Borders For a Purpose: Rethinking God's Delimitations in Acts 17:26[1]

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INTRODUCTION: ENCOUNTERING ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY BORDERS

> *They were warned what would happen with repeated exposure to this seamless earth. You will see, they were told, its fullness, its absence of borders except those between land and sea. You'll see no countries, just a rolling indivisible globe which knows no possibility of separation, let alone war… Yet they hear the news and they've lived their lives and their hope does not make them naive. So what do they do? What action to take? And what use are words? They're humans with a godly view and that's the blessing and also the curse.*[2]

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During the *Pax Romana*, unprecedented levels of migration were both enabled and coerced by the machinations of empire. These movements were managed through physical structures such as military outposts, walls, and border stones, which not only controlled spatial boundaries but also reinforced imperial ideology. Although the construction of border edifices was different during the Roman Imperial period, those borders, not unlike now, stood as symbols of political control, ideology, and the potential for violence was often inbuilt. Paul's unusual vocabulary, often translated in as 'boundaries'[3], in Acts 17:26-27, recalls the experience of Roman bordering:

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1 An early version of this paper was presented at the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics (SSCE) Postgraduate Conference on 'Conflict and Peacebuilding' (School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, May 2025). This article develops that paper, which was an attempt, as a biblical studies scholar, to see how ideas discovered during my research might find traction in Christian ethics. I am grateful for the generous engagement, criticism, and feedback I received.

2 Samantha Harvey, *Orbital* (Vintage, 2024), p. 72.

3 E.g. NRSVue, NIV.

> From one ancestor, he made every nation of humanity to settle upon the whole face of the earth, determining their appointed epochs and the delimitations (ὁροθεσίας) of their habitation, so that they would search for God and, perhaps, fumble about for him and find him— though, indeed, he is not far from each one of us.[4]

Unattested in literary texts outside Acts, the only place ὁροθεσία appears is in epigraphy: most commonly in border inscriptions and occasionally in administrative papyri concerning boundaries. This is why I gloss ὁροθεσία as 'delimitation' rather than simply 'boundary'. Whereas 'boundary' suggests a fixed line or frontier, 'delimitation' emphasises the act of defining, marking, or regulating that line. It captures the procedural and juridical character of the lexeme as reflected in the context provided in the epigraphic record, highlighting not just the existence of a borderline but the process involved in establishing, recording, and monitoring the border.

In this article, I will make the case that Paul uses this particular Roman administrative vocabulary and reconfigures it for his own rhetorical ends. When this context is appreciated, it becomes clear that Paul subverts the ideology that undergirded Rome's borders. Paul reframes the logic of Roman delimitation in a manner that exposes the contingency and impermanence of Rome's borders and consequently undermines their theological underpinning. For Paul, God is the ultimate delimiter. Borders are set not for their own sake, or for protection, but 'so that they would search for God and, perhaps, fumble about for him and find him' (Acts 17:27). Borders have a revelatory and missiological purpose: to draw people to God and his border-transcending kingdom.

First, this paper will address the issue of contemporary violence at borders and briefly address the reception history of Acts 17:26-27 as a segregationist prooftext; I argue that biblical interpretation of this passage cannot be separated from these pressing ethical concerns. Second, the paper will discuss how bordering was perceived, according to Roman literary sources. Third, the epigraphic context of Luke's language will be addressed. Taken together, this context offers ground for a more accurate understanding of Acts 17:26-27 in its context and informs more robust ethical appeals to this passage today. The paper will conclude with reflections on how this vision can inform Scottish evangelical responses to borders, particularly in light of the country's unique and often contested relationship with them.

[4] Translations my own, unless otherwise stated.

READING ACTS 17:26-27 IN A WORLD OF BORDER VIOLENCE

In November 2024, while presenting a paper on New Testament studies through the lens of migration methodologies at the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meeting in San Diego, I was struck by the irony that I could see the US–Mexico border from my window. This notorious border, and the fears surrounding it, galvanised opinion at the US 2024 elections. According to the an *Americas Society and Council of the Americas* poll of polls, concerns about immigration and Donald Trump's promises to secure the border were the primary voting concern for nearly 15% of voters in the 2024 election and 70% of Republican voters cited it as one of the top three issues that motivated their vote.[5] Although my research is primarily concerned with migration as in the ancient world, it was a stark reminder that the concerns of my research in biblical studies do not happen in an ethical vacuum but have relevance to live issues.

Out of interest, I took a trolly to visit the border between conference sessions. In many ways the US-Mexico border, despite the hype, was an anticlimax. A major part of the border complex is an Outlet Mall, where shoppers can buy discounted clothing, some of which was no doubt manufactured on the other side of the border wall. The other striking feature of the bordered landscape is the mix of bureaucratic mundanity and the implicit threat of violence. The border itself is 5.5 to 8.2 meters high, so climbing and falling from the wall is most likely to result in injury or death. In other places, the wall is covered with razor wire, it extends far enough into the sea to use drowning as a deterrent. Other environmental factors mean circumnavigating less built-up sections of the wall is extremely dangerous due to exposure. Moreover, the border wall is patrolled by armed U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers.

The IOM describes the US-Mexico Border as the 'deadliest land route for migrants worldwide on record.'[6] In 2022, the CBP recorded 895 deaths at the US border. Most of these were due to heat stroke, dehydration, and hypothermia. Of that number, another 171 CBP-related deaths were recorded, 68 of these were due to use of force, another 52 died in custody,

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5 Khalea Robertson, 'Poll Tracker: Attitudes on Immigration in the 2024 U.S. Elections', *Americas Society / Council of the Americas*, October 25, 2024, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-attitudes-immigration-2024-us-elections.

6 International Organization for Migration, 'US-Mexico Border World's Deadliest Migration Land Route', September 12, 2023, accessed May 6, 2025, https://www.iom.int/news/us-mexico-border-worlds-deadliest-migration-land-route.

and 51 deaths were deemed 'not-reportable'.[7] These figures also do not account for the number of people who are officially missing in the borderland.[8]

In anarchist theory, as well as some activist circles it is suggested that 'borders *are* violence'.[9] However, given the number of deaths, be that at the US border, Turkey's and Syria's borders with Kurdistan, or the English Channel, contemporary borders are undeniably sites where violence takes place. [10] But a border is not only a physical barrier; according to the social scientists Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik:

> [B]orders are not only constructed by an assemblage of barbed wire, border guards, and the bureaucracy of biometric surveillance… they are also shielded by *epistemic violence*: guarding truth claims, silencing unwanted voices, and shutting out perspectives that expose the injustice of the border itself.[11]

Borders, of course, are not a modern phenomenon. They took different forms in antiquity, but they would have many features that many would recognise today. Like the signage at the US border that threatens state sur-

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7 For more statistics, see: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 'Border Rescues and Mortality Data'. Accessed 6 May 2025, https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/border-rescues-and-mortality-data.

