

Questioning the American Dream: New Monastic Attempts to Restructure the U.S.
Economy

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Abstract

New Monasticism, a growing sect of the Emerging Church movement, is a new envisioning of Christianity in which adherents are called to address socioeconomic inequality through social justice programs. During the summer of 2013, participant observation and interviews were conducted with two New Monastic intentional communities in Kansas City, Missouri, to better understand how the call to “restructure the economy towards justice” is acted out by New Monastics through their social justice programming. This thesis analyzes New Monasticism through a lived religion framework and argues that its beliefs about welfare, work ethic, and capitalism present a combination of “traditional” evangelical social policy beliefs and more critical, liberal imaginings of socioeconomic justice. I suggest that New Monasticism as a social movement is illustrative, more broadly, of the ways that “lived” religions seek to impact the local economies they inhabit, and secular society as a whole.

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Introduction

The more I read the words of Jesus, the more it put me at odds with many of the things I had come to value within the culture, and even within the church. In East Tennessee I was in the in-crowd, I was prom king – it was a small town – but I began to go, man, here’s Jesus saying “If you wanna be the greatest become the least,” and I’m thinking why am I working so hard to be the greatest? And is this dream that I’m pursuing – the American dream – is it really the dream of God?
(Clayborn 2009)

In Kirkton Neighborhood, Kansas City, Missouri, residents experience rates of poverty upwards of 40 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2008b). The racially diverse neighborhood is 54 percent black and 28 percent Latino (U.S. Census Bureau 2008a). Kansas City has an increasing number of vacant or abandoned houses—about 12,000 as of 2010—and some neighborhoods, such as Kirkton, are experiencing abandonment rates of 25 percent and higher (Mansur 2011:A1). In Kirkton neighborhood, entire blocks are overrun with weeds, abandoned houses are brightly graffitied and stripped of their metals, and, in a famous incident any Kirkton resident will be happy to tell you about, a neighborhood pimp ran his prostitution business out of an ice cream truck, which he parked outside of the local middle school. A scrap-yard—popularly known to accept illegally obtained metals—is located within walking distance of Kirkton, a fact that is evidenced by the “cart-pushers” who roam the neighborhood streets, collecting metals in their shopping carts to resell.

While this scene of urban disinvestment is not uncommon in the American landscape, Kirkton neighborhood is unique in some respects. Five years ago, this neighborhood began receiving an influx of white, upper-middle-class Christians. They planted a church, bought and renovated dilapidated houses, acquired vacant lots and covered them in raised garden beds, and began a community gardening program and

sustainable technologies training school for local residents. On the morning of my arrival in Kirkton neighborhood—at the home of one of these urban Christians—I was greeted by a tall, barefoot, twenty-something holding a water bottle which read “God’s original plan was to hang out in a garden with some naked vegetarians.” Their two-story turn-of-the-century Victorian was brightly painted, and hundreds of flowering tulips lined the front of the lawn. The back of the lawn, covered with raised garden beds, overflowed with produce in the summer heat. An above ground pool stood to the left of the raised beds, and in it two blonde children happily splashed with an older woman. Next to the pool, a young, thick-bearded white man in a tank top that read “Hallelujah Hardcore” was speaking to an older black man about the economics of rabbit husbandry. My new barefoot companion leaned over and conspiratorially told me, “That’s a prostitute in the pool, and Chris is talking to a heroin addict!”

The scene described above is illustrative, more broadly, of a social movement within Christianity called New Monasticism. New Monastics—a sect of the growing Emergent Church movement—feel called to relocate to impoverished urban areas and define their faith in terms of social justice outreach, racial reconciliation, and concern for the poor. Since the early 2000s, New Monastics have been migrating to urban areas and forming intentional communities—concentrating mostly on Rust Belt cities that have faced devastation from the loss of industrial manufacturing jobs (Bielo 2011a:8). Several of the guiding principles of New Monasticism—known as the 12 Marks of New Monasticism—state that adherents must engage in socioeconomic justice in the U.S. (Appendix 1) For example, the 12 Marks posit that New Monastics must share their economic resources and engage in the support of local economies (Wilson-Hartgrove

2008:39). New Monasticism presents a new imagining of Christianity, one that places a marked concern on structural inequalities and questions the complacency of modern day evangelicals to social justice issues (Clayborn 2006). This sentiment is illustrated in the quote at the beginning of this section from prominent New Monastic community founder and author Shane Clayborn. A New Monastic at a Camden, New Jersey, community further illustrates this concern for America's economic system: "I was interested in living in Camden because it really is the dark side of the American dream. I wanted to go and see how I could change the economic system from the bottom up...[We're focused on] restructuring the economy towards justice" (Roberts 2009:12).

In this study I question how New Monastics, through their social justice programs, live out the mandates of their faith to "restructure the economy towards justice." This thesis argues that New Monasticism presents a combination of "traditional" evangelical social policy beliefs and more critical, liberal imaginings of socioeconomic justice. Further, I argue that although New Monastics voice, and attempt to enact, critiques of the capitalist system and neoconservatism, in practice they tend to rely upon familiar neoconservative tropes of personal responsibility. I posit that this disjuncture between religious mandates and actions can be understood through the "lived religion" framework. I suggest that New Monasticism as a social movement is illustrative, more broadly, of the ways that "lived" religions can impact the local economies they inhabit, and secular society as a whole.

Overview of Findings

In this thesis, I examine, through the lived religion framework, how New Monastics attempt to live up to the economic and social justice mandates set forth in the 12 Marks of New Monasticism. I argue that New Monastics critique the capitalist system and push for a move away from governmental aid and toward community models of support. New Monastics argue that poverty exists because of capitalism and cite the failures of their parents and grandparents to succeed in the market system as evidence of this assertion. As a critique of the capitalist economy, they attempt to devalue money and seek to empower the poor by teaching them to grow their own food and reduce their dependence on the market. New Monastics eschew governmental aid and push for community models of support because they believe “big” government to be inhumane, encouraging of entitlement, and incapable of the transformative change that is possible one-on-one. While these views are more socially liberal than not, New Monastics retain the idea that some of the impoverished in the communities they serve—the lazy and the ignorant—simply don’t fit into their community models and cannot be helped. In this way, New Monastics perpetrate familiar conservative tropes of personal responsibility and work ethic.

This research adds to scholarship of religion by illustrating the attempt of a new imagining of Christianity to respond to social inequality. While the attention of Christians to social justice issues is not a new one, New Monasticism is illustrative of a new way of thinking about social justice within evangelical Christianity—one in which neoconservative ideologies intermingle with socially liberal critiques of capitalism. Because New Monastics are called to “live” their religion, they are highly likely to

interact with secular society and seek to restructure their local economies. By examining how New Monastics make sense of the 12 Marks, and their calls for socioeconomic justice, we can understand the myriad ways religious groups—Christians, specifically—respond to changing social and economic conditions in the United States.

