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**New Scholars**

**ROM 13:1-7, SUBMISSION TO THE  
POLITICAL AUTHORITIES  
(A Literary-Rhetorical Study)**

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The pericope, 'submission to the political authorities,' found within the exhortative section of Romans (12:1–15:13) has contributed number of studies to support and deny its authenticity within the letter. Those, who argue against the pericope, present various literary and thematical problems within the text. They say that it is impossible for Paul to ask for submission to the authorities, because the authorities are not always acting for good and justice, but often are considered as oppressive. It is also argued that the pericope within two *agape* pericopes (12:9-21 and 13:8-10) interrupts the flow of the love theme. Similarly, some of its terminologies rarely occur in the Pauline writings. Thus, they accuse it as a "content buy-in" from Graeco-Roman political ideology, "an interpolation," "material

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incorporated into in a later stage," "a fully articulated doctrine of the church" and "a situational counsel."

Those, who argue for the pericope, hold the opinion that Paul has purposefully included it in the original letter together with other exhortations on the relationship of Christians with the outsiders. They indicate the incontrovertible presence of it in the early manuscripts of Romans and show the thematical and terminological relation of the pericope with the rest of the exhortative section.

### **The Importance, Purpose and Methodology**

On account of the above mentioned scholarly battle, the pericope is called as a 'storm centre' or a 'tricky text' within the exhortative section of the Romans. Even if many have contributed both for and against the pericope, a detailed exegetical study, purely based on Pauline text is not fully realized. Therefore, we try to look at the meaning and nature of text purely based on the text available to us. In this regard, the historical and different regional hermeneutics on this text are not our major concern. But, employing the literary-rhetorical method, the dissertation investigates the text in an integral approach with its immediate and distant context.

### **The Content of the Investigation**

The first two chapters, give various reasons to show that 13:1-7 is an integral part of the letter to the Romans. The main thesis, the *propositio principalis* of the letter to the Romans (1:16-17), is supported with the justifications (of faith) in the dogmatic section. The exhortative section that begins in 12:1 initiates the presentation of the practical aspects of Christian life, or, in other words, the implementation of faith in one's day to day life. These two sections are closely linked by the terminologies of the *propositio* (12:1-2). Besides, various linguistic constructions and themes have been indicated to show the realisation of the dogmatic teachings in the paraenetic section.

The exhortations within 12:9–13:10 deal with *agape*. Even if the explicit expressions of 'love one another' (12:10; 13:8-10) and 'peace with all' (12:18) cannot be literally found in 13:1-7, the relation to *agape* should not be limited only to the terms like 'love' and 'peace,' because 'recognition of the divine will,' 'doing good,' 'rejection of evil' and 'fulfilling of obligations' cannot be fully understood and properly practised without *agape*, especially when they are practised

in relation to the political authorities or outsiders. Thus, it was shown that in 13:1-7 Paul presents the same mode of exhortation as in 12-13, and thus, it is to be understood that 'submission' is another form of expressing love in Christians' relationship with the political authorities.

Following from this wider context, the second chapter has exposed the delimitation, the relevance and composition of the pericope within chapters 12 and 13. In this attempt, we assessed most of the available rhetorical compositions with a detailed study on the recent ones. In addition, considering the exhortation and its justifications, we proposed another rhetorical composition of the pericope.

In the detailed exegesis of 13:1-7, we notice a *valid progression of the arguments* for the exhortation to submit to the political authorities. In this regard, the nature of Pauline universal invitation, the precise meaning of the term 'authorities' and the type of 'submission' are studied in detail in the third chapter (13:1a) with the help of Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Biblical writings.

The fourth chapter offers a study of *the theological and practical arguments for the exhortation*. It answers the question, *why should one submit to the authorities?* *Firstly*, authorities are instituted by God and it is the will of God to submit. *Secondly*, authorities are for the good of each one. One may ask, why does Paul associate the governing authorities as the ones who are *instituted by God*? The research has proved that Paul argues using the *topos* of his time, because the divine legitimacy of the political authorities was well known to his audience. Applying such an argument, Paul affirms the fact that there does not arise further difficulties to submit to the authorities, because they all believe the divine origin of the authorities. However, one may be dismayed at the misuse of power by the authorities. Paul clarifies this matter in the second argument (13:3-4), arguing that the *authorities are servants of God to reward the good and punish the evil*, and they exercise their obligation with justice. Calling them servants of God, he says that they are instruments to exercise wrath of God on the wrongdoer. However, with the help of a diatribe, Paul affirms the fact that the authorities exercise their power for the good of each one of his addressees.

The final chapter presents the measures for submission to the authorities. *Firstly*, Paul repeats the exhortation with an additional term, 'conscience' (13:5). *Secondly*, he indicates their usual practice of

paying taxes (13:6) and *thirdly* (13:7), he asks his audience to fulfil the obligations to all: both external (taxes and tributes) and internal (respect and honour).

*Why does Paul repeat his appeal to submit (13:5)?* It seems to be a conclusion of his arguments. Even if he has appealed for submission (13:1a), it was a general appeal. But when he repeats it after the arguments, he says, 'it is necessary to submit not only because of wrath but also because of one's conscience.' Here, employing the term 'conscience' in the repetition, Paul wants his readers to submit on account of their free and voluntary decision. The logical reason for such repetition is that he has already given the justifications for the exhortation. Thus, we can conclude that submission to the authorities is a free response to the judgement of one's own conscience, because the conscience recognises the good: the service of the authorities and one's obligation to be at peace and co-operate with the State.

