

Notes

January/February Vol. 31 No. 1

VIRTUAL

BUSINESS MATTERS 2021

Certain Principles for Uncertain Times

February 25, 2021 | 1:00pm – 5:00pm ET

acton.org/businessmatters

A message from our president

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

The economist Friedrich Hayek once astutely observed that we “live as much in a world of expectation as in a world of ‘fact.’” In economics, value is subjective, dependent on the expectations and desires of particular persons. Human expectations are often frustrated, and all too often we desire wrongly. It is our task to bring our expectations in line with reality and our desires in line with morality. This is how both economic and social value are realized, bringing together good intentions and sound economics.

In this issue, we reflect

on Lord Acton on the anniversary of his birth. Acton’s notion that ideas have the power to shape our shared history is precisely what makes the work of think tanks so vital. His dedication to liberty, rooted in his Christian faith, animates the work of the Acton Institute to promote a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles. These ideas are the basis of all genuine human flourishing, and we are privileged to continue Lord Acton’s legacy.

I am pleased to share an overview of our upcoming Business Matters Conference. This virtual event will focus on issues of business in volatile times, entrepreneurship and the creation of value in service to others.

It is also a pleasure to

share with you a profile of one of our donors, Tom Wiarda, and a truly unique gift he has generously provided to the Institute. Our latest print publication, *Rebuilding Social Capital*, is a monograph exploring the capacity of people to cooperate toward common goals. It is a timely volume, drawing on Catholic social teaching and economic analysis to help chart our way forward through these difficult and too often divisive times.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Thank you! Your support is more important than ever in these difficult 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 |
| FEB 25 | Business Matters 2021 <i>Leading experts and accomplished business leaders will advance a global conversation on important topics relating to business, ethics and entrepreneurship.</i> | Online |
| MAR 18 | Acton Lecture Series Anthony Bradley, Ph.D. Speaker <i>Why Black Lives Matter. This lecture is livestream only – free livestream will be available to view @ 12 noon EST on MAR 18.</i> | Online |
| MAR 25-28 | A Liberty & Markets Colloquium Conference Series: Adam Smith on Ethics and Economics <i>This colloquium is for Acton alumni who are currently enrolled or have recently completed graduate-level work.</i> | Holland, MI |

Lord Acton's philosophy should guide our next two centuries

Dan Hugger

January 10, 2021, marked Lord Acton's 187th birthday. Amid a global pandemic, a crisis in institutions and civic unrest may seem like a strange time to look back on the life and legacy of a Victorian historian of ideas, but as Lord Acton himself remarked, "If the Past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the past is the safest and surest emancipation." The freedom of the historian is the freedom to look beyond and through our own times to see the root causes of our current crises.

Many of today's most contested and contentious questions are centered around the nature of liberty, a problem Lord Acton spent his life as a historian seeking to understand, believing that "no obstacle has been so constant, or so difficult to overcome, as uncertainty and confusion touching on the nature of liberty."

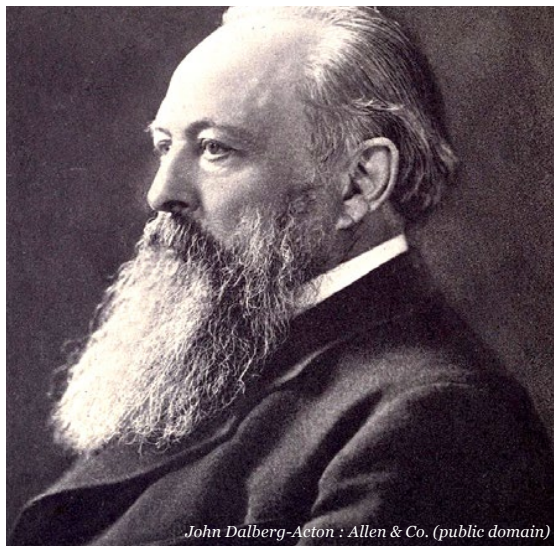
Questions of the proper response to the COVID-19 pandemic, civic unrest, burgeoning public debt, corruption and resurgent socialism and nationalism can only be answered in the context of a proper view of freedom and responsibility.

