

Y2K PARANOIA:

Extremists Confront
The Millennium

A Publication of the Anti-Defamation League



Anti-Defamation League

Howard P. Berkowitz, *National Chair*
Abraham H. Foxman, *National Director*

© 1999 Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
823 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Printed in the United States of America. All rights reserved.

Web site: www.adl.org

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
I. Y2K and the Apocalypse	3
II. Y2K and the Extreme Right Hatemongers	10
III. Y2K and the 'Patriot' Movement	15

INTRODUCTION

The year 2000 carries a futuristic, even exotic ring, representing not only the end of a century — a once-in-a-lifetime event for most people — but the end of *ten* centuries: a millennium. On a mundane, perhaps frivolous level, restaurants and nightclubs have been inundated with reservations for New Year's Eve 1999. Hundreds of millions of people in the United States and around the world will experience a certain sense of drama or exhilaration when all four numerals marking the year advance at the same time, as if the passing of a thousand years were encapsulated before their eyes in a single moment.

For many millions of Christians in particular, the turning of the millennium carries special significance. The modern Western world's ostensibly secular calendar is, in effect, a means of counting the years since the birth of Jesus, as originally calculated by the Church in the 6th century. Indeed, because of adjustments made centuries later to correct certain prior miscalculations, the year 2000 actually comes 2004 years after Jesus' birth; the religious millennium in that sense already occurred no later than 1996. For all practical purposes, however, midnight of December 31, 1999, remains the point of universal anticipation.

But there is a big difference between, on the one hand, the celebratory, good-natured fascination of the average person with that special moment — which presumably will be followed by a return to familiar preoccupation with the daily demands of more ordinary experience — and, on the other, the profound spiritual intensity, the sense of approaching apocalypse which, for millions of believers, encompasses the coming millennium. Many of the latter are seriously preparing for the "End Times" and the Biblically ordained, world-shattering, miraculous events they portend.

For the most part, these "true believers" are not the focus of this report. Rather, the Anti-Defamation League is examining the response to the approaching millennium among violence-prone political extremists, anti-government militia and self-styled "Patriot" groups, and certain religious fundamentalists whose apocalyptic expectations of the event include a view of Jews as playing a conspiratorial or even Satanic role.

It is important to distinguish between the theological and the technological aspects of this subject. Besides the religiously oriented concerns of certain sects posed by the advent of the third millennium, the potential computer problem symbolized by the term "Y2K" (or, "year 2000") is the subject of anxious speculation among the general public, the scientific and business communities, government officials and the news media, as well as by far-right extremists. There is legitimate concern over possible widespread mechanical malfunction, and the chaotic and perilous confusion that might ensue, if millions of home, industrial, governmental and organizational computers misread the crucial electronic "00" symbol intended to designate the year 2000, mistaking it for "1900" (since virtually all computers have been programmed to use the last two digits of any given 20th century year as a "shorthand" reference to that year). Indeed, the U.S. State Department recently published a coun-

try-by-country set of “Y2K” warnings for Americans doing business in 194 nations. According to CNN, the document will advise American travelers who “could be affected by power outages, water shortages and other potentially serious problems if computers are unable to recognize the four-digit date 2000 on Jan. 1.”

At the same time, many computer industry and other technicians and programmers, having devoted intensive attention to this problem — popularly known as the “Y2K bug” — now claim to have overcome it. And some newly developed computers, manufactured after a certain date, may avoid it. Yet the issue, and the alarm it has generated, lingers.

Thus, the theological implications of the new millennium and the technological challenges of the Y2K “bug,” broad-ranging, disparate matters born of the same chronological moment, approach each other at a unique historical crossroads. The existential significance of these events is beyond ADL’s purview. The League is concerned about the paranoid overreaction to them by a variety of bigots and extremists, who are exploiting them to spread vicious, hysterical propaganda of hatred, scapegoating and possible violence. That is the subject of the following report.

I. Y2K AND THE APOCALYPSE

The year 2000, the start of a new millennium, is fast approaching. For certain religious groups that believe in an apocalyptic vision of the “End Times,” this dramatic turn of the century signals tremendous upheaval in the world, a period when chaos will prevail. In particular, a small number of Christian evangelicals and fundamentalists believe that the Second Coming of Jesus will occur in 2000 and are thus looking for “signs” of the Last Days as prophesied in various books of the Old and New Testaments, including Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel and Matthew. The year 2000 is also when many people expect the Y2K computer “bug” to cause worldwide problems, including the disruption of electricity, water services, food delivery, banking systems and transportation, leading to a complete breakdown in society. In the minds of certain Christian evangelicals, the Second Coming of Jesus and the upheaval related to the Y2K bug are inextricably linked — the Y2K bug being a sure “sign” of the “Tribulation” predicted in the Christian Bible. The connection between the start of the millennium and the Y2K bug has led some far-right evangelicals to promote both anti-government and, in some cases, anti-Semitic theories and beliefs to support their vision of the End Times.

It is important to note that the far-right Christian evangelicals who believe that the year 2000 signals the return of Jesus, and that the Federal Government and the Jews are somehow connected to the evil that will ensue at this time, are a small minority. In fact, many Christians worry that false predictions about the Second Coming of Jesus will undermine the authority of the Bible.

