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Gregory Beabout
gregory.beabout@slu.edu

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Review: Beyer's *Just Universities* and Carnaghan and Kuhn's *Power and Protest*

Reviewed by Gregory R. Beabout
Professor of Philosophy
Saint Louis University
gregory.beabout@slu.edu

Gerald J. Beyer. *Just Universities: Catholic Social Teaching Confronts Corporatized Higher Education*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2021. 304 pages. \$30 (paperback).

Ellen Carnaghan and Kathryn E. Kuhn, eds. *Power and Protest at an American University: No Confidence, No Fear*. London: Routledge, 2020. 208 pages. \$128 (hardcover), \$39.16 (eBook).

For those of us engaged in Catholic, Jesuit higher education, two new books deserve attention, discussion, and shared reflection. In quite different ways, these two books examine the inner workings—and shortcomings—of contemporary Jesuit universities. For those who are passionate about Jesuit higher education, reading these might require a strong stomach, as each tends to focus on problems and perceived injustices within contemporary Jesuit universities. These are not books for those looking to celebrate what's going well in contemporary Jesuit education. Each was largely written before COVID, and published during the pandemic. After a brief description of these two books, I call attention to the subtle but complex relationship between justice and friendship at play within these books.

At first glance, these two books might seem to have only a superficial similarity: both focus on injustices on the campuses of Catholic universities. In terms of genre, style, focus, and purpose, the two differ quite significantly.

Just Universities is a monograph that provides a sustained argument indicting Catholic universities of capitulating to neo-liberalism and the culture of consumptive acquisitiveness. Beyer, a theologian who teaches courses on economics and ethics, acknowledges his debt to Jesuit higher education, having been a student and a faculty member at Georgetown, Boston College, and St. Joseph's University. Currently on faculty at Villanova, Beyer's *Just Universities* is written in a voice that combines the careful scholar who marshals arguments to defend a thesis with the cry of the prophet who calls out a warning for a society

become blind. It is this prophetic voice that is most pervasive. Beyer wants to awaken us to the degree to which Catholic universities generally, and perhaps Jesuit universities in particular, have become infected by structures of sin: marketing themselves disproportionately to affluent students; maintaining a "country club" atmosphere; failing to challenge the status quo of consumer culture; relying on unjust compensation structures, especially underpaid adjunct faculty; falling short in terms of both environmental stewardship and socially responsible investing; and failing in inclusion by creating a systemic environment that treats some as outsiders rather than as full stakeholders. The heart of Beyer's argument is his indictment that, despite their mission statements and status as non-profits, Catholic colleges and universities have capitulated generally to the neo-liberal project. Beyer's title is aspirational. He wants us to envision Catholic universities that are just, and to do this, he proposes that the practices and institutions of Catholic higher education should reject the corporatized outlook of neoliberalism, while being guided more by Catholic social teaching.

Anyone familiar with the process of recruiting prospective students and parents while getting them to take on the tuition costs of Catholic higher education will be familiar with the ethos Beyer identifies.¹ The education on offer at Catholic schools frequently gets proposed as a commodity that is valuable in market terms that responds to two consumer demands: interest-filled satisfaction that offers undergraduates the delights of a year-round summer camp, and increased earnings potential for a long-term return on

investment. The heart of Beyer's new book is his stinging assessment that the institutional policies and practices of Catholic colleges and universities "have failed to embody the values of the Gospel and the principles of Catholic social teaching," and have thus "perpetuated injustices on their campuses".

Power and Protest at an American University is a quite different sort of book. It is a collection of essays by Saint Louis University (SLU) faculty bringing the resources of their academic disciplines to reflect on the successful no-confidence movement at SLU in 2012-13 in which a long-serving Jesuit president was pressured to step down. A story in *The St. Louis Business Journal* published prior to the no-confidence movement described the president's leadership of the second oldest American Jesuit university: "In his 25 years as president of SLU, Biondi has transformed the school, the campus and a good chunk of the city. He has ramrodded capital campaigns that have raised more than \$785 million, jumped the endowment to \$880 million from \$140 million, and been the force behind an estimated \$850 million in expansions and renovations, including the \$82 million Edward A. Doisy Research Center, the \$81 million Chaifetz Arena and many student halls, classroom and medical buildings—and even the Hotel Ignacio, a tip of the hat to you-know-who."²² The no-confidence movement at SLU was complex, but much of the energy came from a widespread sense that the administration had come to govern SLU in an unjust manner, treating faculty and employees as replaceable parts.

