

NT200-924

**The implications of Romans 13:1-7 for Christians participating
in the exercise of secular authority.**

23 October 2020

13,164 words

Course: Master of Divinity

ACT Number: 201423500

ABSTRACT

Traditional approaches to Romans 13:1-7 usually treat the audience and the ‘governing authorities’ as wholly separate categories, and therefore tend to understand ὑποτάσσω (*submit*) as generally indicating submissive obedience. Alternatively, they attempt to read into the passage an interpretation of submission that allows for criticism and resistance of authority, noting that the history of human government is replete with oppression and injustice. However, such approaches fail to consider the situation of Christians who, while not in positions of ultimate ruling authority, nonetheless participate in that authority as agents, carrying out its directives and even exercising a degree of delegated authority themselves. This study interrogates how Romans 13:1-7 is to be understood and applied by Christian agents of authority, who in a categorical sense find themselves both subject and subjector, and whether the passage holds a distinct message for them.

The study first analyses the meaning of Romans 13:1-7 in its textual context. A specific focus is an analysis of the key verb ὑποτάσσω and its range of meaning, establishing it as a posture of voluntary yielding to another rather than being wholly synonymous with obedience. The purpose of government set out by the passage is dealt with and a number of possible and legitimate meanings of the passage’s teachings for the Christian agent are identified.

The study then moves to the historical background of the text to establish whether Christian agents of authority might be legitimately included in the text’s historical audience, and how this affects interpretation. The sociological evidence for how Roman society and the early Christian church related to the political structures of the time is given special attention. It is found that Paul was likely acquainted with Christian agents of

authority when writing Romans, and intended Romans 13:1-7 to apply not only to Christians beyond the original audience, but to those Christians agents as well.

Three specific implications of these findings for Christian agents are then developed.

Firstly, Romans 13:1-7 establishes public service and participation in authority as a divinely-called vocation, part of cooperating with God's purpose for government in maintaining order in creation. Secondly, a Christian's participation in that vocation is expressed through submission. This submission is characterised by a humble service that prioritises love of the other (particularly the community that is subject to the authority) over the needs and interests of the Christian agent. Yet thirdly, given that human authorities often fall short of their divine mandate, submission also allows for the gentle subversion of power structures – challenging and reforming systems so that they might fulfil their intended purpose of restraining evil and promoting good in the world.

1. INTRODUCTION

Picking up a modern commentary on Romans, one is likely to find discussion on the place of Romans 13:1-7 among the most contested, misunderstood, and even abused passages of Scripture in history. The conservative approach to exegeting Paul's discourse on submission to the governing authorities – one that affirms the divinely-appointed status of the state and secular government, and the requirement for all people to faithfully obey such authorities – is usually considered the most problematic. This interpretation has historically been put to use to justify support for oppressive regimes and discourage the Christian from acts of reform or resistance.¹ Little wonder that in the 20th Century, in the wake of the Second World War, the horrors of the Holocaust, and movements against racial injustice from the United States to South Africa, biblical scholars have attempted new approaches that variously reject or heavily qualify the passage.

Such alternatives (if they do not at the outset reject the passage as a foreign body to the text of Romans) generally attempt to exegete the possibility of critique and even active resistance against secular authority. These include perspectives that take into account the gospel critiques of secular culture and systems evident across the Pauline corpus, including anti-imperial rhetoric, as well as liberationist schools that seek to apply Pauline thought to the fight against historic oppression and colonialism, especially in majority-world contexts.²

In any case, most if not all of these hermeneutics begin with the assumption that the governing authorities of Romans 13:1-7 and the text's assumed audience are wholly

¹ Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (London: SCM Press, 2019), 48.

² Michael J Gorman, "Pauline Theology: Perspectives, Perennial Topics, and Prospects," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 206-7.

separate categories. This is problematic for a number of reasons. To begin with, all political systems are made up of human beings – people, in other words. These of course include figures of high authority, like emperors, kings, princes, presidents, legislators, judges, and executives. Yet any functioning political system that aspires to implement effective government at scale also consists of a body of participants to serve and carry out the will of those authorities. Whether it is a bureaucracy, civil service, armed force, or medieval court, a great deal of people are required to maintain a functioning authority system. These persons might be termed ‘agents of authority’; individuals who though not the ultimate wielders of secular power, nonetheless participate with authority as direct employees or agents, and may to an extent exercise delegated discretionary authority themselves.

In the 21st Century, and particularly in Western-style democracies with a Christendom heritage, it is utterly unremarkable that Christians might be employed as these agents of authority in political systems across the world. Yet it is not outside the realm of possibility that even in the earliest days of the Christian movement, there might also have been agents of authority among the first Christian communities.

The traditional approaches to Romans 13:1-7 therefore leave the Christian agent in a rather perplexing position. How is one to obey (or alternatively resist) a system of authority when you yourself are an active participant in that system, perhaps with the power to exercise your own will within it? In other words, what does submission to the governing authorities mean when one is both, in a categorical sense, both the subject and the subjector?

1.1 Including Christian agents of authority

This study will therefore look to interrogate whether Romans 13:1-7 has any distinctive relevance for Christian agents of authority, insofar as this may differ from how those who are merely subjects or citizens might receive and apply the passage. It is fair to query whether this aim is a legitimate treatment of the passage within its historical context, or if it risks inappropriately permitting reader-response type presuppositions to cloud the objective message of the text.

In the first instance, a pursuit of the text's objective meaning through historical-critical means can only carry one so far. Historical analysis is only as good as the available data, and the world of the first century church is only partially accessible to the modern reader. Dunn therefore warns against allowing a lack of data to produce narrow, simplistic, or underdeveloped interpretations.³

Furthermore, a valid criticism of the historical-critical method levelled by more progressive critical theories is that the reader and reading communities of any text are critical to creating meaning and interpretation in their reception of the intended message.⁴

That is not say that historical context has no bearing on interpretation. Authorial intent, informed by a text's occasion and historical setting, are critical, notwithstanding that an author may incorporate multiple messages for a diverse audience. Yet against the charge that the question of Christian agents is too modernist for Paul to have considered, a commitment to the authority of Scripture over all Christian life allows the interpreter to

³ "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," *Ex auditu* 2 (1986): 55-63.

⁴ A universal, objective reading of Scripture is therefore so difficult as to be impossible. Indeed, all readings of Scripture – perhaps in particular Romans 13:1-7 – are informed by the exegete's presuppositions and have inherently political implications. David G Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 3; Shelly Matthews, *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), xi.

approach this text (at least at the outset) with the hope of extracting pertinent insights and questions even if it is ultimately shown the text does not address the issue directly.⁵

The study will therefore first consider the meaning of Romans 13:1-7 in its textual context, being its internal structure and position within any larger text, along with its grammar, semantics, and syntax. A specific focus will be an analysis of the key verb ὑποτάσσω (*submit*) and its range of meaning. Special epistolary hermeneutics will be utilised, including careful attention to the argument's logical development, the context behind those arguments (for both in-context interpretation and any extension of application), and the existence of any subgenres. An appropriate degree of integration with other Pauline and New Testament texts will also be used, to the degree that this helps inform the meaning of the passage.⁶

The study will then move to the historical background of the text – how its dating, authorship, geographical and cultural setting, and intended audience influence meaning and interpretation. Of particular concern will be the sociological evidence for how Roman society and the early Christian church related to the political structures of the time. This approach can query how Christians, living in Rome and working as agents of or collaborators with secular authorities, may have understood Paul's teaching to submit, and whether or not Christian agents of authority might be legitimately included in the text's historical audience.

Finally, an exploration of distinctive interpretive implications for Christian agents (if any) will be conducted. This will include how Paul's teaching influences the conduct of

⁵ Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 4.

⁶ Schreiner argues the use of other Pauline texts to aid the interpretation of Romans is acceptable and even necessary, so long as they are not imposed on the text to distort meaning. *Romans*, Second ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 3.

Christian agents within their relevant authority structures and as members of the body of Christ.

1.2 Assumptions and definitions

On the text of Romans itself, Pauline authorship (via amanuensis) is assumed in line with the general consensus of contemporary biblical scholarship.⁷ Precise dating of the letter is a more contentious issue, but on the basis of the text's internal evidence cross-referenced with recorded events in Acts, most estimates place it somewhere within the range of AD 54-59.⁸ The historical era in view is therefore the mid-first century AD.

Some further boundary markers for 'Christian agents of authority' are also in order. For the purposes of this study, this is a Christian who participates in the exercise of secular authority through active and voluntary participation or employment. This person might be an executor of authority, an influencer of government policy, or possess their own discretionary authority in a delegated form. Conceivably this could include members of armed or protective services, bureaucrats or civil servants, as well as political staffers. Ultimately these individuals are subject to higher ruling authority, so elected legislators and executives, monarchs, or other seats of authority are excluded (noting that possible applications of the passage could potentially overlap). Also excluded are ordinary citizens who either only passively engage political structures, or who may be active political players but external to the authority system (such as political party branch members, lobbyists, or members of special interest groups).

⁷ Gorman, "Pauline Theology: Perspectives, Perennial Topics, and Prospects," 197.

⁸ Richard N Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 49-50; Schreiner, *Romans*, 3-4.

2. AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 13:1-7

In this first section, the text of Romans 13:1-7 will be analysed having regard to the range of possible interpretations permitted by both its internal logic and situation within the letter of Romans and broader canon of scripture. Neufeld points out that the text's own internal argument and persuasive techniques are critical to good interpretation,⁹ and for that reason the text will be treated at face-value before examining its historical and socio-cultural context. The particular focus will be on those aspects of the text most relevant to a Christian who participates actively in the work of secular authority, namely what it means to submit to the governing authorities, and the purpose for which those authorities have been established.

2.1 Textual and structural features

The passage at issue falls within the broader section of Romans 12:1 – 15:13, a section which shifts away from the theological exposition of 1:16 – 11:36 and into a series of imperative commands to the audience.¹⁰ The theme of this section is arguably established by 12:1-2, “...*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*(ESV)”

On the one hand, it is straightforward enough to see how an individual's life might need to be altered by the personal reception and application of the gospel. However, Dunn rightly points out that the various ethical commands Paul lays out can be difficult to link thematically if the gospel message of Romans is understood only in terms of individual

⁹ Matthew G. Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7," *Direction* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994).

¹⁰ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 763.

justification.¹¹ On the other hand, if the gospel exposition of Romans finds at least one climax in Chapters 9-11 with the justification resulting in the redefinition of the eschatological people of God, including both Jew and Gentile, then the need for an ethical framework governing relationships within the community and with the secular world is quite logical.¹² It is appropriate therefore to consider the section as laying out the new ethical pattern of life for both the individual and the new Christian community, which follows from the transformative impact of the gospel on both.

