

# ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter  
*July/August 2007, Volume 17, Number 7/8*



*“Connecting good intentions with sound economics”*

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# President's Message

Dear Friends,

At Acton University we heard many extraordinary presentations on ethics, faith, public affairs, and, of course, economics. Now, there is something especially interesting about the idea of economics lectures at a conference focused on religion. It's not something people expect, but once exposed to it, they find the logic beautiful and its explanatory power overwhelming.

Jesus used economic examples in his parables, so it makes sense for us to come to understand the basis on which he spoke. We have to know something about money and interest to follow the meaning of the parable of the talents, for example. And many other parables speak of issues involving commercial concerns.

But the formal science of economics is itself rather modern. In the ancient world, commerce was considered an unseemly calling—nothing fit for a person of higher sensibilities. The basis of economics as a science was first elaborated in the middle ages and came into its own only in the eighteenth century. Today, it is regarded as the queen of the social sciences.

How and when are religious folks going to learn economics? It is no secret that it is badly taught in seminaries. And it is unlikely that most people will attend a seminar exclusively on the topic of economics. That gives the Acton Institute a unique role and opportunity to educate people of faith on a topic involving their daily lives to a huge extent. A world population of six billion needs the free market in order to survive and thrive. It would be inconceivable under socialism or feudalism.

Something else is bound up with economic understanding: freedom itself. If we cannot trade, contract, create, and accumulate without the overweening hand of the state, there cannot be such a thing as liberty. One need only imagine a parable such as the treasure in the field introducing a third-party bureaucrat who would need to approve, regulate, and tax the trade that takes place. It would completely change the dynamic of the story. Just as the truth that sets us free is the theological heart of faith, freedom itself is the underlying proposition of any society rooted in truth about the human person.

Sincerely,



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

Rev. Robert A. Sirico, President

A world population of six billion needs the free market in order to survive and thrive.

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

**ACTON**INSTITUTE

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# Acton University 2007 “A Tremendous Success”

Nearly 300 participants traveled to Grand Rapids, Michigan, for this year’s Acton University conference, led by Acton scholars and prominent affiliates of the institute. The four-day event, held downtown, was enormously successful, according to conference faculty and those in attendance. While many participants found AU close to home, one-third of this year’s attendees were international professors, students, church leaders, lawyers, and businesspeople, representing over forty-one separate countries.

The participants were able to choose from a host of available lectures on topics ranging from globalization and the environment to natural law theory and a Christian ethic of charity. As a new feature of this year’s AU, post-lecture discussion groups were held to give attendees a chance to explore further

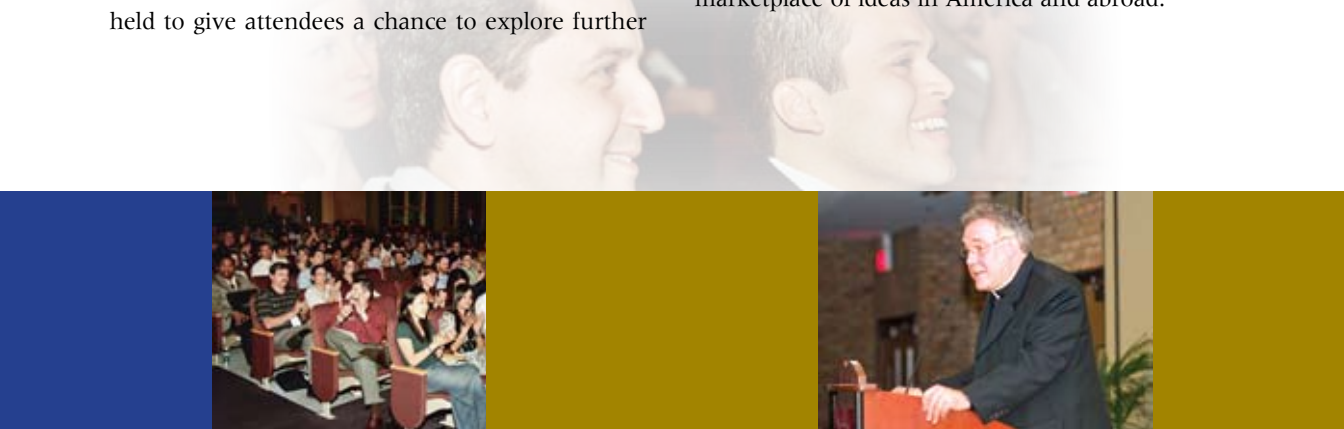
the issues speakers raised in their talks.

