Acton notes

Acton Institute Newsletter
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Urban Density, Downtown Montreal Cityscape, Quebec, Canada. iStock © JayLazarin

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President's Message

"We are stewards of this beautiful historic building; its care is our responsibility, as is the work done in it."

The Acton Institute has been in its new home in Grand Rapids for a little over a year now. I have been pleasantly surprised at the amount of activity our new space has afforded us. With an auditorium that seats 200, a gallery for art exhibits, spacious meeting rooms, and a highly-visible presence in our city, the Acton Institute is busier than ever.

We are able to participate in ArtPrize, our city's art competition, which brought over 400,000 visitors to Grand Rapids last year. The panel discussion on human trafficking we hosted was a standing room-only event. Our Acton Lecture Series, a regular luncheon event, has grown, averaging about 100 attendees each month. We recently offered our first live satellite link-up that allowed those in Grand Rapids to participate in our Rome conference on religion and liberty. Our media studios are taking shape, allowing us to do frequent podcasts and take advantage of more television interview opportunities. The lovely St. Joan of Arc chapel is complete.

Of course, all of this is made possible by our very generous donors, and the Acton staff is always cognizant of that. We are stewards of this beautiful historic building; its care is our responsibility, as is the work done in it.

One of our new projects, *For the Life of the World*, takes on the issue of stewardship and salvation – *oikonomia*, the economy of all things - in a unique way. Told in a story format, the main character, Evan, explores a series of questions through his "Letters to the Exiles." In one episode, Evan asks about work – what does it mean to work? Is it just toil? (I won't tell you much more; you'll have to watch it yourself.)

Let's just say that God made us to work, and that work is a gift. We each have a calling, and it's through those callings that we meet each other's needs. And that is good. Our work - our good work - calls us into relationships with others.

Our new building has called the Acton Institute into many new relationships in the span of just one short year. We look forward to all the new ventures, activities and most of all, the relationships that lie ahead.

Sincerely,

Rev. Robert 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.

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

Rome Conference Ties Religious & Economic Freedom

On Tuesday, April 29, the Acton Institute hosted the conference "Faith, State, and the Economy: Perspectives from the East and West" at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Rev. Robert Sirico, who moderated the discussion, called the relationship between economic and religious freedom "underexplored" in society. Over 200 attended the event in Rome and the conference was made available live to anybody with an internet connection. The Acton Institute opened the Mark Murray Auditorium at the Grand Rapids headquarters for friends to watch and participate by having an opportunity to submit questions.

> "Over 200 attended the event in Rome and the conference was made available live..."

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun, who is the Bishop Emeritus of Hong Kong, did not hold back in his condemnation of the Chinese Communist regime. "Absolute power causes absolute corruption," declared Cardinal Zen. His address was titled, "Economic openness and religious repression: The Paradox of China." He condemned the regime's treatment of Christians by adding, "More than physical suffering, religious oppression consists in humiliation."

Samuel Gregg, director of research at the Acton Institute, titled his address, "Religious Liberty and Economic Freedom: Intellectual and Practical Paradoxes." Gregg stressed the notion that "Corrosions of liberty in one area can damage its vitality in other areas." He also stated that "Welfare states have negatively impacted the Church's institutional liberty."

This conference, which was free and open to the public, was the first in the five-part series "One and Indivisible? The Relationship Between Religious and Economic Freedom." The next event in the five-part series will be in November in Washington on the topic of "Dignitatis Humanae: Preserving Religious Liberty in an Age of Expanding Government." You can watch the entire conference in Rome at http://new.livestream.com/ActonInstitute/Rome2014.

The Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

The Bishop of Emeritus of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun.

From Our Conference Participants

Thanks for the amazing wealth of relationship and heritage that was made available through Acton. Wow. I am continually humbled by how much I simply do not know or even know I didn't know.

—Mark Ismond
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Any Christian who is concerned about the Church's growing irrelevance in our culture must take part in the Acton experience.

—S. Michael Craven
Plano, Texas

ACTON News

Acton Event Highlights Human Trafficking in West Michigan

On March 28th, the Acton Institute hosted and organized a monumental event in Grand Rapids on human trafficking. The panel discussion received a lot of print, radio, and television attention from local press. Elise Hilton, a communications specialist at the Acton Institute, played a central role in organizing "Hidden No More: Exposing Human Trafficking in West Michigan." The event brought together representatives from Michigan's state government and local community activists to shine a light on West Michigan's real and growing problem of human trafficking. "The Michigan State Attorney General's office issued a report on human trafficking at the beginning of 2014," Hilton explained. "One of the major findings was that we have virtually no data on the problem in Michigan. There is no scholarly work being done. There are no records in terms of police. The police department only keeps a record of human trafficking cases that involve kidnap or murder."

The panel featured Chief Deputy Attorney General Carol Isaacs; State Senator Judy Emmons, the Michigan Legislature's leading voice on Human Trafficking; human trafficking survivor and founder of Sacred Beginnings Leslie King; Andy Soper of the Manassah Project at Wedgewood Christian Services; and Becky McDonald of Women At Risk International.

Over two hundred people attended the morning panel.

"From all the accounts that we've heard, there is no one clear face on those perpetuating these crimes in Michigan, and there is no clear face of the victims," declared Senator Emmons. Leslie King powerfully testified to her own experiences in sex-trafficking in Grand Rapids. On the Sacred Beginnings Website, King shares some of her story:

> I was a terrified fifteen-year-old child standing on the corner of Logan and Division in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Pimped out and sold to the highest bidder. I was called a prostitute, a whore, and so many other hateful names that a child should never be called. No one seemed to see me as a fifteen-year-old. No one looked at me to see that I was being used, abused, and sold. It was like the whole world just saw me as trash.

