

# ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

November / December 2013, Volume 23, Number 6



*“connecting good intentions with sound economics”*

Pope Francis kisses a child in St. Peter's Square. (istock.com © nentcos)

## In This Issue

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# President's Message

"In terms of religious liberty, hope took a heavy blow in 2013."

Most of us are familiar with the "Peanuts" comic strip. The lead character, Charlie Brown, is the anti-hero. His life is one of unrequited love, a losing baseball team, and a football yanked out from him at the last possible moment by the perpetually-cranky Lucy Van Pelt. But Charlie Brown is not a misanthrope. Surrounded by seemingly endless discouragements, Charlie Brown struggles on. The creator of "Peanuts," Charles Schulz, speaks through Charlie Brown: "A whole stack of memories never equal one little hope."

"Hope" is a precious thing to reflect upon at the beginning of a new year, as we gaze upon our "stack of memories" from the passing year. In terms of religious liberty, hope took a heavy blow in 2013. From the tragedy in Syria and the heavy loss of life there, to the serious infringements on religious liberties posed by the HHS mandate in the U.S., looking back is discouraging. It is clear that global hostility between religious sects, believers and non-believers remains alarmingly high.

Yet, there is "one little hope," as Charlie Brown says. Psalm 146 celebrates this:

*Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD, his God,  
The maker of heaven and earth,  
the seas and all that is in them,  
Who keeps faith forever,  
secures justice for the oppressed,  
who gives bread to the hungry.  
The LORD sets prisoners free;  
the LORD gives sight to the blind.  
The LORD raises up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
The LORD protects the resident alien,  
comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow,  
but thwarts the way of the wicked.  
The LORD shall reign forever,  
your God, Zion, through all generations!  
Hallelujah!*

Thank you for your support of the Acton Institute. May 2014 be a year when our stack of memories is filled with this abundant hope.

Sincerely,



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

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](http://www.acton.org)

## Acton Responds to “Evangelii Gaudium”

The Acton Institute has been flooded with media requests because of the 2013 apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis. While “Evangelii Gaudium” primarily examined the role of evangelization in the world, the new pope also weighed in on economic issues and the free market. Acton’s primary criticism of the document, stated by research director Samuel Gregg in *National Review*, was that far too many unexamined economic assumptions had made their way into the text. One might assume from some of the pope’s comments that the role of the state’s interest is benign or unbiased in the world in comparison to the free market.

In a November 27 video response, Rev. Robert Sirico said he agreed with Pope Francis when he says “markets are not enough” but added that it’s important to make the distinction between a free market and the kind of crony-capitalism and unfettered governments on the rise today. “Indeed, does the Pope make a distinction between what

his predecessor Blessed John Paul II called the free economy and the kind of crony or state capitalism so clearly on display today in much of his own Latin America?” asked Rev. Sirico.

“Rev. Sirico appeared on Fox’s “Your World with Neil Cavuto,” and CNBC’s “Kudlow Report” . . .”

Rev. Robert Sirico appeared on Fox’s “Your World with Neil Cavuto,” and CNBC’s “Kudlow Report” among other television appearances. He appeared on Hugh Hewitt’s radio show with guest host AEI President Arthur Brooks on December 11. Acton Research Fellow Michael

Miller also appeared on Kudlow’s program.

In a *The Detroit News* column addressing the Pope’s exhortation, Rev. Sirico declared:

We cannot respond with truth to the challenge of eradicating exclusion and poverty if the poor continue to be objects, targets of the action of the state and other organizations in a paternalistic and aid-based sense, instead of subjects, where the state and society create social conditions that promote and safeguard their rights and allow them to be builders of their own destiny.



Pope Francis. Credit: istockphoto.com © NENEOS

Vatican City, Rome, Italy - November 13, 2013: Pope Francis



Rev. Sirico with Pope Francis in Rome.

## From Our Conference Participants

Acton University is the best seminar I have attended: it was highly professional, had excellent speakers, deep thoughts, but was also warm and accessible.

—Marcos Ohlsson  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

The combination of networking, faith and reason was perfect at Acton University.

—Allegra Hewell  
Washington, D.C.

## Acton on Tap in Grand Rapids

At the most recent Acton on Tap in downtown Grand Rapids on December 10, research fellow Jordan Ballor examined “The Economics of the Heidelberg Catechism.” This year marks the 450th anniversary of the publication of this renowned Reformed confessional document in 1563. Although not primarily an economics text, the catechism does have a number of significant things to say about economic activity and material prosperity. In his remarks, Ballor explored the origin, essence, and goal of economic activity as taught in the catechism. Referring to Lord’s Day 50, which treats the fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” Ballor located the divine origin of material blessings in the catechism’s understanding of God as “the only source of everything good.”

The essence of economics is contained in the catechism’s exposition of the 8th commandment prohibiting theft, which includes the positive responsibilities of stewardship and the need for each person to “work faithfully” so that in the cre-

The next Acton on Tap, scheduled for February 4 at San Chez Bistro in downtown Grand Rapids, will address the growing threat to religious liberty. Religion & Liberty’s managing editor Ray Nothstine will discuss the ideas and tradition that promoted a robust religious freedom in America as well as how to handle the current threat today.

Last October, Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) President Lawrence Reed spoke at Acton on Tap on the topic of “Learning the Lessons of Ancient Rome.” If you have questions about Acton on Tap please contact Nick Porter at [nporter@acton.org](mailto:nporter@acton.org).

## Why Libertarians Need God

Jay Richards, former director of Acton media, will deliver a lecture on “Why Libertarians Need God” at the Grand Rapids office. The January 30 lecture is part of the 2014 Acton Lecture Series lineup. Richards believes the core “libertarian” principles of individual rights, freedom and responsibility, reason, moral truth, and limited government make little sense in an atheistic

# ACTON News



Jordan J. Ballor speaks on the economics of the Heidelberg Catechism.



