

ETHNIC BOUNDARIES? with special reference to the case of BOSNIA

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"God made the world and...all nations..., and he allotted...the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God...."
Ac.17.24-27 NRSV

Right now the world is facing the most radical **boundaries instability** it's ever suffered. We religious folk, whatever our religion, feel an urge to give such account of this horrendous & hopeful fact as best (1) illumines it with our particular light & (2) confirms our religion for pastoral, apologetic, & polemic purposes. In this light, this Thinksheet's title should not seem as immodest as you thought it was when first you read it.

1 How much Paul had to do with the Lucan composition of his Athens speech (Ac.17.22-31), we cannot know. But that question has nothing to do with its authenticity as early Christian teaching. The statement in point, as quoted above, is that ethnic boundaries have divine sanction as divinely assigned. The statement is etiological (explaining how peoples got to be where each is), existential (based on the fact that the movement of peoples within historical times is a minor phenomenon: boundary stability is the rule, not the exception), & religious (God's purpose in creation & boundaries assignments is "so that [instead of boundaries squabbling] they would search for God."

The narrative of Paul in Athens "commends itself at once as a genuinely historical narrative." The speech is "a plea for the Jewish doctrine of God, and for the specifically Christian emphasis on a 'Son of Man' doctrine of judgement....It is eminently Jewish....Just as there was a Koine Greek language which was adopted by Hellenistic Jews, so there was a Koine Greek philosophy which was also adopted." (IV.208-209 of the 5-vol. Jackson & Lake THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY, Part I: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES [Mac/33])....NOTE: (1) While polytheism does not rule out racial-ethnic super-/infer-iority, monotheism does (we are all from "One"), as does federal descent (we are all from "one"). (2) While Stoics had a materialistic base for their cosmopolitanism, Jews had a theistic for theirs: creationally-historically, God precedes creation, the nonhuman creation precedes the creation of humanity, & the creation (& therefore unity) of humanity precedes our demographic distribution (& therefore diversity). (3) The unity of humanity is confirmed by God's sending a single Savior, "a man whom he has appointed,...raising him from the dead" (vs.31; the root of Eng. "horizon" is the root of the Gk. words NRSV trd., vv.26-31, "allotted...boundaries...appointed"). (4) Tribe, nation, ethnicity, people, race, clan, multitude, citizenry? The underlined is the best word for translating ἔθνος *ethnos* in our context, but see §2 (below). (5) Paul's pagan hearers (this is the first-mentioned speech of his to nonJews) would be suprised, if not startled, by his message's freedom from fate & chance. We are to play the cards dealt us, but they are not dealt us by impersonal fate or random chance. There is divine purpose behind, & providence within, our circumstances. Life is not one damned thing after another, but one blessed thing after another. This paradigm is harder to think & to live than the pagan paradigm, but it's more productive of human values. Besides, we biblical peoples, Christians & Jews, believe it's revealed truth. (6) The pagan deities are doubly bound, by fate & by place ("live in shrines made by human hands," vs.24): God is bound neither way but is self-determining & frees us to be so within the sphere of his will.

2 **Ethnic identity** is the question prior to ethnic boundaries. As is English (1.4, above), the biblical languages are rich in words for human groupings, a richness corresponding to the complexity of the human social reality. The complexity within each society is compounded when you try to find lexical equivalents in another society, as a biblical translator must. Anthropologists & biblical translators learn from each other, as users of the 2-vol. GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NT Based on Semantic Domains (Johannes P. Louw et al, United Bible Societies/88) realize. The relevant words for us here are in two domains:

KINSHIP TERMS (1.111-120)

A. Blood-related, "but without special reference to successive generations." 15 Greek words, of which 3 are important for our purpose: γένος--*genos* is used for "race, ethnic group, nation" (most broadly [vs.29], humanity is God's *genos*), as is σάρξ--*sarx*. The third word is φυλή--*phulē*: biologically less closely related than "family" but more closely related than "nation"--thus, "clan" (as the early tribes of Israel) or "tribe" (somewhat less biological than "clan"). (Matthew's Jesus takes a dim view of the blood factor: 8.12.)

B. Blood-related through "successive generations." Here, 35 Greek expressions for father, mother, son, daughter, parents, grandparents, ancestors, descendants, lineage, offspring, posterity, child, baby, orphan, bastard, etc.

