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## Toward an Inclusive Faculty Community

Matthew J. Gaudet

**T**O BE ‘ADJUNCT’ IS, BY DEFINITION, “Something joined or added to another thing but not essentially part of it.”<sup>1</sup> Within the university context, there was a time when the title of “adjunct” professor was primarily descriptive of the role teaching played in the professor’s life and career. Fifty years ago, “adjunct” faculty comprised about a third of the American professorate, but the vast majority of them were teaching either in addition to or in retirement from some other career. For these ‘professors-of-practice,’ professional experience in another career is what actually qualified them to teach in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Most of these instructors lacked a terminal degree but were instead hired to bring practical, professional experience (e.g. professional nurses teaching nursing practicums, successful entrepreneurs teaching business courses) that could balance the theoretical expertise of most scholars. That non-academic profession is also what allowed most of these adjunct instructors to teach without benefits and for relatively low pay since their primary career already provided for their livelihood.

Today, however, the qualifier “adjunct” more readily describes the relationship between the professor and the university community. In today’s colleges and universities, 73 percent of faculty work off of the tenure-track, yet 73.3 percent of those indicate that they consider teaching in higher education their primary occupation.<sup>3</sup> That is to say,

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<sup>1</sup> “Adjunct,” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adjunct?utm\\_campaign=sd&utm\\_medium=serp&utm\\_source=jsonld](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/adjunct?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld).

<sup>2</sup> Terminology for the subset of contingent professors who hold professional careers in another field is mixed and varies greatly from campus to campus, and often even between programs on the same campus. Lacking a universal standard, I have elected to follow the American Association of University Professors use of “Professor-of-Practice” (Ernst Benjamin, David A. Holinger, and Jonathan Knight, “Professors of Practice,” *American Association of University Professors*, [www.aaup.org/report/professors-practice](http://www.aaup.org/report/professors-practice).) It is worth noting that this usage of “Professor-of-Practice” differs from how James Keenan employed the term “Professor-of-the-Practice” in his opening essay in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed,” [www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.W8T23FJRfMJ](http://www.aaup.org/news/data-snapshot-contingent-faculty-us-higher-ed#.W8T23FJRfMJ); The Coalition on the Academic Workforce, “A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members: A Summary of Findings on Part-Time Faculty Respondents

52 percent of college faculty today are neither on the tenure-line nor ‘professors-of-practice’ but adjunct *scholars*—with a terminal degree and research agenda—who have the misfortune to work off of the tenure-track.<sup>4</sup> These scholars occupy a liminal space in the contemporary university. On the one hand, by trade and self-identification, they are academics, but they lack the credentials, privileges, and pay of tenure-line professors. On the other hand, they are adjunct by title and rank, but they do not have the experience, professional stature, and the salary and benefits of a non-academic career to supplement their academic work. They exist in a university structure that was not constructed with them in mind, does not take them seriously, and, ultimately, offers them little more than the most tenuous and temporary of connections. Despite being the majority of faculty, they are literally “adjunct” to the institution.

The articles of this issue of the *Journal of Moral Theology* have thoughtfully and rigorously examined several distinct concerns that have arisen due to the adjunctification of Catholic higher education. Many of these issues involved justice for the adjunct professors themselves. However, when this issue is taken in total, one theme that seems to emerge is that this system has repercussions for the entire university or college. James Keenan, S.J., framed the issue of contingency on Catholic campuses as part of a larger void in university life: “The absence of a professional ethics at the university is evidence of and symptomatic of a university culture disinterested in ethics.”<sup>5</sup> Kerry Danner and Debra Erickson showed that the ripples of mass contingency disturb the mission of Catholic higher education and the very notion of a Catholic university.<sup>6</sup> While this system is tragically

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to the Coalition on the Academic Workforce Survey on Contingent Faculty Members and Instructors,” [www.academicworkforce.org/CAW\\_portrait\\_2012.pdf](http://www.academicworkforce.org/CAW_portrait_2012.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> A note on terminology: some scholars (and institutions) have begun to differentiate between the terms “adjunct” professors (who are typically part-time) and “contingent,” “non-tenure-track,” or “visiting” professors or lecturers (who are typically full-time). However, this terminology is far from universal. Moreover, while the distinction between full-time and part-time is meaningful, it is by no means the most meaningful way to parse the sets. Thus, I use the terms adjunct, contingent, and non-tenure-track (NTT) interchangeably. However, throughout this essay, I will maintain a linguistic distinction between adjunct/contingent/NTT *professors* (which is the entire set of faculty off of the tenure-track, inclusive of professors-of-practice) and adjunct/contingent/NTT *scholars* (which is the subset of NTT faculty who are not professors-of-practice, but trying to make their way primarily as scholars and teachers).

<sup>5</sup> Keenan, “University Ethics and Contingent Faculty,” 8-25.

<sup>6</sup> Kerry Danner, “Saying No to an Economy That Kills: How Apathy Towards Contingent Faculty Undermines Mission and Exploits Vocation at Catholic Universities and Colleges,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (2019): 26-50; Debra Erickson, “Adjunct Unionization on Catholic Campuses: Solidarity, Theology, and Mission,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (2019): 51-74.

unjust for the contingent professor, Lincoln Rice, Karen Peterson-Iyer, Claire Bischoff, and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty have shown several ways in which students and fellow faculty members also bear real costs in such a system.<sup>7</sup> All of this is to say, the issue of contingency is not just a justice issue, but a *community* issue, and, as such, it requires a communal solution.

