



This Is the Article That Will Never be Published

Camping had forecast the Earth's demise before, in 1994, and thus joined a list of errant end-of-worlders that goes back to biblical times and beyond.

Of course, whether you believe in the End Times in the Christian sense or not, you probably know that one of these days Camping, or one of his doomsayer descendants, will likely be right. The collision of two collapsed stars a thousand light years away could yield gamma-ray bursts that would irradiate the Earth into oblivion, and if a "rogue" black hole, which roams about, happened our way, it would act as a big vacuum cleaner/trash compactor that would suck us in and never spit us out. For a slightly more mundane end, our Sun will eventually become a supernova and incinerate us in the blink of an eye. And, even if we should escape this fate by venturing out into space, we're told that the Universe, which is now expanding, will reverse that process and start contractions that result not in birth, but death.



All this is very scary when you're 9, and very titillating, obviously, when you're 89, but I find the fixation with the End Times more fascinating than the end itself. I mean, sure, the topic may be exciting to ponder, but dwelling on it misses the point: This isn't just that we can't know the day or the hour, but that our own personal end times — our deaths — will occur soon enough. And insofar as eternity goes, does it really matter if we meet our end in a climactic civilization-rending disaster or wasting to bone in a hospital bed? Either way, you stand before your Maker alone.

Then there are the End Times excuses. I speak here of Christians who dismiss the importance of fighting the good fight, saying, "There's no point waging political battles or worrying about governmental decline; the world is going to end soon, anyway." One has to wonder if these folks still show up for work.

A little story is instructive here, and it goes something like this: There was a wise man who lived in the forest. One day an acolyte approached him and asked, "Teacher, if you knew that today was your last on Earth, what would you do?" The sage answered, "I would wake up at dawn, go down to the pond and do some exercise. I then would walk to the spot overlooking the valley, the place we call Heaven Rock, and pray for an hour. Then I would return home and have some breakfast." After relating other outrageously normal plans, the student exclaimed, "But, teacher, that is what you do every day!" This prompted the old man to reply, "Yes, and why should today be any different?"



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on May 22, 2011

Of course, the obvious interpretation here is that, for all we know, today *may* be your last day; thus, we should bear in mind that “Today may be a fair sample of eternity.” Yet there is a deeper truth here.

Theologians and scientists don’t always occupy the same page, but the best of each group agree on this: Time doesn’t really exist. A wise prelate will say that “God is outside of time,” and a top physicist may quote Albert Einstein and aver that “Time is a handy illusion.” However you frame it, though, the bottom line is that everything is “now,” and we have an obligation to fight for the here and now. It makes no difference if we have before us (by our lights) a million moons or a minute. To cease carrying your cross because you reckon it the latter is to drop the ball at an illusory one-yard line. (This explains why I took the trouble to pen an article that will never be published: The end is the same as the beginning, and though the former be nigh, I shall persevere!)

The irony here is that some people of faith are much like some without it. That is to say, it’s not unheard of for suicidal atheists to conclude that there is no reason to go on and end it all; the Christians in question conclude that it’s all going to end, so there is no reason to go on. And both groups find out, quite unexpectedly, that it isn’t really the end.

Another commonality is that neither group witnesses well for its creed. When would-be prophets such as Camping make loose predictions, they give ammunition to those who would ridicule faith. As to this, some of the criticism is at least light-hearted and amusing, such as the following from a *Guardian* piece by David Batty:

TV scientist Professor Brian Cox summed up the mood of the non-believers. He tweeted: “I think we should all pretend the rapture is happening so that when Harold Camping gets left behind later today he’ll be livid.”

But Kieran Healy had a slightly more comforting message for those disappointed at not joining Jesus: “I guess on Sunday when the Rapture people feel really upset, we can’t console them by saying ‘Cheer up, it’s not the end of the world.’”

But since Sunday, we hear, shall not come, I’ll leave all those who’ll never read this with a parting message: Have a nice life, er ... death, and always remember to take preparing for the latter more seriously than predicting it.



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