



STATEMENT DY001

## **HIGH-TECH APOCALYPSE? MILLENNIUM COMPUTER BUG PROVOKES VARIED RESPONSES**

Hal Lindsay couldn't have planned it better. After three decades of largely fruitless warnings about "The End," a real -life crisis — with endtimes possibilities — is seemingly at our doorsteps. It's Y2K, a computer glitch some claim will take out electricity and phones for weeks, starting January 1, and send the world's economies through the floor. The villains are the last two zeros in the year 2000. As is commonly reported, much of the computer technology that pervades Western civilization (e.g. IBM mainframe computers) has been programmed to keep track of only the last two digits of any given year, as it was assumed the first two digits are "19." If such computers are not corrected by January 1, 2000, they will think it's 1900 rather than 2000 and could begin making a series of critical errors. As a result, some computer analysts warn that Social Security, welfare, electric and gas grids, banks, communications systems, and even nuclear warheads could foul up.

Not everyone buys this scenario. Some, like ABC News commentator Fred Moody, call it "overhype," adding that "not for 1,000 years or so has so much dread been provoked and so much money made, in preparation for something that will amount to so little." Richard Landes, a professor of medieval history at Boston University, guesses on his mille.org Web site that Y2K is simply part and parcel of the apocalyptic fever Christians evidence whenever a new millennium arises. The difference between now and A.D. 1000, he says is that back then, people were predicting the Last Judgment. Today, they predict the downfall of a civilization based on technology rather than God.

### **Y2K AND THE END-TIMES INDUSTRY**

Worst-case scenarios say that the entire planet will move back a century to a pre-electric era for hours days or weeks in one swoop.

End-times enthusiasts are predictably making hay about this potential catastrophe. Numerous evangelical speakers, now marketing themselves as Y2K experts showcased their wares last July at the Christian Booksellers Association convention in Dallas. Books holding forth on the topic included *Time/me 2000*, by James Michael Hile, president of the Little Rock-based Signs of Our Times ministry; radio host Marlin Maddoux's *Seal of Gaia; The Millennium Bug: How to Survive the Coming Chaos*, by Michael Hyatt, a senior vice president for Thomas Nelson Publishers; and Hal Lindsay's *Planet Earth: The Final Chapter*, which supposes the unfixable Y2K problem will pave the way for the Antichrist, who will produce a magic fix for the problem using technology he alone has developed.

End-times themes are hot even without Y2K. The hottest CBA sellers were a series of end -times novels by Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, set in a post-Rapture time slot. The fourth book in the series, *Soul Harvest*, was in its fifth printing by midsummer and that within only a few weeks of being released. "It came out six weeks early," Tyndale House Publishers spokeswoman Mavis Sanders said. "It's been like a runaway locomotive."

While Jenkins and LaHaye happily signed books at a Tyndale Publishers -sponsored barbecue, a few blocks away a "prophecy conference" drew several hundred listeners. Conspiracy scenarios abounded there. Chuck Missler, author of *What to Do When the Chips Are Down*, a wordplay on the Y2K microchip, spoke on the impending malfunction of millions of the world's computers. As statistics flicked rapidly on screens behind him, Missler predicted social unrest will become so great that President Clinton may declare martial law and cancel the year 2000 elections. The American military will take over riot -torn cities. A global superleader — the Antichrist? — will arise soon thereafter.

His listeners, mostly tired booksellers taking refuge in the cool auditorium from the withering Texas heat, were noticeably silent. There is a bright side, Missler suggested, if churches think ahead enough to store medical supplies and food for hard times. "This

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will be the biggest opportunity to minister in 1,000 years,” he said. “It’d be ironic if God judged our technological culture by putting us in a place where we cannot figure out what day it is.”

In response, the crowd shuffled outside to scarf up Missler’s impressive display of Y2K books. He and end-times speakers such as Lindsey and Grant Jeffrey have taken this show on the road, charging \$60 for two-day seminars that offer “the most up-to-date analysis of where we are in God’s prophetic timetable,” according to one brochure. “You will be startled to see how close we are to the most catastrophic period of all time.”

## **HEAD FOR THE HILLS, BROTHERS**

Ironically, well before end-times teachers such as Missler and Lindsey began to sound the alarm about Y2K, one of their strongest critics — a man who believes we’re *not* in the end times and who holds an overall optimistic view of the future — was making the most dire Y2K predictions of all. Gary North, who has moved to northwest Arkansas to escape The Deluge, is a son-in-law of famous Reconstructionist leader R. J. Rushdoony. He believes Christians will ultimately reconstruct the kingdom of God on earth according to Old Testament law. A postmillennialist, North foresees a vast social upheaval that will overthrow present governmental powers so Christ can take over the country and gradually Christianize the world by the power of Holy Spirit.

