1993

The moral character formation of John Lennon and Thomas Merton: Their lives interpreted using insights from Stanley Hauerwas

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THE MORAL CHARACTER FORMATION OF JOHN LENNON AND THOMAS MERTON:

Their Lives Interpreted Using Insights from
Stanley Hauerwas

by

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B.A. (Phil.) Waterloo, 1990
M. Div. Wilfrid Laurier, 1992

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Theology in Christian Ethics

1993

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ISBN   0-315-90800-9

Canada

A B S T R A C T

I have been concerned to understand the relationship between the formation of human moral character and the Christian community. I have noted that character formation takes place in an increasingly pluralistic world, and that cultures which, some centuries ago, institutionalized Christianity as their established religion are unable to develop a character informed by the Christian narrative tradition. It is my thesis that in order to develop a moral character which will best sustain, and inform, the actions and reactions of individuals in the world, people need to be initiated, and remain within, the framework of the Christian narrative tradition. From this standpoint, individuals would develop a character which will best inform the choices to be made within an increasingly pluralistic society.

I have used the methodology of Stanley Hauerwas who advocates the effectiveness of the particularity of the Christian narrative in the formation of character. As he uses biography to illustrate his points, I have looked at the lives of two persons who were educated within a society, and raised in families, which purported to be Christian. It is my conclusion that neither individual received sufficient nurture within the Christian tradition to lead them, in their early years, to make choices informed by the traditions of a community committed to a life exemplified by Christ.

I began my paper by wondering how the character of an individual could manifest so little of the life of Christ when that individual had received some Christian nurture as a child. I have come to the conclusion that it is the life and faith of the community which make the difference. If the community reflects the nominalized form of institutionalized Christianity then it is unable to give an adequate rendition of the metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative which would inform the development of character.

One of the individuals I have looked at began to live within the particularity of the Christian community in his late twenties. As a Christian, his life became reshaped and oriented towards a life exemplified by Christ. I have noted that this person's later life does in fact support the thesis. In preparing this paper I have learnt to critique societies where Christianity has become institutionalized and not to assume that persons living in such a society have developed characters nurtured in the particularity of the Christian tradition. My former expansive view of Christian societies has become limited to encompass only those communities which manifest Christ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

T A B L E   O F   C O N T E N T S

ABBREVIATIONS

Part I of this paper discusses Stanley Hauerwas' ideas on the formation of character and includes many references to his various essays on the subject. Because of the frequency of notations required to fully document Hauerwas' methodology, I have chosen to note the publication title and page number within the body of the text. The abbreviations for these titles are listed below.

AC	–	*After Christendom*
AN	–	*Against the Nations*
CC	–	*Community of Character*
CCL	–	*Character and The Christian Life*
CET	–	*Christian Existence Today*
PK	–	*The Peaceable Kingdom*
RA	–	*Resident Aliens*
VV	–	*Vision and Virtue*

Full publication details are included in the Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

Since being in Canada I have become increasingly aware that the formation of the character of most individuals takes place outside a Christian community. I have noted that character formation occurs within a society which advocates a plurality of value systems with an attendant multiplicity of ethical options from which to choose (VV, 52-55). My own background had led me to suppose that most persons in Britain had their individual characters formed within a Christian narrative framework. I had no reason to think otherwise. My familial, educational, and social influences drew on the metaphors and stories contained within the Christian narrative. In subsequent years I was able to draw on these resources to inform the choices I made with regard to my own children, my work experience, and my interactions with other people and other ethical systems.

During the last ten years in Canada I have experienced the disquieting pressure by institutions within society to separate my faith life from my cultural life. This has led me to consider that my own life in Britain had been somewhat sheltered and limited. Increasingly, I became aware of the need to explore the development of character sustained by the particularity of the contemporary Christian community and compare that with the formation of character in a culture which some centuries ago institutionalized Christianity as its established religion.

In recent years the issues of character and virtue have been proposed as being more helpful to understanding the formation of individuals. Contemporary ethicists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Gilbert Meilaender in particular, have addressed the idea of moral development from the perspective of character and virtue.[1] Another particularly influential ethicist is Stanley Hauerwas, who has written extensively on the place of narrative in the formation of character and virtue. Hauerwas argues that the specificity of the Christian narrative, and the metaphors and stories contained within that narrative, aim to shape the development of human character in such a way that individual choices will be informed by commitment to Christ, and reference to the narrative tradition of the Christian community (CCL, 2). He notes that an ethic is formed within the parameters of prevalent social conditions. Where those social conditions aim towards increased individualism within a pluralistic worldview, human beings are increasingly forced to shape their lives by choosing between alternate ethical systems (VV, 48).

It is the aim of this paper to illustrate Hauerwas' proposition that, in order to develop a moral character which will best sustain and inform the actions and reactions of individuals in the world, people need to be initiated in, and remain within, a community which bases its life on the Christian narrative tradition. Hauerwas has proposed that the character of individuals is best formed within a community which has, as

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1. Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd Ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

its base, the metaphors and stories centred on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He contends that Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels of the early Christian church, is the Jesus who came to transform human beings into worthy members of a community of disciples, and whose life and teaching are to be reflected in the lives of the persons making up the Christian community (PK, 73). The heritage of a Christian community informs individual action both within that Christian community, and outside that community as the Christian individual interacts with the rest of society. From such a foundation, individuals would develop the character which will best inform the choices to be made within the plurality of value systems apparent in a twentieth century world. In Hauerwas' view the individual living the moral life outlined in the metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative tradition will challenge the social conditioning of his or her time, becoming transformed and striving to bring the love and peace exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ to the world (PK, 73). To this end I will look at the lives of two persons who were educated within a society, and raised in families, which purported to be Christian, and compare the development of their characters with Hauerwas' comments on the development of a moral character informed by the traditions of a community of individuals committed to a life exemplified by Christ.

Hauerwas' methodology centres on the idea of narrative and he explicates the notion of 'having character' in a way that is continually evolving in a narrative tradition. He uses biography to illustrate the relationship between the narrative of an individual life, the narrative of

the Christian community, and the formation of character within those narratives.[2] I intend to use the biographies and autobiographies of two individuals who represent the social mileau of their time, whose lives have influenced a significant number of persons within society, and about whom much has been written, to narrate the circumstances of their respective lives and highlight the familial and social influences which helped to form their individual characters. In order to pursue the thesis indicated above I will test Hauerwas' theory by comparing the lives of these two individuals and the development of their respective characters with Hauerwas' proposition of the development of a character formed and sustained within a community which has the traditional Christian narrative as its foundation. This will involve looking at the familial, educational, and cultural influences on the character formation of these individuals, as well as how the characters of these persons informed the choices made between conflicting ethical options.

The two men I have chosen to illustrate Hauerwas' methodology are John Lennon and Thomas Merton. I have specifically chosen these two individuals because I have been confronted by questions about their particular visions of life and their critique of society. Lennon and Merton have challenged the dominant traditions of their time in order to find their own identity and give a sense of coherence and meaning to

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2. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1988). See essays: "Hope Faces Power: Thomas More and the King of England", 199-219; "A Tale of Two Stories: On Being a Christian and a Texan", 25-45.

their perception of the world. I became acquainted with John Lennon
during the 1960's while I lived in Britain, but as I could not be counted
as one of his ardent followers, I lost interest in him when he moved to
America in 1971. When I emigrated to Canada in 1982, I was surprised by
Lennon's continued influence and wondered how his critique of society
and his search for identity could emanate from the Christian narrative
tradition.

The writings of Thomas Merton were presented to me about four
years ago with a cursory look at *The Wisdom of the Desert*.[3] Since that
time, a number of people have talked effusively about Merton and his
critique of society, and have recommended that I undertake a more
detailed study. Until researching for this paper my knowledge of
Merton's life and writing remained limited, and I was under the
impression that his character had been continuously nurtured in the
narrative tradition of the Christian community. I knew that both Lennon
and Merton had received some education in Britain which had included
some instruction about the narrative of the Christian tradition. I thought
that this instruction was likely to have influenced their early character
formation. I knew also that John Lennon had come to renounce
Christianity in favour of a personal ethic, and that Thomas Merton had
become influential as a Christian monk and writer. I decided to explore
the influences which led both Thomas Merton and John Lennon to form
characters which would both engage and challenge the dominant

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3. *Sayings from the Desert Fathers of the Fourth Century*, Thomas Merton,
trans. (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1960).

traditions of society to forge for themselves a sense of meaning. I
decided to use Hauerwas' own method to explore the influences education,
family, and society had on their character development, subsequent
choices, and search for meaning in life.

In Part I of this paper I will explore Hauerwas' exposition on
character formation within a community which is centred on the
metaphors and stories contained within the Christian narrative, and how
it is that a character so formed interacts with the rest of society.
Taking Hauerwas' narrative methodology as a foundation I will then
outline the lives of John Lennon and Thomas Merton.

The first of these individuals, John Lennon, is the subject of
Part II. I will explore the educational, familial, and social influences on
his early character development. I will also look at how his character,
and the choices he made in regard to the narrative options available to
him, informed his quest for peace and the vision of unity he presented to
the world in the words of his song "Imagine".

In Part III I will look at the life of Thomas Merton – a person
renowned for his Christian writing. Thomas Merton is an individual who
converted to Christianity in his late twenties, and withdrew from the
individualistic pressures of the mid-twentieth century world into a
cenobitic Trappist monastery. He, like Lennon, had been initiated into
the Christian narrative during childhood and youth by the British
educational system and family influence, but rejected the metaphors and

stories contained within that narrative to search for his own sense of meaning and identity. This he found in his quest for sainthood and union with God, and ultimately saw that he could contribute to the world by challenging that world with a vision of peace informed by that union.

In Part IV I intend to compare the lives of Merton and Lennon with Hauerwas' narrative methodology, and contrast the character development of Lennon and Merton with a character informed by, and with ongoing commitment to, the metaphors and stories contained within the Christian narrative. In examining the lives and visions of John Lennon and Thomas Merton, their life experiences will be explicated in order to show that the choices made throughout their lives did, in fact, form and shape their individual characters, but that these choices led both men to search for a sense of meaning. John Lennon, and Thomas Merton during his early years, were unable to draw on the resources of the Christian narrative tradition to form ethical decisions based on commitment to the metaphors and stories surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his later years, Thomas Merton committed himself to a Christian community which was able to reshape his character and inform the choices he made throughout the remainder of his life. I will argue, with Hauerwas, that commitment to a community which has as its base the metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative tradition, will shape individual character in such a way that will best inform, on an ongoing basis, the choices to be made amidst an increasingly pluralistic society.

P A R T   I

THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER - Stanley Hauerwas

Stanley Hauerwas has been noted as "the most significant and influential exponent of narrative among contemporary Christian ethicists".[1] In his books and essays, Hauerwas attempts to bring the notion of character and virtue to a place of prominence in discussions about ethics, and character and narrative emerge as the central themes of his perspective on Christian ethics.[2] Hauerwas argues that discussions about character are significant to Christian ethics and are related to the idea of continuing determination of the self necessary for moral growth (CCL, 8). He distinguishes between "character traits" and "having character," saying that a "character trait usually refers to a distinctive manner of carrying out certain activities... while the notion of 'having character'..." has to do with moral strength. Hauerwas suggests that "people often speak of integrity of character, thereby closely identifying integrity and consistency with the meaning of having character." In his view the idea of 'having character' "indicates an inclusive and unitary concept" and denotes "a more basic moral determination of the self" (CCL, 12-15), and it is this definition of character which he uses throughout his work.

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1. Paul Nelson, *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Enquiry* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), 109.

2. Ibid., 111.

Hauerwas suggests that character is but a reminder that it is the self which is the subject of growth. The Christian seeks to develop a character which "trains the self to be sufficient to negotiate existence without illusion or deception" (CC, 132). Hauerwas further defines the self as that which is best understood as a personal narrative set within a community "narrative that will provide the skills appropriate to the conflicting loyalties and roles we necessarily confront in our existence" (CC, 144).

In this part I will look at Stanley Hauerwas' theory of character formation, and how that character is shaped and reshaped in conjunction with the prevalent mores of society. In particular, Hauerwas argues that the concept of character helps to elucidate the moral development required of individuals who are faithful to the Christian story (CC, 132). I will outline Hauerwas' argument that in order to develop the character which will best inform the choices to be made in a pluralistic society, individuals need to be conversant with, and shaped by, the metaphors and stories contained within the Christian narrative.

