Renewal in Catholic community life and New Monasticism:
The way of a contemporary religious communal movement

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Abstract

The search for authentic Christian community in modern society was evident in the resurgence of countless lifestyles movements such as 'new monasticism'. Monastic practices in the Catholic Church were credibly the earliest and most enduring renewal movement. Given that the 'new monastic' movement attempts to imitate conventional monasticism, it was essential to comprehend the latter in order to ascertain the accomplishment of the former. The purpose of this article was threefold. First, the forms of communal life recognized as an integral part of Catholic Christianity were described to sketch the historical context and forms of the Christian community. Second, conventional monasticism was reviewed as a framework for sustainable community life. Finally, the advent of 'new monasticism' as a contemporary Christian lifestyles movement was explored. The 'new monastic' movement was an ardent effort of numerous faith-based communities that employ monastic practices as a model for active Christian ministry.

Key words: Renewal movements, Religious communities, Catholic monasteries, New Monasticism

The search for authentic Christian community in modern society was evident in the resurgence of countless and ingenious lifestyles movements. Renewal movements directed at organizing intentional communities within Christianity were increasing in response to changes attributable to modernization. Modernization transformed traditional societies into more impersonal entities in which individual freedom and autonomy flourish. In addition, urbanization and **secularization** supplement modernization (Berger, 1979; Nolan & Lenski, 2009). In modernizing societies, a sense of community was more vulnerable. These sociocultural changes stimulate lifestyles movements that advocated a particular way of life (Haenfler, Johnson, & Jones, 2012). Such lifestyles movements were a perenniel dimension for renewal within Christianity. Attempts to rediscover a genuine Christian way of life prompted the revitalization of historical patterns and practices in order to promote more compelling faith-based communities than those evident in modern secularized contexts (Bader-Saye, 2004; Harrold, 2010; Tickle, 2012).

There was a growing awareness of Christian mission and vocation that found expression both within and outside the confines of denominational institutions. For centuries, formal religion provided rituals, traditions, and institutional beliefs for individuals and communities who sought a way of life in accordance with Christian convictions. Although Christianity struggled from its earliest days with the question of community, some form of life in common or community life was noted in Biblical passages and was a part of Christian development. Nevertheless, contemporary Christianity was replete with followers seeking earlier forms of community, reclaiming and integrating religious practices from monastic traditions.

Societal and global transformations of recent decades encouraged growing numbers of Christians to seek lifestyles based on fellowship and engagement in service to others. Many raised in mainstream denominations have shifted their attention toward rediscovering early Christian lifestyles through renewal movements such as 'new monasticism' (Harrold, 2010; Kennedy, 2012; Schlabach, 2012).

Countless renewal efforts were offered and ordered within the Catholic Church in reaction to different epochs over time. It appeared evident that Christians who belong to established denominations and those who represent an emerging Christianity (Tickle, 2012), of which 'new monastics' were a part, needed each other. Contemporary lifestyles movements benefitted from the history and rich resources of the Catholic Church while the Church benefitted from the imaginative energy of the emergents.

Monasticism was credibly the earliest and most enduring renewal movements. In times of rapid social change, it reminded the Church of its original mission; discerning innovative ways to incarnate Christian life in a poignant and untainted manner. Given that the 'new monastic' movement attempted to imitate conventional monasticism, it was essential to comprehend the latter in order to ascertain the accomplishment of the former.

The purpose of this article was threefold. First, the forms of communal life recognized as an integral part of Catholic Christianity were described to sketch the historical context and forms of the Christian community. Second, conventional monasticism was reviewed as a framework for sustainable community life. Finally, the advent of 'new monasticism' as a Christian lifestyles movement in modern times was explored.

Catholic community life

In order to appreciate contemporary renewal movements within Christianity, it was imperative to grasp the scope of Catholic community life as it has been discerned over time. Historically, faith communities existed in an array of configurations within the Catholic Church. Three community types were canonically recognized; namely, institutes of consecrated life, societies of apostolic life, and associations of the faithful. In addition, oblates or lay associates and various lay contemplative or quasi-monastic communities were established.

