

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

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“Connecting good intentions with sound economics”



Christ Redeemer © Jong Yuk. Image from bigstockphoto.com

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President's Message

Dear Friends,

"They believe that if they succeed in changing the social environment, the nature of the human person will change as well."

In fashionable intellectual circles, it is still common that educated people refer to themselves as socialists. But then they quickly clarify that they're not talking about the Soviet Union. At this point, they expect a knowing laugh, as if only a simpleton could possibly believe that the Soviet Union represented socialism.

What is the best strategy for dealing with such thinkers? The first priority is asking them what they mean by socialism? If they mean common ownership of the means of production, as tradition dictates, that is not technically possible. Everyone cannot own a steel mill any more than everyone can own a potted plant. Ownership implies the right to control and sell the good, which cannot be done if everyone is said to own something.

With individuals forbidden from owning, the de facto owner of all things under socialism is the state. The state then becomes all powerful, controlling not only lives but also people. Another trait of socialism is the absence of money. Under the Leninist experiment in the early years of Soviet socialism, the attempt to abolish money led to a calamity so horrible that even Lenin had to back away and declare the "New Economic Policy," which amounted to permits in some markets. The socialists of the West called him a traitor. So yes, it is true that the Soviet Union abandoned true socialism rather early and collapsed into a bureaucratized and regimented system that kept its people at subsistence level. And yet if true socialism had been sustained, the country would have been ruined much sooner.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his new encyclical on the topic of Christian hope, reflects on the abysmal failure of socialism and asks why people continue to believe in such a hopeless cause. They believe that if they succeed in changing the social environment, the nature of the human person will change as well. This is false hope that leads to disaster.

We should not place our hope in socialism, the state, or any political system that denies human freedom. Our hope should be in God and the freedom that the creator gave us to choose. By supporting the Acton Institute, you are assisting in enlivening true hope.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Rev. Robert A. Sirico". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Rev. Robert A. Sirico, President

The mission of the Acton Institute is to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.

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First Brazilian TFAVS Receives High Marks from Participants

The Acton Institute received extremely positive feedback from those who participated in the first Toward a Free And Virtuous Society Conference in Itaipava, Brazil. The joint Acton and the Inter-Disciplinary Center for Ethics and Economic Population (CIEEP) Colloquium took place on December 11-14, 2007. Alex Catharino, Bishop Antonio Augusto Dias Duarte, Antonio Paulo Carvalho Pierotti, Claudio Tellez, Marcia Xavier de Brito, and Bishop Wilson Tadeu Jonck all served on the faculty for the conference.

Acton's director of programs Michael Miller spoke of its significance saying, "This is important because Brazil was a center for liberation theology. To have Brazilian bishops working with us is critical because it's for the people who need it more than anybody else." Rev. Robert Sirico himself said in his recent *Wall Street Journal* column, "Today the church is

"Today the church is coming to recognize the link between socialism and the loss of freedom, and a shift in thinking is taking place."

coming to recognize the link between socialism and the loss of freedom, and a shift in thinking is taking place." Sirico also declared,

"A church that emphasizes liberty could play a role in Latin America similar to that which it played in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, as a counterweight in defense of freedom during a time of rising despotism."

Some of the lectures given by the faculty were titled "Building a Free and Virtuous Society," "Local Markets and International Trade," "The Christian Defense of Life and Liberty," "The Entrepreneurial Vocation," and "Economical Foundations of a Free and Virtuous Society." Participant Bruno Giumaraes de Miranda added, "The lecturers showed themselves experts in their fields of knowledge and were very competent in delivering the message. These moments of study are really important because the search for a free and virtuous society is a real challenge."



Participants at the first Brazilian Acton FAVS



Brazilian Bishops at Acton FAVS

From Our Conference Participants

My experience over the weekend enabled me to share and discuss ideas with like minded individuals, and brought about a new perspective to issues that I might not normally reflect on.

—Jason Deng
Mountain View, California

Thank you for your generosity expressed so outstandingly by the number of scholarships you provide to students attending the Acton Institute conferences.

—Antionette K. Kankindi
Nairobi, Kenya

Freedom, the Family and the Market

The inaugural Acton lecture series on January 3 featured a dynamic address by Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse titled, *Freedom, the Family and the Market: A Humane Response to the Socialist Attack on the family*. The lecture focused on the socialist and left wing attack on marriage and the strength of the traditional family dynamic. “I believe it is more accurate to view the Socialist deconstruction of marriage as a second front in their attempt to centralize society under the control of the state,” Roback Morse said.

