

The Southland Times
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Wider horizons

THERE was a time in the deep south of this country when churches came in threes. Not just in towns, but even in pretty remote country districts. There was always a Catholic church, with one for the Presbyterians nearby and usually a third for the Baptists or Anglicans or some other protestant variant not too far away.

The church communities put their shoulders into building these houses of worship, with hefty contributions from families who, from necessity, took excessive care with every penny. These buildings were an outward reminder of devotion — a show that honest farmers and labourers were firm in their faith.

They were tough pioneers who worked hard for six days and went to church on the seventh. The dogs were fed on Sundays, but little else was done on the farm or in the garden as the day was given over for devotion to God.

With those buildings came men of the cloth to keep the flock from straying too far from the straight and narrow path. They, too, were an important part of the social fabric of the time.

Those days are gone and a high proportion of the little country church buildings are either sitting unused and forlorn behind high macrocarpa hedges or have been shipped out on the back of large trucks to be reborn as restaurants, craft stores, private wedding venues or hay sheds. Dozens seem to have disappeared from the landscape during the past decade or so.

Another church will close on Sunday when the final service is held at St Mary's Anglican Church in Wyndham, a Southland town once firmly in the grip of the Presbyterians. The first Anglican church was built there in 1883 as part of a parish that included Mataura, Edendale and Fortrose. That church was demolished in 1967 to make way for something more modern, airy and warmer.

But church attendance has dwindled to the point where the parish secretary-treasurer said there was no sense maintaining it for two families. There has been no resident vicar since 1989 and the last service in the church was at Christmas last year.

This will be a situation familiar to many people living outside main centres, and even in those places churches have survived only by merging parishes.

Does the drop in church attendance and the resultant reduction in church buildings mean we are any less religious — less devoted — than our forebears?

Many of us are more relaxed in our worship but the change is more a reflection of modern rural life. Reliable transport and good roads mean people no longer live, work and die within 30km of the family seat. The employment and social spheres have become much wider, both geographically and intellectually.

The same influences that have widened those horizons have made us more humane, more caring, more considerate than might be interpreted from falling church attendances. In general terms, old values and strictures — adherence to dogma — are being replaced by genuine concern for humanity.

Man goes to war because of the atrocities seen daily in the media, not because of the desire to serve "king and country".

The closure of yet another rural parish church is cause for sadness, but should be seen as part of human evolution rather than a symptom of general godlessness.

Canada and the Arctic scramble

There is a scramble for the Arctic, but it is not military.

THE WORLD
GWYNNE DYER



AMONG the headlines I never expected to see, the top three were "Pope marries", "President Bush admits error", and "Canada uses military might", but there it was, starting up at me from a British newspaper: "Canada uses military might in Arctic scramble". Read a little further into the story and the "military might" turns out to be some armed icebreakers and two small military bases in the high Arctic, neither of which will be operational for some time to come, but all the same ...

At the beginning of August, remote-controlled mini-submarines planted a Russian flag on the Arctic seabed at the North Pole, symbolically claiming the Lomonosov Ridge, an underwater mountain range, as part of the country's continental shelf. If the claim were accepted, it would expand the Exclusive Economic Zone in which only Russians can exploit minerals

and other seabed resources all the way to the North Pole, but it wasn't immediately obvious how planting a titanium-encased Russian flag on the sea-floor advanced Russia's case.

Days later, Danish scientists headed for the Arctic to gather evidence for their claim that the Lomonosov Ridge is actually an extension of Greenland's continental shelf and therefore belongs to Denmark. "We will be collecting data for a possible demand", Christian Marcussen of the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland explained.

And then on Saturday Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, flew to Resolute Bay in the territory of Nunavut for the photo-op of a lifetime.

"Canada's new government understands that the first principle of Arctic sovereignty is: use it or lose it," Mr Harper said, for the second time in a week trotting out a phrase that was originally coined to describe one of the uglier realities of

nuclear strategy. Nunavut is one of the coldest human settlements on earth, but Mr Harper was having the time of his life.

For once there was some sort of threat to Canada's sovereignty, or at least it could be made to look as if there were, and he was the staunch patriot standing up for Canada's rights. What politician could ask for more?

It's actually the Canadian Government that has led this round of Arctic posturing, beginning with its declaration in April that the North-west Passage, a series of channels between Canadian-owned Arctic Islands that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans if they weren't choked with ice most of the year, would no longer be classified as "territorial waters" (through which foreign ships enjoy the right of innocent passage, although foreign warships are expected to seek permission). In future they will be "Canadian internal waters", over which Canada exercises complete control.