This notion of liberty as the unfolding, in history and politics, of the idea of the dignity of the human person and their rights of conscience is deeply Christian. With roots in the Hebrew prophets of old and the classical tradition, it is revealed in its fullness in Jesus Christ.

We see Lord Acton's vision in the guiding

principles of the Acton Institute to promote freedom, as Lord Acton argued, as the highest political good. We realize that freedom is central because it is necessary to virtue, to people fulfilling their duties of conscience. In this sense, when we speak of individual liberty we are speaking of the reign of conscience. Authority, best embodied in religion, is necessary to form consciences, sustain liberty and promote the common good.

Acton's vision, the liberal vision – of a society that is beyond the state, of individual souls that are above the state, and of the God who rules all through His providence – is still worth defending, and it offers hope to us now in polarized and troubled times. **N**



John Dalberg-Acton : Allen & Co. (public domain)

FEATURED STORY

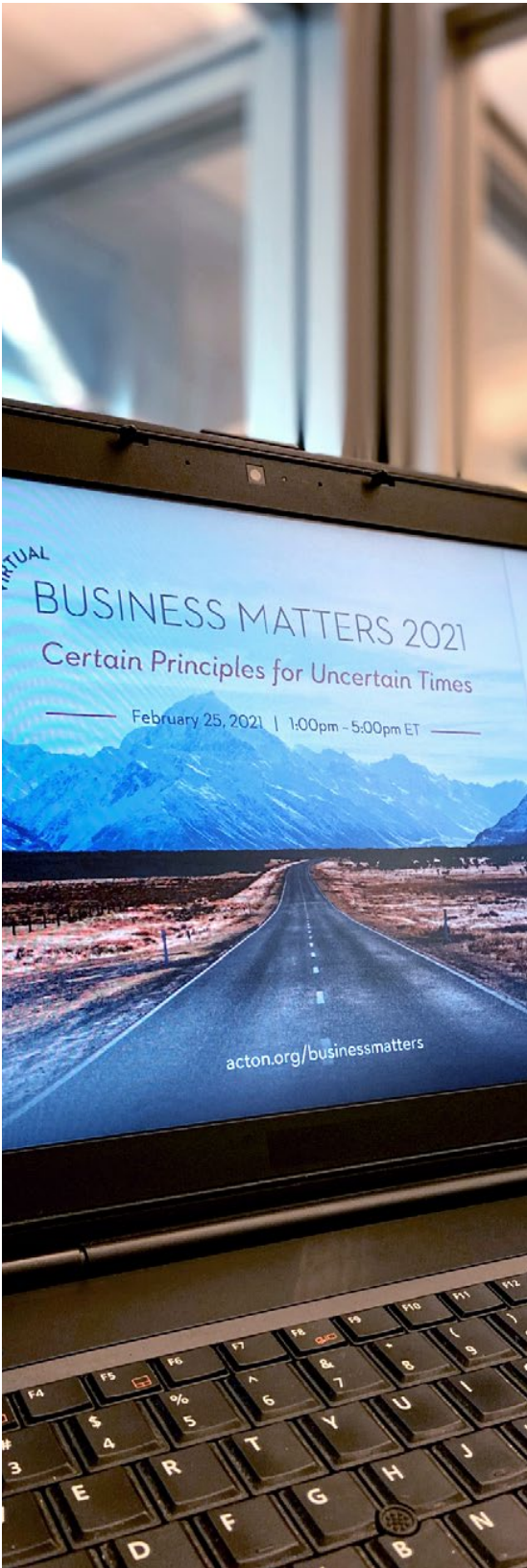
Acton will host third Business Matters conference online

On February 25, 2021, the Acton Institute will present “Business Matters: Certain Principles for Uncertain Times.” This year, Acton has chosen to host its premier event on business entirely online.

We are in the midst of volatile times. Between civil unrest, political turmoil and a prolonged pandemic, we have seldom seen a more uncertain time for our businesses and for the world. Business leaders are being tested by switching to remote work, closing and reopening offices, adjusting to the changing needs of clients, laying off employees and preparing for policy changes under a new presidential administration.