She also easily highlighted the views of gender and marriage in socialist thought, and how this has altered society. “Frederick Engels equated the dominance of men over women with the dominance of capitalists over workers,” Roback Morse noted. Another essential equation into the rise of state power is more liberalized divorce laws. Roback Morse said, “No-fault divorce has led to an increase in the power of government over individual private lives.” In reality, the termination of marriages has caused families to turn power over to the courts.

thinking, offers a different solution to economic inequality between men and women that does Socialism.” She also added, “Christianity respects the family as the great pre-political social institution, and marriage as the most basic unit of social cooperation. The family truly is the cradle of any civilization, especially the civilization of freedom and of love.”

Roback Morse’s lecture in downtown Grand Rapids was heavily attended and an excellent start for the 2008 lecture series. If you missed the lecture, visit the Acton Website to listen to it in its entirety.

What Would Jesus Buy? Rev. Sirico on Fox Business News

Responding to the film *What Would Jesus Buy?* from filmmaker Morgan Spurlock, Rev. Sirico appeared on Fox Business News. Sirico called the film a “mockumentary.” Bill Talen, also known as “Reverend” Billy, heads the self-styled Church of Stop Shopping, which replaces more traditional Christian beliefs with a pseudo gospel that declares consumerism is destroying the American spirit. Sirico challenged the producer and Mr. Talen on the show. “I’m not saying people should buy blindly and I’m not saying people should be

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Dr. Morse speaks at last month's Acton Lecture Series

“Because the Left considers monogamous marriage a central part of the capitalist system of private property, they put enormous energy into destabilizing marriage,” she also said.

The lecture stressed the tremendous strength of a two parent home for children. It is essential for less government control, aids in lower taxes, and a more prosperous economy. “Trying to build a free society without marriage is like trying to build a prosperous economy without property rights,” Roback Morse declared.

Roback Morse also discussed the importance of gender differences and how Christianity embraces this value. “Christianity, combined with free market

overly obsessed with the material world...but if you’re concerned about losing the meaning of Christmas, where is Christ in your message?” Sirico declared. The film’s director and Mr. Talen did not offer a plausible answer to this challenge. Sirico does not disagree that Christmas has been overly commercialized, but rather stressed the importance of giving, and the significance of the incarnation. The film unfairly attacks corporations and a free-market economy.

The month of December included over forty radio and television appearances by Acton staff members. In addition, many of the appearances discussed the current presidential campaign as it relates to faith and politics in the public square.



Glenn Sunshine to Discuss Wealth, Work, and the Church

The February 14 Acton Lecture series will feature Dr. Glenn Sunshine in an address titled, "Wealth, Work, and the Church." Dr. Sunshine is chair of the history department at Central Connecticut State University. He holds his Ph.D. in renaissance and reformation history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an M.A. in church history from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He also received his B.A. in linguistics with high honors from Michigan State University in 1980. Sunshine has written several books including the very popular *The Reformation for Armchair Theologians* (2005).

Dr. Sunshine's teaching interests encompass the renaissance and reformation in Europe, as well as the history of plagues, economic history, and military history. His current research is on the development of worldviews from the Roman Empire to the postmodern era, supported by a 2006 grant from the Acton Institute.

"The lecture will be an extremely beneficial analysis for studying contemporary theological fads compared to a more historical Christian and biblical foundation."

Sunshine's lecture will explore the biblical foundations of work and wealth in creation in light of the history of the church to find the proper balance between the competing ideas of earthly riches in Christianity and the explosion of prosperity gospel. Prosperity gospel incorrectly claims poverty is a curse, and that God wants all of his people to be financially prosperous. The lecture will be an extremely beneficial analysis for studying contemporary theological fads compared to a more historical Christian and biblical foundation.

Rev. Robert Sirico will address the follow up Acton Lecture Series in March on "The Rise (and Eventual Downfall) of the New Religious Left." The 2008 Acton Lecture Series has a new location. All lectures will now be held at St. Cecilia Music Center, 24 Ransom Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan. All lectures are held on Thursdays from 12 - 1:30pm.



