

Issue No. 1
2023-2024



RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWSLETTER



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Rlgn 303: Multicultural Spain at Alhambra Palace in Grenada

Letter from the Chair



Welcome to our new, annual department newsletter!

We want our current students, alumni, and supporters to get the latest news from the Department of Religious Studies at CWRU.

The 2023-2024 academic year was another banner year for Religious Studies. We have continued to grow our faculty and build on our strengths in the global, interdisciplinary study of religion, with the addition of Dr. Jue Liang, Assistant Professor of Asian Religions and the Severance Chair in the History of Religion.

Congratulations to Professor Alanna Cooper, the Abba Hillel Silver Chair in Jewish Studies, who was awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor.

This year, our faculty published incredible scholarship and were awarded several prestigious grants and fellowships. CWRU initiated a new Unified General Education Requirement, and our innovative courses are attracting more students than ever. We saw record enrollments in courses such as Religion and Culture, Religion and Ecology, and Buddhism. We look forward to building on these successes and seeing our numbers of majors and minors grow in the coming years. We know that once students discover Religious Studies, they often return to our courses to explore the richness of religion and work closely with our amazing faculty.

As we look forward to the fall, I know our faculty will be offering essential guidance to the public and to our students on the role of religion in crucial political events, from the US presidential election to the climate crisis, to the wars in Israel/Palestine and Ukraine. I feel fortunate to be surrounded by colleagues who so seamlessly combine intellectual expertise, curiosity, and empathy, to help build knowledge at CWRU and beyond.

Very best wishes,
Justine Howe

Associate Professor and Chair, CWRU Religious Studies

Faculty Spotlight



Meet Religious Studies' newest faculty member, Dr. Jue Liang

Jue Liang joined the University through the Department of Religious Studies in the Fall of 2023. Dr. Liang is a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism. She holds a BA and MA from Renmin University of China (2009, 2011), an MA from the University of Chicago (2013), and a PhD from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia (2020). Her research and teaching engage with questions about continuities as well as innovations in the gender discourses of Buddhist communities. She is also interested in the theory and practice of translation in general, and translating Tibetan literature in particular.

Jue is currently completing her first book, entitled *Conceiving the Mother: The Early Literary Lives of the Buddhist Saint Yeshé Tsogyel*. At the same time, she is also working on a second project, tentatively titled *Thus Has She Heard: Theorizing Gender in Contemporary Tibetan Buddhism*.

Awarded Grants

2024

- 2024-2025 Glennan Fellowship, University Center for Innovation in Teaching & Education (UCITE), CWRU
- Faculty Travel Grant, Baker Nord Center, CWRU
- Manuscript Development Workshop, The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhist Studies
- Expanding Horizons Initiative 2024, Finish Line Fund, College of Arts and Sciences, CWRU
- Flash Fund, Baker Nord Center, CWRU

2023

- Small Grant, Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion
- 2023-2024 Flexible Early Career Fellowship, The Henry Luce Foundation/ACLS Program in China Studies

Public Scholarship

In her March 19, 2024 article for *The Conversation*, "What the Buddhist text Therigatha teaches about women's enlightenment," Dr. Liang explores Therigatha, a collection of poems written in the Pāli language by female disciples of the Buddha, revealing women's enlightenment as a communal and embodied experience.

Grants and Fellowships

Cleveland Humanities Collaborative

Mellon Foundation to support Clites' co-led collaborative

In December, Dr. Brian Clites received a major grant of \$1.49 million from The Mellon Foundation to support Phase III of the Cleveland Humanities Collaborative, which he co-directs with English's Dr. Kurt Koenigsberger.

In January, the university appointed Dr. Clites as the Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan Chair in Catholic Studies II. In April, Brian also received the Faculty Fellowship from CWRU's Baker-Nord Center for the Humanities, which will provide sabbatical leave in the fall while he works towards completing his current book project, *Surviving Soul Murder: Life and Faith after Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse*.



