

# ACTON notes

Acton Institute Newsletter

November / December 2017, Volume 27, Number 6



—INSIDE—  
**ACTON**  
BOOKSHOP  
CHRISTMAS SALE

*“connecting good intentions with sound economics”*

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos speaking at Acton's 27th Annual Dinner

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# President's Message

"There *oughta* be a law!" It's a statement we grew up saying either out of sincere earnestness or frivolous irony. Either way, the expression is loaded with frightening suppositions that humankind somehow can restrain the totality of its nature into an arbitrary mold of what constitutes perfection.

"...top-down governance is antithetical to freedom, free will and personal responsibility."

It seems the impulsive will to impose legal authority over other humans is in our social DNA. Nearly 4,000 years ago, the Babylonian Hammurabi etched 282 cuneiform laws into stone. The Babylonian code was preceded 300 years earlier by the Code of Ur-Nammu in Mesopotamia. Some of these rules are pursuant to what we at the Acton Institute and in our movement at large identify as natural law, whether Hammurabi recognized it or not.

Centuries of political philosophy and trial and error followed, resulting in the Magna Carta in 1215, the 1689 British Bill of Rights and the U.S. Bill of Rights a century later. Each of these limited the reach of government into the lives of the individuals and groups ruled thereunder.

In between Hammurabi and the Bill of Rights, centuries of Jewish and Christian teachings instructed the 10 Commandments among other troves of Biblically inspired wisdom related to human behavior and interaction. The accretion of more than four millennium of lawmaking has done little to stem the statist impulse of our political leaders and worshipers of big government.

Never mind that constitutional efforts to limit government power as well as empirical evidence that top-down governance is antithetical to freedom, free will and personal responsibility. The halls of Washington and corridors of state capitols continuously abound with legislators promulgating cumbersome laws.

Worse, lawmakers are abetted by social justice warriors who mask their political agendas behind a thin veneer of religious faith. Among their many agendas is government-mandated wealth distribution as a substitute for true Christian philanthropy.

Attempts to circumscribe all human activity to the whims and desires of government architects are the tools of those for whom personal responsibility exercised through religious faith and/or natural law is anathema.

There *oughta* be a law, indeed. In fact, there oughta be a lot less.



Sincerely,



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 holds its 27th Annual Dinner

On Wednesday, October 18, 2017, Acton hosted its 27th Annual Dinner at the DeVos Place in Grand Rapids, Michigan. With over 1,000 tickets purchased and more than 50 sponsors, this was the largest annual dinner to date.

Acton's annual dinner is the largest single-day gathering the institute hosts. Every year, Acton staff and volunteers look forward to this fellowship with Acton supporters from all over the world and the opportunity to hear from many of our intellectual heroes.

The evening, celebrating Acton's 27 years of promoting a free and virtuous society, began with a rendition of "O Sing Joyfully" performed by Sacred Heart Academy's high school choir.

Despite her busy schedule in Washington, Betsy DeVos, United States secretary of education, returned to her hometown to give a special guest address. During her 20-minute speech, she was warmly received and given several standing ovations. She addressed education in the United States

and outlined her plan to encourage innovation and parental choice in America's schools.

After DeVos concluded her special address, A. J. Sherrill, lead pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church, gave the invocation and offered an alumnus reflection.

Executive Director Kris Mauren served as master of ceremonies and President Rev. Robert Sirico offered remarks to conclude the evening.

An afterglow was held following the dinner, giving attendees a chance to continue discussing the themes of the evening and enjoy an arrangement of desserts.

Past annual dinner speakers include Rev. Paul Scalia, son of the late Justice Antonin Scalia, who also spoke at an annual dinner; Daniel Hannan; P.J. O'Rourke; Nicole Boon; John Sullivan; and many more.

All speeches from the dinner will be available online at the Acton PowerBlog and on Acton's YouTube channel.



President Rev. Robert Sirico offered remarks to conclude the evening.



Executive Director Kris Mauren served as master of ceremonies.

## From Our Conference Participants

[Acton University] was the biggest conference I have ever attended in my life and the memory will live forever in me ... Acton is simply the best and the lectures were well delivered and well understood.

—Charles O.  
Rome, Italy

What an amazing time I had at Acton University, and I was so excited to be around like-minded individuals. One of the most touching moments for me was when I took the entrepreneurial vocation class. WOW!

—Nancy P.  
Brooklyn, NY

## Report: Education Secretary Betsy DeVos criticizes “sycophants of the system” at Acton dinner

Education Secretary Betsy DeVos was warmly welcomed at the Acton Institute’s 27th Annual Dinner on Wednesday, October 18, and won applause for her plans to promote innovation and choice in schools.

According to an article on her speech published on the MLive news site, she told dinner attendees that “we can amplify the voices of families that only want better for their kids, we can assist states who are working to further empower parents, and we can urge those who haven’t to start.” The “outdated education model” is to blame for the present lack of school choice DeVos stated, and this “antiquated approach, which, incidentally, is being imitated today by too many private and parochial schools as well, fails families by forcing them into the same one-size-fits-all box.”