In his opening essay, Keenan set the direction of this volume with a call to equity, solidarity, and community.<sup>8</sup> In this concluding essay, I will echo that call as I seek to address the problem of contingency from the perspective of the Christian community that our Catholic colleges and universities aspire to be. Jesus never offered us a sermon on the campus green, but it is still worth asking: what does Christ ask of our college communities? If we attend to this call, what might it mean for the non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty who have, thus far, been rendered adjunct to—that is, “added to but not essentially part of”—that community?

#### FACULTY ON THE MARGINS

The economic plight of contingent professors today is well documented. According to the American Association of University Professors, as of 2016, 73 percent of instructors in American higher education today work off the tenure-track.<sup>9</sup> Contingent contracts are certainly devoid of the protections of tenure but also typically lack the security and pay of permanent work.<sup>10</sup> The average pay per course is estimated at less than \$3000, and the average annual pay for a contingent professor at a single institution was \$20,506 in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Further exacerbating the problems is the fact that more than 50 percent of NTT

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<sup>7</sup> Lincoln Rice, “The Threat to Academic Freedom and the Contingent Scholar,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (2019); Karen Peterson-Iyer, “Contingency, Gender, and the Academic Table,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue, no. 1 (2019); Claire Bischoff, “The Spiritual Crisis of Contingent Faculty,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (2019):92-114; Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, “Department Chair as Faculty Advocate and Middle Manager,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, special issue no. 1 (2019):126-140.

<sup>8</sup> James F. Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 54.

<sup>9</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Data Snapshot: Contingent Faculty in US Higher Ed.”

<sup>10</sup> For a good argument for why tenure protections remain important even for those who do not research, see Rice, “The Threat to Academic Freedom and the Contingent Scholar” in this volume.

<sup>11</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Visualizing Change: Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession, 2016-17,” [www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2015-16EconomicStatusReport.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2015-16EconomicStatusReport.pdf).

faculty are relegated to part-time contracts.<sup>12</sup> These contracts typically lack any sort of health insurance, retirement savings, life insurance, funding for research or academic travel, or other benefits. Moreover, contingent contracts are often offered at the last minute—leaving precious little time to prepare—or, even worse, cancelled at the last minute with no remuneration for preparatory work already done. Finally, while some contingent professors do hold multi-year or at least yearly contracts, most commonly, contingent professors are hired and rehired every term or every year, typically subject to the unilateral decisions of the current department chair.

NTT professors deploy several methods for surviving in such conditions. Though relegated to “part-time” contracts, many scholars work at several schools (often totaling far more than a standard 40-hour “full-time” work-week but still without benefits). A 2014 congressional report suggested that as many as 89 percent of adjuncts work at more than one institution and 13 percent work at four or more schools.<sup>13</sup> The practice is so common that the literature has even coined a term—the “freeway flyer”—to refer to those who spend hours commuting between campuses, piecing together a living.<sup>14</sup> Other NTT scholars combine part-time teaching with other employment (in or out of academia). Others rely on the income and benefits of a partner or spouse for survival.<sup>15</sup> In some states, professors are eligible for unemployment insurance between semesters.<sup>16</sup> Finally, ac-

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<sup>12</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession,” [www.aaup.org/report/contingent-appointments-and-academic-profession](http://www.aaup.org/report/contingent-appointments-and-academic-profession).

<sup>13</sup> House Committee on Education and the Workforce Democratic Staff, “The Just-In-Time Professor: A Staff Report Summarizing eForum Responses on the Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty in Higher Education,” [democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/imo/media/doc/1.24.14-AdjunctEforumReport.pdf](http://democrats-edworkforce.house.gov/imo/media/doc/1.24.14-AdjunctEforumReport.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Josh Boldt, “How I Got Out: One Adjunct’s Journey From Freeway Flyer to e-Learning Director,” *Chronicle Vitae*, [chroniclevitae.com/news/575-how-i-got-out-one-adjunct-s-journey-from-freeway-flyer-to-e-learning-director](http://chroniclevitae.com/news/575-how-i-got-out-one-adjunct-s-journey-from-freeway-flyer-to-e-learning-director); Mary Strope, “Freeway Flyers’ Now Make up the Bulk of Faculty,” *Guild Freelancers*, [www.guildfreelancers.org/news/2015/4/15/freeway-flyers-make-up-the-bulk-of-faculty](http://www.guildfreelancers.org/news/2015/4/15/freeway-flyers-make-up-the-bulk-of-faculty).

<sup>15</sup> In “Contingency, Gender, and the Academic Table,” Karen Peterson-Iyer has examined the gender implications of this kind of benefit reliance.

