

ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

May 2008, Volume 18, Number 5

“Connecting good intentions with sound economics”

THE BIRTH OF FREEDOM



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President's Message

Dear Friends,

The idea of wealth coming through the service of others was not known in this world until the modern age, beginning in the late Middle Ages. Before then, there was a widespread assumption, contradicted by hardly anyone, that one sector of society was growing wealthy at the other's expense.

The wealth accumulated through the market process has permitted the human population to grow exponentially. We can read the spiritual writers of the fifteenth century and forward on issues of wealth and see that they celebrated its arrival as something good for humanity, while continuing to warn of the need of charity and spiritual concerns.

Voluntary renouncement of earthly possessions was seen as an act of personal piety, a calling. But so too is the calling to manage money well, to create, invest, accumulate, and give generously. This is the lesson we learn from the science of economics, which was not something invented by Adam Smith, but rather something discovered first by the students studying in Spain under the influence of St. Thomas. With this background we can see what is wrong with dreams of the wholesale expropriation of the rich. It would lead not to social justice but to a historic calamity that would shock even those who witnessed the famines of old. The end of wealth would require the radical reduction of the human population too. It would also be an unparalleled disaster for human freedom.

In Jesus's parables, too, we see not a negative portrayal of enterprise but one that is morally neutral, a setting in which to learn the great lessons of life. In them, we find people buying and selling to obtain treasures, hiring workers to work in vineyards, building houses in a variety of natural environments, and even investing money in productive and unproductive enterprises.

Jesus used the settings of enterprise not to condemn wealth but often as analogies to the kind of spiritual riches we should seek in life. The Acton Institute seeks to spread this knowledge of the market and their virtue, which is one reason your support of our work is also a contribution to civilization itself.

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

“The end of wealth would require the radical reduction of the human population too.”

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

ACTONINSTITUTE

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The Birth of Freedom Premieres in Grand Rapids

Acton's new documentary, *The Birth of Freedom* will premiere for the first time ever in Grand Rapids at the city's public museum on May 8. *The Birth of Freedom* wonderfully traces the progression of human freedom within Western civilization. Medieval theologians, Christian dissenters, and political leaders tied to Christianity all played a role in expanding these God-given freedoms. Commentators in the film are Samuel Gregg, Susan Wise Bauer, Glenn Sunshine, Alan Crippen, II, William Allen, Robert P. George, George Weigel, John Witte, Jr, and Rodney Stark. The Acton Institute is privileged to feature so many fine scholars and authors in *The Birth of Freedom*.

"There has been a systematic campaign to reinterpret our past, as if it meant to disallow free expression of religion," says William Allen. Allen is a political science professor at Michigan State University. By simply portraying the history of Western Civilization and the church, the film powerfully

"The Birth of Freedom wonderfully traces the progression of human freedom within Western civilization."

reclaims the faith contribution to freedom from a tendency to secularize this narrative. "European humanity learned its dignity in the school of freedom, which

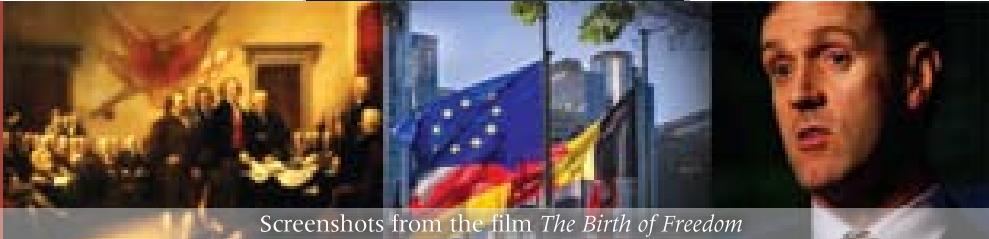
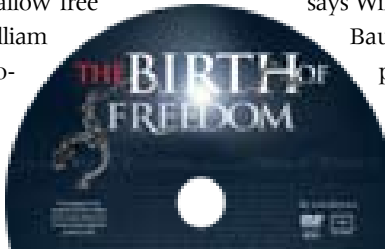
taught European people they were somebody not just some thing," adds George Weigel. "When you take God out of the picture you take this notion of higher law of the whole framework of liberty out of the picture," says Alan Crippen,

II. Crippen is the founder and president of the John Jay Institute for Faith, Society, and Law.

Special attention is also given to the heroic struggle for civil rights in America. "The idea that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with certain rights is not at all a new idea. It is in fact as the phrasing indicates in the creation story",

says William and Mary professor Susan Wise

Bauer. Please plan on joining us for the premiere of *The Birth of Freedom*. It will be a powerful and memorable tribute to the story and meaning of freedom, and that is why it is so important for us today.



Screenshots from the film *The Birth of Freedom*

From Our Conference Participants

Thank you for all the hard work you do for the FAVS symposium. I found the symposium relevant and exciting. The ecumenical spirit was overwhelming and the importance of Acton's mission greatly under-appreciated.

