

original Child in ourselves, who is, at the deepest point (or the 'highest', however you think of it), our 'Self'.

But children need to grow up—they must not be 'scandalized' by wrong guidance, as Jesus said. Strangely, the growth of the re-born Child guided by the Adult, drawing on and carefully interpreting the perennial 'Communal Parent' which is the Church, means that the Child does not lose its childlikeness—that is, its joy, creativity, longing and hope. Rather, it is gradually freed (by the will of Adult and Communal Parent) from whatever impedes its return, with Jesus, to the Father. It is interesting to remember that some of the earliest pictures of Jesus show him as a young boy—the 'Puer Aeternus' of mythology. He is the Child of God, and it is by this that we, also, are made Children of God.

## Mythology and Marian Dogma

### by Geoffrey Turner

On the 1st of November, 1950, Pope Pius XII announced in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*, as an indispensable part of Christian belief, revealed by God, that 'Mary, the immaculate and perpetually virgin Mother of God, after the completion of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into the glory of heaven'. It is difficult to know what sort of sense to give to this kind of dogmatic formulation, but it would seem that sense has to be made of it because it has been accepted by the general consensus of the Church and defined by the highest authority as being an integral part of Christian doctrine for all Roman Catholics. We have to make theological sense of it in order to be faithful to the transmission of the Marian traditions throughout the ages of the Church. This is not to suggest that we should relax our criticism of these traditions, but I take it that we cannot be faithful to Christian tradition and at the same time adopt the liberal attitude of dispensing as irrelevant with those dogmatic traditions which do not meet our taste. Marian dogma cannot be shrugged off by Roman Catholics as being a Catholic aberration of Christian tradition; after the Papal definitions of the immaculate conception of Mary in 1854 and of her bodily assumption in 1950 the dogmas have to be taken with the utmost seriousness, and if it is found to be difficult to reconcile an easy understanding of these dogmas with more fundamental aspects of Christian doctrine then we must adopt a more broad-ranging interpretation of these beliefs. What is required in this instance is an exercise in dogmatic hermeneutics.

The dogmatic formulation of the bodily assumption of Mary is usually accepted literally, in its simplest sense, but this literal understanding is clearly unsatisfactory and is why the dogma requires

interpretation. The dogma does not make sense if it is taken quite literally. In the first place, while we may even doubt the value of body-soul language, her body cannot have gone *up* like some celestial spaceship, and heaven is not a place that bodies go *into*. Pope Pius XII has elevated a metaphor into a dogma. Now this need not be reprehensible if the metaphor of the assumption of Mary is a good one. Dogmatic theology is full of metaphors and some of the favourite bits of Roman Catholic dogmatics are based on metaphors; the 'sacrifice' of the Mass and 'original sin' are both metaphors and a good deal of trouble and misunderstanding is caused by those controversialists who do not understand that they are metaphors. At a very obvious level Pope Paul was using a metaphor when he decided in 1964 at the end of the third session of the Vatican Council to proclaim Mary as the 'Mother of the Church'. So we need not be surprised at the metaphorical status of Marian dogma.

What does the image of the 'assumption' represent? There are two close parallels in the ascension of Jesus and the general resurrection of all Christians as pictured by Paul. Although 'ascension' means literally 'the going up', Luke was rather more subtle in his description: while the disciples were looking at Jesus 'he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight' (Acts 1, 9). In the context of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the unexpected continuation of his life with his disciples after his death, what the ascension represents is not the 'going up' of Jesus so much as his going away, his departure and subsequent absence from his disciples. The assumption of Mary works as a metaphor in a similar way to the metaphor of the ascension of Jesus but not in exactly the same way. After the death of Mary there were no post-resurrection appearances nor any indication of her continued life within the Church, so the image of the assumption does not represent her departure in the same way as the ascension represents Jesus's departure from the Church. There is a better parallel if we compare Mary's assumption with the general resurrection which we expect at the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ. St Paul pictures it in this way in 1 Thessalonians 4, 15-17:

