Charism and Community: A Study of New Monasticism with Special Reference to the Northumbria Community

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Abstract

Charism and Community: A Study of New Monasticism with Special Reference to the Northumbria Community

This thesis argues that the new monastic movement in the UK is at a point in its short history where there is a need to reflect upon its founding intentionality in order to discern its trajectory. After reviewing the literature, no clear or agreed definition of new monasticism can be found. A variety of situations and environments has given rise to small uniform practices and contributes to different relationships between new monastics, the Church and wider society. Having researched a case study of a new monastic community (the Northumbria Community) and interviewed eight of its members both past and present, I found that intentionality governed not only the entrance narratives of the members, but also their understanding of the Community's own charism. I argue for a revisioning of what it means to be new monastic with special reference as a vocation and argue for a new reflective text for new monasticism from an unintentional standpoint.

The study starts with a review of the literature on new monasticism within a global setting before focusing on four key influential new monastic visionaries and practitioners, as interlocutors. I argue for the need of a greater understanding of new monasticism from an anthropological perspective. Why do people join new monastic communities? How do they embrace the charism of community? How do members belong? What is their relationship to monasticism? The study moves on, to justify the research and explain why it is needed, before setting out in detail the methodological stance adopted. In giving my own narrative a voice in the study, it offers a fresh and deeper understanding of what it means to be new monastic.

Part II of the study forms the case study of the Northumbria Community. After plotting the history of the Community and reflecting upon Community literature in Part I, I conducted interviews with members past and present. In doing so, I was able to explore how membership, belonging and embracing of charism had changed over the history of the Community. Having been a member of the Community from 1994-1998, I contributed to the study in privileging my own voice when appropriate to advancing the study. My own voice falls short of auto-ethnographic methodology as I enter the study as one of many voices.

Having concluded the case study, the intentional nature of the Community and its members became very clear, which also correlated with my own conclusions in the literature review. The focus of belonging, charism and relationship with monasticism all centred around what was 'thought' in the minds of those engaging with the community.

Part III, the final part of my study, explores the differences between new monasticism as intentional and unintentional. I argue for a revisioning of what it is to have a vocation to new monasticism that, first, engages within the culture of monasticism and less with its practices and secondly, reconciles intentionality to an unintentionality in letting go of monastic identity and personal preference. Finally, I argue that the *Nauigatio* of St Brendan may perhaps be a key text for new monastics to reflect upon from the perspective of a fragile and unknown post-Covid future.

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PREFACE

Personal encounters of new monasticism

Between July 1996 and August 1997, after being advised by the principal founders of the Community who were also our spiritual directors, my wife and I sought jobs after finishing university as a way of testing our vocation to new monasticism and membership of the Northumbria Community. In August 1997, we received funding from the Bible Society via the Northumbria Community to undertake research exploring links between the Johannine tradition and new monasticism.

In the January of 1998, my wife, one-year-old daughter and I moved up to the Northumbria Community in order to take up residence in the Community complex and develop a research centre for us to continue to study new monasticism within a multidisciplinary approach including: theological, spiritual, cultural, psychological and social comparative discourse.

Four months into our work, I began to recognise within myself a dualism emerge. On the one hand we were exploring the spiritual, ecclesial, cultural and social identity of our community and in consequence its members, but a critical reflection started to gain currency that manifested itself in three questions: Why are so many people and from so many differing social backgrounds joining the Northumbria Community? Why is full membership often disconnected from the degree of adoption of the 'way for living' as set out by the principal founders and communicated in the Community's Rule? And what are the ramifications of this situation for the on-going 'spiritual health' and identity of the Community, including its ability to pass on tradition and ethos to the next generation? At the time I did not have the spiritual maturity or the academic framework to continue this line of enquiry in any constructive way; it remained an intuitive hunch.

Within our personal reflections upon these questions at the time, it seemed that the 'way for living' and ethos of the Rule were only being lived in their 'fullest' sense by our spiritual directors and one or two others whose commonality seemed to be linked through a certain amount of differing 'sacrifice' accepted in order to adopt the 'way for living'. Unaware to us at the time, there was an emerging breakdown in communication and relationship between the principal founders (our spiritual directors) and the rest of the current leadership team. This consequently led to a separation in April of 1998 between the principal founders and the rest of the core community that lived at the Community's home.

It presented us with a dichotomy; our entrance into a vocation to new monasticism was through the Rule or 'way for living' of the Northumbria Community, yet it seemed a schism had occurred between the 'lived experience' and 'represented' aspects of this Rule. These two aspects looked like they had lost their binding ontological and epistemological 'glue', no longer being collectively yet autonomously bound, uncoupled from the shared tradition and memory, whether conscious or unconscious, whether explicit or implicit to experience.

On April 21st, 1998, we chose to leave and continue our vocation to new monasticism outside the confines of the Northumbria Community along with a few friends and our spiritual directors.

Moving back down to Leicestershire to live with my parents, we continued with them to live as community within the new monastic movement, adapting the Northumbria Community rule to reflect our new context of living together. In 2001, my wife passed away leaving me with two small children. It became, to date, the hardest test of our vocation to new monasticism. Personally, I had lost my wife, yet collectively we had lost a member of our community. For a time, I worked in a local Dominican Convent[1] in return for a room to study once a week. It seemed having left the Northumbria Community that I sought comfort within the traditional monastic/religious life.

Having remarried and moving to a bigger property on the estate of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, I still live with my parents, five children and the occasional 'refuge'[2] under one roof as a new monastic community.

Vocation within a vocation: Monos

In 2005 I formally launched an organisation called Monos. It is an educational organisation that seeks to support those living a monastic life outside of traditional monasticism at the same time critiquing the movement. I was becoming aware of my disposition towards education as being a vocation within my vocation to new monasticism. At its annual conference Monos tries to bring practitioners and theorists in monasticism together to enter a dialogue through talks, discussions and living together for a weekend in a monastery or convent. Calling the organisation Monos was a direct reflection upon my time in the Northumbria Community and those founding questions I highlight above whilst living at

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[1] St Martin's Dominican Convent in Warwickshire. This was where I attended secondary school.
[2] The community's language for someone who needs space and time away.

their home. Monos deriving from the Greek *Mónos*, to 'be alone', was a necessity in community formation of time and space to understand oneself and to be honest with oneself and others in terms of community membership, hopes and expectations.

Over the years of my time directing Monos I have witnessed and supported both the 'carnival' and 'wasteland' of new monasticism. Respectively, those that are intent on viewing themselves as monastic, even to extent of dressing in monastic habits and taking different names and those that embrace monasticism as a coping mechanism in times of barrenness and difficulty.

Just prior to the formation of Monos, in 2004 I entered a dialogue with the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, concerning new monasticism watering down the monastic vision. His reply was, 'I quite take the point about the risks of redefining the essence of the monastic calling itself in a way that might undermine its integrity.'[3] (See appendix one for a copy of the letter).

William's comment summed up my three questions that I was living with since 1998 since my departure from the Northumbria Community. If a vocation to new monasticism exists, then it cannot undermine the integrity of its founding principle?

The centrality of this debate has continued within the Anglican church within the UK. David Walker, as part of his role as chairman of the Advisory Council for Relations Between Bishops and Religious Communities, in 2018 published a paper which explores Anglican new monasticism within a larger phenomenon of English monasticism. Walker ends with a question 'has the term monastic been extended so far as to have lost all real meaning?'[4]

This issue is clearly central to any further exploration into the field of new monasticism, not only for the Anglican Church in the UK, but, in the light of a recent polemic between Christopher Jamison and 'The Benedict Option'[5] - I would suggest for any expression of new monasticism that has developed within a cultural paradigm that prescribes 'personal preference' as key. Jamison has brought the traditional 'monastic family' into the centre of this debate, not only criticising the ideological utopian feel to an expression of new

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[3] Correspondence with Rowan Williams on the 4th of October 2004.
[4] GS 2087 - Religious Communities.pdf (churchofengland.org) accessed on 10/4/2020
[5] The Benedict Option is a book written by Rod Dreher (an American writer and editor) where he argues for the growth of new intentional communities to emerge within a post-Christian nation, which he refers to as the US. Dreher highlights the need for radical groups to emerge to challenge a growing secular interest, particularly around same sex marriage, for which he was heavily criticised.

monasticism within North America, but that also conversely encourages renewal and reform of new monasticism, even with its inchoate life. ''The Dreher option' will appeal to some but there is still room for a new – and doubtless very different – Benedict option' (Jamison, 2017, pp. 4-5).

My central question does not revolve around a binary notion as to whether something is 'bad' or 'good': but through exploring the 'meaning making processes,' identity and nature of the word 'monasticism' within new monasticism, and its relationship with traditional forms - it may help contribute to the development of methodologies used by practitioners in 'critical reflection' on any attempt at reform and/or renewal of new monasticism from its current position.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to document and explore the theological unpinning of a Christian phenomenon called new monasticism, with special reference to a founding UK new monastic community called the Northumbria Community. When referring to new monasticism I am specifically referring to those individuals and groups who understand themselves to be new monastic within the movement's diversity of expression. The underpinning principle of the new monastic movement is the retrieval of monastic practice and spirituality into Christian forms of living, outside of traditional monastic practice. There are many other expressions of monastic practice and spirituality outside of traditional monasticism, that do not refer to themselves as new monastic.

Although I reference new monasticism as a movement, I do not intend to suggest that each expression of new monasticism has a global understanding of itself within a large movement. It seems each community or group that defines themselves as new monastic has a source, inspiration or founding reference for their existence within the Church and society at large. Also, I am not assuming that the new monasticisms of North America, the UK, is exhaustive of the movement, but we do find most published literature from these regions.

To the best of my knowledge this is the first study which attempts to argue for a pause and moment of reflection in new monasticism's short history as well as bringing to the fore a critique and framework of my own experiences of living a particular vocation within the new monastic movement. This introduction will outline and set out the premise for this research and highlight the main themes and issues found, as well as the arguments I will make within this thesis.

Following the introduction, Part I of this thesis starts with setting the contemporary landscape for the emergence and growth of new monasticism within a Western context[6] before focusing closer on the development within the UK. Chapter one will focus on past research and reflective practice on new monasticism. Chapter two will focus on new monasticism that has emerged from within North America. Chapter three focuses on the published work from four primary theorists/practitioners of new monasticism as found

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[6] When referring to Western, I am primarily referring to North America and Europe.

within the UK.[7] My argument continues into chapter four where I document the history of the Northumbria Community and contextualise it into new monasticism. Part II of the thesis in chapters five and six provide my research methodological framework and a Case Study of the Northumbria Community through interviews. Part III focuses my thesis on an argument for a vocation within new monasticism and the need for new reflective reading in framing this vocation.

Why New Monasticism?

In the spring of 2004, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and the Rutba House Community[8] invited a group of Christians '...Catholics, Anabaptists, Mainliners and Evangelicals to discuss ways in which their lives could be understood as a neo-monastic movement.' At this gathering, Jonathan Wilson (who was attending the conference and is not to be mistaken for Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, his son-in-law) was asked to explain why he 'coined the phrase New Monasticism' (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004)[9]. Wilson, in his book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World,* argued that the Western Church mirrored the fragmented state of Western society that MacIntyre had identified in his book *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 1981; Wilson, 1997). Wilson went on to suggest that the Christian church in the West 'is in grave danger of compromising its faithfulness to the Gospel' (Wilson, 1997, p. 1). His answer lay in what he described as a 'thought experiment' as the emergence of 'new monasticism' as an antidote to this fragmentation (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004, p. 2).

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and his community at Rutba House, started to live out Wilson's vision for a new monasticism and alongside responding to a fragmented society as understood through MacIntyre, Wilson-Hartgrove also reflected upon another theologian. As revealed in his 2008 publication, *New Monasticism: What it Has to Say to Today's Church*, Wilson-Hartgrove refers to an epiphany movement in reading Bonhoeffer; 'My American Jesus joined Nietzsche's god in the graves of Europe tonight. Yes, that god is dead. Now, let us dance. What Bonhoeffer has invited me into is the living Body of our Lord and Saviour,

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[7] Whilst one of the theorists, Bernadette Flanagan, has a primary focus of new monasticism in Ireland, as with the other architects, her work on new monasticism draws from a broader setting.
[8] In 2003, Jonathan and his wife Leah co-founded the new monastic community Rutba House in the Walltown neighbourhood of Durham, North Carolina (the community is named after the town of Rutba, Iraq, where injured members of their Christian Peacemaker Team were given medical care in a hospital that had been bombed by U.S. forces only three days prior).
[9] Jonathan R. Wilson, teaching fellow at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, is suggested by many within the New Monastic movement both in North America and Northern Europe to be a pioneer of new monasticism.

Jesus Christ…Just as the Holy Spirit raised up a Bonhoeffer in the midst of Nazi Germany, the same God used Bonhoeffer's words to name what I'd been looking for.' (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008, p. 25).

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and earlier (1980), John Skinner was training to become an Anglican Priest at the Lincoln Theological College in England. It was at this point that Skinner stumbled upon a letter written by Bonhoeffer to his brother, that contained the phase 'new type of monasticism' referring to it as if 'receiving an epiphany for living.' Skinner borrowed Bonhoeffer' term to name his own experimental retrieval of monastic practice within the confines of his own family and close friends (Grimley, 2006, p. 17). John Skinner went on to become one of the principal founders of the Northumbria Community.[10]

Positioning new monasticism within practical theology and spirituality

Within Western Europe, towards the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, we have witnessed a growing body of Christians living outside the cloistered life who are seriously considering the benefits of monasticism, as a way of enhancing their own Christian lives and also their own particular vocations, within both the Church[11] and within society at large. This rise in interest for monasticism has to be seen within the context of a larger shift in society from religiosity to spirituality; fuelled by a deep concern for human spirituality that has emerged out of a so-called 'post-modern' paradigm.[12] To this end, in the field of practical theology it is suggested we are witnessing 'fundamental deficiencies in contemporary culture, as is apparent from such central themes as wholeness, integrations, meaning-providing frameworks, community, and personal identity' (Heitink, 1993, pp. 271-72; c.f. Huss, 2014, p. 47; Wolfteich, 2014, p.328). In the study of spirituality, 'spirituality, has become a universal code word for the search for direction at a time of crisis' (King, 2000, p. 3). There has been an increased use of self-help mechanisms to aid people in negotiating through a changing world. Within a Christian context, this has resulted in the interaction with ancient and modern forms of spirituality, particularly monasticism and its prayer traditions. Many books on monastic spirituality

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[10] Formally founded in 1994, the Northumbria Community is a new monastic community with a dispersed network of people from different backgrounds, streams, and edges of the Christian faith. Their centre lies in Northumberland, but the Community is now international in spread.

[11] When I refer to Church with a capital c, I am referring to all Christian denominations.

[12] For the purpose of this thesis, post-modern is referring to a period in history and a particular human condition that allows the subject to receive 'unrestrictive value' from varying spiritual traditions and from across a multitude of faiths.

written by monastics claim that although written for a monastic audience are relevant for all Christians. 'My own conviction concerning the aims of a Benedictine monk is that they are not fundamentally different from those of the ordinary Christian' (Smith, 1995, p. vii). To define further; New, Lay, Neo, Re, Urban, Worldly, Domestic and Secular are the main terms currently being used to describe this phenomenon of exploration into monasticism. In general, the term 'Lay' is linked with the Roman Catholic tradition, the term 'New' is associated with the Protestant tradition, (although currently finding currency within all Christian denominations), whilst 'Neo', 'Urban', 'Re', 'Domestic' and 'Worldly'[13] are terms associated with the free and Christian reformed traditions. 'Secular' monasticism (although an oxymoron), is a term currently being used by nonreligious to contextualise the use of monastic principles within a secular field.[14]

This emergence of a monastic spirituality within non-cloistered Christian expression and community as a way of contributing to Church and social reform and renewal - seems to be simultaneously emerging through a polarity of subservience to, and subversion on, contemporary culture. My own intuition at the start of this research is that this is due to the inchoate nature of new monasticism and blurring of lines between parts of culture that encourages a productive catalysis for diversification and new growth, whilst at the same time some feel we should retreat from. Put another way, new monasticism seems to have emerged from an indifference to contemporary society, 'sandwiched' between what King describes as 'carnival and wasteland' (King, 2000, p. 3; Wolfteich, 2014, p. 330).

Put simply, we seem to be observing a manipulation of religious and spiritual traditions, (including inter-religious and inter-spiritual dialogue) in order to aid a special cause, spiritual experience, existential dilemma, psychological disturbance, political and/or cultural protest and ecclesial renewal – happening outside of commitment to any one form of spiritual meta-narrative. There is nothing new here to what many in the disciplines of practical theology, spirituality and sociology would have known twenty-five years ago – and in the world of philosophy, forty years ago (Lyotard, 1984; Heitink, 1993).

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[13] Used recently by Ludueña in describing a new monasticism within the Post Vatican II Roman Catholic Church in Latin America.

[14] Thanks to Prof. Wim Vandewiele who suggested insights of Jürgen Habermas on the 'post-secular' society and the need for a 'dialogical praxis' between religious communities and the secular institutions on the public forum. There is evidence that Revd John Skinner temporarily used the term 'secular' monasticism to relation to his work on Bonhoeffer in framing a 'new' monasticism for the 'Northumbria Community' in the early nineties. (See below)

Whilst much debate has welcomed the dialogical engagement within new spiritualities providing a 'fertile soil' for spiritual growth, different methods of belonging, diversity, collaboration, inter-dialogue, social justice and emancipatory opportunities - there has been less debate and in particular critical reflection from practitioners, as to the causality from being 'sandwiched' between 'carnival and wasteland' and whether there are any implications for both individual and community growth within the Christian Church.

According to Wolfteich, 'appreciative retrieval of traditions', if only in part,[15] 'must be accompanied by critical reflection. There is no simple process of translating practices from long ago into contemporary contexts with radically different theological starting points and cultural norms.' Wolfteich, quotes Don Browning and his framework for a 'mutually critical dialogue', between the past and present, for mitigating idiosyncratic elements that are not norm in contemporary society - an example of this being, keeping alive the rich source of spiritual nourishment found in the literature of desert *abbas* and *ammas*, despite issues around the treatment of women (Browning, 1995; Wolfteich, 2014, p. 334). Philip Sheldrake has moved the debate on by inferring that we already have an epidemic of what he calls 'presentism', an unbalanced approach to history, in much contemporary spirituality (Sheldrake, 1995, p. 24). An example of 'critical reflection' is found in the work of Ian Bradley on Celtic Christianity. In his third publication, *Colonies of Heaven*, he started to realign himself with academic sceptics, acknowledging an over-enthusiastic use of historical documents for contemporary context (Bradley, 2000). The Northumbria Community still uses the historical event, the Synod of Whitby, as a reason why the Community has adopted a so-called 'less Roman' model for community formation and leadership.

What happens when this critical reflection is absent? When it is present, what methodologies are being adopted to help guide the individual or community between historical sensibilities and/or 'alien' cultures and a contemporary context, and how effective are they? Should there be greater dialogue between academics and practitioners in shaping these methodologies?

Practice within a cultural turn: Between the shoreline of familiarity and the tide of uncertainty

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[15] Some new monastic practitioners claim that they are not retrieving anything or renewing old traditions, but simply borrowing praxis and spiritual nourishment and using it within a new context.

Theories of practice have come to prominence as part of a wider 'cultural turn' that runs across academic disciplines and into other spheres of contemporary society' (Smith, T, 2007, pp. 16-17, 2014, p. 244). Smith[16] writes:

> Academic turns to culture have tended to define themselves against forms of knowledge cast as 'foundationalist' for their appeal to concepts like nature, reason and revelation as eternal and universal bases of knowledge. In the wake of modern scepticisms, and in the context of pluralist societies, such concepts have come to seem more contingent and particular. The nature of their particularity is often described as 'cultural'. (Smith, T, 2014, p. 244)

Therefore, based on Smith's notion, the 'particularities' of new monasticism emerge within a wider 'cultural turn' that sees theories of 'practice' set against 'foundationalist' knowledge, viewing culture as 'omnipresent', - 'the starting point for a constructive project.' The 'practice' is then solidified into something that is 'properly basic', - 'sound enough to serve as the end of a chain of explanation', and referred to by its practitioners as 'cultural' (Smith, 2014, p. 244).[17]

Smith suggests, for the practical theologian, 'No analysis is complete without attention to culture, and culture itself cannot be reduced to other terms.' So this chapter explores a dialogue of 'encounter' and 'particularity', within new monasticism of North America, the UK and Ireland, in relation to the relationship between the departing 'culture' and emerging 'cultural' phenomenon (Smith, 2014, pp. 244-45).

How does new monasticism define itself in relation to the Church and the wider society? The question presupposes notions of identity in relation to society, culture, and the Church, so understanding identity within new monasticism is important. Chapters two and three

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[16] Rev. Dr Ted Smith is the Almar H. Shatford Professor of Preaching and Ethics at Emory Candler School of Theology, Georgia, USA. He is theologically engaged with the practices and institutions of American Protestantism in the season of their disestablishment. He develops thick descriptions of everyday church life that open into political theology, cultural criticism, and practical wisdom for ministry.

[17] New monasticisms from North America, the UK and Ireland all acknowledge and reference their respective theories and practices of new monasticism to a so-called 'post-modern' or 'post-secular' – 'omnipresent'. New monasticism then emerges from this engagement with a 'particular' new monastic cultural expression - 'properly basic'.

infer that definition and identity become entwined within the contextual fabric of new monasticism within North America, the UK and Ireland.

In chapters two and three I draw from literature of new monasticism from both North America and the UK and Ireland in order to plot the development and highlight some founding principles of the movement. The trajectory of new monasticism as a movement has splintered into a wide array of different expressions, some of which would not necessarily see their birth as coming from the founding principles highlighted in this chapter. Furthermore, Flanagan has argued that new monasticism as a movement may in fact follow a trajectory that views the practices of new monasticism as a diachronic development, that is over a long period of time and that precedes the founding principles I argue in this chapter. Flanagan's argument suggests the practices associated with traditional monasticism have in fact been preserved and lived in the lives of non-monastics throughout the history of monasticism itself (Flanagan, 2014, p. xxxiii).

Despite the varying different arguments as to where new monasticism has emerged, it is important for understanding the lived experience of people engaged with new monasticism to comprehend the source material that people reflect on in order to understand more fully human engagement in the movement.

As I argue in chapters two and three, no clear or agreed definition of 'new monasticism' can be found. A variety of situations and environments have given rise to little if any uniform practice and contribute to different relationships between new monastics, the Church and wider society. Yet, despite the distinct nature and form between new monastics, the 'particularities', we can discern uniformity in two key areas: placing 'practice' at the centre of new monastic experience and a commonality in cultural sensibility that seems to highlight a varying disconnect between 'belief' and 'practice'. This is summed in the words of Dorothy Bass[18]:

> They have been baptised 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' They may belong to churches where ancient creeds are spoken during worship, where specific beliefs are advocated in sermons and where people pray, work and

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[18] Dorothy Bass was the director of the Valparaiso Project on Education and Formation of People in Faith at Valparaiso University.

relate to others...Even in the presence of all these explicit articulations of belief, however many contemporary Christians wonder whether and how what they are supposed to believe really connects to the realities of their lives. Most express a desire to share community and to live a moral life, to be sure and hunger for spiritual experience and understanding is widespread. (Volf and Bass, 2002, pp. 1-2)

As I have argued elsewhere, within new monasticism a conflict over semantics and alignment with respective accompanying spiritual and theological source material may reflect the insecurities of any emergent new religious movement (Grimley and Wooding, 2010, p.69). Some perceived new monastic groups may in fact distance themselves altogether from the term new monasticism. An example of this is when, as the director of Monos[19], I contacted the leader of the Iona Community (Kathy Galloway) in 2003 to ask if she would attend a gathering of new monastic leaders; the reply was that the Iona Community was not a new monastic community.

Why the northumbria community?

The Northumbria Community as my Case Study is firstly, because it is one of the longest serving new monastic groups within the UK; secondly, there is a growing amount of literature both published from the Community and a growing body of interest from outside the Community. The longevity of the Community will allow changing to be identified and definition to be discerned throughout its history. Thirdly, having been a member of the Community between 1993 and 1998, I understand the framework of the community, identity and practice over this timeframe. Fourthly, having served under the guardianship of two of the principal founders of the Community between 1995 and 2006, I have partial knowledge of a major trauma in the life of the Community that resulted in these founders in question leaving the Community along with a few close friends including my late wife and myself. Finally, in 2007, living through a further trauma of having to break relational connections with the two founders in order to preserve my own mental and emotional stability and vocational sensibilities to new monasticism, it led me to redefine my

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[19] A Christian organisation engaged in researching and teaching monastic spirituality and culture, both in the Church and in society at large.

understanding of new monasticism in both a lived experience and represented nature of the lived experience which continues in practice to the present day.

These experiences have given me a rich diversity in understanding the emergence, practice and ongoing group dynamics within a new monastic group from an auto-ethnographical perspective, a grasp of a majority of the early documents that gave shape to the represented nature of the Community to its own members and to the world outside, access to unpublished, unsolicited data in the form of diaries and letters that, as Burgess has suggested, are very rare to come by in field research (Burgess, G, 1984, p. 129).

Increasing anthropological awareness in new monasticism.

As part of this thesis, I interview eight Northumbria Community members, past, present and those in their noviciate. I categorise these into first, second and third generational members on the grounds of the Community functioning over three changes in leadership. It brings a rich diversity to the data collection and allows focus upon the movement of, and change in, charism and community memberships and development over the whole of its existence. Questions like, why someone joins the community, why they leave and what attracts them? will help build a better understanding as to why some of these communities are flourishing and some not so.

Primary objective and secondary objectives

The primary objective of this research is to study Charism and Community within New Monasticism with Special Reference to the Northumbria Community. To then ask the question, to what extent, if any, is new monasticism subverting the essence of the monastic call and what are the implications? In doing so, the research will fulfil secondary objectives including providing a critical appraisal of the new monastic movement, understanding more fully new monasticism's relationship to monasticism and bring a greater anthropological dimension to the field - something that is seriously lacking in current research into new monasticism.

Preliminary research

My preliminary work emerged in two forms: firstly a co-written book called, *Living the Hours: monastic spirituality in everyday life* (Grimley and Wooding, 2010). Commencing from historical developments of new monasticism within North America and the UK, I attempted a revising of the process of extracting monasticism from a different viewpoint, as

had previously been suggested and experienced by new monastic practitioners. Instead of following current trends in new monasticism from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, I opted to reflect on those elements of traditional monasticism that seemed absent both within literature and the lived experience of new monasticism. Themes of 'cost,' 'repentance,' 'sacrifice' and 'waiting' became central to my research, which simultaneously led me to renewal and reform of my own role in new monasticism and to questioning my participation in new monasticism. The frustration for me trying to discern a vocation in new monasticism, was that titles of books like *How to be a monastic and not leave your day job*, although written for oblates, seemed to be taking centre ground in the new monastic debate (Tvedten, 2006).

My second piece of preliminary research was a paper given in 2011, at the third International Symposium: *Monasticism between Culture and Cultures*, at the Monastic Institute of the Faculty of Theology of the University of *S. Anselmo* Rome (Grimley, 2013). The central theme in my paper was an exploration of the effects of post-modern society upon the emergence of new monasticism. I suggested a theory that, extracting monastic activities and practices with little attention or comprehension of monasticism as a culture, potentially resulted in reducing the richness of depth to spiritual development on offer. For example, a breakdown in relationship between the extraction of spiritual practice and the host culture maybe a symptom of escapism for the perceived unattractive or most challenging elements of the host culture. On reflection, some of my preliminary work was anecdotal and would need to be read from this knowledge.

Monastic culture

In the final chapters of this thesis, seven, eight and nine, I will be arguing that a vocation to a new monasticism requires a careful reading and understanding of monastic culture. If not, then I argue that monastic expression lies less in vocation, but more in an idea that one 'vacates' to monasticism. In reflecting upon selected published work of Thomas Merton and Rowan Williams, I present a theological framework for a vocation to new monasticism around an idea of entering the 'Church of the desert'. I argue that new monasticism that has emerged within a post-modern world requires a new framework for vision and purpose. I suggest a revisioning of new monasticism around the idea of removing the terms new monasticism and intentionality, focusing more on an unintentional encounter with monasticism. I argue for new reflective material, particularly the monastic text, *The*

Nauigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis, for a post-Covid world, with its capacity to reinforce Christ's words from the back of the boat, 'do not be afraid.'

Summary and conclusions

Within this introduction, I have set out my main argument, for the need to reflect upon the new monastic movement from an unintentional standpoint in discerning a vocation towards new monasticism. The landscape for this inquiry is the Northumbria Community and allowing members to express their encounters with the Community through a series of interviews. This process brings research into new monasticism closer to the lived experience and answers a suggestion for greater anthropological awareness of new monasticism. I argue that my twenty-five years' experience as a new monastic practitioner will help extrapolate conclusions from the Northumbria Community Case Study to other groups in the movement. From this conclusion, I then claim the need for a revisioning of what a vocation to new monasticism might look like. This thesis now moves on to review the literature of new monasticism and map the movement's birth and growth.

Part I

New Monasticism in Context

Chapter 1. Reflections on new monasticism

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will bring to the fore some key research already undertaken in the field of new monasticism. The reason I refer to the research as key is because it acts as a forerunner to my own thesis and validates a need for greater anthropological awareness in the new monastic movement. I do not claim the research as exhaustive other than the fact it highlights the scope of research undertaken. I have also left out the research undertaken by the main theorists of UK new monasticism as found in Chapter 3. As will become apparent below, a majority of research has been undertaken within the Church of England, reflecting the explosion of new communities from 2004 onwards. There has been some sociological research undertaken on new Roman Catholic communities in Italy and some new communities in North America.

1.2 Research in practice

James Shakespeare[20], asked the question as to whether new monasticism within the Anglican Church needs to maintain a 'contemplative' aspect to its core, regardless of its vocation within mission and/or social activity (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 2). Shakespeare's answer is that through greater dialogue with traditional monasticism, new monasticism needs to reflect both 'contemplative' and 'action' in its vocational remit to 'stand the test of time and be effective in society and the Church' (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 1-2). Shakespeare is prescribing the need for traditional monasticism to provide a barometer to the contemplative element in new monasticism.

Richard Norton, a self-professed new monastic within a high Anglican tradition; has 'picked up' on Dr Martha McAfee's[21] criticism of North American new monasticism as prescribed within the Rutba House movement.[22] McAfee suggests that the reason why so many new monastic groups are failing is because they lack tradition and accountability within a larger

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[20] Rev. James Shakespeare is *Vicar, St John the Evangelist, Hills Road, Cambridge, Bishop of Ely's Spirituality Adviser and Assistant Director of Ordinands.*

[21] McAfee was part of a conference hosted in 2008 by the American Academy of Religion: Christian spirituality group. The conference was chaired by Evan Howard and was titled: Introducing new monasticism (Howard, 2008).

[22] Richard Norton who has taught theology in various colleges and universities attended the 3rd International Monastic Symposium held in Rome in June 2011 where Dr Martha McAfee gave an unpublished talk on 'new monasticism in North America'. Norton subsequently wrote an unpublished paper called 'New Lamps for Old: the place of the liturgy in new monastic communities' and presented it to me in 2012.

church remit and liturgical awareness.[23] Norton has noted this in pointing out and critiquing Hartgrove's and Claiborne's[24] '*Common prayer: a liturgy for ordinary radicals*' (Wilson-Hartgrove and Claibourne, 2010). Norton's critique of Claiborne suggests a lack of roots in tradition, a 'wishy washy', hyper-subjective form of liturgy, which is where we started with McAfee (Norton, 2012, p. 7).

Norton clearly demonstrates what I refer to as 'standpoint criticism'; criticism formed primarily through differences in culture, coupled with a lack of reflexivity in commenting on other people's experiences and *praxis* of new monasticism.

John Ansell's[25] MA dissertation was called, '*What is New Monasticism doing to the Church: An evaluation of some Fresh Expressions of Christian Spirituality in Britain today*' (Ansell, 2011). Ansell makes some useful distinctions, 'that new monastics, are not Oblates or monastic Associates,'[26] instead arguing that new monastics owe their 'existence to something more than declining vocations to religious life. It is possible that new monasticism is a response to the suspicion that Christendom itself is in terminal decline.' Ansell, suggests that a 'circular process' occurs throughout the history of the Church, arriving at a point where: 'As secular society pushes the Church further into the periphery...Christians are waking up to the suspicion that God has finally abandoned the Christendom project...' (Ansell, 2011, pp. 5-6).

Ansell's benchmarks for comparing new monasticism with traditional monasticism lie in a set of features: Charism, Interior life, Community life, Rules, Formation and Asceticism. In surveying fifteen new monastic communities in the UK, with small reference to North American new monasticism for comparison, he valued each Community against these benchmarks to measure the phenomenon of new monasticism against traditional monasticism. Ansell's epistemology seems to operate within a reductionist framework. He is reducing new monasticism from a diverse 'living tradition', to something that exists through a set of criteria. This epistemology continues into his conclusion shown through his comment, 'a new monasticism has arisen for these times, marked by the essential elements of traditional monasticism' (Ansell, 2011, p.50). Ansell is clearly legitimising new

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[23] This emerged in conversation at the 'Monasticism between culture and cultures conference,' Rome 2011.
[24] Two prominent figures in North American new monasticism.
[25] A priest in the Church of England.
[26] As a practitioner of new monasticism, I am considering becoming an associate to Mount Saint Bernard Abbey. There may be other new monastics that are also associated with traditional monasticism through oblation or association.

monasticism as being effective through holding to his set of five traditional monastic elements as shown above, but ends as a theory, rather than conclusion, as no evidence was produced that this is the case.[27]

Patricia Sullivan[28] suggests a less critical stance on the life of the individual and accompanying spirituality. Sullivan juxtaposes the theologian, Karl Rahner, in arguing for a 'non-vowed form of the Lay state in the Life of the Church.' Sullivan does recognise the importance of a Rahnerian manifestation, 'of the Church through the individual...' (Sullivan, 2007, p. 7) and moves forward to suggest, 'The particular ways in which individual lay Christians...witness in secular life to 'the Spirit who inhabits the Church' will depend on the specific gifts they have been given to offer in the service of the Church and the world' (Sullivan, 2007, p. 9). In the words of Heather Walton, Sullivan suggests the relationship between the Church and the individual as a celebration of 'the particularity encountered in the poetics of everyday life' (Walton, 2014, p.5).

The most recent research from within the Church of England is Luke Aylen's dissertation, '*New Monasticism and the Renewal of Religious Life: Issues in Terminology and Classification'*[29]. Aylen argues that, despite him highlighting Flanagan's claim for caution in suggesting a homogeneity in new monasticism, 'The thesis concludes that unity can indeed be found between new monastic communities, as well as with traditional and historical forms of the religious life, ultimately through the universal call to discipleship and baptismal vows; what I come to call the universal religious life' (Aylen, 2020. p. 1). Aylen suggests that through a process of '*ressourcement* theology', by distinguishing the religious life through examination of three key sources: the Vita S. Antoni, The Rule of St Benedict and the figure of St Francis, two factors seem to bridge the monastic life in all its aspects, 'consecration and world-relation'. Consecration in the fact that whatever spiritual practice is engaged in, the purpose is for personal consecration to Christ and that this in turn has a 'usefulness' to others (Aylen, 2020, p. 31). Aylen, moves the debate from Ansell in

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[27] Ansell used 'tick' boxes during his interviews in recording whether they expressed any of his five traditional monastic elements. No attempt was made in investigating the effectiveness of the claims, or whether the claims were acted out in the reality of human life.

[28] Patricia Sullivan is assistant professor in the Theology Department at Saint Anselm College, Manchester, US.

[29] https://www.academia.edu/44510424/New_Monasticism_and_the_Renewal_of_Religious_Life_Issues_in_T erminology_and_Clashttps://www.academia.edu/44510424/New_Monasticism_and_the_Renewal_of_Religio us_Life_Issues_in_Terminology_and_Classificationsification (accessed on 02/07/2021)

suggesting a new monasticism around a universality of discipleship, rather than synergy between new and traditional forms of monastic practice.

Lynne Smith OSB[30], argues that the 'closest thing the Reformed Tradition has to a religious order is the Iona Community founded by George McCloud, and the Taizé Community. Smith suggests that there is 'hunger among some Protestants for elements of the spiritual life which our tradition rejected...We do not wish to become Roman Catholic. We want to enrich the best of our tradition with the best of the monastic tradition as we seek to be faithful to the path down which God is calling us.' Smith suggests that this emergent dialectic for renewal is 'Ecumenical monasticism for a new millennium' (Smith, 2000, pp. 1-2).[31]

James Ponzetti[32] argues for a mutually beneficial relationship between the new monastic movement and the institutional Church. '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' (Ponzetti, 2014, p.36). Having set out an historical overview of Christian monasticism as found within the Catholic Church, Ponzetti argues that the ''new monastic' movement constitutes a lifestyle commitment open to all people regardless of faith tradition, and for all states of life' (Ponzetti, 2014, p. 43). Ponzetti solely focuses on new monasticism as found within the US and as a result tends to focus on new monasticism as a movement of evangelism/social activism/anti-capitalism. Wes Markofski[33] in his book, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism*, provides an anthropological and theological reflection upon Ponzetti's theory of new monasticism as found within the US. Markofski argues that 'neo-monasticism' and its 'radical communities' is eroding the fabric of American Evangelicalism by bringing to its attention the need for social justice, active engagement with poverty and spiritual transformation (Markofski, 2015).

1.3 Theological reflections on new monasticism

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[30] A sister from the Holy Wisdom monastery, an ecumenical Benedictine Community in Wisconsin US.
[31] Shelly Stevenson, a professed new monastic and Christian broadcaster has just submitted her doctoral thesis to the University of Coventry. She has been exploring the impact of social media on new monastic communities.
[32] From University of British Columbia
[33] From University of Wisconsin at Madison

A major piece of research that has carried new monasticism into the discipline of practical theology is Philip Harrold's article *'The 'New Monasticism' as Ancient-Future Belonging'* (Harrold, 2010; Eilers, 2013). Harrold suggests that we are witnessing the arrival of a kind of new monasticism from 'self-conscious postmodern Christians in a post-evangelical emerging church' (Harrold, 2010, p. 182), as found in North America and the United Kingdom:

...historical retrievals of ancient patterns and practices that seem to make their originative faith communities more authentic and compelling to postmodern socio-cultural contexts...Expressed desire for new forms of common life is not only synchronic but diachronic – which is to say that it has to do with the textures, complexity, and embodied and spatial aspects of relational being and action even as it fuses horizons over time, exercising a kind of memory that recovers, reconstructs, or at least reckons with a past way of life...' in appraisal of the social background, 'recovery of a past that seems usable, existentially compelling in terms of a whole new way of life, especially a way of life together (Harrold, 2010, pp. 182-84).

Harrold goes on to conclude in setting the scene:

> Here, in particular, a way of connecting oneself or one's immediate relational setting to historical forms of spiritual community is deeply associated with the idea of 'wisdom' – the traditional term most often used for the kind of participatory knowledge that is received and passed on in such richly textured communal contexts. (Harrold, 2010, p. 184)

In setting the scene, Harrold alludes to a multi-disciplined methodology in exploring new monasticism by bridging the disciplines of practical theology, spirituality, psychology and sociology.

Harrold categorises four expressions of new monasticism, the first, the work of Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk'. In using Michael Casey's book, *'Strangers to the city: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict'* (Casey, 2005)*,* Harrold reflects upon the journey of someone in the secular world journeying towards the religious life: 'against the backdrop to the ambient culture...The goals and assumptions of this culture recede in

importance as the seeker is 'impelled toward a different future' and, most immediately, a 'different lifestyle'' (Harrold, 2010, pp. 185-86).

Harrold's second expression is 'oblation,' as a 'space to live,' created within traditional monasticism for others who cannot fully participate in the life of the community – he rightfully distinguishes this from the 'occasional monastic retreat' (Harrold, 2010, p. 186). Harrold in using an oblate's personal reflection[34] on experience suggests a synergy with traditional monastics: 'While an oblate is unable to participate in this communal life in a day-to-day residential capacity, he or she will put the 'balance and realism' of its wisdom to work in the pursuit of God – personally as well as in the local church' (Okholm, 2007, p. 26; Harrold, 2010, p .186).

Harrold's third expression is more related to a process of retrieval of an ancient way of life, within a post-modern world, than monasticism *per se*. He refers to work by Aaron Milavec[35] and his two publications: '*The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Milavec, 2003) and *The Didache: Faith, Hope and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities, 50-70 C.E*' (Milavec, 2003). Harrold is intrigued by the way that Milavec engages with the ancient text, 'in an imaginative reconstruction of its practical theology, that seems to impact on his own historical and current journey, aiding towards a renewing of his own faith (Harrold, 2010, p. 187). Utilising 'Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge,'[36] Harrold suggests Milavec reached the 'point where he can listen to his spiritual 'companions' in *The Didache*, immersing himself in their world' (Harrold, 2010, p. 187). Despite Harrold commenting on the fact that Milavec suggests a 'spirituality' of *The Didache*, that others can also engage within, Milavec also admits that, 'he may 'overdo these parallels and project some of them quite uncritically'' (Milavec, 2003a, p. xxxiv; in Harrold, 2010, p. 188).

The final expression is the work of Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Starting from the position of a consumer-driven, comprised 'evangelical context,' Harrold suggests that Wilson-Hartgrove is, in reading of the *Rule of Benedict* amongst other monastic literature and association with other so-called radical groups in similar circumstances, 'looking for a way to live that would make it easier for (Him) to do the things that Jesus taught and practiced' (Harrold, 2010, p.188).

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[34] Dennis Okholm, oblate of St John's Abbey, Collegeville, US.
[35] Dr Aaron Milavec research fellow Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research.
[36] A kind of knowledge that cannot be transmitted via verbal or codified processes.

The first question that Harrold's classification of expressions highlights, do all protagonists refer to themselves as new monastic? Based on literary evidence, the only person that would be happy being labelled 'new monastic,' is Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, but in this case, is labelled by Harrold as a 'community organiser'. Although Harrold does note differences between a 'traditional Cistercian Benedictine, an oblate, dissenting Catholic scholar and emergent evangelical community organiser, he is happy to see similarities in 'their exercises of imagination and memory.' In this way, Harrold's loose connectivity between the four expressions of new monasticism and new monasticism as a movement is because of a tightening grip on his theoretical framework and methodology for anyone engaged in the retrieval of historical traditions. Nevertheless, his work remains vital for anyone engaged within this field of research.

In regard his theoretical framework, Harrold juxtaposes imagination and memory, a form of 'hermeneutics of social embodiment'[37]:

It is as if history itself becomes a form of consciousness that involves not only rational thought and action, but a sense of real participation through 're-enactment' and its attendant emotions, desires, motives, and other 'non-rational' aspects of human life – individually and communally (Harrold, 2010, p. 190).

Harrold uses two concepts of historical consciousness for his theoretical framework. Firstly, he uses Daniel Hardy's 'discourse of intimate identification' or 'kinships' (Hardy, 1992) and secondly, Wayne Meeks 'hermeneutics of social embodiment' (Meeks, 1986). Regarding the former, in using a variety of 'epistemic practices': ''Time thickens' amid the contingencies and dynamic interchanges between the self and the social, the present thick description of life and an imagined community that is richly textured and complex as any way of life experience in the here and now' (Harrold, 2010, p. 190). Regarding the latter, Meeks suggests that over time: ''participation at least in the imagination, an empathy with the kind of communal life which 'fits' the text.' The 'fit' is discerned by 'tuning' to the way the text worked in its original context before considering how it might work or be applied today' (Harrold, 2010 p. 190).

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[37] Wayne Meeks wrote an article in 1986 called 'Hermeneutics of social embodiment'. He suggests a new reading of Biblical texts, rather than codifying history, to allow the text and the reader to confront each other in a continually new way (Meeks, 1986).

What Harrold seems to be suggesting is that new monasticism, in engaging with history as a form of 'consciousness,' uses practice as a key to unlock a shared memory between history and present-day retrieval for living in the here and now. 'The past becomes embedded in the practice(s) and as such they awaken the imagination to a vision that is strangely familiar' (Harrold, 2010, p, 191).

Harrold goes on: 'The imagination, and its reconstituted memory, recognise more than just goods and values; they also recognise...understandings, beyond the practices themselves...in most new monastic writings...Christian faith is only meaningful when it is properly conditioned by actual practice' (Harrold, 2010, pp. 191-93).

In his conclusion, Harrold argues that the 'active truth of God' within history 'shows itself again and again' (Harrold, 2010, p. 192). Wherever this 'active truth' is visible, then Harrold suggests that the 'recipients need to be conformed to the mode of rationality afforded by the reality of this truth'. To this framework, Harrold suggests we are witnessing 'the post-foundational ontology we see in the likes of the New Monasticism...The intelligibility and deep plausibility of this truth are realised in the wisdom of a practiced way of life...such that what one knows is indwelled or inhabited even as it is received and passed on through ancient-future belonging' (Harrold, 2010, p. 192). It is worth highlighting that Harrold's main focus is on North American new monasticism despite his claims to include the UK. When he does refer to the UK, the evidence is very general and uncritical.

In terms of the future of new monasticism, Harrold is optimistic of union with the 'canonical heritage of the church,' and does not see it has hampering developments in new monasticism, provided the movement 'carefully tends to the practices of reading, testimony, and, most of all, prayer and worship that safeguard the integrity and porosity of the Christian tradition's comprehensiveness, unsurpassably and centrality' (Harrold, 2010, p. 193).

With more 'anthropologically nuanced ways of doing theology' and a 'historical consciousness' that is attentive to a rich complexity of an older 'way of life,' as 'active wisdom' that is transmitted over time and space, then 'New Monasticism – set against its transient context of emerging and emergent – is far more substantial than a trend' (Harrold, 2010. p. 193).

1.4 Sociological reflections on new monasticism

Regarding sociological reflections upon new monasticism, Palmisano[38] has recently suggested, new monasticism is not so much an invention of monasticism as a tradition, but more of a 'source of meaning in order to develop new symbolism and cultural imagery' (Palmisano, 2015, p. 172). This sociological reflection, mirrors similar arguments found in the fields of pastoral theology and spirituality, as noted above, Heitink suggests there are ''fundamental deficiencies' in contemporary culture, as is apparent from such central themes as 'wholeness, integrations, meaning-providing frameworks, community, and personal identity'' (Heitink, 1993, pp. 271-272). This binary notion, between Palmisano and Heitink, introduces sociology into a partnership with practical theology and spirituality, in regard to new monasticism.

Academic research into new monasticism mirrors the same shortage of literature regarding the communities and individuals that make up the movement. In 2015, Stefania Palmisano published, *Exploring New Monastic Communities: The (Re) invention of tradition* (Palmisano, 2015). Her research centred around Italian new monastic communities found in the Roman Catholic world, focusing on eight new monastic communities in the Piedmont region in North-East Italy.

The decision to study new monastic communities is justified not only by the intention of casting light upon a hitherto unexplored research topic. More importantly, analysing them has allowed me to examine both the most radical transformations triggered in contemporary monasticism by the Council[39] and the reactions provoked by these innovations among religious authorities...On a theoretical level this reflection has enabled me to strengthen the tradition-innovation-legitimation nexus by the addition of new critical insights at the crossroads of sociology of religion and sociology of organisation (Palmisano, 2015, p. 3).

Using Goffman's frame analysis, and his metaphor of a 'picture frame,' as a way of framing and defining experiences within a given moment and social situation,[40] Palmisano, comments:

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[38] Stefania Palmisano is Lecturer in the Sociology of Organisation and of the Sociology of Religious Organisations at the University of Turin, Visiting Research Fellow at the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion in Lancaster University, UK, and at the Department of Sociology in Boston University, US.
[39] Vatican II
[40] The late Erving Goffman was a Canadian-born sociologist, social psychologist, and writer. For this particular work see (Goffman, 1986).

My research leads to the conclusion that the paradigm of New Monasticism emerged through a process of imagination applied to the (re)invention of tradition in a global context in which both the monastic institution and society face changing demands. This means that New Monasticism is essentially a selective rediscovery and revitalisation of the mainly-primate monastic tradition on the basis on assumptions, rules, and values typical of the postmodern societies into which New Monks are plunged. (Palmisano, 2015, p. 29)

Palmisano concludes her conceptual framework by suggesting:

Monasticism is an exemplary case to demonstrate that tradition cannot help being something re-invented to correspond to the understanding of a specific group (I would also suggest an individual as well) at an exact historical movement...one of the main characteristics of Western monastic history, that of 'unity in verity' to which a second should be immediately added: that of 'complexity and continuity of internal evolutions. (Palmisano, 2015, p. 27)

Palmisano's ground-breaking research led me to consider a counter-question, do we find new monks, plunged into, or emerging from post-modern societies? Is there a difference? New monasticism is seen by many including: practitioners, commentators and researchers, as a counter-cultural movement, subverting society, (post-modernity) but to what extent and from what, is society being subverted? Are there any grounds for framing new monasticism, in suggesting a more complex relationship between traditional monasticism, society and ecclesial renewal, with a foreground being acted out, to the background of subversion and subservience?

There seems be sociological evidence for this in Palmisano's work on the Bose Community and its capacity to listen attentively to 'public taste'. Chosen as 'the best-known and most lively', of new monastic communities in Italy, her fieldwork was undertaken to explore the 'dynamics of success in a monastery and its consequences for the monastic life, both as regards internal organisation and relations with the outside world' (Palmisano, 2015, p. 95). Palmisano concluded, that whilst the founder had instigated many changes over the years,

they were often related to his own 'consciousness of his...role as innovator.' There was also evidence that some changes were made in relation to the Community's own success in responding to public tastes (Palmisano, 2015, p. 95). Palmisano's research moved on to raise further questions for future fieldwork in qualitative research within new monastic communities:

> Today Bose is Bianchi. The Community occupies a central position in the public sphere which protects it from the risk of decline, but what will happen when the founder withdraws from the scene? Will internal strife be solved by mediation, or will it set off fraternal struggle, with more-or-less silent abandonment making Bose almost irrelevant? Has a successor been 'royally' chosen? Will the new leader be capable of smoothing over conflict as the founder has been? Has the process of 'routinising charisma' already begun with the foundation of fraternities, each guided by its own prior? Or will the Community abdicate its own constitutive traits in order to join the Benedictine order, which has wooed them in the past? These are only some of the doubts which will underline future research on what will remain of Bose after Bianchi?...the importance for the sociology of monasticism of demystifying the ideology which often fuels research on the theme and which, draining the monks of their humanity, condemns them to behave as functionalist, Parsonian actors. (Palmisano, 2015, pp. 95-6)

Palmisano, concludes her particular work in the North-West of Italy with the statement: 'New Monks quench their thirst at the spring of monastic tradition, on the strength of legitimation conferred by the past, as from a source of meaning, in order to develop new symbolism and cultural imagery. This shift of perspective places at the analytical centre not invented but (re)invented traditions' (Palmisano, 2015, p. 172).

Palmisano, continues to have an impact on the research into new monasticism with her latest co-edited book, *'Monasticism in Modern Times'* (Palmisano and Jonveaux, 2019). Palmisano and Jonveaux continue a sociological line of inquiry with the assumption that monasticism is not a monolith, but is a diverse phenomenon. It is to this background that new monasticism is clearly grafted onto the 'monastic tree.' In this sense, new monasticism

within this sociological body of research has been embraced into Christian monasticism *per se* and seems to stem from Palmisano's previous work on Piedmontese new monasticism, viewing new monasticism as emerging from traditional monasticism as practiced within the Roman Catholic Church.

1.5 Problems with sociological inquiry

Laura Tennenhouse in her chapter, '*New Monasticism as 'Reflexive Spirituality': A Case Study of The Simple Way,* argues that although North American new monasticism on the surface can seem individualistic in nature, reflecting modernity, 'The Simple Way Community', offers a 'communal reflexive environment,' where the individuals as a collective can go through a process of 'undoing of beliefs' in society and the church, in order to 'restore a shared 'scared order' (Tennenhouse, 2019, p. 33). Tennenhouse makes a sociological generalisation, based on Peter Berger's work and coined phase 'sacred canopy'[41] (Berger, 1969), in relation to The Simple Way, to then making a generality about new monasticism as a whole.