<sup>16</sup> In California in particular, the 1989 *Cervisi vs. Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board* decision established (fairly) that a promise or even a contract for the following semester is not a guarantee of future employment and thus, all contingent professors are eligible for unemployment insurance at the end of every term. *J. Channell, Cervisi v. Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board*, No. A038995 (Court of Appeals of California, First Appellate District, Division Four. February 1, 1989).

ording to a recent study by the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, one in four families of part-time faculty are enrolled in at least one public assistance program.<sup>17</sup>

These realities have prompted a new genre of literature on academic contingency. While periodicals that focus on academic life (e.g. the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Vitae*, Insidehighered.com) took up this cause decades ago, it has more recently reached the mainstream news outlets, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, CNN, *Forbes*, *The Atlantic*, and *Salon*.<sup>18</sup> In 2016, the media news website Gawker.com even offered an 8-part series on contingent labor in academia.<sup>19</sup> Each of these sources tells a version of the same story: adjuncts are highly educated and often excellent educators, yet they are suffering from a nationwide epidemic of low wages, a lack of benefits, poor working conditions, short and sporadic contracts, and (to make ends meet) long commutes that often involve two, three, or even more institutions. Each source also vilifies the same antagonist—college administrators, whose pay and sheer numbers have increased exponentially over the same decades that have witnessed a massive shift from tenure-line to NTT faculty on campuses. Finally, each of these sources also offers the same solution: support unionization of contingent faculty and collective bargaining in order to increase pay and benefits.

One problem with this mainstream narrative is that it oversimplifies the issue into material terms and, consequently, material solutions. There is no doubt that the economic realities of contingent life are dire. However, like the tip of an iceberg, if we focus only on pay and benefits, we miss the far deeper social, emotional, and spiritual injustices

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<sup>17</sup> Ken Jacobs, Ian Perry, and Jenifer MacGillvary, “The High Public Cost of Low Wages” *Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education*, [laborcenter.berkeley.edu/the-high-public-cost-of-low-wages/](http://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/the-high-public-cost-of-low-wages/).

<sup>18</sup> Colman McCarthy, “Adjunct Professors Fight for Crumbs on Campus,” *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/adjunct-professors-fight-for-crumbs-on-campus/2014/08/22/ca92eb38-28b1-11e4-8593-da634b334390\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9914046b3a9b](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/adjunct-professors-fight-for-crumbs-on-campus/2014/08/22/ca92eb38-28b1-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html?utm_term=.9914046b3a9b); Corey Kilgannon, “Without Tenure or a Home,” *New York Times*, March 27, 2014, [www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/nyregion/without-tenure-or-a-home.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/nyregion/without-tenure-or-a-home.html); Gary Rhoades, “Adjunct Professors Are the New Working Poor,” *CNN Wire*, September 24, 2013, [www.cnn.com/2013/09/24/opinion/rhoades-adjunct-faculty/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/24/opinion/rhoades-adjunct-faculty/index.html); Dan Edmonds, “More Than Half of College Faculty Are Adjuncts: Should You Care?,” *Forbes*, May 28, 2015, [www.forbes.com/sites/noodleeducation/2015/05/28/more-than-half-of-college-faculty-are-adjuncts-should-you-care/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/noodleeducation/2015/05/28/more-than-half-of-college-faculty-are-adjuncts-should-you-care/); Laura McKenna, “The College President-to-Adjunct Pay Ratio,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2015, [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/income-inequality-in-higher-education-the-college-president-to-adjunct-pay-ratio/407029/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/09/income-inequality-in-higher-education-the-college-president-to-adjunct-pay-ratio/407029/).

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton Nolan, “The Educated Underclass,” *Gawker*, [gawker.com/tag/the-educated-underclass](http://gawker.com/tag/the-educated-underclass).

of the current contingent system.<sup>20</sup> For example, short and sporadic contracts certainly are the cause of financial hardship for contingent professors, but they also preclude the consistency around which a life can be planned and executed. Decisions like what neighborhood or town to live in or how to arrange for childcare are necessarily made with due consideration to where and when someone will be working. For contingent professors, however, such decisions are often not finalized until the last few weeks before a semester and, occasionally, even after a semester has already begun. Since courses get dropped from university schedules as a regular practice and for any number of reasons, NTT professors are often bumped out of their classes not only if *their* courses do not fill but also if a tenure-line faculty member needs a course. Since department chairs often make these decisions unilaterally, one's livelihood can be subject to staying in the good graces of one individual. Also, the short and fleeting nature of contingent contracts also makes it difficult to build relationships and become part of the campus community. This is especially problematic again for "free-way flyers," as no single campus may feel like home and the need to commute between multiple campuses means little time to develop the bonds of community even if one campus did rise above the others.

Many NTT professors are offered no office, no physical location to claim as their own, no place to store their belongings, and no place to meet with students. The irony is that they are still, somehow, required to hold "office" hours, typically in a coffee shop, cafeteria, or library on campus. Without an office, NTT faculty also typically lack a phone extension or voicemail, which often leads to them distributing their personal cell number to students. Finally, only rarely are NTT faculty issued computers. Instead they are usually left to purchase their own hardware, which may or may not integrate with the university's network, printers, and projection hardware. All of these policies combine to present the NTT professor as something "less than" a "real" professor to his or her students.

Similarly, contingent faculty are almost never given business cards or letterhead. Such costs are deemed by schools and departments as an unnecessary investment when the professor is only being hired by the semester. However, the lack of such tools prevents NTT faculty from presenting themselves professionally to publishers (for desk exam copies of textbooks, for example) and other professional colleagues. Likewise, on department websites, NTT faculty are often relegated to a list separate from the tenure line faculty, indicating that they are not only a rank below but really outside of the academic caste system altogether.

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<sup>20</sup> See Claire Bishcoff's excellent "The Spiritual Crisis of Contingent Faculty" on contingency as a spiritual crisis in this volume.

