

## **Can New Monastic Communities and The Salvation Army inform each other's practice?**

**By Mark Scott**

### **Abstract**

This article focuses upon two groups: new monastic communities and The Salvation Army and aims to discern whether despite differences they can inform each other's practice. The twelve marks of new monasticism are referred to and the topics of flat leadership, local agreement and social action provide a framework. A particular methodology explored is that of a rule of life as this has been a major part of our local community's journey. Conclusions suggest there is commonality between the groups and while tensions exist, I believe new monastic communities within the context of The Salvation Army are possible.

### **Introduction**

In recent times, the voices of protagonists from the New Monastic (NM) movement have been heard by a much wider audience, with for example, the thoughts of Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove from the Rutba Community and Shane Claiborne from The Simple Way being promoted by several popular evangelical preachers (Manson 2012). Indeed, within the context of The Salvation Army (TSA) Claiborne was a guest speaker at the 2008 Roots Convention in the UK commenting on issues surrounding poverty and challenging listeners to reflect upon their practice and values. This call to reflection is not uncommon within NM communities with the following quote from the front cover of *A New Monastic Handbook* succinctly capturing this nature:

'...here is an invitation to vintage faith... The brilliance of the monastic life is its ability to simultaneously critique both the church and the world, while insisting that if we are going to change anything we had better start with ourselves' (Mobsby and Berry 2014).

Such critique is a helpful method of entering into a learning process, and the interaction between expressions of church, and the world where they exist have the potential to ensure practice and values remain accessible to people with little understanding of, or willingness to engage with, organised religion. It is within this context that the following article will explore how NM communities and TSA could inform each other's practice.

According to Sarah Huxford, the new monasticism movement began officially in June 2004 at a conference in Durham, USA, where members of Christian communities, both old and

new, met and created the twelve 'marks' of NM communities (See Appendix One). These values acted as a link between the fledgling communities who shared such a vision and they continue to be a guiding framework today (Huxford 2006:1-12). Simultaneously in the UK, the Fresh Expressions (FX) initiative was being developed as a response to the *Mission-Shaped Church* report (2004) commissioned by the Church of England. FX were to be encouraged as a mission renewal methodology to reinvigorate established churches, and new monasticism was highlighted as an important strand in attempting to reach people in the mixed-economy of contemporary church and society (Cray 2004:34). This endorsement meant many NM communities have been birthed through FX (Mobsby and Berry 2014:31-32).

Both NM communities and TSA have challenged the established church and have contributed to positive transformation of social malaise in their vicinity. It is apparent, both groups, through reflection, recognise the need for self-development to ensure their engagement remains relevant, and seek to learn from their respective pasts. To aid this examination, three main topics will be focused upon: flat leadership, local agreement and social action and these will be reflected upon in relation to the twelve marks.

While there are obvious similarities between the two groups, it is relevant to recognise that TSA is a global organisation whereas NM communities are more concentrated in Europe and North America. NM mark nine speaks of ascribing communities working within their close geographical proximity, with these tending to be governed locally. In comparison TSA is present in the local, national and international contexts and because of management needs, TSA has employed a hierarchical structure that governs centrally. The next section unpacks this contrast further.

### **Flat leadership**

Rory McEntee and Adam Bucko suggested in their manifesto that NM communities are drawn to a participative model of leadership where decision-making is shared amongst those involved (McEntee and Bucko). This is often seen as counter-cultural. It is an area where more traditional church models, including that of TSA, are challenged (Mobsby and Berry 2014:194). Such hopes in a community can be expressed through 'flat leadership' with David Fitch believing there are three advantages for employing such a model in missional communities (Fitch 2010).

Firstly, flat leadership has the tendency to strongly encourage communities to be outward looking, decentralising the power from one or a few individuals, who in a hierarchical system

are looked to for final approval on decisions. A flat system encourages the gifts of all those involved and helps the community to develop an identity based around a missional activity in the surrounding culture, rather than the personality type of a human leader.

Secondly, flat leadership structures are potentially more flexible, dynamic, and able to discern new things. An example might be when conflict arises within a community, a top-down model of leadership is likely to make choices through a small group of people, whose primary concern can be managing church, rather than discerning the views of the whole community. Discerning vision can be left to the few leaders with new direction being implemented only if they receive the revelation. Flat leadership seeks to listen to the whole community, discerning what God is saying corporately to the group.

