

Notes

July/August Vol. 30 No. 4



A message from our president

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

These are difficult times. Demonstrations and violence erupted in many American cities in the wake of George Floyd’s death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. While voices in the public square are rightfully discussing issues of both racial prejudice and the rule of law, issues of private property rights and entrepreneurship have been neglected.

Many small businesses and entrepreneurs already struggling with new burdens caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have been devastated by the consequences of civic unrest. The creation of wealth is essential to ad-

ressing the material impoverishment that undermines human flourishing. The best means of reducing poverty is the protection of property rights, which allow people to not only improve the lives of their families and communities but also express their creative nature.

In this issue you will read about the importance of beauty and worship adapted from an essay by a member of the Acton Institute’s Emerging Leaders Program. It is a wonderful reminder of the importance of praise and thanksgiving in these difficult times. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these emerging leaders are sadly not physically present with us at our offices but are still making excellent contributions to articulating a positive vision for a free and virtuous society. You will also read about the success

of AU Online. The event included over 4,000 virtual attendees from around the world who were interested in exploring the ideas that are essential to a society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.

Two small briefs round out the issue—one about my recent radio interview on the economic impact of COVID-19 and the other an adaptation of a timely and perennial essay by Anthony Bradley written in 2014 about why black lives matter.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Thank you! Your support is more important than ever in these trying times. If you are just learning about Acton, be sure to check out our website, and please prayerfully consider supporting us in our mission. N

Acton Events REGISTER AT ACTON.ORG/EVENTS • WATCH ONLINE AT ACTON.ORG/LIVE		
DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
AUG 20	Acton Lecture Series Janus v. AFSCME: A Conversation with Mark Janus	Online
SEP 17	Acton Lecture Series: Speaker Elizabeth Corey, Ph.D. Intersectionality and the Socialist Temptation	Online
OCT 27	Acton Institute’s 30th Annual Dinner Online Please visit acton.org/events for more information.	Online
NOV 12-14	A Liberty & Markets Colloquium Conference Series Adam Smith on Ethics and Economics	Holland, MI

The world saved by beauty: Singing, worship and COVID-19

Zsanna Bodor, 2020 Emerging Leader

In a world turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic, many parishes that have chosen to reopen their doors are prohibiting their congregations from singing together in public worship.

This infringement on worship is based in part on a government directive, which stemmed from an outbreak of coronavirus among choir members in a Presbyterian church in March.

The fact that singing is one of the forms of speech currently being restricted in our country is representative not only of the apparent discrimination toward faith-related activities and gatherings but also of what could be considered our culture's increasing disregard for beauty.

Beauty is one of evil's favorite victims. And it's a small wonder, as beauty invites us to look upward, to contemplate the divine. The use of beautiful music in the liturgy invites us to marvel at the majesty of God. The congregation's participation in worship through music is both unifying and edifying.

Evil attacks beauty in two ways. The first is by twisting and distorting something that is inherently beautiful for an evil purpose. The second, which we are currently experiencing, is a silencing of and utter disregard for beauty – as though, in the face of hardship, illness and turbulence, beauty were something trivial and inconsequential. But this is a lie.

Amid the political, economic and social upheaval we face, beauty invites us to reflect

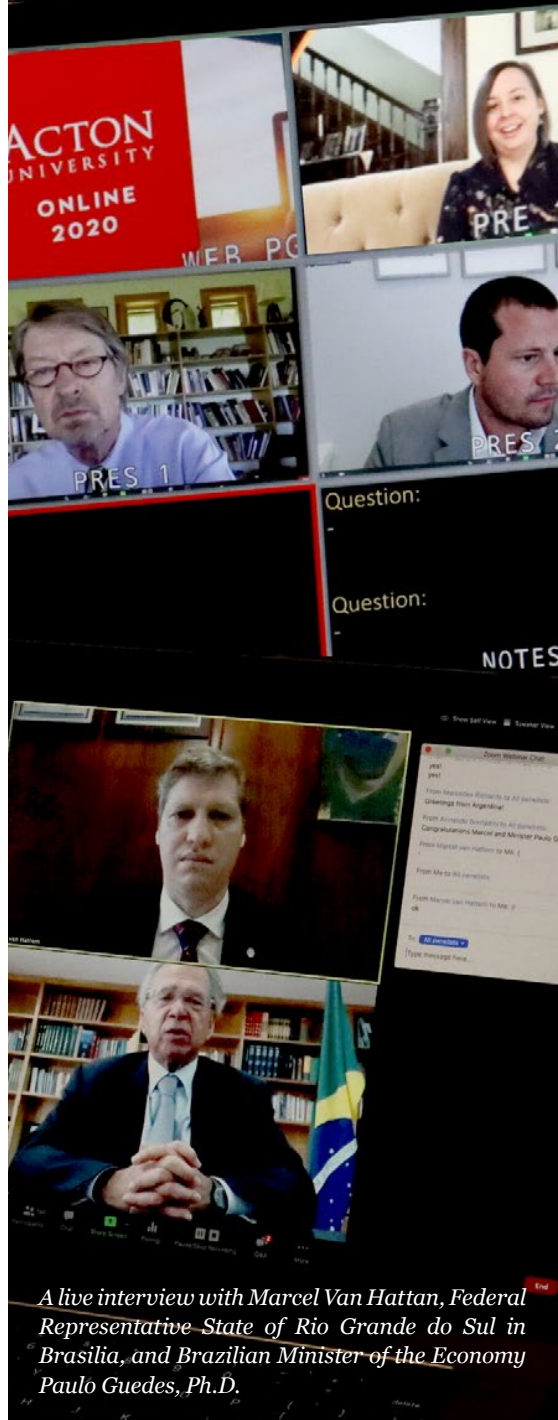
with wonder upon a goodness more perfect and a truth more profound than anything we can attain as fallen human beings in this life.

