

The Ten Commandments

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

1. Thou shalt have no more Gods but me.
2. Before no idol bow thy knee.
3. Take not the Name of God in vain:
4. Nor dare the Sabbath–day profane.
5. Give both thy parents honour due.
6. Take heed that thou no murder do.
7. Abstain from words and deeds unclean:
8. Nor steal, though thou art poor and mean.
9. Nor make a wilful lie, nor love it.
10. What is thy neighbor’s dare not covet.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Acton University

Kevin T. Bauder

The last week of June, I had the opportunity to attend Acton University for a second time. Acton University is not really a university but a week-long conference held in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It is sponsored by the Acton Institute, and its focus is represented by the tag line, “Connecting good intentions with sound economics.”

The Acton Institute is a conservative think tank. It is not explicitly a religious organization, though it involves mostly religious people of some sort. At any rate, it recognizes that political, social, and economic thinking are closely joined with theological thinking, and it invites theological discussion insofar as theology affects those areas of human flourishing.

One of the first principles of conservatism is the belief that politics and economics cannot be uncoupled from transcendent morality, and that moral behavior ultimately rests upon a moral vision. The thinkers at Acton University do not all share the same religion. Many are Catholic. Some are from various Protestant traditions, from Anglican to Reformed to Wesleyan. Some are Jewish. A few are even Muslim. None is prepared to put aside her or his religion for the sake of the conversation, and none is willing to demand that any other do so. Consequently, conservative social, political, and economic principles are examined from multiple theological perspectives, leading to a more robust understanding of how those principles can be articulated in ways that transcend religious divides.

My week at Acton University was funded through the Kern Family Foundation, established by the founders of Generac Power Systems. My daughter and son also obtained funding through the Kern Foundation (one has a PhD in music and the other a PhD in Medieval philosophy), as did my daughter’s husband (PhD in philosophical theology). Consequently, the week was not only a time of instruction and intellectual challenge, but also a time of strengthening family ties.

The hospitality at Acton University is magnificent. The conference hotel is first class and the meals are delightful. Non-classtimes are structured to promote conversation. One breakfast I found myself at a table with an editor from *Reason Magazine*. At another breakfast I was joined by a professor from



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Cedarville University. Other meals were eaten with attendees from a variety of African and Asian nations. I shared table talk with the leaders of several political and religious institutions. Acton University encourages these conversations to strengthen the bonds between people from around the world who hold conservative beliefs.

Tuesday through Thursday, there were two teaching sessions each morning, then two more each afternoon. The two sessions I enjoyed most were both taught by Ryan Anderson, author of *When Harry Became Sally*—one of the very few books to be outright banned by Amazon because of its opposition to transgender ideology. Anderson is always highly articulate and quite entertaining. His first session was on “The Use and Abuse of Anti-Discrimination Law: On Private Property and the Free Exercise of Religion.” The second was on “Social Justice and Economic Rights,” in which Anderson argued that it is possible to articulate a meaningful vision of social justice that does not capitulate to Leftist or Identity Politics. Stephen Barrows had a good session on “Population and Migration in the Modern World” in which he argued that one of the world’s chief dangers at this moment is depopulation and that migration can be part of the solution to that problem. Economist David Bahnsen (son of the late theologian Greg Bahnsen) presented an interesting study on “Debt, Crowding Out, and Economic Growth.” Jordan Ballor had a very good presentation on “An Introduction to Abraham Kuyper’s Public Theology.” This last was of special interest because, while Ballor clearly identified as Kuyperian, he tended to distance himself from the Christian Reconstructionists.

Speaking of Abraham Kuyper, the Acton Institute has commissioned an English translation of his twelve-volume “Collected Works in Public Theology.” The translation is being done in connection with Lexham Press. I do not know whether the entire series has been completed, but at least several volumes are available. I see this as a valuable reference for both Christians and conservatives.

The week was not without its difficulties. All three of my immediate family members got sick during the week. My son and daughter seemed to recover apace. In my case, I ended up with an infection that (after I returned home) required both a trip to the dentist for a root canal and a trip to urgent care for narcotics. By the way, I am genuinely grateful that God has put opioids in His creation, and that He has given humans the ability to refine them. Used in the proper way, they are far preferable to blinding pain. I ended up taking two of my dozen or so tablets; they did the trick in a way that over-the-counter pain relievers could not.

I’ve attended Acton University for two years now. Both years have been excellent experiences. Both have helped me to learn how to articulate a range of moral and social issues. I am grateful to the Kern Foundation for its funding. You do not need to go to Acton University, however, to take advan-

tage of its expertise. Use a good search engine (I recommend DuckDuckGo, which will not track you or sell your data) to find the Acton Institute, and then explore its resources. It has a trove of materials that will be useful to pastors who are trying to engage moral issues.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
