



A Student-Led Liberty  
and Economics Journal



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# *Our Mission*

*Quaestus is a student-led journal presenting ideas about Liberty, Faith, and Economics from a Christian perspective in order to promote human flourishing.*

# *Our Vision*

*We aim to inspire the next generation of Christian thought and leaders by addressing global issues with sound moral and economic principles.*

*God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."*

*Genesis 1:22*

# *Editorial Board*



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## A Discussion with Dr. Jay Bhattacharya

Transcribed by: Natalie Bodnar, Senior Editor

*Concordia University Wisconsin welcomed Dr. Jay Bhattacharya to its third annual Liberty, Faith, and Economics Summit in November 2021. Dr. Bhattacharya serves as Professor of Medicine at Stanford University, Senior Fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, and Professor of Economics. He holds an MD and PhD in economics from Stanford University and has published over 130 peer-reviewed studies.*

To highlight what he thought was a sensible public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Bhattacharya first explained the important lessons learned from his prior research experiences. He shared, “In March of 2020 when COVID hit, I had done work on H1N1 in 2009, and I noticed in that literature...the early estimates of mortality from the H1N1 flu epidemic of 2009 were catastrophically high...5% case fatality rate...people were obviously very concerned.” He added, “There were these studies that came out that measured how many people in the population had H1N1 infection...there was almost 100 times more people infected than were identified as cases.”

Bhattacharya described that a 99.99% survival rate transformed H1N1 public policy and proposed that a similar transformation should have been considered by the U.S. government during its initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Bhattacharya affirmed that the World Health Organization’s (WHO) estimate of a 3% COVID-19 mortality rate was an exaggerated—and therefore misleading—rate. Referencing two large seroprevalence studies completed in Santa Clara County and Los Angeles County, Bhattacharya shared that there were 40 to 50 times more COVID infections than reported cases, reflecting both a 99.8% survival rate and a 0.2% infection mortality rate. “This was extremely controversial at the time,” Dr. Bhattacharya added, “but now there are almost 100 of these studies that have found almost exactly the same thing outside the nursing homes: that this is a 99.8% survival disease.” Dr. Bhattacharya further explained a sharp age-gradient mortality risk: “Older people are at much higher risk of COVID death than younger people. For young people...[particularly] children...there are many more threats...that are

much more severe...than COVID. Whereas for older people, this is a very severe disease.” Dr. Bhattacharya published two peer-reviewed studies investigating this infection mortality rate—one in *The Journal of the American Medical Association for Los Angeles County* and the other in the *International Journal of Epidemiology for Santa Clara County*. He emphasized that this “0.2% is not a controversial fact [but]...is very well-established.”

Bhattacharya further detailed past traditional epidemiological policy for pandemics, which “emphasized identifying the vulnerable and protecting them, and then again, disrupting society as little as possible.” Because the harm from disruption is so great, he stressed that pandemic policies should avoid panicking the population while also protecting activities critical to a functioning society. He reflected, “Instead what we did, is that [we created policies as though]...there were no particularly vulnerable populations, that everybody was equally vulnerable, and that we lock down. If you’re thinking how to assess this—really, there are only two [scientific] facts you need to know.” He emphasized the importance of first, identifying the vulnerable and then second, evaluating the effectiveness of lockdown policies by determining their unintended harm. He added, “The scientific evidence for that second [component] was overwhelming at the time and is overwhelming now.”

“A lockdown is a policy designed to keep people apart from one another. The theory is that if you keep people apart, then [individuals] can’t spread disease to one another. The practice of lockdown actually isn’t that. The practice of lockdown is that a certain class of society is served and keeps itself separate while the rest of society serves it. The practice of a lockdown involves designating

a certain class of people as essential [who are told that] no matter what [the] risk, you go work... [and] go get exposed to the virus, while the other class of people—less than 30% of workers in the United States—can safely work from home without actually having to lose their jobs. That’s the actual practice of a lockdown. So the lockdowns can’t be effective. They will not stop the spread because in practice, vast numbers of people can’t lock down. Otherwise they can’t live. This was even more acute in poor countries where less than 5% of workers could actually work safely from home.”

Dr. Bhattacharya further described the harms of lockdown policy. “In March of 2020, if you questioned or mentioned the existence of harms from lockdowns, you were shot down. I know this from personal experience.” The harms, he shared, were primarily economic but affected every aspect of society: 100 million people worldwide suddenly facing poverty and earning an income of less than \$1 per day; 80 million people struggling with dire food insecurity and hunger; 250,000 children in South Asia dead from hunger and the economic dislocation of lockdowns; enormous psychological harm with 1 in 4 young adults seriously considering suicide; people skipping cancer screenings and faltering in their diabetes management; people with heart attacks staying home. Dr. Bhattacharya related that “these are not simply economic harms but harms to health, psychological well-being, and...to the poor around the world...we knew [this] would happen in March of 2020.” He concluded that these are “not controversial numbers.”

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He continued, “My first reaction to lockdowns is that we should not do it. It is an unethical policy that could not possibly work and would end up harming many more people than it could possibly help.”

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Referencing March of 2020, Bhattacharya emphasized that “looking at...data [from] China and...

Italy, [we knew] that [the elderly] faced the greatest risk. To date, 80% of the deaths are people over 65. We knew that in March of 2020. [From the Italy study] we also knew that nursing homes... and places where older people congregated were places of severe risk...we should have known [to protect them]...instead, in March of 2020, [people] thought the constraint was hospital beds. We were very scared that hospital beds would run out all across the country. And so what we did in many states was we moved [older] COVID patients from hospitals to nursing homes, causing much of the death in March of 2020. We panicked. As a result of that panic, many people who didn’t need to die, died...we were conserving the wrong thing. It was a mistake in not looking at the data carefully and not learning...in economics, we [identify] the real constraint and try to work around that...because we picked the wrong constant many people died...the real constraint is protection of the vulnerable.”

This approach of protecting the vulnerable and leaving the rest of the country to its own discretion was embodied in an October 2020 document called the Great Barrington Declaration. Bhattacharya explained, “The Great Barrington Declaration was a policy proposal that I wrote along with Professor Sunetra Gupta...and Professor Martin Kulldorff...the [ideas] behind [it are] first and most importantly, focused protection of the vulnerable—[to] move heaven and earth to protect the old...[and to appreciate] on the other hand [that] for young people, the harms from the lockdown vastly outweighed the harms from COVID. It was immoral to ask [young people] to bear the burden of the disease.” Almost 1 million people signed this Declaration, Bhattacharya shared, “including tens of thousands of doctors and epidemiologists. The [mainstream] position is not actually the mainstream among epidemiologists and doctors: [many] are deeply uncomfortable with the lockdown policies we have followed...at the same time many people who are in the mainstream reacted negatively to [the Great Barrington Declaration]. [The document] was called ‘irresponsible...nonsense’...and...characterized...as a ‘let-it-rip policy.’” Bhattacharya stressed that “this [response]...was a piece of propaganda in order to not debate the lockdown

policy.” He emphasized that there is a middle-ground [strategy]...that [has been successfully] followed for a hundred years [in] epidemics: identify the vulnerable [and] move resources to protect them while disrupting the rest of society as little as possible.” As a result, Bhattacharya relates that we have created “institutionalized hypochondria” and that the Declaration became “a political thing” because “red states adopted something like the Declaration and blue states kept up with the lockdown policy.”

Given that science is about exploration and humility, this lack of civil discourse affects progress by creating negative implications for those pursuing Truth. In response to being discredited for not supporting the mainstream position on COVID-19 lockdown policies, Bhattacharya revealed that many of his colleagues questioned his motives. He relates, “It became personally clear to me that if I am going to have any integrity whatsoever in terms of my professional life, I had to speak up about lockdowns. I had prepared my entire life essentially for this it turns out...I had [also] been preparing to lose many of my friends. It’s been personally quite challenging...[but] it’s not just me. Almost anybody who spoke out with credentials about the lockdowns was discredited...you’ve heard people say that the right credentials involve epidemiology, virology, and immunology—that’s it. No one else has a right to speak; no one else has any relevant expertise... that is a lie...this is a policy that affects every single one of us in intimate ways.” He concluded that “this is a disease and an epidemic that requires the expertise of everybody. Instead what happened was that people who started to speak up with different expertise were shot down. They were told they do not understand the disease and they therefore do not have the authority to speak...that was an enormous mistake made by the media, by politicians, and enforced ruthlessly through the whole epidemic. And I found myself in a very strange position...I felt that I had [to speak up].”

To address the two competing systems of norms for ethical scientific behavior, Dr. Bhattacharya described the first system, saying, “Science absolutely depends on people being able

to freely speak their minds...on hypotheses that are controversial. Almost all of science is filled with results that most people didn’t believe at one point.” He added, “For science to work, we have to...give room for heretics and let heretics think what they think.” Bhattacharya affirmed that, “free expression of thought and ideas is an absolutely vital input in science. When we don’t have that, science is dead.” In fact, Bhattacharya shared that one of his colleagues declared the Age of Enlightenment over since the start of the pandemic, due to this lack of free civil discourse in science.

Bhattacharya also described the second system for ethical behavior as one of public health, sharing that “in public health, it is irresponsible... to contradict the mainstream narrative...it deserves condemnation.” He elaborated that “the ethical basis of that norm is that there is a deep...scientific consensus...for suppressing [an individual saying anything contradictory]. We applied the ethical norm of public health to a situation with a novel virus that required vast inputs of huge numbers of people with different expertise long before we actually had any consensus on it. The consequences of that have been devastating...many of [the scientists who signed the Great Barrington Declaration] lost their jobs.” He continued, “If you’re an infectious disease research scientist or immunologist, you get much of your money from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases...many scientists derive their living from funding from the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. It is an act of bravery to speak up [against these institutions]... the consensus as you see it is not actually consensus: it involves many people who censor themselves because they were afraid they would lose their research careers if they spoke up. Many people have actually lost their research careers for speaking up. We applied this public health norm of uniformity in messaging when the ethical basis for it did not exist.”