An individual's life story cannot be detached from the stories of those communities within which an individual has interacted. In a pluralistic world, there are many narratives, and roles within those narratives, from which an individual makes choices, and which in turn develop that person's character. Morality is implicit in many organizations - economic, educational, legal and recreational - and many communities founded on religious tenets also initiate their young members

into specific beliefs and practices. The ideology of individual communities is able to form the character of human beings in so far as that ideology initiates and indoctrinates its members with the language, mores, and rituals pertinent to a particular community's heritage. The ideology further shapes the character of individuals as they act, and choose to act, within the boundaries of that particular heritage.

The individual community narratives within society are founded upon a diversity of ethical structures. In a world with such a plurality of narratives it can be argued that individuals are left with such a broad array of resources that it is impossible for them to be able to choose a consistent ethic. All human beings are faced with making choices from a multiplicity of options. Moral action is shaped by habitual consistency developed over time which guides an individual as he or she deals with the conflicts, obligations, and contradictions he or she meets in the world.[3]

Hauerwas argues that a lack of common history makes it difficult for individuals to claim their lives as their own (CC, 125). This absence of commonality gives rise to conflict and a search for a sense of security. Individuals use their life experience and resources to establish a sense of moral coherence amidst conflicting relationships and contesting pluralistic ethical systems. "Conscience" says Hauerwas, "becomes the ultimate authority", in turn shaping and sustaining the identity and

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3. See also James Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 267.

integrity of the individual (CC, 126). In order for an individual to retain a sense of integrity, loyalty to the community is denied or takes second place, and in the process individual and community identity and self-esteem become fractured and self-absorbing (CC, 127).

The unfolding of particular narratives, or stories, helps place an individual in relation to moral continuity and discontinuity. The plurality of communities with diverse moral codes serves to heighten the role of choice in individual action. Consequently the actions of individuals are intelligible only when set in their narrative context (CCL, xx-xxi). Without contextual setting the individual acts are seen to be unassociated and arbitrary, and the agent of such an act is often considered to be of an unstable, or weak character.

Hauerwas argues that in contemporary society the term "character", tends to suggest a heroic concept of the moral life; ". . . thus it is people . . . who go their own way, who are often seen as persons of character" (CCL, xxii). Moral discontinuity in character formation is also a product of choosing between community narratives (CCL, xxi). The 'moral' hero may also be one who negates virtue and responsibility as it is understood in a particular community narrative, and opts for a competing community narrative replete with its own notion of virtue. All individuals face a multiplicity of choices, considerations, conflicts, desires, and consequences, as well as a diversity of moral principles from which to make those choices.

Human life is shaped by conscious enactment within the environment (CCL, 18-19), and Hauerwas is concerned to show how an individual develops a moral character which derives its sense of meaning and unity from the metaphors and stories contained within the Christian narrative tradition. It is almost impossible for an individual to travel through life without confronting an ethic of one sort or another, and it is also unlikely that a human being can avoid becoming an agent of choice with regard to the diversity of moralistic claims made upon him or her. The educational process generates the capacity for judgement between vying principles and the knowledge of how to apply these judgements in particular situations, and the character of an individual is shaped in the response he or she makes to a particular position (VV, 55-56).

Hauerwas defines character as "the qualification of man's self-agency through his beliefs, intentions, and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being" (CCL, 11).[4] Each character or identity is individual and distinct from another human being's character or identity. The character of human beings is considered to be developing, or evolving, while each individual contemplates the variety of options available to him or her. The beliefs, intentions, and actions, as well as the choices an individual makes regarding those beliefs, intentions, and actions, serve to forge the character or identity of that individual.

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4. Inclusive language not used

In discussing the content of character Hauerwas shows that each individual human being has a set of intentions and descriptions which are prioritized and integrated into a general orientation for one's life, and this character orients and directs one's actions in life (VV, 58; CCL, 114-115). As intentions and descriptions change and new possibilities are discovered, an individual is constantly reappraising and redefining his or her orientation (CCL, 113). This continuous reappraisal and redefinition is incorporated into an individual's character, which can be considered as continually evolving.

Hauerwas notes that even passive compliance and response to events beyond individual control serve to form character (CCL, 18-19; 116-117). There may be traditions within a community which have become entrenched and are considered unchangeable, therefore requiring nothing more than a passive acknowledgement. In these instances the tradition itself serves to form the boundary which, in turn, forms character. Hauerwas argues that a positive ethic of character forces one to realize the consequences of one's actions, even where those actions are acquiescent to a tradition which requires little or no input or comment. He argues that character should be formed by individual effort to determine itself beyond cultural conditioning rather than by passive assent (CCL, 17-18) and that the passive character is still a unique entity even though it tends to be shadowed by a more active and creative character (CCL, 117). This creative character invariably exceeds society's

normal expectations (VV, 62),[5] and where such a character is seen as challenging tradition it is often labelled as non-conformist and disruptive.[6]

It can be seen that it is the ability to form choices which determines the capacity to form human character. Character then, is a movable entity – capable of regression and development, shaping and pruning. Hauerwas suggests that though character is formed by choosing from a range of descriptions available in the public arena, it is essentially a private entity; that is, individuals have the capacity to choose, prioritize, and act on one option rather than another (VV, 60). Hauerwas argues that the human capacity for self determination is a very important aspect in the formation of character, and is often overlooked as individual actions generally take place in relation to social institutions and practices (CCL, 96). Self-determination is dependent upon the ability to focus one's attention, and act, on the specific rather than the array of available options (VV, 58). Hauerwas suggests that an individual's character is largely the product of this intentional ability, and that a character is developed by, and in conjunction with, the constant

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5. Sidney Hook, *Philosophy and Public Policy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 154, further defines the creative character. Such an individual has often been described as a spokesperson, an activist, or a source of propaganda or doctrine. He or she is recognized as a power, a leader, a source of identity and authority, and often becomes a model of personal conduct.

6. Throughout history there have been individuals who have been considered gifted, with an ability to comprehend reality in a certain way. These individuals have developed a character which has striven for change, and challenged society to review its fundamental conceptions about individual and corporate presence in the world.

interaction between the perceived mores of a society and how the individual chooses to act in relation to those mores (VV, 58).

Each human person is thus able to become an autonomous centre of self-determined activity, though Hauerwas acknowledges that such autonomous choices and actions are 'destined', and the possibilities for choice are not unlimited (VV, 55-56). Choice of activity is only possible from the range of choices available within one's culture and society (CCL, 18), and as such, human beings shape their own destiny in accordance with their own character, formed from making informed choices within their own context (VV, 56). Hauerwas argues that the limitation of choices is due to the fact that individuals are born into a particular time and place with its dominant traditions and narratives (VV, 56). Though extraordinary capabilities may manifest in particular individuals, these same capabilities are rooted in the institutions, such as family, language, religion, law, and art, which have contributed to the formation of an individual's character. The significance of individual actions can only be discerned in relation to a culture and, as such, can only be understood when considered in that particular frame of reference.[7] Obviously the range of options available for activity are those available throughout society, but Hauerwas recommends that the most truthful options available for individuals to consider are those formulated from within the Christian tradition.

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7. Sidney Hook, *The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1943), 65.

Self-determination has a significant impact on character
formation and moral growth in relation to Christian ethical behaviour.
The self-determined act is a statement about the individual's present
reality and future aspirations. Actions are premised on the emergence of
historical trends and are relevant to a present time. These same actions
also declare the possibility of a future state,[8] where that future state is
perceived as attainable in the present. Actions shape particular
situations as well as form the character of an individual to respond in a
particular way to future situations (VV, 49). By challenging the present
the future can be reshaped rather than be accepted unconditionally.
Hauerwas argues that character is morally significant because, if
rightfully formed, it can determine future possibilities and strive to bring
them about (VV, 64). Character provides the transition from the past to
the future. In Hauerwas' view, character is that which gives individual
lives moral orientation by directing towards certain activities. He argues
that the idea of character provides a way of explicating the Christian
life, and that individuals formed within a Christian community determine
their choice of action guided by the metaphors and stories contained
within a Christian narrative (VV, 66-67).

Hauerwas argues that the current emphasis on the self-
creating individual reflects contemporary society. Liberal society, in
Hauerwas' view, seems to advocate the moral ideal of the autonomous

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8. Ibid., 66.

(CCL, 116)[9] self-sufficient individual. The social conditions prevalent in society shape the moral discourse of the time, and terms like freedom and responsibility (CCL, 6-7)[10] have become integral to the meaning of human beings as self-creating (VV, 48). Individuals are encouraged to become free, or autonomous, choosing between the many alternatives presented, and in so doing, creating their own patterns of life.

Freedom, or the autonomy of the self, Hauerwas suggests, should be considered as a task to be undertaken rather than as a status to be assumed. Freedom refers to the capacity of being able to choose one option over another, and is the successful embodiment of the truth contained in the chosen options. Hauerwas considers freedom as genuine virtue, a determination of the self, serving to protect an individual from making rash decisions without responsible reflection. The freedom to choose between possible alternatives is possible only to the extent that individuals are shaped by their particular narratives, and it is only from within a particular narrative that purposeful free, or autonomous, acts can be effected. Hauerwas believes that for a narrative to be able to support truthful responsible action, the narrative itself has to contain truth (VV, 65).

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9. By 'autonomous' Hauerwas means without dependence upon other persons or past history.

10. Hauerwas notes that the emphasis on individual responsibility recognizes that individuals are often forced into making decisions based on the contingencies of the human situation.

Hauerwas argues that as the character of an individual is formed in freedom, it is formed in relation to the unique circumstances of each person's life. Character is formed by the narrative tradition within which an individual interacts, and it is this narrative tradition which informs an individual's choice of action. In the case of Christianity it is the stories concerning the life of Jesus Christ which best inform, thereby determining, an individual's course of action. From a Christian perspective, freedom, or autonomy, is dependent upon initiation into, and response to, the Christian narrative. A community which has a clear sense of identity, and is able to mobilize individuals within that community, will encourage its members to forge for themselves an autonomous place within the boundaries of that community, while at the same time urging them to interact 'truthfully' with those outside the community (PK, 37-46).

The centrality of narrative, and the importance of the methodology of the Christian community, Hauerwas suggests, are the necessary foundation for the formation of a moral character. In particular, Christians have emphasized the notion of spiritual growth, and implicit in this term is the idea of moral development through the formation of character (CC, 130). It is the aim of Christian communities to encourage their members to interact within their distinctive faith story. The individual self making judgements from within the Christian community has been shaped by that faith story. The development of character emanates from the variety of roles and stories contained within the Christian story, and interchange within these roles and stories

develops an individual self with a character which is in constant
conversation with truthful existence.

Hauerwas suggests that it is the metaphors of the Christian
narrative which best inform character. It is within such a truth-filled
community that the virtues of hope and patience, necessary to venture
into the ethical life, can develop (CC, 127). In order to claim life, argues
Hauerwas, an individual needs hope and patience to form a history
sufficient to be a self. To support his hypothesis Hauerwas argues for a
community founded on a Jewish/Christian heritage which has stressed the
importance of these virtues for an existence bounded by a good and
faithful God. Though Hauerwas does acknowledge that people do manage
to live quite decently without the notion of God and community, he
wonders whether these people are able to find the social and personal
resources to sustain an existence which is capable of withstanding the
diversity of social structures within the plurality of modern existence,
and the often ambiguous nature of ethical life (CC, 128). Hauerwas
believes that in order to sustain a self capable of existence within a
pluralistic society, hope and patience are requisites. These virtues, and
the capacity to be virtuous, depend on the existence of communities with
a heritage which bespeaks the importance of these virtues in character
formation (CCL, 116). The Christian story provides the foundation for the
virtues of hope and patience; and through these one is thus able to trust
that the plurality abounding in the world reflects the wealth in God's
creation (CCL, 128).

Hauerwas suggests that hope is considered to be part of the distinctiveness of the Christian individual (CC, 128).[11] It is displayed towards other Christians and to other people in the world. Hope expresses confidence that a future can be shaped by new possibilities and that these possibilities have the potential of being realized.[12] A readiness to respond and act in all situations calls for a hope based on faith in God's creation and a willingness to engage both with other individuals in their own communities and with individuals who are part of other narrative traditions throughout society.

