

The Franciscan Vow of Poverty as an Ancient and Modern Resource for Innovative Missional Practice¹

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ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER EXPLORES THE experience of those choosing to live a monastic lifestyle and analyses these experiences as potential missional practice in our time. Questionnaires, surveys, and interviews were used to correlate the language, symbols, understanding, and experience of participants. Using the data in an imaginative way, I offer a conversation between: a pilgrim interested in monastic practices, Clare as a facilitator, and composite characters that were

1. Editorial note: While *Ecclesial Futures* uses intext citations, an editorial decision was made to use footnotes in this particular article in order to preserve the clarity of the dramatic script.

created using the research data. These characters' conversations share and critique the lived experience of the research participants. This imaginative conversation also creatively provides a literature review. Drawing on ideas from fantasy fiction, the analysis and results of the research are explored in a fantasy world called "Freedom." The research demonstrates the cyclical process of contemplative action. Innovative missional practice (by individuals and the Church as a whole) becomes an ethos by which to live. Defining missional spirituality in this manner deepens the Church's understanding of "mission" in our time.

INTRODUCTION

This paper speaks into the need to carefully assess how, as followers of Christ, we assemble beliefs, perspectives, and practices, a process called spiritual formation. It creatively engages with ancient monastic spirituality to argue that the Franciscan vow of poverty is a timely and relevant pathway worth investigating. As it explores the challenges of consumerism, materialism, and environmental degradation, it reinvigorates "a blasé world with the freshness of Franciscan Spirituality."² This approach draws a particular Franciscan viewpoint into dialogue with mission.

I believe we are in a time that requires us to think radically about our Christian faith and how we live it out, a time perhaps that encapsulates new wine's need for new wineskins.³ In our time, using the term "monastic" is an imperfect act of cultural translation that obscures more than it reveals.⁴ Instead, I suggest that Franciscan spirituality is an approach that is well placed to grapple with the dominant issues for a culture that has become uncomfortable with conventional religious language.⁵ Franciscan spirituality

2. Mother Mary Francis PCC., *Chastity, Poverty, and Obedience: Recovering the Vision for the Renewal of Religious Life* (Ignatius Press, 2007) p14.

3. See Matthew 2:22.

4. See Stephen J. Davis, *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p10.

5. See Rowan Clare Williams, *A Condition of Complete Simplicity*:

is earthy; it does not shy away from facing the realities of the world head on; but it always tries to do so with love. Franciscans aim to enter the mystical life of love. We too can enter the mystical life of love through contemplative spiritual practice. This engagement requires finding the practices that speak into our journey of discipleship.⁶ This paper provides some options.

As one of the participants in my research says, “Jesus said follow me, he never said worship me. Paul said ‘do not conform but be transformed.’”⁷ This brings into question the way the Church has been “doing” mission for decades, particularly when engaged in an attractional model. This participant’s comments suggest that we need to radically reform the way we define mission, away from “doing” towards “being.” The argument that follows focuses on what the lived experience of those involved in monastic communities might teach us about “being.” The research suggests that growing values of simplicity, contentment, generosity, and hospitality in individuals will grow the Church’s capacity to engage in mission that is relevant for our time. The research shows that emerging new monastic communities are engaged in the task of drawing the wisdom from more traditional monastic and mendicant orders and enculturating it into their own contexts. New monasticism, with its own ethos and orientation, stands at a crossroads of contemplative and prophetic traditions, social theory, and emergent understandings of religiosity.⁸

Franciscan Wisdom for Today’s World (Canterbury Press, 2003) pxiv.

6. See E. Allison Peers, *The Art of Contemplation* (SPCK, 1925) p3.

7. Questionnaire 6 17.10.2019.

8. Jonathan Dunnemann, “Towards A New Monastic Theology,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54c7cca3e4b090b74410c5db/t/54d784f7e4bo80ddb27e6b8/1423410423988/Final+Towards+a+New+Monastic+Theology+%282%29.pdf> p1.

MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY AS AN ECCLESIAL FUTURE

The growth in the number of emerging new monastic communities in the last couple of decades is well documented.⁹ Members of these communities recognize the need to respond to developments in the world outside¹⁰ by exploring how to live out our faith in authentic and relevant ways.¹¹ It is through developing one's own faith that one's cup might overflow¹² into the world around us. This overflow occurs through living an alternative lifestyle which addresses the inequalities that fatigued us.