8 International Organization for Migration (IOM), Missing Migrants Project: The Americas, accessed May 6, 2025, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/americas?region_incident=All&route=3936&year%5B%5D=10121&incident_date%5Bmin%5D=&incident_date%5Bmax%5D=.

9 Erica Ekrem, 'Transcript: Harsha Walia on Dismantling Imagined, Militarized, and Colonial Borders /211', For the Wild, December 2, 2020, accessed May 6, 2025, https://forthewild.world/podcast-transcripts/harsha-walia-on-dismantling-imagined-militarized-and-colonial-borders-211; Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group, 'Borders Are Violence', Melbacg.au, accessed May 6, 2025, https://melbacg.au/borders-are-violence/.

10 Naif Bezwan, 'Borders, Authoritarian Regimes, and Migration in Kurdistan,' in *Jahrbuch Migration und Gesellschaft / Yearbook Migration and Society 2020/2021: Beyond Borders*, vol. 2, eds. Hans Karl Peterlini and Jasmin Donlic (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020), pp. 27–64; Mayblin, Lucy, Joe Turner, Thom Davies, Tesfalem Yemane, and Arshad Isakjee. '"Bringing Order to the Border": Liberal and Illiberal Fantasies of Border Control in the English Channel', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 16 (2024), pp. 3894–3912.

11 Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, 'Epistemic Borderwork: Violent Pushbacks, Refugees, and the Politics of Knowledge at the EU Border,' *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113, no. 1 (2023), pp. 169–88.

veillance and violence if improperly crossed, the Romans erected boundary stones to delimit land rights. Just north of Glasgow, the landscape was permanently reshaped back in the second century by the Antonine Wall, which was fortified with armed soldiers and deadly *lilia*.[12] The Antonine Wall was both a barrier to migration and a source of migration. We know that Antoninus Pius stationed Syrian archers to patrol the wall around modern-day Twechar, in addition to the carving of a Hamian archer, we also have a tombstone of Gaius Julius Marcellinus, a Syrian who probably took on a Roman name when he enlisted as an auxiliary soldier.[13] The presence of a Syrian on the northern border of Britannia reflects a political situation that is both interconnected and delimited. It was within this context of both unity and ethnic distinction that early Christians, like Luke, articulated their theology of peoples and places. Borders—whether stone walls in Scotland or the social and ethnic lines Luke describes—frame questions of who belongs and who is excluded, concerns that resonate in the reception of Acts 17:26–27.

A BRIEF MODERN RECEPTION HISTORY OF ACTS 17:26-27

The Bible was a foundational resource for the ethics of both slave owners and abolitionists, and later, segregationists and desegregationists alike. In the late nineteenth century, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass was perhaps one of the first to make the case for desegregation on the basis of Acts 17:26, focusing on the first part of the verse, that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men', using evocative language of the KJV, to advocate for a universal brotherhood of humankind.[14] The use of Acts 17:26 as a foundational verse about God's design for humanity became a later proof-text for the desegregationist movement.

Prior to this, supporters of slavery had always appealed to the 'curse of ham' in Genesis 9:20–27 as a foundational text. Acts 17:26 was seldom

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[12] Defensive pits, sometimes containing spikes; on these physical features of the wall and its defences, see: David J. Woolliscroft, 'Excavations at Garnhall on the Line of the Antonine Wall', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 138 (2009), pp. 129–76.

[13] RIB. 2172 = CIL. VII, 1110; N. Hodgson, 'Were There Two Antonine Occupations of Scotland?', *Britannia* 26 (1995), pp. 29–49; George MacDonald, 'Miscellanea Romano-Caledonica II', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 73 (1939), pp. 241–72; Anthony R. Birley, 'The "Cohors I Hamiorum" in Britain', *Acta Classica* 55 (2012), pp. 1–16.

[14] Ronald Sundstrom, 'Frederick Douglass', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023), accessed May 6, 2025

referenced, that is, until the mid-20th century in response to the efforts of the civil rights movement. As stated by J. Russell Hawkins:

> Being so widely cited, Acts 17:26 was for twentieth-century segregationist Christians what the Curse of Ham account had been for nineteenth- century proslavery Christians: the foundational scriptural passage from which much of their hermeneutic sprang.[15]

An example is a Mississippi Baptist minister's pamphlet *Segregation: God's Plan and God's Purpose* in which he directly responds to the claims of desegregationist's hermeneutics with his own appeal to the historical-grammatical method:

> The Greek word for 'bounds' shows how determined GOD was that HIS plan for keeping the races separated should not be interfered with or defeated. This word is made up of two small Greek words: 'horos' (mountain) and 'tithamy' (to set up). 'Bounds' literally means 'mountain-setups.' The lines separating one place of habitation from another were selected where there would be natural barriers such as mountains, seas, lakes, or rivers.[16]

The etymology is not entirely off the mark, but his failure to appreciate the context of where ὁροθεσία is used and his application of the verse, is deeply flawed.

These Jim Crow–era pamphlets could be seen as easy pickings for criticism. Moreover, these writers were concerned about racial segregation, not borders. In contemporary debates, rather than segregation, the verse is often used to buttress arguments for closed or hard border policies and ethnonationalism, as often seen on Elon Musk's X platform (formerly Twitter), which can act as a bellwether of this shift.[17] The wilds of

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[15] The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy 53.

[16] Henry W. Fancher Sr., *Segregation: God's Plan and God's Purpose* (1954), 32-page tract, Florida State University Libraries Special Collections, accessed May 6, 2025, https://archives.lib.fsu.edu/repositories/10/resources/337; find similar reasoning in Guy Tillman Gillespie, *A Christian View on Segregation* (1954), Mississippiana and Rare Books Collection, accessed May 6, 2025, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_241e88fc-83a4-4454-ace8-ac10f50d0f27.

[17] For example, note the use of Acts 17:26 in X posts to justify hard-border policies and immigration enforcement. Elon Musk's Grok AI platform appears engineered to offer biblical support for the actions of ICE: Grok AI (@grok), ' From one man he made all the nations…' Acts 17:26. God establishes borders,' X, February 15, 2025, https://x.com/grok/status/1945946517191495716. See

unregulated and anonymous X posts may not constitute firm evidence of popular hermeneutics, but it can serve as a bellwether of wider trends. For example, 'Statement on Christian Nationalism and the Gospel', published on 10 February 2023, written by James Silberman, Dusty Deevers, with William Wolfe, Joel Webbon, Jeff Wright, and Cory Anderson as 'Contributing Editors', cites Acts 17 as a foundational passage. In Article 4, it states:

> We affirm, in regards to 'place' that a nation is definitively set by both its borders and times physically defined by God (Acts 17:26). Thus, we affirm that nations should rightly maintain autonomous government of their people and place, with the necessary rights and duties to (1) *prioritize the security of its people by maintaining its borders*, providing for *its common defense, and repelling invasions from without and insurrections from within*; (2) promote the prosperity of its citizens; and, (3) enforce justice.[18]