Thirdly, flat leadership attempts to model Christ's example of submission to God, rather than hierarchical leadership, where often coercion is required, and there can be a perception that the leader holds a higher office than those in the congregation. Flat leadership requires vulnerability, honesty, and a willingness to serve and therefore, according to Fitch, a top-down leadership model can stop a community from being truly incarnational, reduce its ability to discern new opportunities and hinder engagement with the world in a humble attitude of servanthood. Fitch critically writes that such leadership pacifies the body of Christ to the point of ministerial inability, potentially masking Jesus' Lordship in the world (Fitch 2010).

Whilst TSA's hierarchy is beneficial in mobilising a large organisation and particularly in emergency situations, it can hinder the speed of everyday decision-making. Local expressions have limited decision-making powers, with involved proposals having to be approved by regional and then regularly national boards. Whilst these boards have good understanding of legislative and organisational needs, providing protection to TSA, they have limited local contextual knowledge, which is so important in a diverse landscape. Carol Woods proposes that flat leadership can alleviate some of these problems because there are fewer layers of management, fewer approvals are required, accelerating decision-making processes and allowing the response to opportunities or threats to be more rapid (Woods). A strong advantage of local expressions having decision-making powers is the sense of ownership fostered, engendering enthusiasm and commitment.

Flat leadership is often employed in smaller-scale settings that allow a greater participative contribution from individuals who may see the benefit of their personal input first hand. Smaller groups are often more relational with the ability to invest more deeply in each other. Gifts and skills can be more readily identified and appropriately developed. In a smaller pool

there is a greater reliance upon each other's skills, which encourages a heightened sense of equality. For newcomers, a smaller group may be less intimidating, where viewpoints can contribute to discussions more rapidly thus giving a sense of being heard. Conversely, this could be problematic to anyone preferring to remain an observer. Other challenges might include where power-seeking individuals could upset the dynamics of leadership and dominate the group. A clear understanding is needed so that everyone can contribute and be heard. TSA is openly autocratic, but in reality many consultative-style leaders choose to be as democratic as possible because of the advantages mentioned above. This can cause some tension at a local level where ultimately the appointed leader, according to TSA, has autonomy. As an established organisation, developed over a significant amount of time, TSA has developed systems to facilitate its mission and alleviate presented challenges. With such developments the ease of employing flat leadership has, and would continue to be much more difficult than in a new, independent setting often seen in NM communities.

NM communities displaying a flat leadership model with an emphasis upon relationships, provide a helpful reminder to TSA to continue and potentially expand its focus upon relational ministry. Captain Nick Coke agrees with this emphasis in a 2014 Salvation Army conference reflection that TSA needs:

‘...to embrace a relational culture - to develop hospitality, collaboration, conversation, inclusion, diversity and interdependence both internally within our bureaucratic structures and externally in the ‘communities’ in which we work. We need to teach and model relational behaviour from top to bottom’ (Coke 2014).

An issue particular to TSA is appointed charismatic leaders are asked to move on regularly by the organisation; there is the potential for those drawn to specific leadership personalities to then consider leaving local expressions themselves. A possible antidote would be an agreement to leave leaders in post for longer periods of time where helpful, and while this could defer the issue, it does give more time for individuals to mature and for community values to embed. Such a commitment is also likely to engender deeper levels of trust and community understanding which with a well-managed transition process, could smooth the way for subsequent leadership especially if there has been a ‘cross-over period’ where the incumbent and future leadership can journey together and build the trust of the local setting.

Moynagh suggests sharing leadership encourages ‘indigenization’ and contributes to any transition being more stable, especially if the attitude is building community ‘with’ rather than ‘for’ people (Moynagh 2012:412-413). While it is recognised that this is a resource intense

solution, it would seem worthwhile if local communities have a greater chance of remaining united, especially if indigenous leaders are developed as part of the ongoing process.

