

Harold Camping, radio host who predicted world's end, dies at 92

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December 18, 2013

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(RNS) Harold Camping, the radio preacher who convinced thousands of followers that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011, to usher in the end of the world, has died, according to a statement released late Monday (Dec. 16) by his Family Radio network. He was 92.

Camping died Sunday evening, an employee at Family Radio confirmed. He had fallen at his home on Nov. 30 and had been in weak health due to a stroke since 2011.

Camping first predicted Jesus' return in 1994, but his most recent forecasts gained national attention through advertisements and the Family Radio network of stations he founded. He warned that "judgment day" would occur in May 2011 and said the world would end in October 2011.

When his prophecies turned out to be false, he declared in March 2012 that his May 21 prediction had been "incorrect and sinful" and said his ministry would get out of the predictions business.

The ministry sold its prominent stations and laid off staffers, with assets dropping from \$135 million in 2007 to \$29.2 million in 2011.

Pressed by reporters after his May 21 prediction failed to materialize, Camping said he had miscalculated — it must be Oct. 21, he said. "I'm not a genius," he said. "I pray all the time for wisdom."

Starting in the 1950s, Camping broadcast his views via Family Radio, a global network of Christian stations for which he served as unpaid president and primary

on-air talent. His teachings aired worldwide five nights a week via “Open Forum,” a call-in show that draws listeners as far away as China and Ghana.

“Thank you for calling ‘Open Forum,’ ” Camping said countless times in his trademark baritone, “and shall we take our next call, please?”

Camping was once well-regarded in among evangelicals, both for his encyclopedic knowledge of Scripture and his radio network. But in the late 1980s, when he began teaching that churches had strayed from the Bible embracing a false doctrine, he lost much previous support.

He also discouraged his listeners from joining a church, saying modern churches were heretical and that the “church age” had ended as the end of the world was near. He had no formal religious training beyond his tattered copies of the King James Version of the Bible and couldn’t read or speak Greek, Hebrew or Jesus’ native Aramaic.

His 2011 prophecy got widespread attention, including “Rapture Parties” hosted by atheists who wanted to “ridicule and poke fun at the fools.” It gave one man the opportunity to create a fake business that offered to care for the pets of believers swept up by the Rapture.

His March 2012 statement, which in many ways amounted to the final time many people heard from Camping, expressed regret for the predictions, which had led many followers to sell all their possessions in anticipation of the end of the world.

Camping said people continued to wish for another prediction, but he had become convinced that critics were correct about the biblical admonition that “of that day and hour knoweth no man.”

“We must also openly acknowledge that we have no new evidence pointing to another date for the end of the world,” he wrote at the time. “Though many dates are circulating, Family Radio has no interest in even considering another date.”

Camping is survived by his wife of 71 years, the statement says.