If we choose to take on the challenge of being in but not of the world, monastic practices "provide a means for re-enculturation to a markedly different(iated) lifestyle and worldview."¹³ Monasticism points us towards a communitarian ethical model,¹⁴ as vows are taken in the presence of the rest of one's community. Monastic practices work best in community. Hence, I interviewed members of these communities. As Christians in community we can play a role in the critique of culture. We can build practices that replace unjust social systems with a commitment to non-violence, lack of possessions, fasting, etc. In this way we take on the mantle of monastic orders and their ritualized strategies of social differentiation.¹⁵

9. See Bishop David Walker's comments in Hattie Williams, *New Monasticism: A Desire to go Deeper is Met*, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/28-september/features/features/new-monasticism-a-desire-to-go-deeper-is-met>.

10. See Michael Moynagh, *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission, and Ecclesiology* (SCM Press, 2017) p138.

11. See Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Baker Books, 2002) p53.

12. Psalm 23:5.

13. See Stephen J. Davis, *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p15.

14. Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (SAGE Publications, 1997) p274.

15. See Stephen J. Davis, *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p17.

This research builds on missional thinking from the last decade or so. Emerging missional literature can be categorized into “discovering, utilizing, engaging, and extending the theology of mission.”¹⁶ This research falls into the “extending” category as it seeks to “deepen our understanding, address key issues, and develop a missional hermeneutic.”¹⁷ The research is rooted in historic understanding of mission and ancient monastic practice, drawing from that deep well an understanding of being followers of Christ for our time.

Such a theology of mission is possible through a Franciscan standpoint epistemology. Such an epistemology brings a “particular interpretive logic.”¹⁸ A monastic standpoint has been excluded from the dominant discourses in the Church. Yet Franciscans live out in microcosm the vocation of all Christians—to love and to be present to the world. I take a Franciscan standpoint epistemology and rather than exploring the belief that the vow of poverty is helpful to growing in faith (discipleship), I take this as predetermined through the experience of Franciscans through the centuries and instead focus on the vow as a framework for exploring mission.

There are other voices present here too, those who have realized the need to take seriously our discipleship and are “beginning to develop missional communities that have a specific call to their locality; they are often called emerging new monastic communities.”¹⁹

Emerging monastic communities are exploring the vocation to love and be present in new and exciting ways, so I have also

16. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Baker Academic, 2011) p70.

17. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Baker Academic, 2011) p90–98.

18. Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (SAGE Publications, 1997) p31.

19. Hattie Williams, *New Monasticism: A Desire to go Deeper is Met*, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/28-september/features/features/new-monasticism-a-desire-to-go-deeper-is-met>.

included their voice in my research. The monasticism that seems to be emerging in the twenty-first century is one that both questions the heroic asceticism of the past yet pays attention to the internal motivation for following the monastic values and how these values are put into missional action. New monastic communities model the need to explore mission around values rather than hard outcomes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research uses “the language of themes and patterns to draw the reader into the divine mystery and drama, providing reflective experiences that enable us to reimagine the world and our place within it.”²⁰ I use a correlation method of “contextual theology” “fuelled by both intellect and imagination, as critical engagement with experience, cultural information, and tradition takes place at both rational and intuitive levels.”²¹ This method proposes a basic switch in the process of coming to know reality. Instead of beginning with the conviction that reality is “out there,” existing somehow independently of human knowing, it suggests that the knowing needs to begin one’s quest for knowing what “is” by attending to the dynamic of one’s own consciousness and irrepressible desire to know.²²

This is evident in how I research and in the way that the narrative is formed and presented.

My method of data collection is based on the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” methodology for theological reflection. The term was first coined by twentieth-century American Methodist scholar

20. See Hattie Williams, *New Monasticism: A Desire to go Deeper is Met*, <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/28-september/features/features/new-monasticism-a-desire-to-go-deeper-is-met.>, p12.

21. Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (SCM Press, 2005) p162.

22. Stephen B Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Orbis Books, 2002) p140.

Albert C. Outler,²³ and the method is based on four sources as the basis of theological and doctrinal development—Scripture, tradition, reason, and Christian experience. Scripture is woven throughout this story. This aids in defining contemplative spirituality and mission within a biblical framework. Tradition is a major part of the methodology, as the Franciscan tradition plays a central role. Wesley states that without reason we cannot understand the essential truths of Scripture. However, I believe that reason is not a mere human invention and the Holy Spirit must play a role in helping us understand the mysteries of God. This is why experience is so important to this quadrilateral model. As a Third Order Franciscan, I speak from my own journey of exploring poverty, chastity, and obedience. I also draw on literature that members of the Third Order use daily.