Living in these heightened times, it seems like the only thing that unites us is the general agreement that business is important. And so, we need specificity on why the business sector is vitally important and how to ensure businesses, big and small, continue to play a role in sustaining free and virtuous societies. Accordingly, we have chosen a slate of influential business leaders and entrepreneurs to address topics such as:

- Principles to lean on in volatile times
- Moral challenges for business leaders in 2021



- Business and public policy
- How businesses can be part of the solution

To address this broad chasm in understanding the role of business, we invite you to participate in Acton's upcoming conference, "Business Matters: Certain Principles for Uncertain Times," February 25, 2021, from 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. (ET). Join a virtual audience from across the globe as leading experts and CEOs discuss the current challenges for businesses and equip you with principles to lean on as you navigate these uncertain times.

acton.org/businessmatters

Featured Speaker

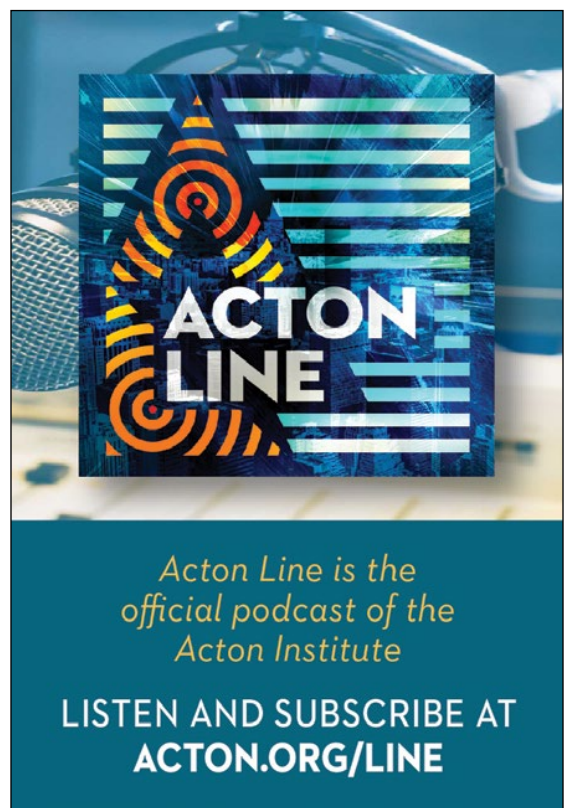
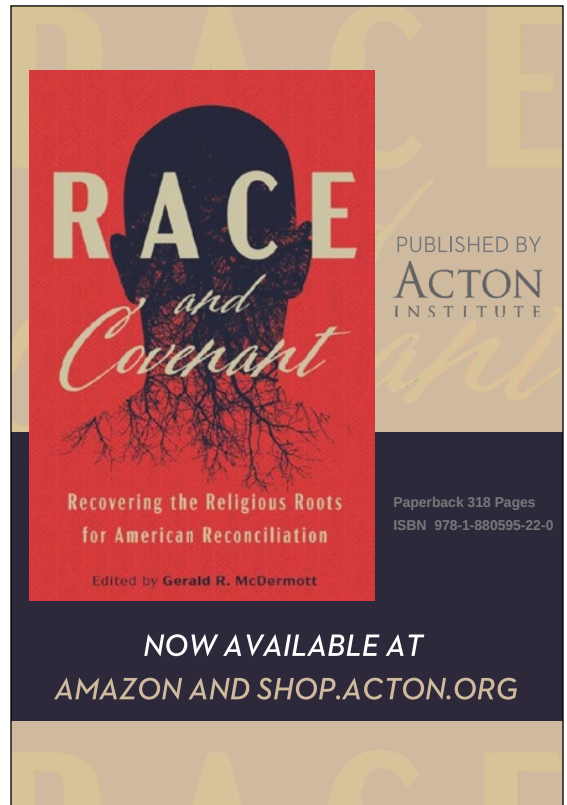
John Mackey, co-founder and CEO of Whole Foods Market, has built the natural and organic grocer from a single store in Austin, Texas, in 1978 into a Fortune 500 company, which went public in 1992 and was purchased by Amazon in 2017. Today Whole Foods Market is a top U.S. super-market with more than 500 stores and 95,000 team members across the U.S., Canada and the U.K.