Phil Potter, Archbishop's Missioner and team leader of FX in the UK, insightfully writes about how leadership has changed from a dominant 'military commander' shape of top-down leadership prevalent in the 1950s, through Chief Executive Officer and entrepreneurial styles, to more relational focused leadership models. He suggests that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, these previous models still exist and work in certain situations, but that newer models are emerging, two of which he identifies as the 'poet' and the 'gardener'. 'Poet' leaders acknowledge they do not possess all the solutions to challenges they face, so they surround themselves with other leaders, listening carefully to the cultural context they lead within. Their primary role is to summarise and synthesise emerging ideas from the team and then galvanise subsequent actions. They enable others to be part of the creative leadership process.

'Gardener' leaders also nurture creative environments where other people can thrive, by cultivating the soil and removing weeds. This occurs through developing both the place and the people to produce an environment disposed for healthy growth. Both these styles concentrate on connection, creativity and community and foster inclusion and TSA would do well to understand such emerging patterns and encourage support structures that would cultivate such engagements (Potter 2015:173-174).

Can TSA learn from new monasticism with regard to leadership models? It would seem that it could, particularly in the context of intentional communities. While presently there are no recognised Salvation Army NM communities, there are certainly groups that employ some of the same methodologies. In these groups, it is not uncommon for a flatter model of leadership to be used, however the reality is such groups are still accountable to a global organisation and need to interact with its hierarchy. This negates the possibility of a completely flat system because the wider organisation's hierarchy has evolved over time and is still relevant for large facets of its ministry.

TSA still works in a system where central authority holds ultimate power and for flatter leadership to flourish there is still a need for permission to be openly delegated to the local context when the congregation decides that it would be beneficial. There has been some shifting of power from central to local context and this would need to continue to the point where the local context has more autonomy but still benefits from organisational support when it requests help. This would seemingly be backed up in the recent summary document for the Fit For Mission Review, with the United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland

Territorial leadership explicitly recommending that there should be increased investment in new local expressions of mission along with new programmes in existing corps and centres.

A further recommendation suggests, ‘...every effort be made to move decision making authority closer to the front line... Where multiple levels of approval are required, this number should be kept as low as possible and proportionate to the item requiring approval’ (TSA, 2019). In the twenty-first century there is a tangible distrust of large institutions and the ability to make routine local decisions speedily and with local contextual knowledge, is highly desirable and engenders responsibility within the local community. Practically this may require revisiting how power is communicated in TSA, for example where uniform is appropriate it should still be employed, however, in everyday contexts where trust has been established, the NM decision to abandon the traditional monastic habit could possibly be a consideration. Authentic relationships should be preferable to an imposed reminder of authority; people should recognise values through lifestyle rather than a visual representation. The positioning of decision-making power could be encapsulated in the development locally of a rule of life, which is discussed below.

### **Local Agreement**

Many NM communities have developed a rule of life (mark nine) and such a local agreement could be a helpful framework for any intentional communities in TSA. This tool reinforces Lieutenant-Colonel Alan Burns’ belief that the local church is the primary missional agent and is the delivery point of mission for TSA, following a biblical mandate. When planting communities from the mother church in Antioch, Saint Paul was clear there should be no authority over the fledgling churches so they could develop autonomously. This process meant the local church rather than the institution shaped its own identity (Burns 2012:3-4). Claiborne reminds us that the beliefs of the Christian faith are often the focus and considering how those beliefs are practically implemented are potentially forgotten (Claiborne in Wilson-Hartgrove 2012:9-10). A rule of life not only informs people of what is pragmatically executed, but it also opens up the discussion of why actions are taken and the values behind them.

In the past TSA identically replicated itself in each community it established, but this methodology is no longer appropriate because of the diverse nature of communities found in the UK and the breakdown of uniformity in society generally. National orders are now unlikely to fit neatly into local contexts and interpretation is often necessary. This contextualisation process is best explored in a group setting where a variety of views can be expressed. This should not dilute the core values of TSA but should enhance their

effectiveness in a particular context. An example is *The War College*, an expression of TSA in Vancouver, which advertises itself as a training school, and not only subscribes to core Salvation Army regulations but also stipulates additional requirements, which have been agreed to be helpful locally (The War College 2014). In the membership course it has developed, discrete expectations have been included which are specifically tailored to the target group's lifestyle. These are above the normal demands of TSA aiming to create sustainability in a particular context and includes abstinence from drugs for twelve months, being a Christian for twelve months, reading the whole Bible and memorising TSA doctrines before being accepted into full membership (Strickland and Court 2008:7). While such demands may be questioned, this is an example of the local context using its own decision-making powers to create a framework for living out its values without losing TSA core values. However, with such raised expectations, there is a danger of excluding individuals who feel unable to meet the standards and this must to be acknowledged and addressed.