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left at the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead of Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Although Paul here is using a very vivid and highly imaginative metaphor it is clear that what he is writing about is a real event which he imagines will actually happen, even though he is not able

to give a literal description of that future event. It seems that the image of the assumption of Mary represents what will happen at the general resurrection, and if we take the assumption of Mary to be a metaphor which represents a real historical event which has happened *in the past* this can only mean that the general resurrection which has still to be realized has been anticipated by Mary. And this conclusion has been confirmed by implication at least by those theologians who, since the definition of the dogma in 1950, have written about the assumption of Mary as though it were the same as her bodily resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is curious that from the first mention of the dogma by Theoteknos of Livias in, probably, the second half of the sixth century<sup>2</sup> the word 'resurrection' (*anastasis, resurrectio*) has been carefully avoided. 'Assumption' (*analepsis*) and 'passing over' (*metastasis, transitus*) were the alternatives in the West, and 'the sleep' (*koimēsis*) became the favoured expression in the East for describing whatever it was that happened to Mary at her death. The avoidance of 'resurrection' by the Fathers as a description of Mary's fate seems to indicate that they were afraid of identifying what happened to Jesus and to his mother at the end of each of their lives on earth, but this cautious use of language was quite unnecessary on their part if we are indeed to suppose that Mary has anticipated the final resurrection. It is as though the Fathers were trying to eat their cake and have it; they wanted to preserve the uniqueness of Jesus's resurrection and they wanted to assert that the same thing had happened to Mary (though it is easy to see why the implied 'Mary is risen' would have been offensive to their religious sensibilities). A way out of this dilemma would be to suppose that the assumption of Mary is not a metaphor which represents a past historical event, and that the development of the belief betrays a confusion of language in what dogmatic theology has to say about Mary.

When writing about the general resurrection Paul uses, on the whole, fairly restrained language but it is clear that he does not fully understand the event about which he is writing; he has only the haziest notion of what the resurrection will involve. The only thing which allows him to write about the general resurrection at all is the knowledge he has of Jesus's own resurrection. Similarly, if we want to say that Mary has been raised from the dead, anything which we say about her resurrection will have to be derived from what we know about Jesus's resurrection. Again it is clear that 'resurrection' is a metaphor by which we refer to whatever it was that happened between the burial of Jesus and the post-resurrection

<sup>1</sup>For example, K. Rahner: 'The Interpretation of the Dogma of the Assumption' in *Theological Investigations I*, pp. 215-227; R. Laurentin: *Court Traité de Théologie Mariale*; and, at the other end of the theological spectrum, *The Dogma of the Assumption*, the C.T.S. pamphlet by Cardinal Heenan.

<sup>2</sup>A sermon by Theoteknos is the first known theological discussion of the assumption and was published by Wenger in *L'Assomption*, Paris, 1955.

appearances. For Paul, resurrection is a waking from sleep, but that is hardly satisfactory as a literal description of what happened to Jesus in the tomb, an event which no one experienced save Jesus himself. The biblical language (*anistēmi*, *egeirō*) implies no more than a 'getting up'. Another point about these two Greek verbs is that they are invariably used of Jesus's resurrection in passive tenses: Jesus did not raise himself up, he was raised by God.

There is a current dispute among German Lutheran theologians whether Jesus's resurrection describes a real historical event at all, and this is indeed denied by some (e.g. Bultmann and Marxsen). It would be inappropriate to pursue this dispute here in a discussion of Marian dogma, but the dispute does highlight Wolfhart Pannenberg's insistence that the metaphor 'resurrection' is used of a real historical event even though the event is not adequately represented by this metaphor and even though this event was not witnessed by anyone.<sup>1</sup> As our language of resurrection is relatively remote from the event to which it refers we must ask on what grounds we believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, when the language for what happened can never stop being metaphorical. Of course we have no evidence for the event itself which we choose to call Jesus's resurrection, but what we do have is historical evidence for the death of Jesus, for the empty tomb after his death, and for his appearances after his death, and I think that precisely as historical evidence this is a good deal more reliable than many people will allow. The earliest evidence which we have for the resurrection of Jesus comes from Paul in 1 Thessalonians which was written about A.D. 50. This was written perhaps twenty years after the event but it represents an unbroken tradition preserved in the Church throughout those two decades. Indeed, the whole of Paul's Christian life and writings were dominated by the vision which he himself had of the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (for example, see 2 Cor. 12, 1-4). The text of the earliest Gospel as we now have it ends abruptly after the account of the empty tomb and the announcement by the angel that Jesus is risen and that he will appear in Galilee, but these appearances are not described (Mk. 16, 1-8). There is some considerable contention whether the text originally stopped at this point or whether the original ending has been lost. Most scholars take the former view but I am inclined to think that, on the basis of the theology which has gone before in the previous fifteen chapters, we should expect a different and more substantial conclusion. Whatever is the case, but especially if the present text of Mark is the correct one, there is reason to suppose that the traditions of the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances were complementary traditions which were preserved separately and which were possibly only brought together in written form in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. By this time (A.D. 70-80) legendary material had also been incor-