Structurally, Paul follows this introduction to the gospel application by laying out a series of four broad ethical themes, which Schreiner describes as love within the church (12:9-16), relations with the world (12:17-21), relations with the governing authorities of the world (13:1-7), and returning again to love within the church (13:8-10).¹³ An extended discussion on the unity of 'weak' and 'strong' believers then follows.

Romans does not fall neatly into the literary genre of epistle. Its emphasis on theological argument has led some to classify it as a tractate or theological treatise, yet this does not adequately account for the letter's personal nature.¹⁴ Efforts to apply a formal Greco-Roman rhetorical framework also fall short, as while such influences may be present the letter does not rigidly follow their forms over its entirety.¹⁵

It is possible to identify Romans 13:1-7, along with most of the section of Chapters 12-13, as paraenesis, a genre of exhortation that reflects a common or universal ethical or

¹¹ Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 60-1.

¹² Isaak argues the entire section of 12:1-13:14 is thematically based on the implications for life of a newly constituted people of God centred on Jesus. "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7," *Direction* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2003).

¹³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 658.

¹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 11; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 13.

¹⁵ See Schreiner for a discussion on the influence of the epideictic, protreptic, and diatribe genres of Greco-Roman rhetoric. While certain rhetorical features can be identified within Romans, it is a step too far to classify the letter wholly according to any one framework. Schreiner therefore cautions against allowing rhetorical criticism to overly influence exegesis of a given passage. *Romans*, 26-9.

theological teaching.¹⁶ Certainly the passage's similarity in content and form to other New Testament passages such as 1 Pet. 2:13-17 support the case for a common tradition, though Dunn is careful to note that this does not preclude its presentation in Romans from having a specific occasional background.¹⁷ Longenecker argues that much of the content of Romans 13:1-7, particularly vv. 1-5, was probably recycled from well-established teachings that Paul introduced to churches throughout his missionary journeys.¹⁸ Thus, noting that the linguistic and theological content of the passage may draw on a paraenetic tradition will assist in contextualising for the reader its meaning and intended audience. This brings one to the question of whether 13:1-7 is original to Romans. The passage's identification as paraenesis and formal similarity to other New Testament passages, alongside an apparent sudden change in subject from the preceding section, has led some to argue it is a later insertion.¹⁹ Yet there are strong internal reasons to consider the passage authentic, and indeed integral to the overarching section. Syntactically it links with the preceding passages, with discussions on the concepts of good and evil common to both.²⁰ Thematically 13:3-4 links with the discussion on vengeance and the repayment of evil in 12:19-12. Indeed, Kim identifies 12:9-21 as a presentation of distinctively Pauline paraenesis, used to exhort churches throughout his corpus to live with humility and peace, reject retaliation against persecutors, and love one's enemies.²¹ The specific application of

¹⁶ Seyoon Kim, "Paul's common paraenesis (1 Thess. 4-5; Phil. 2-4; and Rom. 12-13): the correspondence between Romans 1:18-32 and 12:1-2, and the unity of Romans 12-13," *Tyndale Bulletin* 62, no. 1 (2011): 137-8. Jon Nelson Bailey, "Paul's political paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7," *Restoration Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2004): 11.

¹⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Thomas Nelson, 1988), lvii-lviii.

¹⁸ *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 955.

¹⁹ See for example Kallas, who also argues the passage lacks distinctive Christological, eschatological and supernatural references, themes which are held to be indicative of authentic Pauline literature. "Romans 13:1-7: an interpolation," *New Testament Studies* 11, no. 4 (1965): 365-8.

²⁰ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 489.

²¹ Kim identifies strong parallels with 1 Thess. 5:12-24; Phil. 4:2-9 and Gal. 5:22-25. "Paul's common paraenesis (1 Thess. 4-5; Phil. 2-4; and Rom. 12-13): the correspondence between Romans 1:18-32 and 12:1-2, and the unity of Romans 12-13," 115,37-8.

13:1-7 could therefore be an extension of this teaching, prompted by the specific circumstances of the Roman church. On the other hand, the arguments raised in Romans 12 could be sufficient in and of themselves for Paul to switch to the subject of governing authority, independent of any historical occasion for the passage. For example, it may be that Paul seeks to generally caution against an extremist understanding of the renewed mind and transformed life that might seek total separation from the world.²²

2.2 Literary audience and object

Paul begins his exhortation by addressing *πασα ψυχῇ* (*everyone*), a Semitic construction which does broadly capture all people.²³ Given the letter's stated audience (and the theme of gospel application which applies to the whole section), it is appropriate to infer that Paul has primarily Christians in view, particularly – but not limited to – the members of the Christian community in Rome.²⁴

Precisely identifying the object of the command has in relatively recent times been a more complex matter. Paul exhorts submission to *ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις* (*the governing authorities*), generally held to be human rulers who hold and exercise (usually legitimate) earthly power.²⁵ This reflects both common biblical and secular usage, with *ἐξουσία* referring to secular or civil authorities in passages like Luke 12:11 and 1 Peter 2:13, as well as Josephus' *The Jewish War* (2.350).²⁶ However, it is possible the term contains a

²² Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 341-2.

²³ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 760. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 254. Note that the early textual witness \mathfrak{B}^{46} omits *ψυχῇ*, a variant which might lessen the broad scope of the subject in view, but which Cranfield considers to be an accidental omission (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., vol. 2, International Critical Commentary, (London: T&T Clark International, 1975), 656.).

²⁴ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 812; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2, 656.

²⁵ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 812.

²⁶ From Josephus, "De bello Judaico libri vii," in *Flavii Josephi opera*, ed. Benedikt Niese (Berlin: Weidmann, 1888).

double meaning, referencing not only earthly authorities but also the spiritual powers and authorities (both wicked and angelic) which stand behind them.²⁷ This view finds parallels in the use of ἐξουσία in Ephesians 1:21 and Colossians 2:10, where it is paired with ἀρχή (*rule, principality*) to refer to spiritual powers. For Cullmann, this interpretation allows a Christological element to be read through the passage – since all spiritual authorities are now in bondage to Christ, and earthly authorities are their agents, Paul is able to speak somewhat positively about the earthly authorities so long as they obey and further the will of Christ.²⁸

However, this view fails on several points. Theologically, Stott counters that nowhere does the New Testament provide for the recommissioning of wicked spiritual entities for a positive service to God (bound by Christ though they may be), and furthermore it would make little sense for Paul to require Christians to submit to any spiritual power when they are already subject directly to Christ.²⁹ Yet the most decisive counter-argument is entirely practical: the reference to the sword and the example of taxation in verses 4 and 6 respectively. It is logically impossible to pay taxes to an angelic or demonic power, or for such powers to wield a physical sword, so earthly authorities are the only real possibility which could be in view.³⁰

While a form of ἀρχή is used in verse 3, it is not paired with ἐξουσία as in passages dealing with spiritual authorities, but instead used synonymously to refer to human rulers.³¹ Human government alone is therefore in view, but two important qualifications must be

²⁷ Cullmann is fairly representative of this school; see *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 60-70.

²⁸ Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament*, 69-70.

²⁹ John Stott, *The Message of Romans*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 339.

³⁰ Bailey, "Paul's political paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7," 12; Osborne, *Romans*, 343. Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

³¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 662.

made. The first is that this is not wholly equivalent to the modern concept of the state.³² We must therefore be wary of founding a comprehensive theology of church-state relations on this passage alone. Second, Kruse argues that the specific construction including ὑπερεχούσαις (which in its participle form can refer to government officials) indicates not only figures of ultimate authority like a king or an emperor, but a range of officials exercising ruling power.³³ Paul therefore has in view all the individuals involved in governing and the exercise of secular authority, from a local bureaucrat up to the emperor himself.³⁴ This nuance is significant for any Christian in Paul's audience involved with civil government in whichever way. The passage immediately places them under a challenging tension as both the subject and object of the exhortation.

2.3 ὑποτάσσω and the posture of submission

The crux of the passage is the imperative ὑποταστέσθω (*submit oneself/be submitted*), a form of the verb ὑποτάσσω (*submit*) which appears to carry a considerable semantic range in New Testament usage.³⁵ Its occurrence in Romans 13:1,5 is not parsed consistently by scholarship – while Moo, following Cranfield, argues its form is passive,³⁶ it may well be middle.³⁷

³² There is undoubtedly overlap, but the category of the state as a primary legal and political entity is foreign to the 1st Century. See Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 759.

³³ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 492.

³⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 421.

³⁵ Frederick W. Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1042.

³⁶ Though this occurrence is in the present, Moo contends that it likely mirrors the aorist form, which in the NT always occurs in the passive. *The Letter to the Romans*, 814; Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2, 660.

³⁷ For example, *TDNT* prefers a middle voicing as it does with several other New Testament occurrences of the verb. The practical distinction is subtle but worth noting – arguably the verb's range of meaning is greater in the middle voice, though it is likely that usage in context is more informative as to meaning than grammatical voicing. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 40-42.

The verb broadly indicates a placing of oneself in correct orientation to an ordered structure or hierarchy.³⁸ This is the primary focus of its use in this passage (as it is in other passages on submission to authority: 1 Pet. 2:13; Tit. 3:1), and it used similarly throughout the New Testament with regards to social relationships like wives and husbands (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1), masters and servants (1 Pet. 2:18), and even spiritual relationships (1 Cor. 14:32). Within this ordering, however, it does not imply any sense of substantive inferiority or compulsion – a voluntary sense of the subordination is prominent.³⁹

A secondary meaning of ὑποτάσσω connotes a voluntary yielding in love to the will of another.⁴⁰ This sense suggests a readiness to renounce one's own will and give precedence to others. Context is critical for this sense to shine through. Neufeld argues that Romans 12 provides us with a theme of love and humility which indicates voluntary submission.⁴¹ Other passages that arguably imply a voluntary yielding in love, including a degree of mutual submission, include 1 Peter 5:1-5 (the young submitting to elders) and certainly Ephesians 5:21 (submitting to one another).⁴²

Putting aside debates concerning Pauline authorship of Ephesians, the usage of ὑποτάσσω in 5:21 provides an intriguing parallel to that in Romans 13:1-7, in a text which is also a paraenetic ethical code.⁴³ Beginning from an understanding that submission is the ordering of oneself according to the structured hierarchy, mutuality and reciprocity is introduced by the attachment of ἀλλήλοις (*to one another*) indicating that all parties concerned

³⁸ BDAG, 1042; Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Second ed., 5 vols., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 460.

³⁹ Indeed, only twice in the New Testament is this form of the verb used in a context which requires a sense of compulsion, both in Luke 10: 17-20. For the voluntary nature of submission, see Osborne, *Romans*, 343.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 1042.

⁴¹ Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

⁴² NIDNTE, 462. TDNT, 45.

