

THE DOWNSIDE OF DOWNING THE BERLIN WALL

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The upside is poignantly put in this Christian Science Monitor cartoon (Nov.15). One hug of two human beings dooms alienation & both enacts & symbolizes a world-historical event of people-power victory & people-level reconciliation. History will remember, as one of the 20th-century greats, that Polish shipyard electrician, Lech Walensa, to whom Congress yesterday gave a standing ovation when he said, alluding to his beginning the *Solidarnost* strike by jumping a fence, "Now others jump fences and tear down walls." (Of his one-hour speech, Mary McGrory said "Majesty and victory were in the room.") So why would anyone want to spoil the party with down words on the downing of the Berlin Wall?

1. Geo. Bush scowled when first publicly asked his opinion of the E.Ger. government's opening of the wall. Did he know something we didn't, or was it just that (as Ted Sorensen said), "We have war scenarios but no peace scenarios"? (Of the collapse of "scientific socialism," Art Buchwald, referring to the Wall, said that "The entire U.S. military/industrial complex was in despair" over the "thud heard round the world.").....But this is no downside for me.

2. But I do some scowling about the event, while at the same time rejoicing & thanking God for it. Why?



(1) Sin being anything extended far enough in a straight line, a German sin is logical-irrational-efficient **thoroughness**, the basis of Teutonic **power-lust**. First thing I thought of when I heard of the event was a remark Kurt Scharf, (Lutheran) bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg (with ecclesial responsibilities on both sides of the Wall), made to me when at lunch not long after the wall went up I asked, "How many Germanies should there be?" With a wry smile, he said "Never fewer than two." In the case of this German strength/weakness, it doesn't take one to know one; but it's better to hear this truth as an admission from within than as a warning from without. (My Scottish stock has the opposite weakness: we're impulsive, & never could get organized enough to get the English off our backs. Every people has weaknesses/strengths--Chinese, black Africans, Jews, Hispanics, English, everybody.)....The threat of a reunited Germany this time would be not military but economic, the imbalancing dominance of EC (the European Community), profoundly threatening its existence.

(2) In 1966, less than five years after the Wall went up, I was looking into E.Germany across the Wall, & weeping for those killed trying to cross, & for their loved ones, & for the Wall's tragic necessity if the E.German socialist experiment were to have a chance, & for the oppressed Protestant Christians I'd visited in E.G. (which is mainly Protestant, as W.G. is mainly Catholic), & for the economic Americanization (including the worst features of capitalism) of W.G. Billy Graham's chief evangelist was amazed at my tears till I told him all this....It's a commonplace of social science that you can't experiment on human beings, assigning one group to one set of circumstances & another to another; but that happened with the splitting of Germany. What'll we learn from this unwitting experiment? Which is worse: the absence of freedom, or the presence of humanly untamed private capitalism, enslaving people in the mechanisms & mentality of **consumerism** with its skills at playing on human weaknesses, on avarice, gluttony, & lust? The church in E.G. is, spiritually, in far better shape than the church in W.G., which is as corrupt as most of the American churches. "Democratic capitalism" sounds good but is no more demon-proof than "scientific socialism."

* Leighton Ford