

# ERAGE: 1999





# no future

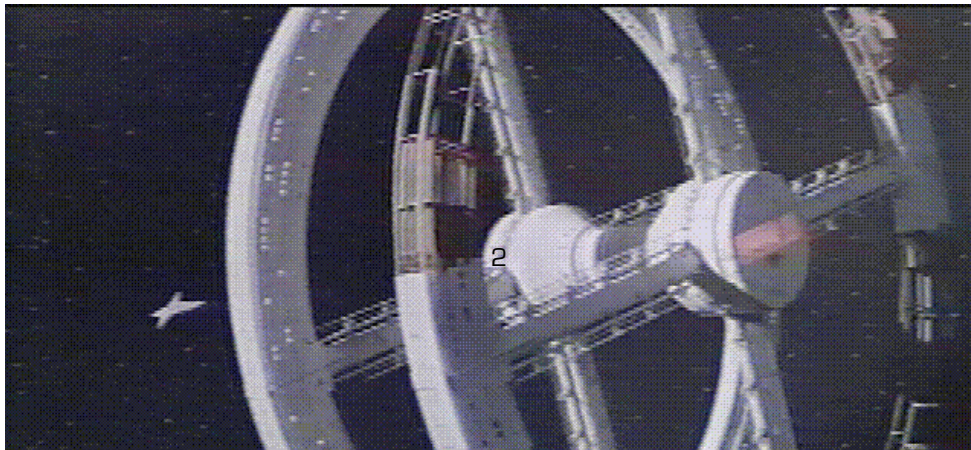
In the wake of the Industrial Revolution, the 19th century saw a rate of technological progress unprecedented in human history. One of the side effects of this was the invention of science fiction, as the rate of change in the real world encouraged imaginative speculation about the unbelievable wonders, or nightmares, that lay ahead.

And it's at about this time, the late 19th century, that the year 2000 starts to take on a special significance in people's imaginations; not in a religious sense, but as a date symbolising the idea of the Future not just as a time not yet come, but as a radically different place from the past. Clearly, during the endless ages of, say, Egypt of the pharaohs, the idea of the future as radically different from the present wasn't going to happen; and for most of human history, whenever people have dreamed of a radically different future it was going to come about as a result of divine intervention from outside human history, rather than as a result of human development itself. But someone in 1890 will have been aware that they were living in a world that had been utterly transformed in the space of a human lifetime, and the magic date with all the zeros, the millennial date, draws the eye and people start to ask the question, "If technology carries on changing human society like this - what will life be like in the year 2000?"

Now clearly, over the past century there have been two answers given to that question - the optimistic answer, where technology brings about a utopia of peace, plenty, and usually human idleness; or the pessimistic answer, where technology either destroys humanity or enslaves it.

Let's consider some of those visions now.

Firstly, the optimistic view, which I think is best symbolised by 2001: a Space Odyssey - in particular the Blue Danube sequence with the space station and the trip to the moon. When I was a child in the late 60s, this was the vision of the future we were brought up on - a future of technological optimism and freedom. When I saw 2001 again a couple of years ago, after not having seen it since the 70s, I was deeply moved by its beauty and deeply sad - this was the future I was promised, my childhood dream - and it will never happen. I feel robbed, in a way.