Hauerwas recommends that individual character is best developed in a truthful narrative, that of the Christian story, which is capable of forming and reforming a purposeful community in which to counter the cynicism developed to deal with moral pluralism (CC, 127). He suggests that the power to choose between alternate options is derived from the narrative, and that a community which has a clear sense of identity, will encourage its members to interact with those outside the community (PK, 43). The moral values inherent in such a community are inseparable from the faith individuals within that community profess. The intent of formation through the Christian narrative is to lead individuals towards moral action which is consistent with loyalty to Jesus Christ.[13]

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11. Hauerwas recognizes that the virtues of hope and patience are concepts which are used extensively in non-Christian accounts of the moral life. He suggests that it is Christians and Jews who have stressed the importance of these virtues.

12. James Gustafson, *Moral Life*, 249.

13. Ibid., 257.

The visions, stories, and metaphors, contained within the Christian story and focused upon the life of Jesus Christ as recounted in the Gospels and the Pauline tradition, serve to form moral character. These metaphors and stories illumine virtuous character and inform how individuals should attend to others, the self, and the world. Hauerwas believes that the moral content of the Christian metaphors and stories is prescribed as necessary if one is to live one's life in a morally appropriate way.

Hauerwas acknowledges that the moral life proposed within a Christian community is necessarily particular, and as such, has the characteristic of qualification when considered amongst the plurality of contesting value systems (PK, 17). As coherent life for the Christian is ordered around the dominant metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative tradition, Hauerwas argues that it is crucial to allow these metaphors to inform how one acts in relation to the various demands placed upon individual life. In so doing, Christians exhibit an orientation to life that is intentional and coherent, and the stories they tell give significance to individual character.

The Christian discourse, Hauerwas contends, is both formative and practical, manifesting itself in the skills perpetuated by human beings in their efforts to live the moral life. He argues that the moral life is evident in how the individual is trained to see the world. The Christian perceives life as a gift, and freedom to live that life as increasing dependence on God (CC, 130-131). Further the Christian is

trained to embody the Christian beliefs and practices which direct the individual's perception of a pluralistic world towards actions which are based upon the moral life exemplified by Christ.[14] The Christian emphasis on love and humility is integral to the Christian life and to the formation of a moral character within the Christian narrative framework (VV, 41).[15] It is in living out the Christian narrative story that individuals can come to see themselves in relation to the world. Hauerwas suggests that the Christian moral life requires a radical transformation and continued moral development only accessible to an individual through conversion. Christians are called to a new way of life, leaving behind them the inadequacies of their past (CC, 131). In Hauerwas' view the individual living the moral life outlined in the metaphors and stories contained within Christianity will strive to bring the love and peace exemplified by the life of Christ to the world (PK, 76).

Within the social reality of a pluralistic world paradigms of meaning arise enabling moral experiences to become widely shared and deeply influential in the formation of character.[16] Hauerwas has contended that the development of character depends on a particularly strong claim and commitment to the historical nature of human existence. He suggests that too many histories, and participation in too many

14. William K. Frankena, "Conversations of Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 3. September 1975, 52.

15. See also Gene Outka, "Character, Vision and Narrative," *Religious Studies Review* 6/2, April 1980, 114.

16. Howard L. Harrod, *The Human Center: Moral Agency in the Social World* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 137-140.

communities, each with its own account of morality, have intensified conflict and a rejection of community specific mores (CC, 125-126). It is not surprising, therefore, that persons committed to, and striving for, change in society include both those who count on and those who count out Christianity in relation to their expectations. There may be as many who see religious institutions as integral to their hopes for the human community as those who see them perpetuating a future that will repeat the past.[17] Christianity offers one distinctive morality amongst a plurality of equally distinctive moral claims, from which individuals choose and shape their characters.

Hauerwas has stressed that Christian presence in a society which is essentially violent would necessarily involve confrontation with the inconsistencies and discrepancies within the world. He challenges the implications of the cultural admonition to forge a peaceful and unified world on the basis that such a peace is often coercive and destructive. The Christian narrative, in advocating peace and unity, love and harmony, invokes the members of a Christian community to challenge the complicity within society (PK, 30) Hauerwas argues that it is only from the standpoint of truth that such a vision of peace can be illuminated, and that the Christian community is best placed to inform the character of its members in such a way that will encourage an eschatological ideal of peace.

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17. Paul G. King, Kent Maynard, David O. Woodyard. *Risking Liberation: Middle Class Powerlessness and Social Heroism* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1988), 63.

Hauerwas has suggested that individuals living out the eschatological ideal of peace express a fundamental life orientation which strives for unity and integrity in one's life and in the world. This struggle for integrity and unity may involve actions which seem to some to be antagonistic, disruptive, and subversive. On the other hand, these same actions may be those which are highly acclaimed as heroic, positive, and momentous (CC, 114). In the succeeding pages I will look at the lives of two persons who, though raised in communities which purported to be essentially Christian, have struggled with the implications of being Christian. These two men, John Lennon and Thomas Merton, have developed characters which have led them both to acquiesce to and to challenge the dominant traditions of their communities. They have been seen by many as anti-Christian, subversive, and disruptive; while at the same time they are considered as heroic, with a point of view which challenges complicit action in a system which they consider has lost sight of the truth. I will set out the narrative of their lives in a way which will highlight the significant cultural, familial, and educational influences on the formation of their respective characters. I will also indicate how their developing characters informed the choices these two men made throughout their lives.

P A R T   II

JOHN LENNON - His life and Vision

At this point in the paper I will explore the life of John Lennon, his formative years, and the development of his character within a tradition which purported to be Christian. I will show through the narrative of Lennon's life that the plurality of contemporary society led him to perceiv' a sense of meaninglessness and nihilism. The nominal Christian instruction Lennon received during his early childhood was insufficient to develop a moral character which would inform the choices he made throughout his life. In his quest for coherence in his life he addressed not only his own need, but also a common search for meaning in a pluralistic culture, as well as a common need to identify a unifying source of transcendence which would inform character and lead towards a vision of love and peace throughout the world.

John Lennon embodied and articulated the essence of his culture, and his life experiences within that culture informed his perception of that culture. He was a man of particular insights who used his talents to challenge the dominant structures of society and to create a lifestyle for himself which was to earn him fame and fortune. He explored the stories and metaphors contained within the narratives of alternate value systems and rejected those which did not fit with his

personal vision. These narratives and the choices he made regarding these narratives formed his character and informed the vision he addressed to the world in the words of his song "Imagine". John Lennon called for a unified world – a world in which there was peace and love – and he actively sought this reality for himself and for others. The elements of Lennon's life add up to a narrative which reflects his struggle with fame, artistic representation and commitment to his art form, responsibility, world politics, his personal life, and finally his death.[1] The years since his death have brought memorials, pilgrimages, vigils, memorabilia, tabloid journalism, books, recordings, music videos, and films.[2] John Lennon dead has brought as much publicity as John Lennon alive.

John was born in Liverpool in October 1940. His father, Fred, a merchant seaman, was often away and Julia, John's mother, took advantage of her husband's long absences and flirted audaciously with other men. On one occasion Fred returned to find Julia pregnant. A half-sister to John, Victoria, was given to the Salvation Army at birth and later adopted.[3] Finally, Julia left Fred for another man and John was given the option of living with his mother or father. He chose

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1. John Lennon was killed by an assassin in December, 1980.

2. Wayne Hampton, *Guerrilla Minstrels* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 4.

3. Albert Goldman, *The Lives of John Lennon* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1988), 29-32.

initially to live with his father, but ran after his mother as she walked away.[4]

The unsettled circumstances of his family life, with the long absences of his father, and the flirting, drinking, and romantic inclinations of his mother, prompted John to take his vengeance on other, particularly younger, children. John began his education at Mosspits Infant's School at five years old and was considered to be a difficult child. He was expelled five months later for misbehaviour.[5] It was at this time that Julia gave the five and half year old John to her sister, Mimi, who with her husband George provided John witha home in a middle-class suburb populated with lawyers and doctors. George, a weak and passive man,[6] became a father to John. He taught John to read, to paint in watercolours, and bought him his first mouth organ. He died when John was fourteen.

Mimi hoped discipline, routine, seclusion, and quiet would stabilize the emotionally disturbed young boy she had rescued from his mother. Mimi set about acculturating John to a middle class role. He was to forget his working class origins and take on reading, writing, and art, which were activities commended to higher learning. The Just William stories by Richmal Crompton about the misdemeanours of an affluent

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4. Ibid., 35.

5. Ibid., 33.

6. Ibid., 55.

upper middle class boy were considered good reading,[7] whereas cinema
and television were forbidden. John Lennon was reared in a relentlessly
improving cultural atmosphere, with a treasured library card and a
cultured accent. He was supposed to become the first in the family to
achieve professional distinction. Throughout his most formative years
John was to learn that his middle class status was a false acquisition and
that his family belonged to the unacceptable working class.[8]

John's character was further formed by his maternal great
grandmother.[9] She was a Welsh puritanical Methodist who had belonged
to a cultic chapel known for its zeal and stringency. A stickler for rules
and observance of the sabbath, she was known to instil the fear of God
in her family. Her character was passed on to her granddaughters,
especially to Mimi, who then transmitted the impression of the
grandmother's character to their children. John's religious beliefs were
directly inherited from his great grandmother, who was sustained by an
absolute certainty that right and wrong are determined by unquestioning
belief in a creed.[10]

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7. The *Just William* stories were first published in Britain in 1931 by
Wyman & Sons.

8. Goldman, *Lives*, 40.

9. Ibid., 42. Grandmother Mary Elizabeth looked after the household of
her daughter (John's grandmother) with "Hebraic strictness", and passed
on her formidable Welsh puritanical character to her grandchildren.
Though this woman died eight years before John was born her temperament
was passed on to him through her grandchildren.

10. Ibid., 42.

John resumed his education at Dovedale Primary School, where says John, he learned to fight and tell dirty jokes. He joined a gang who went in for shoplifting, putting firecrackers in letterboxes, blowing up lampposts, and assaulting girls. John thought that he was not liked by the masters or other boys' parents, who considered John to be a troublemaker and a bad influence.[11] At kindergarten John believed himself to be psychic, intuitive, or poetic, seeing things in an hallucinatory way. He realized he was different from everyone else and he labelled himself as either crazy or else a genius.[12] By the time John was eight or nine years old, he had decided that he was a genius,[13] and that he was going to be a millionaire either by legitimate or crooked means.

In 1952 John went to Quarry Bank Grammar School,[14] a first rate educational institution closely modelled on the British public school

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11. Miles., comp. *John Lennon In His Own Words* (New York: Quick Fox, 1981), 9 and 23.

12. Ibid., 10.

13. Ibid., 14.

14. Mike Evans, "The Arty Teddy Boy," in *The Lennon Companion: Twenty Five Years of Comment*, ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (New York: Schirmer Books, 1987), 15. Entrance by merit into Grammar schools at the age of eleven distinguished between children who were considered capable of academic achievement and career potential and those who were not. Secondary schools represented the mainstream proletariat. The secondary schools tended to produce students who were non-literary, anti-art, and interested in a working-class style of music centred on the burgeoning rock and roll groups of the fifties and sixties. Grammar School students in contrast, were encouraged to be artistic and literary, with a deference to etiquette. These students identified more readily with styles of music which included jazz, folk, and skiffle.

system, with a particular strength in the humanities. John Lennon did not study willingly. He was extremely hostile and defensive, adopting lying as a way of dealing with the people he met there. He thought that the teachers were stupid and that they ought to have recognized his genius by that time. His aunt, who threw most of his poems and drawings out, was the object of much personal attack. John believed that she should have treated him like the genius that he was and that he should have been sent to art school to be trained.[15]

John Lennon felt isolated as a child and took solace in the writings of Oscar Wilde, Dylan Thomas, H. Rider Haggard, and the paintings of Van Gogh. He longed to be accepted and understood. He read and looked at anything which his aunt described as being the work of persons who had suffered because of their particular visions. John saw that life as a genius was lonely and that such persons were tortured by society for trying to express their inner selves. He was influenced greatly by surrealism - seeing in it a co-ordinated sense of reality which made sense out of his own youthful hallucinations. Some of his teachers encouraged his artistic temperament but, on the whole, John argued that his school days were spent mostly rebelling against the attempts to train him for a medical or teaching profession.[16]

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15. Miles, *Words*, 14.

