The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset famously said, “I am I and my circumstance.” Human persons do not exist in the world as isolated individuals but are firmly rooted in their own context. Although persons find ultimate fulfillment only in communion with God, our social context, including family, church and local community, is an essential part of our development as persons. We are by nature social persons fulfilled by interacting with others and participating in moral goods. This includes our interactions in the marketplace, which realize not only economic but also moral value. Other relations of mutual dependence, such as promises, friendships, marriages and the family, are likewise moral goods by which we flourish in the world.

Every year the Acton Institute invites young people into the social and professional context of the Acton Institute through our Emerging Leaders Program. In this issue, one of those leaders, Andrew Houser, shares his experience as part of that program.

The Acton Institute’s own Kayla Kaseska shares her recent experience of participating in the Acton-Liberty Fund co-sponsored colloquium on “Liberty, Markets and Responsibility.” These colloquia are part of our return to live programming, which we are excited to ramp up as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

There is also a feature on the success of Acton University Online, in which thousands from all over the world were brought together to explore the nature of a free and virtuous society. A brief recap of Acton University Online is also included, summarizing a portion of my closing remarks in which I address the current situation of the imprisoned entrepreneur and democracy activist Jimmy Lai and the deteriorating situation in Hong Kong.

None of this would be possible without the generous support of our donors. Thank you! Your support is more important than ever as we work to spread the ideas that animate a free and virtuous society. If you are just learning about Acton, be sure to check out our website, and please prayerfully consider supporting us in our mission. 🙏

### Acton Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUG 19</td>
<td><strong>Lecture Series: What It Means to Be Human</strong>&lt;br&gt;Acton Lecture Series featuring O. Carter Sneath, professor of law at Notre Dame. Sneath will discuss the core ideas of his book, “What It Means to Be Human.” Event livestream is free to view @ 12 noon EST.</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEP 9</td>
<td><strong>A Graduate Student Colloquium</strong>&lt;br&gt;Conference Series: Religion, Liberty and American Culture&lt;br&gt;Co-sponsored by Liberty Fund, Inc., this is an intellectually demanding and stimulating weekend colloquium that explores the foundations of liberty in a mixture of graduate-level, text-based, guided Socratic discussion and lecture sessions.</td>
<td>Grand Rapids, MI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCT 8</td>
<td><strong>Academic Colloquium on Markets &amp; Morality</strong>&lt;br&gt;Acton Institute’s First Annual Academic Colloquium sponsored by the Journal of Markets &amp; Morality. This year’s theme is Neo-Calvinism and Modern Economics. The conference will be at Acton Institute @ 10:30 am.</td>
<td>Grand Rapids, MI</td>
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The importance of the Emerging Leaders Program

Andrew Houser, 2021 Emerging Leader

The Acton Institute’s internship program has been an integral part of its programming since the Institute’s founding in 1990. The summer internship program was rebranded last year and is now called the Emerging Leaders Program. This program is continually improved upon each year to provide cohorts with incredible job-training and networking experiences, as well as the opportunity to build a professional portfolio.

This summer, I had the privilege of participating in the Emerging Leaders Program through the Koch Internship Program. Before joining the summer 2021 cohort, I graduated from Aquinas College in 2018 with a bachelor of arts in political science, Spanish, and international studies, with an economics minor. I spent a year working for a think tank but eventually left after my internship formally ended. Following that year, I worked several jobs, but I desired to return to work in the think tank and policy arena. Thankfully, after applying to and interviewing for Acton’s Emerging Leaders Program, I was accepted. I was particularly excited, because ever since college, I’ve felt a calling and deep desire to work for Acton.

During our time in the Emerging Leaders Program, my fellow interns and I have been involved with numerous projects, including moderating question-and-answer segments during Acton University and maintaining databases critical to the Institute’s success. We have also been encouraged to write for Acton’s PowerBlog and to work as a team to ensure the quality and accuracy of each project. The Emerging Leaders push each other to be not only better employees but also better people. The programming also encourages us to grow and thrive in our academic and professional careers.

The Emerging Leaders Program is vitally important, as it helps groom the future generation, helping young people understand Acton’s overall mission. I truly believe it is essential to articulate why individual liberty and religious principles are so important by showing how these principles, when connected, allow societies to thrive. This is truly the kind of work I want to pursue throughout my life.

If you’re interested in learning more about the Emerging Leaders Program, please visit acton.org/internship.
Acton University (AU) began in 2005 as a modest conference, hosting fewer than 100 participants in its inaugural year. Each year since, the Acton Institute has focused on growing the conference’s footprint and reaching new audiences around the world. By 2019, AU was established as a four-day, world-class conference that welcomed about 1,000 individuals from more than 80 countries.