Data collection began with a paper questionnaire at the Anglican Religious Communities conference. To deepen saturation, I repeated the same questions through an internet survey. I dug deeper into the lived experience of those in monastic orders through further face-to-face interviews. This gave me, as researcher, the opportunity to explore themes more deeply. It also enabled the writing of a narrative that expressed that lived experience in an authentic way.

My ontological position is that the knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, and experiences of those who live a religious life are meaningful properties of the social reality which my research questions are designed to explore.²⁴ Hence, taking a Franciscan standpoint epistemology alongside an interest in members of new monastic communities suggests that interviews and questionnaires are both legitimate ways to generate data based on my ontological position.²⁵ I am aware that there is the potential for

23. W. Stephen Gunter et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Abingdon Press, 1997) p17.

24. Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (SAGE Publications, 1996) p39.

25. Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (SAGE Publications, 1996) p40.

epistemological shortcomings with interviews in terms of only being able to access the interpretations and understandings revealed during the interview. However, given that my methodology is based on interpretive correlation, I cross-checked interpretations with the questionnaires and available literature in building a true picture of monastic understanding around the vow of poverty.

In exploring the experiences of people who have taken vows or engaged with poverty as a life choice, deeper, archetypal meanings are found. “By focusing on the value orientation of the vows, we are invited to reclaim the significance of the vowed life for all God’s people and not merely for those called to live that life.”²⁶ The values themselves do not change from one age to the next—how we enculturate those values, how we translate them into personal, interpersonal, social and political action is a human dynamic from within which people invent “liminal movements” to assist them in grounding and living out their God-given value orientation.²⁷

Franciscan spirituality is based strongly on “*Imitatio Christi*,” living lives in the light of Christ, following Christ’s example.²⁸ In a world that is paralysed by possibility, “the affluence of choice,”²⁹ we need to be people that make the choice to live a missional life, to be imitators of Christ. “To be sustained for life and mission in a turbulent world we need to nurture a particularly resilient form of spiritual life.”³⁰ I believe we can do this by exploring and engaging with contemplative monastic practice.

To present my data, I created a “messy text”³¹ drawing on the life experience of those who have taken monastic vows as an

26. Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience: Radical Option for Life* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) p15.

27. Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience: Radical Option for Life* (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) p17.

28. See Stephen J. Davis, *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2018) p61.

29. Paul Borthwick, *Great Commission Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (IVP Books, 2015) p13.

30. Cathy Ross & Colin Smith (eds.), *Missional Conversations: A Dialogue between Theory and Praxis in World Mission* (SCM Press, 2018) p210.

31. Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices*

“existential turning-point moment”³² in their lives. The messy text takes the form of a narrative. “Stories are privileged and imaginative acts of self-interpretation. We tell stories of a life in order to establish meaning and to integrate our remembered past with what we perceive to be happening in the present and what we anticipate for the future.”³³ A “messy text” provided a way to explore what Franciscanism in the past and present might say into the future of mission. My aim is to re-present the voice and experiences of those who are under-represented in missional discourse with an “enlightened eye, a form of connoisseurship” that allows what has been seen to be shared in a public and critical way.³⁴ Composite characters have been developed from the data, based not on the participants of the research but on the experiences they shared. In this way I can “compress considerable amounts of documentary evidence from a variety of sources into a vivid and unified telling of the story.”³⁵ The “messy text” uses tropes from fantasy fiction by introducing the main protagonist before sending them into a fantasy world akin to the *Chronicles of Narnia*. The narrative also draws on the character concept from *Pilgrim’s Progress*, developing characters directly from the research data. Using software to highlight repeated words from the questionnaires and surveys, I was able to compile a shortlist of contemporary language that participants related to the vow of poverty. I then built character profiles by cross referencing that language with the interview data. In this way, the characters become a “living” embodiment of the research data. Using contemporary language was a theme that participants repeatedly said is important to their missional practice. By using the same language in the narrative, I am showcasing

for the 21st Century (SAGE publications, 1997) pxvii.

32. Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (SAGE publications, 1997) pxvii.

33. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (Jossey Bass, 1998) p3.

34. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (Jossey Bass, 1998) p32.