⁴³ Mutter provides for the generic foundation of Eph. 5:21-33 in the Hellenistic household codes common to the time, while noting that their philosophy is radically reformed by the introduction of mutual submission. "Ephesians 5:21-33 as Christian Alternative Discourse," *Trinity Journal* 39, no. 1 (2018): 13.

participate in the act of submission.⁴⁴ The context demands mutuality. Furthermore, this idea of mutual submission does not criticise or subtract from commands to obey, love, and respect others in subsequent verses.⁴⁵ Mutuality in submission coexists with the rightful recognition of hierarchy and authority.

Does this mean that all people are subject to all others? Surely this would be an impossible situation for a government. The answer may be yes, in a sense, for the Christian grounded in love and submission to Christ. Just as Paul is able to claim that he can become a slave to all (1 Cor. 9:19), so in a sense even those in authority submit to those who are subject to them.⁴⁶ This was perhaps best expressed by Calvin, expressing in his commentary on Ephesians that even rulers rule that they might serve.⁴⁷ Lincoln argues that the requirement to humbly and selflessly place oneself at the service of others is perfectly compatible with whatever subordination is demanded by the system or hierarchy in question.⁴⁸

It is also important to keep in mind a central theme of the earlier chapters of Romans, that is the consequences of failing to submit to the will and law of God.⁴⁹ For the Christian who is renewed and transformed by the gospel, submission to God and his way of love is paramount.⁵⁰ Therefore, though Romans 13:1-7 does not explicitly state this, a posture of submission to governing authorities must be expressed and analysed through the Christian's own submission to God.⁵¹ He is the ultimate authority which sits over and above earthly power structures. Submission to authority is therefore constrained by God-

⁴⁴ Mutter, "Ephesians 5:21-33 as Christian Alternative Discourse," 13. The construction also clarifies that, at least in this instance, the verb is formed in the middle voice.

⁴⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 366.

⁴⁶ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 373.

⁴⁷ John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, ed. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 317.

⁴⁸ *Ephesians*, 385-6.

⁴⁹ See particularly Rom. 8:7; 10:3.

⁵⁰ Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

⁵¹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 825.

ordained limits, and the expression of that submission should not come at the expense of allegiance to God's rule.⁵²

It is therefore critically important to distinguish submission from obedience. Cranfield notes that the New Testament commonly utilizes a number of other verbs for 'obey', including *πειθαρχέω*, *πείθω* and *ὑπακούω*.⁵³ On the other hand, *ὑποτάσσω* is not synonymous with these terms, though it can carry the sense of obedience as an act of willing subordination.⁵⁴ It is fair to say that while the concepts may be linked, submission should not be uncritically conflated with obedience since the former implies greater agency on the subject's part. Indeed, obedience is especially nonsensical in the context of mutual voluntary submission where the relational categories in question simply do not allow for it.

It is appropriate at this point to explore those perspectives which seek to interpret submission to allow for criticism of government and even active resistance against authority under some circumstances, especially when the term is conflated with obedience. A 20th and 21st Century audience, operating within living memory of destructive global conflicts and brutally oppressive political regimes, may understandably be biased towards a strong scepticism of the notion of good and beneficent government.⁵⁵ Stott, for example, argues that the principle of submission to secular authority is conditioned by a primary submission to God, and notes biblical examples of godly disobedience toward earthly government (such as the Hebrew midwives (Ex. 1:17); Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Dan. 3:16-18); Daniel (Dan. 6:10); the apostles themselves (Act. 5:29)). This qualification is certainly legitimate in view of the command of Acts 5:29 to obey God before men. It is

⁵² Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

⁵³ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2, 660.

⁵⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 662.

⁵⁵ Horsley, for example, argues that the horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust ought to shake any assumptions that Romans 13:1-7 demands obedience of authorities. "Introduction," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2004), 2.

also possible to read the passage in the light of other Pauline texts which present the Christian community as a counter-imperial alternative, and that criticism of the imperial authorities is implied alongside the command to submit.⁵⁶ Yet as Moo notes, outright opposition to divinely appointed authority is explicitly condemned by Romans 13:2.⁵⁷

These challenges are largely avoided when submission is understood not as mere obedience, but as a voluntary yielding of one's will to another, within the appropriate structures and hierarchies, in the knowledge that all is ultimately in submission to God himself.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the sense of mutuality and reciprocity that the submission can convey suggests a link to Christian ideals of humility and service to others.⁵⁹ Indeed, we have noted that humility and service (in love) are both themes which can be identified across the paraenetic exhortations of Rom. 12-13.⁶⁰ Situational context is key to a precise interpretation, but it is entirely possible that a Christian called to submission may possess more agency and opportunity for active service than a passively obedient citizen.⁶¹

2.4 The purpose of secular authority

A rationale for this submission to governing authorities is provided in verses 1-2. Submission is necessary because the governing authorities have been appointed by God. The use of τεταγμέναι, itself a relative of the root verb τάσσω, syntactically links this appointed order with the act of submission, providing the structure under which the

⁵⁶ Greg Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 27.

⁵⁷ ajntitassovmenoV (those who oppose), deriving from the same root as uJpotavssw, highlights that outright opposition is the anti-principle of submission. Bailey, "Paul's political paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7," 12; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 815-6.

⁵⁸ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 814.

⁵⁹ *TDNT*, 45. Additional reference required.

⁶⁰ Kim, "Paul's common paraenesis (1 Thess. 4-5; Phil. 2-4; and Rom. 12-13): the correspondence between Romans 1:18-32 and 12:1-2, and the unity of Romans 12-13," 137-8.

⁶¹ Isaak argues that the Christian is to use discernment and conscience to determine the appropriate course of action for submission, which could range from civil disobedience to full participation in political systems. "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

audience is to willingly posture themselves.⁶² This is a confronting thought given the degree of abuse that is possible (and has been historically observed) in human authority. Indeed, Neufeld prefers the idea that God ‘orders’ or ‘arranges’ authority, rather than the sense of responsibility implied by ‘appointed’.⁶³ Yet the establishment of authority by God has deep roots in Jewish Scriptural tradition which recognises the ultimate authority of God as well as the reality that government can and will act in evil ways.⁶⁴ The hand of the omnipotent God is behind all things. That includes the ordination of human authority, and yet theologically there is some comfort in the knowledge that the same authority is therefore liable to his judgement.⁶⁵

This why Paul can go on to describe the governing authorities as a δῖόκονος (*servant/minister*) and λειτουργοί; (*ministers*) of God in verses 4 and 6 respectively. The term δῖόκονος finds reasonably common use in the New Testament describing Christians serving each other or the Lord.⁶⁶ The notion of divinely ordained ministry is also heavily implied by its use in Romans 13:4. Secular authorities, having been appointed by God, consequently offer him some kind of service (either consciously or unconsciously).⁶⁷ It should be noted, however, that the term can also function in a strictly secular sense referring to civic or court officials.⁶⁸

In Jewish and early Christian contexts, λειτουργός carries an even more explicit sense of appointment to divine ministry.⁶⁹ It often references temple workers engaged in cultic

⁶² Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*.

⁶³ Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7." See also Isaak for a similar Mennonite perspective on tavssw. "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

⁶⁴ This tradition is common to OT political theology (see for example Prov. 8:15-16; Isa. 41:2-4; Jer. 27:5-6; Dan. 2:21,37; 4:17,25,32; 5:21) and can be seen in first century Jewish texts such as Josephus' *Jewish War* (2.140). See also Bailey, "Paul's political paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7," 13.

⁶⁵ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 493; Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 64.

⁶⁶ See for example Rom. 16:1; 2 Cor. 6:4; 11:23; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:8,12; 4:6.

⁶⁷ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 817.

⁶⁸ For example, see Est. 1:10; 2:2; 6:3 (LXX) for usage denoting court officials with no religious connotations.

⁶⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 821.

ministry. Yet it too may be used in a secular sense, specifically to describe a public official.⁷⁰ This could be a government employee akin to the modern role of a public servant, or also a private citizen offering service for the public good at their own expense.

The implication is that secular authorities are carrying out a divinely ordained task in governing, and that in a sense they mediate God's activity in that role. That is not to say that government itself is divine, or can perform acts of God.⁷¹ However, the breaking down of the barrier between the secular and sacred spheres suggests that even the most mundane of worldly activities may qualify as service to God.⁷² Stott argues that under these broad terms, divine ministry could conceivably include legislators, public servants, magistrates, police, social workers, or even tax collectors.⁷³

Verses 3 and 4 flesh out the purpose of this ministry, namely, to punish wickedness and to promote good. This is a reflection of God's own purpose in the world to maintain order for the good of his creation.⁷⁴ The punishment of the wicked mirrors to an extent, in a temporal and limited way, God's own judgement of sin. The reference to the authorities' wielding of τὴν μάχαιραν (*the sword*) is intriguing. It likely refers to the general right of authorities to punish lawbreakers and evildoers (a right which historically would have extended to capital punishment).⁷⁵ This potentially creates another moment of tension for any Christian agents of secular government, since in Romans 12:19-21 the Christian is

⁷⁰ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2, 669.

⁷¹ Karl Barth, "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," in *Barth in Conversation*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 33.

⁷² Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 764.

⁷³ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 343.

⁷⁴ Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

⁷⁵ Bailey, "Paul's political paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7," 21; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 818. It is probably not a reference to the *ius gladii*, a small ceremonial sword, as this weapon was carried only by a provincial governor and was representative of his power to inflict capital punishment on Roman citizens serving in the military, with the symbolism being limited to that specific context. Osborne, *Romans*, 345; Schreiner, *Romans*, 666.

forbidden from exacting vengeance against evil, an activity that Paul now seems to suggest is only legitimately exercised in the secular realm by the divinely appointed authorities.⁷⁶

The notion of promoting good also seems to mirror the theme of the preceding chapter. Cranfield argues that the phrase θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ εἰς τὸ ἀγαθόν (*he is a servant of God for [your] good*) indicates that the government's role is to encourage and support Christians in doing moral good, which is a consequence of working out their salvation.⁷⁷ This is a fair assessment, however, it would be a mistake to conceive of these good works in only soteriological terms and miss the very tangible and temporal civil goods which are implied by government's mandate to maintain order in creation. Indeed, Kruse highlights that the approval of the authorities mentioned in verse 3 refers to a tradition of Hellenistic civic life, whereby rulers would publicly commend and reward private citizens who carried out work or deeds that benefited the society and its people, in the hope that others would be encouraged to follow suit.⁷⁸ Traditionally the citizens deemed worthy of this honour were those λειτουργοί who had contributed significant personal wealth to the completion of these public goods. The implication is that Paul's audience would themselves have the means and resources (material or otherwise) to be public benefactors in a similar way.

It is useful here to address why Paul, in restating again why the Christian should submit to authority in verse 5, refers to the concept of συνείδησις (*conscience*). Thrall argues persuasively that in Pauline usage, συνείδησις refers to the human faculty which not only assesses and judges past action, but also future intentions.⁷⁹ Moreover, for the Christian this is in congruence with an awareness of God's purposes and will. Paul's appeal to

⁷⁶ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 765.

