

Subject to Whose Authority? Multiple Readings of Romans 13. By Jan Botha.

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The bulk of this study was written as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Stellenbosch under the direction of Bernard Lategan. Botha's aim is to present an ethically responsible reading of Romans 13:1-7. Such a reading, says Botha, cannot ignore the fact that all texts are interpreted from a certain perspective. Yet he also insists that readers must interpret texts responsibly, which means that the historical dimension of the text cannot be ignored in the process of interpretation. Botha endeavors to fulfill his goal of interpreting Romans 13:1-7 in an ethically responsible way by presenting an interpretation of the text according to four different perspectives: linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and social-scientific. A chapter is devoted to each of the four methods. In each case Botha provides an explanation and historical overview of the method utilized and then applies it to Romans 13:1-7.

In the chapter on the linguistic perspective a useful survey of scholarship on the method is included. Botha applies linguistics to the meaning of certain words in Romans 13: *exousia*, *archēn*, *hypotassesthai*, *antitassomai*, and *syneidōsis*. An analysis of the text at the sentence and discourse level is also provided. Botha's study of the meaning of certain words was instructive methodologically, even though he did not come to any novel conclusions. Using discourse analysis to study a text is crucial in order to discern the contours of the argument, and Botha's analysis is useful here as well. In fact, I found this chapter to be the most helpful of all those contained in the book. The succeeding chapter investigates Romans 13:1-7 from a literary perspective. Once again the method is helpfully explained and surveyed. An outline of the whole of Romans from a literary perspective is provided. Romans 13:1-7 is identified generally as parenetic literature, but Botha

argues that it should be labelled more specifically as protreptic since the text is a sustained argument in which syllogistic argumentation is employed. He goes on to say that Romans is best described as an epideictic letter in which Paul attempts "to strengthen the existing values of the recipients" so that the Romans will support Paul in his future plans. The benefits of studying Romans 13:1-7 from a literary perspective should not be slighted, and yet upon finishing this chapter I felt that I had not learned much more about Romans 13 than I knew before.

The survey of rhetorical criticism in the chapter on studying Romans 13:1-7 from a rhetorical perspective helpfully sketches in the broad parameters of rhetorical critical studies. Botha explains the difference between rhetorical criticism and literary criticism and argues that epistolography is a species of rhetoric. In the case of Romans 13:1-7 he maintains that the rhetorical genre is epideictic. Paul does not primarily write this passage to exhort the readers to action. The aim is to confirm to the readers that he shares the same values as they, so that they will support him in the future. In this instance Botha's overall understanding of Romans propels him to label Romans 13:1-7 as epideictic. I would contend, on the other hand, that the passage should be understood as deliberative if one were to place it within the categories of rhetoric. Botha's contention that the readers already shared the world view of Romans 13:1-7 is not clearly supported in the text.

Lastly, a study of Romans 13:1-7 from a social-scientific perspective is conducted. The customary survey of the discipline is presented here as well. Botha understands Romans 13:1-7 as an example of a text which holds in tension both "structure and anti-structure." Believers are to follow the norms of society so that they can continue to exist as Christian communities. Thus, obedience to the government is recommended for pragmatic reasons.

Botha's attempt to study Romans 13 from various perspectives is useful. In the final

analysis one learns more about the various methods than one learns about Romans 13:1-7. Indeed, the exegetical harvest from Romans 13 is quite disappointing. The book's main value is in the survey of interpretive approaches. I did wonder in the course of reading this book if over attention to methodology consumes us, when a careful reading of the text can protect one from most of the errors Botha worries about. Most important, Botha says nothing about reading a text theologically. I would contend that an ethically responsible reading of the text must include the theological dimension of the text. Of course, a defensible theological reading of the text cannot be separated from a careful historical reading. Botha's own exegesis of Romans 13:1-7 may lack more depth precisely because he eliminates the theological dimension. He says at one point that "All theological ideas are always socially and culturally determined" (p. 196). Does Botha collapse all theology into sociology? If so, the group with the most power in society "wins." Botha's theological blinders lead him to the astonishing conclusion that obedience to the government is commanded for pragmatic reasons. This ignores altogether the theological grounding given in the text. Obedience is demanded because God has ordained the earthly powers. Botha's appeal to "pragmatics" inserts his own explanation over against the Pauline rationale. Of course, the Pauline call to obedience should not be used to justify governmental evil. The canon itself guards us against a simplistic estimation of the role of government, for John in Revelation 13 warns us that the state may also function as a "beast."

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