<sup>1</sup>Pannenberg: *Jesus, God and Man*, 1968, pp. 74-5.

porated, particularly in Matthew, but the descriptions of the resurrected body in the post-resurrection appearances in each of the last three Gospels agree in general with the simpler and earlier account given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. The public speeches by Peter and Paul in Acts refer to the risen Jesus and claim that he was seen by the disciples (Acts 2, 32; 3, 15; 13, 30-31). These speeches were not reported by Luke until after A.D. 80 but their general accuracy is confirmed by the earlier letters of Paul which contain what look like cultic affirmations which correspond to parts of the speeches which were recorded later in Acts. Paul's letters in this respect are an echo of earlier apostolic tradition preserved and passed on to Paul by the earliest disciples, and Paul claimed that over five hundred of his brethren had seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15, 5-6). Whatever it was that happened in the tomb there is quite reliable evidence that Jesus was dead and then alive again before he finally left his disciples. (The ascension is not a metaphor which is separate from that of the resurrection but is simply a corollary of Jesus's having been raised from the dead in the light of the fact that he is obviously no longer bodily present with the Church.)

This is a very cursory account of the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus and it does no more than show what sort of evidence is available and in which direction it points. The point I want to make in this context is that there is evidence, quite concrete evidence, for the resurrection of Jesus but there is no comparable evidence for the resurrection of Mary. The evidence for Jesus's resurrection is all scriptural, of course, and we may want to invest it with some special authority on that count (though in fact I think it reasonable to give scripture special divine authority only retrospectively after we have been convinced that God has raised Jesus from the dead and that scripture does in fact recount the action of God in history), but in the first place this evidence takes the form of historical testimony. Not only is there no scriptural testimony for Mary's resurrection but, outside the New Testament, there is no historical information available either, even about her death. It may be argued that the visions which some people have had of Mary since the beginning of the nineteenth century provide evidence for a bodily resurrection, but there are difficulties here. It could be argued in reply that these visions were the result of simple credulity, whereas the Apostles' experience of the risen Jesus does seem to have been authentic. Those who have had these visions of Mary do not have the same importance as individuals as the first leaders of the Church who met the risen Jesus. And furthermore these visions of Mary were not bodily in the way that Jesus appeared bodily to his disciples when, it is alleged, he ate with them and was touched by them. On the whole these supposed visions of Mary do not seem to count as evidence for the bodily resurrection of Mary. That she has been assumed into heaven was not suggested before the end of

the sixth century and the belief did not really take hold until the thirteenth century. The belief that Mary has been raised was not the result of any empirical evidence but was the conclusion reached by the *a priori* argument that this is what one would expect God to have done. However, the argument first used by the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon monk Eadmer—*potuit, deuit, fecit* (he could do it, he ought to do it, therefore he has done it)—is quite unsatisfactory for supposing that God has performed an arbitrary act. Far from supposing that God *should* have raised up Mary, the supposition that he has done so creates for us a considerable theological problem.