35. J. Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel* (University of North Carolina Press, 1977) p31.

to other mission practitioners how we can use ancient monastic practice as a resource for developing innovative missional practice in our time.

The narrative remains rooted in reality, one in which “the skills, imagination, and lens of cross-cultural mission that is nurtured when a missionary travels to another country or culture is precisely the kind of thing we need for our own contexts now.”³⁶

FRANCISCAN FANTASY: RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Prologue

NARRATOR Like so many other pilgrims before him, Jim strolled through the olive groves back from San Damiano towards the city of Assisi, periodically wiping the midday sweat from under his hat. Today was the third day of his pilgrimage to Assisi with a coachload of other tourists who, he guessed, may also be exploring what St Francis and St Clare may have to speak into what had become a bland and uneventful spirituality. The planned excursion for the afternoon was the Basilica of Santa Chiara, the resting place of St Clare and the Crucifix from San Damiano through which God had apparently spoken to St Francis.³⁷ Jim was mildly suspicious of such stories—although open to having a similar encounter. Jim waited, leaning on an ancient stone buttress at the edge of the basilica³⁸ until the hordes had

36. Jonny Baker, in Jason S. Sexton and Paul Weston (eds.), *The End of Theology: Shaping Theology for the Sake of Mission* (Fortress Press, 2016) p233.

37. Br Damian Kirkpatrick SSF, Fr Philip Doherty OFM Conv, Sr Sheelagh O’Flynn FMDM (eds.), *Joy In All Things: A Franciscan Companion* (Canterbury Press, 2009) p213.

38. Details of the chapel and its surroundings come from a conversation

taken their photos and moved on before he found a quiet spot to sit and admire the famous crucifix hanging beatifically in the void above. In an uncharacteristic moment of extemporary prayer, Jim whispered, almost to himself, “What’s it all about God? Why am I here?” It was at this point that Jim hoped for one of those wonderful and creative God moments mentioned earlier, but nothing happened. After a minute or two, for Jim wasn’t a terribly patient person, he stood up, turned around and took his selfie stick out of his back pocket. Having adjusted his phone to the perfect angle, he smiled and pressed the button to take the Instagram image all his friends were expecting . . . Jim vanished. Jim woke up, not as you might expect in early-thirteenth-century Assisi, for that, dear reader, would be too obvious a plot device. Instead, he found himself lying on the ground staring up at the ceiling of a vintage-looking marquee. Looking down at him was a young lady, who sounded much more proper than she looked.

Scene—a vintage marquee with low tables around which small groups of eclectic-looking characters are drinking herbal tea.

CLARE I’m Clare, are you okay?

JIM Yes, I’m Jim.

CLARE Lovely to meet you, Jim.

Jim stands to get a better sense of his surroundings.

ALL Hi, Jim!

via Facebook from people who have made a pilgrimage to Assisi, a privilege I have yet to accomplish.

ECCLESIAL FUTURES: VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

- JIM Am I dead?
- CLARE I hope not; do you want to join us?
- JIM Errrm, I guess so . . . where am I?
- CLARE A tent called “Poverty.”
- JIM Eh?
- CLARE Poverty.
- JIM Like, poverty, the concept of being poor?
- CLARE Poverty is not a concept, or a law, or a thing, or a substance which can be analysed, dissected, or put through a filter to separate cultural and psychological elements from the pure gospel essence.³⁹ However, you are welcome to explore that essence here . . .
- JIM Okay.
- CLARE Tea?
- JIM Yes, please.
- CONTENTMENT I’m Contentment.
- CLARE That’s Simplicity, this is Hospitality and Generosity.
- CONTENTMENT We’re discussing how many compensations you need to buy in order to keep you from noticing the emptiness inside.⁴⁰
- JIM Compensations?
- SIMPLICITY Something that counterbalances or makes up for an undesirable or unwelcome state of affairs.⁴¹

39. Thomas Clarke, “Witness and Involvement,” quoted in Joyce Ridick, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: The Vows* (St Paul Publications, 1984) p2.

40. Rowan Clare Williams, *A Condition of Complete Simplicity: Franciscan Wisdom for Today’s World* (Canterbury Press, 2003) p64.

