Basic Understanding Bible Prophecy

THE BOOM IN DOOM By Gary DeMar

"'Apocalyptic thinking is in the air,' University of Connecticut psychologist Kenneth Ring says. 'As we approach that subjective date, 2000, images stored in the collective unconscious begin to populate our dreams and visions.'"[1] The year 2000 held mystical qualities for sociologists, utopians and dystopians (anti-utopians), New Agers, cultists, and psychics. Robert A. Nisbet, former professor of sociology at the University of California, Riverside, commented in 1968 that *"The approach of the year 2000 is certain to be attended by a greater fanfare of predictions, prophecies, surmises, and forewarnings than any millennial year in history."*[2]

Over the years, the year 2000 had preoccupied a number of revolutionaries and self- styled "prophets." Restif de la Bretonne, revolutionary and pornographer, wrote *The Year 2,000* in 1789. He was the first person to use the word "communism." Other utopian novels focused on the year 2000. A German communist published a book for use in France at the beginning of the 1840s, *Paris en l'an 2000* (*Paris in the Year 2,000*). It *"depicts a historian lecturing in that year in Notre Dame Cathedral to an incredulous audience about the horrors of the by-gone age of war and class conflict."*[3] One of the most famous utopian fantasies is Edward Bellamy's *"more widely read Looking Backward, 2000–1887 of 1888."*[4] Bellamy's fiction became much of the world's reality in twentieth-century communism. There was little diversity in Bellamy's utopia. *"The stores, the clothing, the residences, and the incomes were all the same, made uniform by the governance of bureaucrats."*[5] Bellamy believed, in one of his many "sermons" that break in on the

narrative, that *"human nature is naturally good and people are 'god-like in aspirations . . . with divinest impulses of tenderness and self-sacrifice.' Therefore, once external conditions are made acceptable, the Ten Commandments become 'well-nigh obsolete,' bring us a 'second birth of the human race.'"* [6] In this, Bellamy was a man before his time. He managed to mix the perversions of communism, secularism, and New Age philosophy into one impossible world.

Edgar Cayce (1877–1945), the "sleeping prophet," saw 1998 as the beginning of a New Age–*"right after a catastrophic shift of Earth's axis."*[7] Cayce made other predictions, most of which are so far into the future that no one reading this book will be able to check their accuracy. Much of his work was devoted to the lost continent of the imaginary Atlantis. In 1940 he predicted that part of Atlantis would reappear "soon." Cayce made very specific predictions about the California coastal cities and the sinking of Georgia and the Carolinas into the Atlantic.

Apocalypse Now!

Doomsday prophets are a dime a dozen–from predicting earthquakes, "pole shifts," flooding from the melting polar ice cap, and general ecological disaster. The year 2000, however, was their focal point, whether for doom and gloom or a New Age of cosmic consciousness:

Bob Nelson, also known as Mobius Rex, a California radio talk-show host and author of *Prophecy*, a compendium of doomsday predictions across the ages, expects that "less than one third of the world's population will be around by 2020." He adds, *"It might be best for this planet and humanity if this civilization collapses as quickly as possible."*[8]

Ecological catastrophes and New Age thinking were brought together as we inched closer to the year 2000. A new glacier

period was about to dawn, according to New Age seer and UFO contactee Earlyne Chaney. *"This will all happen, says Chaney, between now and 1999."*[9] *A modern-day interpreter of the "in" prophet Nostradamus, Erika Cheetham, proposes that Nostradamus predicted that the Third Antichrist (the first two were probably Napoleon and Hitler) will enter center stage on the world scene in July of 1999. After this, of course, the "millennium" will dawn.* [10]

Elizabeth Clare Prophet (her real name, the surname of her second husband), also known as Guru Ma, had been expecting imminent doom for some time. She described, through *"the Word she receives from the Ascended Masters (a New Age heavenly host),"* the *"coming Aquarian Age and the 12-year 'time of troubles' that will precede it."* [11] One of the "Masters," El Morya, warned in 1987 that *"the U.S. risked war with the Soviet Union, possibly as early as Oct. 2, 1989. When the day came and went, El Morya told Mrs. Prophet that 'the timetable for war had been set back.'"*[12]

