‘Be Subject to the Governing Authorities’:
A Ghanaian Christian Understanding of Romans 13:1

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Abstract
‘Be subject to the governing authorities’ (Rom. 13:1) has been the subject of discussion by scholars for centuries. Different interpretations have been given. The interpreters used mainly two traditional methods of biblical hermeneutics to interpret the text namely: (1) Historical critical methodologies which locate the meaning of a biblical text behind the text; and (2) the Exegetical method which locates the meaning of the text in the text. These methodologies which are part of the legacy of Western biblical scholarship have been used by Ghanaian biblical exegetes to interpret the text over the years. In this paper, the author uses the a the mother-tongue biblical approach - a sub method of a broader methodology that finds the meaning of a text in front of the text – to find out what Rom. 13:1 mean to indigenous Ghanaian Christians and mother-tongue bible readers. Using fifteen (15) different versions of the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the text in six (6) languages, the author found out that, the different translations render pasa psuche and exousias the main subjects in the Greek text variedly, thus, giving a host of meanings to the text. The significance of this study is that it has added to the interpretations of the text, and thus it has implications for political education in Ghana.

Keywords: Political education, interpretations of Romans 13:1, bible translation philosophies, mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics, African biblical studies.

INTRODUCTION
Some texts of the New Testament have been the subject of scholarly discussions in the twentieth century. Romans 13:1-7 is an example of such texts. Different interpretations have been given, including the notion that the verses are an interpolation (Kallas, 1965:365-366). According to Kallas, the text seems to be a self-contained unit within the ethical advice section of the letter to the Romans where Paul argues for an attitude of love and non-resistance in the face of suffering (Rom 12), hence it is inconceivable that he should discuss the Roman community’s relationship to the governing authorities (the State) further in this ethical section. Byrne reacting to Kalla’s stand says that, even though the argument in Romans 13:1-7 seems to stand on its own, Paul at this point of the epistle may have decided to address a problem the Roman’s were experiencing - civic unrest over Roman taxes (Byrne, 1996:385-386).

Earlier interpreters of Romans 13:1-7 such as Cullmann, Karl Barth, and others have stated that the state has a Christological basis – Christ has conquered the cosmic powers (cf. Rom. 8:38; Col. 2:15) which are said to stand behind the governing authorities on earth (Rom. 13:1). But this has now virtually disappeared from most commentaries by those who once championed it (Käsemann, 1980: 352-354; Cranfield, 1975, 1979: 653-655). Reuman (2003) argues that Rom.13:1-7 does not appeal to Jesus’ teaching about Caesar (Mark 12:17) as some people think. But rather in it, Paul reflects typical Old Testament/Jewish teaching (cf. Jer. 29:7, pray for Babylon; 1 Mac 7:33) and makes use of a common theme of being good subjects, also found in 1Pet. 2:13-14 and part of a broader Hellenistic code for social life taken over by Jews and Christians, with modifications, in the “Tables of Household Duties” (eg. Col. 3:18-4:1).

Kallas, Käsemann, Cranfield, Reuman, have interpreted Romans 13:1-7, using two methods of biblical interpretation: (1) Historical criticism which locates the meaning of a biblical text behind the text; and (2) the Exegetical method which locate the meaning of the text in the text. The first method focuses on issues of historicity – the writer’s intended meaning, the historical circumstances of the text – rather than the text itself. The second method, which is the exegetical method, finds the meaning of the text in the context of the text (Green, 1995:301-328; Tate, 2008: 89-101). How do Ghanaian Christians understand Romans 13:1-7? Ghanaian Christians constitute those who practice the Christian faith in Ghana spanning the eras of the Early Missionaries, African Independent Churches, Early Classical Pentecostals, the combined efforts of the Pentecostals and the Mainline Churches, Neo-Pentecostals (Koduah, 2004) and recently the Neo- Prophetic Churches (Omenyo and Atiemo, 2006: 55-68).

