



FORMER CEO OF 7-ELEVEN & BLOCKBUSTER, BESTSELLING AUTHOR, AND GLOBAL KEYNOTE SPEAKER

James (Jim) W. Keyes is a global business leader, best-selling author, philanthropist, artist, musician, commercial pilot, and modern renaissance man. He is the former CEO of two globally recognized Fortune 500 companies, 7-Eleven, Inc. and Blockbuster, Inc. His other business interests cover a broad range of industries from retail, consumer products, technology, healthcare, cyber security, new space, energy, and advanced nuclear. He sits on several public company boards and serves as a board adviser to a venture capital firm and a number of start-up companies.

Jim Keyes has experience in successfully leading multinational corporations with a deep understanding of global and local franchise operations. His creativity, innovation, and adoption of leading-edge technology contributed to the successful transformation of both public and private organizations. He is a seasoned executive, known internationally for leading transformational change.

Keyes' philanthropic initiatives have an equally broad focus, including serving a three-term seat on the Board of Governors for the American Red Cross, acting as the former Chairman of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, and serving on the board of directors for institutions such as UT Southwestern Medical School, Cooper Institute, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Dallas Performing Arts Center, SMU Cox School of Business, Columbia Business School, and his alma mater, College of the Holy Cross. He has had a lifelong commitment to education, serving as a founding director of the Dallas Education Foundation and is the founder of the Education Is Freedom Foundation. He is the author of *Education is Freedom: The Future Is in Your Hands* which provides the "what," "why," and "how" of learning. It outlines the importance of education for all mankind, the power of education to change our world, and the wisdom to unlock our personal freedom while preserving our democracy.

Keyes is a personification of the American Dream, as he comes from humble beginnings. He was inducted in 2005 as a Member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans. In 2024, he received the Robert S. Folsom Leadership Award presented by Methodist Health System Foundation to recognize demonstrated community leadership and in 2025 he received the 42nd H. Neil Mallon Award presented by the World Affairs Council of Dallas/Fort Worth.

Fides et Ratio: Faith as the Antidote to Fear

JAMES KEYES

The greatest threat facing humanity is not a single weapon, ideology, or even artificial intelligence. It is the human propensity for fear, and the chain reaction it sets in motion. Ancient philosophers first noted that ignorance leads to fear; fear leads to anger; anger leads to hatred, and hatred leads to violence. This ancient insight, echoed across centuries and cultures, is pervasive in today's society. Technology and the acceleration of change across the planet have increased this negative cycle.

If ignorance is the root of fear, then knowledge is the antidote. Knowledge dispels the shadows where fear lives. But knowledge alone isn't enough. There are things in life that remain uncertain. From our own mortality to the mysteries of the universe, there are some things that no amount of study can fully resolve. For those unknowns, we need something more. We need faith.

I am a man of faith, blessed with a belief that God has guided my life and eliminates my fear. I've dedicated my life to helping others realize that their destiny, and indeed the future, is in their hands. I deliver this message around the world to those with a broad range of belief and some without.

A universal understanding I've achieved borrows from *Star Wars* and uses the teaching of Yoda as he tried to help young Luke Skywalker become a Jedi. He taught Luke the knowledge of the Jedi, but there was still something missing. It was only when Luke believed "May the Force be With You" that he was empowered with the ability to overcome fear and prevail over the "Dark Side." Knowledge prepared him. Faith allowed him to act.

George Lucas himself said he intended "*the Force*" as a metaphor for faith, not any one religion's faith, but the universal human need to trust in something larger than ourselves.

Pope John Paul II captured this same truth with far greater precision in his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. He wrote that faith and reason are like two wings that elevate the human spirit toward the contemplation of truth. Neither wing alone can lift us and allow us to soar. Only when both wings work together does flight become possible.

This is why the pairing of George Lucas and John Paul II resonates so powerfully with audiences around the world ... with those of deep religious conviction to those who claim no religion at all. Because underneath the different vocabularies, the message is the same: reason alone cannot carry us all the way, and neither can belief without understanding. We need both wings.

And what waits at the end of that flight is truth. Not a partial truth assembled from facts alone, nor a comforting truth built on belief alone, but the fuller truth that comes from reason and faith working in concert. It's that truth, earned through knowledge and steadied by faith, that finally answers fear. It replaces ignorance with understanding, uncertainty with trust, and isolation with connection to something greater than ourselves.