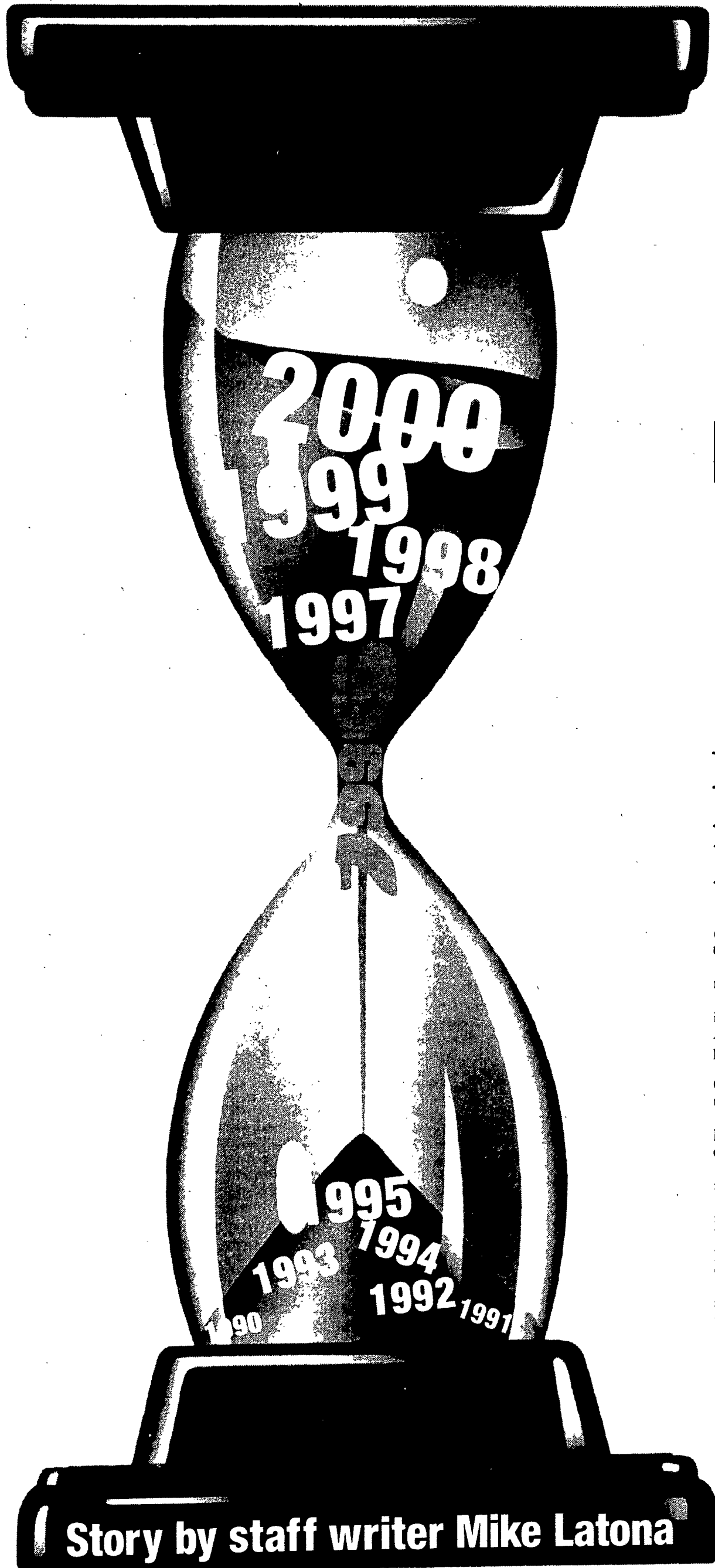




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As the Third Millennium Draws Near...

Pope looks upon milestone year as the 'great jubilee'

Some people may think it's too soon to think about the year 2000.

Others may not feel it's worth fussing over something that signifies nothing more than a nice, round number.

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, is preparing feverishly for the 2,000th observance of Christ's birth. And his vision calls for Catholics to engage in much more than sipping champagne and blowing noisemakers.

In fact, by the time we observe another February 29, the Catholic Church will possibly be immersed in some of the most intense self-examination in its history.

The second millennium's conclusion is a subject Pope John Paul II has repeatedly broached during his 17-year pontificate. His most detailed statement about the year 2000 was issued in November 1994, when he released his apostolic letter, "*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*" ("As the Third Millennium Draws Near").

"The 2,000 years which have passed since the birth of Christ represent an extraordinarily great jubilee, not only for Christians but indirectly for the whole of humanity, given the prominent role played by Christianity during these two millennia," the pope stated in his letter.

"It is significant that the calculation of the passing years begins almost everywhere with the year of Christ's coming into the world, which is thus the center of the calendar most widely used today," the pope continued. "Is this not another sign of the unparalleled effect of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth on mankind?"

Father Joseph A. Hart, associate professor of systematic theology

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