C. Of the same generation. 4 words, corresponding to brother, sister, foster brother/sister, cousin.

D. Based on marriage. 11 words, for husband, wife, bridegroom, bride, father-in-law, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, widow.

GROUPS & CLASSES, & THEIR MEMBERS (1.121-136)

A. General. 11 Greek words, covering crowd, multitude, cohort (sociological sense), dining club, an orderly arranged group, wedding guests together, party, group; member, nonmember, co-member; in-/out-sider.

B. Socio-Religious. 45 Greek expressions! Some relevant to this Thinksheet: people (of God), sons of the kingdom, the twelve tribes, the initiated, flock, congregation, church, heathen (or pagans or gentiles), ethnics (ie, non-Jews), religious party, sect, proselyte.

C. Socio-Political. 40 Greek expressions. Relevant: ἔθνος--*ethnos* & λαός--*laos*, "the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community--'nation, people'"; πατριά--*patria*, nation, people, "a relatively large unit of people who constitute a socio-political group, sharing a presumed biological descent"; τόπος--*topos*, place, people, the inhabitants of a place; πόλις--*polis*, city, the inhabitants of a city; χώρα--*chora*, region, inhabitants of a region; πολιτεία--*politeia*, state, people as a socio-political unit, citizenship ("the right to be a citizen of a particular socio-political entity"); πολίτευμα--*politeuma*, state, commonwealth, place of citizenship ("the place or location in which one has the right to be a citizen"); ἐκκλησία---*ecclesia*, assembly, gathering, church; γείτων--*geiton* & περίοικος--*perioikos* & πλησίον--*plesion* & ἀδελφός--*adelphos*, "a person who lives close beside others and who thus by implication is a part of a so-called 'in-group,' that is, the group with which an individual identifies both ethnically and culturally--'neighbor, brother'."

D. Ethnic-cultural. 6 Greek words, all set on the Greek/barbarian divide. "Hellenistic" is cultural (Greek-influenced life), not ethnic.

E. Philosophical. Epicureans & Stoics.

3 Notice, in §2, that in the NT: (1) Blood is thicker than politics, so "ethnic boundaries" are more kinship than geographical (though the latter is what I mean in this Thinksheet's title). (2) Blood is thicker than religion. (3) Contrast *genos* in KINSHIP.A with *ethnos* in GROUPS.C. The two words can seem almost synonyms till you think about what different subdomains each is in. One reason I'm bothering to go through this whole lexical exercise is to display the **complexity** of the words representing the complexity of the realities they signal. Improved transportation, communication, & weaponry create the illusion that the human situation is more complicated today. To remove the illusion, read, in any Bible encyclopedia, "race," "nation," "people(s)," "ethnicity," "family-clan-tribe," "economics," "culture," "community," "class," "gender," "government," "city-citizen," "state," "member," "society," "war," "crime," "order, social," "church." What now is the main reason for the illusion that today there's more complexity, confusion, chaos? The television camera has (literally) an eye for conflict, mess, & violence. Historically, empire has been the only political structure achieving (though always only temporarily) simplicity, order, & peace. Everybody wants simplicity, order, & peace, so everybody wants a well-functioning U.N.: everybody wants "national" sovereignty, so nobody wants a strong U.N. So for the foreseeable, there will never be fewer than nine wars going on simultaneously, "but the end is not yet"

(Mt.24.6; "still to come," M.13.7 NRSV). (4) Place (& thus also **boundaries**) is, among all the nine subdomains, most important in the "socio-political" (GROUPS.C). In territoriality, blood & religion are not as important as **collective consciousness** as "a socio-political community." When this last seems threatened (as in Bosnia), each group gets all it can out of biology & piety: suddenly, ancestry & religion become hot buttons: chauvinism & fundamentalism take on new life (most prominently, at the moment, among Islamic peoples). (5) Under a broad definition of a religion as an account of the nature of things & of the meaning of humanity, ecopolitical **ideologies** function as "socio-religious" (GROUPS.B) & can divide a people territorially (eg, N/S Korea, N/S Vietnam)....Can you make additional observations as you reflect on \$2? I've made all I need to for this Thinksheet.