Reflecting on the public health stance of early 2020, Bhattacharya continued, “Once you suppress the debate, there is no lifting of that. You still see that today...in...[times] of uncertainty, scientific debate is needed more than ever —free

and open exchange of ideas is needed more than ever especially when there is a pandemic. There is a cost to that: people will say things that are wrong; others will believe them...but [here] we have suppressed the debate before it even happened.” Bhattacharya also described the public health concept of precautionary principle in which scientists assume “the worst about the virus.” He elaborated that it “is completely reasonable... to calibrate what your response is going to be. What’s not reasonable is [simultaneously] assuming that the responses...you are proposing are automatically the best...or that [lockdown] interventions have no harm.” He further warned that “the loss of trust in public health is near complete...the work of science depends deeply on public trust.”

In response to early treatment protocols and physicians being able to prescribe off-label, Bhattacharya said, “The economics of this is really interesting. If you have a drug that is off-patent, there is nobody interested in testing it. So ivermectin is a drug that’s incredibly cheap given billions of people around the world with river blindness and a whole host of other parasitic diseases [take it].” He described a thought experiment to the audience, proposing that “some scientists come up with the hypothesis that [ivermectin] works for COVID [treatment] and they have some in vitro studies...that suggest [ivermectin] might be useful...same thing with hydroxychloroquine... [with these] early hypotheses.” He elaborated, “Hydroxychloroquine is another drug that is used for malaria intervention and treatment around the world...somebody comes up with the hypothesis that [these drugs] ought to work [for treating COVID] but there is nobody with an interest in testing them. [Conversely there is] a drug that is on-patent with a company that has a very strong interest in testing [it]. Very quickly in the epidemic, Gilead [which] is a pharmaceutical company in California...came up with the idea that remdesivir is useful for treating patients with [COVID]. They run a study and within two months, the FDA approves the drug for use in hospital settings—they still use it...though I don’t think it works very well. Nobody has an interest in testing any of these other drugs [and] very quickly running studies. It’s the responsibility of the NIH actually

to do that...[testing]. It’s the responsibility actually of the NIAID—Dr. Fauci’s organization—to do that; but they didn’t do that. There’s now a study for ivermectin that the NIH has approved which I think is due to be complete sometime in 2023... we’ll know the answer in 2023 for ivermectin. That I think...is an enormous failure of public health policy. We moved heaven and earth to... develop and test the vaccine. We should’ve made an equal effort to develop early treatment, and it’s a failure of the NIH.”

“[Regarding the efficacy of early treatment] there are...25 randomized clinical studies that I’ve seen on ivermectin so far, and they come to different conclusions. So the answer is I don’t know if [ivermectin] works or not...there is not a definitive study that’s been done on it.” He reflected, “that is a scandal: the idea that ivermectin might work was known in 2020. We should have an answer by now [as] to whether it works or doesn’t work. A lot of the controversy you’re seeing around ivermectin and...hydroxychloroquine should have been resolved in 2020. We had the resources, we spent trillions of dollars; there was no reason not to do definitive studies on the effectiveness of these [cheap] drugs...it’s great to have drugs that come out by drug companies but they are very expensive and you can’t use them in poor countries where many cases of COVID happened. So there is a real good public policy reason to test cheap [off-label] drugs.”

To address the ethics of using off-label drugs, Bhattacharya related, “If a drug company... gets a drug approved by the FDA, now doctors have a right to use it in other settings that are not specifically approved by the FDA.” He described this scenario as “very, very common [and that] aspirin is a good example of this. For many years, aspirin was a...pain-reliever. Then [it was later discovered that low-dose aspirin] could be used to prevent heart attacks...so people [started using aspirin for that] even though the FDA didn’t approve [the drug] for heart attack [treatment]. So now there’s recent literature to suggest that [aspirin] might not work so well for that. Anyways, such is science.” He discussed, “You have a situation where it is normal for doctors to use drugs in ways that are not approved, that are not on-label. Should

the doctors have a right to do that? Absolutely... because [doctors] pay the consequences if they're wrong—it ends up being malpractice. Many doctors want to use ivermectin and yet they're prevented from doing [so]." Dr. Bhattacharya described how he personally would not try a drug that has not been FDA-approved "but that [he could] understand why someone who is in dire straits clinically would want that...there's a good ethical case to be made for allowing doctors to prescribe it in those situations...we as scientists have an obligation...when we see doctors using a drug...for this kind of setting...to evaluate as quickly as possible whether it is right to do so... the scientific failure, the policy failure, to evaluate these early treatments [is] an enormous mistake during the early pandemic, and it's a mistake you can put directly at the feet of the NIAID and Anthony Fauci."

Dr. Bhattacharya reflected, "I don't think [Dr. Fauci] is driven by monetary considerations; I think he has from an early age of his career had an intellectual attraction to vaccines. In the HIV days, he invested a ton of money and resources into the NIH towards vaccine development and was famously much less active in trying to get the drug out for HIV." Bhattacharya concluded, "If I'm going to try to understand [Dr. Fauci], it's most likely that he is just intellectually attracted to the vaccines which actually worked out here [regarding COVID-19] in some ways. But there's no reason not to also relay the same kind of effort into early treatment and development."

He went on to say, "I've been telling the people on Fox that the vaccines are great because I am a big advocate of [vaccines]...in January when [the vaccines] came out, I looked at the clinical trial data published in the New England Journal [of Medicine] by Pfizer...it looked like [the vaccine] not only prevented severe disease but also stopped [the infection]—99% efficacy against both. So in January I thought [the vaccine] was going to stop the transmission of the disease. That turned out not to be true. In one sense, the vaccines protect against infection for a short while—[for a couple, 3 or 4 months]—but after a while the efficacy against infection drops very sharply. So for instance I got vaccinated in April of 2021 and then

I got COVID in August of 2021. The vaccines on the other hand seem to have very good efficacy against severe disease—they will keep you out of the hospital. That's not nothing. In fact, that is huge...I wish [the vaccine] would stop transmission but it does not stop transmission."

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He later shared that "[he thinks] that vaccines are the single most important scientific [medical] discovery in history; they've saved countless lives, and I'm a big advocate of them but you have to understand what the science is saying about them and the proper use of them."

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He admitted, "I've served as an expert witness on—I've lost track of how many—cases opposing the vaccine mandate. I think the vaccine mandate is an enormous public health mistake...I think a mandate is justified when you have a vaccine that stops transmission...[so] if I [were to] get vaccinated with a vaccine that stops transmission, I not only benefit myself but [also] you all. I'm...posing less of a threat to you all... there's a public benefit...on the other hand, if you have a vaccine that mainly provides a private benefit but not a public benefit, it's a very different situation. When there's a public benefit, you have...a positive externality...as a result... there's actually going to be less demand than is socially optimal for the vaccine...there you might want a mandate...because people aren't going to want [the vaccine] as much as they ought to and they're not taking into account how much they're protecting others. You may want to induce them to [take it]...this is a vaccine where there is much less of a public benefit and much more of a private benefit. So the economic justification we would normally use doesn't apply with the same amount of force as it normally would for vaccines...the vaccine mandates by themselves on the other hand have imposed enormous harm...there is absolutely overwhelming evidence that if you had COVID and recovered, that you are actually very well-protected from...getting COVID again." Bhattacharya referred to an Italian study that tracked individuals during their COVID-19 recovery and identified a 0.3% rate of re-infection one year later.

“That’s much more complete protection than [what] the vaccines [offer],” Bhattacharya noted. “Many of the people who got COVID [were] essential workers during the epidemic...they were regular working-class people who got COVID and recovered [and] the vaccine mandates put that working-class out of work.” He related that the “vaccine mandate has created an enormous problem for public health, it’s created a huge undercutting of the trust in public health.”

He openly stated, “I sympathize with people who don’t trust public health and its pronouncements...particularly with this denial of natural immunity [conferring] protection. Public health has gone out of its way to deny overwhelming scientific evidence that there is...considerable [natural] protection...so I think the vaccine mandates in this setting undercut trust in public health and do not serve the purpose that people say they would, which is to end the epidemic. Even if 100% of us are vaccinated, COVID will still spread.”

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Dr. Jay Bhattacharya (left) and Dr. Daniel Sem (right) discuss the finer points of COVID-19 response and American liberty.

## And The Darkness of Fear Did Not Understand It

By: Harrison Hulse, Publication Editor

Between different periods of complete and total lockdown, individual quarantine, and moments of tentative freedom, I've had ample opportunity to reflect on humanity's response to the notorious virus that radically transformed the face of humanity—masks and all. I have wondered how it is possible that in our age of incredible scientific achievement and understanding, American society should crumble when confronted with a biological enemy similar to diseases which we've long since overcome. There have certainly been a multitude of factors at play in the events of these past twenty months, but I firmly believe that a significant reason for our failures lies in the cultural and institutional reign of fear over facts. The political lawmakers, leaders, and media personnel whom God has charged to dutifully guide us have conjured up a monstrous cloud of anxiety and distress, hoping that the grave impressions of a true calamity will convince Americans that unprecedented measures must be taken to ensure the safety. I, however, cannot see even the theoretical good which can come about with this approach. For while the umbral haze of fear can only perpetuate itself unto death, the illuminating light of facts and the Truth have proven their ability to uncover a path forward into renewed life during this COVID-19 crisis.