The year 2000 held fascination even with those who saw themselves as sober observers of societal trends. *"Novelist, poet and science writer Brad Leithauser, whose novel Hence is set around the year 2000, is convinced that the second millennium is going to bring a 'psychological shift'"* that will *"literally redefine what it means to be a human being."*[13]

A more scientific look at the future was presented by a group of scholars from the Hudson Institute. The book *The Year 2000* is *"simply what the subtitle says—'a framework for speculation.'"*[14] The dust jacket copy is much bolder in its assessment of the book's purpose. "*The Year 2000* ultimately defends the humanist position of man as architect of his own destiny." A popular version of what the year 2000 was to bring is *Megatrends 2000* by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene. The authors write that *"in the 1990's apocalyptic themes will*

emerge and reemerge with stunning regularity. Disaster, it seems, is always just around the corner; the superpowers, having just signed a nuclear arms agreement, come face-to-face with the 'greenhouse effect.' . . . As we move toward this extraordinary date, the mythology of the millennium, consciously or not, is reengaging us."[15] While acknowledging that Christians have had a virtual monopoly on millennial themes in the past decades, the authors point to the rise of divergent religious groups that are voicing similar apocalyptic interests. *"On the opposite end of the religious spectrum, a wide assortment of metaphysical and occult groups, today's populist religions, are predicting the earth will undergo some sort of cataclysmic shift around the year 2000. Headlines about global warming and holes in the ozone layer convince many the time is at hand."*[16]

While acknowledging the popular version of Christian millennial suspense, Naisbitt and Aburdene predicted a less religious and more man-centered version of the older utopian novels, although they do leave their options open only slightly in considering the "fundamentalistic" version. *"Humanity will probably not be rescued deus ex machina either in the form of a literal Second Coming (the fundamentalist expectation) or by friendly spaceships (the New Age version). Though we will be guided by a revived spirituality, the answers will have to come from us."*[17] Essentially, their forecast is a save-yourself millennium. *"Apocalypse or Golden Age. The choice is ours."*[18]

Dial-A-Bummer

Doom, the Society for Secular Armageddonism, had posted a phone number where callers could get the latest information on what they perceived to be signs of the end. Doom cited the following as evidence of an impending "do-it-yourself apocalypse": "chemical and biological weapons, nuclear

proliferation, deforestation, the greenhouse effect, ozone depletion, acid rain, the poisoning of our air and water, rising racism, massive species lost, toxic waste, the AIDS pandemic, the continuing population explosion, encroaching Big Brotherism, and at east a thousand points of blight." The following recorded message from Doom, Inc., reproduced in the December 1990 issue of *Harper's Magazine* under the title "DIAL-A-BUMMER," gives you some idea of their apocalyptic thinking at the time:

You have reached the hot line of Doom for news and information related to the coming apocalypse. This is a service for the organization Doom, the Society for Secular Armageddonism, a nonreligious group dedicated to promoting public awareness of the coming end of the world. We believe the apocalypse is at hand, and the reasons for that belief are overwhelming. . . . These aren't just conversation topics for yuppie cocktail parties; they're grade A, unadulterated harbingers of destruction, 100 percent bona fide specters of doom, and they're all proof that we don't need God to end it for us. The coming end will be a strictly do-it-yourself apocalypse.[19]

The number was not toll-free. In case the end did not come as quickly as they thought, Doom, Inc. didn't want to be stuck with a large phone bill.