Tennenhouse's methodology 'falls short' in regard to recent criticism of Case Study and cannot work in all expressions of new monasticism. This shortfall is less concerned with issues relating to viewing new monasticism within monasticism as a whole, but more concerned with the inadequacies in researching Christian phenomena as 'lived experience' and 'presented experience,' through empirical research within the field of sociology, with very little reference to practical theology/spirituality. In pursuing new monasticism from isolated sociological methodology, Tennenhouse runs the risk of listening to the rhetoric of social theory, through the social rhetoric of new monastic practitioners. This foreground 'noise' can mask subtle background nuances of subversion and subservience that make up the interplay of new monasticism, society and the Church.

1.6 Summary and conclusions

The growing body of research into new monasticism that is emerging from within the Church of England only reflects the environment that new monasticism has primarily grown from within the UK. Most of this research focuses on internal debate within the Church of England around notions of nature of the Church within a post-modern world and how to

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[41] Peter Burger's idea of a sacred canopy is that a worldview of a group of people or culture is shaped by certain common assumptions which give order and meaning to respective lives.

nurture disciples within this new arena. The debate oscillates between new monasticism functioning around certain monastic principles and practices, and the idea that new monasticism is in fact monasticism in a traditional way if it can prove its field of consecration and worldly relatedness.

Theological inquiry has led research to conclude that the 'active truth of God' shows itself 'again and again over history'. In this way new monasticism is part of that 'active truth' and practitioners are responding through an understanding that history and consciousness are connected through 'practice'. So far, theological inquiry has lacked anthropological awareness and although being conscious of it, skews the relationship between traditional monasticism and new forms in order to validate methodological validity.

Sociological inquiry has agreed with most theological inquiries in suggesting that the reinvention of monasticism within new environments is because the 'new monks are plunged into post modernism.' Sociological awareness of new monasticism has posed some questions that can only add to the theological and practical understanding of new monasticism around notions of how charisms and ethos are passed down between various generations of new monastic communities and I would suggest over generations within new monasticism as a movement, both as an insular and a global phenomenon. Saying that, sociological inquiry without theological awareness can leave the study as bias towards social theory, rendering conclusions as incomplete and partial. In the next two chapters I will focus on what particular aspects of new monasticism make up the cultural fabric for new communities both in North America and in the UK.

Chapter 2. The cultural fabric of North American new monasticism (NANM)

2.1 Introduction

In 1979, Charles Fracchia published a book called *'Living together and alone: the new American monasticism'* (Fracchia, 1979). The central argument of the book was to suggest that the emergence of quasi-monastic identity was continuing on from the 'new religious' movement of the sixties and seventies. There does not seem to be a direct connection between this book and what is to emerge in North America as the new monastic movement.

On the surface, it looks as if one does not have to delve too far into socio-political and cultural commentaries on both society and the church to understand the background to the emergence of new monasticism in North America. NANM identifies itself with the answer, if only in part, to the fragmented state of American capitalism and the decline in the urban life that has been allowed to seep into the individual and the Church (Wilson, 1997, p. 32). Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove and his work at Rutba House Community are seen as a 'leading exponent' and architect in the development of NANM (Harrold, 2010, p. 188). Yet the prelude to the story begins in 1997 with the publication of Jonathan Wilson's book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World.* Wilson's book is culturally charged and missional in nature, providing a lens for ecclesiastical renewal through which we view MacIntyre's work in *After Virtue*.

Before setting out his theoretical vision for a new monasticism, Wilson establishes some key themes within Western society and the Church:[42] 1) An inability to live with history. Wilson argues the Church should start to tell its story as an argument and historical reality for its witness to the Gospel. Wilson concludes, 'if we do not attend to our history, others also become victims of our past (Wilson, 1997, p. 23). 2). 'That we live not in a pluralistic world, but among fragmented worlds' (Wilson, 1997, p. 30). Areas of fragmentation include: a loss of *telos* where Christians are seen as doing Christian things without connection to the proper eschatological end, interweaving of culture into individual and Church creating worship as a 'feel good' therapy. 3) The 'Failure of the enlightenment project' in its attempt to rationally justify things, outside of conviction and theology. Resulting in a vacuum of unfaithfulness, where 'emotivism' has taken shape, to which the church's answer should be

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[42] The current author will only attend to Wilson's conclusions drawn from *After Virtue* and not form a comparative discourse between the two works; unless where it impacts upon the central question of this piece of research.

to live the 'way of life' the Gospel calls it to live (Wilson, 1997 pp. 39-53). 4) Recovery of a 'living tradition' by: learning to give account of our life through 'thinking and living teleologically', reflecting on ways in which the church has been corrupted, accepting the need to embrace a lifelong process of 'practicing church' (Wilson, 1997, p. 67).

2.2 Jonathan Wilson's vision for a new monasticism

The last page of *After Virtue* is where the 'business' of NANM is worked out and launched from:

> ...it is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of such parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the dark ages. Nonetheless certain parallels there are...Men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman *imperium* and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that *imperium*. What they set themselves to achieve instead - often not recognized fully what they were doing - was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another doubtless very different – St Benedict. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 263)

Wilson claims:

...At the same time, I want to look with an even greater hope then MacIntyre expresses here for a "new monasticism" that will sustain, not the tradition of virtues but the witness to the Gospels of Jesus Christ through Faithful living...The new monasticism for which we look will be like old monasticism in refusing both to shore up the *imperium* of contemporary society and to identify the future of civilization with the *imperium*. The new monasticism will be unlike the old monasticism because the history with which we live is a different history. (Wilson, 1997, p. 70)

Wilson goes on to suggest that the Church needs to disentangle itself from the larger culture it currently inhabits:

...At such a time, the church must withdraw into a new monasticism, not in order to avoid a "bad" society but in order to recover faithful living and a renewed understanding of the church's mission' (Wilson, 1997, p. 71).

Although MacIntyre does not in any way present himself as the new St Benedict, Wilson argues that the new monasticism, as the Church's answer to its mission within a fragmented society, must be situated in the narrative provided within MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (House, 2005, p. 3; Grimley and Wooding, 2010, p. 46). *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World* was written as part of a series of books published by Trinity Press under the banner, Christian Mission and Modern Culture. Within this missiological context, Wilson is clearly writing for a Protestant audience and in particularly to a North American post-Evangelical audience[43] (Harrold, 2010, p. 182). Wilson's conviction that we are witnessing an unfaithful church, suggests it retreats into new monasticism in order to retrieve faithful living and a renewed missional fervour within an unfaithful church. The synonymous nature of new monasticism and Christian mission is a commonality between North American and European new monasticism.

At the conclusion of *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World,* Wilson goes on to establish four characteristics for his vision for a new monasticism: 1) Recovery of the *telos* as revealed

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[43]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258171601_The_Christian_Mission_and_Modern_Culture_Trinity_Press_International_Series (accessed 15/07/2019)

in the Gospels and the difficult task of bringing together the sacred and secular. Wilson suggests this cannot happen in larger Church, but in 'small disciplined' groups committed to the vision for a new monastic movement (Wilson, 1997, pp. 72-73). 2) A monasticism for the whole people of God with no divide between secular and religious (Wilson, 1997, p. 73). 3) Because of the difficult and lengthy task of recovering a new human telos, the new monasticism will need to be disciplined like old monasticism. 'However, because the discipline will be for the whole people of God, it cannot simply be a recovery of the old monastic rules.' New monasticism should not be governed by the larger culture from which the Church is retreating but should be operating in a 'restricted space' to protect itself from corruption. Small disciplined groups will either be based around a shared work or common life circumstance (Wilson, 1997, p.73). 4) New monasticism will be undergirded by deep theological reflection, recovering the right theology and right Christian practice, resulting in a continued reminder of its contingent tactical purpose. '...the new monasticism provides a means by which an undisciplined and unfaithful church may recover the discipline and faithfulness necessary for its mission in the world' (Wilson, 1997, pp. 74-75).

2.3 Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

Wilson-Hartgrove is one of the main proponents of new monasticism in North America. The 'scaffolding' that supports his deductive vision for a new monasticism comes from within Wilson's book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*. For a clearer picture of Wilson-Hartgrove's vision for a new monasticism we turn to two publications; firstly, a preliminary report on the conference at Rutba House Community in 2004 (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004) and the conference publication that followed, *Schools for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, published in 2005 (House, 2005). The report clearly indicates that Wilson-Hartgrove was beginning to sense that what was emerging in his Community House, a kind of renewed Christian response to society and the Church, by moving to 'margins of society' and 'abandoned places', seemed to be mirrored in other small groups in North America (House, 2005, p. viii).[44] Wilson-Hartgrove, in organising this conference, was proposing that the narrative for this removal from current social norms and in particular the close inter-relational landscape of society and the church, referred in Wilson's work as 'Constantinianism', was to be sought in Wilson's semi-theoretical vision for a 'new

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[44] The report clearly states that the invitations to attend the conference were such that those attending were of a similar nature to the Rutba House Community, in viewing themselves as living on the edges of society.

monasticism' (Wilson, 1997, p. 14). As you read through the personal stories contained within the report, it becomes clear that many groups who attended the gathering were already existing Christian groups or communities working in so-called 'abandoned places' (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004). At the announcement, in the report, of the formal acknowledgement of 'a movement of radical rebirth', called 'new monasticism'; it becomes clearer that the '12 marks of new monasticism' (see below) that followed were an attempt at encapsulating the practices and concerns of all those groups in attendance, whether they saw themselves as new monastic or not (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004, p. 16).

12 Marks of a New Monasticism[45]

1) Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.

2) Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.

3) Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.

4) Hospitality to the stranger.

5) Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.

6) Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.

7) Peace-making in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18.

8) Lament for radical divisions within the church and our communities combined with active pursuit of a just reconciliation.

9) Care for the plot of God's earth given to us along with support of our local economies.

10) Support for celibate singles alongside monogamous married couples and their children.

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[45] This list is taken from the 2004 report on the gathering at Rutba House Community. Another list is in circulation taken from the book *Schools for conversion: 12 Marks of New Monasticism*. The only differences are the change of order of the marks in both publications and mark 2 in, *schools for conversion*, drops the word 'the', to read 'Relocation to abandoned places of Empire'.

11) Intentional formation in the way of Christ and the rule of the community along the lines of the old novitiate.

12) Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life (e.g. prayer and silence, keeping hours, reading scripture, confession and guidance, fasting, Eucharist/Lord's Supper, spiritual friendship, work, Sabbath, celebration etc.) (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004, p. 16).

The marks were seen as an 'umbrella' of concerns and that all who signed up to them, needed to discern 'rules for living', that helped embody the Marks in local contexts (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004, p. 16). In a sense, Wilson-Hartgrove's new monasticism reflects a triangular 'blanket' of common spiritual, social and theological themes, that have been placed retrospectively upon, or contextualised within by groups and individuals who have signed up to Wilson's narrative of a North American fragmented society and an 'unfaithful church'.[46] Another aspect of Wilson-Hartgrove's new monasticism is highlighted as he sets out the inspirational figures and groups that have impacted on the workings of Rutba House Community: Catholic Worker Tradition, Christian Community Development Association, Renovare movement, Emergent Fellowship, Ekklesia Project, Bruderhof movement, Shalom Mission Network, Atlantic Life Community and the Antioch Communities. Wilson-Hartgrove highlights the influence from these communities in his book, *New monasticism: what it has to say to church's today* and suggests a synthesis of various groups in forming the Rutba House Community (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008. pp. 26-31).

Similar to what we find in the UK, new monastic expression is like a jigsaw puzzle, the practices, ethos and charism are often pieced together from an array of sources; even if sometimes at opposite ends of the theological/spiritual spectrum. A further aspect of Wilson's-Hartgrove's new monasticism is the varying degrees of monastic nature found within some groups, from having very little inspiration, to continual dialogue with monastic literature and or cloistered monasticism. In the Rutba House published book, *Schools for Conversion: 12 marks of a new monasticism*, we see a more systematic reflection on the 12 marks of new monasticism, and each commentator on each respective mark varies greatly as to references to both traditional and new monasticism (House, 2005).

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[46] The extent of the impact of this formal announcement of a new monastic movement on the groups and individuals attending the gathering is hard to know from the report and would require interviews to ascertain results.

Maria Russell Kenney, in her treatise on mark No. 3, 'Hospitality to the Stranger', does not mention monasticism in any form, whereas Sr Margaret McKenna's reflections on 'Abandoned places', in mark 1, are littered with references to Christian monasticism, historical and current monasticism (Kenney, 2005; McKenna, 2005). Wilson-Hartgrove claims, 'Church's response to compromise and crisis has consistently been one of new monastic movements.' He goes so far to suggest that St Francis in his rejection of the Crusades started a new monastic movement.

Christian spirituality in the modern era is prevalent with anachronistic interpretations of ancient texts and different ancient Christian practices. A long-held view amongst historical scholars is that the habitation of the Egyptian deserts in the fourth and fifth centuries was a result of the adoption of Christianity into the Roman world resulting in the need for Christians to flee to abandoned places to find new ways to fulfil a kind of martyrdom now the persecutions were over (Dunn, 2003). The new monastic movement, along with accompanying secondary literature on 'desert spirituality', uses this parallel between the ancient Roman world and modern society, suggesting a return to practices of the early desert Christians as an aid in overcoming the post-modern facets of consumerism and individualism; and wider still, a Christian Church that wants to dominate and 'rule the world by exercising power through political structures' (Wilson, 1997, p. 14).[47]

Within NANM, consumerism and individualism are the two biggest contributors to a fragmented world and church and a retrieval of what is referred to as 'old monasticism'[48] will provide a prescriptive adhesive for repairing the cultural fissures in society (Wilson-Hartgrove, Stock and Otto, 2007, p. 27 and p. 92). This leads to another aspect of NANM, which relates to how NANM refers to what I describe as 'cloistered' or 'traditional' monasticism, as 'old monasticism'. The juxtaposition of 'old' and 'new' in new monasticism infers the emergence of something new from something aging. Across the Rutba House Community, other than the need for some conversation with 'old' monasticism, interaction between 'new' and 'old' monasticism seems arbitrary, tailored to personal preference, and sometimes contradictory in output. For example, in *Schools for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*, Mckenna suggests we should be forming a new monasticism firstly by

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[47] Wilson calls this the 'error of Constantinianism'
[48] The use of 'old monasticism' is mainly used amongst the practitioners of the Rutba House school of NANM to indicate cloistered monastic practice. There does not seem to be any attempt to distinguish between ancient monastic practice and contemporary cloistered monastic practice.

asking God for a 'word' by which to live, whereas Shane Claiborne seems more intent on framing new monasticism as a protest against the effects of capitalism.

2.4 Shane Claiborne

Claiborne a prominent activist, speaker and author, is another foundational figure in the NANM movement. In 1998 he helped found a community for the homeless in Philadelphia called The Simple Way.[49] Prior to which he spent ten weeks working with Mother Teresa in Calcutta. In 2003, he worked on the same Christian Peacemaker team[50] in Baghdad, as did Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Whilst on this trip, Claiborne's car was derailed and crashed into the roadside. He was attended to by doctors whose hospital had just been bombed by American forces. Wilson-Hartgrove recalls this incident as not only impacting Claiborne, but the level of love and care from so-called enemies, led him to call his Community Rutba (a community of hospitality, peacekeeping and discipleship), after the place where this incident occurred (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2008, pp. 35-6).

In a 2010 interview by the Patheos[51], Claiborne was asked to summarise the essential elements of new monasticism?

New Monasticism was not the terminology we used when we started things here. But as you may know, our community started out of a housing struggle, where homeless families were living in an abandoned cathedral. We got involved in that. As we were a part of that movement in 1995, we began to see that, wow, this is challenging a lot of what we would consider church. What does it mean to be the church? That's when we looked in the book of Acts, and we saw all these believers were together and shared everything they had.

We also looked at church history and saw that there were these renewal movements, like in the thirtieth century, when Francis of Assisi heard the whisper of God, "Repair my Church, for it is in ruins." In a lot of ways, it was humbling to realize that we weren't doing anything truly new. It was fresh for today but rethinking what it means to be the church is something that happens over and over every few centuries.

What we learn from the monastic tradition is that it begins with the single-minded pursuit of God and neighbour -- "to will one thing," as Kierkegaard said, wholeheartedly seeking the

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[49] Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove spent time at the Simple Way prior to forming Rutba House.
[50] Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) is an international organisation set up to support teams of peace workers in conflict areas around the world.
[51] An online platform discussing different faiths and spiritualities.

kingdom of God. Monasticism has often put together beliefs with practices and lifelong commitments, so that Christianity is more than a presentation of ideas. It becomes a lifestyle.[52]

Claiborne's main work in new monasticism can be found in his 2006 publication, *The Irresistible Revolution: living as ordinary radical*, where he strongly argues for an authentic faith based on belief, action and love (Claibourne, 2006).

2.5 Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko

The forward of McEntee and Bucko's book, *The New Monasticism: An Inter-spiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* (McEntee and Bucko, 2015), is written by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee[53] and the preface written by Mirabai Starr[54]. In this, we see a slight deviation from both Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove, setting new monasticism within a global world and inter-spiritual dialogue.

> Personal wisdom re-imagined for an emerging globalised world...Seeker drawn to a committed spiritual life and yet do not feel at home in any one of the established religious traditions, you are not alone...You are probably a new monastic, a member of a growing tribe of inter-spiritual beings who draw from the many wells of the worlds timeless teachings, and with these mingled waters cultivate the garden of your soul and feed the hungry. (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. xi)

Vaughan-Lee goes on to suggest:

There are no manuals for new monasticism and that as an 'invisible life...germinating underground...the journey of new monasticism requires quiet, deep listening, deep dialogue...not for those who seek predictable questions and answers and feel-good spirituality (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, pp. xii-xiii).

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[52] https://www.patheos.com/resources/additional-resources/2010/08/how-to-derail-the-new-monasticism-an-interview-with-shane-claiborne (accessed 12/01/2021)
[53] Author and Founder of the 'Golden Sufi Centre in North Carolina, he is a Sufi Mystic and teacher in the Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order.
[54] An acclaimed author on the Spanish Mystics and a voice and author in the inter-spiritual movement.

The basis of McEntee and Bucko's new monasticism is conceptualised and theorised within the works of Raimon Panikkar, Wayne Teasdale and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. xviii). McEntee and Bucko's personal, spiritual and theological interaction with Wayne Teasdale in particular seemed to have a great effect on their envisioning of a new monasticism.[55] It is in this relationship that we see pathways of conversation open up with Fr Thomas Keating and Fr Bede Griffiths. McEntee and Bucko's use a quote from Bede Griffiths' book, *The New Creation in Christ* (Griffiths, 1994), to form an argument for the emergence of a new world order of interconnected monastics:

'The monk is a lay person...An order of monastics is essentially a lay order. Some monks may live in monasteries, but increasing the majority will live in their own homes or form small communities – a monastic order in the world' (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. xix).

McEntee and Bucko suggest the need for a measured and critical juxtaposition of traditional and new monasticism which finds currency in their quote below:

> The root of the word monk is *Monachos*, which means 'set apart'. For us, this is not so much a physical separation as a setting oneself apart from our cultural conditioning from an unquestioning, and un-questing, view of life, one that drives us to adulate material success, seduces us into participating in the devastation of our planet, hardens our hearts to the plight of the poor and oppressed, and divorces us from our innate capacity for spiritual growth and maturity. (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. 13)

From this, McEntee and Bucko's sociological framework for new monasticism seems to imply that practitioners, as social actors, operating within a given society, should be reforming the underpinning cultural supports and assumptions that frame self and society, without stepping out from society within which they exist. This also presupposes that traditional monasticism might find it hard to make these cultural changes in the society from which they flee. The essence of this argument continues throughout the book in defining new monasticism from a negative argument against traditional forms of monasticism.

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[55] Both MB were present at Wayne Teasdale's first and second bouts of cancer and at his passing

We assert that new monasticism names an impulse that is trying to incarnate itself in the new generation. It is beyond the borders of any particular religious institution, yet drinks from the wells of our wisdom traditions. It is an urge which speaks to a profoundly contemplative life, to the formation of small communities of friends, to sacred activism and to discovering together the unique calling of every person and every community. (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. 15)

Despite McEntee and Bucko's negativity in defining new monasticism against traditional monasticism, we do glimpse some common ground between the two, particularly when McEntee and Bucko suggest that some who enter new monasticism may find their way to more traditional forms of monastic communities (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. xxv).

Before moving forward to look at McEntee and Bucko's new monastic *praxis*, in summary: their new monasticism is framed within a globalised world with all the so-called post-modern, post-colonial, post-traditional conditions that have become norm in socio-political and socio-theological discourse at the turn of the century. From this, inter-spirituality has emerged as an answer to this new paradigm, as a way of reconnecting the 'self' with the 'whole'. For McEntee and Bucko, Panikkar's concept of the 'monk as being an archetype in all humans', is both the human framework and vehicle for an emergent *praxis* that extracts its resources, from so-called 'other traditions', which in turn, seem to be finding it harder to find relevance in this new paradigm. Inter-spirituality is where we see the final break, in a gradual parting of philosophical and theological frameworks of new monasticism between Rutba House and McEntee and Bucko. Although common ground continues to be found within the conflicting theological frameworks, between Rutba House and McEntee and Bucko we still can discern a 'levelling up' of monasticism between traditional monks and nuns and the emerging new monastic movement.

McEntee and Bucko's new monastic *Praxis* starts with the notion that we should be engaged with others and other traditions, Christian and non-Christian, through 'dialogical dialogue.' In order to build a firm foundation, 'one should practice prayer in a formal way twice a day.' The type and method of prayer adopted, along with where this happens, is centred fully around one's vocational commitments and personal preferences. Silence should also happen twice a day and increase in time from twenty minutes to fifty minutes over time,

again, in reference to preferences whether it is, centring prayer, *lectio divina*, mindfulness or mantra practice (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, pp. xxvii - xxx).

Along with daily practice, McEntee and Bucko suggest weekly, monthly and yearly, 'rituals and practices' that extend our reflective and meditative modes of living. These periods should also be integrated into 'sacred activism, spiritual direction, formal study, spiritual friendship and community, shadow work (exploration of inner life and guarding against 'spirituality as avoidance') and commitment to vows. 'New monastic vows represent our deepest intentions for life, named and formalised so that we may remember them' (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, p. xxx). Although McEntee and Bucko suggest not all new monastics will take vows, they infer that adoption of vows correlates with a greater level of spiritual maturity and growth, 'incarnating space of grace in his or her life' (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, pp. xxx-xxxv). Based on words from Wayne Teasdale, McEntee and Bucko suggest the adoption of nine vows and that after five years, one can be fully professed too. In comparison with the Rutba House movement, they follow a similar generality that allows for a multitude of variations in *praxis* and nature:

1) I vow to actualise and live according to my full moral and ethical capacity.

2) I vow to live in solidarity with the cosmos and all living beings.

3) I vow to live in deep non-violence.

4) I vow to embrace a daily spiritual practice.

5) I vow to cultivate mature self-knowledge.

6) I vow to live a life of simplicity.

7) I vow to live a life of selfless service and compassionate action.

8) I vow to be a prophetic voice as I work for justice, compassion, and world transformation (McEntee and Bucko, 2015, pp. xxxv-xxxvi).

2.6 Summary and conclusions

What we have witnessed within this chapter is the emergence of a new monasticism that is in direct confrontation with the socio-political world of its host culture. Although distinct, Claiborne and Wilson-Hartgrove share both vision and practice, in a new monasticism that is open to dialogue with tradition and rooted practice, but with the need to be relevant to

new spheres of activism and areas of public life that lack a moral compass, grounded within the scriptures. This may be in part due to their common experience in Iraq. Wilson-Hartgrove, despite engagement with traditional monastics in the early period from 2004, continues, like Claiborne, to have suspicions of traditional monasticism rooted in institution.

Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko open the NANM experience to encompass greater dialogue with other faiths within inter-spiritual borrowing of practice and vision. Both seem to encourage greater responsibility of the individual to embrace monastic practice within the 'household', not just within a community setting.

Chapter 3. The cultural fabric of UK new monasticism

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will be framing the main themes discovered in new monasticism within the UK. I do not pretend that what follows is exhaustive of all new monastic expression and vision, but what follows seems to underpin most of the cultural expression found in new monasticism.

As referred to above in chapter 1, a relatively safe place to start is 1980 in the library of Lincoln Theological College, with a joyous announcement of clarity, declaring an 'epiphany for living.' John Skinner, was reading work by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, particularly *The Cost of Discipleship* and a collection of his letters, where he came across the phase 'new type of monasticism' (Grimley, 2006).[56]

'The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ.'[57]

In the formative years of Skinner's new monasticism, between 1980 and 1991,[58] Skinner seemed to contextualise his experiences within the Church and society, through a comparative discourse between sociological and psychological theories, with monastic literature, both historical and contemporary, along with spiritual direction from monks and nuns. This follows a similar pattern to NANM and other practitioners and theorists in the UK.

In 1985, he presented his first attempt at outlining a new monastic framework to David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham. It resulted in Jenkins advising Skinner to 'go into the desert and quietly live the framework.' Skinner, along with his family, left his curacy and moved to North Northumbria to live his new monasticism.[59]

Skinner went on to become a founding member of the Northumbria Community in 1994.[60]

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[56] In the same way as I mentioned regarding founders of new monasticism in North America, those groups and individuals mentioned in this introduction to UK and Irish new monasticism are not the first to adopt monastic practice in everyday Christian living; they simply have a connectivity with new monasticism as a current movement.

[57] This quote is taken directly from Skinner's lecture (Skinner, 1992).

[58] Skinner found the Bonhoeffer quote in 1980 and co-founded the Northumbrian Community in 1994.

[59] Skinner told me this event personally in various conversations between 1999-2001.

[60] Skinner was the first in the UK to connect Bonhoeffer's term new monasticism with the actuality of someone outside the cloister trying to live some kind of monastic experience as a vocational quest. As commented in the introduction to this thesis, the late George McLeod, a Church of Scotland minister and founder of The Iona

3.2 Mission-Shaped Church Document and the Fresh Expressions

Despite Skinner, and in consequence, the Northumbria Community's use of the term new monasticism, the explosion of new monastic communities occurs as a result, in 2004, of the Church of England publishing its finding from a working group that was commissioned by the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs council to explore new ways of existing as 'church'.[61]

Rowan Williams states:

> If 'church' is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other, there is plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythm and style, so long as we have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common. (Cray, 2004, p. vii)

The backdrop to the report was an acceptance that the Church was operating in a changing socio-political world. Themes like, fragmented society, consumer culture, post-Christendom and post-denominational were synonymous with this change and these changes were having a direct impact upon how people related to the Church. In one sense, the document was a 'confession' that the Church is only just waking up to the effects of sociological change upon itself and its participants and prospective participants through mission. Confession or not, the report offered a ten-year plan for change, that would allow the Church to operate in this changing climate. In chapter four of the report, we come across another term, 'fresh expressions of church,' and it's through this ecclesial lens that many are introduced to new monasticism in the UK.

The precursor to the *Mission-Shaped Church* report is a report called *Breaking New Ground* written in 1994. This previous report was compiled as a direct reflection upon a changing

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Community in 1938, used some of Bonhoeffer's work around notions of community as part of his inspiration for the Community, but as far as I know he did not used the term new monasticism in reference to themselves.
[61] The report was a reflection on the outcomes of a previous report in 1994, recommending good practice for church, called 'Breaking New Ground'. This was presented to the backdrop of an emerging missional strategy called 'church-planting.'

cultural phenomenon called 'network based society'.[62] (Cray, 2004, p. 19) The planting of new churches across parochial and diocesan lines led to a tension within Anglicanism in how to deal with the fact that neighbourhood no longer was seen as being reflected within the physicality of the parish church. Since the early nineteen eighties, church planting was building momentum, the first Church of England church planting conference was held in 1987 at Holy Trinity Brompton and the Breaking New Ground report was seen 'primarily as a permission giving' exercise rather than something that helped shape the 'future-looking' context of a church pant. Despite this, the report was the first formal document of the Church of England to own 'planting' as a 'missionary strategy'. (Cray, 2004, p. xi)

According to Cray, *The Mission-Shaped Church* report was an attempt to offer further guidance to the Church of England as to what a new church plant might look like within a given contextual setting. Moynagh offers a framework as to how a new contextual church may emerge: either as a new congregation, from the participation of a course or event or the deepening on involvement of a small group. (Moynagh, 2012, p. 206) These new expressions are referred to as 'Fresh Expressions'.

 Fresh expression is an 'umbrella' term to reflect the diversity of ways of 'being' church. The report highlights common features found in many expressions of church: 'The importance of small groups for discipleship and relational mission..., These churches do not meet on Sunday morning..., These churches relate to a network of people for example workplace church and school-based church..., these churches are post-denominational..., some of these churches may have connection to one or more resourcing networks...' (Cray, 2004, p. 43).

The typology of expressions of church include: alternative worship communities, base ecclesial communities, cafe church, cell church, churches arising out of community initiatives, multi- and midweek congregations, network-focused churches, school bases and school-linked congregations and churches, seeker church, traditional church plants, youth congregations and traditional forms of church-inspired new interest (Cray, 2004, pp. 43-8). It is from the latter expression that we see the term 'new monasticism' appear. The Church of England understands new monasticism as a collective, existing for the purpose of containing

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[62] People beginning to move from the immediate vicinity of their homes to build friendships, undertake leisure activities, attend church based on common experiences with others and commute to work.

diversity. In this way 'fresh expressions' of church, have sub-expressions of fresh expressions; new monasticism being a sub-expression.

This contextualisation of new monasticism presupposes that all involved emerge from traditional forms of church. The report notes that most involved in new monasticism live dispersed from their respective centre, or 'mother house,' although some may never visit the centre or even be related organisationally. The Iona and Taizé Communities are used as founding examples of this model, although as commented above the Iona Community don't regard themselves as new monastic, and as far as I am aware, nor does Taizé.

The connection between the Iona Community and new monasticism, may have been made through some post-graduate research carried out in 2001 by Craig Gardner, a Baptist minister, where he argued for synergy in what he described as 'worldly monasticism' between Bonhoeffer and George MacLeod - the founder of the Iona Community[63] (Gardiner, 2001). There are two Communities that the report refers to in direct reference to 'fresh expressions,' one is the Northumbria Community and the other, The Order of Mission, based at St Thomas Crookes, Sheffield. The report notes that, like historic orders, new monasticism also has diversity of expression, and that both of these communities are 'intentionally mission-focused…Church Planters would gain from the treasures of disciplined spirituality and community. New Mission Orders might learn from the wisdom gained in planting and in missiology' (Cray, 2004, pp. 74-5).

Here lies another inferred preposition, that so-called Church Planters do not embrace a disciplined life and conversely, so-called New Mission Orders do not carry a form of missiology. This simple dualistic comment in separating 'mission' from the 'disciplined life,' saturates much debate and practice of UK-based new monasticism.

The report concludes in offering pragmatic ways for further development and the incarnation of some of its propositions. In regard to new monasticism, amongst other expressions, the report suggests that a new legal category be developed called 'Bishop's Order':

> ...Bishop Rowan Williams gave recognition and patronage to two different orders, 'Jacob's Well' and 'Living Proof'. Episcopal recognition placed both in the overall life of

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[63] Rowan Williams was aware of his work through correspondence with me in 2004.

the Church in Wales, but freed them from quasi-parochial status and modelled creative untidiness in church life. (Cray, 2004, p. 131)

3.3 New monasticism within fresh expressions

There are three forms of new monasticism within the fresh expression typology: those inspired directly by the *Mission Shaped Church* document, those adopted or highlighted by the Church of England that show synergy with the methodology developed within the document, and those that have the term new monasticism imposed [64] These forms break down further into communities of: social action, missional concerns, pastoral centric, ecclesial reform, or a combination of any of the four.

All communities seem to start with a charismatic figure, who in dialogue with other people, (some including other family members) with similar interests, especially in 'finding new ways of being church, within a changing world,' found a form of community, whether dispersed, networked, and non-dispersed and all with a variety of membership structures, from strict temporary withdrawal, formal distance-based membership, informal distance-based membership, and membership through loose association. Another commonality across all groups is an inspirational backdrop, whether in visiting a place of pilgrimage, or another community or group.[65] As well as the dispersed nature of some new monastic communities, like the Northumbria Community and the Community of Aidan and Hilda, within the Church of England there is a growing number of new monastic residential communities established next to cathedrals.[66] Other new monastic communities emerge within a traditional church setting, albeit with a focus on the contemplative and the activistic nature of Christianity.[67]

3. 4 International dialogue

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[64] Whilst I have developed this typology for the purpose of the literature review, in reality each group may also fit within other typologies, and continually need to be treated as independent as well as inter-dependant to other bodies of reference.

[65] It is difficult through literature alone, to discern whether these visitations are directly or indirectly forming inspirational material.

[66] Archbishop Justin Welby has encouraged the development of these new types of communities and include: The community of St Anselm based at Lambeth Palace and the Community of the Tree of Life based at Leicester Cathedral. These communities tend to build their communities around short periods of membership living under one roof and for young people between 18-35.

[67] An example would be the Moot community based at St Mary Aldermary and its sister community the Wellspring community based at St Luke's church in London.

There is evidence that international dialogue is growing between new monastic communities around the world: Adam Bucko and Ian Mobsby[68] worked together on a new monastic gathering in 2018; the Northumbria Community have an emergent relationship with The Community of Transfiguration[69] in Australia, and many groups through their worldwide membership; and the Oikos Community[70] in Sweden is in communication with the Fresh Expression Committee in the UK.

3.5 The impact of new monasticism on aspects of ecclesiology

Practitioners of new monasticism have started to fill roles within the wider church. Roy Searle (co-founder of the Northumbria Community) became the Head of the Baptist Union from 2008 to 2009. Pete Askew (Leader of the Northumbria Community until 2017) was appointed to Chaplain and Spirituality Adviser to the Bishop of Newcastle. Rosy Fairhurst was appointed Canon Chancellor in 2017, from her work in new monasticism within the Bromley by Bow Church and Centre in London.

This chapter now moves forward to explore and highlight the key themes that are witnessed as evident in new monasticism within the UK. As I say at the start of this chapter, what follows is not exhaustive of new monastic thought within the UK. I have chosen to allow four voices to come to the fore in order to offer the reader a varied typology of themes that span new monastic expression within the UK. I have sought not to replicate for brevity, for example, I have chosen not to bring the voice of a new monastic thinker and practitioner Ray Simpson, due to the amount of repetition in his work and that of the Northumbria Community.[71] What we have below, in Mobsby, Flanagan, Skinner and Gardiner is a cohort of thinkers who show the various cultural themes found in new monasticism within the UK and more importantly, the theories guiding the different levels and types of membership of within the Northumbria Community.

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[68] Ian Mobsby, an Anglican priest, is a leading figure in the new monastic movement in the UK.
[69] A Baptist new monastic community in Teesdale, Victoria.
[70] A community that encourages its members to meet wherever they live whether it be in a café, park or any other space.
[71] An Anglican Priest, retreat-giver and author who is the founding guardian of the international Community of Aidan and Hilda. In the early formation of the Community of Aidan and Hilda, there was a lot of borrowing of terms and concepts from the Northumbrian Community. Andy Raine one of the founders of the Northumbrian Community and Ray Simpson both lived on Holy Island at this time.

3.6 Ian Mobsby[72]

Mobsby's first book, written in 2007, *Emerging and Fresh Expressions of Church: How They are Authentically Church and Anglican?* – follows the contextualisation of new monasticism, as set out in the Church of England's Mission-Shaped Church report. It claims, new monasticism is a Fresh Expression of church and mirrors other types of churches emerging out of a so-called 'Emergent church movement' (Mobsby, 2007).

Of the 'Emergent church movement':

> The first few years of the twenty-first century there has been a groundswell of interest in local church communities and how they need to respond to a changing world. Many writers have characterised those changes by describing the impact of globalisation, of the network society now 'wired up' in communication systems and in changing patterns of spirituality and a sense of the diversity of culture. (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 132)

As a result, local church communities are beginning to form their own theologies:

The corporate identity and self-understanding of the 'body of Christ' forms the raw material of theological reflection. The community of faith generates theological language in its life together (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 14).

In practice, 'life together' can seem difficult when people reflect on new theological expressions. The unfolding debate within the Anglican Church, making sure that Fresh Expressions[73] of church still has theological and ecclesial accountability, is polarised. On one side there are some in the Anglo-Catholic branch of the Church who do not recognise fresh expressions as churches, and some in the evangelical branch of the church who are arguing for church status for Fresh Expressions, but without some of the 'institutional baggage'

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[72] Ian is a writer, speaker, missioner, Anglican Priest and an enthusiast of new monasticism. He is currently the Woolwich Episcopal Area Mission Enabler in the Diocese of Southwark and the Priest in Charge of St Luke Camberwell in Peckham London, and Prior of the Wellspring New Monastic Community also in Peckham.

[73] Fresh Expressions started to develop in 2003 as a joint vision between the then Archbishop Rowan Williams, Bishop Steven Croft (Bishop of Oxford) and his Mission Shaped Church Report and Revd Peter Pillinger, a Methodist Missioner. A Fresh Expression is a form of church that emerges within contemporary culture and mainly engages with people who do not go to church. Fresh Expressions can be found across Europe and North America. https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/our-story/ (accessed 02/02/2018)

within the 'inherited church'. This 'baggage' is seen as a hindrance to engaging with so-called 'un-churched' and 'de-churched'.[74]

> However, the time has come to ensure that any fresh expressions of church that emerge within the Church of England, or are granted a home within it, are undergirded by an adequate ecclesiology. The Church of England needs to be true to the gospel and its own history whilst engaging adequately with the society in which we now live. The intention here is not primarily to produce a blanket theological underpinning for all new forms of church, but to suggest some theological principles that should influence all decisions about the shape of the Church of England at this time of missionary opportunity. (Cray, 2004, p. 84)

The Mission-Shaped Church report attempted to reform the basic theological principles that underpin the Church of England, that would allow new emerging churches to stay connected with 'institution', yet free to engage with contemporary culture with its accompanying suspicion of institution.

> We exist now in a complex culture where society is not only fragmented into different people groups, but where people have completely different worldviews that, broadly speaking, correlate to pre-modern, modern and post-modern mindsets. This has created a great challenge for the Church in the United Kingdom. The new, growing post-modern and post-secular cultural sensibility signals a new cohort of spiritual seekers. (Mobsby, 2010, pp.12-13)

Mobsby locates new monasticism within a pluralised cultural environment and sees new monasticism as a possible answer to a clash of 'cultural sensibilities'. 'The inability of the parish church, since the Reformation, to continue as centres of monastic prayer and worship, is now replaced with a movement, self-assured of its 'being sent on God's mission'. According to Mobsby, many new monastics have picked up the so-called 'monastic baton',

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[74] Inherited church is a term used to categorise traditional and institutional forms of church as opposed to new forms emerging. Un-churched is a term developed to categorise, in a broad sense, people who do not attend a church. De-Churched, is a term developed to denote people who no longer attend a church, but who see themselves as religious or spiritual. https://freshexpressions.org.uk/about/what-is-a-fresh-expression/ (accessed 02/02/2018)

living it out in: 'natural beauty, car parks, and run-down council estates or in the ruins of old monasteries' (Mobsby, 2010, pp. 13-4).

Mobsby defines new monasticism within a global setting as, 'groups around the world…promoting relational mission and evangelism centred on the importance of being community, by imitating the Christ of the Gospels' (Mobsby, 2010, p. 14). According to Mobsby, central to the whole movement is the question, 'How should we live?'[75] which in turn generates a diverse array of answers. The answers are uniformly connected through a series of different 'spiritual rules' or 'rhythms of life', often related to 'context' - a 'postmodern reworking of a pre-modern approach to orthopraxis' (Mobsby, 2010, p. 15). The retrieval of something 'old' into a new environment is at the core of Mobsby's new monasticism and presupposes a process that would see 'relevance' as key in any reworking. Yet, despite the centrality of this concept, Mobsby does allude to the dangers of 'rubbing shoulders' with contemporary culture, 'particularly facing the darker side of culture and the consequences of consumerism' (Mobsby, 2010, p. 17). Other than highlighting the dangers of 'rubbing shoulders', Mobsby does not expand either his theory in negotiating these dangers or advice in dealing with the dangers on a practical level. For Mobsby, the 'cultural turn' is seen as a liberating factor in providing a fertile meadow from which new monasticism has grown.

What we see in Mobsby is a lack of critical awareness when one integrates 'alien' spiritualities into one's own expression of the Christian faith. The adoption of monastic practice into a contemporary setting is done in the 'harsh landscape' of 'retrieval'.

3.7 Bernadette Flanagan

Flanagan shares Mobsby's view for the liberation of the Christian spiritual quest within the 'cultural turn':

> It is in the spirit of thoughtful seeking for new manifestations of culturally sensitive expressions of the core identity of spirituality focused lives, which I experienced during these discussions, that I approach my current project. New rich interpretations of traditional practices associated with the God quest-poverty, celibacy, fasting, pilgrimage, solitude, social solidarity, asceticism – are reconfiguring the analysis of the

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[75] This question is a direct quote from the Northumbria Community.

core of lives of commitment to spiritual practice in discussions of the new monasticism. Under the influence of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, these practices no longer are considered primarily as moral behaviours but are viewed as modes of expression, through which individuals intentionally form personal identity. (Flanagan, 2014, pp. xxi-xxii)

In a recent review of Flanagan's work, it is noted that:

Flanagan has her ear to the ground of what is happening in the Church and in new forms of contemplative Christian living. Her awareness of what is happening...asks for further analysis than she gives of how new forms are related to the old, if at all...She doesn't look into the contemporary revival of oblation among lay people associated with monastic houses as a way of living monastic life outside the cloister but still supporting and learning from traditional structures. (Reynolds, 2014, p. 835)

Flanagan clearly positions her project, exploring the role of 'solitude' in the lives of women within new monasticism, clearly within the 'cultural turn'. In Stefan Reynolds'[76] review of Flanagan's book, whilst acknowledging the emergence of 'new' forms of 'old' practices, he falls short of recognising Flanagan's intentional positioning of her project within the confines of the 'cultural turn'. This is evident in Reynolds highlighting the absence of any explicit reference to oblation[77], which for Flanagan would see new monasticism reduced back into the 'stewardship' of traditional monasticism, back within the world of 'meta-narrative' or 'foundation' (Grimley and Wooding, 2010).

Flanagan suggests, 'with the postmodern deconstruction of meta-narrative, personal narratives have assumed greater significance'. This comment forms the reality for new monasticism within Flanagan's new monastic vision, reflected through the 'final say' in her book being given to one such personal narrative of Beverly Lanzetta[78]. Despite this, contrary

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[76] A former post-graduate student from Heythrop College
[77] As noted in the literature review, is the process by which traditional monasticism extends its charism beyond the monastery wall through the lives of the un-cloistered Christian.
[78] A spiritual teacher and theologian, Lanzetta is the author of seven books on global spirituality and new monasticism. She is also the founder of *Schola Divina* and the Community of a New Monastic Way..

to Reynolds, Flanagan does implicitly refer to Oblation in relation to her 'third strand' of new monasticism, ' creating its identity by forming new partnerships and associations with living traditional monastic communities' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 21).

Flanagan's framework for new monasticism offers a 'wider lens' than adopted by Mobsby. Flanagan's classification of new monasticism is linked with her method of retrieval of 'spiritual practices'. Flanagan chooses to use a deconstructionist[79] method in adopting Ray Simpson's[80] model for new monasticism as emerging over five generations. The first generation being those influenced by the work of Thomas Merton, Flanagan suggests, 'in the life of Dorothy Day and Catherine deHueck Doherty a certain blurring of the previously fixed lines of demarcation between a spirituality focused life, lived within monastic structure, and a spiritually focused life lived outside of such walls began to occur'. The second generation of new monastics emerging after World War II, through a, 'new experimentation with monasticism' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 20). Flanagan refers to Brother Roger and the Community of Taizé, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his book, (*The Cost of Discipleship*) and George MacLeod and the foundering of the Iona Community. The third generation comes from the interaction between traditional monasticism and society at large. 'Identity by forming new partnerships and associations with living traditional monastic communities...a strong association with classical monastic rules...Carthusians, Cistercians or Benedictines'. The fourth generation coming from an engagement with 'historical monastic traditions...not having current living loci since the tradition in question is the Celtic monastic tradition' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 25). The fifth generation is seeing new monastic groups expressing new monasticism through the arts and adopting an online presence. Flanagan adds a sixth generation referring to the emerging new communities in the US and European communities engaged in social justice, including some involved in ecology and inter-faith dialogue (Flanagan, 2014, pp. 18-32).

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[79] Deconstructionist, in this context is referring to those who are happy to see the traditional institutional Church in all its denominations dismantled to see new forms of church emerge that has at their centres a relevance and alignment to 'personal preference' and choice, catering for a variety of contexts. They see the decline of Christendom equating to the decline of Church as an institution. Although Flanagan does acknowledge this so-called post-modern phenomenon in relation to new monasticism, as noted above, Flanagan falls short of both Mobsby and Simpson, who seem to be happy to see the institutional church disappear.

[80] Ray Simpson is the guardian of the Community of Aiden and Hilda based on Lindisfarne (Holy Island) in North Northumberland. The Community is a dispersed new monasticism community having followers all over the world.

Mobsby offers very little attention to 'critical awareness' of the 'retrieval', Flanagan does attempt to piece together a historical emergence for new monasticism, which may suggest that Flanagan's new monasticism is less to do with 'retrieval' and more to do with a 'softer' notion of 'borrowing' or a 'continuing' tradition for the purpose of generating its own spiritual *praxis.*

Flanagan also has pointed out some of the criticism that new monastic movements have been subjected to: generalisations in being too 'individualistic', or not being in it for the 'long haul', being excluded for 'good' because of the newness of the movement, Flanagan suggests, these assumptions can short-circuit the conversation traditional spiritual communities need to have about the facts...of a new monasticism (Flanagan, 2014, p. 36). This contrasts will recent work by Anna Clot-Garrell, who argues that in fact some monasteries are embracing 'individualism': 'The interpretation of obedience in terms of freedom demands individual and more active engagement of recent candidates in a process of negotiated appropriation of lay traits and abilities into the construction of a more subjectivised and personalised monastic identity' (Clot-Garrell, 2019, p. 23).

3.8 Craig Gardiner

Craig Gardiner[81] enters the new monastic dialogue within the 'cultural turn', as both a visionary and practitioner: setting out his new monastic vision in his book: *Melodies of a New Monasticism: Bonhoeffer's Vision, Iona's Witness* (Gardiner, 2018). and practicing new monasticism through his membership of the Iona Community.[82] 'Postmodern theorists reject universal foundations, arguing that interpreting the world by imposing upon it some undergirding explanation or meta-narrative is not only historically calamitous, but is also morally suspect' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 75). Gardiner's approach to the cultural turn, like, Flanagan, Skinner and Mobsby, is to post-modernism, as the fertile ground from which new monasticism emerges. Although all four authors refer to caution in associating new

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[81] Craig Gardiner is a tutor of Christian Doctrine at the South Wales Baptist College and honorary Senior Tutor in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion at Cardiff University. He is also a Baptist minister, amateur musician and member of the Iona Community.
[82] The Iona community is a dispersed Christian ecumenical community working for peace and social justice, rebuilding community and Christian worship. Its centre is within the ruins of the Abbey on the island of Iona situated off the Western coast of Scotland.

monasticism with post-modernism, of the four authors, it is Skinner and Gardiner who show a greater level of critical awareness in framing new monasticism within post-modernism.

Gardiner argues that, 'post-modernity is too humble to forbid and too weak to banish the foundational excesses of modernity's hubris, yet its criticism means that the truth for any given community becomes no more than the truth constructed by them' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 18). Gardiner is hinting that although post-modernity may have unshackled the 'chains' of modernity, the moral void left may be suspect to ego-driven self-constructed forms of truth. In criticising a Church that still affirms itself on 'foundationalism', that views the decline of Christianity as a symptom of the causality of a fragmented society, Gardiner suggests that 'the contemporary church rarely regards this process of fragmentation positivity' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 76).

Set to this cultural backdrop, Gardiner suggests that Bonhoeffer, through his adoption of music as a metaphor for theological reflection, offers the post-modern inhabitant a model for Christian living. 'Perhaps it was with prophetic wisdom that Bonhoeffer proposed the musical metaphor of melody and counter-point to help theology respond to such fragmentation with polyphonic living' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 33).[83] Although Gardiner uses the term new monasticism within the title of his book, he adopts the name 'worldly monasticism', to frame his version in contrast to what has gone before, both traditional and new forms of monasticism and in keeping with his theological perspective:

> These and other instances of new monasticism all envision a community in which the devotional disciplines that nurtured the radical spirituality of traditional monks are reinterpreted so that the Christian community can participate in the performance of the melodies of God in the midst of contemporary society. But here, in choosing to name it a worldly monasticism, it is hoped to invoke a deliberate tension and bisociation that reflects the praxis and spirituality of such communities. This will adopt the best of ancient disciplines, many of which retain rich value in contemporary society, but clothe them in no vestments 'other than those worn by the human family'

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[83] Gardiner uses two quotes from Bonhoeffer's publication: *Letters and Papers*: Letter dated February 23, 1944 p. 306 and Letter dated May 20, 1944, p. 394.

and inhabit a monastery without walls other than those of the entire planet.

(Gardiner, 2018, p. 89)

3.9 John Skinner

During the formative years of Skinner's new monasticism, between 1980 and 1991,[84] Skinner, like Flanagan, Mobsby and Gardiner, seemed to contextualise his experiences within the Church and society, through a discourse between sociological and psychological theories, monastic literature, both historical and contemporary and spiritual direction from monks and nuns.[85] Like Mobsby, Skinner's spiritual quest centres around the question, how then shall we live?

As highlighted previously, during the late nineteen eighties, Skinner stumbled upon a quote by Bonhoeffer and summed it up as if receiving an 'epiphany for living.' The quote went on to become the framework on which he positioned his experiences of living with the question, how then shall we live?

To recap, the quote is:

The restoration of the church will surely come from a sort of new monasticism which has in common with the old only the uncompromising attitude of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount in the following of Christ.

During his formative period, Skinner placed more contextual emphasis on the term 'new monasticism,' as representative on his own experiences, than on Bonhoeffer's theological framework for living the Christian life in an ever-growing secular society. In a way, unlike Gardiner, Skinner was borrowing the term from Bonhoeffer, whilst allowing the latter's theology to 'play on' in the background with other theological, sociological and psychological commentaries.[86]

Skinner's awareness of a 'cultural turn', was within the lived experience, through what he was witnessing in his own tradition – The Church of England, people visiting him for spiritual

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[84] Skinner found the Bonhoeffer quote in 1980 and co-founded the Northumbrian Community in 1991.

[85] Over the years Skinner lost the reference for this quote and it became paraphrased both in the Northumbrian Community liturgy and by others who copied the quote from this liturgy.