METHODOLOGY
The researcher used the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach - the scholarly engagement of the indigenous language translations of the Bible. This approach is oriented towards the reader(s) or
reading community and the part they play in the communication process. It is a sub approach of a broader methodology that “finds the meaning of a biblical text in front of the text” (Tate, 2008: 228).

The proponent of the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics is John D. K. Ekem who says that “The varied mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, study Bibles and commentaries” (Ekem, 2007:48; for an outline of how mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics is done, see Kuwornu-Adjastor 2012: 557).

The mother-tongue is the medium of our innermost feelings and thought (Amonno, 1986). It is that native language into which one is born and in which one grows up (Quarshie, 2002:7). It confirms and affirms who a person is, where one comes from and ones sense of identity. The mother-tongue is a repository of indigenous wisdom, knowledge, insight, science, theology and philosophy. It is in the mother-tongue that one thinks and dreams, before translating ones thoughts to other languages (Bediako (2004:37).

Mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics uses the indigenous language translations of the Bible, to get more insight into the meaning of the Biblical text so as to interpret Scripture using the reader’s own worldview. The researcher analysed a phrase and a word in the Greek text of Romans 13: which he considers to be key in understanding Romans 13:1-7 and compared them with fifteen (15) different versions of the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Rom 13.1 in six (6) languages – Asante-Twi, Akuapem-Twi, Ga, Dangme, Ewe and Fante, the southern Ghanaian languages he can read and understand - after which he drew some lessons for political education in Ghana.

PROCEDURE
Since Rom 13:1 is in a larger context, the researcher provides the periscope; analysed a phrase and a word in the Greek text of Romans 13:1 which he considers to be key in understanding Romans 13:1-7 and compared them with fifteen (15) different versions of the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Rom 13.1 in six (6) languages – Asante-Twi, Akuapem-Twi, Ga, Dangme, Ewe and Fante, southern Ghanaian languages he can read and understand - after which he drew some lessons for political education in Ghana.

Romans 13:1-7
1)Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2)Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3)For rulers are not are terrors to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4)for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain: he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer. 5)Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6)For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7)Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due (RSV).

An Interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 in the Life Application Bible
The Life Application Bible, one of the common Study Bibles in Ghana comments on Romans 13:1-7 as follows:

Christians understand Romans 13 in different ways. All Christians agree that we are to live at peace with the state as long as the state allows us to live by our religious convictions. For hundreds of years, however, there have been at least three interpretations of how we are to do this.
(1) Some Christians believe that the state is so corrupt that Christians should have as little to do with it as possible. Although they should be good citizens as long that they can do so without compromising their beliefs, they should not work for the government, vote or serve in the military.
(2) Others believe God has given the state authority in certain areas and the church authority in others. Christians can be loyal to both and can work for either. They should not, however, confuse the two. In this view, church and state are concerned with two totally different spheres – the spiritual and the physical – and thus complement each other but do not work together.
(3) Still others believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better. They can do this politically, by electing Christian or other high-principled leaders. They can also do this morally by serving as an influence for good in society. In this view, church and state ideally work together for the good of all.

An interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 in the African Bible Commentary
The Africa Bible Commentary (2006) interprets Romans 13:1-7 this way:
Believers must submit to the governing authorities, that is to all those who represent the state, from local authorities to the Roman emperor himself...Certain institutions and people have been placed over us by God, and they have the right to our respect. Anyone who rebels against the authority that God has put in place can be said to be rebelling against what God has instituted and can expect punishment for such disobedience Christians must do what is right if they want to avoid punishment or judgment. But fear of punishment should not be the only reason we submit to civil authorities. We should also do so because of our consciences. In other words, our consciences should tell us that God, who is the ultimate authority, has established a hierarchy and set rulers in place to maintain stability and order and that to resist them is to resist God’s plan for a stable society...