Software consultant Ed Yourdon, widely known for his best-selling *Time Bomb 2000* book, calls North a “national treasure” even, he says, “if you disagree with him.” North’s massive Web site, no doubt the world’s largest on Y2K-related phenomena, is at more than 2,500 documents, with 100 being added each month. Sample saying: “If most repair projects don’t get finished, western civilization as we know it is finished.” His “martial law” subcategory, which outlines the U.S. government’s alleged plans to control the country à la Nazi storm troopers, is scary or schizoid, depending on your point of view.

In a 24 December 1997 public statement, the Christian Research Institute’s Elliot Miller accused North of “taking an irresponsible alarmist position” that “could almost become a self-fulfilling [prophecy] where the run on the banks he is predicting takes place because people have been reading his (and others’) predictions.” Miller further accused North of taking government officials’ statements out of context in order to develop “an elaborate and tenuous scenario of how everything that could go wrong will go wrong.”

In anticipation that Y2K will bring an end to his ministry, North announced in his November newsletter that he was selling off his inventory at a 50 percent discount, and he would not be republishing his books. In his December newsletter, however, he stated that he is raising funds to publish two new books.

Yourdon, for his part, counsels buying up gold, silver, and platinum, and leaving town — now. “When it became known that I had moved from New York to New Mexico,” he said from his new home in Taos, “I became branded with the term ‘survivalist.’ I’m moving out of New York because I see a lot of problems in the urban centers.

“Roughly one-third of the computer professionals in this country are employed on this problem. That’s one million people. At least half of them are worried. Most of the people I know are making sure they have an escape hatch — a country home or relatives in the country.

“There are 11,000 banks in the United States, and they are not all going to make it. If you’re really pessimistic, you may get all your money out of the bank and bury it in the yard or under the mattress. The 8,000 utilities in this country are not all compliant, either. There will be a national power outage. It’s going to be real cold January 1. The lights will be off, the heat won’t work, and neither will the phones or the banks. If the airports shut down, that will ruin the economy.”

Some Christians are literally heading for the hills, such as Robert Andrews, pastor of the conservative, charismatic Tree of Life Christian Church in Lynnwood, Washington, just north of Seattle. Since June, 17 of the church’s 40 families put their homes on the market, pulled up stakes, and moved about 200 miles to rural Colville in the northeastern part of the state, where they staked out a 50x100-foot garden, fixed up a farmhouse, and hope to use a nearby stream as a water source. They moved there to escape God’s judgment, he told *The Seattle Times*, not to mention the possible collapse of the world banking system and a societal meltdown in a city where more than one million people do not grow their own food and where supermarkets could be stripped bare. If the government collapses, he said, rural counties will be the highest level of government able to operate, as the United States will collapse into a cluster of nation states, “If God misses 2000 to judge,” he told the newspaper, “he will have missed a great opportunity.”

Cherie Brown, however, a member of Tree of Life, says her marriage split up partly over her husband's desire to move and follow Andrews. It all started, she says, when the pastor started reading material from the Web site of Gary North.

"First they started having classes on how to prepare grain, how to prepare water, and then how to prepare to survive the "kill zone," she says. "Then they started putting together truckloads of food for families. My husband has stockpiled guns," she adds. "He's bought huge cases of ammunition." Her husband also taught gun classes at the church. There, over a year ago, the pastor announced a move to eastern Washington was imminent, and several families left the church on the spot. "You know what that Y2K thing is?" she asks. "It's a decoy Mr. Andrews is using to lure people over there. It might not be a good idea to keep your money in a bank, and I think you should store a bit of food, But to store up guns?"

Other like-minded groups include the Arizona-based Concerned Christians for Christ Preparedness Group, whose organizer, Greg Wiatt, said that "gold, guns, groceries, and God are the four Gs of Y2K". Or there's the more peaceable Bob Rutz, a 66-year-old engineer and entrepreneur from Southern California, who's building "Prayer Lake," a Y2K Christian community in the Ozarks.

Many Christians look askance at such survivalist withdrawal, such as Joel Belz, publisher of *World* magazine, a Christian newsweekly. "The common wisdom is that you should be stockpiling water and appropriate foodstuffs, that you should find a place (preferably in the country) where you can hide, that you should be buying some gold or other precious metals, and that you should be sure to take along some guns and ammunition," he wrote last spring. "The very thought of Christians by the thousands deliberately choosing to flee from the culture we are here to affect should depress us," he added. "Let us sound instead a clarion call to stand firm, confident in the Lord God's ability both to provide for and to protect his people. Those could become two key expressions of our trust in the Lord."

