

*Sunday December 29, 2013*

## **The gospel of growth, growth, growth**

By Jim Taylor

Two pipeline debates wrack North America these days. Both start in what Alberta euphemistically calls its “oil sands.”

One projected pipeline heads south, to refineries on Texas’ Gulf Coast – the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. The other, the Northern Gateway pipeline, heads west to the Pacific Ocean and the burgeoning Asian markets.

I had a premonition that the Joint Review Panel studying the Northern Gateway line would come out in favour of it. On December 19, they did.

According to the David Suzuki Foundation, 1159 people spoke to the panel against the pipeline, including the representatives for 130 First Nations. Only two spoke for it.

### **Invisible allies**

The sheer volume of public opinion might suggest that the pipeline’s opponents should win. But in cases like this, majorities do not necessarily rule.

Because the two who supported the pipeline had powerful allies – money and mindset.

They had the entire oil industry behind them. That’s about 25 per cent of the value of the Toronto Stock Exchange, and almost ten per cent of Canada’s gross domestic product.

Back in the 1970s, when Pierre Trudeau tried to impose his National Energy Plan on the oil producing provinces in western Canada, bumper stickers in Alberta read, “Let the eastern bastards freeze in the dark.”

The slogan has lessened impact now that provinces east of Ontario’s financial towers also produce oil. But the implied threat is still there. If Canada’s oil companies ever locked out consumers as a bargaining tactic, more than just “eastern bastards” would be freezing. And not driving. And doing without plastics of all kinds.

The Joint Review Panel found that “opening Pacific Basin markets is important to the Canadian economy and society.” Also that “the project would bring significant local, regional, and national economic and social benefits.”

Money talks.

### **Endless growth**

Even more significantly, the two in favour of the Northern Gateway pipeline had on their side a prevailing mindset -- the gospel of growth, growth, growth.

Its defenders cite economics – you must have growth to provide jobs.

Or demographics – you need a growing economy to provide continuing income for the people who are already there and retiring.

Or biology – any organism that stops growing is beginning to die.

Or even theology – the biblical mandate that God made the earth for humans to have dominion over it.

Against that mindset, it’s heresy, anathema, blasphemy, to argue that half of the province of B.C. should be preserved as is.

For four years, I covered news for the sweep of Highway 16 across northern B.C. And for one glorious summer, I worked in the woods that the pipeline will pass through on its way to Kitimat. It is a spectacularly beautiful region, barely damaged by the urban obsession with parking lots, freeways, and big box stores.

I don't want to lose it. I don't want my grandchildren to have to experience nature in a make-believe Disney theme park. Neither do the 1159 people who spoke against the pipeline.

They weren't completely ignored. The review panel issued 209 recommendations to address their concerns.

But the panel also found that "after mitigation, the likelihood of significant adverse environmental effects resulting from project malfunctions or accidents is very low.... After weighing all of the oral and written evidence, the Panel found that Canada and Canadians would be better off with the Enbridge Northern Gateway project than without it."

## **At their own pace**

But I would guess that few of the pipeline's opponents would want to freeze the clock where it is, let alone turn it backward. I doubt if they're satisfied with the present quality of education for their children, medical care in their hospitals and medical clinics, and availability of road, air, and rail travel to larger centres outside the north.

In that sense, they too believe in growth – but at their pace, their timing. Not sudden massive growth where a single accident could destroy much of what they value about living in the north.

The pipeline itself may be the least of their worries. Pipelines can be monitored. Spills can be contained.

Tankers, that's another matter. A tanker that runs aground, the way that B.C. Ferries flagship did, because of a short lapse of attention, despite all navigational aids, could have massive consequences.

And there will be an accident. I don't know when. It may be decades away. But there will be an accident, eventually. The owners of the pipeline, the owners of the ships, will cut a dollar here and a dollar there to reduce costs. Safety will take second place to profit. Maintenance will become a chore rather than a commitment.

Now it's up to the federal government to approve or reject the pipeline.

Given Stephen Harper's support for private industry, his conservative economic leanings, his conviction that resources exist to be exploited, I don't see him rejecting a development that could produce hundreds of jobs and billions of dollars of revenue.

As I expected, Northern Gateway will go ahead.

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## **YOUR TURN**

Judging by the diversity of responses to last week's column about Christmas, this may have been a column I should have done some more thinking about before starting to write.

Steve Roney wrote, "I don't think you're being fair to Christians here. Of course, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus or Muslims do not impose the celebration of their holidays on others in Canada. They can't: they're small minorities. The proper comparison is with other nations in which they are the majority.