Finally, NTT faculty are usually excluded from department meetings, faculty senate, and other committees where decisions on curriculum, policies, and standards get made, thus rendering 71 percent of faculty voiceless with regard to decisions that directly affect their work. Similarly, since it is wholly unheard of that an administrator would be hired directly from the contingent ranks, contingent faculty are further unrepresented when it comes to university decision-making. Even when NTT faculty unionize to gain a voice, typically their association is separate from and operates independently to the tenure-line union, which often pits the two labor organizations in de facto competition with each other.

In summary, while the economics of contingency are of vital importance and ought not be minimized, the issue cannot be dealt with in material terms alone. When one begins to consider the myriad of policies and practices that serve to alienate NTT faculty from the university community, it becomes clear that academic contingency is, in fact, a form of social and professional marginalization that goes well beyond, but is still intimately tied up with, economic and material deficiencies.

### **DEBUNKING THE MYTHS OF CONTINGENCY**

Responding to contingent marginalization requires us to confront our understanding of what NTT faculty are and should be to the university community. As noted in the introduction, the contemporary contingency system was not planned for. It emerged from the classical professor-of-practice adjunct model, but little thought was given in the early years to how contingent scholars differ from professors-of-practice in both nature and needs. In the 1970s, the ratio of tenure line faculty to adjuncts was nearly inverted from what it is today (65 percent tenure line), and non-tenure-track faculty were almost always operating as professors-of-practice. Over the course of four decades, tenure line roles have given way to NTT roles at a steady rate, until today contingent scholars are the majority and tenure-line roles comprise only about a third of all faculty. The tepid pace at which this frog has been boiled has left a legacy in the form of three myths, which persist to keep non-tenure-track faculty on the margins of the university life. These myths must be debunked before we can proceed.

#### *The Meritocracy Myth*

It is commonly held that academia, for all of its politics, is idealized as a meritocracy. Those that publish well and often, teach well, and contribute their time and service to the university are supposed to gain tenure and rise through the ranks, while those who fail to meet these particular tasks do not. Scholars are also hired into their initial tenure-

track positions based on merit or, more typically, potential for scholarly merit, as measured through a top academic pedigree and the recommendation of top scholars in the field. Ostensibly, then, academic rank (and the privileges that come with it) are the fruits of an individual's academic labor, and those who end up filling out the contingent ranks did not merit inclusion in the tenure-line ranks. This claim is worth exploring in greater detail.

Tenure is a credential that tends to be permanent and for life. Even when tenured professors change institutions, they tend to arrive at the new institution already tenured. At the same time, tenure is something that is achieved only once and at a single point in time. Thus, the fairness of the competition is highly subject to evolving market conditions. To put it more concretely, a scholar who was first offered a tenure-track job in 1975—when tenure-line faculty comprised 58 percent of the professional faculty on American college campuses—had a significant advantage in getting on the tenure-track compared to those who seek that same credential in today's market—when tenure-lines hover around 30 percent of all faculty. Using these numbers, even if all other working conditions remained the same, nearly half of those who are currently in contingent roles would have been hired on to the tenure-track in 1975.

All other employment conditions did not remain the same, however. The generational inequity has been further exacerbated by a significant increase in the number of doctorate holders on the market. From 1989 to 2007, the number of Ph.Ds. graduating and hitting the job market each year increased by 40 percent while the number of tenure-line roles in American colleges and universities only increased by 11 percent.<sup>21</sup> In short, as the demand for tenure-line jobs has reached an all-time low (as percentage of total professorate), the supply of candidates for those jobs has reached an all-time high.

Now, on the surface, the relatively low increase in tenure-line roles during these decades could of course be the result of a stagnating *need* for college professors. However, over the same period (1989-2007) in which tenure line roles increases by a mere 11 percent, total college graduates increased by a whopping 70 percent. Instead of filling this

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<sup>21</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, "IPEDS Data Center," [nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter). Data compiled by the author. Note that while the total number of tenure-line roles did actually increase over the past four decades, this increase has not kept up with the corresponding increase in undergraduate and graduate students over those same years and has been dwarfed by the rapid rise in numbers of NTT professors over those same years. Since the *total* number of professors has increased relatively proportionately to students during these years, the most appropriate basis for comparison between generations is percentage of total professors that end up in tenure-line and NTT positions.

need with additional tenure-line roles, however, the steady trend between the mid 1970s and the mid 2000s has been the increasing use of NTT faculty. Making matters worse, while *full-time* contingent positions have ticked up slightly (13 percent in 1975 and 19 percent in 2014), the vast majority of newly created roles have been *part-time*. All of this begins to explain why a 2010 American Federation of Teachers study also found that 47 percent of part-time contingent faculty members would take a tenure-line role if it were available, but are trapped in a contingent role due to circumstance and market forces.<sup>22</sup>

The severity of these numbers begins to weaken meritocratic claims. First, when supply of doctorate-holders exceeds demand so greatly, short lists for openings include not one but several highly qualified candidates and ultimate hiring decisions are often made more on personal and academic fit than they are on merit.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, such an argument would have to reckon the inherent unfairness across generations. That is, if the threshold of entry to the tenure-line is significantly greater today than it was a generation ago, those who secured tenure-line jobs a generation ago did not earn them on merit alone but also on timing. Tenure itself only exacerbates this problem since a tenured professor who does not want to change jobs is largely protected from ever having to enter the job market again. This is not to say that the tenure system should be abolished.<sup>24</sup> It simply acknowledges that any claims to meritocracy are hollow when such protections are in place.