⁷⁷ Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2, 666.

⁷⁸ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 495-6.

⁷⁹ Margaret E. Thrall, "Pauline use of syneidēsis," *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 1 (1967): 125.

συνείδησις is therefore an appeal to the knowledge that God has instituted government for the good of his creation, and so a posture of submission within that system is good and right quite apart from any fear of punishment.

However, Paul's argument for submission to divinely ordained authorities by way of a picture of just and beneficent government does not equate to an endorsement of all government conduct.⁸⁰ Osborne's view is that Paul portrays an ideal in order to support the principle of secular authority while not being ignorant of its all too common failures.⁸¹ Indeed, the paraenetic form of the passage, drawing on long-held and universally-framed principles, seems to lend itself to this conclusion.

One further aspect of the text is worth considering, that being verse 6's example of taxation and the phrase εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο προσκαρτεροῦντες (*they devote themselves to this very thing*). The object which the authorities, as God's λειτουργοί, devote themselves is somewhat ambiguous, and could conceivably be the aforementioned collection of taxes, or any one of the individual services to God Paul has listed. Kruse, perhaps a little cynically, believes it is indeed the taxes they are devoted to.⁸² This seems rather too sarcastic for the text, given the authorities have been previously described as servants and ministers of God, and verse 7 goes on to require also respect and honour to be paid to those to whom they are owed, not taxes alone. It is far more likely that in principle, the authorities are devoted to all the activities of government which they offer (unconsciously or otherwise) as a service to God and his good purposes.⁸³ This why Stott renders the phrase, '*...who give their full time to governing*'.⁸⁴ Indeed, Dunn contends that by using the verb προσκαρτερέω, Paul is indicating a careful and diligent sense of occupation which elevates the vocation of

⁸⁰ Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

⁸¹ Osborne, *Romans*, 344-5. See also Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 10.

⁸² Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 498.

⁸³ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 821.

⁸⁴ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 346.

dedicated public service to a high ideal.⁸⁵ Even something as mundane (and potentially oppressive) as tax collection, it seems, may be interpreted as service to God.

2.5 Preliminary insights for Christian agents of authority

It is possible to now draw some preliminary conclusions as to the passage's meaning and intent that may have some bearing on how it is to be interpreted by the Christian agent of secular authority.

The first is that submission is not strictly equivalent to obedience but is rather a posture that recognises the system of authority which God has put in place and voluntarily yields one's own will to that of another. It is not a stretch to say that such submission is likely to be characterised by humility, an attitude of service, and also obedience where called for. Moreover, this submission is ultimately an expression of the Christian's submission to God himself.⁸⁶ Christians are therefore to yield their wills to the divinely appointed authorities, within the context of their ultimate allegiance to God.

As indicated by the passage's paraenetic form, its foundation in Jewish political and theological tradition, as well as its inclusion in a section on the gospel's ethical application, the principle of submission is intended to be broadly universal.⁸⁷ That is, all Christians, having been transformed by the renewing of their minds, are to submit to authority in this way.

Verses 2-5 also supply the reader with a theological argument for what might be called the natural goodness of government. The maintenance of order (here the punishment of the wicked and the promotion of good) is good for human society, and secular rulers are

⁸⁵ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 767.

⁸⁶ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 826.

⁸⁷ Notwithstanding that its inclusion in Romans may have been prompted by a specific set of circumstances in Rome.

established by God for that purpose.⁸⁸ Kruse notes that, by implication, these rulers ought to exercise their authority in a manner consistent with God's will and justice.⁸⁹ We must again be clear that, in spite of this principle, it is of course possible (and indeed likely) that human government might transgress its purpose and act oppressively and unjustly. The passage is therefore taken out of context and misapplied if taken to require uncritical submission to all authority in every circumstance.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, even an oppressive and unjust government can carry out good activity. Paul therefore never calls for either open rebellion or a withdrawal from civil society, contrary to more radical or anti-imperial interpretations.⁹¹ Rather, the best principle for dealing with the real fallibility of human authorities is a submission that prioritises obedience to the ultimate authority of God, and subsequently discerns the appropriate response to the policies of secular government.

Yet Romans 13:1-7 does paint the institution of human authority in a very positive light.⁹² It demonstrates that the wielding of authority according to its true purpose is an act of ministry, and may even open up the possibility of public service as both a spiritual and secular vocation. For Dunn, Paul's view of authority breaks down any notion of a sacred-secular divide which allows for Christians to be engaged in their societies and involved in political structures without ceasing to be Christians.⁹³ Allegiance to God's kingdom is not incompatible with secular government, and the two can rightly coexist when the latter adheres to its proper responsibilities.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 771.

⁸⁹ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 499.

⁹⁰ Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

⁹¹ Interestingly, both approaches would resonate with political movements roughly contemporaneous to Paul, such as the Zealots and Qumran community respectively. See Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 773.

⁹² Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

⁹³ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 773.

⁹⁴ Ovidiu Hanc, "Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus," *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (2014): 316.

The apparent paradox of obeying an entity which at least to some extent includes your own agency is largely resolved by the understanding that ὑποτάσσω indicates a posture more than it does any one kind of action (such as obedience). The context of the relationship colours how submission is appropriately expressed within the established structures while recognising the Christian's ultimate allegiance to God and his kingdom. The boundaries for Christian participation in authority remain somewhat contestable. The question of punishing evil is difficult given the prohibition of Romans 12:19-21. How then a Christian agent of authority – say a magistrate or member of civil or armed forces – is to express submission in such situations remains an open question.⁹⁵

3. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF ROMANS 13:1-7

This section will consider the traditional historical-critical questions concerning the historical context of the text's composition and audience, and whether a precise *Sitz im Leben* can be ascertained that sheds light on the text's occasion and therefore authorial intent. However, there is a risk that such an approach fails to account for the possibly diverse ways a text was received by the original audience, and perhaps fails to credit the author with the ability to incorporate a nuanced spectrum of messaging for diverse recipients (and even diverse times). For Romans 13:1-7, a traditional approach that assumes a categorical distinction between the church and the governing authorities has failed to consider whether Christians which bridged that gap were among its recipients, and if Paul in fact intended to address them also.

As the capital of the empire, it is reasonable to assume that Paul was aware of the social, economic, and political context of Rome and kept in mind how these might affect the local

⁹⁵ Barth, "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," 39.

church as he wrote to it.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, the paraenetic nature of Romans 13:1-7 is suggestive of a broader, even universal application. This section will therefore examine first the socio-economic and socio-political context of mid-first century Rome and the early church, paying careful attention to the sociological relationships that existed between individuals, communities, and the social strata that Paul wrote into. It will then consider the occasion of Romans and the passage in question, and whether these necessarily limit (or otherwise) the application of the passage to Christian agents of authority.

Note that the term ‘Christian’ is used here to denote the earliest followers of Christ that made up the early Roman church, to distinguish them from Jews who rejected Christ as the Jewish Messiah. However, it is acknowledged that the earliest followers of the Christ were themselves Jewish, and generally continued to consider themselves so before religious boundaries became clearer in the second century.⁹⁷

3.1 Social, economic, and political context of Rome in the mid-first century

Thus far, a date between AD 54-59 has been assumed for the composition of Romans, with the location of writing likely Corinth. Internally the letter provides us with the names of its bearer, Phoebe of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1-2), and Paul’s present host, Gaius (16:23). Cenchreae was one of the seaports of Corinth, and Gaius may be identified with the individual mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:14 as having been baptised by Paul – both therefore indicate Corinth as the likely location.⁹⁸ Based on the logic that Romans was written after 2 Corinthians but prior to Paul’s journey with the collection to Jerusalem, Longenecker further narrows down the likely date to the winter of AD 57/58.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 56.

⁹⁷ Matthews, *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire*, xiv.

⁹⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 4.

⁹⁹ Romans 15:26-27 notes that the churches of Macedonia and Achaia have made contributions to the collection, which they had not done at the time 2 Corinthians 8-9 was composed. Romans 15:25 also

Rome, of course, was the capital of the vast eponymous empire. A young Nero was emperor at the time of Paul's writing to the Roman church, though it should be noted he was not yet the classic tyrant that Christian history remembers.¹⁰⁰

Roman society of the time may be broadly broken down by socio-economic and socio-political class. Wright and Bird identify the ruling senatorial class as holding the most significant political power and wealth.¹⁰¹ This was followed by lesser but still wealthy and influential Roman citizens of the equestrian and decurion classes, often appointed to provincial governorships and local leadership respectively. These three classes represented the elite of Roman society.¹⁰² The lower classes included ordinary citizens of trade and merchant background, freed persons, and of course slaves. It is estimated that the slave demographic of urban areas of the empire could represent up to 30% of the population, with an individual's enslavement possibly a result of anything from birth, conquest, punishment, and even voluntary bondage.¹⁰³

Estimates for the population of Rome itself vary and are difficult to make for a specific time period. Hanson and Ortman argue that by the second century the city had up to 1 million inhabitants.¹⁰⁴ Schreiner agrees with a similar figure at the time of the writing of Romans, indicating a significant population centre.¹⁰⁵ The socio-economic breakdown of this population largely mirrored that of other urban centres at the time.¹⁰⁶ Ethnically the

indicates Paul's immediate plans to take the collection to Jerusalem. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 44-50. See also Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Osborne, *Romans*, 341.

¹⁰¹ N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in its World* (London: SPCK, 2019), 148.

¹⁰² Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (London: SPCK, 2009), 54.

¹⁰³ Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, 148.

¹⁰⁴ "A systematic method for estimating the populations of Greek and Roman settlements," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (2017): 301.

¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 10. Note that Dunn and Kruse propose a much more conservative figure, as low as 400,000 in the mid-first century, which would require a massive spike in population growth to reach 1 million by the second century. See "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 58; *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 1.

¹⁰⁶ On average, around 30% of the population would have been slaves, 30% freed persons, and up to 40% freeborn. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 1.

city was diverse, reflecting its prominence as the capital and economic centre of the empire. Osborne puts the Jewish population of the city at around forty to fifty thousand – almost as large as the population of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷

This ethnic diversity also reveals the broad spectrum of people groups which had come under Roman imperial rule, largely through violent conquest and colonisation.¹⁰⁸ Carey states that Rome was arguably the first empire to successfully maintain its territorial control through a combination of military force (including the enslavement of conquered persons) and securing cooperation from influential elites among conquered populations.¹⁰⁹ It cannot be understated how foundational slavery was to the Roman system, particularly its economic prosperity.¹¹⁰

Life outside the upper classes was insecure and could be severe, precipitating any number of local dysfunctions and even rebellions throughout Rome's history that were kept in check by a brutal yet efficient authoritarian regime.¹¹¹ Outside of the emperor himself, ultimate political power and governing authority was exercised by a few selected from the elite echelons of society.¹¹² There was little hope of an ordinary citizen wielding such power, and positions of influence and wealth were hoarded by the upper classes through a reciprocal system of political and economic patronage.¹¹³

On that basis, scholars like Isaak are quick to note that the modern concept of liberal democracy and popular participation in government are wholly foreign to the Roman

¹⁰⁷ *Romans*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Horsley, "Introduction," 11.