First, *institutes of consecrated life* were ecclesiastically recognized groups (i.e., by the Roman Catholic Church) of men and women. There were two main categories of consecrated life: religious institutes and secular institutes. Religious institutes were perhaps the most recognized Catholic communities. These institutes required life in the community as well as a degree of separation from the world in conformity with their character and purpose. Members observed the evangelical counsels (i.e., chastity, poverty, and obedience) through the profession of solemn, public vows sanctioned by the Church. These vows were originally indissoluble, but dispensations were eventually granted for just cause. Each religious institute had its unique charism, and adhered to a particular lifestyle that was conducive to it, whether enclosed/cloistered, contemplative, mendicant, or apostolic. Accordingly, monastics, canons regular, mendicants, and clerks regular comprised the different religious institutes.

Monastics, from a historical point of view, were the first religious to live and work communally. Basil the Great of Cappadocia in the East and Benedict in the West organized monastic life by authoring influential rules to guide spiritual collectives. A rule for life in the community was introduced to modify secular practices into an organized system, covenant, or pact. Rather than being confessional, creedal, or doctrinal, it merely represented the communal vision to which monks or nuns subscribed and submitted. Community life based on garnering spiritual resources by following such a rule rendered great things even in turbulent times (Hevelone-Harper, 2007). As Noll (2001) astutely noted, "For over a millennium, in the centuries between the reign of Constantine and the Protestant Reformation, almost everything in the church that approached the highest, noblest, and truest ideals of the gospel was done either by those who had chosen the monastic way or by those who had been inspired in their Christian life by the monks." (p. 84)

Canons regular represented the ecclesiastical adaptation of monastic life, as it grew out of an attempt to organize communities of clerics to a more dedicated way of life. Distinct from monks, canons engage in public liturgical and sacramental ministry, while remaining committed to pastoral care, appropriate to their primary vocation as priests. As members of a particular community in a particular place, canons regular typically served parishes close to their priories or religious communities. This way of life was first documented in the eighth century. Canonesses regular developed from the communities of women who assumed the name and rule of various congregations of canons regular. Communities of canonesses typically dedicated themselves to various forms of social service, such as nursing or teaching. These groups prepared the way for the quite different religious orders of the 13th century.

During the early 13th century, mendicant orders (e.g., friars or religious sisters) emerged whose vocation was emphasizing mobility and flexibility required them to defer the monastic concept of stability. The name described their practice of corporate as well as individual poverty, which means that the institutes cannot possess anything. They promised to follow the evangelical counsels like the members of many other religious congregations. The mendicants, usually, combined religious life with some apostolic, missionary, or charitable ministry. The Franciscans and Dominicans exemplified of early mendicant orders.

Clerks regular, or clerics regular, were priests who lead an active apostolic life. Clerks regular and canons regular were closely related in that, although distinct from the secular clergy by their vows and observance of community life, they form a discrete religious state, the priestly as opposed to the monastic. The clerks regular of the 16th century and after, such as the Jesuits and Redemptorists, professed the same general vows, though several add a fourth vow, indicating some special apostolate or attitude within the order. The religious institutes of consecrated life were verified in the *Annuario Pontificio* (Italian for *Pontifical Yearbook*) which listed institutes headquarters and contact information in addition to similar information about prelates in most Vatican and diocesan offices or institutions.

There were other types of consecrated life in the Catholic Church for single men and women. Such were the secular institutes in which followers promised to abide by the evangelical counsels, but lived consecrated lives in the world (i.e., not as members of a religious institute). In this sense, secular institutes were similar to societies of apostolic life. The historical origins of these institutes go back to the end of the sixteenth century. However, Pope Pius XII only recognized secular institutes as institutes of consecrated life in 1947.