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<sup>22</sup> "American Academic: A National Survey of Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty," *AFT Higher Education*, [www.aft.org/sites/default/files/aa\\_parttimefaculty0310.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/aa_parttimefaculty0310.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> It is also worth acknowledging here that the same American Federation of Teachers report found that one third of contingent faculty have a preference for part-time work either because they already have a different primary occupation (24 percent) or because it allows them to devote time to family or personal matters (9 percent). The election toward family responsibilities, however, is one reason why the gender balance of contingent roles skews far more toward women than in the tenure-track ranks. See Karen Peterson-Iyer's "Contingency, Gender, and the Academic Table." on contingency and gender in this volume. Two points need to be made here about self-selection and scholarly merit. First, the decision to remain in a contingent role is not necessarily indicative of a less meritorious scholar. There is no reason to suggest that part-time status renders one a less effective teacher and, while part-time scholars may not publish as prolifically (since they necessarily do not spend as much time on the task, and they are universally not paid for the work), when they do publish there is no indication that their work is any less rigorous or scholarly than a tenure-line colleague. Secondly, it is important to distinguish between the choice to teach part-time and the socially constructed role that comes with that decision. Voluntary part-time professors are opting for fewer responsibilities, not second-class status or exclusion from the benefits of the tenure-track.

<sup>24</sup> See Lincoln Rice's "The Threat to Academic Freedom and the Contingent Scholar" in this issue on the moral imperative to expand, not restrict tenure.

Even excluding both of these points, however, an argument for meritocracy, quite simply, defies the facts. Ostensibly, a meritocratic system would make hiring decision based on a candidate's prospective ability to perform the central functions of a professor: teaching and research. Of these, the evidence on teaching is clear. Contingent faculty continually rise to the challenge and teach on par with or even above their tenure-line peers. A recent study from Northwestern University that showed "consistent evidence that students learn relatively more from non-tenure line professors in their introductory courses." Moreover, the study found that "differences are present across a wide variety of subject areas, and are particularly pronounced for Northwestern's average students and less-qualified students."<sup>25</sup> These numbers are particularly remarkable when considered against the significant handicaps that contingent faculty face every day.

Unfortunately, similar studies of *research* prowess among the contingent ranks are not available. Still, some conclusions can be inferred. First, since most initial tenure-track hiring decisions are made before scholars have really begun to make their scholarly mark, the decision is typically made on the prospect, not the reality, of merit, where the prospect of merit is measured with imprecise proxies such as graduating from a prestigious program or working with a prestigious scholar. A recent study in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* found that, for most disciplines, at least half of available assistant professorships went to candidates who were in their last year of Ph.D. studies, while 90 percent went to those within four years of completing their Ph.D. Furthermore, most of those who landed tenure-line jobs a few years after the doctorate held postdoctoral fellowships in the intervening years, not contingent positions.<sup>26</sup> In a true meritocracy, those who are further removed from their doctorate should have the advantages of more publications and more teaching experience when compared to freshly minted Ph.Ds. In reality, moving from contingent faculty to tenure-line has become an extremely rare event—meaning that those who, for any number of reasons, find themselves on the contingent side of the divide are extremely likely to stay there regardless of the work they do from that position.

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<sup>25</sup> David N. Figlio, Morton O. Schapiro, and Kevin B. Soter, "Are Tenure-track Professors Better Teachers?," National Bureau of Economic Research, [www.nber.org/papers/w19406](http://www.nber.org/papers/w19406). Introductory courses were used as the measure due to the study's methodology, which compared performance in later courses against the professor type students had in introductory courses.

<sup>26</sup> L. Maren Wood, "On the Academic Job Market, Does Patience Pay Off?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 16, 2015, [www.chronicle.com/article/On-the-Academic-Job-Market/233683/](http://www.chronicle.com/article/On-the-Academic-Job-Market/233683/).

Finally, even if we concede that contingent faculty publish less prolifically than their tenure-line colleagues, this would not prove the existence of a successful meritocracy. Rather, it would simply show that the advantages offered to tenure-line faculty have a very real effect on the amount of scholarship a scholar can produce. Even prior to tenure, junior professors on the tenure-track already possess an entire set of advantages over their contingent colleagues, including lower course loads, better pay, offices, travel funding, research funding, and research assistance. Many tenure-track junior professors even get course releases and sabbaticals with the express purpose of allowing them even more time to continue to publish. All the while, our so-called “part-time” faculty are working multiple jobs, commuting across several campuses, and teaching high course loads to make ends meet, leaving precious little time for research and publication. If a contingent faculty member is able to publish with even a fraction of the efficiency of her tenure-line colleague, it should be hailed as a remarkable accomplishment.

Yet, the opposite is true. In the academic hierarchy, almost invariably, contingent faculty are considered subordinate to even the greenest Assistant Professor. It does not matter if the contingent faculty member has several books published with high-ranking university presses or articles in all of the top journals. It does not matter if the contingent faculty member has been in the classroom for twenty years and has a remarkable and extensive teaching and service record. By rank, they remain at the bottom of the hierarchy and on the wrong side of the privilege divide.