It was a crowd-pleasing gesture in Canada, especially since the United States has long denied that the North-west Passage is even Canadian territorial waters, insisting instead that it is "international waters" over which Canada has no control.

Washington has even sent warships through from time to time, deliberately not asking permission, which greatly annoyed Canadian nationalists. And global warming means that by 2015 or 2020 the North-west Passage might even be open to commercial shipping for five or six months a year, so Mr Harper had a plausible pretext for getting excited.

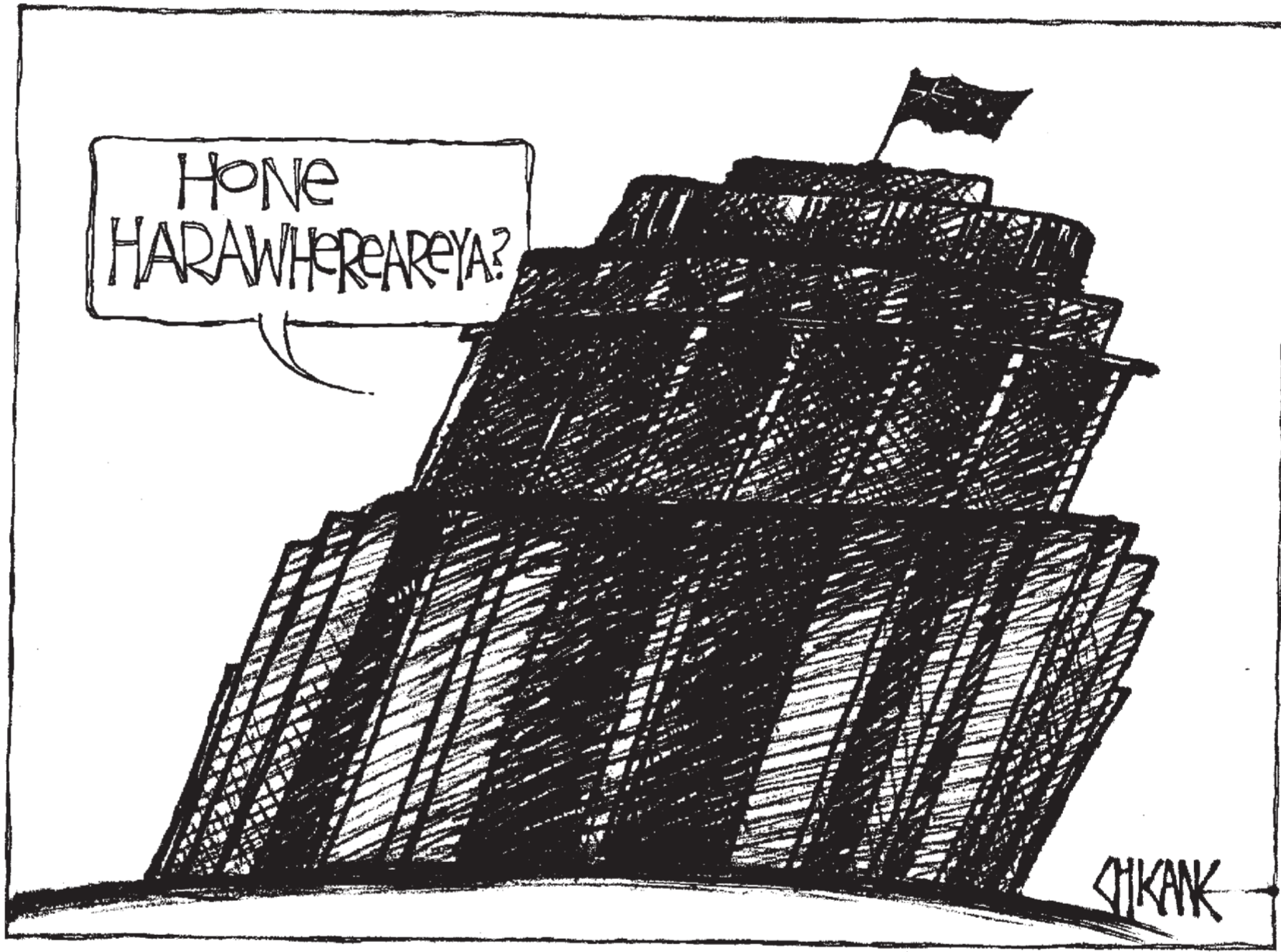
But it was a pretext, not a reason, since there is actually no danger that the United States is going to steal the North-west Passage from Canada, or blockade it, or even attack Canadian ships. Yet Mr Harper has announced that Canada will spend \$7 billion on six new armed ice-breakers to assert its sovereignty in Arctic waters, build a new deep-water port at Nanisivik on the northern tip of Baffin Island for both military and civilian use and even open a new army training centre for cold-weather warfare at Resolute Bay.