Societies of apostolic life were groups within the Catholic Church, who came together for a specific ecclesiastical purpose. The apostolic mission was given emphasis over community life. Societies of apostolic life resembled institutes of consecrated life but differed in that their members did not profess religious vows. In some of these societies, members assumed the evangelical counsels through a promise defined in their constitutions other than that of vows. Societies of apostolic life were clerical or lay, male or female. The Daughters of Charity and the Glenmary Home Missioners were examples. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of the Roman Curia was responsible for everything which concerned institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life.

Associations of the faithful were distinct from institutes of consecrated life. These groups were constituted by Catholics who united in a common effort congruent with the mission of the Church. Two broad categories of associations existed within the Church: public and private. Ecclesiastical authority recognized public associations of the faithful. Only a public association received a mission to teach Catholic doctrine in the name of the Church, promote public worship, or pursued a purpose that by nature was reserved to ecclesiastical authority. A couple of examples suffice. The Emmanuel community, a Catholic lay international community was established in 1972, and erected as a public association of the faithful in 2009. The Community of the Chemin Neuf, inspired by Ignatian spirituality, was created in 1973. In contrast, private associations existed by private agreement, freely made among believers, with the intent to further the Catholic mission. By far, private associations of the faithful were the most flexible and least restrictive means for Catholics to pursue a common purpose in the community. While ecclesiastical authority maintained a certain degree of vigilance over private associations, the guidance and direction of the association came from the members in accord with its statutes. Examples of private associations of the faithful include the Legion of Mary founded in 1921, or the Neocatechumenal Way formed in 1964. A contemporary example was the Brothers & Sisters of Charity, comprised of an integrated monastic and domestic expression, founded by John Michael Talbot in 1980. For a list of the officially approved associations of the faithful, consult the *Directory of International Associations of the Faithful* published by the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

The option to become an oblate or lay associate experienced a recent swell of popularity as Catholics and others have sought a more intense religious engagement which they perceived was missing. *Secular oblates or associates* were typically lay people; however, members could also be clerics who affiliated with a specific monastic community or another institute of consecrated life. Members promised to follow the rule, often the *Rule of Benedict*, in their daily lives as attentively as their individual circumstances and prior commitments permitted (Mattingly, 2010). Oblates were dynamic witnesses that contemplation and action can transform the world at a practical level (Harrington, 2011). As the oblate/associate was in a distinct relationship with the monastic community/institute of consecrated life, and does not form a discrete unit with the Catholic Church, there were no regulations in canon law dictating their actions. One consequence was that non-Catholics can be received as oblates or lay associates (Holdaway, 2008; Norris, 1997).

The continual rise and development of various lifestyles movements offered evidence of the longing for community that epitomizes ongoing Catholic renewal (Armstrong, 2007; Hayes, 2006). Lay Catholics have established diverse movements and community initiatives that did not have canonical standing, but were vibrant beacons to Christian life and mission. Catholic communities represented analogous approximations of traditional monastic or communal practices in that the organizations espoused a different way of life, or radical choice over dominant society (McCrank, 1997; Miller, 2010; Yount, 2008).

Lay contemplative or quasi-monastic Catholic communities were not new. These quasi-monastic communities included lay people (married, or single), and not only consecrated men and women. Catholic communal movements were plentiful around the world. To name just a few examples: Schönstatt (1917), Cursillos (1939), Foccolari (1942), Communion and Liberation (1969), and Community of Sant'Egidio (1968). The Catholic Worker movement founded by Dorothy Day in 1933 was perhaps the best-known example of a collective community endeavour. The movement was motivated by the teachings of the Catholic Church to engender a society devoid of depravity such as racial discrimination, economic exploitation, or interpersonal violence. A few more examples of quasi-monastic communities were enlightening. In 1975, Sky Farm Hermitage was established in California to promote prayer, contemplation, and study. Finally, Starcross Community, an autonomous community of lay men and women in California, was formed in 1986.