¹⁰⁹ "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 14. See also Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*, 53-4.

¹¹⁰ Contrary to some perspectives, Horsley argues that Roman slavery was not generally benign or paternalistic, but violent and insecure, and absolutely essential to the economic success of the empire. Horsley, "Introduction," 11-12.

¹¹¹ Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, 145-6; Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 17-8.

¹¹² Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 63.

¹¹³ Horsley, "Introduction," 15.

context.¹¹⁴ Yet Winter also points out that Roman policy allowed for some degree of local self-government across its vast empire, and that in significant cities there is evidence of local leaders being elected as civic benefactors to guide and influence the community.¹¹⁵ Horsley also notes that participation by local citizens was possible through city gatherings and forums, though Rome was prone to abolishing such institutions in order to maintain control.¹¹⁶

We should also note Roman political and cultural attitudes to Jews during the period. A religious pluralism of sorts existed in Rome, indigenous faiths and religious traditions having been imported along with migrants from across the empire.¹¹⁷ However, among the political and intellectual elites foreign cults were often viewed with suspicion, and Second Temple Judaism especially for its refusal to worship any but its one God.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, Jews were influential in Rome, and there is evidence that some prominent families were attracted to its customs, and Jews were able to secure certain political and religious concessions. These included the ability to practice Jewish customs without molestation, jurisdiction over certain internal matters, and permission to levy the Temple tax for forwarding to Jerusalem.¹¹⁹ These privileges could however spark criticism and dissent, and there is evidence for at least two expulsions of the Jews from Rome during the decades

¹¹⁴ Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

¹¹⁵ It should be noted that such individuals were still invariably elected from among the more privileged classes of society. An official civic benefactor was generally required to donate a major asset or project, or commit to funding such projects by way of an election commitment. See Bruce W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 180.

¹¹⁶ For example, public assemblies and law courts were at times abolished in Greek cities to prevent the spread of unrest and dissent. See Horsley, "Introduction," 17-8.

¹¹⁷ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 60.

¹¹⁸ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 63; Matthews, *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire*, 62.

¹¹⁹ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 766-9.

leading up to Paul's letter.¹²⁰ The Jewish community, despite its relative prosperity and influence, was therefore vulnerable.

3.2 Demographics of the early church

There is a fairly prevalent view that the early Christian church was predominately of low social and economic status, pointing in the main to the evidence of slaves and former slaves among the addressees of the New Testament epistles.¹²¹ However, Winter offers a caution that class membership is not always indicative of relative honour, influence, or even wealth – indeed, he argues that even slaves within prominent households or under an influential patron could themselves be afforded significant authority and status.¹²² On the other hand, a freeborn tradesperson or merchant who was unattached to a household or community might find their livelihood and position relatively insecure. The notion of Christianity as a religion of only the poor and enslaved also fails to account for the earliest Jewish followers of Christ, who were just as likely to be tradespeople, merchants and relatively influential in their diaspora communities as not.¹²³ Therefore while the majority of early Christians may have been drawn from the lower classes, there were some with significant wealth and standing among them.¹²⁴ Wright and Bird are correct in seeing the early church as incredibly diverse, with representatives of numerous ethnicities, economic groups, and all class backgrounds (except perhaps the very highest ruling class).¹²⁵

¹²⁰ An expulsion under Tiberius c. AD 19, and the more famous expulsion under Claudius in AD 49 noted by Tacitus and Suetonius. See Marcus Borg, "A New Context for Romans XIII," *New Testament Studies* 19, no. 2 (1973): 210-12; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 63.

¹²¹ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 575.

¹²² Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 203.

¹²³ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 2; Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 58.

¹²⁴ Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*, 67; Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 84.

¹²⁵ Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, 149.

Christian tradition holds that the church at Rome was founded by Peter and Paul.¹²⁶ It is an understatement to say that the evidence for such an origin is lacking – there are no early accounts of either apostle introducing the gospel to the city or founding gatherings of Christians. The evidence of the New Testament and the text of Romans itself suggests the Christian movement in Rome was already significant by the time of Paul’s writing (to a community he had never visited) in AD 54-59.¹²⁷ It is probable that the Roman church originated out of the many Jewish synagogues in the city, spread by Jewish and proselyte travelers and merchants possibly including some who were witnesses of the Pentecost event in Jerusalem.¹²⁸ The early character of the church was therefore decidedly Jewish, with the faith then being passed on to Gentiles in the city. Emerging as it did from the Jewish synagogues, it is likely the Roman church was similarly decentralised, which is supported by Paul’s greetings in Romans 16 to churches meeting in separate households.¹²⁹ It is therefore perhaps better to speak of the Roman churches as a collection of disparate communities, rather than a cohesive whole.

However it appears the initial Jewish majority changed after the aforementioned expulsions. The most well-known was in AD 49 under Claudius. Suetonius reports that a disturbance arose among the Jews in Rome “...at the instigation of Chrestus”, which most modern interpreters view as a conflict within the Jewish community over the identity and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Israel’s Messiah.¹³⁰ Whether or not all ethnic Jews in Rome were in fact expelled, the result seems to have been Gentiles filling the void left in the

¹²⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 10.

¹²⁷ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., vol. 1, International Critical Commentary, (London: T&T Clark International, 1975), 9; Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 3-4.

¹²⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 10-11. Dunn notes that the synagogues in Rome were not a cohesive community, and likely lacked central organisation. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, li.

¹²⁹ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 5.

¹³⁰ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 4; Schreiner, *Romans*.

Christian community.¹³¹ As such, Gentiles were in the majority when Paul wrote Romans, though the names in Chapter 16 indicate many of Jewish origin, possibly due to some exiles having returned.¹³²

If the names Paul addresses in Chapter 16 are representative of the social and political demographics of the Roman church, it would seem that slaves and freed persons were in the majority, more so than in other communities like Corinth. According to Schreiner, names like Junia, Ampliatus, Herodion, Tryphaena, and Tryphosa, (Rom. 16:7-8,11-12) suggest a slave origin, and the references to the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus (16:10-11) indicate the pagan patriarchs of households whose slaves formed individual church groups.¹³³ Kruse does note that of the remaining names, up to eight may have been persons of some means and influence.¹³⁴ Furthermore, none of the names are particularly Latin and local – since Paul had never visited Rome previously, it is possible that he greets only those he knows or has heard of. Whether Chapter 16 is representative of the Roman churches is therefore somewhat uncertain.

3.3 The relationship of early Christians to the secular authorities

How these sociological and political realities inform the relationship between the early Christians and the secular authorities of the day is somewhat difficult to ascertain. In terms of the overarching imperial system, Christians were certainly cognisant that their own Messiah had been executed by the Roman authorities, and this no doubt contextualised the complex issues of Christian public identity and engagement with authority.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Osborne, *Romans*, 14.

¹³² Schreiner, *Romans*, 16.

¹³³ *Romans*, 763-6.

¹³⁴ *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, lii.

¹³⁵ Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 9.

Yet Carey argues that the evidence of New Testament teaching and historical witness demonstrates a large diversity of attitudes towards authorities among early Christian communities.¹³⁶ Beyond attitudes to Rome itself, the relative autonomy of local power structures may also have resulted in different attitudes towards local officials for early Christians, ranging from obedience and accommodation, to indifference, to subtly challenging culture and even public criticism.

The New Testament itself also provides us with some evidence of early Christians who seem to have been agents of secular authority. One of these is to be found in Romans 16:23 where Paul extends the greetings of a certain Erastus, the οἰκονόμος (*city treasurer/manager of public works*), to the Roman Christians. On the face of it, Erastus appears to hold some civic position in a city, likely Corinth where Paul writes from.¹³⁷ Dunn interprets the position as merely a financial officer within local government, of uncertain seniority and possibly equivalent to the middle rank of *quaestor*.¹³⁸

Yet an Erastus is also named as one of Paul's helpers sent into Macedonia in Acts 19:22, and is listed among the greetings of 2 Timothy 4:19-21 (where he is said to have remained at Corinth). There is some debate as to whether any of these references (or indeed all of them) are to be identified as the same person.¹³⁹ Furthermore, a bronze on limestone inscription was found in 1929 within the confines of ancient Corinth, bearing the words: "Erastus laid it [the pavement] at his own expense in return for his aedileship."¹⁴⁰ Having been dated to the mid-first century, is this also the same Erastus and if so what might this indicate about the wealth and socio-political status of early Christians?

¹³⁶ "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 10.

¹³⁷ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2-3.

¹³⁸ Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 910.

¹³⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 782.

¹⁴⁰ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 12-3; Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 180-1.

An *aedile* was generally an elected position, filled by a free Roman citizen and responsible for the construction and maintenance of public works and managing associated revenue.¹⁴¹ Usually candidates were elected on the basis of having committed to fund a major project out of their own wealth, a tradition of elite λειτουργοί which was imported from the Greek city-states.¹⁴² In Corinth, two *aediles* were elected and sat below the ruling magistrate in authority. Winter's extensive work on the historical Erastus identifies three common Greek terms for the Latin title: ἀστυνόμος, ἀγορανόμος, and οἰκονόμος. οἰκονόμος aligns particularly well with usage in Corinth for the position of *aedile* during the Julio-Claudian period, though it could also be used unofficially to describe general positions of public administration.¹⁴³

If we can confidently identify the Erastus of Romans 16:23 with the sponsor of the Corinthian inscription, it is likely that he belonged to the decurion social class, was moderately wealthy and held some influence as a local leader.¹⁴⁴ If we can further identify this Erastus as the same who assisted Paul in Acts 19:22, then it appears he returned to Corinth and sought public office after becoming a Christian. Winter sees in this a fulfilment of the Christian calling to seek the good of the local community through acts of public good works.¹⁴⁵ While as an elected official this would not correlate exactly to a Christian employed as an agent of secular authority, it does provide an example of Christian public service within a broadly authoritarian and unrepresentative system of government.

¹⁴¹ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 585-6; Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 181-4.

¹⁴² John M.G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 32.

¹⁴³ *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 185-91.

¹⁴⁴ Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, 148.

¹⁴⁵ *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 195-6.

