Millenarian Prophecies

To the Editor:

Craig Lundahl, in his article in the Spring 1999 issue of this Journal, warned us that we ignore the parallels between Biblical and Mormon prophecies and the predictive aspects of some near-death experiences "at our own risk" because it could be "the most serious and deadly mistake we could ever make" (p. 203). May I dissent? It is at least equally possible that Joseph Smith and contemporary near-death experiencers simply worried about the immediate future of our civilization and clothed their worries, and their sense of urgency about them, in a traditional apocalyptic dress that has been part of the collective Western subconscious at least since Biblical times.

Much modern Biblical scholarship recognizes that when Jesus of Nazareth used this type of imagery, He was not predicting the end of the space-time universe or, even less, things that would happen millennia ahead, but that He and the Jewish prophets before Him "knew a good metaphor when they saw one and used cosmic imagery to bring out the full theological significance of [contemporary] cataclysmic sociopolitical events" (Wright, 1992, p. 333). Sadly, and particularly at the turn of the millennium, many people still hold to the literal meaning of metaphorical language. So far, every dated prophecy has failed, despite frequent adjustments in the light of nonfulfillment (Kyle, 1999). That should make us realize that the millennarian scenario is symbolic rather than literal; but obviously, for many of us, it does not. That depresses me.

References