Literature Review

The Emerging Church and New Monasticism

A current trend in anthropological studies of Christianity is to focus on the “diverse local formations” that the religion can take (McDougall 2009:193). The burgeoning number of ethnographies of the Emerging Church and New Monasticism attests to this. The Emerging Church—a movement which can be traced to the early 1990s—is a label coined by movement insiders and primarily intended as cultural critique (Bielo 2011b:5). Members of the Emerging Church, or Emerging Evangelicals, are primarily white, middle-class, well-educated Christians who voice frustration with conservative Evangelical subculture—which, by and large, they were raised in—and attempt to “live” a response (Bielo 2011b:6). In the late 2000s, social scientists began investigating the movement, though the first major ethnographic study wasn’t published until Bielo’s “Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity and the Desire for Authenticity” (2011b).

New Monasticism can be situated within the Emerging Church movement, and is also marked by disenchantment with conservative evangelical Christian culture. But it calls its adherents to “live” their cultural critique in a different way; most notably, New Monastics focus on forming intentional communities while members of the Emerging Church do not (Bielo 2011b:7). Bielo (2011b:99) explains that all New Monastics are Emerging Evangelicals, but not all Emerging Evangelicals are New Monastics. Though New Monasticism arose among a younger sect of Christians than those within the Emerging Church, the movement is still predominantly white, middle class, and well-educated.

The New Monastic Movement was institutionalized in 2004, at a conference in Durham, North Carolina, where the 12 Marks of New Monasticism were agreed upon and drafted (2005:40). New Christian intentional communities met with more established traditions, such as Catholic Worker houses, and developed 12 distinctives that would mark these New Monastic communities (Moll 2005:41). Communities are not required to abide by all 12 Marks. Rather, the Marks serve as guiding tenets, and as a means of providing a loose structure to the New Monastic movement. Clayborn states, “The marks show the common threads that connect Christian communities that might otherwise be seen as scattered anomalies, rather than vibrant cells of a body” (Moll 2005:41).

New Monastics posit themselves in opposition to mega-church culture, the commodification of Christianity, white flight and suburbanization, and seek to form intentional communities that abide by the 12 Marks of New Monasticism (Clayborn 2006). The 12 Marks include “Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire,” “Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us,” “...active pursuit of a just [racial] reconciliation,” and “Care for the plot of God’s earth given to us along with support of our local economies” (Appendix 1). Monasticism, in this modern rendering, can be interpreted as the intent to practice religion in one’s daily life – as intent to practice the 12 Marks in daily life – and doesn’t bear much resemblance to historically reclusive monastic living. New Monastics are deeply committed to social justice work, which is often manifested through programs promoting sustainable urban agriculture, and most New Monastics practice some form of urban homesteading (Bielo 2011a:19).

Since 2004, numerous books have been written by Christian intentional community members calling others to join the movement, a call that is being answered by increasing numbers of young Christians migrating to inner city areas. The number of New Monastics is difficult to calculate, as the movement is intentionally unorganized. New Monastics and, more broadly, members of the Emergent Church, seek to counter the institutionalization of Christianity and prefer house churches or personal worship to church planting (Bielo 2011b). But an online register of “Community of Communities,” maintained by the Simple Way, one of the first and best known New Monastic communities, listed over 160 intentional communities in over 30 states (Community of Communities 2013). This represents an increase from only 64 registered groups in 25 states as of October 2010 (Bielo 2011b:100).

Though scholars have only recently turned attention toward New Monasticism there have been several ethnographic studies of the social movement. New Monasticism has been the topic of a master’s thesis, in which Lowitzki (2006) draws on participant observation with New Monastic communities to discuss their preference for communal living. Bielo (2011a, 2011c) has contributed a large body of scholarship to studies of New Monasticism, focusing on the cultural logics of, and difficulties faced by, these evangelicals who relocate to urban areas. Elisha (2008a, 2008b) contributes analysis of New Monastic methods of providing aid or charity to local populations. My study examines how New Monastic groups engage with the concept of welfare, question capitalist logics, and seek to restructure the local economies they inhabit.

Christianity and Capitalism

The ties between Christianity and the rise of capitalism and capitalist ideologies have been well recorded. In the *Spirit of Capitalism* Max Weber famously locates the origins of the capitalist work ethic within the rise of Calvinism in 15th century Northern Europe (Sedgwick 1999:154). Weber argued that Calvinist mentality emphasized hard work, limited consumption, and the avoidance of pleasure—what he describes as the Protestant Work Ethic—and resulted in creating a work force that was willing to invest a great deal of themselves in labor (Sedgwick 1999:156). Though over time, the Protestant Work Ethic was “absorbed into a secular work ethic,” Weber shows us that the rise of capitalism owes much of its success to Christian theology (Sedgwick 1999:159).

Current anthropological discussions of Christianity and its intersections with the market focus on several themes. The individualizing force of the Protestant Work Ethic, and the way it fosters market participation, features prominently in the literature (Haynes and Robbins 2008:1149). Additionally, scholars have argued that conversion to Christianity leads to increased market participation because it “inculcates particular behaviors that are useful in the flexible labor conditions of the post-Fordist economy” (Martin 1995, 1998, cited in Haynes and Robbins 2008:1149). Most analysis of Christianity and market participation has focused on African populations, with the exception of Muehlebach (2013) who uses the context of Lombardi, Italy, to illustrate how moral sentiment and market rule have been married to create a Catholicized neoliberalism.

The link between evangelical Christianity and pro-market ideology is also well documented. Especially prominent on the American landscape is the marriage between

Christianity and the Republican Party—known as the Christian Right, Religious Right, or neoconservatism—which has been gaining influence and support since the 1970s (Williams 2012). This movement attracts Evangelical Christians, with whom the socially conservative anti-welfare policies and free-market ideologies resonate (Elisha 2008b:435). Biblical standards of “accountability and moral worth” translate into objections to government welfare and the promotion of individualism, and are a prominent aspect of the Christian Right’s ideologies (Elisha 2008b:435). It is this especially vocal and politically active group of Christians that New Monasticism arose in opposition toward and whose ideologies it critiques.

Christianity and Social Policy

Christians have a long history of volunteerism, and most Christian denominations concern themselves with providing aid to the needy. The church was especially active in providing welfare in urban areas up until the mid-1920s (Conn 1994:99). Christian organizations, such as the Young Men’s Christian Organization (YMCA) and the Salvation Army, feature prominently in the American landscape and have offered provisions to the destitute since the mid-19th century (Conn 1994:41). The Social Gospel—a movement among Protestants that peaked around the turn of the 20th century—is a famous example of a movement within Christianity dedicated to philanthropy (Conn 1994:68). It’s important to note, however, that such aid programs maintained that the poor “...were responsible for their own predicament” (Conn 1994:41).

Economic policy changes in the 1930s changed the role of Christians and the church as providers of aid to the needy (Bretherton 2010:33). Roosevelt’s New Deal

reforms in the 1930s and 1940s replaced, to some extent, the role church volunteerism had filled. For most Christians, this signaled that “the federal government, not the church, would now plan and program America’s urban society” (Conn 1994:99). Coupled with the concurrent white flight out of urban areas, and suburbanization of Christians, this meant that Christians grew increasingly distant from urban poverty and became less involved in providing charity to the needy than they were in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Conn 1994:99).

