

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter
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Cover photo: "Elizabeth Bruenig, Anne Bradley Rathbone and Rev Robert Sirico at Acton University"

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President's Message

The dust is still settling from our latest Acton University. On the last day of this year's event, I was able to celebrate my birthday. In both instances, it's difficult delineating whether we're celebrating the end of a cycle or the beginning of another.

"...it's difficult delineating whether we're celebrating the end of a cycle or the beginning of another."

It's all a matter of perspective, I suppose, but one needs only to persevere to celebrate one more birthday. Wrapping up one Acton University and immediately preparing for the next, however, is somewhat another story. Both incidents should prompt examination and introspection, of course. In the interest of continuous improvement, we take into consideration the observations shared by our guests so we can better serve their spiritual and intellectual needs moving forward. As for myself, I'm left with prayer, my relationship with God and the support of close friends and coworkers as the catalysts for self-improvement.

Birthdays and AU are cyclical but should never represent a stagnant, closed system that simply repeats itself like some mindless perpetual-motion machine lacking any significant purpose. I'm reminded of chapter three of Ecclesiastes: "God has made everything appropriate to its time, but has put the timeless into their hearts so they cannot find out, from beginning to end, the work which God has done."

Birthdays and mapping the AU continuum also are linear. Timelines for both can be drawn easily. This year, for example, marked the first year since the inaugural AU that our good friend Michael Novak could join us only in spirit. Yes, he couldn't attend every AU while he lived, but his wise counsel was reflected in nearly every aspect of our conferences, keynotes and conversations, and the same holds true today even after his death last February. Losing Michael was a great loss to the Acton community in general and to his friends—of whom I am but one of many hundreds, if not thousands—specifically. Ecclesiastes again: "There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens."

Once again this year we honor Michael's significant contributions to our cause by bestowing the award bearing his name upon a worthy recipient. This year's Novak Award is granted to Wim Decock, a Belgian who, carrying on the rich tradition originally stoked by Novak, conducts research on the nexus of theology, religion and economic history.

Time marches on, but the rich traditions in which the Acton Institute is so thoroughly steeped continuously replenish and repeat.



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

ACTONINSTITUTE

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

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

Acton University 2017 enjoys new features and upgrades

Though June is famous for long, warm days, it means only one thing for Acton Institute staff and supporters: Acton University. For four days in late June, more than 1,000 people from many different backgrounds, cultures and countries came together for fellowship and education. The Institute's 12th Acton University was held at the DeVos Place in downtown Grand Rapids on June 20–23. There were more than 2,000 applications and of the attendees, one-fourth were students and over one-third were part of a fellowship.

Acton University includes four plenaries, four sessions a day for three days and plenty of networking or special sessions. Attendees chose from nearly 120 sessions with topics on business, economics, Catholic social thought, environmental stewardship and more.

Acton's director of research, Sam Gregg, opened the event with Tuesday's plenary. He advocated for persecuted Christians in the United States and abroad.

“...more than 1,000 people from many different backgrounds, cultures and countries came together...”

The other evening plenaries included Russell Moore and Rev. Robert Sirico. Thursday attendees enjoyed a special plenary: a debate on the question “What does Christianity have to offer the poor?” The debate included not only some familiar to Acton, specifically Rev. Robert Sirico and economist Anne Bradley Rathbone, but also two new faces: Elizabeth Bruenig, assistant editor for Outlook and PostEverything at The Washington Post, and Michael Wear, former Obama White House staffer. The four had a lively discussion about the best way for the church to help impoverished people.

This Acton University took advantage of several tech upgrades. Keynote and large-session participants were able to ask questions right from their laptops or phones using Sli.do, an audience interaction tool. One lecturer, unable to attend in person, gave his lecture via Skype. The Foundation Courses and evening plenaries were all livestreamed so people all over the world could virtually attend the event.



Rev. Robert Sirico speaking with guests during the four day event.



Russell Moore giving the evening plenary for Acton University 2017.

From Our Conference Participants

I had one of the best experiences that I've had in ministry in the last few years [at Acton University 2017].

I made great connections, met new friends, and I'm already incorporating what I learned into my ministry here at home. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend.

—Jacob S., Carbondale, Illinois

I am writing to express my deep gratefulness for the work of Acton and the scholarship [to attend Acton University 2017]. It was a great, mind-stretching experience. I hope it is possible to come again!

—John J., Portland, Oregon

Details announced for 27th Annual Dinner

We will celebrate Acton's 27th anniversary on October 18, 2017. This event will take place at the DeVos Place in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Acton's Annual Dinner is the largest single-day gathering the Institute hosts, drawing over 1,000 attendees. Every year, Acton staff and volunteers look forward to this fellowship with Acton supporters from all over the world and the opportunity to hear from many of our intellectual heroes.

