

A Wall Mentality

I often find myself in a book store, but in March of 2009 I was in a bookstore at the Sydney, AU, airport, looking for some kind of suitable reading for the long flight back to Los Angeles. The choices were not exactly captivating, but I wound up with The Great Wall: The extraordinary history of China's wonder of the World, by John Man.

A highlighter is usually a companion while reading, but I scrapped the idea for this book, a handicap at the moment as I might like to draw out certain pieces of information. The essence of what I might pull out involves two central themes: The Great Wall of China was not what it was cracked up to be, and the consequences for a nation and a long variety of dynasty's as they became locked into a wall mentality.



Last week, with extra time on my hands, I found myself following The Great Wall



of the United States of America. It is a clearly visible entity as one travels from Bisbee to Sierra Vista, on State Route 92. The ribbon of steel is visible for miles; it may be visible from the space shuttle.

As I approached Sierra Vista I noted a sign for the Coronado

National Memorial and followed the road, interested in the Memorial, but more interested in finding out how close the road might take me to the Great Wall.

The road did travel in the right direction and the wall became ever more clearly defined. However, no particular road headed in that direction so I simply continued to the Memorial to gather whatever insights it had to offer to my knowledge of the history of the southwest.

My return found me leaving that highway for a lesser travelled route in the direction of the wall. It became a rough road and eventually a sign declared a limit: No Vehicle Traffic Beyond This point.. The wall was out there, visible, but still a considerable distance. Camera in hand, I started walking. Nearly two miles later I found myself standing next to the Great Wall of the United States of America, standing and taking pictures of steel stretching out for miles in both directions, steel and concrete that I would later learn in a web search cost all of us 3.9 million dollars a mile. I am sure that from where I stood I could view 78 million dollars of the wall.



Opinions vary, but I found myself ashamed and sick at heart. I could hear Reagan at the Berlin Wall telling Gorbachev to tear the wall down. I gathered mental images of walls all over Israel and Palestinian lands, funded and supported by the United States. And there were images of walls our armed forces have built to divide the city of Bagdad in Iraq. My God, we love walls!

The slide show in my mind did not stop there. Many of us live in “gated” communities, surrounded by walls. Walls are part of our urban culture in the southwest. But none of those walls are quite like this wall. Square steel tubes, topped by sheets of steel, perhaps twelve or fourteen feet high, with a construction/maintenance road running on the north side, perhaps thirty feet across.

I wonder how we became so afraid.

And I believe walls are not all they are cracked up to be. More frightening is what happens as we enforce in our national consciousness our love affair with walls and the emergent but invisible wall mentality!



Rev. Dr. Jerry Ebbinga

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