Inaugural Mandel Fellowships

Launched with generous funding from the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Foundation, the Experimental Humanities Program is a bold initiative to integrate humanistic principles and STEM disciplines in order to address the rapidly evolving technological landscape and the most pressing societal issues of our time. A key component of this program is a new Experimental Humanities major currently under development, piloting in the spring 2024 semester with its first cohort of undergraduate students.

Students in this exciting program will blend humanities-oriented critical reflection with hands-on experimenting and skills development in new technologies, enabling them to ask deep questions about the ethical, philosophical and socio-cultural implications of scientific and technological change.

Grants and Fellowships



Dr. Timothy Beal's Trio of Groundbreaking Grants

"Finite Futures: Imagining Alternative Ways Forward in the Anthropocene" (PI), a \$250,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation focused on imagining future possibilities at the intersection of religion, technology, and justice in the face of ecological catastrophe.

"Responsible Artificial Intelligence Curriculum Design Project" (PI), grant from the National Humanities Center and Google to design and teach a new course, "Responsible AI: Cultivating a Just and Sustainable Socio-technical Future Through Data Citizenship" (cross-listed with Religious Studies).

"Experimental Humanities" Initiative (faculty director), a \$3.5 million grant from the Mandel Foundation focused on the mutually transformative integration of the humanities and STEM through applied technologies.

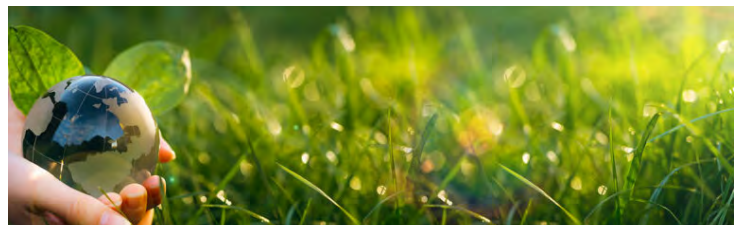
Finite Futures: Imagining Alternative Ways Forward in the Anthropocene

"We aim to design and implement a new model of generative, public-facing, multidisciplinary engagement at the nexus of religion, technology, and justice in the Anthropocene.

Occupying the margins and borderlands of the academic religious studies, drawing insights and practices from emergent design, poetry, counterfactual histories, and speculative fiction, our shared task is to imagine new possibilities on the horizon of climate collapse.

How can religious studies help us imagine and live into a finite but just and thriving future?"

Dr. Beal, along with Dr. Joy Bostic, Sarah Gridley, Michael Hemenway, Andrea Jain, Sylvester Johnson, Jenny Preston (Religious Studies MA), Mayra Rivera, Idris Tang, and Jenna Wagner, have been hard at work since the grant was awarded in 2022. Through their efforts, a series of speakers will be presenting in the upcoming Fall semester, coinciding with Dr. Beal's course RLGN 206: Religion and Ecology.



Student Highlights

Capstones

The department had a stellar group of capstone projects this year, which were showcased at its Capstone Celebration on April 17th, 2024.

Vivek Aslot

Complexities of Euthanasia: A Study of Contemporary Discourse Among Indian Bioethicists on Hindu Terms

Emma Bauman

Rethinking Feminism and NRMs: How Quiverfull Women Found Liberation in Submission

Glennis Covault

A New Youth Ministry: Why Young People are Leaving the Church and What Should Be Done About It

Yiwen Gao

Gender, Sexuality, Religion: Interpreting Public Perceptions of LGBTQ+ Relationships in China

Al Johns

The Healing Power of Tradition: African American Perspectives on Cultural Appropriation in Alternative Medicine

Jadon Orr

Shugendō: Religion and Tourism in the Japanese Mountains

Brooke Yanai

The Blind Eye in the Study of Religion: Experiencing Religion with Aphantasia

Awards

The Ratner Family Prize

The highest academic achievement in the study of religion.

Senior Winner: Jadon Orr

Cont. Student Winner: Lily Stuart

The Eudese and Elmer Paull Prize

For demonstrating an interest in Jewish studies or Jewish contemporary life.