Christian Apocalyptic Thought

The beliefs associated with Christian apocalyptic thought are based on a particular interpretation of the Book of Revelation. According to this interpretation, there are a number of events that will occur before the bodily return of Jesus, who will establish a thousand-year kingdom on earth. These events begin with the Rapture, when all the faithful will be swept up from the earth to meet Jesus “in the air.” The cataclysmic events of the Tribulation will ensue, a seven-year period of terror, calamity and persecution of “true believers,” ending when Jesus returns with his church to vanquish evil at Armageddon, the final battle. The millennium of Jesus’ earthly reign follows, culminating in his final judgment over the living and the dead, the end of earthly history. This scenario is known as premillennialism.

Some evangelicals argue that history’s final events and the return of Jesus will follow rather than precede the millennium — a notion known as postmillennialism. Its advocates believe that God’s elect will come to rule the earth gradually during a period of 1,000 years.

Signs and Conspiracy Theories

According to many Christian fundamentalists, a key player in the apocalyptic drama predicted in Revelation is a world leader who unites all nations in a “one world government” with the purpose

of betraying humankind before being exposed as the agent of Satan or the Antichrist. Jesus battles this evil force before restoring his kingdom on earth.

Many evangelicals who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible look for “proof” that the Antichrist is present on earth today and that the return of Jesus is fast approaching. Before the Y2K bug came to the public’s attention, they viewed other 20th century events as signs of the Antichrist’s presence and the imminent return of Jesus. The advent of Communism, the establishment of the United Nations after World War II and later the creation of the European Union, and former President George Bush’s statement during the Gulf War about establishing a “New World Order” were seen as “evidence” that the Antichrist was at work forming the “one world government” predicted in Revelation. However, the most important “sign” to evangelicals was the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. The vast majority of evangelicals are strong supporters of Israel and its government, but they saw the establishment of the Jewish State as the fulfillment of a prophecy in the Bible attributed to Paul, one of the apostles of Jesus. According to this prophecy, the Jews of the Diaspora will gather in Israel where a large number will be converted, and this event will shortly precede the return of Jesus and the end of earthly history.

There are also Jews on the far right who believe that the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible will soon bring about an “end of history” scenario. Gershon Salomon, head of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, and his followers have reportedly asserted that they must “liberate” the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, destroy the Dome of the Rock Mosque, and build the Third Temple that was foretold by the prophets. They also believe that the creation of Israel and the Six-Day War leading to the reunification of Jerusalem herald the final Redemption. These far-right Jewish groups receive tremendous support from evangelical Christians who see their existence as evidence that the Jews are preparing to rebuild the Temple, one of the “signs” that will lead to the Second Coming.

Some evangelicals on the far right transform two particular prophetic beliefs — the return of the Jews to their homeland and the creation of the “one world government” — into conspiracy theories. They promulgate scenarios in which the Federal Government, the United Nations and the Jews are the key players who act out the final drama of the apocalypse in the service of the Antichrist.

One of the books that has had the greatest impact on apocalyptic, conspiracy-oriented thinking is Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Originally published in 1970, it has sold about 30 million copies. Lindsey told readers that the establishment of the United Nations, the creation of the State of Israel, the unrest in the Middle East, and the rise of Satanism were sure signs of the End Times. He analyzed biblical passages to prove that these events and others signaled the coming of the Antichrist. Since Lindsey’s book was published, he and those who share his beliefs have continued to point to an increasing number of signs that the end of the world is near.

Naming the Enemy

In 1970, Lindsey focused on Communism, unrest in the Middle East and other “signs” relevant at that particular time. Today, for Christian evangelicals on the far right, the main players in the End-Time drama are the Federal Government, President Clinton and his associates, and the United Nations. For those who look for signs that the government is poised to seize power and establish the “one world government,” the global aspects of the Y2K computer bug offer the perfect opportunity to further their conspiracy theories. In several publications and on the Internet and the radio, various evangelicals have linked the Y2K computer bug to a plot by the President and the United Nations to seize power and establish a dictatorship in the service of the Antichrist.

The Prophecy Club, a money-making entity dedicated to warning “Christians and non-Christians of the devices of the devil and judgment coming on America,” sells many books that warn of the government’s plans to establish a dictatorship and imprison “true believers” in concentration camps. One Prophecy Club speaker cautions that “you dare not trust Bill and Hillary Clinton. . . . Regardless of the ‘book’ they carry to ‘religious’ services, or what they do while attending, they serve the same ‘god’, i.e., Belial-Beelzebub himself; not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

In an essay entitled, “Y2K: It Simply Won’t Go Away,” circulated over the Internet, David Kralik, a pastor in Fairhope, Alabama, describes a Federal Government that seeks to define “conservative fundamental Bible-believing Christians who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture and espouse a literal fulfillment of end-times prophecy as outlined in the Word of God” as a “dangerous David Koresh-type cult.” Although Pastor Kralik does not set any specific date for the return of Jesus, he apparently believes that the Federal Government may use the Y2K chaos as an excuse for assaulting Christians. He writes, “We can easily see how the forming globalist government can use [the problems related to Y2K] to further their goals. And we do see how the realization of these goals can and may possibly be the governmental platform utilized by the Anti-Christ in the last days in the fulfillment of Scripture.”

Many Christians on the far right see the Federal Government’s 1993 confrontation with David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, and the resulting death of Koresh and his followers, as “proof” that the Federal Government has no qualms about attacking Christians who believe in biblical prophecy. The Branch Davidians were preparing for the Last Days, which they believed were imminent, when Federal agents tried to arrest Koresh on weapons charges. Koresh and his followers were reportedly stockpiling weapons in anticipation of an end-times assault by demonic forces. Some assert that Koresh believed that the siege by Federal agents was one of the signs from Revelation that signaled the final battle between good and evil.