This all makes great copy, but just who are these soldiers supposed to fight? Russians infiltrating the Canadian Arctic on foot? And what are the guns on the new Canadian ice-breakers for? Fighting the US Navy the next time it sends a ship through the Northwest Passage without permission?

There is a scramble for the Arctic, but it is not military. It's about laying claim to potentially valuable resources on the basis of geographical and geological data, within the framework laid down by the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea.

The 1982 treaty, which now has 155 member-states, sets out the rules for claiming seabed rights, which is the only issue of real economic importance to the various Arctic players. It's all about mapping the seabed, doing the seismic work, and registering your claims within 10 years of ratifying the UNCLOS treaty. In Canada's case, that means by 2013, and it would do better to concentrate on that task, like the Russians and the Danes, rather than make meaningless military gestures.

Gwynne Dyer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.



YOUR VIEW

Call for open mind on NCEA merits

I RESPOND with pique to an editorial attack on NCEA in Saturday's Southland Times (August 11).

Criticisms of NCEA can usually be categorised. There are those who remain nostalgic for a system that was simpler because it was, in reality, simplistic. There are the unscrupulous who target NCEA as a whipping boy for political gain or to attract families to their more exclusive schools.

Others, including some employers, refuse to suspend their prejudices and do some listening and learning. And there are those who are genuinely confused but have not sought explanation from our students, who understand this necessarily complex tool very well. They are able to give comprehensive explanation to any adult learner with an open mind and a little patience.

NCEA has created an environment where teachers are more attuned to what constitutes good learning and students have clearer understandings of where their shortcomings lie and where remedial energies need to be directed. Those who teach and learn in our schools deserve better support for the superior system they have worked hard to implement. To critically dismiss a system so

necessarily complex without careful discernment is destructive and negligent.

For the record, St Peter's College requires that all students sit NCEA at their current year level. We parallel national norms in the proportion of less academic courses we offer, and our subject range is comprehensive.

Martin Chamberlain, principal, St Peter's College, Gore

Bus behaviour

A FEW weeks ago a bus driver kicked some kids off a the bus travelling to town from Bluff because they were misbehaving. At the time I, like a lot of others, thought that was over the top because of the what-ifs (hit by traffic, weather, being picked up by someone, etc). The bus driver was seen to have done the wrong thing.

Last Thursday (August 9) at 3.30pm there was a crash involving a school bus and a car driven by an elderly man. At the time of the crash the bus driver went up to the elderly driver and openly admitted that he took his eyes off the road because the kids on the bus were not behaving.

The kids were then transferred to another bus to be taken home while

the elderly man, my Grandad, was taken to hospital.

I am led to believe the bus driver was charged. He was in the wrong to have crashed but if the kids were behaving, this would not have happened.

So my opinion has changed — make the kids walk home. Obviously they are abusing the bus service, or put a minder (a second adult) on the bus so the driver is able to keep his or her eyes on the road.

M A Gallie, Invercargill

Religious beliefs

PAULINE MCINTOSH'S criticism (letters, August 6) of the High Court decision over *South Park* is bogus.

Like many others, she is confusing her right to freedom of religion, a right she never had when the Vatican was in control, with her belief that we must respect her religion. Yes, the NZ Bill of Rights Act states that she has the right to believe anything she wants, but we do not have to respect that belief. We are respecting the right to hold a belief, not the belief itself.

We can't enforce respect for all beliefs because it is impossible to respect beliefs you don't agree with. For example, does Ms McIntosh have "personal respect" for Islamists who slaughter infidels according to their deeply held religious beliefs? If she does then she should be viewed with contempt; if she doesn't then she is a hypocrite.

She can't demand that we respect and refuse to criticise her religious beliefs while she freely condemns the religious beliefs of others.

Perhaps Ms McIntosh actually means we should tolerate the religious beliefs of others, but again, is she willing to tolerate the freedom of Islamists to kill us? I suspect not.

