

IMAP and UPF USA Hold Webinar on New Religions and the Media

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United States -- IMAP/UPF-USA held its monthly webinar on July 25, 2023 entitled "New Religions, Cult Experts and the Media." **Dr. Thomas Ward**, provost and professor of Peace and Development Studies at HJI Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership spoke on the topic of "press bias," how new religious movements (NRM's) are marginalized due to the media's improprieties. Dr. Ward said that the media can foster an atmosphere of animosity and hysteria towards NRM's. Journalists are supposed to adhere to the "Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists," but they violate their own code. "The press typically respects racial, ethnic, and other societal minorities, referring to them respectfully in the way that the minority refers to itself." But they do not show this to NRM's. And the media's use of the word "cult" creates a negative image of the NRM. Dr. Ward also pointed out that people with no qualifications in religious journalism or in assessing NRM's are deemed "cult experts" and their perspectives are given credibility.



Professor Joel Campbell, associate teaching professor at Brigham Young University School of Communication, was the second speaker. Professor Campbell, a member of the Latter Day Saints Church, concurred with Dr. Ward that journalists should allow people of that faith to self-identify. He also stated how the media's anti-Mormon sentiment led to the assassination of their founder. He added that when trying to understand another religion, you should ask the adherents of that religion and not its enemies.

In their concluding remarks, both Dr. Ward and Professor Campbell agreed, saying that we need to have an interfaith partnership in addressing media bias. Professor Campbell added that having religious journalist training sessions would be beneficial.