Alcazar And Cathedral Of Segovia, Spain © Philip Lange. Image from bigstockphoto.com



Dr. Glenn Sunshine to speak this month at Acton Lecture Series

ACTON in the News

Liberation theology may appeal to socially conscious clergy, yet it also politicizes the Church's role by blessing another form of wholesale control.

—Excerpted from Rev. Robert Sirico's article in *The Wall Street Journal*

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Title: Liberty Theology

Publisher: *The Wall Street Journal*

Date: 12.31.2007

Jordan Ballor

Title: Tithing is about giving, not getting

Publisher: *Washington Examiner*

Date: 1.2.2008

Dr. Jay Richards

Title: Huckabee and Religion in the 2008 Campaign

Program: *Jim Brown in the Morning*

Air Date: 1.7.2008

Reminder

Help Acton Promote Freedom and Virtue!

The Acton Institute depends on the generosity of supporters like you. If you have not donated to Acton, but enjoy *Acton Notes*, please consider helping us meet our goals! Your help makes possible our continuing mission to promote a free and virtuous society. You may choose to donate using the envelope provided, or you may visit <https://secure.lexi.net/acton> to make a secure donation online. We send our heartfelt thanks to those who have been so generous in the past with your strategic support as well as your prayers. You have a broad vision and a generous heart.



Acton and You

There are still open positions for Acton University, which takes place in Grand Rapids, Michigan, from June 10-13. Acton University is not only for students, donors and friends of the Acton Institute are also invited to attend. If you would like to attend, or you are interested in sponsoring a student please email Acton's program officer Kara Eagle at keagle@acton.org. The conference website is located at www.acton.org/actonu. Participants will have the unique opportunity to delve into the framework and foundations that makes the free and virtuous highly valuable.

ACTON UNIVERSITY

JUNE 10-13 SYMPOSIUM OF FAITH, ECONOMICS, LIBERTY

Grand Rapids
Michigan

2008

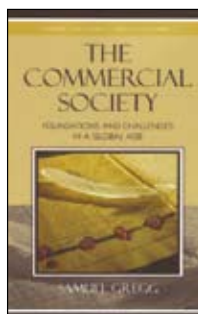
"The seminars and conferences of the Acton Institute provide the world's foremost training in the theology and philosophy of the free-market model." *Michael Lee, adjunct professor, Johns Hopkins University*

Registration for Acton University is already filling up! If you or someone you know would like to learn about the foundations of a society sustained by freedom and virtue, apply today at www.acton.org/ActonU



Apply today at www.acton.org/actonu Travel, lodging, and registration scholarships will be offered to select students.

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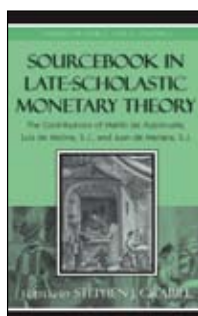


The Commercial Society

by Samuel Gregg

Guided by the thoughts of Alexis de Tocqueville, Samuel Gregg's *The Commercial Society* identifies and explores the key foundational elements that must exist within a society for commercial order to take root and flourish. Gregg studies the challenges that have consistently impeded and occasionally undermined commercial order, including the persistence of "corporatist" values and political movements seeking to equalize social conditions.

Paperback 177 pages Original Price \$16.95 Sale \$15.00



Sourcebook in Late-Scholastic Monetary Theory

by Stephen Grabill

The art of creating, managing, loaning, and investing money has always been fraught with moral hazards. Unfortunately, the widespread habit of viewing banking in a less than positive light has contributed to misunderstanding of a human activity that not only contributes to human prosperity, but also creates a sphere of endeavor in which people can genuinely pursue virtue.

Paperback 362 pages Original Price \$33.00 Sale \$30.00

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Feb 14	Acton Lecture Series <i>Wealth, Work, and the Church</i> Dr. Glenn Sunshine to speak	Grand Rapids, Michigan
June	Registration now Open for Acton University	Grand Rapids, Michigan

STAFF ACTIVITIES/DEADLINES

Date	Event	Location
Feb 6	Myths Christians Believe Dr. Jay Richards to speak	Houghton, New York
Feb 21	Morality of Capitalism Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Madison Wisconsin
Feb 28-March 2	London City Business Seminar Dr. Samuel Gregg, Michael Miller, and Kishore Jayabalan to speak	Rome, Italy

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