Fear, especially for one's life and future, suffocates the mind and shrouds one's thoughts in a fog of apprehension and despair. As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, fear is "the emotion of pain or uneasiness caused by the sense of impending danger, or by the prospect of some possible evil," (Simpson, 1989). In other words, fear deals with the unknown and intensifies our negative thoughts such that one is gripped in mental paralysis. When gripped in the clutches of fear, the capacity for logical reasoning, long-term planning, and risk assessment is all but non-existent. In the Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics, fear is directly connected to large-scale political decision making. According to the included psychological research, the causes of such politically debilitating fear include low self-

control, low certainty, and low external agency (Wagner, M. et al., 2019). These were all essential components of the news cycle and governmental messaging since the initial lockdowns began and pervaded the conversation during the following years. Fear feeds upon perceived threats and related uncertainties, looming ever larger in one's mind and driving him or her to seek solace of any kind, even death at one's own hand. The specific consequences of fear upon one's decision making are information seeking and conviction references habits. When fear enters the equation, individuals tend to want to seek out more information to reduce uncertainty, yet their judgements concerning this information tend to be much less reliant on foundational convictions and deep-seated reasoning (Wagner, M. et al., 2019). In this way, fear destabilizes and corrodes the mind, leaving it utterly unfit to make prudent decisions about the future.

When my father passed away, fear overwhelmed me and clung to me for weeks after he died. My mind was a roiling sea; emotions and thoughts crashing in on one another, lightning flashes of potential catastrophes and the booming thunder of the words "He's gone" all raged on inside of my skull. My aspirations for college, my future career, marriage prospects and so much more petrified and turned further into stone with every new Dad-shaped crater I discovered in the aftermath. I did not have the mental space necessary to make these important, critical decisions for myself because I was entirely consumed by the fear of what lay next without my father's guiding presence.

In the same way, the fear of COVID-19 and its potentially devastating effects on their lives drove the American response not to a place of preventative action, but crippling inaction. With pure physical survival at the forefront of the conversation thanks to a fear-driven narrative in the news cycle, many governmental actors instituted draconian lockdown measures. With little thought to the other consequences of such a seismic lifestyle shift for the citizen, those in

power pressed on. As time wore on, however, it became apparent that physically confining citizens to their homes only gave birth to new, much greater problems. Prolonged isolation produced catastrophic levels of new mental illness and incidents of suicide among younger people in just the past year—truly a horrifying conclusion to a well-intentioned plan. As a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns and their related messaging, which themselves were inspired out of fear, legions of young people succumbed to serious mental illness and killed themselves, seeing no other escape from a world that appeared to be crumbling around them. According to the CDC itself, “Compared with the rate in 2019, a 31% increase in the proportion of mental health–related emergency department (ED) visits occurred among adolescents aged 12–17 years in 2020,” (Yard, E. et al., 2021). This trend was malignant, for the rate at which these visits occurred only increased as the pandemic progressed:

“Among adolescents aged 12–17 years, mean weekly number of ED visits for suspected suicide attempts were 22.3% higher during summer 2020 and 39.1% higher during winter 2021 than during the corresponding periods in 2019, with a more pronounced increase among females. During winter 2021, ED visits for suspected suicide attempts were 50.6% higher among females compared with the same period in 2019; among males, such ED visits increased 3.7%,” (Yard, E. et al., 2021).

Yet amid an environment drenched in climbing death counts, constant reports of outbreaks across the nation, and paranoia on full display wherever the news was played, a disaster like this was bound to happen. We allowed fear to slip into our national consciousness, and it made our reason worthless once it blinded us to the entire scope of our seemingly clear-cut decisions.

Facts, on the other hand, shine brightly through the darkness of fear and facilitate clear, solutions to even the most precarious problems. Solid information offers firm ground upon which leaders can build complex answers to equally complex issues. While the answers concocted in

this way may not fix everything all at once, they provide a more holistic approach to the problem at hand and account for the whole, sacred, and precious human lives in question. Once certain state and local leaders chose to reevaluate their approach to the pandemic upon learning more about the virus, the situation in their localities improved remarkably. Not only did their case and death counts plummet, but their economies, institutions, and citizenry began to regenerate rapidly. A brand-new report from the National Bureau of Economic Research reveals as much, in which states were ranked on a scale of one to one hundred on the efficacy of their individual COVID-19 responses by measuring effects upon each’s economy, educational system, and mortality (Kerpen, P. et al., 2022). Overall, the authors state that “Several studies find low COVID-19 transmission rates in schools. Herby, Jonung, and Hanke’s (2022) metanalysis finds that lockdowns in Europe and the United States only reduced COVID-19 mortality by 0.2% on average,” and how “Several other studies have found that efforts to reduce COVID mortality had costly unintended consequences,” (Kerpen, P. et al., 2022). Returning to the case of Florida, the state received a score within the top parameters of each category and was especially called out as a primary example of appropriate response habits: “Whether or not political leaders can be considered responsible for mortality outcomes is therefore unclear, although advocates of a “focused protection” strategy have suggested that sheltering the high-risk could reduce overall mortality – an approach adopted by Florida,” (Kerpen, P. et al., 2022). In short, the nuanced, informed decision to focus on protecting the vulnerable while keeping normalcy and regularity a priority for everyone else has illuminated a path out of our current state despite the blanket fire of fearmongering and mass hysteria from all angles.

Yet even this reality misses our greatest misstep of the pandemic. Entrapped in our secularized and materialistic fear, American society has forsaken the firm foundation of God’s grace and truth, which acts as a guiding light not just through trouble and danger, but the only firm foundation in times of plenty as well. Churches were closed en masse to reduce the chance that

the physical disease might spread, but the spiritual disease of sin was free to metastasize in the hearts of many as a result. Even though we may now be emerging from the worst throes of the virus' rampage, we now stand at the precipice of a much graver concern. Psalm 119 implores us to let "Your Word [be] a lamp for [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path." It is imperative, therefore, that we reignite the flame of faith in Jesus Christ which now lies dormant in the hearts of many Americans.

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**Only this hope in our greater salvation through Him, the Word made flesh for our sake, can we carry on in a broken world where disease, war, and discord lie just around the bend.**

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In my pit of despair, God's Word was the only lamp bright enough to light a path through the waves of grief, shame, and regret that would rise and recede in the years which followed. I found that nothing else granted me the sure direction for my wandering feet, the straightforward answers to my bubbling questions, and the unyielding love of Christ which became a healing balm applied directly to my battered and bruised heart. Purely by clinging to the Truth as my life preserver, I forged onwards and followed God's call to study in preparation for the pastoral ministry here at Concordia University Wisconsin. The waves have not gotten any smaller, nor has the thunder become any quieter. Yet as I cleave to the Bible, the darkness around me increasingly fades from view, unable to comprehend the perfect light of Christ which now fills my life.

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# The Foundation of Civility

By: Grace Hemmeke, Editor-in-Chief

*Q [1]. What is your only comfort  
in life and in death?*

*A. That I am not my own,  
but belong—*

*body and soul,  
in life and in death—*

*to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.*

*He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious  
blood,*

*and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.*

*He also watches over me in such a way  
that not a hair can fall from my head  
without the will of my Father in heaven;*

*in fact, all things must work together for my salva-  
tion.*

*Because I belong to him,  
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,  
assures me of eternal life*

*and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready  
from now on to live for him.*

It may be odd to begin a discussion on civility with these words from the Heidelberg Catechism. Civility is often viewed as a peripheral, genteel aspect of life, while worldview and values are central to the identity of a country or culture. However, civility is the fruit of a Biblical worldview; one which roots itself in God's ownership of the universe.

At the foundation of many secular ideas is the belief that before we belong to anyone else, we belong to ourselves. Manifestations of this include the "I don't need no man" mantra of the feminists, the popular changing of wedding vows to omit the word "obey" (Tigar, 2020), and an increase in the culture of self-love or self-care, which, while promoting the value of good stewardship, removes God as the owner and creator of the things which must be stewarded.

In order to bring about a civil society, we must recognize God's kingship over the world. Yet following the West's increasing rejection of God (Lipka, 2015), secular humanists now demand basic human rights and dignity for all without any idea of where these rights come from. Many papers have been written by men, outlining these basic human rights. All of them have failed to recognize Yahweh as the Author of those Rights. Perhaps the most famous and most cited document on ethical guidelines is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which in its very first article attempts to lay the groundwork for every right to which humans are entitled. The authors state that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (United Nations, 1948, art. 1). This article leaves a very important question unanswered: Who endowed humans with reason and conscience? The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, written during the French Revolution, states:

"For these reasons, the National Assembly doth recognize and declare, in the presence of the Supreme Being, and with the hope of his blessing and favour, the following sacred rights of men and of citizens" (National Assembly of France, 1789, para. 2).

Even the French, while chopping off their "divinely appointed" king's head, understood that some higher power existed. Although it is difficult to find a more secular nation than the Republic of France and its Temple of Reason, the United Nations does not even recognize that there might be Something more powerful or more important than humankind.

The American Declaration of Independence offers an insight which seems closest to the Christian worldview, stating famously that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their

Creator with certain unalienable Rights...” (Jefferson, 1776, para. 2). This is somewhat better than the French version, as the Founding Father’s point to the arbiter of human rights, recognizing that the Creator has power to endow what rights He will to His creations. Although the Founding Fathers did not name their Creator, they understood that they had one. Christians further affirm the Bible’s teaching: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27). From that image of God flows all the deserved respect and dignity which the seculars cannot articulate.

The Heidelberg Catechism elaborates on our creation, stating that we belong to God, and furthermore, that this is our only comfort in life. Because we belong to God, our selfish tendencies are shown to be sinful, instead of helpful, as secular culture would have us believe. Oprah Winfrey (n.d.) teaches “The biggest choices begin and end with you.” Jesus teaches: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13). Oprah’s advice is in direct conflict with the Christian worldview. How are we to have respect for the God-given rights of others if we are concerned primarily with our own lives?