Evangelicals, in particular, had retreated even further from faith-based charity by the 1980s (Luhr 2009:6). Luhr (2009:6) argues that suburban evangelicals emphasized “meritocratic individualism’ ...ignored structural inequalities...[and] gradually became increasingly Republican during the late twentieth century.” Luhr (2009:13) continues, stating that these evangelicals were “economic individualists who saw a causal relationship between moral laxity and economic misfortune.” They rarely concerned themselves with providing aid to America’s needy and increasingly became associated with social conservatism, mega-churches, and consumerism (Bielo 2011b:8). The evangelical welfare services that do exist place strong emphasis on the “advocacy of personal responsibility” (Bretherton 2010:34). It is within this context—upper-middle-class conservative evangelicalism—that New Monasticism arose.

New Monasticism as Lived Religion

The concept of lived religion arose as an attempt, within religious studies, to highlight the ways “religion and spirituality are practiced, experienced, and expressed by ordinary people (rather than official spokespersons) in the context of their everyday lives” (McGuire 2008:179). Following Talal Asad’s assertion that we cannot assume a

timeless and universal definition of religion, the lived religion framework argues that religious expression and belief cannot be understood outside of their sociohistorical context (McGuire 2008:79). Moreover, the lived religion approach accounts for incongruencies between “official” religious mandates and the religious behavior of individuals. McGuire (2008:58) asks, “What if we think of religion, at the individual level, as an ever-changing, multi-faceted, often messy – even contradictory – amalgam of beliefs and practices that are not necessarily those religious institutions consider important?” With this view of religion in mind, we can make sense of religious actors’ seemingly contradictory behaviors.

Importantly, the lived religion framework accounts for sociohistorically unique formations of religious belief and practice, allowing us to understand how New Monasticism creates religious meaning. Lived religion posits that people create religious worlds together and emphasizes that religious meaning is constantly changing and adapting to the context in which it exists (McGuire 2008:179). McGuire (2008:786) argues that “religious expression can adapt and seamlessly incorporate seemingly strange blends of cultural building blocks,” resulting in religious expression that may not be congruent with accepted “package beliefs” about faith.

It is useful to conceptualize New Monasticism through a lived religion framework for several reasons. First, New Monastics do not consider the Bible or other Christian texts central to their faith – “you don’t find God in the Bible” was repeatedly mentioned to me by New Monastics. Though New Monastics cite historical Christian figures such as St. Francis of Assisi and Mother Theresa as inspirations, by and large, they do not rely upon biblical mandates or attend church to affirm their faith (Clayborn 2006). It is

through social justice outreach, communal living, and adherence to the rest of the 12 Marks of New Monasticism that they practice their faith. While McGuire and other lived religion scholars use the lived religion framework to gain a better understanding of a group's everyday religious experience, I use the lived religion framework in this thesis to show how a faith group's imperative to *live* their religious beliefs can ultimately impact secular society, and in this case, local economic systems.

Methodology

In this thesis, I draw on five weeks of participant observation at two New Monastic intentional communities, formal and informal interviews, and print and electronic texts central to the New Monastic social movement. Access was gained through an internship program with a New Monastic intentional community in Kansas City, Missouri, known as The KC Urban Farmers. In exchange for participating in farm labor and daily chores, I was given room and board—along with 12 other interns, who cycled in and out throughout my stay—in the home of the founder of the KC Urban Farmers. The names of interviewees, organizations, and neighborhoods represented in this thesis have been changed to protect their privacy.

Study Population

I conducted this research in Kirkton neighborhood, Kansas City, Missouri, at two New Monastic intentional communities: the KC Urban Farmers and Kirkton Catholic Worker. The KC Urban Farmers, a 5013c nonprofit organization, moved into Kirkton in 2009 to join a fast growing New Monastic community. The New Monastic community centered around the KC Urban Farmers consists of what is now over 35 families, who moved into Kirkton from across the United States. Kirkton Catholic Worker, a New Monastic community registered with The Simple Way's Community of Communities, moved into Kirkton neighborhood in 2000, and has 13 members today. Kirkton Catholic Worker incorporates Catholic Worker ideologies into its New Monastic beliefs and takes the New Monastic tenet of communal living even further by requiring all members to live in a communal house and share their salaries.

Consistent with Bielo's (2011a:19) findings of New Monasticism's emphasis on gardening and sustainable technologies, both The KC Urban Farmers and Kirkton Catholic Worker utilized urban gardening programs as the core of their social justice outreach. Kirkton Catholic Worker sits on a main street in Kirkton Neighborhood and figures prominently in the landscape because of its terraced front steps, overflowing with edible greens during growing season, and its backyard chicken coop and orchard, visible from the street. They offer daily showers, breakfasts, and once weekly dinners to the homeless and needy in Kirkton. Neighborhood residents are encouraged to help tend the garden on weekend workdays. The KC Urban Farmers place a greater emphasis on community outreach and have so far purchased 10 large lots in the neighborhood; they are in the process of placing raised garden beds—to be used by community members—on each lot. Two community gardens—the 12th Street Garden and the Kirkton Community Garden—are already fully operational and in use by community members and New Monastics. The KC Urban Farmers' internship program is primarily meant to attract New Monastics and to train them in providing social justice programming in their own communities, in the form of urban gardening programs. In its five years of operation, the internship program has attracted over 120 New Monastics to Kirkton neighborhood.

Kirkton neighborhood, Kansas City, has a population of around 16,000 and is racially diverse (U.S. Census Bureau 2008a). Nearly 54 percent of the neighborhood identifies as black; 28 percent identifies as Hispanic or Latino; a small percentage—less than 1 percent—identifies as Asian; and the remainder of the population is white (U.S. Census Bureau 2008a). Forty-two percent of Kirkton residents' income falls below the

poverty line, and 36 percent receive food stamps—now known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (U.S. Census Bureau 2008b).

Sampling and Terminology

I conducted 12 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with New Monastic community members over the course of three months in 2012. Interviewees were recruited through connections at the internship site and word of mouth. Not all of the interviewees were self-described New Monastics, though all were residents in New Monastic intentional communities. While all the interviewees can be grouped under the moniker New Monastic, they claimed affiliation with various denominations of Christianity. They self-described as Charismatic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox, and nondenominational Christian. This is consistent with other studies on New Monastics which find that those within the social movement identify with a wide number of denominations (Bielo 2011a:7).

Results

New Monastics believe their faith and beliefs should be “lived” and strive to fulfill the 12 Marks through their social justice programs. Both the KC Urban Farmers and Kirkton Catholic Worker seek to address larger socioeconomic issues through their community gardening programs. In this section, I use examples from my experiences with these two communities to illustrate how New Monastics translate the written imperatives of the 12 Marks to address socioeconomic inequality in their daily lives.

