

## Borders

I still have an atlas published in 1960 which I bought or was given when I was at school. Quite a lot has changed since then. A number of countries now have different names, and even some borders have changed.

Borders between countries are not always natural ones but often as a result of political decisions by occupying powers. And this can lead to ongoing disputes and conflicts, as we are seeing at the moment in Kashmir, with the worrying tensions between India and Pakistan. For borders do not always simply separate distinct nations, they can also divide communities, families, cultures.

Our situation in the United Kingdom is at first glance much easier and clear-cut. As an island we have obvious natural borders. We have miles of sea between us and neighbouring countries.

Well, that is almost true. Very much at the forefront of the current Brexit debate is the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. One of the important achievements of the European Union has been the breaking down of the borders between member states. That is surely a good thing, though some people disagree. What will happen after the UK leaves the European Union remains to be worked out.

And there are other borders within the UK too. Today is the feast day of St David, patron saint of Wales. Having lived and worked in Wales for four years prior to moving to York I was very conscious of the different culture, history and national pride there – not to mention the different language. And of course there is Scotland with a desire by some there for independence from the rest of the UK.

Today is also Zero Discrimination Day. Although sponsored by UNAIDS it focuses not simply on discrimination against those who suffer from AIDS and HIV. Instead it challenges all forms of discrimination and discriminatory laws. One factor that encourages regions to press for more autonomy and even independence is the discrimination inflicted either in the past or even still by central governments. For instance, for a long time the Welsh language was officially suppressed. Children were punished for speaking Welsh. At least now the opposite is true and there is positive official support and encouragement for the Welsh language.

Our Bible reading just now is that clear message from St Paul that barriers, divisions and borders are to be broken down (Galatians 3.23-29). Like many borders between countries the barriers between people are often artificial and based on prejudice. Although St Paul is particularly addressing Christians, with the message that we are one in Christ, his words have a much wider application to humanity as a whole. For true peace and reconciliation to succeed barriers need to be broken down and borders crossed.

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