The contemporary Christian lifestyles movement finds a point of reference either explicitly or implicitly in the Second Vatican Council with its universal call to holiness and the active apostolate. For example, the Spiritual Life Institute, a Catholic community striving to maintain the spirit of Vatican II, began in 1963. It offers a communal life with an ecumenical thrust in a male-female community that adheres to ancient Carmelite ideals. In its 50-year history, four hermitages have been found in Sedona, AZ, Kemptville, Nova Scotia, Crestone, CO, and the newest one in Skreen, Ireland. Jean Vanier founded L'Arche International in 1964 as inclusive communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities could share life together. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal, developed as a significant movement in the late 1960s, giving rise to a great number of communities.

Pope John Paul II acknowledged in his apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles laici* (1988) that out of "the flourishing of groups, associations and spiritual movements as well as a lay commitment in the life of the Church" after the Second Vatican Council a multiplicity of forms of community life grew _Interestingly, Leahy (2007) presented the inspired energy characteristic of these movements as the Church's charismatic dimension, a principle Pope John Paul II described as co-essential with the hierarchical-institutional dimension.

Conventional monasticism

Conventional monasticism articulates a deliberate and discrete lifestyle. Monastic practices reveal a concerted effort to offer a viable alternative to the secular world (Goddijn, 1965; McCrank, 1997). Monastic bonds and routines support a communal life in as extreme and pure a form as can be found. Common faith, a shared set of rules, collective worship, collaborative sentiments, mutual efforts to perpetuate its ideology, and common religious experiences bind fervent devotees together in cloistered communities (Mohler, 1971; Yount, 2008). Yet, to think that monastic life was an excuse to ignore the things of the world, to go through time suspended above the mundane, to wander from place to place in utter self-absorption, was clearly mistaken (Chittister, 1997). Monasticism augments quotidian rhythms and changes were inherent in social life. In fact, monastics exhibit a profound sense of connectedness between themselves and those in society outside the cloister.

In the midst of daily life, as people struggle to get by in the world, monasteries were religious communes where people encounter a different way of doing life. There was something ineffable about the intrinsic impulse to a life that was individually ascetic and collectively monastic (Capps, 1983). It speaks to the 'monk' within every person, the universal monk (Pannikar, 1984; Steindl-Rast, 1977; Talbot, 2011). The monastic impulse exhibits a radical juxtaposition of routine and transcendence in committed practices and observances that sustain the communal enterprise.

The persistence and transmission of the monastic tradition have traversed more than sixteen centuries. The historic presence of monastic communities reinforces its veracity for communal sustainability. The legacy of monastic history exists in the formidable achievements it often made during periods when it was difficult to realize them through typical means. Its impressive contributions reflect the significance of religious collectivist lifestyles. Christian monasticism, however, did not evolve in an unvarying cohesive manner (Dunn, 2003; Stewart, 2010).

Three basic types of monasticism have evolved over time. The first was eremitic monasticism. The monastic movement began in earnest as ardent first century Christians who forsook material possessions and renounced personal desires so they could live as eremites or hermits. Anchoritic monasticism was a second form of monastic organization. These monks and nuns pursue less secluded lives and congregate in lax settlements, spending modest amounts of time in joint activities. The final type was called cenobitic or community-based. It was typically regulated by a 'rule' or set of precepts directing the kind of life expected of communal residents (Dunn, 2003).

Benedict of Nursia, a 6th century Italian monk, was the central figure in advocating cenobitic life. He formulates a dramatic way for like-minded individuals to live together apart (de Waal, 1984; Feiss, 2007). He articulates the monastic routine to which monks and nuns subscribe and submit in the *Rule of Benedict* (hereafter RB) (Fry, 1982). Monastics were not defined by the roles accorded them by mainstream society. Their primary loyalty was not to any function they may fulfill, but to the tradition they promise to abide by. In the solemn act of profession, monastics volitionally pledge fidelity to monastic life and stability of place that unites communities in singleness of purpose (Mattingly, 2010). Further, they promise to work toward community sustainability (Casey, 2005). The vows of *stabilitas* (stability), *obedientia* (obedience), and *conversatio morum* (i.e., an idiomatic Latin phrase suggesting "conversion of manners") hold those in community accountable to one another, creating a common way of life (Fry, 1982, see *RB* chapter 58). In living out this special lifestyle, monastics exercise their influence on the modern world not as individuals but as part of a community. The profound balance and moderation of the *RB* provides the foundation for an especially vital, communal lifestyle (Berg, 2012; de Dreuille, 2002; Rausch, 1990).

