



# PAUL'S CONCEPT OF POLITICS IN ROMANS 13:1-7 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL (ECWA)

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## ABSTRACT

*Politics is the art of governance and as such a responsibility for every citizen to participate in it. The Church in Rome finds it extremely difficult to understand the concept of politics. This may be due to the cruelty of the wicked Emperor at the helm of affair during the apostolic era. Apostle Paul's concept of politics about Christians and civil authority is a point of reference for generations. Nigeria Constitution adjudge every citizen to be responsible to the constituted authority. ECWA as a Church denomination is quiescent about participation of staff and members in partisan politics, but gratifying the dividends. This may not be unconnected with some part of ECWA Bye-laws that forbids active political participation especially of persons under her employment. Since no church's Constitution and Bye-laws can be greater than biblical injunctions, the researcher undertakes to study Paul's Concept of Politics as enshrines in Romans 13:1-7 in relations to ECWA policies on membership political participation. The study employs historical, analytical and exegetical methods. Findings reveals that ECWA policies on political participation arose from a misconstrue notion that politics is a dirty game bedeviled with devilish activities. The study concludes that since Apostle Paul admonished the Roman Christians to submit to constituted authority and play their roles in carrying out their civil responsibility to the political policies of rulers of his time, politics itself might not be as dirty as they assumed. The study recommends a review of ECWA Constitution and Bye-laws.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Partisan Politics, ECWA, Concepts, Constitution and Bye-laws.*

## INTRODUCTION

Paul had a teaching on the relationship of Christians and civil authority which the Church should study keenly to fulfill obligation to God and the society. The authorities that exist have been established by God, consequently, he who rebels against what God has instituted will bring judgment on themselves. So, God ordered every soul to submit to the higher authority. It means there is no power but of God, the powers that are ordained by God. If then those who resist the authority sin against God, there is punishment for the offenders, perhaps through the established authority. Paul noted that, "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right" (Rom. 13:3). On recognizing the civil authority, Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers wrote: "The Christian is the enemy of no man, least of all the emperor, for we know that he has been appointed by God, it is necessary that we should love him, and reverence him, and honour him, and desire his daftly together with that of the whole Roman Empire. Therefore, we sacrifice for the safety of the emperor."<sup>1</sup> Christians are not exempted from civil responsibilities, participation in partisan politics is part of the civil responsibility. Darrell Dow wrote, "for the Christian, all government begin with self-governments. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is the starting point of all self-government."<sup>2</sup>

## History of the background that inform Paul

Pauline theology is one the main focuses in the New Testament. This can only be understood through the knowledge of Paul's background, that is, his conversion, calling, vision and then, his mission. Paul hailed from Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. He was a Jew by birth (Acts 22:3). The date of his birth was not mentioned in the Bible, but scholars assumed it was at the same time with Jesus' birth, 4 B.C. H.T. Sell explained, "The date of Paul's birth is nowhere recorded, but from certain dates given in the Acts, from which we reckon back, it is thought that he was born about the same time as Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Paul's concept of politics in Romans 13:1-7 was not advocating absolute obedience to men at the expense of the word of God. If the authority enacted any law contrary to the word of God, Christians are left with no option than to disobey the constituted authority. Paul wrote in respect of the recognition given to human government in general, it is a legitimate authority. At the same time Christians cannot use their faith as an excuse for civil lawlessness. Paul addressed this letter to Christians in Rome. "The government of Rome ruled much of the known world at the time. It was led by Emperor Nero from AD 54-68. Nero is famous for his cruel and unfair treatment of Christians, among other groups. We



must not assume that Paul is writing these words lightly. He was aware of the implications of his teaching.”<sup>4</sup> Christians have the audacity to protect their lives and properties and to also protest against any authority that is against God. Robert J. Karris quotes Luke Timothy Johnson when he wrote, “If all the civil authority is from God and ordered under God, then it equally follows that a Civil authority that does not respond to God’s will can be considered disqualified as a true authority, and so could be resisted for conscience’s sake.”<sup>5</sup>

### EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 13:1-7.

<sup>1</sup>Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup>Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. <sup>4</sup>For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. <sup>6</sup>This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup>Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (NIV).