Acton’s new documentary, *The Call of the Entrepreneur*, was shown during the conference.

The film received favorable reviews, especially from attendees living in countries where few tools exist for educating the public about the mechanics of the free market.

While over one-third of participants had attended the conference in previous years, AU 2007 also drew in a fresh crowd of academics, professionals, and church leaders interested in developing a coherent, Christian philosophy of economics. Equipped with books, teaching materials, and a solid exposition of issues critical to worldwide faith and liberty, participants returned home better prepared to engage the marketplace of ideas in America and abroad.

“While many participants found AU close to home, one-third of this year’s attendees were international...”



Fr. Robert Sirico lectures the AU crowd

## From Our Conference Participants

I can say without hesitation that it was the most fruitful and enjoyable programme I have been on of its kind; fruitful because I learnt a great deal about free markets and enjoyable principally because of the robust debate and super friendships...

—Samuel Burke  
London School of Economics  
London, England

Acton is a very unique organization, and I’m glad and thankful for its existence, for its mission, and for its staff. This year’s conferences were even more impacting and influential in my life.

—Jorge Smith  
Knox Theological Seminary  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida



## A Firsthand Taste of Maggot-Free Capitalism

During Acton University, a group of African participants joined executive director Kris Mauren on a visit to Gordon Food Service's Grand Rapids headquarters for an up close look at ethical capitalism. Mauren called it a perfect opportunity for people from countries with barren and corrupt markets to see an efficient, principled business for themselves.

The group met with Gordon Food Service management for a luncheon, then toured the company's office and factory area. Harry Ayile, formerly from Ghana and now residing in Norway, was completely blown away by the excellence and dedication he observed. "It was like ... *wow*," Ayile commented with a smile.

Comparing Gordon Food Service's methods to the way business is done in Africa and even in Europe, Ayile said his visit couldn't have been more of an eye opener. "Before I came to Acton, I thought all people who did business were evil," he said.

Ayile recalled one food production company in Ghana that deliberately had been selling expired grain infested with maggots. "They would just sift out the maggots, package the grain, and sell it at

full price," he said. Ayile called the incident typical of business practices in much of Africa, which lacks the institutional support necessary for free enterprise to flourish. He added that many businesses "show very little respect for the consumer, as opposed to the way American businesses like this one care about their customers."

Although Africa has a long way to go, Ayile said his visit was inspiring and gave him hope for the future of Ghana and other developing countries in Africa.

## Alticor

On Thursday, another group visited Alticor, Inc. in nearby Ada, Michigan. The participants, including a law student from Guatemala, a reporter from Romania, and a nonprofit administrator from Brazil, toured Alticor's headquarters and learned about the company's entrepreneurial history. Later, the group lunched with Alticor executives and held a lively discussion about Alticor's business operations, the value of free markets, and the impact of globalization. This second visit also allowed the participants to see how an American company applies the principles of entrepreneurship and free enterprise in today's business world.



Executive director Kris Mauren with participants on a visit to Gordon Food Service's Grand Rapids headquarters for an up close look at ethical capitalism.

# Acton University Evening Lecture Highlights

Rev. Robert A. Sirico opened Acton University 2007 with his traditional evening address, joined this year by Diet Eman, who was part of the Dutch Resistance during WWII. As a twenty-year-old girl in Nazi-occupied Holland, Eman repeatedly risked the death penalty to hide and aid Jews throughout the duration of the war. Eman added a powerful perspective to an already stirring address on the importance of moral formation to safeguarding liberty and the value of human life.

Jeff Sandefer gave a moving Wednesday night lecture on his own “journey from pride to gratitude.” Sandefer formerly chaired the Acton Institute’s board of directors, started five highly successful companies, and now teaches entrepreneurship at the Acton Business School—which he also founded and which is ranked by Princeton Review among the top three business schools in the nation. In his

“His riveting talk addressed the fallacy that greed drives the free market.”

address, Sandefer emphasized the need for prayer and gratefulness as part of the life well lived.

On Thursday evening, George Gilder impressed upon his audience the moral dimensions of entrepreneurship and the market economy. His riveting talk addressed the fallacy that greed drives the free market. Gilder is well known for his smashing bestseller, *Wealth and Poverty*.