What, for us, is the point of God's having raised Jesus from the dead? It would seem that in Pharisaical circles in Palestine before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 there was a general expectation that God's Messiah, his anointed servant, would appear and would inaugurate the general resurrection of all pious Jews. Whether Jesus expected the general resurrection to follow immediately after his own death is not clear, but Paul's letters show that the early Church, up to A.D. 60 at least, expected this resurrection to happen quite soon. Of course it didn't happen. But in the light of Paul's prediction of the general resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and elsewhere, the fact of Jesus's having been raised from the dead is confirmation that we also will be raised and, particularly as natural theology no longer seems such a viable option for showing that God exists, it is confirmation that there is a God who raised Jesus from the dead. The general resurrection of all men has happened proleptically, in advance, in Jesus, and this acts as a ratification by God of Jesus's previous life and ministry. If we look at Jesus's resurrection in this way, Mary's resurrection becomes theologically superfluous. Traditional Catholic theologians try to justify the historicity of Mary's assumption by seeing it as a confirmation of our own future resurrection (though it can hardly be a confirmation when there is no evidence for it). Yet this is exactly what Jesus's resurrection is; he is the 'first fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 15, 20). If Mary has been raised up by God it must detract from the unique significance of Jesus's resurrection, and his resurrection, if it is to be differentiated theologically from Mary's assumption, would then have to be moved to a 'higher' level, perhaps to the extent of speaking of the pre-existent Logos who has raised himself from the dead. But such a christology would not do justice to the language and theology of the New Testament, where Jesus is shown as a mortal man who has been raised up by God. Admittedly the christology being proposed here, a christology which examines the evidence for the life and death of the man Jesus without doctrinal presuppositions about his divine nature, is only one of several possible alternatives. But it is one which many find more satisfactory than some earlier forms of christology, and the difficulty about the dogma of the assumption of Mary—if it is taken as a past historical

event—is that it precludes this form of christology.

There are similar though less urgent difficulties when we look at some other Marian dogmas. The immaculate conception is not so problematic as the assumption because it does not claim to be an historical event in quite the same way as the dogma of the assumption claims to be, nor, because of this, do we have quite the same difficulty in deciding what sort of event it was (in the sense that in the case of the assumption it is the equivalent of ‘resurrection’). Yet a problem remains because the dogma of the immaculate conception claims to refer to an objective state of affairs while its language remains at the level of metaphor. All that this doctrine claims in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* issued by Pope Pius IX in 1854 is that Mary was exempted from original sin by a special act of God. But original sin, because there is no personal responsibility involved, is a sin only by analogy,<sup>1</sup> and refers rather to a fundamental corruption in men and their willingness to give themselves up to the forces of destruction, a religious belief which it is not difficult to accept in this barbarous twentieth century. In more religious terms original sin can be taken to refer to the lack of moral integrity which Paul said was part of his life before his conversion (Rom. 7, 7-25). It may not be unreasonable to think that Mary should have been free from the moral defects from which Paul suffered before his conversion, but if we take the immaculate conception to refer to an objective state of affairs and raise this to the level of dogma then we must provide reasons for doing this. In the first place there is no scriptural affirmation of this doctrine. Allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament such as Jeremiah 1, 5 (‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’) is not a sufficient basis for asserting an objective fact about Mary. And Luke 1, 28 does not support this doctrine either. This verse should not be translated ‘Hail, full of grace’, because there is no reference to the quantity of grace involved; *kexarītōmenē* means no more than ‘you who have been graced’, or ‘you who have been blessed’, or, best of all, ‘you who have received a favour’. It would also require an absolute biblical fundamentalism (an accusation usually made by Catholics against a certain type of Protestant) to exploit to the full each word of this verse from Luke to support the objective status of the immaculate conception, and such fundamentalism would be especially dangerous in the first two chapters of Luke where fact has become inextricably intertwined with legend. If, despite the lack of scriptural attestation, we accept for the moment the argument that Mary required such a special grace so that she would not have passed on the hereditary defect of original sin, it can be countered that this special act of grace could

<sup>1</sup>K. Rahner: *Theological Investigations I*, pp. 207-8: ‘We should remember that in original sin . . . we are dealing with a “sin” which is essentially different from personal sin as the act of that freedom which permits of no deputization, a sin, then, which only falls under the same concept “analogically”.’

very well have been reserved for the foetus which became Jesus. Belief in the factuality of this dogma does not offend religious sensibility in the way that the assumption can insofar as that belief can detract from the uniqueness of Jesus's own resurrection, but *a priori* arguments in favour of the immaculate conception founder, like those arguments for the assumption, on the charge that in a strict sense they are not theologically necessary.