4 What of the OT? Most of what I've said of the NT applies to the OT, but here are a few pertinent comments: (1) Gn.10 is the world's earliest extant effort to fashion an anthropological overview, & it's an astonishing achievement (& sets the stage for the next chapter's linguistic chaos). Here's the rough, not always steady distinction between the two main Hebrew words: am is a people viewed as biologically related, goi is a people viewed as geographically related. (2) The OT's view is more ethno-geographic than ethno-linguistic (as we moderns) or racial (as in much of the current "multiculturalism"). (3) The cultural & ethnic stratigraphy of the ancient Near East is, we are coming to see, stunningly **complicated**. Epigraphic records (OT et al) are terse & fragmentary, & for various reasons give a simpler picture than the reality--a textual reality which hermeneutics must always be aware of. Eg, some OT passages give the impression that Joshua's ethnic cleansing campaign was completely successful, all the "Canaanites" being expelled (which, from other OT passages & from extrabiblical sources, we know was not the case). (4) When the Jewish exiles returned from Babylon, they had the dual problem of avoiding assimilation with, & maintaining ethnic self-definition from, the mixed populations surrounding them. E. Theo. Mullen Jr., in NARRATIVE HISTORY AND ETHNIC BOUNDARIES (Scholars Press/93), suggests that the work of the Deuteronomistic historian(s) included establishing those ethnic boundaries as a survival mechanism. Demography is a vital nontheological factor--or is it also theological? (5) God is concerned about another boundary, that between the divine & the human. God defeats human hubris: Gn.3 (Eden) & 11 (Babel, which is reversed in Ac.2 when all languages are brought under the domination of the Spirit). (6) War is about limits, boundaries (metaphoric sense in the case of most civil wars), & almost all wars are about **ethnic boundaries** (if "ethnic" is not read narrowly). Geo. Mendenhall, father of the pregnant idea that ancient New Eastern religious covenants were modeled on political suzerainty treaties, says (IDB Suppl. Vol. [Abingdon/76], pp.919f) that "a tribe seems to be an attempt to transfer the loyalty of kinship ties [family, clan] to a larger social organization....sometimes motivated by the necessity of forming large economic or political power structures, often as a reaction to a competing structure. A tribe may be held together by the need to lay claim to and mobilize the defense of territory. Such social coalitions have often been formidable opponents to the ambitions of political empires, but once the opponent is gone, the tribe will often disintegrate....the primary function of Israelite tribes seems to have been the organization of a large and strongly bonded (on the specifically religious grounds of the Yahwist covenant) society that could ward off the constant attempts of urban rulers to regain economic and political control of villages. With the establishment of the centralized monopoly of force under David, the older tribal organization had no social functions and withered away. The tribal names seem to have survived for a time as genealogical traditions." (Underlinings mine.)

5 In Ac.17.24-27, the biblical text for this Thinksheet, we have an answer to the Thinksheet's title question. Ethnic boundaries are one of many human realities **radically relativized** by Jesus' resurrection. Geo-boundaries are about real estate, but the true God is nonlocative (vs.24), so to worship him it's not necessary to create & defend your land-claims &/or use violence (by "ethnic cleansing") to effect population purity in your territory. Further, all our claims, including land claims,

are subordinate to the Creator-Provider's, who (vs.25) "bestows upon us everything that is ours." In 1956 we learned that humanity is of 13 "races" (ie, blood groups), but they are relatively unimportant in light of (vs.26) God's having created us "of one single stock" to "occupy the entire earth." The prosperity & even the existence of a particular people is no matter of great moment, for God "has fixed for each nation how long it should flourish" (Cadbury: "fixed the term of residence"; in this §, I'm using the translation of Heinz Cassirer). Again, this in vs.26 can be seen as a territory-stabilizing use of the divine sanction: God "has fixed for each nation...what were to be the limits of its territory." No invasions (empire-building from outside). No expansions (empire-building from within). No minority challenges to the hegemony of the *ethnos* in its territory. (As to this last, the OT is clear [with the exception of the Joshua saga] on the rights of non-challenging minorities. No oppression, & by implication no ethnic cleansing. The NT intensifies this liberal attitude.) Again, space-place are important to us human beings, but God transcends space &--this fact supervenes over what we call our place--is (vs.27) "not far from any of us." Again, the divine judgment applies to all of us wherever we are, so we (vs.30) "must all repent." And our repentance will be effectual, for (vs.31) Jesus' resurrection "makes faith available to everyone."