A paraphrase of Romans 13:1-7 is as follows:

Be subject to rulers (1a) because they possess divine authority (1b-c). As a result, resisting them is in fact resisting God (2a), and such resistance will face God’s judgment (2b). Secondly be subject because rulers support what is good and punish what is evil (3a). Good people need not fear authorities but will be approved by these servants of God (3b-4a). On the other hand bad people should be afraid, for as God’s servants, they carry out God’s wrath upon evil doers (4b-d). Therefore in light of all this be subject not just because of the wrath of the state (as described in 3-4) but also because your conscience (1b-2) knows that such authority comes from God (5). This is proven by the fact that you pay taxes, for this practice demonstrates that you know that these authorities are ministers of God (6). In conclusion give to all these authorities what is due them whether tribute, taxes, respect or honour (7) (Stein, 1989: 343).

These interpretations and paraphrase of Romans 13: 1-7 above - Western and African seem to be saying the same thing – Christians must submit to the governing authorities, who have both the responsibility to do God’s will, and to the population at large in deciding what that will is. None of the interpretations advocate rebelling against or refusing to obey government’s laws or regulations unless they clearly require Christians to violate the moral standards revealed by God.

The Rendering of ‘pasa psuchê’ and ‘exousias’ (Romans 13:1) in some Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Bible

Pasa psuchê and exousias in the Greek text are the key words one needs to understand in order to interpret Romans 13:1-7 properly. Following is Romans 13:1 in some Ghanaian mother-tongues.

Gâ

(1) Ámale Krônkrôn Le (The Bible in Gâ, UBS/BSG 1907)
Mof...mo aba ehe’ i aba hegbe ni yeô nô le Ed ake hegbe ko be ni dêc Nyoômg to;’i hegbe ni ya le, Nyoômg to. [Everybody should submit to the privileges/opportunities that rule. For there is no privilege/opportunity which does not come from God; privileges/opportunities which exist are from God].

(2) Ámale Krônkrôn Le (The Bible in Gâ, BSG 2006)
Mô fôc mô aba ehe shi ahâ hegbe ni yeô nô le. Ejaak: hegbe ko be ni jëe Nyoômg âôô eje; hegbe ni yô le, Nyoômg to. [Everybody should submit to the privileges/opportunities that rule. For there is no privilege/opportunity which does not come from God; privileges/opportunities which exist are from God].

Ewe

(1) Biblia (The Bible in Ewe, UBS/BSG 1931)
Amesiamè nabôbô edokai nàa dżidûdu, siwo âusë li na. Elabena dżidûdua deke meli o, nege esì tso Mawo gbô ko; ke dżidûdu, siwo li la, Mawo do wo anyi. [Everybody should submit to the government that has power. For there is no government that is not from God. Government that exists has been instituted by God].

(2) Nubbla Yeye La (The New Testament in Ewe, BSG 1990)
Ele be amesiamè na do to dżidûduawo, elabena dżidûdu aðeke meli, si menye Mawo dò anyi o. Dżidûdu siwo li la, Mawo Autôe do wo anyi. [Everyone should listen to the rulers. For there is no governments which exist apart from what God has instituted. The governments that exist, it is God’s power that has instituted them].

(3) Agbenya La (The Living Word, IBS 2006)
Miôo to dżidûdu la, elabena Mawue nye ame si dò dżidûdu la a niy. Dżidûdu aðeke meli afe aðeke si Mawu ãtse âusë na o.[Listen to the government, for it is God who instituted it. There is no government that God has not given power to].

Fante

(1) Nwoma Krônkrôn (The Bible in Fante, UBS/BSG 1948)
Hom mma akra nyina mbre hônô adze mma etum a òÔkrôn; na tum biara nnyi hö dê dża afe Nyânkopôn, na etum a wôwô ho no Nyânkopôn na ôçhyêsê. [Let every soul submit to the power in glory; for there is no power except that which is from God, and the powers that exist are instituted by God].