It is less difficult to accept that Mary was a virgin. There is scriptural affirmation for this at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, yet these chapters contain so much legend (wise men following a star, angels appearing before shepherds) that we may reasonably doubt whether these references to Mary's virginity refer strictly to her lack of sexual experience, though the tradition of a miraculous birth has a long history. Certainly the belief that Mary was a virgin *in partu* can hardly be taken to mean that her hymen was not torn during the birth. In the early creeds 'Born of the virgin Mary' is an integral part of the christological beliefs expressed in those creeds and refers to the unique quality of the child, his conception and his birth. This is where the true significance of the belief in the virgin birth lies independently of whether Jesus was conceived outside the normal pattern of human fertilization.

It seems to be an open matter whether the traditional belief in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ refers to an objective fact about Mary's inner physiological constitution in addition to the original intention which points to the theophanic significance of the child. However, while the immaculate conception and the assumption *may* be objective facts, we can reasonably doubt that they are, if only because there is insufficient evidence for asserting them to be objective facts. Yet, no matter what the historical status of the content of these dogmas may be, it is clear that the tradition of Marian dogma is on to something; there is something of importance trying to get out of this fumbling and confused language. If we interpret these doctrines in a loose way, short of denying that they have any meaning or significance, we can say that they propose that Mary had a special relationship with God throughout her life, at her conception, during her pregnancy, at the birth of her son and at her death. Mary was closer to Christ and, with the exception of Christ himself, closer to God than anyone else can be. Yet the separate Marian dogmas are not unconnected. They have a continuity, they represent an historical pattern. They take the key moments of Mary's existence and show how they were related to God's purpose in history in terms of religious mythology. Man's mythopoeic faculty has transformed the theological significance of Mary's life into symbol. Now I must make it clear at this point that when I refer to Marian dogmas as myths I do not mean that they are untrue or deceptive or that they are like fairy-tales which the

adult mind should grow out of. What I want to suggest is that they should not be looked upon as statements of fact which must be either true or false; they do not convey simple information about the world. When I say that these doctrines are mythic I mean that the *function* to which they are put in the Christian community, irrespective of the status of their content, is comparable to the function which the myths of original sin, creation and so forth, have in the liturgy and in private reading and devotions. Anyone who doesn't like the term 'myth' because it is too loaded a word may prefer to speak of 'symbols' or 'metaphors'. But it is important to understand that the historical status of the content of these doctrines is secondary to and independent of the primary significance of religious myth, which is to refer to man's situation in the world and before God.

While such myths may not in every case refer to historical events they always have a deeper spiritual, indeed mythological, meaning which does not lie on the surface. The historical pattern of the Marian dogmas has a literary parallel in Isaiah 51, 9-11:

Awake, awake, put on strength,  
 O arm of the Lord;  
 awake, as in days of old,  
 the generations of long ago.  
 Was it not thou that didst cut Rahab in pieces,  
 that didst pierce the dragon?

Was it not thou that didst dry up the sea,  
 the waters of the deep;  
 that didst make the depths of the sea a way  
 for the redeemed to pass over?  
 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
 and come with singing to Zion;  
 everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
 they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
 and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The prophet was writing amongst the exiles of Babylon in the sixth century B.C. and in this passage he uses—almost in the style of an incantation—three myths of varying historical status to form an historical pattern for God's interventions on behalf of the Jews. Isaiah says in effect, just as you killed Rahab at the creation of the world (Rahab, also known as Leviathan, was the chaos monster who had to be defeated at creation to bring order into the world), just as you brought the Jews out of Egypt (the crossing of the sea seems to have actually happened but the accretion of legendary material has transformed the event into a myth, though a myth with a sound historical basis), now do it again, defeat the Babylonians and lead the Jews out of exile (an event which happened some years later, but an event which can be regarded as mythic in this passage because it refers to a future event, just as Paul's language about the