Junior Winner: Jordyn Kelly

Junior Winner: Alyssa Zimmerman

Sophomore Winner: Dylan Pines

First-Year Winner: Bea Sampo

The Ira and Ruth Bressler Prize

For outstanding work in the area of Jewish Studies.

Sophomore Winner: Asha Kartha

Course Spotlight



Spring '24

RLGN 305/405 // ARTH 305/405: Embodied Religion and Mixed Reality

In Spring 2024, Professor Howe taught an exciting, innovative course, “Embodied Religion and Mixed Reality,” with Professor Maggie Popkin in Art History. Through hands-on experience that combined art history, religious studies, and programming and digital modeling, students confronted the technological and interpretative challenges that structure the extended reality experiences that they encounter in their daily lives. With support from the Interactive Commons, CWRU’s internationally-renowned center for visual technologies, religious studies and art history students created their own mixed reality models using a three-dimensional model of the mihrab, or Islamic prayer niche, from the Cleveland Museum of Art, pictured above.

New Course for Fall '24

RLGN / ASIA 244: Ghosts, Zombies, and Monsters: What We Fear and Loathe in Religions



Kali Attacking Nisumbha, c. 1740. India, Pahari, possibly Guler, 18th century

Supported by a flash fund from the Baker Nord Center and echoes of the 2024 Cleveland Humanities Festival theme of “Awe,” this new course, taught and conceptualized by Dr. Jue Liang incorporates museum collections local to Cleveland and those accessible online. It includes a collection of creative pedagogical design, from collective sharing of materials related to ghosts, zombies, and monsters (“Cool stuff I found”) to a final project of story map and visual analysis of one other-than-human being.

Alumni Spotlight

Meet Liz Hanna, a remote program management and business development professional at Education For Employment (EFE), a non-governmental



organization (NGO) in Washington, D.C. She graduated from CWRU in 2020 with a Religious Studies minor, completing majors in International Studies and Middle Eastern Studies, as well as another minor in

Economics. Based in Cleveland, Liz supports EFE, a leading nonprofit in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, in the implementation of diverse skills training programs for unemployed youth. EFE specializes in soft skills, entrepreneurship, and technical training to connect participants with high-quality jobs. Additionally, she actively contributes to EFE's Alumni and Mentorship initiatives, playing a crucial role in fostering community and support for program graduates.

How did religious studies impact you and your goals?

Studying Religious Studies played a key role in shaping the way I think and interact with people. Being totally honest, I was always most excited for my Religious Studies courses and never dreaded them or the work for them. I also participated in extra activities through the Religious Studies Department

that provided me with incredible hands-on learning and really shaped me. I entered and won the Baker-Nord Undergraduate Humanities Prize for my Religious Studies minor capstone which was such an honor, and I was awarded the Reisacher Summer Fellowship, in which I used the funds for summer research on migrant Christian identity in the Arab Gulf. This led me to travel to the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain to interview people and learn about a totally new topic for me at the time. All of these experiences deeply impacted me by shaping my mind and my ability to relate to others.

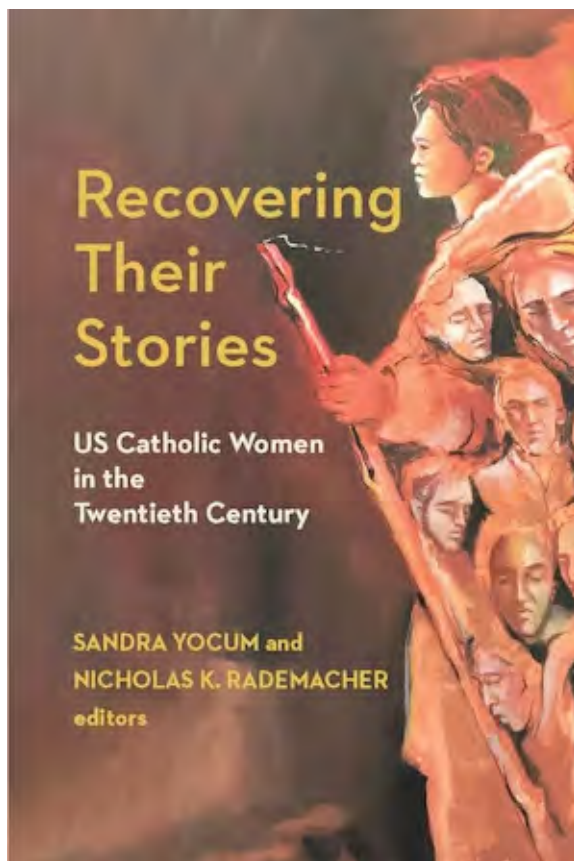
Why did you choose religious studies?