The process of developing a rule of life should be as important as the rule itself. An imposed rule is no different to a prescribed set of orders and regulations where the local community has no influence. When a group subscribes to TSA, it is presumed the core values adopted would be TSA doctrines, which are comparable to the twelve marks, and then additional contextual expectations may be added. Not adhering to all core values constitutes something that is not authentic and therefore cannot be considered representative of the organisation. In effect these core values constitute the beliefs whereas the additional local expectations set out the practical delivery of those beliefs. For instance, mark three, which encourages showing hospitality to strangers, is pertinent for both NM communities and TSA, but could be delivered in various guises dependent upon the context.

A rule of life does ask for a level of commitment above the norm in a culture where many individuals are commitment-averse. Becoming a soldier of TSA is a life-long commitment and if expectations are not upheld, there are prescribed sanctions. NM communities that annually renew their rule of life seem to have more realistic expectation levels. Today, life moves at an increased pace with technology encouraging the blurring of work and family life, and church life can be viewed as an additional pressure. It should be recognised that changing situations in life affect an individual's ability to commit and that such situations are for a finite period. An example could be a new baby joining a family unit, which obviously requires significant devoted time. A local agreement might be that in these agreed situations previously committed parents are given permission to not subscribe to the rule whilst still promoting the core values. Such understanding should pre-empt any feelings of guilt, reduce any resentment at being too busy and hopefully make future re-commitment far more likely,

and could even be recognised as something akin to a sabbatical. This mechanism is not formally available within TSA currently and potentially its adoption could increase commitment by all involved rather than decrease it. If a rule of life is to be used as a tool for discipleship, realistic expectations are likely to be more honest and sustainable.

Potentially, the rule of life can provide the local agreement, which can be tailored to the needs of the group at that time. The agreement should be regularly reviewed and flexible enough to assimilate the views of new members because the beliefs do not change, rather the outworking of them. TSA faces a situation where attendees are prohibited from becoming full members because their lifestyle choices prevent it. Particularly, the consumption of alcohol restricts an individual from becoming a Soldier and whilst the context of working with alcoholics provides a rationale, there is no scriptural directive for total abstinence.

A proposed model could be to prioritise the local agreement that still encapsulates the beliefs of TSA, but contextualises the practice with individuals who want to be part of the global Salvation Army having the option of taking up the additional commitments of being a Soldier. Anyone entering the community should be involved in an annual review of the rule before committing to it, therefore being involved in shaping the rule before subscribing. Being part of the community should not be dependent upon subscribing to the rule but be viewed as a positive tool for development of an individual's Christian faith and if this is stated in the rule, it helps to reduce exclusivity. For a local agreement to be successful, accountability will be paramount both in the community and to wider church organisations (mark five). For TSA intentional communities, humble submission to the international body should be practised with the hope being that local decisions inform wider practice and that there is trust and respect flowing both ways between the local and national levels. Another element of a local agreement for TSA should be a commitment to the poor, which should be seen through social action.

## **Social Action**

Mark one is clear that NM communities should be present in 'the abandoned places of empire' and TSA has historically, and should always operate at the margins of society with such a value manifesting itself in serving the poor and challenging social ills. Mark two encourages sharing financial resources that could be implemented at both the local and national levels for TSA. TSA is strong in this area having established efficient relief programmes, however improvement can still occur. A system does exist for Salvation Army centres across the country to share a percentage of finances, but the strength of NM

communities, where the effects of financial investment are tangible, is not always obvious in TSA because the resources are being used at a distance. Money goes into regional and national funds and there is little immediate feedback as to how these are used, possibly breeding resentment with the perception sometimes being that this 'centage' supports administration, rather than directly going to points of need. Flatter leadership could reduce such issues with greater accountability measures also enhancing this. Potentially TSA has the resources to make a significant impact at local level if affluent centres shared their resources with poorer ones and then allowed the local expressions to spend them appropriately without any caveats. The poorer expression would need to feed back to the donors thus improving relationships and understanding of resource allocation.