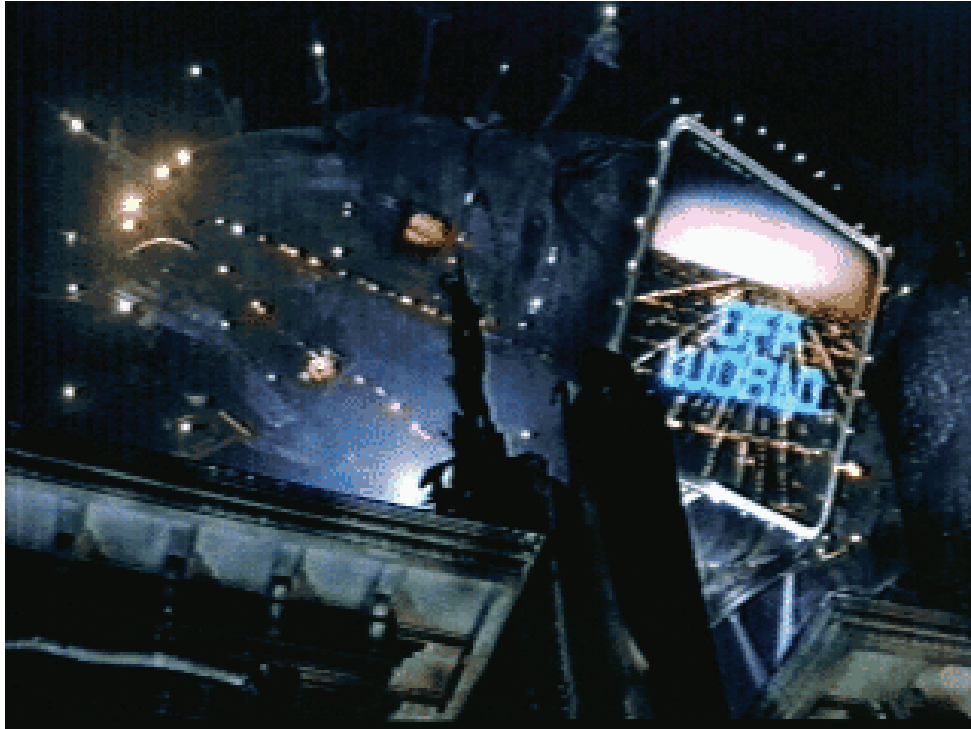


By the 1980s it was obvious that the shiny space-age vision of the future wasn't going to happen, and the worsening of the Cold War brought about by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the election of Reagan, the deployment of cruise missiles etc, brought about a series of visions of the future as nuclear nightmare such as hadn't been seen since the 50s, all encouraged by the increasing apocalypticism of the religious right in America who almost seemed to enjoy what was going on. Consider the opening sequence of Terminator 2: the ruins of Los Angeles 2029, the voiceover: "3 billion human lives ended on August 29th 1997. The survivors of the nuclear fire called the war Judgement Day. They lived only to face a new nightmare - the war against the machines." And a metallic foot crushes a human skull.



Note the irony of that date - these visions in turn now look a little dated, since the end of the Cold War. We at Grace know that machines can't take over the world, because they can't even work the slide projector. My, they're going to have to evolve fast!

So where does this leave us now that we're almost at the year 2000? Well, what's been creeping up on us in the years since the 60s is that the Future isn't futuristic after all - it's pretty much like the past but with different gadgets. Human history as normal, in short, rather than a radical break from it. Remember the Blue Peter time capsule, buried to show the year 2000 what the long-forgotten 1960s were like. Nobody realised that we'd still be living in them, that the future would in fact continuously recycle the past. And although we're having a little burst of excitement now, once we get past the year 2000 there isn't another date to replace it, that can stand as a symbol of the Future, for a very long time. 2100 doesn't have the same ring. And I'd suggest that the idea of the Future [capital F] as a place radically different from the past, as we have known it for the last hundred years or so, will fade away and we will be back in a situation similar to that of, say, the 18th century, where the future was just whatever happened next, without the capital F or the apocalyptic vision. A future in which the human race muddles on through wars and rumours of wars, in which the battle is never won, but never lost either, until the Lord returns. The tube will still be dirty and we will get stuck in the tunnel, but the voice of a female android [excuse the contradiction] will tell us what the next station will be, if we ever get to it. In short, Blade Runner!



Now Blade Runner is probably too pessimistic [I hope]; but it is I think far closer to a real future than anything else we've seen. It's a non-futuristic future, in which clothes and buildings have retro styling. It's a future in which electronics, and genetics, are simply business. And it's an environmentally degraded future. Blade Runner is based on the book 'Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?' by Philip K. Dick, and what isn't made explicit in the film, but is in the book, is that most animal life is extinct. It starts with owls - one day all the owls are dead, and no-one knows why. Then another sort of animal just dies, and another, until hardly any real ones are left - and artificial animals are manufactured to fill the human need for nature. Which seems uncomfortably possible.