"Limits" (vs.26) is a land-surveying term, ὁροθεσία--*horothesia*, lit., "boundary ["horizon"] - setting." Then as now, few artificial boundaries; most were mountains, rivers, & bodies of water (oceans, seas, lakes)...The idea of God as Divider occurs in another dimension in ICor.12.11: "one and the same Spirit distributes [διαίρω--*diaireō*, lit., "chooses between"; divides, apportions, allots] severally to each, in accordance with his will" (Cassirer; Vulg., "dividens").

6 But what to do when a minority is perceived as threat, as in Bosnia Christians east (Serbian Orthodox) & Christians west (Croatian Catholics) recently came to perceive the Muslims between them, in light of rising Muslim demands for autonomy &, broadly in the Islamic world, the rise of fundamentalism? Our American political ethos may be too quick to judge this case. When Clinton said (referring to the Serbs; he should have included the Croats), "Ethnic cleansing cannot be tolerated," what's that supposed to mean? If it's a general announcement, it's a more radical police-the-world statement that Clinton's mentor JFK ever made. But even if he meant only "in Bosnia," we could not have expected him to say so, for he was speaking from what Inside-the-Beltway likes to call the high ground, ie at the level of principle informing policy.

Ethnic cleansing is virtually universal in history. The swans in our Craigville ponds don't want assorted other water birds polluting the space around them: "birds of a feather flock together." A society can stand only so much dissonance before it begins to break down, at which point the dissent is experienced as pollution. The negative side of this is instances of deliberate **ethnic pollution**, which was the policy of the Assyrian empire to tame a troublesome territory (eg, foreigners imported into 8th-c. BC/BCE Israel); & of the British in northern Ireland.

7 Let's look at the **people/place spread**:

(1) The ideal is that a people occupy a virgin territory, virgin in the sense that no humans were there to meet them when they moved in. This was the situation in Eden, & eight centuries ago when Polynesians from BoraBora arrived on the Hawaiian chain. For millenia, extremely rare; now extinct, an impossibility.

(2) An immigrant people may co-live with the native population, as Abraham & Sarah in Canaan. Or (3) merge with them, as the Aryans in Canaan long before Abraham & Sarah. Or (4) both, as the Spanish in Latin America (or, to a far lesser degree, the Africans in English America). (5) Or absorb the natives, as in Britain the Europeans absorbed the Picts. (6) Or submerge the natives, as the Chinese the Taiwanese. (7) Or displace the natives, as the Europeans the Amerinds in almost all of the Western Hemisphere. In the U.S., the Native Americans were displaced by (a) cultural conflict vis-a-vis land use & other customs, (b) war (King Philip's), (c) land purchase, (d) naturally (innocently)

imported diseases, (e) diseases deliberately spread (eg, by the gifts of infected blankets), (e) skirmishes (raids/counterraid), (f) expulsion into enclaves (reservations, the March of Tears). (8) Or neutralize the natives, as in the U.S. the Anglos did to the Dutch, the French, & the Spanish--& the Catholics & the Jews did to the Protestants (eg, in the public schools & the media).

Which of the above possibilities qualify as **ethnic cleansing**? Obviously, (7). But (6)? (8)? The phrase is too recent to have reached the dictionaries, & Bill Safire hasn't yet pontificated on it. Behind it, I think, is the Nazi phrase "racial purity"--indeed, the whole purity sanction in religion & culture, behind which is civilization's preference for cleanliness over filth.

8 While I intend to conclude this Thinksheet with the case of Bosnia, please try to think of the in/applicability of "ethnic cleansing" to some **other** troublespots: (1) Palestine. Will Israel conclude that 400 radical Arab Palestinians were not enough expellees? When they gain autonomy (though not military sovereignty) in, I think, a matter of weeks, will the West Bank & Gaza Arab Palestinians want to expel the Jews & make efforts (which would be ineffectual) to do so? (2) Northern Ireland. Will the IRA find enough allies to help them expel the British, or will the Protestants expel the Catholics? (3) India. Will the process furthering separate territories for Hindus & Muslims, begun with the India/Pakistan split upon Ghandi's success in breaking the British empire's hold, continue on a state or county basis within India? (4) United States. "Can we all get along," as Rodney King asked, in South Central Los Angeles & elsewhere, without the territorialitis that has made us more segregated than before "desegregation"? (5) Germany. How much, if anything, will the skinheads & NeoNazis accomplish vis-a-vis limited immigration or even getting certain groups of immigrants expelled? (6) Black Africa. Yesterday (27Apr93), Eritrea split from Ethiopia, which had appropriated it in 1962: will either or both sides expel residents from the other side? How strong is the population-purity factor in intertribal warfare in Somalia? in Kenya? in Zaire? in South Africa? (7) Will South Africa's turmoil result in some new form of apartheid, "purity" separations by agreement rather than by edict? (8) Will Tibet ever be able to cleanse itself of Chinese? (9) Will the Ainus & Koreans ever become full citizens of Japan, without restrictions of residence? (10) And just think how complex the situation in Lebanon!