16. Ibid., 14.

John hated to make plans for the future. He drifted through Grammar school taking nine 'O' levels which he failed through lack of studying. After which, with the aid of the headmaster's letter of introduction stating that John's recent failure did not reflect his real ability, a hastily put together portfolio, and his Aunt's meagre savings, he then went on to the Liverpool College of Art to study commercial art.[17] By the end of the first year John Lennon was known as the most disruptive student at the college. He spent most of his time concerned with music and very little of the five years actually at school. Eventually he was told to leave.[18]

Julia began developing a relationship with her son during his teenage years. She taught John some banjo chord techniques when he was fifteen and bought him his first guitar.[19] When John Lennon was seventeen Julia was killed by a policeman in a car accident while standing waiting for a bus. After her death John continued to explore his musical abilities and lived his identity through the music he created. He formed a group which played in Liverpool and Hamburg. Though some of the original members changed and the name of the group changed from the Quarrymen to the Beatles, the music was to become a familiar sound during the 1960's. John Lennon thought ballet, and folk songs and their singers to be boring, middle-class, and minority interests kept alive by

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17. Goldman, *Lives*, 72.

18. Miles, *Words*, 19.

19. Ibid., 17.

minority groups. Lennon began taking drugs at seventeen and thought

that he needed the drugs to survive. As his drinking and drug-taking

increased, his use of language became increasingly profane and his

manners devoid of social grace. His first book, *In His Own Write*,

published in March 1964 and created in the style of Lewis Carroll's *Alice*

in Wonderland and A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, was a compilation of

anecdotes jotted down on scraps of paper. These anecdotes and sketches

portrayed the manifestations of Lennon's past, and represented his

version of what was happening personally and culturally. Lennon's

second book, *Spaniard in the Works* published in 1965, is also a collection

of sketches and anecdotes centred on his perception of his own life, the

prevalent social order, and the pressures put on him by society.

By mid 1964 John Lennon began to resent the imposition of

social ideals by the millions of persons who had raised him to a position

of fame, wealth, and power.[20] The fame of the early sixties had brought

with it promiscuity, violence, alcohol, drugs, bribery, and wealth, and a

host of people who wanted their cut. Lennon lived the life forced upon

him by the very persons to whom he had something to say. Though John

had been one of the first to adopt a Liverpool accent and habits

commonly attributed to the working-class,[21] he thought that the

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20. Sidney Hook, *The Hero*, 66. Social forces within the culture canonize
persons who are perceived to be advocating a vision which sums up a
present reality which, at the same time, points to a redefined social
order. The canonized individual thus becomes the symbolic expression of
historical and social forces.

21. Goldman, *Lives*, 162.

superficiality of the life being imposed upon him was superseding that
which he conceived as reality. John Lennon considered it humiliating to
be less than who he thought himself to be. He hated living out other
peoples' dreams, and being with persons he did not like.

By 1965, John Lennon was in the midst of a spiritual crisis.
Hailed in early 1966 as a cultural hero or messianic paradigm, and a
prophetic voice of the modern world,[22] he began to see that messianism
also included the risk of martyrdom. He saw himself being destroyed by
society, and believed he had lost his soul, his way in life, his satisfaction
with music and art, and his pride. He began composing autobiographical
songs which were filled with despair, cries for help, and the failure of
success. Though these songs were listened to by millions of people
throughout the world, John Lennon believed he was not heard.[23]

Lennon attacked every cultural institution through his
songwriting, books, and media interviews.[24] His family background, his

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22. Hampton *Guerrilla*, 6. Fans and followers saw John Lennon as the
saviour whose 'messianic' leadership would deliver them from
exploitation, oppressiveness, injustice, and meaningless.

23. Goldman, *Lives*, 179-180.

24. Harold Lubin, *Heroes and Anti-Heroes* (San Francisco: Chandler
Publishing Co., 1968), 309. Artists, whether they be musicians,
painters, poets, or authors, have presented a vision of social order
which identifies the struggles of the past and present, and offers an
alternative. Many serious entertainers, like the folk singers of the
past, write their own songs to express honest, deep felt concerns about
their culture. They speak out of their culture and reflect that culture.
These individuals challenge dominant cultural values and aspirations, and
attract a following which is eager to effect a change.

association with other musicians, government policies, and religious organizations were subjected to his critical appraisal. Though Lennon became increasingly preoccupied with the possibility that he might be Christ,[25] his critique of religious institutions included the fashioning of a life-sized effigy of Christ to taunt a group of nuns from a nearby church in 1962,[26] and the suggestion made in March 1966 that Christianity would shrink and vanish.[27] In his quest for coherence in his life, John Lennon attempted to articulate a view of transcendence while at the same time exploring the content of that view for himself. Though John became increasingly contemptuous of the manifestations of Christianity his exploration into other narratives, metaphors, and symbols during his life were, to some extent, informed by the nominal Christian heritage articulated through the traditions of his family, his schooling, and his culture.

Lennon's association with the Church of England continued through his childhood and into his adolescence, and included Sunday school, church school, and services.[28] He noted that church attendance, and religious instruction in school did not instil in him a sense of awe,

25. Ibid., 205.

26. Goldman, *Lives*, 120.

27. Ibid., 205. (reporting an interview with Maureen Cleave published in *The Evening Standard*, 4th March, 1966, 10). Jon Wiener, *Come Together: John Lennon in his Time* (New York: Random House, 1984), 21. After this interview the Ku Klux Klan swore enmity, and books, effigies, and records were burned across the southern states of America.

28. There is no indication of regular attendance, though John notes that he did go to Church and receive Christian instruction at school.

leaving him with a feeling of emptiness.[29] His two marriage ceremonies

were from the Book of Common Prayer and he expected traditional funeral

rites.[30] Before leaving his first wife, Cynthia, and embarking on a new

vocational direction with his second wife, Yoko, he prayed as he had been

taught as a child, on his knees.[31] Even as late as 1974 he confessed to a

sense of destiny and future recompense for deeds he had committed

during his life.[32] John acknowledged that he believed in God, but he was

beginning to sift through the religious ideas imparted to him in his youth

by school, church, and family. His views on Christianity were

increasingly being shaped by his growing understanding of what was

going on in British society, and by reading books such as *The Passover*

Plot by Hugh J. Schonfield.[33] He rejected God as an old man in the sky,

saying that he did not believe in a God existing outside of himself or

anyone else for that matter.[34]

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29. Miles, *Words*, 59.

30. Goldman, *Lives*, 690, 548. A third ceremony, The Renewal of Vows, with Yoko Ono was druidic in character which, Lennon said, symbolized his descent from the ancient Celts and rivaled Yoko's 900 year old Japanese heritage.

31. Ibid., 194.

32. Ibid., 107 (after a particularly vicious mugging attack by Lennon in Germany).

33. Wiener, *Together*, 16. Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot: New Light on the History of Jesus* (New York: B. Geis Associates, 1966). John explained that the premise of Schonfield's book was that Jesus' message had been twisted by his thick and ordinary disciples for a variety of self-serving reasons. See also note 40 below.

34. Miles, *Words*, 59.

Lennon was deeply interested in religious experience, though he recognized that Christianity was a declining phenomenon in British society,[35] and much of his identification with Christ had to do with the traditional Christian emphasis on limitless power and meaningful suffering. John Lennon perceived this emphasis to be the destiny placed upon him as the hero of a generation searching for its own meaning.[36] The messianic expectations placed upon him by an unrelenting generation of teenagers searching for meaning brought Lennon from a position of believing that he himself was Jesus Christ, either in actuality or in a future life,[37] to a point where he rejected the attribution of miracle worker placed upon him by a devoted public.[38] Lennon felt that despite all the supposed supernatural powers that came with widespread public acclaim, society was still perpetuating an existence which was nihilating and meaningless.

In order to deal with the inconsistencies Lennon perceived in his life and in the social order, he read extensively on Mohammed, Buddha, and Jesus, and came to believe their message of love and peace

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35. Goldman, *Lives*, 205. (When espousing the decline of Christianity, an issue passed over in Britain, John Lennon was subjected to attack and ostracism from the American Bible Belt.)

36. Lloyd Rose, "Long Gone John: Lennon and the Revelations" in *The Lennon Companion: Twenty Five Years of Comment,* ed. Elizabeth Thomson and David Gutman (New York: Schirmer Books, 1987), 10.

37. Goldman, *Lives*, 205, 301. John Lennon's claim to be Christ in this or a reincarnated life brought him to speculate on the years (four) he had left before he too was to be killed.

38. Hampton, *Guerrilla*, 12. Children and the sick were brought to him for touching by besotted relatives.

was right. He explored transcendental meditation with the Maharishi

Mahesh Yogi, a spiritual leader who taught the practice as that which will

bring one to the complete fulfilment of one's life.[39]   Though John Lennon

became disillusioned with the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi,[40] he continued to

practice meditation along with other forms of "cosmic" experience.[41]

Lennon believed that the Maharishi's message about life and the universe

was the same as that of Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha.[42]   In his efforts to

become self-aware, John Lennon recognized his own violent personality,

and increasingly became involved in anti-war movements, denouncing all

forms of violence.[43]   He believed in the power of images and symbols to

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39. Goldman, *Lives*, 274. Lennon encountered the Maharishi in India at a Spiritual Regeneration gathering. For more information on the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's interpretation of Hinduism and transcendental meditation, see Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *On the Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation and Commentary, Chapters 1-6* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967); Martin Ebon, ed. *Maharishi - The Founder of Transcendental Meditation: His Life, His Times, His Teachings, His Impact* (New York: Signet Books, 1968); Anthony Campbell, *Seven States of Consciousness: A Vision of Possibilities suggested by the Teaching of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

40. Miles, *Words*, 71. Lennon renounced Maharishi Mahesh Yogi as his spiritual guide and a teacher of truth because of the Maharishi's inappropriate sexual conduct: behaviour which seemed to Lennon to be unethical and out of character with that expected of a teacher of truth. At least Lennon seemed to have a notion of what constituted acceptable ethical behaviour in a spiritual leader.

41. Goldman, *Lives*, 78, 281, 600, 365. Cosmic experiences include seances, tarot readings, and investigations into the existence of extra terrestrial beings.

42. Miles, *Words*, 63-64. John argues that the truth in the message gets lost or distorted because the bringer of the message is judged, worshipped, or rejected. He argues also that Christianity, Mohammedanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Maoism, etc. are all person-centred rather than message-centred.

43. Goldman, *Lives*, 346.

bring about a transformation, in himself, in other people, and in the structures of social order, and he set about to establish universal peace through a variety of publicity stunts. His slogan, "Give Peace a Chance" was aimed at all people in the world who were interested in protesting violence and striving for peace.[44] Through the peace movement, John Lennon voiced what was uppermost in millions of people's minds, striking out against war, hunger, greed, and inequality.

He brought his views on politics, music, and peace together to forge for himself a position of power through the peace movement, and he used his position as a moral paradigm to broadcast his message to the world. His vision captured the essence of the meaninglessness and nihilation he thought was evident within society and suggested a way of living at peace with the whole world. John Lennon's vision of universal peace included a ballot which was to be taken throughout the world giving people the choice between war and peace. If the vote for peace turned out to be greater than the vote for war, then Lennon would be acclaimed as peace leader of the world. He intended to set up and travel between offices in every country to proclaim unity. Singlehanded, he was to bring about peace on earth.[45] Lennon suggested that cultural and political boundaries inhibit world peace. He went on to say that religious institutions are divisive, and exact from their members a kind of faith and belief in doctrine which excludes those who do not share that faith

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44. Ibid., 344.

45. Ibid., 361.

and doctrine. In Lennon's view religion cannot advocate world peace as its own institutions promote disharmony and discordance. Though each institution may advocate unity, this is entirely on its own terms, and, in Lennon's opinion, this is not enough.

There are those who believe that the meaning of John Lennon is not to be found in his name but in his philosophical view of life and utopian vision.[46] They believe that Lennon's character and the machinations of his turbulent career have little relevance to the content of his vision. Apparently, in many minds, the artistic representations made by John Lennon stand infinitely beyond reach, and are not to be confused with his achievements and failures. These people believe that the vision outlined in the song "Imagine" will lead to universal harmony and peace, and Lennon has become for these individuals the imparter of a truth. For a man hailed as a messiah, as a standard for others to emulate, the admonition to consider only the message rather than the actions of the man seems to be naive; clearly how John Lennon presented his vision is dependent upon the determinations he has made throughout his life, and the outcome of those determinations is included within the structure of his vision.

