

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

January / February 2017, Volume 27, Number 1



“connecting good intentions with sound economics”

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President's Message

A new year gives us fresh reminders that the battle for freedom and liberty demand renewed intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual efforts.

We need look no further than Venezuela for evidence that central control of an economy is spiritually and materially detrimental to a nation's people. The previous century is rife with other examples of government-controlled economies squelching the entrepreneurship, innovation and human flourishing concomitant with free markets.

Unfortunately, despite all the evidence to support the economic principles in which we endeavor to instruct not only Christians and people of faith but also policymakers and the public at large, we continue to face an uphill battle.

More than 60 years after formerly fervent Marxist adherents declared Communism "the God that failed," and mere decades after the collapse of the USSR and the shredding of the Iron Curtain, the collectivist urge continues to entice with false promises of an earthly utopia. Witness the support for a self-professed Democratic Socialist among an estimated 70 percent of millennials during the 2016 presidential primaries, the anti-capitalist Occupy Wall Street movement and any number of proposed government schemes and political promises to redistribute income and wealth masked as forcing others to pay their "fair share."

Witness as well the ridiculous fashion statement represented by T-shirts of college students and musicians emblazoned with Ernesto "Che" Guevara's visage, the delusional encomiums rendered by public figures upon the death of Fidel Castro and the persistent claims made for Sweden and Denmark as socialist paradises. Largely unmentioned is that these last assertions run contrary to both countries increasingly trending toward free-market privatization and deregulation over the course of the past 20 years.

More troubling to me are well-funded groups that employ faith as a Trojan horse for progressive agendas. So-called "social justice" advocates, shareholder activists, environmentalists and other groups increasingly claim religious authority for advocating government-enforced wealth-redistribution schemes. Rarely—if ever—do they acknowledge the benefits provided society as a whole by free-market prosperity and innovation. It's our job to remind everyone of the spiritual and material necessities of the Acton Institute's mission.

"More troubling to me are well-funded groups that employ faith as a Trojan horse for progressive agendas."

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



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Robert Sirico". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Robert Sirico, President

ACTON INSTITUTE

98 E. Fulton Street • Grand Rapids, MI 49503 • USA • www.acton.org

New Acton website aimed at growing traffic, mobile users

In September, Pew Research Center published findings about internet usage that pretty much confirm what we've been seeing at Acton: More and more people all over the world are using the web to find information, news and educational resources.

In America, the vast majority of people are online. Back in 2000, 86 percent of adults 65 and older did not go online; today that figure has been cut in half. Not surprisingly, only 1 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds are now offline.

Acton's web traffic to its main site and blog reached 2.2 million visitors in 2016, an increase of 10 percent over the previous year. To keep up, in January we launched a newly designed site using the latest publishing technology, with plans to update other stand-alone sites, such as PovertyCure and For the Life of the World, later.

The new Acton.org site will also be optimized for a web world increasingly shifting to smartphones and tablets. In 2016, Acton's mobile traffic topped 44 percent and we expect that to increase.

Keeping pace with on-the-go users is crucial for an international research and educational organization like Acton, with a growing following in developing nations.

According to media buying agency Zenith, 75 percent of internet usage will be mobile in 2017. In four years, mobile usage has gone from 40 percent to 70 percent (of total internet use) in mobile.

We began the process of updating Acton.org in mid-2015 with a deep study of how users interact with our site, which now numbers more than 4,000 unique pages. A team comprised of Acton staff and outside developers and designers interviewed users, studied their feedback and went over all the key sections with an eye for major improvements.

The new site gives Acton a platform that showcases the content from our experts in a much more engaging, easy-to-use way. Navigation will be simplified, and the pages will have a brighter, more graphical look.

Be sure to check out the new site at www.acton.org.



A screenshot of Acton's newly designed website.



At Discover Acton you can download Acton Notes online.

From Our Conference Participants

Acton prepares the “upper room” where disciples can come together, roll up their sleeves and learn smart strategies for applying biblical wisdom to pursuing the common good and achieving human flourishing for all.

—Bill S
Kansas City, Kansas

Coming away from the [Thriving Churches conference], I felt empowered to speak to key business people in my church about how they could work together with the church and other social agencies to effect real change in our immediate neighborhood.

—Eric L
Austin, Texas

New resources available for Acton alumni

Over the past 26 years, Acton has built a strong foundation seemingly in preparation for this exact moment in history—a moment that needs both morality and freedom more than ever. Over the course of the last month, we have seen protests breaking out across the country. We have watched as protestors from all walks of life shout with disdain at the state of our current political climate.

According to Freedom House’s “2016 Freedom in the World” report, 2016 was “the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.” Specifically in the United States, the country received a negative “trend arrow,” meaning that while the United States is free, it’s headed in the wrong direction. Now, more than ever, Acton is needed to spread the urgent message that virtue and democracy are paramount.

That is why our Acton alumni program is so crucial. The goal of the program is to better equip our valued alumni with the resources and opportunities

competitive market, small and medium enterprises as the engine of prosperity, the negative impact of crony capitalism and marrying good intentions with sound policy ... Acton is challenging me to shift my focus from support to empowerment, from help to hope.

She relayed the impact Acton principles have on practitioners in industries across the spectrum. Through catalysts like Cheryl, Acton principles move from abstraction to action.

Like Cheryl, Acton University alumni in Milwaukee are also taking the Acton principles to heart. They have formed a reading group and have spread the word in their community. They are also planning their own Acton-themed event in the near future.

In the coming year, the alumni relations program will equip the alumni network with better resources. This will include:

- a new online platform that allows alumni to connect with others in their geographic region;
- an alumni job board, connecting Acton-minded employees and employers;

ACTON News



Acton University attendees purchasing resources at the bookshop.



needed to have a stronger, longer-lasting impact in local communities.