As I was presenting my International Studies capstone in my junior year, one of my judges was Professor Jonathan Tan in the Religious Studies Department. He had some challenging and thought-provoking questions for me at the end of my presentation, and it was a very exciting conversation. Further discussion with Professor Tan led me to realize my biggest research (and personal) interest – Middle Eastern Christianity (large topic) – is part of Religious Studies, and it was silly that I wasn't already enrolled in a Religious Studies major or minor. I truly just never considered it before! With his help, I fit in a few religious studies courses my senior year and was able to complete the minor. One of those courses was an independent study with Professor Tan on Middle Eastern / West Asian Christianity, and given his expertise in Asian Christianity, it was one of my favorite courses ever.

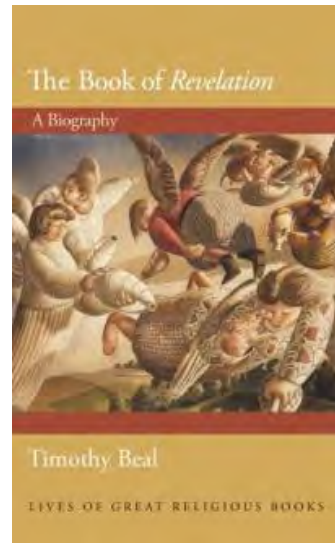
Publications

Articles and Journals

Over the past year, Dr. Brian Clites had two major publications. Over the summer, his most recent journal article, “In Search of a Historiography of Clergy Sexual Abuse,” was published in *U.S. Catholic Historian*. A separate essay, about Chicago’s St. Benet’s Catholic bookstore and its famous owner, Nina Polcyn, was published recently in the new volume Recovering Their Stories: U.S. Catholic Women in the Twentieth Century (Fordham University Press, 2024).

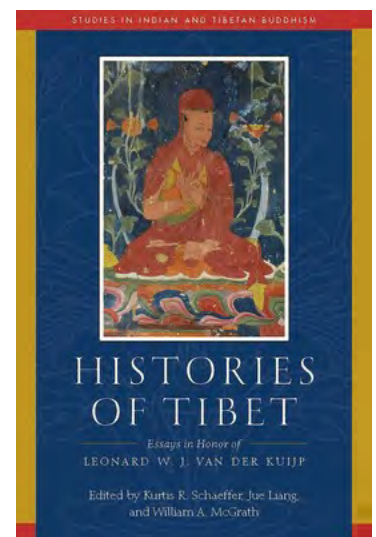


Books Etc.



Dr. Timothy Beal published a Korean translation of *The Book of Revelation: A Biography* by Sungyoon Kang (Time Education, 2023).

Dr. Jue Liang, along with William A. McGrath, and Kurtis R. Schaeffer edited *Histories of Tibet: Essays in Honor of Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2023.



Additionally, Dr. Liang wrote the chapter "Yeshé Tsogyal Laments," in *Longing to Awaken: Buddhist Devotion in Tibetan Poetry and Song*, edited by Holly Gayley and Dominique Townsend. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2024.