Civility is an act of selflessness, though not as dramatic as death. In civil conversation, people are expected to listen, to respond without aggression, and to be peaceable. These actions deny our own selfish instincts and instead show patience with others. All of us have felt the instinct to tell an egotistical bore that the company has heard a story a thousand times before, or the instinct to tell someone exactly what we think of their outdated political views. Yet to be civil to those we disagree with is to be both humble and respectful. Selfish conversationalists are easy to spot, and harmful to any conversation they enter. Without humility, they elevate themselves above everyone and therefore assume that their point of view is the only valid one. Their minds do not entertain any ideas that they dislike or that could cause them to rethink their positions. Extreme versions of selfish conversationalists include

internet trolls and debaters who restate their points without engaging counterarguments. There is no conversation with these people, only a one-sided broadcast of opinion.

Therefore, civil discourse is only possible in a society which is selfless, and which has a virtuous foundation which leads us to respect others. That foundation cannot be “Humanity” alone, for history is rife with the despicable acts of humans. That foundation cannot rely even on a “Supreme Being,” or even a “Creator,” for how are we to understand these vague entities?

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**Rather, the strong foundation of respect must stem from a Biblical love for Christ, co-creator with His Father, selfless Messiah who humbled himself to the point of tortuous death for our undeserving sake.**

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If this is our God, then we have our rules of civility premade, taken to their ultimate ends, and exemplified perfectly for us. The selflessness required for civil discourse leads us to something as equally important as human rights – it leads us to the discovery of truth. Just as Christ’s selflessness gave us the truth of the gospel, so too our smaller selfless acts of civil conversation can show us other truths. Selfless conversation leads to questioning of beliefs, which leads to a better understanding of what is true.

We call this the Great Conversation, which has built much of the philosophy of Western culture. But the West lost its civility when it lost sight of God and took up the refrain of the humanists, that Man is the measure of all things. Civility can be regained by understanding our own smallness in comparison to God. We are told to put ourselves first when we ought to respect others as more worthy than ourselves and extend the love of Christ to those who do not know Him. Civility, in the end, means embracing God as the One to whom we belong, and embracing His image as we find it in our fellow image bearers.

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# CAPITAF Student Program

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## The Role of Social Media in a Civil Society

Transcribed by: Ben Dubke, Senior Editor

*This is a summary of a keynote presentation given by Jaron Lanier at the Liberty, Faith, and Economics Summit at Concordia University Wisconsin in November 2021. Jaron Lanier (pictured left) is a computer scientist, author, and speaker. He coined the term “virtual reality,” and was ranked one of the 25 most influential people in tech by Wired magazine. He is the author of numerous books about life in a high-tech world, including *Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* in 2018.*

### What is Social Media?

Lanier began his presentation by defining “social media.” In its most fundamental sense, social media is any personal connection or communication via the internet, and Lanier sees this broad concept as a net positive for society. He gave the example, “Before the internet, people with unusual diseases couldn’t find each other to compare notes, and then once the internet started working, they could, which is transformative. That’s just one of thousands examples I could come up with.”

What people usually mean by “social media,” however, is a particular business model built around “the science of behavior modification.” Lanier stated, “Behavior modification is measuring what you have experienced and using it in a feedback loop to change what you experience next, in order to modify your behavior in the future, and to have an adaptive algorithm that optimizes itself to find out what kind of change in experience will have an impact on your behavior.” The modern techniques of modifying behavior, also known as operant conditioning, originated in the work of Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. These researchers investigated how they could change animals’ behavior patterns using rewards and punishments, often small candies and electric shocks.

Lanier explained that social media companies used the same principles to manipulate their users: “What Facebook discovered is that instead of candy and electric shocks, you can use vanity and social fears, so when somebody feels like they’ve been liked or followed, or have gone viral for a day, those are the candy. And when someone feels they are the targeted one, or ostracized, or ignored, those are the electric shocks.” Social media companies have developed

algorithms to find more and more reliable ways to keep users on their platforms, all with the goal of increasing profits from advertising. The algorithms they employ have discovered that social pressures are very effective methods to reach that goal. Lanier went on, “People are social creatures—we think together, our genetic heritage is to be together and to think together—so social pleasure and social pain are not arbitrary or incidental. They are profound and central to our experience of life.”

### The Lizard Brain

What is the problem with this business model? In order to find the most efficient doses of social pleasure and pain, the algorithms must constantly evaluate themselves by tracking any changes to users’ behavior. Lanier explained, “The responses that you can read from people... tend to be the pretty dramatic ones, like if you click on something a lot or hover over something or comment on something, and it’s right in real-time so that the algorithm can understand what the cause was that created that effect.” The actions the algorithms can track tend to be governed by the brain’s instantaneous “fight-or-flight” response, cognitive activity which Lanier termed “the lizard brain.” Over long periods of repeated exposure, social media users’ thought patterns begin to shift. In Lanier’s words, “If you’re exciting the lizard brain a lot, you make people into lizards.”

Lanier went on to describe the effects of the lizard brain, “This is the problem that you gradually bring out the worst in people, where you have this totally contextless, weird, triggered response that is a normal part of being human, but normally wouldn’t happen so much. When you’re under a behavior modification regime, there’s this effect on you that you become a little

more vain, a little more socially nervous, a little more socially fearful, a little more aggressive, a little more xenophobic, a little more irritable, a little more paranoid.” Lanier was careful to say that all these qualities existed in people before the age of social media. Social media does not immediately transform all its users’ personalities, but it exaggerates these parts of human behavior. It causes an overall, ambient change in how the population thinks and acts.

Lanier claimed that removing the social media algorithms would improve our society and reduce the characteristics associated with the lizard brain. He admitted this is difficult to prove because all the experimental data is kept under lock and key by the social media companies who first discovered the business model, especially Facebook. Nevertheless, researchers occasionally decide to whistle blow, and “from the little peeks we’ve had of their research, we know that these algorithms do have a profound effect.”

### **Social Media and Civil Discourse**

Lanier argued for a correlation between social media and the apparent paucity of civil discourse. He explained, “There’s always been societies becoming more or less civil at different times...It’s not that we’re necessarily seeing the worst that there’s ever been of humanity—we’re certainly not. We’re seeing a simultaneous, global effect, and that is actually different.” He even noted, “It usually happens within a few years of the Facebook brand becoming big in a given country or region.” On a broad scale, “All these places in the world that were kind of doing better in terms of democracy and civility and rational approaches to problems all started to get nuts at the same time, and that is the correlation that leads right to the door of Facebook and a few other platforms.”

Lanier also connected the lack of civil discourse online to the massive wealth and social influence concentrated in tech companies. He theorized, “I think that [concentration of wealth and influence] leads many people around the world to have this strange feeling of their own futures being stolen. People wonder if they’ll be obsolete, if their children will be obsolete. There’s

kind of a general lack of belief in a path toward a future, which is something that is absolutely essential to civilization, and I think that’s a sort of correlate of the success of the lizard brain methodology. It’s kind of robbed people of hope on some level.” Lanier then tied this issue back to civil discourse, “If you turn the economy into a competition of who can manipulate who, and there’s network effects...this does rob people of their futures in a material and real sense, and when you combine that with the lizard brain amplification, I think that that’s a lot of why it’s become so difficult to have conversations or to think or talk lately.”

### **The Chinese Model**

Two coexisting models have emerged of using social media to control populations. Lanier termed them the “Silicon Valley model” and the “Chinese model.” The American corporations of Silicon Valley use their influence to manipulate their users’ beliefs and behaviors, but according to Lanier: “[Silicon Valley-style technocracy] tries to keep an arm’s length from specific events. For instance...it’s not the most common thing for a Silicon Valley figure to directly intervene and try to prefer certain opinions to others or to suppress certain things.”

The Chinese model, however, “is kind of based on [direct intervention].” Although the Chinese model shares similar algorithms and personnel with the Silicon Valley model, “In the Chinese model there’s an additional belief that you can and should control specific communication—speech about Tibet, or Taiwan, or the Uyghurs—the things that are hot buttons for the Chinese Communist Party.” Lanier went on, “Despite believing in that first-order, concrete controlling of content, using an enormous army of content controllers—that is not typical of the Western model—everything else is similar. The degree of power concentration, wealth concentration, influence concentration that happens in the Silicon Valley model is similar to what the Communist Party can achieve with their system. It’s somewhat more abstractly applied, but the difference is probably less than the similarity.”

Lanier argued that China’s cyberactivity presents some geopolitical concerns for the United States. Although very few people, if any, have full knowledge of China’s strategy in its complexities and contingencies, he offered a few general impressions of China’s goals, “[China] thinks in long terms, and a lot of senior people in China are still upset about [being slighted in recent centuries] and feel that China should naturally be atop the world order...I actually think China has a view of the future of a world that works overall that they don’t necessarily control completely. I think what they would like is to have a world that makes them rich, but I don’t think they want to be administering Chile or something...I do want to say that we have a national security issue with allowing China to enter the platform war so successfully...If you own TikTok, there are so many things you could do. There are so many ways to be an evil mastermind if you own TikTok.”

### **Cancel Culture / Free Speech**

Social media can seem like a contributor to free speech because almost anyone can post almost anything they like. Lanier pointed out, however, that this environment is actually damaging for productive discourse, “What looks like free speech is not. Real free speech can only happen with a little bit of friction and a little bit of structure...so there’s a little bit of a chance that someone will hear what somebody said.” He used the analogy of a soap box to explain that the volume of content on social media drowns out those seeking to speak constructively, “If you want to shut down a public square where people can get up on a soap box and speak freely, one way to do it would be to arrest the people on the soap box, but the more efficient way would be to hand out bullhorns to every single person in the audience.”

