

# ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

May / June 2010, Volume 20, Number 3



*“Connecting good intentions with sound economics”*

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# President's Message

“...I find many teachings of Jesus to be illuminated by bringing an economic understanding to parables...”

In American political culture, there is a tendency to associate the support of free enterprise with the “Christian right” and the cultural causes of family values and other forms of “conservative” activism. The connection is a general one that may or may not apply in every case.

I’m intrigued that the United States is virtually alone in this association. In most countries around the world, especially in Latin America, Christian political activism is more closely associated with an attack on so-called neoliberalism, the word used to identify support for lower taxes, less trade protection, and private property rights. In fact, the association is so intense that any supporter of free markets is in danger of being decried as “unchristian” and uncharitable toward the poor.

What are we to make of these biases? It is a testament to the political pliability of bodies of religious teaching, and the capacity of most any regime to manipulate religion to its own ends.

For this reason, I’ve detected the rise of an unwarranted cynicism among many young students towards the political implications of Christianity. In my own reading of the scriptures, I find many teachings of Jesus to be illuminated by bringing an economic understanding to parables, many of which use examples drawn from the world of trade. Moreover, I find it impossible to avoid the economic implications of even the commandments, which so clearly presume property rights, for example.

The real core of the confusion here is not so much over religion and its economic implications, but over economics and its effects on how the world works.

This summer, the Acton Institute will host many programs designed to educate religious people about economics and its implications. I’m thrilled to say that we are doing fantastic work in this area, thanks to your continued support. We certainly have our work cut out for us, not only in the United States but around the world too.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Sirico".

Rev. Robert A. 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

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# Alinsky for Dummies

Mr. Joseph Morris's lecture "Alinsky for Dummies: His Persistent Influence and Its Meaning for American Society and Politics" was delivered on May 6 in Grand Rapids. As Lord Acton warned that power corrupts, Saul Alinsky — the father of modern "community organizing" — rejoiced that corruption empowers. "The Alinsky model of social action, by nature, generated conflict," said Morris. Morris talked about the Alinsky connection with President Barack Obama while Obama was a community organizer on the South Side of Chicago.

Alinsky took the concept of labor organizing and sought to apply the same notion to the community. The idea is that everybody bands together and confronts the "oppressors," whoever the organizers have decided are doing the oppressing.

Mr. Morris talked about how the fundamental flaw of Alinsky was that he could never get past the sins of America. "He didn't share the sunny optimism of Ronald Reagan, or agree with John F. Kennedy when he called America 'The last best hope on

earth'." Alinsky did not believe that America's Founding principles or leaders had any uniqueness or carried any exceptional qualities. Mr. Morris said Alinsky's own words called upon America to apologize to the world for all its "sinful actions."

**"Alinsky's own words called upon America to apologize to the world..."**

Mr. Morris also discussed the moral culture by saying that people who share a fundamental belief in God can sustain and build a society that they want.

He noted that, currently, there are many that no longer share this view in the United States.

He recommended to those at the lecture that they read Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* for themselves. "This book lays out the action plan for the community organizer," said Morris. Mr. Morris served under President Reagan as assistant attorney general of the United States, in charge of international affairs and director of the Department of Justice Office of Liaison Services. He is a member of the bars of the Supreme Court of the United States, and the Supreme Court of Illinois. If you would like to listen to this lecture, please visit [www.acton.org](http://www.acton.org).



Saul Alinsky



Mr. Joseph Morris at the Acton Lecture Series

## From Our Conference Participants

The opportunity to attend this conference was a great blessing to me. I am certain that it will prove to have been a formative and significant aspect of my education.

—Lorraine Krall  
Washington, D.C.

As one who is headed into a pastoral career, my interest in issues of virtue and serving the poor were not only stimulated, but also informed by a new set of critical tools.

—Adam Barton  
Zeeland, Michigan

## Acton Luncheon in Chicago

On April 29, over 160 friends and guests joined Acton for our annual luncheon in Chicago, hosted this year at the Newberry Library. Rev. Robert A. Sirico delivered the address “Does Social Justice Require Socialism?” in which he discussed the increasing calls for government intervention in financial market regulation, health care, education reform, and economic stimulus in the name of “social justice.” He was joined by special guest, Mr. Joseph A. Morris. Mr. Morris is a partner at Morris & De La Rosa and CEO of the Lincoln Legal Foundation.

Rev. Sirico began by framing the discussion in the nature of the person, and the role of government:

“I don’t think it is necessarily the case historically, intellectually, philosophically, or theologically that what social justice calls for is a form of coercive socialism. I think a lot of this has to do with a certain confusion about the role of government in society, and about the understanding and distinction between social responsibilities and political responsibilities.”

## Are Tea Parties Good for America?

Acton on Tap hosted the discussion “Are Tea Parties Good for America?” at Derby Station in Grand Rapids on April 27. Associate Editor Ray Nothstine offered remarks on the lessons tea party groups can learn from the civil rights movement and other movements in American History. Quoting Dr. Martin Luther King, Nothstine reminded the attendees of the importance of raising the quality of public discourse when it comes to political disagreements, saying, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.”

Forty five participants attended the event, including officers and members of West Michigan Tea Party organizations. Acton on Tap features a speaker who briefly introduces a theme for the evening and leads group discussion throughout the evening. Stay tuned for future Acton on Tap events as it continues to expand its reach in the community.