These are, of course, extreme examples. However, note how Acts 17:26 has been used to justify a divine mandate for ethnic separation, as cited by Old Testament scholar Markus Zehnder: 'Acts 17:26 in particular confirms the view that a differentiation of various ethnic groups together with concomitant national structures is seen as a positive institution ordained by God himself.'[19] To be clear, this is not to suggest that Zehnder belongs in the category of 20th-century segregationists or contemporary Christian nationalists; however, given that this hermeneutic has been used to justify Jim Crow Laws and apartheid, prudence and nuance are necessary.[20] In New Testament studies, there is now an open acknowledgement,

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also Dirty Casualty (@Dirty_Casualty), 'Acts 17:26 clearly supports national boundaries—why won't Christians admit this?', X, January 29, 2025, https://x.com/Dirty_Casualty/status/1941480394173579607; Mark A. J. McDonnell (@MarkAJMcDonnell), 'Paul said God determined nations' boundaries (Acts 17:26). That means we should respect them today', X, June 6, 2025, https://x.com/MarkAJMcDonnell/status/1882048809129394597; Todd Hudnall (@Todd_Hudnall), 'Acts 17:26 shows borders are divinely appointed. Christians should support secure borders and ICE,' X, March 3, 2025, https://x.com/Todd_Hudnall/status/1849493474220908793.

18 *Christian Nationalism & the Gospel: The Statement on Christian Nationalism & the Gospel*, written by James Silberman and Dusty Deevers, with William Wolfe, Joel Webbon, Jeff Wright, and Cory Anderson as contributing editors, October 2, 2023, accessed May 6, 2025, emphasis added.

19 Markus Zehnder, *The Bible and Immigration: A Critical and Empirical Reassessment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021).

20 Due to my own position as a British-American writing about these issues, I have focused on the reception history of the passage in these contexts. How-

apology, and lament for former antisemitic interpretations of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (the Jews);[21] it follows that interpretations of Acts 17:26 that ignore past misuses of this passage do so at their peril. To move beyond the harmful effects of these superficial segregationist readings, we must first appreciate how the Romans understood and managed borders in their world.

AN INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON ROMAN BORDERING

At the turn of the first century, Ovid recounts the origins of the Terminalia festival. When King Tarquin was making space for the temple, he tried to clear the Capitolium of monuments to every other god. All the deities yielded—except Terminus, the god of boundaries, who refused to budge.

> quid, nova cum fierent Capitolia? nempe deorum cuncta Iovi cessit turba locumque dedit:
> Terminus, ut veteres memorant, inventus in aede restitit et magno cum Iove templa tenet. nunc quoque, se supra ne quid nisi sidera cernat, exiguum templi tecta foramen habent.
> Termine, post illud levitas tibi libera non est: qua positus fueris in statione nec tu vicino quicquam concede roganti[22]
>
> What do you suppose happened when the new Capitoline temple was being built? Surely, the entire crowd of gods yielded to Jupiter and gave him place: Terminus, as the ancients recount, having been found in the shrine, stood fast

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ever, the passage was used similarly in South Africa; see: Edward A. Tiryakian, 'Apartheid and Religion', *Theology Today* 14, no. 3 (1957), pp. 385–400; Elelwani B. Farisani, 'Interpreting the Bible in the Context of Apartheid and Beyond: An African Perspective', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40, no. 2 (2014), pp. 207–25; Robert Vosloo, "Christianity and Apartheid in South Africa," in *Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, 400–23 (Routledge, 2015); Robert R. Vosloo, 'The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid in Reformed Circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Remarks', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015), pp. 195–215; Johann Theron, 'A Reformed Confessional Perspective on Racial Apartheid in the History, Theology, and Practice in the South African Dutch Reformed Church', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (2021), pp. 1–25

21 Sarah E. Rollens, Eric M. Vanden Eykel, and Meredith J. C. Warren, eds., *Judeophobia and the New Testament: Texts and Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2025); Paul N. Anderson, 'Anti-Semitism and Religious Violence as Flawed Interpretations of the Gospel of John', in *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, vol. 87 (2017), pp. 265–312.

22 Ovid, *Fast*. 2, pp. 667–674.

> and holds the temple with great Jupiter. Even now, so that he may see nothing above himself except the stars, the roof of the temple has a small opening. Terminus, after that moment, freedom of movement is not yours: wherever you have been stationed, do not grant your neighbours anything if he asks.

Thus, Tarquin incorporated Terminus' standing stone into Jupiter's temple complex, which explains the hole in the roof. In Erasmus' later retelling of the myth, he famously summarised Terminus' response as to being moved as, 'Cedo nulli!'[23] ('I yield to no one!'), an appropriate summary of the god's perseverance as described in Graeco-Roman literature. The story provides justification for Rome's divine mandate to set borders, making Terminus as both a guarantor of stability and a peacemaker in land disputes. For Ovid, Terminus represents the inviolability of Rome's border-making mandate. As he states later in the *Fasti*:

> conveniunt celebrantque dapes vicinia simplex et cantant laudes, Termine sancte, tuas: 'tu populos urbesque et regna ingentia finis: mnis erit sine te litigiosus ager[24]

> The humble neighbours gather for a feast and praise you, holy Terminus: 'You set the boundaries for people, cities, and great kingdoms; without you, every field would be a source of conflict.

Ovid concludes the story with a bold statement about Roman exceptionalism and its imperial ambition, dramatically translated by James George Frazer:

> gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo:
> Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem

> The land of other nations has a fixed boundary:
> The circuit of Rome is the circuit of the world.[25]

Even though Terminus' original stone remains in place on the Capitoline, Ovid describes other border markers associated with Terminus that

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[23] Edgar Wind, 'Ænigma termini,' *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 1 (1937), pp. 66–69; John Rowlands, 'Terminus, the Device of Erasmus of Rotterdam: A Painting by Holbein', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 67, no. 2 (1980), pp. 50–54; Rudolf Pfeiffer, 'Die Einheit im geistigen Werk des Erasmus', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 15 (1937), pp. 473–87.

[24] Ibid. 2, pp. 657-60.

[25] Ibid. 2, p. 680; Trans

become sites of devotion, sacrifice, and the celebration of the Terminalia festival in the god's honour.[26] Ovid describes an array of sacrifices, which acknowledge the god's role in maintaining peace and order between neighbouring peoples.[27] In Ovid's description, contemporary Augustan political bordering is linked to Rome's mythic past. As Katharine Allen stated, 'it is the Fasti which embodies the poet's real contribution to imperial propaganda.'[28] Ovid links the everyday stones that mark Rome's boundaries with the obdurate original on the Capitolium. Although a literary representation, the *Fasti* describes physical objects—in this case, border markers—and intends to shape how his audience perceives and interacts with the space that they delineate. Border stones and the empire they represent, are imbued with theological significance. Ovid's poem participates in Rome's imperial project by presenting the Imperial management of space and borders and its manifestations in everyday life and administration and places them within the trajectory of Rome's sacred history.