Cancel culture is often characterized as an enemy of free speech online. Lanier expressed a nuanced view of cancel culture, saying, “I often find myself...in sympathy with the impulse, [but] often feeling that the execution of cancellation is not productive and often more destructive than it needs to be, and often not ultimately achieving the benefits that the people achieving it are hoping

for.” He mentioned the “Me Too” and Black Lives Matter movements as examples of social justice movements that tangibly improved the real world, in part by using cancellation. Lanier also speculated at the deeper roots of cancel culture, “I think that a lot of the younger people who get involved in cancel culture circles on Twitter... are fighting a looming fear of powerlessness and irrelevance in the society, and [cancel culture] gives them a foothold on relevance and power, which of course everybody wants.”

### **Data Dignity**

What is the alternative to social media’s present form? Can people interact online apart from the current system built around advertising and behavior manipulation? For years, Lanier has been a proponent of an alternative model called “data dignity.” He explained, “In data dignity... you treat any data that exists because a person exists—in other words, any piece of data that wouldn’t exist if a given person didn’t exist... [as] inseparably owned by them. They have moral rights to it...It becomes a part of them, just like a part of their body to which they have rights. However, what they can do is they can join into a confederation with other people to create an organization with enough power to bargain for licensing arrangements for their data.” These organizations are called “mediators of individual data” (MIDs).

According to Lanier, MIDs should take the place of social media corporations, “They’re the first entities that can exist on the internet that can actually advocate for people, because right now there’s no one positioned to have fiduciary responsibility for people—there’s no one positioned to be an advocate of any kind.” Currently, social media is “a brutal, extractive thing” because the corporations serve their own interests, not users’. Also, competition on social media tends to be winner-take-all. Lanier argued that a MID would soften this effect: “If there are a million wannabe influencers and only a thousand of them become really successful influencers, according to whatever was negotiated within the governance of that MID, it might be the case that [the winners of the game] benefit quite a lot...”

but not to the total expense of everybody else. Everybody else gets at least a little bit.”

Lanier likened data dignity to the Total Quality Management movement in business. Launched by the work of W. Edwards Deming in the 1980s, this was an effort to improve manufacturing using quality control. According to Lanier, Deming’s breakthrough was that “this information has to not just go to engineers and owners...It has to go to the workers in the factory lines so they can improve what they do with knowledge.” The same idea should be applied to today’s high-tech world. Oftentimes, tech companies enlist users to generate data without ever telling them the data’s purpose. Lanier gave the example of CAPTCHA games, which require users to identify all the tiles that contain fire hydrants, or stoplights, or some other object. This is an approach Google uses, without telling users, to gain free data to improve its AI for self-driving cars. On the other hand, “With MIDs, people can become aware of what the purpose of data is and improve it.”

Lanier closed his presentation by describing his vision of a thriving online world. “Let’s say in the future there’ll be thousand, tens of thousands of new types of robots and new types of algorithms that are doing this and that. Whenever someone hears about one of those, instead of saying, ‘My jobs going to be obsolete. What will my children do? What will their children do?’ they’ll say, ‘This is a great opportunity—I’m going to join the MID and make the data for that thing better and get paid for it and be proud of it. I’m going to make it more creative, and it’s going to be like a new art form.’ Instead of just solving one problem in a boring way once, it becomes an eternal new platform of creativity for an open-ended culture that goes on forever. That transformation is what hope has to look like in a high-tech society. I don’t think there’s any other way. That’s data dignity.”

# Social Media: A Scarily Evolving Reality

By: Tyler Zacho, Guest Contributor

Ever since the turn of the century, technology has been continually growing, thrusting the world into a reality where smartphones, social media posts, and constant exposure to new information are simply a part of everyday life. As the internet and social media have grown hand in hand, society's ability to connect with others, listen to varying viewpoints, and share thoughts through these global platforms has forever altered the way people communicate and exchange information with each other. Messages and ideas that may have historically taken months or years to spread, can now be seen receiving millions of views in just a matter of hours and days. This raises the question of what the long-term impacts of this alteration will be, how it will change over time, and whether it's even a good thing. These are valid questions, and although this explosion in technology has brought many new convenient abilities to the world, it's increasingly important to consider the negatives, and what the risks of this evolving concept entail. Social media has endless possibilities, many of which have and can continue to enhance the world into the future. However, society's inability to separate virtuality from reality and to discern fact from fiction on these platforms will ultimately determine whether or not they're used for good.

There are currently 4.2 billion active social media users, or in other words, a little over half of the entire global population (Johnson, 2021). This is tough to fully conceptualize but is very telling of the influence that social media has on the world. Individuals from a variety of cultures, ethnicities, age groups, and belief systems use these platforms. Considering this, social media must expose individuals to a wide variety of ideas and content, oftentimes different from their own personally held beliefs, right? Wrong, quite the opposite. Regardless of the social media platform being discussed, they all use machine learning algorithms, which are capable of analyzing your actions on their platform to identify your interests, behaviors, and concerns to suggest and present content

to you that you'll enjoy (T.K. et al., 2021). Along these same lines, former workers of these social media conglomerates such as Tristan Harris, a former Google executive, have started to warn the public about how these platforms intentionally incorporate addictive qualities into their products to take advantage of their users' weaknesses and keep them hooked (Harris, 2017). This continues indefinitely, meaning that the more you use social media, the more data they collect from you, and the more they can refine what appears on your feed. As a result, everybody who uses social media ultimately ends up in their own personal echo chamber of content, where strongly held beliefs are reinforced, biases are fortified, and exposure to opposing ideas is minimized. It's the ultimate paradox, where the more you use social media platforms, which house a wide variety of users with differing beliefs, the less likely you are to be exposed to new ideas and content that differs from what you typically see.

One might conclude that because social media platforms have built-in algorithms made to show specific content that they think their users will agree with and find appealing, this should have a positive impact on them, shouldn't it? Well, that doesn't appear to be the case, at least as far as mental health goes. Social media use has been found to have a negative effect on anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep quality, thoughts of self-harm and suicide, psychological distress, cyberbullying, body image dissatisfaction, fear of missing out, and life satisfaction (Sadagheyani et al., 2020). This is the grim reality of social media which these platforms won't tell you about, an unknown risk that arises when you go to create your Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account. Social media skews our view of reality and makes it difficult for many individuals to assess what's typical versus what's abnormal in the world around them. For example, social media serves as a platform to share personal accolades for many, whether that be the purchase of a new car, a post about a job promotion they just received, or photos from their destination wedding last weekend. In

other words, these same individuals are unlikely to post about the argument they had with their spouse last night or the credit card payments they've fallen behind on. Overall, individuals only post what they want everyone else to see, while hiding what they don't. All in all, the individuals who view these posts are likely to obtain a skewed understanding of the life of the poster, as their true reality is hidden behind the facade of their social media profile. As the previously mentioned research suggests, the impact of this can be detrimental. Furthermore, society's ability to interact with one another and participate in civil discourse is dependent upon a certain level of truth and understanding. However, an altered understanding of each other's livelihoods due to the false perceptions given off by social media has the potential to hinder the world's ability to understand and interact with each other effectively.

Social media is here to stay, and the ramifications of its use will perpetuate for decades to come, reverberating throughout the various generations of individuals who utilize this ever-growing technology. This has and will continue to shape the way people view the world, and consequently, themselves, specifically with regard to their self-image. The potential of this technology is unmatched and has had instances of creating wonderfully beautiful moments. However, the world cannot allow itself to ignore social media's undeniable pitfalls and the negative aspects of its existence which are continually influencing the lives of its billions of users globally. Ultimately, the impact of social media on humankind as a whole will come down to one thing and one thing only, the intent and social awareness of its users. Will they rise to identify and address the failures which social media has exposed thus far, or will they remain blind, within a lifestyle filled with mindlessly scrolling and liking posts? That question remains unanswered, yet its potential solution lies within the hearts and minds of the next generation of social media users.

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# The Critical Role of Social Media

By: Natalie Bodnar, Senior Editor

In a very tangible way, social media has become an extension of the democratic process by encouraging participation in civil discourse. Freedom of speech thus perpetuates the spirit of a free republic by enabling expression of life, liberty, and happiness. While the advent of big tech has radically transformed how individuals have expressed themselves, the desire to engage in public debate and express opinions has only grown stronger. Today, billions participate in this marketplace of ideas by sharing content, photos, and websites that facilitate dialogue and encourage debate on topics ranging from public health to education to economic growth. Through healthy debate and exchange, the pursuit of truth—rather than popularity—is maintained. The great American experiment relies on such uninhibited discourse because without debate, there can be no exercise of reason, no discipline of thought and opinion, no defense of liberty. Truth ultimately prevails in a civil society that honors an individual’s inalienable rights. When individuals shirk their civic responsibilities and fail to participate in this experiment, free speech atrophies. By enabling constant discussion, questioning, and public engagement, media outlets serve a critical role in preserving freedom.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, however, social media has failed to provide an objective platform for the marketplace of ideas, controlling instead both the content and means of communication in the name of the public good. A 2020 study completed by the Pew Research Center, for example, revealed that nearly 75% of U.S. adults believe social media and big tech intentionally censor political viewpoints. In his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Scottish economist Adam Smith likewise expresses concern when this “ideal [censored] society” is created and arranged at the expense of individual freedom. Austrian economist and philosopher Friedrich A. Hayek also warns of a fatal conceit that values oneness of mind over diversity of thought. Hayek retorted that such a civil body would “not be very complex but extremely primitive.” Truly, controlling the content of

speech limits the flourishing of a free society by removing the ability to question a fallible status quo and petition public authorities, governments, and officials for redress of grievances. There is no discourse, only silence.