The restrictions on congregational singing undermine one of the primary reasons for communal worship, which is to inspire hope through the beauty of music and liturgy, a hope that is desperately needed today.

This is not to say that church leaders do not have the right, and even the responsibility, to protect their congregations and take the steps they deem necessary for the welfare of their flock. But as we contemplate the chasm that divides the world that is from the world that ought to be, beauty reminds us that our help comes from something beyond ourselves, something eternal. To read this article in its entirety, please visit acton.is/singing. **N**



Acton Online presenters: satirist and author P.J. O'Rourke; Sarah Estelle, Ph.D. and Seth Dillon, Chief Executive the Babylon Bee



A live interview with Marcel Van Hatten, Federal Representative State of Rio Grande do Sul in Brasilia, and Brazilian Minister of the Economy Paulo Guedes, Ph.D.

FEATURED STORY

Acton University Online is a great success

When Acton University (AU) started in 2005 (as Acton Symposium), it was a modest conference, welcoming fewer than 100 participants. But each year since, Acton Institute has worked to expand the conference, solidifying it as an annual four-day event. Over the past few years, AU has experienced exponential growth. In 2019 we received over 2,000 applications and hosted nearly 1,000 individuals from more than 80 countries. With this success, and the excitement of participating with this vibrant global community, we were all very disappointed when the “COVID-19” pandemic forced us to cancel Acton University 2020. Thankfully, we quickly pivoted and decided to move forward with an online version. In a matter of a few short months, we had designed, organized and scheduled a unique two-day, fully online version of Acton University. For our innovative digital pivot, participants from around the globe were able to virtually engage with dozens of original, world-class webinars and on-demand video content from expert scholars, practitioners, and lecturers. For the first time, participants were able to access Acton University from the comfort of their own home.

While we were confident the new digital format would be successful and anticipated

it would allow more global participants to attend than ever before, our ambitious expectations were exceeded:

Over 4,100 people registered for AU Online.

Over 90 countries and territories were represented, including all 50 states.

67% of respondents (to post-event survey) had never attended an in-person Acton University.

Following the event, the positive feedback flooded in. It was encouraging to read how well this new platform was received by people across the globe. A common theme was how, for many people, flying to Grand Rapids, MI, to attend the traditional AU was difficult, so the online format allowed them to participate in the event for the first time. Comments came in from Argentina, Sudan, Venezuela and beyond, noting how timely the content was. Many offered their gratitude to the sponsors for making the event affordable, oftentimes free, through financial aid.

In the words of one conference participant:

“For financial and personal reasons, I have never been able to participate. And the opportunity to participate from a distance made me very excited. I learned a lot. It was very, very important to me. You have no idea what impact it has had.”

Although we have some areas where we would like to improve the digital AU experience, we are encouraged about integrating this virtual platform alongside our next in-person Acton University, ensuring we welcome an even larger global community in 2021. **N**

SUPPORT OUR MISSION

► **HELP US EXPAND OUR LOCAL PROGRAMMING, WEBSITE AND PODCAST TO REACH MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER BEFORE!**

acton.org/donate



*Acton Line is the
official podcast of the
Acton Institute*

**LISTEN AND SUBSCRIBE AT
[ACTON.ORG/LINE](https://acton.org/line)**

The Church's 'anemic response' to COVID-19 hurts everyone

Rev. Robert A. Sirico


The political response to COVID-19 has created an economic downturn unprecedented since the Great Depression. However, the Church's "anemic response" has deprived the poor of spiritual solace and the Church of its vocation and vitality, said Rev. Robert Sirico in a nationally syndicated radio interview.