"You yourself cite the unrestrained celebration of Holi in India. In other words, Hindus are at least as prone as Christians to involve outsiders in their holidays. So, I can vouch, are Muslims. In fact, it is indeed illegal not to fast here and throughout the Gulf during Ramadan. Just try getting caught on the street drinking a can of cola during that month. Jews are only a majority in one country on earth, but I read of similar things in orthodox areas of Jerusalem.

“Are Christians worse than others? I suspect they may even be better than others, i.e., more lenient than others, on this score.”

But Christa Bedwin took an opposite view: “The key is tolerance and embracing joy and celebration. I still cherish that I was once invited to Channukah in Montreal... Here in Calgary ALL of the Christians I know would rather see me alone on Christmas morning than invite me to their breakfast table. I know this because I have begged for invitations. Christians are cold, that is my experience.

“I am happy to be wished Happy Diwali, too, and if someone does, it warms my heart. I note, however, that my Indian and Bangladeshi immigrant friends generally do not invite me to any of their parties. The Iranians are more likely to invite and include. That tells me their religion -- that Muslimness we revile so much for the radical nutsos who follow it -- has taught them the ways of Jesus more than my church has done.

“The key to happiness in our broader global society is loving and accepting all. That means we can say Happy Holidays and be totally happy with it, because we are looking outward and spreading love, not looking inward and reacting to how others treat us.”

Fran Ota defended the term, “Happy Holidays.”

“Personally, if someone wishes me Chanukah Sameach, or Happy Holidays, or Merry Christmas, or whatever -- I take it as it is meant. None of these is a meaningless greeting. I'll pick ‘Happy Holidays’, because it has a historical meaning, which began in the US and has moved beyond those borders. American Thanksgiving is so close to Christmas that the whole season became known as ‘the holidays’ -- from Thanksgiving right through to the New Year. -- and the term ‘Happy Holidays’ is **\*meant\*** to denote that period -- or at least through Christmas to January 6 or the end of the 12 days of Christmas, and sometimes includes the Feast of St. Nicholas. It **\*had\*** a specific cultural context -- which has waned somewhat as it becomes popular in Canada as well. While we don't celebrate the ‘holiday period’ the way Americans do, for those who aren't Christian but want to say something, it's a good way to do that.”

Dan Luett preferred the generic term: “I don't understand why saying Happy Holidays is so bad! Happy Holiday means Happy Holy Days. in my way of thinking. Happy Holy Days is much more respectful to what we celebrate at Christmas; ‘Merry Christmas’ says ‘Let's party!’”

Vern Ratzlaff had similar overseas experiences to mine: “I too lived for some years in another culture (Moslem) where the celebration of Ramadan and of the prophet's birthday (peace be upon him) were major events in our life, and the manger was not the focus. It was a great reminder of what the early church felt until the machinations of ecclesial power centred on domination rather than on worship.”

Cliff Boldt added a twist (read his last sentence carefully!) “I have noticed that the hype around a greeting has really been ramped up. I suspect it is because we live in times of uncertainty and confusion: economic, political and social. So some people grasp at a greeting as the place where they draw their line in the sand. This greeting thing is something they can understand or think they understand. A friend of mine suggested we put ‘Christ’ back in Christian.”

Isabel Gibson commented, “Our patterns of celebration assume a more-or-less Christian population (culturally Christian, anyway), and we're more complicated than that now.

“I neither want to impose my celebration nor have to assess someone's probable faith stance before I wish them a happy something (Based on what? The colour of their skin? Other indications of their country-of-origin and the recency of that origin? Yikes.). Those two reluctances will, eventually, lead to me saying nothing about Christmas with strangers. That's OK by me. My Jewish in-laws don't go around wishing a happy Hannukah to folks they meet in passing.”

John Cameron noted that the International House of Pancakes had "Keep Christ in Christmas" on their sign. He called them to say "I like your sign. Keep it up".

"Oh, thank you, Sir," replied the order-taker. "Several people have called about it."

Dale Perkins thought I might be making an artificial distinction: "You might consider the late Marshall McLuhan's line -- 'The medium is the message.' I think we fine-tune the point by attempting to differentiate between the message and the messenger -- there always must be some connection between what is messaged and the ones giving out the messages."

Carl Sitton and Christine Way Skinner sent links to presentations that others had made on the use of the word Christmas.

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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

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.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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