John Lennon attempted to regain a sense of reality in his existence by becoming involved in a search for meaning which took him outside of himself. He came to see his experiences through hallucinatory

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46. James Hazard, "A Thousand Names to Come: An Opera Libretto to John Lennon" *Anglican Theological Review* 64 (July 1982): 322.

drugs, meditation, and cosmic experiences as means to deal with the divisiveness of both his position of fame, and the culture in which he lived, though ultimately he came to the conclusion that there was nothing meaningful in society, or beyond it, except that found within himself.[47] Increasingly he questioned the supporting structures of society, leaving nothing intact except the medium of music which he used to further his attacks. Religion and democracy were demolished and rebuilt to become the redefined utopian vision of unity and love expressed in his song "Imagine". Lennon asks his listeners to consider a world where there is no religion, no hell or heaven, no boundaries between countries,[48] no killing or sacrifices, no possessions, and no hunger or greed.[49] This is a world where there is universal peace, sharing, equality, and harmony. Lennon advocates a spiritual unity and sharing in the essence of humanity;[50] the only problem is that with no countries, no religions, and no possessions, there is not much left to share.

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47. This is attested to in the lyrics of Lennon's song, "God". It is a statement declaring disbelief in magic, I Ching, the Bible, tarot, Hitler, Jesus, Kennedy, Buddha, mantra, gita, yoga, kings, Elvis, Zimmerman (Bob Dylan), and the Beatles. John Lennon concludes by saying that he would no longer be what culture wanted him to be; he would only be himself.

48. Ralph Synning, *Candles for Lennon: Philosophical Reflections on the Vision of a Pop Icon* (Montreal: Aardvark, 1992), 26. According to Lennon, countries and the boundaries they imply inhibit the world's population from living in peace.

49. Ibid., 30. Where there are no possessions, there is no possessiveness; where there is no possessiveness there is no greed; where there is no greed there is no hunger.

50. John Lennon. "Imagine" - A brotherhood of man.

Lennon rejected his earlier belief that living in the present would be judged in the future.[51] In his vision he argues only for day-to-day earthly existence; therefore, there could be no future reckoning and consequently no heaven or hell beyond that which is lived out in ordinary life. In this ordinary life, every individual will seek to perpetuate an existence which exists for that individual in each present moment, rather than striving towards a future which is indeterminate. Living each day for that day does not include an idea of transcendence beyond that which is contained in the world existing in reality.[52] Clearly, John Lennon's explorations into alternative experience, whether cosmic, hallucinatory, or occult, to search for transcendence beyond the world came to naught. Lennon has suggested that all religious institutions should be discounted on the grounds that they induce divisiveness and competition, and perpetrate a view of transcendence which is external to reality.[53] John Lennon continually reaffirms that only in the self, and that self's relationship to the world, is life and meaning possible. In Lennon's view, transcendence is found in recognizing and accommodating the differences between human beings in their present realities. In transcending these differences, human beings will be better equipped to participate in a universal reality where there is no strife, hunger, or greed. Everyone will be willing to share everything and live in peace.

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51. See note 30 above.

52. Miles. *Words* 63. The Maharishi taught that one should not think about the future or the past; one should be present in the 'now'. One seeks transcendence only in the present reality.

53. Synning, *Candles*. 13.

Before drawing conclusions about the development of John Lennon's character, I intend, in Part III, to look at the life of Thomas Merton. At the conclusion of that chapter I will then, in Part IV, compare the development of both men's characters with the theory of character formation put forward by Stanley Hauerwas.

PART III

THOMAS MERTON - His Life and Vision

Before going on to look at John Lennon's vision of universal
peace and to compare his life with Hauerwas' theory of character
formation within the Christian community, I will look at the life of Thomas
Merton and the influences that formed his character. I was surprised to
find so many similarities between the early life of Merton and the life of
John Lennon. Merton, like Lennon, had received some nominal instruction
in the Christian narrative tradition, but this was insufficient to inform
the choices he made during his early life. After converting to
Catholicism in his late twenties, Merton joined a cenobitic order of monks
where his character underwent significant change. The heritage of the
Christian monastic tradition began increasingly to inform the choices
Merton made during the rest of his life.

Thomas Merton has been acclaimed as one of the most public
persons in American Catholicism. Though he travelled little after entering
monastic life in 1941, Merton's life became a paradigm for the lives of
others. He is hailed as the saint[1] he wished to become, and as such can

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1. Dennis Q. McInerny, *Thomas Merton: The Man and His Work* Cistercian
Studies Series, No. 27 (Washington DC: Cistercian Publications, 1974),
13, 81. "Merton's explicit and unapologized-for aim in life was to
become a saint." McInerny suggests that there is little doubt that
Merton considered the monastic life to be the kind of community which was
most conducive to sanctity. For further reading see Edith Wyschogrod,

be understood as an initiator and a creative model. Studies of Merton's life have emerged twenty years after his death which have had the effect of re-interpreting his life.[2] There is ongoing interest in Merton's legacy both within monastic circles and within society generally; his influence has extended beyond Christianity to other faiths, agnostics, revolutionaries, and skeptics.[3] Merton has come to epitomize a life which is searching for meaning and integration, and he found that meaning and integration within the confines of a monastic tradition. It was within the seclusion of the monastery that Merton was able to find the freedom to critique himself and his society.[4]

In an early book, *My Argument with the Gestapo*, Merton defines himself as a writer seeking his place in the order of life. He explores the notions of non-violence and universality, and becomes known as the

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Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 34. Wyschogrod suggests two definitions of sainthood. The first is that life which is dedicated entirely to the worship of the deity. The second is devoted to the alleviation of sorrow and pain regardless of the cost to the saint. See also Lawrence S. Cunningham, "The Life of Merton as Paradigm: The View from Academe", in *The Message of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 160.

2. James Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 35. James Fowler notes that the life of Thomas Merton has become re-interpreted by biographers who seek to relate the faith journey of Merton to his early life, his non-violent approach to universal peace, and his critique of society, institutionalized religion, and monastic life.

3. Cunningham, *Merton as Paradigm*, 154-164.

4. Gerald Twomey, "Thomas Merton: An Appreciation", in *Thomas Merton: Prophet in the Belly of a Paradox*, ed. Gerald Twomey (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 8. Twomey suggests that it is only after finding solitude that Merton was able to find himself critically in the world.

prophet of peace.[5] Thomas Merton articulated a vision of peace which is directly correlated to, and enriched by, his life experiences. In the following pages I will explore the formation of Thomas Merton's character through the narrative of his life and identify his vision.

Thomas Merton was born in France in January, 1915. His mother, Ruth, was an American who had been brought up in a family with Welsh ancestry, connections to Quakerism, and strong beliefs about pacifism.[6] These connections and beliefs were to be evident in Thomas as he grew up. Ruth herself was a woman of austere temper who kept meticulous details of her infants' progress.[7] She was extremely conscientious about Thomas' well-being from the standpoint of both health and education, and emerges as a devoted moth٤ if somewhat obsessional.[8] Thomas' father, Owen, was an artist[9] from New Zealand who, while studying art in France, had met and married a fellow art student, Ruth.[10] Owen was known as an original thinker who was not averse to

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5. Anthony T. Padovano *The Human Journey - Thomas Merton: Symbol of a Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982) 13.

6. Padovano, *Human Journey*, 68. According to Padovano there has always been a representative pacifist tradition nourished by Quakerism in America.

7. George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1978), 9.

8. Monica Furlong, *Merton - A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 3.

9. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 9. He eventually gained some repute as a kind of neo-impressionist selling his work in Britain and America.

10. Furlong, *Biography*, 7.

altering his lifestyle to fit his beliefs.[11] He believed that sincerity in one's vocation was carried out by means of order which is reflected as art.[12] Threatened with the possibility of being conscripted to fight in the first World War, Owen left France in 1916 with Ruth and their year old son, Thomas, to live in America with his wife's parents.[13]

Both Owen and Ruth had intended to continue their vocations as artists and live a simple life in which they would grow their food and keep animals. To supplement the income from his art, Owen served as a farm hand, and gained sufficient income to rent a small house. John-Paul, a brother to Thomas, was born in 1917 and was to alert Thomas to a sense of his own inferior worth. Thomas saw himself as having a less serene nature than his brother and this sense of inadequacy brought Thomas to feel unworthy and unsatisfactory. This, coupled with the knowledge that his mother had high expectations of him, made him feel insecure and lonely.[14] Thomas recalls that he responded to his feelings of inadequacy with behaviour towards his brother which was hard-hearted and often brutal.[15]

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11. Ibid., 9. Thomas inherited this ability to alter his lifestyle to fit his beliefs.

12. Ibid., 10. "Sincerity gives one a clear vision".

13. Ibid., 9.

14. Ibid 12-13, 15. "...there is a faint bitterness in his references to her; she seemed critical, pedagogic 'severe', measuring him all the time against some standard that seemed unattainable, leaving him with a sour taste of failure.... Much later in his life he was to remark that 'perhaps solitaries are made of severe mothers'."

15. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Books, 1948), 23.

Family life included some religion. Ruth Merton attended the Quaker Meeting occasionally, but did not take her children with her. Owen Merton became the organist at the Episcopal church in Douglaston, on Long Island, and Thomas used to accompany his father. While Owen played, Thomas admired the lighted candles and fantasized in the stained glass symbols. In later reflection Thomas says, "One came out of the church with a kind of comfortable and satisfied feeling that something had been done that needed to be done".[16] Thomas recalls that as a child of four he had heard the nearby church bells ringing, and that he had passionately wanted to go to church and be part of the joyful mood of the morning. His paternal grandmother, visiting from New Zealand at this time, taught Thomas the Lord's Prayer, and though he admits to not saying it for a long while thereafter, he never forgot it.[17]

Ruth Merton developed cancer of the stomach and died when Thomas was six years old. Ruth had told her son in a letter that she was dying and that as she did not wish her children to see her decaying state, he would not see her again. Though Thomas was taken to the hospital at the time of his mother's death and to the funeral a few days later, he was left to wait in the car. This memory of his mother, coupled with her high expectations of him as a young child, left him with a

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16. Furlong, *Biography*, 13; Merton, *Mountain*, 13.

17. Furlong, *Biography*, 13.

memory of her as a cerebral character. This memory was to cloud his view of women for the rest of his life.[18]

Ruth's death meant that young Thomas began journeying with his father; first to Bermuda and then on to France and England. While his father painted and held exhibitions of his work in Bermuda,[19] Thomas stayed with his father's Protestant friends and began his education at the local elementary school for white children.[20] Thomas recalls being constantly punished for not being able to grasp the complexities of multiplication and division.[21] This failure resulted in Thomas being taken away from the school to live with his father until Owen returned to New York for another exhibition. Thomas, meanwhile, again stayed with his father's friends until he was taken to live with his grandparents in Douglaston where his brother was already living.[22]

Thomas' grandfather worked for a prosperous publisher and was enamoured with film-making. He spearheaded the publication of illustrated books about the films of that time, which eventuated in economic stability for the family.[23] Thomas' grandfather belonged to a

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18. Ibid., 8, 14-15.

19. Merton, *Mountain*, 18-20.

20. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10. In later years Merton became a fervent advocate of the elimination of racial barriers.

21. Merton, *Mountain*, 19.

22. Ibid., 20; Furlong, *Biography*, 18.

23. Merton, *Mountain*, 21.

Masonic organization called the Knights Templars,[24] from whom Thomas

suspected that his grandfather heard about the wickedness of the

Catholic Church and the corrupt politicians of New York State. Thomas

notes that his grandfather's favourite place of worship was the theatre,[25]

a trait which was to influence Thomas as he grew through adolescence.[26]

According to Thomas, his grandparents were Protestants, financially

supporting the Zion church, the Salvation army and others, none of which

they attended. John-Paul later attended the nearby Episcopal school

which was located in a peaceful bourgeois neighbourhood, and it was

intended that Thomas would also be educated there.[27] Thomas recalls that

his grandparents considered religions to be, on the whole, socially

acceptable and part of the natural order, though Judaism and Catholicism

were the exceptions.[28] The Catholic church was bitterly attacked as

connected to a sinister maliciousness which manifested itself in the public

arena mainly through politics. In Thomas' grandfather's view Catholicism

had become associated with everything that was dishonest and immoral.