Osborne considers Erastus just one of a number of Roman and local officials evident in the New Testament who were early converts to the Christian faith.¹⁴⁶ The record of Acts provides several key examples. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 6:26-40) was a treasury official in a royal court, and the centurion Cornelius (10:1-48) was a military officer commanding a local garrison.¹⁴⁷ Paul is also recorded as having prompted a faith response from a certain Sergius Paulus (13:4-12), proconsul of the senatorial province of Cyprus, and the unnamed city jailer at Philippi (16:25-40).¹⁴⁸ In its earliest days the gospel seems to have attracted and won over agents of authority at multiple levels, from a lowly city jailer, to military commanders, and to high officials of prestigious rank and standing.¹⁴⁹ Paul would have been personally acquainted with at least the latter two examples. Carey notes that in the case of Cornelius, it is not apparent that he relinquishes his military position and its associated duties.¹⁵⁰ The same may also be said of the Ethiopian eunuch, Sergius Paulus and the Philippian jailer. While the argument from silence is always slippery, the text does not raise any issues around whether conflicts existed between their secular positions and their new Christian faith.¹⁵¹ This might even imply some degree of compatibility between the concerns of the gospel and that of the secular authorities.

3.4 The audience and occasion of Romans 13:1-7

As to the original audience of the letter, it is natural to see Chapter 16 as providing a window into the specific individuals Paul had in mind when writing to the Roman church. Schreiner is careful to note that it is not necessary for Paul to have personally known each

¹⁴⁶ Osborne, *Romans*, 417.

¹⁴⁷ Darrell L Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 341,85.

¹⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 444,540-3.

¹⁴⁹ Matthews, *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire*, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 29.

¹⁵¹ Matthews, *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire*, 54-5.

person greeted.¹⁵² We must therefore be wary of viewing the names of Chapter 16 as wholly representative of the letter's intended audience.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, McKnight argues that the addressees of Chapter 16 do map reasonably neatly onto this intended audience.¹⁵⁴ Their social and ethnic breakdown correlates well with the theological themes of the letter, which may go some way towards indicating a specific occasional context for the letter and Romans 13:1-7 in particular.¹⁵⁵

This brings us to the question of whether a specific historical context within the Roman church prompted Paul's teaching on authority in Romans 13:1-7. A number of possibilities have been put forward in scholarship.

A conflict may have existed within (or between) the Roman churches, and Paul writes his whole letter to promote peace and unity among the faithful. We have noted the ethnic, socio-economic and socio-political diversity of the early Roman church, particularly the waning and waxing Jewish and Gentile demographics over time. Stott argues that a theological conflict between these two groups arose concerning the soteriological status of Gentiles, the same conflict which may have led to the Claudian expulsion in AD 49.¹⁵⁶ McKnight agrees that Paul's Roman audience was internally divided, but contends that more than simple ethnicity the battle lines were between the 'weak' Jewish or judaised Gentile Christians who insisted on strict Torah adherence, and the 'strong' who considered that because of grace Torah observance was no longer necessary (Rom. 14-15).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² *Romans*, 8-9.

¹⁵³ Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*, 77.

¹⁵⁴ "Paul and Romans," in *The State of New Testament Studies*, ed. Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 385.

¹⁵⁵ For example, the 'weak' and 'strong' Christians of Romans 14-15 may correlate roughly to the Jewish and Gentile sections of the church.

¹⁵⁶ *The Message of Romans*, 34.

¹⁵⁷ "Paul and Romans," 386.

Another option is that Paul simply sought to introduce and defend his theology to a church he had not previously engaged but intended to visit. He therefore may have framed his letter around the questions he anticipated, particularly those that touched on potential disagreements between the Jewish and Gentile constituents.¹⁵⁸

Paul may also have been seeking spiritual and practical support for his missionary work. Both his collection trip to Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-28) and his intended mission to Spain (15:24) are noted in the letter, and Paul may have been using his letter as a means of gaining the Roman church's endorsement of the former, or preparing it as a base of operations for the latter.¹⁵⁹ Of course, all of the above may be possible at once – for example, if Rome were to be a sending church for the Spanish mission, it would need to have overcome any disunity and be in general agreement with Paul's theology and approach to the gospel.¹⁶⁰

As for Romans 13:1-7 specifically, its paraenetic nature (and indeed, its place within the broader paraenesis of 12:1-15:6) does not necessarily indicate that it lacks its own historical occasion.¹⁶¹ It is possible that its appropriate context is simply the underlying tradition it draws upon, rather than any particular socio-political realities in Rome.¹⁶²

Alternatively, Paul may exhort the Roman Christians to submit to authorities as a safeguard against a misapplication of the theology of the surrounding passages.¹⁶³ Though

¹⁵⁸ Osborne, *Romans*, 17-8.

¹⁵⁹ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 25.

¹⁶¹ Dunn argues the entire section is specific rather than general paraenesis, drawing on common tradition but presented here for a specific purpose. *Romans 1-8*, lvii-lviii.

¹⁶² For example, Hanc argues that Paul's Jewish understanding of the Old Testament is the primary framework for his political theology and how it is expressed in the theology of the passage. Hanc identifies the specific theology as the 'New Exodus' paradigm: that the liberation of God's people comes about through his divine intervention rather than human activity. Foreshadowed in the Old Testament (not least in the original Exodus), this is fully manifested in Christ's death and resurrection. For the Christian, political activity should therefore not rely on subverting authority with human activism, but be expressed in submission, non-retaliation, and the doing of good works in society in imitation of Christ. "Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus," 313-4.

¹⁶³ Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 808-9.

they are freed from bondage to sin, a newly constituted people of God, and are to live out their transformed lives over against the patterns of the world, this is not to be expressed through social isolationism, withdrawal, civic resistance, or Zealotry. It is possible Paul felt that the Roman church might attempt to passively or actively resist the Roman authorities, particularly those 'weak' Christians who through their Jewish roots may have been influenced by the Zealot movement emerging in Judea.¹⁶⁴

On the other hand, a tendency towards resistance in the Roman church might have had practical rather than theological roots. We have noted that the Jewish community in Rome, despite its relative prosperity, was vulnerable and had recently experienced hostility from the authorities. Paul may therefore be guarding against any anti-imperial sentiment that would naturally arise in response to such hostility, and likely deepen any existing rifts between the Jewish and Gentile members of the church.¹⁶⁵

The Roman church may also have been caught up in unrest among the general populace over taxation. Both Suetonius and Tacitus reference civil discord in Rome over indirect taxation practices around AD 57-58, and it is possible that this unrest was fomenting as early as Paul's writing.¹⁶⁶ This would provide an obvious context for Paul's mention of taxation in 13:6-7, which becomes an example directly addressing the everyday lives of the Roman Christians.¹⁶⁷

Alternatively, Kruse notes that the early reign of Nero (during which Romans was written) was relatively peaceful.¹⁶⁸ It is therefore possible Paul makes his exhortation in good faith,

¹⁶⁴ McKnight describes Zealotry as a passionate commitment to Torah, often expressed through violence against those who flouted or abrogated it. In Judea, the Zealot movement thus sought to remove Roman control by force. McKnight, "Paul and Romans," 386; Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 490; McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

¹⁶⁶ Kim, "Paul's common paraenesis (1 Thess. 4-5; Phil. 2-4; and Rom. 12-13): the correspondence between Romans 1:18-32 and 12:1-2, and the unity of Romans 12-13," 116; Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 490.

¹⁶⁷ Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 66.

¹⁶⁸ Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 490.

and as a logical consequence of his argument up to that point. The specific example of taxation is, however, a fairly compelling reason to think that Paul was aware of the socio-political issues that confronted the Roman church as he wrote. Yet on the available evidence, the precise nature of those issues can be little more than the subject of informed conjecture.

3.5 Influence of context on interpretation and application

How then should this contextual data inform interpretation of the Romans 13:1-7, let alone its contemporary application? It is apparent that none of the cases put forward as to the specific occasion of Paul's teaching here are strong enough to be determinative.¹⁶⁹

Nonetheless, there is enough to be confident that Paul was aware of the local socio-political context and intended this teaching to be directly relevant to local issues, even if a precise *Sitz im Leben* cannot be established.

However, a specific historical occasion does not diminish the possibility of broader application.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the evidence of the social, economic, and political diversity of the early church combined with the paraenetic nature of the passage and its setting in Romans suggests that Paul intended this message to be taught and applied beyond the local circumstances.

Kruse still cautions against being too eager to understand and apply the text to situations beyond those of the original audience, particularly the modern democratic context.¹⁷¹ Yet the available data on the historical context of the Roman church (and the early church as a whole) allows us to make two relevant observations. The first is that despite the uniqueness and spiritual transformation inherent in the early church communities, it is wrong to view

¹⁶⁹ Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*, 74.

¹⁷⁰ Osborne, *Romans*, 20; Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 257.

¹⁷¹ *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 491.

them as somehow separate from their world and its structures – including the local and imperial authorities. They fully inhabited their worlds, and their experience of and response to the reality of secular authority was likely as diverse as their demographics and specific local contexts.¹⁷²

Second, the evidence suggests that despite the non-democratic, authoritarian, and even oppressive system of government at the time, Paul was fully aware of Christians (probably in Rome, and certainly across the Mediterranean) who participated in the exercise of secular authority. These ranged from basic employment, to committed public service, and even potentially to the seeking of high public office.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Paul intended Romans 13:1-7 to be as applicable to such Christians as it was to the ordinary Christian citizen, and that their expression of submission may well differ.

4. SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN AGENTS OF AUTHORITY

A brief stocktake of the analysis thus far is in order. Paul's use of ὑποτάσσω in Romans 13:1-7 indicates a posture or attitude of submission that voluntarily yields one's will to that of another. Such submission recognises the systems of secular authority that God has appointed and the individual's role within that system, potentially expressing itself through humility, service, and obedience depending on the circumstance. However, it also recognises the ultimate authority of God over both the Christian and the systems of secular authority that have been established, and this accordingly contextualises how the submission is expressed.

¹⁷² Carey, "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire," 23-4, 34.

Whatever occasion prompted Paul to exhort the Roman churches towards this submission, this occasion does not negate the fact he intended this teaching to be applicable to all Christians. Paul was himself likely aware of Christians who actively participated in the exercise of secular authority, and it is reasonable to conclude that he intended them also to receive and apply his message. It is conceivable that said application might be in some ways distinct from how an ordinary Christian citizen might respond.

Paul's positive portrayal of ideal secular government shows that it exists for a beneficial, divinely appointed purpose to maintain order and promote good in society (notwithstanding that this purpose regularly goes unfulfilled in practice). For the Christian, there is therefore no inherent incompatibility between allegiance to God's kingdom and service to secular authority, though there are some tensions – such as the role of punishing evil.

It is possible to further develop these findings into three broad areas of application for Christian agents of authority.

4.1 Three implications for Christian agents

4.1.1 Public service as a divinely appointed vocation

Since secular authority is called and appointed by God for a purpose, and there is no inherent incompatibility between that purpose and those of the Christian, it is possible for the Christian to view public service under a ruling government as itself a divine vocation. Despite being members of the kingdom of God, and therefore in sense alien to secular society, Christian life and spirituality is inevitably (and appropriately) expressed within the

worldly sphere, not apart from it.¹⁷³ Indeed, Paul's own language in Romans 13:1-7 blends the purpose of government with the language of divine ministry, blending the barriers of the sacred and secular to the extent that the authorities are direct servants of God.