At the 26th Annual Dinner in October 2016, Cheryl Cuthbertson, director of strategic initiatives at Children of the Nations and a 2016 Acton University alumna, had the opportunity to share how Acton has shaped her thinking:

In three days I was mesmerized and changed by colleagues that imparted vision, theory and solutions to the bitterness of poverty. I was intoxicated by new paradigms that challenged our approach to long-term charity. We took a deep dive into theories of the free

- a newsletter highlighting important work and updates from the network;
- and regional networks.

Our hope is that you begin your 2017 positively and focus on the good you can do in your own community, rather than the negativity that pervaded so much of 2016. Together we can be a force for good in the United States and globally.

For more information on our alumni programs and how you can get more involved, please contact Patrick Oetting at poetting@acton.org.

Thank you for supporting Acton’s work.

Conference looked to the future of the West

The latest of the Reclaiming the West: Freedom and Responsibility Conference Series, the Crisis of Liberty in the West Conference, took place at the Bloomsbury Hotel in London on December 1.

Speakers included Remi Brague, the recently knighted Sir Roger Scruton, Victoria C. G. Coates, Philip Booth, Veronique de Rugy and Declan Ganley. The conference included two sessions with lectures from three speakers and concluded with the presentation of the 2016 Novak Award and Calihan lecture delivered by Ryan T. Anderson.

Rev. Robert Sirico and Kishore Jayabalan, director of Acton's Rome office, served as session chairs.

The morning sessions, featuring Brague, Scruton and Coates, included lectures on humanism, freedom and the nation state, and Western heritage. Coates, while arguing that we should always "defend, rather than apologize for" our heritage, also warned that "democracy is not a panacea for all of society's woes."

In the afternoon session, Booth, de Rugy and

Ganley addressed the growth of government (both in the United States and Europe), threats to the free market and cronyism. During his address on cronyism, Ganley argued that individuals need to take a stand. "Freedom and liberty are not preserved by the many," he said. "Freedom is preserved by the conscience and courage of individual persons."

The theme of Anderson's Calihan Lecture was liberty, including what has eroded it and how we can reconstruct it. Anderson argued that there are primarily three ways liberty has been lost: bad intellectual defenses of freedom, a collapse of the civil society that promotes human flourishing and cronyism. He also suggested that freedom serves the common good and offered several arguments in support of that.

The conference was streamed live online and people from all over the world tuned in at various times to catch the lectures and interact with individuals at the event. The full recording of the conference, including each session and Q&A period, is available online at www.acton.org/London2016.



First session speakers at the Dec 1 Conference.



ACTON in the News

"Above all, free trade facilitates free and open competition. This means that businesses can only profit by meeting consumer demand in more effective and innovative ways rather than through securing privileges from governments."

—Excerpted from Samuel Gregg's article
in *The Stream*

Poverty, Inc.

Title: The curse of charity in Haiti
Publication: *The Wall Street Journal*
Date: 10.17.16

Samuel Gregg

Title: Trade deals aren't the same as free trade
Publication: *The Stream*
Date: 12.09.16

Samuel Gregg

Title: Why moral absolutes matter
Publication: *The Catholic World Report*
Date: 12.13.16

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 mission to promote a free and virtuous society. You may choose to donate using the envelope provided, or you may visit the Acton website to make a secure donation online. We send our heartfelt thanks to those of you 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.

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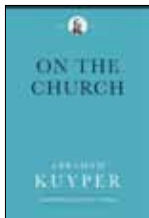
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ACTON'S 26TH ANNUAL DINNER



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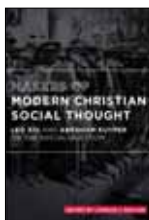


On the Church

By *Abraham Kuyper*

On the Church contains seven of Kuyper's most important essays and speeches on the nature of the church. These newly translated works show Kuyper's conviction that Christians must take an active role in the world, a world upheld by God's common grace but standing in need of God's particular grace in Christ.

Hardcover 528 pages Sale \$35.99



Makers of Modern Christian Social Thought

By *Pope Leo XIII and Abraham Kuyper*

Leo XIII's encyclical (*Rerum Novarum*) and Abraham Kuyper's speech to the first Christian Social Congress ("The Social Question and the Christian Religion"), both published in 1891, are foundational sources for subsequent Christian social thought in their respective traditions—Roman Catholic and Reformed.

Softcover 158 pages Sale \$14.95



What's Wrong with Global Governance?

By *Robert F. Gorman*

In an increasingly interconnected world, the question of how the world's peoples should interact, cooperate and settle conflicts rises to the fore. Gorman brings extraordinary experience and keen judgment to the task of applying the timeless principles of Catholic social teaching to this issue.

Softcover 106 pages Sale \$8.00



The Church's Social Responsibility

Edited by *Jordan J. Ballor and Robert J. O'Rourke*

The evangelical church has a social responsibility. But what is that responsibility and what does it look like in practice? This collection explores the nature of the institutional church's responsibility, but also explores deeper questions related to the church's social witness.

Softcover 126 pages Sale \$14.95

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What's Wrong with Global Governance?	\$8.00		
The Church's Social Responsibility	\$14.95		

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Feb 8	Liberty and Character Lawrence W. Reed to speak	Orlando, FL
Feb 9	Acton Lecture Series C. S. Lewis versus Democracy Micah Watson to speak	Grand Rapids, MI
Mar 23	Thriving Churches: Flourishing Communities Urban Ministry Conference	Seattle, WA
Apr 20	Acton Film Screening Our Last Stand: One Woman's Journey to Reveal the Plight of Christians in Iraq and Syria Jordan Allot to speak	Grand Rapids, MI