Antonio Gonzales makes an important observation about border stones and how they manage space. Though Ovid describes border stones as permanent, their permanence is a matter of perspective. As Gonzales explains:

> *The Romans therefore have an ever-present relationship with Terminus…* He is the god who guarantees property and therefore the contracts that bind owners together... In effect, Terminus seals the city's pact with its inhabitants by legalising property, justifying it while obliging owners to coexist accord-

[26] J. Rufus Fears suggests that Juventas and Terminus are associated in some traditions, but argues that their connection is likely a later interpretative development rather than evidence of an ancient, intrinsic relationship. He argues that Juventas' presence in Minerva's *cella* was probably introduced in 218 BCE, rather than reflecting an early Roman cult alongside Terminus. Would you like me to refine this further or add a specific citation? (J. Rufus Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology,' *in Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ANRW) / Rise and Decline of the Roman World*, Teil II, Principat. Band 17/2, Religion [Heidentum: Römische Götterkulte, Orientalische Kulte in der römischen Welt [Forts.]], ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), p. 848.

[27] Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer (London: Heinemann, 1931); for a discussion on the merits, or otherwise, of Frazer's translation and how it reflects the concerns of his milieu, see: Emma Gee, 'Some Thoughts about the Fasti of James George Frazer,' *Antichthon* 32 (1998), pp. 64–90.

[28] Allen, Katharine. 'The Fasti of Ovid and the Augustan Propaganda', *American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 3 (1922), pp. 250–66. https://doi.org/10.2307/289371.

> ing to a single principle, which is respect for the foundation that the limit justifies and that the boundary stone seals in the ground. [29]

That *principe unique*, of course is Rome's imperial ambitions over all territories and space. The local boundaries set by Terminus are set within Jupiter's temple, a god who embodied Rome's global ambitions. As Ovid states,

> Iuppiter arce suo totum cum spectat in orbem, nil nisi Romanum, quod tueatur, habet.[30]
>
> When Jupiter gazes from his citadel upon the whole world, he sees nothing to guard but what is Roman.

Later, Ovid raises a rhetorical question about the scope of the imperial project to Jupiter:

> haec est, cui fuerat promissa potentia rerum, Iuppiter? hanc terris imposturus eras?[31]
>
> Is this the empire to which you promised dominion over the world, Jupiter? Was this what you intended to place above all nations?

For Ovid, there is no tension in his account between the fixed local boundaries guaranteed by Terminus and the limitless imperial aspirations embodied by Jupiter. For the Roman elite, Terminus functions within the logic of expansion, not against it. His stones do not restrain Roman ambition but confirm its cosmic jurisdiction: each boundary marker is a divine affirmation of Rome's right to claim, organise, and sanctify space. The tension of the boundary is reserved for those on the other side of it—those who are subject to Roman space, not sovereign within it. As Ovid makes clear, Jupiter sees nothing beyond Rome's domain, a world left deliberately indefinite in scope. Even the poet's later moment of rhetorical doubt—*haec est, cui fuerat promissa potentia rerum, Iuppiter?*—only underscores

[29] Trans. mine, emphasis added. '*Les Romains ont donc un rapport ubiquitaire avec Terminus*… Il est le dieu garant de la propriété et partant des contrats qui lient les propriétaires entre eux... En effet, Terminus scelle le pacte de la cité avec ses habitants en légalisant la propriété, en la justifiant tout en obligeant les propriétaires à coexister selon un principe unique qui est le respect de la fondation que la limite justifie et que la borne scelle dans le sol.' Gonzales, 'Le dieu,' 65

[30] Ovid, *Fast*. 1.85

[31] Ibid. 6. pp. 359-60.

Augustan expectations of total dominion. The empire does not merely inherit the world; it maps space and engraves its instructions on stone to shape the world in its image. These literary sources offer insight into political and religious conceptualisation of borders during Paul's speech in Athens and when Luke recorded it in his narrative.

ὙΟΡΟΘΕΣΙΑ IN CONTEXT

When considering the use of ὁροθεσία in the Athens speech, the dynamics of Roman bordering practices are part of Luke's *Sitz im Leben*. Whittaker, in his comprehensive study of Roman frontiers, concludes:

> So the Roman imperial edict in AD 17/18 ordering the erection of triumphal arches and statues on the borders of the empire was not a statement of the termination of empire, but defined a sacred threshold that assumed a transition to the world beyond… The discovery of a new cadastral stone on the borders of Roman North Africa, which was clearly not a frontier, prompts the comment by [Pol Trousset], 'It is first and foremost the signature of a conquering power that is *exploring and constructing its space*.'[32]

Epigraphy records a diverse vocabulary the Romans used to describe borders, including, but not limited to *limes, finis, terminus*, ὅρος, and πέρας, each with its own spatial, legal, and theological nuances.[33] A discussion of all of these are outside the scope of this study; instead, this analysis will focus on the attestations of ὁροθεσία, the specific term used by Luke's Paul in Acts 17:26. To reiterate my earlier point: the Lucan hapax legomenon ὁροθεσία is unattested in literary sources. Although the form is rare, its meaning is obvious—a compound of ὅριον ('boundary') and ἵστημι ('to set' or 'to place'). A semantic parallel exists in Deuteronomy 32:8, but Luke departs from the LXX there by employing this uncommon compound. The term was entirely unattested in extant texts until the discovery in 1903 of a damaged papyrus from the Faiyum, dated to 151 CE.[34] Despite the rarity of ὁροθεσία, and the fact that its only non-Lucan attestations are epigraphic, its potential significance for interpret-

[32] Whittaker, *Rome*, p. 4; emphasis added.

[33] For further discussion of these, see: Seth Estrin, 'Horoi and Horizons in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens', in *Shifting Horizons: A Line and Its Movement in Art, History, and Philosophy*, ed. Lucas Burkart and Beate Fricke (Basel/Berlin: Schwabe Verlag, 2022), pp. 27–54.

[34] BGU 3.889

ing Paul's speech in Acts has, curiously, remained largely unexamined by commentators.[35]

There are sixteen known attestations[36] of ὁροθεσία but I will only discuss two significant inscriptions as they exemplify the ideological functions of these border monuments. First, I will discuss a Histrian stele from 100 CE that documents a long-running dispute over fiscal exemptions. The second inscription is a mid-second-century inscription from Kilkis, which shows Roman incorporation of a pre-existing hero-shrine into their border-setting practices.

