

EDITORIAL

“Millennium”—few words have stirred people’s imagination more in recent history than this hard-to-spell Latin term. Evangelicals naturally associate it with eschatology, the topic of our 1999 annual meeting. For others, the expression has evoked the notion of closing one chapter in human history and of starting another, or perhaps simply the sheer excitement of seeing all four digits of the number 1999 turn to 2000.

But the turn of the millennium marks changes much more profound than the mere adjustment of calendar. We live in an age of rapid, unprecedented change on a global scale, brought about by an astounding technological revolution. There are many indicators of this. As a sign of the times, Jeff Bezos, founder of amazon.com, the first global internet company, was chosen *TIME* magazine’s “man of the year.” A jury of experts voted “internet” “word of the century.” And in the recent AOL/Time-Warner merger, it was the internet giant buying Time-Warner, not vice versa. As the series of images of millennial celebrations from around the globe impressively demonstrated, the world has indeed become a “global village.” In fact, many suggest that globalization, not postmodernism, best describes our age.

Yet perhaps nothing illustrates the pace of change better than the fact that, shortly after the “irrational exuberance” (to use Alan Greenspan’s famous phrase) of worldwide millennium celebrations on the eve of December 31, 1999, the world woke up the next morning to find that the arrival of the new millennium was already old news, having fallen under the bane of Andy Warhol’s well-known dictum, “famous for fifteen minutes.” Y2K? Long forgotten. Paying an exorbitant amount for the web address year2000.com? Utter folly. Yet even this “millennial fatigue” has not quenched the prevailing enthusiasm and unbounded optimism with which many are greeting the onset of this era of apparently limitless opportunity.

The accelerating pace of change at the turn of the millennium presents evangelical Christians with unique challenges as well. With regard to the Evangelical Theological Society, the question arises how we should conceive of its role in this rapidly changing world. Is our task merely that of remaining faithful to our charge of preserving orthodoxy? Or must we also work to find ever new ways of exploring and communicating the relevance of the timeless Christian message of redemption and forgiveness in Christ to an ever-changing world? Some of us—myself included—may feel uncomfortable, even overwhelmed, in the face of the unknown and unfamiliar future ahead. As Jim Lehrer recently concluded in his “News Hour,” writers are certainly not exempt from being afraid of technological change.

I confess that at times I am tempted to respond to the world’s change of pace with the kind of sentimental romanticism epitomized by the words of the 15th-century French poet François Villon, who mournfully lamented the

passing of the “snows of yesteryear” (cited by Richard Eder in his perceptive cover story of the January 1, 2000 issue of *The New York Times*). Understandable as such longings may be, however, change is inevitable, and ignoring its implications entails the peril of sinking into irrelevance. The Spirit may be conservative on doctrinal issues; it is less clear whether he is equally conservative on gospel distribution systems, publishing procedures, or other non-doctrinal matters. Thus while we must not be swayed by every wind of new technology, we ought to be concerned with discerning the times, like the men of Issachar of old and unlike the Pharisees who were scolded by our Lord for their inability to “interpret the signs of the times.”

Whether we like it or not, the shape of theological education and the dissemination of knowledge and information, for example, are already in the process of being altered indelibly and irreversibly. Even our very own Society may increasingly be confronted with the question of how to respond to the rapid globalization of our planet in every area of life. Thus in a recent essay entitled “Beyond Gutenberg” (published in a special issue of *The Economist, The World in 2000*, pp. 109–110), Bill Gates extols the virtues of electronic publishing, presaging that more advanced technology, including the possibilities of hypertext links and customization, will render this new device increasingly attractive, if not inevitable. Publishing costs will plummet, he predicts, as will the retail price of books, and self-publishing will continue to be on the increase. Gates even envisions the setting up in poor countries of “virtual” public libraries with “access to the same content as the Library of Congress.”

Some may dismiss this as “irrational exuberance” (Greenspan revisited) or as infatuation with change for change’s sake. What good is it, it may be asked, to produce ever smaller chips, ever faster delivery systems, while neglecting the substance to be transmitted? Others may decry the undeniable toll some of this change has taken on the moral fabric of our society where relationships break down because fathers spend more time at home on their computers than with their spouse and children. Yet it would be unwise to draw too radical a dichotomy between technological change and moral virtue, as if change itself were our enemy and preserving the status quo somehow more virtuous or Scriptural. As we formulate our response to the changes with which we see ourselves confronted, we ought to avoid both extremes: a naive, undiscerning embrace of change as well as resistance to any (or almost any) change out of a mistaken conservatism that equates maintaining the present state of affairs with greater Biblical fidelity.

In his parting 1998 editorial, Ron Youngblood said he wanted as new *JETS* editor “someone who will bring to the position new and fresh ideas—in short, someone who has young blood coursing through his or her veins.” “Young” may be a relative term (as Irenaeus has it, “from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age,” *Adv. Haer.* 2.22.5), but if God so desires, I am willing, by his grace and enablement, and together with all the officers, members, and friends of our Society, to be, not only an instrument of preservation, but also of change.

P.S. On more pedestrian matters of current business, I am grateful to welcome to the team our new book review editor (theology), Gregg Allison. The increased number of book reviews featured last year eliminated the backlog and enables us to enter the new year (though not yet the new millennium) with a clean slate. Many thanks also to the referees, whose behind-the-scenes work, I am convinced, has made this a better journal. In web-related news, the *Journal's* table of contents will from now on be posted on our website (<http://etsjets.org>).

The year 2000 holds many treats in store for *JETS* readers, including articles by Mark Saucy on "Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox Together"; Stan Grenz on "What Does Hollywood Have to Do with Wheaton? The Place of (Pop) Culture in Theological Reflection"; John Jefferson Davis on "Ecological Blindspots in Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies"; and Van Campbell on "Religion and Culture: Challenges and Prospects in the Next Generation."

If you have any encouragement, feedback, or suggestions related to the *Journal*, whether on the issues addressed in the present editorial or otherwise, please feel free to send me your comments via e-mail: AKostenber@aol.com. For the "millennial" editorial, see, *Deo volente*, the March 2001 issue.