Predicting the end in ecological terms is now all the rage. One of the earliest attempts at calculating the time man had left on earth was Reverend Thomas Malthus. His was pure science: the lifeboat scenario—too many people and not enough food. In 1798 he published *An Essay on Population*. According to Malthus, population grows at a geometric rate while food lags far behind because it is entrapped in the mathematics of arithmetic growth. It's a matter of multiplication over addition. Population growth would always outdistance the food supply. As history attests, Malthus has been proved wrong time and time again. *"Since World War II, world grain production*

tripled while the world's population doubled."[20]

In 1968 Malthus was "reincarnated" in the person of Paul Ehrlich. The stilted nineteenth- century academic title, *An Essay on Population*, had to give way to a modernized title for the times: *The Population Bomb*. And what a bomb it was. It was an instant best-seller. Ehrlich's predictions, like those of Malthus, have been proved wrong, but few people seem to have noticed. This didn't stop him from updating his false theories. He came out with *The Population Explosion* in 1990 predicting the same end-time scenario. How many of these new "predictions" will come to pass? My guess is, the same number that were fulfilled in his first book. Will anyone notice? Only a few.

Utopia or Dystopia?

The ultimate prophetic trip is the dream of utopia. The word utopia is derived from the imaginary island depicted in Sir Thomas More's fantasy novel *Utopia* (1516). Utopia was to be a "good" (Greek *eu* = good) "place" (Greek *topos* = place) where a near perfect society would exist. Utopia, however, can have the opposite meaning based on another Greek prefix. The *u* sound (Greek = *ou*) can also mean "no." Depending on one's perspective, therefore, utopia is an ideal that can be attained or it is an illusion exists only in the minds of dreamers; it is "no place" or "nowhere" to be found.

More and other utopian dreamers painted their visions of the future with socialistic and communistic colors. More, for example, called for the abolition of private property and the adoption of communism. It should not surprise us, therefore, that *"Utopia has become a text- book of Socialist propaganda. It did more to make William Morris a Socialist than ever Karl Marx did."*[21] In similar fashion, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, *"called for an equal annual income of $4,000 per person."*[22] Of course, such a way of living will have to be forced on those

who embrace the utopian dream, hardly what one thinks of when he hears the word utopia. Why should a person work hard if he will be guaranteed a certain income? What reason can the entrepreneur have for being enterprising when all he can earn is $4,000? If this is what utopia is all about, then we don't have to go very far to observe it. When Vladimir Bukovsky read these socialist utopias, he *"discovered, to his amazement, that all of them had actually been realized– in the Soviet Union."*[23]

All such dreams of utopia dismiss the realities of sin and the abuses inherent in centralized political government. Sin, although this is rarely what they call it, is the reason why most believers in utopia often end up as dystopians (pessimists). But if the utopians forget about sin, the dystopians forget about redeeming grace. Consider the views of H. G. Wells, best known for his science fiction novels *The Time Machine* and *War of the Worlds*.

Wells began his writing career on a high note of optimism. His *Outline of History* (1920) *"was a song of evolutionary idealism, faith in progress, and complete optimism. By 1933, when he published The Shape of Things to Come, he could see no better way to overcome the stubbornness and selfishness between people and nations than a desperate action by intellectual idealists to seize control of the world by force and establish their vision with a universal compulsory educational program. Finally, shortly before his death, he wrote an aptly-titled book, The Mind at the End of Its Tether (1945) in which he concluded that 'there is no way out, or around, or through the impasse. It is the end.'"*[24]

In the early years of Hollywood, a number of films were produced that reflected this newborn pessimism. *"The dystopic films Metropolis (1926) and Modern Times (1936) portray humanity overcome by technology and political oppression."*[25] Unlike many contemporary anti- utopian films, however, one

could still find a remnant of redemption in these early attempts at futurology. Christianity was still having an impact on culture in spite of the growing trend toward secularism.

A Third Way

Rarely is Christianity considered to be the way out, a remedy for both utopian romanticism and dystopic despair. Of course, one of the reasons for this is the general dystopic worldview that seems to be inherent in much of modern-day fundamentalism and evangelicalism. What hope does today's Christianity offer a world "at the end of its tether"?: The rapture and an eventual earthly millennium that is always near but elusively far away. For those longing for tangible hope in the here and now, beyond the promise of salvation after death, today's Christianity rarely has much to offer. Is it any wonder that we see increased interest in hedonistic and "inward" religions like the New Age Movement?