Two hundred people attended the morning panel. For many of them, this was their first time attending an Acton event.

Religion & Liberty Interviews Russell Moore

Russell D. Moore, who is a leading public advocate of defending America's first freedom, was recently interviewed in the pages of Religion & Liberty. Moore serves as the eighth president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in America.

Russell Moore

In his editor's notes, R&L managing editor Ray Nothstine noted, [Moore] "delves into why Baptists offer a unique insight on this issue because of their own persecution in American history. He also touches on the importance of ecumenical cooperation for religious liberty, an area where he has emerged as a leader."

Prior to his election to his role at the ERLC in 2013, Moore served as provost and dean of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he also taught as professor of theology and ethics.

Acton Fights City on Denial of Property Tax Exemption

Grand Rapids has denied Acton's city property tax exemption request because according to the city, the think-tank "does not meet non-profit charitable status." Acton is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and their status with the IRS is unrelated to the case with the city. "We are disappointed with the city assessor's ruling, but we are confident that our appeal will be successful," Acton Executive Director Kris Mauren declared. Acton will appeal to Michigan's state Tax Tribunal. "I think the city is not persuaded because they have a very narrow definition, but that very narrow definition is not supported by case law," added Mauren.

> "...they have a very narrow definition, but that very narrow definition is not supported by case law..."

Mauren expanded on the appeal and cities going after non-profits as a revenue stream in a short column in the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of *Religion & Liberty*:

> Government at the local level is desperately looking for new funding sources. It has turned its sights on non-profits and charities for now. Part of the reason is because localities often don't have the courage to ask for tax increases from the voters to meet their overextended public expenditures. We are only asking for the laws in Grand Rapids to be applied fairly and consistently. But we are committed to conveying the importance and power of improving our local community and the world apart from government.

In April, the Mackinac Center reported that city officials in Grand Rapids gave detailed information and background to a local reporter, but did not turn over that documentation to Acton. At a Board of Review hearing in March, a reporter for Mackinac's Capitol Confidential was told that electronic recording equipment was not allowed at the hearing. Since the city has never barred recording equipment at the hearing before, they later backtracked, saying this policy was a "miscommunication."

Tax law. iStock © Creativeye99

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

ACTON in the News

"That's what an encounter with God is, to look at the truth of who we are."

—Excerpted from Rev. Sirico's appearance on *Your World With Neil Cavuto.*

Jordan Ballor
Title: Desmond Tutu Draws a Line in the Oil Sands
Publication: *The Federalist*
Date: 4.22.14

Rev. Robert Sirico
Title: Honesty and Faith in Politics
Program: *Your World With Neil Cavuto*
Air Date: 4.17.14

Kishore Jayablan
Title: Pope Francis, Without the Politics
Program: *BBC World News*
Air Date: 4.01.14

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 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.

Introduce Acton To A Friend

Know someone who would be interested in the work of the Acton Institute? Use our website to send them an e-mail with information on our programs and activities. Thanks for promoting freedom and virtue!

Visit: www.acton.org/refer

Acton University 2013

ACTON Book Shop

Acton University Pocket Drive: 2010-2013 Lecture Bundle

By Acton Institute

Own all of the lectures from Acton University on a USB flash drive with this inexpensive bundle. Valued at $179, these lectures were recorded from Acton University sessions from 2010 to 2013. The flash drive comes with lectures organized by year and each includes the lecturer and course title in the file name.

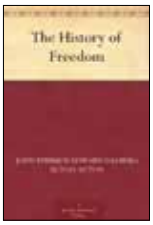
181 Lectures **Sale $29.95**

Get Your Hands Dirty: Essays on Christian Social Thought (and Action)

By Jordan J. Ballor

This volume brings together a decade of reflection at the intersection of culture, economics, and theology. Addressing topics ranging from the family to work, politics, and the church, Jordan J. Ballor shows how the Christian faith calls us to get involved deeply and meaningfully in the messiness of the world.

Softcover 238 pages **Sale $22.00**



The History of Freedom

By Lord Acton

Lord Acton's two most famous essays, with an introduction by Acton scholar and Acton Institute Advisory Board member Professor James C. Holland.

Softcover 93 pages **Sale $6.00**

Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life

By Michael Novak

In straightforward language, Novak sets out to refute the popular conception that business leaders are materialistic and rapacious, asserting that "...business not only creates social connections, lifts its participants out of poverty, and builds the foundation of democracy, but also can and must be morally uplifting."

Hardcover 246 pages **Sale $21.00**

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Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life	$21.00		

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Jun 17-20	**Acton University** DeVos Place Convention Center	Grand Rapids, MI
Sep 11	**Pittsburg Luncheon** Keynote Speaker: Rev. Robert Sirico	Pittsburg, PA
Sep 18-20	**Thriving Churches: Flourishing Communities** Developing Economic Leadership in Urban Ministry	Weehawken, NJ
Oct 9	**Acton Annual Dinner** Keynote Speaker: Daniel Hannan, Author & Member European Parliament	Grand Rapids, MI
Nov 10	**Dignitatis Humanae** Preserving Religious Liberty in an Age of Expanding Government	Washington, D.C.