In summary, the meritocratic justification of tenure-line privilege fails on several overlapping points. First, any claim to merit fails to account for the extreme differences in market conditions between generations. Second, even accounting for the market today, the severe oversupply of Ph.D.s coupled with the decreasing supply of tenure-line roles typically leads to ultimate hiring decisions based more on luck and fit than on merit. Finally, those who—by bad luck or lack of fit—do not succeed in landing a tenure-line position directly out of graduate school immediately face severe disadvantages of time, funding, assistance, privilege, and prestige when compared to their tenure-track peers, creating a contingent vortex that is extremely difficult to escape. The meritocracy argument probably endures, in part, because there was a time when it was more or less true. Merit differences could explain the majority of those who did not end up on the tenure-track in the 1970s, when tenure-track was the norm, rather than the exception for graduating Ph.D.s and NTT roles aside from professors-of-practice were rare. Similarly, a later era in the history of contingency

also gave rise to a second myth: that NTT roles can serve as a stepping stone to the tenure-track.

### *The “Stepping Stone” Myth*

In the mid-1970s, the percentage of the professorate in contingent roles began to increase by a steady 1 percent per year. The effects of this steady shift in market prospects occurred in stages. At first, the shift was small enough that it was absorbed by the existing tiers. By the 1990s, however, tenure-track opportunities had been significantly displaced but were not yet outnumbered by part-time adjunct roles.<sup>27</sup> During this period, many of the new NTT positions were being filled temporarily by newly minted Ph.Ds. who did not initially find tenure-track jobs coming out of their doctorate programs. However, since tenure-track roles still outnumbered NTT scholars, there was still generally a viable route from contingency to the tenure-track. In fact, for many during this era, time as a NTT professor offered the nascent scholar a chance to gain some valuable teaching experience and begin a research agenda that would help to secure a permanent position.<sup>28</sup>

The existence of this period in academic history is likely why the stepping stone myth is so commonly told by senior scholars. For example, in her article in this issue, Kerry Danner noted that in her work with the American Academy of Religion’s Academic Labor and Contingent Faculty Working Group she has “heard, more often than I would like to, department heads or administrators explain that adjunct teaching is a career stepping stone.”<sup>29</sup> I would further suggest that those who offer such advice to NTT faculty are highly likely to have finished their Ph.D. in the 1990s or early 2000s and will often confirm that either they spent some time in a contingent position or knew others who had. Anecdotally, it would seem that the stepping stone path was indeed a viable one for a time.

The problem is the market today has shifted once again and the experience of those, now senior scholars, is no longer the norm. Today, contingent faculty outnumber tenure-line faculty by more than two to one, making it a statistical impossibility for contingency to serve as a reliable stepping stone to the tenure-track for more than a select few. Graduate programs are also graduating more Ph.Ds. than ever before, creating an oversupply problem that only exacerbates the

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<sup>27</sup> The late 1980s was when total NTT positions first surpassed tenure-line roles in sheer numbers. However, when professors-of-practice are subtracted, tenure-line roles still outstripped NTT roles until the mid 2000s. See American Association of University Professors, “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession.”

<sup>28</sup> American Association of University Professors, “Contingent Appointments and the Academic Profession.”

<sup>29</sup> Danner, “Saying No to an Economy That Kills.”

lack of demand. Furthermore, when at least half of available assistant professorships in recent years went to candidates who were in their last year of Ph.D. studies, and 90 percent went to those within four years of completing their Ph.D., and those who landed tenure-line jobs years after the doctorate held postdoctoral fellowships in the intervening years and not contingent positions, today the stepping stone myth is demonstrably false.<sup>30</sup>

Today's market is flooded with more Ph.D.s. that it can absorb, giving rise to two distinct professional tracks that emerge nearly immediately from the granting of the doctorate. And, as Keenan has neatly summed it up, "the gulf between tenured faculty and adjunct faculty has few secure ways of passage" across it.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Myth of Faculty Solidarity*

Despite the gulf between tenure-line and NTT faculty, a notion of solidarity still exists between the two classes. This may be particularly true on campuses where faculty are unionized, where faculty unions are seen as fighting the same fight against the same antagonist, and there is strong encouragement from each class to support each other's negotiations with administration. However, it also emerges in interpersonal relationships on all campuses, where individual tenure-line faculty who recognize the injustice of contingency—a growing number today—offer sympathy and support for the struggle.

Yet, when those sympathies are tested, all too often they dissolve. In 2013, Robin Wilson offered the following report for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*:

The first order of business when arts-and-science professors at New York University gather each year is to decide whether their full-time colleagues who work off the tenure track should be granted voting privileges in faculty meetings. This academic year, for the first time, the professors decided no. Extending the vote to full-time contingent faculty members was deemed too "dangerous." As on most campuses, professors at NYU who have tenure or are on the tenure track are a dwindling minority, and some worry that their power would be weakened and their voice muffled if shared governance were shared more broadly.<sup>32</sup>

This is stark example of what Keenan has termed the "cultural myopia" of tenure-line faculty. In short, "Tenure-line faculty probably,

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<sup>30</sup> Wood, "On the Academic Job Market, Does Patience Pay Off?"

<sup>31</sup> Keenan, "University Ethics and Contingent Faculty."