Father Sirico closed AU on Friday night with a call for holistic integrity in every area of the Christian life. The very first verse of the Bible—*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*—provides a paradigm of synthesis between the material and the spiritual world, he said, which the human person ought to blend more delicately than anything else in creation. Transcendent integrity, when lived out, will impact not only the person practicing it but each facet of the material world he or she touches.



Guests enjoying a reception after AU



George Gilder lectures the AU crowd

## ACTON in the News

The Marxist prediction of a revolution that would bring about this good society rested on the assumption that the condition of the working classes would grow ever worse under capitalism.

—Excerpted from Rev. Robert A. Sirico’s article in *Imprimis*

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Title: Socialism, Free Enterprise, and Common Good

Publisher: *Imprimis*

Publication Date: 5.1.2007

Kishore Jayabalan

Title: Christian Ethics, International Law, and International Institutions

Program: *Acton University*

Air Date: 6.15.2007

Dr. Jay Richards

Title: Spontaneous Order, the Market, and Divine Providence

Program: *Acton University*

Date: 6.15.2007

## 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

### International Affiliates Visit

The Acton Institute has established relationships with four international affiliate organizations that share our mission and seek to advance the ideas of the Acton Institute within their own cultural context. Following Acton University, representatives of three such organizations from Zambia, Argentina, and Brazil visited our Grand Rapids office to brainstorm about ways to cooperate with Acton in the future. In their meetings with Acton staff, the partners discussed progress made in 2007, planned for future projects such as joint conferences, and received practical training tools to promote free-market principles outside the United States.



Chanshi Chanda, our Zambian affiliate, joined the AU faculty by delivering a lecture on Africa this year.



Our Brazilian affiliates, Marcia Brito & Alex de Souza, mentored participants throughout the conference. They are pictured with Zambian affiliate Chanshi Chanda, Gustavo Santos & Marcio Coimbra.



## Acton Institute's Seventeenth Annual Dinner

# Oct 24

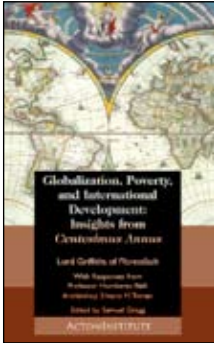
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Featuring Dr. Mart Laar  
Former Prime Minister of Estonia

"Laar belongs high in Europe's pantheon  
of post-communist heroes..." -*The Economist*



# ACTON Book Shoppe



## Globalization, Poverty, and International Development: Insights from *Centesimus Annus*

by Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach

One subject that never fails to spark debate is globalization. The phrase is used in every possible context, and yet its origins, nature and implications—especially for developing countries—are often misunderstood. In this monograph, Lord Brian Griffiths examines the theory and practice of globalization and underlines its positive influences on wealth-creation and its success in raising millions out of poverty.

**Paperback 65 pages**

**Price \$6.00**



## A Theology and History of Globalization

Samuel Gregg

Understanding globalization requires theological reflection and historical contextualization. This lecture identifies key theological principles through which to consider globalization, and contextualizes globalization as a historical phenomenon.

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Globalization (CD) & (Book)	\$15.00		

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## Calendar of Events

### ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
<b>August 16-19</b>	<b>Toward a Free and Virtuous Society Conference</b>	West Cornwall, Connecticut
<b>August 23</b>	<b>Acton Lecture Series</b> "Myths Christians Believe about Wealth and Poverty" Dr. Jay Richards to speak	Grand Rapids, Michigan
<b>Sept 6</b>	The Call of the Entrepreneur <b>Film Premiere</b> Sponsored by Briggs and Stratton	Milwaukee, Wisconsin
<b>Sept 13-15</b>	<b>City FAVS</b> Emory Conference Center	Atlanta, Georgia
<b>Sept 20-23</b>	<b>Toward a Free and Virtuous Society Conference</b>	Sonntagberg, Austria

### STAFF ACTIVITIES

Date	Event	Location
<b>July 20</b>	<b>Family Wealth Forum</b> "Wealth Creation, Stewardship and Philanthropy as Vocation" Fr. Robert Sirico to speak	Santa Ana, California
<b>Sept 21</b>	<b>Keynote Lecture</b> Sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Dr. Jay Richards to speak	Fort Worth, Texas

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notes