*Can one submit to the authorities, if they fail to act for the common good?* In 13:6, employing the phrase, 'for this reason' and the indicative expression, 'you pay taxes,' Paul connects the payment of taxes to the general principle of submission to the authorities. In this indicative expression, he expresses that his readers continue to pay the taxes even if the authorities do not behave for the common good. In this way, they by paying the taxes exemplify themselves and recognise the authorities as 'ministers of God.'

Later, progressing to the final exhortation (13:7), Paul appeals to pay the dues to all and he introduces two *internal aspects of submission*: 'respect' and 'honour.' Here, Paul intends that whatever be the situation, one should respect and honour the authorities recognising and acknowledging their distinguished position and appointment. In addition to the authorities, the reference to 'all' reminds Christian obligation towards other fellow beings. In this way, he exhorts to retain a peaceful relationship with 'all' in which political authorities are also properly placed, because tax and tribute are rendered exclusively to the State and its officials while respect and honour can be extended to the authorities and also to all other human beings and to God. Thus, 13:1-7 concludes with each individual's internal disposition for submission that is acceptable and valid for everyone to everyone in all places and times.

### The Final Results: How Should We Approach the Pericope?

Firstly, we need to affirm the fact that 'Submission to the Authorities is an expression of love.' The basic demand of the entire exhortative section of Romans for a transformation by the renewal of minds (12:1-2) is subsequently explained by the exhortations (12-13) incorporating persecutors, enemies and neighbours into one's household so that one realises the genuine love (12:9) and establishes the supremacy of love over the law (13:8-10). In the literary context of the text, 12:9-13:10 forms a unified sequence in which the term *agape* is the initial and final point. The terminological and thematic relations among the pericopes justify the fact the exhortations within this section express the Christian relationship to fellow Christians (*ad intra*) and to others (*ad extra*). More precisely, proceeding from the *agape* theme, 13:1-7 carries forward the thematic continuity of 12:17-21 in which main themes are those of 'good' and 'peace.' Thus, we can see that the exhortation to submit to the political authorities proceeds from his previous exhortation, 'peace with all' (12:18) and 'overcome evil with good' (12:21). In this way, the Pauline gospel that deals with the practical ways of Christian relationship overtakes the boundaries of Jews, Gentiles, secular or religious world in order to make the *agape*, the guiding principle of all kinds of *ad extra* relationships. With political authorities coming under the category of an *ad extra* relationship, it follows, then, that the exhortation to submit to the political authorities functions as an exemplary application of 'live-in-peace,' and it is a symbolic expression for Christians' life in peace with outsiders of any kind.

The Pauline use of the terms formed from the root *opheil* (cfr. 13:7 and 13:8) links the exhortation to the political authorities (13:1-7) to the theme of *agape* (13:8-10). In 13:7, Paul specifies the dues that are to be paid to the worthy ones, in 13:8, instead, he restricts himself to a single due, i.e., love. The phrase, 'owe no one anything, except to love one another' (Rom 13:8) proposes a universalistic language of love. In this way, Paul conveys the message that all the different dues, especially respect and honour, are means of the voluntary commitment to love. Such a progression of Pauline words moves towards the amalgamation of all dues to a single due so that Paul makes it clear that what one owes to all in the final analysis is love. Thus, the 'debt of love' (13:8-14) is an alternative wording for respect and honour (13:1-7), which one owes to the political authorities.

To understand the pericope, one *should realise the limits of this pericope*. *Firstly*, the Pauline appeal to submission to political authorities is not exclusively Christian, nor is it addressed toward the Christian alone, therefore, we can associate it neither with the Jesuanic material, nor with any specific Christian attitude to Christians. But it is a universal and open exhortation to 'everyone.' *Secondly*, the exhortation to submit to the governmental authorities is not to be identified with an agreement with all the decisions of the political authorities: one can respect an office and disagree with some or even all of its decisions. It neither argues for a political correctness nor does it blindly defend the constant 'good performance' of the authorities. *Thirdly*, the Pauline exhortation neither ideates a general theory of relation between the State and a Christian, nor does it formulate a universal doctrine of how the Christians should deal with the State.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Paul, through the exhortation of submission to the political authorities, aims at encouraging the readers to pay their debts toward the State. To the minimum of paying all taxes, they should add the recognition of the position of the authorities, i.e., they should also pay respect and honour, which are attitudes motivated by love. One should rather read the exhortation together with the previous and following pericopes of Rom 12–13 that offer enough clues to enable one to resolve all the difficulties for the act of submission. In fact, one can easily note that the exhortation to submission is subsumed within other exhortations like, "do not repay anyone evil for evil" (Rom 12:17), "overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21), "owe no one anything, except to love another" (13:8) and "love does no wrong to a neighbour" (Rom 13:10). The act of submission, in such a context, is nothing more, but it is also nothing less than, an expression of Christian love towards others.

To one who thinks that this Pauline instruction does not mean a lot for those who 'hunger and thirst' for justice in political and social relations, let it suffice, as a rejoinder, the fact that Martin Luther King used exactly the same idea as the motto of his political programme, and the history of his movement effectively proved its goodness: "Man must evolve for all human conflict a method, which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."