Thomas inherited this view, and by the time he was nine he was already

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24. Ibid., 25.   Merton notes, "The original Knights Templars were a military religious Order in the Catholic Church, who had an intimate connection with the Cistercians, of which the Trappists are a reform." The Masonic version has no connection with the original.

25. Merton, *Mountain,* 22.

26. Ibid., 149.   Merton was much influenced by the cinema, admitting later that it was to become an addiction, "a kind of hell".

27. Ibid., 25.

28. Ibid., 25.   They objected to Judaism because it was more a matter of race rather than religion.

rejecting any form of religion.[29]

In 1925 when Thomas was ten, his father brought him to France to live with him. Owen had been seriously ill and in recovery he had become aware of the need to provide a home for his sons,[30] take over their education, and encourage their religious faith. After much travelling and exploration of Catholic and Protestant schools,[31] Thomas was enrolled in the local elementary school where he was put in the youngest class because of his inability to speak French.[32] A year later Thomas began as a boarder in the Lycée Ingres.[33] He again felt inadequate because of his fair colouring and poor French. While the young Merton had experienced the amenable temperament of the peasant children at the elementary school, he was singled out for ridicule at the Lycée.[34] Though he gradually became accepted he felt imprisoned and began to know the desolation and abandonment which was to pervade his life through the years to come.[35] It was at this school that Thomas began his writing career, fell in love for the first time, and received his first religious instruction from a Protestant minister.

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29. Ibid., 25-27.

30. Ibid., 39. The plan was to bring over John-Paul later.

31. Ibid., 33-36.

32. Ibid., 39.

33. McInerny, *Merton*, 5; Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10.

34. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10.

35. Merton, *Mountain*, 49.

In 1928 Thomas accompanied his father to England, where he was left with an aunt and uncle. The uncle, a retired preparatory school headmaster, arranged for Thomas to attend a middle class preparatory school in the London suburbs[36] - Ripley Court School in Surrey. Thomas was again put in the lowest class as he did not have any knowledge of Latin, which he needed if he was to go on to a decent public school.[37] While at this school Thomas recalls that he dressed in the appropriate Eton suit and marched off to church each week. Religious instruction, *Pilgrim's Progress*, prayer, and the amenable nature of the other school boys helped Thomas to settle. He became part of the English lifestyle, taking in the cricket, institutionalized religion, tea parties, newspapers, and the affluent values of upper and middle class society.

At fourteen, Thomas was sent to Oakham School in the Midlands county of Rutland. Oakham was a scholastic establishment of the public school system,[38] and was considered suitable for Thomas as he was unable to meet the academic requirements of the better schools such as Winchester and Harrow.[39] While Thomas was at Oakham, his father grew seriously ill again. Owen Merton informed Thomas by telegram of his

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36. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10.

37. Merton, *Mountain*, 64-66.

38. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10.

39. Merton, *Mountain*, 66.

imminent death. He died in 1931 of a brain tumour.[40] This death left

Thomas in a state of despair. Thomas realized that it had been his

father who had nourished his soul, built his character and cared for him

in a way that he would revere all his life. Thomas remained at Oakham

after his father's death, and it was at Oakham that Thomas' literary

career began to develop. At school the literary influences of poets Eliot,

Hopkins, and Blake[41] were established. His godfather and appointed

guardian, a Harley Street specialist, introduced Thomas to modern

painting, jazz, and the modern novelists Huxley, Joyce, Lawrence, Waugh,

Céline, and Gide. He also encouraged the young Merton to identify with

the modern pluralistic culture, influencing him to question the dominant

cultural institutions, class structures, and the traditional mores of

society.[42]

Thomas Merton's grandfather had provided Thomas with the

financial means to continue his education and live independently. This

meant that he was free to explore England, middle class values, and a

decadent life style. It was from Oakham that Thomas matriculated to

Clare College, Cambridge, in the autumn of 1933,[43] having been awarded

an exhibition to read modern languages. While at Cambridge he immersed

himself in heavy smoking and hard drinking, spending more time

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40. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet,* 10; Merton, *Mountain,* 69-84.

41. Woodcock, 11. Merton later wrote his MA thesis on Blake, from whom
he acquired fascination with the contemplative life.

42. Merton, *Mountain,* 80.

43. McInerny, *Merton,* 2.

socializing than studying.[44]   Thomas gained the reputation of being

unruly: taking up with working class girls,[45] breaking windows, fighting,

being arrested, living beyond his means, and fully engaging in a life of

debauchery.   He gained a second class degree at the end of the year in

French and Italian and made plans to return to America for the summer.

Thomas' guardian requested an explanation of Thomas' poor behaviour,

later suggesting that he stay in America with his grandparents and give

up all thoughts of returning to Cambridge.[46]

Thomas' escapades in England left him with a deepened sense of

emptiness, and a depression which made him doubt his identity.   He

projected his isolation, and the grief associated with the loss of his

father and mother, onto the people, landscape, and values which

surrounded him during the year in Cambridge.   The feeling of guilt

associated with the failure to contact his child and the mother of that

child, increased his feelings of animosity for everything associated with

Britain, and he was glad to return to America in December, 1934, to the

security of his grandparents' home.[47]

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44. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 10-11; Furlong, *Biography*, 47-61.

45. Furlong, *Biography*, 59-60.   One of these girls was to give birth to
Merton's son.   This affair was to cause Merton to feel continual guilt
and cost him entrance to the Franciscan Order.

46. Ibid., 60-61.

47. Ibid., 61-62; Merton, *Mountain*, 126.

While at Oakham and Cambridge Merton had read heavily in Marx and conceived of himself as a Communist.[48] He was a tireless activist,[49] picketing and rallying for peace.[50] Having decided that the study of the arts and literature was bourgeois and socially useless, he intended to enrol in the New School of Social Research once he arrived in New York. He enrolled at Columbia, where he began to concentrate on the social sciences. The intense social concern he brought with him to Columbia manifested itself in the National Student's League. Merton became a card-carrying member of the Communist party with a party name of Frank Swift.[51] Due to the influence of an English professor, Merton abandoned the social sciences and became an English major.[52]

Merton became a member of a fraternity at Columbia, getting involved in everything possible.[53] He was on the track team until his heavy smoking, steady drinking, and minimal sleeping eventually forced him to quit all collegiate athletics. In contrast to the beliefs of the adolescent who had been at Cambridge, Merton began to develop a keen interest in his studies and in literature, even though his addictions to

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48. Merton, *Mountain*, 131-148.

49. McInerny, *Merton*, 3; Furlong, *Biography*, 67.

50. Merton, *Mountain*, 147.

51. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 11.

52. McInerny, *Merton*, 3.

53. Ibid., 4.

smoking, drinking, girls, and films continued.[54] He took an interest in Aquinas,[55] Duns Scotus, and other scholastic philosophers,[56] and he wrote for every campus publication, becoming editor-in-chief of the year book as well as art editor of the campus literary magazine.[57] Merton graduated with a baccalaureate in 1938, and a Master of Arts in 1939.[58]

Since leaving Oakham, Merton had been intent on living a life filled with sensual pleasures. He had set out to become the hero of Cambridge and Columbia and achieve acclaim and notoriety in a seedy world.[59] During 1936 and 1937 Merton's grandparents died, and the worldly lifestyle Merton had set out to accomplish for himself began to

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54. Merton, *Mountain*, 164. These addictions, coupled with the deaths of his grandparents and the suicides of people known to him, were to lead Merton to conclude in 1935 and 1936 that once again life was becoming intolerable.

55. Furlong, *Biography*, 75. In particular, Merton studied Maritain's interpretation of Aquinas.

56. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 11.

57. Ibid., 20. As a student Merton had written reviews, fiction, poetry and reports. In monastic life he was to go on to write poetry, and autobiography, philosophy, theology, religious history, comparative religion, and hagiography. Merton also anthologized Gandhi and the Desert Fathers and translated poems from French, Latin, Spanish, and Portuguese. Merton explored his early interests in Eastern mysticism, mediating between the western traditions and the ways of thought and life represented by Taoism and Zen Buddhism. See for example, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961); and *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965).

58. Furlong, *Biography*, 75-76. His MA thesis was on William Blake who was to influence Merton for the rest of his life. Blake's insights on Catholicism especially led Merton to a greater understanding of God.

59. Merton, *Mountain*, 163.

overtake him.[60]   The deaths of his grandparents deprived Merton of the

remaining vestiges of security, and marked the beginning of a neurotic

imbalance,[61] which was to lead him to a reflection of his life and a search

for meaning.

During 1938 Merton resumed his study of William Blake, whose

inspirational faith gave Merton an idea of God which he was able to relate

to.   What he learned from Blake and Maritain's interpretation of Aquinas

was that human passions need to be transformed by love, and this in

turn suggested to him that his own life was in need of transformation.

Merton came to realize that heretofore he had interpreted life from a

sociological and economic standpoint, and allowed this view to confine him.

What was needed was faith and charity which would moderate the

passions and direct human life towards fulfilment in God.   The writings of

William Blake and the influence of some of Merton's friends encouraged

him to explore Catholicism, which he did with his usual vigour.[62]

While Merton examined his past and searched for a meaningful

life, his raucous lifestyle continued.   There were still the girls, the

drinking, the smoking, and the movies, but at the same time, there were

discussions about mysticism, and a desire to pray.   He took a course in

French medieval literature to recover some of his childhood memories of

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60. Furlong, *Biography*, 71.   Hindsight revealed to Merton that the
worldly life had emptied him.

61. Ibid., 70.

62. Ibid., 77.

France with his father. While at Columbia Merton was introduced to Dr. Bramachari, a Hindu monk[63] profoundly centred on God,[64]who, like the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, taught about the higher states of consciousness, and who introduced Merton to oriental mysticism.[65] Bramachari also suggested to Merton that he read Augustine's *Confessions* and *The Imitation of Christ.* Merton went on to read Hopkins and Gilson, which challenged and broadened his view of God. During the next few years Merton continued to explore his own life, the friendships made at Columbia, his writing career, his faith commitment, his interest in Eastern mysticism,[66] and how all these elements could be integrated into his search for identity and meaning. The influence of this reading and studying, coupled with the sense of spirituality inherited from his father, brought Merton closer to Catholicism and his eventual baptism in 1938.[67]

Thomas Merton had lived in or visited many countries around the world. He had met people from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and he had been nurtured in a family which had diverse views on culture and faith expression. By 1939 Merton had begun to draw on his wealth of life experience and integrate this with a need to

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63. Merton, *Mountain,* 193.

64. Furlong, *Biography,* 73.

65. Furlong, *Biography,* 74. Merton acknowledges that at first he failed to grasp the principles of oriental mysticism, learning instead a technique of relaxation and how to catch up on his sleep.

66. Merton, *Mountain,* 198; Furlong, *Biography,* 73.

67. Merton, *Mountain,* 171-172; Furlong, *Biography,* 77-79; Woodcock, *Monk and Poet,* 12.

write and be in control of his many sensual appetites. He continued his studies of eastern mysticism and was persuaded by one of his friends to take retreats in Catholic monasteries.[68] These experiences cemented his vocation to the priesthood, and he decided that he needed the security and discipline of the solitary life.[69] Merton began to explore the possibilities of joining the Franciscan order,[70] but was rejected after revealing to them the escapades of his past life. They suggested that he put off entering the novitiate, perhaps indefinitely.[71]

The rejection by the Franciscans coupled with the guilt and insecurity of his former years convinced Merton that he was worthless. He resumed teaching and sought retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani, a Trappist monastery. While on retreat he decided to make application to join the monastery, and disclosed his past to the superiors at the monastery.[72] He was accepted[73] and lived as a monk at Gethsemani from

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68. Furlong, *Biography*, 80-98.

69. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 13. Throughout his life Merton was to be constantly searching for solitude. He joined a cenobitic monastery but yearned for the eremitic lifestyle.

70. Ibid., 13.

71. McInerny, *Merton*, 5; Merton, *Mountain*, 265-298.

72. Woodcock, *Monk and Poet*, 13. The Trappists are a Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance, the most austere offshoot of the Benedictine Order. They are silent and cenobitic, and form communities dedicated to contemplation.