In the months leading up to AU 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic shut down travel and required Acton to cancel its in-person conference. In a matter of months, the Acton Institute pivoted to hosting Acton University fully online. The new digital conference retained its world-class speakers and panels but made these amazing resources available to participants from the comfort of their own homes.

The continued challenges due to the coronavirus pandemic forced Acton to host AU online again this year. Holding the conference digitally for a second consecutive year allowed Acton to improve the experience for participants and spread its message to several thousand more people than are able to attend AU in person.

Acton also hosted a small group of participants in its headquarters for a unique
“hybrid” AU experience. These guests watched the panels and lectures digitally but were able to meet, discuss and socialize with their in-person peers. This experiment was a success and will provide a model for other hybrid Acton events in the future.

Both hybrid and fully digital AU participants provided positive and excellent feedback about this year’s event. Data showed that over 3,300 participants registered from 86 countries and over 95% rated the conference as “good” or “excellent.”

Like last year’s conference, AU Online 2021 increased the conference’s accessibility and allowed many guests to participate who would not have been able to attend the event in person. Participants from all over the world commented on the quality of the speakers and lectures, and expressed gratitude about their ability to attend AU this year.

In the words of one conference participant:

“This is my third year of AU participation, and I do not have enough words to express the impact of this experience on my life, the way I envision what a virtuous society should be and how well-equipped I feel to share these thoughts and visions with others in my community.”

Although the last year has taught that virtual events cannot fully replace in-person experiences, hosting Acton University online for two years showed that a digital conference is a great tool for reaching new people and growing Acton’s influence with participants around the world.

The Acton Institute is happy to announce that next year’s Acton University will feature an in-person conference in conjunction with a digital experience for guests not able to travel to Grand Rapids.
Rev. Sirico closes Acton University Online 2021

Michael Severance

Acton University 2021 concluded with a live-streamed “in-person” lecture and interview with Rev. Robert Sirico. The event was broadcast from Acton’s auditorium in Grand Rapids, Mich. During Sirico’s address, he waxed nostalgically about the past and Acton’s efforts since its founding in 1990 to articulate a free and virtuous society to people worldwide. Sirico noted how inspiring it has been to witness the intellectual blossoming in individuals across the globe through this cultural activism and many public debates.

Later, Sirico highlighted Jimmy Lai, the Catholic, Hong Kong-based media mogul currently in a Chinese prison for his outspoken criticism of the Communist Party. For Sirico, Lai is a person who has real integrity with regard to the timeless principles of liberty and perfectly knows the consequences of remaining faithful to them.

Sirico’s last advice was to stay strong and united as an Acton family despite the isolation brought on by the ongoing pandemic. Such fortitude and solidarity, he said, is developed through “a rich interior life, [just] like Jimmy’s.” Prayerful discernment and an intimate relationship with the Creator of our human dignity, according to Sirico, are sure ways to grow in not only optimism but also “real theological hope” based on trust in God’s Providence. It was with this same theological hope that he ended, promising participants a return to the in-person edition of Acton University in 2022 while retaining some of the best online offerings for those who cannot travel to Michigan.

Liberty Fund teams with Acton for colloquium

Ben Stoner

In 2004, the Liberty Fund began partnering with organizations to host small, Socratic-style conferences focused on themes of liberty and responsibility in economics, among others. Recently, the Acton Institute and the Liberty Fund hosted the “Liberty, Markets and Responsibility Colloquium.” The multi-day event brought together professors in economics, journalism and politics, as well as religious leaders, community activists and two Acton staff members, including external relations officer Kayla Kaseska.

The small group spent the weekend addressing the relationship among freedom, markets and culture and “discussing (and sometimes disagreeing on) economic theories and debating if and how capitalism can survive,” explained Kaseska. “Attendees were put in a circle with a discussion leader who provided historical context to each reading, managed the queue of speakers and submitted questions for the attendees to consider.” For this particular colloquium, Victor Claar, associate professor of economics at Florida Gulf Coast University, was the facilitator. “He kept the group engaged while creating a friendly and thought-provoking atmosphere,” said Kaseska.

“The highlight for me was watching respectful debate and hearing different perspectives on economic theories and policy,” shared Kaseska. “But no matter the background, we all came out with the same agreement: free markets are the way to create a flourishing economy, but they must be sustained by a moral society.”
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