The New Monastics I encountered in Kansas City, Missouri, were quite aware and articulate about socioeconomic structures and conditions in the United States. In these results, I follow their lead and use identifiers such as conservative and liberal only as they themselves did—I do not impose these categories upon them without consent.

Critiquing Capitalism

The Failed American Dream

Many, if not all, of those who currently identify as New Monastic grew up in suburban neighborhoods and were raised in middle-class evangelical families. Most of my informants come from this background and acknowledge that it has shaped their conceptions of what family life—and work life—should look like. Ben, the KC Urban Farmers intern whom I witnessed wearing a “Hallelujah Hardcore” tank top, highlighted this issue. Thick bearded, perpetually barefoot, and the owner of a fixed-speed bike—Ben dropped out of a Kansas City Bible college with a group of friends to start a farm in Vermont. He left the farm a year ago to accept an internship position at the KC Urban Farmers. His childhood was spent in the suburbs of Florida, which he describes as “golf course suburbs – gated community bullshit.” Ben’s parents owned a landscaping business

which had a direct impact on his choice to identify as New Monastic and promote community gardening programs:

One of the reasons I got into agriculture as an adult-ish person, was the thought of eventually having children – and then watching my childhood, where I never even saw my dad because he had to work his butt off just so he could pay the bills. But not even so he could pay the bills, but so he could get further along in the failed American dream – like, the American experiment does not work. Ever. And so you work your ass off – but now he’s bankrupt, doesn’t have anything to show for it. But he’s like 54, and his body is broken down because of all the other jobs he worked before. He’s like a case study of what I didn’t want to do.

Watching his father, Ben became disillusioned with the “American Dream.”

Ben’s own life goals are in direct contrast to his father’s: “I would love to live simply, and help other people. I’d just like to pay the bills, sustain myself, and teach other people to sustain themselves.”

Alex, another KC Urban Farmers intern, also argues for the value of simply sustaining yourself and proposes that gardening is a skill that can allow you to detach from the capitalist system:

Outsourcing and automation are eliminating most of the jobs. And I think the way the capitalist system works in America is that you’re raised and taught to spend years and years behind a desk, writing things down, and training to do one thing really well. Everyone is a specialist in this society. You train to do one thing really well, you do it for 40, 60 hours a week – that one thing, that’s all you know how to do. But now when you have outsourcing and automation, it’s creating rising inequality where more and more jobs are becoming obsolete. If you spent your entire life learning this one skill, and now the skill is not needed anymore – because you were a cash register at a supermarket, or like any market, and now there’s an autoscan computer – now millions of people don’t have a job anymore. So now you’re pretty much stuck; if you have a family, a mortgage, you’re screwed. There’s nothing you can do about it. If you know how to garden, you can feed your family, no matter what else is going on. If there’s a revolution, if the financial system collapses, if your job gets – if your industry disintegrates – learning to garden is the most basic human skill, and we’re so detached from it that we don’t know how to do it. Just growing your own food is something that I think everyone should know how to do.

Alex offers a scathing critique of capitalism. He understands the economic precarity that many lower-to-middle class families—especially those in Kirkton—exist in, and argues that the capitalist system and the promise of the American dream places them in this vulnerable position. He argues that tangible skills such as gardening offer security; at least, one will be able to feed oneself and one’s family in case of job loss. Alex has an architectural engineering degree and worked for an engineering firm in New York before leaving to pursue his dream of teaching others to garden. Even more than precarious, Alex describes the capitalist system as turning his life into a “grey blur,” stating: “I’ve had the office job where I came home; it was, like, 8:30 at night and I was, like, I have to be up at 6 AM to do it again tomorrow, and it’s miserable. I can’t believe that I bought into this lie for so long—so many people accept it, and they don’t just do something about it.”

Power in demonetization

Early on a Monday morning, I accompanied Christina and Derek to Alice and David’s house—a young New Monastic couple that just moved into the neighborhood a year ago. Christina is Mark’s wife and co-founder of the KC Urban Farmers, and Derek is a senior in chemistry at a Philadelphia college and intern in Kirkton. During the short drive, I held a cooler on my lap that contained three skinned and gutted rabbits – creatures that I helped to butcher the day before. When we reached the young couple’s house, we were ushered inside and I put the rabbits in their freezer. Alice handed Christina two tiny egg cartons, filled with quail’s eggs in blue, brown, and grey—in trade for the rabbits. As we left, David told us that he’d see us tomorrow, when they come to

tend their garden plots next to Christina's house. On the way home, Derek and I spoke about bartering, and he explained its importance to me:

People let money have so much power – we can't even grow our own food without money, build shelter without money – if people can survive, be sustainable, without money, then they can't be controlled anymore.

Derek's statement echoes some of the critiques of capitalism, voiced in the previous section. By deemphasizing the importance of money, growing their own food, and embracing barter systems, New Monastics seek to distance themselves from the capitalist system.

Later that day, Alex emphasized the importance of devaluing money. I joined Alex on the porch as he worked on his laptop, doing research on New York City zoning laws. After completing his internship, he plans on returning to New York, buying land for community gardens – he models his future program on KC Urban Farmers' methods – and recruiting the homeless to grow their own food. "I'm trying to think of the minimum amount of things that each person can grow, to get a nutritional diet," he told me. I suggested the three sisters garden plan – consisting of corns, bean, and squash – and told him I heard that it provides a high number of calories per acre. "I love that," Alex replied, "They can grow everything they need themselves. Like, in contrast to people who are begging for change on a corner; to me, this is a much more holistic and dignified way of living." Here, Alex suggests that by taking money out of the equation, by stepping out of the capitalist system, the poor can achieve greater quality of life and increased dignity. For Alex, growing one's own food, supplying for oneself without depending upon money, is the ultimate means of uplifting the poor.

A comment from Mark expands on the sentiments voiced above, tying money and capitalist society to the creation of poverty and ghettos:

The reason that ghettos exist is because of money. It's because of capitalism, it's because of the industrial revolution kind of mindset and mentality, and *if you can take money out of the equation – to any degree in someone's life – and empower them, you're actually acting in defiance against that.* It's just a big old middle finger to Walmart and corporations. It's peaceful violence, it's an activism. And so if you can teach people, or even just facilitate land for people to support themselves on—you're helping somebody to a degree that they probably never even thought possible. The ghettos are dying because the government doesn't care – the only food and resources there are poor, and terrible, so people die from disease, and then they don't have the healthcare so they are also dying just from that. But then if you start helping them grow their own food, then they start flourishing and thriving.

Mark sees money as a tool of the capitalist system, used to exploit and keep people poor. By eschewing consumerism, and devaluing the importance of money, Mark believes he is voicing his critique of the whole capitalist system. By teaching the poor to grow their own food, Mark not only thinks he is helping them sustain themselves, he also sees himself as empowering groups whose labor is not useful or needed in the capitalist labor market.

