

after the New Deal had demolished all the levees,” Voegeli writes. But they didn’t look particularly hard for alternatives, either. Buckley eventually recanted, saying that his view that America could evolve its way out of Jim Crow was wrong. His own opinion had changed over time, however, and by 2004 he said flatly, “Federal intervention was necessary.”

Conservatives’ complicity in segregation during the early years of the civil rights movement made it easy for liberals to dismiss all their subsequent arguments against busing, affirmative action, and hiring goals and timetables. By drawing a line in the sand and then eventually conceding that it had been politically and morally indefensible, conservatives lost standing to affect the course of the debate. When faced with what they saw as the constitutionally reckless approach of the civil rights movement to ending segregation, these conservatives

shrugged their shoulders and proposed waiting until the segregationists got religion. By letting the best be the enemy of the good, Voegeli argues, conservatives “squandered the opportunity to fashion a constitutionally principled argument in favor of either augmenting the federal government’s powers so they were equal to the task of ending Jim Crow, or activating latent powers afforded by the Constitution that were not being brought to bear against segregation.”

By drawing the line in an indefensible place, conservatives ceded the high ground to those who insisted there should be no lines whatsoever—those willing to embrace any expansion of government that might further racial justice. “Liberals came to grief over civil rights because they had no stopping point,” Voegeli concludes, “while conservatives came to grief because they had no starting point.”

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Will Evangelicals Hail Mary?

THE SOURCE: “Evangelicals and Mary” by Tim Perry, in *Theology Today*, July 2008.

STARTING WITH THEIR OPPOSITION to abortion access, Catholics and evangelical Christians have a lot in common politically. But they still differ dramatically in their theology and everyday worship practices, and that is nowhere more apparent than in their reverence for Mary, the mother of Jesus. Among Catholics, the role of the Virgin has traditionally been central, among evangelicals, almost nonexistent. Now evangelicals are rediscovering Mary, writes Tim Perry, who teaches theology at Providence College and Seminary in Manitoba, for reasons both devotional and theological.

The near-universal veneration of Mary became a casualty of the

EXCERPT

End of the Mainline

America was Methodist, once upon a time—Methodist, or Baptist, or Presbyterian, or Congregationalist, or Episcopalian. . . . In truth, all the talk, from the 18th century on, of the United States as a religious nation was really just a make-nice way of saying it was a Christian nation—and even to call it a Christian nation was usually just a soft and ecumenical attempt to gloss over the obvious fact that the United States was, at its root, a Protestant nation. . . .

The denominations were often engaged in what

later generations would scorn as narrow sectarian debates. . . . Perhaps precisely because they were aimed inward, the Protestant churches were able to radiate outward, giving a characteristic shape to the nation: the centrality of families, the pattern of marriages and funerals, the vague but widespread patriotism, the strong localism, and the ongoing sense of some providential purpose at work in the existence of the United States.

Which makes it all the stranger that, somewhere around 1975, the main stream of Protestantism ran dry. . . . The great confluence of Protestantism has dwindled to a trickle over the past 30 years, and the Great Church of America has come to an end.

—JOSEPH BOTTUM, editor of *First Things*, Aug.–Sept. 2008

Reformation. As Protestant leaders rebelled against the sacramental and clerical system of the established Catholic church, Mary was almost written out of their version of Christianity, to be mentioned only at Christmas, if at all. Even the Dutch reform-minded humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), no pushover for theological orthodoxy, thought that under the Reformation “not only have the abuses stopped, so has appropriate devotion.”

Evangelical preachers have long been wary of upholding Mary as

exemplary or symbolic for fear that they would be seen as too sympathetic to Catholicism, Perry writes. Now that is beginning to change among writers and theologians. Some are responding to genuine Catholic ecumenical overtures, and others have developed renewed interest in studying early church writings to understand the Bible without drawing too heavily on the “zeitgeist of contemporary Western culture,” Perry says.

Some of the emerging dialogue between Catholics and evangelicals over Mary became possible because

of a new receptivity resulting from what has been called the “ecumenism of the trenches,” Perry writes. Shared concerns over *Roe v. Wade* and “further ethical challenges posed by developments in biotechnology, embryology, and gerontology” have fostered alliances that previously did not exist. Moreover, he contends, evangelicals’ commitment to ecumenism regarding Mary is not optional, but rather “a gospel imperative.” Evangelicals must acknowledge a certain special status for Mary because, quite simply, the Bible does.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The Arrow of Time

THE SOURCE: “Does Time Run Backward in Other Universes?” by Sean M. Carroll, in *Scientific American*, June 2008.

THE MYSTERIES OF BLACK holes and supernovas notwithstanding, the universe on the whole is a law-abiding place. From galaxies of stars to the tiny particles that constitute atoms, objects interact with each other according to rules that scientists think they understand. But one aspect of the universe has them baffled. That component is time.

There is a satisfying symmetry to the physical universe. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; for every negatively charged electron there is (presumably, somewhere) a positively charged positron. But time marches

on in only one direction. One way of looking at this idea is that it is the stuff of the *Back to the Future* movies: It’s fun to think about traveling to the past, but you can’t actually do it. And entropy—randomness or disorder—tends to increase with time. That’s the second law of thermodynamics. So the universe has been steadily growing more disorderly. When you add milk to your coffee, the milk spreads randomly throughout the cup; it doesn’t spontaneously separate into a layer on top. Humpty Dumpty didn’t suddenly reassemble himself; not even all the king’s horses and all the king’s men could put him together again.

But why should time go in only one direction? If the universe is otherwise symmetrical, what’s so

special about time? Sean M. Carroll, a senior research associate in physics at the California Institute of Technology, offers one possibility: Maybe, just maybe, ours is not the only universe there is. Maybe a big bang of the sort that is thought to have given birth to our universe happens every now and then. And maybe the arrow of time points in our direction (that is, toward the “future”) in half the universes and in the opposite direction (toward the “past”) in the other half. What if “we see only a tiny patch of the big picture, and this larger arena is fully time symmetric?” Carroll asks.

Not to worry, he says. In a universe in which the “past” was the “future,” people wouldn’t be born old and die as infants. In the confines of their universe, everything would proceed as in ours. It is only when they compared their universe to ours that anything would seem unusual. And each universe would be entirely separate and unknowable to denizens