A number of books about the approaching millennium and its consequences have been published in the last year. Tim LaHaye, a retired minister and political activist, and Jerry Jenkins, a former sportswriter, have written a series of novels that chronicle life on the eve of the Second Coming of Jesus. The novels describe a near future in which Christians disappear to Heaven and everyone left on earth suffers through havoc and the whims of the Antichrist in the form of the Secretary General

of the United Nations. The books (the latest is *Assassins*) have sold millions of copies. *Time* magazine reports that LaHaye also offered warnings about Y2K on an on-line chat event. He reportedly said, "It very well could trigger a financial meltdown leading to an international depression, which would make it possible for the Antichrist or his emissaries to establish a one-world currency or a one-world economic system, which would dominate the world commercially until it is destroyed."

"Rabbi" Loren Jacobs, the leader of a Michigan-based messianic Jewish group (Jews who have not formally converted to Christianity but believe Jesus is the Messiah), has written a report on Y2K for his congregation. In it, he asks, "Is it inconceivable that a computer apocalypse could rapidly propel us into a one-world economy and a one-world government, headed by a world dictator?"

Other Christians see not only the impending Y2K problem but also technology itself as the tool that will allow the Antichrist to seize power. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that Noah Hutchings, the author of *Y2K = 666* and a radio preacher from Oklahoma City, suspects that "computers, with their ability to know 'all about us . . . whether we've been good or bad,' might be a tool of the Antichrist to bring down civilization." Others believe that supermarket bar codes, another tool of modern technology, are really the "mark of the beast," a mark — 666 — that Satan gives to his allies, so that they can avoid the punishment meted out to Christians who refuse to abandon their faith. The Prophecy Club sells a book entitled *Technology and the Mark of the Beast* in which author Walt Myers tells readers "how technology will be used to trap the masses into receiving The Mark of the Beast." He warns readers about "Radio Frequency Identification, computer chips of human flesh, Low-Orbital Surveillance and tracking satellites" and other technological devices.

More Doom and Gloom

There are other far-right Christian evangelicals who view the Y2K issue with alarm. Gary North, who writes, lectures and speaks on Y2K at various events, has been predicting that the Y2K computer bug will lead to widespread chaos and panic. North is also a leader in the Christian Reconstructionist movement whose followers believe in the manifestation of a society on earth that is defined and controlled by Christians. He has headed the Institute for Christian Economics which advocates a free-market economy based on "explicitly biblical laws." Reconstructionists believe that it is their duty to help bring down the present-day government so that they can establish a fundamentalist theocracy that operates on principles chiefly from the Old Testament.

Although North is predicting havoc related to the Y2K computer bug, he does not connect that havoc to the imminent return of Jesus. His Reconstructionist belief is based on postmillennialism. Reconstructionists believe that the return of Jesus to earth will happen after a millennium of peace on earth has already been established. Nonetheless, North's thinking about Y2K, his "expertise" offered in lectures at Y2K Preparedness Expos, and his numerous publications have made many people believe his theories that the Y2K "bug" will result in a global disaster.

Cults and the Millennium

Some groups who proclaim that the apocalypse will occur in the year 2000 do not relate this event to Y2K at all. Yet, these groups are of concern since authorities believe that they may carry out violent actions in hopes of hastening their particular version of the end of the world. These groups are generally led by charismatic leaders who believe that either they are the long-awaited Messiah or a designated witness to the Second Coming.

One such group that achieved notoriety is Concerned Christians, whose members settled in Israel in the fall of 1998 and were arrested and deported by Israeli authorities in January 1999. The Israelis assert that the group was intent on carrying out violent acts in the streets of Jerusalem at the end of 1999 to hasten the Second Coming of Jesus. Members of the group believe that their leader, Monte Kim Miller, will die on the streets of Jerusalem in December 1999 and be resurrected three days later.

Yisrayl (also known as Bill) Hawkins, leader of another cult, House of Yahweh, has convinced his followers that he is a “witness” who will announce the Second Coming of Christ and then be murdered by Satan. Hawkins and his followers are awaiting the return of Jesus in a compound in Abilene, Texas. The group has sometimes been thought to belong to the Identity Church movement, a racist and anti-Semitic pseudo-religion that defines Jews as children of Satan and all minorities as subhuman “mud people.” The House of Yahweh believes that the end of the world will arrive soon if the Bible’s laws are not universally obeyed and the Temple in Jerusalem is not rebuilt. Authorities believe that the group is stockpiling weapons and there are reports that former members of the Posse Comitatus, a group of Christian Identity activists dedicated to survivalism, vigilantism and anti-government action live at the Texas compound.

Robert Millar, the leader of Elohim City, a Christian Identity settlement located in Muldrow, Oklahoma, on the Oklahoma-Arkansas border, believes that the Tribulation is already upon us, and that a series of disasters will occur soon after the year 2000 when the wicked will be removed from the earth. His teachings are explicitly based on white supremacist beliefs, and some Elohim City leaders and members had ties to The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), a paramilitary survivalist group that operated another Identity compound near the Arkansas-Missouri border. Elohim City is reportedly heavily armed in anticipation of the End-Times battle.

Another cult, Aum Shinrikyo — based in Japan — has gained worldwide attention because of its apocalyptic beliefs and its 1995 sarin poison gas attack on the Tokyo subway, which killed 12 people and sickened 6,000. Even though Aum is rooted in Japanese religious culture, its leader, Shoko Asahara, has claimed to be Jesus. In an article analyzing Aum Shinrikyo, Ely Karmon, director of the Internet and Data-base Project at the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism of The Interdisciplinary Center in Herzlia, Israel, said that Asahara’s claim that he was Jesus “allowed him to add to Aum’s Buddhist doctrines the Judeo-Christian concept of the Last Judgment and the final battle of Armageddon.” Asahara and his followers believe that the apocalypse is coming soon after

2000, and that in order to survive Armageddon Aum members must possess a special resistance to chemical and bacterial weapons. The group's attack on the subway in Tokyo may have been one way of proving their invulnerability to these agents.