Defending the free market, Hayek would further argue that the problem lies not in allocating resources or public favor but in the nature of knowledge itself. His article, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” demonstrates that all of human knowledge is scattered across countless market actors in a free society and that each actor holds a small fragment of knowledge particular to time, place, and experience. Only through free exchange does the actor reveal his limited knowledge to others: it is by revealing and sharing this limited knowledge that individuals are able to promote the public good.

When the liberty to freely share this knowledge on social media platforms is unilaterally censored, a pre-established narrative—not truth and critical thinking—dominates. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his *The Gulag Archipelago* warns his readers of the final result of such relentless censorship of freedom: “We forget everything. What we remember is not what actually happened, not history, but merely that hackneyed dotted line they have chosen to drive into our memories by incessant hammering.” Ultimately, the cost of overt censorship is liberty. When people of good will knowingly remain silent and fail to voice reason, they surrender liberty: ultimately, tyranny reigns sovereign.

Furthermore, no true academic or personal freedom exists when individuals dare not break away from the mold of societal conformity due to fear of retribution. Free speech rapidly degrades when individuals continue to engage in self-censorship rather than self-expression. When individualism is targeted on social media platforms, for example, the orthodoxy of mainstream ideas provides irresistible security: what once served as the means of promoting freedom now halts reason and self-governance. While the Asch Conformity Study of 1951 is not directly related to the use of social media, the

Study's conclusions demonstrate that individuals may knowingly deny what they witness firsthand when their perception of reality does not align with what the majority purports to be both true and acceptable. In other words, the fear of being rejected as a deviant or enemy to the public good motivates individuals to betray values, consciences, and truth in order to align with whatever is socially acceptable—even if they fundamentally disagree on philosophical, moral grounds. Group-think and herd mentality thus betray limitless power and influence because collectivist thinking becomes immune to individual scrutiny and offers protection from public shaming. Rather than thriving in a free society, ideas are banished into an underground black market of suppressed ideologies. James Buchanan warns that sacrificing individual freedom for the sake of such security reveals that many are “afraid to be free.”

Liberty indeed comes with great responsibility and while difficult to defend, challenges each individual to rise to the virtue of self-governance even when doing so remains unpopular. As an extended platform of the democratic process, social media may in fact strengthen the moral backbone of a free society by encouraging discussion and diversity of thought.

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# Taking Back Control

By: Ben Dubke, Senior Editor

In 1934, T.S. Eliot wrote, “Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” (1970, p. 147). Today, it is harder than ever to draw knowledge from our vast stores of information and to distill our knowledge into true wisdom. Sometimes, it seems like enormous tech companies control our access to information, our political discourse, our economic decisions, and our mental well-being. But with careful consideration of how social media operates, we can overcome big tech companies’ far-reaching influence by using social media with more discernment.

Social media has benefitted our society in many ways. The Internet allows us to create and store massive amounts of data, and the rise of social media has enabled every individual user to create information and share it widely. Platforms like Twitter have democratized civil discourse by enabling any person to publicize his opinions and ideas, and platforms like Facebook allow users to maintain contact with family, friends, and colleagues, even when separated by great distances. Across the Internet, people are finding meaningful communities and contributing to important causes.

In the early days of the Internet, the prospect of benefits like these caused an idealistic vision of what the world would become once everyone was connected online. Singer and Brooking quote Twitter cofounder Evan Williams, “I thought once everybody could speak freely and exchange information and ideas, the world [was] automatically going to be a better place” (2018, p. 19). Like Williams, many people imagined the Internet and social media would enrich people’s lives, facilitate free speech for all, and help democracy sweep across the globe. We now know these utopian predictions were unrealistic. Social media has also been used to livestream terrorist attacks, to obstruct democratic elections, and to drive teenagers to suicide. The Internet has exponentially multiplied our data and information,

but whether it will enrich our knowledge and wisdom remains to be seen.

We can never return to a pre-Internet world, but neither can we afford to let the Internet shape our world without cautious consideration. A full understanding of social media’s effects, both positive and negative, demands inspection of its underlying business model. Social media services are typically free to users, so tech companies rely on advertising for revenue. Social media companies have two mechanisms to increase this revenue stream: maximizing the effectiveness of each advertisement to change the user’s behavior and increasing the number of advertisements to which users are exposed by keeping them on the platform for as much time as possible.

The key to social media’s effectiveness in advertising is targeting advertisements to specific users. Social media corporations employ sophisticated algorithms which track every user’s actions, create detailed personality profiles for each user, and select which advertisements will most effectively alter each user’s behavior. Shoshana Zuboff, professor emeritus at Harvard Business School, terms this system “surveillance capitalism” (2019). She writes, “With a new generation of research tools [Facebook] learned to plunder your ‘self’ right through to your most intimate core” (Zuboff, 2019, pp. 270-271). Most people have experienced this phenomenon at a basic level. They might search Google for a product or service, then notice an advertisement for the same product appear on their Facebook page.

The extent of targeted advertising on social media goes far beyond this rudimentary example, though. Zuboff explains:

“We are not scrutinized for substance but for form...It is not what is in your sentences but in their length and complexity, not what you list but that you list, not the picture but the choice of filter and degree of saturation, not what you disclose but how you share or fail to, not where you make plans to see your

friends but how you do so: a casual ‘later’ or a precise time and place?” (2019, p. 274)

Data about a user’s activity on social media is so effective because it is almost impossible for the user to withhold or manipulate. A user trying to protect his privacy could choose not to post certain information, but even this restraint will be noticed by the algorithms and used to devise advertisements to which the user is even more susceptible. Targeted social media advertising is dangerous because it enables social media companies to unobtrusively shape users’ behavior without their knowledge.

The other way social media corporations boost advertising revenue is keeping users glued to their platforms for as long as possible. They have been especially effective in catering to the psychological vulnerabilities of young people. Adolescents are dependent on their peers for social approval; they are still developing their individual identity as distinct from the surrounding group (Erikson, 1963, pp. 261-263). Social media captivates so many young people because it quantifies in terms of their “likes” and “friends” how well they satisfy their desire to belong. This accords social media corporations not only more revenue, but also more influence over how users think and feel.

The development of echo chambers reveals another danger of social media. Singer and Brooking argue that echo chambers emerge because of people’s tendency toward confirmation bias: “The real source of these digital echo chambers is again deeply rooted in the human brain. Put simply, people like to be right; they hate to be proven wrong” (2018, p. 125). Klein adds that echo chambers provide a safe community which reinforces the user’s preexisting views (2020, p. 158). Tightly-knit online communities—from flat-earthers to the alt-right to ISIS terrorists—have flourished through social media’s ability to bring together interested people and surround them with content that supports their views. By handicapping our ability to think critically, echo chambers have prevented the Internet from becoming a place of robust civil discourse.

Then again, it is easy to overstate the effects of echo chambers. Users rarely exist in such a tightly sealed online bubble that they have no exposure to opposing views. In fact, Stephens-Davidowitz argues that people are more likely to encounter opposing views online than in their everyday offline lives. He summarizes:

“The average liberal may spend her mornings with her liberal husband and liberal kids; her afternoon with her liberal coworkers; her commute surrounded by liberal bumper stickers; her evening with her liberal yoga classmates. When she comes home and peruses a few conservative comments on *cnn.com* or gets a Facebook link from her Republican high school acquaintance, this may be her highest conservative exposure of the day,” (2017, pp. 144-145).

The danger of echo chambers is not absolute lack of exposure to opposing views, but the way we respond when we do encounter them. Instead of sincerely considering the reasoning behind opposing views, we often become even more resistant to them. Much of the outrage online is due to human’s psychological aversion to being proven wrong, combined with social media’s ability to connect us with people who confirm our existing views.

What can we do about all these challenges social media presents? How can we engage the online world with more wisdom? The first step is awareness of the dangers. When we use social media, we must remember that the platform’s business model relies on captivating our attention for as long as possible and manipulating our behavior with targeted advertising. We should be mindful of our cognitive biases and preconceptions when we interact with others online. We should recognize how online content provokes certain emotional impulses. As we become more self-aware of our online habits and how social media affects us, we can begin to resist in simple, common-sense ways. We can be slower to share extreme content, get out of our echo chambers, and intentionally seek out perspectives that balance our cognitive biases. We can create boundaries for our social media use

and invest in offline hobbies and relationships. Simple steps like these can help social media users take back control of our decision-making and emotional well-being.

Social media itself is neither good nor bad. Rather, social media is a neutral medium which reveals the good and the bad of the people who operate and use it.

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Social media shows that we are social beings who depend upon each other for approval; we resist information that contradicts our current assumptions; we are capable of both incredible good and gut-wrenching evil.

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Social media can seem like a vast, amorphous force no one can control, but it is nothing more than the collective creation of its designers, moderators, and users. Social media is a double-edged sword, that is continually being redirected with every post, view, and share. It is up to each of us to use this tool for good.

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# Diversity: A Dialogue on Definition, Importance, and Use

By: Business and Marketing Editor Isaiah Mudge and Guest Contributor De'Shawn Ford

## Introduction (Isaiah Mudge)

The following article is an example of civil discourse between myself and De'Shawn Ford. At the moment of my writing this introduction, neither De'Shawn nor I know the opinions of the other on the topics below. Furthermore, neither of us will read the other essay until we have written our own. The exercise will be for each of us to convey our thoughts in a cool-headed, clear, and concise manner. We will then each provide a number of brief questions for the other to answer. The goal of the exercise is to demonstrate healthy dialogue. In this polarized time, De'Shawn and I will each try to genuinely understand the other person's perspective.

When we question each other at the end, our questions will be either to improve our own understanding, or to challenge the other person to consider something he has not thought of before. In either case we are acting out of genuine care and respect for the other person. We sincerely hope you, the reader, will do likewise.

