

Millennial musings

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [October 7, 1998](#) issue

When there were only 474 days left until the new millennium--or 840, depending on when you think the 21st century starts--the Religion Newswriters Association asked people to comment on how the press might cover this turning of the ages. My list included suggestions about what not to comment on, as does this one.

- Whether the new millennium begins in 2000 or 2001.
- Whether the Antichrist has something to do with the Y2K computer problem.
- Why automakers, cosmetics manufacturers and so many religion editors spell it "millenium" instead of "millennium."
- How shortsighted the founders of this magazine were to foresee a "Christian century," and whether the name should be changed.
- Why people buy the books of Hal Lindsey and all contemporary apocalypticists, since every one of their prophecies has already turned out to be wrong.
- Why people who gain great royalties from books saying the world as we know it will end tomorrow invest in long-term projects such as real estate.
- Whether the millennial turn has already occurred in 1994 or 1996, since most calendar keepers think that, as a result of a calendar error, Jesus was born in 4 b.c. or 6 b.c.
- What "premillennial," "rapture," "tribulation," "pre-," "post-" and "midtrib" mean.
- Whether the year 1000 was a big deal or not; historians are divided.
- Why, since "it" didn't happen in 1000, people chose 2000 for their next guess--instead of holier numbers like 7000 or 144,000.
- How to treat what historian Daniel J. Boorstin calls "a pseudo-event," which this millennial observance certainly is.

- Why the nation of Israel is central to so many millennial plots, and who should take the place of Russia as the power from the north in the Armageddon scenario.
- How to transfer Christian energies into concern for the apocalyptic phenomena that are already around us: environmental disaster, terrorist threat, religious and tribal wars.
- How to use the time to help frame ways by which people, churches, cultures, nations and the world could take seriously the idea of an ending, the limits to time and the need to "reason from the end."
- Exploring what nonpremillennialist Christians mean when they say, in good faith, "Christ will come again!"
- Reckoning that individuals, societies, civilizations and civilization do and will die--and what this means about satisfying our desire to live.
- What all this has to do with the faith that God is the Lord of history. As for the details about end times? God only knows.