Let that vision of the future stand as a warning. I end with a quotation from Jurgen Moltmann:

'Whether humanity has a future or whether it is going to become extinct in the next few centuries depends on our will to live, and that means our absolute will for our one indivisible life - we have got used to death, at least to the death of other creatures and other people, and to get used to death is the beginning of freezing into lifelessness itself - so the essential thing is to affirm life - the life of other creatures - the life of other people - our own lives. The people who truly affirm and love life take up the struggle against violence and injustice - they do not conform - they resist. Humankind is finally united - we are united in our future of global death. Our immediate task now must be to find an answer for the creation of a sustainable life for all lifeforms - both now and for all generations to come.'

steve collins

Footnote 1:  
Sometimes the future arrives, but more slowly than expected. I remember seeing designs for people-carriers in the 1960s, but it took the car industry 30 years to get around to it. And virtual reality - remember that? - very 1992 - looks like it's going to be another future that takes forever to arrive.

Footnote 2:  
The airline Pan Am appears in both 2001 and Blade Runner as a brand of the future, and has long since disappeared. The spaceliner in 2001 would in actual fact be operated by British Airways - or possibly Virgin.

Footnote 3:  
Over half of all the brands featured in Blade Runner; set in 2019, disappeared during the 1980s.

## holy

recognising god for who he is  
 living in the light of god  
 prayer  
 letting god in  
 repentant heart  
 things done with a godly attitude  
 everyone and all creation especially cats even  
 snakes  
 guitars  
 wholeness  
 spirit filled  
 honesty  
 openness  
 identifying with christ  
 daring to be different  
 selfless  
 pure  
 delirious? t-shirt  
 the guardian  
 someone who lives by the biblical law [spirit]  
 humble  
 christlikeness  
 wears a halo  
 tries to build commitment to the truth  
 seeking intimacy with god  
 no dress sense  
 superspiritual  
 overpious  
 middle class  
 conformity  
 challenging injustice  
 being right with god  
 little spare cash  
 sandals  
 inclusive  
 challenging by lifestyle  
 makes you feel uncomfortable  
 punk  
 gospel  
 breakbeat  
 self-sacrifice  
 bruce cockburn t-shirt  
 integrity

Father we come to you, as we are, in unholiness, in holiness, as sinners, as children of God.

We are sorry for the times we fail you. For times when we are not holy, that is when we have put barriers between ourselves and you, preventing us from being close to you. Forgive us Lord. Forgive us also when we set a measure or a standard of holiness to aspire to which is not what you require of us. Help us to become closer to you and to remove the obstacles that distance us from you.

Thank you that Jesus shattered the illusions of holiness performed by the Pharisees. You re-interpreted the meaning of holiness and you are our example that we aspire to follow: Despite being accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, this did not deter you from being engaged with the poor, needy, Roman officials, the sick, tax collectors, children, prostitutes, the rich, rulers, widows. We could think of many types of people that you would be engaged with this day.

Let us not commit the sin of holiness, when we have put barriers between ourselves and the world, that is, abstinence from engagement with the world in which we live. Lord you have called us all to the great commission. Show us by your example how we may be holy and pleasing in your sight, being both close to God and being salt and light to the world. Amen

paul wainwright

## unholy

deceitful  
 greed  
 rock music  
 satanism  
 prodigy t-shirt  
 apathy  
 legalism  
 selfish  
 arrogant  
 blasphemous  
 bigot  
 american  
 exclusive  
 sex  
 rebellion  
 miniskirt  
 bow tie  
 grunge look  
 metal jacket  
 open to immorality  
 chooses own paths for life  
 uncaring  
 disregard for others  
 nirvana t-shirt  
 violence  
 the sun  
 porn video  
 expletives  
 abuse  
 pride  
 anger  
 disrespect for god  
 wilfully against god  
 media baron  
 brokenness  
 pot noodles  
 curly guitar leads  
 shutting god out  
 'me' culture  
 envy  
 ceremonial killing of chickens  
 hypocrisy

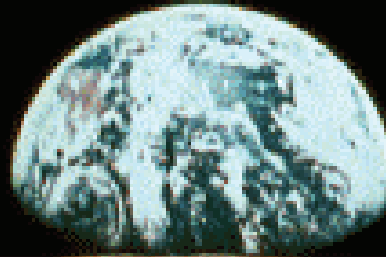
[answers provided by the congregation at the 'sin of holiness' service 13/9/98]



the time has come for judgement  
and for rewarding your prophets  
and your saints who live in awe of you  
both great and small  
and for destroying those  
who destroyed the earth

revelation 11:18

## to whom does the earth belong?



Reflect on Psalm 24:1, Psalm 50:10-11, Psalm 115:16.

