

Doomsday prophets and their followers
by Lloyd Robertson

"The sun will supernova in about 2 billion years and the earth will be evaporated", said the professor.

"WHAT?" asked the terrified student in the front row.

"I said the sun will supernova in about 2 billion years," came the reply.

"Oh thank goodness, I thought you said two million years."

It is January, 2000, and we are still here! Those who predicted the end of the world are busy revising their forecasts.

Preacher Tim LaHaye, co-author of the popular "Left Behind" books, now "regrets having talked about" the Y2K bug causing economic disaster leading to the anti-christ. "Armageddon: Earth's Last Days" author Grant Jeffrey now says the end-times will happen gradually, maybe by April. Jerry Falwell has withdrawn his alerts that his god would shake and humble the U.S. Other evangelicals are postponing end-times predictions for years or decades.

Actually, several "End-of-the-world" predictions are made by someone, somewhere, most year but some are more memorable than others.

In 1818 for example, William Miller began preaching that the "kingdom of god is at hand". Eventually, he set the date March 21, 1844. More than 500,000 people are reported to have attended Miller's speeches with mass conversions at each event. When March 21st passed without Jesus' return Miller declared that he had made a mistake in his calculations. His new date also passed. In all, Miller had four "kicks at the can" before his movement fell apart, but millions of scared converts remained Christians forming the Adventist movement and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Personally, I am more interested in the psychology of those who want to believe that the world will end, and soon, than those prophets attempting to lead them. According to psychologist Eric Fromm, many people cannot handle the freedom to make their own decisions and the responsibility that brings. These people are afraid to make their own mistakes and are searching for an infallible leader, or religion, that will give them all the answers. A charismatic leader who actually, and with certainty, predicts the exact date of the earth's extinction seems to have all the answers. But their "escape from freedom" is only part of the story.

These end-of-the-world prophets are part of a scam and with any scam emotion overrides intellect. "Get-rich-quick" artists typically use the emotion of greed to increase gullibility. The doomsday prophets ride on a crest of hate.

Put simply, the gullible who believe these tales actually want the world to be destroyed. They may believe that the world is unfair and, therefore, deserves to be destroyed. Some have the

feeling that they have simply not been given recognition or their rightful place. Still others are incensed that most people do not agree with them. Still others simply believe that the world is evil. Whatever the reason, they are prepared to see the world end, and soon.

Many of these people repress the hatred they feel. Yet the hatred is there and can be brought out into the open in therapy. The fact is, if they were motivated by some other emotion then they would not be so quick to be fooled by the doomsday prophets.

The world certainly must end some day. Perhaps, by that time, we will have colonized space. In any event, a million billion end-of- the-worlders won't hasten that date.