

# ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

May / June 2016, Volume 26, Number 3



*“connecting good intentions with sound economics”*

## In This Issue

- City of Grand Rapids ends tax dispute with Acton
- Details for 26th Annual Dinner announced
- Acton experts featured in local, national, and international media

# President's Message

As this is written, the Acton Institute staff is ramping up for another exciting Acton University, which will be held June 14-17. Since we inaugurated AU eleven years ago, it has become a jewel in the ever-expanding Acton portfolio of educational services we're able to provide to not only clergy but also the public at large, who are eager to learn about blending good intentions with sound economic principles.

"Since we inaugurated AU eleven years ago, it has become a jewel in the Acton portfolio..."

Economics, what the 19th-century Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle dubbed "the dismal science," is often misconstrued as some type of alchemy conducted in the darkest academic corridors. Devoid of context, Carlyle's quip too often serves as a justification to disregard what we know about markets in order to work backward from desired results while employing faulty economic theory. In this alternate universe, the aspiration for utopian ends justifies whatever means to attain them.

Nothing could be further from the truth, however. No less the father of modern economic thought and author of *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, another Scotsman, Adam Smith, also wrote a book titled *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, after all.

Lest you think Carlyle is receiving the bum's rush in this matter, I assure you that he also recognized the implicit and explicit moral repercussions inherent in matters both economic and social. Carlyle, readers are reminded, coined the phrase "dismal science" after his analysis concluded there exists no rational economic basis for slavery. In other words, the nexus of economics and morality makes the case against racism and slavery while at the same time championing liberty and equal opportunities. Carlyle concluded it was "dismal" to erroneously apply faulty economics to any market practice abrogating personal freedoms.

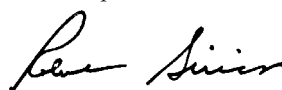
Too often, lazy or uninformed journalists misapply Carlyle's phrase whenever they write about what they anticipate readers will interpret as economic injustices and moral dilemmas in today's world. While it's true these injustices and dilemmas inflict bleak results economically and morally, too often they are the unforeseen consequences of public policies informed by bad economics that place the cart before the horse on the immoral trail Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek christened *The Road to Serfdom*.

These in a nutshell are the religious and economic underpinnings of the Acton Institute. Outside the nutshell these underpinnings also provide the intellectual and spiritual scaffolding for the universe explored each year by more than 900 Acton University attendees and experts.

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

**ACTON**INSTITUTE

98 E. Fulton Street • Grand Rapids, MI 49503 • USA • [www.acton.org](http://www.acton.org)

# City of Grand Rapids drops property tax dispute against Acton

A two-year dispute between the Acton Institute and the City of Grand Rapids regarding the nonprofit's exempt status under state property tax law is over, with Acton emerging the victor.

In 2014, the City rejected Acton's request for a tax exemption on its building, parking areas and personal property at 98 E. Fulton. Acton purchased the property in 2012 and spent much of the next year renovating it. An appeal before the City's 2014 Board of Review was denied, leading Acton to bring its case before the Michigan Tax Tribunal in Lansing. On March 8, Presiding Judge Preeti P. Gadola granted a consent judgment between Acton and the City, bringing two years of litigation to a close.

Since filing its appeal in 2014, Acton has paid more than \$200,000 in property taxes, which the City must now refund, with interest. Acton will be exempted from these taxes going forward.

Particularly disappointing were briefs submitted by the City during this process that made factually inaccurate assertions and used incendiary, highly

politicized language more suitable to a partisan political blog than a court of law.

In one court document, the City of Grand Rapids called Acton a "politically driven think tank that publishes right-wing libertarian, philosophical, and political propaganda tempered with extreme right-wing viewpoints." The city's willingness to attack a faith-based charitable and educational institution openly on the basis of alleged "right-wing" viewpoints was both surprising and alarming.

In its own filings with the Tax Tribunal, Acton remained civil in tone and stuck to the case law and emphasized Acton's faith-based charitable and educational mission and activities.

Perhaps the most disturbing misrepresentation made by Grand Rapids in its court filings was that Acton was "ironically and hypocritically ... anti-charity." In fact, Acton has always been a strong advocate of private charity.

Acton is pleased with the outcome and happy to move on, focusing on our research and education.



Acton Institute's renovated office is located at 98 E. Fulton Street

## From Our Conference Participants

I know how valuable and precious freedom is for all human beings regardless of any culture, nation, color and religion. [Acton University] has intensified my belief and learning. It has opened new avenues for me to evangelize the gospel of the Lord in a new and fresh way.

—Patrick S  
Pakistan

I have been to many conferences but never one so full of interesting participants with such diverse insights to contribute. It was a stimulating conference to say the least, and I am grateful for all your efforts to make it happen!