## Executive Director Honored

Acton’s Executive Director and co-founder Kris

# ACTON News



Rev. Robert Sirico lectures on Social Justice



To hear Rev. Sirico further discuss this distinction, and to hear the rest of the lecture, please visit our online media archive at [www.acton.org](http://www.acton.org).

The Acton Institute has many resources available on Social Justice in our online bookstore, including a new Acton monograph *Beyond Distributism*, a new book titled, *Liberating Black Theology*, and a DVD curriculum *Effective Stewardship*, produced by Acton Media and available through Zondervan.

Alan Mauren was awarded the 2010 Charles G. Koch Outstanding Institute for Humane Studies Alumnus Award. The award is named in honor of Wichita businessman Charles G. Koch, in recognition of his longtime support and keen interest in cultivating young talent to advance the principles and practice of freedom. Mr. Mauren was awarded a special plaque and a cash award of \$5,000. He generously donated the money to the Acton Institute. Mr. Mauren co-founded the Acton Institute with Rev. Robert Sirico in 1990.

# Rev. Sirico Speaks at St. Thomas More Academy

Rev. Robert Sirico spoke to an assembly of students about the monumental importance of what the Judeo-Christian heritage has contributed to our culture and society. The lecture took place at St. Thomas More Academy in Raleigh, North Carolina on March 26.

He also praised the influence that Western Civilization bestowed upon our legal system, nation, and the world. "It is noteworthy that the institutions that allow us to enjoy the prosperity that we have, has emerged out of Western Civilization," said Rev. Sirico. In his address, he articulated the links between our religious heritage and all the positive forces that emerged out of Western Civilization, such as rule of law, ethics, charitable organizations, and modern medicine.

Rev. Sirico also warned students to be vigilant of those who wish to tear down the values and positive forces that emerged from Western Civilization. "We need to fight for human liberty. It recognizes that we are made in the image of God and that we have rights, not by virtue of an action by govern-

ment or a political process, but by virtue of our nature... man is prior to the state," said Rev. Sirico. He also told the students that they shouldn't apologize for the heritage they inherited. He called on students to be informed about the kind of ideas they advance and the ones they oppose.

This address is also available in its entirety on the Acton Website. Saint Thomas More Academy's mission is to continue the vital tradition of Catholic education by integrating the very best academic curriculum with the deepest spiritual wisdom of Catholic Christianity.

While in Raleigh, Rev. Sirico also lectured on social justice, a lecture similar to his Chicago address. The lecture was sponsored by the John W. Pope Civitas Institute and took place on November 25. Rev. Sirico stressed the importance of a morally formed society. "The system that produces the maximum amount of economic prosperity is the system of free trade, a system rooted in law and that is prefaced on a certain ethical or religious understanding of the human person," Sirico said.



St. Catherine's Church in Utrecht, Netherlands



## ACTON in the News

"If markets are going to work and appropriate limits on government power maintained, then society requires reserves of moral capital."

—Excerpted from Dr. Samuel Gregg's comments in *The Pittsburgh Tribune - Review*.

### Ray Nothstine

Title: Will Tea Parties Awaken America's Moral Culture?  
Publisher: *The Christian Post*  
Date: 05.09.10

### Dr. Samuel Gregg

Title: Exposing Goldman Sachs: Where's the morality?  
Publisher: *The Pittsburgh Tribune - Review*  
Date: 4.29.10

### Kishore Jayabalan

Title: Fifth Anniversary of Benedict XVI's Election  
Program: *AI Kresta Radio Show*  
Air Date: 4.16.10

## 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.



## SAVE THE DATE

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF PROMOTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

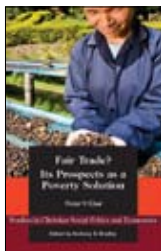
# ACTON INSTITUTE ANNUAL DINNER

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2010

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MR. RICHARD M. DEVOS TO RECEIVE THE FAITH & FREEDOM AWARD

# ACTON Book Shoppe



## Fair Trade? Its Prospects as a Poverty Solution

by Victor V. Claar

Fair Trade is an enormously popular idea in Christian and secular circles alike. Who, after all, could be against fairness? Victor V. Claar, however, raises significant economic and moral questions about both the logic and economic reasoning underlying the fair trade movement.

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## Catholic Education and the Promise of School Choice

by Kevin Schmiesin

American education is in crisis. Many public schools, especially those serving students of challenging socio-economic backgrounds, fail to provide the training necessary to succeed in a modern, global economy. Meanwhile, Catholic schools, traditionally the bastions of excellent academic and moral formation, suffer from funding shortages and lack of mission clarity.

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## Beyond Distributism

by Thomas E. Woods, Jr.

Troubled by rampant injustice and inequality, many conscientious Christians advocate radical economic reforms. Distributism, a program that traces its popularity to Catholic writers Hilaire Belloc and G.K. Chesterton, promotes the widespread ownership of property by tempering the market with guilds or similar associations.

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## Calendar of Events

### ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
<b>June 15-18</b>	<b>Acton University 2010</b> Co-sponsored by Acton Institute and Liberty Fund	Grand Rapids, MI
<b>June 25</b>	<b>Breakfast lecture and book signing</b> With Dr. Arthur Brooks, President of American Enterprise Institute	Grand Rapids, MI
<b>July 15</b>	<b>Acton Lecture Series: Dr. Stephen Grabill</b>	Grand Rapids, MI

### STAFF ACTIVITIES/DEADLINES

Date	Event	Location
<b>June 25</b>	<b>Catholic University of Portugal</b> Dr Samuel Gregg to speak	Lisbon, Portugal

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notes

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