

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

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“connecting good intentions with sound economics”

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President's Message

“There is a romance associated with this history, and it is bound up with strong moral concerns.”

There is a long-standing bias in Catholic social teaching toward unions, and this dates from the long history of labor struggles for fair wages and safe working conditions. There is a romance associated with this history, and it is bound up with strong moral concerns. The Catholic Church played a heroic role in the fall of Communism in Poland through its influence on labor unions that were striking against oppression, which is to say state coercion.

Pope John Paul II, who knew something about the social role of labor unions, also warned about their drift into politics. In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, he wrote: “Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them.”

The reality with all public affairs, however, is that conditions change. Just because something is called a union does not make it automatically good and moral. Essential considerations of justice and freedom must be in place. Generally speaking, the long history of unions has been bound up with the right of free association. So far as I can tell, the current practice of public-sector union organizing has little or nothing to do with this principle, so it is right and proper that Catholic social teaching should also recognize this.

Here's the question Catholics need to ask themselves: Are the unions I support of the same type that are idealized in Catholic social teaching? Or have they changed to the point where they are unions in name only but actually just political machines for coercing workers and extracting money through the political process?

The bias toward unions in Catholic social teaching is rooted in a perception that unions fulfill certain moral conditions. When they fail to do so, the application of moral teaching can change. There is no *a priori* reason to back every union demand and no reason for Catholics to feel under any doctrinal obligation to do so.

Part of the mission of the Acton Institute is to provide faithful information and to think critically as these events unfold. We are grateful for your support.

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".

Rev. Robert Sirico, President

ACTONINSTITUTE

Christian Poverty in the Age of Prosperity

The 2011 Acton Lecture Series kicked off with Rev. Robert A. Sirico speaking on the topic of “Christian Poverty in the Age of Prosperity” in Grand Rapids. The February 3 lecture struck a very pastoral tone. Rev. Sirico addressed many of the parables in the Gospel and how they instruct in caring for the poor.

Rev. Sirico pointed out that the enemies of society describe the material world as bad, but that we “need to be concerned about the things that keep us from having a full relationship with God.” God declares that “it is not the physical thing that I want, but the heart that I want.” He reminded those in attendance that the one way we test the heart “is how we deal with physical things and the material world.”

He chided religious figures who offered superficial exegetical statements about condemning all matters of wealth. “The main way the poor can overcome the perpetual state of poverty is through enterprise

and access to capital,” Rev. Sirico added.

Continuing with these themes, he stressed to the assembled that they pay attention and “see the vulnerable among us.” He talked about the challenges that society faces because of so much technology and prosperity and declared that we need to meditate on the Scripture. “We can never give up our vocation to be Christian, to

be believers, to really be servants of almighty God because of our prosperity.”

And, he said, when it comes to the call for sacrifice in the Gospel, “We should not minimize the demands of the Scripture but we should embrace them.”

The Acton Lecture Series began in 1991 as a service to the local community. Through the series, the Institute seeks to bring knowledgeable and thought-provoking speakers to the area, providing our local audience in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the opportunity to interact with prominent thinkers on issues of faith and freedom.

“We should not minimize the demands of the Scripture but we should embrace them.”



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Rev. Sirico speaking at the first Acton Lecture Series of 2011

From Our Conference Participants

I've told so many people about Acton and the wonderful opportunity this has been for me. I know that I'll learn so much here that can be a benefit for the rest of my life.

—Kathryn Allen
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

The conference truly was a gift and a blessing and you have my sincerest thanks and appreciation for helping to make this possible for me and so many others.

—Joseph B. Howard II
Sewanee, Tennessee

New Call of the Entrepreneur Site

Acton's web coordinator David Lohmeyer has designed a new website for the documentary "The Call of the Entrepreneur." The site went live in March and is online at www.calloftheentrepreneur.com.

The film tells the stories of three entrepreneurs: A failing dairy farmer in rural Evart, Michigan, a merchant banker in New York City, and a refugee from Communist China.

"The Call of the Entrepreneur" has been translated into Spanish, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, German, Polish, French, Slovak, Romanian and Portuguese.

Michael Severance, an operations manager for Acton, translated an Italian article written after a recent premiere in Italy on February 19. The original article titled "Who's Responding: "The Call of the Entrepreneur" was written by Francesco Bellotti for the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*. Bellotti declared:

The Acton Institute's Italian premiere of "The Call of the Entrepreneur" in the city of La Spezia was the first of many more showings foreseen in the coming months to stimulate debate in Italy

faith impacted each. He said:

I think there are definitely some key public events that give added insight into his faith life: His assassination attempt, his spiritual battle with communism, with special attention on his 1988 summit in Moscow, and his 1994 letter to the American people announcing his Alzheimer's affliction.

In an Acton commentary titled "Deeper Truths Magnify Reagan Centennial," he also declared of Reagan:

It's not the policies that point to Reagan's greatness but his principles. His ideas are timeless because they evoke deeper truths about man, his relationship to the state, and most importantly, his Creator.