Jay Richards

ation of wealth and the service of others we might “share with those in need.” The goal of economic life is represented in the catechism’s teachings on the Sabbath, particularly as understood in the obligation to more and more rest from our “evil ways” in anticipation of the eternal rest of the new heavens and new earth. The meeting concluded with a Q&A period, in which the participants discussed the significance of the catechism, the responsibilities of individuals, churches, and governments to assist those in need, and a number of other issues. Audio of the evening’s talk is available at the Acton website: <http://wp.me/p1yKke-gxB>.

and materialistic worldview; but make far more sense in a theistic context. Jay W. Richards is the Distinguished Fellow at the Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, author of *The New York Times* bestselling books *Infiltrated* and *Indivisible* and author of *Money, Greed, and God*, which won a Templeton Enterprise Award in 2010. Future 2014 lecturers include Raymond Arroyo of EWTN, Lawrence Reed, and Chip Mellor, who is the president of the Institute for Justice (IJ). The entire Acton Lecture Series schedule can be viewed at <http://www.acton.org/program/als/home>.

# Acton Now Accepting Bitcoin and Dwolla Donations

In December of 2013, the Acton Institute started accepting Bitcoin and Dwolla donations. Bitcoin is the first decentralized digital currency that is created and exchanged electronically. Dwolla, a United States only company is a payment network that allows people to send, request, and accept money with just a flat fee of 25 cents and no fee for transactions under \$10. Both forms of exchange are hailed for some as a new, cheaper, and easier way to transfer money in the global economy. Foundation for Economic Freedom (FEE) accepted a 1,000 BitCoin gift in 2013. At the time, the donation was equivalent to a million dollars.

The decision to accept Bitcoin has garnered positive news stories for Acton. *The Detroit Free Press* and *MLive* have both chronicled Acton's decision to accept BitCoin. *The Detroit Free Press* highlighted the increasing number of companies and organizations accepting BitCoin.

One of the positives of BitCoin and Dwolla is that it comes with enhanced privacy protection.

“Because of the built in privacy strength of the currency, Bitcoin’s founders called it ‘very attractive to the libertarian viewpoint if we can explain it properly.’ There is virtually no risk of identity theft through the currency transaction,” declared Acton’s executive director Kris Mauren. BitCoin is considered a positive development in repressed countries as BitCoin can bypass blocks in payment or giving.

Acton’s executive director expanded on the importance of BitCoin:

We want to be an organization that always encourages free expression and speech too. As we expand opportunities to raise funds and promote a free and virtuous society, we vow to continue to do the very best at being stewards of your hard earned gifts. Since we promote liberty and freedom here at Acton, it makes sense to offer increased freedom in the ways that our donors are able to give.



Bitcoin banknote 2012; Credit: Wiki Commons © CASASCUS.

Bitcoin is a peer-to-peer payment system and digital currency developed by Satoshi Nakamoto in 2009.

## ACTON in the News

“Let’s make sure that what we want is what is really good for us.”

—Excerpted from Jordan Ballor’s article in *The Gospel Coalition*.

### Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: Tips for Jesus, the Wolf of Wall Street

Program: *Your World with Neil Cavuto*

Air Date: 12.24.13

### Rev. Robert Sirico

Title: Pope Francis as *Time*’s Person of the Year

Program: *The Kudlow Report*

Air Date: 12.11.13

### Jordan Ballor

Title: Sabbath Rest and the Moral Limits of Consumption

Publication: *The Gospel Coalition*

Date: 11.27.13

## 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](http://www.acton.org/refer)



## ACTON ANNUAL DINNER 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.

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With the help of our guide, Pastor Jim Liske, along with seven inspiring stories and key biblical insights, takes us on a journey to explore God's purpose for our stewardship of all that He created. Ultimately, stewardship is about doing what God calls each of us to do, so we can become the people He created us to be.

**DVD & Guides Sale \$15.99**

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

By Jordan J. Ballor

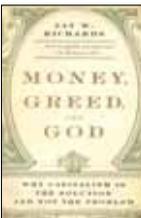


This volume brings together a decade of reflection at the intersection of culture, economics, and theology. Addressing topics ranging from the family to work, politics, and the church, Jordan J. Ballor shows how the Christian faith calls us to get involved deeply and meaningfully in the messiness of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

**Softcover 238 pages Sale \$22.00**

## Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism is the Solution and not the Problem

By Jay Richards



Does capitalism promote greed? Can a person follow Jesus' call to love others and also support capitalism? Was our recent economic crisis caused by flaws inherent to our free market system? Jay Richards presents a new approach to capitalism, revealing how it's consistent with Jesus' teachings and the Christian tradition.

**Softcover 272 pages Sale \$12.00**

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<a href="#">Our Great Exchange Curriculum</a>	\$15.99		
<a href="#">Get Your Hands Dirty</a>	\$22.00		
<a href="#">Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism is the Solution and not the Problem</a>	\$12.00		

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### Calendar of Events

#### ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
Jan 30	<b>Why Libertarians Need God</b> Jay Richards to Speak at the Acton Lecture Series	Grand Rapids, MI
Feb 4	<b>The Growing Threat to Religious Freedom</b> Ray Nothstine to Speak at Acton on Tap	Grand Rapids, MI
Feb 25	<b>Evangelizing in the Shrinking Public Square</b> Raymond Arroyo to Speak at the Acton Lecture Series	Grand Rapids, MI
Mar 13	<b>American Presidents: The Best and the Worst</b> Lawrence Reed to Speak at the Acton Lecture Series	Grand Rapids, MI