

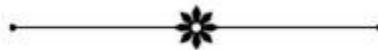
Remember, remember always,
... that you and I, are
descended from immigrants
and revolutionists.

*President Franklin D.
Roosevelt (1882-1945)*

COMPASSION WITHOUT BORDERS

Full Disclosure: I hate walls which are designed to keep people out or in. Maybe it's in my genes. Many centuries ago there were walls built to exclude my Celtic ancestors from areas conquered by the Romans — it didn't work.

What follows are a number of reflections that do not all always flow smoothly into each other. They are more like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle. And unfortunately there are some missing pieces! So bear with me and we will work on the puzzle together.



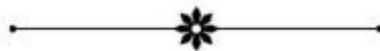
Listening to Mr. Trump and his supporters you would assume that the wall across our southern border, designed to separate good people from people who don't look like Mr. Trump, was the greatest thing in American history with the possible exception of the Declaration of Independence.

A few days ago, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, said she wasn't at all sure that Mr. Trump was actually that interested in a wall across our southern border. So what's it really all about? The number of immigrants coming into the United States from the south has in fact dramatically decreased. Are we worried about terrorism? The highest number of people requesting asylum on our southern border are women and children fleeing from terrorism! Last year only 6 terrorists were apprehended attempting to enter the United States from the south as compared to 41 who were crossing the Canadian border! Is Mr. Trump simply catering to his base? One prominent woman suggested it might be “like a manhood thing for him.” Could that be it? Frank Bruni wrote in the *NEW YORK TIMES* “ It’s a victory for victory’s sake. It’s a show of might. It’s proof of his potency.”



I don't know Mr. Trump's motivation but I do know that the country is being torn apart as a result of his preoccupation with his wall.

The fight over a wall is a *déjà vu* moment for me and probably others my age. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the destruction of the Iron Curtain on the night of November 9, 1989 was something that brought unparalleled joy to many people, myself included. I can't help but compare my feeling at that time to my feelings about Mr. Trump's wall 30 years afterwards — but more about that later.



Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners*, and himself a politically and socially progressive evangelical Christian, says Mr. Trump's wall is about “America's Original Sin” — racism.



First, racism is always based on lies; it always has been and always will be. We saw that again in Donald Trump's recent address to the nation. It was more of the same lies he has used since he announced his presidential candidacy in 2015. He uses his lies to try to justify his border wall, the signature issue of

his political campaign and administration, which people on both sides of the aisle have said has nothing to do with border security and everything to do with Donald Trump's central message: You should fear people who aren't white. The wall would be Donald Trump's 2,200-mile monument to white supremacy.

I agree with Jim Wallis' statement and I believe it comes out of his personal, deep religious convictions.



Now, to borrow a quote from Lewis Carroll's (1832–1898) *Alice in Wonderland*, things are getting “curiouser and curiouser!” Fasten your seatbelts for a weird ride as we turn to look at several recently circulated ideas from some fundamentalist Christian followers in Mr. Trump's base.

I have often wondered why any fundamentalist Christians are able to ignore Mr. Trump's moral and ethical record. Some who once damned him as a serial adulterer, among other things now see him as being the anointed of God. Now follow the reasoning —

We are talking about the 45th president of the United States. So we turn to chapter 45 of the Book of Isaiah in the Bible. Get the connection? Back in the sixth century B.C.E. God chose a pagan, the Persian King Cyrus, to serve God's will.

One additional point — some fundamentalists believe God does not like democratic institutions. He prefers an absolute monarch, like Cyrus, through whom he can act. Now onward —

In 2016 God spoke to a fundamentalist American businessman and told him that Donald Trump was a necessary wrecking ball. Later he was instructed to read Isaiah 45. Some like-minded followers even go so far as to see Mr. Trump's hotel and real estate empire as the foundation for “a building that will stretch from earth to heaven.” Trump, like Cyrus, was powerful, rich, and heathen, and by Trump according to their reading of Isaiah 45, “The foundation of the new Temple shall be laid.”



Mr. Trump's desired wall on our southern border shifts into that picture somehow. For those who see Mr. Trump as the anointed one, it is probably helpful to expunge from their Bible, Matthew 25. That chapter, in which Jesus left these instructions, contains this statement from Jesus,

For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, imprisoned and you came to see me.

Let us meet two of those horrible people who Mr. Trump and his followers do not want to make welcome.