While devoting his career to helping shoppers satisfy their lifestyle needs with quality natural and organic foods, Mackey has also focused on building a more conscious way of doing business.

He was the visionary for the Whole Planet Foundation to help end poverty in developing nations; the Local Producer Loan Program, which provided \$25 million in low-interest loans to help local food producers expand their businesses; and the Global Animal Partnership's rating scale for humane farm animal treatment.



John Mackey



BRIEF


New monograph released: *Rebuilding Social Capital*

Dan Hugger

Rebuilding Social Capital, the latest monograph in the Christian Social Thought Series, is now available. Social capital – the capacity of people to cooperate toward common aims – is an indispensable element in a free and prosperous society. Many studies show that social capital has declined sharply in many places in recent decades, with devastating consequences.

Social pathologies, such as the breakdown of the family, addiction and deaths of despair, are strongly correlated with weakening social ties and norms. The decline of social capital is not just merely an academic curiosity but has far-reaching real-world consequences.

Authors Maryann and Barry Keating draw on work from scholars such as Robert Putnam, Francis Fukuyama and Charles Murray to document this crisis in social capital. The volume ably summarizes the state of sociological scholarship on the issue. The authors also bring new light from both Catholic social teaching and cutting-edge economic analysis to offer insight into the task of restoring it.

In a time of increasing social breakdown, alienation and polarization, this volume both expands our understanding of the underlying causes of social crises and offers a model for productive engagement for citizens, policy makers and people of faith. The project of rebuilding social capital deserves the commitment of all those concerned about preserving what is good while building a better future. To purchase the book visit <http://acton.is/rebuilding>. 

BRIEF


Tom Wiarda provides a special gift to Acton

Ben Stoner

Each year, generous supporters donate important items from their family homes or personal collections. The Acton Institute has been blessed with paintings and sculptures, as well as collections of antique books. Recently, Tom Wiarda, a retired commercial realtor and property manager, chose to donate a special work of art that he created: a writing arm Windsor chair.

“Many years ago, I inherited my grandfather’s tool chest filled with old hand tools. That got me interested in old tools and woodworking. I started collecting old tools, restoring them and using them. I made various pieces of furniture for the house and started concentrating on making chairs about 10 years ago.”

Although Mr. Wiarda has taken several chair-making classes, he explained that he’s mostly “self-taught.” And while there is no connection between furniture making and his former occupation, he has always enjoyed working with his hands. “Chair making is satisfying because I start with a log (sometimes from my own woods) and split it and shape it mostly by hand and end up with something functional.” Wiarda noted that his chairs have no “square corners or flat surfaces,” which presents challenges, but “the mistakes generally lead to improvements.”

Mr. Wiarda came to know and appreciate Acton’s work by taking a class at his church led by an Acton team member. Later, he began attending the Lunchtime Lecture Series and enjoyed watching Acton-produced documentaries like *For the Life of the World*. A sincere thank you, Mr. Wiarda! 

CHECK OUT THE NEW PODCAST FROM
THE ACTON INSTITUTE!



LISTEN AND SUBSCRIBE AT
[ACTON.ORG/EVENTSPODCAST](https://acton.org/eventspodcast)

The Acton Institute's international events include public lectures, academic seminars, joint participation in panels and the annual Acton University conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan – all focused on illustrating the Acton Institute's vision of a free and virtuous society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.

98 East Fulton Street, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 USA

ACTON

LECTURE SERIES

JOIN US ONLINE

March 18, 2021 • 12:00p.m.



*Anthony B. Bradley, Ph.D. The King's College
Professor of Religious Studies*

WHY BLACK LIVES MATTER

There has been much debate about what led to the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, among others, as well as other systemic challenges that undermine black thriving. Dr. Bradley will address the meteoric rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, and what black communities truly need to thrive from within.

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

Our lunchtime Lecture Series has gone virtual. Stream this special event free from the comfort of your home!