—Greg R  
Tucson, Arizona

## 26th Annual Dinner to honor Antonin Scalia and feature Rev. Paul Scalia as keynote speaker

To celebrate and reflect on another year of promoting a free and virtuous society, the Acton Institute will hold its 26th Annual Dinner on October 27 at the JW Marriott in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. The soiree will have a black tie preferred dress code.

Every year this event brings together Acton staff, supporters and lovers of freedom and virtue from all over the world to enjoy an evening together, discussing the important themes of the day and focusing on the mission of the institute. Last year's dinner reflected on the first years of the Institute in honor of its silver anniversary, with more than 800 attendees. It was the largest single day event ever held by the Institute.

The evening plenary address will be given by Rev. Paul Scalia. Scalia is the son of the late Justice Antonin Scalia. He studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Pontifical University

through outstanding leadership. During his time on the U.S. Supreme Court, Scalia was known for his quick wit and steadfast devotion to freedom for Americans. He held to the judicial philosophy of originalism, a doctrine that does not accept the Constitution as a "living document" but, rather, subscribes that any interpretation must adhere to the original intent of the founders. Scalia had no interest in judicial activism, believing that any major change should be done by the people's representatives in the legislature.

A devoted family man, Scalia and his wife, Maureen, had nine children and more than thirty grandchildren. The couple took pride in raising their children traditionally and devoutly Catholic, similarly to Scalia's own upbringing. This faith kept the family close. With Scalia often busy with work, their most precious bonding time together as a family occurred weekly during mass at St. Matthew's Cathedral. Antonin Scalia died suddenly of natural causes on February 13, 2016.

This will be the tenth Faith and Freedom Award given by the Institute. Diet Eman was presented

## ACTON News



Grand Rapids: iStock © Henryk Sadura

Acton's 26th Annual Dinner will be held at the JW Marriott.



Rev. Paul Scalia

of Saint Thomas Aquinas, both in Rome. Since his ordination in 1996, he has served as parochial vicar at Saint Bernadette, Saint Patrick and Saint Rita parishes near D.C. He served as pastor of Saint John the Beloved until 2012, when he was appointed the Bishop's Delegate for Clergy. Fr. Scalia will be following in his father's footsteps, as late Supreme Court Justice gave the Annual Dinner address almost two decades ago at Acton's Annual Dinner in 1997.

Also during the evening, Justice Antonin Scalia will be posthumously awarded Acton's Faith and Freedom Award. This award recognizes an individual who exemplifies commitment to faith and freedom

with the Faith and Freedom Award at the 25th Annual Dinner. Other past winners include Lady Margaret Thatcher, Richard M. DeVos Sr., William F. Buckley Jr., Mart Laar, Charles W. Colson, Rocco Buttiglione, Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan and John M. Templeton. To learn more about these individuals, visit <http://www.acton.org/about/faith-and-freedom-award>.

There are many opportunities to sponsor this event. For more information and to save your seat or reserve an entire table at the 26th Annual Dinner, please visit us online at [www.acton.org/dinner](http://www.acton.org/dinner), email [nporter@acton.org](mailto:nporter@acton.org) or call the office at 616.454.3080.



# Acton Experts given national, international attention

Part of the mission of the Acton Institute is to educate business and political leaders about the importance that faith plays in economics. Already this year, Acton has been given excellent platforms to discuss current events in light of this.

Acton analysts and experts have been making waves in local, national and even international media. In April, Rev. Robert Sirico was called as a witness to give testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works discussing climate change and *Laudato si'*. The lively exchange between Rev. Sirico and Senator Barbara Boxer of California drew a lot of attention as they both passionately defended their thoughts on the controversial encyclical. A video containing the “highlights” of the hearing is available on Acton’s PowerBlog.

The last event in the “One and Indivisible” conference series was held in Rome at the end of April. This series looked at the relationship between religious and economic freedom, and the final event was titled, “Freedom with justice: *Rerum Novarum* and the new things of our time.” It marked the 125th

anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical denouncing socialism and defending private property. Several journalists attended the event in Rome and covered it in publications, including Institut Coppet’s online blog, The European Conservative and Zenit.

Acton’s director of research, Samuel Gregg, has been called upon by several publications to address the 2016 presidential election. He has analyzed the candidates as well as the overall themes that have emerged during the race. He’s written for the Detroit News, Crisis Magazine, Public Discourse, Catholic World Report and more.

The property tax dispute with the City of Grand Rapids discussed previously in this issue of Acton Notes also inspired several editorials and reports in local and state press, including the Grand Rapids Press, Grand Rapids Business Journal, the Detroit News and more.