Conventional monasticism has served as an exemplary Christian reform movement established on the inimitable importance and meaning of life from a Christian perspective. The tradition of Christian monasticism aligns with the communal endeavours of the earliest Christians (Schlabach, 2012). It remains a witness for advancing genuine renewal in light of contrary sociocultural imperatives. Accordingly, monasticism was one of the most influential instances of counter-culture (Jones, 1972). It fosters alternative societies centered on revitalized, communal fellowship. What was often forgotten was that monasticism, while ancient, continues to be a dynamic presence in both the Christian church and the modern world. It expands on historical practices of simplicity, contemplation, community, and accountability to sustain contemporary communities (Jamison, 2006; Tvedten, 2006).

The veracity that monasticism has something to offer modern living has been affirmed at a popular level (Armstrong, 1993; Clapp, 1988). This resurgence in popularity was notable in light of the monastic paradigm "which, by the concrete practice of long-honed wisdom" propagates authentic lives (Mannion, 1993). Monastic principles were applicable to life both inside and outside the cloister (Chittister, 1997; Srubas, 2006). Further, Catholic monasteries and independent or Protestant intentional communities were not contradictory, but complementary expressions to collective existence. That so little was written about Christian community life, especially Catholic monasticism, as a lifestyles movement was surprising given the insight such attention affords enduring, sustainable communal lifestyles (Goddijn, 1965; Hillery & Morrow, 1976).

New monasticism

Growing numbers of individuals from an array of denominations (e.g. Catholic, Anabaptist, Pentecostal-Charismatic and mainline Protestant) share a disillusionment with what they perceive to be spiritual complacency towards injustice and other social maladies. So, they were refocusing their involvements on 'new' intentional communities; specifically, the impetus for Christian renewal and evangelization was in great measure found in purposeful communal life. The concept of intentional community was the very foundation of what 'new monasticism' was attempting to create. Although such communities vary in spirituality, intent, and stance, many draw on Catholic monastic tradition to rediscover earlier rhythms, rules of life, and vocational mandates for a new era. Most of these small communities were independent, and when viewed individually appear frivolous and disorganized. But when viewed as part of a global movement, their collective resolve to bear witness to the Christian vision emulates monastic undertakings. Their fervour was often enthralling (Byassee, 2005; Hurst, 2008; Nozaki, 2011; Samson, 2014).

Rooted in ancient expressions of Christian community and born out of previous renewal responses to the institutional Church, the 'new monastic' movement was manifest in the desire of men and women to live in sync with Christian principles and teachings. Basically, adherents want to revive communities that support and nurture their perspective of an earnest Christian life (Carter, 2012; Harrold, 2010; Kennedy, 2012; Schlabach, 2012).

The resurgence of a spiritual life that leads to action directed by Christian precepts and principles was the essential characteristic of new monasticism. New monasticism names a yearning trying to incarnate itself in a new generation (Bros, 2009; Bucko & McEntee, 2012). The movement represented by a number of small communities "hope to be harbingers of a new and radically different form of Christian presence" in the modern secular world (Byassee, 2005, p. 38).

'New monasticism' was fundamentally a Christian response for lives less rapt by modernization and other cultural seductions of contemporary times. It rejects the individualism and privatization of Christianity indicative of modern societies through an arrangement marked by religious communalism. The 'new monastic' movement constitutes a lifestyle commitment open to all people regardless of faith tradition, and for all states of life (Lowitzki, 2006; Samson, 2014). Contemporary Christians, as well as non-Christians, were coming to understand and seek the pragmatic way of life inculcated in monastic rhythms and examples (Bourque, 2010; Stewart, 2010; Tomaine, 2005). Monasticism provides 'new monastics' with a radical, sustainable and innovative model for deliberate communal life grounded in Christian scriptures.