Aum is already considered dangerous because of its violent past and authorities fear that the group may commit more violent acts as the millennium approaches. According to Karmon, Asahara has identified the United States as the Beast in the Book of Revelation and has said that the U.S. will one day attack Japan, which he must then save.

Asahara also sees a conspiracy among various forces, particularly Jews and Freemasons, to bring about World War III and the end of the world. Aum has posted the virulently anti-Semitic tract, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* on its Web site. *The Protocols*, a document supposedly created by Jews (the Elders) determined to seize control of the world, was actually a forgery prepared by Russian secret police agents during the last decade of the 19th century. Karmon asserts that *The Protocols* enable Asahara "to explain many difficult events and phenomena and to convince his followers to unite and organize for the final, decisive battle against the Devil and his representatives in Japan." The Aum Web site has begun to post Asahara's doomsday preaching. Although Asahara is currently in jail for his connection to the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway, his following remains strong.

Apocalyptic Thinking and the Jewish Community's 'Role'

The End Times scenario known formally as dispensational premillennialism (dispensationalism refers to the idea that history has been "dispensed" in divinely appointed eras) is principally based on the teaching of John Nelson Darby, a 19th century British preacher. Darby's elaborate biblical prophecy interpretations emphasize both the singularity of the Jews and the magnitude of their error in rejecting Jesus. According to these interpretations, the promises made in the Bible to the people of Israel have been transferred to all those who believe in Jesus and the Jews can only be saved by publicly accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

In many cases, those who believe in the apocalypse focus on the Jewish community as the key element in setting the stage for the events that will bring about the End Times and the Second Coming. Hal Lindsey, in *The Late Great Planet Earth*, states bluntly, "The Jew is the most important sign to this generation."

In focusing on the Jews as the "most important sign" of the End Times, some millennialist Christians not only believe but actually hope that the Jews will cease to exist as a unique people with their own separate religion, history and culture.

During 1999, someone associated with the Prophecy Club contacted Jewish institutions to warn the Jews that it is essential that they return to Israel because the United States Government and the United Nations are building concentration camps in America to imprison Jews and "Israel-supporting" Christians. The return of the Jews to their homeland and their subsequent acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah are seen as the key to preventing the Antichrist from ruling the world. Other groups

see the Jews solely as the embodiment of evil, plotting with the Antichrist to destroy the world.

In an article posted in “The WINDS,” a prophecy-oriented, far-right, anti-government on-line magazine, the author wrote, “The Jews arranged for the crucifixion of Jesus and there has never been repentance for that act. Jesus is still being crucified, yet, professed Christians bow at the feet of this anti-Christ. . . . This anti-Christ uses as its tool the organization called the United Nations which was instrumental in setting this force on the glorious holy mountain in Jerusalem in 1948.”

In 1999, Jerry Falwell, a mainstream Christian evangelical leader, stated publicly that the Antichrist is Jewish. He apologized to the Jewish community after his remarks caused an outcry. Nonetheless, his belief speaks to the central role that some Christians see Jews as playing in the End-Times drama.

Many evangelical Christians believe that they must focus their efforts in helping the Jews convert as the millennium nears. One such person who attended the Y2K conference sponsored by Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network was quoted in a recent issue of *Esquire* magazine as saying, “. . . we will have to hide the Jews so that they can get back to Israel, so that Jesus Christ can come again in glory.”

Underlying Anti-Semitism?

While some evangelicals view Jews as merely the catalysts that will allow the return of Jesus, there are others on the far right whose ideas on the subject contain overtones of anti-Semitism. While dispensational theologies foresee an ultimate reconciliation between “Israel” and the “Church” when Jesus establishes his millennium, they have supported unusual forms of theological anti-Judaism. Evangelical and fundamentalist writers, for instance, have regularly spoken of anti-Semitism as part of God’s will — both as a sign of the Jews’ prophesied future and as “chastisement” for their past error in rejecting the divinity of Jesus. In his 1979 book, *Israel’s Final Holocaust*, televangelist Jack Van Impe called anti-Semitism “a cancer that seems never to heal,” but he also wrote: “Following the rejection of their Messiah and the dispersion after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jews entered the longest period of suffering and persecution. . . . In taking the long look at history, one sees that the Jews had been steadily marching toward Hitler’s ovens ever since the fall of their beloved city in A.D. 70.”

Van Impe is not the only evangelist to refer to the Holocaust. While many Christian prophecy writers have lamented the horrors of the Holocaust, some have seen the genocide as furthering God’s intentions, hastening the creation of the State of Israel and thereby offering “proof that the covenant of God with His people had not been broken,” according to a 1976 fundamentalist statement. Moreover, for a number of these writers, the Holocaust foreshadowed the final persecution of the Jews by the Antichrist, which, according to Hal Lindsey, would make the Nazis “look like Girl Scouts weaving a daisy chain.”

Radio preacher Chuck Missler has also been quoted as saying that the Tribulation, the final seven years of history, will “make the Holocaust . . . look like a picnic.”