41. Lexico, “Compensation.” <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/compensation>.

James Fox-Robinson—*The Franciscan Vow of Poverty*

- GENEROSITY And therein lies the crux of this evening’s conversation.
- CONTENTMENT Is it, in fact, unwelcome or undesirable to notice the feeling of emptiness in the first place?
- JIM Does emptiness equate to poverty then, how do the two relate?
- SIMPLICITY Good question, young man. We have to reflect on why we feel the need to consume.
- CONTENTMENT Do you define yourself by possessions, wealth, or status, Jim?
- JIM Errrm, I’m not sure I’ve ever thought about it.
- SIMPLICITY Precisely. To be poor actually stretches human potential, because it is no longer rooted in an understanding which judges a person for what he or she has.⁴²
- JIM But aren’t status, power, and acquisition of wealth a blessing?
- CONTENTMENT Are they?⁴³ This may be a jarring reality to those who have power and wealth, but being poor gives us the eyes to see.⁴⁴
- JIM To see what?
- CLARE The divine.
- SIMPLICITY Young man, you need to move “from the boundary of logic to the horizon of paradox”;⁴⁵ it will serve you well here.

42. Rowan Clare Williams, *A Condition of Complete Simplicity: Franciscan Wisdom for Today’s World* (Canterbury Press, 2003) p64.

43. For a deeper understanding of poverty in relation to the Old Testament, see Francis J. Moloney SDB, *Free to Love: Poverty, Chastity, Obedience* (Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1981) p1–4.

44. See Rowan Clare Williams, *A Condition of Complete Simplicity: Franciscan Wisdom for Today’s World* (Canterbury Press, 2003) p64.

45. Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience: Radical Option*

ECCLESIAL FUTURES: VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

- CONTENTMENT You need to let go of what you think you know, what you've been told, taught, and to some extent experienced thus far in your life if you want to make the most of this debate.
- JIM Okay.
- CONTENTMENT Where were we?
- GENEROSITY Materialism.⁴⁶
- CONTENTMENT Ah, yes. Do you engage with the media much, Jim?
- JIM I guess I watch the news and some TV and social media and stuff.
- CONTENTMENT Try to ignore the media; it tells us we need more. It is arguable that materialism is the single biggest competitor . . . for the hearts and souls of millions in our world today.⁴⁷
- CLARE I assume that's what brought you here in the first place. You want some sort of freedom from the culture in which you live?
- JIM I guess so. It just feels like there might be something more to life.
- SIMPLICITY So what example are you setting?
- JIM In what regard?
- CONTENTMENT Are you content?
- JIM What does that have to do with the emptiness I feel?
- SIMPLICITY Have you not been paying attention? Do you try to fill that emptiness with material goods?

for Life (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) p34.

46. Questionnaire 11 11.09.2019.

47. Craig L. Bloomberg, *Neither Poverty or Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Intervarsity Press, 1999) p132.

- JIM Not really. I try to give away the money I don't need.
- GENEROSITY Good to hear.
- JIM This feels less like a discussion and more like an inquisition by the minute.
- CLARE Sorry, Jim. They like to make the most of the time they have with a guest.
- JIM I'm content with what I have, there's just a niggling feeling that there's something more to life . . . and it sounds like you might be saying that we should be less content if we want to hear the divine, but at the same time we should be content in all circumstances, so which is it?
- CONTENTMENT Content whatever the circumstances, subtle difference. You can be poor and content, wealthy and content, sick and content . . . it's a mindset, a way of being, an ethos.⁴⁸
- JIM Then no, I'm not content. I need to know more about how contentment with material things relates to the emptiness.
- CLARE Having what is necessary to serve the divine to the best of your ability.⁴⁹
- JIM So, it's like when people talk about letting go of the ownership of things?⁵⁰
- CONTENTMENT Having a prophetic attitude to material possessions breaks down barriers in a society based on wealth.⁵¹
- GENEROSITY This applies to material things, but also to knowledge, skills, availability. Are you clinging to

48. Questionnaire 6 07.10.2019.

49. Questionnaire 8 11.09.2019.

50. Questionnaire 5 11.09.2019.

51. Questionnaire 11 11.09.2019.

- these as your own possessions or do you willingly share them?⁵²
- JIM So what's the difference between contentment and simplicity?
- SIMPLICITY Simplicity is a deliberate choice to counteract the kind of consumer culture, consumer lifestyle of the world.⁵³
- JIM So having what we need rather than what we want allows us to live a counter-cultural lifestyle that actually benefits others?
- GENEROSITY That depends what you do with the rest of your income. You can choose a less affluent lifestyle for the benefit of others.⁵⁴
- JIM Like that saying, "living simply that others can simply live"?⁵⁵
- HOSPITALITY That would indeed link it back to poverty, but what about the emptiness this debate started with?
- SIMPLICITY To simplify physically, emotionally, and spiritually gives us time and energy to focus on filling the divine emptiness, thus creating an ever-increasing cycle of finding deeper spiritual peace.
- JIM I think I'm getting it. It isn't about how much you have, it is about how you view what you have;⁵⁶ simplicity is a value that creates space to fill the emptiness with the divine rather than taking part in a material lifestyle.⁵⁷

52. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

53. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

54. Questionnaire 6 07.10.2019.

55. Survey 1 13.10.2019.

56. Survey 4 14.10.2019.

57. Questionnaire 6 07.10.2019.

- SIMPLICITY Well done, Jim. We can live with a poverty that allows for need, not greed.⁵⁸
- JIM But what about the monastic brothers and sisters who have nothing, who choose real poverty?
- SIMPLICITY Some choose poverty but live comfortably; you might say they live simply rather than in poverty, others by virtue of where they live are actually very poor and live in what may be more traditionally described as poverty.⁵⁹
- JIM So how do you define poverty?
- SIMPLICITY A lack of power; the power for example, to have your say and be heard, or to know your rights and demand them; the power to have access to essential services or to share fairly in the world's resources or to live in the security not only of surviving, but also of thriving.⁶⁰
- JIM I'm involved in projects to help those people. Projects addressing domestic poverty: soup kitchens, food banks, credit unions, homeless shelters . . .⁶¹
- SIMPLICITY The key here is that some choose poverty; all are called to live simply.⁶²
- HOSPITALITY And to serve the poor. Like you said, Jim, this is also about the dimension of our relationship to the poor. To those who have nothing not through their choice but because of circumstances, usually beyond their control, which have deprived

58. Questionnaire 8 11.09.2019.

59. Interview 1 11.09.2019.

60. Christian Aid, *Partnership for Change, Executive Summary*, 2012, p3

61. Susan Durber, *Poverty: The Inclusive Church Resource* (Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2014) p66.

62. Questionnaire 11 11.09.2019.

- them of adequate housing, medical care, food, employment, et cetera.⁶³
- JIM May I have some more tea? What do I owe you?
- GENEROSITY Our treat. You see, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etcetera, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures exclude them.⁶⁴
- JIM So, that's how generosity links to simplicity and contentment?
- CLARE You're getting it.
- JIM It's not simple though, is it, at least not to get your head round the changes that need to be made . . .
- CONTENTMENT You know something practical you can try, Jim. Give thanks.
- JIM What, like saying grace before a meal?
- GENEROSITY Well yes, but more than that; be thankful in all circumstances.⁶⁵ Gratefulness builds contentment, contentment lays the foundation for a generous life.⁶⁶ Everything is linked. And sharing, being committed to radical sharing.⁶⁷
- JIM I see; we're back to holding things lightly?

63. Written Interview 23.04.2019.

64. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1958) p81–82.

65. 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

66. Paul Borthwick, *Great Commission Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (IVP Books, 2015) p145.

67. Survey 2 13.10.2019.

- GENEROSITY Everything is linked. I encourage you to have a continuing dialogue between poverty and generosity based on a belief that your possessions are held in trust for the work of the divine.⁶⁸
- JIM I've always thought that to share is more intelligent than to accumulate. But it's so easy to fall into the trap of consumerism. I understand now that "in our option-overload world, we face the daily choice on how to use our money, our time, our gifts, our home and our very lives."⁶⁹
- GENEROSITY Spot on. Try to be concerned more for the generosity that gives all, rather than for the value of poverty in itself.⁷⁰
- JIM Gives all, like time and energy and your home, etc.
- GENEROSITY Everything is linked. Do you have anything to say about that Hospitality?
- HOSPITALITY Certainly. I can add some thoughts. You mentioned home there Jim but let us for a minute define hospitality as being less about place and more about commitment to openness of life to others.⁷¹
- CLARE Hospitality is about both giving and receiving, it's important to be free to receive the hospitality offered by others.⁷²
- HOSPITALITY Linking to what has already been said, does your idea of hospitality allow for identity with the poor?⁷³