'New monastics' adopt a form of radical discipleship that rejects both uncaring society and mundane Christianity. They adopt a zealous standpoint that takes Jesus' teachings literally while rejecting the ubiquitous individualism and consumerism evident in modern societies (Fitz-Gibbon & Fitz-Gibbon, 2002). Adherents solicit a spiritual view in sync with their empirical reality (Lowitski, 2006; Moll, 2005).

Historically, Protestant groups, like Catholics, initiated renewal movements through assorted communal ventures. For example, the Hutterites were a communal branch of Anabaptists who, like the Amish and Mennonites, trace their roots to the Radical Reformation of the 16th century. The Bruderhof was an international communal movement founded in 1920 that seeks to put Christian love into action. Finally, ecumenical groups such as the Taizé Community established in 1940 to foster solidarity among all Christians.

America has proven to be particularly fertile soil for so-called 'new monastics.' Reba Place Fellowship began in 1957 just north of Chicago, Illinois. The Simple Way was founded in 1997 by Shane Claiborne and five others in northeast of Philadelphia (Brouwer, 2012). Rutba House in North Carolina was formed by Jonathan and Leah Wilson-Hartgrove in 2003 as a community that eats, prays, and shares life together. Over 100 Christian communities (exist that vary in resolve, theology, and apostolate, yet they share a commitment to communal life following monastic principles (Armstrong, 2007; Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008, 2010).

The origin of the 'new monasticism' was difficult to pinpoint. The phrase has been used in various contexts since the early 20th century. Goodenough (1936) used it to describe the exodus from city to suburb. Interestingly, contemporary new monastics were called to move back to the city in service to the numerous needs extant there. As a theologian, Bonhoeffer (1954; 1997) called for a 'new monasticism' to rejuvenate Christian community. However, the term 'new' for Bonhoeffer most likely implied the sense that it was foreign to his faith tradition and experience. Indeed, it was 'new' for most Protestants to embrace Catholic spiritual practices and foundations (Fitz-Gibbon & Fitz-Gibbon, 2002) even though Catholicism has historically recognized sundry forms of community that reflect intentions similar to those held by new monastics.

In *After Virtue*, philosopher Alasdair Maclntyre (1981) called for another Benedict to recoup virtuous lifestyles in response to contemporary social deprivation. Almost two decades later, Jonathon Wilson (1998), an evangelical theologian, galvanized 'new monasticism' in a more explicitly Christian form. Many view the defining moment for the movement in a modest gathering of like-minded individuals and activists in Durham, North Carolina in June, 2004 at the invitation of the Rutba House. The most noteworthy outcome of this gathering was the publication of *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. Not surprisingly, these marks bear close resemblance to beliefs and practices expressed in the *RB*.

Recently, the movement has been stretched by two Catholics, Adam Bucko and Rory McEntee (2012), with their manifesto on 'new monasticism' as an expression of global, "interspiritual" dialogue between those who feel called to lives of contemplation and action (Manson, 2012). These new quasi-monastic communities were dedicated to *metanoia* (i.e., a transformative change of heart; *especially*: a spiritual conversion, see *Merriam-Webster.com*) which instills tacit assumptions and habits vital to social justice and communal sustainability. In other words, they were committed not only to contemplative lifestyles, but also conversion or *metanoia* as a way to create genuine Christian lives (Carter, 2012).

Social commentators and pundits have brought attention to 'new monasticism' as an expanding lifestyle movement in which participants expend concerted effort to respond to the Christian message through nonviolent activism , reconciliation, and unanimity (Byassee, 2005; Lowitski, 2006; Moll, 2005). While enthusiasts of 'new monasticism' may not read books on monastic spirituality or ever visit a monastery, they were inspired by community and counter-culture. 'New monastics' intentionally redefine Christian community in monastic terms and reimagined it using historical forms (Kennedy, 2012).

Concerns about new monastic movement

The revitalization of Christian life was not only experienced among countless Catholic groups but also expressed in emerging Christian enclaves as it has in the past (Stewart, 2010; Tickle, 2012). Catholic monasticism never intended to encompass a *different* set of values than those followed by all Christians. Monastic communities make it possible to extend the benefits of the cloister as a model for Christian engagement as embraced in new monastic ventures.

