

## Introduction

As this introduction to our millennium issue of *New Theology Review* is written, the Millennium Society notes on its Web page that there are exactly 252 days, 11 hours, 20 minutes, and 48 seconds until the year 2000. Hotels, cruises, and party celebrations are planned for a grand New Year's Eve 1999, but will cost four times the normal price. The Internet and book stores are saturated by scholarly and not-so-scholarly apocalyptic interpretations. Intelligence sources in the United States are seriously responding to reports about some Christian cults who appear to be planning mass suicides or political commotions.

The hype and the overload of commentary about this event caused some of us on the editorial board to wonder what our journal could possibly contribute to the discussion. But it was decided that since *NTR* is intended to provide today's ministers a serious theological reflection on current issues in the American culture, we simply could not avoid the millennium question. Or should we say questions? Will the Y2K problem really send us into a cataclysm? How will the new millennium affect the way we preach the gospel? Will the new millennium be a new age of liberation as in Dante's vision of the redeemed shining like a great white rose unfolding petal by petal in the light of glory? Or is this the end of time where planet Earth is obliterated by some monstrous event? Is this the definite marker for the second coming of Christ?

We asked three respected scholars to provide theological, biblical, and historical foundations to begin to respond to such questions. Church historian Kevin Madigan notes the decrease of apocalyptic activity in the years following the first millennium and ponders the question, "Which is the age of faith and credulity, theirs or ours?" Biblical scholar Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., explores why the turn of the millennium and the expectation of Christ's imminent return moves some people to irrational behavior and where such thinking originates. He is convinced that since apocalyptic is part of our biblical heritage, we should not be silent to the prophecies of contemporary fundamentalists. Systematic theologian Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., tackles the complex project of providing us with a new cosmology for the new millennium. Even though modern science views humans as "embedded in the chemical process more deeply than was the case with medieval thought," Hayes offers a view of humanity possessing "a distinctiveness which raises important moral, ethical questions."

While the next three articles are not specifically focused on the millennium moment, they do have serious implications for the Church in a new age. Systematic theologian Donald Buggert, O.C.A.R.M., explores

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three major issues in contemporary christology: the resurrection of Jesus, the role of narrative in christology, and the claim that Jesus is universal savior. He addresses these issues through a critique of three recent books by Michael L. Cook, Scott Cowdell, and Kenan B. Osborne. Australian religious educator John N. Collins examines Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's phrase "a discipleship of equals" and asks if it represents the early Christian tradition understood by the Church. Media expert Bernard R. Bonnot presents a positive way of how to appreciate today's media that can actually bring us closer to God in Christ. Our regular columns and book reviews round out our millennium issue by providing us timely insights and useful pastoral resources.

A thousand years in your sight are as yesterday when it is past,  
and as a watch in the night.

*Psalms 90:4*