

Building Walls for Protection is Not Immoral or Unchristian

The building of walls has been very much in the news over the past week or so. There is, of course, the famous or infamous wall that [President Elect Trump has promised](#) to build along the Mexican border. And then there are the recent comments by Pope Francis, seen as a thinly-veiled intervention by the pontiff in the U.S. election campaign, in which [the Pope stated](#) that politicians who proposed to build walls instead of bridges were “not Christian.” It’s not the purpose of this brief meditation on the building of walls to comment on the rights or wrongs of Trump’s wall-building promises. What is much more interesting is the claim by the pope that the building of walls instead of bridges is somehow reprehensible.

The first problem with the pope’s comments is his failure to distinguish between the building of walls to keep people in and the building of walls to keep people out. The first is necessary for the building of prisons; the second is necessary for the building of homes. The first reason for building walls is not necessarily bad because, whether we like it or not, law-abiding citizens need protecting from those who threaten their lives and properties. The second reason for building walls is not only necessary but is a necessary good. Just as you can’t make an omelet without cracking eggs, you can’t build a home without building walls. The walls of a home are not only necessary to hold up the roof and to keep out the elements, they are also necessary to keep out wildlife and, yes, to keep out people who might want to harm our families through violence or theft.

Taking a look at two walls erected for political purposes will illustrate why the pope’s comments were muddled and wrong-headed.

The building of the notorious Berlin Wall by the Communists is a good example of a bad wall built by political tyrants. It was not built to keep people out but to keep people in. It was the wall of a prison, designed to prevent those in communist East Berlin from escaping to the freedom of West Berlin. This was a bad wall built by tyrants because it was erected to incarcerate political prisoners.

In contrast, the building of walls around the cities of mediaeval Europe is an example of good walls built by wise and prudent rulers. They were not built to keep people in but to keep people out. They were the walls of a home, not the walls of a prison. Take, for example, the walls around the city of Vienna. It was those walls that withstood the siege of the city in 1529 by the Islamic army of the Ottoman Empire. If those walls had not withstood the Turkish onslaught, or if they had not even been built, it is likely that the Muslim armies would have overrun Europe. Surely we should all be thankful that those walls were built and that they did their job. Surely the pope, of all people, should be thankful that wise and prudent politicians have sometimes built walls.