(1) The Histrian border stele is particularly valuable for analysis because, unlike many inscriptions, the mostly intact text survives and is self-interpreting; that is, it explicitly articulates its function. The monument itself is roughly dated around the second to beginning of the third century,[37] but the preserved text is from 100 CE.[38] The stele, inscribed in Greek and Latin, records correspondence going back at least 50 years regarding territorial rights of the region. The inscription records a decision by Manius Laberius Maximus, the governor of Moesia Inferior to officially recognise Histria's territorial rights and fiscal freedoms for the production of salted fish production and timber, on which their economy was based.[39] However, despite these guarantees, Roman tax collectors often imposed unofficial duties. The stele is a record of the long-standing legal dispute between Histria and the Roman financial administration. The inscription is evidence that cities often had to fight for the privileges that they had been granted. The stele is erected to stand as a reminder of Maximus' final ruling on the matter, that the Histrians have a right to

35 One exception being Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: A. and C. Black, 1955), pp. 36–7.

36 To my knowledge, at the time of writing. I have use Trismegistos numbers where the exist for ease of reference: 815406, 191252, 892619, 815766, 815771, 121820, 9401, 935523, 781350, 764213, 760639, 842723, 316240, 39122, FD III 4:42 = PH240156, PHI 283293 = F.Xanthos, VII, 86

37 TM 191252

38 TM 191252; our text of the inscription is a composite text that includes a similar, but degraded, inscription; see: James H. Oliver, 'Texts A and B of the Horothesia Dossier at Istros', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002), pp. 143–56.

39 E.J. Owens, 'Histria, Romania,' in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah16071.

produce salted fish and timber without taxation.[40] The permission is literally set in stone for the benefit of future generations.

The inscription is obviously of interest to historians seeking a better understanding of Roman financial administration, and I would like to draw attention to the ideological and religious dimensions of the inscription. The epistle of Pomponius Pius refers to the emperor as 'godlike' (θειοτάτου)[41] and places the fishing rights in the realm of gift-giving (χάρις). As John Barclay explains, Roman patronage operated through structured hierarchies of benefaction that reinforced both social order and imperial ideology:

> …the ultimate prize was to attract the emperor as the supreme benefactor, with provinces, cities, institutions, and individuals going to extraordinary lengths to win, and then to publicize, his superior gifts… the emperor enhanced [governor's] patronal networks in extension of his interests.[42]

The epistle of Tullius Geminus is explicit on the terms of tax-free fishing rights. Like Pius, he appeals to the emperor and then hints at a reciprocal arrangement, stating, 'Therefore, recognising the attitude your city has demonstrated toward us, I shall always strive to become the creator of something good for you.'[43] Though the stele appeals to the Histrians' ancestral rights, the Roman response is not one of benevolence, but a gift given with the expectation of allegiance to Rome and its godlike emperor who can bestow such gifts.[44] The Histrian ὁροθεσία is negotiated with reference to the divine authority of the emperor. Though the inscription

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[40] For more on this inscription, see: Octavian Bounegru, 'La Chorothésie Histrienne: Essai d'une Taxonomie Contextuelle,' *Pontica* 42 (2009), pp. 375–383. and Annalisa Marzano, 'A Story of Land and Water: Control, Capital, and Investment in Large-Scale Fishing and Fish-Salting Operations,' in *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*, eds. Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020), pp. 275-305.

[41] The text on the stele is incomplete, but given the use of θειοτάτου in reference to the emperor in other texts, the reconstruction here is likely (e.g. Luc. *Octog.* 7, P. Oxy. 1038, 1892), A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, trans., *Select Papyri, Volume II: Public Documents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), §386.

[42] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 35,38.

[43] ἐπιγνοὺς οὖν ἣν καὶ πρὸς [ἡμᾶς ἐνεφάνισαν τῆς] πόλεως ὑμῶν διάθεσιν πειράσομαι ἀεί τινος ὑ[μεῖν ἀγαθοῦ]

[44] David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 96.

shows that the Romans affirmed the Histirans' ancestral ties to their land, the setting of a border allows Rome to impress its own authority as the ultimate boundary-setter. The validity of the Histrians' ancestral rights to the land is not self-evident, rather that claim is determined by Roman authority.[45]

(2) Another boundary inscription of significance is from Kilkis:

> ὅρους ἀπο/κατέστησε κα/τὰ τὴν γεγενημέ/νην {ΜΕΝΗΝ} ὑπὸ Φι/λίππου τοῦ βα/σιλέως ὁροθεσί/αν Π(όπλιος) Κλώδιος Κα/πίτων Αὐρηλια/νὸς ἀνθύπατος / Βραγυλίοις / Τιβηρίοις Κισσυνί/οις ὅρος [θεμέ]/λιος ἡρῷον[46]
>
> He established boundaries according to the boundary that was set by King Philip. Publius Claudius Capiton, the consul, established the boundary for the Bragylians, Tiberians [and] Kissynioi, the boundary foundation [is a] hero-shrine.

The Roman delimitation makes use of a pre-existing hero-shrine, 47 thus using a marker that already had cultural significance for the Bragylians, Tiberians, and Kissynioi. From the Greek Archaic period onward, tombs and shrines of mythic heroes became loci for cult activities that reinforced group identities and cohesion. By establishing the border as deferential to the heritage of King Philip, the Roman proconsul legitimised the hero-shrine. Again, the bordering process displays their authority in choosing and integrating the border. This is also an example of the Roman practice of assimilating traditional cults and god into their pantheon to reduce conflict. Having the authority to officially integrate the border reinforces the pre-eminence of imperial ideology over local deities.

To summarise my findings from the epigraphy: while ὁροθεσία is unattested in literary Greek, it occurs primarily in border inscriptions and, occasionally, in papyri, that record the process of Roman delimitation. The language used in Acts 17:26, I believe, is a deliberate reference to the discursive field of Roman bordering practices.

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[45] It is with some irony that Histria was established as a Greek colony and the city the Romans controlled was probably a mixed society of Greek and the indigenous population (Owens, 'Histria', 1); prior to this, Herodotus suggests it was colonised by Milesians (Hdt. 2.33).

[46] SEG 30, 573 = SEG 39, 577 = AE 1992, 1521; emphasis added.

[47] On ἡρῷον, see: W. H. S. Jones, 'Introduction', in *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2* by Pausanias, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 93 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), xxvi.

BORDERS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Bordering in the Roman Empire was not the same as it is in the modern era of the nation-state. Given the limits of ancient cartography and centralised bureaucracy, spatial control was enacted through a dispersed set of physical markers: boundary stelae, roads, milestones, military installations, and natural geographic features such as rivers and mountains. Land was often surveyed and managed by *agrimensores*, who were tasked with recording boundaries and resolving disputes over cultivation or access to water.[48] As the archaeologist Mike McCarthy observes:

> To Caesar, Tacitus, and other Roman writers, polities were thought of in terms of the *gens* rather than the territories they inhabited. Rome negotiated with people, not states or land, and the people would, it was hoped, enrich it.[49]

In this sense, bordering was often administered locally, but never ideologically neutral. Even where forms differed, such spatial practices remained embedded in imperial modes of control and legitimation.

