

## UPF W. Pennsylvania Scholars Examine Media's Role in Shaping Religious Views

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**IMAP, United States** – In a webinar on June 25, 2024, IMAP-USA posed the question, "Is media reshaping our religious perspectives and beliefs, as well as our moral values?" The panelists were **Professor Terry Mattingly**, religious columnist and senior fellow at St. Constantine College in Houston Texas, and **Dr. Doug Bandow**, senior fellow at the Cato Institute in Washington D.C. The moderator was **Mr. Ray Lipowcan**, UPF executive director for western Pennsylvania.

Prof. Mattingly, who writes a Substack newsletter called Rational Sheep, said that there is a lack of coverage of good religious stories and events. Rather than promoting positive religious stories that would enhance public opinion of religion, the media often choose to ignore these stories and focus on more sensational events, thus creating a negative bias toward a particular religion. He also touched on First Amendment issues – the right to free speech – that give the media the right to report from their particular perspective, which can create a gray area that obscures what is true or not.

The second speaker, Dr. Bandow, addressed the issue from a global perspective. He said that religious practices and beliefs are most tolerated in stable democracies. Regimes that feel threatened, especially totalitarian regimes, tend to limit religious freedoms. He said that issues of religion, religious persecution, and liberty are at the root of many conflicts, or certainly exacerbate conflict. The way people perceive a certain faith can have extraordinary consequences on those around them. Among geopolitical issues that are rooted in religious differences, he cited the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and internal conflicts taking place in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India and Nigeria, among others.

In his concluding remarks, **Dr. Michael Jenkins**, chairman of UPF-North America and president of the Washington Times Foundation, applauded both speakers for standing up for ethical journalism and emphasizing the need for media to offer fair and unbiased reporting on religious issues.