A big government is an inhumane government

On a Thursday evening in June, I, along with Christina, walked over to Kirkton Catholic Worker for their weekly community dinner. Kirkton Catholic Worker community members advertise the event by walking around Kirkton neighborhood and extending an invitation to whomever “seems to need one.” When we arrived, the dining and living rooms of the spacious craftsman home had been stuffed to capacity with long, plastic dining tables covered with mismatched tablecloths and set with place settings at each chair. Somewhere between 40 and 50 Kirkton neighborhood residents were

crammed into the space – most were middle-aged or older, primarily black and white. Some of the guests were homeless, some were middle-class mothers who brought their children for a free meal, and some were drug users, scratching at their arms agitatedly. Kirkton Catholic Worker’s 13 New Monastic community members are all white, all in their early to mid-twenties. They milled around the crowd, smiling brightly and greeting new guests by holding their hands in both of theirs, chatting with regulars and strangers alike as if they’d known them for years.

When the room was full, and everyone had taken their seats, Tucker—a New Monastic who has lived at Kirkton Catholic Worker since its founding—stood, smiled, and asked everyone to join him. We all stood, holding hands, and formed a meandering ring around the dining areas. Tucker began a blessing—some guests bowed their heads, others did not—“Sharing a meal, breaking bread, brings us together. May we decrease the distance between us so that we think twice about becoming violent against our neighbor.” Tucker raised his head and asked if anyone had something they needed to share. An older Latino man, dressed in several ratty layers of flannel, said: “There were two deaths this month. Some of our friends were shot. It’s been rough.” Several guests nodded sympathetically, and Tucker added: “It has been. We’ll keep them in our thoughts.” After a few more comments by guests, dinner was served—pulled pork sandwiches, hot dogs, baked beans, and blueberries from the garden. The rest of the plate’s contents were donated or recently expired products, provided by a local grocery store. Kirkton Catholic Worker’s New Monastics filled each plate and served each guest individually, also bringing them their beverage.

The attention to the individual is an important facet of New Monastic social justice programs. An opinion voiced to me by numerous New Monastics was that large programs—whether operated by government agencies or corporations—were too removed from community members to understand their needs. Some even criticized faith-based charity organizations they perceived as too large. Tucker, the New Monastic who opened up the Thursday night dinner with prayer, stated:

We are intentionally small, because huge organizations—although they do beautiful work, and it's much needed—because they're so big—it's tough to treat people humanely, and a lot of folks will say it feels like they're going into prison because of the metal detectors and the lines and the public showers and all that. We intentionally open up our home, and let people in. We keep it small so we know people's names. And we see our place as a place that does the work of rehumanizing people. This is a place of actuality, and respect, and dignity. We don't have security, we deal with stuff ourselves. We never call the police. I see what we do as rehumanizing.

Tucker denies the ability of large organizations to make lasting changes in a community. He asserts that such aid programs are dehumanizing, and that guests are treated without respect or dignity. For Tucker, a good aid program is one in which program organizers know the names of their guests and have personal relationships with them. Tucker continued, voicing more distaste for “inhumane,” large aid programs:

I don't put a lot of faith in political systems. I think a lot of it has to come from a transformation from every individual person's heart. There are definitely structural fixes that we need to cry out for something to change, because all of our big political systems are broken, and they are not humane, because they are so large. I think a lot of has to do with that we [New Monastics] want to break down this large system into a bunch of smaller, local systems that are more empowering to communities.

Here, even more plainly, Tucker states that the government and large organizations cannot improve communities because they are too big and do not make efforts to improve lives on the *individual* level. While Tucker acknowledges that

structural inequality has an effect on local economies, he argues for small, local-based systems of aid.

Moving to Community Models of Support

Replacing Entitlement with Accountability

In addition to being large and dehumanizing, another perceived fault with government and charity programs is that they breed what New Monastics see as entitlement and laziness. As Owen, who left a theology program in Dallas to join the KC Urban Farmers in Kirkton, told me: “The book of Proverbs says, a man’s hunger is good for it drives him on – it motivates him. If you don’t have to work for food, why work?” New Monastics seek to counter this entitlement by creating accountability through social justice programs. For the KC Urban Farmers, one way to encourage accountability is through community gardens—each community member who asks receives his own raised bed and is responsible for watering it himself.

Though the KC Urban Farmers own and operate more than six lots with community gardens, the 12th Street Garden is the most popular. Located directly adjacent to a Section 8 apartment complex, most of the garden plots are claimed by each of the apartment’s 12 tenants, and the remainder are used by the KC Urban Farmers’ interns. Carolyn – a tall, middle-aged black woman with long braided hair who sells hand made purses on Etsy – is the garden’s champion. Carolyn’s plots thrive, and she is responsible for painting all the raised beds rainbow colors, with each gardener’s name written on one side. Soon after I arrived in Kirkton, I heard about Carolyn’s displeasure with her fellow gardeners: “They don’t water a goddamn thing,” she told me during one of our first

conversations. Carolyn complained several times to Christina and Mark, telling them she was tired of taking care of everyone else's plants. Mark wasn't surprised:

That's a common problem with people who help out other people. It causes an enabling issue. And people start to expect that she water their garden, and it becomes this not very great thing. I've kind of coached her and said "Hey, I wouldn't water anybody's garden. At all. Because then they'll come to expect that, and it'll just be a bad thing." If somebody's out of town you could do them a favor, but really, you're not teaching them how to garden if you're watering their garden for them.

Mark argued that often times, helping people leads to dependency. By helping her fellow gardeners, Mark thinks Carolyn is keeping them from learning how to accomplish goals on their own. Changing topics, Mark introduced the subject of drug abuse, and told me several of the residents in the apartment next to the 12th Street Garden are users. He worries they will never kick the habit because they're estranged from their families and aren't held accountable to anyone:

But as the government gets too big it takes the heart out of things; it takes the heart and the accountability out of things. People used to – if they wanted help, they had to stick with the person who was going to help them, and people took care of their own. If their uncle, or brother, or cousin was acting up, the community told them about it and they helped them. Now everybody's uncle, brother, or cousin is on the street and nobody cares because the government's taking care of them. So there's no accountability and when the person blows it over here, they can go over there and get help. No one holds 'em to the line, so they never grow up, and then you've got a bunch of ten-year-old adults running around. So I think you can't mandate love. As much as we want to love the poor, it's got to be done by individuals and not the government.

For Mark, expanding on his ideas about accountability in the garden, communities that depend upon governmental aid, or welfare, ignore the plights of their neighbors. He also believes that large programs are ineffective at creating change. The government, Mark argues, doesn't hold individuals accountable for their relapses, or their failures. It

continues to help them, regardless; whereas, local, community models of aid would hold individuals accountable and help them succeed.

Change Happens One-on-One

As a counter to the idea that large aid programs and governmental welfare are not effective, New Monastics posit that effective, lasting change occurs between individuals, one-on-one. New Monastics often mention the famous Mother Theresa quote in response to the question of how she helped so many people: “Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you.” Alex, the intern with plans to start an urban gardening program in New York City, expanded on his goals for me. In Alex’s vision, the homeless are invited to live in tiny homes – typically 300 square foot, pre-fabricated mobile houses – and grow their own food. The beauty of this model, Alex states, is that each of the individuals he trains to grow their own food can pass on the knowledge to someone else: “If you help someone with untapped potential to release it, they do the same for someone else. This kind of influence spreads so much quicker than charity.” Alex posits that if attention is paid to the individual, that individual will be inspired to help another—which, presumably, he believes would not happen with individuals who receive government aid.

