

Could "1994" Be the End of Family Radio?

by Perucci Ferraiuolo

from the News Watch column of the Christian Research Journal, Summer 1993, page 5. The Editor-in-Chief of the Christian Research Journal is Elliot Miller.

California-based Family Radio, Inc., a worldwide conglomerate of 38 radio stations broadcasting a mostly conservative Christian viewpoint, is in danger of self-destructing, according to high-level sources within the ministry.

The problem centers on Harold Camping -- Family Radio's president and the moderator of its popular **Open Forum** call-in radio program -- and on his explosively controversial 562-page book, **1994?** In it Camping proclaims that Jesus Christ will return in September of 1994. "No book ever written is as audacious or bold as one that claims to predict the timing of the end of the world," he writes, "and that is precisely what this book presumes to do."

Camping is causing problems for the organization that go far beyond general discomfort with the book. Key ministry officials, who requested anonymity, told the JOURNAL that he has used the network to promote **1994?** without the authorization of Family Radio's board of directors. "We've had battles with him before, during and after this book came out," offers a ministry insider, "and Harold just won't listen. He considers himself a modern-day Jonah and feels he has to get his message of Christ's return in 1994 out to everyone, especially those who are reached by Family Radio."

Insiders claim that the contention among Camping, his nationwide staff of over 400, and his board is undermining the entire ministry. "Everyone is in turmoil about his 1994 stand," says the high-ranking staff member. "Instead of working for the cause of Christ worldwide, we're merely taking sides in a battle that will divide us -- and ultimately defeat us. Harold's position on end-time events is his own business, but he's brought all of us into this by using Family Radio as his own personal forum to promote his book. He uses **Open Forum** to talk about **1994?** and has even gone so far as to counsel people who call in not to make any long-term plans because Jesus is coming back next year.

"We told him not to do that anymore," he sighs, "but he's a loose cannon."

The 72-year-old Camping explained his approach to planning for the future to the JOURNAL. "Look, let's put it this way. My wife came to me and said we needed new linoleum in the kitchen. I told her that we should hold off on the effort and the expense of doing it until October or November of 1994 -- after the time I predict Christ's return. Now, while it is likely that Christ will return in September of '94, it is not absolute. That's why I take the position I do."

"What scares **me**," says the senior staff member, "is that people are going to react adversely to Harold's 'news.' We've had so many people over the past few decades that have predicted the end of the world and bombed out, that for Harold to virtually pinpoint the time is...extremely poor judgment."

International Outreach Hurt. The anonymous staffer paints a grim picture of Camping's impact on Family Radio's international outreach, citing **1994?**'s effect on sensitive negotiations in Asian communist nations as a prime example. "China is finally opening up to us, and this has been in the working for almost two years now."

We had a meeting with the president of China and mapped out what we wanted to accomplish there, and submitted everything we wanted to distribute to the people for approval.

"After submitting the material, Harold said he was going to change some of it to include his **1994?** information. When we told him he couldn't do it" -- because officials would cancel the entire project, as happened earlier in Vietnam -- "he went ballistic. We had one of our biggest knock-down, drag-outs over it. See, this is the kind of thing that can kill what the ministry is trying to build, and it's causing the kind of turmoil you just can't believe.

"Furthermore, we were going to build a huge radio transmitter in Russia, with a greater ability to blanket Europe. Everything was set, and Harold virtually gave it away to a third party, even though Family Radio was still obligated to pay for it and build it. Why? Harold said, 'Well, Jesus is coming back, and we don't want to deal with this.' We wanted to buy a station that would cover Canada, but Harold refuses -- not because we don't have the money, but because he feels Christ is coming in September, 1994, and it'll be totally useless to buy it."

Camping -- who has no formal theological education -- feels that rather than trying to sow deception or erroneous predictions, he's getting out the message that "we still have time." "If I am correct in this," he says deliberately, "and there is every indication that I am, we have a very short time left to get right with God." In **1994?** he warns that "when September 6, 1994 arrives, no one else can become saved. The end has come."

By February, Camping's book had shot to no. 4 on the Christian Booksellers Association's best-selling prophecy book chart, past such popular end-time authors as Hal Lindsey, David Jeremiah, and John Wesley White. Since then sales have slowed, leveling off at around 50,000 copies, and Camping is working hard to expand his audience.

"Harold is convinced he's doing the right and proper thing here," surmises the Family Radio executive. "He wants to warn the world...and he's desperate for attention -- both in general and, specifically, regarding the book."

"We've been doing shortwave programming in ten languages for several years," he continues, "and distributed over three million tracts and a half-million Bibles to Russia. Harold has seen just how responsive people have been to this, and now he just can't help himself in including **1994?** material on the back of the [evangelistic] tracts. Having that message on the back just literally destroys our credibility."

Operating more radio stations than anyone else in America, with fourteen high-power shortwave transmitters broadcasting worldwide and two network satellite feeds, Family Radio has been widely known as one of the biggest, quietest, and most judicious ministries around. Until **1994?**

From an embarrassing appearance on CNN's **Larry King Live** to interviews with a host of secular journalists, Camping, his book, and Family Radio are in the secular media spotlight -- someplace they've never been.

"Well, it **is** an experience," says Scott Smith, vice president of Family Radio's KEBR in Sacramento, California, and Family Radio board member. "I wouldn't really say we're in the limelight, but Harold's book has given us a good amount of notoriety."

Smith admittedly disagrees with **1994?** but feels he should support Camping nonetheless. "I don't see much of a problem about Harold and **1994?** but there has been a lot of talk and some dissension about it. Some people, including myself, don't totally agree with everything **1994?** says, but we don't have to."

Yet, others close to Camping are still trying to convince him to stop injecting **1994?** into the ministry. "I've personally tried to make Harold see the light," says the senior staffer. "Many of us have brought up the Korean incident, recently, where a group said that Christ would return but didn't, and the [Edgar Whisenant] experience in 1988, and how it made the one doing the predicting look foolish, but Harold sees no connection. He really feels he has the answer and he knows."

Camping had this to say in defense of his date-setting process: "I'm an engineer," he says. "I'm methodical. And when I began to study the Bible over 30 years ago, I started seeing things others had missed. I discovered that God had a timeline running from Genesis to Revelation, and with precise calculation the end of the world can accurately be determined.

"As far as the others go," he continues, "they based their predictions on dreams, alignment of planets, and natural disasters such as earthquakes, but **I** base my findings on hard, biblical evidence" -- for example, the number of swine cast out of the Gadarene demoniac in Mark 5 and the number of fish caught in John 21.

Officials at Family Radio continue their quest to convince Camping that his rigid views and unteachable spirit concerning **1994?** will lead to the demise of the ministry. "Harold believes so intently that Christ will return in 1994 that everything else holds no meaning. His family has turned against him, the church community doesn't support his views, and the majority of staff members here at Family Radio fear that the end just might be near...not for the world, but for Family Radio."

Copyright 1994 by the Christian Research Institute.

COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION LIMITATIONS:

This data file is the sole property of the Christian Research Institute. It may not be altered or edited in any way. It may be reproduced only in its entirety for circulation as "freeware," without charge. All reproductions of this data file must contain the copyright notice (i.e., "Copyright 1994 by the Christian Research Institute"). This data file may not be used without the permission of the Christian Research Institute for resale or the enhancement of any other product sold. This includes all of its content with the exception of a few brief quotations not to exceed more than 500 words.

If you desire to reproduce less than 500 words of this data file for resale or the enhancement of any other product for resale, please give the following source credit: Copyright 1994 by the Christian Research Institute, P.O. Box 7000, Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688-7000.