In what ways have human beings failed to exercise a cooperative and responsible dominion over the Earth that God has given them?

Read Genesis 1:9-12, 20-30.

Do verses 26 and 28 provide a declaration of war on nature?

Are developing tools and technology, farming the land, digging for minerals, extracting fuels, damming rivers for hydroelectric power, harnessing atomic energy all fulfilments of God's primeval command?

Are we the 'lords' of the Earth?

Has Christianity actually caused irresponsible use of natural resources?

So what distinctive contribution to the ecological debate should Christians make?

We believe that God created the Earth and that one day he will recreate it. Read Romans 8:18-25.

In Ronald Higgins' book 'The Seventh Enemy', the first six enemies are the population explosion, the food crisis, the scarcity of resources, environmental degradation, nuclear abuse and scientific technology. The seventh enemy is humanity itself, our personal blindness and political inertia in the face of today's ecological challenge.

Do we find it easier to subdue the Earth than we do to subdue ourselves?

At the root of the ecological crisis is human greed. How does this challenge us?

In what one way could I help to conserve our human environment for the next century?

mike rose

# autumn leaves

As we approach the end of the second Millennium since the birth of Christ, how do we find the Church and what future does it have? Possibly the best symbol for the Church in the West today is autumn leaves, wonderfully colourful, reflecting the denominationalism/sectarianism that is so much a part of the Western Church. Colourful but.....dying, with nothing more to contribute to keeping the tree alive through the coming winter.

We've all heard the statistics - less than 10% of the population attend church regularly; falling and ageing congregations; financial problems; coupled with this are opinion polls that suggest an increased interest in the spiritual. Yes we know tales of revival, of God working in the world, of hundreds coming to Christ, of the harvest to be reaped...and yet these revivals only seem to favour para-religious groups with individual obsessions, rather than the Church as a whole.

Coupled with this is the growth in all the world's major religions of fundamentalism. This fundamentalism seems to be the result of fear triggered by the break-up of traditional cultural patterns. As we move from one era of civilisation to another, from the modern world of scientific certainty to the postmodern world of uncertainty, where even if the truth is out there it will be different for each one of us, people become more and more anxious and seek safety in a non-existent past, a land of Hovis and Holy Spirit where they feel they still have a role and where the rules are clear and unquestionable. Many of these groups seem to feel that we are living in 'the last days'. Listen to their songs if you want to know how they think:

Called to the battle, heavenly war  
God subdues every nation  
We are saved, we are saved  
At his name the demons flee  
There's a wind blowing all across the land  
Great celebrations on that final day when out of the heavens you come

Six different songs, but there are hundreds more like them, full of battles being won, exile ending, the Temple rebuilt, the Lord reigning. All this imagery points to a longing for a turning point, some great event that will mark a return to a world of certainty.

So as the 20th century draws to an end and we prepare to enter the Third Millennium, the Western Church can be seen thrashing around in disarray, its limbs out of control, rather like a dinosaur in its death throes, its tail whipping about felling anything in the way. This monster could easily destroy its own treasure of mystics and prophets, of good news and wisdom, of sacramental powers and sacred ritual. If our Mother Church is to survive the winter and bloom again in the spring of the new millennium, we must try to save these treasures before they are lost forever under a sea of mud of legalism, dualism, fundamentalism, formalism, sexism, ageism, and any other ism you care to mention.

The Church must develop a new and inclusive spirituality if it is not to become the exclusive and closed club that so many of its members seem to want. Change must be welcomed as a God-given challenge, as a chance for growth and not as something to run away from. Only if the Church is seen to open its doors and heart to all will it survive in the Third Millennium.

david holme

If Mother Church is dying in the West there are many possible causes and many things that must be saved. Below is a list of factors that may be helping to kill our Mother, and of things that need to be saved....it's up to you which category they go in. Use this list to help you as you pray for our Mother. Add your own factors, discuss with others, act on it.

