

*Sunday January 13, 2013*

## **The Big Blue Marble, 40 years later**

By Jim Taylor

In all the silliness about the Mayan calendar and the end of the world, I failed to note a significant anniversary. On December 7, 1972, 40 years ago last month, Apollo 17 astronauts on their way to the moon snapped the photograph that has since become known as the Big Blue Marble.

What's significant is what it doesn't show. There are no national boundaries, no multicoloured patchwork quilt of countries. No religious symbols defining territories. No barriers to exclude undesirable immigrants, diseases, or ideas.

There's just one planet. One blue globe spinning in the endless empty blackness of space.

That's all there is.

### **The real globalization**

The concept challenges every system humans have devised to divide us – governance, economics, health, education, religion...

Think about it – does any government consider itself responsible for the welfare of the entire planet? From what I see, every government acts as if it has exclusive jurisdiction over its own area. And it competes with every other government for advantage.

Scientist Bob Crawford analyzes the detritus that accumulates where surface water runs off glaciers in the Rocky Mountains. His technology can identify, with absolute confidence, that last summer's precipitation included dust from the Great Wall area in China, smoke particles from forest fires in Siberia, radioactivity from the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan...

Anything that happens anywhere affects everywhere else.

Nothing stops air from circulating around the world. Ocean currents don't respect national boundaries either.

Brian and Joan Stewart of Naramata, here in the Okanagan, sealed a message in a wine bottle while on a cruise around Cape Horn. Two years later, a father and his 14-year-old daughter found the bottle on a beach near Perth, Australia. The bottle had floated eastward from Cape Horn, across both Atlantic and Indian oceans, before drifting ashore in Australia.

And it never once passed through a customs inspection or security checkpoint.

### **Economics in perspective**

Economies cannot operate in isolation. Austerity in Greece makes U.S. markets plunge. Interest rate manipulation in London creates a chill in Indonesia. An oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico makes Saudi sheiks salivate.

A competitive advantage in one place creates a disadvantage somewhere else. Both situations cause ripples that criss-cross their way around the globe.

A finite planet makes a lie out of the myth of endless growth.

The SARS panic in Toronto began in China, the deadly Ebola virus in a tributary of the Congo River in Africa. Zebra mussels in the Great Lakes came from streams in southern Russia. Knapweed infesting western grasslands arrived from eastern Europe.

Boundaries become meaningless.

## **The only energy source**

If you think the world has problems dealing with refugees now, wait until 750 million people in low-lying Bangladesh have to seek higher ground to avoid flooding.

If climate change is a reality – as I believe it is – no nation will remain immune. Some will be drier, some wetter. Most will get hotter; a few may get colder.

Whatever happens, rising populations and standards of living, especially in the so-called “developing world,” will increase energy demands.

Look the Blue Marble again. Tell me where we’ll look for energy when we have drilled into every area of the surface.

The only energy source we have is the sunlight that falls on the spherical surface of our Blue Marble. The fossil fuels we consume so recklessly are actually ancient solar energy, stored underground. We’re not only using up the planet’s energy revenue today, we’re drawing down the energy endowment accumulated over millions of years.

And there is no oil in black space.

## **Rethinking religious dogma**

After Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin first orbited the earth in 1961, he’s supposed to have said that he had looked for God, and didn’t see him. The world’s religions scoffed. They should have reconsidered how their ancient doctrines stood up in the light of this new vision of our planet.

Instead, most religions clung ever more dogmatically to their traditional teachings. And so Judaism has seen a rise among its ultra-orthodox. Islam has come under the dominance of fundamentalist mullahs. Hinduism has abandoned its historic tolerance and become xenophobic in India.

And in the U.S., of course, the Christian right has kidnapped politics, media, and education. Rejecting any knowledge attained in the last 20 centuries that might challenge the Bible, it focuses on more and more vehemently on reaching heaven – or hell – in some other dimension. This life is only temporary. So it doesn’t matter what we do to the planet because we’re ultimately destined for somewhere else.

Really? Show me where.

The Big Blue Marble picture tells us that if there is a heaven, it is here. If there is a hell, it is here.

The only legacy we can leave to our grandchildren is the heaven or hell we create here, on this Blue Marble floating in empty black space.

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## **YOUR TURN**

Last week’s column was neither an easy one to read, nor an easy one to write. As Isabel Gibson wrote, “It was difficult to read your column. My younger son once told me that he watched a documentary about some war crime or other (there are, regrettably, many from which to choose) precisely because he found it difficult to watch. As he said – ‘Sometimes all you can do is not turn away from the pain. Others had to undergo it: the least I can do is not turn away.’”

I sense that there’s a lot of wisdom in the Gibson family.

Sally Stoddard added a further viewpoint: "Many rapes are done for *sport*, to 'prove' themselves to other males. Women, on the other hand, go through life *afraid* of its possibility."

Catherine Cadieux wrote, "I had the same questions. Where was the bus driver? As you have probably learned, he and the ticket taker joined in the horror (according to NPR).