[86] Bonhoeffer's quote is spoken at the very end of his first formal lecture in 1991, on new monasticism, with no explanation of anything other than the quote. Through a critique of Skinner's soon to be published book, where he will be unpacking his relationship with Bonhoeffer's theology in forming his new monasticism, I anticipate further material to emerge.

direction and from his own reading in disciplines of sociology and psychology. Skinner was alerted to his perceived severity of the problem through reading Francis Schaeffer's[87] work, which claimed that 'religion was often the last entity, behind, art, philosophy and science, to feel and express changes in culture' (Skinner, 1993, p. 2). After reading Jacques Ellul[88], *The New Demons* (Ellul, 1975) and Peter Berger's[89], *Sacred Canopy*, (Berger, 1969) Skinner suggested:

> Post-Christian society is convinced that it knows all that it needs to know, all that it is to know about Christianity - Christianity can offer nothing new or surprising. Attempts have been made all along to make points against this, but they aren't often taken into society as a new basis. The Church has become introvert in any discussion about a new move of the Holy Spirit. (Skinner, 1993, p. 5)

Skinner's answer to the church's so-called dilemma is to venture 'inwards', into the 'landscape of the heart'. Skinner found synergy between the work of psychologist, Carl Jung, and the literature of the desert fathers and mothers for aiding the 'inward journey':

> Compare this to the desert father's teaching on passions – disordered emotions, irrational reactions - the desert fathers speak of striving for a passionless state, of regulating emotions. For Jung, individuation is a technique which involves not acting out emotions in the outer world but transferring the conflict to the inner world of experience. He is not saying that we shouldn't feel the passions but should experience them without projecting then onto the outside world, we should project them onto SELF...the desert fathers, taking anger for instance, we shouldn't project them onto the person we are angry with, but we should turn them onto what inside us we are reacting to badly and onto God. We still have to face the person and deal with the

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87 Schaeffer is an American evangelical Christian, theologian, philosopher and Presbyterian pastor. He is best known for establishing the L'Abri community in Switzerland. He died in 1984.
88 Ellul was a French philosopher, sociologist and lay theologian and long-time professor at the University of Bordeaux.
89 An Austrian/American sociologist and protestant theologian, whose main body of work falls under the notion of sociology of knowledge.

issue, but we do not get rid of all our other hurt onto them as well. (Skinner, 1993, p. 8)

In 1991, Skinner wrote a series of seminars entitled *Internal Émigré*. The concept for the series came from a book called, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, written by William Stringfellow[90] (Stringfellow, 1973). The seminars emerged from a desire to incarnate the last ten years of his 'meanderings' into the arenas of sociology, psychology, theology, history and monasticism.

The seminars were addressed to friends and people who had started to gather around Skinner and his family, for emotional and mental support, spiritual direction and curiosity. The third seminar was entitled 'A New Monasticism,' and is Skinner's first attempt at communicating a 'localised' theoretical context of his new monasticism, which emerged in Skinner's later work to find a 'transferability', from the 'local' to the 'universal':

> In our studies of the desert fathers (seminar one), we attempted to look at the 'heart' of monastic spirituality. To do so, we had to divorce ourselves from our contemporary understanding of monasticism, in all its outward expressions, to try not to miss the originality and vulnerability of these early Christians, who as pioneers had no foreknowledge as to how their lives would develop as they responded to what was, for them, 'the call of God'… What we are looking for is the 'heart' of monastic spirituality and its application in our contemporary setting. As Merton goes on to say: 'We cannot do exactly as they did (the desert fathers and the celts) but we must be as thorough and as ruthless in our determination to break all spiritual chains, cast off the domination of alien compulsions, to find our true selves; to discover our inalienable spiritual liberty and use it to build on earth the Kingdom of God. (Skinner, 1996, p. 1)[91]

This opening statement reveals two main influences and the spiritual 'spine' running through Skinners new monasticism, the desert fathers and their accompanying literature

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[90] Stringfellow was a lay theologian, lawyer and social activist. Based in the US, he was mainly active in the nineteen sixties and seventies.
[91] I accessed this seminar paper via a 1996 publication by the Northumbria Community.

and the historical Christian tradition in Northumbria.[92] Skinner's new monasticism emerged from 'Christian desert literature' and was incarnated through the memory of the Irish/Anglo-Saxon Christian tradition of Northumbria, falling into Flanagan's third generation of new monasticism. Other than suggesting that new monastics are not cloistered monks and nuns, there is evidence of less suspicion towards traditional monasticism than in Gardiner, but Skinner suggests no attempt at renewing traditional monasticism.

Skinner goes on to say that:

> There are also present today those of us who have responded to that 'call'...and who have found ourselves in a Christian context which defies definition and coherence, yet in some way only makes sense within the monastic tradition, and we are not alone...William Stringfellow in his book...describes the characteristics of what he calls an 'emerging confessing movement in Western Christianity: 'Dynamic and erratic, spontaneous and radical, audacious and immature, committed if not altogether coherent, ecumenically open and often experimental, visible here and there, now and then, but unsettled institutionally. Almost Monastic in nature, but most of all...enacting a fearful hope for human life in society. (Skinner, 1992, p. 2)

Like Gardiner, Mobsby and Flanagan, Skinner, through the lens of critical theory, notes with regularity, the impact of post-modernism on both society and the Church. Yet, Skinner goes on to highlight alterative spiritualities that may mimic new monasticism. He criticises the 'new age movement', including alternative spiritualities and their use within a Christian context:

> The new age movement, with its 'alternative everything's,' is calling to people to find 'an alternative spirituality' to that which we have experienced in the western world. But involved in this call is also the call to worship a different God...And while the altar

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[92] When my late wife and I applied to test out our vocation to new monasticism under the stewardship of Skinner, he gave us Thomas Merton's book: *Wisdom of the Desert* and told us to reflect on it for over a year.

may look familiar, and the liturgy sound the same, the worship will only lead to a

greater manifestation of evil disguised as 'good'.... (Skinner, 1992, p. 6)[93]

3.10 Developing theologies within new monasticism

Gardiner's foundation for his new monastic vision is borrowed from Bonhoeffer's concept of

Christ being the *Cantus Firmus*,[94] from which 'counterpoints'[95] may develop. 'Such living

would allow for and even rejoice in the possibility of a community able to maintain

difference within a unity assured by varying relatedness to the *cantus firmus* of Jesus Christ'

(Gardiner, 2018, p. 76). Gardiner's theological framework for new monasticism and other

such movements shapes the possibility for Christians to live within a fragmented society.

Another borrowed term from Bonhoeffer, that Gardiner uses, is 'religion-less society'.

Gardiner alludes to the fact that a society in which religion seems void, allows for a theology

in seeing Christ in all. 'Christ is the *cantus firmus* in which every fragment holds together'

(Gardiner, 2018, p. 76). Gardiner suggests that 'theology learns many things from exactly

the same places as the secular world. For theology, God is the Creator, revealed in all things'

(Thompson, Pattison and Thompson, 2008, p. 165). Skinner also claims that, 'we all,

believers and non-believers, share the same map as we all live in the same world with the

same distractions and voices etc' (Skinner, 1993, p. 1).

Gardiner expands on a concept of a 'theology of participation' that sees Christ in the

Gospels as being acted upon by worldly events. He moves on to suggest that this is a

requirement for the Church to be acted upon by the world's sufferings. Participating within

what Gardiner calls the 'polyphony of Christ'; all Christians enter a living exchange between

Father, Son and Spirit. Both Gardiner and Mobsby concur that an explicit notion that

Christian community should mirror a Trinitarian *Perichoresis*[96] - a concept that focuses more

on participation in 'someone' rather than in 'something', a kind of 'indwelling'. 'If the

community is to perform the polyphony to which Christ calls them, then it must be a

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[93] Skinner had the Scottish new age community The Findhorn Community in mind, in comparison to the Northumbria Community when making this point.
[94] Cantus firmus in music is a melody used as the basis for a polyphonic composition.
[95] In music, the technique of entering a melody or melodies in conjunction with another
[96] *Perichoresis* is a term that describes the relationship of the Trinity. Gardiner joins others in using the term to also describe human relations.

participative polyphony that takes part in the life of Christ and in the otherness of life in the world beyond the church' (Mobsby, 2012, pp. 26-28; Gardiner, 2018, p.62):

> That Christian community, the Church, is a community of participation is at the root of new monasticism...The community of God, the Trinity, is not only a model for growing healthy and life-giving community, it is also an invitation to participate in relationship and purpose. (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, pp. 38-9)

Mobsby continues by suggesting that as we try to align ourselves with God's perfect love, we are also sent in this love. Mobsby suggests this is the core of new monasticism (Mobsby and Berry, 2014. p. 39). Both Mobsby and Gardiner would agree with the radical theologian Peter Rollins, arguing for the truth of Christianity being found in experience alone, following a social constructivism epistemology – In the extreme, there is a hint of a contemporary form of iconoclasm[97] (Rollins, 2006, p. 56; Mobsby, 2012, p. 35). 'The performing of this polyphony has never been anything other than a persistent encounter of divine epiphanies and a gathering together of their fragments' (Gardiner, 2018, p. 77).

Skinner contributes to the theological debate within of new monasticism with his four points:

1. Divine Concern: 'an urgent desire to get to know the Lord more deeply.' He claims that 'All true spiritual renewal begins with an urgent desire for God...no matter how 'good', no matter how 'blessed', is lacking: we are not truly getting to know God.'

2. Strategic Retreat: 'To retreat is to remove ourselves as far as possible from the normal, and every day, responsibilities that we share. The purpose is to give more time to seeking the Lord in prayer, meditation and study. This is a time to reflect on God, and a time of self-examination. This is practical repentance; for a deliberate decision to re-order our priorities.'

3. Self-Denial: Skinner's concept of self-denial is sourced from the desert fathers; he goes on to stress the importance of receiving support from another 'further down the spiritual road' in discerning our way through our inner world. He makes a

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[97] Iconoclasm is the destruction or hostility of visual representations.

distinction between some who may be called to live a 'desert vocation' and those that are called to live temporarily in periods in the 'desert' as vacations: 'Anyone who feels called to a desert vocation must be willing to give up all opportunities for success, whether they are sacred or secular. Vocation...is not jumping onto a spiritual bandwagon.'

4. Resistance of Evil: Skinner suggests that one does not have to be very long into a desert vocation to become aware of the level of evil present in the world and in our consciousness. 'That is why the desert is never a 'sickly' attempt to escape from life and its complications, or indeed ourselves...our prayer becomes our protest; this is the beginnings of intercession. Skinner uses two types of darkness in people's lives, one that originates from sin and one that makes one feel that God is absent for no reason. Found within the Northumbria Community Rule is a quote from an anonymous monk from the monastery of Patmos. 'Those that lean on Jesus' breast hear the heartbeat of God (Skinner, 1992).

Despite Skinner's, 'withdrawal', into 'self' at the 'cultural turn', it is clear on his discussions concerning the 'landscape of the heart', it is not a selfish withdrawal, but something out of a necessity for others. 'We need a map for the (landscape of the heart) to see the way we understand our relationship with, ourselves, others and God' (Skinner, 1993, p. 1).

In this way, it becomes what Mobsby and Gardiner refer to as a 'theology of participation'. Flanagan, enters the debate with this notion as she suggests, 'One learns that without coming home to oneself one cannot be prepared for meeting and embracing creation and other human beings' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 6).

Flanagan's methodology of metaphoric exploration as opposed to more sociological and philosophical probing seems to allow for a less 'aggressive' retrieval from tradition and foundation. As a result, Flanagan's addition to the theological debate centres on 'encounter', creating a holistic theological environment, focused through the grace of solitude. It suggests a theology, were 'scripture and traditions of faith are less like rule books, more like a school of desire' (Thompson, Pattison and Thompson, 2008, p. 162). Flanagan's retrieval is in contrast to Gardiner, who displays critical analysis, or 'interrogative' approach - leading to a more 'imperative' theology, a 'theology of authority and command, whose main point is to articulate the summons of God and what our ethical

response should be' (Thompson, Pattison and Thompson, 2008, p. 161). Flanagan seems to reflect a closer theological texture to Skinner, albeit, having a slightly 'softer feel':

> Solitude is a quality of personhood that facilities singularity of purpose, through coming to know one's unique name. This is not just a matter of finding an acceptable and satisfying blend of involvements in life...solitude is a space...to discover...what is utterly original and uniquely woven into the fabric of one's being. (Flanagan, 2014, p. 4)

3.11 Monasticism for all

One emergent theme within new monasticism seems to be a notion of 'monasticism for all'. For Mobsby, he suggests that new monasticism, as an answer to the question 'How should we live? - has benefits for, not just the practitioners, but for the whole Church. Through a relational commitment to build Christian ecclesial communities, Mobsby argues that it will go on to provide new forms of 'catechesis and discipleship', within a given context - birthing new 'mature expressions of church' (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, p. 16).

Flanagan aligns her new monastic vision alongside Raimundo Panikkar's concept of 'monkhood' (Panikkar, 1984) a concept that sees a monastic archetype existing in all humans – allowing for inter-religious and spiritual dialogue within new monasticism (Flanagan, 2014, p. 15).

Gardiner suggests, 'This (worldly monasticism) will adopt the best of ancient disciplines, many of which retain rich value in contemporary society, but clothe them in no vestments 'other than those worn by the human family' and inhabit a monastery 'without walls other than those of the entire planet' (Gardiner, 2018, p.23).

Skinner, prior to the turn of the twenty first century, whilst acknowledging the benefits of monastic spirituality for all, suggested that there may be a distinction with those that saw new monasticism as a 'vocation' and those that saw it as a 'vacation' (Skinner, 1992).

3.12 New monastic language

Flanagan highlights the lives of six women spanning more than seventeen hundred years, plotting a diachronic journey of solitude throughout history. Flanagan claims that the new monasticism movement is unified by an appreciation of the role of solitude as a new

spiritual attentiveness that reaches beyond 'enlightenment anchored certainty', allowing a rich variety of expression to emerge in various contexts.

Flanagan's book, *Embracing Solitude*, is an attempt at providing a heuristic handbook for those engaged in contemporary new monasticism. Flanagan's exploration for the existence of new monasticisms is formed by highlighting the voices of contemporary new monastics, which remain conflictive and varied. I would suggest that the exclusion of her chapter 'survey of new monasticism', would not diminish any of the heuristic qualities of the book as a handbook for Christians associated with any new movement within a 'cultural turn', nor would it have reduced in anyway the 'attentive inquiry' into the diachronic journey of solitude throughout the ages. It suggests, what I have referred to in the introduction to this thesis, to what extent is new monasticism imposed?

We see an 'imposed' notion also within Gardiner. Gardiner's vision and practice of the Iona Community being a form of new monasticism, yet the Iona Community as a body, does not identify itself as new monastic.[98] In this way, new monasticism is being 'imposed' onto a pre-existing Christian movement, a re-contextualisation. Although the 'imposing' is carried out by a community member, it offers a further context for the Iona Community to engage within new monasticism as a whole.[99]

Gardiner offers a possible cause for this seemingly disconnected relationship between the Iona community and monasticism:

> The Community attracted criticism for being hapless romantics playing at being monks and were accused of being 'halfway towards Rome and halfway towards Moscow. MacLeod defended the project asserting that they only sought to remain part of the world in which we find ourselves and yet not be of it. We have definitely barred the cloistered life. (Gardiner, 2018, p. 18)

What both Flanagan and Gardiner seem to show is that new monasticism is a contemporarily imposed term on a movement of the Spirit that has been going, for

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[98] Other than reference to the 'common life', there is no reference to new monasticism on the website of the Iona Community.
[99] There seems to be no discussion as of yet between Gardiner's book and the Iona Community, other than various articles written by Gardiner in the Iona Community magazine.

Gardiner, since Pentecost, and, for Flanagan, since the emergence of the desert fathers and mothers.

Between 1992 and 1994, the Northumbria Community published its community 'Rule' and daily prayer book. As the Community acknowledges, it was the publication of this book that saw a 'growth explosion' in membership of the Community. In this way the language developed through an encounter of transformation for Skinner and his family had been moulded into the cultural fabric; a shared language of the Northumbria Community to which others could 'graft' their own personal narratives in a corporate display – Skinner was experimenting with theological transferability.

Mobsby develops a new monastic language that reflects a 'universality' of vision and practice. He sets out a systematic development of practice, from founding aspirations, development of spiritual practices, periods of refinement, virtue, and all lived out through the rhythm of life within the 'DNA of total living' (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, p. 73). His handbook clearly reflects the Fresh Expressions of Church in tailoring monastic spiritual practice for the masses, allowing for greater engagement and help in forming new Christian ways of discipleship.

In his 2010 publication, *New Monasticism as fresh Expression of Church*, Mobsby provides a framework for new monasticism that sees three forms emerge: giving rise to a new language that differs from traditional monasticism.[100] The first form sees people, inspired by monks and nuns, interpret God's mission as breaking down the barriers between the 'sacred' and 'ordinary', 'as there are no places where God is not'. This is what Mobsby refers to as a Benedictine re-monking of the church.[101] Mobsby includes the Northumbria Community within this first cohort and my own work and life within Monos.[102] The second form finds inspiration from the friar tradition[103]. Like the first form, in that they too 'gather for worship and action', but instead of dispersing back to their homes, this second group make their home within 'particular contexts' where traditional forms of church are making

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[100] Mobsby seems to be referring to traditional monasticism as those who are part of a cloistered life within the institutional church.

[101] Although Mobsby does not reference this term, Stuart Murray Williams, a theologian and Baptist minister, uses the term 're-monking', to argue that new monasticism might find clearer synergy with the Anabaptist movement (a peasant uprising in sixteenth century Germany against feudalism and social injustice) than with traditional monastic expressions.

[102] Monos is an organisation and Community that I direct. Started in 2005, It has an educational ethos in 'fostering a monastic wisdom within society', through conferences, workshops, publications and advisor roles for those engaged within the new monastic movement.

[103] Mobsby is here referring to the mendicant reforms, including the Dominican, and Franciscan orders.

little impact. 'They are as committed to contemplation and charismatic as the first group. The vision here follows the example of the Celtic wandering monastics, the Franciscans and the Dominicans and is concerned to re-friar the Church...Both (groups) draw on contemplative spirituality reframed for the twenty-first century' (Mobsby, 2010, p. 14).

There is an important inference here between the first two groups that see the first group reduced to an inability to 'impact' from 'home', in contrast to those who are seen as physically moving towards areas of need. This unfolds below in Mobsby viewing the Benedictine and Franciscan traditions as dialectic, a one-dimensional perspective in one tradition being 'static' and one tradition as 'being on the move'.

Mobsby's third group carries a vision that 'combines both the monk and friar models', into which he places himself and his former Community, Moot. The Moot Community became a new monastic community in 2003. Ian Mobsby, the leader at the time was invited by Steven Croft, then Archbishops' Missioner and Fresh Expressions team leader to consider developing a 'rhythm of life', a new monastic way of 'doing' Christian discipleship. Mobsby goes on to define this third group in a binary way that draws from the so-called 'monkish' group one, in creating a 'sacred space' for people to enter and the establishment of an 'intentional community', then to the 'friar-like' group two, in then moving out to seek 'social justice and transformation'. Mobsby claims that it is from within these three groups, that 'the language of new monasticism' exists (Mobsby, 2010, pp. 14-5). Both Mobsby and Skinner place an importance on personal and corporate liturgy, which sees prayers emerging as reflections of the 'encounters' with God on the journey. The shortness in length of the Northumbria Community's mid-day prayers is a direct result of Skinner working as a window cleaner during the early years prior to the formation of the Community. The liturgy needed to be short, so that it could be said whilst up a ladder; new monastic forms of liturgy are created from and within the 'messiness of life' (Mobsby, 2010, p. 15).

What we find in these four interlocutors is a new monastic language that has at its centre, the entwined fabric of life with theological reflection. For this to be authentic, it should be reflecting each other, in vision and practice, glued together with a Spirit-given grace of diverse 'charisms of particularly'.

3.13 Old but new: Retrieving and embracing the past or not? personal monasticism

Perhaps the greatest service postmodern fragmentation has offered to the Christian community is to have broken the Constantinian linkage between religion and society'. Gardiner places his form of new monasticism, which he calls 'worldly monasticism', with the fragmented epiphanies of a generation of humans who have lived new melodies - a 'counter-cultural epiphany' to the 'homogenisation of fragments' by Constantine. (Gardiner, 2018, p.135)

Gardiner follows the same pattern as Flanagan, Skinner and Mobsby, in constructing a historical tradition of new monasticism through a linkage of human encounters with God that have happened through struggles and tensions within a 'Constantinian' Church[104].

Flanagan chose the metaphor of 'solitude' to retrieve a sense of linkage between contemporary new monasticism and historical encounters of monastic reinvention. 'The surge of interest in spiritual practices often based on personal enrichment and well-being...The Silent Takeover of Religion...explores the ways that the new public interests in the arts of spiritual practice is being exploited for commercial gain'[105] (Flanagan, 2014, p. 33). Flanagan uses a hermeneutical key (solitude) and hagiography (lives of women) to underpin her engagement with historical encounters with women in solitude:

Thus the horizon within which the texts of women's lives and writings...will be read allows us to engage with the world in front of the text wherein these women are precursors to the solitude movement being described by contemporary women spiritual writers in the penultimate chapter and the testimony of Beverly Lanzetta with which the book concludes. (Flanagan, 2014, p. xxii)

Flanagan seems to be suggesting that the human encounter with 'intentional' solitude is a hermeneutical key to which we discern a diachronic relationship between the 'ancients' and contemporary spiritual seekers. In this sense, the 'lived experience' of new monasticism, pre-dates the term itself, i.e., new monasticism is a synchronic (contemporary) understanding of the 'monastic archetype' that has been in existence throughout time,

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[104] Within the Christian tradition, Emperor Constantine, is seen as the one who married the state with religion. In a post-modern turn, the impact of religion within the state is reduced considerably.
[105] Flanagan's references for these comments come from two books: *The Spirituality Revolution* by David Tracey and *The Silent Takeover of Religion,* by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King.

allowing the human to engage with the 'authentic source of being', encountered through solitude (Flanagan, 2014, p. xxiii):

> It is an apophatic approach to scholarship, where the hidden mystery of a text is savoured and received; rather than a cataphatic engagement where the text is deconstructed so as to yield up its treasure...this work might be described as an appreciative inquiry.[106] 'This type of research approach focuses on seeds of life within the field of inquiry. (Flanagan, 2014, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

Flanagan's 'solitude is not simply a matter of geographic isolation in a deserted place, or the withdrawal from the everyday demands of shopping, cooking, travelling, cleaning, working...but rather having the courage to strip off the mask of conventional living in favour of presenting to the world the true face of one's inner identity, it takes commitment to find this true self' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 9).

At the end of the chapter 'reflections on solitude', Flanagan, even before her literature survey of new monasticism, makes a comment that implicitly and subtly disconnects solitude with new monasticism. Flanagan suggests:

> In true solitude one finds one is attentive to a presence in one's inner core that may often be different from how others name one's personal essence. In solitude, the quieting of inner and outer critics allows one to let go of the egoic self and to become present to the most profound truth of one's being. (Flanagan, 2014, p. 10)

How much of the language and definition of new monasticism finds its origins from within the 'outer and inner critic', an association to some form of the egoic self? This would imply that the 'lived experience' of new monasticism needs a certain amount of longevity before it can have some understanding and discernment of itself in relation to both the ego and the

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[106] Based on work by David Cooperrider, in Cooperrider and Whitney, *Appreciate Inquiry*, Flanagan uses this form of qualitative research to frame her own research. It's a form of enquiry that is less concerned with problem solving, but more based on dialogue, engagement in mystery and valuing different particularities, across time, culture and space.

Spirit calling. In this way solitude becomes the 'ascetic renunciation' that new monasticism may adopt to find an embrace of and trajectory away from ego. Does this notion become a spiritual methodological dilemma in intuitive inquiry?

Similar to Mobsby, Gardiner criticises traditional monasticism as he suggests that a polyphony of Christian community should see the 'love of God, experienced and expressed...concretised in their choosing to live the values of heaven and by binding themselves in solidarity with the earth, rejecting any flight from it that sought only to secure their own purity and salvation' (Gardiner, 2018, p .58). It's as if Mobsby and Gardiner are still arguing Martin Luther's claims, against institution, rather than listening to the voices of engaged humanity that is still being lived within the (albeit failed in parts) institution. They seem keen to busy themselves at defending new monasticism against traditional monasticism, in dismissing aspects of monasticism that challenge or seem counter to the work of new monasticism.

Flanagan, in her reflections on 'new trends in religious experience in the West', continues with this debate on traditional and new monastic relations, by highlighting the Apostolic Letter by Pope John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*. Flanagan suggests, 'Monasticism (traditional) supports companionship in the spiritual journey and operates within the horizon of a 'spirituality of communion' that is a spirituality of closeness, 'being with', 'being amidst' others on the journey into God (Flanagan, 2014, p. 38). This suggests a positive engagement between traditional and new monasticism, a need for human contact between people both within and outside the cloister. Flanagan continues:

Those who are actively involved in reading the shape and contours of contemporary spirituality find themselves drawn into a self-implicating exploration that requires the virtues of those who take up spiritual disciplines. These virtues include...the willingness to set aside one's familiar maps of the spiritual journey in order to go on pilgrimage in new territories of the soul. (Flanagan, 2014. p. 42)

By self-implicating, Flanagan seems to be suggesting that within the world of spirituality we are moving towards what Ted Smith suggests as 'mixed allegories rather than pure symbols', the world of 'metaphor' has arrived as a way of describing identity and experience.

'Becoming familiar with the language of 'metaphor' is one of the central challenges of those hoping to discern the meaning of the variety of modalities in which contemporary spirituality is expressed' (Smith, 2004, p. 89; Flanagan, 2014, p. 34).[107]

Flanagan clearly breaks from methods adopted by both Mobsby and Gardner in setting out the problem before offering a solution, a prescriptive answer to a contemporary dilemma. Flanagan's sweep of new monasticism within a global setting, (Flanagan, 2014, pp. 12-32), clearly demonstrates her encounter with an organic and inchoate movement, littered with variety. Despite the break from Mobsby, Flanagan chooses to use Mobsby's words as a way of contextualising the contemporary arrival of new monasticism, 'as a movement new monasticism is not coherent or united, it operates in a low-key way, and generally at grassroots level' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 18)[108].

Within the language of new monasticism, mission and social justice seem central to many new monastic expressions.

> Brother Richard Withers who could not join us because of his vows of stability and commitment to only travel by bicycle, sent a statement in which he called us to remember the 'irrelevancy of the monastic life'. Monasticism is not a tool by which we change the world, he wrote, but a way to freedom. The essential thing which Richard would not have us forget is that the evil which we seek to resist is inside of us. Most of the great evil that has been done by human beings has been done to 'save' the world from evil. The monk, Richard says, does not believe salvation is any different from transformation. The only way to save anything is to abandon ourselves to God. (Wilson-Hartgrove, 2004, pp. 3-4)[109]

The comment from Brother Richard is in stark contrast to the mission and social justice activity that many participants at the meeting would have signed up to. The concept of being irrelevant, to participants of the 'cultural turn', is alien, in the sense that contextualisation being central to definition, leads one to becoming relevant within a

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[107] Flanagan does not reference Ted Smith, but Jack Finnegan and his book, *The Audacity of Spirit*.
[108] From Adams and Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition*, Canterbury Press, p. 55
[109] As mentioned in the literature review, this quote comes from a gathering in North America in 2004 of people interested in new monasticism. Brother Richard is a cloistered, traditional, monastic monk.

particular context. The conversation between traditional monasticism and new monasticism whether in the form of: historical engagement with traditions, that may include, what Flanagan describes as traditions without a 'current living loci' (Flanagan, 2014, p. 24), or contemporary engagement with 'living' monasticism, can seem contradictory. In some cases, the contradictions simply reflect two separate conversations, to which each party occasionally engages, like 'family resemblance'.

In this context, traditional monasticism is having a conversation with itself as to how to keep alive 'tradition' and 'charism' in a changing world, how far will the charism stretch in keeping linkage with the past, but also 'coming alongside' the world it engages? In this way, it is being 'purist' to tradition and heritage, but in dialogue with a pluralistic world.[110] The new monastic movement seems to be having a conversation, less with itself, but with anyone and anybody who can help make sense of its position in society and the church. The conversation seems to operate around answering a fundamental question, how then shall we live? The conversation then proceeds in a chaotic, sporadic, reactive and spontaneous multi-layered dialogue with many, dead or and alive.

Mobsby concludes his reflections on the Benedictine tradition with the statement that, 'with its communitarian focus on love and life, on living out life together as an ecclesial community with and to the world, challenges the dualism of many contemporary expressions of the Christian faith' (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, p. 24). Mobsby does not expand but, set to the backdrop of the rest of his book, I suggest an inference that he is referring to a dualism between the 'sacred' and the 'ordinary'. Despite this attempt to argue against dualism, there is evidence, within the new monastic movement, in the retrieval of various Christian traditions, dualism exists.

The relationship between mission and community seems to oscillate between a dualism in its theory and conception yet forming a closer connectivity in practice. For Mobsby, in his 2014 publication, *A New Monastic Handbook*, he expands on his previous work in forming a language of new monasticism: monks and nuns as reflecting a Benedictine flavour of new monasticism, friars, as more socially engaging and his third option monk-friar, as a combination of both traditions.

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[110] The Cistercian Monk Michael Casey has recently written on the topic of monasticism's engagement with a pluralistic consumer driven world, through its nurturing of novices from this world.

He reduces the Benedictine tradition to a series of ecclesial communities, founded on love for each other through a shared life, lived 'with and to the world...The world is not a broken God-less place, and the human body is not nasty, sinful thing...we have been created in the image of God as an original blessing that, yes, acknowledges brokenness, but where we are firmly loved by God' (Mobsby and Berry, 2014. p. 24). This concluding statement comes after, attributing the Benedictine tradition to the forming of the essential fabric of the Western world in birthing: education, health care, welfare, libraries, patronage of the arts, and community cohesion' (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, p. 19).

Mobsby continues:

For Francis, being spiritual community meant obedience to Christ and participation in the world...it was a radical form of spiritual community, concerned with engagement with the world, entering its brokenness rather than creating monastic withdrawal. This approach to life is centred on contemplation and action'. Francis 'illustrates the gospel values of loving your enemies, seeking reconciliation and common humanity. (Mobsby and Berry, 2014, pp. 27-29)

Skinner reveals a priest friend who not only introduced him to:

> Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 'monasticism', the 'mystical tradition' and 'the importance of social justice and inclusion of people different to ourselves', the replacement of a megalomaniac God with a God of unconditional love, present even in the most intense suffering and, finally who introduced the idea of Skinner becoming a priest. (Skinner, 2017, pp. 23-8)

3.14 Summary and conclusions

The new monastic world is littered with murmurings and prescriptive texts suggesting a preferred way of 'doing' new monasticism: new monasticism is in the air and the rumour of it is spreading throughout the Christian Church.

By way of summarising, the Rutba House movement seems to detach itself from various so-called post-modern ideologies, like consumerism and aesthetic popularism, yet

unconsciously embraces other traits of post-modernism, in constructing new monasticism from post-modernism, as a synthesising apparatus. In this sense, traditional monasticism seems to be seen as part of an old classical capitalistic framework, left by the roadside, in the reshaping of a new type of monasticism. Is new monasticism part of a larger protest against the enculturation of post-modernism into the Church and its lack of speed to recover its missional qualities as a result?

There seems to be an attempt at subverting a dominant culture, (post-modernism) at the same time as this dominant culture is facilitating our ability to subvert elements that are residue in traditional monasticism that do not fit into a new vision. In short, who is driving new monasticism?

McEntee and Bucko clearly makes a departure from the rigour of North American Evangelical Biblical exegesis in any new monastic vision, turning to a global answer in humanity's teleological quest for an interconnected spiritual wholeness. Even though McEntee and Bucko throughout their manifesto point out to practitioners the need for guidance from spiritual directors etc., it's what seems to be emerging behind the scenes that is of interest here. I sense for McEntee and Bucko , a balancing act between responsibility for one's own spiritual maturity, ability to borrow and adapt advice and nourishment from anywhere in the world, yet the need for tradition, emerging through shared wisdom and experience. The two seem to be needed in order to offer framed critical discourse.

The work of McEntee and Bucko seems to echo what Harrold suggests for new monasticism in that it can coexist within the canonical remit of the Church, whilst at the same time occupying a new place within the Christian tradition. We see interplay between the culture of departure and the culture of arrival – both being subverted whilst being subservient to, simultaneously. It begs the question; to what extent does McEntee and Bucko's new monasticism cling to so-called, traditionalism?

In regard to new monasticism in the UK, we witness a diversity of expression and character, where practice seems to be central to its connectivity with traditional monasticism. Varying degrees of interaction with post-modernity can be seen, with the sense that uncritical reference is made to it, in order to claim legitimacy in the particular group or vision. Whether the various new monastic groups see themselves as relationally diachronic or synchronically influenced with monastic practice, is very much dependant on the group's

own consciousness of itself in relation to history and in some cases like the Northumbrian communities to their geographical environment as well.

In both cases, it is evident that we are witnessing 'liberating' and celebratory' encounters with God through 'particularity'. New monasticism seems to have emerged within this environment.

What the literature review has shown is that I am entering a dialogue with a phenomenon called new monasticism that is emitting an espoused theology that is revealing a partial theological 'transformation' yet is at the same time trying to find theological 'transferability' before being fully formed in and through Christ. Regardless of the feelings of a particular new monastic group towards traditional monasticism, I would argue that the movement should listen to what the traditional monastic community consider through the voice of Noker Wolf, that new monasticism lacks years of history and development. In some way for those that see new monasticism as solely a diachronic development, this advice still stands, as one still needs to mature into the spiritual life.

One way of mitigating the lack of years, is to allow new monasticism to continue to emerge through the lived experience of the practitioners, holding what is written about new monasticism' lightly'. After being sent to the 'deserts' of North Northumberland by the Bishop of Newcastle, John Skinner went to see his spiritual director Br Roland from the Community at Roslin, Edinburgh. He took his plans for a new monasticism, Roland took them from John and ripped them up, telling John to go and live his vision quietly for twenty-five years before writing about it.[111]

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[111] John told me this story in the spring of 2002.

Chapter 4. Northumbria Community

4.1 Introduction

In the third chapter, through reflecting upon the main published works on new monasticism that emerged out of the literature review, I started to discern and explore various themes. Whilst allowing the authors to speak from within their own 'works', I then moved on to conclude the chapter by allowing the authors to become interlocutors, thus allowing a debate to occur.

One aspect that consistently remained central to the published works, whether explicitly or implicitly, was the relationship between forms of 'old' or 'traditional' monasticism, with new expressions and experiments of new forms of monasticism. This often manifest itself around themes pertaining to 'power' and 'authority', more specially, around institution and attempts of extracting monastic practice from institutional forms, both historically and contemporary.

A further theme of 'belonging' was discerned and was constant throughout all the published works being considered. Flanagan suggested that new monastic practice and consequently, a sense of belonging to a movement, centred around a metaphoric exploration of silence than runs throughout Christian history (Flanagan, 2014a). That contemporary new monastics are the daughters and sons of all those Christians who had historically already responded to a call from the Holy Spirit to withdraw and embrace silence as part of their Christian call on their lives. Here, Flanagan only hints at a monastic movement outside of 'institution', in a way, holding in tension the 'worn paths' of traditional with new forms of monasticism. In contrast, Gardiner is happy to dismantle and topple institutional forms of Christian expression and community, paving the way for new forms (Gardiner, 2018).

The third theme that I have discerned within the published work, particularly in Skinner is that of 'charism' (Skinner, 1992). In Skinner we see a version of new monasticism that suggests that any pursuit of a new monastic vocation should be accompanied with some aspect of 'cost or sacrifice', implying a certain charism in the Community that he birthed. This is modelled on the early writings on the Desert Fathers and Mothers, which we know informed much of Skinner's early work within the Northumbria Community.

As I move on to consider the Northumbria Community, I will identify and follow these key themes throughout this study in order to see whether or not these themes are as relevant in the lived experience of new monasticism as they are in published works.

4.2 The origins and development of the Northumbria Community

I have chosen to introduce the reader to an initial overview of the significant developments in the life of the Community introducing the various leaders and key themes. The overview is constructed from the Community's website, published in 2015[112]. The chapter will then move forward in looking at other sources, particularly through the eyes of leaders, in building a holistic historical narrative of the Community: the way it communicates itself, its own understanding of itself over the length of its existence, and what others say about the Community.

4.3 The 2015 Northumbria Community website[113]

The history starts with the title, *The Origins of the Northumbria Community*.

We are a dispersed Christian Community scattered across the world yet united in our commitment to a daily rhythm of prayer and a common Rule of Life in saying Yes to Availability to God and others and Yes to intentional Vulnerability before God and others. (Community, 2015c)

The origins of the Community are attributed to the emergence of relationships in the late seventies and early eighties in North Northumberland between John and Linda Skinner and Andy Raine.[114] 'Here God planted the seeds of vision and vocation in their hearts that bore fruit in the ideas, images, metaphors, and concepts that were foundational to the ethos and spirituality of what was to become the Northumbria Community' (Community, 2015c). These ideas seemed to be formed in creative workshops and gatherings around

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[112] https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/story-of-the-community/ There is an assumption that Roy Searle, Trevor Miller and Pete Askew who were all leaders at the time of the publication of the website gave approval to the narrative as told through the website.

[113] Some leaders are covered in the next chapter on interviews. Roy Searle, Trevor Miller, John Skinner and Pete Askew are all included in this part of the narrative as all speak from a position of leadership, whether past or present, and none were interviewed for various reasons.

[114] John Skinner is an Anglican Priest, married to Linda and have four children. Andy at the time was single and was a self-declared missional itinerant who had befriended John and Linda and at points lived with them.

what the Community called its Annual Easter workshops.[115] These workshops have gone on to form the opportunity at Easter for the renewal of vows[116] by members of the Community.

According to the website, in the mid-eighties John and Linda were released to pursue spiritual direction in the context of a 'contemplative calling' under the name Nether Springs Trust. At a similar time, Roy Searle had founded a group called Northumbria Ministries whose Christian mission was to the 'ancient kingdom of Northumbria' (Community, 2015c). It was a merger in 1990 of these two entities, initially as the Nether Springs Trust, that went on to form the Northumbria Community (Community, 2015c). The website claims it was unplanned and spontaneous and that through this merger emerge the founding questions that the Community to this day still asks of itself and on behalf of others. 'Who is it that you seek? How then shall we live? and How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?, began to shape the thinking and understanding of God's call on our lives alone and together' (Community, 2015c).

The history then moves on to introduce some of the main spiritual themes and accompanying monastic figures that shape the nature and ethos of the Community. A shared Celtic link with Northumbria, the saints and scholars of Ireland, the wisdom tradition of the desert fathers and the 'mixed life'[117] of the Franciscans, all contributed to the ethos of the Community. "A blending of the cell and coracle,"[118] representing the former as the

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[115] These gatherings often occurred in church halls dotted around Northumberland. Invitees were the people who had gathered around John and Linda Skinner and Andy Raine during the late seventies for spiritual direction and friendship.

[116] The vows of the Community are to availability and vulnerability to God and others.

[117] I assume that what is referred to here is a binary relationship between a contemplative and a missional aspect of Franciscan spirituality. This notion has currency in the Church of England's manifesto of new monasticism.

[118] The 'cell' and 'coracle' to this day remain two key metaphors in the ethos of the Community. The coracle, a small wooden framed boat, often for one person, is borrowed from monastic writings from early Irish monasticism, often representing the journeying of Irish monastic figures who set sail on the ocean in order to find a 'desert place' in the ocean. During the early nineties, with a resurgence of interest in so-called 'Celtic Christianity' particularly from within what has become the 'emergent church movement', we see the use of these Irish monastic stories to represent a missional dimension to Celtic Christianity. This has culminated in a book published in 2003 called *How the Irish Saved Civilisation* by Tomas Cahill. Wooding, Dumville and O'Loughlin have all questioned the impact of Irish monastic figures during the early medieval period, instead finding greater currency in an ascetical inspiration for voyaging, cultural constraints and a nuanced relationship of borrowing ideas and resources between mainland Europe and Celtic regions in the West. See, O'Loughlin, 1994, Wooding, 2000 and Dumville, 2002. The cell is borrowed from desert father literature, particularly a desert father saying by Abbot Moses from a book called *Wisdom of the Desert* by Thomas Merton. "Go sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything." (Merton, 1961) John Skinner went on to compile his own modern version of this saying in a story called 'Jordie the Monk'. The story centres on the young monk Jordie being told to keep going back to his cell by his Abbot despite how he was feeling and the fear that seemed to emerge in him. Eventually over time Jordie 'carved' out a way for living that centred on time in his cell, work, prayer, and community living.

"monastery" a time alone in prayer and contemplation and the latter as "mission" including engagement with the world, all formed the language that has helped sustain the Community going forward in handing on of its tradition (Community, 2015c).

As early pioneers in the new monastic movement, the Community has intentionally explored the meaning of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prophetic words: The renewal of the church will come from a new type of monasticism, which only has in common with the old an uncompromising allegiance to the Sermon on the Mount. It is high time people banded together to do this. (Community, 2015c)

The story continues to what the website describes as *The Hetton Years 1992-1998*. (Community, 2015c)[119]

> The foundational lecture series entitled 'Internal Émigrés' held in Old Bewick church[120] over the winter months of 1991-92 purposefully articulated the Monastic spirituality of Northumbria and our own calling to identify with the monastic tradition. Our desire was to explore "a new inner monasticism of the heart" by drawing from the ancient wisdom of "old" monasticism; respecting and consulting with traditional monastic values in order to live those insights outside of the cloister. (Community, 2015c)[121]

The website goes on to mention 'many significant things coming together.' A Mother House was found in Northumberland called Hetton Hall for the emerging Community. John and his family moved into an annexe at Hetton Hall, whilst Roy and his family moved to a house in nearby Wooler. Andy became a permanent resident on Holy Island. It seemed that the catalyst for the 'explosion' of interest in the Community came from an amalgamation of

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[119] https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/story-of-the-community/hetton-years-1992-1998/ This page is still within the section of the Community website called 'Story of the Community' as found in the bibliography, including the same date of access, albeit under the different heading, Hetton Years 1992-1998.
[120] This is a church near Chatton, about seven miles from Hetton Hall that became a place of pilgrimage for some people who came to Hetton Hall on retreat.
[121] By way of reference, John Skinner's archetype for a new monastic vocation is contained within this lecture series. His lecture will be brought into this thesis in chapter 6, as I reflect upon my own journey into his new monastic vision. (Skinner, 1992)

these personal relationships and respective gifts, alongside the publication of the Community's prayer book in 1994 called *Celtic Daily Prayer* (Raine and Skinner, 1994; Community, 2015c). The book contained morning, midday and evening prayers along with some readings and reflections that people could follow throughout the year.

> 1994 saw the formal adoption of the name Northumbria Community as a way of differentiating between a trading arm of the Community and the charitable Trust set up to look after the governance of all Community activities. After helping in negotiations prior to the formal announcement of the Northumbria Community, 1994 also saw the arrival of Trevor and Freda Miller to the Community to test out their vocations as 'Priors' to the Mother House. (Community, 2015c)[122]

The website describes the fact that, in 1996, 260 people said, 'yes to Community,' which required over the next few years for greater governance to be developed to look after the growth of the Community. 'This period of learning and training coincided with Trevor being appointed to the leadership of the Community, initially alongside John and Roy, and at the end of 1997 succeeding John as Abbot to partner Roy Searle in overall Community leadership' (Community, 2015c).

> In January 1998, at Bradford Cathedral, John and Linda formally relinquished (to Trevor Miller and Roy Searle) the responsibility they shared for the Community in order to concentrate on pioneering the European vision of the Celtic arc, a spiritual connection from Turkey to Ireland. This became an original and distinct foundation tasked with taking the spirituality that formed and established Northumbria Community into Europe as John and Linda, together with Kevin and Ellen Grimley, travelled extensively throughout Europe researching this Celtic arc vision of Christian renewal in Europe. It was also a time of division, despair, bewilderment, and paralysis. George Lings[123] comments that "the Community is notable because it has survived

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[122] Trevor was a Baptist Minister from Scotland and his wife, Freda, is John Skinner's sister.
[123] See below for more details

what is still felt by some as a painful split among founders over divergence of vision
and inability to come to common discernment about it. (Community, 2015c)

The story then continues to what the website describes as, *The Hetton Years 1998-2010*.[124]

In 1999, after major re-evaluation and the painful task of putting our house in order,
the cry of our heart: 'Let your tender mercies come to us that we may live again'
became a reality once more. This sustained period of focused prayer led to a greater
openness and dependency upon God. This in turn led to further stability and growth
as the task of 'Building the new on foundations of old' and 'giving away that which is
not ours to keep' began to influence many, as people began connecting through the
creation and sale of our resources and publications. This was a time of renewed
impetus, 'a season of mission' as new initiatives, partnerships, music, dance, liturgy,
storytelling, creative arts, and writing began to be expressed at festivals, in groups and
gatherings all carrying the DNA of the Community throughout Europe and North
America. (Community, 2015c)

Having personally been involved in what the website describes as a 'time of division,
despair, bewilderment and paralysis,' I am surprised by the brevity of this narrative of
breakdown. When one considers the fact that this website history was published in 2015, it
gives seventeen years for the people involved to process, to reconcile feelings and
emotions, and to reflect more objectively upon the incident. There is also very little found in
the Community's newsletter *Caim*, within the period of the 'split', other than the need for
re-evaluation and transition. A brief commentary on the 'split' was given to an 'outsider'.
George Lings, founder of the Church Army Research Unit in Sheffield, was given open access
to the Northumbria Community between 2004-2006 after which he wrote the booklet,
Northumbria Community: Matching Monastery and Mission[125](Lings, 2006). According to

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[124] https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/story-of-the-community/hetton-years-1998-2010/
Found within the website page from the Community 'The Story of the Community'.
[125] See further on in the chapter for an overview of this booklet in contributing to constructing a history of the
Community.

the website, he went on to be influential in some major changes to the Community, including re-evaluating the Community values and vocation.

In 2003 the Community began an ongoing exploratory period of leadership development, described as:

> The most radical thing in the history of the Northumbria Community'. This involved a significant transition from leadership by the first generation to a shared leadership with following generations. This resulted in the appointment of a Senior Leadership group working alongside the Overseers[126] with a broader representation of Community Companions through a quarterly General Chapter. (Community, 2015c)

In 2007 the Community developed its novitiate program which focused on delivering more 'fully' the values and ethos of the Community to its membership. Another significant period in the history of the Community came in 2009, when due to 'the economic turndown the eighteen year lease on Hetton Hall was not to be renewed' (Community, 2015c). In 2009, the arrival of Pete and Catherine Askew seemed to be welcomed in helping the Community in this difficult time.[127] '…each taking on major responsibilities at the Mother House. Pete, already in senior leadership, was soon to become an Overseer[128] and tasked with project managing the whole transition from Hetton Hall to Acton Home Farm' (Community, 2015c).

> A liturgy of blessing and thanksgiving was shared as the Lease expired on 30 November 2010. Then we became engulfed in snow, unable to move, which halted the extensive building work needed at Acton and, with it, our intention of beginning with a New Year retreat. However, it was worth waiting for as in early February 2011, the new Nether Springs was open to offer heart, home and hospitality to all. (Community, 2015c)

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[126] Term given to those entrusted with maintaining ethos and values within the Community
[127] Pete, an Anglican Minister (now spiritual advisor to the Bishop of Newcastle) and Catherine, a Presbyterian Minister from the USA. They met and married in 2008 at Hetton Hall.
[128] A new aspect to leadership that was tasked with 'overseeing' ethos and maintaining of Community values in all aspects of the life of the Community.

The final instalment of the story of the Community as told from their website is called, *Transition and Acton Years*.[129]

> This gift to us of a new Mother House is an amazing thing, but it will need our collective commitment as a Community to make it a place of blessing for others. As 2011 began the buildings that had so recently been a building site soon became a place of welcome and home as many Companions, Friends, and visitors crossed the threshold of Nether Springs at Acton Home Farm. It was a new place, and yet somehow very familiar, a real sense of continuity, with the same people, same ethos, same heart. The rhythm of the day unfolded to the ringing of the same bell, but its sound filled a different space in what was a new and exciting chapter in our Community's life. (Community, 2015c)

The website clearly refers to the 'new place' as the new Mother House; this is a point of interest when we consider the interviews of current Community members, (see the next chapter) as it seems that there is a movement to reduce the nature of the Mother House from a central hub for the dispersed Community to a place of occasional retreat. In 2008, Miller writes in the *Caim*:

> However, it has to be acknowledged that 95% of our Companions cannot live the way the folk at the Mother House can. We cannot and must not divorce the Mother House and its daily life from the Community it represents. What the Mother House provides is an example, an icon of the principles needed for a new monastic spirituality to be real and authentic. These principles can then be adapted to each unique set of circumstances our Companions have to deal with. (Miller, 2008, p. 1)

The website also clearly states that despite moving to a new location, familiarity seems to be evident and a sense of 'continuity' from Hetton attained (Community, 2015c).

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[129] https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/story-of-the-community/transition-and-acton-years/ The page can be found within the Story of the Community

Between 2011 and 2012 the Community revised its novitiate programme along with a reorganisation of its Admin. According to the website, the main impetus for this change was to meet the type of and growth in numbers of people approaching the Community to be Companions and Friends. It seems evident that a typology of membership seemed to be growing from outside the UK, referred to as, 'scattered Community' (Community, 2015c), so the admin and novitiate programme needed to cater for people who could not readily come to Acton Farm for guidance. The novitiate programme developed through appointing a 'mentor' to each novice who would then guide them through a series of papers and reflections on the ethos and life of the Community.

Pete Askew, as Overseer in Residence, exercised specific responsibility for the oversight of the Mother House, as well as directing and managing all aspects of the transition process. Catherine Askew as Priest and Chaplain in Residence, guided the liturgical life of the Mother House, overseeing the programme of spiritual formation through retreats, mentoring, and training *in the 'new monasticism' through the Novitiate process* (Community, 2015c).

What seems evident in this brief historical overview of the Community is a correlation between growth in membership and the need to flex and shape the leadership model to cope with the growth, its administrational capacity, and its legal structure.

In July 2014, the Community changed its legal structure to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation – a new way of being a charity developed by the Charity Commission in the UK that provided wider scope and improved safeguarding for Trustees. (Community, 2015c)

Another growth area of the Community has been in its publications, although it is unclear whether this is a result of Community growth, pastoral support of membership or publishers request, probably a mixture.

Over the time since *Celtic Daily Prayer* was published in 1994, there have been four further publications. *Celtic Night Prayer* published in 1996, introduced various versions of Compline to their prayer book (Community, 1996). *Celtic Daily Prayer* published in 2000, was an attempt to bring together the last two books into one volume (Community, 2000). *Celtic*

Daily Readings published in 2001,[130] was an attempt to bring to the Community past readings and reflections[131] from its early days, when the Liturgy of the Community was published in a Filofax[132] and monthly readings posted to those who subscribed to them (Community, 2001). 'They were written to build up the Community's awareness and knowledge of the many issues affecting individual lives – and indeed what it means to be a community such as ours…' In 2015 after three years of compiling, two further volumes, *Celtic Daily Prayer Book 1: The Journey Begins* (Community, 2015a)and *Celtic Daily Prayer Book 2: Farther Up and Farther In* (Community, 2015b) were published to 'much acclaim' (Community, 2015c). These last two hardback publications expand the Community's Prayers to include various communion liturgies, a shabbat, seasonal liturgies, rites of passages including: birth, into adulthood, singleness, marriage, reaching mid-life, growing older, in difficult times, death, dying, bereavement and more monthly devotions.

The 'Way for Living',[133] was first published in a hand-written form with illustrations to accompany the text (Skinner and Raine, 1992). It was used as a template at many Community introductory weekends for those interested in journeying with the Community.[134] In terms of publishing the Rule, the Community came into some difficulties in copyright issues, particularly in relation to the illustrations that were photocopied from other publications. A text-only form was made available, then, between 2008-2010, a series of booklets was written and published in order to further 'unpack' the ethos and Way for Living of the Community for people interested in joining. Most were written by Trevor Miller, who also compiled the first novitiate programme. They include Dietrich Bonhoeffer's New Monasticism: A Central Influence, (Community, no date b) Introduction to Wisdom of the Celtic Saints, (Sellner, no date) Alone Together, (Community, no date a) The Heretical Imperative and Soul Friendship (Community, no date c).

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[130] This publication was dedicated to my late wife Clare Grimley who died just as it was going to print. The publication contains extracts from an unpublished diary of our honeymoon tracing Celtic monastic sites around Ireland. Our work over the course of our honeymoon in 1995, which lasted eight weeks living a campervan, had a large Impact on the Community's association with St Brendan and its consequent exploration of its mission across Europe (Community, 2001, pp. 92-95).

[131] Every day, the Community's liturgy contains three scripture passages, one from the Old Testament, one from the New Testament and a reading from one of the Psalms. These are accompanied by a brief refection on something that ties the scripture passages to some aspect of the Community' ethos and values.

[132] No longer available

[133] The 'Way for Living', or sometimes called the 'Rule of Life', of the Community has presented itself in many forms over the years.