Roundups or summaries of these articles, commentaries and interviews are available on Acton’s PowerBlog at <http://blog.acton.org>.



Rev. Sirico testifying before the Environmental and Public Works Committee



## ACTON in the News

“It bodes ill for both the republic and civil society that any government feels itself entitled to attack a taxpayer for its perceived beliefs. And, that the answer to budget shortfalls is always more taxation—never less spending. This as government power at all levels grows unchecked.”

—Excerpted from Rev. Sirico’s article  
in The Detroit News

### Acton Institute

Title: City on hook for \$205K in tax decision  
Publication: Grand Rapids Business Journal  
Date: 3.21.16

### Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: When politicians want your money  
Publication: The Detroit News  
Date: 3.22.16

### Todd Huizinga

Title: Future of the European Union  
Program: Capitol Hill Hearings—C-SPAN  
Airdate: 4.11.16

## 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.

## INTRODUCE ACTON TO A FRIEND

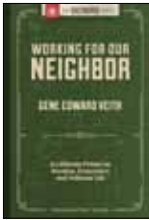
KNOW SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE WORK OF THE ACTON INSTITUTE? USE OUR WEBSITE TO SEND THEM AN E-MAIL WITH INFORMATION ON OUR PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES. THANKS FOR PROMOTING FREEDOM AND VIRTUE!

**Visit: [www.acton.org/refer](http://www.acton.org/refer)**

### DISTRIBUTISM VS. FREE-MARKETS DEBATE



# ACTON Book Shop

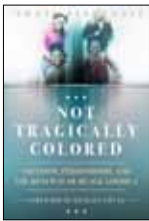


## WORKING FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

By Gene Edward Veith

In this elucidating work, Gene Edward Veith connects vocation to justification, good works and Christian freedom—defining how the Lutheran contribution to economics can transfigure ordinary life and work with the powerful presence of God.

**Softcover 140 pages    Sale \$9.95**



## NOT TRAGICALLY COLORED

By Ismael Hernandez

Despite a seemingly endless series of programs, discussions and analyses—and the election of the first African American president—the problem of race continues to bedevil American society. Ismael Hernandez strikes at the root, even when that means plunging his ax deep into the hard soil of political correctness.

**Softcover 300 pages    Sale \$19.95**



## THE NEW TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION

By Todd Huizinga

*The New Totalitarian Temptation: Global Governance and the Crisis of Democracy in Europe* is a must-read if you want to understand how the European Union got to this point and what the European project fundamentally is. This is the first book to identify the essence of the EU in a utopian vision of a supranationally governed world.

**Hardcover 280 pages    Sale \$23.99**



## THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Edited by Jordan J. Ballor and Robert J. Houstra

The evangelical church has a social responsibility. But what is that responsibility and what does it look like in practice? This collection explores the nature of the institutional church's responsibility, as well as the deeper questions related to the church's social witness.

**Softcover 126 pages    Sale \$9.95**

For our fastest service and a complete list of titles, visit [store.acton.org](http://store.acton.org)

	PRICE	QUANTITY	TOTAL
<a href="#">WORKING FOR OUR NEIGHBOR</a>	\$9.95		
<a href="#">NOT TRAGICALLY COLORED</a>	\$19.95		
<a href="#">THE NEW TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION</a>	\$23.99		
<a href="#">THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY</a>	\$9.95		

Make checks payable to "Acton Institute." For orders in the United States, Canada and Mexico: for the first item, add US \$6.75 for shipping, plus US \$1.00 for each additional item. Overseas orders: US \$8.75 for the first item, plus US \$1.75 for each additional item.

Michigan residents add 6% sales tax \_\_\_\_\_

(see rates at left) Shipping \_\_\_\_\_

(enclose check or credit card information) Total \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Country \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

☐Mastercard ☐Visa ☐Am Ex    Signature \_\_\_\_\_    Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Call** 616-454-3080    **Fax** 616-454-9454    **Mail** Acton Institute, 98 E. Fulton St, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

# ACTON notes

NONPROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
GRAND RAPIDS, MI  
PERMIT 986

Acton Institute • 98 E. Fulton Street • Grand Rapids, MI 49503 • USA

## ACTON notes

### Calendar of Events

#### ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
<b>Jun 14-17</b>	<b>Acton University 2016</b>	Grand Rapids, MI
<b>Oct 13</b>	<b>Pittsburgh Dinner</b> Duquesne Club Rev. Robert Sirico to speak	Pittsburgh, PA
<b>Oct 27</b>	<b>26th Annual Dinner</b> Rev. Paul Scalia to speak	Grand Rapids, MI