An interview with Ben highlighted this issue as well. We had settled in for our interview on Mark and Christina’s porch in the early evening, when we were interrupted by a black man, barefoot and limping up the driveway with the support of a shopping cart. He called out to us, asking if he could have some water: “Something bad just happened, I already called the cops. Just some water, please.” Ben immediately jumped up and ran over to the man to see if he was okay before heading into the house to get him some water. He returned a minute later with two water bottles and a couple snack size

bags of chips, which he passed off to the man with a pat on the arm. Ben then continued answering the interview question I had asked before the interruption—telling me his feelings about welfare and charity programs:

I'm not really a big advocate of organizations—whether they're governmental or non-profit. I'm actually no advocate of organizations for helping people, as much as community. Which I know is a hot topic, big word and it's misunderstood. But it's actually you helping the people you know, that you are around, and that you see. It's getting some dude water and some chips because he asked you to.

Ben idealized the interaction he just had with the man on the street, using it to illustrate ideal forms of aid. For Ben, no organization is better equipped to provide aid or charity than individual people within a community.

Those Who Don't Fit

On a sunny weekday, Mark, four other interns, and I worked outside, filling the cracks in the asphalt driveway bordering the 12th Street Garden. The 12th Street Community Garden faces a main street in Kirkton neighborhood and is located a block away from the local scrapyards. While we worked, a gaunt white man with a long, greying beard and limp dirty clothes walked up the sidewalk and waved. He was pushing a shopping cart full of scrap metal which he must have been on his way to sell at the scrapyards. Mark stood up from his work and asked how he was doing. The man shrugged and said he's doing alright. This prompted me to ask Mark if he recruits many people to join the community garden simply by greeting them on the street. "Yes," he replied, "The other day a group of three women walked past the 12th Street Garden and were excited about getting their own garden plots." Mark thinks they're coming back this weekend to claim their spaces. "But like that guy, that just passed us?" Mark continued, "No, he was pushing a shopping cart full of scrap metal. Those kinds of

people aren't good at making plans, or using a calendar. They're not going to come back."

In this incident, Mark made a character judgment about a man he had just met, based on his appearance and his means of making a living – selling scavenged scrap metal. Mark immediately categorized him as the type who "won't come back," who can't keep plans, who won't commit. He is identified as someone who will not succeed in the community garden and as someone who is incapable of providing reliably for himself.

This theme – of identifying those too lazy to be helped, to be included in the community—ran throughout my fieldwork. Owen, relating an encounter he had with a dinner guest at the Kirkton Catholic Worker Thursday night dinner, said:

I sat down at the dinner table, and I met this guy. He just began this flood – "I just got taken advantage of, I'm abused, I just got out of prison and nobody understands, I'm doing the best I can. And then he's really really angry and blaming everybody and everything. And I just listen for a while and I said "Can I make an observation?" He goes "Yeah." I said, "Well, what you're doing is not working. You want to be happy and you're not. And you're blaming everyone else for your lack of happiness. And I just wanna suggest to you that maybe there's other options." And he exploded, started screaming at me: "You're judging me, you're criticizing me, you religious people are all alike." And I just said "Wow, okay dude." There's nothing I can do for someone like that.

Here, Owen, like Mark, identified someone who doesn't want the offered aid, someone New Monastic social justice programming cannot help. He did not recognize the man's complaints as valid and categorized him as someone he can do nothing for because he will not take accountability for what Owen views as mistakes. In these examples, Owen and Mark define the boundaries of who can be included in New Monastic social justice outreach, and who cannot.

Not only is the dividing line of those who cannot be helped drawn for those perceived to be lazy, it is drawn for those New Monastics perceive to be ignorant. In the case of the KC Urban Farmers and Kirkton Catholic Worker, whose social justice outreach consists of community gardening programs, ignorance of health, diet, and agriculture is held in particularly poor esteem. A few weeks before I began my stay in Kirkton with the KC Urban Farmers, I called Mark to work out the logistics of my internship. At one point in the conversation, I asked how his new lot was doing. The last time I'd spoken to him, he'd acquired a new plot of land and had just set it up with raised beds for community members. Mark laughed:

I went out the other day and saw that someone had planted pea pods in their plot – peas in their pods! They're just going to rot unless they take the peas out of those pods. I'm gonna come out someday and they'll be planting cheeseburgers.

In this statement Mark laughs at the ignorance of the community gardeners.

While he does not preclude these gardeners from participation in the community gardening program, he jokes about and doubts their capability to succeed in the program.

In a later interview, Christina made similar remarks to Mark, presuming the ignorance of Kirkton community members of what constitutes healthy dietary choices:

In other places in the world, agriculture is like a necessity that you learn and pass on. And in this neighborhood sometimes it's an educational process. It's almost like, if this was a food desert—or if it wasn't—the result would be the same because of the lack of education. So it doesn't matter—if we're in the hood and we're next to the grocery store, or if we're in the hood, and there's a grocery store five miles from here—either way, everybody's eating potato chips.

Here, Christina laments that for some Kirkton residents, the ability to garden will not positively impact their diets because of their “lack of education” about what a good diet looks like. Christina posits that it will be harder for the KC Urban Farmers to

teach agricultural self-sufficiency to some Kirkton neighborhood residents than others.

Again, while Christina does not preclude this population from participation in the community garden, her comment illustrates her reticence about their ability to thrive within the community that New Monastics envision for Kirkton neighborhood.

Discussion

Critiquing Capitalism – the Garden as a Site of Resistance

Two of the 12 Marks of New Monasticism directly address economic issues: Mark 2: “Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us,” and Mark 11: “Care for the plot of God’s earth given to us along with support of our local economies.” (Appendix 1). The KC Urban Farmers and Kirkton Catholic Worker address both imperatives by offering community gardening programs, and training in sustainable technologies, to Kirkton neighborhood residents. Through the actualization of these two imperatives, New Monastics in Kirkton critique what they see as the failed “American dream,” move toward noncapitalist modes of exchange, and seek to rehumanize charity.

New Monastic critiques of the American dream stem from their disenchantment with their suburban upbringings and what they see as the failed efforts of their parents to succeed in the market economy. Every one of my informants grew up in middle-class suburbia, and the majority commented on how their parent or parents worked long hours, in jobs they didn’t care for, to afford their middle-class lifestyles. Ben’s statement that the “American experiment does not work” and Alex’s disenchantment with his corporate job, even though he was economically and socially successful, highlight the frustration, more broadly, of New Monastics. These new Christians argue that capitalist society takes the soul out of work and encourages the idea that hard labor and capital accumulation bring status—two ideas they disagree with and seek to counter through their community gardening programs. In this way, New Monastics also critique work ethic—the idea that work for work’s sake is a virtue, that “it is undignified to rest,” and

that labor that garners wages is the only worthwhile kind of labor (Bauman 2005:5).

