

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

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“connecting good intentions with sound economics”

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President's Message

"We argued that the two concepts were as compatible as personal liberties and human dignity."

When Kris Mauren and I conceived of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty nearly 30 years ago, we did so with the understanding that free markets and religious faith weren't at odds. We argued that the two concepts were as compatible as personal liberties and human dignity. We weren't the first to reach this conclusion—philosophers and economists had broached the subject as early as the 17th century.

Over the subsequent centuries, however, an invisible barrier was erected between religious faith and economic reality—unless somehow that religious stripe reflected progressive redistributionist ideologies. From the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the culture embraced this concept of robber barons and corporate criminality as the norm of a commercial society. Karl Marx dismissed religion completely as "the opiate of the masses." Others, such as adherents of South America's liberation theology movement, attempted to bend the legitimacy of Christ's message to the logic of class warfare.

Armed with little more than a small library of books authored by the stalwarts of Austrian economics and their counterparts from the Chicago School of Economics, Kris and I dreamed big. The two of us would establish a repository of knowledge that would, in William F. Buckley's infamous words, stand athwart history, yelling "Stop!" In other words, we wanted to stop the rapidly growing government. We wanted people to recognize their individual dignity. We wanted people to recognize that economic freedom benefits men and woman on every rung of society's ladder.

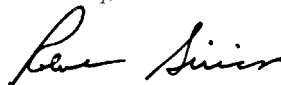
For too long, we have heard that the economy is a zero-sum game and that the wealthy succeed only at the expense of the poorest and, increasingly, the natural environment. If only the world's Ebenezer Scrooges were forced by government fiat to fork over more of their money to Leviathan's social programs, the left argue, then all comrades would share in increased health and prosperity.

Acton continues to prove none of the above could ever be true, which is what we initially set out to do. That Acton has grown in recognition and influence over the past 27 years—once again named one of the Top Think Tanks in the United States by the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program—is but icing on the cake. We still have important work to do.

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



Sincerely,



Rev. Robert Sirico, President

ACTONINSTITUTE

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Acton makes a strong showing in think tank ranking

The University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) recently released its 10th Annual Think Tank Report. Chatham House was named "Think Tank of the Year," while Brookings Institution was listed as the "Top Think Tank Worldwide" and the "Top Think Tank in the United States." Acton and Argentine subsidiary, Instituto Acton, appear in the report:

- *Acton Institute is 11th (out of 100) in the Top Social Policy Think Tanks ranking.*
- *Acton Institute is 29th (out of 90) in the Top Think Tanks in the United States.*
- *In Top Think Tanks Worldwide, Acton ranks 156th (out of 175).*
- *8th (out of 90) in Best Advocacy Campaign for PovertyCure.*
- *24th (out of 65) in Best Think Tank Conference for Acton University.*
- *Instituto Acton was ranked 138th (out of 148) for Best Independent Think Tanks.*

In his introduction to the report, James G. McGann addresses trends in think tanks and the 2016

presidential election. "Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders both tapped into the deep discontent in a sizable segment of the American electorate," he explains. "The platforms of these two candidates were cut from the same cloth but are sewn by different tailors. They are both Nationalists, Nativists and Protectionists." He also offers several explanations of the great discontent of the global electorate:

- *Globalization fed into an economic insecurity and sense of loss for many.*
- *International terrorism, violent crime and drug use have caused "physical insecurity" for many communities.*
- *Demographic shifts are leading to a loss of a sense of identity.*
- *The world has shifted from being "bi-polar" to "multi-polar," meaning no one and everyone is in charge.*
- *Leaders have failed to understand the needs of their citizens.*

Acton will continue to connect good intentions with sound economics and work to fight this discontent. We appreciate your continued support.



Acton Institute ranked 11th (out of 100) in the Top Social Policy Think Tanks.



Anti-Trump Protest (Image by Jonathan Ichikawa) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

From Our Conference Participants

Before [Acton University], I didn't see a connection between economics and religious thinking. Now, I see they are interrelated. AU has given me useful language in speaking to my congregation so that I help others understand the purpose of their work.

—Acton University Attendee

Thanks to Acton University, I have grown significantly in my understanding and appreciation of faith traditions, and I have learned a great deal about the history of democracy in America and in the benefits of a free market.

—Acton University Attendee

Acton Lecture Series connects broad themes to political climate

Since 1991, the Acton Lecture Series has served as a catalyst for productive discourse on social and economic topics relevant to West Michigan and global audiences.

In the past few months, Acton has invited many speakers who address topics ranging from a discussion of cultural conservatism in our current political climate to the causes of the failures of governmental checks and balances in the United States.

In his lecture “The End of Cultural Conservatism as We Know It,” Avik Roy, founder and president of The Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, discussed the fracturing of conservative thinking in the United States. He observed that the traditional “three-legged” stool model of conservatism—free markets, anti-communism and cultural conservatism—is no longer an accurate synthesis:

Without the Soviets as a foil, conservatism became a two-legged stool. ... [and] before

long conservatism might be down to a one-legged stool because, we no longer agree on ... what we seek to conserve.