future resurrection could be said to be mythic in view of the literary function he gives such language). In a similar way we can take the continuity of Marian dogmas as myths representing the course of her special relationship with God throughout her life where the historical basis of each myth may differ from each of the others. In the case of Isaiah's myths we would no longer regard creation as literally God's conquest of the chaos monster, but we would think it likely that there was a crossing of some sea when the Jews came out of Egypt, though we cannot be sure of what happened in any detail (we don't even know which sea it was), and we would insist as a historical fact that a number of Jews did come to Jerusalem from Babylon in or around 538 B.C. The historical status of the Marian dogmas is less easily determinable than these, but precisely because their historicity is not easily determined no Catholic need feel committed to a particular view of them as historical fact. While all Catholics should be committed to the use of these dogmas in the life of the Church, all should see that their true significance lies elsewhere.

It is by no means obvious what is the real meaning of Marian dogma, but having given so much negative criticism I ought now to suggest, however hesitantly, where that meaning lies. Behind the mythic passage in Isaiah 51 there are three public, historical events, but Isaiah has imposed religious interpretations on to them by seeing them as the result of God's divine purpose. The moments in Mary's life which have been singled out in the three Marian dogmas which have been formally defined are not public events open to impartial examination, but the dogmas again impose religious interpretations on to these life moments. We may well ask why Mary should have become the object of such interpretations. Up to the fifth century the reference to Mary's part in the birth of her son was subsidiary to the christological intent of belief. Since the fifth century Marian dogmas have become separated from dogmas about Christ, they have become ends in themselves. It is clear that Mary is being treated as a representative, but because of the separate development of this later stage of Marian dogma it would seem that she is not treated as a representative in the same way that Jesus is in the development of christology.

The key to understanding her representative function lies in the kind of interpretation which has been applied to the important moments of her life. Her own conception was 'immaculate', that is, she was preserved from original sin or lack of moral and psychological integrity. Her conception of Jesus was 'virginal', that is, non-sexual. The birth of Jesus is often said to have been without pain, though this is by no means a dogma of the Church. Her death was 'assumptional', or, shall we say, non-final. In each case there is a kind of corruption which Mary is said not to have suffered from. In each case there is a corresponding Old Testament myth in Genesis

which represents a corruption which all men are said to inherit, but from which Mary has been exempted in the Christian tradition. In this context each Marian dogma can be said to be a 'counter-myth', that is, the counterpart of myths in Genesis. In Genesis 4, 1 Eve conceives Cain, which is an event of tragic significance because of the conflict and murder which he later originated. But the immaculate conception, on the other hand, presents the conception of a child as an event which is free from corruption and tragic significance. After the eating of the apple, sex is a matter of shame (Gen. 3, 7), but when Mary had her child she was preserved, not so much from sex, as from the shame of sexuality. In the Old Testament childbirth is painful and bringing a child into a world of suffering is itself tragic and dreadful (Gen. 3, 16). For Mary, having a baby was without pain and was a matter for joy. In Genesis, death is annihilation and total corruption (3, 19). But Mary's death is not the end, she does not return to dust. What Mary represents is life in the new dispensation brought about by the resurrection of her son. Marian dogma represents life in the Church under grace. In dogma, Mary has become a cypher for the Church and for each member of the Church. But not in a static sense; she stands for the life of the Christian who has been freed from all forms of corruption by the grace of God. In mythic terms Mary has become the archetypal Christian. We too can now be free from original sin (contrast Paul's pre-Christian and Christian life in Romans 7, 7-25 and 8, 1-39). We too are liberated from the shame of sexuality. Bringing children into the world is no longer a matter for regret. Death is no longer the final corruption.

## **God, America and the Remnant**

by John Illo

The American assault on the human spirit and upon the salvational work of God began at home as a degeneration of the American character. The European capitalist ethic had always threatened a perversion of the spirit, because it exalted individualism and because it measured religious justification by ownership or wealth or power. And so the American character from its infancy bore the potential of moral disaster: the individualism could become egotism, the productive energy could become technicism and a commodity ethic, the optimism and pride of achievement could become racism and imperialism. Thoreau saw the danger in the 1840s, De Tocqueville even earlier. The American contribution to the decay was a separation of the capitalist ethic from a religious base, a vulgarization of