**Keywords-** υποτάσσοντα- submissive, κυβερνητικές- governmental, εξουσία-authority, επαναστατεί- rebel, κρίνουν-they judge, άρχοντες-rulers or lords, υπηρέτης του Θεού- servant of God, public servant of God, τιμωρήσουν-punishment, φόρους-taxes.

- i. *υποτάσσοντα*- It is a verb present mid-imperative- to be submissive or to subject oneself: is a hierarchical term which stresses the relation of a person to his or her superiors; in Classical Greek it means “to place under.” Gerhard Delling points out that the subordination which *hypotassō* connotes may be either voluntary or compulsory.<sup>6</sup> It appears from the context of chapter 13 that the mark of a Christian is selfless love for the other. The argument of 13:1-7 itself is that the Christian should voluntarily submit himself in love to divinely instituted authorities.
- ii. *κυβερνητικές*- This is participle present, active participle, dative-plural-feminine- meaning ‘to having authority’ or governmental. Apostle Paul was referring to human beings in positions of authority as ordained by God.
- iii. *εξουσία*- Noun, dative-plural feminine- meaning authorities. In Classical Greek, *exousia* refers to an ability to perform an action and the right or permission to perform that action. It appears that

Paul had human powers in mind when he wrote to the Roman Church.

- iv. *επαναστατεί*- rebel. Paul, aware of the possibility of the Church in Rome to rebel against the constituted authority, argued that as an extension of the love they have for one another, the Jewish Christians in Rome must accept the rule of the empire and not rebel or provoke persecution and expulsion from the cities.
- v. *Αντιτασσομενος*- opposing- participle present-middle-participle normative -singular-masculine. Paul’s argument may have been difficult for a Jewish Christian in Rome, or elsewhere for that matter, to accept.
- vi. *Κριμα*- Noun accusative-singular-neuter-meaning judgment. “For it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.” Romans 13:4. The judgment connotes divine standard of God carried out by man in authority.
- vii. *άρχοντες*- noun nom-plural-masculine. Meaning rulers, chiefs or lords who are assigned by Romans Government to administer in the Roman Empire, either by election or political appointment.
- viii. *υπηρέτης του Θεού*- normative -singular-masculine. This is ‘Servant of God’ or ‘Public servant of God,’ the same word applicable for deacon and minister. Paul affirmed the Gentiles’ rulers are servants of God, perhaps under the permissive will of God.
- ix. *φόρους*- noun accusative-singular-masculine-Meaning taxes or toll. Paul was advising against anti-Roman and Palestinian nationalist sentiments among the Jewish Christians in Rome. They were to submit to the governing authority (the Roman Empire) because its authority was derived from God. This includes the payment of taxes or toll, remitting revenue (*έσοδα*) and show of respect (*σεβασμός*) and honour (*τιμή*) to people in authority.

### EXPOSITORY ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 13:1-7

Paul’s argument is in verse 1a, the recognition of governing authority as God’s institution, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.” Paul then supports his message by appealing to different reasons why the Roman Christians are to submit to the authorities.

1. First, no authority exists except from God, and all authorities that exist have been instituted by God (13:1b).
2. Second, rulers are not a terror to good conduct but rather to bad (13:3a).
3. Third, the authority/ruler is God’s servant in three ways: for the Romans’ good, to execute wrath on the wrongdoer, and by collecting taxes (13:4a,4c,6b).



Paul intersperses his reasons with examples and consequences, such as at 13:2 where he notes the results of resisting authority. All (godly) political activities are ordained by God. He also makes a noticeable shift from making statements of fact (the indicative mood) to a command “pay to all what is due them” (the imperative mood) at 13:7, thus connecting submission to the authorities with a duty to pay taxes and offer revenue. The reasons (facts) for submission to the governing authorities are fundamental to Paul’s command that the Roman Christians fulfill their civic responsibilities.

There are numerous reasons for Christian’s participation in politics; it is an integral part of Christian Mission, it is a tool of service to God and humanity, it is part of wholistic ministry and to the glory of God.