A Time of Hope

Most Christians welcome the approaching millennium with a sense of renewal. In October 1998, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America issued a letter telling their members to disregard wild prophecies and to welcome the coming millennium with hope. Likewise, Pope John Paul II has told Catholics to celebrate the turn of the millennium and to confirm their faith by making pilgrimages to Jerusalem and Rome, if possible.

Those far-right groups that connect potential Y2K chaos to the end of the world have a particularly dark vision of the world. They constantly seek out signs to confirm that their vision is correct. Hopefully, however, most people will see the millennium as a time for reflection, not for scapegoating and conspiracy theories.

II. Y2K AND THE EXTREME RIGHT HATEMONGERS

Hate groups on the extreme right — even those with a strong religious component — have not embraced apocalyptic or biblical predictions as a blueprint for what the world will look like after January 1, 2000. For the most part, these groups are more concerned with the technical aspect of the Y2K computer glitch, and how prepared the country is for the chaos that such a crisis may bring. Even though many on the extreme right offer a measured and even ostensibly disinterested view of the Y2K situation, when they assign blame for the cause of the computer glitch, they often rely on conspiracy theories laced with anti-Semitism and racism.

Perhaps the most bizarre Y2K conspiracy theory emerging from the extreme right is the one spun by the Fargo, North Dakota-based National Socialist White Revolutionary Party (NSWRP). This neo-Nazi group claims that Russians will “take advantage of the civil and military chaos caused by the Y2K computer bug” and launch a nuclear, chemical and biological attack on the United States. According to “defectors,” the “attack will begin with a disinformation news broadcast in which a phony holographic image of Clinton or Gore . . . directs military and civil authorities throughout the U.S. to DISREGARD and DISOBEY any subsequent orders that they may receive from Washington, as there has been a military insurrection or coup against the legitimate U.S. government.”

The scenario grows more far-fetched as NSWRP describes how electronic communication will be disrupted following an “electro-magnetic pulse hydrogen bomb blast in the stratosphere over the U.S.,” which will enable the Russians to launch the “‘first strike’ of nuclear ballistic missiles against U.S. missile and military bases. This will be followed by chemical and biological strikes against massive population centers.” The final chapter of NSWRP’s globalist conspiracy theory begins with an invasion of Russian and Chinese forces, “all of whom will invade under the banner of the United Nations.”

Predicting the Chaos – and Blaming the Jews

Other extremists do not share NSWRP's extreme paranoid fantasy, although some Identity groups do use global conspiracy theories to explain the changes the new millennium will bring. (The pseudo-theological "Identity" philosophy teaches that Anglo-Saxons, not Jews, are the biblical Chosen People, that nonwhites are "mud people" on the level of animals, and that Jews are the "children of Satan.") Among Identity adherents, James Wickstrom, an Identity minister and a Posse Comitatus leader in Michigan, is among the most caught up in the Y2K frenzy. Posse Comitatus, Latin for "power of the county," is an intermittently active, loosely organized group of Identity activists dedicated to survivalism, vigilantism and anti-government agitation. Disciples of the Posse propaganda believe that all governmental power is rooted at the county — not Federal — level. In 1991, Wickstrom was convicted in Pittsburgh of plotting to distribute \$100,000 in counterfeit bills to white supremacists at the 1988 Aryan Nations World Congress. He was released from prison in 1994.

Whereas other Identity leaders cautiously report that some computer glitches may arise on January 1, 2000, Wickstrom predicts that "banks will fail, supermarket computer cash registers will not function, gas-station computer cash registers will not work, no pension checks, no S.S. checks, no transportation deliveries of all goods. . . . Nothing!!"

Far from dreading the havoc he expects Y2K to bring, Wickstrom is "ecstatic about what is forthcoming upon a jew [sic] and anti-christ [sic] world system that has been built by corrupt weights and measures, especially the money systems of the world." He claims that "the jews [sic] who unlawfully control the nation's money and their private Central Banks" are playing down the Y2K threat in order to avoid a run on the banks, "as that will prove that the money that has been deposited IS NOT THERE."

So consuming is Wickstrom's obsession with the alleged Jewish conspiracy to downplay the Y2K crisis that he insists that the NATO air strikes against Serbia in early 1999 were a Jewish plot to divert attention from the impending disaster: "While the masses continue to look afar, the Jews are busy preparing for their Communist New World Order, and the entire downfall of what you call The United States of America." He also warns that "foreign speaking men dressed in black" have already set up shop in the mountainous areas of the country. They are here, Wickstrom insists, "to assist the jew [sic] communist's [sic] who sit in high places."

Wickstrom's advice to his followers echoes the familiar refrain of survivalists: stock up on food, water and gasoline and do not trust the government or anyone else to offer protection in the wake of a Y2K disaster.

Yet Another Jewish Plot

Unlike Wickstrom, Scriptures for America's Pete Peters argues that the Y2K hype is the latest in a long line of "fear fads," that also include nuclear holocaust, global warming, killer bees and UFOs. Peters, an Identity pastor in LaPorte, Colorado, does not blame Jews for downplaying the

Y2K panic, but for promoting it: “Where do so-called Y2K experts get their information? From the enemies of Christianity and our country! Only as Judeo Christians, they don’t call them enemies rather they call them ‘God’s Chosen People.’”

Peters is so intent on finding an anti-Semitic explanation for Y2K that he invokes *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* as the necessary background for fully understanding the issue. He contends that, beginning with the abolition of the gold standard, Jews have “successfully conspired to enslave and plunder God’s people” throughout the last century. As the year 2000 approaches, Peters preaches, Jews will try to “economically rape and plunder” America once again, this time by forming a cash-free society — which is the dreaded prerequisite for the “New World Order.” How will this be accomplished? By creating a panic that all bank computers will crash, which will encourage Americans to liquidate their accounts before January 1, 2000.

