

## **Dividing Walls of Hostility**

I was just fourteen when construction began on the Berlin Wall. In the West, the Wall was universally seen as an affront to democracy, a testimony to the failure of the Communist system, an ugly blotch on the face of human society. I later wrote a poem about the Wall and its barbed wire that helped me win a statewide English contest. The Wall made a big impression on all who cherished freedom. What a great day when that Wall came down!

How sad to see new walls going up today. Among the most tragic are the walls my own government is building. Along the southern border, in places, the wall is literally a wall, up to 18 feet high. Elsewhere, as along our northern borders with Canada, the wall may be a high-tech “security” fence, ostensibly to keep out potential terrorists, but also serving to constrain the movement of resident citizens, to pen us in. Then there is the wall that defines the Green Zone in Baghdad, a wall that isolates and insulates its inhabitants from the rest of the city and society, even as it protects the unwanted inhabitants inside. There are also the walls of myriad gated communities, and all the less tangible but nonetheless impermeable walls that divide us by race, religion, class, and nationality.

Our country is not alone in building these tragic walls. We all know about the wall Israel built to restrain the movement of Palestinians. Few of us have heard about the walls and high-tech fences going up on the borders between India and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and who knows where else.

One of the key metaphors in the Christian lexicon for describing the work of Jesus Christ is found in the book of Ephesians: “For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down *the dividing wall of hostility*.” The historical reference is to the hostility between Gentile and Jew, but Christians have long understood the work of Jesus Christ to have universal application, to encompass people of all races and ethnicities, to embrace rich and poor, male and female, presumed enemy and trusted friend. The walls going up today are an affront to human dignity, a tragic reminder that the love enjoined by Christianity and all the world’s major religions has yet to deliver us from hatred and fear.

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