Through urban gardening, New Monastics counter work ethic and encourage the idea that “simple living” is enough and that capital accumulation is something to be avoided.

Through community gardening, the New Monastics in Kirkton critique capitalism by promoting noncapitalist forms of exchange and putting charity back in the hands of individuals rather than state actors or large organizations. A conversation with Ben about his plans for his own social justice program was particularly telling:

Money isn't our [New Monasticism's] currency anymore. When I get my own organization going, I want to be able to just give a guy an aquaponics system, and when he asks me what he owes me I'll just say “friendship,” and walk away. That's how you build community, and it's not with capital.

Ben believes individual relationships are stronger means of forming community and empowering the poor than “dehumanizing” aid from large state or organizational actors. Further, distancing themselves from money and disavowing the accumulation of capital is used by New Monastics as a critique of the capitalist system. For Mark, empowering people to grow their own food and succeed outside of the market economy is as a “...big old middle finger to Walmart and corporations.”

The New Monastic critique of capitalist ideologies is not complete or uncontradicted. In the following section I will discuss how New Monasticism adheres to “traditional” evangelical tropes of personal responsibility and individualism. New Monasticism is illustrative of the attempts of evangelical Christians to grapple with the “traditional” standpoints on socioeconomic issues offered to them by the modern leaders of their faith. Connolly (2008:51) says “...the porous structures of capitalism move along a relatively open temporal trajectory...the quality of the ethos inhabiting it is

always pertinent to its operation.” Through this view, we can understand how New Monastics’ multifaceted, contradicting ideologies concerning capitalism shape the format and implementation of their social justice programs.

Fighting Entitlement – Community and Accountability

New Monastics promote community models of support, rather than rely on aid from state or organizational actors, through their community gardening programs. The New Monastics I encountered in Kirkton hoped to return the neighborhood to an idealized, church-centered community where neighbors help neighbors and welfare or charity programs are no longer needed. Adam, New Monastic community member and police officer in Northeast Kansas City, laments what he perceives as the move away from community in American society:

The foundation of a community used to be the church—right smack dab in the middle, with the steeple up in the air. More and more and more, we’ve moved away from that. Back in the day, there were no suburbs—this was not the urban core, it was just Kansas City. And you had the young families, and the foundations of that—community schools, community churches—everybody knew each other. You know, when one parent saw another parent’s kid acting up, it was no problem for that parent to get on that kid and that kid knew he needed to mind and do the right thing—well, that’s not the case anymore. Things change.

Adam imagines a community in which life is centered around faith, in which neighbors know and care for each other, and in which community members are held accountable to one another. In Adam’s idealized community, we can imagine that welfare isn’t needed. In New Monastic imaginings, once community is achieved, poverty won’t exist.

New Monastics push for community models of aid and eschew government support for several reasons. They believe welfare and charity programs, because they do not hold

welfare recipients accountable for their actions, breed entitlement and dependency. Mark and Christina's insistence that Carolyn only water her own plants, and stop watering her neighbors' plants, is illustrative of this. In their eyes, Carolyn wasn't being neighborly; she was enabling the dependence of lazy community members. This is consistent with Elisha's (2008b:432) findings that "modern evangelicals are increasingly moving toward new styles of evangelism that stress the importance of interpersonal relationships" because it allows them to offer aid while holding the recipient accountable to Christian moral mandates.

This concern for moral accountability through welfare transactions is a distinctly conservative evangelical stance, though New Monastics actively try to distance themselves from evangelical ideologies. Elisha (2008b:435) cites prominent conservative evangelical ideologue Marvin Olasky, who, in his widely read book, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (1992), argued that "religious organizations are best suited to serve the welfare needs of local communities." Olasky "extols the virtues of private, community-based forms of caregiving...because they were free to exercise 'compassion' with unfettered authority and according to biblical standards of accountability and moral worth" (Elisha 2008b:435). *The Tragedy of American Compassion* has been highly influential in evangelical culture, and even played a role in welfare reform in the 1990s (Elisha 2008b:435). New Monastic social justice programs adhere to many of Olasky's mandates, even though the group vocally eschews the ideologies of conservative evangelism.

Lastly, the exclusion of some individuals from the New Monastic ideals of community enforces the imperative of accountability to this group. The New Monastics I

encountered derided those who they considered too lazy or ignorant to help. I argue that this is because these people are seen, by New Monastics, as unable to be held accountable or held to their word. New Monastics were reticent to provide aid to people they did not deem entirely deserving. Elisha (2008a:155) terms this “compassion fatigue,” and argues that Evangelicals experience it when working with groups that don’t live up to their moral expectations.

New Monastics draw upon a diverse array of resources to form their ideologies about welfare and socioeconomic justice. Although New Monastics seek to move away from the conservative, pro-market ideologies of the neoconservative culture they were raised in, in practice, their social justice programs bear some resemblance to those advocated by conservative Evangelicals. Analyzing this disjuncture through the lived religion framework allows us to understand how divergent ideologies can be reconciled within New Monastic imaginings.

The Implications of a “Lived” Religion

Analyzing New Monasticism as lived religion is useful for several reasons. First, through this framework we can understand how seemingly mundane activities gain religious meaning for New Monastics. McGuire (2008:854) states that lived religion allows us to “address important religious concerns through beliefs and practices that were no longer accepted as properly religious by powerful religious institutions in their society.” In this light, acts such as urban relocation, organizing social justice programs, and even gardening can be seen as acts imbued with faith. Allison, a 24-year-old member of Kirkton Catholic Worker, illuminated this idea:

Moving here allowed me to really see the whole picture of my faith. My faith wasn't just about following some rules and going to church and stuff. It was a lot more about relating to people and being responsible for the earth and the resources that we have. So once it sort of became a part of my theology, it became important for me to act it out.

Allison emphasizes the importance of typically nonspiritual acts to her faith.

Allison—and other New Monastics—work against Durkheimian logic and the idea that there exists a separation between the sacred and the profane (Bielo 2011a:101). Bielo (2011a:101) elaborates, arguing that New Monastics are “able to, and are often apt to, sacralize all of life. They take their faith to work, to play, to relationships, and to the most mundane activities.”

But more importantly, the lived religion framework allows us to understand *how* New Monastics decide to live their faith in practice. New Monastics draw on a wide array of influences when forming their beliefs. They cite the 12 Marks of New Monasticism, historical Christian figures, and modern-day New Monastics—such as influential writer Shane Clayborn, and even urban agriculture as being integral influences in their beliefs. New Monastics draw upon these diverse sources to form their opinions on *how* to live their faith. New Monastics embody lived religion scholar McGuire's (2008:233) assertion that “researchers are misguided if they try to describe individuals' religions and religiosity by looking for congruence with a standard package of beliefs and practices that some official religion has authoritatively approved.” While the New Monastics I observed in Kirkton enacted their faith through a mix of anti-market and pro-personal responsibility ideologies, New Monastics in other contexts may interpret their faith in other ways and have completely divergent ideas of how to enact their faith.