New monasticism, in imitating the practices of conventional monasticism, is realized as a substitute for modern "insensitivity to utility, numbers, competition, noise, inequality, hatred, ruthless logic, and tyrannical order" (Jones, 1972). However, three major concerns have been opined regarding new monasticism. First, new monasticism places too much emphasis on the New Testament. This criticism implied that the movement ignores other parts of the Bible, including the Hebrew Scriptures and the epistles in the New Testament. While this criticism may not be entirely valid, the prominence of Jesus' teachings, and even more specifically his ideas on right (or ethical) thoughts and behaviors, appears to be true in some venues. Many 'new monastic' communities focus on the teachings of Jesus while paying less attention to the Bible as a whole, because their evangelical orientation emphasizes the authority of the New Testament (Lowitski, 2006). While other communities embrace a more eclectic orientation that subscribes to an assortment of texts and additional resources to buttress their movement.

A second concern attends to the novelty of new monasticism and the lack of a clear organizational structure. Although 'new monasticism' was a provocative movement grounded in a religious ideology typically at odds with that of the secular world, it may not be as novel as presumed (Stewart, 2010). Only small insular communities typically operate independently at the local level with scant or no connection to other communities that share similar ideologies. The lack of any central organizational structure undermines a broader purview and impact. It also threatens the direction and sustainability of the singular communities. In other words, the promise of new monasticism may become its peril in that adherents turn to any and all possible supports to make up for this lack of organizational structure: "...Imperiling the promise that this movement will transcend some of the more troubling trends in individualistic and consumeristic American Christianity, therefore, is the risk of doing so precisely through more individualistic self-reinvention, with yet more consumeristic browsing of Christian traditions." (Schlabach, 2012, p. 248).

Finally, the loose confederation of communities in the new monastic movement, and a fairly homogenous membership offer additional concerns. Because there was no official organization, it was difficult to determine exactly how many people were involves with new monasticism as a whole, though there were clearly communities and individuals leading the way. Although new monasticism was open to all, young, middle class, predominantly Caucasian, college-educated evangelicals appear largely attracted to the movement (Lowitski, 2006). This composition may lead to the espousal of lifestyles that were not in sync with the very people the movement intends to engage; that is, a gulf between new monastics' life experiences and those they hope to serve may lead to a disjunction not easily overcome (Chamberlain, 2009; Walker-Barnes, 2008).

Conclusion

Christian monastics offer a sustainable alternative for dealing with social continuity and change that deserves concerted inquiry and appreciation. Community life lived in humility and charity was difficult. The maintenance of a rigorous monastic observance was formidable. Monastics did not live purely through trial and error, rather there were beliefs and practices that shaped an ideology which was learned not only from books, but communicated through imparting a common life shaped by tradition (de Dreuille, 2002). Further, a particular monastic community does not exist in isolation, but constitutes a web of interconnected communities all seeking the same thing. Those who adhere to a monastic lifestyle exemplify an instinctive drive to an authentic reality beyond that encountered in conventional society (Capps, 1983; Keenan, 2002).

Monasticism is a way of life that is independent yet comparable to secular communal movements. Monastic life provides a vital path to mutual respect and devotion which lead to the recognition that everything else was secondary. Even where monastic life appears to be different, it was recognizable because the *Rule of Benedict* provided the firm foundation to facilitate sustainability. Those who live according to the *Rule* were expected to behave in a manner that was different from the way of the world (Fry, 1981; Ponzetti, 2014). It may not look like it did in the past or will in the future, but contemporary monastic life still proclaims a powerful message that has withstood the onslaught of misunderstandings, contrary views, and other external influences. The 'new monastic' movement was an ardent effort of numerous independent small faith-based communities that employ monastic practices as a model for active Christian ministry. The historical development of Catholic community life advances a constructive framework to attend to the benefits and challenges of collective religious endeavors.

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