As the twentieth century approaches its end, the conviction grows that many other things are ending too. Storm warnings, portents, hints of catastrophe haunt our times. The "sense of an ending," which has given shape to so much of twentieth-century literature, now pervades the popular imagination as well. The Nazi holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation, the depletion of natural resources, well-founded predictions of ecological disaster have fulfilled poetic prophecy, giving concrete historical substance to the nightmare, or death wish, that avant-garde artists were the first to express. The question of whether the world will end in fire or in ice, with a bang or a whimper, no longer interests artists alone. Impending disaster has become an everyday concern, so commonplace and familiar that nobody any longer gives much thought to how disaster might be averted. People busy themselves instead with survival strategies, measures designed to prolong their own lives, or programs guaranteed to ensure

good health and peace of mind.[26]

Is there a viable Christian response to this secular feebleness that does not end up in some form of apocalyptic escapism? Must the Christian always answer with "the end is at hand"? Is it possible that today's so-called "Christian" message has led many to acquiesce to a dystopic worldview and a rejection of Christianity?

It seems that no matter where we turn we find an insatiable appetite for apocalypse. Some believe it comes from fear. There may be some truth in this. My guess is that this appetite grows from irresponsibility. Escapism is man's way out of the unpleasantness of life. The hope is that we will all be rescued before the end really comes.

There was a time when a more vibrant church reclaimed much of the world without feeling the need of being rescued apocalyptically. Civilization was once identified with Christianity. Winston Churchill, for example, saw *"the Battle of Britain"* as a struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. *"Upon this battle,"* Churchill said on the 18th of June 1940, *"depends the survival of Christian civilization."*[27] There is talk now about the *"twilight of civilization,"* that is, the demise of Christianity. But such talk has been heard before. Christianity has always entered the world deep in the stench of paganism and darkness. Such conditions bring out the best in the Christian worldview. It was Christianity that brought the world light. This vision of Christianity seems lost on this generation of Christians.

The cry now is for some apocalyptic "miracle" to save us from the ever-expanding shadow of darkness. The miracle has already come. Jesus lived and died, but He also rose from the dead and ascended to sit at His Father's right (Acts 2:32–36): "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). Jesus is presently reigning. The rescue

came nearly 2000 years ago in a manger in Bethlehem. The church's duty is to go into all the world and "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them [i.e., the nations] in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all" that Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19–20).

1 Dick Teresi and Judith Hooper, "The Last Laugh?," *Omni* (January 1990), 43

2 Robert A. Nisbet, "The Year 2000 and All That," *Commentary* (June 1968), 60.

3 James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 512, note 5.

4 Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men*, 512, note 5.

5 Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, [1983] 1993), 189.

6 Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, 190.

7 Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, 44.

8 Teresi and Hooper, "The Last Laugh?," 44.

9 Teresi and Hooper, "The Last Laugh?," 48.

10 Teresi and Hooper, "The Last Laugh?," 83.

11 R. Gustav Niebuhr, "Millennium Fever: Prophets Proliferate, The End is Near," *Wall Street Journal* (December 5, 1989), A13.

12 Niebuhr, "Millennium Fever," A13.

13 Bill Lawren, "Apocalypse *Now*?," *Psychology Today* (May 1989), 42.

14 Herman Kahn and Anthony J. Wiener, *The Year 2000: A*

Framework for Speculation on the Next thirty- Three Years (New York: Macmillan, 1967), xix.

15J ohn Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 14.

16 Naisbitt and Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000*, 14

17 Naisbitt and Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000*, 17.

18 Naisbitt and Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000*, 17.

19 Cited in *Harper's Magazine* (December 1990), 22

20 Ronald Bailey, "Raining in Their Hearts," *National Review* (December 3, 1990), 32.

21 R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1958), 125.

22 Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), 271.

23 Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, 192.

24 Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, 2.

25 Naisbitt and Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000*, p. 296.

26 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 3-4.

27 John Baillie, *What is Christian Civilization?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), p. 5.