73. Ibid., 15-16. The twenty-seven year old Merton joined the Trappists at Gethsemani as a postulant after gathering the documents which the monastery demanded and making arrangements with the draft board.

December 1941 until he died in 1968.[74] While at Gethsemani Merton was

constantly troubled with what seemed to be a joint vocation. He was

gifted as a writer, able to draw on his past experiences and research

new ideas; yet, he believed he was also called to the solitary life of the

contemplative monk. He reconciled his joint vocation by integrating

writing into his view of sainthood, arguing that for him, sainthood

included recording his journey and his learnings.[75] While attending to

the rigours of monastic life, Merton wrote over fifty books[76] and three

hundred articles dealing with all aspects of the monastic experience,

Eastern and Western mysticism, and his own life.[77] He obediently

observed the rigid censorship rules of the Catholic institution which

severely restricted his freedom.[78]

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74. Furlong, *Biography*, 330-332. He died of suspect circumstances, possibly of electrocution, in Bangkok after giving a lecture on Marxism.

75. Merton, *Mountain*, 410; Elena Malits, "'To Be What I Am': Thomas Merton as a Spiritual Writer." In *Thomas Merton: Prophet in the Belly of a Paradox*, ed. Gerald Twomey, (New York, Paulist Press, 1978), 195.

76. Patrick Hart OSCO, *Thomas Merton/Monk: A Monastic Tribute* (Gethsemani: The Abbey of Gethsemani, 1974), 107. The impact of *The Seven Storey Mountain* has become a legend, selling 600,000 copies at the first printing. Merton was embarrassed by its success. In 1949, *Seeds of Contemplation* was printed and has proved his most popular book.

77. McInerny, *Merton*, 15. Merton wrote much which was circulated privately throughout Gethsemani, and selected Cistercian and Benedictine monasteries. It is estimated that Merton's written and artistic material will continue to be edited and published over the next twenty-five years.

78. William H. Shannon, ed. *The Hidden Ground of Love - The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* (New York: Ferrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1985), 74. An example of the restrictions put on Merton's writing is found in Letters of Thomas Merton. "Peace writings have reached an abrupt halt. Told not to do any more on that subject. Dangerous, subversive, perilous, offensive to pious ears, and confusing to good Catholics who are all at peace in the naive idea that we ought to wipe Russia off the face of the earth. Why get people all stirred up?"

Merton's interest in Marxism and the dialectical approach to reality, Gandhi and non-violence, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism, continued throughout his life in Gethsemani. He believed that an openness to Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism, etc., offered an opportunity to learn more about the potentiality of his own tradition.[79] His family heritage and experience of different cultural and faith traditions shaped and enriched Merton as a monk. In 1964 Merton argued that literature, contemplative solitude, Latin America, Asia, Zen, Islam, etc., come together in his life and shape his critical responses to the ambiguities in the world, the church, the monastery, and his own life.[80] He maintained and developed the friendships made at Columbia, and maintained an eagerness to develop new friendships through the limited correspondence allowed by the monastery.[81]

His books were to influence millions, reaching a large and diversified audience reading subjects from civil rights and peace, spiritual direction and Scripture, world literature and oriental philosophy.[82] Merton's writings were to bring the Trappist movement to

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79. Patrick Hart, *Monastic Tribute*, 216; McInerny, *Merton*, 81.

80. Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1971), 62.

81. Furlong, *Biography*, 157. All mail was censored and usually passed on to the monks four times a year. Merton received mountains of correspondence, good and bad, all of which he answered.

82. Padovano, *Human Journey*, 37.

the public eye. The life of the contemplative monk became an ideal, to be
pursued by many young men disillusioned with war and modern culture.
Merton has become understood as a prophetic voice amidst a trouble-filled
society, and a witness to the transformation of life and consciousness
through contemplative prayer.[83] His prophetic vocation announced the
being and action of God in history and in God's future. Merton came
from being in the world with all its attendant distractions, to being a
cenobitic monk afraid of his own worldly tendencies. He integrated his
past with his vocation as a monk to explain more fully how he as an
individual could be present within the world and yet be apart from the
world.

Though in the early years of his monastic life, Merton had
acquiesced with the monastic style of world denial, by the early 1960's he
had come to see that active engagement with the world would be more
beneficial to that world, as well as being more Christ-like.[84] While
remaining at Gethsemani, Merton began to confront the dominant issues
facing society. He was acutely aware of the painful memories of society
which continued to haunt him, finally bringing him to challenge the world
with his vision of peace. He argued that an individual should engage in
political action and witness to the truth and the reality of the created
order.[85] He challenged the institution of the Catholic Church to reassess

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83. Fowler, *Weaving*, 32.

84. Furlong, *Biography*, 252.

85. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Destruction* (New York: Ferrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1965), 227.

its position on peace and non-violence and was at first greeted, in 1963, with a reprimand to remain silen⁺. Apparently issues concerning the violence in society were considered issues which were outside the jurisdiction of a monk.[86] Merton continued in his struggle to bring the message of non-violent peace to the world. He became one of the founders of the Catholic Peace Movement, wrote many articles and essays about non-violence and peace,[87] organized retreats at Gethsemani to discuss the issues which surround peace making,[88] and received a peace prize in 1963 for his efforts.[89]

Merton evolved from an egotistical and individualistic young adult into a monk who felt spiritual responsibilities for the failings of individuals in the world. By the time he was forty-two he began to advocate the universality of human life built on a foundation of love and peace.[90] Merton came to see that the communal responsibilities of love and peace were to be lived out in the social and political world by becoming actively engaged in current social issues.[91] He never gave up

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86. Ibid. 257.

87. Some of these articles and essays are collected in: Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton on Peace* (New York: The McCall Publ. Co., 1971).

88. Merton, *Merton on Peace*, 260. Amongst the people attending one of these retreats in Nov. 1964 were Daniel Berrigan, John Howard Yoder, and A.J. Muste. Among the subjects suggested for consideration was "the nature of technological society and whether such a society is by its very nature oriented towards self destruction...".

89. Merton, *Merton on Peace*, 71.

90. McInerny, *Merton*, 60-61.

91. Ibid., 62.

hope that the future could be shaped by new possibilities in peacemaking through non-violent efforts, and immersed himself fully in the social realities of the 1960's. Merton's vision of peace and universality addressed the violence and racism of his time. Merton believed that violence was not a solution to world problems. He argued that Christ was the paradigm of peace and that his ethical teaching was strictly towards non-violence.

At the same time Merton continued exploring eastern mysticism, seeking out elements of truth in other faith systems. He was influenced greatly by Mohandas Gandhi who taught that he could not lead the religious life unless he became identified with the whole of humanity.[92] Gandhi taught that the foundation of all human beings is love.[93] To be motivated by this love is to act in courage, as the hero rather than as the coward. To act in love is to stand out in support of universal peace, accepting the differences manifest in others. The non-violent human being seeks justice for all human individuals. Merton believed that only when human beings have the courage to love their fellow human beings will universal peace be possible. A society built on the Christian

92. Padovano, *Human Journey*, 116. Gandhi believed that the social, economic, political, and religious components of society were indivisible.

93. Merton, *Destruction*, 233. Gandhi believed that human beings chose either to accept or reject the basic law of love and truth which had been made known to the world in traditional religions. This was evidenced most clearly by Jesus Christ. Much has been written on Gandhi, his life and message. The following is an example: Louis Fischer, *Gandhi: His Life and Message for the World* (New York: Mentor Publications, 1954).

conception of love will be one where every human being recognizes the rights and differences of everyone else.

At this point in the paper I will go on in Part IV to summarize the discussions on John Lennon and Thomas Merton to support Stanley Hauerwas' ideas on the development of character.

PART IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In concluding this paper I will show how the lives of John Lennon and Thomas Merton, as outlined in Parts II and III respectively, support Stanley Hauerwas' ideas about character formation and ongoing commitment to the Christian narrative. Hauerwas has argued that active participation with the Christian stories and metaphors within the community of followers encourages a character which will best inform the choices to be made within a pluralistic society. The Christian narrative Stanley Hauerwas seems to be referring to is one which is actively lived in the particularity of a faith community, rather than the mere acknowledgement of that narrative as part of one's cultural tradition. Hauerwas argues that being raised in a society which has adopted Christianity as its established religion is insufficient to develop a character informed by the metaphors and stories of the Christian tradition (AC, 23-25).

Much of Hauerwas' theory regarding character formation holds true regardless of which community or culture an individual is part of. A person's character is formed within a given culture and that culture's tradition is passed on as heritage informing the character of its young members. It is the quality of that character formation which Hauerwas

critiques. Where the tradition includes Christianity as one of its ethical system options, the individual is put in the position of seeing Christianity as one possibility among others; thus, the choices that individual makes potentially could be drawn from a multiplicity of sources. Christianity in both Merton's and Lennon's school days was offered as the institutional norm, albeit in an increasingly pluralistic society. Its ethical code had become absorbed into the legalistic structure of cultural institutions, which advocated a moral ethic perceived by society as conducive to the well-being of its members. The call to ongoing spiritual regeneration in the life of Jesus Christ was missing, and the community which Hauerwas suggests as imparting the most truthful ethic, i.e. the community centred on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, had become fractured and immersed in a social morality.

Hauerwas has argued that character formation takes place through conscious enactment within the environment. Lennon and the young Merton, though raised in different environments, exhibit the individualistic aspirations of their culture. Both men became unwitting recipients of, and participated in, a culture's attempts to become pluralistic. Their lives exhibited an inconsistency which was in keeping with the changes occurring within their society. Both of them were faced with making choices between the multiplicity of options presented to them in a pluralistic society, with the result that no one system could inform their characters. Hauerwas' ideal of the Christian community being able to educate its young members in a way that generates the capacity to judge between vying principles, and apply these judgements to particular

situations, seems to be lacking in both Merton's and Lennon's early life.
The Constantinian form of Christian religious and ethical teaching seems
to have failed both these young men. The narratives which purport to
be essentially Christian have figured as a passive backdrop rather than
as an all-encompassing active value system informing and shaping the
whole of life.

It can be argued that society is constantly changing and that
codes of conduct and bases for belief often need re-evaluation. This, in
turn, necessitates a constant re-evaluation of an individual's orientation
in respect to society. Hauerwas' position is clear on this; he ardently
furthers the argument that human beings are products of their
environment. Each individual is formed with his or her own outlook
which includes a cultural, political, religious, and familial heritage. These
influences are received, interpreted, and embodied, in turn informing an
individual's intentional action (CCL, 115). Though there are elements of
social conditioning in all communities, this social conditioning does not
always illuminate truth. Where the narrative tradition of a society
appears to be inconsistent, this may lead to inconsistency in the
individual.

To counter the inconsistencies apparent in society, Stanley
Hauerwas advocates the consistency in the truthful Christian narrative to
form the basis of an individual's judgements and interaction with the rest
of society, though even within the Christian community it should be noted
that an individual is constantly re-evaluating his or her position as new

possibilities are discovered and new meaning illuminated. In Hauerwas'
view the Christian community will sustain a character which will inform
the choices most able to lead to truth. Lennon and Merton, during his
early life, are examples of individuals who lived in nominally Christian
communities which were unable to guide their members towards making
choices informed by the Christian moral tradition.

In examining the early lives of Lennon and Merton it is evident
that both persons share in some form of religious experience. Both John
Lennon and Thomas Merton where brought up in social systems which
contained some Christian teaching. In their childhood and youth both
individuals attended worship services, received some religious instruction,
and experienced the Christian narrative as interpreted by their
respective family heritage, education, and social interaction. In both
cases this religious experience was insufficient and inadequate to lead to
the conclusion that the choices made in their respective early lives
reflected the life of Jesus Christ as told in the Christian narrative. The
formation of their characters took place amidst the traditional heritage of
the communities in which they were placed, and the diversity of
narratives within these communities led both these men to pursue their
interest in these alternate stories.

It is probably true that Merton had recourse to a wider variety
of systems than Lennon from which to form his opinions. His early
choices, with their subsequent consequences, indicate little reference to
the life of Jesus Christ as it is known through the Gospels. Though it

has been said in Part I that value systems are implicit in the many organizations and communities which influence the development of a moral character, Merton, in his early life, seems to have put more emphasis on the satisfaction of his passions and becoming a leader amongst his peers, rather than attending to the implications of an institutionalized moral ethic.