For Rome, bordering was more than administrative, it was ideologically driven. This is the thesis of C. R. Whittaker, who concludes that 'Roman frontiers were not political barriers but social, cultural and moral definitions of community and alterity, the very opposite of the fixed frontiers of ethnicity and territoriality created by the rise of the nation-state.'[50] Although Whittaker is correct to highlight the differences between contemporary and Roman borders, the political philosopher Étienne Balibar has shown that despite the complexity of administrative structures related to contemporary borders, they have always played an ideological and propagandistic role from a historical perspective, despite the different forms they take. For Balibar, a border is not a fixed line but a process—historically contingent, administratively variable, and ideologically charged. Drawing on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's concept of 'innere Grenzen', he argues that borders are not only physical boundaries, but also 'invisibles, situées partout et nulle part'[51], governing everyday life and

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48 O. A. W. Dilke, 'The Roman Surveyors', *Greece and Rome* 9, no. 2 (1962), pp. 170–80.

49 Mike McCarthy, "Boundaries and the Archaeology of Frontier Zones," in *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*, eds. Bruno David and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 204.

50 C. R. Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p. 213.

51 Étienne Balibar, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une frontière?,' in *Cosmopolitique: Des frontières à l'espèce humaine – Écrits III, L'horizon des possibles* (Paris: La Découverte, 2022), p. 187

shaping how individuals navigate the spaces in which they live. This is perhaps not as distant from the ancient world as we might first assume.[52] The reference to ὁροθεσία in the Athenian speech alludes to Roman borders as Luke's authorial audience would have experienced them.

Luke wrote for a cosmopolitan and geographically scattered audience, likely composed of Jesus followers who were familiar with Greco-Roman urban landscapes and imperial symbolism. Moreover, Luke writes his 'apologetic historiography'[53] from a (or at least informed by) Diaspora perspective.[54] According to Gregory Sterling:

> Apologetic historiography is the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group's own traditions but hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.[55]

Acts depicts a community that cut across typical social and ethnic boundaries. The Christian message is received by Pharisees (Acts 9:1–19; 23:6), priests (Acts 6:7), Hellenist widows (Acts 6:1–6), Roman soldiers (Acts 10:1–48), those associated with Herodian power (Acts 13:1), Timothy, who is of mixed ethnicity (Acts 16:1–3), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). The movement itself becomes a picture of cultural hybridity. The hybridity of the ἐκκλησία is not to be confused with vague humanistic idealism. Acts describes a disparate people who are nevertheless united by their allegiance to a particular proclamation; that is, the good news (Acts 8:12, 17:18, 20:24) that Jesus Christ is Israel's Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36), who has inaugurated a kingdom (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31), which calls all people to repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20) as they await Jesus' universal judgement and return (Acts 1:11; 3:20-21, 17:31).

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52 For example, UK asylum seekers who are 'liable to deportation' after exhausting their appeal rights live on the border of the British state, even if they live geographically within a boundary in a city like Manchester.

53 A term coined by Gregory Sterling to describe the genre of Acts, Gregory E. Sterling, *Shaping the Past to Define the Present: Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), pp. 13–42.

54 This is convincingly argued by Sterling, *Shaping*, pp. 108-137; though Sterling is hesitant to definitively describe Luke as a Diaspora Jew, Stephen's speech (Acts 7) shows significant engagement with Jewish Samaritan and Egyptian interpretations to justify life in the Diaspora (Ibid., pp. 129-137).

55 Ibid., p. 5.

When Paul refers to ὁροθεσία, the vocabulary evokes the administrative apparatus of empire, yet Paul uses it in a theological register, claiming that it is God who has determined 'their appointed epochs and the delimitations (ὁροθεσίας) of their habitation', thereby claiming that it is not Rome, but God who sets and controls the limits of peoples and empires. Rome may stretch its borders as wide as its imperial apparatus allows, but Paul insists that such borders are neither ultimate nor determinative; they are subordinated to God's purposes and therefore relativised in light of the gospel's universality. However, Paul immediately qualifies these delimitations with a teleological purpose: 'so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him — though, indeed, he is not far from each one of us. (17:27). It is precisely these delimitations that are given a revelatory function: they exist not as ends in themselves, but in order to prompt the search for God. The precise force of this purpose, however, turns on how we understand the grammar of Acts 17:26–27, especially the relationship between the infinitive verbs κατοικεῖν and ζητεῖν.

Many scholars favour reading these as 'parallel purpose infinitives'.[56] Understood this way, humanity has two purposes: to dwell on the earth and to seek for God; as stated by Flavien Pardigon, 'they denote the twofold divine design for his human creatures.'[57] Despite the support he finds for this position from other commentators, Pardigon admits that it is 'a difficult construction'.[58] An alternative interpretation is to read ἐποίησέν as a supporting verb for κατοικεῖν, and ζητεῖν as a purposive infinitive. In that case, the relationship could be glossed as: 'God made them to dwell *so that* they would seek.'[59] Martin Pohlenz makes a strong case in favour of this reading.[60] He argues that the lack of any coordinating parti-

[56] As described by Witherington, Acts, 526; other scholars who suggest this reading, see: Jacques Dupont, "Le discours à l'Aréopage (Ac 17,22-31) lieu de rencontre entre christianisme et hellénisme," *Biblica* 60, no. 4 (1979), pp. 535-96, Flavien Pardigon, *Paul Against the Idols: A Contextual Reading of the Areopagus Speech* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), p. 163, Schnabel, *Acts*, p. 735, Parsons, *Acts*, p. 247, Conzelmann, *Acts*, p. 144, & Scott Kellum, *Acts*, The Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), pp. 204–205.

[57] Pardigon, *Paul*, p. 164.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Modern English translations almost unanimously translate the ζητεῖν as purposive in Acts 17:27, e.g. *NRSVue*, *NIV*, *NASB*, *CSB*.

[60] Martin Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 42, no. 1 (1949), pp. 84-85. Johnson, *Acts*, p. 315; a similar understanding is proposed by Clare K. Roth-

cle between κατοικεῖν between ζητεῖν means that, syntactically, they are not obviously parallel (a coordinating particle is used in a similar construction in Mark 7:37: καὶ τοὺς κωφοὺς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ τοὺς ἀλάλους λαλεῖν) and that the purposive infinitive is more natural. *BDAG* also cites Acts 17:26 as an example of when ποιέω 'with a focus on causality' when 'The result of the action is indicated by the acc. and inf… *to bring it about that*.'[61] The construction is common in Homer (e.g. *Xen. Hell.* 7.5.24)[62] and in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha.[63] Ultimately, the matter cannot be settled by grammar alone and the context of the argument should be taken into account. Considering both grammatical likelihood and contextual elements, the purposive infinitive suggesting causality (i.e., the experience of borders leads to seeking) appears to be the strongest option. In either case, the borders are described as being set by God. Whether they function to prompt human seeking or whether seeking is portrayed as innate, the role of the borders is relativised. They are not absolute boundaries but part of a divine strategy oriented toward bringing relationship between peoples and, ultimately, those peoples in relationship with God.