The content of the article will center on the word diversity, which has been at the heart of extensive debate and distress at CUW. De'Shawn and I will write on our thoughts according to the following outline:

- a. Please give a working definition for the word diversity.
- b. What is the importance of using this word, to what extent should we ensure that it continues to be used in dialogue?
- c. Is it possible for this word to be abused or misused, so that we should be cautious about how we use it?
- d. CUW is a Christian university. What special considerations should we have regarding the word on account of this (both in use and implementation)?

“Use and Implementation” in Item d means we will discuss both the word and what it means. For example, we will both discuss our thoughts on

using the word “diversity” and we will discuss the actual presence of diversity on this campus.

For Reference: De'Shawn Ford is a Junior at CUW studying Psychology and Spanish. He is the President of the Black Student Union and the Vice President of Psychology club. Isaiah Mudge is also a Junior at CUW, he is studying Philosophy and Theological Languages. He is the President of the Pre-Seminary Student Association, Vice President of Philosophy Club, and a member of the Quaestus editorial board.

## De'Shawn Ford: On Diversity

*Diversity*. Merriam-Webster (2022) defines Diversity as “having or being composed of differing elements.” When one thinks of the word, they are inevitably drawn to a key component of its definition: Difference. When one uses diversity in reference to other people, the differences they are referring to can be any number of things, ranging from skin color to sexual orientation. In her series of essays titled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” black, lesbian essayist and poet Audre Lorde (2018) states that “difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.” Though these words were written in the 1970s, they ring true even in our modern times. Differences serve as the basis of beautiful inventions and innovative creations. They can serve as the foundation for learning, as long as one is willing to accept another perspective. In this way, they can promote healthy, efficient communication between people. Difference has always been a defining characteristic of progress in its truest form. Differences are what makes humanity unique and can and should serve as the basis for appreciation. Diverse beliefs, thoughts, cultures, races, and opinions serve as arguably the most important contributor to monumental change throughout the history of nations across the world. Embracing diversity can protect vulnerable people, particularly minorities, from abuse at the hands of

those in positions of power. Diversity reminds a nation of the multitude of differences that make up its fabric and to appreciate these differences. This is what I will reference as the “true” meaning of diversity throughout this paper.

I do not believe that many people I have met and spoken to about matters related to diversity would disagree with this assertion. But recently “diversity” and its use have been matters of controversy at Concordia. In the aforementioned use of diversity, differences serve as bridges that connect people and fundamentally change the world for the better. However, it is undeniable that the word “diversity” has also recently been used and associated with political agendas that deviate from its true purpose. It has been used as a buzzword for corporate companies and article headlines. Some groups, most notably civil rights organizations, have used “diversity” and other words, as a means to garner support for a particular agenda.

Before I continue, I believe it is important to note that corruption of diversity’s meaning is not unique to these groups. Diversity has frequently been used as a means through which to divide and separate people throughout American history. This use of diversity is what I refer to as the “them and us” use of the word. There are two ways in which diversity has been used to further divide and separate people throughout American history. Lawmakers and politicians highlighted only the challenges and changes that arise as a result of the acceptance of diversity in its true sense. They preyed on the natural fear of the unknown and the new that is a fundamental characteristic of human nature. This fear resulted in the creation of the infamous Jim Crow Laws, the practice of redlining, and the superpredator theory. These different principles established whites as the ingroup and others as the outgroup, “Them and Us.”

Political initiatives based on the importance of diversity can and have done good for underrepresented populations, such as the NAACP’s fight for the integration of schools in the famous Brown vs Board of Education case (NAACP, 2021). However, the use of words like “diversity” coupled with political agendas and stances changes the context of the word, an

important component of its definition. It begins to corrupt the true nature of the word. This corruption of the word presents a number of issues. Most notably, it creates barriers instead of bridges and prevents the very appreciation that is essential for growth.

Diversity then becomes a “them or us” concept, rather than a “we” concept. It becomes a point of contention, as opposed to a point of conversation and conflict resolution among different groups of people. When someone says that they “don’t support Black Lives Matter Organization” (important to note that the organization is separate from the movement here), it is common that someone might assume they must be against diversity, when in fact this could not be the case. It may simply be that an individual does not support a portion of the organization’s political agenda, but that same individual may attend every rally and speak out against systemic racism against Black Americans, much like someone who supports the organization itself. In the end, these individuals are fighting for the same true appreciation of diversity but subscribe to different political beliefs.

There is an important distinction to make between the “diversity” tied to political agendas and its true form. A true appreciation of diversity is not political in and of itself, but can and often does affect political change. Understanding differences requires careful discussion, but the “all or nothing” belief which comes as a result of viewing diversity through a corrupted lens creates a barrier to this understanding.

The issue at hand here seems to be one surrounding the two contexts in which diversity may be used. The first is what I have previously described as its true meaning, as a means through which love and acceptance of differences fuels a greater good for humanity. The second, more dangerous context in which “diversity” is used is in the context of being supplementary to a group or an organization’s beliefs or political agenda, wherein becomes a separator. It makes dialogue surrounding the term divisive, not inclusive. It fuels a “them versus us” mentality, fueling a desire to be proven right and win rather than to learn and grow. An understanding of this dangerous misconstrual provides a potential explanation for

the recent controversy surrounding the word.

As I mentioned before, for centuries of American history, differences have been used by those in power as a stopping point, something to be called out and used to separate. As a response, many minority cultures' existences rest on the celebration of the very differences used to once discriminate and separate from the rest of the country. Langston Hughes' "I, Too" and James Baldwin's "Untitled" are two examples of embracing such differences. Both poems speak to the challenges of having to exist in a country that has systematically been set up to ensure your failure because of your difference, in this case, Hughes' blackness and Baldwin's homosexuality as a black man. Thus, a criticism of CUW's desire for a president who supports diversity by white, Christian students and faculty was perceived as an attack on not only the terminology but on the people whose being has become tied to the very word (Prospectus, 2021). It feels to some like an attack on the struggles of minorities and those are different from the perceived Christian ideal.

Because of the political agendas and organizations that "diversity" is popularly attributed to, Christians may have found it concerning that the institution would support it. This is understandable and such concerns can be considered warranted as it relates to faith. But, Concordia's support of diversity, if it was used in the first context, is supported by faith, and should not represent a cause for concern (Gal. 3:28). Concordia's acknowledgment of diversity then represents a future to look forward to, but not one without change. If this is the case, I believe that change is certainly a contributor to the issue at hand here then, because to accept the true meaning of diversity is to accept change and be willing to do the work required to respect differences.

Moving forward, we must come to understand the context of our language. It is not only essential but a prerequisite for reaching true understanding. We should seek to appreciate differences, not fear them. Diversity should serve as the basis for creation, not destruction. It should open doors, not close them. We should listen to the stories it has to tell, the lessons it has to teach. They will be what saves us from our own ignorance.

## Isaiah's Questions for De'Shawn

Isaiah: In your introduction you write that differences "can serve as the foundation for learning, as long as one is willing to accept another perspective." To what extent must we accept other perspectives to have productive differences in a diverse society? Can I disagree with someone else's perspective, even disagree with things foundational to their identity, and still respect them?

De'Shawn: I think that if we want to have productive differences, we must be willing to fully accept another perspective. I'll explain this in a little more detail because I see where this may be confusing. I believe that we are able to accept perspectives freely, in the same way in which we can accept opinions, without agreeing with or internalizing those opinions. One can accept the way that another is interpreting something (perspective) without agreeing with their perception.

Now, as it relates to things foundational to another's identity, I think that the same train of thought applies, though this naturally takes on a more personal tone. I also think it is important that we not make snap judgements when it comes to perspectives, or even opinions. It is important to ask careful questions and take the time to understand others, because there are so many things that contribute to the way that we interpret the world around us (e.g. race, gender, economic status, sexuality). To respect another person is to give "due regard for their feelings, wishes, rights or traditions," and I fully believe that it can be possible to respect others, even when disagreeing with their perception of the world.

I'll use sexuality as an example. I think that it is certainly possible to respect different perspectives of sexuality, even as a Christian. I say this because our sexuality is not defined solely by choice, but by a number of different components and contributing factors (e.g. genetics, developmental background, etc.) (APA, 2022) (Scott, 2021). I am personally not a follower of the LCMS. But I believe that, logically speaking, the same attitudes and approaches that the LCMS

utilizes against homosexuality, considering it frames it as a choice (again, simply not the case, at least not the complete one), should therefore be applied to other sins or transgressions as well, but this is simply not what is done. If one can pick and choose what they adhere to in this sense, then the entire foundation of the faith ought to be re-examined.

Isaiah: In your final body paragraph you write, “to accept the true meaning of diversity is to accept change and be willing to do the work required to respect differences.” What is the work we must do to respect differences? For instance, the LCMS perspective on homosexuality is “to help the individual to bear his/her burden without fear of recrimination and rejections by his/her sisters and brothers in Christ,” but also very clearly that “homosexual behavior is contrary to God’s Word and will,” (LCMS, 2022). Can CUW as an institution hold this view while still respecting diversity among its students? Do students who believe Christians are wrong on this have a duty to respect the beliefs of the Christians too?

De’Shawn: I believe it is the responsibility of CUW as an institution that is home to a diverse range of students and staff, to respect and care for all of the students under its umbrella, so to speak. I believe that Concordia can say, “We don’t agree with your sexuality, but you acknowledge that you exist within the bounds of our institution, and so we respect you as a human.” In this way, Concordia is able to care for these students, and provide them with relevant resources and support, regardless of their beliefs. This is the work that I am referencing. Understanding different perspectives and accepting challenges to your beliefs is an actual act of work, as it consumes mental energy and requires intentional effort, a fact corroborated by psychological principles. It is possible to consider and respect different views without compromising on your own.