Peters even reaches back to the Bible to find a prophesy for the Y2K scenario: “Though the term ‘Y2K’ is not found in the Bible, the Y2K phenomenon — together with all the fear, dread and anxiety it generates — is.” Peters calls this the “Y2K curse” and warns, “today, our enemies have hired people to curse us by means of programming. We’ve already seen that fear, dread, and anxiety is a curse; thus, those who program us to fear are, in actuality, cursing us.”

As an antidote to the Y2K hysteria, Peters suggests that his followers not only reprogram their computers, but their souls as well: “If you know in your mind that God can and will provide your needs, yet feel in your heart you are living on the eve of destruction, you must repent — you must reprogram.”

A front-page article in the April 1999 issue of *The CDL Report*, published by the virulently anti-Semitic Christian Defense League in Arabi, Louisiana, echoes Peters’ analysis that Y2K is a Jewish plot to take over the world, but takes it to a more conspiratorial level. “Y2K has been in the planning stages since the period of 1972-73 and is a designed peripheral function of the much larger study and implementation of ‘Global 2,000,’” the alleged plan to reduce the world’s population through money control, with the goal being a cashless society. “The global owners (Zionism) finally realized that the peasant serfs would not accept the cash-less concept without a fight. . . . The decision that was agreed upon was the devastation of the existing banking system. Y2K is the vehicle to cause (or blame for) the complete collapse of that system.”

CDL makes clear that control of the banking system is only part of the plot waged by “International Zionism:” “This entire debacle, that is titled ‘Y2K,’ is a completely programmed, well thought out and diabolical scheme directed for and to the ultimate control of people through mind control and all that might entail.”

CDL Report editor James K. Warner, a longtime anti-Semitic propagandist, predicts that the new millennium will bring “computer problems” and urges his readers “to prepare for what may be some discomfort for a few days to a week or so.” However, he is more concerned with the “advertising from hundreds of organizations and firms trying to get us to purchase survival foods, stoves, windmills, guns and thousands of other gadgets to prepare us for the ‘Y2K disaster.’” Warner is con-

vinced that these companies are not strong supporters of extremist goals and are only taking advantage of “a lucrative and gullible market among right wing patriots.”

A More ‘Cautious’ Paranoia

In contrast to Warner and other Identity preachers, Dan Gayman of the Missouri-based Church of Israel informs his readers in a more cautious tone about the potential problems Y2K may bring. In its flagship publication, *The Watchman*, Gayman reports that some newspapers have predicted major social and economic disruptions due to the computer glitch.

While Gayman tries not to feed the Y2K hysteria, he does mention some far-fetched scenarios without explicitly rejecting them: “Silence on the part of our government [about Y2K] could mean that there is a master plan in place that will seize this movement to move America into the arms of a people-controlled police state.” Without certain knowledge of what will happen, Gayman suggests a plan of preparedness: “Considering the times in which we live, it is best to be prepared for any contingency,” much as one would prepare for a major storm.

One area of particular concern for Gayman is the possible social unrest that Y2K may stir up. This is not surprising considering that the Church of Israel is a vocal proponent of racial separatism. “America is pulsating with explosive societal problems. Growing numbers of non-white, third world people are being supported by public welfare assistance programs. . . . If these monetary welfare programs were disrupted even for a short time, the social structure of America would crumble. Civil chaos could quickly turn America into a land of unbridled killing, plunder, looting and raging fires.”

Gayman advises all families to make a list of essential materials (water, food, clothing, heat and lighting) needed in case of a Y2K-related disaster. Like Pete Peters, he also advises his readers to “examine your spiritual state” because no amount of preparedness will help “without absolute trust and dependency upon God.” Gayman suggests that Identity adherents should be selective about where they live, choosing areas with “those of like mind, faith, race, culture and spiritual vision.” Moreover, people should liquidate all debts, close their bank accounts and “keep [their] trusty shotgun handy.”

A ‘Doomsday’ View

More fearful of the Y2K fallout is the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP), which calls Y2K “the biggest problem that the modern world has ever faced” and has committed itself to running at least one Y2K-related article in each of its bimonthly bulletins. NAAWP — a self-described “civil rights educational organization, demanding equal rights for Whites and special privileges for none” — was founded in 1980 by David Duke shortly after his days as a Klan leader ended.

NAAWP paints a doomsday Y2K scenario, predicting that “months before January 1, 2000, the world’s stock markets will have crashed,” which will cause a run on the banks. If computers stop functioning on January 1, 2000, NAAWP predicts shortages of food, heat and money that will lead

to lawlessness. "Within three months there will be only two kinds of people left alive — those who for whatever reason had managed to store food and those who armed themselves and stole it from those who had it.

Reno Wolfe, NAAWP's national vice-president/CEO, warns of race-riots in the wake of Y2K chaos much like Dan Gayman: "Right now, all these American Africans [sic] are receiving their monthly allotments from Local, State and the Federal Government.... What do you think will happen when they DON'T get their computer generated welfare checks, food stamps, etc. in January 2000? Right now, they think nothing about stealing food or whatever they fancy. As I said, Black on White crime is at an all time high right now. In January, 2000, it will be astronomical! The hoards will roam the streets of our cities and the country side [sic], looking to take whatever they want from the white citizens who have the food, have the water and have money!"