According to Paul's reasoning in Acts 17, the bordering of humanity is not the final word, nor a self-evident good. What was the point of this for Luke's authorial audience? They were a disparate, geographically scattered, and likely cosmopolitan community. As Acts 6:1-15 shows, they were not a community without conflict and needed to negotiate its own boundaries and identity. Luke describes the ἐκκλησία (church) not as existing in a single location but as realised through their empowerment by the Spirit, fidelity to Christ, ethical distinctiveness, and public witness; they are a scattered but unified body, calling others into their alternative Christ-shaped community, the inaugurated-but-not-fully-realised kingdom of God.

ACTS 17:26, MIGRATION, AND A SCOTTISH EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

What is the relevance of this vision for evangelicals in Scotland? Given their commitment to Scripture as inspired and authoritative, the starting point is the conviction that all people are made in the *Imago Dei*, regard-

schild, *Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 65-66, Dunn, *Acts*, p. 235.

61 *BDAG*, s.v. ποιέω, 2.h, 840.

62 See further examples in Diana Gibson, "Periphrastic causatives with ποιέω in Ancient Greek prose," *Oxford University Working Papers in Linguistics, Philology & Phonetics* 7 (2002), pp. 27–40.

63 See the examples listed in *BDAG*, s.v. ποιέω, 2.h, 840

less of nationality, ethnicity, or legal status. These are general proposals rather than prescriptive rules, intended to guide reflection and discussion. As Daniel Carroll has stated:

> The creation of all persons in the image of God must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today. Immigration should not be argued in the abstract, because it is fundamentally about immigrants. Immigrants are humans, and as such they are made in God's image.[64]

On the other hand, and perhaps uncomfortably for some evangelical activists (I will include myself in this category), borders, according to Acts 17:26-27, are a feature of human history in which God is involved; they have a role in a fallen world in offering safety, maintaining order, and enabling hospitality by putting limits in place. How current national borders can function in an ethically responsible way, while also excluding where necessary, is an important and difficult question. My concern here is to provide guiding principles and to argue (even if implicitly) segregationist readings of the text. Still, I do not want to ignore the proverbial elephant in the room with the classic evasion tactic often used by academics for difficult questions: 'this falls outside the scope of this paper'.

Regarding borders and their maintenance, I start from a Kuyperian framework of 'Christian Pluralism' regarding the relationship between church and state, recently applied to current concerns about migration by Matthew Kaemingk.[65] This 'pluralism', to be clear, is not to be misunderstood as salvific universalism. It is the theological conviction that Christian faith should not yield to any single public ideology; instead, it provides the foundation for a pluralist society in which each sphere—church, state, family, science—operates under Christ's lordship. Kaemingk deftly charts a third way between exclusionary fearful nationalism and idealistic multiculturalism. For Kaemingk, if a nation is to be hospitable to migrants (be they asylum seekers, refugees, or economic) some controls are necessary. As emphasised by the late Christine Pohl in her magnum opus on the theology of hospitality, the existence of hospitality implies limits.[66] Kaemingk articulates the tension well:

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64 M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Ada, OK: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 67.

65 Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).

66 Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024), pp. 126–49.

> All states require borders if they hope to develop any sense of safety and solidarity among their citizens. Without borders, without a distinction between insiders and outsiders, hospitality quickly becomes impossible… That said, a state's hospitality to outsiders must not destroy its communal integrity and its ability to show hospitality in the future. Finite states, like finite families, must recognize their boundaries and limits. It is certainly true that sometimes the walls of the family and the state are too high; it is true that sometimes doors are closed when they need to be open. That said, those walls and doors remain necessary—they make the ensuing hospitality possible.[67]

Where this becomes more difficult, and not addressed by Kaemingk in his book, is the legacy of colonialism and the fact that migration routes often follow the troughs forged by colonial activity, past and present.[68] This complicates the picture, because the economic flourishing of one nation has often come at the expense of another. Do former colonial powers have a moral obligation that transcends the standard right of a sovereign state to control its borders? Acknowledging this historical complexity does not, however, invalidate Kaemingk's fundamental observation. His point that borders provide necessary limits for any practical and sustainable form of hospitality remains valid. As he writes, 'The ultimate goal of their service must be the restoration of public hospitality through the provision of a safe and just public square.'[69]

When it comes to state borders, the International Organisation for Migration's 'Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration', negotiated in 2017–2018 and formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2018, is a sensible set of rules for nation-states to follow. The difficulty in the current political climate is the divisiveness of migration narratives of perpetual crisis which are, by and large, incorrect. Migration scholar Hein de Haas has shown that despite occasional peaks and troughs felt most acutely at the local level, migration remains fairly constant at 3% of the world's population from a historical perspec-

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67 Kaemingk, *Christian*, p. 183.

68 Achankeng Fonkem, 'The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: Human Tragedies as an Extension of Colonialism', *The Round Table* 109, no. 1 (2020), pp. 52–70; Roberto Stefan Foa, 'Persistence or Reversal of Fortune? Early State Inheritance and the Legacies of Colonial Rule', *Politics & Society* 45, no. 2 (2017), pp. 301–324; Hans van Amersfoort and Mies van Niekerk, 'Immigration as a Colonial Inheritance: Post-Colonial Immigrants in the Netherlands, 1945–2002', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006), pp. 323–346; see a theological discussion of this issue in Elaine Padilla, 'The End of Christianity', in *Christianities in Migration*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 299–319.

69 p. 187

tive, with refugees at even less at 0.3%. De Haas has also argued that governments often prefer 'bold acts of political showmanship that conceal the true nature of immigration policies'.[70] He argues that migration policies often run on two different levels: for voters scared of migration and policies that are maintained with economic realities in mind.[71]

Often, public perception of migration is stronger than the reality. Here, the church can bear witness and advocate for ethically functioning borders in line with international law by bringing truth to the debate, offering sobering facts rather than sensationalism, and bringing light rather than heat to an issue that has become a tinderbox. Churches can do this at a public level,[72] but also individual members in their own community spaces. Again, different views can be held on the constant tension between hospitality and limits when it comes to state policy, but there is a need to seek the higher ground and conduct the debate with the knowledge that all migrants are human beings, rather than an issue to be managed. A more effective and just management of migration depends less on specific 'tough' or 'lenient' policies and more on a fundamental commitment to good governance, evidence-based decision-making, and long-term strategic planning;[73] these are all things that are, admittedly, less headline-grabbing than 'acts of political showmanship.'[74] The church is distinct from the state and can express Christian faith through practising responsible hospitality (informed by robust safeguarding and intercultural training, provided by many parachurch organisations) in ways that the state cannot, or in protest of the state's policies.[75]

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70 Hein de Haas, *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics* (London: Viking, 2023), p. 11; the expensive and largely ineffective Rwanda Plan under the UK's previous Conservative government could cited as an example.