"If we sit back and look at the big message of the Church, it's 'We're closed. We'll let you know when we open again.' And I think that's very dangerous," Rev. Sirico said on the June 26 episode of "The Catholic Current with Fr. Robert McTeigue, S.J."

Rev. Sirico addressed the role the Church should play during a time of economic devastation – and how shirking this responsibility hurts both the poor and Christians themselves.

The proper role of Christian charity is to be close enough to people in need that we see Jesus Christ. If we bureaucratize this or allow others to take on that role, it's not just the poor who suffer from it, no matter what material things they may be provided with. The poor will suffer because of the lack of spiritual depth, but we will suffer because of the lack of encountering in them the suffering Christ, who comes to us in distressing disguises.

"By not having that," Rev. Sirico said, "we lose our vitality."

During the 30-minute interview, Rev. Sirico also addressed whether the universal basic income is a prescription or a placebo, and why "the 'stimulus' is going to be the greatest single burden on us economically." 


Why do black lives matter?

Anthony Bradley

"Black lives matter." "All lives matter." Americans are in the midst of a crisis of human dignity. Are we still able to articulate why anyone's life matters? We can loudly protest that "black lives matter," but it will mean nothing in the long run if we cannot explain why black lives matter.

Black lives matter because black people are persons. One of the greatest tragedies in American history was the myth that America could flourish without blacks flourishing as persons. From the founding of this country, throughout slavery, Reconstruction, the eugenics movement, and the civil rights movement, black Americans fought to establish themselves, first and foremost, as persons.

In a culture that has done all it can to expunge moral virtue from the aspirations of human life, why are we surprised that we are shouting, "Black lives matter?" When human persons are not expected to be in communion with God and others, why are we surprised that the reverence due to the human person is lost? Black lives matter because persons are not autonomous, self-contained, individualistic creatures who do not need others for their flourishing. Black lives matter not simply because they are black but because blacks are persons – persons who are a necessary variable to the flourishing of others so that we all may attain the end for which we were created.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed, "[E]very human life is a reflection of divinity, and ... every act of injustice mars and defaces the image of God in man." Advocating for black life without a moral basis is throwing sand into the wind. To read this article in its entirety, please visit acton.is/blm. 

ACTON

LECTURE SERIES



JOIN US ONLINE

Our lunchtime Lecture Series has gone virtual. Stream the upcoming events free from the comfort of your home!

Janus v. AFSCME: A Conversation with Mark Janus

Mark Janus, Liberty Justice Center Senior Fellow

AUGUST 20, 2020 • 12:00PM

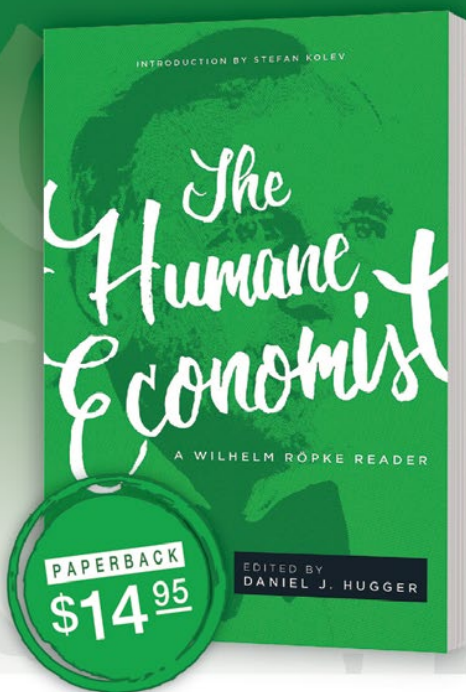
Intersectionality and the Socialist Temptation

Elizabeth Corey, Ph.D, Baylor University

SEPTEMBER 17, 2020 • 12:00PM

LIVESTREAM @ [ACTON.ORG/LIVE](https://acton.org/live)

98 East Fulton Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 USA



THE HUMANE ECONOMIST: A WILHELM RÖPKE READER

Edited by **DANIEL J. HUGGER** Introduction by **STEFAN KOLEV**

ACTON INSTITUTE • Paperback 336 Pgs • ISBN 978-1-942503-51-4

Nobel laureate Friedrich Hayek once warned that “the economist who is only an economist is likely to become a nuisance if not a positive danger.” As an economist and theorist of liberalism, Wilhelm Röpke was acutely aware of this danger. His combined commitments to sound economic analysis, the importance of social institutions, and the moral and religious framework of the Christian tradition make him a unique figure in the history of economic and social thought. This anthology, through carefully chosen selections from Röpke’s writings, introduces the contemporary reader to this most humane economist and theorist of the free and virtuous society.

“This volume is a great place for students of society to start to learn about the humane economy and its relevance for the twenty-first century.” – Peter Boettke, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

NOW AVAILABLE AT **AMAZON AND SHOP.ACTON.ORG**