

(2), R. Bengtson (2), K.Aa Strand (1), W.T. Sullivan III (5), G. Swarup (2), A.F. Toomre (2),
VPRO (T. Verheul, 2), B.P. Wakker (2), Th. Walraven (4), M. Weston Smith (5), J.A.
Wheeler (1), H. van Woerden (1), L. Woltjer (2), F. Yusef-Zadeh (1), P.T. de Zeeuw (1).

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December 6, 1989

Prof. Dr. J. H. Oort
President Kennedylaan 169
2343 GZ Oegstgeest
The Netherlands

Dear Jan:

This is merely a Christmas greeting, but I can spell it out a little bit more than usual because I am dictating this while driving on a long lonesome road to the Mountain, the Kitt Peak bus will take the cartridge to Tucson where Mrs. Marinus will type it up and send it off to you.

If you see Bram at Christmas time, would you please give him my special greetings. We became friends in Ahmedabad, years ago, and we have not had much contact since, but I am sure we will meet again sometime somewhere.

Coen is a neighbor of Anne Marie Aarts (now Mieke Rouppe van der Voort, a brave person who is mentioned, by the first name, in my Glassy Sea book as the courier who hid our weapons behind the books in the library of the Peace Palace in the Hague. That surely was a most illegal thing to do, violating international law which, ironically, the Germans respected because, as far as I know, they never entered the Palace.

It is a beautifully clear day with good predictions for tonight and especially for low humidity which will be essential for my work because I am using a new CCD, of 2048 x 2048 pixels, the largest in the world at this time, but its dewar is still too new and there is some outgassing inside so

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that it is not possible to hold the hard vacuum and the bad effect of that is that the window gets cold and will frost over when the humidity is more than 30%. This project is referred to as Spacewatch, scanning the sky with CCD on an old 36-inch telescope on Kitt Peak that we have rejuvenated for the purpose. It is fascinating to do something new, like exploring a new territory. We have already discovered our first near-Earth asteroid with this CCD so that our spirits are high even though our persistence in computer programming will be needed in order to make the operations more automatic. We should be discovering new comets too with this facility. The principal purpose is to study magnitude-frequency distributions in comparison with those in the asteroid belt, in order to study their formation and collisional history.

This spring I am to lecture again the course "The Universe and Humanity: Origin and Destiny", a peculiar type of course that we pioneered at the University of Arizona, but that is now being taught more and more at other universities too. The purpose is to bring our science closer to people who in the future will not be scientists. It has been gratifying to see how the enrollment has grown such that my class has 180 students and another one has nearly 100. These are still not large numbers, of course, when you compare them with the total enrollment at this university which is 35,000.

I have not forgotten to send you a copy of Hubert Reeves' comments about my latest work. I could send you some right away, but I believe I will have something more extensive from him before long. This topic I have had to lay down for awhile because of the Spacewatching and the lectures for the course, but I have learned a lot about the topic through some lecturing and discussions in various places, including with you in Leiden, such that

I now know to write a better book, later this year.

The request for your review of the Glassy Sea book is a mystery. I have called the American Institute of Physics about that a few times, and they have contacted Nature, but nothing seems to be happening. The answer may simply be that the book is such a hodgepodge that Nature, and others as well, lose interest in doing anything with that manuscript. I believe a similar thing is happening at the SU in Amsterdam where van den Heuvel at first was interested in translating the book and publishing it in the Netherlands, but I do not think he can find a publisher for that. This is quite all right with me because I was not planning originally to write a publishable book, but rather to have a manuscript with enough copies only for family and a few friends. It was the interest at the American Institute of Physics that brought the book into published form. All the same, I have seen a few reviews already that are curious: Father Heyden, from his Philippino isolation, totally condemns the book because of its apparent, to him, atheism; he suggests it should be called "The Flying Dutchman," but missing the point that the background of this saga is the search for truth and eternal peace. The curator of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum wrote, for Sky and Telescope, that the editor had wisely preserved my Dutch sentence structure and lilting accent. I did not think one could preserve an accent in the written form, but the editor claims that he did do just that, as well as preserve the sentence structures. Audouin Dollfus wrote a perceptive remark, namely that my Calvinistic background had influenced my whole life in searching for the philosophical background of our science; this was a surprise, because I believed to have totally foresworn my Dutch Reformed background, but I now admit, with some gratitude in fact, that he must be right. You are surely an important part of my

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background and that I have always recognized: being allowed to come into Oort's Paradise, to take your comet course, and to see you at work, made a lasting impression, especially because it came after years of war and frustration. It ran a little deeper, however, because soon there appeared a partial reason for my going to the United States in order to be more rebelliously free than I might have been under your gloved hand. This is not to say that it was not clear, even then, that you had to rule astronomy in the Netherlands with a firm hand in order to unite limited resources for the pursuit of promising studies such as those of the 21-centimeter line.

This is enough for reminiscing. Liedeke is teasing me that I show the tendency of old men to talk about the past (women dont ?). She is right, of course, and the view from this car now reminds me of an attractive future: the Kitt Peak domes have just come into sight, it is crystal clear and the wind has subsided so that this is going to be a fine night with good seeing. Then I will go to bed tomorrow morning after having been up more than 24 hours and sleep will come as the greatest reward.

Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year. Give my love to Mieke.

With best regards,

Tom Gehrels