NAAWP's response is one of preparedness, advising readers to "prepare for Y2K as you would a natural disaster." NAAWP tries to be cautious, advising its readers not to panic, but it also warns, "this may be a world-wide catastrophe with disastrous consequences." NAAWP is distributing information packets to its members, with titles like "Survival Equipment" (which includes checklists for different types of 'survival kits'), "Food Storage" and "Water Gathering and Storage."

A More Upbeat View

The Jubilee, a California Identity newspaper that promotes anti-Semitic and anti-government conspiracy theories, takes a more optimistic view of the potential Y2K chaos. Chris Temple, a writer for the newspaper, "will welcome the Millennium Bug with open arms, as it *just might* end up being one of the greatest things to happen to freedom loving people all over the world."

Temple's sanguine attitude comes from seeing a potential for social transformation in the possible fallout from Y2K-related computer glitches: "the *net* result of the Year 2000 problem as I have described it will be POSITIVE! Internationalism and global capitalism will be dealt severe blows; efforts to recapture local control economically and otherwise will be spread. Families and communities will be rediscovered, the end result of which will be a major reassessment for many people of the very meaning of life itself."

Jubilee managing editor Paul Hall echoes his colleague's view and refutes popular conspiracy theories suggesting that "internationalist forces" have created Y2K unrest in order to establish a "New World Order." "Yahweh is in total control, He will get the last laugh outta [sic] this whole thing. . . . Yahweh created the path that we are on to provide a wonderful opportunity to bring us back into obedience at just the right time." Any Y2K chaos, Hall insists, will convince many to return to religion by reminding us of "how enslaved we have ALL become, and how urgent it is to reverse the process.

Neutral – But Still Hateful

Not all extremist groups are concerned about Y2K. The National Alliance (NA), one of the most dangerous and well-organized hate groups in America, has pretty much ignored the Y2K issue. In fact, NA's leader, William Pierce, believes that the government, banks and large corporations will fix their computers in time. He predicts that any chaos will be driven by "crazed millennialists going berserk when the Second Coming fails to occur . . . [and] a few right-wing nuts may launch a premature attack on the government, figuring that without its computers the government won't be able to fight back." Other than that, Pierce says, nothing catastrophic will happen. Pierce doesn't see anything wrong with being prepared, but "there are much more serious things than the 'millennium bug' . . . to worry about," such as "the Jewish domination of our mass media of news and entertainment."

III. Y2K AND THE 'PATRIOT' MOVEMENT

The approach of the third millennium and its related "Y2K" computer problem has provided militia groups and other anti-government extremists — sometimes loosely referred to as the "Patriot" movement — with a clarion call for their followers. Serving as a touchstone among the movement's conspiracy theories and symbolizing its worst fears of government repression and nationwide anarchy, the Y2K computer "bug" represents for many of these far-right extremists a problem far beyond the capacity of the Federal Government to control.

Although individual leaders in the Patriot movement may differ in their theories regarding the origins and nature of the Y2K problem, as well as whether the government is ultimately responsible for it, almost all agree that Americans should fear its "inevitable result": the institution of martial law. Most anti-government extremists agree that potentially, Y2K means a serious threat to an American way of life they imagine existed in the early days of the republic, which has been steadily eroding with the growth of the American state. The watchword for these extremist groups is "preparedness," as they urge their followers to be ready to protect and defend themselves against the impending breakdown in social order.

Origins of the Movement

In the 1970s and 1980s, certain far-right Christian Identity and "Constitutionalist" groups found common ground with apocalyptic survivalists, spawning a number of militant semi-underground associations which seemed to loosely agree that an "America" they imagined was being taken from their midst. After the rural farm crisis in the 1980s, the collapse of European Communism, and the launching of the Persian Gulf War, President Bush announced that he intended to help build a "New World Order." His phrasing resonated throughout the Patriot community — which viewed it as sug-

gesting a dark future in which American sovereignty would be forever lost, and the world would be fully run by secret international associations of “elites,” who planned the imminent imposition of some form of tyranny.

Drawing recruits from other pre-existing movements and networks, including gun rights, anti-abortion, survivalist, anti-Communist, libertarian, anti-tax and anti-environmentalist, self-styled Patriot groups began to form organized, armed militias. Relying on computer and fax networks, shortwave radio, AM talk radio, and video and audio tape distribution, the fundamental message was always the same: the U.S. Government is run by a secret network of elites, who are engaged in a vast conspiracy to deny Americans their constitutional rights and create a New World Order via a globalist U.N. police state.

The Movement Adapts to Climate of Suspicion

Following the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, the armed militia movement finally received long-overdue national attention. Many states have enacted anti-paramilitary training statutes, which restrict unauthorized military-style training. The net result of this national focus has been the curtailing of organized paramilitary training exercises that were more common in the early 1990s.

However, the goals, ideals and conspiracy theories which fuel these organizations have not changed in the intervening period. Nor are patriot organizations, as they often call themselves, any less dangerous. In fact, it could be argued that these organizations are more dangerous than their militia forerunners because of changes in their mode of operation, and access to more people through the use of the Internet and other means of communication. They have adopted a strategy of “leaderless resistance,” a term coined by Louis Beam, a former Grand Dragon of the KKK, wherein a movement is broken down into small “cells” of “operatives,” so as to act with greater stealth and avoid infiltration by the authorities. Although the effectiveness of their strategy is unclear, there has been a massive proliferation in the number of Patriot Web sites, organizations, newsgroups and E-mail lists over the past several years, all distributing information to a potentially wide audience of Internet users. For these organizations, the “Year-2000 Crisis” represents a sort of technological apocalypse, forcing an ultimate battle between the forces of liberty and of tyranny.