There is an extent to which all Christians are to not be spectators of politics and government, but to take responsibility for the activity of authorities through prayer and seeking the civic community's welfare.¹⁷⁴ Yet beyond that, an individual Christian may be called to minister for God through involvement in the political structures of the time and even the wielding of secular authority.¹⁷⁵

This calling is part of the synergy between the roles of the Christian and the secular authority in working for the maintenance of order in God's creation. The Christian as a member of the kingdom of God is, as Wright puts it, participating in the bringing about of the new creation.¹⁷⁶ The workings of God's people – which could be put as an expression of their gospel-transformed selves – are effective present signs of God's kingdom as it breaks further into the world. Within this inaugurated eschatology, justice (or the maintenance of order in creation) is a central task of the church in the world, alongside its other missional priorities.¹⁷⁷ Paul's own language in Romans 13:1-7, highlighting as it were the public honour reserved for benefactors, suggests his desire for the Roman church to work out this new creation by doing good as far as they were able for the society they lived in.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 12; Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 67.

¹⁷⁴ Karl Barth, "Podium Discussion in Chicago: 1962," in *Barth in Conversation*, ed. Eberhard Busch (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 188; Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 67.

¹⁷⁶ "Paul and Missional Hermeneutics," in *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life: Ethical and Missional Implications of the New Perspective*, ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B Modica (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 180.

¹⁷⁷ Wright and Bird, *The New Testament in its World*, 523; Wright, "Paul and Missional Hermeneutics," 181.

¹⁷⁸ McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, 50.

The secular authorities also exist within this now and not-yet world, though they may not be aware of it. They continue to be appointed by God (at least for the time being) for the purpose of dealing with wrongdoing and promoting goodness and order. Barth observes that there is tangible benefit to having the state and government in place for the maintenance of the world – a statement that is all the more noteworthy given he lived through the oppression of the Nazi regime and the Second World War.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Paul himself is able to speak of these good purposes of government in Romans despite having experienced suffering at the hands of the authorities of his day himself.¹⁸⁰

It is worth noting that per Romans 13:4, established governments are only servants or ministers within this divine calling, and are not divine themselves or necessarily representative of God¹⁸¹ – an important constraint on any temptation to read into Romans 13:1-7 a divine imprimatur for any and all acts of state or government power (legitimate or otherwise). The Christian should therefore not consider public service to be an ascent to some higher or less-constrained form of ministry.

Indeed, any Christian agent is ultimately responsible to God for the use of their power, just as the ruling secular authority is. The Jewish tradition is clear that regardless of having been appointed to their purpose by God, secular authorities are liable to his judgement if they stray from that purpose or abuse the power given to them.¹⁸² It would be illogical to think the same does not apply to Christians serving or participating in that authority – indeed, the same could be said of a Christian serving in any God-given and God-empowered vocation.

¹⁷⁹ "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," 34-6.

¹⁸⁰ See for example Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:23-25. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 254-5.

¹⁸¹ Barth, "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," 32-3.

¹⁸² Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 64.

Any Christian who feels called to such a vocation must therefore keep in mind the positive goods for their civic community which are the divinely ordained goal of secular authority, not to mention their ultimate allegiance to God himself. Horrell argues that within Pauline ethics, being political means being concerned with the formation and maintenance of well-functioning human societies.¹⁸³ There are arguably any number of diverse expressions of this vocation, ways in which Christians can engage political and governance structures as agents and not simply external advocates. Employment within the public service, as political staff, and even as armed and protective servicepersons are all potentially legitimate options. However, it pays to be wary of extending the application too far – whatever their merits might otherwise be, it is probably a stretch to argue Romans 13:1-7 extends to an endorsement of establishing ‘Christian’ political parties or states, which may risk undermining Paul’s efforts within the letter to untangle salvation and membership of the kingdom from national or political identities.¹⁸⁴

4.1.2 Submission as humble and selfless service

Whatever form this service takes, it must remain grounded in a posture of submission – that is, an attitude which is humble, respectful, and which voluntarily yields one’s own will to the needs of others. This posture recognises the rights to respect and dignity of others, including those who by virtue of the established power structure are placed in positions of authority over us.¹⁸⁵ It must also elevate the needs of those whom the authority exists to serve – the society or community in question – above those of the individual agent, and even above those of the power structure itself. It also restrains the personal ambition and interest of the agent in cases where they might conflict with the needs of the community.

¹⁸³ *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 2.

¹⁸⁴ Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7: a charter for political quietism?," 67-8.

¹⁸⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 429.

Despite the natural instincts of human nature, such submission is not dependent on the good behaviour of the authority or of the society which is being served.¹⁸⁶ It is also not to be influenced by the personal standing or ambition of the Christian participating in the exercise of authority. If the New Testament ethics of humility, respect, and sacrificial love are expressions of the Christian agent's submission, it is entirely possible that submission will be incompatible with other cultural notions of political success and the exercise of power. Recall that Paul's fundamental point for his ethical exhortation is a transformed life that does not conform to the patterns of the world.¹⁸⁷ Humility must therefore be an antidote to reckless ambition. Respect must overcome any tendency to dehumanise or other either those in authority or those in subjection to it. Selfless love that seeks justice and mercy for the community it serves must take priority over self-interest, whether it be legitimate or corrupt.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that recognising public service as a divine vocation does not imply that the Christian must seek out opportunities to participate in the exercise of authority, or that the church global should aspire to maximum political influence. Rather, each Christian as an individual and member of the church body should serve in response to the specific leading and gifting of the Holy Spirit.

This has implications for how one deals with opportunities for personal career advancement or the assumption of additional authority in the course of public service. It is quite possible that any Christian called to enter public service will need to seriously consider denying their own financial, reputational, or careerist concerns to prioritise how they might best serve their community and mission of maintaining order in the world.

¹⁸⁶ Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 19-20.

¹⁸⁷ McKnight notes that Romans 12:14-21 provides a tangible expression of this transformed living through the task of peacemaking in a disrupted world and the blessing of one's enemies. *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire*, 47.

Similarly, the Christian may need to respond counterintuitively to personal opposition or setbacks in their workspace, particularly if they are targeted for their faith. In western democratic cultures workplace rights are often of utmost importance, and the maintenance of personal honour and reputation remains important in the public sphere. Yet submission to authority characterised by humble service may demand an acceptance of personal dishonour or reputational taint, even if manifestly unjust, for the purpose of continuing to serve one's calling. Alternatively, submission might be expressed in such circumstances by departing the public sphere with grace and humility, not seeking retributive justice or personal compensation.

These are certainly hard implications, especially in the context of a secular workplace (notwithstanding that such attitudes are often expected in other ministry settings). They are not, however, 'one size fits all', and the benefit of understanding submission as a posture rather than a mandated activity (such as obedience) is that it can be appropriately tailored for the relevant context, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Christian's ultimate allegiance to God. On the other hand, submission as humble service to the world and established authority does not seem compatible with those positions (particularly ecclesiologies) that mandate separating the Christian community from the secular, especially positions of secular authority. While it is true that the gospel provides a new identity for God's people as a distinct community in fellowship with Christ and one another, this community continues to have an obligation to interact with the kingdom of the world.¹⁸⁸ This is not just for the purposes of evangelism, but also for the physical and tangible benefit of others – an extension of how the Christian community themselves treat each other in love through Christ.¹⁸⁹ Theologies of withdrawal, and even those that see the

¹⁸⁸ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, vol. Parts III & IV (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1277-9.

¹⁸⁹ Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 268-9.

church as offering an alternative *politeia*, are at risk of failing to see that shared political engagement with the world is an opportunity to fulfil this mandate to do good for all people.

4.1.3 Gentle subversion - submission through critique and reform

What then does submission look like when the misbehaviour of the governing authority (or indeed, the community being governed) is not only an affront to a Christian individual, but a larger failure to justly restrain wickedness and promote the good of society? It was noted above that submission as set out by Paul is not dependent on the good behaviour of the governing authority or the community being served. Indeed, Winter points out that the Christian has in Christ the ultimate example of sacrificial service to an undeserving world in the face of tremendous oppression.¹⁹⁰ So even in the face of an ungrateful or seemingly irredeemable society, or under the weight of a corrupt and oppressive government, the Christian can continue to serve as an agent of authority seeking both the spiritual and secular welfare of all those around them.

No doubt such a prospect is highly offensive to many, regardless of their political inclinations. In the 21st Century, issues like the oppression of marginalised communities by national governments and dominant communities, the rise of populism and a tendency towards authoritarianism even in established democracies, as well as the ubiquitous phenomenon of executive and bureaucratic corruption are understandably cause for outrage. Yet if a Christian is truly called by the leading and gifting of the Spirit to the service of the community through participation in governing authority, it seems that their priority must be faithful service within the framework of submission set out by Paul in Romans 13:1-7. The risk is that the Christian agent of authority becomes by default a strict

¹⁹⁰ Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*, 19-20.

political and social conservative. As Horsley correctly points out, this may lead to a wholesale accommodation of political structures as the inevitable established order, an accommodation that then bends the gospel of Jesus Christ to become a tool of the dominant political excesses of the day.¹⁹¹

The solution is to return again to the definition, context, and purpose of Christian submission to authority. Submission is a posture of voluntary yielding according to established structure, not an uncritical obedience or accommodation. Christian submission is contextualised by ultimate allegiance to the sovereign rule of God. God himself appoints secular authority not for its own ends or interests, but to maintain order in the world.

Therefore, a Christian may continue in submission when they disobey or challenge authority so as to yield to will of God.¹⁹² Furthermore, since Paul can say that the authorities not only exist to punish evil and promote good, but can and should recognize that dichotomy, there is an implied opportunity to criticize and counter power structures when they fail to do so.¹⁹³

The Christian agent of authority therefore has the opportunity to utilise their vocational service to challenge, influence, and even reform oppressive or broken systems of authority. It might be appropriate to call this approach ‘subversive’, in that it challenges the status quo through the radically transforming power of the gospel.¹⁹⁴ However, use of this term by a Christian agent of authority is potentially problematic, since in normal political terms it could imply destructive and even violent attempts at revolution.

¹⁹¹ Horsley, "Introduction," 22-3.

¹⁹² Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 826.

¹⁹³ Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 256.

¹⁹⁴ See, for example, use of the term in Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."; Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Parts III & IV, 1281.