- i. Politics as Integral Christian Mission: Christian’s mission is to reach the world with the gospel of truth, “You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” John 8:32. It is expected of Christian politician to treat every citizen with the concept of truth and justice.
- ii. Politics is service to God and humanity: Paul rightly said, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Romans 13:1 (NIV). No one ascends the leadership position without the approval of God. Vongdip again added, “Every Leader is ordained by God to rule on His behalf.”<sup>7</sup> A politician administers as duty to be accounted for before the Lord.
- iii. Politics is wholistic ministry: One of the significant examples of Jesus Christ followed by Apostle Paul is doing the wholistic ministry. Jesus was going about preaching the gospel and healing the sick. He was also meeting their physical basic needs; he fed five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fishes after preaching the message of the kingdom of God to them. Luke 9:10-17 (NIV).
- iv. Politics should be done to the glory of God. Fawenu said, “The agenda for righteousness that Christians in politics must uphold is not party biased. Therefore, dividing ourselves along party lines and labelling Christians in a particular party as enemies of the Church is reading the game wrongly and putting the wrong foot forward.”<sup>8</sup> Christians must be exemplary in conducts of life careers, politics is God-given opportunity to serve and bring glory to him, it must not drag the name of Christ to mud.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF ROMANS 13:1-7 FOR ECWA

Romans 13:1-7 is the only place in Pauline Epistle where Christians relationship with civil authority is effectively stressed. The passage is a template for the Church to navigate the unfolding events in the Church and society. The following facts explain in brief the implications of the passage for ECWA;

1. The reason Paul commands the Roman Christians to submit to the authorities is because civil authority is God’s institution and as such will punish wrongdoers and praise those who do good (13:1-5). ECWA should concur that politics is God’s institution to govern the society.
  - a. Paul commands the Roman Christians to submit to civil authority because God has appointed that authority (1-2a). Politics is God ordained tool, as such ECWA should wholeheartedly embrace partisan politics by allowing her clergy men, staff and members who are led to actively participate in it.
  - b. Paul commands the Roman Christians to submit to civil authority because the civil authorities will punish those who resist them (2b-3a) and praise and do good to them that obey (2b-4). All members of ECWA, Pastors inclusive should be responsible in their commitments to civil responsibility, politics inclusive.
  - c. Paul commands the Roman Christians to submit to civil authority because of the punitive action of the state (i.e. wrath) and also because of conscience (5). Patriotism is imperative as far as Paul was concern. If righteousness of God, justice and tranquility will take place in the society, the Church must be fully involved in the administration of good governance.
2. The way in which Paul enjoins submission to civil authorities who gave themselves to collecting taxes is by giving back to them whatever is owed, whether taxes, dues, respect or honor (13: 6, 7).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to encourage the participation of ECWA clergy, employees and members in partisan politics in Nigeria:

1. ECWA Ilorin DCC as a District in the denomination should suggest to ECWA to amend her Constitution and Bye-law to give room for effective participation in politics by her Pastors and employees.
2. ECWA clergy and members in Ilorin DCC should take into consideration Apostle Paul’s advice and demonstrate patriotism and loyalty to the constituted authority.
3. ECWA leadership in Ilorin DCC should engage in politics and participate in civil authority, the overlying thought is that God sanctions the government and as Christians, we have the responsibility to obey, support and participate in it.
4. ECWA in Ilorin DCC should desist from viewing politics as dirty game but to see the constituted authority as God-ordained venture.

## CONCLUSION

The failure of ECWA as a Church to play active role in politics pose a dangerous threat to the sanity of the political system of the society. This kind of careless and parochial attitude has relegated ECWA members and clergy who supposed to be at the lime-light of nation building to the back



side of the line thereby creating a dilemma to the development of the society. The aim of this paper is to stimulate the Church to have role to play in partisan politics. Politics is part of the responsibility of the church to the state. The misconception of political involvements is archaic and unscriptural. It is the responsibilities of Christian politicians to be honest and be Christ's ambassadors in partisan politics.

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Fawenu, COS. *Recipe for Peace and Good Governance (Ilorin, Hezelect Royal Nig. Ltd, 2018)*, 140.