[134] My father attended a Community men's retreat on the Isle of Iona in 1992 where the Rule was circulated for comments. I remember my father saying that he struggled to understand some words, but that the illustrations really helped convey to him the ethos of the Community.

One of the main 'vehicles' of communication between the Community leadership and its members and Companions, with opportunities to share stories amongst its membership, is through its quarterly publication *Caim*.[135]

4.4 Trevor Miller

In Miller's work on Bonhoeffer and new monasticism, he clearly distances the Community from the mainstream new monastic movement; the:

Community has clearly been a forerunner of a new monasticism…intentional new monastic community is not the whole truth about us. We are simply a Community in the tradition of monasticism: people who have embraced a monastic heart, and who aspire to live monastic values and ethos in a contemporary setting. (Community, n.d.-b, p. 5)

Furthermore, Miller suggests that the Community are less concerned with Bonhoeffer's theology but more with his idea of living vocationally.[136]

It is to live the questions, 'Who is it that you seek?' 'How then shall you live?' 'How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' It is to seek God as the one thing necessary so as to learn to love Him with all out heart, soul, mind and strength: to love our neighbour as ourselves; to love one another as Christ has loved us. This is the heart of what we understand to be new monasticism. (Community, n.d.-b, p. 15)

Miller seems happy to depart from any notion of a vocation to new monasticism in the fact that he suggests that, according to Bonhoeffer, new monasticism was not for the select few, 'but was open to all who took seriously the challenge of following Jesus in the costly discipleship presented to us in the Gospels' (Community, n.d.-b, p. 18).

The call of the Community through the 'filter' of Bonhoeffer is to:

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[135] I read all back issues in order to bring anything to this thesis that contributed to my main inquiry.
[136] I remember various conversations with John Skinner between 2001-2008 discussing the fact that the main emphasis from Bonhoeffer on the Community was the term 'new monasticism' and life in a secular world and less from his various theological works.

Live vocationally which is missional: we are sent to be: to live the good news of Jesus Christ and be where we are, who we are and what we are. We seek God in order to know ourselves and make a better job of living with others in the hope of being of service to the world of our influence, whether that be great or small. (Community, n.d.-b, p.52)

4.5 Pete Askew

Askew informs us that he came to the Community through participating in the Community liturgy with close friends, not long after his Christian conversion. 'There was something about the simplicity and depth of the words that spoke to me, and I was interested to find out more about the community that had crafted them' (Askew, 2007). The Community in 2010 clearly distances itself from the emerging expression of new monasticism as suggested by Mobsby and fresh expressions of church as defined within the Church of England. Now as an Overseer of the Community, Askew writes:

Alongside the debate about how far new monasticism can be interpreted as a full expression of church, there have also been attempts to label new monastic communities as either 'monks' in a gathered community of prayer, or as 'friars' with more of an activist or apostolic emphasis…such definitions are unhelpful…Community was born out of a coming together of apostolic and the contemplative, two groups of people who recognised a need for each other. (Askew, 2007)

Askew continues:

Therefore, to be a monastic in nature was never an end in itself, but a means by which worship, and evangelism (key themes Askew identified in reflecting upon Northumbrian Saints) could be explored and expressed as a whole. There can be no

Northumbrian spirituality without the monastery, and the monastery exists for mission. (Askew, 2007)[137]

4.6 Roy Searle

In the Autumn 2007 edition of the Caim, we catch a glance of Roy Searle's template for new monasticism. He juxtaposes the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 with new monasticism:

> I believe that one of the reasons we are being called to embrace our new monastic vocation and to live missionally in a changing world is to embrace that call to come home to the Father. For too long we've been away in a 'far country' of busyness, drivenness, being conformed to the values of a post-Christendom, individualist, consumer culture and creating God in our own image. (R. Searle, 2007, p. 1)

Searle goes on to set out his blueprint as to how we achieve this: Firstly, to repent, secondly, to be in relationship with God through a discipleship that requires discipline and training, thirdly, to confront our desires, which doesn't mean supressing them, but to try to manage them through a balanced life, to align our desires to live life as God intends. Searle moves on to suggest a better way, through a realisation that God desires us and that we should then re-orientate our lives in that knowledge. 'A reminder of the primary desire which is a rebuttal to the distractions and the pursuit of all other desires…to repent, to turn and move in the right direction' (R. Searle, 2007, p, 3).

4.7 John Skinner[138]

At one of my recent supervisory meetings, having spent three years discussing the difficulties and tensions of the Community and one of its founding members John Skinner, my supervisor turned to me and asked, "Where is the elephant in the room?"

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[137] Catherine Askew, Pete's wife, is currently one of the leaders of the Northumbria Community and has recently participated in an online dialogue with other new monastic leaders, most of whom would argue for a monk friar separation of new monastic communities.

[138] The reader may question why Skinner is given more space in this thesis. The reason is to simply bring into focus some of the stories and practical outworking's of the early period in the growth of the Community. I do not wish to form a biased understanding of the Community told through Skinners eyes.

John Skinner declined to be interviewed but having written his own narrative of the early beginnings of the Community I have been able to bring his voice to the thesis.[139] Already commented above, in 1980, in the library of Lincoln Theological College, with a joyous announcement of clarity, declaring an 'epiphany for living.' The soon to be Revd John Skinner, was reading work by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, particularly *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* along with a collection of his letters and he came across the phase 'new type of monasticism.'[140]

After spending some time in Alnmouth Friary after John and Linda married, at the end of their partial silent retreat 'they sat down to see if any single word had come to mind…both said the same thing: community' (Skinner, 2017, p. 40).

The title of the chapter that contains Skinners narrative of the origins of the Community is 'Distance, diminish and delete'[141] (Skinner, 2017).

Skinner incorporates his own journey into the formation of the Community in suggesting that the founders, including John and Linda Skinner and Andy Raine, span between 1979 - 1990. Skinner goes on to argue that many of the external aspects to the Community, including its vision, the Rule and liturgy also evolved during this period. Within a section of his narrative Skinner describes:

> A Rule is a body of experience that a community acquires when they are working out how to live their lives together. It is not a set of regulations that someone has to police. In 1985, when we all moved to Glanton,[142] we were faced with the

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[139] Having been present around the so-called split between John and his family and the Northumbria Community and the consequent hurt and fallout that pursued, I have chosen not to comment on who may be right, or who did what etc. I have also not included some explicit comments about people in the community that are found within Skinner's book out of respect to my ethical considerations in this thesis. On a personal note, having allowed time to take its course, I have come to the conclusion that any attempt to lay blame or defend the impact that the split had on any party would no longer benefit any individual(s). Like the end of a twelve-round boxing fight, each fighter on the floor covered in blood, the only right thing would be to stop the fight and allow each to heal, bring perspective to the fight and pray for God's Grace in the guise of forgiveness. Saying that, I do not condone this in covering up fault or failure, but that time would allow people to find their place in what happened, for the greater good of what and who comes after.

[140] This story was told to me by John in 2001.

[141] Skinner throughout his book claims that the Community and in particular his successors in leadership have tried to distance, diminish and delete him in terms of his influence and impact on the Community.

[142] Small hamlet in North Northumberland.

fundamental question: how then shall we live? The question at the heart of all communities. (Skinner, 2017, p. 63)

Skinner goes on:

> The pressing question when we arrived…related to work, what kind of jobs are available? I had no idea what to do. Linda had a full-time job in looking after our four kids. Andy Robertson, a local man, offered me his window cleaning round for free…I was terrified of heights…Chris[143] and I later joined forces to begin landscape gardening. (Skinner, 2017, p. 65)

Skinner expands on why the desert fathers were so influential in the early period of the Community and in particularly, Thomas Merton's view of them.

> A book that really helped us sort out what new monasticism might look like and how to respond to this dilemma was *The Wisdom of the Desert* by Thomas Merton. In the stories they send themselves up as they struggle with the complexity of human nature in their new life. Many of the stories are related to work. They recognised the need for work, but they emphasised that work was just a part of the life they lived. They were not following a career but doing work, which was an essential part of their vocation. This rooted them in the ordinary, everyday life and didn't allow them to become vain, or religious introverts. They also stressed that being available to other people was the single most important aspect of their lives. If someone knocked on your door, you dropped what you were doing to see what they needed. (Skinner, 2017, p. 64)

When Skinner arrived at Glanton, few knew the added significance of the question, 'How then shall we live?' 'When we arrived in Glanton, I was advised by the Archdeacon of Northumberland that I was not welcome at any of their churches. Furthermore, I was not to

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[143] Chris and Sandra Haggerstone along with their children moved to North Northumberland along with the Skinners to join them in their journey.

impersonate a Church of England minister or I would be prosecuted' (Skinner, 2017, p. 64). He was barred from his own denomination, made unintentionally churchless. [144] Skinner was reinstated as a priest during the early days of the Community, instigated by the then Bishop of Newcastle, Alec Graham, with an apology.

Skinner describes them (John, Linda and Andy) trying out a set of prayers that they had created at an Easter Worksop. They had been collected through various prayer groups that had evolved over the years.

> …although the prayers (Daily Office) provide a rhythm for the day, their essential purpose is to provide an anchor during a psyche storm. Any major change in life can cause a psyche meltdown…The Daily Office provided us with stability when everything was constantly changing around us…they were the fruit of fourteen years of struggle and challenges, joy and pain and plain everyday living…getting kicked out of the church in 1984 for whistle blowing on a sexual predator gave me the push I needed to start looking for the place of the Nether Springs and unpacking Bonhoeffer's new type of monasticism. (Skinner, 2017, p. 65)

Prior to moving to Hetton Hall, Skinner describes every Monday morning he, along with his friends, would look over an Ordnance Survey map looking for a place for the Nether Springs. The place was to be, 'a place to reflect upon loss of belief and religious faith…it would be a safe place where people could express doubt, recover from abuse and get their hands together. All would be welcome…' Skinner describes the Community of his mentor, Brother Roland Walls of the Community of Transfiguration in Edinburgh. There was a Nissen hut, where Roland and Brother John lived, it was used for their kitchen, bathroom, sitting room/library and a couple of guest rooms. In the back garden, they had a big wooden hut as a chapel and the brothers slept in six feet by six feet wooden huts (Skinner, 2017, p. 66).

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[144] In the previous chapter Skinner describes his uncomfortable journey into the appointment of his first position as a priest in the Church of England. He was assigned to the parish of the now sex offender, The Venerable Granville Gibson. As his case and conviction is now complete, Skinner was able to tell his story and, in part, that is why he wrote this book. It was in the act of reporting Granville to the hierarchy that he was given a choice to "shut up" or leave. He left and chose to be silent in his anguish.

Brother Roland describes a story to Skinner when one of their close friends asked Brother Roland if they could take in a man who was recovering from a mental breakdown. Br. Roland was concerned that this man would struggle with the lack of 'creature comforts' in the cold damp Nissen hut. The man in question replied, 'No, I have been told by my psychologist that what he needs is a place where people failed…Yours is the only place I can think of.' Skinner declared; 'we wanted the Nether Springs to be just like this place' (Skinner, 2017, p. 66).

A departure from the Community website is the fact that Skinner says that the first Nether Springs was his house, The Grange at Glanton. Whilst living at The Grange, Skinner comments on two sets of people that supported him and his family. A couple from their previous parish who supported them financially and administratively and the Friars of the Society of Saint Francis at Alnmouth. It was in 1990 that, as the visitors grew, Skinner describes the fact that his work was suffering, and his friends suggested that the Nether Springs Trust be set up to support his work.

Skinner describes an incident at one of the early Trust meetings where they were given £23,000 by someone; it was enough to pay off their debt. After considering a new car and holiday, he reluctantly handed it over to the Trust. He describes the mood at the meeting as being upbeat now that they had money; 'money empowers'. The Trust decided to pay off Skinner's debt, providing he didn't get into debt again, 'I was in debt through propping up a work, not because of being reckless' (Skinner, 2017, p. 68).

Towards the end of the Skinners' time at Glanton, John met with Roy after being approached by him for a chat.[145] At the meeting, John describes him talking about new monasticism and Andy Raine talking about Celtic Christianity. Skinner says that Roy wanted to join him (Skinner, 2017, p. 69).

> …Our monastic conundrum (answering the question, how then shall we live?) our mentors Br. Roland and the monastic communities in Merton's Wisdom of the Desert. To really experience their ethos, we had to follow the way they lived: no career, only

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[145] John and Roy knew each other from their time at The Lebanon Missionary Bible College in Berwick-on-Tweed during the late nineteen seventies.

vocation, no ownership of property, no hanging onto money, no pensions, daily disciplines. (Skinner, 2017, p. 69)

Skinner goes further:

> As more property owning, career-minded, savers and security conscious people joined us, was it possible to translate the essence of monasticism to inform their lifestyles? Had we got too close to traditional monasticism? Monasticism is unintentional. It disrupts, is uncontrollable, unpredictable and dislocates you from your current way of life. It demands your availability and, as a result, plunges you into vulnerability. You don't choose this way for living, it chooses you. An intentional way for living is something you choose, maintain and control. (J. Skinner, 2017, p. 69)

Skinner's account of the partnership between The Nether Springs Trust and Roy's organisation, Northumbria Ministers was sealed with a joint covenant:

'Covenanted together in the love of Jesus, we are a group of Christian friends who share a common vision and concern to see God's Kingdom extended in the area covered by the ancient Kingdom of Northumbria, from the Forth to the Humber – Northumbria Ministries' (Skinner, 2017, p. 70).

Skinner makes the claim that a major connectivity between the Nether Springs Trust and Northumbria Ministries was the fact that both groups felt that 'Irish/Celtic monasticism' had something to do with the fulfilment of this now shared covenant. Skinner writes, 'In the sixth Century AD…This was the golden age of the Irish/Celtic Christianity before the Synod of Whitby in 644 AD when the European Church effectivity dismantled the Irish Church's position in the UK and Europe' (J. Skinner, 2017, p. 70).

This idea is something that is prevalent throughout secondary reading on Celtic Christianity and is still accepted today in many Protestant expressions of new monasticism, including the Northumbria Community. O' Loughlin and Wooding have disputed and reduced the impact of the Synod of Whitby to a more localised level that included a small handful of Irish

monks, led by Colman based on Lindisfarne; they indeed went back to Ireland after the ruling.[146]

After the formal establishment of the Northumbria Community, Skinner claims he started to use the metaphors 'monastery' and 'mission' in a new way:

> Monastery represents the unconditional, the essential failure, waste of time that monasticism is. It has no mission, no intention, no purpose, no teachers, no timescales. It is in this milieu that unconditional love is at home. Mission must come out of the ethos of the monastery. It must reflect its importance, vulnerability, and availability to the other…not promise things that unconditional love would never deliver, not try and make the monastic respectable and successful. (Skinner, 2017, p. 73)

The publication of what became a Northumbrian Office was in a leather Filofax. 'This was so we could add and subtract as we went along.' Having had many arguments with Andy Raine about what should be included, a consensus was found that they wanted 'prayers and readings that had inspired and influenced them the most on the fourteen-year journey to Hetton Hall' (Skinner, 2017, p. 76). Skinner claims that after Harper Collins had picked up the book, they wanted to publish it. Skinner says he said no, and that Andy said yes. The book was published in 1994 and a second volume called Celtic Night Prayer in 1996. '…the book created a wave of interest in the new monasticism and the Northumbria Community. More growth meant more work' (Skinner, 2017, p. 76).

Skinner's current reflection upon new monasticism sees him place it through the 'filter of radical theology' and in particular 'the work of theologians, Prof. John Caputo and Slavoj Zizek.' As a result, he seems to be engaging more with an activist slant, forming a 'resistance in dismantling of the welfare state,' he says he no 'longer wants to be identified with mainstream Christianity, preferring to call himself 'the non-church.' Two years after the

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[146] In 2003 at a teaching seminar at the University of Wales Lampeter, this topic was brought up after the teaching session in a local pub and Thomas O'Loughlin and Jonathan Wooding (lecturers at Lampeter at the time) gave their opinion.

publication of the book, in 2019, John Skinner was announced a new priest in the Scottish Episcopal Church in mid-Angus (Skinner, 2017, p. 143).[147]

Most of the rest of Skinner's narrative and journey with the Community centres on conflict, accusations, disappointment, anger and hurt. As I move forward in this thesis, I will be keeping an open mind as to whether to include any further material from Skinner if I feel it will contribute to answering the main question that this thesis has lived with over the course of its history.

The narrative moves on to explore what others say about the Community.

4.8 Kristina Cooper

Prior to October 1992, Kristina Cooper reports on The Northumbria Community and the new monasticism.[148] Cooper writes:

> Community is always a gift and grace from God and is always about love and relationships rather than organisation and planning. The roots of the Community began fifteen years ago with the friendship between two Christians, Andy Raine and John Skinner, who both felt a calling to work for the Kingdom of God in the North of England. (Cooper, 1990, p. 12)

Cooper describes Andy as having an 'itinerant ministry in Christian dance and John, married with four children had a more contemplative calling…Together they sought to develop the "Nether Springs", which gave Andy a prayer base and community back-ground for his often isolated ministry' (Cooper, 1990, p. 12). Cooper writes that, eight years prior, John felt called to give up his curacy as an Anglican Priest to live a more contemplative or monastic way of life.[149] She continues to write:

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[147] http://www.thedioceseofbrechin.org/news/entry/new-priest-for-brechin-and-montrose-with-inverbervie (accessed on 12/12/2019)

[148] I have found this clipping in a box of other such clippings on topics relating to new monasticism. Having done an extensive search, I cannot find details of both the author and the publication. The reason I have arrived at the date, 'prior to October 1992', is because in the postal address for further information on the Community, John Skinner is still living at the Grange, and, although acquired, has not yet moved to Hetton Hall; that occurred in October 1992. I may be able to locate the time of publication to nearer 1990, as the article refers to the Roman Catholic Decade of Evangelism, prior to its Jubilee in 2000.

[149] John did not disclose why he felt he had to leave the curacy in relation to the abuse commented above.

With his family he moved into part of an old country house and to support them he cleaned windows and dug gardens and prayed and studied...I was just following what I felt was my own call with no thought of starting something, but people just began to come, and they didn't stop coming. Another couple with their children joined us and we had so many people visiting that we couldn't do our work anymore. (Cooper, 1990, p. 12)

This last comment about following his own call, is identical to the same reference in a historical note to the beginnings of the Community in the publication, Celtic Daily Prayer: A Northumbrian Office, albeit it changed from 'I was just following' to 'we were just following' (Raine & Skinner, 1994, p.441).

Cooper introduces a third figure in the emergence of the Northumbria Community 'One of the people who came to visit (John) was Roy Searle, a Baptist minister, who also had a calling to work for the renewal of Northumbria' (Cooper, 1990. p. 12). Roy had already identified a number of Christians who had a similar call to him and had set up a group called Northumbria Ministries. Cooper writes, 'Roy felt the need for a contemplative base for his work which the Nether Springs provided...the two networks Nether Springs and Northumbria Ministries came together to form the new Northumbria Community' (Cooper, 1990, p. 12.) Cooper tells us that the three founders had a common resonance in Celtic Christianity, 'Andy and Roy's active apostolate and John's desire for a hidden life rooted in quiet, together provide the ethos for the Community' (Cooper, 1990, p. 12).

John tells Cooper that it was after Roy joining, 'that things got out of proportion.' Being overrun with people, John states '...we realised that we would have to lay the foundation of a proper community if we were to cope with all the demands that were coming our way' (Cooper, 1990, p. 12). Towards the end of page 12, Cooper reports John's blueprint for a new monasticism. This is the first published account of John's vision.[150]

I believe God is calling people to a monastic lifestyle outside the cloister, of prayer, work and mission as God leads. I call it new monasticism because it is untried. What

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[150] John has shown me diary entries from the late eighties of his ramblings and thoughts of a new monasticism, but this is his first attempt to formalise it beyond his close friends and supporters that I am aware of.

we are doing is trying to draw from the depths of the monastic tradition in order to learn from those who have gone before but interpreting it in a way that is relevant to the new situation today. You don't have to be a monk to live a monastic way of life. I met a man recently who is an example of this new living monasticism. He lives on a housing estate with his family where he cleans toilets for a living and lives a life of simplicity and prayer and opens his house to the waifs and strays around him. For me this is the spirit of the new monasticism even though it is not something consciously thought about in his case, but just a response to a call to live like this. (Cooper, 1990, p. 12)

Before turning to the Northumbrian Rule and Office, Cooper tells us that the acquisition of Hetton Hall, '…a large eight bedroom house in four acres of ground…was to act as the Mother House, (the new Nether Springs) but the Community will extend right across the North with people committing to the same rule of life and vision while remaining loyal to their local church situation' (Cooper, 1990, p. 13). John says, 'We are excited to see Andy return to live on Holy Island…we watch in anticipation for the unfolding of the vision for the Upper Springs which Andy has held in his heart for so long' (Cooper, 1990, p. 13).

In writing a Rule (way for living), John tells Cooper that it was not a self-conscious thing but was a response to what people were asking for. 'We had already been living it over the past years.' Likewise, regarding the Northumbrian Office, Cooper tells us that the prayers, scriptures, and various spiritual writings that make up the Office were 'prayed over the years' by John and Andy. The Office not only reflects an ecumenical membership but also interests the 'free church contacts, as more and more Protestants are feeling drawn to a more monastic and regular prayer commitment' (Cooper, 1990, p. 13).

The essence of the Community's call to prayer and mission is described by John as being reflective of the Carmelite vow, 'every man in his cell meditating day and night on the law of the Lord unless otherwise led by the Holy Spirit' (Cooper, 1990, p. 13).

The nature of the Community in the early nineties is reminiscent of a 'Celtic Monastery'. Individual cells centred on an oratory. They came together to say prayers and shared the same rule of life; individually they would respond to the Spirit to go on

mission wherever led. They didn't have to report to anybody or ask permission to do it. It was the same as the desert fathers, I see the same for us. Each person and each family are responsible for their own lives and have to seek God for themselves. What holds us together is Prayer and our desire to work for the coming of the kingdom in Northumbria. (Cooper, 1990, p. 13)

This concept of being an individual and community at the same time morphed into what has become known in the Community as 'alone and together'.

Finally, Cooper tells us that the Community is engaged in reaching the marginalised of society. John tells her, 'We see Nether Springs as a contemplative base out of which mission springs and outreach particularly to the marginalised and the totally unchurched, who find the church as it is too stuffy and not related to their needs' (Cooper, 1990, p. 14). The base was also to be a place of study and retreat for those preaching the Gospel and for Christian apologetics. Cooper tells us that John had been engaged in the latter in his commitment to face the challenges of what he claimed was the emergence of the 'New Age'. John saw the work of the monks in the Celtic Church and their attack on Druid temples as something to learn from in the challenge from the New Age, which also required knowledge of 'spiritual warfare' (Cooper, 1990, p. 14).

4.9 Joshua Searle

The most comprehensive discourse on the origins, theology and narrative of the Northumbria Community, outside of the Community's own narrative, comes from two pieces of academic work by Joshua Searle (Searle, 2008; Searle, 2006). In the spring of 2006, Joshua Searle, as part of his bachelor's degree in Modern History at Oxford, started to collect and archive what he describes as the 'Northumbria Community Archive'. (Searle, 2008, p. 7)[151]

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[151] Although I suggest these two pieces of work lie outside the Community's own narrative, Joshua Searle is a member of the Community and is the son of Roy Searle. After completion of his BA at Oxford, he went on to the International Baptist Seminary in Prague where he completed his MA before completing his doctoral studies at Trinity College Dublin. He has recently published a book, *Theology after Christendom*, which includes some of his previous work on the historical and theological formation of the Northumbria Community. I contacted Joshua at the start of this thesis to try and get access to this Archive. He no longer knew where this Archive was and after further inquiry about its whereabouts to the Community leadership, no-one knew where it was. If found, there may have been issues surrounding GDPR due to the private nature of some of the documents. As a result, the only access to these primary sources is through secondary reading of them via Searle.

Seale's narrative of the Community centres on three hermeneutical *foci*, Hope, Community and Narrative (Searle, 2008, p. 5). Regarding hope, he states:

> …it is only by looking towards the future that the true meaning of human existence can be understood…In relation to the Northumbria Community, I am referring to a particular kind of eschatological hope, rooted in Christ that extends beyond the grave to the future life with God and the community of the redeemed. (Searle, 2008, p. 11)

In relation to community, Searle suggests that the Northumbria Community is a:

> Community that coheres around a living tradition that is passed on from one generation to the next. During a crucial time of transition in its history, one of the founder leaders of the Community wrote that…We are now handing down the story God has given us to a new generation of people who weren't part of the Community's early days…. (Searle, 2008, p. 12)[152]

Searle goes on to suggest that the Community carries a 'certain social identity and locus of moral growth, it is also an expression of hope embracing covenant relationships…' (Searle, 2008, p. 13).[153]

Regarding narrative, Searle suggests that 'identity is revealed in the interaction between character and event, which is always expressed in a narrative.' He goes on to suggest that although the formation of identity is important in any narrative, 'the question of identity *per se*, however important, does not occupy the central place in the Community's narrative account of hope…this place is occupied by eschatology' (Searle, 2008, p. 13).

> The Community realise, therefore, that its account of hope needs to be lived out in the narrative setting in which it is placed. The Rule recognises that, the human spirit

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[152] Joshua refers to his dad (Roy) as a founder leader of the Community.
[153] Searle's moral identity centres on Macintyre's work in *After Virtue,* and his construct of social and covenanted identity through membership, is derived from work by Hauerwas in his book, *Community of Character*.

requires ritual. The stories we tell, the myths that shape us and give us meaning need to be acted out. Such stories…are carriers of hope. (Searle, 2008, p. 15)

Searle suggests that the founders of the Northumbria Community were aware of what he describes as an 'epistemological crisis' that was evident in Britain at the end of the twentieth century. 'They sought to act on what they believed was a call from God to establish a community that would respond with hope to the prevailing crisis caused by the churches' perceived inability to adapt to the new situation in which it found itself' (Searle, 2008, p. 20).

Searle then moves on to quote from a joint statement between his dad and John Skinner for a grant application to the Bible Society for research into rediscovering the Johannine tradition for a postmodern era:

> The Northumbria Community came into existence to provide companionship, coherence and community for those believers who have felt isolated by this crisis of faith… Community development has been a direct response to this quest…from the perspective of the Community, the crisis of the faith community is the *opportunity* of the faith community and such opportunity generates hope. (Searle, 2008, p. 20)[154]

Searle uses the theme of 'crisis' to introduce in 1998 'the serious split in leadership that witnessed several defections, and which seemed to threaten the very existence of the Community' (Searle, 2008, p. 20).[155] Searle then sets out an agenda that seems highly contradictory, yet understandable when one considers that he has made no attempt to listen or communicate with the so-called defectors. This then leaves his narrative of this particular episode in the history of the Community biased and self-generated within the confines of those left in the Community after the split.[156]

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[154] The Community were successful in their application. As will be discussed later, my late wife and I were given the research assistant roles in this project until we left the Community in 1998. The findings were published in October 2002. (Searle, 2002)

[155] According to Searle, I along with my late wife and my parents would be classed as defectors.

[156] My work is the first attempt at giving voice to many involved in the split and from both sides of the divide.

According to Searle, the crisis that evolved from the split allowed the Community to 'weed out' old assumptions that were not based on the Bible and insensitivities that were apparent in relation to culture. To guard against institutionalisation, 'that would render the Community indistinguishable from traditional structures, thus enervating its capacity to be an authentic embodiment of hope' (Searle, 2008, p. 21).

Although Searle goes on to suggest that the Community's appropriate response to crisis is repentance, he is not clear what the Community repented for and to whom.[157] He continues in listing the benefits for the Community of repentance; in giving insight into deficiencies of the old narrative and offering a better robust tradition once the crisis engendered by the breakdown of the previous tradition has been overcome.

In his dismantling of secular humanism (rational accounts of hope) and the New Age movement (transrational accounts of hope), Searle argues, 'without a common narrative (i.e., a tradition) and a community in which such a narrative can be embodied, all that is left is the subjective anarchy of each person having to choose what kind of aims and goods to pursue' (Searle, 2008, p. 25).[158]

Searle introduces the relationship between the monastic tradition and the Community by quoting from an article written by Kristina Cooper mentioned above. It seems Searle is equating monasticism as something in the past, which helps the Community:

> Construct a framework for hopeful living in the future…The Rule arose out of the monastic emphasis on the priority of seeking God with singular devotion in every aspect of daily life. In the Northumbrian context the Rule is regarded as a narrative of hope that provides a structure for one's spiritual search. (Searle, 2008, p. 28)

Searle concludes his thesis, arguing that the Northumbria Community offers the Church a model for missional engagement. The Community has both an 'incarnational' aspect in that

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[157] I am aware that attempts were made between the Community Trust and John Skinner after the split to find some form of reconciliation. This came in a series of emails over the course of 2002-2003 which I was given access to at the time. A recent attempt at a reconciliation has also occurred prior to the start of my thesis were I am told some from of settlement was agreed through the process of mediation.
[158] John Skinner in the early nineties spoke extensively about the Community's alternative to the New Age movement and accounts of false hope residing in human ego and desires, commenting in various lectures given at various Community retreats, yet Searle makes no reference to these.

Companions are encouraged to live out the Community Rule within their given setting and an 'attractional' aspect, that serves as an invitation to 'come and see' to those who are disillusioned with the traditional church and those who are unchurched (Joshua Searle, 2008, p. 34).[159]

In relation to the Community's philosophy of hospitality, Searle sees currency in the Church adopting it in its quest for inclusivity within its congregations.

Contemplation and action are two themes within the Community narrative that Searle suggests the Church can learn from. Founded upon writings of Thomas Merton, Searle suggests that a discipleship programme that holds in tension these two essentials of the Christian life needs developing. 'For the Community, spiritual formation is an ongoing task that comes through "ordinary" activities such as washing dishes or mowing lawns just as much as through sermons or organised discipleship classes' (Searle, 2008, p. 36).[160] Out of the ordinariness, companions of the Community live as "celebratory people". Celebration is one of the great outward expressions of Christian hope. Whilst Easter Workshops have become a melting-pot for fears, hopes, prayers and protest, they also are an occasion where people celebrate through various creative activities the story of the Community (Searle, 2008, p. 37).

As Searle rightfully points out, the Community from its beginnings to the present day has 'consciously avoided the label of church.' Searle goes onto to say, 'The Northumbria Community, despite this, identifies strongly with the emerging church' (Searle, 2008, p. 39).[161] Searle suggests that what the Community and the emergent church have in common is that both are trying to take seriously the culture they live in and seek to express the fullness of the Christian gospel within it. In this way, 'The Community seeks for a biblical rather than new age response to postmodernity…to bring together the sacred and secular spheres' (Searle, 2008, pp. 39-40).

Searle acknowledges that some in the emergent church movement and the Community have been uncritical of postmodernism and the culture they are seeking to live within. The counterweight to this, as described by Searle, is for the Community to maintain its core set

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[159] Searle borrowed 'Incarnational' and 'attractional' from Steve Chalke, whilst adding covenant as unique to the Community. (Chalke, 2006)

[160] Searle claims that Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline* is still the best introduction to the spiritual disciplines. (Foster, 1978)

[161] Searle's evidence for this is based on an article written by Trevor Miller in the Caim saying that the Community had connected with several people from the emerging church movement.

of convictions, especially the Rule and its vows of Availability and Vulnerability, as well as maintaining its eschatological dimension of Christian hope (Searle, 2008, p. 40).[162]

Searle expands his critique of Christendom by suggesting that, 'theology tended to neglect passionate commitments to such spiritual values of truth and love and was often in captivity to overly rational and cognitive methods of apprehending life and faith.' He went on to suggest the result being that the Christian faith was 'predicated on an incomplete understanding of the human condition' (Searle, 2018, p. 63).[163] Searle follows the Rutba House model of new monasticism and the new monasticism as prescribed by Gardiner, that a reconnecting of theology with life seems to require the dismantling of institutional structures; 'Spiritual depth comes not from being inducted into systems of sound doctrine or by attending Christian meetings, but through disciplined, costly commitment to following the Risen Christ.' In a similar argument as Gardiner, Searle suggests, 'In AD 313, one of the most fateful dates in the history of the Christian movement…the Constantinian turn' (Searle, 2018, pp. 63-4).

Searle claims the aftermath of Constantine's conversion saw faith shift from openness and revelation to being ready to accept what is authoritatively decreed by the church hierarchy. 'As a result, faith was understood not as the story of our lives but a set of propositions to which one must subscribe' (Searle, 2018, p. 77).

This one comment reveals the fragility of Searle's argue, for, according to his own narrative, for companionship to the Northumbria Community one needs to subscribe to a set of so-called vows to Availability and Vulnerability, which arrived at the Community from a 'lived experience' and were formalised in order for others to follow and embody.

Ten years after the completion of his MTh thesis, Searle published his book, *Theology after Christendom*, and expands his narrative of the Northumbria Community under the notion that it serves as 'church without walls' in a post-Christendom environment.[164] He argues again that the 'Rule of Life' is created not to prescribe but to provoke, yet, contrary to what Searle suggests, no matter how one tries to construct an argument in favour of this, one

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[162] Before concluding, Searle accepts that he has not been sufficiently critical of his own Community in order to offer a balanced perspective, although he feels there is enough conviction in his work for it to offer important lessons for "the emergent church with which the Community identifies itself" (Joshua Searle, 2008, p. 41).
[163] Searle uses various quotes from Soren Kierkegaard to reinforce this concept, especially from his work, *Attack upon Christendom.* (Kierkegaard, 1968)
[164] 'Church without Walls' is a phase that has its roots in the first published pictorial version of the Rule. He does not add anything worth noting to what he has already argued in 2008.

cannot argue against the fact that availability and vulnerability needs to be ingested and contextualised through the 'prescribed' framework of the Community's charism, in order for it to be 'authentic' and 'deep' (Searle, 2018, p. 183).[165]

4.9 George Lings

A further addition to the ongoing narrative of the Community from outside the leadership comes in a report delivered by the Church Army Research Unit in Sheffield.[166] Already mentioned above, George Lings was invited to journey with the Community for two years at the end of which he wrote this report.

Lings, like Searle, positions the new monastic movement as a force to confront and resist the dominant powers in society, like consumerism, individualism, and entertainment. In the face of excess, 'personal discovery of a blessed frailty is one enduring strand of the monastic' (Lings, 2006, p. 7). Lings suggests that throughout history when the church loses its own distinctiveness, the monastic communities 'arise'. Lings claims that we are entering a new dark age and that the new monastic movement may provide wisdom for the church.

Lings through his reading of work by Antonio Romano[167], (Romano, 1989) suggests that the attitude among founders is significant. The rebels who tend to leave banging the door and the innovators who work within the system exhume differing levels of humility. There charism keeps them 'moving ahead of the church and their genuine originality can be disturbing and cause difficulties to the church.' As prophetic they 'question some aspect of the church, but not call into question the church itself' (Lings, 2006, pp. 9-10).

The correlation between new monastic communities, so-called radical Christianity and discipleship is at the heart of new monastic expression in the UK. It is worth noting at this point that Lings brings 'humility' into the discourse and relates it to the founding generation of leaders.

In defining the founding of the Community, Lings stays very close to the narrative as found on the current website. He does clearly state that the Community has at least three

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[165] Searle argues that a post-Christendom theology needs to be authentic and deep, connecting all aspects of the church together, for example, discipleship and mission. (Searle, 2018, p. 32)
[166] The Research unit works towards enacting Church Army's values, through the provision of excellent and innovative research and consultancy that seeks to address these questions for both our colleagues within Church Army, our funding partners and the wider Church.
[167] Romano specialises in spirituality after receiving a doctorate in philosophy and theology. He is a part of a new community of consecrated life called, Redemptor Hominis.

founders which he says is unusual, 'moreover, it is more centred in values than personalities' (Lings, 2006, p. 14). Lings chose to align the Community with the Augustinians, in the sense that like the Augustinians, the Community formed 'much later but they chose to honour the much earlier great man' (Lings, 2006, p. 15). In the place of St Augustine, Lings suggest the Community shows a fidelity through creative reinterpretation of the Celtic Northumbrian tradition. Lings takes a fresh approach in narrating the origins of the Community through to the first generation by not emphasising the personalities in the Community's founding (Lings, 2006, p. 15).

In regard to the next generation, from the 'founders to the few', Lings claims that it was during this period of "normal daily living" that the values of availability and vulnerability emerged and became crystallised within the fabric of the Community (Lings, 2006, p. 14).

There seems to be a theme emerging through Lings narrative of the Community, that of a reductionistic view of the impact of the founders. Whether this is related to the 'split' in 1998, or the impact of reading Romano alongside the history of the Community is hard to tell at this stage.

According to Lings, 'Hetton Hall is in practice the heart, home and hospitality of a monastic centre' (Lings, 2006. p. 16). In recalling the so-called 'split', Lings comments, 'As such, the Community is notable because it has survived what is still felt by some as a painful split among founders over divergence of vision and inability to come to common discernment about it' (Lings, 2006, p. 16).

Regarding the next generation of membership, Lings points out the tension of 'formation' and people simply 'consuming'. With various Community publications being sold and missional teams on the road, numbers swelled. Lings claims, 'the way to nurture greater levels of membership to the Community required relational links with the motherhouse (Lings, 2006, p. 16).[168]

As found within the fresh expression movement, whether you lean more towards St Francis or St Benedict has become somewhat related to whether you live in a urban or rural setting and whether you are seen as intentionally engaged within your local community for

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[168] This notion is no longer common currency now with the establishment of the Community's monastic school for living; it seeks to nurture its novices online and through occasional conversations with mentors. Lings points out the difficulties in balancing this aspect of Community life, "for the dilution of the charism of any monastic group is a dangerous way forward." (Lings, 2006, p. 17)

missional purposes. This view has gained traction through the work of Ian Mobsby, as commented upon within the literature review.

What Lings brings to the foreground in his narrative of the Community is the fact that he thinks the Community is more like the 'new Franciscan' than the 'new monastic'.

> Not only are they out in the world, but they are often laughing, their enjoyment of life is conspicuous. At the same time, there is something in common life they share which is humble, playful, carefree and even crazy…Day 29 of the monthly readings celebrates the Lady Poverty Prayer, the accommodation is perfectly adequate yet feels like a time warp from a previous era. Mealtimes model the same qualities of simplicity…. (Lings, 2006, p. 19)

In the same way as Searle, Lings suggests that the inherent gifts within the Community can be absorbed into the church at large. Commentating on the Rule, he says, 'It is not like the Benedictine Rule…it is more like something out of the literature of the desert fathers in that it more resembles a collection of sayings, biblical texts with wise words of old and new' (Lings, 2006, p. 20). Lings suggest that despite the Community playing down the Rule as something that points towards a greater end, the Rule provides stability for the Community and something of a yardstick of progress.

In balancing of 'monastery and mission', Lings touches on some fundamental nuances within the new monastic movement that seem to flourish without critical discernment. Firstly, like two magnets being pushed together, being 'enclosed' and 'missional' in the same instance can rarely be incarnated.[169] The dualism between 'monastery and mission', sometimes called 'cell and coracle' is a notion that you find throughout the new monastic movement and has been formalised into the Church of England's and some Evangelical modes of churches manifesto for new monasticism through the writings of Ian Mobsby, also see, (Freeman and Greig, 2007; Adams, 2010; Mobsby, 2010, 2012; Mobsby and Berry, 2014). Lings chooses to follow the same argument that any new monastic community that seems on the surface to venture out into the world is more akin to 'Celtic, Franciscan or Jesuits,' and is happy to place the Northumbria Community into this category (Lings, 2006,

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[169] Lings does suggest that the attraction of a monastic enclosure can impact on people's lives.

p. 26). Lings does go on to suggest that the Mother House of the Community, Nether Springs, does have some kind of missional activity in its capacity for hospitality to an increasing number of disillusioned churchgoers, and concludes; 'monastery naturally includes mission,' and that those that are engaged in missional activities outside Nether Springs should so operating 'out of the monastery of the heart' (Lings, 2006, pp. 26-7).

A further gift to the church is the use of 'Abbot and Bishop' to distinguish between the leadership of the former whose responsibility is to embrace a calling to the monastery and the later, to embrace the call to mission. Respecting each other and the wisdom that each share, Lings suggests that more new communities that are emerging should develop shared leadership to avoid 'power' being in one leader (Lings, 2006, pp. 29-30)[170]

The gift of liturgy is something else that Lings suggests the Community can share with the wider church.

> The strength of Celtic Daily Prayer is its simplicity, accessibility, freshness, realism, and what I would call, its 'aspirational' texts…The worship in the chapel at Hetton Hall makes a deep impression. There is a sense of rapid and natural descent into the depth and stillness. The slow pace both of spoken and sung liturgy carries conviction. I notice with gratitude that both the rule and prayer book have a strong emphasis on the centrality of Christ as befitting a Celtic root and engaging with contemporary multi-faith mission context… Most Anglican liturgies arise from a Christendom pastoral context and do little to nurture the calling and charism of pioneers and evangelists. (Lings, 2006, pp. 29-30)

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[170] The concept of Abbot/Bishop model as a form of leadership does come from reading Celtic church material as Lings alludes to. The early use of this model between John Skinner and Roy Searle was to safeguard the 'life' of the Community against the temptations and opportunities that life in the so-called 'mission fields' can bring. It seems that with Trevor and Roy, the difference between the two has been reduced into so-called, differing 'wisdom'. I feel this is a direct dilution of the 'heart' of the Community. As I have argued elsewhere, secondary reading of so-called Celtic church material in relation to this Abbot/Bishop model, against a 'Roman style', with its Bishop leadership model, is flawed on the grounds that it is primarily through secondary reading of primary sources that creates the evidence for its own rhetoric. Lings uses work by Ian Bradley (Early Christian Historian based at St Andrews University) throughout his book to evidence Celtic Christian associations, and Bradley, even after an apology by himself in his book *Colonies of Heaven*, continues to popularise so-called Celtic Christianity as a model of church worship in direct opposition and difference to the Roman Catholic model.

Before concluding his report with what the 'future brings for the Community', Lings tackles the 'hot potato', of the new monastic movement in the difference between monastery and church. Through this publication, Lings has brought a sensitivity to his narrative, to monastic culture and that if any group or community stray too far from this, then its own connectivity with monasticism, whether it be small, large, metaphorical or literal is in danger of being diluted. His appraisal of monastery and church follows this sensitivity; monastery throughout its history has 'protest against some weakness in the church…they are more difficult to join than a church…Their specific charism also points up the existence of a particular vocation that may not be shared by all Christians' (Lings, 2006, p. 31). The downside is that:

> If the gap between monastic and church is too great then the danger is it is seen only as the call to the few, it buttresses an unhelpful unattainable view of sainthood and fosters a lay/clerical divide' Connectivity to monasticism for those who want to remain in the world but not be cloistered, is through Third Orders and Oblation. (Lings, 2006, p. 31)

When tacking the direct question as to whether the Community is a church, Lings points out that early it tried to be careful not to declare itself as a church. He suggests things are changing. He points out that the language of the church and its definitions of what constitutes a church are changing and loosening. 'Can a group of people who are Christ centred and share a common life call themselves a church?' (Lings, 2006, p. 33) Lings suggests that in fact it may be that the group act like a church without calling themselves a church.

Lings concludes his book with what the future of the Community might look like. He suggests, as someone who argues that the Northumbria Community is a fresh expression of the church, he suggests other fresh expressions can learn from them.[171]

The three founding questions that constitute the charism of the Community are, "Who do you seek?", "How then shall we live?" and "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign

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[171] Lings refers to the Community's longevity and its ability to move past multiple generations as a factor in its relevance to others.

land?" Lings mentions that whilst the first two are regularly mentioned, the third is not. The third question evolved to directly refer to the vocational calling upon the Community to travel beyond the shores of the North-East of England and into the rest of Europe and beyond. This was the next stage in the Community's maturity into its vocational commitment and was to be headed by John and Linda Skinner. Where Lings has diluted this third question is in his reference to post-Christian culture. What Lings fails to understand is that the first two questions are in fact a response to that culture as well.

Lings finishes with pondering upon what the future holds:

> …how will the Community cope with growing popularity? Will they eventually own their own property? Will they succumb to the temptation of just perpetuating their own life? Or seeing themselves as existing just for the world? Is it that the church is not spiritual enough that draws people to groups like the Northumbria Community? My own journey of the last few years makes me think that the new monasticism is more significant than many kinds of fresh expressions which commendably focus on connecting with those outside the church but may still pander to society's values. (Lings, 2006, p. 38)

4.10 Summary and conclusions

In reflecting upon the various 'voices' that have been given coverage throughout this narrative in the development of Northumbria Community, it is very clear that a majority of the transitional, re-evaluating, theologising and rebranding of the values and charism of the Northumbria Community have centred around: the trauma of the 'split', moving to a new Mother House, the growth in and varying types of membership, its relational position to culture and the church and indeed to the new monastic movement as a whole to which it seems to have recently distanced itself. One gets the feeling that at each juncture of transition, those charged with negotiating the change seem one step behind the reality of the lived experience. It shows that change often centres around relational and existential dilemmas and within the both the individual and Community. I have also continued to identify three hermeneutical keys in exploring new monasticism within the Northumbria Community: charism, traditional monasticism and belonging.

Charism seems to have been passed on through a loosening of some of the prescriptive and so-called exclusivity in ethos and language that can be found in the early writings of Skinner. Whether this relates to the: absence of Skinner after 1998, Skinner's argument that an attempt to rewrite some of the foundational literature in order to diminish his impact, or current leadership coming to terms with the grief of the loss of their founding father, or simply to meet a changing membership, is only a question that can be solved through honest and fraternal dialogue between those involved.

When John Skinner first made public his concept of a new monasticism, did he and others realise that in fact he seemed to be pioneering two different, although interconnected entities. One was a possible vocation to new monasticism, that is to say a vocation to monastic culture (more than just monastic practice and spirituality) and the other to the birth of a community that was to be informed and underpinned by this vocation to new monasticism.

The two entities amalgamated at the birth of the Northumbria Community and for all the 'posturing' of; who are the founders?, who said what?, who's allegiance do we follow?, who brought various pieces of the ethos and charism?, how monastic are we?, how much of Bonhoeffer's vision do we subscribe to?, my conclusion is that the split in 1998 was a direct result, if only in part, of either, no one seeing, or if they did, not valuing and embracing these two separate vocations.

It also seems evident from Skinner's writings that no sooner had the Community been formed, he was starting to plan and discern life beyond leadership to the Community in the UK. How much of a failure in imparting of the ethos into the new leadership occurred, or were the wrong people chosen to succeed? Whilst the Community showed great resilience in coping with major trauma, as commented by Lings above, the devastating impact of a failed transition of charism seems hidden from view. I wonder whether the fact that a majority of people who make up the membership to Community today prefer this new form of Community and that those who are classed as 'defectors' by Joshua Searle, are in fact those that are living in the reality of this shadow of failed transition?

As the Community began to flex and change to meet a new set of circumstances and cultural and ecclesial environments, it seems it was overrun with people falling out of its 'guesthouse' into the very heart of its charism. The capacity to belong widened to a point of all embracing. I suggest, the result being as Lings warned, the monastic element of the

Community started to be diluted into a vocational form of discipleship that clung to Bonhoeffer's vision as framed by the Community, 'For Bonhoeffer, new monasticism was the very opposite. It wasn't for the select few but was open to all who took seriously the challenge of following Jesus in the costly discipleship presented tom us in the Gospels' (Community, n.d.-b, p. 18). The relationship with traditional monasticism seems to be reduced to an intentionality to aspire to live monastic values and ethos in a contemporary setting. This differs from Skinner's unintentional vocation to live the heart of monastic spirituality, in a response to a call from God to do so.

It seems a vocation towards a new monasticism was reduced to a renewal of the way we understand and nurture Christian discipleship and that a vocation to the Northumbrian Community, 'as alone', and 'together' with its inclusivity to meet the demands of its typology of membership became central to the Community's progress and vision for the future. 'This is the lesson to learn about vocation. To seek to be at home with God – who you are, where you are, what you are. It is being 'attentive to our own distinctness' because vocation is fundamentally a call to relationship with God' (Miller, 2007, p. 4).

Over the course of this thesis, the Community have implemented a new leadership and a new set of trustees to further make relevant its leadership within a culture that requires greater diversity. Two of the three leaders were able to give an interview. This is important to building up a picture of the Community between 2015 and the present day, including the future.

Part II

Case Study: Northumbria Community

Chapter 5. Approaches to research

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I have set the scene for my research and described the reasons for my thesis. In doing so, I have also disclosed my interest in my research topic through being a practitioner of new monasticism and a former member of my Case Study, the Northumbria Community. In this chapter I will discuss and argue for my methodology and the theoretical framework that will carry my methodology and methods for data extraction and analysis.

Within the field of practical theology, 'qualitative research involves the utilisation of a variety of methods and approaches which enable the researcher to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit it' (Mowat and Swinton, 2006, p. 29).

5.2 The journey

Having spent several months prior to January 2018 planning for a case study that was speedily extending this research beyond its timeframe, I finally arrived at the decision that in fact my research had chosen me, not that I had chosen it. 'I' had become part of the research, 'life was transforming into a text' (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 18). Put another way, in the words of John S. Dunne, 'my method is my journey', in the sense that 'life can be constructed as a journey and that this journey itself can be a method' (Nilson, 1987, p.65). This 'epiphany' moment redirected my methodological attention away from what Stausberg and Engler describe as over excited students and scholars framing phenomenon without little attention to the creative relationship between theory and method. 'The recipe reads: choose a case; choose a theory; add rhetoric and stir' (Stausberg and Engler, 2014, p. 11).

This form of inquiry would certainly move forward research in the field, regarding the 'call' from my literature review for more anthropological awareness. Yet, something troubled me, because of the level of subjectivity and 'constructed context' inherent in new monastic theory and *praxis*, and hence a constructionist epistemology, I felt a hermeneutically driven narrative enquiry needed to be adopted as well in order to unpick the 'meaning making' process behind much new monastic expression. The idea of a juxtaposition of hermeneutics/narrative and constructionistic methodology certainly holds in the field of qualitative research, particularly in understanding 'personal narratives of experience' and

'circumstances under which certain stories get told' (Chase, 2014, p. 553). In the field of practical theology, there is a 'strong and positive attention to the narrator's subjectivity' and the concept of 'practices and stories being more performative than representative' (Ganzevoort, 2014, p. 216-17). Sally Brown suggests, 'Today, a hermeneutical conversation that began several decades ago with a handful of pastors...has become a humming, multidisciplinary gathering of literary theorists, pastoral theologians, ethnographers...engaged in avid discussion in a vast arena' (Brown, 2014, p. 113).

5.3 Connecting theology with method

> In the autumn of the same year, John received another visit from foreign monks. A party of seven, one of them a deacon, came from Rufinus' monastery on Olivet to make a tour of monastic Egypt. Fear of barbarian unrest deterred them from going farther south than Lycopolis. So the travel narrative that one of them has left us – the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* – starts with an account from thence, finishing with a cursory visit to *Nitria*, and finally an account of the monks of *Diolcus* at one of the mouths of the Nile from whence no doubt they took ship back to Palestine. (Chitty, 1995, p. 51)[172]

> One of the best known of the Desert Fathers of fourth-century Egypt, St Sarapion the Sindonite, travelled once on pilgrimage to Rome. Here he was told of a celebrated recluse, a woman who lived always in one small room, never going out. Sceptical about her way of life – for he was himself a great wanderer – Sarapion called on her and asked: 'Why are you sitting here?' To this she replied: 'I am not sitting, I am on a journey. (Ware, 1995, p. 7)

The juxtaposition of these two quotes provides a hermeneutical framework for connecting practical theology into my methodology. The quotes also bridge the space between my literature review and my Case study in the sense that new monasticism is represented by the desert of 'monastic Egypt' and the visitation to the recluse represents visiting one such group/individual within the desert monastic landscape of late-antiquity Egypt.

Having completed a 'sweep' of the cultural fabric of new monasticism within the UK, I will now focus on one such group as a Case study, the Northumbria Community. As I enter the

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[172] For a revision of the work of Derwas Chitty in regard to the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* see: The Lives of the Desert Fathers, eds. Russell, N; Ward, B.

fabric of the Community, like the episodes of the recluse and St Sarapion, the validity of my research settles on my ability to embrace the awareness of non-judgemental difference, a kind of reflexive awareness, or, instead, with an awareness of the effects of difference.

