

The Edmonton Sun, Monday, February 18, 1991 11

VICKY  
MACLEAN



## Prophets and loss in the war

**P**rophecy is no job for the faint-hearted. There are a million ways to be wrong and only one way to be right.

Through the ages, people have scorned prophets for their failures and burned them at the stake for their successes. It's a better gig these days. Half-baked predictors like Jeanne Dixon make a mint prognosticating for the big tabloids.

The good ones are erratic at best. Take the psychic Criswell, for instance. He hit paydirt by accurately foretelling the Arab-Israeli Six Day War and the death of Martin Luther King Jr. Then he went right off the rails. He said the women of St. Louis would go bald in 1983. He said someone would spike the U.S. water supply with an aphrodisiac in 1988, causing an all-American sex rampage.

Farther back in time and closer to home, a guy named Ralph Centennius wrote in 1883 that 100 years later the Dominion of Canada would be a land of social and technological perfection. Furthermore, Canadians would be 93-million strong. (To achieve population levels like that, we'd be the ones needing the aphrodisiacs!) Readers will be also gratified to know we were to have no taxes by now. Apparently, Centennius did not foresee Michael Wilson.

### Prophecy fell on hard times

Prophecy fell on hard times in the current hi-tech century, that is, until the Gulf war came along. Now, bookstores report Nostradamus selling like Jackie Collins. Revelations is discussed at cocktail parties.

It's fitting that prophecy should have its roots in Babylon or Chaldea, which is now Iraq. It first appeared in the form of hepatoscopy, the reading of livers for portents. Happily, the Chaldeans decided this was just too messy and intrusive. Accordingly, they raised their sights and pioneered astrology.

But the Bible probably remains the most accessible place for doomseekers to look for bad tidings from Babylon. As I'm not a great biblical scholar, I'm grateful to Pastor David Thomas of the New Life Fellowship here in Edmonton, who took pity on the ignorant journalistic hordes and faxed out a compilation of relevant quotations.

Jeremiah was the prophet with the most to say about Babylon and its future. Much of it can be applied to earlier Babylonian conflicts. However, he does seem to refer to some final and complete destruction that may have relevance to the current devastation.

The ancient seer said a nation "out of the north" would come to destroy Babylon. America is farther north than Iraq. He went on to predict "many kings will be aroused from remote parts of the earth" to join the battle. They would "encamp on her every side" and "set fire to her cities."

He also told of an exodus of foreign labor, saying those who wielded the sickle would "flee to their own lands."

This terrible conflict would leave Babylon "desolate forever." The prophet Isaiah confirms some of this.

### Attention drawn to poet

But Christianity has no corner on the prophecy market. Public attention has recently been drawn to a 12th century Islamic poet, Mohi Aldin bin Arabi. His work was based either on the sayings of Mohammed himself or those of his son-in-law, the first Shia imam.

*"When the Jews are united with the crusaders and fly on iron horses; when the Asqa Mosque is taken prisoner; when rule is in the hands of women; when fire emerges in the gulf and rule in the Hijaz falls into the hands of perverse people; and people capable of waging war in the stars come to their capitals; and oil flows into the gulf and the yellow races come from the east and call for oceans of blood to cover the area; then the one-eyed charlatan shall appear."*

Well, the mosque in question is in Jerusalem, on Israeli turf. A pessimist can find mention of Maggie Thatcher, star wars, oil spills and the anti-Christ. In fact, it's a good thing Israeli general Moishe Dayan is no longer with us. With his eyepatch, he'd be a natural candidate for the one-eyed anti-Christ, as perceived by Muslims.

However, keep in mind this is a translation. I'm doubtful that a 12th century poet could conceive of oil spills. I suspect the same psychology is at work here as crops up in some of the more outlandish translations of Nostradamus.

And in wartime, the temptation to turn prophecy into propaganda is often overwhelming.