Paranoia and the Imposition of Martial Law

Virtually all leaders of these organizations agree that the government will deprive citizens of their civil rights if Y2K wreaks significant social and economic havoc. They differ only in what measures they are willing to take in being “prepared.”

John Trochman, cofounder of the Militia of Montana (M.O.M.), does not fault the government for creating the problem. He merely fears the results. On the M.O.M. Web site, he refers repeatedly to “secret” reports issued by military branches of the U.S. Government which assess the potential fallout from Y2K on major American cities. He claims that both the Army and the Navy have kept

these reports secret in a coordinated effort to make sure that Americans remain unprepared: “Folks, the deception has just been blown away. Branches of the U.S. Government have known, apparently for quite some time, that Y2K was likely to result in major infrastructure failures in highly populated cities. They deliberately withheld this information from the American people.”

Trochman goes on to say: “We need to expose corruption in America. . . . I believe when Y2K hits there will be Federal troops on every street corner. I’ve got documents to prove it.” However, Trochman has declined to furnish his sources.

Norm Olson, founder of The Michigan Militia, in a widely disseminated E-mail message dated March 24, 1999, echoed Trochman’s position in principle, but advocated harking back to the more organized, militant days of the militia movement:

“It appears that the devastation of Y2K is only now being truthfully considered. That alone ought to give us pause, but still greater in scope and scale is what may follow; for, unless there is a miraculous spiritual and moral change in the attitude of this nation, armed revolution is inevitable. Nothing can stop it. And so we prepare. That, my friends, is what the militia is all about.”

Y2K and Profiteering

Many so-called Patriots have found the Y2K phenomenon to be extremely profitable. For the past several years, “Preparedness Expos,” periodic events throughout the country where hundreds of extremists, gun enthusiasts and others interested in survival products and conspiracy theories gather, have been well attended. These events typically include panels and round-table discussions on all manner of conspiracy and survival topics, including the virtues of various types of firearms, how to build underground shelters, purify water and survive underground for a lengthy period of time. All manner of “survival” products and extremist propaganda urging the purchase of such products are offered for sale. Over the past year, ADL research has noted increases in the sheer number of catalogues peddling survival gear, food, etc. Many patriot organizations have attempted to exploit Y2K by selling these products along with their propaganda.

After charging \$5 for a lengthy diatribe at a recent “Preparedness Expo” in Sacramento, California, entitled “Leftist Revolution and the Y2K Crisis in America,” Gerald “Jack” McLamb, a former Phoenix policeman and founder of Police Against The New World Order, reportedly directed the audience to “head downstairs and stop by booth 225,” to purchase survival products distributed by Family Preparedness Now.

Other organizations have attempted to prey on financial insecurity, claiming that in the year 2000, the computer systems at the Federal Reserve and other world financial institutions will malfunction, causing the international monetary system to collapse. The most notable of these organizations is NORFED (National Organization for the Repeal of the Federal Reserve Act and the Internal Revenue Code), an Evansville, Indiana-based organization that has been busy promoting its Y2K “Liberty Currency” — which the organization claims on its Web site to be

“America’s only silver-backed Currency — provides you with a legal Warehouse Receipt which is your title of ownership to pure .999 fine silver. Redeemable in pure silver at over 100 Redemption Centers throughout the nation, this currency will not be devalued in any coming financial collapse, such as may follow the year 2000 ‘Y2K’ computer crash.”

NORFED offers currency with “intrinsic value,” which therefore will not be subject to the devaluation which it claims American currency will suffer as a result of Y2K computer failure.

Perhaps no figure is more emblematic of what Y2K has done for the “Patriot business” than Colonel James “Bo” Gritz. A former Green Beret and 1992 Presidential candidate for the extremist Populist Party, Gritz has trained hundreds of anti-government zealots to fight the “New World Order.” He preaches fear about the impending dangers of Y2K, and sells an array of products designed to help “cope” with what is to come. In January 1999, before an overflow crowd of more than 400 at the Northland Opry in North Kansas City, Missouri, Gritz exhorted the crowd: “Y2K could bring chaos to the nation and the world. . . . For the general good, regulations could be imposed that turn you into less than an American.”

Gritz offers rigorous “training sessions” run by S.P.I.K.E. (Specially Prepared Individuals For Key Events), where he teaches all manner of survival skills. He has attempted to sell plots of land in a common-law community he called “Almost Heaven,” offering investors a pastoral escape from cities, where the greatest effect of the millennial tribulations will be experienced. On his S.P.I.K.E. Web site, he offers a dizzying array of high-priced survival products for the “Time of Noah,” ranging from 12 different survival training videos (each of which sells for \$75); a “Family Herb Kit” for \$99.95, which includes tinctures, powders, poultices, powders, salves and oils; a \$199.95 two-person duffel bag; a \$36.95 Homeopathic Flu Solution, and a “Basic Year’s Supply of Food For One Adult,” for \$490, as well as lock pick sets, maps, radios and many more survival-related items.

A Troubling Prospect

While some of the leaders of the Patriot movement may be sincere in their belief that apocalyptic disaster will occur with the onset of the year 2000, it is clear that most are taking advantage of the opportunity to exploit the paranoid fears of their followers. Others, most notably gun dealers, have done so as well.

The onset of the millennium and its Y2K problem confront our society with an important and potentially dangerous challenge: how to deal with the prospect of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of extremists in possession of a large supply of firearms and survival gear, suspicious of government and of major social institutions and preparing for the worst, being urged by conspiratorial propaganda toward some “emergency” action against perceived “enemies.”