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James F. Keenan

Matthew J. Gaudet

Santa Clara University, mgaudet2@scu.edu

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Introduction

Matthew J. Gaudet and James F. Keenan, S.J.

TODAY OVER 70 PERCENT OF COLLEGE faculty in America work off of the tenure-track on some kind of fixed-term contract. Their service might be for a term, a year, or, rarely, multiple years, but even the longest of these is typically revocable at the discretion of the university and wholly dependent of the needs of the university. At some schools, it is common practice for contracts to be revoked even after the term has begun, as course enrollments are ironed out and the final needs of the school are accounted for. In short, to be a contingent professor is to risk losing one's livelihood at any moment.

At the same time, the university business model today is deeply reliant on contingent faculty labor. Not only do short and revocable contracts allow universities to provide students with "just in time" scheduling with little risk to the institution, but the low pay and lack of benefits that typically go with contingent contracts are deeply embedded in the economics of how most colleges and universities operate today. Many schools would have difficulties remaining fiscally solvent without contingent labor as we know it.

In the end, efforts to replace or even modify the unjust system would require a wholesale restructuring of the enterprise of higher education as we know it. Currently, there is little will among the powers-that-be to take up such a restructuring. Our highest aspiration in putting this volume together is that these essays might do their part to bring about such wholesale change. More modestly, we at least hope the articles presented here open a space for greater scholarly conversation about the role of non-tenure track faculty on Catholic (and all) college campuses for, despite a growing audience for scholarly work on the ethics of contingency work, prior to the publication of this issue there had not been a good outlet for such scholarship.

We found this out the hard way. The origins of this issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology* (JMT) can be traced to the 2017 Annual Meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics (SCE) in New Orleans. At that meeting, the SCE Caucus for Contingent Faculty Concerns (CCFC) had organized a panel of contingent scholars to respond to James Keenan, S.J.'s then newly published book *University Ethics*:

How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics. Debra Erickson and Lincoln Rice had organized and were convening the discussion, Matthew Gaudet and Karen Peterson-Iyer were two of the three panelists, and Keenan was to respond to the panel. Several other authors in this volume were also in attendance at the session, as was Jason King, the editor of the *Journal of Moral Theology*. The session was well received by all who attended, and the subsequent discussion was intelligent, constructive, and, groundbreaking in the sense that it was the first sustained and academic discussion of contingency at the SCE. From here, however, the story diverged into two tracks. On the one hand, conversation regarding contingency was burgeoning throughout the broader theological academy, especially at the SCE and the American Academy of Religion (AAR). On the other, there did not seem to be any place for *scholarship* on ethics and contingency.

Following a successful advocacy campaign by several contingent faculty in its membership, the American Academy of Religion had commissioned a Contingent Faculty Task Force in 2014, charged to examine “issues of contingency labor in religious studies as well as to advocate for contingent faculty and make recommendations to the AAR to address the needs of contingent academic labor in religious studies.”¹ In 2015, AAR began offering travel grants for contingent faculty to attend the annual meeting, and, in 2016, when the Task Force completed its work, the board of the AAR replaced it with a permanent working group aimed at contingency as well as a “Contingent Faculty Director” position on the AAR Board. Kerry Danner would be elected co-chair of the working group in 2016 and then elected as the first Contingent Faculty Director in 2017. In 2018, the AAR added access to JSTOR’s religion and theology collection as a member benefit, with an aim to stem one of the impacts of contingent contracts being cancelled or not renewed.

Back at the SCE, Karen Peterson-Iyer had been elected to the Board of the SCE in 2014 and, to this day, remains the only contingent scholar to serve in that capacity. Her voice on the Board, combined with skillful advocacy by CCFC co-conveners Debra Erickson and Lincoln Rice, began to open eyes to the plight of the contingent scholar in our midst, the moral issues involved, and the effects this sea change might have on the very notion of a scholarly society. In 2015,

¹ The open letter that is given credit for catalyzing for AAR’s response to contingency was Kate Daley-Bailey’s “For the Good of the Guild: An Open Letter to the American Academy of Religion.” Daley-Bailey would later acknowledge her letter was informed, in part, by a prior letter written by Debra Erickson, in response to an AAR decision to adjust one of the hotels for their 2011 annual meeting because the hotel was in an ongoing labor dispute. Erickson questioned why the same solidarity was not being afforded to the blighted workers *within* the academy.

the SCE Board had commissioned a Professional Development committee to find ways to better serve those in transition from doctoral programs to employment, both professorial and otherwise. Meanwhile, the Caucus for Contingent Faculty Concerns was strongly encouraged by all in attendance at the New Orleans session to continue to sponsor panels for discussion at the SCE Annual Meeting. Thus, in 2018, the CCFC invited Jason King and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty to reflect on contingency from their perspective as department heads, with Danner serving as respondent, offering her view as both contingent scholar and advocate.