—Dave Doty
Wilmore, Kentucky

In the climate of our culture, the Acton Institute's vision and mission is essential.

Academia is increasingly fraught with Marxist ideals, and Acton's voice is an essential force in countering this trend.

—Nicole Meline
Huntington Beach, California

Acton PowerBlog Celebrates Three-Year Anniversary in April

The Acton Institute's PowerBlog celebrated its anniversary on April 4. The PowerBlog allows for Acton staff and thinkers to engage in thoughtful religious, cultural, and political thought. The site is also essential for networking as, Anthony Bradley's recent appearance on Glenn Beck to discuss Black Liberation Theology came to fruition because of a media member reading the blog.

"In the last four months, we've averaged 88,000 visitors per month. To put it in perspective, that's anywhere from a fourth to a third of all Acton web traffic," said Acton's director of communications, John Couretas. Additionally, other bloggers will be attending this summer's Acton University Conference, and Couretas noted that we will be reaching out to them to cover the conference.

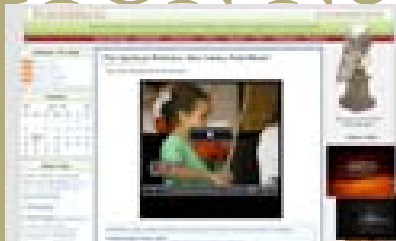
The continued professionalism and improvements of the PowerBlog would not have been possible without the hard work and experience of Acton's website administrator Jonathan Spalink. Also of note is Acton

also an assistant professor of theology at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Bradley penned a series of essays on Black Liberation Theology for the newsletter of the Glenn Beck Program.

The recent media attention on Dr. Jeremiah Wright, the former minister of Senator Barack Obama's church, Trinity United Church of Christ, allowed for Bradley to discuss his research in high exposure news outlets. Dr. James Cone, who is a professor at Union Theological Seminary, is widely credited as being the chief architect of Black Liberation Theology. "One of the tasks of black theology, says Cone, is to analyze the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ in light of the experience of oppressed blacks. For Cone, no theology is Christian theology unless it arises from oppressed communities and interprets Jesus's work as that of liberation," says Bradley.

Bradley examined in-depth the Marxist roots of Black Liberation Theology. "Among all of the controversial comments by Jeremiah Wright, the idea of massive wealth redistribution is the most alarming. The code language "economic parity" and references to "maldistribution" is nothing more than channeling the

ACTON News



Anthony Bradley talks Black Liberation with Glenn Beck

associate editor Jordan Ballor, who has penned 48 percent of all entries. Plans are in the works to increase the number of popular and scholarly book reviews on the site as well. The Acton Institute would like to thank the readers of the PowerBlog.

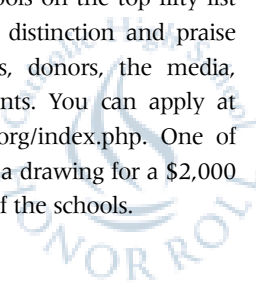
Anthony Bradley Discusses Black Liberation Theology with Glenn Beck

Acton research fellow Anthony Bradley discussed Black Liberation Theology on CNN Headline News with Glenn Beck. Bradley, whose Ph.D. dissertation is titled *Victimology in Black Liberation Theology*, is

twisted economic views of Karl Marx," says Bradley.

Catholic Honor Roll Deadline Draws Near

May 15, 2008, is the final deadline for this year's Catholic High School Honor Roll. Since the Honor Roll's inception in 2004, schools on the top fifty list have enjoyed well deserved distinction and praise from bishops, school boards, donors, the media, and, most importantly, parents. You can apply at the website www.chshonor.org/index.php. One of the incentives for applying is a drawing for a \$2,000 scholarship awarded to one of the schools.



Rev. Robert Sirico on the Religious Left

Rev. Robert Sirico discussed the “Rise and Eventual Downfall of the Religious Left” to a packed room for the Acton Lecture Series on March 13. The lecture hall had over 120 attendees to hear the address by Acton’s president. Rev. Sirico warned the audience of common misguided beliefs that characterize the religious left. A couple of notes of warning declared that the religious left embodies, “A conviction that the cause of material inequality is due to injustice that must be rectified, usually by a forced redistribution of the wealth.” Rev. Sirico also declared how the religious left has become overly fixated on government programs, vastly preferring these solutions to private charity and communal efforts.

In a critique of Jim Wallis and his brand of religious politics, Sirico noted, “Wallis’s view of the role of Christianity is obsessively focused on the goal of social change, and in using the state as the primary, and indeed sometimes the only, tool to achieve

“Wallis needs to be reminded that the primary purpose of Christianity is the transformation of the human heart toward the goal of salvation...”

such change. ...Truly, Wallis needs to be reminded that the primary purpose of Christianity is the transformation of the human heart toward the goal of salvation, with cultural and social consequences that may follow,” Sirico added.