Dr. Carl Trueman, who teaches church history and serves as academic dean at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, also delivered a talk for Acton on Tap under the title, "An Englishman Abroad: Amateur Reflections on the Current Evangelical Political Scene." One of Dr. Trueman's recent books is called *Republicrat*:

ACTON News



The Call of the Entrepreneur in its new look went live in March



on the virtues of entrepreneurship.

Acton on Tap 2011

On February 17, associate editor Ray Nothstine hosted an Acton on Tap in Grand Rapids on "Faith and Public Life in Ronald Reagan's America." Nothstine spoke about Reagan's personal faith life as well as the influence of his faith on the nation and world. The event was held in part as a tribute to the centennial Reagan birthday. Over 50 people attended the celebration. Nothstine focused his talk on three events in the life of Reagan and how his

Confessions of a Liberal Conservative. In this book Trueman argues that "conservative Christianity does not require conservative politics or conservative cultural agendas." The event took place on March 2 in Grand Rapids. Dr. Trueman said of the experience:

Despite my fears that I might be heavily out-gunned at Acton, the seminar actually turned out to be great fun. I had, after all, never before lectured in the back room of a pub, with a pint of Pale Ale in one hand and a notebook in the other.

Acton Responds to “A Call for Intergenerational Justice”

On March 10 at the Derby Station restaurant in Grand Rapids, Acton hosted an open mic discussion on “A Call for Intergenerational Justice: A Christian Proposal for the American Debt Crisis.” The event featured Dr. Gideon Strauss, who is the CEO of The Center for Public Justice, and Acton research fellow Mr. Jordan Ballor. “A Call for Intergenerational Justice” claims to “promote a just solution to our debt crisis.” The Call also says, “Effective programs that prevent hunger and suffering and empower poorer members of society must continue and be adequately funded.” You can read the entire statement and see a list of signers at <http://www.cpublicjustice.org/intergenerationaljustice>.

Ballor led the effort on the Acton PowerBlog in criticizing “A Call for Intergenerational Justice” and summed up his thoughts at the discussion saying:

The Call moves too easily and quickly from God’s clear concern for the poor to endorse particular federal governmental responsibilities. This gives the clear impression that direct federal assistance to the poor is somehow divinely mandated, an impression that does not do justice to

the responsibilities of other social institutions, particularly the church... We are in a situation where difficult choices need to be made about governmental spending, and the Call does not provide a principled or prudentially helpful framework for making these tough decisions.

Dr. Strauss argued that the document was a unifying document and said that, “We must reduce the deficit and continue to take care of the poor.” The mission of the Center for Public Justice is “to help citizens and public officeholders respond to God’s call to do justice.”

On April 20, the American Enterprise Institute will hold a further discussion on “A Call for Intergenerational Justice” in Washington D.C., with Dr. Strauss and Ballor participating in a panel consisting of supporters and critics of the document. The event is titled “I Hope I Die Before I Get Old.” The Acton Institute would like to thank Dr. Strauss for making himself available to discuss the document here in Grand Rapids.

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Strauss argued “We must reduce the deficit and continue to take care of the poor.”



Dr. Gideon Strauss

ACTON in the News

“The bias toward unions in Catholic social teaching is rooted in a perception that unions fulfill certain moral conditions.”

—Excerpted from Rev. Robert Sirico’s article in *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: Catholic teaching’s pro-union bias
Publisher: *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*
Date: 02.28.11

Dr. Samuel Gregg

Title: Catholic Church and Public Sector Unions
Program: *Kresta in the Afternoon*
Air Date: 02.22.11

Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: The Morality of the Federal Budget
Program: *EWTN World Over with Raymond Arroyo*
Air Date: 02.17.11

Reminder

Help Acton Promote Freedom and Virtue!

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The Poor Will Be Glad

By Peter Greer & Phil Smith

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Hardcover 288 pages Original Price \$12.00 Sale \$10.00

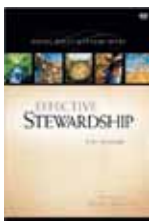


International Aid and Integral Human Development

By Philip Booth

Christians in wealthy nations have an obligation to assist those who struggle to subsist in developing economies. The critical question remains: How is this duty best discharged? Philip Booth, relying on the principles of Catholic social teaching and the evidence of development economics, argues the strategy.

Softcover 67 pages Original Price \$7.00 Sale \$6.00

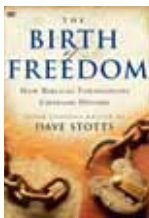


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Birth of Freedom Curriculum DVD - 7 lessons	\$28.00		

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
May 5	Chicago Luncheon Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Chicago, IL
Jun 14-17	Acton University	Grand Rapids, MI

STAFF ACTIVITIES/DEADLINES

Date	Event	Location
April 20	AEI Roundtable: "I Hope I Die Before I Get Old" Jordan Ballor featured as panelist	Washington DC
May 4	Catholic Financial Association Dr. Samuel Gregg to speak	New York, NY
May 17	Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace Dr. Samuel Gregg to speak	Rome, Italy

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