As this relates to an institution, there is also the obvious financial considerations as well. Concordia does not, and likely will never, screen the students that pay them to attend the

school. There is no questionnaire or labeling on applications that explicitly states, “if you have committed these sins or believe in this, we will not accept your money or application.” If an institution is willing to accept tuition from an individual of a diverse background, I believe they not only can, but must support those students and at the very least, attempt to understand and respect their perspective. It ties back to what I said about respecting differences, it requires accepting and acknowledging challenges to the way one views the world. Providing resources and platforms for those under one’s care or institution is not, and should not be seen as, the same as outright endorsement. I believe that this absolutely works both ways and requires the same approach on both sides of the argument.

### **Isaiah Mudge: On Diversity**

*Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.* This is an African proverb, one learned by my parents during their ten years of missionary service in West Africa. What it means is this: withhold judgement. Wait, listen, and see, until you think you genuinely understand both sides. Your first goal is not to determine what you think is true, it is to learn what you may not already know. The wisdom of this saying is important for Americans to hear, given the frantic pace of life that we are known for. Perhaps if we slow down and really listen, his story will be good also. It is important for people to hear perspectives from different cultures and backgrounds so that they do not become entrenched in the things which their culture assumes. This is what writers such as C.S. Lewis mean when they encourage the reading of old books from different times, and this new perspective is the greatest gift which diversity brings to a culture (Lewis, 2022).

The Merriam-Webster definition of diversity is, “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements,” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Primarily this word is used regarding cultural and racial differences, and the presence of diversity brings the unique gifts mentioned above. Differences between people are normal and healthy. They help to teach people to communicate with one another, and the differences in belief and opinion cause a mutual sharpening of thought between people so long as they are speaking with and learning from each other. Diversity of thought, belief, opinion, race, creed, and culture forces a nation to endure conflict, to reconcile, and to grow. On a personal level, embracing diversity is important in protecting the various members of people groups, especially races, which have been treated as inferior and harmed. Use of the word “diversity,” itself is important for a nation to remind itself of the value in its differences and to stay keyed-in to different perspectives and outlooks on life. *Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.*

I have never spoken with a person who disagreed with the points stated above regarding the goodness and importance of a diverse and respectful nation. Yet, there has been an outcry recently with the use of the word “diversity,” at Concordia. The reason for this is that there are two primary ways in which “diversity” can be used. The first is the one named above, wherein diversity represents people of broad backgrounds all respected and listened to. I believe everyone I have ever met at CUW supports this. The second is identical to the first, but it is used as a means for political control.

Let me explain. Some groups, especially civil-rights organizations, use diversity as a means to push policy. Due to its prominence, Black Lives Matter will be the example used in this paper. BLM is certainly a powerful civil-rights organization which has done good for black communities and minorities in the U.S., promoting diversity of all kinds. Yet, one of BLM’s central demands is to defund policing within the U.S. (BLM, 2022). One may believe that policing will encourage safer communities, which will assist with trust and cultural mixing,

and therefore disagree *not* with BLM’s goal, but with its methods. The proposed “second” use of diversity occurs when one person says, “*I do not support BLM,*” and the response is, “*you must hate diversity.*” Two people may have the same goal and disagree on methods. When the word “diversity” is used to prevent a complex view of our fellow humans, or to force one to conform entirely to the ideas of another, it is being abused. The Africans have it right in this instance. When our knee-jerk reaction as a culture is to accuse on impulse, perhaps we should slow down. *Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.*

When this second use of “diversity” occurs, it becomes difficult for people to hold nuanced views. It creates an “all or nothing” approach to thought; either you are entirely on the side of an organization, or you are entirely opposed to it. The complex situation which this creates for Christians is when some tenants of an organization oppose Christian beliefs. Let this be made clear: love and respect for all people, bar none, is biblically mandated (John 15:12, Gal. 3:28, 1 John 3:16). This is a powerful biblical defense for the first type of diversity which was named above, although many Christians throughout history have failed to uphold it. It is also true that Christ himself commanded Christians to defend and protect all biblical teachings (Matt. 28:19-20, Rom. 16:17-18, 1 Pet. 3:15). In essence, Christians must have nuanced views in this area. The Bible is not opposed to diverse groups of people, but sometimes it is against the beliefs held by them. To use BLM as an example again, the organization stated in 2020 that one of its core principles was to disrupt the nuclear family (Bernstein, 2020). This language was removed after backlash, but it alone would provide ample reason for a Christian to be non-supportive of the organization, since the nuclear family is instituted and commanded by God (Gen. 2:24).

As members of a Christian university, then, it is important for everyone to stay attuned to the complex relationship between this first and second use of “diversity.” The first is love and respect for all kinds of people. The second is expected agreement with political movements

or organizations which are fighting for the first. When this second use is employed, it becomes difficult to communicate clearly. If someone says, “*I do not support BLM,*” and the immediate response is, “*you must hate diversity,*” it destroys the careful dialogue between two people who may very well agree. When this occurs, and it has, the opposite also becomes true. If one cannot disagree with a civil rights organization without others assuming they are against diversity, they then cannot support diversity without others assuming they support civil rights organizations and all they stand for. This makes it difficult for Christians who support diversity to communicate their beliefs without seeming to support organizations with which they disagree.

This is the reason for recent concern over the use of “diversity,” at CUW. When the administration specified that they were looking for a president who supports diversity, many Christian students and faculty became concerned (Concordia, 2021). This was not because these students and faculty are against diversity, but rather because they did not know which use of “diversity,” the administration was employing. If the administration were supporting respect and love for all people, there would be no issue. If the administration is looking for someone supportive of organizations which may oppose Christian beliefs, then Christian students and faculty have cause to be concerned.

Going forward as a university we must recognize the misunderstandings caused by nuanced differences in our language. Ironically, these misunderstandings come from diversity. They extend from the different experiences and backgrounds had by each student at CUW. The solution is simply to listen. When someone disagrees with “diversity,” simply pause and ask why. *Your story is good. Perhaps his story is good also.*

### **De’Shawn’s Questions for Isaiah**

De’Shawn: What are your thoughts on CUW providing resources for those who may not hold the same views as LCMS/Christians? Do you believe there is or should be a limit to how much

CUW does provide?

Isaiah: I think there are basic resources that must be provided for all students. These include food, housing, and safety. Assistance through the food pantry, the counseling office, or the comfort dog program would apply here as well. The various campus ministries also exist to support all students spiritually regardless of their allegiance to the LCMS. These are all resources which CUW has an obligation to provide to students who do not hold LCMS views, although it provides them to students who do hold LCMS views as well.

I think that CUW also has a responsibility to provide resources that push its students to learn and grow. For students who may not hold LCMS views this means ensuring that classes are teaching LCMS beliefs well so that students can learn and be challenged. This also means ensuring such students have the opportunity to voice disagreements and to have their own opinions without any fear of recrimination. This will force LCMS students to engage with different ideas as well, so that all students are mutually pushing each other, as is the goal of diversity.

Where CUW does need to limit resources is where the resources begin to actively support beliefs which Christianity/the LCMS deems to be wrong. I think CUW should provide resources for pregnant students on campus, for instance, but it must not provide resources directing students to abortion centers since that supports an act which the LCMS holds to be wrong (LCMS, 2022). As another example, CUW should allow students to meet and discuss in groups such as philosophy club, but it could prevent the club from using CUW funds to host an event which is raising money for an anti-Christian organization.

De’Shawn: You spoke about the first use of diversity being a “love and respect for all kinds of people.” What do you think that looks like in practice? More specifically what do you think CUW can do better as it relates to supporting those who do not fit within its primary demographic (i.e. White, Christian, Heterosexual, Cisgender)?

Isaiah: Love and respect for others comes down to recognition of God's love for all people. The heart of how we ought to treat others then comes down to following Christ as he acts in the Bible. He loved people. He valued them, encouraged them. He never mocked them or tried to hurt them. He listened to them and had conversations with them. However, He also corrected them and He resisted them when they believed things that were wrong.

This shows us that love and respect for all people is more complex than it may seem. In practice it involves upholding others in their physical, mental, and spiritual health. It means genuinely wanting what is best for those around us, no matter who they are. As Christ showed us, it also means lovingly and firmly pushing back when others follow an ungodly path. Christians must have this resistance in order to love rightly, because if you believe someone is harming his relationship with God, others, or himself and you simply stand by then you do not love that person at all.

As an example, the greatest place where the church has screwed this up has been with the LGBTQ+ community, and I will use homosexuality as the primary example. Through their fixation on a specific sin, many Christians have propagated the belief that homosexuality is a greater evil than the sexual temptation that nearly all people endure. These people have failed to remember that love must accompany firmness of belief. Christ would have resisted the LGBTQ+ community as well, but he would never have made them believe they are unloved on account of the struggles they endure. Emulating Christ is the Christian call.

As a Christian university, the administration and faculty of CUW must support this Christian call. They would be violating their offices if they did not. This means that CUW must ensure that all of its students, especially those who have endured the kind of mistreatment that many minority communities have, are loved the way Christ would love them. There must be support for physical, mental, and spiritual health with no discrimination. CUW must also uphold the Bible as true, and CUW must side with Biblical

teachings where they conflict with the culture. To best support minority demographics at CUW, our administration must heed this call. It will ensure that the administration gives every support and help to such students that it can without going against its responsibility to uphold what is true.

To do better at this, I think the administration primarily needs to ensure that students and faculty have venues to communicate openly on these issues without any fear. Dialogue will allow the leaders at CUW to know what they need to improve on regarding all students. Finally, students need to have the charitability and carefulness to discuss these issues with each other. The administration of our university can make a space for these conversations but nothing will happen without our support. It would take effort but I believe it is possible to create a closer and more loving community if all sides are willing to try.

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