

The Power of Prediction

What can you really trust in for the future?

Predictions have power. They influence emotions, alter behavior, and even change social policies. During the 1960's, it was predicted that the earth would become overpopulated within a few generations. It seemed there would be no end to the periodic doubling of the human population and the negative environmental impact this would bring. Rachel Carson's 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, predicted a future springtime without the familiar songs of wild birds¹. She based this prediction on the widespread use of the pesticide DDT to control mosquitoes in populated areas, and the discovery that DDT made songbird eggs so fragile that many were crushed in the nest. Carson predicted that if population growth and DDT use continued, then fewer birds would be born each spring—until one spring when there would be only silence. Her prediction ignited a new environmental movement in the United States that spearheaded a successful campaign to ban the use of DDT.

The fear of overpopulation has influenced personal choices and public policy decisions for generations. Part of the power of the "population explosion" prediction is due to the ability of the average person to understand its mathematical basis. If the time that was needed for a population to double is known, this can be used to project future growth. The numbers grow slowly at first but then suddenly rise explosively, or geometrically, and reach toward infinity. One 1970's-era astronomy textbook used this geometric progression to predict the earth's population would become infinite on Friday the 13th of November, 2026². A day they called "doomsday."

Doomsday predictions abound in the secular media today. The earth might be annihilated at any moment by a meteor impact. Human life may succumb to bird flu or some antibiotic-resistant plague. A giant volcanic erup-

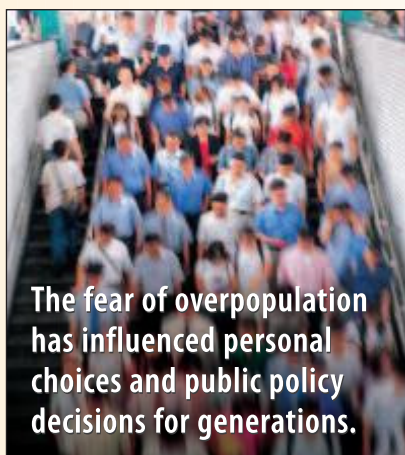
tion could plunge the world into an ice age. Conversely, fossil fuel use might cause global warming, resulting in coastal flooding around the world.

So far, all these predictions have been wrong. Even the predictions of overpopulation may be wrong. Author Phillip Longman, in his recent book, *The Empty Cradle*, contends that birth rates in many cultures are well below replacement levels³. Longman suggests our current 6 billion-person population may never actually double but only increase to 9 billion by 2070 and then begin to decrease! This, he predicts, would cause social and economic problems for future generations. After all, nothing can replace the babies who were never born because they were aborted,

or because women entered the workforce and chose to have fewer children.

So are we headed for environmental ruin from overpopulation or economic collapse from under population? This exposes one problem with predictions: they can't be validated until after they come to pass. Christians are often scolded by the secular world for expecting the return of Jesus Christ at any moment based on biblical predictions (prophesies). But the lesson from secular history is that while man's predictions do have power, they can also be wrong. The lesson from biblical history is that only God's predictions can be relied on to surely come to pass.

—MICHAEL G. WINDHEUSER, PH.D.



1 R. Carson, *Silent Spring*, (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962).

2 G.O. Abell, *Exploration of the Universe*, (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974).

3 P. Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How falling birthrates threaten world prosperity*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004).