In 2017-18, David Gushee would rise to be both President of the SCE and President-Elect of the AAR. Following conversations about contingency in both organizations, Gushee became “more sensitized to the increasingly dark labor market problems and began to see that these were ethical issues—and also vocational issues, collegiality issues, and more”² He had also decided to dedicate his presidential year at the SCE to underrepresented voices. Thus, he invited the CCFC to host the 2018 SCE Forum, a preconference event in which participants took up a topic of interest to the whole SCE in a plenary session before the main conference began. The team that designed, presented, and led the Forum included Rice, Erickson, Danner, Peterson-Iyer, and Gaudet. Also in 2018, the SCE Board commissioned its own Task Force on Contingency, co-chaired by Gaudet and including Keenan, Peterson-Iyer, and Danner as members. At the publication of this issue, the work of that Task Force is still ongoing.

Despite the successful advocacy work and ever-expanding conversation on the topic at AAR, SCE, and other scholarly societies, there still did not seem to be a place for thoughtful Christian ethicists to take up the morality of academic contingency as a *scholarly* topic. The papers of the New Orleans panel were submitted for publication to numerous journals. They were offered both as a joint-authored paper by all of the panelists, including Keenan’s response, and as individual stand-alone essays. They were also submitted to other journals in several different disciplines, including education and Christian theology. Despite these efforts, none of the papers submitted were accepted for publication. More importantly, the general response, from all disciplines was the same: “this is interesting work, but it just does not fit with we do here at XXX journal.”

Frustrated by the lack of space for scholarly conversation on ethics and contingency but buoyed by the growing interest in the subject, in the summer of 2017, we finally turned to the editor of *JMT*, Jason King. He responded almost immediately and offered to run a special

² Email exchange between Matthew Gaudet and David Gushee, August 14, 2018.

issue of the *JMT* to get the topic to press as soon as possible.³ Thus, the *JMT* special issue on Contingency at Catholic Colleges was born, and there was finally a place for sustained theological and scholarly work on contingency.

We offer this history to the reader for three reasons. First, you will notice a significant overlap between the names mentioned in this narrative and the editor and author list for this issue. That is neither coincidental nor accidental. Several of the articles in this issue have their roots in the panels named above and the versions here are the product of a continuing conversation these authors have been having for many years. Also, several of the late drafts were shared with other authors in the volume to help cross-fertilize the ideas. As a result, this issue has a maturity to it, not just in the essays that have been developed over time but also in how they coalesce with each other. Our hope is that, in turn, the conversations here prompt wider and further discussion throughout the academy.

Secondly, it is worth acknowledging that those who strive for academic worker justice are both advocates and scholars. Thus, the essays in this volume are unmistakably informed by personal experience but raised to a scholarly level and placed into necessary conversation with Catholic social teaching as well as Catholic ideas of mission, vocation, and higher education itself.

The final reason we offer the history above is that it informs the structure of the issue itself. The overarching goal of this volume is to attend to the reality of contingency today in light of pertinent Catholic teachings on education, social structures, and economic justice. The essays in this volume will proceed in three parts. Part I is a single essay offered by Keenan that situates the issue of contingency within the broader field of university ethics. The original New Orleans panel responded to Keenan's text *University Ethics* and much of what is done in these pages is owed to that antecedent.⁴ In his opening essay of this text, Keenan offers an expanded version of his thoughts on the issue of contingency, including insights, claims, and observations that he has continued to develop since *University Ethics* was published.

The task of Part II is to examine the intricate details and facets of the main subject. To this end, the five authors in this section each offer a snapshot of one of the most glaring concerns regarding contingency today as well as suggestions for solutions to address these acute concerns. The selection of these particular snapshots was not accidental but rather the result of careful and collaborative work by the interlocutors to take up several different perspectives on the same subject so as to leave the listener with a thick, multi-dimensional image of the

³ Email exchange between Matthew Gaudet and Jason King, July 3, 2017.

⁴ Seven of the eight essays in this issue either quote or cite *University Ethics*.

subject. The first four essays of part II all have their roots in the “SCE Forum” that occurred before the 2018 SCE Annual Meeting. A team of six scholars planned that event over the course of several months and five of those six—Kerry Danner, Debra Erickson, Lincoln Rice, Karen Peterson-Iyer and Matthew Gaudet—are represented in these pages.⁵ Offered a blank slate to present the complex issues of contingency to an entire academic society, this team spent months discussing and parsing the questions of contingency in order to develop a program that was both comprehensive and accessible.