Though Merton developed an aversion to all forms of formal religious experience in his early youth because of the unsettling events in his childhood and the inability to find a source of spiritual comfort in the institutionalized church, he found recourse to a sense of spirituality which was to surface later in his life. His early spiritual experiences were contained within the artistic realm of images and feelings exhibited by his father. In later years he argued that institutionalized religion was gravely inadequate. Though Merton became absorbed in the spiritual aspects of religious faith, he experienced religious teaching in his youth as indoctrination into the cultural mores of a society,[1] which, like most adolescents, he tested and rejected. Merton opted for the lifestyle which seemed to fit in with the social conditions of the community in which he interacted. The choices Merton made regarding that lifestyle were informed by the context in which he lived. After the death of his father, Merton says "that the hard crust of his dry soul finally squeezed out all the last traces of religion"[2]. The ambiguities of a pluralistic society led

1. Merton, *Mountain*, 65.

2. Merton, *Mountain*, 85.

him to choose to act without reference to the Christian narrative and its ethical tradition.

Lennon's early life seems to have included some idea about the content of the Christian metaphors, though these metaphors were not evidenced in a positive manner. His negative conception of God was inextricably bound with his education, his family, the moralistic claims of society, and his own search for autonomous identity. The stories and metaphors of the Christian narrative, as interpreted and pronounced by his family and the Church, led him first to identify with Christ, and then, ultimately, to reject the existence of an external God who was to be revered, feared, and adored. Lennon's sense of identity, and moral self, was shaped amidst the ambiguities of his early existence, leading him to develop a philosophy of life which he found tenable. His turbulent upbringing and formative years led him to experiment with alternate value systems through the medium of music. John Lennon could hardly be described as a passive member of society, and I would say that his early character was being formed by the effort to determine itself beyond cultural conditioning. What was lacking in his formative years, was the identification, the feeling of belonging, and a se　　of stability, found within the Christian narratives which would inform Lennon's choices as he grew.

There is no doubt that both Thomas Merton and John Lennon were capable of self-determination; they did choose to act, which in turn identified and informed their characters. Hauerwas has argued that the

self-determined act is a statement about an individual's present and
future aspirations (CCL, 8), and that a positive ethic of character forces
one to realize the consequences of one's actions (CCL, 19). From these
statements one could conclude that during their early lives Merton and
Lennon were insufficiently nurtured in the Christian tradition, making it
unlikely that they would be able, at that time, to determine their future
possibilities in ways which could be sustained and which would reflect
Christ in their lives.[3] It could be argued also that in choosing to act,
Merton and Lennon gave consideration to the consequences of deferring
the immediate satisfaction of their youthful pleasures, but in this respect
it has to be acknowledged that some of their actions seemed to lack
forethought. For example, though I doubt if much attention had been
given to the consequences of their sexual liaisons and their addictions to
drugs,[4] both men exhibited some control over their artistic talents.[5] Both
Merton and Lennon seemed to lack the orientation towards responsible
action during their early years, their characters becomingly increasingly
centred on their own individualistic claims to selfhood.

Hauerwas has said that the truth contained in the Christian
story is capable of forming and reforming a community which is able to

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3. It is true that later in his life Merton converted to Catholicism and
underwent a radical transformation of character. At that time, the
community of Christian monks were able to re-form Merton's character in
ways which would inform the subsequent choices he made.

4. This includes addiction to tobacco, alcohol, LSD, or heroin, etc.

5. Merton wrote voluminously while at college, and Lennon pursued his
musical career while still at school.

counter the cynicism people like John Lennon and Thomas Merton had developed to deal with modern pluralism (CC, 127). Neither Lennon nor Merton identified with such a community in their early lives. Though it has to be acknowledged that both these men were brought up in societies where Christianity had become the established religion and which had incorporated a nominalized form of Christian values into their political systems, their characters were not formed in such a way that the metaphors centred on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ were able to inform their choices, intentions, and actions. If the communities of John Lennon's and Thomas Merton's youth serve to form the boundaries which in turn formed their characters, and if one takes their youthful behaviour as living out that formed character, then one can conclude that their respective communities were unable to impart a consistent moral ethic which is in keeping with the moral life exemplified by Jesus Christ.

The metaphors contained in the narratives shaping the early lives of Lennon and Merton failed to nurture the virtues of hope and patience, which Hauerwas suggests are necessary if one is to venture into the ethical life. The virtues of hope and patience, and the capacity to be virtuous, modelled on the life of Jesus Christ, seemed sadly lacking in the early lives of both Thomas Merton and John Lennon. However underdeveloped these virtues were, both Merton and Lennon set out to achieve autonomy and acclaim.[6] Both men became known as paradigms of

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6. Merton, *Mountain*, 164; Miles, *Words*, 14.

behaviour and thought – setting the pace amongst their peers and admirers. It could be said that Lennon and Merton claimed their sense of selfhood from their determination to succeed in the parameters of their chosen lifestyles.

I would argue that Lennon and Merton were raised in societies which encouraged them to think of themselves as self-creating individuals. These societies would have offered both men the opportunity to choose between a multiplicity of competing narrative traditions, with the result that without in-depth study the embodiment of truth from any of the available narratives was likely to remain fragmentary and undeveloped. Thomas Merton and John Lennon interacted with a variety of ethical systems throughout their early lives, making it difficult for either man to identify with any one particular community. Both men explored Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and incorporated some elements of these and other alternate systems into their own thought processes. These diverse narratives informed the choices these men made, leading them to integrate their early religious and societal experiences into a way of life which led them continually to explore competing ideals and metaphors.

Merton's and Lennon's early initiation into an institutionalized interpretation of the Christian tradition, and their early life experiences, did not provide them with sufficient resources to judge the value in other faith systems. Using Hauerwas' theories we could argue that had John Lennon and Thomas Merton received the appropriate type of nurture

within a community which is profoundly Christian and which has an
educational function in the life of its members, they might have formed a
character which was grounded in their own tradition and might have
been able to enter into critical discussion with persons from other faith
narratives. The truth contained within the Christian narrative, and
portrayed through that narrative's metaphors and stories, would have
informed their interaction with alternate narratives and perspectives. (CC,
93-94).

Neither man could be said to be a passive member of society,
simply acquiescing to the given tradition.[7] In fact, as has already been
noted, Lennon and Merton were to be acclaimed as paradigms during their
lives and after their deaths for their roles in challenging the given
precepts of traditional society. Lennon, after exploring other narratives
and in his attempts to find identity, meaning, and a sense of coherence
in his life, proposed his own idea of salvation for the world. He brought
his life experiences together in a vision which summed up the
meaninglessness and nihilation he saw around him and experienced in his
own life. Lennon rejected the claims of Christianity and turned instead
to meaning within himself. He rejected all forms of transcendent reality
and focused only on that which was concrete within his own being. In
so doing, he based his personal ethic only on that which he could know
and control for himself. Unwittingly, in rejecting all the mores of

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7. Though it is acknowledged that during Merton's first twenty years in
the monastery he did seem 'simply' to acquiesce to the tradition.

society, he became the model that same liberal society advocated, that is, the moral ideal of the autonomous, self-sufficient individual.

Merton, after leading a life filled with debauchery, and a search for his own identity, despaired that he would ever be able to gain control of his tendency towards excess. He came to realize that his choices, intentions, and actions, were uncontrollable, and that the resources he needed to placate his wanton desires were not to be found within himself. In an effort to curb his vices, he resumed his reading and study in spirituality and ultimately came to ground his life in the structured Christian metaphors as interpreted by Roman Catholicism. He subjected his own will to the will of God as revealed to him in the Christian narrative, and the search for truth and meaning in his life eventually led Merton to the contemplative life within a silent order. Firmly ensconced within the confines of a restrictive Christian monastery Merton was able to find freedom and peace within himself. He claimed his identity through identification with God as known in Christ, and his voluminous writings have become testimonies to the struggles he faced during the first half of his life and the ongoing search for complete communion with God. Only later in his life did he come to critique the restrictive structure of the monastery, the Catholic Church as an institution, and the world, while still remaining within the monastic tradition.

It is interesting to note how Lennon's dialogue with spirituality parallels Thomas Merton's own meanderings early in his life. Neither of

these men possessed characters solely shaped by the Christian narrative, and both continued to explore competing alternate traditions throughout their lives. Whereas Lennon concluded that he was unable to reconcile himself to the Christian metaphors and stories, Merton came to see that Christianity offered a sense of meaning which grounded his identity and illuminated the truth in other narratives. Catholicism became the underpinning of his existence, and throughout the remaining twenty-seven years of his life his character became re-formed within a Christian community.

Merton's search for identity led him through a process of self-denial in which possessions, fame, and human desires and appetites, were subjugated to the role of being a monk. His increasing disillusion with the stringent traditions of the monastery and with the authority of the Catholic church became less important as he came closer to the union with God which he sought. This union led him to conclude, twenty years later, that he should seek further seclusion in a hermitage while at the same time continuing to challenge the misconceptions abounding in society, which he considered were perpetuated by outdated, and in some cases false, claims to truth.[8] Although Stanley Hauerwas does not advocate withdrawal from the world, he does further the view that Christian individuals should participate fully in society nourished by the truth of the metaphors of their Christian tradition. Hauerwas suggests that the Christian community should constantly challenge the coercive

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8. Furlong, *Biography*, 265-266.

tendencies within society, and though this may make the community unpopular it should serve to form characters which seek out truth and strive for autonomy (PK, 102).

Hauerwas has argued that the Christian community should be the truthful community able to form and reform the character of its members. This being the case, it would seem that the communities to which Merton and Lennon belonged in their early years, had absorbed Christianity to the degree that it had become a diffused social ethic, no longer able to sustain the formation of an individual's early character in such a way that is consistent with, and oriented towards, the truth contained in the metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative. Lennon's life and Thomas Merton's youth demonstrate clearly that the formation of a moral character informed by the Christian narrative tradition is difficult to effect outside the particularity of a Christian community. The nominally Christian narrative tradition of Lennon's youth in particular, seemed to be swallowed up by his ever increasing nihilistic tendencies. However, as is suggested in Merton's case, the Christian community is able to re-form character, albeit through a process of conversion.

Hauerwas does not exclude the possibility of conversion; in fact, he is an advocate of the community of believers where the process of conversion is a long process of being baptismally engrafted into a new counter cultural community seeking to influence the world (RA, 46). It is my opinion that Hauerwas would advocate that the Christian community

become that which is able to nurture individuals throughout their lives,

sustaining them in the ambiguities of existence and forming characters

which would best inform the choices to be made by individuals in a

pluralistic world. In this way the Christian community would regain, and

be in a better position to retain, its particularity, and the truth

contained within the Christian community narrative would cease to be

refracted into ill-formed policies which lose their Christ-centredness when

institutionalized.

It is certainly true to say that the Christian community which

Merton joined was able to engage fully with him in his search for

meaning in his life. The monastery in which he lived had a educational

function, nurturing him and influencing the re-formation of his character.

Though this goes some of the way to substantiate Hauerwas' theories, I

do not think he had this type of monastic experience in mind when he

suggested that the Christian community was the ideal community in which

to form a moral character. Though the monastic tradition is counter

cultural, I believe that the community Hauerwas refers to is one which

lives out the Christian narrative tradition fully engaged in society,

throughout all aspects of life, familial, social, and political: the fully

visible church, centred on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ.[9] During the last years of his life Merton became an advocate of

this kind of community within the world, and though he remained within

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9. Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 46.

the monastery he challenged the social order to reappraise its position on many issues.

Hauerwas has argued that human beings initiated into and remaining within the framework of the Christian narrative tradition can sustain individual action and reaction in the world, living as worthy members of a community of disciples reflecting the life and teaching of Christ. In Hauerwas' view, the individual living the moral life outlined in the metaphors and stories of the Christian narrative tradition will not hesitate to challenge the social conditioning of the time, striving to bring the love and peace exemplified by the life of Jesus Christ to the world (PK, 73). I believe, with Hauerwas, that individuals living within the Christian tradition will develop a character which will best inform the choices to be made within the plurality of value systems apparent in modern society, and will be better equipped to dialogue with alternate traditions guided by the truth contained within the Christian narrative.

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