"A former colleague now lives in Delhi and she says that this was the final straw, the tipping point, that has galvanized India to make new laws and to work to change this culture.

Anne Hepburn too pointed out "that there was one victim but multiple rapes. Consider that it was a gang rape with 6 men and likely more than one attempt by each!

"Hopefully this will cause a new approach to sexual assault but -- like this issue of guns in the USA -- I fear that it will take a long time to effect change of lasting impact."

Mary-Margaret Boone worried that we in the west will think ourselves "above these actions. However, the statistics show that we are not. We do not represent any kind of moral majority when it comes to the role and rights of women. In Canada, we have only to look at the disappearance of First Nations women -- we have our own thermometer of judging who has worth and who does not. Statistics can be overwhelming, startling and eye-opening but also very cold and misleading. One daughter, sister, mother, grandmother, niece, granddaughter raped is one too many and calls for change in both law and attitude and teaching!

Laurina Tallman offered a rebuke: "Rape has never had anything to do with love. But neither does your brutal recommendation for revenge.

"The horrific brutality you recount took place in a society that has exploited female sexuality as part of its religion and that has embedded discriminatory attitudes to women that are being exported to other countries through immigration; 'honour' killings in Canada are only the most prominent of those attitudes. The essential evil or insanity of the Indian social ethos regarding women must be transformed. Christian missionaries were ousted from India decades ago, so that avenue for social change has been lost. However, something of 'Western' ethics now motivates significant parts of Indian society as evidenced by the reactions to this rape/murder."

Laurina then noted, "However, sexual ethics in Canada are problematical as well." She described examples of medical doctors abusing their patients, both sexually and pharmaceutically, and asked: "Do you have the same recommendations for Canadian doctors who are causing serious mental illness, addictions, horrific weight gain and other physical problems, obsessions sexual and otherwise, and even death among their patients? Shall we enlarge our psychiatric facilities so most Canadian doctors can spend a few weeks or months incarcerated and subjected to their own prescriptions for their patients? The retributive model of justice is the least effective way of dealing with any outrage. We can find positive ways of addressing even rape and the atrocities to which humankind has ever been prone including forms of torture and murder, such as crucifixion."

Charles Hill: "A couple decades ago I lived in a 'disadvantaged' neighborhood, because of my wife's church work, where going to high school meant dodging bullets. I had a teen-age stepdaughter. She choose to have her first sex with an idiot (my assessment) who convinced her that she would be raped anyway so why not me? He could have been right in his assessment.

"As long as a culture [holds women in contempt], be it religious teachings to subjugate women or local culture that sees others as existing to meet their desires, there will be rape. Whole neighborhoods or nations can suffer from psychopathy. In many neighborhoods in America girls expect to have forced sex before they reach 16. Adolescent males brag about how many 'baby-mommas' they have. Females are not humans; they are objects like your TV or computer. Rape has been a weapon in every war. I suspect that those attackers in India would be just as brutal to any male who had something they wanted and couldn't defend himself.

"Incidentally, I've [also] worked with male rape victims."

Fran Martens, like me, was surprised at the high rate of reported rapes in Sweden. "I assume this was based on 'reported' rapes rather than 'unreported.' From what I have learned about Swedes, their culture and their education, I would assume that there would be very few, 'unreported' rapes in Sweden... In other words, Swedish females would have no hesitation in reporting rapes because of the attitude towards sexual education in schools, where the students are taught about sex from a very young age. I'm also surprised at the high rate of rapes because, although

Swedish men are robust individuals, so are Swedish women (by and large), who, I would think, wouldn't hesitate to kick butt if attacked."

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## HYMNSIGHT

My friend Ralph Milton, who published his Rumors newsletter for many years, has something special for you. It's called HYMNSIGHT, and it's for any church that currently projects the words of hymns and prayers, or plans to.

Ralph writes, Since retiring, I have rediscovered my old love of photography, and found creative use for my pictures in the life of First United where Bev and I worship. Our entire liturgy is projected, so that people read responses and sing hymns from screens. I use my photos to add color, vitality and depth to all the hymns and most of the liturgy.

In the course of this, I have developed slide sets to go with 600 hymns, plus about two thousand slides, in both the standard screen and the newer wide screen shape. You can use all of them, in any way you wish, without permission, and absolutely free, as long as it's non-profit and church related.

All you need to access the website is go to: <http://www.hymnsight.ca>

In addition to all that visual material, there's a comprehensive "how-to" manual for using projected visuals in church.

HymnSight provides a set of suggested visuals to go with each hymn, but the words to the hymn are not there, mainly for copyright considerations.

Please take a look at this service. If you think it's worthwhile, please let some of your colleagues in ministry know about it. And if you know of a website that could benefit from a link to HymnSight, why not add it?

Blessings,

Ralph Milton

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## TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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## PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, [www.seemslikegod.org](http://www.seemslikegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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