### **INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**

No denomination has put out a position statement on Y2K, but individual Christians are very much looking after themselves. Al Durtschi, who runs an Internet site for Walton Feed of Mount Pelier, Idaho, a Mormon-owned nonperishable foods company, says he is back ordered six months on some items, not by Mormons, but by evangelicals. Although Mormonism suggests storing away a year's worth of foodstuffs, "it's now the Christian community ordering from us," he says.

The company specializes in basic packages such as 22 cubic feet of wheat and beans for \$300 — flour being perishable within two years but wheat being storable for 30 — and a \$945 "deluxe one-year package," including water purification equipment, a cook stove, lanterns, and basic foods.

"I don't think people are scared," Durtschi says, "but they're hedging their bets. People are concerned enough to put out serious money for this. I took an order for three-quarters of a semitruckload of this stuff."

Christians are rampaging through other mail-order businesses as well, such as the tiny family-owned Lehman's of Kidron, Ohio. Its \$3 Non-Electric Heritage Catalogue is a must-read for people who think a malfunctioning computer chip could shut down power grids for large portions of the country. Hot items are oil lamps, solar water heaters, refrigerators that run on propane, and battery-operated radios.

Co-owner Galen Lehman, whose company had previously marketed solely to the nonelectricity-using Amish residents of southeastern Ohio, reports "hundreds" of worried people are calling them. "We're doing quite a bit with grain mills — which grind grain into flour — and other products that relate to food processing," he says. "These people are deadly serious. People want items that can be run by hand or easily transported fuel sources." Incidentally, that's what Gary North is suggesting.

### **LOCAL CHURCH RESPONSE**

As for evangelical churches, they are all over the map on how or whether to prepare for Y2K. Some are doing nothing, convinced that the Y2K crisis is in name only. Others, perhaps primed by Y2K specials on Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network and James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* are making plans to store food and buy up gas-operated stoves and generators to better operate as emergency shelters for the shivering hordes. The most effective groups seem to be city-based gatherings of coalitions of churches that provide Y2K forums for secular businesses. A Christian relief organization spearheaded the country's first such coalition, the Rogue Valley Year 2000 Task Force in southwestern Oregon. The task force sponsored a community Y2K conference for 250 people on May 8-9, keynoted by computer programmer Jim Lord. Executive director Liza Christian says she gets 200 e-mails a day asking for advice on how to stage similar meetings.

"I think people of faith have a deeper concern for humanity than others may have," she says. "There's a Christian mandate from the Word of God to take care of one another and to be a servant." Instead of fleeing for the hills, her Medford, Oregon -based group aims to help that corner of the state prepare for a possible disruption in government and medical services, food supply lines, and food access, and even for traffic light failures.

"I don't think it's smart to move, period," she says. "It's unethical or at least irresponsible. If you are going to live in your community, why not help the community, such as beginning community gardens, building first aid kits, alternative energy supplies, and even studying how you can bring people into your home for a season so they can be warm and dry?"

Her coalition helped start a similar group in Atlanta, Joseph 2000, named after the Old Testament patriarch whose advance planning saved Egypt and his family from a seven-year famine. Joseph 2000 staged a citywide conference on September 12, keynoted by Christian Financial Concepts president Larry Burkett, who has taken a leading role in Y2K affairs. Despite all this, Joseph 2000 president Shaunti Feldhahn, a former Wall Street analyst and author of the recently released *Y2K: The Millennium Bug — A Christian Perspective*, says not enough people are concerned.

"It's still very quiescent in peoples' minds," she says. "An awful lot of pastors and churches don't understand why Christians should care."

Christians have often been accused of being a day late and a dollar short on the crucial twentieth-century issues, such as the Holocaust and civil rights, but this time, she says, they can exercise moral leadership.

Christian Research Institute President Hank Hanegraaff believes that the call to moral leadership would not ring hollow if Christian leaders took it upon themselves to repent of and renounce fanatical and fanciful statements regarding Y2K. Hanegraaff says that the Christian Research Institute is nearing the completion of an extensive Y2K research project — including analysis of irresponsible positions touted by a wide range of religious broadcasters. Says Hanegraaff, "The most significant problem is not computer glitches but Christian gullibility. One would expect Michael Hyatt, Chuck Misler, and Don McAlvany to engage in selling, sensationalism, and subjectivism. But when distortions by these men are legitimized in the mainstream Christian media we are all in a world of hurt."