First, Kerry Danner sets the stage by exploring recent but significant shifts in the economic structures of academic life and the relationship of these shifting structures to Catholic social thought, the mission of Catholic higher education, and the vocation of the professor at Catholic schools. She then offers some concrete suggestions for how to move forward with an eye to economic justice and Catholic morality.

Debra Erickson follows Danner with an examination of the role of faculty unions at Catholic colleges. Using recent trends and specific cases, Erickson plots the range of recent responses to unionization by the administrators of several Catholic colleges and challenges those Catholic schools who have sought to thwart unionization as not only not in keeping with Catholic Social Teaching on worker justice but also in violation of the Catholic notion of the university.

Next, Lincoln Rice shifts our attention to individual rights and, specifically, a right to the protections of tenure for contingent faculty. Making a strong case that such protections are as necessary for quality teaching as they are for quality research, Rice argues in favor of universal tenure, even if the contemporary university continues to hire faculty into non-research teaching roles.

Karen Peterson-Iyer then addresses the “gradual but distinct feminization of contingent labor in institutions of higher education.” Engaging a wide range of Christian and non-Christian feminist authors, Peterson-Iyer paints a vivid picture of both the root causes and the effects of a system in which women consistently earn at least half of all Ph.Ds. but are nevertheless 10-15 percent more likely than their male peers to hold contingent roles.

Finally, Claire Bischoff offers a compelling argument that contingent work is the cause of a *spiritual* crisis for both individual contingent faculty and the institutions they serve. Framing her essay around

⁵ Many thanks are offered to the sixth member of that team, Darrin Snyder-Belousek of Ohio Northern University. Though Darrin did not include an essay for this volume, he is no doubt represented in the other five essays that emerged from this thoughtful and reflective planning team.

Thea Bowman's notion of spirituality as self-awareness, other-awareness, and God-awareness, Bischoff shows how contingency interferes with each of these interior sensibilities and in turn, harms our ability to be great institutions of education and learning.⁶

Taken individually, Danner, Erickson, Rice, Peterson-Iyer, and Bischoff each offer the reader a detailed and nuanced examination of the thorniest moral questions within the topic of contingency. Collectively, however, they capture a rich, layered, and multi-dimensional image of the plight of the contingent professor, which is unrivaled in the literature on the subject to date.

Having laid this foundation, Part III redirects attention once more, from the subject (the contingent scholar) to the observer of the picture (the reader). Part III of the volume pivots away from acute issues and towards those who will need to respond to these issues. First, Hinson-Hasty offers a view from the seat of (marginal) power, as she wrestles with the limits and responsibilities of tenured faculty and, in particular, department chairs in the contemporary university structure. Seeking to "reflect authentically and honestly out of [her] own experience about the cognitive dissonance and moral incoherence one encounters when navigating two worlds—the world of tenured faculty and the world of contingency"—Hinson-Hasty acknowledges the limits that one has as a "middle manager" in academia but nevertheless challenges her fellow department heads and senior faculty members to "envision alternatives and affect the current consumer-driven trajectory of higher education."

Finally, in the coda essay of the volume, Gaudet offers a bookend to match Keenan's opening essay. Where Keenan's essay begins with consideration of the university as a whole (and its lack of ethically driven culture) but narrows the focus to contingency, Gaudet widens the aperture, keeping contingency as the subject, but also bringing the wider university community back into clear view. Looking toward a brighter future for contingent scholars, Gaudet first clears the way by debunking several of the myths which sustain the current divided and individualistic university culture. Then, drawing upon both Catholic Social thought and direct appeals to scripture, he calls the entire institution of Catholic higher education to a recommitment to solidarity

⁶ It is worth noting that Bischoff is the only author in Part II who was not part of the SCE Forum team. (Her essay was first presented at the 2018 College Theology Society annual meeting, for which Jason King served as convener.) She is also the only scholar in this volume who is not an ethicist by training and scholarship. The relationship between those two facts is not incidental. As ethicists we all-too-often overlook the spiritual effects of the issues we take up. (This was the case in the SCE Forum on Contingency.) Nevertheless, Bischoff does a fine job of reminding us of the necessary connections between the spiritual and the moral, especially when it comes to the present topic.

and the common good as we collectively work towards a better and more inclusive university community.

This volume is intended to fill lacunae in the fields of Christian ethics and higher education studies. Prior to this volume, there were a few scattered scholarly pieces on Christian ethics and academic contingency, but the vast majority of work done on the topic limited to journalism and advocacy. Our hope is that this volume both engenders further conversation on the ethics of contingency and becomes the scholarly foundation of many future conversations. **M**