

Q&A: How should we speak when confronted about Harold Camping?

Anonymous asks: How do you think we should respond, when confronted about him [Harold Camping] and others? One 'whacky' minister, gets more media attention than a million faithful followers or a thousand faithful preachers (from my experience) and the faithful witness of neighbours is undone by the preaching of someone who seems to be seriously misguided, but offers the nightly news a dramatic sound bite.

Thanks for the question. It's actually something I've been reflecting about the recent "big day" in hindsight.

One obvious form of response was mockery. Sometimes this was taken to extraordinary lengths. And it's not necessarily an invalid response. The prophecy and the underlying framework is worthy of derision and "Don't listen to this fool" is an appropriate pastoral message. Some people did seem to enjoy it a bit too much though and I don't think that's helpful.

I also suspect that there was a flurry of mockery in order to set up a clear demarcation to non-Christians – "Yes we're Christian, but we're not like those whacky Christians – haha, how foolish they are." Sometimes this came across as the wannabe-cool-guy in the playground laughing at his embarrassing younger brother to earn kudos. Not a good look.

And it was probably not very effective or needed. Those non-Christians who understood the demarcation would have continued to understand. Those non-Christians who didn't care would continue not to care. Indeed, some of the anti-Christians I follow simply didn't get it ("I'm not raptured yet."

Seriously, not even Harold Camping was suggesting you would be!) and continued to lump the serious Christians in with the

whacky ones.

The best response I heard was on the radio – I can't remember who it was now, if someone remembers, please remind me – and it was a simple response that clearly portrayed the mainstream Christian gospel and expressed genuine pastoral concern for those who would have their faith shaken when the prophecy failed.

So, to answer your question: I think the way to respond is with clarity about the truth – and the error being put forward – without mockery or derision, and something positive about how you live your life for Jesus.