Delivery of relief would look different depending upon the context and at the international level this is TSA's forte as stated above. An area where TSA could help NM communities to develop is seeing the bigger picture where the joining up of resources locally, nationally and internationally can make a significant difference. For example, lobbying government carries more weight when initiated by a larger body of people and encouraging local NM communities to network and work together more may increase their influence. A presence at both local and national levels is the ideal situation.

A re-emerging emphasis within TSA is the investment in prayer, an area in which contemplative NMs often have particular expertise (mark twelve). An opening of dialogue between TSA and NMs regarding prayer would be mutually beneficial, with such practices not being limited to internal worship, rather intercessory prayer being seen as an integral part of mission and social transformation as well.

TSA was recognised in its early days for its innovative approach, which was reinforced with the authentic lifestyles of its members. As it has become more established, these traits are still present but are more challenging to maintain, and have the risk of becoming compartmentalised and removed from worshipping communities. Establishment has brought respectability and opportunities to work with governmental and statutory bodies, allowing opportunities to promote its values to a wider audience, but also external legislation and reputational management. Remaining authentic in such an environment is challenging. NM communities have the benefit of being autonomous and less visible, thus having the ability to become more innovative. TSA should not lose its ability to minister in both the global and local contexts and should retain an emphasis of being in close geographical proximity to the marginalised.

Empowering local people to be involved in decision-making and delivery of Christian mission, along with the permission to take measured risks, which are elements of NM, should be considered by TSA, in fact Hudson Taylor observed, 'Unless there's an element of risk in our exploits for God, there's no need for faith' (Taylor in Guillebaud 2010:24). Many NMs practise hospitality and re-employ disused church buildings and an adoption of this model by TSA might allow a redistribution of its resources within the denomination, whilst building on its hospitable nature, but it must learn that the historic pattern of taking a model and replicating it in every location will not work in the twenty-first century. Contextualisation at the local level by local people is my opinion vital.

## **Conclusion**

NM communities and TSA have much in common already. Their passion for action and sharing God's love are evident and they both mobilise committed Christians who seek to live a life that reflects Jesus. Both have a particular calling to place and meeting the needs of their context and have structured rules to facilitate holy living. There is little to suggest that TSA could not develop its own NM communities, however there would be some challenges especially around TSA's militaristic structure and language which could, at a surface level, appear to contradict mark eleven which clearly promotes peace. TSA's use of such language is war-like against the spiritual realm and not towards fellow humans but could easily be misinterpreted. At the turn of the century General Shaw Clifton reiterated that TSA was established for 'the whosoever' (Clifton 1999:8) and would hope to continue to be open to all, regardless of ethnicity, sexual orientation, affluence or social standing. There may be some questions raised regarding the openness of NM communities through the wording of mark eight and this tension would need to be considered.

Order and structure are characteristics common to both. Simplicity and sacrifice are expressed within both communities and through dialogue, both groups could learn much from each other, whilst retaining their own missional charisms.

When asked to give advice to NMs, Abbot Stuart, an Anglican Benedictine and Brother Samuel, an Anglican Franciscan felt it acceptable for them to continue to draw on all traditional orders. Brother Samuel commented:

'Do not worry too much about what you are doing... You will draw on both traditions, people always have. So draw and make connections with them both because, in the end, if it is authentic, you will be called to do something radically new... Keep

seeking God for the vocation of your community.’ (Samuel in Mobsby and Berry 2014:33-34)

This applies to monastics, both traditional and new, and is equally important to TSA. Combining the wisdom of the past, ancient or more recent, with innovation and contextualisation would seem the best methodology for the future.

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### **Appendix One - The Twelve Marks of New Monasticism**

Relocation to the abandoned places of empire [at the margins of society].

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

Hospitality to the stranger.

Lament for racial divisions within the church and our communities, combined with the active pursuit of a just reconciliation.

Humble submission to Christ's body, the church.

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

Nurturing common life among members of an intentional community.

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

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

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

Peacemaking in the midst of violence, and conflict resolution within communities along the lines of Matthew 18:15-20.

Commitment to a disciplined contemplative life.

(Claiborne 2006:363-364)