68. Survey 7 17.10.2019.

69. Paul Borthwick, *Great Commission Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (IVP Books, 2015) p141.

70. Survey 6 17.10.2019.

71. Questionnaire 7 11.09.2019.

72. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

73. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

ECCLESIAL FUTURES: VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

- GENEROSITY You are here to broaden your perspective, Jim, so when you get home you can continue that process by engaging in class-crossing practice—you may need to engage with those outside of your usual social circles to broaden your perspective.
- SIMPLICITY Remember the horizon of paradox. We all need to strive to create community—a place of love, safety, and growth, yet, at the same time, welcoming the stranger and service to the world outside that community.⁷⁴
- JIM Well, that doesn't sound at all simple.
- GENEROSITY Paradox. For anyone accustomed to social privilege and institutional strength, hospitality involves a dispossession of all that would keep us from loving our neighbours in vulnerability and humility.⁷⁵
- CLARE Spiritual growth takes place as the Spirit sends us across social, cultural, and religious lines.⁷⁶
- HOSPITALITY A practical way of looking at this is to expand your friend base; pursue empathy with the poor by sharing life together.⁷⁷ Counter-cultural service to the poor—be known for hosting a socioeconomically diverse group of friends at your home.⁷⁸

74. Cathy Ross and Colin Smith (eds.), *Missional Conversations: A Dialogue between Theory and Praxis in World Mission* (SCM Press, 2018) p119.

75. Dwight J. Zscheile (ed.), *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2012) pxiv.

76. Dwight J. Zscheile (ed.), *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Eerdmans Publishing, 2012) p9. For example; Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10.

77. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Eremitical Press, 2009).

78. See Paul Borthwick, *Great Commission Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (IVP Books, 2015) p147.

- JIM I know we need to do something about those who are hungry, thirsty, or in need of clothing. Those who are strangers, sick, or in prison. The marginalized and the vulnerable,⁷⁹ it's finding the time, isn't it . . .
- CONTENTMENT Ah, well, that's just about priorities. If you are filling the emptiness with the work of the divine rather than engaging with consumerism, the time will be available.
- GENEROSITY Try this when you get home: the more you give away, the more comes.⁸⁰
- JIM The more what?
- CLARE Time, money, peace, joy, humility, love . . . that's how the economics of the divine economy actually work.⁸¹
- HOSPITALITY Of course, there is another important aspect to hospitality. How we accept or abuse the hospitality of the planet we live on.
- JIM Having a smaller footprint.⁸²
- GENEROSITY Remembering that, of course, this is all linked. It all connects to justice, issues of slavery, environment.⁸³
- JIM Yes! Isn't it obvious that there's more than enough stuff on the planet? We actually don't need it. Shouldn't we stop manufacturing today?⁸⁴

79. See Paul Borthwick, *Great Commission Great Compassion: Following Jesus and Loving the World* (IVP Books, 2015) p58–64

80. Interview 1 11.09.2019.

81. Interview 1 11.09.2019.

82. Survey 8 17.10.2019.

83. Questionnaire 7 11.09.2019.

84. Interview 1 11.09.2019.

ECCLESIAL FUTURES: VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

- CLARE This is the system that's got to change.⁸⁵
- GENEROSITY You can think about paying more for food and goods that have been ethically sourced.⁸⁶
- JIM Which is fine for me, but hardly achievable for those who actually live in poverty.
- HOSPITALITY That's why we need alternative economic models to unbridled growth. Offering ways of living that are ecologically sustainable and which foster human values.⁸⁷
- JIM Okay, so a part of what poverty is about is our witness in a world being eaten up by the economic model of growth and expansion where there are dwindling resources to support that growth?⁸⁸
- CLARE But there's also a more basic call to take care of the environment and the other inhabitants of it. Our life is intimately connected with creation.⁸⁹
- HOSPITALITY Hang on, I'll see if Ecology is here . . . yes, there she is! I'll invite her over.
- CLARE This is Jim.
- ECOLOGY Hey Jim, enjoying your time with this lot?
- JIM Taxing on the old grey cells but yes, learning a lot.
- ECOLOGY So you wish to know more about family relationships within all creation?
- JIM Here to learn.