<sup>32</sup> Robin Wilson, "The New Faculty Minority: Tenured Professors Retain Control as Their Numbers Shrink," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 18, 2013, [chronicle.com/article/The-New-Faculty-Minority/137945/](http://chronicle.com/article/The-New-Faculty-Minority/137945/).

conveniently, do not care about adjuncts.”<sup>33</sup> In this admission, he even includes his (former) self:

In my ten years at my university, I have been working on faculty development, mentoring junior faculty, and developing programs for graduate students.... Still, in my university and in my department there are adjuncts. I know next to nothing about them.... I know little about the terms of their employment. Like other tenured faculty, I have unconsciously, and conveniently, worn blinders about their work context.... I have managed to tell myself they do not concern me.<sup>34</sup>

This myopia regarding academic contingency is supported by the three factors I have noted so far in this essay. First, in focusing on material inadequacies, the mainstream tale of contingency focuses on a single antagonist—the greedy administrator—rather than as a systemic and cultural problem. Under such a paradigm, tenure-line peers can express solidarity without much commitment beyond platitudes. After all, even department chairs have little power to change pay and benefits, and individual professors are completely powerless with regard to such material injustices.<sup>35</sup> However, if the mainstream narrative fails to account for social and structural marginalization of contingent faculty, as I have sought to show in this essay, then the problem is cultural, not hierarchical, and responsibility begins to fall on all who hold power and privilege in the community.

Second, holding on to the meritocracy myth also makes it easy to dismiss both the material deficiencies and the social marginalization of NTT faculty. When “publish or perish” is the mantra that drives pre-tenure scholars towards tenure, it becomes easy to regard NTT faculty as among those who have “perished” in a system that rewards academic merit. It ignores that initial hiring decisions—the point at which most end up in contingent roles—tend to be more of a function of timing, personal ‘fit,’ and ‘potential’ than they are about actual merit. It is blind to the privileges and advantages that come from getting hired on to the tenure-track, further stacking the deck and making the system far from meritocratic. However, if we blunt the power of meritocracy, then dismissing contingent faculty as somehow less worthy becomes far harder to excuse.

Finally, if contingency is understood as simply one more rung on the ladder toward tenure then the plight of contingency can be chalked up as “doing time” in order to earn the privileges that come with a

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<sup>33</sup> Keenan, *University Ethics*, 40; Keenan, “University Ethics and Contingent Faculty.”

<sup>34</sup> Keenan, *University Ethics*, 39–40; Keenan, “University Ethics and Contingent Faculty.”

<sup>35</sup> Hinson-Hasty, “Department Chair as Faculty Advocate and Middle Manager.”

tenure-track position. However, when NTT positions rarely function today as a “stepping stone” they promised a generation ago then the contingent faculty reality looks less like a rite of passage and more like systemic marginalization.

In summary, if we broaden the mainstream narrative on contingency and reject the trappings of the meritocracy and stepping stone myths, then the plight of contingency begins to be seen in a different light. Moreover, once we begin to accept that contingency is a form of social and structural marginalization, responding to the issue becomes the responsibility of faculty peers and not just administrative leadership. What remains, then, is to consider just what such a response might look like.

### RESTORING THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY ON CAMPUS

There is little doubt that Catholic social thought (CST) would identify contingent professors as worthy of protection in the modern market driven university culture. Certainly, any response to contingency would have to begin with increasing pay and benefits. As stated in *Quadragesimo Anno* and elsewhere, justices requires workers to “be paid a wage sufficient to support him [sic] and his family” (no.71) and *Mater et Magistra* declares that “the remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful” (no.71). However, the contingency crisis demands a deeper response. To this end, *Gaudium et Spes* expanded the claims above beyond mere material sufficiency: “remuneration for labor is to be such that man [sic] may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his [sic] own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good” (no. 67). *Laborem Exercens* stakes a right to shared governance: “Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves—an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be ‘cogs’ in a huge machine moved from above” (no. 15). In short, while CST’s emphasis on the protection of unions is often highlighted, a full reading of CST on worker justice reveals a driving narrative of the restoration of the *dignity* of the worker through the (re)establishment of dignified relations between the employer and the worker.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For a more extensive argument on contingency from the perspective of Catholic Social Thought, see Gerald J. Beyer, “Labor Unions, Adjuncts, and the Mission and Identity of Catholic Universities,” *Horizons* 42, no. 1 (2015): 1–37, as well as Danner, “Saying No to an Economy That Kills” in this volume.

Even considering this, the direct calls to worker justice in Catholic social thought, helpful as they are, still cannot comprise a complete response to contingency on Catholic campuses. Catholic social thought also includes a firm commitment to the maintenance and expansion of community through an abiding attention to the common good and the solidarity of all of God's children. It is toward these themes that I am arguing Catholic higher education needs to fundamentally recommit itself. Pope Francis sums up the point well: "Here and now...the Lord's disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community!" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 92) The gospel call to community is one of restoration and of radical inclusiveness. From the tax collectors Christ ate with to the prostitutes he socialized with, from the lepers he healed to the adulterer he protected and then forgave, so much of Christ's earthly ministry was aimed at restoring the communion between the communities he visited and those they had pushed to the margins.

Elsewhere, I have drawn upon the particular similitude between the plights of NTT faculty on campus today and the man born blind in in Chapter 9 of John's Gospel.<sup>37</sup> While the story is billed as a physical healing, that event is merely an incidental prelude. The main story examines how his community *reacted* to the healing and revealed the complex practices we employ in order to maintain our in-groups and out-groups and the status that comes with them. Blindness, at the time, was associated with sin, and this sin was understood as pretext for the exclusion of the blind man from the synagogue, the town, and even his own family unit. When Jesus and the disciples found him, he was literally on the margins of the town he was born in, begging for his food. When Jesus healed him, it should have restored his place in society. Instead, the pretext of disability and sin is revealed for what it was: an excuse to exclude and marginalize and thus reify one's own "proper" position in the society.