MLive reporter Brian McVicar noted that “DeVos also touched on the status of education” in her

“About two dozen people gathered outside the event, waving signs and chanting against what they described as DeVos’ efforts to undermine public education,” McVicar wrote. While the dinner drew a number of protesters, the Acton Institute’s dinner went off without a hitch.

## 2017 year-end matching challenge

Since 1990, the Acton Institute has worked tirelessly to promote freedom and virtue. We are extremely grateful for the help of our friends and supporters over the past 27 years, which made our work possible.

While we’ve experienced great success in promoting a free and virtuous society, much work remains to be done. We need your financial support to do it. Since its founding, the Acton Institute has been completely independent and solicits zero government funding. We rely exclusively on private support from donors like you to fund our operations.

# ACTON News



Special guest Betsy DeVos speaking at Acton's 27th Annual Dinner.



Contact Nick Porter at 616.454.3080 or [nporter@acton.org](mailto:nporter@acton.org) for more info.

hometown of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

She said that while the city is home to great schools including traditional, charter and private – “there are still too many kids in neighborhoods on both sides of the river who don’t have a good option.”

“They are why our work is never done,” she said, adding that all schools need to be challenged to do better. “I acknowledge change can be scary, particularly for sycophants of the system, but we owe it to our children to be fearless. We owe it to them to be undeterred by the loud voices who protect what is.”

The dinner, however, was not without protest.

The end of each year is especially important for us to balance our budget. We receive up to 40 percent of our revenue during the last few weeks of the year.

To help us reach our fundraising goal this year, two donors have issued a \$250,000 Matching Challenge Grant. If we can secure first-time gifts, or an increase in giving from our existing supporters, they will match all gifts two-to-one between now and year-end.

To qualify for the gift match, you must make a gift to the Acton Institute on or before December 31.

## Rev. Robert Sirico on Helen DeVos

I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Helen DeVos, the wife of Amway co-founder Rich DeVos, in Grand Rapids at the age of 90. She was one of those people who had an incalculable impact in building flourishing communities with her generosity and, yes, business acumen. Rich and Helen's philanthropy has been estimated to exceed \$1.2 billion over the years, a testament to their deep faith and commitment to be responsible stewards of the financial resources God has put in their hands. In large part through the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, they supported scores of Christian churches and ministries, hospitals, schools and civic projects. This intelligent generosity helps provide a model of philanthropic engagement, making West Michigan one of the highest per capita giving communities in the United States.

The DeVos family issued a moving statement on the October 18 passing of Helen:

While we grieve her passing, we rejoice in her new life in heaven and are grateful for the countless ways she blessed our lives.

We are comforted in knowing that she was welcomed home into the loving arms of Jesus. We will never forget her unfailing love, strength and devotion that were truly the heart of our family.

Although known for her support of health, arts and education, she was also an early and important driver of the family's Amway business. In an article on the MLive news site, it was recounted that Helen left her teaching job to help Rich and partner Jay Van Andel run their start up – out of the basement in their home. "DeVos and Betty Van Andel have been described as the hidden partners of the direct sales giant," the article said. In the family, too, she was a driving force.

"There was no question her role was critical in terms of keeping things going on the family front. She was very much the day-to-day chief operating officer of the family," Dick DeVos told MLive.

She was laid to rest at her family's memorial gardens in Ada, Michigan.



## ACTON in the News

"It's one thing to be, for instance, dishonest but acknowledge you are doing evil. It's altogether different to say that no such moral absolutes exist: that morality is in effect a fiction, a mere set of customs to be dispensed with, whenever convenient."

—Excerpted from Samuel Gregg's article in *The Catholic World Report*

### Victor Claar

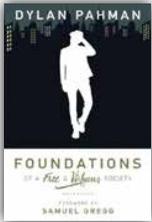
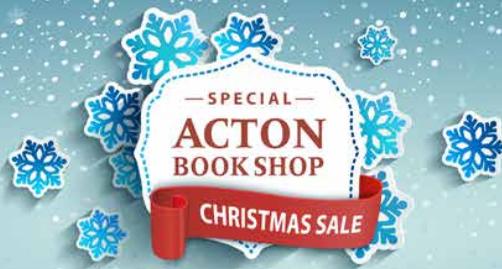
Title: Price gougers deserve medals  
Publication: *The Detroit News*  
Date: 9.07.17

### Acton Institute

Title: Betsy DeVos praises Trump tax plan, criticizes "sycophants of the system," in Grand Rapids speech  
Publication: *Grand Rapids Press*  
Date: 10.19.17

### Samuel Gregg

Title: When Evil Triumphed: The 100th anniversary of Russia's October Revolution  
Publication: *Catholic World Report*  
Date: 10.23.17

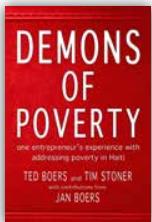


## Foundations of a Free & Virtuous Society

By *Dylan Pahman*

Creative, quirky and always winsome, Dylan Pahman builds a systematic case for a positive relationship between a biblical understanding of the human person and the economic flourishing that freedom enables. In this book, Pahman presents a crash course in the principles of a free and virtuous society.