> The exclusive standpoints of certitude and self-assurance do not empower reflective, committed, compassionate lives. They lead us to repeat some of the tradition's teachings out of context in order to support particular arrangements of power, values, and roles that we hold dear and from which we benefit. They lead us to ignore other aspects of the tradition for the same purpose. (O'Connell Killen and de Beer, 2004, pp. 15-6)

After leaving the confines of my 'city', as in the case of St Sarapion, I become the visitor in the same narrative as the recluse. I arrive at the new monastic movement as both a practitioner and visitor. As I journey throughout the movement, the desert of new monasticism - the visions set out by the leading architects of the movement, I journey with others. Despite us all journeying, the journeys may be taken for different reasons: out of intrigue, novelty, or a genuine desire to learn and embrace new monasticism from a particular expression. My intrigues lie within the processes adopted in 'meaning making', 'identity' and 'constructive narrative'. My intrigue is not only towards others, but to myself; I journey as an equal, experimenting with monasticism within the context of Christian living outside the cloister wall. In this way, the last twenty-five years of practice as 'life as text' as data to be analysed, join others in dialogic dialogue. This chapter now moves forward to enter a critical dialogue between practical theology and qualitative research methods.

5.4 Methodological inquiry: Qualitative research

The nature of the research data I will be working with requires the use of qualitative research methodology.

> Qualitative research assumes that the world is not simply 'out there' waiting to be discovered. Rather, it recognise 'the world' as the locus of complex interpretive

processes within which human beings struggle to make sense of their experiences, including their experiences of God. (Mowat and Swinton, 2006, p. 30)

Qualitative methodology 'focuses primarily on the kind of evidence (what people tell you, what they do) that will enable you to understand the meaning of what is going on. Its great strength is that it can illuminate issues and turn up possible explanations, essentially a search for meaning' (Gillham, 2000, p. 10).

> Furthermore, the qualitative research community consists of groups of globally dispersed persons who are attempting to implement a critical interpretive approach that will help make sense of the terrifying conditions that define daily life at the second decade of this new century. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. xiii)

5.5 Constructivism: Narrative reality epistemology

The term epistemology relates to the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the theory of knowledge. In essence it seeks to ask and to answer the question 'How do we know what we know?' Indeed, 'How we can we know at all?' The epistemology of qualitative research relates to the particular theory of knowledge that underpins this approach (Mowat and Swinton, 2006, p. 32).

> A personal narrative is a distinct form of communication: it is meaning making through the shaping of experience: a way of understanding one's own or others, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions, events, feelings, or thoughts over time in the past, present and future. (Chase, 2014, p. 549)

In its basic form, constructivism is an epistemological inquiry of truth and knowledge that 'the ways in which it is perceived by human beings and human communities are not, to a greater or lesser extent, constructed by individuals and communities' (Mowat and Swinton,

2006, p. 35). Darin Weinberg[173] suggest there are 'two significate themes in constructionist thought: anti-foundationalist sensibilities and a resistance to reification' (Holstein, 2018, p. 395).

Within the field of new monasticism, anti-metanarrative, and a rejection of objectification of monasticism as ascribed to traditional forms, are now mainstream within its development.

Despite the 'cosy' fit between my new monastic inquiry and constructivist epistemology, Holstein has brought to the fore some recent criticism of this form of knowledge base.

> Constructionist sensibilities and motivations continue to draw criticism on a variety of fronts. Commentaries from both the intellectual and political left and right…Some still object to constructionism's so-called relativist or subjectivist stance. Others are ill informed or ideologically blinded. (Holstein, 2018, p. 405)

Holstein suggests that one such 'blinded ideology' lies in the obsession that some critics focus on the basic premise of constructionism in the reduction of, 'social reality to mere discursive practice…focusing entirely on how reality is constructed. In doing so, critics ignore the concerted ways in which recent constructionist analysis explicitly incorporate context, conditions and resources into analysis' (Holstein, 2018, p. 405).

One such incorporation is the adoption of narrative reality. Narrative is an implicit dimension within most qualitative approaches. 'The telling of stories and the accurate recording, transcription and analysis of this data form the heart of the qualitive research enterprise' (Mowat and Swinton, 2006, p. 38). 'This reorientation encourages researchers to consider the circumstances, conditions and goals of narratives - how storytellers work up and accomplish things with the accounts they produce' (Holstein, 2018, p. 402).

Another way that I will be expanding context to my constructionist narrative epistemology is through a Derridean[174] reading of 'deconstruction', which reads that 'deconstruction is not merely a way to find inconsistencies, tensions, and failings. It requires that we also make

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[173] Dr Darin Weinberg is a reader in sociology at Cambridge University.
[174] The late Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher best known for his analysis of deconstruction within the field of phenomenology.

room for the 'irruptive' emergence of a new 'concept.'[175] In this way it justifies new monasticism within a post-modern worldview, whilst at the same time allowing the researcher access to 'meaning making' processes behind the construct (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012, p. 31). As operated within qualitative research, it allows for a greater 'flexibility' than would be found in quantitative inquiry (Stausberg and Engler, 2014, p. 7).

Furthermore, amongst some scholars of religious studies, there seems to be reluctance in seeing post-modernism as a legitimate research lens with its 'extreme relativity', discrediting it as having little impact on serious research methodology (Jensen, 2014, p.43). Despite it being heavily criticised, there is a large quantity of post-modern and post-structural impact shown in the recent work on qualitative research particularly in the field of feminist and Queer theory methodologies as shown by Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

The main points of criticism of this anti-foundational methodology are, not critiquing personal narratives with available facts, possible bias in ethnographical/auto-ethnographical methods of enquiry and criticism from recent feminist research enquiry, for not representing a cultural or macro system within which experience exists (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 14).

As shown above, my adopted line of methodological framework is narrative inquiry. The nature of my inquiry explores the following topics: the historical development of charism and ethos as described through the experiences of members across its history.

5.6 Positioning myself in the research

Although I do not bring my voice to the interviews, other than from a reflexivity understanding of myself within the research process, my own voice does contribute to the final three chapters in framing a vocation to new monasticism.

Central to my thesis lies the notion that I did not choose the research, but the research chose me. Within recent psychological methodology, attention has been given to the researcher's internal complexity within any given research project.

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[175] It is important to point out that what I mean by this is that I will be working with this notion of deconstruction and using it when appropriate to my research, not to be used as a general method of analysis.

The work wants something from the researcher as much as the researcher wants something from the work. I called what the work wants from the researcher the unfinished business in the work…a researcher can and must differentiate his or her complex relation to the work from the work's unfinished business, if the work is to be more than a personal confession of the researcher's complexities, an unconscious projection of his or hers biases onto a work. (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 105)

As a practitioner of new monasticism for over twenty-five years then Flanagan's methodology of 'living with a question', a methodology of research that brings to the fore the researcher's own 'transformation', then my own voice becomes part of the data of this thesis (Flanagan, 2014).

Although I left the formal stewardship of the Northumbria Community in 1998, I have been trying to re-contextualise the heart of what I discovered whilst in the Community. This condition will offer some understanding of the 'transferability' of Northumbria Community practice outside its own' borders'. What has been left at the shoreline of the Community and what has been taken back into my own reinterpretation of the Northumbrian 'spirit'? It becomes a further line of inquiry into the evolution of new monasticism and forms my concept of a vocation towards new monasticism.

5.7 Method: Case study

In a way, my literature review has guided my adoption of my primary method of Case study. Whilst the review explored the general fabric of new monasticism within the UK, it became very evident in the lack of research in the 'lived experience', what Harrold called for, the need for greater anthropological awareness in new monasticism. Again, as I inferred within the introduction to this thesis, the adoption of the Northumbria Community as Case was chosen due to its longevity and therefore the ability to view the historical development of a community. Also, as a past member to offer my own voice to the data retrieval when relevant.

A case study is one which investigates the above to answer specific research questions (that may be fairly loose to begin with) and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers. (Gillham, 2000, p. 1)

Case study method both validates and bridges my epistemology and choice of methods in synergising my overall methodology. Why? Because 'case study method can allow for 'critical constructive reflection' and that 'case studies are a special form of narrative' (Schipani, 2014, p. 91). Schipani suggests that:

'Good' cases tell a story and are normally brief: they are relevant to the reader and focus on an interest-arousing issue or critical event: they have pedagogical or heuristic value by eliciting optimal expectation or tension and calling for discernment and some kind of resolution or decision. (Schipani, 2014, pp. 91-2)

Criticisms of case study method are: its limitations in and difficulties in generalising from one case to another, difficulty for the researcher in setting parameters for the research, distortions to the research through misplaced memory of the researcher, and bias in the selection of documents to be explored (Schipani, 2014, p. 99).

5.8 Case study method: Preliminary inquiry

'Absorbing the culture…It never entirely stops…You go in with your eyes and your ears open: you look and you listen' (Gillham, 2000. p.27).

Between the 6th-8th January 2019, I undertook an exploratory visit to Acton Farm, the Northumbria Community retreat centre. The exploratory trip was organised in order to:

- Meet with the leadership, Roy Searle and Trevor Miller, to give them an opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns and finalise and affirm my proposal.

- Stay at the Community (retreat centre) in preparation for a five-day residential

- Identify interviewees

- Familiarise myself with the Community within its new setting after its move to its new location.

5.8.1 The welcome

The outcomes of my trip were recorded within a field notebook. On arrival at Acton Farm (new location of the Community), Nether Springs, I was met by one of the house team leaders and welcomed to what I thought was the 'retreat centre' of the Community but was in fact referred to as the 'motherhouse' of the Community. There was an emphasis on this which, I think, reflects the dispersed nature of the Community, an interconnected collection of members scattered throughout the world. I wonder if it's something that is relative throughout the Community?

Within my welcome, further distinctions were made between the old (Hetton Hall) and new Community home (Acton Farm). I was told the old motherhouse centred around members of the Community with smaller accommodation for guests, whereas the new building centres on guests with smaller house team accommodation.

I was told that most meaningful dialogue amongst visitors and staff happened around the Aga and the washing-up sink situated within the dining room. This is something that I can confirm from my time at Hetton Hall but, due to health and safety, this could no longer happen in the new place. The Community had installed an Aga but was not used much during my visit.

I was introduced to the word 'Rhythm' during a conversation as something that develops around what is referred to as the 'Rule' of the Community. A team member said when they leave the motherhouse, they will need to develop a new rhythm that would suit a new context of living the Rule. I was unsure of the relationship between rhythm and rule, and it led me to want to ask, what do they think should remain constant within a time of change, if in fact anything should remain constant?

5.8.2 Material culture

I noticed dotted around Acton Farm various pictures and banners that used to hang on the walls of Hetton Hall. The doors to the Acton Farm chapel came from the Chapel of Incarnation that was situated within the grounds of Hetton Hall. Why were certain things brought from the old place and for what reason? How have the old items been absorbed into the fabric of the new place? The new location certainly felt more monastic in layout than the old place. The guest rooms were situated around a square quadrant, like a cloister.

As the Community leadership had a central role in the conversion of the barns, one would assume a certain amount of intentionality in it reflecting a cloister.

5.8.3 Representation of old and new

The person that welcomed me was unaware I used to be a member and that I had lived at the old place. This was very useful in the fact that I experienced real-time representation of the Community and its motherhouse.

When I was shown the Poustinia within the grounds of the motherhouse I was told that they decided to put a window in it as the views were beautiful across the fields it overlooks. She said that the 'puritans', were unhappy, as the Poustinia at the old place had no window based on the lines of the Community's source in Catherine de Hueck Doherty book, *Poustinia* (Doherty, 1975).

I met someone who I known from my time in the Community and who had been around the Community from the start. Whilst in conversation they said, 'things change over time, you just need to readjust to new environments.' They were aware of the split in the leadership in 1998 and of my involvement with John Skinner after he left the Community.

They took me to show me a picture of Hetton Hall that was hanging up in the dining room. They said, 'we had good times there, the place was right for then, it was a bit run down, wasn't it?' They described how it is now easier for people to visit the motherhouse as it is only five minutes off the A1 as opposed to twenty minutes from the A1 and on very narrow lanes to get to the old place. They described the old place as if 'camping inside'.

5.8.4 Meeting with Roy and Trevor

Trevor has agreed to give me a comprehensive document that documents the Community minutes and meetings over the years.[176] This document was compiled by Roy Searle's son, Joshua, who did his MA on the Community. They have assured me no one else has researched the effect of transition on the Community narrative so I still have a research basis for working within the Community. They are both excited by what the research may generate and are both very willing to help me in whatever way they can, including being very happy to be interviewed.

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[176] This document never materialised as no one in the community knew where it was.

One bit of information that they both agreed on, is that the 3rd generation of membership cannot go back to the founders for wisdom. I want to ask why when they are interviewed? Does it relate to the breakdown in relationship, or do they think it is more generic in the development of community?

5.9.5 Summary from the visit

Meeting the few members I did, has confirmed the importance of interviewing members of the Community who have only been members since the move to the new place and members who have been around to see the transition. This will hopefully reveal how the narrative has developed to embrace the transition from one building to another. What memories have been left behind and what memories have been incorporated into the new Community narrative? Has the transition from one building to another allowed the Community to leave behind the hardship of the breakdown amongst the founders? Has history been changed?

One member seemed to only be able to comment between the new and old location from practical and aesthetical standpoints. The reference to the old location as if living in an indoor campsite almost becomes a justification for moving to a very new and modern-looking location.

The person I spoke to who had lived in both places seemed to justify the new location as if for the need of a new location for a new phase in the Community development. The old location only being talked about in a nostalgic way. I would like to ask them what part of the Community within the old location has been carried forward?

There is an importance expressed throughout the Community of inclusivity. Acton Farm feels more like a retreat centre than the motherhouse of a community. Is this a result of embracing diversity in people's adoption of the Community Rule into a variety of contexts? It does beg the question, other than in name, what binds all members together? Is there any cohesion in how people read the Rule? If the Community disappeared, what would identify people who were still living the Community Rule?

It seems inclusivity has taken the Community to a point where difference to the inclusivity has become a boundary of suspicion. It feels more like a dispersed parish church than a monastic Community.

A more focused question has emerged after my initial trip. Whilst identity and definition are still central to my research, particularly within personal and corporate narratives - how do identity and definition travel between times of transition and generations of membership and leadership? I feel that I need to identify the relevant people to be interviewed who will produce the data required for my research question. This is different from my initial thought of sending a blanket letter to all members. The current leaders have offered to help identify them.

Times of transition within the Community:

- From the **founders** to the **few** to the **many**. Once the Community had been fully established in the late nineties, the Community looked at ways of sharing responsibilities amongst a growing membership. This accounts for three transitional periods under the stewardship of the 1st generation of leaders.

- 2nd generation emerging from 1998 after the breakdown in relationship between leaders and the exile of a founder.

- 3rd generation, 2015 to the present, after moving to new location in 2015 and a leader of the Community leaving to become the spirituality advisor and chaplain to the Bishop of Newcastle.

I felt it would be very good to interview some members that span all transitions and some that emerge within each of the generations; this offered a fuller understanding of transmission of charism throughout the life of the community.

5.9 Case study and mitigating criticism

Shortfalls in case study method are:

Firstly, In the light of research into 'generalisation theory' within case study methodology, suggesting that 'generalisation in social science is an illusory goal.' Thomas has argued that, 'one's *phronesis*,[177] rather than one's theory' should be considered within a multiple-

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[177] Translated into English it means, practical virtue and practical wisdom. It is an ancient Greek word for a type of wisdom or intelligence relevant to practical action.

contextual understanding between researcher, subject and reader. (Thomas, 2011, pp. 31-32)

As a schoolteacher for over twenty-five years, Thomas has argued that the wisdom and experience gained within this time allow for greater awareness in extrapolating generalisations from one case to another. I would suggest care is needed in this process so that maybe findings are less conclusive, but more an 'intuitive hunch' that should be taken seriously. 'It is time to stop the witch hunt on intuition and see it for what it is: fast, automatic, subconscious processing style that can provide us with very useful information that deliberate analysing can't.[178] My own time within the new monastic movement and time in the Northumbria Community adds generalisation value to my research.

Secondly, the researcher in case study method is susceptible to unregulated parameters and memory forgetfulness in negotiating large numbers of documents. Throughout the case study method, I have continually used the data generated from my adopted methods to bear upon the central focus of this case. This led to a large amount of data that was not used on the grounds it did not add anything new in answering the central question. I also have kept a research diary throughout this thesis in order to record anything that is relevant to my thesis.

Finally, in terms of bias towards the researcher and their interview selection, I have consulted the leaders of the Community in order to select the interviewees that would produce the best results in exploring change throughout the life of the Community. Saying that, then bias could be laid upon the leaders, so I consulted with some senior figures in the Community to act as a measure for their selections. Also, throughout my research I have tested my assumptions by actively looking out for evidence that challenges my own understanding.

One such event occurred in reading a report by the Church Army on the Northumbria Community that challenged some preliminary ideas of charism and led me to build up my evidence around the notion of the Community having both the charism of the founder and the charism of the founding present.

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[178] Is it rational to trust your gut feelings? A neuroscientist explains (theconversation.com) (accessed 20/05/2018)

5.10 My own voice

As a former member of the Northumbria Community and a practitioner of new monasticism I argue against some criticism pointed at autobiographical reflections within research and thus mitigate against some issues that may occur.

An instance of writing in a personal voice, while simultaneously considering the difficulties of that process, is Jane Tompkins's 'Me and My Shadow'…It opens with the words:

There are two voices inside me…One is the voice of a critic who wants to correct a mistake in the essay's view of epistemology. The other is the voice of a person who wants to write about her feelings…These being exist separately but not apart. One writes for professional journals, the other in diaries late at night. (Tompkins, 1987, p. 169; Fisk, 2014, p. 6)

The criticism of the researcher who brings their own voice to their research is that they are often criticised for overtly subjective writing. To safeguard against too much subjectivity, I will be guarding against: excessive focus on my voice in isolation from others, an over reliance on narration rather than analysis, exclusive reliance on personal memory and negligence in ethics in relation to writing about others within self-narratives (Chang, 2008, p. 54). Where my voice does find greater validity is within the final three chapters of this thesis where I argue for a new revisioning of a vocation to new monasticism that comes directly from the conclusions that I draw from my case study.

Furthermore, reflexivity needs to be observed throughout my thesis on the basis that I am studying a research topic of new monasticism that I operate in to a greater or lesser extent.

Reflexivity means being able to reflect – in-and -on-action, engage with feelings, and be able to make informed and committed judgements…you have to reflect on the nature of what you are doing, on what you bring to the process, on what happens in the field, on how you will write up your findings and on the meaning or significance of what you have found. (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015, p. 106)

I would argue that honesty towards ulterior motives, openness about invested interests and declaration of pre-judgements prior to the research can only help towards a greater awareness of reflexivity. This is an exercise I did in my diary prior to my research. Also, time between my own membership of the Community and now, reacquaintance with old friends from the Community, and a single and focused attention to my central question and the purpose of why I am using the Northumbria Community, all help towards safeguarding my own presence within my field of study.

Recently, within auto-ethnographic inquiry, Karen Barad[179] has suggested new methodological influences that, to an extent, reduce the laborious work of reflexivity.

> Rather than a representation of what is different between self and other, 'diffraction' is interested in the *effects* of difference...such a stance engenders an auto-ethnographic focus concerned not with an epistemology that represents difference but one that seeks to articulate and embody the sociocultural effects of our material and discursive bodies. (Barad, 2007, pp. 72-3; Spry, 2018, pp. 631-2)

I am not suggesting a 'retreat' from reflexivity, but a further safeguard in negotiating between the 'I' and the 'other'. In adopting this epistemology, it will allow me to compare the effects of 'contextual particularity' with other 'contextual particularities. This would allow a constructive comparison, without criticism of a 'situated experience', and as difference 'does not necessarily give rise to separation' - would allow me to momentarily hold each new monastic expression in communion with one another, across the whole spectrum of this research (Spry, 2018, p. 631).

5.11 Interviews as method: Preliminary considerations

The purpose of interviewing members of the Northumbria Community was to create a: 'rich' and 'varied' understanding, theme generating process and to be attentive to observations that would contribute to the research. A secondary purpose to interviews was to challenge some of my own preconceived ideas around current Community vision and practice, and in

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[179] Karan Barad is a professor of feminist theory at the University of California

some cases to challenge the presence of my own voice in the thesis. A third reason was to bring the 'lived experience' to the static processes of analysis of simply reading documents.

5.12 Sampling considerations

As in a majority of cases, I adopted a theoretical sampling method for my interviews (Bremborg, 2014, p. 313). The variables for choosing my samples were set after my initial visit to the Northumbria Community. In wanting to generate data from across the whole history of the Northumbria Community I chose to stratify my sampling between three generations of members that related to the three different generations of leadership. After consultation with Community leadership and some senior figures in the Community, I decided on interviewees that would contribute to a rich source of data and allow me to view the transmission of charism and belonging over the history of the Community. I was aware that this form of sampling, 'snowball' sampling had the potential for bias, particularly by just asking the leadership. This is why I also consulted with senior figures in the Community

I invited ten people from varying backgrounds, male and female, old and young. Four members from the first generation, three from the second generation and three from the third generation, although on the account that the last three interviewees were all very similar, I only included one of the interviews. I initially wrote to each perspective interviewee explaining my research and inviting them to participate. After their response, I sent them consent forms with a greater introduction to what I was going to be asking in the interviews.

I was unsure at the start of my research how effective the interviews would be in relation to gathering data. All I knew was that having left the Community in 1998, there was a twenty-year period in time where I have not been at the heart of the Community in terms of the lived experience and the hope was that the interviews would help fill this gap, as well as produce data in their own right.

5.13 Interview structure

I have used a semi-structured interview framework in order to allow the interviewee some scope to expand and interpret. Semi-structured interviews are the most important form of interviewing in case study method (Gillham, 2000, p. 65; Gregg and Scholefield, 2015, p. 116).

The advantage of using a semi-structured interview is that: you can respond to what the interviewee says, you can change the order of the questions, albeit asking them all, and

elicit information and judgments and reflective comments (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015, p. 117). As a researcher engaged in using semi-structured questions, I certainly felt the full repertoire of benefits as most information extracted came from the so-called 'side-lines' of my proposed questions.

In creating the interview questions, I was guided by Gillham and his framework for interview technique within case study method (Gillham, 2000). Once complete, I conducted interviews with family and friends to gauge their response, give myself practice and also, as some of them have been involved in the new monastic movement, received some feedback on content.

I was aware that some of the interviews may generate 'strong' feelings that could also bring to the surface feelings of hurt and anger. I was very aware of the impact in the breakdown of leadership in 1998 and the fact that some in the Community are still impacted by this trauma. I felt capable of negotiating through this on the grounds that I know who was around during that period and so would be able to make judgments throughout the interviews and change accordingly when I felt that the interview was moving from within the boundary of my ethics approval or was generating overt feelings.

All the interviews lasted around an hour and were undertaken in the January of 2019 at Acton Farm. I was given an outside heated hut to conduct the interviews, although two interviewees wanted me to go to their homes which I agreed with.

I was aware in some interviews of the 'power difference' in the fact that the interviewees did not need the interviewer, but that the interviewer needed the interviewee (Gregg and Scholefield, 2015, p. 120). I was also aware in some cases that the interview was used as a way of airing concerns about certain situations in the management of the house team. Two interviewees thanked me after the interview as it brought a sense of closure to some historical hurt, in the way that they had not talked about them for many years. One interviewee had not been to the new place for many years through fear of what they found. After the interview they were welcomed into the centre.

Regardless of the impact of the interviews on my research, the interview process brought about healing and in some cases clarity for some of the house team and those that had lived through the trauma of the 'split'.

A copy of the semi-structured interview, my ethics form and a copy of the approval letter that was signed by each interviewee, can be found in the appendices.

5.14 Limits in interview method

Some of the limitations of the interview technique lie to the time required to transcribe, read, and reread in order to find the 'golden nugget'. Researchers are reliant on the interviewee telling the truth or on the interviewee telling the interviewer what they think they want to hear. This was the case of one of my interviews, which resulted at the end with them asking if they could come to visit my own organisation and stay for a period of time.

Limitations more specific to my research arose from the fact that some of the interviewees know me as a past member. It was agreed that the leadership gave full permission to the members and house team so as to generate the best results for my research, which according to the leadership would offer some insight and support to the Community going forward in its own understanding of charism. Individual interviews also helps break the interviewee from 'peer pressure' that may influence what is said (Chang, 2008, p. 104).

5.15 Analysis of the interviews and data gathering

Carrying out interviews and recording them is very different to transcribing and analysing. I transcribed the interviews within a three-eighth week period after they took place. I opted to fully hand transcribe the interviews on the grounds that I felt I was drawn closer to the data in having to repeatedly listen to the interview, I felt that was spoken was 'Holy', to be treated carefully.

Using the same themes as I did in my document analysis, I started to highlight parts of the transcript that spoke of charism, belonging, identity, relationship to monasticism and feelings and knowledge of the 'split', whilst allowing other themes to emerge that found currency and frequency in relation to all the interviews.

Added to this were my field notes, which helped connect my own thoughts and feelings towards various occurrences that occurred within the interviews and also from an ethnographical perspective, from my time at staying at Acton Farm.

I allowed the interviews to speak above and beyond my thematic constraint in allowing other themes to emerge through a careful process of content analysis as suggested by a curtailed version of Gillham (Gillham, 2000, pp. 71-5):

- Going through each interview, highlight substantive quotes - ignoring repetition.

- After, go back to the beginning, highlight common themes or quotes throughout all the interviews. I gave these simple headings, for example, 'entrance into the community via their prayer book.'

- Decide if any themes could be grouped or classified together or split up.

- Go through the group to decide how relevant the themes are to the research question.

- Review classifications ready for data extraction to chapter six.

5.16 Summary and conclusions

In this chapter I have set out my argument for the epistemology and methodology that underpin my research. I have argued for a constructivist epistemology and a methodological narrative inquiry. I have explained the inclusion of my own voice alongside others (interviewees). I have argued the connection between theology as method and my own methodology through observations of early Egyptian monasticism. Finally, I have framed my set of methods and how I intend to extract data and analyse that data moving forward.

Part II of this thesis now focuses on my interviews, which will, in turn, show my methodology in practice.

Chapter 6. Meeting the interviewees: Voices from within

6.1 Introduction

As commented above in the literature review, sociological exploration into new monasticism has suggested that we now need to expand the boundary of our study to consider how new communities negotiate expansion beyond the charismatic founding figure(s), to the subsequent new leadership team. How does ethos and practice pass on from one generation of membership to another? Theological enquiry into new monasticism has called for greater work in the field of anthropology, giving voice to the practitioners and their discursive relationship within the culture they practice within. For this reason, I have chosen to undertake interviews to move the study of new monasticism forward. The purpose of these interviews is firstly; to give voice to those practicing new monasticism within the confines of a new monastic Community. Exploring how members, past and present, contextualise the three themes of 'belonging', 'monasticism' and 'charism' within their own lived experiences. Secondly, to plot how ethos and practice is passed on from one generation to the next. Thirdly, to understand how trauma is processed and absorbed into the life of a new monastic community.

Because of the nature of my thesis in plotting movement of themes and ethos within the lived experience, I have felt it necessary to include more data that is often seen in these types of study. I have decided to focus my attention on three generations of Community membership: an interview with founding leadership and members, interviews with second generation of leadership and members and interviews with a third generation of leadership and membership. Accompanying these, will be some interviews with co-participants who bridge the generational spectrum and include some that have left the Community in some capacity.

As commented in the last chapter, some of the first, second and third generation of leaders including Roy Searle, Trevor Miller, Pete Askew, John Skinner and Sarah Pillar have not been able to be interviewed. Roy, Trevor, and Sarah have both suffered illnesses and the onslaught of Covid-19 has added additional difficulties. John and Pete asked not to be interviewed, although Pete was happy to have an unrecorded conversation with me.

As prescribed in my ethics review, for the sake of protecting interviewees privacy as well as sensitivities in relation to relationships within the Community, I have chosen to change the gender of the interviewees and chose not to include age or ethnicity and where appropriate to remove identifying characteristics.

6.2 First generation

First generation includes those that worked and served under John and Linda Skinner from the mid-eighties to the departure of John and Linda in 1998. It spans the formal formation of the Community in 1992.

6.2.1 Sarah

Sarah self-referred as a *"foundational stone,"* they were present at the very early [180]stages in the development of both the liturgy and way for living of the Community. Being present before the formal formation of the Community, Sarah has since been on the 'outskirts' of the Community after the Community moved to its new location at Acton Farm. The invitation to be interviewed at Acton Farm served as an opportunity to meet *"new friends and to reacquaint with old ones."*

Sarah made no explicit mention of monasticism in the entire interview.[181] During my ethnographic observations in January 2019 at Acton Farm, I was struck by the small amount of monastic literature within the library. The library of the Community was split into topics and nestled in one corner of the room was a shelf dedicated to monasticism. Sarah went on to talk about the connection between family and Community. She described that she had fallen out with her mother, so lost connection with that side of his family, other family members lived away, so he found family in the Community. she suggests *"nowadays communities have a large draw, with more family's breaking down. Unity and points of interest hold people together."*

Sarah inferred another level of belonging within the Community, certainly at the early stages of the life of the Community. *"When John and Linda were living up here,[182] the group around them thought it would be good to have a liturgy that offered continuity throughout*

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[180]During my time in the community I hand first-hand experience this fluctuating seeking advice from interviewee No.4. From my observation it tended to centre around personalities.

[181] I purposely did not include monasticism into the semi-structured interview as I wanted to see how far the term and use of monasticism was part of the interviewee's nature vocabulary and expression.

[182] 'up here' refers to a place called Glanton in Northumberland where John and Linda lived in a house called the Grange. This was prior to a move to the formal Community house called Hetton Hall.

the week and not just when they met. It was written as a trial, but soon all the copies of the liturgy were taken by people enjoying them."

She went on to say that *"at this point, John, Linda, Andy and Roy all had separate mailing lists and any correspondence sent from the Community went to all these separate lists. Out of them came the bones of Community."*[183]

"As we became more formal more people joined from outside the lists, folk joined that had no history with the founders, no allegiance to them, that made a change."

"At that time if you wanted to see a leader you were encouraged to see someone you didn't have a history with to try and bring people together. It helped to level the playing field. People who could not do that stayed on the mailing list but were not part of the Community."

In relation to charism, Sarah suggested that she felt there was a change in emphasis within the Community. *"it seems more established, no longer holding onto its coat tails,"* she referred to a saying that was spoken of on a daily basis, *"constant change is here to say,"* at the time *"it was exciting, challenging and sometime volatile."* When asked what she thought the ethos of the Community is, she said, *"I know what it was. Rule and ethos were about relationships above reputation. Once the ethos permeates you do not think about it…Going out of your way for someone is a natural thing now for me, I do not think about it…ethos of Community permeates through own character. Ethos is like a jewel, what facet you are, reflects that part of the jewel. When you squeeze your history and ego through a particular ethos you should see change, but the change is centred around a particular character."*

Throughout the interviews each interviewee was asked if they were to produce a film about their experiences in Community what would it be called and what would the film be about. As indicated in the methodology, the purpose was to unlock further feelings and thoughts about time in the Community. Not everyone used words to describe how they feel so the inclusion of this question was to give another avenue of exploration. Sarah's film title was, *"Driven to distraction."* she went on to reminisce about her time in the early Community, *"when they had nothing, had many struggles that resulted in blind faith."* she talked about *"living on the edge. We were often unsure whether we could pay the wages and bills,* it felt

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[183] It seems that Nick was suggesting that each founding member of the Community already had people around them in a supportive and communal capacity. These people then became the first members of the Community when the founding members joined to form under one entity.

like *Community may have been for a season and that it was God's business.*"[184] She went on to talk about how they were taught about the concept of how we can *"project feelings on to others whilst living in Community."*

In relation to change and trauma, Sarah refers equally to the two traumas in the life of the Community, the departure of John and Linda and moving to a new Mother House. *"When John left it required a bigger call for stability, a long-time of hanging on and staying in it. No one rocked the boat, and everyone protected what was there, it was a huge shock. Although we were now clinging to each other we were still giving the Community away to those that needed it. This is a way to live the life through giving it away."*

"It was also difficult when we moved to a new Mother House…I was considered the 'old fart' who would not move forward. After the move, I was moved to an office in Berwick,[185] it felt like they did not want me here... I never came near the new place for a long time as I did not feel welcome, but it did not stop me living the ethos and praying the liturgy or being in Community, I just was not associated with here."

6.2.2 Thomas

Thomas referred to the Community as a *"by-product of my personal journey."* He was present prior to the formation of the Community and refers to himself as a founding member and leader of the Community and as fundamental to writing of both the 'liturgy' and the 'way for living'. Since the formation of the Community to the present day, the influence of Thomas on the leadership has fluctuated and he felt that with the arrival of the new current leadership, his advice has been explicitly sought.

Thomas makes very little reference to his belonging to the Community. His opening statement about the Community being a by-product of a personal journey seems to have been carried to the present day.[186] Thomas clearly and explicitly refers to a *"calling to live on Holy Island,"* and whether the Community are with him or not, it seems this would have remained constant. *"I was called to live on Holy Island in 1976. I was going to Holy Island for*

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[184] This notion of Community being for a season was expressed in 1995 by John Skinner. Whilst being recorded for a community message from a trip to Clonfert in Ireland the site on which St Brendan built a monastery. In this video message, John expressed his desire that community members would set off in their own boats to settle wherever God leads them to start a community of their own. He alluded to shutting the Community home at Hetton Hall.
[185] About 30 miles North from Acton Farm.
[186] Having known Thomas for over thirty years and him being the person that introduced me to John and Linda Skinner before the start of the Northumbria Community I have witnessed Thomas's attempt and maintaining a double trajectory towards life on Holy Island and a commitment to the Community.

what I thought was a retreat, I was arguing with God at the time and God changed the subject to invite me to live on Holy Island, it was a life calling to the Island." [187]

Throughout the interview Thomas regularly expands on the charism of the Community and what he thinks it should look like. When asked what the ethos of the Community is and where the practices come from, he said, *"Inclusive, for non-believers and believers on a sliding scale of commitment. We are all still seeking. The greater always includes the lesser…"*

"We witnessed a large amount of people who wanted direction, it was necessary to formalise, organically – so becoming more structured. First came the vows of vulnerability and availability, then John said we should be praying an office. Me and John sat down one evening, after the kids had gone to bed, we started pulling together an example of what an office might look like...[188]*Midday-Prayers needed to be short in the time of boiling a kettle, as a pause in an active day."* He went on to say, *"the liturgy was just an example and the reason it was produced in a Filofax was because they thought it would change and be fluid, although it has not changed and has remained remarkably consistent."*

When asked if the ethos has changed, Thomas said, *"No, we are user friendly for non-believers. The typology has changed, more secular, more non-religious and more spiritually open, but we are still behind what is happening but remain more inclusive than churches."* Thomas went on to say, *"I think we need to focus more on people who are 'totally unchurched,' believers or not…People encounter the Community in a positive way…we should not be distracted by gaining the approval of the Church, or by paying too much attention to people who are dissatisfied with church… we should be intentionally engaging with people who come from 'different places."*

When asked if there was anything that he would change in the Community, these changes centred around the charism, *"Yes, two parts of the Rule we never got around to developing. The first is an accountability issue. When they were formulating the Rule for others to follow,*

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[187]*'Then it came about when she came to him, that she persuaded him to ask her father for a field. Then she alighted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, 'What do you want'? She said to him, 'Give me a blessing, since you have given me the land of the Negev, give me also springs of water'. So, Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.* Judges 1: 14-15. This is a founding biblical quote prior to the start of the Community. Thomas went on to describe the fact that he was tasked with identifying the Upper Springs (missional outpost) on Holy Island and John and Linda to identity the Nether Springs (retreat centre) which was to be on the mainland and became Hetton Hall.

[188] This is an important first-hand account of the period in which the liturgy was written. There have been different accounts of this throughout the interviews and through document analysis in the previous chapter.

they choose to refer to it as voluntary accountability. The reason they did this was because many of the first wave of members came out of the 'heavy shepherding movement.' Community can be a terrifying place to be and that we have to break down our idealism into real stuff." Thomas felt that accountability for the Community should be based around the idea of a *"'soul-friendship model' a move away from spiritual directors and experts."* He commented that the Community's novitiate programme has become more *"touchy and feely"* and less *"academic"*, allowing a soul-friend to accompany novitiates through the questions.[189]

Thomas does not explicitly refer to monasticism throughout his interview only implicitly in connection with the Celtic Church and the concept that is found within most popular publications on the Celtic church.[190] *"The Celtic model has no parishes; it's based on relational aspects and that there is no church planting. Faith is lived as individuals with friends and families. This it is why soul-friendship is so important as a form of accountability in this model of church, there are no experts."* Thomas concluded that the Church only seems to make *"cosmetic changes regarding adopting a Celtic style, then just carry on doing the same thing."* He quoted Kierkegaard: *"Christ did not die for the crowd but died for individuals."*[191]The other reference was in relation to two communities that he looked to in order to explain the Community's own ethos, *"Taizé in its ability to be there for 'genuine seekers' whilst at the same time being formed around a monastic rhythm and the Othona[192] Community, which is a safe fence to sit on and ask why they are not or why they are believers?"*

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[189] Through informal conversations with others and through comments made in some of these interviews, Trevor Miller who succeed John after his departure is often blamed for a more legalistic and cognitive approach to the Communities novitiate programme as well as its working model at tis mother house. Due to a severe illness, I have not been able to interview Trevor.

[190]These publications have been listed in the literature review, the main one being Ian Bradleys book *'Colonies of Heaven'*.

[191] Andy went on to explain at length the connection between history and contemporary life and the ability for history to aid contemporary circumstances. He referenced Celtic stories and Saints *Vita* to illustrate current Community dilemma and action. Evidence of what Philip Sheldrake describes as 'presentism', the notion of reflecting on past spiritual and historical accounts to give meaning to present day circumstances, without necessary reflection upon the culture it emerged from, is riddled throughout new monasticism and interpretations of so-called Celtic Christianity. Whilst this alone is worth reflecting through a thesis, here it only serves as a contribution to exploring new monasticism within the remit of this thesis and has already been considered within the literature review.

[192] As found on their website, The Othona Community is an open and inclusive Community rooted in the Christian faith and drawing on a wealth of other inspirations. It started in 1946 as a summer camp in the marshes of Essex. https://www.othonaessex.org.uk/

When asked about the tile of his film, it is called, *"building beyond brokenness."* Thomas went on to give numerous historical accounts from the writings of Bede of people coming to Holy Island to find comfort and peace, often people who are already *"broken."* When reading about Holy Island, he found *"a praying place, the prayers that have been prayed here have made a difference and the prayers that are being prayed are making a difference. The place is marked and marks people when they come to visit."* Hs choice of film centred around his own 'life calling' to Holy Island.

In relation to change, Thomas referred to the move to Acton Farm *"The Mother House rather than being the central hub was just a larger version of the small boats that were heading off. It seems we are being sent out not expecting the world to come to us…The Mother House was moved to a place that was more accessible and yet still quite. The focus of the Community has moved outwards but there is a lot of 'bias' that stops them being flexible. The other big change as you know, is that big 'bust up'[193] we went through. We haven't handled it well at times, but I think we survived one way or another."*

It seems Thomas has negotiated the change in a positive way discerning the way he feels God is directing the Community. There is interest here in the fact that Thomas chose to position the property move first and the departure of John and Linda second, including the fact that he chose to only refer to their departure via one sentence.

6.2.3 Simon

Simon is a longstanding trustee of the Community and *"has been around the Community from the start."* He made a point of saying that he had known John and Linda Skinner prior to the formation of the Community. Simon is someone that has been involved at the centre of the Community throughout its entire history.

It was very difficult to discern any particular need of, or purpose for belonging to the Community, other than the excitement of the early days in wanting to be *"around them and what was happening."* Coming from a *"anti-liturgy"* tradition he did infer he found the liturgy an *"anchor that means more as time goes on."*

Charism of the Community through the eyes of Simon has changed from; the early days of being with *"People who came around the table being broken and in transition, people had relationship and church breakdowns,"* to operating in the new property with its *"hotel spec"*

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[193] He was referring to John and Linda, me and my family leaving the Community.

rooms. *The new bathrooms were a far cry from the bathrooms at Hetton Hall that had no two taps that matched and were always cold."* He said it felt like *"God had given us a home and that now He had given us what we really wanted."* Despite this, he had concerns, that some of the *"poor folk"* that were around at the start of the Community would find it difficult to fit in now. He suggested that this may be in fact that *"God is now calling the Community to have an impact on the middle classes, the movers and shakers of the world. Maybe we are serving different people as the Community expands."* Simon was glad that the Community had appointed a more diverse leadership in three female leaders.

Simon makes no explicit reference to monasticism, although based on the language of the Community, his reference to *"rhythms and patterns"* being good, is an implicit reference to liturgy, borrowing from the idea of a monastic office.

When asked about the title of his film, he says, *"Pillocks I have worked for and bastards I have known, only joking. Well, I know it will not be dull, the film will be about my time at Hetton Hall, maybe a month in the life of. Where poor people met with God. People used to come thinking they needed spiritual direction, in fact most needed pastoral counselling. I did a Samaritans course, that I think at the time was the only one on offer. We were just making space for God to work. Place didn't matter, when we left Hetton Hall some people went back to say goodbye, I didn't, we had moved and the heart had moved so why go back, it was nostalgia, place meant so much to some."*

The moving to a new property did not, on the surface, seem to impact on Simon. The trauma of moving according to him, seemed to centre around people who associated the Community with place. There was no reference to John leaving and in fact, Simon went out to suggest that the Community was not dependant on the early work of John, Linda and Andy, living together, suggesting that others were, and have lived in community, prior to the formation of the Northumbria Community.

6.2.4 Julia

Julia is positioned within the first generation of membership, although she does say, *"it is only since being more involved in the work of the Community that the liturgy has taken deeper roots."* She is about to be appointed to the leadership team. Her first encounter with the Community was via one of its community groups that were set up around the county where Community members would gather to socialise, receive teaching, and say the liturgy

together. Although a first-generation member, Julia is part of the third generation of leadership.

For Julia, belonging started with *"no dramatic* call, *just simply a feeling like just coming home."* She has grown more recently at a "deeper level…*life used to be 'straightforward' and that after problems in her job, loss in terms of family and children, that the Community now resonates on a deeper level, Community with others resonates more,"[194]* In accepting a leadership role in teaching and educating Community members, Julia was very aware of her role, *"It's a massive problem now the fact that not everybody now knows each other."[195]*She went on to describe three ways people enter the Community; through buying Celtic Daily Prayer, know someone who is a member and through Community groups. *"My role is to help find core values again. To return to those, to keep revisiting to go forward. It's all about the picture Rule,[196] we need to know the centre to cope with transition, others may fall off, we need to know what the heart is truly about."*

This leads to what Julia describes as the Charism of the Community centred around at ethos of *"living and walking a pathway a sense of journey. The life resonates around Northumbrian spirituality, we seek the Lord for ourselves, availability and vulnerability is our pathway of life…Ethos is openness of heart, hospitality, greeting the stranger, we are in it altogether, relationships are important. Whilst at Nether Springs a few weeks ago, I sat round a table with a hurricane chaser and water-divider and a transvestite, surrounded by these people is normal, co-existing, sitting around a table together, its inclusivity, messy, it's an exciting place to be, it's not boring."*

There was no explicit mention of monasticism from Julia, other than what has to become synonymous with certain Community language and inferred monastic borrowing.

Julia made no reference to the departure of John and only referred to the trauma of moving properties in relation to the impact on her own feelings, *"The difference between the old and new place meant more to me at the start. In the new place I did not know too many*

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[194] Julia was head of an English department in a secondary school.
[195] The new leadership, headed by Julia are currently working on what they call, *The School for Monastic Living*. It is an attempt to be able to provide better teaching material and connectivity to Community members within a dispersed environment.
[196] The Picture Rule is the first published Rule in the early nineties that had pictures to accompany each written part of the Rule. The purpose was to reach people who were illiterate who were around the early Community at that time.

people and I wasn't at the centre as much. Know going more regularly and working with the Community in leadership, it feels different, the ethos is still there."

When asked about her film Julia says, *"Come to the edge: Called to risky living. The film will be about the people in Community, the wild people who are daring and open, Andy Raine experiences, things that make you feel vulnerable."*

6.3 Second Generation

Second generation spans from 1998 (departure of John and Linda Skinner) through to 2019. This includes all levels of leadership under the stewardship of Roy Searle and Trevor Miller, including the addition to the leadership team of Pete Askew in 2008.

6.3.1 Gordon

Gordon said he has been *"involved in the Community on and off for 25 years."* his level of involvement with the Community has fluctuated over the 25 years and now he has been asked to help the Community in a transitional period *"beyond the founding generation."*[197] His encounter with the Community came *"around 1995"* via a mission outreach.[198] I have chosen to position Gordon, Into the second generation of membership as they infer throughout their interview that their involvement became explicit and formalised after 1998.

Belonging for Gordon occurred after hearing stories of the Community people on the mission team and expressed what he described as a *"coming home experience."* The experience summed up in a personal struggle in understanding *"who he was as a Christian"* that offered her a *"language to express these experiences."* After that time, he said he was used by the leadership team as a facilitator for many difficult decisions as well as for advice in the physical move to their new home and change in leadership. Gordon was to become an *"overseer,"* a term the Community adopted for their leadership model.

Gordon gives us an insightful view of the ethos and charism of the Community from an organisational and structural standpoint. He says, *"Moving to the new Mother House has*

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[197] There was an inference that because of the nature of his previous job, working in management and organisational development within the charity sector for 25 years that their skills were being used in this instance.

[198] Roy Searle former leader of Northumbria Ministries pioneered what was called, 'Celtic Fire'. Celtic Fire was the missional outreach of the Community, teams would go to churches and groups to provide creative arts centred around the liturgy and the 'Way for Living'.

raised the bar of expectation on the Community. The moving has raised some questions: 1) Who are we? 2) What is the Community's relationship to the Mother House? 3) What do we need to recreate? 4) What can we leave behind? They relate to achieving a strategic and organisational awareness, a better operational performance." He compared the old Mother House as a *place "where the laundry was hung out of the window to dry, but the new place could not allow that to happen."* Gordon said, *"it raised a philosophical argument, what could be transferred to the new place. The new place was more middleclass, more controlled by health and safety and safeguarding – that these new things needed to be embedded in the new place and structure."* During the transition from the old Mother House, *"I heard stories from people who lived in the old place and felt related to the physicality of the building rather than the ethos."*

Similar to what Simon suggested above and equal in contradiction; they both justify a new charism or outlook, centred around 'place', yet criticise those who could not make the move from the old place to the new, as being nostalgic to 'place'. Was this nostalgia to 'place' or was it to an older charism or ethos? Or in fact ethos embedded in 'place.'

When asked how you maintain ethos and charism within change, Gordon went on to describe a story about the Aga; *"At the old place, the dining room and Aga was the place you were welcomed into the Community home, given a hot drink and made to feel welcome. It was often the warmest room in the building."* They choose to install an Aga in the new dining room of the new house with the same intention of being the place to welcome people with a 'cup of tea', and he seems to think people are having the same feelings of welcome in the new place. He suggested that the Aga represents hospitality, welcome and a sense of home and that the Aga is just one expression of this. He went on to say that *"in the old place there was an intensity, particularly in the early period. Hetton Hall was a significant place in people's personal journeys, memories bound up in the place."* Gordon was inferring that those that could not make the transition, tended to be those whose memories and personal journeys were too wrapped up in the physical place.

As the above suggests, there is a tension in the trauma of moving properties of the Community, with contradictions that centre around the position of 'physical place' in people's sense of belonging and spiritual connectedness.

When describing a current need of the new leadership to understand the widening cohort of membership from around the world, Gordon reverts back to suggesting, *"the building is*

not important, but the people are." There seems to be another dualism that is emerging between 'place' and 'people', between charism of the old and the demands of the future.

Finally, in regard to charism, Gordon refers to a quote from Bishop John Pritchard, who suggests that the *"Community is neither part of the traditional denominations nor is it part of the emergent new monastic movement"*.

Gordon does refer to monasticism in terms of a past Community model of leadership. He said when John left the Abbot/Bishop roles were *"personalised in Roy and Trevor."* It led to a separation of *"monastery and mission,"* monastery focused on the Mother House and the team that ran it and mission focused on teams away from the Mother House. He said it created an unhealthy polarisation of monastery and mission that saw the *"monastery"* part of the Community become *"Mother House centric."* Gordon implied this gave rise to an unhealthy individualism that had emerged in the Community. *"The three Community questions that over the last 20 years have become individual rather than corporate."*

1) *"Who is it that we seek?"*

2) *"How do we sing the Lords song in a strange land?"*

3) *"How then shall we live?"*

In the light of the report on the Community by George Lings, he has chosen to change the order of questions. Originally in the early days of the Community, question three was second and question two was third.

The change comes about from the idea that *"how do we live Community corporately twenty years on? Things that were then, twenty years ago need to change from an organisational level not a community level. For example, how do you have a Chapter meeting in a dispersed Community?"*

In regard his film title, he chose, *"Living in the valley and looking from the mountain top, they are words from a song. The valley is a tangle of roads; you need to live in the valley but from the perspective of the maintain top." H*e expressed that from an *"organisational perspective the Community have not been doing this, it could have been so different if they had."* He used this opportunity to constructively criticise the past leadership and install his role in the Community as consultant.

6.3.2 Karen

Karen came to the Community after widely exploring other new monastic communities throughout the world. Of all the interviewees, Karen is the only person to explicitly say that they have been following a *"monastic call, I was prepared to leave everything if I could find the place of community."* Karen entered the Community in 2006 and therefore sits within the second generation of membership. After serving as a chaplain to the Community under the leadership of Pete Askew, Karen has now been appointed to the third generation of leadership.

In relation to belonging to a community, Karen set out her blueprint for the ideal; *"prayer at the centre and that everything else goes around it. A community of simplicity and connectedness with the earth. Spiritual formation and hospitality."* In 2004, Helen who was at the time a Presbyterian Minister, describes a feeling of *"restlessness, it was not what I hoped for in ministry, I had a call to the monastic life, it took a while to figure it out."* After visiting the monastery of the Holy Cross in East Tennessee on retreat, she describes a feeling as though her *"spirit was doing fireworks, I wanted to shout out to the brothers, I am one of you, this was the moment of my call; this is your life."* Having been advised by one of the Catholic monks to find a Catholic order, Karen said, *"I don't want to change denominations, surely there is a place to do both."*

After the next few years trying to set up her own community and visiting other communities around the world, she read Celtic Daily Prayer and eventually found her way to the Northumbria Community. On arriving she describes *"it was not sexy and cool, like other places I had visited." It was through conversations with people at Hetton Hall that God seemed to be calling me here, they were not just lovely people. God was showing me a hiddenness. A place I could eventually live."*

Her belonging to the Community has a further twist, she met her husband to be on the very first day of arriving, Helen eventually moved to Hetton Hall in 2006 and lived in a caravan in the grounds. She describes finding her *"dream, the Community and marriage."*

One further aspect to belonging that Karen highlights, albeit in relation to how the community negotiated change, was the impact to what George Lings describes in his report on the Community, *"the years without an Abbot."*[199] It reveals the impact of Karen's experience of trauma within the Community, Karen describes living and working within this

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[199]This document by George Lings is mentioned in the previous chapter in 'what others say about the Community'.

period as being looked after by *"my brothers and sisters…I was a child and my father did not care for me. He would not leave his bedroom, he had no investment in his daughter, he never helped around the house."*[200]

In regard to Charism, her experience of the 'missing Abbot' has impacted her style of leadership, she claims; "*there was no clarity of purpose or clear expectations, something that Pete tried to sort in his leadership. 2007-2009 were the crisis years for the Community.*"

Karen continued by saying, *"now as a leader, there is wisdom in delegation. But if I give too much away, I stop living the life."* It felt that she was having to unpick some of her thinking around being 'present', firmly placing 'physical presence' as a leader with the actuality of living the 'life' and ethos of the Community.