Public Scholarship



In anticipation of the total solar eclipse seen over Cleveland on April 8th, 2024 Dr. Deepak Sarma offers their perspective to several media outlets, including the New York Times, Fox 8, and the Juggernaut. Describing the eclipse as an "egalitarian event," they discuss the sense of wonder shared across time and cultures, as well as examining the myths and legends about eclipses throughout history. Collection of Dr. Sarma's media mentions on the 2024 solar eclipse.

Dr. Timothy Beal writes about climate change for the Public Interest Technology University Network. Titled "Tech for the Anthropocene: Cultivating Earth Creatureliness," Beal's piece appeared as part of PIT-UN's September newsletter theme of climate change.

During a recent visit to Israel, Dr. Cooper had the privilege to meet Rabbi Anat Sharbat, whose spiritual work in Hostage Square inspired her to write the article, "Hostages Square in Tel Aviv is one of the most religiously diverse synagogues." Amid war, grief, fear and pain, Rabbi Sharbat and others have found creative and uplifting ways to connect to each other and find some solace.



Rabbi Anat Sharbat in Hostages Square, Tel Aviv
Photo by Alanna Cooper

"This Little Light of Mine" - Interview with Dr. Joy Bostic

Following her keynote lecture at Oxford University, "It Feels So Good to Be Alive", Dr. Joy Bostic spoke with Beshara Magazine about Africana spirituality and its expression in popular music and dance.

Dr. Jonathan Tan quoted in USA Today

USA Today's April 20th article, "Share of US Catholics backing legal abortion rises as adherents remain at odds with church," features insight from Dr. Jonathan Tan.

Faculty Lectures

“Is there an ordinary state of consciousness?” Deepak Sarma Lecture & Reception

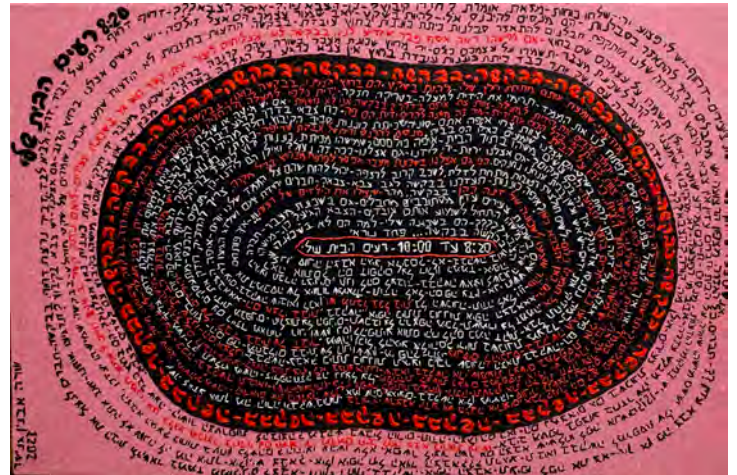
Why do we contrast ordinary states of consciousness with non-ordinary ones? Why do we presume that there are any ordinary or normal states of consciousness? The current curiosity about altered states of consciousness and the therapeutic value of so-called psychedelic substances begs the question of what is considered to be “normal.”

Dr. Sarma challenged attendees to think in new ways about states of consciousness on Wednesday, December 6th 2023.

Keynote: Dr. Joy R. Bostic



Associate professor Joy R. Bostic gave the opening keynote address at St. John's College, University of Oxford for the Mystical Theology Network's Mysticism and Action conference, March 19-21, 2024. Her keynote address “‘It Feels So Good to Be Alive’: Vital Unity, Africana Cosmology and Embodied Sociality as Spiritual Practice” includes excerpts from her upcoming book on Africana religion and popular culture.



“Making Sense of Trauma: Israel's Black Sabbath and its Aftermath” Dr. Alanna Cooper lecture and reception

This lecture on Wednesday, May 1st, 2024 by Dr. Alanna Cooper analyzed the cultural work born out of the trauma experienced by Israel's citizens on October 7. Research explores the existential patterns Israelis seek to make sense of their wounds, as well as the ways in which they assemble a set of hopes and fears for how they might be healed.