**Softcover 165 pages Original Price ~~\$14.95~~ Sale \$11.95**

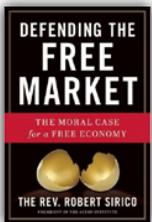


## Demons of Poverty

By *Ted Boers and Tim Stoner*

For ten years, Ted Boers, a well-intentioned, successful entrepreneur, devoted himself to improving the poor conditions in Haiti. His journey would take him into many dark places, including a crisis of faith that launched him on a mission to discover what he did not know and wished he had known before he began.

**Hardcover 188 pages Original Price ~~\$13.00~~ Sale \$10.50**



## Defending the Free Market

By *Robert A. Sirico*

Rev. Sirico argues that a free economy actually promotes charity, selflessness and kindness, and why free-market capitalism is not only the best way to ensure individual success and national prosperity but also the surest route to a moral and socially-just society.

**Hardcover 256 pages Original Price ~~\$24.95~~ Sale \$19.95**

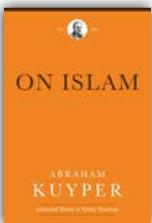


## The Evidence of Things Not Seen (New)

By *Vernon L. Smith*

In this provocative collection, Nobel Laureate in Economics Vernon Smith explores the spooky aspects of contemporary science and uncovers the faith and mystery at the root of scientific inquiry. But what if science and religion share something deeply mysterious in common? What if that mysterious commonality is faith?

**Softcover 67 pages Original Price ~~\$5.95~~ Sale \$4.75**

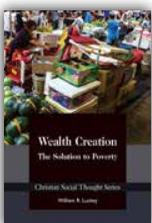


## On Islam

By *Abraham Kuyper*

Part travelogue, part cultural critique, *On Islam* presents a European imperialist seeing firsthand the damage colonialism had caused and the value of a religion he truly never understood. Here, Kuyper's doctrine of common grace shines as he displays a nuanced and respectful understanding of the Muslim world.

**Coming Soon**



## Wealth Creation: The Solution to Poverty (New)

By *William R. Luckey*

Care for the poor has been a hallmark of Christianity since its beginning. Yet the economic world that provides the context for both Christianity and poverty has changed dramatically since the time of Christ. Professor William Luckey helps us understand that context with Christian thought.

**Softcover 66 pages Original Price ~~\$8.00~~ Sale \$6.50**



## PovertyCure Global Edition DVD

*Produced by Acton Institute*

Join host Michael Matheson Miller on a journey around the world to explore the foundations of human flourishing, and learn how people are moving toward partnerships and pursuing entrepreneurial solutions to poverty rooted in the creative capacity of the human person made in the image of God.

**6 Part DVD Series    Original Price ~~\$24.95~~    Sale \$19.95**

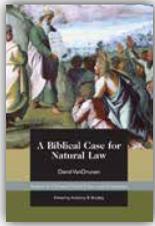


## For the Life of the World: Leaders Edition

*Produced by Acton Institute*

*For the Life of the World* is an entertaining film series that explores the deeper meaning of salvation. Have you ever wondered, "What is my Salvation actually FOR?" Is it only about personal atonement, about getting to heaven or something that comes later? Is it just to have a "friend in Jesus"?

**DVD and Field Guide    Original Price ~~\$64.99~~    Sale \$51.95**



## A Biblical Case for Natural Law

*By David VanDrunen*

Are you perplexed about the Biblical standing of natural law? This study offers an explicitly biblical defense for the existence and practical importance of natural law. If natural law is taught in Scripture, it should certainly be affirmed in Christian theology.

**Softcover 59 pages    Original Price ~~\$5.95~~    Sale \$4.75**

**For our fastest service for Christmas, order online at: [shop.acton.org/books/christmas.html](http://shop.acton.org/books/christmas.html)**

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<a href="#">Demons of Poverty</a>	\$10.50		
<a href="#">Defending the Free Market</a>	\$19.95		
<a href="#">The Evidence of Things Not Seen</a>	\$4.75		
<a href="#">Wealth Creation: The Solution to Poverty</a>	\$6.50		
<a href="#">PovertyCure Global Edition DVD</a>	\$19.95		
<a href="#">For the Life of the World: Leaders Edition</a>	\$51.95		
<a href="#">A Biblical Case for Natural Law</a>	\$4.75		

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.

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## ACTON notes

### Calendar of Events

#### ACTON INSTITUTE EVENTS

Date	Event	Location
<b>Dec 6</b>	<b>Conference Series: Reclaiming the West</b> Public Spirit and Public Virtue	Washington, DC
<b>Apr 19</b>	<b>Evaluating the Idea of Social Justice</b> A Liberty & Markets Colloquium	Holland, MI
<b>Jun 19-22</b>	<b>Acton University 2018</b>	Grand Rapids, MI