85. Interview 1 11.09.2019.

86. Questionnaire 6 07.10.2019.

87. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

88. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

89. Franciscan Seculars, "Canticle of the Creatures." <http://franciscanseculars.com/the-canticle-of-the-creatures/>.

- ECOLOGY Birds, fire, and wind are brothers, the moon, stars, and water are sisters and our planet Earth who nourishes us is Mother.⁹⁰
- JIM I've never thought of creation like that.
- ECOLOGY Creation is nature viewed with the Creator in mind; creation is fullness, life, and community. Creation becomes fraternity.⁹¹
- JIM So “creation” is broader than just the environment or ecology?
- ECOLOGY Exactly. We need to think about the redemption of all creation.⁹² Now you'll have to excuse me as I need to get back to a fascinating debate on what role cosmology and triangular numbers play in addressing modern poverty.
- JIM Goodness.
- CONTENTMENT So you just need to explore which element of poverty you feel called to do something about—we can't all do everything.
- JIM How do I know what is an authentic way for me to engage with poverty?
- HOSPITALITY One of the signs that our poverty is authentic will be the readiness of others to confide in us their own experiences of suffering, grief, and loss. If we are evading the mystery of poverty in our own lives we will shut ourselves off from the pain and weakness in the lives of our brothers and sisters.⁹³

90. Franciscan Seculars, “Canticle of the Creatures.” <http://franciscanseculars.com/the-canticle-of-the-creatures/>.

91. Franciscan Seculars, “Canticle of the Creatures.” <http://franciscanseculars.com/the-canticle-of-the-creatures/>.

92. See Clive W. Ayre, “Eco-Salvation: The Redemption of All Creation.” *Worldviews* 14.2/3 (2010) p232–42.

93. Martin L. Smith SSJE, *Living in Hope: A Rule of Life for Today*, (Canterbury Press, 1997) p17.

JIM So it's a process, start somewhere and see if it feels right?

GENEROSITY If you love the poor, you will share their poverty and be poor like them. If you love the poor be often with them. Be glad to see them in your own home or to visit with them in theirs. Be poor when conversing with them and speak to them as their companions do, but be rich in assisting them by sharing some of your more abundant goods with them.⁹⁴

CONTENTMENT On a practical note, resist management processes and models of governance and leadership to support the poor more actively.⁹⁵

JIM How do I do that?

GENEROSITY Being generous and focusing on outward-looking and doing rather than maintenance.⁹⁶ In this way we can mirror the character of the divine to the world. Perhaps we can turn the tide on places of power and hierarchy, where the marginalized do not feel welcome any more.⁹⁷

CLARE Well, it's time for me to go; I'm heading to Café Chastity. Care to join me Jim?

JIM Café what?

CLARE Chastity.

JIM Errrm, sure. Let me just summarize what I'm taking from this. Thank you so much for everything you've shared. Living an alternative lifestyle premised on giving, justice in social

94. Francis de Sales, "Introduction to the Devout Life," *Discipleship Journal* 25 (1985) p33.

95. Questionnaire 1 11.09.2019.

96. Questionnaire 10 11.09.2019.

97. See Cathy Ross & Colin Smith (eds.), *Missional Conversations: A Dialogue between Theory and Praxis in World Mission* (SCM Press, 2018) p123.

relationships, working for fair and equitable sharing with others and the environment⁹⁸ gives people a broad range of ways to engage with poverty that might actually lead to sustainable change.

- CONTENTMENT In a nutshell . . .
- SIMPLICITY It's been a pleasure Jim, you take care, friend.
- HOSPITALITY See you again sometime.
- GENEROSITY Yes, welcome back anytime.
- CLARE Let's go.
- JIM Bye all.

CONCLUSION

This paper has creatively explored the relevance of the monastic vow of poverty for contemporary challenges such as consumerism, materialism, and ecological disaster. The results embedded in this “Franciscan fantasy” narrative demonstrate that the monastic vocation is a call to each and every one of us—not necessarily to follow a call to join a monastic order but to live an alternative lifestyle, to “be in the world but not of it.”⁹⁹ Monastic spiritual practices are “not the exclusive property of religious orders, we just explicitly live them out in a particular way.”¹⁰⁰ The vow of poverty is investigated as living an alternative lifestyle premised on contentment, simplicity, generosity, and hospitality. Practical strategies like thankfulness and expanding ones’ base of friendship become ways to embody Franciscan spirituality today. The result is a creative expression of our individual and corporate call to missional practice which might lead to sustainable change.

98. Questionnaire 10 11.09.2019.

99. John 17:14–16.

100. Written Interview 23.04.2020.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to everyone who filled in a questionnaire or online survey that gave me such a breadth of data to work with, especially the attendees of the 2019 Religious Communities Conference. Also to the interviewees who so openly shared their life experiences. Thanks to my tutors at Church Mission Society, the Brothers and community at Hillfield Friary for the use of their library, and finally, to the editors of this journal for their wisdom and support.