71 Mathias Czaika and Hein de Haas, 'The effectiveness of immigration policies: A conceptual review of empirical evidence,' DEMIG Project Paper no. 3, IMI Working Paper 33, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, April 2011.

72 Here, the Baptist Union of Great Britian has offered helpful, factual comment on migration: *The Baptist Union: Statements*. (n.d.). Org.uk. Retrieved 22 September 2025, from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/264782/Statements.aspx

73 To summarise the findings of Sachin Savur and Joe Owen, 'How the government can design better asylum policy', (Institute for Government, December 2024), https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/.

74 De Haas, *How*, p. 11.

75 E.g. Suna Boztas, 'Let us pray and pray: church shelters migrant family with 192-day service,' *The Observer*, June 1, 2025, https://observer.co.uk/

For those drawn to more protectionist policies, they must remember that the Apostle Paul's vision in the Areopagus speech focuses on the missiological aspect of borders: they are functional and temporary, always subordinate to God's kingdom, which transcends human divisions, and exist so that people might be drawn to God. This could be described as a border dialectic: at borders we both recognise difference and are also confronted with our shared humanity.[76] The Christian duty is ultimately not to the earthly kingdom, but to the differently bordered Kingdom of God. Of course, this hospitality implies some risk, which cannot be entirely mitigated,[77] and we must be cognizant of that reality lest we make security an idol.

Scottish evangelicals are placed in a distinctive context of political borders. Debates over the constitutional question highlighted the tension between soft or invisible borders and the desire for stricter borders over financial or immigration matters.[78] The claim in the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence claimed that 'There is no empirical evidence to suggest that the reception conditions provided for asylum seekers constitute a "pull factor" or an incentive to seek protection in a particular country'[79] requires reassessment in light of the current housing crisis and the appeal of Scotland's mitigating benefits.[80] The underly-

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news/international/article/open-hof-church-shelters-migrant-family-with-192-day-service.

76 Harald Bauder, 'Toward a critical geography of the border: Engaging the dialectic of practice and meaning,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 5 (2011), pp. 1126–39.

77 Heb. 10:34; Pohl, *Making*, p. 93.

78 Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013), pp. 223–4, 476, 490, 493, 500–1, https://www.scotreferendum.com.

79 Ibid., p. 494.

80 E.g. Elaine Wilson-Smith, Kate Skellington Orr, and Caroline Akina, Analysis of Responses to the Scottish Government Consultation on Mitigation of the Two-Child Limit: Final Report, June 2025, https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-analysis/2025/06/mitigation-two-child-limit-consultation-analysis/documents/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit/govscot%3Adocument/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit.pdf; cf. Peter Smith, 'Can Glasgow afford to continue welcoming refugees?', ITV News, September 3, 2025, https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-03/can-glasgow-afford-to-continue-welcoming-refugees; Stewart Paterson, 'Are refugees given priority for social housing in Glasgow?', *Glasgow Times*, June 20, 2024, https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/25251134.refugees-given-priority-social-housing-glas-

ing question remains: hospitality requires both openness and limits. Any boundaries, however, must be exercised in light of the Imago Dei, remembering that God's kingdom is not confined by state lines but transcends them, and that national borders are contingent and serve a missiological purpose. No matter their position on the constitutional question, evangelicals must engage with this knowledge with the recognition that their ultimate allegiance is not to a political kingdom, but to God's kingdom; their perspective and fidelity to God's mission must remain primary. Even if there are political differences about border control, evangelicals are to be unique in responding with a missiological outlook that places obedience to God's mission over and above fears about security.[81]

In the current political climate, Scottish evangelicals must also be committed to truth, particularly in public debates about borders, where misinformation has frequently shaped public sentiment and fuelled protests at asylum hotels.[82] Christians have a responsibility to highlight and combat such distortions, modelling integrity in public life. Like heavenly

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gow/; 'Glasgow 'faces £66m bill' for refugee housing crisis,' *Scottish Housing News*, August 18, 2025, https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/articles/glasgow-faces-ps66m-bill-for-refugee-housing-crisis.

81 Matt. 16.24–25; Luke 9.57–62; Acts 5.29; Heb. 11.8–10; 1 John 4.18; Isa. 41.10; Rev. 2.10.

82 Andrew D. Sutherland and Tiffany A. Dykstra-DeVette, 'Constructing Identification and Division through Fake News Reports of Refugees', *Language, Discourse & Society* 6, no. 1 (2018), pp. 19–31; Charlotte Taylor, 'Disinformation and Immigration Discourses,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse and Disinformation*, ed. Stefania M. Maci (London: Routledge, 2024), pp. 171–186; for recent examples from across Scotland, see: Adam Forrest, 'Inside Falkirk, the frontline of Scotland's anti-asylum flag wars,' *inews*, September 22, 2025, https://inews.co.uk/news/inside-falkirk-frontline-scotlands-anti-asylum-flag-wars-3927080; Kirsty Paterson, 'Falkirk asylum hotel protest 'concerning' as council chief tackles misinformation,' *Daily Record*, August 21, 2025, https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/falkirk-asylum-hotel-protest-concerning-35769870; Kathleen Nutt, 'Asylum hotel protest sparked by 'completely false' claims,' *The Herald*, August 24, 2024, https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/westminster/25413694.asylum-hotel-protest-sparked-completely-false-claims/; Lucy Garcia, ''Completely false': Perth council leader rejects further asylum hotel claims,' *The National*, August 24, 2024, https://www.thenational.scot/news/25413687.completely-false-perth-leader-rejects-asylum-hotel-claims/; Keiran Fleming, 'Council requests urgent meeting with UK Government over asylum seeker move,' *STV News*, August 29, 2025, https://news.stv.tv/north/aberdeen-city-council-calls-for-urgent-meeting-with-uk-government-after-asylum-seekers-moved-from-hotels. (all accessed 14 September 2025).

perspective of the astronauts in Samantha Harvey's novel in this article's opening quote, the blessing and difficulty of maintaining a biblical perspective is that Christians are motivated by a vision that does not see borders in the same way as the surrounding culture. As a community that recognises, like Paul, the missiological aspect of borders, the church must provide space for positive contact between people and communities.[83] True Christian hospitality reflects a community that is not bounded by states or policies, but lives into a kingdom defined by allegiance to Jesus Christ, shaped by his teaching and example. In this vision, borders serve a purpose, but they do not constrain the reach of God's justice, mercy, and love, and invitation to share life in that differently bordered Kingdom.

[83] For practical suggestions to this end, see my paper '"How Much Evil He Has Done to Your Saints?": Ananias, Saul, and a Christian Approach to the Contact Hypothesis in the Scottish Refugee Context.' *Theology in Scotland* 32, no. 2 (2025) [forthcoming].