Lived religion allows us to understand that textual mandates are enacted in personally meaningful and varying ways by religious adherents.

When New Monastics argue they want to “restructure the economy towards justice,” they draw on a diverse array of influences to understand how to actualize that statement. New Monastics draw upon the experiences of their parents in the market economy when trying to understand what the 12 Marks ask of them. They think of Mother Theresa when making sense of how best to offer aid to the poor in their communities, and they draw on the popular urban agriculture movement when trying to understand how to care for this “plot of God’s earth” (Appendix 1). The ways New Monastics make sense of the calls of their faith to address socioeconomic injustices depend heavily on the context of each New Monastic’s life. In this way, we can see how New Monastics blend the variety of religious and secular influences available to them when enacting their faith.

Conclusion

In the early church, when it says the offerings were put at the apostle's feet, and they were redistributed to people as they had need – there was this radical economy of sharing, where people were committed to sharing each other's burdens, and sharing the needs of the community together, and the resources of the community together. A lot of times people say “oh, this sounds like socialism, or communism!” I like to say, once we've really discovered how to love our neighbor as our self, capitalism as we know it won't be possible, and Marxism won't be necessary. (Clayborn 2009)

For New Monastics, activism is not a byproduct of their religion—it is at the core of their faith. New Monasticism arose among evangelical Christians who publicly voiced their disenchantment with the passivity of their fellow church members toward socioeconomic inequality in the U.S. At the center of New Monastic faith is the grappling of Christians with the morality and effectiveness of various economic models. The quote by New Monastic, Shane Clayborn, above shows how providing a more just economic system is a central part of faith for these new Christians.

For the New Monastics I encountered in Kansas City, the way to “restructure the economy towards justice” involved community gardening. These New Monastics promoted noncapitalist forms of exchange, sought to reembed people in social networks, and tried to enforce community social obligation. Their belief set was a complex amalgamation, in which they both consciously critique the capitalist system and advocate “traditional” evangelical ideas about personal responsibility. Their disavowal of capitalism is not complete. Their critiques of America's market economy and welfare systems are fluid and not whole. They are questioning the economic systems we have in place and are attempting to work out what exactly a more “just” system would look like, through trial and error in their social justice programs.

The findings I present here allow us to understand how people of faith respond to changing socioeconomic conditions in the U.S. today. There are many voices within Christianity, and even within evangelical Christianity: New Monasticism is but one of those voices. But it is illustrative, as a social movement, of the ways people of faith understand and respond to the conditions of poverty around them. Much modern mission work is conducted outside of the United States, in developing countries. New Monasticism represents a shift in Christian thinking. The urban core of American cities—devastated by the losses of industrial manufacturing jobs, gentrification, and structural inequalities—presents a new, more urgent site of mission work. Building wells in Africa was the mission work of yesterday. Teaching the urban poor to grow fish in aquaponic systems is the mission work of today.

Many people of faith, such as New Monastics, seek to impact secular society. Cloke and Beaumont (2012:27) argue “a greater propensity among the Christian faith to explore faith-by-praxis has fuelled increased activity in the public sphere.” Increasingly, Christians are working to change the conditions of secular society around them. New Monastics do not even conceptualize a difference between religious and secular worlds. Bielo (2011a:101) notes that for these new Christians there exists no “sacred/profane, religious/secular, and physical/metaphysical distinctions.” With no distinction between religious and secular space, social movements such as New Monasticism see the whole of American society as an arena in which to enact their faith. In this light, understanding how such religious groups conceptualize the economic conditions in the U.S. and seek to change them becomes an increasingly important task for scholars.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several methodological limitations. First, though I observed two New Monastic communities, I only studied New Monasticism in one context – Kansas City. While the scene of urban disinvestment in Kirkton neighborhood is similar to the contexts in which other New Monastic communities exist, it may not be entirely representative of the broader movement. New Monastic intentional communities are concentrated in the Rust Belt, and Kansas City, Missouri—though in some areas it exhibits similar economic conditions to Rust Belt cities—is not technically included in that post-industrial region. Additionally, the sample size of New Monastics I interviewed is limited, though representative of a broad swath of New Monastic community members in Kansas City. Future studies should consider increased sample sizes, and multisited studies of New Monastic communities within the Rust Belt—where the movement thrives.

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Appendix 1

12 Marks of a New Monasticism (Wilson-Hartgrove 2008:39):

Moved by God's Spirit in this time called America to assemble at St. Johns Baptist Church in Durham, NC, we wish to acknowledge a movement of radical rebirth, grounded in God's love and drawing on the rich tradition of Christian practices that have long formed disciples in the simple Way of Christ. This contemporary school for conversion, which we have called a "new monasticism," is producing a grassroots ecumenism and a prophetic witness within the North American church which is diverse in form, but characterized by the following marks:

1. Relocation to the abandoned places of Empire.
2. Sharing economic resources with fellow community members and the needy among us.
3. Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.
4. Geographical proximity to community members who share a common rule of life.
5. Hospitality to the stranger.
6. Nurturing common life among members of intentional community.
7. Peacemaking in the midst of violence and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Mathew 18.
8. Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities combined with the 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.
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.

May God give us grace by the power of the Holy Spirit to discern rules for living that will help us embody these marks in our local contexts as signs of Christ's kingdom for the sake of God's world.

Appendix 2

Sample Interview Questions

These interview questions provided a loose guide that was used while I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. During actual interviews, questioning sometimes deviated from the order and content indicated on this list.

Tell me about your background.

Name

Date of birth

Place of birth (urban, rural?)

Racial/class makeup of hometown?

What are your views on agriculture and food?

Can you tell me about how you came to these views?

What are your feelings about Kirkton neighborhood?

What were your feelings about the neighborhood when you first moved here?

What do you think needs to be done to improve Kirkton neighborhood?

Why do you think so many development projects involve community gardens? Do you think gardens improve communities? How?

What do you think about the idea that gardening builds community?

What does gardening teach people?

How involved should the government be in improving the lives of the poor?

What do you think about current economic conditions in the U.S.?

How do you think that Kirkton neighborhood residents have responded to the KC Urban Farmers (or Kirkton Catholic Worker)?

Can you tell me about any Kirkton residents who haven't responded favorably to the KC Urban Farmers (or Kirkton Catholic Worker)?

Can you tell me about any conflicts with Kirkton residents since you've moved here?

If there were conflicts, why do you think they occurred?

Can you tell me why you think the Urban Farming Guys' methods work?

Has working with Lykins neighborhood residents caused you to change your methods at all? If so, how?

Is there anything difficult about living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel like you've noticed a change in the neighborhood since you've been here? If so, in what ways?

What religious denomination do you identify with? Were you raised in this faith tradition, or a different one?

Can you tell me about the role of your faith in your life?

If you identify with New Monasticism: What does it mean to you to be New Monastic?

Why is New Monasticism significant?