Keynote: Dr. Jonathan Tan

Professor Jonathan Tan gave the opening keynote address at St. John's School of Theology and Seminary in Collegeville, MN for the Godfrey Diekmann Center Graduate Symposium Thursday, May 2nd.

His keynote address, “Doing Liturgy Intersectionally: Opportunities and Implications,” opened the annual graduate student's presentation of scholarly papers.

Events

2024 Ratner Lecture: "Democracy or Theocracy? The Test for America in 2024" by Dr. Anthea Butler



On October 18th, 2023, the department hosted Dr. Anthea Butler, Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought of the University of Pennsylvania, for the 2024 Ratner Lecture.

Her talk examined the future prospects for maintaining a healthy, safe democracy. As Americans begin to look towards the 2024 election cycle, there are growing concerns about the erosion of democratic processes on the state and national level. Professor Butler explored how moral panics couched in religious language, actions, and fervor are being used to dismantle some of the more cherished principles of democracy in America.



"Rejecting the Pill: A History of the Science of Natural Family Planning" presented by Katherine Dugan, PhD

In this April 2024 lecture, Dr. Katherine Dugan examined the history of the science of Natural Family Planning—starting with the "rhythm" method of the 1920s through the app-based methods of the 2020s. This lecture integrated medical history with Catholic history in order to tell the story of how what is now known as NFP came to be practiced. In addition to tracing the history of these methods, the lecture also detailed some of the biographical history of the medical doctors and scientists committed to this work.



"Sisters in the Mirror: Muslim Women and the Global Politics of Feminism" a lecture by Elora Shehabuddin

Western feminists, pundits, and policymakers tend to portray the Muslim world as the last and most difficult frontier of global feminism. Challenging this view, Professor Elora Shehabuddin presented, in October of 2023, a unique and engaging history of feminism as a story of colonial and postcolonial interactions between Western and Muslim societies. Muslim women, like women worldwide, have long fought for their rights, both individually and collectively, beyond just their religious

identity. Navigating the modern and globally enmeshed Muslim world, often marked by disparities in wealth, power, colonization, and Western influence, they have developed their own ideas about gender roles in the West, shaping their feminist visions for their societies.

Explore Event: “What is Asian American Studies” – A Conversation with Professor Jonathan Tan

On Tuesday, April 16, 2024 Professor Jonathan Tan gave a talk on the discipline of Asian American Studies within Ethnic Studies at CWRU, as well as the place of Asian Americans in contemporary discourse of politics, society, race, and culture in the United States.

This talk was sponsored by: The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures and Ethnic Studies and had more than 50 individuals at the event, the majority of which were students.



Black Visions, Black Voices, and the Power of Black Art: AFRICOBRA and Ohio

Siegal Lifelong Learning held a two-part remote lecture.

Dr. Regennia N. Williams facilitate a discussion about the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and beyond as seen through the work of Wadsworth Jarrell, Jae Jarrell, and Nelson Stevens.

2024 Cleveland Humanities Festival



Each year the Baker-Nord Center for the Humanites, directed by Dr. Michele Berger as of 2023, puts on The Cleveland Humanities Festival, a collaborative event celebrating the great cultural institutions of the city of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, dedicated to humanistic inquiry.

The theme of the 2024 Cleveland Humanities Festival was AWE. Wonder. Reverence.

Humility. Intensity. Fear. Awe is a complex emotional and cognitive state that can be triggered by a variety of experiences. How have diverse cultures across time harnessed the profound to create art, sculpt beliefs, and shape the course of history? Are there universal truths about awe, or is it deeply personal? What are the ways that feelings of awe have been mobilized for political purposes? Does the intricate dance of biology and ecology in nature inspire the same awe as a timeless masterpiece? How has our understanding of the evolutionary value of awe changed over time? These questions were addressed by Cleveland area arts, cultural and educational organizations through a series of public events in the spring of 2024.

For more information and a list of events, visit <https://thedaily.case.edu/2024-cleveland-humanities-festival-to-explore-awe/>