There are several sponsorship opportunities for this event: Liberty Circle and Lord Acton Circle. A Liberty Circle sponsorship costs \$3,500 and includes premier seating for a table of 10 and recognition for the contribution in our program, Acton's website and marketing. A Lord Acton Circle sponsorship costs \$7,500 and includes VIP seating for 10, recognition for the contribution, and invitations to a private cocktail reception with Rev. Sirico and the guest speaker. Due to limited seating, it's advised to reserve a sponsorship. Single-seat tickets for this

Two paths cross at one Acton University table

Francis Chikwado Onwuchulum, who grew up in Onitsha, Nigeria, enjoys his breakfast on one side of an Acton University table. He is now a seminarian at the Sedes Sapientiae International Seminary and currently studies theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. This is Francis' first Acton University. In describing the importance of Acton University, Francis says that a priest has two vocational callings. The first call leads him to priesthood, the second to his specific mission once he becomes a priest. After his ordination, Francis plans to teach at a university in Nigeria. He praises the quality of lectures, integration of ideas and diversity of thought at Acton University.

On the other side of the table sits Mark Lauer. Hailing from Detroit, Mark did not have to travel quite as far as Francis. Less than a month previously, Mark retired after 34 years in sales and marketing at General Motors. Unlike Francis, Mark has been involved with the Acton Institute for over 20 years.

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Acton's 27th Annual Dinner will take place at the DeVos Place.



dinner are \$175 each and include invitations to receptions before and after the dinner.

Keep an eye on Acton Institute communications for the announcement of the special guest speaker.

Previous Annual Dinner speakers include Rev. Paul Scalia, Daniel Hannan, P.J. O'Rourke, Mart Laar, John O'Sullivan and Eric Metaxas.

For more information and to save your seat or table at the 27th Annual Dinner, please visit us online at www.acton.org/dinner, send an email to nporter@acton.org or call the office at 616.454.3080. The anniversary event is black tie preferred.

He has lost count of the number of times he has attended Acton University but returns each year because he recognizes the constant need to fight against the notions that the free market is inherently immoral. Mark understands Acton's mission at a deeply personal level. "You can't use a religious argument with an atheist," he notes. "And you can't use an economic argument with a religious."

This table is a micro Acton University: the young seminarian and the retired businessman sharing why the Acton Institute is indispensable to both of their missions.

Wim Decock named the 2017 Novak Award winner

In recognition of Professor Wim Decock's outstanding research in the fields of theology, religion and economic history, the Acton Institute will be awarding him the 2017 Novak Award.

Despite Michael Novak's passing in February 2017, his memory will continue to be honored every year with the presentation of the Novak Award. This recognizes new outstanding research by scholars early in their academic careers who demonstrate outstanding intellectual merit in advancing understanding of the relationship between religion, the economy and economic freedom. Recipients of the Novak Award make a formal presentation at an annual public forum known as the Calihan Lecture. The Novak Award comes with a \$15,000 prize.

Professor Wim Decock teaches legal history at the Universities of Leuven and Liège (Belgium). He is an associate fellow at Emory University's Centre for the Study of Law and Religion (USA) and an affiliate researcher at the Max-Planck-Institute for European Legal History (Germany). Decock holds an M.A. in classics and an LL.M in law, and he

received his Ph.D. in legal history in a joint program through the Universities of Leuven and Roma Tre (Italy). His 2014 book, *Theologians and Contract Law: The Moral Transformation of the Ius Commune*, earned him the H.M. Leibnitz Prize of the German Research Foundation. Decock has held visiting professorships at the University of Bergen (Norway) and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (France). He was also a visiting scholar at Harvard Law School (USA).

Besides his interest in early modern Catholic and Protestant sources, Decock investigates numerous other topics that highlight the connection between moral, theological, legal and economic thought.

The Novak Award forms part of a range of academic scholarships, grants and awards available from the Acton Institute that support those engaged in serious reflection and research on the relationship between theology, the free market, limited government and the rule of law. Details about these academic scholarships may be found at www.acton.org/scholarships.



Professor Wim Decock the 2017 Novak Award winner.

THE
Novak Award
2017

ACTON in the News

“... [I]ncompetence is actually inherent to human learning. To some degree, it is unavoidable in any form of government or organization. All competence is learned, though different people have more natural aptitude at some skills than others.”

—Excerpted from Dylan Pahman's article
in Public Discourse

Paul Bonicelli

Title: Emmanuel Macron wins French presidential election
Program: Fox Business
Airdate: 05.08.17

Dylan Pahman

Title: Suppose you were an idiot: On the importance of acknowledging incompetence
Publication: Public Discourse
Date: 05.31.17

Samuel Gregg

Title: Walking in the shadow of Globalism
Publication: Library of Law and Liberty
Date: 06.13.17

Reminder

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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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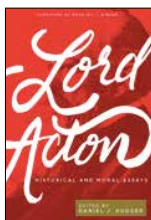


Foundations of a Free and Virtuous Society

By *Dylan Pahman*

Creative, quirky and always winsome, Dylan Pahman builds a systematic case for a positive relationship between a biblical understanding of the human person and the economic flourishing that freedom enables. His tour of scripture, philosophy and economics mirrors Acton Institute's highly successful conferences.

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Edited by *Samuel Gregg*

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Sep 21	Pittsburgh Luncheon Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Pittsburgh, PA
Oct 2	A&M United Methodist Church Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	College Station, TX
Oct 3	Houston Luncheon Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Houston, TX
Oct 5	Dallas Evening with Acton Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Dallas, TX
Oct 18	Acton's 27th Annual Dinner	Grand Rapids, MI
Dec 6	Public Spirit and Public Virtue Conference	Washington, D.C.