

"THE YEAR 2000: WORRIES & HOPES"

1 When in 1967 I was a religion consultant to the Hudson Institute's founder, Herman Kahn, he & Anthony J. Wiener came out with THE YEAR 2000 (Macmillan). They were not oh-wow starry eyed futurists like Carl Sagan but sober worriers, as in their unfairly maligned REPORT FROM STONE MOUNTAIN. Here's the last ¶, slightly reduced (p413): "It will be worthwhile to try to improve our understanding of future possibilities and the longterm consequences of alternative policies. But the problem is ultimately too difficult....almost the only safeguard that then remains is to try in general to moderate Faustian impulses to overpower the environment, and to try to decrease both the centralization and the willingness to use accumulating political, economic, and technological power, or to arrange matters--somehow--so that the centralization of this power is placed in the hands of people who will respect its disastrous potential and will not centralize it further. What is necessary is an unflagging respect for the world as we find it and for dissent and diversity....Above all, there must be a concern for perpetuating those institutions that protect freedom of human choice" (underlinings mine).

Thirty years have now passed, & both those worries & those hopes are greater. Privately telling me he'd like to "die as a rabbi" (because he doubted humanity could survive without using spiritual resources to the full), he nevertheless continued his scientific-imagination calculations (the backbone of his "scenarios") within the limits of discursive reason, without benefit of God (though not entirely without benefit of clergy).

2 The Bible, nuclear physics, & astrophysics are not sanguine about earth's survival-chances. As their discipline has developed, astrophysicists have come to see an asteroid death for earth, or at least life on earth, as increasingly probable & near. Nuclear physicists, more aware than the rest of us of radiation dangers, worry that Cassini, on its way to Saturn, may explode soon after takeoff (as did Challenger): it has on board enough plutonium to kill everybody on earth many times over. And the Bible speaks of the destruction of human life not again by water but (to trope Jas. Baldwin) "the fire next time" (2P.3.10-12; the next v. promises "new heavens and a new earth").

*Peter

Unlike those science-&-technology worriers, the Bible sees a **moral** dimension in earth's destiny. Read-think-pray your way through that chapter (2P.3). After the Flood (Gn.7-9), the rainbow-sign sealed God's promise that (9.11) "never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." Recounting the Flood, 2P.3 says not by flood but "the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the godless."

3 But while the Bible is a book of threats & punishments, it is primarily, & by God's primary intent, a book of promises & rewards. To be biblical about the year 2000, we should major in hopes & minor in fears. "The Lord is not slow about his promise,...but is patient..., not wanting any to perish, but all to come to **repentance**leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God....we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2P.3.9-14 NRSV)....In light of the Lord's Prayer (God's will to be done "on earth"), the fire judgment is to be seen as renovation by purgation, not as total destruction.

4 It won't be the year 2000 in the Chinese or Jewish calendars. It's the 1999th year from Dionysius Exiguus' miscalculation (off ca.4 years) of the birth of **Jesus**, of whom you'll hear little from the secular media in 2000 or (the end of the 2nd Christian millenium) 2100. (The date mill. will be 1 cent. after the decimal mill.)....And should the year be designated A.J. ("After Jesus"), since A.C. ("After Christ") would be as offensive to Jews as B.C. ("Before Christ") & A.D.* ("In the year of the Lord [Jesus]") are? But should the history-minded complain about C.E. ("Common Era"), which wipes Jesus/Christ/Lord off the calendar? And the multiculturalists: "Common" to whom?....My practice: I use, together, both the particular Jesus/Christ/Lord reference & C.E. So here you have it, folks: "AD 2000 CE."

* For Christians, the phrase is a perpetual reminder that every year since his resurrection belongs to the "Lord" (Jesus Christ God's Son).

5 The year 2000, & anticipations thereof, is a twofold religion opportunity. It's a signal of both our human time-**boundedness** (so, mortality) & our human time-**trans-cedence** (so, our actual imaginal ability to live in the past/present/future & our actual or potential "eternal life"). I recall a pertinent poem of Theognis (540 BC/BCE): "Enjoy your time, my soul! another race / Shall shortly fill the world, and take your place / With their own hopes and fears, sorrow and mirth; / I shall be dust the while, and crumbled earth." The ancient Greek concludes "Drink..., and cheer your heart, and banish care, / A load of wine will banish your despair." There's no cure for mortality, but there are chemical anodynes, which will plentifully be used in celebration at midnight AD 1999 CE. How should Christians & the churches celebrate the transition? What of *our* "hopes and fears, sorrow and mirth"? What'll we have to say to captives of this narcissistic culture where (now on Cape Cod) one bumper sticker commands "Honk if you're having fun" & another rejoins "Honk if you're **not** having fun"? Will we be found living in God's great world/creation or only in our "own little world"?

6 Millennial fever is already producing media orgies of species self-congratulation: Hail to *Homo scientificus*! *The present century has been history's most spectacular for techno-changes*, the influence of science & its practices on human life & on the planet.

Being of the generation born in WWI, I grew up with what I accused Herman Kahn of having (in my only public appearance with him), an erector-set mentality. (He said "True!" & invited me for conversation in his garden.) What we couldn't do with all those little metal parts & tiny electric motors! But after WWII, the electronic revolution picked up speed, celebrated a generation ago by Marshall McLuhan (whom Geo.P.Elliott called an "electronic chiliast" & Jn.Leonard dubbed a captive of "a 'value-free' Herman Kahnoclasm" [43 NYT 11.26.69]). Now we have Bill Gates' oh-wow philotechnistic computolatry (the short way to say "such love of techno-fixes for human problems as to amount to the worship of the computer")--reminiscent of the "technocracy" of between the Wars (I & II) faith-trust in science as lord & savior.

Our Christian response? Multiple. We should lose no opportunity to point out what Lord & Savior the millennial transition, historically, celebrates. We should denounce science-worship as idolatrous & "value-free" scientific research & development as demonic. And we should preach & otherwise promote the exploration of inner space--the life of the spirit. (On this last, a generation ago TIME [2.16.70 39] warned that while the computer revolution is inevitable, that "is additional reason why modern man fights ever harder for some space inside himself to call his own, beyond the encroaching outside world.") And we should work with others to harness for truly human ends all the powers, natural & technical, within our control & therefore within our responsibility & our accountability to God.

7 Expecting the world to notice the year 2000 is an instance of **Western imperialism**. Even the West isn't the West it used to be: in England, 1,000,000 attend Anglican worship weekly (& the year 2000 is for them as Christians), but 700,000 go weekly to the mosques (& the year 2000 is not for them as Muslims). But because "the West" is now everywhere on earth--because Western imperialism is, culturally, the first global imperialism--the year 2000 should be everywhere seized as an opportunity to feel/think/act globally. Environmental issues are increasingly global. Economically we are (as Wendell Wilkie said in 1941) ONE WORLD. Political tribalism is more & more seen as dysfunctional. And the religions need to discover & create areas & arenas for joint pro-human action. Pray for us sinners (a truly "inclusive" category)! And heed the Scripture's call to an alternative vision & version of world reality.

8 Pray through the Bible's last three chapters. They begin with where "the millenium" comes from, & they end with Jesus' versicle "Surely I am coming soon" & Christians' response "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" Finally, the Bible's last verse, a blessing (benediction) on "all" (I think the original did not have "the saints"): "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all [the saints]." Amen & amen.

HAGAR THE HORRIBLE

By Chris Browne