Romero and his sister were born in El Salvador. In 2003 when Romero was 19, he and his sister were extorted and threatened by gang members for three years. When it became very obvious that their lives were in danger they left to live with their grandparents here in the United States. When Romero got to the border, he was detained and then released by officials but given an order to appear later in a Texas court which was 2,000 miles from where he would be living. He tried to get them to allow him to appear in a court nearer to where he was going but was unsuccessful. An immigration judge in Texas at some time tried him *in absentia* and ordered him to be deported. Over the years he tried to reopen his case but the lawyers he contacted told him he wouldn't have a chance of becoming a citizen. He found work, paid taxes, learned English, married an American citizen and had a child.



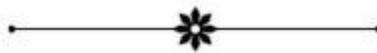
In 2016 his wife Rose heard that there was a new policy allowing undocumented people to apply for residency. She and Romero walked into their interview and Romero was detained indefinitely because of an even newer policy that said anyone with an order of removal should be arrested during their residency interview. His three-year-old daughter would wake up at night screaming for her father.

Romero was to have been immediately deported when a lawsuit was filed on his behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union. After Romero spent 90 days in jail, a judge ordered

that he be allowed to go back and live with his family as his case made its way through the courts.

Romero is only one of thousands of good people who have created a “crisis at the border” according to the Trump administration.

And then there are the children. When Maria arrived at the border she was forcefully separated from her father who was put on a plane back to Guatemala within a few days. Maria celebrated her fourth birthday alone at a detention center in Arizona. After nearly a year she was returned to her family. But she is now a different child. Her father says she speaks very little. However the administration, according to the ACLU, “continues to believe that family separation was and remains an effective deterrent for migrants coming to the U.S.” Effectiveness should never be more important than human rights. The results of the kind of trauma Maria endured can last a long time. This type of political policy is and will always be immoral.



Jump back with me in time to the night of November 9, 1989. Just as an historical refresher, let's start with a speech Winston Churchill (1874–1965) gave to a college in Missouri in 1946 in which he said,

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent [of Europe.] ... Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case and... there is no true democracy.

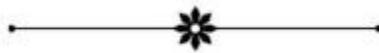
The keystone of the Curtain was the concrete Wall that divided Berlin. West of the Wall people were making an historic effort to establish a democratic and compassionate city. East of the Wall was a Soviet dominated half-city whose leaders were actually more ruthless, indeed more vicious, than their Soviet masters.

I went behind the Wall a few times, mostly with permission, occasionally with a degree of danger. Two days will always stick in my memory. On the first day I was traveling with permission through “Checkpoint Charlie.” The East German



authorities had placed large concrete obstructions which would keep anyone from suddenly just driving through. I was on a bus. The nervous driver was having trouble maneuvering around these obstructions and ended up scraping the bus on one of the concrete barriers. Instantly the East German guards appeared in force with guns pointed in our direction. These guards at the Wall were mostly late-teen age boys, nervous themselves, who were recruited from rural villages. There was every indication that shots would be fired. Luckily a Soviet Army officer came out and calmed the situation. The next day I was on the west side of the Wall, joining people who had gathered at the spot where the night before a teenager in East Berlin had attempted to get over the Wall and was shot and killed. It was a silent memorial — there was no need for anyone to say anything.

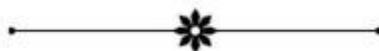
My admittedly limited personal experiences have led me to the conclusion that Step One is to build a wall to keep people in or out. Step Two is to shoot people attempting to overcome the barrier.



Next, President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) entered the picture. He was a president with whom I disagreed on many things, especially during the AIDS pandemic, but on June 12, 1987 in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin I felt he presented the best in American values. He said,

Behind me stands a wall that encircles the free sectors of the city, part of a vast system of barriers that divides the entire continent of Europe.... General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberation... Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this Wall!

President Reagan went on to mention some words he had just seen crudely spray-painted on the Wall and which he assumed were written by a young Berliner, "This Wall will fall. Beliefs become reality." Reagan went on to comment, *Yes, across Europe, this Wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The Wall cannot withstand freedom.*

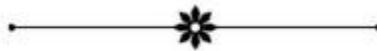




At about 11:30 PM on November 9, 1989 hundreds of thousands of people participated in tearing down the Berlin Wall and it was the point-of-no-return in the collapse of the Cold War. That destruction of the Wall was the coalescence of many individual stories of bravery. I'll use the action of a secret police officer (Stasi) as an example. When parents were being separated from children and he was faced with the likelihood of

having to machine-gun hundreds of people, he chose instead to order his men to open the gates at the largest checkpoint between East and West Berlin. Huge crowds went through that checkpoint while other Berliners physically tore down the Wall.

Any political transformation has as its foundation, individual acts of courage.



I know some readers will think this is not a fair analogy, nonetheless in my heart I say over and over, "Mr.Trump — do not build this Wall!"

Brother Toby