This pleading to respect her religion is nothing but a smokescreen to insulate their silly superstitions from the gaze of reason.

Remember that if their beliefs and claims were true and just, they wouldn't need to demand that we tolerate or respect them — we would have already adopted them as our own. Instead we have adopted the beliefs of science, which doesn't demand respect or tolerance.

On the contrary, it demands critical inquiry, debate and rejection of theories if the evidence doesn't support them. Religion should demand no less.

John Cotton, Dunedin

Local government

SOUTHLAND is going to be faced with some serious problems over the next few years: there is going to be a large increase in dairy farm conversions, the Oreti Estuary, Waituna catchment and Lagoon, maybe the capping of stock numbers in the Waituna catchment, surface water consents in Fiordland, and global warming.

With the local body elections imminent, I am asking citizens who have concerns about Southland's environment and our future to give some serious consideration to standing at this next election.

The work is very interesting, but not particularly well paid. What is required is a reasonable level of

intelligence, a good work ethic and the ability to think for one's self.

Southland's environmental future is at stake.

Consideration also needs to be given to the future of Southland's local government bodies.

Auckland has 185,000 people per local government authority; we have only about 25,000 and Auckland is having local government authority numbers reviewed.

Do we need three territorial bodies and Environment Southland? I would suggest it is like having six blacksmiths in a one-horse town and changes need to be made.

Ted Loose, councillor, Environment Southland

Child abuse

CHILD abuse is partly lack of education. It is baffling that education in child rearing throughout the child's life is not mandatory. It could easily be tied to a child benefit — and save much ineffective expense later.

M H Lockie, Invercargill

Day by Day

Get well soon: Nearly half of all hospital kitchens and canteens in England could be failing to meet basic standards of cleanliness and hygiene, it's been revealed. Vermin, cockroaches and mouse droppings, medical waste on food handling equipment and poor personal hygiene among catering staff were all cited as problems. The report said dozens of hospitals were failing to store food at the correct temperature, while 18 had food that was out of date.

Birthdays

- John Galsworthy, British novelist and Nobel laureate (1867-1933)
- Steve Martin, US actor-comedian (1945)
- Danielle Steel, US author (1947)
- Magic Johnson, US basketball player (1959)
- Halle Berry, US actress (1966)
- Kieren Perkins, Australian swimmer (1973)

Thought

"In view of the fact that God limited the intelligence of man, it seems unfair that he did not also limit his stupidity."

Konrad Adenauer, who was appointed first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany on August 14, 1949.

Scripture

"The Lord is on my side, and I am not afraid of what others can do to me."

Psalms 118:6

Over the equator

Southlander **Mark Wilson** continues his reports from on board the Speight's pub ship heading for London.

ALL the lads had a great time in Samoa, but as soon as the rolling started we knew we were in for a long slog to Panama — 24 days in the big blue Pacific with no land and 35degC-plus heat would be a stern test of what the boys were made of.

Over the first few days some old acquaintances with seasickness were renewed for a few of the lads and, combined with the new captain taking a hard stand on discipline, morale among the team was definitely tested.

But things calmed down as we approached the equator and everyone perked up after a good Wednesday-night do in the bar.

We're struggling a bit with the oppressive heat here in the tropics. The sea is 30degC, the cabin temperature at night barely dips below 28degC and it can hit the high 30s in the middle of the day outside.

For a Southlander this is pretty hard work, especially combined with the high humidity. I don't think I've worn a top since Samoa. We crossed the equator on Sunday, a big milestone as I'm pretty sure we are the first people in history to take a working land-based bar over it and to top it off we made a Speight's keg raft and dropped that in the ocean for a wee spin.

The crew initiated us as true seamen by locking us in the hold for an hour before letting us out only to be pummeled with a fire hose, made to crawl through an oily tarpaulin to only then be allowed to quench our thirst on glasses of seawater and rum.

However, the Speight's crew gave as good as we got with a small initiation of our own involving Speight's questions and eggs.

This was followed up in true southern style with a hearty barbecue and a few quiet Speight's as the sun set on yet another day of this epic voyage.

The team is really close now and working well as a unit. We have had many challenges and I've been impressed by how everyone has fronted up to them. I don't know how Speight's did it, but they managed to pick a great bunch of blokes for this trip and I'm stoked to have them as crew mates.

To top off a great day, the Stags took down the Naki and I can now give Tim Cleaver, my Taranaki crewmate, some grief.