When asked what she thought the ethos and life of the Community is, she said, "*when 'marked' by it you recognise it,*" Karen then lists her thoughts:

- *"Seeking God as one thing necessary"*

- *"Joy beyond what you can imagine"*

- *"Pain beyond what you think you can bare"*

- *"Every day God opens his hands and asks you to give Him your heart, soul and mind"*

- *"Come to the question each day"*

- *"Old nuns who hold things lightly, who have a twinkle in their eyes, I want to be that Joy is as important than humility"*

- *"Internal movement of the Spirit"*

- *"You cry a lot, get shown many things"*

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[200] I have wrestled for many weeks about the inclusion of this statement. Although the statement seems explicit in its blame to the 'missing Abbot', Helen is clear that now as a leader it has helped her understand more fully the role of leadership, as well as appreciating the experience in "knocking bits of her ego." Helen describes an incident whilst living in Tennessee of a car crash that left her having flashback to her childhood. Whilst Helen makes no connective comment about these flashbacks and her experience with the so-called missing Abbot, I may contact her further in order to ask. The reason for doing this is because it is becoming evident in the discursive nature of belonging to the Community, that past trauma can be aspect to why people are joining, inputting to the reason for and sense of belonging.

- *"Provision, you never have enough on your own to get through the day. It is like being a beggar. A danger of new monasticism is that you must be in poverty."* I think she was alluding to different types of poverty.[201]

- *"Ethos is different but connected:"*

- *"It is the way you do all of this"*

- *"The spirit in which all is done"*

- *"Availability and Vulnerability"*

"The team often see me weak as I cry in team meetings. They see the dirt in my fingertips as a fallen yet worker person. Hopefully seeing Jesus at work in me. I encourage the team to make their own judgements but are to here to help but people are capable."

Karen uses the word 'marked', of which there are twelve, which seems to replicate an expression of new monastic movement birthed through the Rutba House movement, with their twelve marks of new monasticism.

She concludes her reflections on charism and change with suggesting that she hopes to; *"change some ethos stuff, some of the structure and framework to respond to what God is inviting us to do. Better infrastructure around admin, communications, website, and better support for the team. The Community is growing too much, I want to travel and plan… I wanted to develop new things, the school of monastic living. I need to sort things that had been left undone. Reconnect with John Skinner, sort new trustees to govern properly, tidy the garden before the white-water rapids."*

As commented above, Karen is the only interviewee who expressed a 'call to monasticism', including testing her vocation within the presence of traditional monks. Her departure from this experience led her to conclude that she wanted to explore a monastic vocation within the stewardship of her own tradition of Presbyterianism. This led her away from traditional institutional monasticism. Moving on, she explicitly equates a monastic call with community life and reconciles marriage within this personal call.

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[201] In the formative period of the Northumbria Community financial poverty often accompanied the early members and the Community itself. They lived from week to week.

The title of Karen's film is, *"1000 stories of transformation and provision, 1000 moments recalling more amazing stories than fiction."*

6.3.3 James

James came to the Community as part of the first generation of membership, but I have chosen to place them within the second generation on the grounds that a majority of the interview centred around the period after the departure of John and Linda Skinner. Having visited Hetton Hall on a number of occasions they (James and his family) described their time there as like visiting a *"safe space, we regularly went there taking our children with us as they liked the rugged nature of the place and surrounding countryside…we felt as if we could be open and honest to be real as church leaders without being condemned. I would often go and find myself crying."* James went on to move to Hetton Hall with his family to help on the house team and were there when John and Linda Skinner left in 1998.

Belonging for James centred around the opportunity to work in a ministry that allowed his partner who had just had *"a breakdown related to the church we belonged to, I hoped it would be a time and place of healing for her."* James went on to say, *"I found the Community liturgy and their personality profile teaching really helpful. The Office, although my tradition does not cater for set prayers as an evangelical charismatic, I found it helpful in having a rhythm of prayer."*

The trauma of the departure of John and Linda Skinner seemed to lead to the eventual leaving of James and his family. *"Yes, leadership happened over there and us minions jumped. They never found a seat for me... In the end, me and my partner just became friends of the Community, we de-membered.[202] Our hearts were not in this as a Community, we didn't go back for nearly ten years…We continued saying the Office after we de-membered as we found the rhythm helpful and the prayers were rooted in the bible."*

Back in church leadership, *"I tried to build honesty and openness into church community and invited Andy to come and input to help my fellow evangelical charismatics to find depth and rootedness. At the Community, people were making the Community their church, although it was never the aim, it happened. People were dissatisfied with traditional church."*

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[202] For James, de-membering is a self-generating term meaning no longer being a companion of the Community. The commitment of a friend, which he chose, is to simply agree with the spirit of the Rule of the Community rather than a member or companion were you are encouraged to go 'deeper' into the charism.

This is an important statement in the fact that it reveals how trauma, monasticism, belonging and charism all impact upon people beyond membership to the Community. It suggests something beyond membership to the Community, ethos and practice being transferred and transplanted beyond the confirms of the Community, into a new context of experience and ministry. The act of retelling stories seems to have helped James in his past experiences, he says, *"thank you for this, it has been really helpful to be able to speak about it."*

In asking James about the ethos and charism of the Community, he says, *"Welcoming, accepting, inclusive and Grace is important, people who are messed up have a safe place to come to, creativity, pioneering and honesty."* James seems happy to see the charism replicated within the new property, *"there is not much difference, it still feels like home."*

James makes no mention of monasticism, other than in removed reference to the office and rhythms of prayer.

His film title is, *"Confessions of or best and worst times of a onetime Community member. The film would be about home, safety, the early days, God's gift to us as family. It would have the light bulb moment of doing motivations and finding who we were in God."*

6.4 Third generation

There was a small cohort of interviewees who would be classed as emerging at the close of the second generation of membership to move forward as third generation membership under the 3rd generation of leadership. Having reviewed the data, I have decided to just add one of these interviews as they all contained very similar detail. The reason for choosing Joy, was because of the objective nature of some of their interview, giving some in-depth data that adds to the overall understanding in the development of what the Community may look like going forward.[203]

6.4.1 Joy

Joy arrived at the Community on the back of being given a copy of Celtic Daily Prayer, entering just as the Community was moving property, they were asked to join the house team in 2017 just as the second generation of leadership was departing. They now work on

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[203] For clarity for the reader, both Julia and Karen, although placed in the first- and second-generation membership respectively, as new leaders, they are classed as third generation. The data produced in their interviews will be used across all generations were appropriate.

the house team as a supervisor. Like Gordon, they were aware of being asked to help on the back of previous employment within the charity sector and the skills that come with this work.

In relation to Belonging, Joy said *"After dipping in and out of it,"* she described the moment at which the use of Celtic Daily Prayer became significant was at a point when she was going through a *"change in spirituality."* At that time, she was a member of a Pentecostal church but did not seem to fit into the *"boxes"*, the inference being that she did not meet the expectations of what was required to be in the church. She expressed it being a *"difficult place to be."* She went on to say that she has always been a *"creative person"* and suggested that she would have always been *"aligned"* to the publication. She started to attend an Anglican church that a friend was attending. She described it as a form of *"detox," fro*m the difficulties she experienced at the Pentecostal church. After being quizzed a little further, she went on the expand: "*The Pentecostal church was not quiet, not simple, you had to be a certain way, there were lots of words, I did not feel I quite fitted in, despite my shared concern for social justice."* In contrast, she describes her time within the Anglican church as if being *"held within the liturgy. The liturgy held me in a place where I didn't have words. When I did not have the words, the liturgy held the words for me."* She concluded by suggesting the possibility that she was finding security within the Anglican church, knowing it was only for a *"season, a form of respite care."*

Once arriving at the Community, Joy expresses a form of belonging that requires a certain amount of justifying. As a member of the house team she offers us an insight into some of the relational dilemmas;[204]*"although we live in the same building, when you work with people 10 hours a day, you don't always want to hang out with them in the evening."* She relates and maybe justifies her feelings to a term the Community uses *'alone and together'*. She says someone had recently suggested the Community is like a *"community of hermits,"* although she made the point of saying that it was not Community policy to think this way. She suggested, *"together whilst working and alone, when off duty."* She referenced other communities who work the other way around, alone in relating to work outside a community and together when they return. She describes the latter as *"community in their free time."* She says that if she *"didn't go off site and see people outside of the house team she would find it difficult."* She was quick to say that there were always people in the team

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[204] This was after I asked if being on a team was like forming a Community within a Community.

to help when you needed it. They have a common room where the team can meet. She refers to a married couple on the team who have a whole house to themselves, within the complex of Nether Springs. They occasional allow the rest of the house team into their sitting room.

In relation to ethos and charism, Joy described her first experience within the Community as being *"excepted without judgement."* She felt *"valued."* It seemed to her, that the life of the Community placed a lot of "*value on being non-judgemental of people."* She described *"availability and vulnerability" as* summing up the *"way of life"* of the Community. The interviewee seemed to reference back to her experience within the Pentecostal church again, she describes moving from an expectation to be always "*pleasing God,"* she added that it is not necessarily a bad place, but it made her *feel "like she could never make it, it felt like the bar was out of reach. T*he prescribed resolution to any problem coming through *reading her bible more.*" Now that she has found the Community, she can be *"weak,"* she can have *"shadow* that she can *embrace."* She describes that "*her weakness allows her to connect with others and a place where God can work through."*

The interviewee suggested that the ethos of the Community does not harbour *"perfection and excellence."* She states that the importance of these is set by the world. She juxtapositions this thought to the house team trying to weekly discern a balance between the work that needs to be carried out and the wellbeing of the team and those they are looking after. She describes it as a place of *"availability and vulnerability in each situation."* Striking a balance between the work of the team and their own wellbeing seemed to centre around the capacity of the Nether Springs to host more team members and the growing number of guests arriving.

I probed further by asking, *"how is the ethos developed within people who have just started on the team?"* She mentions the difficulties in teaching ethos to new volunteers, these issues tend to centre around *"expectations."* She says that *"being a guest is quite different to working on the team,"* She suggests that the *"capacities of the place and energies are important to understand."* The expectations of guests can vary between *"who is God, to, how do I journey with the Community?"* She expressed the difficulties of having a "refuge" as a team member. She referred to refuge as someone that the house team may have helped previously either, spirituality, emotionally or mentally. She said the house team

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faced difficulties in negotiating some guests that think, because they are a Christian Community, they should "*cater for all needs,* despite the *limits* of the place and team. "[205]

Joy navigates her way around the Community trauma in a matter-of-fact way, by simply describing the moving property, departure of John and Linda and the current change of leadership. She only expanded her thoughts regarding the latter. She described the time she arrived at the Nether Springs in September 2018, she was asked to see Pete in his office where he told her he was leaving and that did she want a job on the house team? She seemed a little hesitant when describing this episode. She goes on to say, that *"as she worked in a youth charity prior to her moving up,"* she felt this was a reason why Pete asked her to shoulder some of the responsibilities now he was leaving. She expressed a certain amount of shock at this, she thought she was moving up to work under *"Pete's leadership."* She said she left her charity work to take a break and was now being asked to pick it up again. She said, *"I didn't really experience this place with Pete at the helm. I have only lived with the Community in transition."*

She went on to suggest that people who have been around to see and work in the old place (Hetton Hall the first place of the Nether Springs) say that the *"essence"* of the old place seems to live on in the new place. She does express that the new house in the early period was a little *"clinical, the house had not worn in."* She claims the new place still has the same *"vibe and ethos*" as in the old place even with new people as the team.*"*[206]

I expand by asking, *"when people refer to it as their home, do you know what they are referring to?"* She says *"a mixture, mainly spirituality, rhythm of prayer, it's like for some, coming in putting your slippers on and making a cup of tea. We foster the place more like a home than a retreat centre or conference centre and it helps that people can get involved in jobs. We also tell people treat it like your home."*

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[205] Historically, refuge in the language of the Community is someone that comes to the Community showing greater needs than the average guest. They often seek security and respite for a period and may or may not go on to become members of the Community or work on the house team.

[206] As I say at the start of this paragraph, Joy never worked or lived at the old property so is basing this on what others have said. During my ethnographic work at Acton Farm, most of the house team said the same thing about the feelings being similar between the new and old place yet were all based on other people's accounts. In this way justifying of charism often seems to be transmitted via the experiences of others, feelings and experiences seem to be a prominent carrier of ethos and charism between people within the Community.

There was no explicit mention of monasticism, other than through the emergent language of the Community in adopting a monastic practice in reference to 'patterns and rhythms of prayer, work and life'.

Finally, I have decided to include the whole of Joy's reference to her film title, *"The Soup, someone making soup. Andy, John, Roy and Trevor all mixed together. Or maybe The Tapestry – threads getting woven together, including the tricky threads, life, complexity, and difficulties. The Soup, you could have crazy colours, dark colours, they all contribute and can enhance the image, even the dark colours. It needs to have shadows to give it depth' It needs spice to enhance other flavours. Maybe its God that brings it all together to make it beautiful? It needs to be a slow-moving film, it unfolds slowly, the process is seen through the slow unfolding. No, I think it should be called The Tapestry! You see the effects of the multitude of threads insitu, but only see the purpose at the end. It is not a good film for the youth, slow moving!"*

6.5 Summary and conclusions

Having identified three themes within new monastic literature, Belonging, traditional monasticism and charism or expression of the lived experience, I then followed these themes throughout a documental discourse of the Northumbria Community and through to the interviews.

What the interviews have revealed, is that within the life and the passing on of tradition and charism within the Northumbria Community, through a spiritual reflexivity, emotion, experience, and 'personal history' impact greatly upon interpreting Community, vision, ethos, and charism. Some tensions that exist within the life of the Community, often get reinterpreted through expectations and aspects pertaining to belonging and roles.

Identifying charism that 'threads 'itself through the history of the Community in a process of transmission is harder to discern. We find throughout the documental discourse, in the previous chapter, a charism being reinterpreted to fit with change and trauma. We also read through the eyes of others outside the Community looking in, that Community ethos and charism is shaped around and through the particular 'lens' the outsider views the Community.

The subjective nature of new monasticism is clearly central in the transmission of charism and tradition, yet as Sarah reminds us, *"Ethos is like a jewel, what facet you are, reflects that*

part of the jewel. When you squeeze your history and ego through a particular ethos you should see change, but the change is centred around a particular character."

In the previous chapter George Lings was concerned that the third question that the Community lives with, "How do you sing the Lord's song in a strange land" seems to have taken a 'back seat.' I wonder if he had considered whether in fact the dividing line between what the culture that the Community pertains to subvert and the spiritual culture that the Community espouses to be, is it fact far closer in reality. Is this what he means when he expands his concerns that the Community and any new monastic group also runs the risk of diluting its monastic nature when engaging too much in the prevalent culture.

Michael Casey, a Cistercian Monk from Australia in his book*: Strangers to the City: Reflections on the beliefs and values in the Rule of St Benedict.* (Casey, 2005) Warns his own traditional monastic community that not only do they need to be careful in regulating contact with the world outside, but that the outside world and associated culture arrives into the heart of a monastic Community through the human condition of its novices.

The impact of what has been discovered in this thesis so far has revealed a new understanding of my own time in the Community, between 1993-1998 and also why in fact I was attracted to it. It seems that serendipity, played a large part, I had responded and said 'yes' to two distinct vocations, that I was unaware of at the time, but something I intuitively felt in April 1998.[207]

My departure from the Community took me directly to Thomas Merton's book: *Wisdom of the Desert* (Merton, 1961). Although this advice was given to me by Skinner, I didn't realise until his recent book (Skinner, 2017) that he too found solace, companionship and challenge in this book after leaving the Church of England.

Part III of this thesis now focuses on a revisioning of a vocation to new monasticism, starting from Skinners unintentional new monasticism in the context of the Northumbria Community and journeying towards what Thomas Merton refers to as the Church of the Desert.

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[207] It was at this time that my late wife and I started to question why we moved the Nether Springs and why in fact things felt so different to what John Skinner was teaching through his seminars.

Part III

Towards a Vocation in New Monasticism

Chapter 7. Intentionality and unintentionality within the Northumbria Community and new monasticism

7.1 Introduction

Intentionality in regard to this chapter should not be confused with the use of intentionality as the core component of phenomenology and thus as a way of gaining knowledge. Intentionality in regard to this chapter is centred on human action, 'the purpose we have in mind when we act' (Sokolowski, 1999, p. 8). As I suggested in the last chapter, intentionality is a key component not only within the Northumbria Community, but, as shown in the literature review, also within the new monastic movement in general - The ability to focus on and draw from monasticism in order to shape the nature of belonging, especially within community life and to shape the particular charism lived by a specific community or individual.

> We are called to intentional and deliberate Vulnerability...We embrace the vulnerability of being teachable expressed in: a discipline of prayer; in exposure to Scripture; a willingness to be accountable to others in ordering our ways and our heart in order to effect change. We embrace the responsibility of taking the heretical imperative: by speaking out when necessary or asking awkward questions that will often upset the status quo; by making relationships the priority, and not reputation. We embrace the challenge to live as church without walls, living openly amongst unbelievers and other believers in a way that the life of God in ours can be seen, challenged, or questioned. This will involve us building friendships outside our Christian ghettos or club-mentality, not with ulterior evangelistic motives, but because we genuinely care. (Community, 2015c)[208]

Within my own micro-narrative, I signed up to the above statement in 1995, becoming a member of the Northumbria Community in contrast to living my faith as a Roman Catholic within a parish. Within my parish setting I witnessed the parish complexities of power

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[208] https://www.northumbriacommunity.org/who-we-are/our-rule-of-life/ (accessed 16/05/2020)

struggles, satisfaction with limited engagement with faith outside of church attendance.[209] My intentionality was for a new and 'fresh' way of living my Christian faith, that seemed to suggest a liberation from what seemed a mundane parish existence.

Within the field of spirituality, I would be classed as one of the post-modern spiritual seekers, encountering faith outside normative institutional frameworks, exhibiting a growing disconnect between spirituality and religious. 'I'm spiritual but I'm not religious. Indicates not only youthful frustration in being unable to find meaning in either the sterility of fundamentalism or the rigidity of the organized churches…' (Tyler & Woods, 2012, p. 1). Tyler and Woods go on to claim that; 'spirituality is a word used by contemporary writers when they are discussing those aspects of human life which are seen by their subjects, or interpreted by their observers, as intentionally related to that which holds unrestrictive value' (Tyler & Woods, 2012, p. 1).

Interest here lies in the use of intentionality in relation to something that seems valuable from the 'outside', and the ability of the observer to be able to piece together many 'unrestrictive values' in creating a new value that may become an 'unrestrictive value' for someone else. In one way, I am describing the great explosion of interest in Christian spirituality over the last thirty years, but would also argue that this 'process' of spiritual encounter, or as Williams describes as bumping into signs, 'that is, things that communicate, that trigger further symbolic communication, that produce further utterance and make a difference at that level' (Williams, 2018, p. 9) is as old as Christian monasticism itself.

Kardong claims:

> The judicious use of source criticism in our own time can sometimes give us an insight into the mind of an author in a way that an uninformed common-sense commentary cannot. For example, when we compare the way Benedict picks his way carefully through the Rule of the Master, sometimes copying from line after line, sometimes omitting a word or adding one…we do get some special insight into his mind.
> (Kardong, 1996, p. xiv)

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[209] This was not a protest against the Roman Catholic faith but to the way it was communicated to me through relationship with my parish and fellow parishioners. As I entered the Community, I remained a Catholic.

I would argue that in consequence, this shows Benedict's intentionality.

Furthermore, with reference to the interplay between someone's intentionality and unintentionality, we start to discern a pattern that would suggest that often intentionality can become the forerunner of an unintentional encounter with God. Williams claims:

> Jesus, as he restores humanity 'from within' (so to speak), has to come down into the chaos of our human world. Jesus has to come down fully to our level, to where things are shapeless and meaningless, in a state of vulnerability and unprotectedness, if real humanity is to come to birth. (Williams, 2014, p. 4)

This begs the question whether in fact intentionality can sometimes hinder our ability to be shapeless, meaningless, vulnerable, and unprotected.

When the priest/monk Zossima[210] left his childhood monastery to go 'in order to make spiritual progress,' he stumbled upon another monastery where having been accepted he set about learning and living the particular rule for the monastery. Sophronius claims, 'The monks had a rule and I think it was because of this that God had led Zossima there'[211] (Ward, 1987, p. 39).

After Zossima left for his Lent retreat in the desert, it was here he stumbled upon Mary, after running for some time after her:

> Then the fugitive (Mary) spoke: 'Father Zossima, forgive me, for God's sake, but I cannot turn round and show myself to you, for I am a woman and, as you see, with shame of my body uncovered. If you wish to answer the prayer of a sinful women throw me the cloak you are wearing so that I can cover my own women's weakness and turn and have your blessing.' At this dread and anxiety fell on Zossima, as he said himself, when he heard her calling him by his name of Zossima…when she had either

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[210] Born in the fifth Century he was a monk in Palestine and is famous for his encounter with St Mary of Egypt, as described in her life.

[211] Sophronius, bishop of Jerusalem, is the author of the *Life of St Mary of Egypt*. Although not essential to my argument, the rule was that the monks left the monastery after the first Sunday of Lent, passed over the river Jordon and spent Lent in the desert alone fasting and returning to the monastery at the beginning of Holy Week.

seen him or heard of him…she was enlightened by the grace of insight. What do you want to learn from me or see…He knelt down and asked her to give him the customary blessing? She also knelt down. So, they both remained on the ground asking one another for a blessing. (Ward, 1987, p. 42)

The intentionality of Zossima in finding 'spiritual progress' was met with an encounter with God that turned his world upside down. His intentionality dissolved into an unintentional encounter that brought Zossima quite literally to his knees in a shapeless, meaningless and unprotected state of unawareness. What followed, I would argue, is one of the most beautiful episodes of humility found in monastic literature, the repeated request for each other to be first at offering a blessing.

Mary's intentional understanding of ecclesial order of the time, for the priest to give the blessing, humbles itself in front of the subject on which her intentionality is focused, the result being that Zossima's intentionality is stripped of all control, expectation and understanding. His desire for spiritual progress turns into God's invitation that is, in fact, for all humanity, to embrace a new intentionality that seems to call us to strike fearlessly into the unknown, not for the sake of the unknown, but in order to find God in what the Christian tradition calls, a 'desert experience'.

7.2 Intentionality within the Northumbria Community

For the purpose of consistency, I have continued to used double inverted commas and italics were quoting directly from the interviews.

As I have shown in the last two chapters, the Community's trajectory of travel throughout its history has been marked with intentional engagements, with monastic values, missional capabilities, and its capacity to receive a diverse membership. Intentionality is not reserved just for the Northumbria Community but will be found wherever 'two or three gathers'; it is part of the human condition. How has the Community dealt with unintentional encounters, especially through change? What follows is a meander through the interviews.

The intentionality and deliberate nature of vulnerability that the Community encourages for its members presupposes that prior to membership vulnerability may be seen as something to be shunned. Thomas, in his interview, alludes to a reason for the inclusion of intentional and deliberate into the Community's ethos; he claims, *"I think we need to focus more on*

people who are totally unchurched…we should not be distracted by gaining the approval of the Church, or by paying too much attention to people who are dissatisfied with church…we should be intentionally engaging with people who come from 'different places.'" Here Thomas is explicitly referring to what I call 'protest intentionality' against others who may feel the Community should be focusing on its relationship with the Church and providing provision for Christians who use the Community as a form of retreat.

I argue that even at the very beginning of the Community, intentionality as prescribed in the Community's 'way for living,' was in fact a protest against a dichotomy between the pre-Community gatherings known as the 'Easter workshops and the inherent levels of vulnerabilities seen in the people that gathered and a growing membership of so-called 'church goers/lapsed' often described as 'middle class' and 'financially stable'. *"We witnessed a large amount of people who wanted direction, it was necessary to formalise, organically – so becoming more structured. First came the vows of vulnerability and availability…'* (Thomas). Skinner confirms this as he claims, 'The Alnwick Prayer Group were at the heart of the early workshops; some of my best memories are associated with the folk from that group. Having lived all their lives in a deprived area, they were a forgotten people with few resources' (Skinner, 2017, p. 62).

In this way, intentionality was an attempt at bridging a diverse emergent membership around the Community's so-called vows of availability and vulnerability. This is compounded further by the fact that, according to Thomas, the Community adopted a policy of *"voluntary accountability"* on the basis that many members came from the *"heavy shepherding movement"* (Thomas).

There was a sense throughout the interview with Thomas that his intentionality focused on his own vocation and protest against anything that stood in the way of progression and rigidity of the Community; *"soul-friendship model was a move away from spiritual directors and experts…the novitiate programme has become more 'touchy feely' and less academic"* (Thomas). Simon negotiated change and unintentionality with embracing a new intentional focus on what was in 'front' of the Community; an example of this is: *"The charism of the Community has changed from the early days…people who came around the table being broken and in transition…God has now given us a home and has given us what we really wanted…God is now calling the Community to have an impact on the middle classes"*

(Simon). What Simon and Thomas reflect is what I would describe as 'fluid intentionality', the ability to switch focus when negotiating change.

One thing that had become apparent throughout the interviews was that some people who had not been members long, or who had not had the opportunity to experience the life of the Community from an unintentional encounter, used 'phases' that one would find in Community literature, but which seemed 'hollow' or 'ungrounded' when repeated. It poses the question as to whether ownership of a community charism and ethos starts when one is challenged by an unintentional occurrence that challenges our initial intentions.

Unintentional change sometimes births a new intentionality that not all can refocus on. In this regard, (the move away from the old motherhouse) was often justifying by claiming people who could not make the move were *"being nostalgic to place"* (Gordon). It seems too simplistic to assert this notion on everyone that may have disagreed with the move; it has very little regard to the spirituality of 'place'. What this shows is the relationship between unintentional change and the formation of a new focus opens up the possibility for a shift in a 'power' base.

Karen was the only interviewee who expressed an intentional action to join a community if she found the right one. She gave this intentionality a name, "monastic calling" (Karen.) She went on to describe two encounters of unintentionality; one that she met her future husband in the Community and the second, that her first few years of membership to the Community and her work at the motherhouse was like being fatherless. This is a direct quote from the impact of the relational breakdown of leadership and what Sarah described as a period where, *"no one rocked the boat, and everyone protected what was there..."* (Sarah). There is evidence that Karen was able to renegotiate this traumatic unintentional encounter and create a new intentionality in her leadership style, a sense of being present. *"The team often see me weak as I cry in team meetings. They see the dirt in my fingers as a fallen yet worker person"* (Karen).

Throughout the interview process each interviewee was invited to describe a film that best reflected their time in the Community and its ethos. Thomas, when asked to describe his film, chose to focus on his own vocation to live on Holy Island and seemed to suggest that the stories both historically and contemporarily of 'broken people' retreating to the Island for comfort and rest is in fact what the Community should be doing.

For Sarah, her film description was used in order for her to remise on the past when it seemed she was at the heart of Community life. *"We had nothing, had many struggles that resulted in blind faith…living on the edge…We were often unsure whether we could pay the wages and bills"* (Sarah).

Julia, in her film choice, expressed what I have called an 'intentional detachment.' The ability to pick and choose from different elements that make up the Community for any number of reasons. In describing her film as the place where *"the wild people who are daring and open…experiences and things that make you feel vulnerable"* (Julia). There was an implicit notion that she was not one of these people, but they were important for the Community and its mission.

James offers an insight into Community intentionality and membership by claiming that he moved to Hetton Hall for his partner's sake who had just had a *"breakdown related to the church we belonged to, I hoped it would be a time and place of healing for her"* (James). The leadership breakdown seems to have had a large impact on his decision to move away from the Community as he describes his close relationships broke down and trust was lost. When asked about the charism of the Community, his answer centred around his own experience and intentionality of the Community, *"welcoming, accepting, inclusive and grace is important. People who are messed up have a safe place to come…"* (James).

Joy reflected upon charism in a similar way by describing her own entrance and experience of the Community. *"Excepted without judgment…valued…value on being non-judgemental people…shadow that can be embraced"* (Joy). Joy goes on to describe what I refer to as 'deferred intentionality'. That is the other people's intentions have been communicated to someone via someone else without verification. Joy claims that people who have lived in the *"old place"* say that the *"essence"* of the *"old place"* is in the *"new place"*. Joy suggests the new place still has the same *"vibe and ethos"* (Joy).

My own time at Acton Farm was one of receiving hospitality and space for rest and relaxing. I felt included, although this has to be mitigated with the fact that most of the team knew why I was there and for what purpose. I was also given explicit permission by the leadership team to be there. My own experience between living at the so-called 'old place' and briefly being in the 'new place', was that I had gone from a family home into a retreat house for the middle classes. I have purposefully not referred to one as community and one as not, because community exists outside of personal intentionality. For me, my intentionality of

moving to the Community in 1998 was in order to 'literally' live close to my spiritual father and learn how to live a new monastic vocation. My unintentional encounter within the Community with Skinner leaving did not change my intentionality of learning from him. What I am saying is that it would be dishonest to my own integrity and vocation to suggest that the Community failed me or that it was not what I expected, or that it has changed for the worst, for my worst, as it will probably become someone's joy. Unintentional encounter and change is best met with radical honesty about self, honesty as to why we are here and for what purpose?

7.3 Film Titles

- Living in the Valley and Looking from the Mountain Top

- Pillocks I Have Worked For and Bastards I Have Known

- Building Beyond Brokenness

- Driven to Distraction

- Come to the Edge: A Call to Risky Living

- 1000 Stories of Transformation and Provision: 1000 Moments Recalling More Amazing Stories Than Fiction

- Confessions of, or Best and Worst Times of a Onetime Community Member

- The Tapestry

Common with all of these film titles is the fact that they mirror the experiences of the interviewee of their time in the Community, which isn't unexpected considering that this was the framework for choosing a film title. There seemed to be one exception which was the film, 'Come to the Edge'. Here, the title seemed to be an aspirational notion for the Community interviewee that seem to be lived elsewhere in the Community, amongst others, but is known to be important for the Community's mission and life. As the interviewer, one thing I noticed about the inclusion of this question is that it finished each interview on a light-hearted tone and allowed the interviewee to sum up their experiences in an abstract way, outside of personal hurt, joy and frustrations, it justified using this as part of my ethics considerations in supporting the 'wellbeing' of the interviewees.

What has become apparent throughout this chapter is that intentionality in membership and participation within the life of the Northumbria Community is paramount for the existence of the Community. For example:

7.4 Unintentionality with the Northumbria Community

> When we started to answer the monastic conundrum (how then shall we live?) our mentors had been Brother Roland Walls and the monastic communities in Merton's *Wisdom of the Desert.* To really experience their ethos, we had to follow the way they lived: no career, only vocation, no ownership of property, no hanging onto money, no pensions, daily disciplines. You get my meaning. As more joined us, was it possible to translate the essence of monasticism to inform their lifestyles? Had we got too close to traditional monasticism? Monasticism is unintentional. It disrupts, is uncontrollable, unpredictable and dislocates you from your current way of life. It demands your availability and as a result, plunges you into vulnerability. You don't choose this way for living, it chooses you. An intentional way of living Is something you choose, maintain and control. There are few demands because you are calling the shots. (Skinner, 2017, p. 69)

A Cistercian monk comments about a similar experience in the realisation that in fact he had not chosen monasticism:

> Prayer is like the air you breathe, that is the challenge of the monastic life and I chose to take it up, sometime later I realised that it was God that was pushing me, urging me, and drawing me to himself. I didn't particular like that in a way, I thought I had made the decision, but I hadn't. It was very foolish to think I had made that decision. In a way it's what Jesus said, I have chosen you did not choose me, I was an idiot to think otherwise. The relationship with the Lord Jesus takes over and becomes the most important thing in your life… You have to face yourself and who you are but that brings challenges and tensions, it gives you this amazing sense of freedom… sometimes joy it's the peaceful realisation you are in the right place.[212]

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[212] https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vtjdhR56WCc&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR1ds-LM5M8gEI8IvZnzypccAJ4PFfC_oNH5116Nom00Y0JndHIZC9nQunQ (accessed 6/7/2020)

My central argument so far has been that the Community has lacked understanding and compassion towards the difference and the effects of this difference between the founder's charism as new monasticism as something unintentional and the charism of the founding as an intentional choice of its members. Yet when the two statements above are put next to each other, then my argument is challenged as to the simplistic notion of seeing intentionality and unintentionality as polar opposites. An intention to join a community is simply the start of a journey towards an unintentional encounter, as we 'bump' into other 'things' that challenge and inform our standpoint, in addition to God choosing to disturb and question the very core of our intentionality. In the case of Zossima through humility and openness, it only strengthened his relationship with God, his vocation and those around him.

7.5 Unintentionality: A motif of new monasticism

If we are to accept intentionality and unintentionally as being 'twinned', a common language emerges that connects new monastic with traditional monastic vocations. No matter how long someone journeys with their own personal intentionality, vocation seems to occur when that is challenged at the very core, that life is turned upside down, you are plunged into an unintentional vulnerability. Peters[213] suggests, 'that a better way of navigating life would be to immerse oneself in the difficult process of vocational discernment and to do so as early and as intentionally as possible' (Peters, 2018, p. 177). Peters juxtapositions this notion with a quote from Thomas Merton, 'A man knows when h has found his vocation when he stops thinking about how to live and begins to live' (Merton, 1958, p. 84; Peters, 2018, p. 177). Furthermore, according to the Cistercian monk above, a new freedom is felt, a freedom received through grace, that seems dependant on facing the corrupt nature of our human condition, a realisation we had a false start, but that the journey so far is not wasted, but is caught up in a 'new humanity' that is Jesus Christ.

One way of exploring this shared language between new monasticism and traditional monasticism is from a phenomenological horizon. What I mean by phenomenological horizon is that through observing the subjective experience of Skinner and the Cistercian monk. In this way, 'phenomenology seeks patterns in such descriptions, without imagining

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[213] Greg Peters is a associate professor of medieval and spiritual theology in the Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University.

that they refer to anything but subjective consciousness…Not only is experience always of something, but the things presented to the experiencer are always presented in a context that shapes both parties to the action' (Spickard, 2014, p. 335). Fisk suggests that 'theology would do better to attend to how things are, rather than how we want them to be' (Fisk, 2014). Is there a shared element of monastic culture between a vocation to new monasticism and a vocation to monasticism within the cloister, a shared experience, but experienced from different contextual landscapes?

So far in my narrative of intentionality and unintentionally, I have argued that most of the new monastic expressions presented from within the UK and in fact from the US, has centred around an intentionality that has seen new monastic visions emerge from an inherent intent towards a goal or an object for change. Yet in reflecting upon the research data, I am beginning see the emergence of a 'conversation of experience', between new monasticism and cloistered monasticism, a shared cultural sensibility, albeit within different horizons of existence.

Intentionality of definition in locating oneself within the monastic experience, that centres around monastic practice and values, can 'impinge' and even 'hijack' a vocation towards new monasticism. A vocation that understands itself as a new interpretation of monastic culture outside of what it is to be monastic. This is what is different to current new monastic definition, vision, and practice. What is this shared element of monastic culture? What is the methodology for engagement with an 'alien world', yet offers a language for a shared experience of God's action in and around us?

7.6 Monastic culture as a shared language: new monasticism from behind the cloister wall[214]

In his work, *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living*, Casey invites the non-cloistered Christian to take lessons from his own reflections upon the fourth chapter of Benedict's rule. 'I am confident that the readers will be able to take the lessons that Benedict gives beyond their gendered and cloistral origins into their own world of experience and still find them profitable' (Casey, 2014, p. xiii).

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[214] I have not included various written work for oblates and also work in monastic spirituality from monastics. The reason for this is that a majority of work written from behind the cloister wall which is intended for all Christians is that they are not written specifically for new monastics. Saying that, these various works do impact new monasticism in the sense that new monastics maybe consulting with them. An example is the oblate handbook, which I often consult with for my own spiritual life (Holdaway, 2008).

Casey more specifically, suggests that Benedict's rule is in fact relevant to the Church as a whole.

> What Benedict presents to us is no more than a digest of gospel teaching applied to a particular situation. I hope to reflect on his words in a way that will enable you, the reader, to apply this doctrine to your own circumstances and perhaps find in the ancient writings words that are life-giving' (Casey, 2005, p. xii).

In a similar tone, the Benedictine monk Cyprian Smith also suggests that:

> My own conviction concerning the aims of a Benedictine monk is that they are not fundamentally different from those of the ordinary Christian. As for the spiritual resources of monastic life, some of these a fully available to the non-monk, others less so…If the essence of (monastic(obedience lies in the purification of our thoughts and motives, then it is clearly something which is as available to people outside the monastery as to those who are within it' (Smith, 1995, pp, xii-56).

After the BBC TV series The Monastery, Christopher Jamison claimed that 'The sense that the Christian monastic tradition has something special to offer is growing among contemporary people of all religious beliefs and those of none' (Jamison, 2006, p. 1). His book, *Finding Sanctuary* was a reflection upon the TV series and the impact on five people who had chosen to live with the Benedictine Community at Worth Abbey.

In his attempt at renewing the Christian contemplative tradition through the practice of 'centring prayer', the late Thomas Keating[215] suggested that the Church was in need for the contemplative prayer and life to be taught within the parish life and 'lay ministry'. His work on Centring prayer, as Keating describes is a 'specific method of preparing for the gift of contemplation and was a reaction, if only in part, to people looking elsewhere for spiritual practices that they could not find in their own church (Keating, 1986, pp. 3-4, 1997, p.7).

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[215] Was a Cistercian Priest monk and abbot, he died in 2018. He was the founder of 'Centering Prayer' movement.

Contemplative prayer can open one up to 'two kinds of unconscious energies, 'spiritual consolation, charismatic gifts or psychic powers and the experience of human weakness through humiliating self-knowledge. To 'neutralise' these energies, Keating suggests that Contemplative prayer holds in a creative tension, dedication to God in 'developed commitment to one's spiritual practices for God's sake. Service to others is the ongoing movement of the heart prompted by compassion' (Keating, 1986, p. 15).

Both Casey and Chittister[216] suggest that the monastic charism can be identified outside of the institutional lifestyle. Chittister suggests that 'To change an institution in which we have been formed…requires more than fidelity; it requires the emotional maturity and the living faith to believe that a vision that spawned it lives on even after the structures which expressed it are in need of replacement' (Chittister, 2006, p. 89). Casey argues that it is shared 'essential monastic attributes' that carry the monastic charism between generations. He states:

1) Monks and nuns must be seekers of God, however the divine reality is described. 2) This seeking after something more must inevitably involve a radical renunciation that includes a solid degree of separation from 'the world'. 3) Characterised by 'blessed simplicity'…not merely the result of withdrawal from the accelerating complexity of 'modern' life or the self-conscious pursuit of inauthentic neo-primitivism…simplicity in essence is the effect of sustained subjective commitment of a single objective…such clarity cannot be attained quickly; it is a lifelong pursuit. 4) A monastic is constituted as such by living within an evident tradition. General monasticism is not self-generating. It cannot be the product of individual self-expression precisely because the goal of monastic living is self-transcendence. This is why Benedict finds it essential that the monastic recruits should desire to live a common life under an abbot, so that they do not live by their own judgement or obey their desires and pleasures…Do-it-yourself monasticism is no more than a semblance of the real thing (Casey, 2006, pp. 25-6).

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[216] Joan Chittister is a Benedictine Sister of Erie, Pennsylvania. Joan is also executive director of Benetvision, a resource and research centre for contemporary spirituality.

The then Abbot General of the OCSO, Bernardo Olivera suggested that the attraction of Lay people to the Cistercian charism, through association with monastic communities, should be met both with caution and hospitality.

> Our Cistercian identity is a reality that allows us to identity ourselves by what distinguishes us within dynamic of relationships and not of juxtapositions and exclusions…A clearly defined identity will keep monks from playing at being seculars and these latter from playing at being monks. It will respect the vocations and ways of life proper to each (Olivera, 1997, p. 231).

There was a lay response to the words of Olivera, 'We believe indeed that the Cistercian charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed not solely on those who live within monastic enclosures. Rather we feel it is the gift of a 'way of life' that can be as appropriate for a lay person living in the world as it is for a monk or nun living in a monastery' (Day, 1997, pp. 235-6). The response came from a number of Cistercian lay associates and their shared charism was through the monastic spiritual practices, relationship with communities and charity to those who they met in everyday life.

Before moving on to reflect upon direct quotes from behind the cloister on the new monastic movement, what we find above are prescriptive tools/supports to support the Christian life in the modern world and all that it brings to life lived outside the cloister. There is an implicit narrative that runs through monastic literature and instruction written for those outside the cloister, that monastic spiritual practices lived, transmitted, and protected within the cloister are accessible to all, albeit, outside of what it means to be a monastic within the institution of monasticism. Casey and Chittister, to an extent, challenge this implicit notion by suggesting that the monastic charism cannot be restricted to an institutional framework of existence and in fact may be identified outside such frameworks, as has been shown throughout history of Christian monasticism.

In a recent lecture[217], exploring the role of 'new monasticism' in the twenty first century, Michael Casey paused to pose a question to his audience, 'how monastic is the new monasticism'? Speaking as a Cistercian monk, he was inquisitively genuine and humble in his question; he inferred the emergence of a reflexive relationship between traditional monasticism and new monasticism. What followed was an open-ended debate amongst his audience; the answers being inductive in opinion and phenomenological in nature. Each answer emerged from a collective premise that new

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[217] Organised by the Benedictine Institute based at Ealing Abbey in London. I helped the late Fr James Leachman organise this event.

monasticism was an entity within itself and that each specific lived experience and/or expression of new monasticism was evidence for this.

In answering his central question, Casey juxtaposed traditional monasticism with new monasticism as both being impacted upon by sensibilities of modernity and post-modernity. He noted that, for traditional monasticism, a major factor in negotiating modernity was the imprint of individualism on new novitiates and finding new ways of 'reconciling this with established patterns of obedience and commitment within the Rule.'[218] In regard to new monasticism, based on work by Peter Burger, Casey suggested, rising from the individualistic playground of 'secularisation' and 'privatisation', came the post-modern condition for a 'hermeneutic of suspicion', particularly with institutions. He observed that this paved the way for people to create their 'own conditions for reality and religion, a kind of moral relativism, a search for new meanings, spirituality started to express religion'[219] Casey concluded his talk by answering the question, how monastic is new monasticism? His answer was 'it was not up to him to comment,' spoken with a smile on his face.

In July of 2017 I interviewed Dom Fr Erik Varden[220] in order to get his own thoughts about the new monastic movement and what he refers to as monastic culture ad mission. He was very sceptical about the validity of new monasticism referring to it as an oxymoron; he seemed to be inferring the notion that people were pretending to be monks and nuns. When it came to monastic culture and mission, he claimed that the 'go to book' for the monastic community at large was still Jean Leclercq's[221] 1961 book, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. Added to this was a recent book that Varden had translated from Italian into English called, *Living Wisdom: The Mission and Transmission of Monasticism* by Sr Christiana Piccardo.[222]

In the Summer of 2005, Notker Wolf OSB, abbot primate of the Benedictine Order, acknowledged the emergence of new monasticism. It is not clear which particular breed of new monasticism he was referring to, but he posed the question why the new movement looked so attractive. He argued that although these new movements undoubtedly lacked

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[218] Words in inverted commas are taken directly from my notes from attending the lecture.

[219] Notes taken from a conference organised and hosted by the Benedictine Institute, Ealing Abbey on the 16th October 2016. The conference speaker was Fr Michael Casey OSOC and his talk was entitled: *The role of New Monasticism in the 21st Century – The Search for Meaning...* Those attending the conference were from a cross section of the Christian Church, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Baptists and Methodists and from both the new and more traditional forms of monastic communities, including Franciscans, Benedictines, and Cistercians from traditional monasticism and UK-based new monasticism. As far as the current author could ascertain, there was no representation from the North American form of new monasticism.

[220] Fr Erik was then Abbot of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey. He is now Bishop-Prelate of the Roman Catholic Territorial Prelature of Trondheim.

[221] Was a French Benedictine monk and distinguished medievalist.

[222] Long-time abbess of a Cistercian Abbey of Vitorchiano in Italy.

the routine of 'institution' and long years of living a tradition, it was conversely, this reason that they looked so attractive to some. Wolf concluded in saying that the difference between traditional and new types of monasticism is less concerned about 'what is done', but more about 'how'. In this way he suggested that new monasticism might have something to say to traditional forms of monasticism in revealing new impulses.

More recently whilst in conversation with a Roman Catholic monk, he expressed disbelief that his local Anglican Bishop, in creating a new monastic community attached to a diocesan centre did not approach his own Community for help. He seemed genuinely open to offering consultancy in community development within a monastic context.[223]

The conference, Monasticism between culture and cultures, included a section on new monasticism, to which I gave a lecture.[224]

Finally, the Church of England, through its General Synod on religious communities has just included some new monastic communities into its cohort of religious communities:

The Religious Communities' Advisory Council recognises and acknowledges these new developments:

It seeks to discern what God is doing and how the wisdom of the old can inform the new. The Church Missionary Society has now been acknowledged as a community. It now has members rather than supporters who sign up to a simple rule of life. The Church Army has also been acknowledged as a community.

Essential elements

- A rule and constitution that develop as time goes on

- A community (dispersed or residential) bound by the touchstone of celibacy

- A common mission, purpose and vision

- A strong sense of community even when dispersed

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[223] Despite this, I am aware that the particular community did consult with the nuns from the Community of the Holy Cross at Costock, an Anglican Benedictine community.
[224] The third conference organised by the Monastic Institute of the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Athenaeum S, Anselmo.

- A passion for God, for the apostolate and for one another

- A common life expressed in prayer and retreat together

- A sharing of goods so the richer members help the poorer ones

- Obedience/accountability

- Commitment to a vow, promise or pledge

- Openness to the Holy Spirit

- Engaging with the church where it finds itself in society: meet people where they are while at the same time being counter-cultural

- Call to holiness[225]

In conclusion, the cloistered life, as a particular Christian vocation is specific to Christian monasticism in its fullest sense. The spiritual practices, relational engagement outside the cloister, through a kind of hospitality then lead the monks and nuns to see the un-cloistered inquirer as simply the fruit of their own commitment to the cloistered life, the Church, ultimately to God. There is an intentionality to the way that the cloistered Christian sees their own vocation and its relationship to those outside of it. Those outside the cloister, span their connectedness between those that feel they are responding to a charism, a gift from the Holy Spirit that transcends the institutional understanding of that gift; to those who engage in monastic practice in order to support and deepen their Christian lives outside of their understanding of what it is to be monastic. In regard to the new monastic movement, differences are evident within traditional monasticisms response to new monasticism.

In discerning a shared language between new monasticism and traditional monasticism I have opted to reflect upon the advice given by Dom Erik Varden, a critique of new monasticism, as he did not attempt to justify new monasticism as monastic in any way. If Casey and Chittister are right in their conclusions, a shared culture and language should be evident to some degree, revealing, if only in part, how close new monasticism can be to traditional monasticisms understanding of itself outside of institution.

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[225] https://www.singleconsecratedlife-anglican.org.uk/scl-journey/new-monasticism (accessed 22/05/2019)

In reflecting upon Leclercq's book I have drawn out six characteristics that attempt to standardise (but not in an exclusive way) a monastic culture as an entry point for new monastics engagement. In line with Casey and Chittister, the method adopted for these characteristics is based on the notion that monasticism operates out of its own culture and observed by the following descriptions:

In a similar usage of Thomas as shown in the methodology chapter, according to Terry Veling:

> In philosophy this process is known as *Phronesis* – a 'practical wisdom' that is shaped over years of practicing the wisdom of a craft, a teaching, or a discipline that becomes a 'way of life'. For practical theology, this process is known as a *habitus,* a disposition of the mind and heart from which our actions flow naturally, or, if you like, 'according to the spirit' dwelling within us. (Veling, 2005, p. 7)

Mary Carruthers claims:

> Orthodoxy explicates canonical texts, whereas orthopraxis emphasizes a set of experiences and techniques, conceived as a 'way' to be followed, leading one to relieve the founder's path to enlightenment. Because it seeks an experience, an orthopraxis can never be completely articulate; instead of normative dogma, it relies upon patterns of oral formulae and ritualized behavior to prepare for an experience of God, should one be granted. Like chance, grace also favors a prepared mind. (Carruthers, 1998, p. 1)

Furthermore:

> A cabinetmaker's apprentice…His learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer

and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood – to wood as it enters into the man's dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busy work…Every handicraft, all human dealings, are constantly in that danger. (Heidegger, 2010, pp. 355-56)[226]

Therefore, whilst monastic culture can be viewed through 'ritualised behaviour', to which the observer may participate, it is not contingent to understanding monastic culture. This is because inculturation can occur through the concept of, '*habitus,* a disposition of the mind and heart from which our actions flow naturally.' A 'coming alongside' to learn from and serve that which we are observing.

Orthopraxis emphasises a set of experiences and techniques, conceived as a 'way'. Yet, the 'way' is learnt 'not through mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor to gain 'knowledge about the customary forms of things to build.' The fundamental process of monastic inculturation according to Heidegger's cabinetmaker analogy, is that his or her attention to 'wood', is equivalent to our attention to 'self'. Relatedness to self, is what 'grounds' our monastic experience. Monasticism starts and ends with attention to the *Monos*, the alone, collapsed into the 'new humanity' in Christ. Unless this takes priority within our vocation, 'all human dealings, are in that constant danger…of being empty busy work'.

For a vocation to new monasticism, one is better to see oneself as an apprentice within monastic culture, where one starts to 'read' life alongside the culture. The six characteristics of monastic culture are less concerned with practice but more with a particular disposition of heart and mind. In the words of Varden, 'to be truly human is to be stretched vertically'[227], as we journey on, we gaze less on 'self' as our soul is always intentionally focused on God. I would add that we are also stretched horizontally towards our neighbour and the created world, with an unintentional encounter with God.

7.7 Leaving and transcending the past

From an episode from the Life of St Antony:

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[226] Found in (Veling, 2005, p. 8).
[227] Taken from a lecture at Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in 2016: Reflections in the life of St Antony

Now six months had passed after the death of his parents. On his way to church he was thinking to himself and reflecting on all these things: how the apostles gave up everything and followed the Saviour, and how those in Acts sold their possessions and brought them and placed them at the feet of the apostles for distribution to those in need…Pondering these things, he went into the church. It happened that the Gospel was being read at the time and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, 'if you want to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor and come follow me and you will have treasure in heaven'…He sold all his remaining possessions…distributed it among the poor, keeping a little for his sister…When Antony entered the church again and heard in the Gospel the Lord saying, 'Do not be concerned about tomorrow', he could no longer bear it, he immediately went out and gave his remaining things to the poor. (Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, pp. 59-61)

Leclercq uses Benedict as an example of this notion; Benedict leaves a dangerous world in order to search for God. Studies are undertaken that support a reconstituting of who Benedict is that helps him transcend his past and adopt a life that is now lived for the sake of the Kingdom alone (Leclercq, 1982, pp. 14-5). Piccardo softens Leclercq's somewhat violent departure from a past life by suggesting a closer relationship between past and present, '…a memory that is alive does not exist to serve as an anchor. Its vocation is to be a catapult. It is not a safe haven of arrival but a point of departure. It does not disown nostalgia. But it much prefers storm-tossed hope with all its risks' (Piccardo, 2014, p. xix).[228] Through this piece, Piccardo is describing the world we live in and the attacks on human nature from nihilism and pantheism.

If Benedict is driven by a desire for God, 'the result of this desire is peace rediscovered in God, since desire is itself a possession in which fear and love are reconciled' (Leclercq, 1982, p. 40). Leclercq continues in suggesting that there is a pedagogical aspect to this desire, that ultimately sees a hardened soul, 'converted, it is simplified, rectified, freed' (Leclercq, 1982, p. 40). Piccardo also claims that there needs to be a re-educating in him or her the faculty of love. 'Such formation in love is at the heart of true chastity' (Piccardo, 2014, p. 87) For a married couple, Piccardo suggests that the same love needs to be nurtured in the context of family, 'So how do we learn to love? We learn it by praying, by serving and by loving…John

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[228] Piccardo was quoting from a Uruguayan Author called Eduardo Galeano on a piece called 'Crushing Remembrance'.