In the book, Dr. Kathryn Kuhn's Preface begins with a description of her presentation at a Fall 2012 "teach-in." Held a few days before scheduled votes of no confidence, Kuhn voiced her sense that workers at SLU were disrespected, disdained, and devalued. Next, she describes a meeting a semester later, after multiple votes of no confidence. It was a time of broken trust. "In the spring of 2013 two of us decided to attend a student government meeting in order to hear what the president had to say" (p. xiii). Student government meetings are, as mandated in the group's constitution, open to the public. She was joined at the meeting by a faculty colleague. The university president arrived with an armed security guard. "He glanced around the room and noticed

Greg and me. We had said nothing and had no plans to do so. Out of the corner of his mouth he whispered to the SGA president, "Tell them to leave. Make Kathryn and Greg leave" (p. xiii). Professor Kuhn goes on to describe the mix of emotions she experienced—incredulity, disappointment, fear, and anger—as she and her colleague were escorted out of the student government meeting by an armed guard.

It is appropriate that I acknowledge my relationship with this book, *Power and Protest*, its authors, and the events narrated by Dr. Kuhn. Along with Kathryn Kuhn, I was one of the faculty speakers at the Fall 2012 "teach-in." And I was the colleague who was kicked out of the SGA meeting with her during the Spring 2013 semester. It might help to explain what I was doing there. During that semester, I was assigned to teach an upper-level course on Catholic social thought, which is a regular area of teaching and research for me. My course is, perhaps, similar in content to the course Beyer describes that he teaches at Villanova. One of the students enrolled in my class was a senate member of the SLU student government. This student mentioned to me after class that the university president was scheduled to address the SGA at their weekly meeting, and the student invited me to attend. Upon my arrival, as the meeting was beginning, one of the few available chairs was next to Kathryn, so I sat next to her. We didn't plan to attend together, and we certainly didn't expect to be escorted away by an armed guard at the order of SLU's president, a Jesuit priest.

Thus, in full disclosure, the editors and authors of *Power and Protest at an American University* are my colleagues, but through our shared experiences, we are more than that. Some might say we were "co-conspirators." The book's dedication is a wink to the "rebel alliance," and I suppose I am included in that group, though I would not describe myself in those terms. Dr. Ellen Carnaghan notes in her introductory essay that participants in the activities of that year had a wide range of motivations. "Faculty do a lot of their work alone but changing a structure as big as a university demands a committed team, with many people sharing burdens and offering each other moral support. Enduring and unexpected friendships were forged. Faculty developed a sense

of ownership of the university's future" (p. 11). So, in writing this review and recommending *Power and Protest*, I am calling attention to a book written by fellow faculty colleagues who became unexpected friends.

The editors arranged the essays that make up the body of *Power and Protest* in two parts: one on power and another on protest. The faculty authors approach the topic from their respective disciplinary lenses: economics, history, law, political science, public administration, rhetoric, sociology, and women's and gender studies. While the book certainly includes a discussion of SLU as a Catholic, Jesuit university, this is not central to the book's purpose. Instead, SLU is treated generally as "an American university," and the central purpose is to evaluate the events at SLU during 2012-13 using the categories of various social science disciplines by focusing on power and protest.

Power and Protest might thus seem to differ in purpose from *Just Universities*, and in a sense, this is correct, but there are also significant points of overlap. Both focus on perceived injustices on campus in the context of Jesuit higher education from a faculty perspective. Both have, at times, a tone of anger or righteous indignation that might make some supporters of Jesuit higher education defensive. Each includes a discussion of the trend to decrease tenured faculty lines, along with a discussion of various social justice issues. As such, both are concerned primarily with perceived internal injustices.

Despite the importance of justice, in my judgment what makes these books worthy of deeper consideration is the way both point to a subtle, complex relationship between justice and friendship. After all, there is nothing particularly "Jesuit" or "Catholic" about faculty complaining about campus injustices. *Power and Protest* is rather explicit about this, since the book is framed and titled with a focus on SLU as an "American" university (though several chapters discuss SLU's Jesuit mission, especially Paul Lynch's excellent essay). Beyer frames his concerns in terms of Catholic social teaching, but there is not much that is distinctively Catholic about most of the justice issues he raises: the need to improve in terms of recruiting, admitting, and retaining

economically disadvantaged students; stewardship of university resources; the task of moving racial inclusion beyond tokenism to participation, and the challenge to promote gender and LGBTQ equality. Beyer's location and experience at Villanova and St. Joseph's in Philadelphia are not central to his argument, but I found myself noticing that the issues he raises seem identical to what one would expect from a secular moralist at any of the non-Catholic colleges and universities in Philadelphia, such as Penn or Temple or the several prestigious schools along the gilded old money estates of Philadelphia's Main Line. Why appeal to Pope Francis or the Gospels when one can make the same complaints about injustice by considering the arguments of a secular philosopher like Michael Sandel?

