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BOOK REVIEW

James F. Keenan, SJ, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. Pages: viii+279. ISBN: 978-1-4422-2372-1

"It is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher," Iris Murdoch observed, "What is he afraid of?" For anyone involved in American higher education, Jim Keenan's response to this query should give us pause. "We in the academy teach ethics that bear on the lives of other professionals but not on our own professional lives," he writes, yet "No one studies ethics for the academy; no one takes or offers courses on university ethics" (17). What frightens Keenan is not simply that universities have neglected a system of university ethics. What frightens him, and should frighten us all, is that universities seem to be systemically *disinterested* in doing so.

Keenan, a well-published priest and ethicist, writes *University Ethics* in the wake of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that has rocked the Catholic Church in America. He detects an analogy in the way Church and University both emphasize vertical accountability over horizontal. Priests and professors are accountable to none but the "man upstairs," whether that "man" be a bishop or one's department chair or president. Keenan draws on the model of "fiefdoms" to convey this. Faculty work alone, answer to those above them, and are organized into departments operating independently from one another. The University landscape parodies Tertullian: "What has History to do with Chemistry?" but the effect of this fragmentation is no joke.

The first three chapters of the book diagnose the lack of professional ethics within the University and situate the book within the current literature. Keenan traces clearly the evolution of professional medical ethics and convincingly demonstrates the degree to which the University has lagged in developing and articulating a similar code of professional ethics. In chapter two he

quotes Wayne Meeks' observation "Making morals means making community." This quote undergirds the book for, lacking professional ethics, the University cannot help but to be fragmented along departmental lines and, more deleteriously, along lines of employment status, race, gender, and class. Without a shared *ethos* that articulates and regulates a University's identity, chaos scuttles community.

In subsequent chapters, Keenan expertly describes the symptoms of this lack of ethics. This is the book's third most important aspect as he draws together a host of accounts and analyses to paint a realistic, if dour, portrait of the University. In chapter four, Keenan admits his own blindness to the plight of adjunct faculty and exhorts his fellow faculty to assume an ethical position of *solidarity* with and on behalf of their colleagues. In a chapter entitled "Undergraduates Behaving Badly" he peels back the veil on practices many would shrug off as "rites of passage" and analyzes hazing, racially-themed parties, and the social pressures exerted on undergraduates. As lurid and troubling as these events are, more troubling is his claim that faculty have maintained relative silence about these issues. "For all those who have written on hazing," he writes, "I found only five who wrote as faculty" (106). For Keenan, the paucity of conversation over issues of student life is a direct consequence of a lack of university ethics: faculty operate within their silos and leave it to Student Services to attend to students' social needs. Lacking any sense of responsibility for one another, the University is a "community" in name only.

Chapters on "Gender," "Diversity and Race," and "Commodification" similarly paint an equally stark picture. From sex assault to gender inequity, campus climate to the hiring pipeline, chapter eight draws on women's voices to name and advance their fight for equity within the university. Chapter nine calls out the "old boys networks" that seeks to maintain the status quo by preserving the University as it has always been and refusing to imagine what it is capable of becoming. Indeed, Keenan summons the University system to own its complicity both in the history of racism and also in perpetuating it. "Until white men at our universities actively work to secure gender and racial equity, their unspoken biases are recognized and validated by their white male students" (172). We must repent of our past in order to forge, as equals, an ethical future. Finally, in chapter ten, he raises the ethical implications of students-as-customers and considers the University's obligation to international students who often pay

full-tuition but are, sadly, marginalized from the rest of the student body. Commodification, in effect, is a handy cipher describing how Universities have pivoted away from their mission to educate and adopted a business model emphasizing growth and survival.

The book's second most important aspect is seen in the concluding chapter where he imagines himself as University president and sketches out the scope and task of a "Universal Ethics Committee." University presidents and administrators ought to consider this proposal as a template for how each institution might begin to inculcate a culture of professional ethics. Only through communal deliberation and action aimed at establishing a culture of ethics will we realize the University's potential to be a flourishing community.

Most important, above all else, is that Keenan is showing us what we can do together to make the University better for all. If there are times that the text takes a dark turn, and there are several such turns, it is only to help awaken us to what is at stake in continuing to disregard the need for university ethics. The news is filled with campus cheating scandals, racism, sexism, gender inequality, and the plight of adjuncts. Instead of seeing these as isolated incidents, Keenan presciently recognizes them as symptomatic of an ethical deficiency. Apart from writing a clear and compelling book, Keenan is to be lauded for rousing the University from its ethical slumber. If we wish future generations of students to avoid repeating our mistakes, educators and administrators must practice the ethics we teach. We need *University Ethics* to help us embrace a professional code that will help us "build the university to represent the future we are seeking rather than the past where we are presently entrapped." There may be much to fear, but at least Keenan has shown us a hopeful path.

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