As far as Romans 13:1-7 is concerned, the role of the Christian agent in such circumstances is to responsibly and consistently discern through the Spirit the appropriate action that supports and exhorts the established authority in fulfilling its purpose to benefit the common good.¹⁹⁵ There are multiple and nuanced options available to subjected peoples in their political response to oppressive or corrupt governments, rather than being wholly for and against, and this extends to those Christians who find themselves operating within and as part of the political system.¹⁹⁶ One might accept the status quo given its broader benefits, while internally or publicly recognising its faults. An individual or collective with sufficient influence might attempt to reform a system from within, attempting to balance the interests of the system with the interests of society. Where a system's course is irredeemable, it might even involve civil (or, as it were, workplace) disobedience, refusing to betray the purpose of authority or the will of God when these conflict with the activity of government. The point is that any such actions are not to be insubordinate, violent, or retributive – Paul explicitly condemns these. Rather, they are to be expressions of Christians' love for one another and for the broken world, a love that mirrors the missional love of Jesus Christ for his creation. Submission manifested as critique and challenge is therefore, in a sense, a gentle subversion.

Discernment of the correct course of action will necessarily require an integration of Romans 13:1-7 with broader New Testament and biblical ethics. Of course, the perspectives of the many Christian traditions on ethics will produce a diverse array of responses to political contexts. This is not necessarily troubling – it likely reflects the diversity of action and opinion on political matters that was already evident in the early Christian church. One obvious example would be the broadly Anabaptist approach to war,

¹⁹⁵ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 970.

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Parts III & IV, 1276-7.

that is, a holistic commitment to pacificism and non-violence.¹⁹⁷ In many cases this theology necessitates a rejection of service in the armed forces, or at least a commitment to serving only in roles that do not directly perpetrate violence. On the other hand, traditions which ascribe to theories of just war may have no qualms about military service.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, a Christian agent in such circumstances might still seek to serve the purpose of government and of God himself by influencing defence and foreign policy to minimise the devastating and destructive impacts of military conflicts.

On the issue of disobedience, while the ordinary Christian citizen might well need to simply exercise submission through civil disobedience or public protest, the Christian agent will also need to have regard to their personal integrity as an agent of authority. Participation in legitimately constituted arms of public services often requires adherence to employment contracts, codes of conduct, and certain ethical norms. There is a legitimate question as to whether a Christian can with all integrity disobey or publicly criticise a government or authority structure if they have formally committed to serving it and upholding its norms. Therefore, when a Christian agent finds themselves in the position of having to disobey or denounce the activity of the authority they serve, serious consideration should be given to whether they should continue in that service. Once again, the correct course of action will require a careful and humble consideration of the Christian's allegiance, and how they should ultimately submit to God in and through their vocation.

¹⁹⁷ Neufeld, "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7."

¹⁹⁸ The theological basis for this position may be found in the Augustinian tradition of the church supporting and taking advantage of the earthly peace maintained by human government. See *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), Book XIX, 17, 877-9.

4.2 Remaining issues

Romans 13:1-7 therefore provides a framework that guides Christian agents of authority in exercising their vocation for public service in a manner that appropriately submits to their relevant power structure, the community they serve, and to will of God. However, just as the passage is not a comprehensive Pauline theology of church-state relations¹⁹⁹, neither does it offer instruction on every issue that confronts the Christian agent.

Staying with the subject of tenability, there remains a question on how the Christian agent navigates shifts in not only the policy positions of the governing authority, but in the cultural norms governing the society at large. Indeed, Wright notes that the claims of the Christian faith are more likely than not to bring the Christian into conflict with the worldly claims of secular authorities seeking political and cultural dominance.²⁰⁰ Leaving aside the situation where the Christian agent is forced to contend with a direct command that conflicts with Christian principles, where is the line to be drawn between patiently forbearing with a generally immoral system and making a principled stand that might jeopardise one's position, and therefore ability to fulfil the calling?

The options for responding, which are undoubtedly numerous and well-treated elsewhere, are beyond the scope of Romans 13:1-7 and require diligent integration with the entire ethical counsel of Scripture. Yet the ethical conundrum that is raised directly by the text is apparently left unanswered: if the Christian may not seek vengeance (12:19-21), but the government is empowered to punish wickedness with the sword (13:4), how does the Christian agent engage state-sanctioned violence?

¹⁹⁹ Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*, 971.

²⁰⁰ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Parts III & IV, 1282-3.

Barth puts the problem well, that the violence of the state (being an apparently necessary component of its God-given task) is effectively a foreign task for the Christian.²⁰¹ Yet the Christian can benefit from the justice and security brought about by that violence, be grateful for it, and indeed support the authority that executes it through prayer and practice. Should Christians therefore avoid all association with violent vehicles of governing authority? Is public service through violent means vocationally 'out of bounds'? Or is there, as some conservative readings suggest, a distinction to be made between prohibited personal retribution and participating in the just violence of the state?

On the basis of the argument of Romans, it perhaps must be sufficient to say that the Christian agent's priority is to reflect the love of Jesus Christ and overcome evil by doing good.²⁰² That is by no means a passive statement, but it might also need to recognise that in the present age the Christian remains *simul justus et peccator*, and so engagement with the secular powers and their God-given mission will be complex and not easily navigated.²⁰³

A final question arises out of how such difficult decisions might affect an individual or church's general witness to the gospel. This is a potentially underexamined field, examining how a Christian vocation of public service (that is, more than simple civic or political engagement) might be integrated with the church's missional task to preach the good news and make disciples. While well beyond the scope of Romans 13:1-7, the overlap between God's purpose through secular authorities to maintain and safeguard his creation, and his mission to reconcile that creation to himself, is significant enough to warrant further investigation.

²⁰¹ Barth, "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," 39-40.

²⁰² Isaak, "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7."

²⁰³ Barth, "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963," 40.

5. CONCLUSION

Christian agents of authority are therefore not excluded from considering themselves full and equal recipients of Romans 13:1-7. On the contrary, the language and context of Paul's paraenesis speaks comprehensively to the situation of Christians who are neither rulers nor simple subjects, but somewhere in between – exercising influence and agency within the political structures around them. Casting the governing authorities and the Christian community as wholly distinct and largely oppositional categories risks overlooking the tremendous opportunity for both institutions to partner in ministering to God's creation through the maintenance of order and promotion of human flourishing.

Yet by understanding Paul's use of ὑποτάσσω not as prescribed obedience, but as a posture of voluntary yielding in love, the possibilities for participating in the good purpose of government becomes not just an optional career-path for the Christian, but a Spirit-called ministry. This purpose, to punish wickedness and promote the good of the community, continues to exist regardless of how far short secular authorities might fall – and fall short they do, in often devastating and horrifying ways. In that space, the Christian agent has the opportunity to exercise submission by placing the needs of the community over their own, humbly serving the authority and the community for the good of both, and using their privileged position to gently subvert broken power structures, encouraging secular authority to return to its true mission.

Romans 13:1-7 should therefore serve to fortify Christians serving secular authorities in their roles as λειτουργοί to the public sphere and to God itself. The call to submit is also a consistently important reminder to allow the Holy Spirit to lead the conscience of Christian agents in responding to the unique challenges of their vocation.

6. REFERENCES

- Augustine. *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin, 2003. Orig. ed. 413-427.
- Bailey, Jon Nelson. "Paul's Political Paraenesis in Romans 13:1-7." *Restoration Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2004): 11-28.
- Barclay, John M.G. *Paul and the Gift*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Barth, Karl. "Conversation with the Church Brotherhood in Württemberg: July 15, 1963." In *Barth in Conversation*, edited by Eberhard Busch, 28-69. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2018.
- . "Podium Discussion in Chicago: 1962." In *Barth in Conversation*, edited by Eberhard Busch, 161-91. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Borg, Marcus. "A New Context for Romans Xiii." *New Testament Studies* 19, no. 2 (1973): 205-18.
- Calvin, John. "Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians." In *Calvin's Commentaries*, edited by William Pringle. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Carey, Greg. "Early Christianity and the Roman Empire." In *The State of New Testament Studies*, edited by Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta, 9-34. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.
- Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. Vol. 1, London: T&T Clark International, 1975.
- . *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. International Critical Commentary. 2 vols. Vol. 2, London: T&T Clark International, 1975.
- Cullmann, Oscar. *The State in the New Testament*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
- Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 1-8*. Word Biblical Commentary. Thomas Nelson, 1988.
- . *Romans 9-16*. Word Biblical Commentary. Thomas Nelson, 1988.
- . "Romans 13:1-7: A Charter for Political Quietism?". *Ex auditu* 2 (1986): 55-68.
- Gorman, Michael J. "Pauline Theology: Perspectives, Perennial Topics, and Prospects." In *The State of New Testament Studies*, edited by Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta, 197-223. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.
- Hanc, Ovidiu. "Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus." *Tyndale Bulletin* 65, no. 2 (2014): 313-16.

- Hanson, John, and Scott G Ortman. "A Systematic Method for Estimating the Populations of Greek and Roman Settlements." *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 30, no. 1 (2017): 301-24.
- Horrell, David G. *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*. London: T&T Clark, 2005.
- Horsley, Richard A. "Introduction." In *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, edited by Richard A. Horsley, 1-24. Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2004.
- Isaak, Jon. "The Christian Community and Political Responsibility: Romans 13:1-7." *Direction* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 32-46.
- Josephus. "De Bello Judaico Libri Vii." In *Flavii Josephi opera*, edited by Benedikt Niese. Berlin: Weidmann, 1888.
- Kallas, James. "Romans 13:1-7: An Interpolation." *New Testament Studies* 11, no. 4 (1965): 365-74.
- Kim, Seyoon. "Paul's Common Paraenesis (1 Thess. 4-5; Phil. 2-4; and Rom. 12-13): The Correspondence between Romans 1:18-32 and 12:1-2, and the Unity of Romans 12-13." *Tyndale Bulletin* 62, no. 1 (2011): 109-39.
- Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10 vols. Vol. 8. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Kruse, Colin G. *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016.
- . *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Matthews, Shelly. *The Acts of the Apostles: Taming the Tongues of Fire*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013.
- McKnight, Scot. "Paul and Romans." In *The State of New Testament Studies*, edited by Scot McKnight and Nijay K Gupta, 368-88. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.
- . *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel in Search of Peace in the Midst of Empire*. London: SCM Press, 2019.
- Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018.
- . *Romans*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Mutter, Kelvin F. "Ephesians 5:21-33 as Christian Alternative Discourse." *Trinity Journal* 39, no. 1 (2018): 3-20.
- Neufeld, Matthew G. "Submission to Governing Authorities: A Study of Romans 13:1-7." *Direction* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 90-97.

- Oakes, Peter. *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level*. London: SPCK, 2009.
- Osborne, Grant R. *Romans*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Second ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018.
- Silva, Moisés, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Second ed. 5 vols. Vol. 4. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- Stott, John. *The Message of Romans*. The Bible Speaks Today. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.
- Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.
- Thrall, Margaret E. "Pauline Use of Syneidēsis." *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 1 (1967): 118-25.
- Winter, Bruce W. *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Wright, N.T. "Paul and Missional Hermeneutics." In *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life: Ethical and Missional Implications of the New Perspective*, edited by Scot McKnight and Joseph B Modica, 179-92. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- . *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Vol. Parts III & IV, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Wright, N.T., and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World*. London: SPCK, 2019.