(2) Ahyâmû Fofor No Mu Nwoma (The New Testament in Fante, UBS 1982)
Nyimpa nyina mfa hônô nhêc aban no tum ase. Osiande tum biara nnyi hö dê dża afe Nyânkopôn, etum a wôwô hö Nyânkopôn na ôçhyêsê. [Let all people submit themselves to the authority of the government. For there is no authority that is not from God; all authority that exist, God instituted them].
Akuapem-Twi

1. Kyere Kronkon (The Bible in Akuapem-Twi, UBS/BSG 1964)
Momma akra nyinaa mmarbrε wɔn ho ase ndɛɛ tumi a ewò anumɔnyam no ase. Na tumi biara nni hɔ s: nea efi Nyankɔpɔn; nanso tumi a ewowɔ hɔ no. Onyankɔpɔn na wahye atɔ hɔ. [Let every soul submit to the power that is in glory. For there is no power that is not from God; and those powers that exit have been instituted by God].

Momma akra nyinaa mmarbrε wɔn ho ase ndɛɛ tumi a ewò anumɔnyam no ase. Na tumi biara nni hɔ s: nea efi Nyankɔpɔn; nanso tumi a ewowɔ hɔ no. Onyankɔpɔn na wahye atɔ hɔ. [Let every soul submit to the power that is in glory. For there is no power that is not from God; and those powers that exit have been instituted by God].

Âsɛ se obiara brɛ ne ho ase ma tumi a ewò ōman no mu, efisɛ, tumi biara nni hɔ a emfiri Onyankɔpɔn pe mu. [It is good that everybody submits to the government that exist in a nation. For there is no power that is not from the will of God].

Asante-Twi

1. Twere Kronkon (The Bible in Asante-Twi, UBS/BSG 1964)
Momma akra nyinaa mmarbrε wɔn ho ase ndɛɛ tumi a ewò anumɔnyam no ase. Na tumi biara nni hɔ gye deã afiri Onyankɔpɔn; nanso tumi a ewowɔ hɔ no. Onyankɔpɔn na wahye atɔ hɔ. [Let every soul submit to the power that is in glory. For there is no power that is not from God; and those powers that exit have been instituted by God].

Âsɛ se obiara brɛ ne ho ase ma tumi a ewò ōman no mu, efisɛ, tumi biara nni hɔ a emfiri Onyankɔpɔn pe mu. [It is good that everybody submits to the government that exist in a nation. For there is no power that is not from the will of God].

Dangme

1. Somi He ô (The New Testament in Dangme, UBS/BSG 1977)
Nô tsuua nô nɛ ba e he si ngɔ hɔ nô yeli nɛ yeɔ nô ô. Ejakaa he blô ko be nɛ e ji Mawu ngô; se he blôhî nɛ ngxô Mawu nɛ to. Everyone should submit to the government that exist in a nation. For there is no power that is not from the will of God].

2. Wami Munyu ô: Somi He ô Kà La amâ (The Living New Testament and Psalms in Dangme, IBS 1997)
Nô tsuua nô nɛ ba e he si ngɔ hɔ nô yeli, ejakaa Mawu ji nô nɛ to nô yemi ô. Nɛ nô yemi ko be he ko nɛ pi Mawu nɛ to le. [Everyone should submit to rulers, for it is God who institutes government. And there is no government that is not instituted by God].

3. Ngmami Klûklû ô (The Bible in Dangme, UBS/BSG 1999)
Nô tsuua nô ne ba e he si ha ma nô yeli, ejakaa blô nɛ tɔ yɛ nɔ. Mawu le haa nô; nɛ nô yeli nɛ ngx ne ô hû he wami nɛ a hzz ô. Mawu le ha mc. [Everybody should be subject to government. For every opportunity/privilege is given by God; and the power that government has is given by God].

Analysis of the Translations

(a) Pasa psuchê
The Akan translations –Akuapem-Twi, Asante-Twi, and Fante – translate pasa psuchê, the main subject in the pericope of Romans 13:1-7 as akra nyinaa – every soul. ‘Soul’ means one of the three components of the human being in African cosmology. In that sense, it does not refer to the complete person, but only to the innermost part of the person. The Gâ, Dangme and Ewe render the phrase as mō ŋà mó/nô tsuua nô/amesiam respectively, meaning, every person, comprising the three components of body, soul and spirit.