Paul II places love at the heart of the religious vocation, which he understands as a way of committing oneself utterly for the sake of a clearly defined goal' (Piccardo, 2014, p. 87).

For a vocation of new monasticism, there needs to be some kind of departure, which becomes a part of the fabric of the vocation. Casey[229] argues that the most pressing current need of traditional monasticism is to 'wake up' to the dilemma of dealing with the 'world brought inside the monastery in the heads and hearts of monks and nuns' (Casey, 2005, p. 1).

Our departure from 'something' towards a desire to live in the contemplation of God may not be as dramatic as someone leaving the world to join a monastic enclosure. But, according to Skinner, our journey towards a vocation of new monasticism requires an openness, and I would argue a serious expectation that the call, demands numerous distributions, sacrifices and costs that challenges our perceived norms.

In my own experience, one of these costs was having to leave my 'perfect job' in setting up a research centre for the Northumbria Community. As John Skinner departed the Community, I followed him because what was important to me at the time was learning and understanding my own vocation. Years later I realised that God had given me back a calling to education and teaching of Christian spirituality as I set up Monos, including undertaking a MA programme. My own understanding of a vocation to 'teaching' had been reconfigured and 'refashioned' within my main vocation to new monasticism. Teaching had become secondary, a vocation within a vocation, a departure from the expectations of the world that only made sense to me as 'read' from within a monastic culture.

Leclercq argues that in order to fully understand the work of St Bernard, one needs to be within the 'living context' in which Bernard wrote out, the 'whole ensemble of monasticism past and present (Leclercq, 1982, p. 99). Leclercq's unequivocal claim is that living the monastic life is the first and most important aspect to a monastic culture, everything else is secondary, and as such in danger of turning the monastic 'project' into a social or moral enterprise. Inscribed above the workspace of the new monastic it should read, 'apologies for my missed deadline, I am too busy failing at trying to live the life'.

7.8 Reinterpretation of society and a new view of contemplative and action

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[229] Michael Casey is a Cistercian Monk based Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia.

Leclercq alludes to the fact that Gregory the Great was 'condemned to action' despite his preferred option for the monastic life. 'External circumstances and the call from God, obliged him to serve and then govern the Church, to live…in the 'agitations of the world' (Leclercq, 1982, p. 36).

In a letter called *'In praise of the desert'*, written by Eucherius of Lyon to Bishop Hilary of Lerins:

> For when you first entered the desert as an inexperienced young man, you had a leader…who became your instructor…By following him, you followed after, although you had left your parents behind. Now, however, after having thought you should follow him when he was called to the heights of episcopal office, you fell yourself drawn back by love of the desert…What shall I call that love of the desert if not the love of God in you? (Vivian, Vivian, & Burton Russell, 1999, pp. 197-8)

More recently I have witnessed an Abbot of a Community being asked to leave and take up an episcopal office in a different country within the space of one month. The impact not only on him but also on the Community which he was leaving was traumatic.

At a recent Monos conference, Fr Joseph[230] spoke of an interview between a journalist and the head of the Cistercian Order. The question was put to him, 'why did you become a monk?' The reply was, 'because I was unable to fit in anywhere else.' This negative argument as to why someone enters a monastery can be contrasted with someone who may feel they are responding to a particular vocation, to embrace a gift from God that is 'unwrapped' and lived out within a monastic enclosure.

When I heard this at the conference, my mind was taken back to 1997 on my final day as a structural engineer.[231] I remember walking out of the office in tears as I had just been shouted at by the lead engineer for the third time in two days. Was it the pressure of the job or my lack of experience, or simply working with a bully? Whatever the reason and there may have been a combination, I remember getting home and feeling so relieved. The back

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[230] 2018 Monos Conference: *Between Landscapes of Francis and Benedict*. Fr Joseph from Mount Saint Bernard Abbey spoke about his journey to Assisi.
[231] Having left University in 1996 after graduating as a civil engineer, I took a job close to my parental home as a trainee structural engineer.

story to this event was that the previous year my late wife and I had approached John Skinner and his wife Linda to ask if they would 'school' us in a life of new monasticism that they had experienced themselves. Their reply was to go and get a job in the world, live a so-called normal life, particularly as we had only been married for a year and see what happens in the future.[232]

The point of highlighting this story is that the language used by the head of the Cistercian order, shown above, is a language which now describes my own experience in leaving my office. I did not fit in with the expectations of what was required, not just regarding my job, but what society was offering a pair of newly wed graduates. In hindsight, i had started to 'read' my life from within a monastic culture; my life was making more sense from reflecting upon monastic literature and experience. A reinterpretation of our society in which we were living.

For reductionists, I may be seen as a failure within the normal expectations of society and that I took the less 'pressured' way out, particularly as someone who has struggled with depression and anxiety. But the judgment needs to be made on the basis that twenty years on, I am still reading my life from within monastic culture. Williams poses the question:

> How do we 'make friends' with defeat? … if we are able to set our defeat alongside
> the defeat of Jesus, in the knowledge that defeat is absorbed in life…and that for God
> no defeat is final… the ground for our trust being that no defeat is final…then we share
> a common 'vulnerability,' that all humanity faces. If we can find, in the light of the
> gospel, a language for us and for them to communicate this common vulnerability, we
> shall have realised the new humanity that is in Jesus. We shall have accepted the
> importance of our fantasies of control; or, as you might say, we shall have repented
> and believed the gospel

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[232] In the January of 1998, my wife, new-born baby and I left our home and moved up to the Northumbria Community to learn to how to live a new monastic life from John and Linda and to help the Community in setting up a research centre where we would be paid as lead researchers.

From a phenomenological perspective, it feels like I am living in a 'tent' on the edge of society with one arm stretched towards the 'enclosure' and one arm towards the society I am required to live in.

In regard to contemplation and action which, within new monastic language, are often seen as interrelated but primarily indicative of a particular monastic tradition (Benedictine = contemplation, action = mendicant orders) and practiced from relating to intentional choice to fit with a particular disposition or calling from God. But, of a monastic life in service to others, Gregory and Hilary, shown above, remind us that our first call is not to a life of contemplation or of action, but to follow wherever the Spirit takes us. Our love of, or disposition to, either contemplation or action is open to being disrupted by our very vocation, in this way, we do not own of choose either contemplation or action, but we respond to them as gifts of Grace in which to participate.

Within the Rule of the Northumbria Community, it reads that 'Family is Holy Ground! The family is a microcosm of the monastery; we should be seeking to free each other and to cherish those things that God has placed in our care.'[233]

If a family is to be a microcosm of a monastery, then it is not to monastic practice, even prayer, that we should be considered, although they are important tools, but to striving to encourage and release those within the family to become the persons that God demands, to become fully human. We are required to care for and love those in our care. Love of self, other and God is what bridges the family with the monastery. Whatever else we learn from monasticism becomes secondary; family is reconfigured around a new 'society 'of love and care. Our prayer and action are 'caught up' in a loving service to a 'authentic togetherness' that reflects our relationships with the ones we live with and forges a new understanding of the 'togetherness' of contemplation and action.

The fact that the mother or father cannot attend to certain periods of prayer or liturgy, because the baby needs attention; not complete a period of study, as a neighbour is in need; not follow through with an attempt at fasting, because a friend has bought dinner: just like Bishop Hilary or Gregory the Great, it is the love of contemplative/desert, and in consequence God, that makes our action authentic, purposeful and genuine. The new monastic notion of friar verse monk becomes inadequate and too simplistic.

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[233] This part of the rule was written by John Skinner.

7.9 Detachment of self and prosperity: waiting upon God

The Christian life is conceived of as, above all, a life of detachment and of desire, detachment from the world and from sin and an intense desire for God. This attitude is already a prayer in itself, a life of prayer…Furthermore, if desire for God is ardent, it is also patient. It grows under the trial of time. One must learn to wait for God in order to love Him…(Leclercq, 1982, pp. 36-40).

Piccardo claims that 'a vocation constitutes an ideal that lays claim to every aspect of a person.' In that regard, love of self leads to love of vocation and peace that we are where God wants us to be.

Often in the waiting, our waiting can be filled with self, thoughts of an exciting past, hope for a prosperous future, anything to fill the void of waiting and escape the mundanity of the present. In part, new monasticism within the UK seems to have been caught up with a Christian neurosis with the Church for its own survival and how it looks to a new generation of people. If a vocation to new monasticism is to have a sensitivity and capacity to wait for God, then we need to learn how to wait.

McBride[234] suggests that 'to wait is a counter-cultural activity' (McBride, 2003, p. 15). He goes on further:

> Abraham and Sarah have already waited a quarter of a century for a son of their own. Is there nothing to be done? Waiting for that son of promise seems a fruitless enterprise…There is a way. The good news is after twenty-four years of waiting, Abraham and Sarah learn to dream again, for this time the annunciation specifies a time: it will happen next year…That timing gives substance to their better hope…Paradoxically, the dream that God holds out to them is more real than what they see, because it is the dream that holds the truth, not what they behold. (McBride, 2003, pp. 44-6)

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[234] Denis McBride, a Redemptorist Priest. After studying under Raymond Brown, McBride has gone on to lecture all around the world and has written ten books, one of which is *Waiting on God*.

Antony spent almost twenty years alone practising his ascetic discipline this way; nether going out, nor being often seen by anyone. After a while, many people yearned for his way of life and wished seriously to follow his ascetic practice, while others, his friends, came, forcibly tore down the door and forced him to come out. (Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 91)

If a vocation to new monasticism is able to share in the same way as a vocation to monasticism as highlighted above by Piccardo, then waiting is essential. As our vocation takes time to penetrate into every aspect of our being, waiting for God to mould and fashion our hopes, dreams and failures into an understanding of reality, which at times we are going to struggle with: 'It is a moment of crisis, because answering the call (vocation) to be oneself at any given moment is not at all easy…we have to find what is our particular way of playing back to God his self-sharing, self-losing care and compassion…'(Williams, 1995, p 150).

Waiting also gives us time to befriend our self and ego, to learn their complexities and illusionary capabilities. True and false freedom a.re too easily mixed up, and the elusive and cunning ego clings very obstinately to an ersatz and ultimately crippling idea of freedom as commitment (Williams, 1995, p. 159). An opportunity to sever the 'tentacles' of false hope and desire that emerge from it. This is not necessarily an act of psychological awareness, but like the desert fathers and mothers, a radical honesty about self within their practices. Piccardo claims that 'Psychoanalysis can become a shift from God to man…a community can be robbed of its transforming sanctifying force…the community does not exist, only persons exist' (Piccardo, 2014, p. 39).

The impact of this final aspect of waiting upon God as a quality of monastic culture, transforms the society in which the new monastic is trying to embody. People are at the centre, not the physical manifestations of our vocation, not the context from which our vocation departs and arrives, not the remnants of a 'sickly' intentionality that prescribes that 'people above reputation'.

Decisions may have to be made within the life of a new monastic that seem counter to what society expects and demands; one may be accused of being irresponsible. In 1994, when the head of a large Roman Catholic missional Community, who happened to be a Monsignor,

read the 'Way for Living' of the Northumbria Community he said that 'if someone was to live that way, they will never get anywhere'. Outside of monastic culture, one may say that he was rude, maybe arrogant; yet within monastic culture, then the answer is yes, it is a wasteful life, but only in the eyes of a 'barbaric world'. Only persons exist in the economy of a vocation to new monasticism, yet we still need to function in the world. That is where discernment of God's will be so important; where can I find God's provision and providence at this time? Is a phase of the new monastic as they balance living in the world whilst building a new inclusive, perceived 'wasteful' society from within, which to live?

7.10   Phenomenon of resilience as the fabric of experience

Speaking of the life of Gregory the Great, Leclercq claims, 'On every page one finds alternately suffering and experience but also their reconciliation, their synthesis in charity' (Leclercq, 1982, p. 43).

White and Cook[235] have recently argued:

> That current understandings of resilience, in contemporary culture was well as in much academic scholarship, are incomplete and inadequate in describing of human responses to adversity…A pull yourselves up by your bootstraps approach to resilience that prizes a Nietzschean 'power of will' as the highest expression of human flourishing overlooks the experience of a vast segment of the population – the weak and powerless – those resilience in the face of difficulty often is distilled through a different form of strength…Strength in weakness. (White & Cook, 2020, p.9)

Tyler moves the debate on by claiming that, 'Christian anthropology…invites us to enter into the symbol of suffering which will be made manifest by what we now term resilience. The shorthand for this symbol is, of course, the Cross. The Cross…straddles these two realities of existential despair and eschatological fulfillment' (Tyler, 2020, p. 162).

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[235] Nathan White is Director of the Institute for Faith and Resilience and a Chaplain for the US Army; Christopher Cook is Professor of Spirituality, Theology and Health at Durham University.

…resilience, from a Christian perspective, is not about 'getting through a difficult patch'. Yes, some of the psychological discourse points us in that direction, and this is clearly uppermost in much clinical investigation of the phenomenon, But, from the Christian point of view, this must always be secondary – resilience, or better the response to suffering, pain and humiliation, must rather reveal to us something of the structure of the universe, which for the Christian is God's saving and loving plan for us. (Tyler, 2020, p. 158)

When I lost my wife in 2001, having two young children, I was visited by a social worker within days of Clare's death. I remember her, after making sure that the children were well, turning to me and handing me a leaflet describing seven stages of grief. Internally I reacted from a place of, 'Who does this person think they are in telling me how I am going to grieve'?

For many nights after her death, I read a passage from the life of St Antony to contextualise my grief within what Tyler calls 'God's saving and loving plan':

> Children, let us, then keep to our ascetic discipline and not lose heart. We have the Lord to help us, as it is written: 'God helps everyone to do good who chooses to do good'. Now with regard to losing heart, it is good for us to meditate on the Apostles statement: 'I die daily', for if we too live our lives like this, as though we are going to die each day, we will not sin. I will not be alive until evening, and again when we are about to go to sleep, if we think, 'I am not going to wake up', then we will not take for granted that our life is so certain, then we know that it is measured out each day by providence. (Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 109)

Who am I to question when God wants to take his children home? Even at the point of a vocation to marriage, it is not absolute, our togetherness in love, through the grace of marriage, is only temporary and temporal in experience. For a vocation to new monasticism, as suggested about, we should be actively seeking to free each other to become God's own. The symbol of resilience, as a new language for our suffering, is absorbed in the sufferings of Christ on the Cross. But, in the words of Leclercq, our suffering is reconciled to the Cross

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through an act of charity, without which, our suffering may become stuck in a pit of self-soothing or pity, robbing our suffering of its eschatological prospect. Inscribed over every 'door' of a new monastic should be:

Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? On the day of prosperity be joyful, and on the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will come after them.[236]

For a vocation towards new monasticism, this is the life to which one seeks; its mission, through embracing suffering and not shrinking away from further pain, is to bring a fearful hope for humanity, a 'new humanity' in Christ.[237]

7.11   Fruits of monastic culture

> *Lectio* taken as a basis for formulating *quaestiones,* the monks prefer writings dealing with actual happenings and experiences rather than with ideas, and which, instead of being a teacher's instruction for universal and anonymous public, are addressed to a specific audience…The edifying character of monastic literature is the more striking because of the contrast between most monastic poems and many written by worldly clerics anxious to entertain and amuse, sometimes at any price. The monastic writings are directed to the practice of the Christian life. (Leclercq, 1982, p. 188)

Monastic literature is only one fruit that monasticism has given the Church. Carruthers argues that monasticism lived as an 'apprenticeship to a craft', could show trends of 'monastic imagery' (culture) in architecture as well as literature, revealing a theological and spiritual unity regardless of chronology and in some cases context (Carruthers, 1998, pp. 1-6).

This section is less to do with a typology of monastic fruits but is more concerned with the way that fruits emerge out of the monastic life, the context within which they are nurtured and revealed. Leclercq's opening passage to this section looks like an advert for a modern-

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[236] Ecclesiastes 7: 13-14
[237] Despite being able to reflect upon my wife's death twenty years ago in a lucid matter, I do not want to over stylise the impact psychologically on me. As Tyler alludes above, modern modes of psychology, talking, meditation, mindfulness, and medication on occasions helped, but it was always secondary to my own sense of self within the created world and my own vocation.

day marketing company. 'Authenticity is your USP, what you say and how you act should mirror each other. It will bring maximum impact to your audience'. 'Fruits' emerge from somewhere and not only have a growth period, but also a shelf-life. In the same conversation with Varden, as referred to above, He describes monastic mission like an apple tree bearing its fruit. The tree is destined within the created world to produce good fruit, if it doesn't it fails. The monastic is to produce 'good apples', but where they go, how and when they fall, it not in the remit of the monastic.

Piccardo further claims that, the missionary character of monasticism articulates our passion for the conversion that our monastic life proposes…'the heart of mission – placing ourselves entirely at God's disposal…not subjected merely to adventurous enterprises' (Piccardo, 2014, p. 105).

How does this look in practical terms for a vocation to new monasticism? Piccardo continues: 'When I believe in something, I pass it on. When something is supremely important in my life, I bear witness to it. When I know what gives meaning to my existence, I speak of it again and again with words, with gesture, with my entire life (Piccardo, 2014, p. 105).

For a traditional monastic community, it seems that there is an emphasis that mission, or the fruits of the monastic life, occur from within a collective. It's the whole Community that offers the gift and not just the ingenuity of a monk or nun, although this can inform the whole. This notion is key and is clear evidence to those that are called to a new monasticism of intentionality and those that are seeking a vocation to unintentional new monasticism.

A new monasticism of intentionality, which will contain most of the new monasticism as prescribed by the Church of England, focusses its intention on something other than monasticism. Monasticism is absorbed as a tool for which to achieve something else: build a community; support a church's missional remit; support programs of Christian discipleship; to bring a new ecological awareness; to intensify better inter-religious dialogue and of borrowing of practices and communalities of spiritual awareness; championing a moral or social prejudice. The list is endless: the mission of new monasticism within the Church.

For someone following a vocation of new monasticism, then one may find themselves as part of a 'bigger whole' in building up the Kingdom of God. The fact that all Christians are part of a whole, the body of Christ, is non-negotiable; it's a seamless authenticity to life and

action that seems to be the way in which monastic mission is understood within its own culture. This is not to say that intentional new monasticism is inauthentic, but it seems that the intentional new monastic is on the cusp of becoming subservient to a culture which demands high levels of entertainment, protest to any notion of 'boundary'[238] and costless spiritual activity.

7.12   Vocation as an act of faith

Peters has recently argued 'The discernment of vocation will be difficult and may not be without its share of false starts and tangents. But if believers have a 'secondary' vocation beyond their 'general' vocation of being Christians, then they need the structures to live out these vocations' (Peters, 2018, p. 177). He suggests that the notion that all Christians should be embracing an 'interiorized' monasticism, that in itself does not support the structures required to live a traditional monastic life. Therefore what is required to live an unintentional new monastic life, or a vocation to new monasticism? At the core of my argument for a vocation to new monasticism lies Skinner's six characteristics of unintentional monasticism:

- No career

- Only vocation

- No ownership of property

- No hanging onto money

- No pensions

- Daily disciplines

William's comments, The trouble with the idea of vocation is that most of us, if we are honest, have a rather dramatic idea of it (Williams, 1995, p. 147). The reality of a journey towards a vocation is that we regularly try and fail, it is more like a journey of 'measure' and 'desire' as we grapple with living in a new 'society' of existence. These six characteristics are both the start and departure of our vocation. If we are to live a life that has more meaning in how we act than what we say, then the world around us does not need to hear that we

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[238] I think it is important to illustrate my intention by offering an analogy. It is reported that a child saves his dog's life as it was suffering from heat exhaustion after being left in a car. The child got into his father's shed and took out a hammer to smash the glass. We then have protests on the streets demanding that all children should have access to their parents' sheds.

find no value in career, but what they witness is our value and seriousness of love of vocation, catapulted from our love and seriousness of God. We guard against our characteristics simply being reduced, (through our own understanding of ourselves and the perceived notion of ourselves from others) to a fanciful comparison with the world, a reductionistic mindset of suspicious of intent.

Our mission is not to convert others to our way, but to support, serve and love others in their own journey into God and what it is to be fully human. A vocation to new monasticism in the words of Mark Plaiss[239], is an 'invisible vocation' to the society we live and in some cases the church we worship (Plaiss, 2003, p.23). We live in a constant fragility of human faith in Divine providence. We never grow tired of Christ's words, 'leave all and follow me', 'don't worry about tomorrow' and the mantra for our journey on a stormy sea, 'do not be afraid'.

7.13 Summary and conclusions

If we view monastic spiritualty as 'unrestricted value' from which the world can access, then what, if any, will be the impact on the Church and its members of intentional unrestricted access to fruits of monasticism? Are we already seeing some choosing to move to an unintentionality through a repentant observation of the impact of human intentionality that is requiring greater levels of adaptation and revisioning of what we thought we knew?

Having argued for the possibility of a vocation to new monasticism that draws its own life from monastic culture whilst remaining in the world as part of a wider vocation to the Christian life outside of the cloister; the fragility, unknown trajectory and undiscernible future of the world we live requires a new template from which to reflect.

This thesis now turns to view what Merton calls 'the church of the desert' as a new template to embrace for a vocation to new monasticism.

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Chapter 8. The Church of the Desert: Engagements with Thomas Merton and Rowan Williams

8.1 Introduction

As I have shown previously, the emerging breakdown in communication and relationship between the principal founders of the Northumbria Community in the 1990's, was from a clash of charism of founding and charism of the founder. I argue that this, in principle, was due to the inchoate nature of both the Northumbria Community and new monasticism as a whole in the UK at the time. As I have highlighted previously, Notker Wolf seems to concur with my argument. In the summer of 2005 he stated that, whilst recognising the creative impulses of the new monastic movement, something that traditional monasticism may learn from, he also recognised the lack of experience of long years of routine and institutionalization (Grimley, 2013, p. 553).

The lack of experience and routine of the Community allowed personal hurt, trauma, ego and anger to take centre stage, masking the reality of the emergence of two distinct spiritual experiences, that, whilst being interconnected, were autonomous within their own rights. As referred to in the previous chapter, what I experienced in April 1998 was a clash of these spiritual experiences and I had decided to follow the charism of the founder as opposed to the founding charism of the Northumbria Community.

As shown before, Flanagan has rightfully argued that, in the typology of new monastic emergence, Thomas Merton is a clear 'influencer' in terms of reflective practice. My own journey within new monasticism continued within two patterns of reflection: Firstly, on advice from Skinner to read and re-read the book *Wisdom of the Desert* by Thomas Merton and more importantly reflect upon its implications for my own vocation and the reality of my lived experience within new monasticism. This led me to read other works by Thomas Merton as well as ancient literature from the early fathers and mothers of the deserts of the Middle East.

Secondly, the growth of new monasticism at the start of the twenty-first century, I started to reflect more fully upon the word 'monasticism' in new monasticism, by drawing closer to people living the religious life. In 2002, I volunteered to do manual work at St. Martin's

Convent in Warwickshire.[240] The agreement was that I spent three hours in the morning tending to their garden, had lunch with the sisters, then was given a room for the afternoon where I could study. My close proximity with traditional monasticism continued in 2010, as I moved with four generations of family onto the estate of Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, a Community of Cistercian monks, renting both a house and also a property to run a Community Centre from.

As already commented in my introduction chapter, regarding my introduction to Williams, in 2004 I entered a dialogue with the then Archbishop of Canterbury concerning new monasticism watering down the monastic vision. His reply was, 'I quite take the point about the risks of redefining the essence of the monastic calling itself in a way that might undermine its integrity.'[241] The dialogue was set to the backdrop of what I have discussed within the literature review as the emergence of the Fresh Expression movement and the growth of new monasticism within the Church of England. Williams' concern was taken into a Synod debate to bring in a new Canon that would see new monastic communities come under the stewardship of the Church of England. The motion was brought by the Rt Revd Dr David Walker[242] in July 2018 and, despite expressing concerns as to the 'overstretching' of the term monastic in some instances, his motion was approved in 2019.[243]

8.2 Engagements with Thomas Merton and Rowan Williams

This chapter is not a comprehensive reading of both Merton and Williams or is it a critique of scholarship of both theologians and authors. I intend in this chapter to bring various works by Merton and Williams to the fore, in order to frame what Merton describes as the Church of the Desert. Having consulted with Dr Paul M Pearson, Director and Archivist, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, he said that no other reference to 'the church of the desert' has been found in Merton's other work. In his opinion, Pearson suggested that Merton was referring to a 'Kenotic' model of the Church

Thomas Merton (1915 – 1968) was an American Trappist Monk at the Abbey of our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky from 1941 to his death. Known for writing over fifty-five books,

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[240] A Dominican Convent where I attended its secondary school. I knew five of the six remaining nuns at the time.

[241] Correspondence with Rowan Williams on the 4th October 2004.

[242] Bishop of Manchester, Chair of the Advisory Council of Relations between Bishops and Religious Communities.

[243] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/GS%202087%20-%20Religious%20Communities.pdf. Accessed 17/04/2021

amongst personal journals, articles, and letters, on topics of: mysticism, poetry, theology, Christian spirituality, social activism, and inter-faith dialogue.

His fame has led him to inhabit two areas of contemporary interest, Merton as a Monk (contemplative) and Merton as a Man (activist).[244] I would argue for far less of a demarcation by adopting Williams' appraisal of a kind of existentialism that sees the monk's flight to the desert as an impulse to confront the diabolical, the infernal which threatens all men (Williams, 2013, pp. 25-6). In that way, the monk takes with them not only their own personhood but that of all humanity. As Tyler comments on Merton, 'all commitment must have as its heart a commitment to our actual selves. All Christian commitment must consequently have as its source and goal the engagement of the actual self with its source in God our creator' (Tyler, 2000, p. 85). Merton as monk and Merton as man are inextricably tied together, and it is the nature of that reality, a vocation that sees Merton commit to and struggle with monkhood born out of the one true vocation of the actual self being constantly engaged with God the creator – a vocation from within a vocation.

Resisting the Church's absorption into a safe identity, Williams claims that the contemplative experience is as varied as the many modern instances of it. Maria Clara Bingemer claims that we no longer need to look in cloisters or religious orders to find mystics:

> They can be found in factories, amid the nosily and stressful rhythm of machines and industry; in the streets with those who are poor and excused from progress; or in prisons, and even in the hell of the 'laagers' and 'gulags'. Due to their activity and commitment, they may be regarded as dangerous by the established authorities. I affirm that they are mystics according to the evidence of a radical experience of God's love, which inspires and drives them…the mysticism of our own time does not wait for the reform of churches or religious institutions to effect its own search. (Bingemer, 2020, p. 87)

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[244] This became very apparent at a Thomas Merton Conference led by the Thomas Merton Society in 2018 at Oakham School. Much debate emerged through various talks about the causality of Merton through his writings as happening through Merton the Monk or Merton the Man in conflict with his monkhood.

Whilst on one level Williams and Bingemer may concur in regard to the multiple possibilities of how mysticism as our encounter with the Divine reality can manifest itself, in her treatment of Merton I think Williams may distance himself.

> Whilst undisputedly having been a contemplative at heart for many years, in March 1958, in Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, Merton received an enlightening grace, and was suddenly overwhelmed with the realisation of his love for his fellow persons and their mutual relation and connection one to another, despite being total strangers. This experience among others, led him to see his monastic vocation as inseparable from his facing the problems of the world…. (Bingemer, 2020, p. 93)

Likewise, Keith James[245] chose to view Merton as a monk concerned with prayer, implicitly set against Merton the man who became increasing concerned with many world challenges. James went on to hold in tension both Merton as 'spiritual' and Merton as 'missional' (James, 2009, p. 3).

The reductionist treatment of Merton to a man in a constant struggle with coming to terms with his vocation as a monk, as shown above in Bingemer, in terms of a monastic versus the world, I argue is because of the amount of access we have to Merton's interior life. I am not suggesting that the weight of institutionalisation on monasticism has not, from time to time, acted as a hurdle to the vocation of monasticism, but it can mask the fact that this 'struggle' is in fact innate in the whole monastic experience and in fact for anyone who is coming into a maturity of self-understanding of vocation and place within one's Divine calling and responsibilities. The reading of Merton's encounter at 'Fourth and Walnut', I would suggest, is an expanding vocational capacity as a monk to the world. 'The monk's service to the city he leaves is the objectification of its demons so that they become visible and identifiable for men; his immense risk, his total exposure of himself, has a universal 'therapeutic' effect' (Williams, 2013, p. 26). Williams continues, '…to imagine ourselves as agents by imaging ourselves as self-regulating individuals is to misconceive our fundamental need, which is for identity in relation, conversation and mutual recognition' (Williams, 2000, p. 71).

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[245] Revd Keith James a curate in Bewdley, working in parish life for over twenty years.

I would argue that the 'total exposure of himself' (Merton), through his writings and consequential cult following status has often acted like a constructed veneer over his location in a monastic context. Is this exposure of Merton what Williams refers to as a 'therapeutic effect?' For the purpose of this thesis, I want to put Merton back into the centre of his monastic experience and focus on his last publication that seems to allow him to articulate his monastic vocation[246] whilst at the same time open an invitation to non-monastics who are responding to a call to live, work, and pray within 'the Church of the Desert'.

8.3 Monastic dread and the human Inner conflict

> The peculiar monastic dimension of this struggle lies in the fact that society itself, institutional life, organisation, the 'approved way,' may in fact be encouraging us in falsity and illusion. The deep root of monastic 'dread' is the inner conflict which makes us guess that in order to be true to God and to ourselves we must break with the familiar, established, and secure norms and go off into the unknown. Unless a man hates father and mother… These words of Christ give some indication of the deep conflict which underlies all Christian conversion the turning to a freedom based no longer on social approval and relative alienation, but on direct dependence on an invisible and inscrutable God, in pure faith. It must be said at once that this struggle does not end at the gate of a monastery, and often it may come to light again in a conflict over one's monastic vocation. (Merton, 1969, p. 36)

Merton's reference to 'the peculiar monastic dimension' as something that may exist outside of 'institutional life' and the 'approved way', suggests that the monastic dimension is to be located in the experience of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. 'This *Life* (St Anthony) is a great document of monastic tradition, perhaps the very greatest, second to no other, even to the Rule of St Benedict. It is one of the great sources of Eastern and Western

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[246] Despite this, the nature of Merton's writings suggest that it would be clumsy to frame Merton in ways other than a discursive reflective practice upon himself, the Church and the world at large. The Merton story continues to be unravelled even in the present.

monasticism, and shows the monk as a solider of Christ, a man of God and a man of the Church' (Merton, 2005, p. 39).

Williams provides more clarity on Merton's growing interest in the Christian East and in particular the Desert Fathers by highlighting Merton's reading of Paul Evdokimov's[247] work on a 'radical tradition of monasticism.' Williams claims it was Evdokimov's treatment of 'authenticity' and ascetism as 'therapy, humanising therapy' that Merton focused on and that 'one goes into the desert to vomit up the interior phantom the doubter, the double' (Williams, 2013, p. 24). I will expand Merton's thoughts on the Desert Fathers below.

Merton's claim that the 'approved way' may be 'encouraging us to illusion', is a statement that I would argue all new monastic practitioners would subscribe to, not just in the UK but throughout the world. The turn from 'something' in order to draw closer to God is a staple of the Gospel message. The question then becomes what are we turning from and why? In our contemporary age, the turn from institution and meta-constructs is an over-stated phenomenon and as I have argued previously, new monasticism is built upon that very concept with the ability to maintain a relationship with God outside of so-called normality and theologically and socially expected norms.

Merton goes on to remind us of the 'sour taste' in our depths that can come from the freedom to question norms that consciously or unconsciously falsify and create illusion, that is 'monastic dread.' It is the impact of this inner conflict that drives the monastic to, at best, 'guess' that something has to be done to break from the familiar in order to maintain a relationship or the possibility of a relationship with God and our true selves. Despite coming second to his warning of institutional illusionary meddling, the inner conflict or monastic dread is the precursor to any change or turn from something. Williams suggests:

> What is 'infinite' here is the possibility of an eternally renewed relation to God, opening out whatever finite situation we inhabit to further growth and deepening. And this also allows the believer's self-understanding to embrace passages of extreme doubt and obscurity. (Williams, 2020, p. 13)

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[247] Paul Evdokimov (1901 – 1970) was an Orthodox Christian theologian who after a Revolution was forced to leave Russia with his family and become Russian Émigrés in France.

There seems to be an implicit suggestion in what Merton is saying in relation to conflict, dread and structures around us, that they may stop that conflict from being felt inwardly through distraction and distortion. It seems there is a need to wait, pray and discern prior to change and movement, lest we may find ourselves simply reacting from ego in order to protect our own environment. In this way the 'approved way' may simply be subverted in order to remain subservient to self-cultivation. Williams claims:

> If that integration is lacking (theology, action and prayer), the mystical returns as a self-conscious submission of religious life, readily thought of in terms of a facile opposition to community experience and public action; it becomes all too easily a path of self-cultivation, not the foundation of a practice of self-dispossession and costly availability for God and the World. The mystical is what we have to learn to speak about (tentatively) when we are driven to recognise the drastic difference of God's action at work; when the fabric of the familiar world is stretched thin not by obvious miraculous interpretation but by events that open unlooked-for possibilities for human beings. (Williams, 2020, p. 18)

Williams continues:

> The emergence of God's purpose is the Paschal event which places human beings back at the heart of the Temple, the world itself seen as a sanctuary and sacrament; but to be placed there is also to know the impossibility of sustaining the language and the relational patterns of self-interested and self-promoting individual agents, seeking mastery of their human and non-human environment. The constant resistance of the contemplative encounter with God's agency to any words that will make it manageable or predictable, capable of being domesticated within categories the ego can handle, is what helps Christian reflection not to lose its critical and self-critical edge. (Williams, 2020, p. 16)

Both Merton and Williams would concur with each other that any turn from something we perceive as obstructing a greater relationship with God and ourselves first needs time, prayer, and theological and spiritual discernment before action. This counters some of the reductionist commentaries on Merton who claim that prayer without action is not authentic prayer; it may be that the action is waiting for the Spirit to move in the prayer life of the individual and/or Community. Williams warns his Fresh Expressions movement against too hastily communicating how we feel inwardly. 'Of course there are dangers, because at some point we need at least to try and put into words what this is about, however inadequately, so as to be able to communicate it more fully and more truthfully; but this can't be hurried too much' (Williams, 2009, p. 3).

Denis McBride suggests[248]:

> The future of the church in the Western world looks like a story of chronic disaffection and loss and staying on in the congregation means living inside that larger experience of loss, without going to sleep on what is happening. It's not easy to stay on not knowing what is going to happen…Do I believe in God? Do I believe that God's purposes are being worked out in the middle of what is happening? Do I believe that the congregation still has a word of life to offer? I can say 'yes' to these questions, I wait, I stay on because I have not given up the habit of hoping. (McBride, 2003, p. 32)

The juxtaposition of McBride next to Merton and Williams supports my argument for discernment before action, for we may be called in service to our Church and society to stay put, embodying a 'habit of hoping' for a period of time or as a lifelong vocation in service to God and others.

Merton continues with the notion that once the conflict or dread has been felt and through a discernment that change is needed to draw closer to God and self, then movement towards the unfamiliar may be required, a step into the unknown. As shown above, Williams has also identified the need to sometimes have our familiarity 'stretched', not just for us but more importantly for other's sense of hope. Merton is then quick to suggest that

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[248] The Redemptorists of the Edmonton-Toronto Province in Canada asked the theologian Denis McBride to offer some biblical reflections on the theme of 'Waiting on the Lord.'

this change in direction from the safe harbour of individual and corporate self-cultivation to the dependence on the Word from the back of the boat to calm the storm, is in fact something of a lifelong commitment, it does not just end at the gate of the monastery but can even occur on the corner of 'Fourth and Walnut.'

The location of conflict or dread according to Merton is 'deep' yet despite him claiming is located in all Christian conversion, he reminds us of his monastic vocation and the call to leave behind parents, to pick up your cross and follow Christ. For those that are praying within the Church of the desert, Williams reminds us that 'People come to an awareness of this emptiness in different ways' (Williams, 1995, p. 81). One needs to be patience and wait for a 'God experience in a personal encounter' and have the 'courage to go beyond the feelings of anxiety' that can emerge in our conflict and dread (McBride, 2003. pp. 155-7).

From out of this depth springs a freedom that, according to Merton, is a freedom that seems to turn the world upside down, for it is the freedom to be in total abandonment to the providence of God, stripped of all normal avenues of support and comfort, not just any God, but an invisible God that seemingly can only been found through pure faith. Williams claims that: 'we are fascinated by selves as we understand them, and so find it practically impossible to conceive of a relation to God which is not comparable to relation to a self' (Williams, 2007, p. 229).

This is a difficult place to comprehend, if you happen to be in the Church of the Desert outside of a monastic vocation and even more so, if we were to let go of some of the reductionist models of desert spirituality that seek to locate it above and beyond a monastic experience.[249] Merton implies that the freedom he is talking about cannot be given or even traded from the world. It is a Divine gift, a gift that suggests drawing closer to God through an availability and vulnerability, not only of living with the conflict or dread, but also from the distance required from our self-cultivated environment in order to receive the gift.

8.4 Monastic dread as a mirror to the world

> This is precisely the monk's chief service to the world: this silence, this listening, this questioning, this humble and courageous exposure to what the world ignores about

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[249] I am mainly referring to the idea of the desert experience being located in psychological conditions and disorders, that solely view the experiences from a clinical condition to be healed.

itself – both good and evil…We speak frequently of the concept of 'dread,' it will be in this existential sense…This is the creative and healing work of the monk, accomplished in silence, nakedness of spirit, in emptiness, in humility. It is a participation in the saving death and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, every Christian may, if he so desires, enter into communion with this silence of the praying and meditating Church, which is the Church of the Desert. (Merton, 1969, pp. 36 -8)[250]

Williams describes the 'monk's chief service to the world' In his book, *Why Study the Past? The Quest for the Historical Church.*[251] In order to view monasticism then we need to look 'sideways.' After taking a sideward glance, Williams describes:

In other words, the person who prays is the person who both in behaviour and in understanding restores order to a disordered world, a person who makes visible the effect of submission to *logos*; he or she is someone who vindicates the Christian faith as a scheme that unifies the world of experience rather than fragmenting it. The mature life of contemplation is an embodiment of the *Logos*…but that *Logos* emanates from a reality that cannot be encompassed by rational perception, only by love and radical detachment and the silencing of analytical and imaginative activity. (Williams, 2005, pp. 45-6)

Interest here lies in the location of the monastic experience as something viewed from a sideways glance. I would argue that Williams is arguing against a reductionist view of monasticism in relationship to a retrieval of the spiritual life, in its ability to act as a spiritual barometer to the Church and society at large. This presupposes that before the glance one needs to stop what you are doing and turn towards something that may in fact be unfamiliar and awkward to one's own standpoint. The friction that this can cause in one's

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[250] Through recent correspondence with Dr Paul Pearson, director and archivist at the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, despite Merton using the phase 'Church of the Desert', he does not seem to explicitly suggest what this might look and feel like and operate in reality.
[251] A book to discuss how we read the historical Church can impact our justifications for current models of church structure and theological concerns. Firstly, history is a set of stories that helps us understand where we are today; secondly, that history can be located within God's activity; and, thirdly, that history past and present is bound up in the body of Christ.

own understanding of self, neighbour and God can help in negotiating self-cultivation and help towards a healthy critical awareness.

This can be shown in what I have brought to the fore from my methodology chapter section 4.3:

> One of the best known of the Desert Fathers of fourth-century Egypt, St Sarapion the Sindonite, travelled once on pilgrimage to Rome. Here he was told of a celebrated recluse, a woman who lived always in one small room, never going out. Sceptical about her way of life – for he was himself a great wanderer – Sarapion called on her and asked: 'Why are you sitting here?' To this she replied: 'I am not sitting, I am on a journey. (Ware, 1995, p. 7)

This intersection of theological awareness, from Merton and Williams, suggests a dialectic between the nature of the monastic life in its service to the world and its need to be irrelevant enough from the society in which it has departed so that those who turn to view monasticism can see enough difference to make its irrelevance relevant to the quest of withdrawal from falsity and illusion. This kind of monastic 'mission' is not passive, the fruit that the monastic life bears is of great importance in its contribution to building the Kingdom of God on earth, what happens to that fruit is of God's concern alone. This irrelevance of outcome, is collapsed into a relevance of being oriented towards Christ through his death and resurrection.[252]

As pointed out above, one of the criticisms of the new monastic movement is its desire and ability to manoeuvre from viewing monasticism on a right angle, to manipulating and changing the viewpoint to a self-constructed semi-monastic experience that requires only a ten-degree turn of the head, allowing one to keep moving forward without stopping, waiting, or critiquing one's experience.

The invitation from Merton to enter the Church of the Desert through awareness of our own conflict and dread, and desire to reflect on the practicalities of the Desert Fathers and

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[252] In conversation with Fr Erik Varden he suggested that the fruit of the monastic life is likened to an apple tree bearing its fruit. Where that fruit falls is of little importance to the monk or nun.

Mothers is an invitation that transcends institutional, traditional forms of monasticism and I would argue the new monastic movement itself.[253]

Williams suggests that:

> The early monks and nuns moved off into the communities of the desert because they weren't convinced that the church in its ordinary manifestations showed with any clarity what the church was supposed to be about; they wanted to find out what the church really was – which is another way of saying that they wanted to find out what humanity really was when it was in touch with God through Jesus Christ. (Williams, 2003, p. 23)

Merton revealed how important the sayings of the Desert Fathers were by pointing the novices to his own book *Wisdom of the Desert* and in suggesting that:

> These collections are easily accessible in easy Latin and should be read by every monk…Anthony the hermit, when some monks asked him for a rule and for a form of monastic life, gave the books of the Gospel… This is not the place in which to speculate what our great and mysterious vocation might involve. That is still unknown. Let it suffice for me to say that we need to, learn from these men of the fourth century how to ignore prejudice, defy compulsion and strike out fearlessly into the unknown. (Merton, 2006 p. 21-4)

Merton continues:

> Yet we must not think that they went into the desert expecting to avoid temptation. The desert was a place of deeper and more spiritual temptation, not just a refuge from the world…The ideal was one of silence, solitude, dependence on God. Direct

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[253] I am not suggesting that the institution of monasticism does not have the ability to reach back to its sources to help negotiate periods of change and renewal.

dependence on God is the vocation of the solitary. Perfect abandonment is proper to the monastic state, because it is a literal and exact fulfilment of the Gospel.' Speaking of the life of St Anthony, Merton claims, 'it should be read by all monks. (Merton, 2005, pp. 30-1)

Despite Merton's audience being novices and monastics who chose to return to monastic source material after Vatican II and to a lesser or greater extent, himself, and his internal battle over his vocation (Merton, 2006, p. ix); Williams' audience was to a Church ripping itself apart under the pressure of potential schism. Yet as is shown above, despite changes in language, the core message from the early Christians of the fourth century is the same.

So far, we witness in Merton, despite knowing we cannot replicate them, a ruthless determination and practical awareness of the experiences of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, this lies at the heart of the monastic vocation, a call to a self-awareness of our human inner conflict and to cast off 'alien compulsions'. In Williams, we see more of a philosophical approach to the desert until, in 2003, Rowan Williams published a series of talks he delivered on the stories of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the title was *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert.* Here he moves directly to a kind of practical realism that seems to speak directly to a fragmented Church of England. Williams chose to adopt Merton's title, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, from his 1960 publication, albeit as his subtitle. Speaking of the Desert Fathers and Mothers:

> Silence somehow reaches to the root of our human problem, it seems. You can lead a life of heroic labour and self-denial at the external level. Refusing the comforts of food and sleep, but if you have not silence – to paraphrase St Paul, it will profit you nothing…We have to be careful about the risk of modernising the desert tradition in a shallow way. It sounds wonderful when we are told that the path pf asceticism is all about self-discovery, because most of us are deeply in love with the idea of self-expression and discovering the 'true self' so as to express it more fully in the burden of hundreds of self-help books – but for the desert monks and nuns, the quest for truth can be frightening, and they know how many strategies we devise to keep ourselves away from the real thing. (Williams, 2003, pp. 45-6)

Williams suggests silence can impact at the heart of the human dilemma, far greater than any act of 'labour'. It reminds me of the Gospel episode at Bethany when Christ rebukes the criticism of the women anointing him, saying that 'she had done a beautiful thing to me.' And the fact that we will always have the poor and that we can choose to help them whenever we want.[254] Somehow the silence that Merton and Williams talk about is a ferocious silence that demands a stillness of physical, mental, and spiritual awareness in order to prepare us for an encounter with Christ.

What we find in these next two statements frames the Church of the Desert in a way that bridges Merton and Williams and in consequence, the monastic, and the non-monastic:

> The desert monastics have very little to say about theories of the atonement – apparently very little to say even about Jesus for quite a lot of the time. But they are speaking about and living out something that only begins to make sense in the context of the Gospel…At the centre of practically all they have to say is Christ's own command 'not to be afraid. Dying to neighbour, refusing to judge…all this is about freedom from fear…The desert community tells the church, then and now, that its job is to be a fearless community and it shows us some of the habits we need to develop in order to become fearless. (Williams, 2003, p. 34-5)

> They were humble, quiet, sensible people, with a deep knowledge of human nature and enough understanding of the things of God to realise that they know very little about Him. Hence, they were not much disposed to make long speeches about the divine essence, or even to declaim on the mystical meaning of scripture. (Merton, 1961, pp. 14-24)

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[254] Mark 14: 3-9

8.5 Realism in the desert: A new hermeneutic[255]

We now turn to explore a realism of the desert in how Merton and Williams reflect upon the sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. As commented by the Benedictine monk, Columba Stewart, 'what sets the *apophthegmata* apart from so much of patristic literature is that they speak from and to experience rather than text or theory; they are practical rather than intellectual' (Stewart, 1990, p. 25).

Merton contends that the flight to the desert was neither, 'negative or purely individualist. They were not rebels against society. True, they were in a certain sense anarchists and it will do no harm to think of them in that light' (Merton, 1961, p. 5).

> What the fathers sought most of all was their own true self, in Christ. And in order to do this, they had to reject completely the false, formal self, fabricated under social compulsion in the world. They sought a way to God that was uncharted and freely chosen, not inherited from others who had mapped it beforehand. (Merton, 1961, p. 6)

Now teaching his novices, Merton maps a trajectory of spiritual companionship with an Antonian style of monastic experience through summarising Anthony's thirty-eight sayings, known as the *Apophthegmata* of St. Anthony:[256]

1) It is curious that the very first is about the apparition of the angel showing Anthony how to alternate work and prayer and thus combat *acedia*. (also the importance of a recreation in the monastic life)

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[255] Burton-Christie has developed what he calls the 'desert hermeneutic' (my love of the subject). 'could the desert approach to interpretation be retrieved, reappropriated in terms that were both faithful to its official spirit and comprehensible to a critically minded contemporary audience?' (Burton-Christie, 2005, p. 107). Burton-Christie argues that a balance of the two, imaginatively and critically reflections, with the subject we love, can 'yield its secret in deepened understanding and appreciation.'
'The divergent awareness of the desert experience across; time, place, race and religion are evident throughout the current interest in desert spirituality. In most cases we find a convergence, not only on what happens in the desert, but of its benefit to a wider audience - those that may stumble upon the desert experience through mental, emotional, or spiritual aridity' (Burton-Christie, 2005, pp. 107-8).
[256] These are taken from Merton's own transcripts that he wrote as part of his delivery of lectures and conferences to his community. Whilst Merton cross-references his characteristic points of Antonian monasticism with sayings, I will simply number each characteristic and not reference them to the actual sayings of Anthony.

2) On minding your own business and not worrying about the dispositions of Providence.

3) On expecting temptations until our last breath – On helping others who are tempted.

4) Only tempted and tried can be saved; they only have a realistic view of life. Humility is the only way to escape the snares of the enemy.

5) Austerity without intelligence (discretion) separates one from God.

6) A monk out of his cell is like a fish out of water.

7) Importance of self-custody.

8) Visions are from the demons.

9) Miracles are no guarantee of sanctity.

10) The supreme importance of charity.

11) The uselessness of passive dependence on others in the spiritual life.

12) Silence and nescience.

13) Meekness and non-violence.

14) Poverty and detachment.

15) Three sources of impure temptations: nature, too much food and demons.

16) A time will come when all will be crazy and will attack those who are unlike themselves.

17) Love casts out fear.

18) Austerity.

19) Need for a spiritual father, (note the) realism of this spirituality. (Merton, 2006. pp. 22-3)

We already know that Merton told his novices that every monastic should read the Life and sayings of St Anthony. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian monk, in his work on Anthony as a paradigm for the spiritual journey, suggests that 'Anthony's experience of the spiritual journey is a classic example of how the Divine action works in our lives...the Divine action laid to rest the unconscious motivation of his false self...which was at the same time a

radical letting go of the influence of his cultural conditioning insofar as it being an obstacle to following Christ' (Keating, 1997, p. 83). Furthermore, in 2015, Fr Erik Varden became the eleventh Abbot of the Community of Mount Saint Bernard and the first set of conferences he delivered to his community was called, 'On Becoming Human: Readings in the Life of Antony.'[257]

Merton suggests that the Antonian monastic spirituality was disseminated throughout the West and East and eventually found itself in the hand of St Benedict through both Cassian and Rufinus.[258]

Through Merton, Keating and Varden, the explicit notion of a compulsion to remove obstacles that stand between you and God retains the heart of the Antonian monastic enterprise. It suggests something deep enough that goes right to the heart of the monastic 'dread' and, time and time again, monasticism turns to its so-called founding father for support in this process. Whilst the Benedictine rule may support the life of individuals together, unless we are able to stand before God as *Monos* (alone) we run the risk of hiding behind our corporate identity and ultimately our ability to become truly human.

In this way Varden suggests that to be truly human is to be vertically stretched. The tension arises from what we are by nature, which is to return to dust, whilst at the same time receiving God's promise through grace in giving us a shadow of the *logos* and life in immortality. We are constrained by our nature wanting to burst into something else. To be a human being is to go beyond our nature; it's a profound longing of who we are.[259]

The realism of desert spirituality allows a mutuality of human conflict to exist between the monastic and non-monastic so that vocation is no longer something that separates but which binds through human experience and encounter. Is this what Merton was talking about when he wrote a letter to Helen Wolff, the publisher of Pasternak's Dr. Zhivago, 'I think it is terribly important today that we keep alive the sense and possibility of a strong communion of seemingly isolated individuals in various places and cultures: eventually the foundation of true human community is there and not in the big states or institutions.'[260]

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[257] A conference delivered to Mount Saint Bernard's Abbey and I was invited to attend, January 2015.
[258] *Vitae Patrum* and the Rule of St Basil.
[259] Taken from my own notes from a series of conferences held at Mount Saint Bernard Abbey in 2015. The talks were called, On Becoming Human: Readings in the Life of Antony and were delivered by Fr Erik Varden.
[260] Written on November the 2nd 1967. Thank you to Dr Paul M Pearson, Director and Archivist, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University for pointing this out to me.

In reflective practice on the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, as a paradigm for understanding the human conflict, it seems a meta-community of experience may emerge. It both supports the post-modern construct of standpoint experience whilst at the same time rejects it in a shared commonality of individuals that inhabit institution. For the monastic institution, the lives and sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers are important for the individual monastic's confrontation with their own monastic dread; yet the institution of monasticism, through an invitation from Merton, joins with the non-monastic to face and work through their own conflict within the same cultural turn to the desert.