dave holme





# invitation to the feast

Come, all you who thirst,  
all you who hunger for the bread of life,  
all you whose souls cry out for healing;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are weary,  
all you who are bowed down with worry,  
all you who ache with the tiredness of living;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you poor,  
all you who are without food or refuge,  
all you who go hungry in a fat land;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are bitter,  
all you whose hopes have tarnished into cynicism,  
all you who feel betrayed and cannot forgive;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who grieve,  
all you who suffer loss as a fresh knife wound,  
all you who curse the God you love;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are sinners,  
all you who have sold the gift that is within you,  
all you who turn uneasily on your bed at night;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are oppressed,  
all you who have forgotten the meaning of freedom,  
all you whose cries cut to the very heart of God;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are traitors,  
all you who use your wealth and power to crucify God,  
all you who cannot help yourselves;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are sick,  
all you whose bodies or minds have failed you,  
all you who long above all for healing;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

Come, all you who are lost,  
all you who search for meaning but cannot find it,  
all you who have no place of belonging;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

The table of Jesus is your place of gathering;  
Here you are welcomed, wanted, loved,  
here there is a place set for you;  
Come, come to the feast of life.

mike riddell, ponsonby baptist church communion liturgy 1983

# hospitality

When you get invited to a party, what do you think?  
Does it depend on who's invited you?  
The hostess with the mostest?  
Or the bachelor with BO?

**Jesus himself was a guest at a wedding in Cana -  
we've heard it all before.**

**He turned the water into wine  
[it's our proof-text against puritans].**

**Vintage stuff.**

Does your mind think up an excuse straightaway? Or two, just to be safe?  
Or do you clear the diary and buy a new outfit? Or two, just to be safe?  
If it's bring a bottle, do you?

**Jesus was a guest...of humanity.**

**The heavenly host, who laid on a harvest of abundance for the world,  
the creator, my provider, became the guest**

**of the animals in the stable,  
the villagers of Nazareth,**

**the religious leaders in the Temple,  
the prostitutes, drunkards, tax collectors.**

**He let us play host, did away with the VIP pass,  
ate, drank, and was probably merry.**

**Became one of us, dined at our table.**

**Ate the same bread, drank the same wine -  
everybody having a good time.**

**Shared stories;  
shared our story.**

Do you turn up early?  
Turn up late?  
Turn up the volume?  
Turn it down?

Turn down the invitation?  
Turn out to keep up appearances?

Or to keep up with the Joneses?  
Or to keep young? Or to keep moving?  
Or just to keep keeping on?

How do you feel if someone turns up uninvited?

Do you a] ask them to leave, b] welcome them with gritted teeth,  
or c] pour them a glass of your best Chablis?

What if someone you invited doesn't turn up?

Do you a] grin and bear it, b] phone them to 'see if they're all right',  
or c] accidentally forget to send them a Christmas card that year?

**When he left the table,  
he left bread and wine.**

**He left, himself;  
but left himself.**

**The guest,**

**once more,**

**became the consummate Host.**

And didn't you go to all that trouble?

Oh, it was nothing, I'm sure...but you hope they'll take the trouble to notice.  
Does it trouble you when they don't?

Do you expect to receive an invite?  
Or does that just invite disappointment?

How could you thank someone for being a great host?  
Just compliment them? Or return the compliment?

What does the word 'thank' mean?

And how do you say it? With flowers? With relish? With practice?

How do you receive?

Receive attention, friendship, undeserving love?

Can you hear God's call through the atmospherics and interference:  
"Are you receiving me? Are you receiving me? Are you receiving me?"

brian draper



# hindsight

Too busy having fun, or learning how,  
to fully realise the truth; but now  
the sound of wavebreak brings me to my knees:  
"Whenever you drink this, remember me"

It wasn't alcohol or diet Coke  
that burned our hearts within us as we spoke.  
He broke the bread, we didn't think it odd;  
With hindsight he's an avatar of God.

I must have worn dark glasses everywhere  
or else my sight adjusted to the glare,  
but now low winter sunlight blindingly  
assaults my eye and dares me not to see.

Transfiguration's subtle, not overt;  
our spiritual sense seldom alert.  
But distance lends discernment to the view,  
reveals the truth we never thought we knew.

steve collins

grace 1999: alpha for the lost in space



**fresh vital worship**

relaxed funky ambient & reflective  
visuals\* meditations\*tunes

8pm@st mary's church, st mary's road,  
ealing w5 second sunday of every month.

info jonny 0181 567 6926  
mike 0181 567 3466

grace.london@btinternet.com  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/adam.baxter/grace>