(b) Exousias
While the Akan translations use tumi/tum to translate the Greek word exousias, the Ewe translation use dziduda – government, ruler to translate the word. The Gâ and Dangme Bibles render exousias as hegbâi/blînya. Tumi means authority which is delegated power. Hegbâi/blînya means privilege, opportunity, chance.

FINDINGS

The study found out that Ghanaian Christian interpretation of Romans 13:1 has been missionary interpretations of the text (Schaaf, 2002: 193). This interpretation became part of Ghanaian Christianity as a result of the translation of the Bible into the Ghanaian mother-tongues (Ekem, 2011). In that sense one can say that the missionaries translated and interpreted Romans 13:1 as they would in Western societies. Western evangelical interpretation of the text has come to Ghana through various English translations of the Bible, Study Bibles and Bible Commentaries.

The Akan translators of Romans 13:1 tried to use the formal/literal equivalence approach, while the Ewe, Gâ and Dangme translators used the dynamic equivalence principle. The formal/literal equivalence is referred to as word-for-word translation. It is a translation principle based on dogmatic presuppositions – the mechanical theory of inspiration of Scripture – and the assumption that translation does not need interpretation (Van der Watt, 2002:247). The Akan translations have introduced the word ōkrôn/anumɔnyam/animuonyam, meaning, ‘glory’ to those who are in authority; perhaps to say that when one is in
authority, some sort of glory overshadows that person. But, this is not in the Greek. This proves that accuracy in word-for-word translation is impossible without interpretation. Loba-Mkole (2008:12-13) argues that Bible translation and Bible interpretation are intertwined so much that the practice of either one presupposes the other. Thus, word-for-word translation is an impossible task since translation is not a matter of finding word equivalents in another language, because languages seldom correspond at the same level. In a real sense, translation is interpretation.

The dynamic equivalence methodology is based on the principle that translation should not be a static process (word-for-word), but rather on thought patterns (thought-for-thought). An outstanding proponent of the dynamic equivalence theory of Bible translation is Eugene Nida who says that a good translation is the one in which connotations, rhetorical impact and emotive meaning of the original text are reflected as much as possible, without necessarily following the word arrangement and grammar which characterize the original language (Nida, 1964/2003; Nida & Taber 1969/1982). Even though some scholars have criticized the dynamic equivalence methodology of Bible translation on the basis that its receptor (language and context) oriented rather than source language oriented (Nababan, 2008); and also that it is a system of hermeneutics rather than a method of translation (Thomas, 1990), it is important to note that, Bible translation and interpretation are intertwined. It is impossible to do translation without interpretation.

Applying the two Bible translation approaches to the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of Romans 13:1 cited above, we can gather three things: First, every Christian should obey the governing authorities, from deep within him or her. Christians should do that as a duty. And as the Nkwa Asidm: Apam Fororô Ne Nn vôm (The Living New Testament and Psalms in Akuapem and Asante-Twi, IBS 1996/2000) puts it, “It is good that Christians obey those in authority. Second, all governments and rulers function under delegated power from God. Thus they rule on behalf of God, and as such ought to rule as God would – with love, passion and compassion. Third, it is a privilege for a government to be in power. This privilege is given to a government by God through the electorate. Being in government is an opportunity to serve and not to lord it over people. If it a privilege, then it is not a government’s right to want to remain in power. The electorate has the right to retain a government in power. Thus, a ruling government has no business doing all it can to retain seat. Since it is the electorate that has the right to decide which government to be in power at a time, the electoral process must be carried out well. Christians must register and vote. It is un-Christian not to register and not to vote. The electoral process must be transparent, free and fair. It also implies that after an election the party that does not win, should not only accept defeat, but must also know that the people it will govern do not need its services. With this understanding, a party that does not win an election should not resort to violence, for violence against a people created in the imago Dei is vengeance against God; he will surely repay (Romans 12:19).

CONCLUSION
Ghanaian Christians have relied on Western interpretations of Romans 13:1-7 over the years. We cannot throw these interpretations away because they have helped in promoting peace among governments and the Christian citizenry. However, the Ghanaian mother-tongue translations of the Bibles have a lot to add to the interpretations that exist.

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