Williams cautions us within the realism of the desert experience against the value of certitude:

> A certain brother came to see Abba Arsenius as Scetis. He arrived at the church and asks the clergy if he could go and visit Abba Arsenius. 'Have a bite to eat,' they said, 'before you go to see him.' 'No,' he replied, 'I shan't eat anything until I have met him.' Arsenius's cell was a long way off, so they sent a brother along with him. They knocked on the door, went in and greeted the old man, then sat down; nothing was said. The brother from the church said. I'll leave you now; pray for me. 'But the visitor didn't feel at ease with the old man and said, 'I'm coming with you. 'So off they went together. Then the visitor said, 'Will you take me to see Abba Moses, the one who used to be a highwayman?' When they arrived, Abba Moses welcomed them happily and enjoyed himself thoroughly with them until they left. The brother who had escorted the visitor said to him, 'Well', I've taken you to see the foreigner and the Egyptian; which do you like better?' The Egyptian (Moses) for me!' he said. One of the fathers overheard this and prayed to God saying, 'Lord explain this to me. For your sake one of these men runs from human company and for your sake the other receives them with open arms.' Their two large boats floating on the river were shown to him. In one of them sat Abba Arsenius and the Holy Spirit of God in complete silence. And in the other boat was Abba Moses with the angels of God: they were all eating honey cakes. (Williams, 2003, pp. 42-3)

Williams argues that the quote above reveals 'distinctiveness of vocations' emerging within the desert tradition:

> Spiritual tourism did not take long to develop in fourth- and fifth-century Egypt; travellers would come from far to see one or other of the 'great old men''. This is why inattention is such a problem in the context of the desert communities, insensitivity to the real differences in people callings and gifting. (Williams, 2003, pp. 42-3)

As Williams suggests, anxiety occurs in the mindset of the visitor and the father overhearing and, as Williams comments, there is no hint that Moses or Arsenius lost any sleep over their diversity.

> The standpoint of certitude costs us our experience in order to possess the tradition. The standpoint of self-assurance costs us the richer meaning and understanding that the Christian tradition has to offer in order to make our current thoughts, feelings and desires primary. The problem with both...is that they diminish our ability to relate to ourselves, our experience, our world and our religious heritage...They seduce us into believing that life will not call into question our most cherished certainties...Precisely because these two ways of understanding dominate discussions of individual and corporate values and spirituality in culture and in our churches, we are in desperate need of authentic theological reflection...without theological reflection... faith is reduced to a possession. (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2007, p. 16)

Williams claims: 'What you thought mattered – i.e., what you thought was truest to the Real You – turns out to be empty and dishonest. You have to keep asking and keep looking; no wonder we hate it and find every excuse for not getting on with it' (Williams, 2003, p. 47). Williams seems to be alluding to the difficulty if 'ego' remained unchecked allowing it to develop 'defences' against contingencies that may threaten 'entrenched' positions. The Christian faith built upon the 'heavy burden' of self-justification can be remedied by turning to the 'lighter burden' of 'self-accusation' (Williams, 2003, p. 47).

From a standpoint of 'corporate theological reflection', Williams[261] may be seeking method in the desert literature to heal the growing canonical divisions within the Anglican Communion. It may also be a 'call' for respect between the emerging divisions of so-called 'inherited' and 'emergent' churches, a topic central to new monasticism within the Anglican Communion.

On the notion of being radical, which is something often suggested from within new monasticism as a kind of self-referral, I have often been concerned. Williams sheds light on the matter from within the desert experience:

> So, the saint isn't someone who makes us think, that looks hard; that's a heroic achievement of will with the inevitable accompanying thought, that's too hard for me, but someone who makes us think, how astonishing! Human lives can be like that, behaviour like that can look quite natural – with perhaps the thought, how can I find what they found? (Williams, 2003, p. 57)

Williams is viewing the radical from the visitor's perspective. The silence of the radical about his or her own life leaves the condition of vulnerability observable through behaviour alone. What happens when we perceive our life as a radical in contrast to another? What are the implications for humility, for authenticity in our wrestling with our own conflict, if we have to justify it as a radical turn from something else? The nature of being self-declared as radical in itself leaves one dangerously open to egoistical abuse, another stumbling block to be removed in our quest for God. The nature of declaring someone else as radical, as Williams points out, can hasten us towards a kind of false humility, in the sense that 'we could not possibility do that'. I am not suggesting that we should not use the word radical to describe the action of God through the lives of those who ruthlessly set out in a single-minded pursuit of God, but a level of understanding why and the implications for our brothers and sisters may help mitigate the openness of the ego's intentionality to create safety in the face of fear, sometimes masked as being radical.

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[261] When the book was published Rowan Williams was Archbishop of Canterbury.

The desert fathers and mothers are no less sure that God will forgive, but they know with equal certainty that for us to receive that forgiveness in such a way that our lives will be changed is a lifetime's work requiring the most relentless monitoring of our selfish and lazy habits of thinking and reacting. (Williams, 2003, p. 35)

In this next statement Williams reminds us that the obstacles that stand in our way of God should not only be removed for ourselves, but more importantly for our neighbour. He then concludes with what I would argue is his invitation into the Church of the Desert:

The whole purpose of any kind of ascesis is to challenge and overcome in ourselves whatever makes us an obstacle to the connection between God and the neighbour…You flee to the desert not to escape neighbours but to grasp more fully what the neighbour is – the way to life for you, to the degree that you put yourself at their disposal in connecting them with God…the desert monastery of the first generation is not meant to be an alternative to human solidarity but a radical version of it that questions the priorities of community in other contexts. And this remains the most important function of any monastic community today – for the church and wider world alike. (Williams, 2003, p. 38)

As commented above, Williams suggests that silence somehow reaches to the root of our human problem; it is the arena where we flee from our own projects on ourselves and others, other people's projects and from our own 'inflated expectations'. There is a paradox in the desert enterprise in regard to fleeing, as both Merton and Williams are very aware of the importance of staying. Merton suggests that:

To sit in the cell and to learn from the cell evidently means first of all learning that one is not a monk…In fact in any vocation at all, we must distinguish the grace of the call itself and the preliminary image of ourselves which we spontaneously and almost unconsciously assume to represent the truth of our calling. (Merton, 1971, p. 253)

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For Merton, if the cell is to teach you what you need as opposed to what you think you need, 'One must be in the cell for the right reasons' (Merton, 1971, p. 285).

Williams suggests:

> You can cope with a certain level of demand for stability if you have some of the resources provided by the world, some of the skills which the monastic life tries to strip you of, in fact. But precisely because the monastic life seeks to take away your capacity to distract yourself in the usual way, by dramatizing and fantasy, you have a real problem if you are not open to God's grace. (Williams, 2003, p. 83)

The realism of the desert demands knowledge of why you are here, for your own good and the good of your neighbour. It is not good to be present through an abstract concept of the desert experience or some metaphoric construct as to why we think we are here. If we find ourselves in the desert for these reasons, then we have safety net in being open to God's grace as our last salon.

8.6 Summary and conclusions

In both Williams and Merton, we see a divergent evolution of vocation in the desert, a diversity that requires at some point of the journey a convergence upon the knowledge that you are here not for yourself but for your neighbour in supporting their own quest towards God. This is difficult for us today in pluralistic society that has, as its standard bearer, follow your desire as an illusionary concept of freedom. Williams seems to be suggesting that we enter the Church of the Desert to learn the requirements and need of self-accusation. Armed with the virtue of silence and guided by the Holy Spirit, we seek to become fearless, through learning habits of self-awareness and attention to each other. From constant exposure to God in Bible reading and prayer, we reach out fearless into the unknown. For Williams, like Merton, the invitation is for all, yet the desire, inclination and capacity will vary depending upon circumstances and abilities.

For Merton, he focuses on the instructions to his fellow monks in understanding the human internal conflict from a monastic dimension that he calls dread, yet all are invited on the journey. Silence, listening, fleeing and staying are all part of the desert mosaic; Merton

focuses on the stark and rustic Antonian spirituality in understanding the building blocks of encounter with self, God and neighbour in the desert. Williams, on the other hand, focusses on a desert notion of self-accusation and the dangers of certitude in a capacity to maintain a critical edge within a post-modern turn.

The Church of the Desert is collapsed into two standpoints. Merton and Williams stand on the opposite sides of a right angle. Merton looking towards the world of Williams in the knowledge that he has taken that world into his own cell and occasionally, when required, Williams pausing to take a sidewards glance back to Merton's world, to find clarity and remembrance of the need and Divine call to become truly human.

What happens if someone takes a sidewards glance and remains fixed in a sense that life in the world and respective cultural sensibilities of place and time are daily challenged by a new order of community awareness that is found in the monastic experience of the desert?

Through my own consultancy in my organisation Monos, there seems to be a growing number of people who are fixed sideways in the best way they can. I am beginning to sense that this occurring in new monasticism, is a maturing into an understanding of self; that it is not monastic and intentional, but is in fact, an unintentional call that has 'slipped' between two cultures, a monastic culture of the desert and the inhabited culture of the world we live.

The fact that we live outside the cloister and own possessions it is irrelevant; it is the awareness or unawareness of our true human internal conflict that can separate human beings. This has implications for the non-monastic's understanding and self-awareness and their relationship with monasticism and in particular traditional forms of it. Since the turn of the century, monastic spirituality communicated between traditional monasticism and the interested non-monastic has centred around notions of monastic practice, monkhood in all, retrieval of ancient monastic practice to fix contemporary ecclesial and cultural dilemmas, and the Benedictine tradition outside the cloister has been stretched to almost irrelevancy.

Having argued for a vocation to new monasticism from an unintentional relationship with monasticism, a 'secondary' vocation to our 'primary' vocation to being Christians in the world, I suggested a particular 'scaffolding' that would support these two vocations, as one, through what Merton has called 'the Church of the Desert'.

Since starting this project, Covid has become a major problem for the world. Anxiety, fear and a notion of living with the 'unknown', of which many try to avoid through being in control of their own lives. As a result, I have followed Merton further by using another concept from his work that sees the symbolic nature of the monastic life centre around a monastic text called, The *Nauigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*. A re-reading of a monastic text that has at its centre the call from Christ 'not to be afraid', allows a vocation to new monasticism or the Church of the desert, to be focused not just on ourselves, but also with our neighbours own plight within the new world we now live.

Chapter 9. The *Nauigatio sancti Brendani abbatis*: symbolic tract for Merton's church of the desert

9.1 Introduction

According to a letter written to Dame Hildelith Cumming[262], Thomas Merton saw 'The legendary voyage of Saint Brendan as a symbolic tract on the monastic life' and hence, the need to view the text as being written within a monastic *milieu*, for the monk (Merton, 1990, p. 223).

Two months prior to the letter to Dame Hildelith, referred to above, Merton reveals, through a letter he wrote in May 1964 to Nora Chadwick[263], his growing 'love' for so-called Celtic monasticism; which infers that Merton's interests in the *Nauigatio* grow out of his interest in Celtic Christianity.[264] Wooding argues that it was probably through contact with Chadwick that Merton eventually bought the *Nauigatio* on the 18th July 1964, four days before he wrote his letter to Dame Hildelith (Wooding, 2010, p. 111). Merton wrote to Chadwick a second time in August of 1964, expressing his interest specifically in the *Nauigatio*. Wooding has argued that Merton is one of the first to suggest a relationship between the *Nauigatio* and the Exodus tale, 'a journey into the desert' (Wooding, 2010, p. 111). In fact, Merton follows Chadwick's view, as contained within her book, *The Age of the Saints in the Early Celtic Church* that the 'desert' motif heavily inspired Celtic monasticism *per se*, particularly around the beginning of the period in question (Chadwick, 1963, *passim*).

As I have argued above, Merton's fascination with a 'desert' motif was both a scholarly interest and also an experiential concern within his monastic vocation. As will be argued below, it is this unique relationship, between the scholar and lived experience, forged in one person, that allows Merton to reflect on the *Nauigatio,* drawing conclusions that point the text fully to a monastic ethos and in particular to his concept of 'church of the desert', and the invitation to all to enter, if called.

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[262] The late Dame Hildelith was a nun at Stanbrook Abbey; she died in 1991.
[263] The late Nora Chadwick was a medievalist, who specialised in Anglo-Saxon and Celtic periods of history; she died in 1972.
[264] Celtic Christianity is a term given to the study of the early Christian church in so-called Celtic regions and has become a popular area of study in relation to Christian spirituality. The current author wishes to thank Prof. Jonathan Wooding for pointing out the letters written between Merton and Chadwick. Wooding has now retired from his post as Professor of Celtic Studies at Sydney University.

In his article '*Celtic monasticism as a metaphor for Thomas Merton's Journey*', Pearson[265] uses the *Nauigatio,* with its main thematic and structural context of the lived monastic life on the ocean, as a mirrored image of Thomas Merton's life and journey and hence his monastic vocation. Pearson points out that Merton's interest in the *Nauigatio* and also in Celtic Christianity *per se*, was because, according to Merton, Celtic Monasticism seemed to have a deep understanding of pilgrimage and journey. Merton used this metaphor to reflect not only his outward journeys, particularly his trips to Asia, but also his own inner conversion and search for God (Pearson, 2008).[266]

 Merton expanded this notion through his chapter, 'From Pilgrimage to Crusade', in *Mystics and Zen Masters*, being inspired by work by Mircea Eliade[267].

The notion that in every culture, both past and present, there is paradisiacal place close by, and that in order to get there one is required to go on an, often hazardous, journey is a topic that has influenced many academic arenas, from psychoanalysis, theology, sociology, anthropology to even economics. In his book *Myths, dreams, and mysteries*, Eliade argues that in either a simple or complex context, the paradisiacal myth constantly appears all over the globe, and that each myth can be placed under two categories; firstly, depicting the once close proximity between heaven and earth; and secondly a direct communication between heaven and earth (Eliade, 1960, p.58). Eliade argues that within the Christian tradition it is primarily through mysticism that a bridge is formed between heaven and earth and that life in paradise is restored. Eliade suggests that 'early Christian monastics, particularly the Desert Fathers, are exemplars of this notion' (Eliade, 1960, p. 68).

Here we find Merton using a comparative tool in considering the *Nauigatio*, and again we see the 'desert' motif as the bridge between the *Nauigatio* as an ancient monastic text and the possible benefits it has for contemporary monastic reform and renewal and, implicitly, the benefits for the Christian *per se* as a new model for living the Christian life. This notion stays with Merton for the rest of his life, for in his 1969 book, his last, *The climate of monastic prayer,* Merton states:

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[265] Dr Paul Pearson, Director and Archivist at the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University.
[266] http://www.thomasmertonsociety.org/celtic.htm, accessed 04/06/2008, no longer available on this address.
[267] A Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, philosopher, and professor at the University of Chicago; he died 1986.

That society itself, institutional life and organization, the 'approved way' may be presenting us with a falsity of our true self and vocation…it is only when we break from secure norms and familiar and go into the unknown, that we are able to view our true imagine of God and ourselves…the deep conflict which underlines all Christian conversion – the turning to a freedom based no longer on social approval and relative alienation, but on direct dependence on an invisible and inscrutable god, in pure faith. (Merton, 1969, pp. 36-7)

As will be argued below, the *Nauigatio* reveals an overwhelming comprehension in total dependency on God and purity of faith, regulated around a monastic life. Although there is no direct evidence that Merton was considering the *Nauigatio* as his inspiration for his 'Church of the Desert' model, Merton's quote above, with his reference to 'go into the unknown', shows the *Nauigatio* is not too far away from his thinking.

In a letter written to Chadwick, Merton suggests that Chadwick is also living a monastic ethos and that some of her thinking around Celtic monasticism reflects his own desires for the monastic life. Merton concludes, 'Monasticism remains a very living reality, and one which is not necessarily defined by enclosure walls' (Merton, 1990, p. 217).

Therefore, according to Merton, the *Nauigatio* can be used as a metaphor for the call to, and model of, the monastic life in any given time and place; as in the case of Abraham, to leave his country and go into the land which God had shown him, but remembering that according to Merton, monasticism is also lived outside the enclosure by many non-monastic Christians. Merton's invitation from the traditional monastic community is to enter in a shared lived experience, through his 'Church of the Desert'.

9.2 Overview of the text

St Brendan, who is the main protagonist of the tale, was born around 489 AD in Co. Kerry. He is connected with many monastic settlements throughout Ireland, the most famous being Clonfert in East Galway. We know Brendan lived in a time when Irish monks were setting sail on the ocean for the 'love of Christ'. Carl Selmer in his 1956 bibliographical study of vernacular translations of the *Nauigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* concluded that, whilst the earlier translations were normally done within a religious *milieu*, towards the end of the Middle Ages the translations were being developed for more secular reasons which included

information for seafarers, adventurers and even economists (Selmer, 1956, p. 167). The fact that the *Nauigatio* has been translated from the Latin into so many different languages and that we know of 126 extant manuscript copies in Latin, composed over six hundred years and spread throughout Europe including Russia, Spain and Denmark, stands as evidence of the great interest that the western world has had and continues to have, in the *Nauigatio*. Wooding has argued that interest in Saint Brendan, and particularly the development of his cult, was helped with the wide circulation of the *Nauigatio*, from the ninth century onwards, along with various travels by individuals and groups, and philological convergence, which all contributed to building a wide and varied interest (Wooding, 2000, p. xi).

According to Wooding, the voyage was written sometime between 795 to 950 AD, but Professor Carney[268] suggests that a primitive Latin version of the voyage was written around one hundred years after Brendan's death (Wooding 2011, p. 26). The *Nauigatio*, is a tale about a monk called St Brendan and his fourteen disciples. After a visit to his monastery at Clonfert in Ireland, a monk called Barrind tells a story of a journey into the ocean in order to find 'the promised Land of the Saints which God will give to those who come after…' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 4). After the departure of Barrind, Brendan shut himself away in a church with fourteen of his Community and speaks to them saying, 'I have resolved in my heart if it is God's will and only if it is, to go in search of the Promised Land of the Saints of which father Barrind spoke' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 7). Having all agreed to go, the group set off to what is known today as the Dingle Peninsula in the south-west of Ireland. We are told that it was his, 'native region where his parents were living. But he did not wish to see them' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 8). This is further evidence that the tale is for a monastic audience and written by a monk.

Having built a:

> Light boat ribbed with wood and with a wooden frame, as is usual in those parts. They
> covered it with ox-hides tanned with the bark of oak and smeared all the joints of the
> hides to cover the boat and other things needed for human life. They also placed a
> mast in the middle of the boat and a sail and the other requirements for steering a

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[268] James Patrick Carney was an Irish Celtic Scholar attached to the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies; he died in 1989.

boat. Then Saint Brendan ordered his brothers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to enter the boat. (O'Meara, 1991, p. 8)

The story then continues with Brendan and his monks encountering many places on the ocean and visiting many islands and experiencing many dangers. O' Meara suggests that the tale is a 'direct…description of the public life of Jesus and his disciples as found in the New Testament. The journeyings, miraculous meals, fears and wonders that happened around the sea of Galilee are transferred to the Atlantic and a strongly insular context' (O'Meara, 1991, p. xv).

The tale is, 'stylised, abstract and non-naturalistic'. For seven years Brendan and his companions sail around the Atlantic Ocean, celebrating the major Church feasts at the same spot each year. Maundy Thursday to Holy Saturday on 'The Island of Sheep', Easter Sunday on the back of a whale called 'Jasconius' and from then on until the octave of Pentecost, on 'The Paradise of Birds'. They visit the Crystal Pillar, The Island of Smiths and encounter a devouring beast. Of these three, those that claim a hyper-diffusionist attitude[269] towards the story claim that these, respectively, are ice sheets of Greenland, volcanoes of Iceland, and various encounters with whales.

There are periods when Brendan encourages his monks to row, to sit back and allow the wind to take them wherever, to shelter in a harbour until a storm is over, to remember that 'God is our helper, sailor and helmsman and he guides us. Ship all the oars and the rudder. Just leave the sail spread and God will do as he wishes with his servants and their ship' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 10).

On the seventh year of the voyage, Brendan and his monks received the blessing of their steward to set out for the Promise Land. One last time, Brendan encourages his monks telling them, 'Do not be afraid. You will suffer no evil. Help for the journey is upon us' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 66).

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[269] A hyper-diffusionist attitude is one that sees the voyage as an actual voyage. It is often based on a misinterpretation of the text assuming Brendan sets out West in his final leg towards the Promised Land but in fact the Latin tells us it is East. During the nineteen seventies an experimental archaeologist, Tim Severin, prepared and made a voyage to America in a boat based on the one found in the *Nauigatio.* In 1962 Geoffrey Ashe published his book promoting the view that the *Nauigatio* was a factual voyage and related to various Islands around the Atlantic seaboard.

The final part of the:

> …voyage was for forty days towards the East. The steward went to the front of the boat and showed them the way. When the forty days were up, as the evening drew on, a great fog enveloped them, so that one of them could hardly see another…After the space of an hour a mighty light shone all around them again and the boat rested on the shore. (O'Meara, 1991, p. 67)

Having spent forty days walking on the island, eating from the fruits of the islands and taking water from its wells, they eventually came to a river that flowed through the middle of the island. Here they were met by a 'youth' who spoke to Brendan, 'There before you lies the land which you have sought for a long time. You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his varied secrets in the great ocean. Return, then, to the land of your birth…the final day of your pilgrimage draws near so that you may sleep with your fathers' (O'Meara, 1991, p. 69).

As I have argued above, the *Nauigatio* is a monastic tale, saturated in monastic culture and practice, albeit within an Irish medieval setting. Merton, Wooding, Bourgealt and Bray all argue for the monastic nature of the tale. Merton claims the voyage as a symbolic tract on the monastic life; Wooding suggests the close connection of the Irish genre of penitential and monastic exile sometimes called (*peregrinatio*) and the renunciation of kin, in imitation of the self-exile of the desert fathers; whilst Bourgealt and Bray choose to see the voyage tale as an allegory of the monastic life lived on the ocean (Bourgealt, 1983; Bray, 1995; Merton, 1990; Wooding, 2000).

Despite, Bourgeault, Bray, Merton and Wooding all claiming that the *Nauigatio* was written by monks and for monks, O'Loughlin moves this concept forward by suggesting that the *Nauigatio* was a universal instruction rather than a parochial instruction to one monastery or one particular tradition of monasticism. In fact O'Loughlin concludes that because the *Nauigatio* operates on so many different levels, reflecting some of the basic Christian beliefs, it allows the text to be applied directly to anyone's situation, whether 'one is a lay-person, a novice, or a monk' (O' Loughlin, 1999, p. 18).

Having argued for a monastic centrality to the Nauigatio that transcends the cloistered life and non-cloistered life, the chapter now moves forward in reflecting upon the text as a symbol of the monastic life as lived within the new monastic movement.

9.3 Intentionality within the Nauigatio

The contemporary reception of theology and spirituality from the Church in Celtic regions is littered with mythology and fiction, albeit with good intentions[270]

As I have argued above, Ian Bradley through his book on the topic on Celtic Christianity, *Colonies of Heaven*, has started to appreciate a blurring of boundaries between primary texts and current enthusiasm of spirituality. Bradley states that his recent work is primarily written as an attempt to realign himself with academic sceptics, who had recently cautioned a comparative discourse between early medieval Christian worship and modern reflective expressions of it. Despite his realignment, Bradley is still happy to propagate the view that ancient Celtic Christian practices have something to contribute to current Christian reform. (Bradley, 2000, pp. vii-viii).

As O'Loughlin has suggested, what seems apparent not just through Bradley's work but from many contemporary popular authors of Celtic Christianity, is that we are seeing a 'crisis' in self-awareness. Is the protagonist aware of what his or her intentions are and are they aware of what historical and theological aspects are being ignored or sacrificed in order to relate the past to the present? (O'Loughlin, 2000, *passim*).

The intentionality in the reception of the *Nauigatio* into a contemporary setting within the new monastic movement is one that views the text as a 'call to risky living'. There is an emphasis on the stylised nature of the text, its adventurous genre and unknown edge to what Brendan and his monks were going to encounter, but, as O'Loughlin has alluded to above, what has been ignored and sacrificed through the intentionality of those who have engaged with the text for contemporary purposes?

My own engagement with the *Nauigatio* has occurred on many levels: I first came across the text at University and having fallen in love with it, my late wife and I spent a week of our honeymoon in 1995 walking the monastic sites of the Dingle Peninsular, including Brandon's

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[270] I was awarded an MA in Celtic Christianity from The University of Wales Lampeter.

Creek and an attempt to climb up Mount Brandon[271]; next, I built my own sailable coracle during a workshop at the Northumbria Community[272]; to writing and preforming a drama/dance production on the *Nauigatio* around the UK; and finally, to helping the Northumbria Community discern the implications on the Community of engagement of the *Nauigatio*.

At this stage my intentionality focused on the tale being true as a describe below:

> Sitting in a 'odd' looking lecture room, that resembled a Nissan Hut more than a lecture hall, I sat waiting to hear my MA tutor Jonathan Wooding who was about to deliver a lecture on St Brendan and his voyage.[273] The reason for doing a master's was because I had become a little disconcerted with having to rely upon other people's interpretations of Celtic Christianity. I found the same themes and interpretations of Celtic Christianity; a quasi-Church that had evolved outside the Roman Empire and that had lost a 'liturgical battle' at Whitby; a Church that had monasteries instead of churches as their pastoral centres; a Church that valued Abbots above Bishops; a Church that held the perfect balance between life in a monastery and life on mission; a Church that embraced both genders into its administrative and pastoral strategy; a Church at one with nature; and the possibility of a Church in the Ancient Britannia physically meeting a party of Desert Fathers that had journeyed from Egypt.

> About halfway through the lecture, Jonathan mentioned the fact that many secondary accounts of the Voyage of St Brendan refer to him and his fellow monks in their boat, turning East as they made their final trip to find the place of 'Paradise.' Many of these accounts form the basis of the possibility of Brendan reaching the shores of Newfoundland. The detail is not important here, but what is important is the feeling it generated in me as I started to interpret the possibility of the Voyage being false, a

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[271] The text refers to Brendan 'pitching his tent at the edge of a mountain stretching far out into the ocean, in a place called Brendan's seat, at a point where there was entry for one boat.' 'LORD, who may reside in Your tent? Who may settle on Your holy hill' (Ps, 15:1).

[272] A coracle is a smaller version of the Irish sea-going boat in which Brendan sailed, which is called a curragh. A coracle is made in the same way as a curragh; ribs of wood, covered with a material and waterproofed with a tar-like substance. My father, from that workshop, has become a master coracle builder and specialises in the Ironbridge coracle.

[273] In 2000 I started a Master of Arts on the topic of Celtic Christianity at the University of Wales Lampeter. Dr Jonathan Wooding (now Professor) was a leading expert on the Life and Voyages of St Brendan and other such Voyage literature from early Ireland.

myth in the sense of something not being 'true' in reality, I was horrified and for a split second the last five years of my life passed me by. The Voyage of St Brendan was becoming a metaphor of experience for myself. Jonathan went on to tell us present that the earliest Latin version of the text had, in fact described Brendan as turning West on his final journey to the 'promised land.' Calm descended upon my heart and mind, 'Brendan is a historical figure, someone that I could 'befriend.'

The importance of including this retrospective account of my engagement with the *Nauigatio*, is that it illustrates the relationship between intentionality and reality. Intentionality does not correlate with perceived truth when it comes to engagement with spirituality. The Spirit can illuminate, challenge and encourage our faith journey through any means, yet our intentionality can either nurture a capacity for that engagement or narrow our horizon through allowing our intentionality to deconstruct and filter the meaning of a text into a contemporary need that often lies outside of our own reality.

In my experience the spiritual impact of repetitively and prayerfully reading a text, visiting the physical landscape referred to in the text, engagement in the creative arts in replicating the text to a modern audience, viewing life from within the text; only enhances the possibilities of viewing the text as a symbolic reflection of the reality of our lived experience.

For me, this symbolic reflection upon the text and my own lived experience collapsed in battling depression and anxiety and the loss of my wife. By 2001, Brendan had become a 'friend' in the sense that I often prayerfully reflected upon and consulted with the *Nauigatio* and points of transition and difficulty. A reminder that Christ encouraged His disciples on the boat, 'not to be afraid', despite how weary we may become in embracing His command.

The loss of my wife is part of my own narrative; the journey continued and grief for me had collapsed into a past, present and future voyage into the unknown. In relation to depression, I regularly found myself waking up throughout the night with only the capacity to imagine an image of me, wrapped around the one sail in a curragh, clinging on for 'dear life', whilst the storm was raging around. Christ was asleep in the boat, but I did not want to awake Him; He was my last resort. Looking up at the sail I could see the image of the cross; my sufferings were already absorbed into Christ's suffering.

Not wanting to privilege my own narrative, it is important to my main argument to highlight the process of engagement with the *Nauigatio* as a potential symbolic tract for a vocation

into new monasticism. My intentionality for the *Nauigatio* had challenged me to accept life as an unintentional journey into an unknown end; yet ladened with a teleological hope of 'The Land of Promise'.

The intentionality of my engagement with the *Nauigatio*, as a Christian tract for a 'call to risky living', was beginning to fade from my horizon. The nature of life in Christ is 'risky', why dwell on what it is to be 'nominal' as a Christian? In the words of Merton, it is a 'call' to an adventure, placing ourselves in the hands of God and not taking them back. Intentionality within the reading of spiritual texts always has the potential to trivialise the Christian life to temporal matters and cultural trends with superficial expectations.

For example, is it living riskily, in having a BBQ when our weather application tells us there is a 35% chance of rain? Or do we embrace that life may bring rain into our 'setting' when we don't want it? Can we refocus our priority on why we are arranging the BBQ, let the unintentionality of our intentions bring possibilities of engagement with things outside our own control, boundaries, and expectations? Is this not where God meets his people?

9.4 Unintentionality within the *Nauigatio*

In letting go of the idea that the *Nauigatio* is a 'call to risky living'; replacing it as a symbolic tract for those who see their lives as part of journey on a 'trackless ocean'[274], whose control of it is intermittent depending upon the limitations of resources, temporal and spiritual, and whose ability to shape and form their own understanding of themselves in the world, seems only to make sense within a traditional monastic milieu, to which they don't belong; then what does this look like?

Douglas Burton-Christie has suggested, at its root monasticism is akin to **'**lying alone on the bare earth, in utter abandonment to God' (Burton-Christie, 2005, p. 354).

> In the harsh environment of the Aran Islands at the turn of the century every natural resource had to be used to ensure that man could eke a living from the land. Fields had to be made often from bare rock with seaweed being used as fertilizer. The making of ropes and building of curraghs and houses required skills which were handed down from generation to generation. (O'Sullivan, 1998)

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[274] An Augustinian doctrine of the ocean being uncrossable.

Life from bare ground connects both the desert experience and an attempt of forging a life with limited resources within a monastic way without the monastic identification, this contextualises further a Skinner vocation to new monasticism. These two quotes above also highlight similarities between the desert 'motif', as lived on land and at sea, a kind of dwelling on a 'shoreline'.

As suggested above, the earliest version of the text we have seems to be dated to around the 8th century, and therefore at a time when practices of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei* were becoming less favoured within a changed Irish ecclesiastical environment. 'Setting sail for foreign lands as an ascetic ideal became replaced by the ascetic life of the anchorite and tales of wandering entered the realm of fantasy and literature' (Bray, 1995, p. 178).

As a result, we see the story rooted in the stability and regularity of the monastic life, despite it still being a voyage. Bray has argued that at every Island that the monks visit, there was some intended connection with monastic life as lived within a community, as being the most perfect form (Bray, 1995, *passim*).

There is a paradox here within the new monastic movement. The movement often sees, through its intentionality, the *Nauigatio* as relating to travel, exploration, contextualisation within a local setting, a sense of freedom to adventure and in some cases, missionally relevant. The extreme being that these Irish monks in their 'little boats' are seen by some as saving European Christianity during the Middle-Ages. This notion is contrasted with a Benedictine style monasticism that favours stability to one place and moderation of work, life and prayer.

Yet, when the *Nauigatio* is read within its monastic culture, then life on the ocean presupposes that time has been spent living the monastic ideal on land. The *Nauigatio* shows there seems to be an order, a process of discernment, a testing of will, as the monastic moves from the monastic life on land to the monastic life on the ocean. Historically, this concept may also be actualised through 'power' and 'control' of monastic foundations, keeping their communities together, but in relation to new monasticism, I would argue, encourages the displacement of human power and control to an unintentional abandonment into God. The fact that we symbolically feast on the back of a whale, can only

make sense, within reception of the providence of God; human rationalism cannot comprehend the possibilities of this kind of provision.

9.5 Microcosm of monasticism: A new vision of engagement

'Brendan's tiny boat of oxhides thus becomes the microcosm of his monastery, manned by his chosen representatives, in a sea of moral and physical trials where they are sustained only by their ascetic zeal and faith' (Bray, 1995, p. 177).

There is a point of connection here between the Northumbria Community 'way for living', Skinner's vision towards a vocation to new monasticism, and Bray's appraisal of the *Nauigatio.*

Within the home, we should ideally see a microcosm of the monastery. We should seek to be freeing each other for the love of God. We must be valuing each person. Family life is holy ground (Skinner and Raine, 1992).

This quote is attributed to Skinner and, as I will argue below, turns the Community's 'way for living' 'upside down' and 'inside out'. For St Brendan, Bray is suggesting the fact that life on the ocean for the community should be the same in nature and ethos as life in a monastery on land. We see variations of the monastic life through Brendan's encounter with various communities on islands they landed upon. As I suggested above, there is a presupposed assumption that the monastic life needed to have been lived on land before embarking upon the ocean, as well of testing of one's will.[275]

For Skinner, it seems that those that were to join the Community needed to have already been at least trying to live its values and ethos within their 'household' prior to joining the community, or at the very least consecutively. Skinner implicitly shifted the focus on Community membership; making sure that there was no schism in living life in the Community and living it elsewhere. To join the Community, it required you to care for and attend to the household which the member joined from, remembering that for most the community was dispersed; this was for the majority.

I would argue that Skinner's intent was also a response to him reading desert literature in helping him negotiate his way through his existential crisis. To survive life in the desert one

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[275] There is an explicit notion in the episode of the three late arrivals to Brendan that their intentions were not what was needed to survive in living in community on the ocean. Two die and one is allowed to join a monastic community on an island.

needs to have a 'radical honestly' about one's own self. To be able to see life, in periods of adversity and prosperity alike, bridging the past, present and hopes for the future into life lived in a reality - life as a journey – life as authentic.

A traditional monastic community will often be aware of the culture that each postulant brings into the enclosure and helps facilitate the changes needed to absorb them into a monastic culture. I would suggest, Skinner seemed to be very an aware of some of the reasons people wanted to join the Community and the inclusion of this part of the rule, referred to above, mitigated against a form of escapism from reality.

This has significant implications for new monastic communities, most of which remain dispersed. Do these communities exist to care for their members and households, or is the focus on what the members bring to the whole? How do communities negotiate this interchange? Towards the end of Skinner's time in the Community, he started to talk about the implications of closing the Community home and encouraging people to go out and live their newfound 'life' in their homes and environments, which also included those who were responding to what he thought of, as a response to reading the voyage tales of the Irish saints, to go off a journey for the love of Christ.

In regard to the *Nauigatio's* suspicion of wandering monks, the new monastic may well make a comparison between the *Nauigatio* and the Rule of St Benedict with its own distaste towards the 'Sarabaites' and 'Gyrovagues[276]'; those without a rule and master and those that wander from cell to cell respectively. Interestingly, Kardong refers to this as a point in monastic history that sees the period of charismatic founders give way to a more 'codified' practice that sees a 'decent monk' as having to operate within a Rule and an abbot (Kardong, 1996, p. 44). Essentially, this is to guard the monastic against listening to and acting upon his/her own will and ego.[277]

For the new monastic, they may be happy to see themselves as part of a new phase of charismatic pioneers. As I have argued above, most practice and expression of new monasticism centres around the intentions of people seeking change and renewal in various ecclesiastical arenas. The *Nauigatio,* to an extent, challenges this notion of new monasticism. The awkward, disruptive, and often mundane practice of the monastic; a cycle

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[276] Taken from the Rule of St Benedict chapter one: The Kinds of Monks.
[277] There is also a reference to this with regard to the latecomers to Brendan's voyage; said to have followed him from his monastery, each with different reasons for joining the voyage; two die and one remains with a community.

of fasting, prayer, hospitality, work, and study, set free of human intentionality, is what helps manage times of unintentional encounters of life, journeying on the sea. The risk to someone discerning a vocation in new monasticism is that they do not necessarily have a large community or an institutional 'compartment' within which to draw resources from and to offer legitimacy and role awareness.

In letting go of classifying ourselves as monastic, whilst at the same time discerning how living a monastic life might look, as lived in the world, then the unintentionality of having to let go of our definition, then becomes our intentionality to live a monastic life, albeit often invisible to institution. The facing of our will and ego confronts our construct and understanding of monasticism, yet at the same time silently allows us access into the monastic arena.

Reading the *Nauigatio* within a monastic cultural lens is the perfect text from which to pray and reflect through this phenomenon and renewal. It offers all the rigours of the monastic life, regulatory and balanced attention, stability of prayer and liturgy, that reminds us we are a part of the one Church in Christ. Yet it contrasts with an intentional reading of Benedictine spirituality which has been the dominant force of monastic retrieval for the non-cloistered; often watered down to make it more palatable to those in the world.

The *Nauigatio* allows us to be authentic in life, embracing life as lived in a stormy and unpredictable world, whilst at the same time allowing us to pitch our 'tent' between the world and monastery. St Brandon's Creek represents a 'fissure' between cultures, the stability of institution and the reality of life as lived unintentionally in faith and abandonment.

9.6 Summary and conclusions

My favourite part of the *Nauigatio* is from chapter 16 and is probably the most uninteresting, and for this reason brings a sense of humanity and reality to what is a stylised and contemporised over-spiritualised text. Brendan and his monks have just witnessed a devouring beast being slain into three before the eyes. Not long after they arrived on a large island and on 'disembarking' from the boat they saw the 'end portion of the beast.' Saint Brendan said: See what wished to devour you! You now shall devour it!' We are told that they remained on the Island for three months, because there was a storm at sea and a strong wind and variable weather with rain and hail' (O'Meara, 1991, pp. 41-2).

Here Brendan is disarmed of his foresight, his ruthlessness in surrendering all trust to God and is confronted with God's created world, an ocean of chaos; only to be calmed through the Spirit hovering. For all the sailors' monastic endeavours and wonderous adventures, the fragility of sailing on the ocean with only an animal skin between them and the waves demands measured care and discernment between faith in abandonment to God and a respect and understanding of the created world and its ordered chaos, in the words of Williams, we sail into 'Christ the heart of Creation' (Williams, 2018b).

Having argued for a revisioning towards the possibilities of a vocation to new monasticism around an unintentional re-reading of monasticism, I suggested a model for this to be enacted and lived through what Merton calls the Church of the Desert and a script by which to life in the *Nauigatio*. This thesis now moves on in drawing conclusions.

Chapter 10. Summary and conclusions

10.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I will present a summary of what I have set out and argued for through this thesis. The trajectory of inquiry started with past research on new monasticism, including both the theoretical and practical awareness of those engaged in the new monastic movement. Despite the wealth of work written in monastic spirituality, I focused my attention specifically on new monasticism as a movement. My review then focused on the main themes, suggested by the primary architects of new monastic practice and theory, that have impacted upon new monasticism in the UK. It became very clear at the end of my review of literature on new monasticism that it lacked an anthropological awareness of the reality of those engaged in new monasticism as a lived experience. The subjective nature of new monasticism was hinted at within my review but, in order to move the debate on, I needed to hear from the voices of those at the centre of new monastic experience.

As I started to formalise the methodology that would support my thesis, I had a moment of clarity, in the sense that the research seemed to be choosing me. In living with so many questions within my own lived experience of new monasticism, the analytical part of my being was entering a dialogue with my own lived experience. In this way my own voice within the thesis needed to be regulated and centred on bringing to the fore only that which moved my thesis on in terms of answering my primary objective.

In choosing the Northumbria Community as my case study, it met two primary requirements in order to validate my thesis: Firstly, it allowed my own voice to find a context, rather than just focusing on autobiographical inquiry, as I once was a member of the Northumbria Community. Secondly, the Community is one of the oldest new monastic communities in the UK, so I could explore how charism and ethos are transferred between generations.

In allowing the story of the Northumbria Community and the voices from those engaged in the lived experience to bear upon my central question, I found a highly subjective reading and interpretation of the Community's ethos and charism. In consequence, my inquiry also offered the Community a new understanding of the traumatic breakdown in the leadership in 1998, in the fact that there seemed to be two distinct yet connected vocations within the founding of the Community.

The final part of my thesis then focused upon a revisioning of a vocation to new monasticism that centred around what I have called the 'lost vocation' of the Northumbria Community. In my own lived experience of new monasticism, it has been to this 'lost vocation' that I have lived and reflected upon over the last twenty-three years. As I argued within the methodology, this has allowed me to make some tentative generalisations across the whole new monastic movement in the UK, that at the very least need to be taken seriously and reflected upon.

10.2 The context of my research

The purpose and context of my research focused around two notions. Firstly, the realisation that research into new monasticism lacked an anthropological awareness, or in other words, what is happening within the practices of new monastic communities? Secondly, the importance of reflecting upon Rowan Williams' concern for the new monastic movement, that care was needed in order to safeguard against watering down the integrity of the essence of the monastic call.

I had made previous attempts at arguing, albeit intuitively, that new monasticism as prescribed in the Church of England had in fact already started to water down this essence, but I lacked evidence. My literature review brought to the fore the various practices and accretions that are evident in new monasticism:

- New patterns of living

- Rhythm and balance

- New focus on personal liturgy

- A new language of Christian living centred around unrestricted access to Christian spiritualities and inter-faith dialogue

- New forms of missional activity centred around liturgical practice

- A self-understanding of the radical nature of the movement

- A measured and critical engagement with traditional monasticism that often focuses on a rejection of 'foundationalism'.

- A self-realisation of the movement emerging from a post-modern environment, that has been the catalyst but also, for some, its 'Achilles' heel'.

Both theorists and practitioners of new monasticism focus on the historical context of how the movement emerged. Mobsby and the cohort of new monastics within the Church of England have tended to focus on personal history in creating new monastic identity and justification. A particular contemplative experience or a visit to a particular Abbey at a young age followed by an experience of encounter with God.

Flanagan, to date, has given the new monastic debate a clear understanding of the emergence of new monasticism as either a diachronic or a synchronic development. In terms of the Northumbria Community, its charism and nature centre around the notion that they are continuing in the footsteps of the early Celtic and Northumbrian Saints; they walk, pray, and live on the same land as Ss Aiden, Cuthbert, and Hilda, and hence follow a diachronic trajectory.

10.3 A new awareness

My case study into the Northumbria Community has brought a new awareness to the new monastic movement in the UK. For members of the Northumbria Community, their engagement with the Community seems to be more focused on the fulfilment of: an existential crisis, a spiritual void, an answer to boredom, or the need for a type of gap year. There is no doubt that some find their way to the Community for its connectivity with the land it occupies and the spiritual landscape of the early Northumbrian Church and what it says to the Church today. In every interview that was conducted, if only in part, I found that personal: emotional, spiritual and mental requirements were met through membership of the Northumbria Community. The evidence from the interviews, suggests that the Community to a greater or lesser extent is a depository for human need: spiritual, emotional and mental.

There is clearly scope for further research on new monastic communities, around the area of vulnerability of members and visitors who arrive with mental, emotional and spiritual crisis and the impact on them of membership to new monastic communities. The Northumbria Community clearly has had moments of trauma to manage in its short history as have some members of the Community. Stefania Palmisano in 2016, wrote about her own experience in a new community in Italy that turned out to be a cult (Palmisano, 2016).

There is clearly a disconnect between the reported charism of the Northumbria Community and what is lived as charism, which in turn differs from one member to another. Yet, one

thing that does seem to bind all members is the liturgy of the Community. This contributes to the Community maintaining a fraternity amongst its dispersed membership. At each generational turn in leadership of the Community, a new emphasis has occurred, above and beyond personality. John Skinner's reading of Bonhoeffer, other than the *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, centred around the use of Bonhoeffer's term 'a new type of monasticism'. It was a synchronic reading of Bonhoeffer in the sense that Skinner imposed his own lived experience of engagement with monasticism to support his own existential crisis in leaving the Church of England. He called it new monasticism. Under the leadership of Trevor Miller, we witness a growing body of work produced around the theology of Bonhoeffer, and Skinner himself in his book suggests that after leaving the Community he spent some time in reviewing Bonhoeffer's notion of 'religionless Christianity'. The recent set of leaders has expressed the desire to reflect back on some of the founding principles of the Community and look at ways of recommunicating these to a dispersed Community.

In some ways the Bonhoeffer quote is a 'red herring' in the reflective discourse on new monasticism. The ownership of Bonhoeffer differs from one community to the next and requires further research in seeing it as a diachronic notion within new monasticism. The Iona Community would welcome Bonhoeffer's 'religionless Christianity' as it tries to break down boundaries between institution and the diverse expression of the Christian faith. The Northumbria Community through Trevor Miller and Roy Searle has used Bonhoeffer in arguing for a vocation of new monasticism as a vocation for all Christians to enter. John Skinner's paraphrase of the Bonhoeffer quote in the early nineties was copied during the early stages of new monasticism by other communities, including the Community of Aidan and Hilda. The borrowing of terminology does not always correspond to a particular theology or spiritual retrieval.

10.4 Concluding reflections: A lost vocation in new monasticism

The relative, intentional and subjective epistemology of monastic retrieval in the new monastic movement in the UK is central to its own identity, role within the Church and society, and its survival under its current trajectory. I would suggest that without this notion the Northumbria Community would have severely less membership and it would be almost impossible to pastorally care for a dispersed membership.

What I have found in answering my primary question in this thesis is that I have uncovered another vocational trajectory that was apparent in the early days of the Northumbria

Community. It was through this slightly hidden vocation that I myself was drawn to the Community and hence why I left in 1998 with the embodiment of this vocation in the lives of John and Linda Skinner. It is framed in an unintentional reading of monasticism that is only relative in the fact that humans experience 'dread' in different ways. The subjective nature of this new reading is only subjective through personality, circumstance and context, not with monastic retrieval that objectively, through the Holy Spirit, seeks to challenge, disrupt, and stretch us vertically, and questions the very fabric and expectations of life in the world.

My own revisioning of a vocation to new monasticism seeks to follow the same call to exclusive devotion to God that once founded monasticism itself, in such a way that even the accretions of monasticism itself are laid aside; it offers what might be called a 'unintentionality' – a following in which what that call is traditionally understood to *intend* is abandoned and forsaken. For now, it seems to be an invisible vocation within new monasticism as found within the UK.

Appendix 1.

ARCHBISHOP
OF CANTERBURY

4 October 2004

Mr Anthony Grimley
Monos
Unit 8, Konfedence Works
Arthur Street
Barwell
Leicester
LE9 8GZ

Dear Mr Grimley,

My apologies for not replying sooner to your very kind and helpful letter last month. I greatly appreciated the points you made, which are – as you can imagine – very close to my own heart. I'd be grateful to be kept informed about what you're doing; and meanwhile I've taken the liberty of passing your details on to Steve Croft, who is co-ordinating work in the C of E about new developments in church life. I quite take the point about the risks of redefining the essence of the monastic calling itself in a way that might undermine its integrity.

As it happens, I'm meeting today with someone (Revd David Jarmy) who is exploring some of the ecumenical dimensions of this; and I've had a good deal to do with a Baptist minister in Cardiff who's been writing a thesis on new monasticism in George Macleod and Bonhoeffer. So there is a lot of very interesting stuff going forward.

Every blessing with your work, and please do keep in touch.

Yours in Christ,

+ Rowan Cantuar:

Lambeth Palace, London SE1 7JU

Appendix 2.

Dear ...

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN AN INTERVIEW EXPLORING: Charism and community in the Northumbria Community

Following your expression of interest, I am sending you more information about my research project. This project will be conducted in accordance with criteria established by the Ethics Sub-Committee at St Mary's University. Consequently, you need to be fully aware of the nature of the research you are participating in. Secondly, I need to obtain your formal consent for the use of any data arising from your participation. Participation in the research will be in the form of a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. It will be recorded and transcribed and kept strictly confidential. You may wish to contribute further through some reflective writing which can be emailed to me direct and I am happy to enter further dialogue through email.

Any reference to the origins of this data will be anonymous. Only myself, my supervisors will have knowledge of your identity. The data you provide will be stored electronically on my personal computer and backed up on to a separate hard drive and data stick. All other copies will be destroyed. If you wish, you have the ability to waver your anonymity, please let me know via your consent form if you wish to do this.

I would be grateful if you could read the following information carefully and if your wish to participate in this research project sign and return a signed and witnessed copy of the consent form to me as an email attachment. If at a later stage, you wish to withdraw from the project please inform me as soon as possible using the section at the bottom of the consent form.

If you need to discuss anything or require further information, please contact me.

INFORMATION SHEET AND OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project is an integral part of my PhD thesis. The current working title is How does new monasticism define itself in relationship to the Christian community and society at large? As you all know, new monasticism is a Christian movement that seeks to retrieval both contemporary and ancient monastic spiritual practices for Christian expression and practice within the 21st century.

There has already been some limited research into the various new monastic expressions within the UK, so I have chosen to study one expression of new monasticism in the Northumbria Community, as a way of digging deeper into how new monasticism defines and identifies itself. As a member of the Northumbria Community, between 1995-1998, central to my thesis lies the notion that I did not choose the research, but the research chose me, and I hope that it will add to creating a picture of how identity may have changed over time. This study will explore the evolution of how individual and corporate identity and definition is formed within one particular new monastic community and its relationship with the Christian church and society at large.

Throughout this research, 4 questions will be explored:

1. What is the discursive framework for the community

2. What is the relationship between personal narratives and the Community's narrative?

3. What metaphors and symbols are used in the narratives?

4. How is change negotiated within personal and communal narratives?

The research will be exploring Community literature and literature written about the Community by others. I will reflect on my own experience within the Community, live at the 'mother house' for five days to observe and reflect how the community works today and finally conduct interviews with a variety of Community members and leaders. It is regrading this last part of my research that I write to you today.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

I shall be organising and co-ordinating the research and can be contacted through my university email: 167213@live.stmarys.ac.uk If you have been invited to participate in these interviews you will be either: leaders past and present, members who live at the 'mother house', members who live dispersed, international members and members who have left. In

total I propose to conduct between 10 interviews, each on a one to one basis, lasting around 60 minutes at a location and time convenient to you.

In late 2019 you will receive a summary of the outcome of this research. After you have received the summary, and had time to reflect on it, you will have an opportunity to contribute further feedback in the form of some reflective writing and/or email correspondence with me. As stated at the start of this letter, if you wish to participate in this research please sign and witness the consent form and send back to me no later than January 20th[th], 2019. I will then contact you after to arrange a mutually agreed time and place to meet.

Please note, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time, just sign the withdrawal slip at the bottom of the consent form and send to me at the St Mary's email address above.

I look forward to hearing from you

With good wishes

Anthony Grimley

Appendix 3.

Name of Participant: _____

Title of the project: _____

Main investigator and contact details: _____

Members of the research team:

1.   I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet which   is attached to this form. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions   have been answered to my satisfaction.

2.   I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, for any reason and   without prejudice.

3.   I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded.

4.   I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.

5.   I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.

Data Protection: I agree to the University processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me.

Name of participant (print)………………………………………………………………….

Signed…………………………………… Date…………………….……........

Please tick if you want to waver your anonymity. ☐

Witnessed in front of:

Name (print)……………………………………………………………………..

Signed…………………………………… Date……………….……….........

If you wish to withdraw from the research, please complete the form below and return to the main investigator named above.

Title of Project: _____

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4.

Welcome and ask if they have any questions before we start the interview

Questions for new monastic interviews

- What is your Christin tradition or denomination if any?

- How long have you been a member of the Community?

- How did you find the Community? What was your view of the Community from the outside?

- In a sentence or a few sentences describe your feelings and experience when you first came upon the Community and what part of the Community first caught your attention?

- What aspects of the Community attracted you to eventually become a member?

- What aspects of life if any, were changed or challenged to become a member? Has this changed since becoming a member?

- How does and what parts of your personal story and history fit within the story and tradition of the Community? If not, why?

- If you were to produce a film about your experiences in the Community, what would the title be and tell me a little bit of the film you would create?

- To the best of your knowledge, how was the Community formed and who are the founders?

- Where have the Community liturgy and spiritual practices come from?

- Can you describe the ethos of the Community?

- Can you describe the life of the Community?

- What can the Christian church learn from the Community?

- To a Christian outsider, how would you describe the Community and what would you say are the benefits of joining the Community?

- To a non-Christian outsider, how would you describe the Community and what would you say are the benefits of adopting aspects of the Community and what are they?

- Is there anything you would change within the Community, if so, why and for what and who's purpose?

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