In today's university communities, we rarely exclude individuals on the basis of "sinfulness." However, we do rely on the myth of "merit" to form hierarchies and rank structures and exclude NTT faculty from the university community in dozens of ways. If my earlier argument against meritocracy holds then those who hold power and privilege in the university structure—especially administrators, department chairs, and tenure-line faculty—owe their contingent col-

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew J. Gaudet, "Reflections on the Contingent Workforce at Catholic Colleges," in *Catholic Identity in Context: Vision and Formation for the Common Good* (San Francisco: University of San Francisco Press, 2018), 33–43.

leagues both an examination of personal conscience and an examination of the social structures that perpetuate the unjust power and privilege dynamics.

Such introspection is the necessary first step toward true Christian solidarity among all workers at Catholic colleges and universities. But it will not be easy. As Keenan observed, “Unlike most professionals and civil servants, we university faculty function very much as individuals in the academy. Aside from department meetings, we study alone, work alone, teach alone, write alone, and lecture alone; we also grade students individually and write our singular letters of recommendation.”<sup>38</sup> Such siloing certainly enables the cultural myopia with respect to contingency. It also undercuts the real power of any claims to faculty solidarity. In the Catholic context, however, it is also antithetical to the common good. As Francis observes, “The radicalization of individualism in...anti-social terms leads to the conclusion that everyone has the ‘right’ to expand as far as his power allows, even at the expense of the exclusion and marginalization of the most vulnerable majority.” Such radical individualism “denies the validity of the common good because on the one hand it supposes that the very idea of ‘common’ implies the constriction of at least some individuals, and the other that the notion of ‘good’ deprives freedom of its essence.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, we observe cases of tenure-line faculty responding to the contingency crisis by circling the wagons and creating greater barriers to participation by contingent colleagues, despite ostensive claims to faculty solidarity.

Of course, any efforts to circling the wagons are antithetical not only to solidarity but to the common good as well. After all, as Rice has argued earlier in this volume, “If three-quarters of higher education faculty today are contingent, is it meaningful any longer to talk of academic freedom as a ruling principle in higher education?”<sup>40</sup> Or as Erickson has noted elsewhere, in the face of a changing academic landscape, perhaps “we are all contingent” more than we realize.<sup>41</sup> Recognizing that the present state of contingency foretells the future

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<sup>38</sup> Keenan, *University Ethics*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Francis, “Message from the Holy Father to the Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences,” April 28, 2017, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/04/28/170428h.html>.

<sup>40</sup> Jan Clausen and Eva-Maria Swidler, “Academic Freedom From Below: Toward and Adjunct-Centered Struggle,” *Journal of Academic Freedom* 4 (2013): 1-26, as quoted in Rice, “The Threat to Academic Freedom and the Contingent Scholar.”

<sup>41</sup> Debra Erickson, “‘We Are All Contingent’: Advocacy and Solidarity in the Profession” Presented at Toward a Culture of University Ethics: An Interdisciplinary Conference, Boston, MA, 2017, [www.bc.edu/centers/jesinst/toward-a-culture-of-university-ethics/speakers/day-three---wednesday.html](http://www.bc.edu/centers/jesinst/toward-a-culture-of-university-ethics/speakers/day-three---wednesday.html).

of higher education as a whole offers important pretext for establishing universal faculty interdependence. For if the fate of NTT faculty is tied up with the fate of tenured faculty then tenured faculty need to make better efforts to support NTT faculty. Catholic notions of solidarity and common good, however, go even further than mere shared destiny and interdependence.

Interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 39).

Or, as interpreted by the US Bishops:

We have to move from our devotion to independence, through an understanding of interdependence, to a commitment to human solidarity. That challenge must find its realization in the kind of community we build among us. Love implies concern for all... and a continued search for those social and economic structures that permit everyone to share in a community that is a part of a redeemed creation (*Economic Justice for All*, no. 365).

Catholic social thought does not allow for the picking and choosing of in-groups and out-groups based on ability, rank, or merit. Rather, Catholic notions of solidarity and the common good aim at a radically inclusive community where each of us—sighted or blind, tenured or not—is invited to the table. This is what Francis means when he pleads for us to “not be robbed of community.” It is not some outside force that robs us of community but our own choices, and nowhere is this more true than the communities on Catholic campuses today. Locked in our silos, we rob ourselves of community. Sectioned by rank and status, we rob ourselves of community.

Keenan has called tenure-line faculty to “expand [the] circle of who deserves that meritorious title of ‘colleague.’”<sup>42</sup> This is not merely a call to be friendlier to other individuals, but rather a call to recommitting the university to a “culture of ethics” and an “economy of life.”<sup>43</sup> I would go even one step further and suggest that for all universities and colleges—but especially for Catholic schools which are committed to both Catholic social thought and the Catholic understanding of the mission and purpose of higher education—the culture of ethics ought to be oriented toward the common good, and we all

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<sup>42</sup> Keenan, *University Ethics*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Keenan, “University Ethics and Contingent Faculty”; Danner, “Saying No to an Economy That Kills.”

must recommit ourselves to the kind of radical solidarity and inclusive community that Jesus offered us and invited us to extend likewise. **M**