Roy also noted that conservatives have failed to adapt to changing demographics in the United States. In its emphasis on Western Judeo-Christian values, conservatism failed to listen to those voices that were found outside of its European concentration. Roy called for an increased emphasis on inclusion with those who are not traditionally part of Western Civilization, those who share similar values of human dignity, virtue and liberty. Conservatives need to adapt to

cultural shifts to combat the feelings of alienation and separation from many in the movement.

In “The Growth of Leviathan,” Joseph Scoville, a retired U.S. Magistrate Judge for the western district of Michigan, addressed the application of the United States Constitution: there is a great disconnect between the Constitution that we teach children in school and the Constitution that we actually live under. Scoville highlighted how the growth of the federal government has developed well beyond its original intent, giving it levels of power never defined in the Constitution. The impetus for this federal overreach began with the progressives during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. Concerning this shift in power, Scoville asked:

How did this happen? Whom do we have to blame for this? The progressives ... They contrived some makeshift objections to the original Constitution and said that senators should be elected. That's because they didn't believe in the original design of the Constitution.

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Ilya Shapiro speaking at one of many Acton Lecture Series.



Despite this shift in power, Scoville stated that he is still hopeful. He suggested that the Supreme Court justices will stand up for what the Constitution actually says.

These topics are worthy of examination, considering the modern political climate in which polarization and the federal government's great authority over its citizens are ever increasing. The Acton Lecture Series will continue to address relevant social and economic topics in the near future and put emphasis on free-market principles and individual liberty. Visit Acton.org for our upcoming events and archived videos.

Religion & Liberty getting a makeover

Just as Acton's website was redone in the beginning of 2017, it's time to give a fresh coat of paint to *Religion & Liberty*. The spring issue of Acton's quarterly magazine will be updated and redesigned.

The scope of the magazine will change. For the past several years, *Religion & Liberty* has focused on an American audience. The new tagline of the magazine will read: "Acton Institute's *International* Journal of Religion, Economics and Culture." The theme will continue to be the intersection of faith and economics, but now with an added transatlantic focus. Connecting good intentions with sound economics goes beyond our national borders.

The format will be different. With a larger audience comes a need for more space and more content. The current magazine runs with 16 pages, but the new design will include a total of 24 pages.

The look will be different. If you've visited www.acton.org recently, you'll notice our website features more imagery and brighter colors. The new

Religion & Liberty will mirror that, with a bolder shade of red and a full-color interior. You can expect stunning visuals to accompany new essays and articles.

Much will stay the same, however. Acton's commitment to quality, well-researched pieces will remain. Our commitment to reaching a broad interfaith audience will remain the same. Many of the essays, reviews and articles will be consistent with content found in *Religion & Liberty* archives.

The new product will also reflect our commitment to good stewardship with sustainable packaging and paper. The editorial team will look into options that are not only a good use of the money so generously given to the institute but also ecologically-friendly.

Ultimately, the goal of the redesign is to reflect the quality of the writing and content in an updated, bolder design. The hope is that this new look improves the readability of the publication and that all readers will enjoy the change.



The next issue of *Religion & Liberty* will feature a new design and more content.

ACTON in the News

"Freedom is necessary for virtue to be practiced. We don't become virtuous by accident; we become virtuous by a free act of the will."

—Excerpted from Rev. Robert Sirico's article
in *The Ledger*

Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: Ordered liberty depends on virtue
Publication: *The Ledger*
Date: 01.31.17

Acton Institute

Title: Downtown think tank ranks among top in world for "social policy"
Publication: *Grand Rapids Business Journal*
Date: 02.06.17

Samuel Gregg

Title: Good Money
Publication: *Public Discourse*
Date: 02.08.17

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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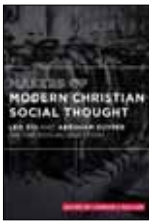


Lord Acton: Historian and Moralist

Edited by Samuel Gregg

Lord Acton was one of the most profound and peculiar individuals of the Victorian era. These essays introduce and engage the works and legacy of this brilliant scholar. Written by the most respected authorities on Acton, these essays grapple with Acton's ideas about history, morality, politics, religion and revolution.

Softcover 188 pages Sale \$10.95



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



For the Life of the World Film

Produced by Acton Institute

This feature film version was created to enjoy all seven episodes in one viewing experience. Be entertained as you explore the deep question of what your Salvation is actually for. What does having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ mean for the here and now of living on earth?

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Edited by Mark L. Russell

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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
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
Apr 20	Chicago Luncheon Lecture Globalization or Global Governance Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Chicago, IL
Jun 20-23	Acton University Registration closes May 19	Grand Rapids, MI