

Is Social Media Distorting Your Reality?

Americans appear to be as divided as perhaps they have ever been in their values, beliefs and opinions, as well as in their negative views of those with whom they disagree. But is much of it a social media distortion?

Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES,) President Dr. Richard Land explored this topic recently in his “Bringing Every Thought Captive” radio feature, which airs on nearly 800 stations nationwide. And the subject matter relates closely to the courses and concentrations at the seminary.

“Only about 22% of U.S. adults are on Twitter, and 80% of the tweets come from 10% of the users, according to a Pew Research study,” Land noted. “As Arthur Brooks points out in a *Washington Post* column, if you rely on Twitter for political information, you are too often being informed by fake propagandists and pundits who average about 2.2% of the population. Social media platforms are thus severely skewing our understanding of the true social and political picture in our country. For example, as Brooks points out, people who consume news media most of the time are three times more inaccurate in their understanding of others’ views as those who consume news only now and then. This is almost certainly a function of their compulsive consumption of media sources that support their existing views.”

Brooks provides a fascinating example, Land added. A 2018 study in the *Journal of Politics* reveals that the average Democrat believes that more than 40% of Republicans earn more than \$250,000 a year. Meanwhile, Republicans believe that nearly 40% of Democrats are LGBTQ. How close are these estimates to the reality of things? Not very. Just 2% of Republicans are doing that well financially, and just 6% of

Democrats are LGBTQ.

"This column raises some very serious questions," Land said. "There are real differences in American political views, and they are important, but social media distorts these differences by accentuating the extremes of the left and the right and making the moderate middle disappear. Social media exacerbates our differences and makes us think we're more divided than we actually are. 'Living online' also helps along social alienation. For example, in his book *Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis titles the first chapter 'Men Without Chests.' What does that mean? In our culture, we've been engulfed by moral relativism, and we have seen the vitiation, strangling and stifling of societal bedrocks, such as family, church and community. As a result, 'we make men without chests and expect from them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.' It's a powerful statement about facts we can no longer ignore."

Another telling anecdote, Land said, is contained in Nelson DeMille's best-selling novel, *Word of Honor*, where the author writes that only so many obscenities can be imprinted on a man before he begins to malfunction.

"We're imposing a lot of obscenities on our young people and they're beginning to malfunction," Land said. "As a starting point, let's all agree to read and view less social media and talk more with, not at, our fellow Americans, especially those with whom we disagree. It will make a real difference, and it's really important."

Headlines like these link directly into SES' curriculum as students delve into Christian apologetics, how it applies to practical daily life, and how to rationally, intelligently and lovingly defend the historic Christian faith. Specifically, students also debate news and commentary through its "Philosophy, Politics and Economics" program. Offered primarily at just a few top-tier universities around the

world, SES's PPE program introduces students to a Christian perspective of how philosophy, politics and economics intersect, focusing on the works of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Henry Hazlitt, Karl Marx, Thomas Aquinas, Robert Sirico, Jay Richards and others. Additionally, SES often considers issues of morality and technology and how ethics intersects with both through its Center for the Ethics of Emerging Technologies.

SES' 26th annual National Conference on Christian Apologetics (NCCA) is set for Oct. 11-12 at Calvary Church in Charlotte. For the 2019 event, SES is focusing on the theme of "Why Truth Still Matters" and is welcoming some of the nation's top apologetics speakers, including Michael Brown, Alisa Childers, Gary Habermas, SES co-founder Richard Howe, Chip Ingram, Richard Land, Mike Licona, Stephen Meyer, Jeff Myers, Hugh Ross and Frank Turek, among others. For over a quarter-century, SES's annual conference has provided Christians with the tools, knowledge and motivation to defend their beliefs in a culture that is sometimes hostile toward Christianity. The conference will also include a special tribute to Dr. Norman Geisler, SES' co-founder, longtime professor and president emeritus, who passed away July 1. [Learn more or register here.](#)

For 27 years, SES has equipped students and ministry leaders to share the gospel from an intelligent, informed and rational biblical worldview. Courses, conferences, seminars, guest speakers and more seek to accomplish this longstanding mission. Central to this purpose is the provision of a biblical basis and an academic understanding of believers' commitment to Christ. Therefore, SES seeks to provide an educational opportunity where the Christian worldview is both a framework for thinking and a dynamic for living.