In response to this worry, I found myself reflecting on *Fratelli Tutti*, the recent encyclical of Pope Francis. While Pope Francis discusses injustice, he is much more concerned with love, fraternity, and social friendship. Indeed, Pope Francis uses the word love more than twice as many times as justice in his recent encyclical. "In the face of present day attempts to eliminate or ignore others, we may prove capable of responding with a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words."³ As I read both *Just Universities* and *Power and Protest*, I found myself asking what it might look like to consider the issues raised in these books about injustices on our campuses with greater attentiveness to the themes of fraternity and social friendship.

In my judgment, the best chapter in *Just Universities* is the one that focuses on worker justice and solidarity. Beyer begins that chapter with a heart-wrenching story of a friend of his from graduate school. He and his family had come to the United States in order for him to pursue a doctorate in religious studies. He taught for ten years at a Catholic university as an adjunct, and later as a one-year non-tenure-track appointee while completing his dissertation. During this time, his child became very ill. Adjuncts do not typically get health insurance, so his wife and child returned to their native land while he stayed to finish his degree. Upon completion of his degree, he was replaced by a freshly minted Ph.D. candidate who had published more than he had. "Thus, in spite

of his dedication to his students, success in the classroom, and imminent dissertation, he was essentially told that he was expendable." This transpired at a Catholic university.

Beyer goes on to detail the subculture that exists at many Catholic colleges and universities, in which full-time faculty lines have been replaced with contingent faculty. Beyer describes a widespread pattern: "the massive rise in part-time faculty positions and the concurrent decline in full-time posts." As Beyer puts it, "Corporatized colleges and universities have created a mirage that masks gross injustice by constructing shiny new academic buildings, luxury student apartments, and expensive athletic and recreation facilities while operating like sweatshops."

At SLU, almost a decade has passed since the votes of no confidence, but many of the old issues simmer. The administration and board of trustees continue to spend millions of dollars on new buildings, while faculty continue to be treated as items of cost that need to be trimmed. The new administration developed a program called "Magis" in which the board approved ten percent increases for administrators and a ten percent cut for faculty and staff. Distrust continues. On the ground, it is widely taken for granted that the administration and the board disrespect faculty, including the rules of the Faculty Manual.

My sense is that the central themes or arguments in these two books are probably not particularly attractive or persuasive to administrators and board members, even though people in these roles are crucial to Jesuit higher education. A normal reaction to accusations of injustice is to become defensive, so it seems likely to me that administrators and board members at Jesuit universities would interpret these books as the works of whining faculty. I find myself

questioning whether justice, power, and protest are the appropriate categories for this dispute. My inclination is to suspect that the path proposed by Pope Francis, in which fraternity and social friendship are cultivated, may be more fruitful.

While fraternity and social friendship are not central in these books, they are present, and important. The passion in Beyer's call for "just universities" stems from his ability to see the marginalized as friends. *Power and Protest* concludes with an essay by Silvana Siddali in which she reflects on Newman's essay, *The Idea of a University*. She notes that the no-confidence process brought to life a vibrant community, nurtured through a mutual love for the university. Indeed, most may not notice that *Power and Protest* is framed by references to friendship and love. Catholic, Jesuit universities, quite obviously, are places in which the virtue of justice should be embodied in our social practices and institutionalized in our structures. But there is more. Catholic theology holds that the universe is held together by love, and so is a university. These two new books point to areas where work is needed in terms of justice and power. But even more, Catholic, Jesuit universities are places in which the virtue of love should be, and is, embodied. These two new books, each in their own way, invite us to contribute to what Pope Francis has called "the rebirth of a universal application to fraternity between all men and women." With Pope Francis, let us dream that our campuses and our communities can better be places where we participate in the shared pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty as "fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all."⁴

Notes

¹For a fuller discussion of related issues, see AnaMaria Conley and Aimee Wheaton, "Jesuit Colleges Meet Market Forces: How Ought We to Respond?" *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020), <https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol9/iss2/8>.

²Greg Edwards, "Biondi: 25 Years—Architect of Change, Bulldog for Progress," *St. Louis Business Journal*, August 10,

2021, <https://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/print-edition/2012/08/10/25-years---architect-of-change.html>

³Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Encyclical Letter (Vatican City, Italy: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 6, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

⁴Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 8.