by **UF Bud Shorstein Center for Jewish Studies** with journalist and historian **Joshua Leifer** about the changing foundations in Jewish-American communities over the past several decades. The event was organized by UF Religion faculty member **Dr. Yaniv Feller**.

American Jewish identity is undergoing major change as its traditional foundations—Americanism, Zionism, and liberalism—shift. With Holocaust survivors passing and global Jewish demographics evolving, experts predict that most of the world's Jewish population may live in Israel by 2050. Meanwhile, rising antisemitism, political tensions, and the aftermath of the Gaza war are raising new concerns about the future of Jewish life in the U.S.

In a timely conversation, journalist-historian Joshua Leifer and UF Professor Rachel Gordan discussed how these changes are unfolding, their impact on Jewish communities today, and why they matter for the years ahead.

FORUM
FOR FAIRNESS IN DISCOURSE

**AMERICAN JEWISH
POLITICS IN AN AGE OF
GLOBAL TURBULENCE**

JOSHUA LEIFER
Historian and Journalist

23
FEBRUARY

**3:00 PM - LECTURE
4:00 PM - RECEPTION**

PUGH HALL OCORA*
296 Buckman Dr.
Gainesville, FL 32611

UF Bud Shorstein Center
for Jewish Studies

*Reserved parking is available
**Event will also be livestreamed

Joshua Leifer is a journalist and historian. A columnist for *Haaretz*, he has also written for *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Guardian*. His debut book, *Tablets Shattered: The End of an American Jewish Century and the Future of Jewish Life* (2024), received a National Jewish Book Award.

Leifer is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in history at Yale University, where his research spans modern intellectual history, Jewish political thought, U.S. foreign policy, and Holocaust memory. His dissertation investigates the politics of antisemitism and the challenges facing the modern liberal order.

PUBLICATIONS

Professor **Dr. Bron Taylor** recently published a review of Michael Barnes Norton's book titled, "*Anthropocene Religion: Rethinking Nature, Humanity and Divinity Amid Climate Catastrophe*" in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture*.

Associate Professor at the University of Arkansas, Michael Barnes Norton, writes on the post-modern and colonial scholars who have worked towards contemporary environmental issues. Dr. Taylor's review discussed the structure and content of Norton's book, along with his own personal notes of Norton's ideologies.

This article, published in the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, looks at how the idea of the Anthropocene—a time when humans are shaping the planet in major ways—challenges traditional religious ideas about nature, humanity, and God. It argues that rapid climate change is disrupting long-held beliefs that separate humans from nature and God from the physical world. Because humans now have such a large impact on Earth, the article suggests that religious thinking needs to change as well.

It places Norton's work within broader discussions in environmental humanities and spiritual ecology, showing how he calls for a new kind of theology—one that sees humans as deeply interconnected with Earth's systems rather than standing apart from them. Overall, the article adds to ongoing debates about how religions must rethink their ideas and ethical responsibilities in order to respond meaningfully to the climate crisis.



EVENTS

From the **U.S. Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA)**, Secretary **Michelle Branham** will be speaking to two classes from the Religion Department on March 23rd. She will be discussing her experiences and thoughts of public policy working both within the government and as a member of her community.

Secretary Branham will discuss the role of government and faith in a community, along with the ways in which they can work together. She will focus her talk on the state of Florida and how this partnership between religion and governmental processes, with the help of constitutional principles, can help bring together and strengthen communities and freedom.

Michelle Branham was appointed in 2021 by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to lead the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, where she oversees services for nearly 6 million seniors across the state. She brings over two decades of experience in public policy, public health, and senior-focused initiatives, including a decade in senior executive roles at both state and federal levels.

Before her appointment, Branham spent nine years as Vice President of Public Policy for the Alzheimer's Association and served in several statewide leadership roles related to aging and Alzheimer's care. She also contributed to Florida's public health response during the pandemic as a member of the Governor's Safe and Limited Return Task Force. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Stetson University and a master's in theological studies from Emory University's Candler School of Theology.

FROM THE FLAG TO THE FAITHFUL: RETHINKING THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE



WITH DOEA SECRETARY
MICHELLE BRANHAM



Florida Department of Elder Affairs Secretary **Michelle Branham** draws on her experience both inside government and as an observer of public policy to explore how government and faith communities can responsibly work together to serve the common good – particularly in a state like Florida, where many residents identify as religious.

The presentation will consider how partnership, when grounded in constitutional principles, can strengthen communities while preserving freedom for all.



Department of Religion
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

EVENT DETAILS

MARCH 23

4:55 - 8:15PM

Fall 2026 Courses

REL 1107: Nature, Spirituality, and Pop Culture — Bron Taylor

REL 1163: God, Humanity, and Evolution — Ali Mian

REL 1411: Why Is There Evil In The World? — Yaniv Feller

REL 2085: Religion and Violence — Ali Mian

REL 2240: Intro to the New Testament — Jeyoul Choi

REL 2300: Intro to World Religions — Vasudha Narayanan

REL 2334: Religions of India — Vasudha Narayanan

REL 2502: Intro to Christianity — Jeyoul Choi

REL 3022: Myth and Ritual — Jeyoul Choi

REL 4933: Senior Seminar — Yaniv Feller

IDS 1114: Ethics in the Public Sphere — Anna Peterson

IDS 2935: Post-Holocaust American Jews — Rachel Gordan

IDS 2935 Women & Religion in US Popular Fiction — Rachel Gordan



Learn more about these courses at our tabling events, starting March 3rd through March 26th!

STAY CONNECTED!

Follow Us On Social Media!



@ufreligion



University of Florida
Religion Department



@ufreligion



University of Florida
Religion



@ufreligion

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!