9 The Holocaust, viz what Hitler did to Jews, colors, should color, all thinking about ethnic cleansing, of which it was history's most horrendous instance. Color, not control. I hear/read much that paranoidly implies, if it does not state, that unless "we" take military action against ethnic cleansers in former Yugoslavia, some new Hitlerlike horror will hit the world. But since WWII, many peoples have been bloodily pushed around. Why all the excitement over the plight of the Bosnian Muslims? Various reasons are proffered: (1) Improved TV coverage, esp. CNN. (2) "If we let them get away with it, the war will expand." (3) Unless we the U.S., with or without allies, go counterviolent, "we'll lose our moral credibility in the world." Oh? I thought we lost it some time ago. (4) We corrupt ourselves if we do not take compassionate violent action (which we failed to take vis-a-vis the Holocaust & Jews trying to escape it). This argument is doubly ambiguous: (a) If we do take action, does it assure us that we remain righteous? (b) Isn't "compassionate violent" an oxymoronic assemblage of adjectives? (5) Like it or not, "we are the only great power & must act the part." What part? If we bomb the ethnic cleansers & they thumb their noses at us, what happens to our "greatness"? (6) "We should do *something*." What? kill a few people to make us feel good about ourselves? administer some though ineffectual punishment (as the stupid & evil U.S.S. New Jersey's shelling of Arab villages in Lebanon after our pullout)? Besides, maybe we've already done too much in cooperating in embargoing arms to the Bosnian Muslims. (7) "It's a clear case of good/bad guys." Oh? That's what most Americans thought in the case of Vietnam. In former Yugoslavia, on the ground & close up things seem far more ambiguous than they do in the air & far away. (8) The guys getting cleansed are Muslims, & we already have enough trouble with Muslims. Helping them may improve our relations with

Islamic governments: failing to help them may get us more Trade Towers, more Muslim terrorism in the U.S. I reply that the Arab mentality, which is built into Islam, knows all the tricks & wouldn't be deceived by such "interested" action on our part.

10 "From the dawn of civilization, human beings have been pulled in two diametrically opposed directions, by their inclination toward ethnocentrism or particularity, on the one hand, and by their visceral feeling and conscious aspiration for the universality and unity of humankind, on the other" (Jos. Kitagawa, qt. p.15, Winter/93 CRITERION). Communism was an honest but fatally flawed expression of the latter, & it functioned in most places where it took over (China being the great exception) to suppress ethnism, ethnic nationalisms. Yugoslavia's Tito was the first communist ruler to shake free of Moscow & try to create an overarching Yugoslavian nationalism, which artifice of course disappeared with his death. The alternatives now are (1) to let the ethnics struggle for dominance, Serbia the sure winner; or (2) to cripple Serbia economically, if not also militarily, into submitting to the Vance-Owen cantonization apartheid plan (divide to prevent conquering) under Yugoslavian management; & (3) the second, but under U.N. control. Plans (2) & (3) would deny military equipment to the cantons. Plan (4), arms for the Muslims, would, from many angles, have only a dim prognosis.

11 On the 8th of this month, the World Court refused to pass judgment between Bosnia-Herzegovina's declaration of independence as a (dominantly Muslim) state & Serbia-Montenegro's frightened reaction in pushing (together with Bosnian Serbs) for a Greater Serbia. Both designs violated the consensus of global institutions & major nations for world boundaries-**freezing**. This sentiment makes for peace--but justice? Certainly not for "the self-determination of peoples" if the phrase means the right to set **ethnic boundaries**. But in 1948 the Republic of South Africa set ethnic boundaries to keep blacks out of white areas. The world needs a moral equivalent of empire, with justice as well as peace. Is the U.N. pregnant with it?