Rev. Sirico also traced the rise of Christian socialism in the twentieth century and declared how the National Council and World Council of Churches have been strongly influenced in this direction. Sirico noted how their goals call for higher taxes, more bureaucracies, more market regulations, and a curbing of the sphere of free enterprise in society.

He pointed out that over the long run their political philosophy will lead to their demise. “The religious left and its romantic attachment to the socialist ideal fails to come to terms with the nature of the human person and the need for social space for creativity and the need for freedom,” Sirico said.



A packed room for Sirico's lecture on the Religious Left



Rev. Robert Sirico

ACTON in the News

This explains the phenomenon that puzzles some observers: Many blacks can be culturally conservative and yet vote with liberal Democrats

—Excerpted from Anthony Bradley's article in the *Detroit News*

Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: A Look at the New Religious Left

Program: *The Sandy Rios Show*

Air Date: 4.1.2008

Anthony Bradley

Title: Worry about Obama's economics, not his faith

Publisher: *Detroit News*

Date: 4.1.2008

Andrea Robinson

Title: Would today's coverage tarnish Martin Luther King?

Publisher: *Miami Herald*

Date: 4.3.2008

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.



www.samaritanaward.com

Acton and You

The Acton Institute is now accepting online applications for the Samaritan Award. Please encourage your favorite charity to apply for the 2008 Samaritan Award. You can visit the website www.samaritanaward.com to access the application and receive more information. The application deadline is May 30, 2008. Acton rewards the winning charity with \$10,000 for embodying the principles of effective compassion. The winning charity will be primarily supported by private funds, will display a high

level of transparency and accountability, and will incorporate faith into its programming. The second and third place prizes are awarded with \$1,000 each. The top ten charities are highlighted in a special edition of World Magazine. All of the applicants are included in the online Samaritan Guide database of U.S. charities, which is a unique and valuable tool for marketing and development. Last year we received over 300 applicants and the top award went to Arkansas Sherrifs' Youth Ranches.

ACTON UNIVERSITY

JUNE 10-13 SYMPOSIUM OF FAITH, ECONOMICS, LIBERTY

Grand Rapids
Michigan

2008 The seminars and conferences of the Acton Institute provide the world's foremost training in the theology and philosophy of the free-market model. -Michael Lee, Johns Hopkins University

Registration for Acton University is already filling up! If you or someone you know would like to learn about the foundations of a society sustained by freedom and virtue, apply today at www.acton.org/ActonU



Apply today at www.acton.org/actonu Travel, lodging, and registration scholarships will be offered to select students.

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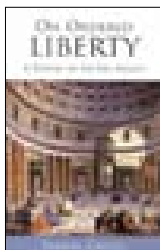


The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success

by Rodney Stark

It is a commonplace to think of Christianity and rationalism as opposite historical and philosophical forces. In this study, Stark demonstrates that elements within Christianity actually gave rise not only to visions of reason and progress but also to the evolution of capitalism.

Paperback 304 pages Original Price \$15.00 Sale \$12.00

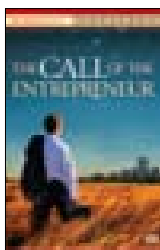


On Ordered Liberty: A Treatise on the Free Society

by Samuel Gregg

On Ordered Liberty goes beyond the liberal and conservative divide, asking its readers to think about the proper ends of human choice and actions in a free society. Beginning with the insights of Alexis de Tocqueville and some natural law sources, author Samuel Gregg suggests that integral law must be distinguished from most contemporary visions of freedom.

Paperback 144 pages Original Price \$19.95 Sale \$17.95



The Call of the Entrepreneur (DVD)

produced by Acton Media

A merchant banker. A failing dairy farmer. A refugee from Communist China. One risked his savings. One risked his farm. One risked his life. Why do their stories matter? Because how we view entrepreneurs—as greedy or altruistic, as virtuous or vicious—shapes the destinies of men and nations.

Length 60 minutes Original Price \$22.00 Sale \$20.00

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On Ordered Liberty: A Treatise on the Free Society	\$17.95		
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Calendar of Events

ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
May 8	<i>The Birth of Freedom</i> World Premiere Acton's Newest Documentary Public Museum of Grand Rapids	Grand Rapids, Michigan
May 22	Acton Lecture Series "Looking for Happiness, Finding Faith" Dr. Arthur C. Brooks to speak	Grand Rapids, Michigan
June	Registration now Open for Acton University	Grand Rapids, Michigan

STAFF ACTIVITIES/DEADLINES

Date	Event	Location
May 19	Catholicism and the Free Market Sponsored by the Institute of Applied Philosophy Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Lugano, Switzerland
May 20-21	Friedrich Naumann Foundation's Conference "Master Plan 2050 - Strategies for a Free World" Rev. Robert Sirico to be keynote speaker	Berlin, Germany
May 28	Napa Legatus Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Napa, California

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