

Lively Debate on the Media and Religion at The Straus Center

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June 18, 2019

Panelists Discuss the Nature and Scope of Religion Reporting in the Media

On Wednesday, May 22, 2019, the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center For Torah and Western Thought, The BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies and the J. Reuben Clark Law Society co-sponsored a panel discussion titled “The Media and Religion: Trends and Challenges.” The event took place at Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue as part of the conference “What’s Next for Religious Freedom,” a two-day series featuring respected scholars and industry leaders participating in sessions including “Anticipating a Landmark Religious Liberty Decision: Are Smith’s Days Numbered?,” “Strategies and Conflicts Over Religious Liberty,” and “Advancing Religious Freedom through Faith-Friendly Workplaces,” among others.

The panel was hosted with insight and humor by Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, rabbi of the synagogue and director of the Straus Center, and featured noted panelists Emma Green, writer and editor at *The Atlantic*; Terry Mattingly, Senior Fellow for Media and Religion, The King’s College; John Podhoretz, writer and editor of *Commentary*; and Sohrab Ahmari, op-ed editor at the *New York Post* and contributing editor to the *Catholic Herald*. Among those present in the audience were Robert Abrams, former attorney general of New York, and Dr. Selma Botman, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Yeshiva University.



(l-r): John Podhoretz, Terry Mattingly, Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, Emma Green and Sohrab Ahmari

The panel discussed biblical literacy and illiteracy in the media and the cultural divide in America. There was also a fascinating discussion about the perceived lack of religion reporting in the media today and the scarcity of a dedicated religion reporter in most major American newspapers. A lively debate among the panelists ensued discussing whether this was a result of bias and antagonism towards religious individuals by the American media or due more to the media's ignorance of the topic. Also discussed were the perceived inaccuracies in religious reporting and why they occur.

The Straus Center looks forward to offering the next in its series of Great Conversations and further programmatic partnerships with the conference's co-sponsors in the academic year to come.