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## A SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ROMANS 14:13-23: A DISCUSSION OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Elizabeth K. Hunt

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The following socio-rhetorical analysis utilizes an inner texture analysis and sacred texture analysis of Romans 14:13-23 to illuminate, refine, and critique ethical leadership theoretical foundations. In particular, the narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures and argumentative texture provide support for specific ethical conduct of leaders towards followers in the example of the stronger brother's conduct toward the weaker brother. A sacred texture analysis provides evidence that the character of the Christian directly stems from their identification as part of the Christian community. Together these analyses provide evidence that conduct and character remain inextricably linked. Finally, the analysis provides evidence supporting the ethical leadership construct of moderation orientation both as a viable construct and as having support in the Christian faith.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The concepts of ethics and ethical leadership continue to dominate leadership theory discussions and research. However, ethical leadership theory suffers from a distinct lack of sound theoretical articulations and verifiable research (Northouse, 2016). Discussion of ethical leadership focuses on two main streams, leader conduct and leader character (Northouse, 2016). However, research does not assess these constructs together. The following exegetical analysis seeks to find biblical support for the connection between leader conduct and character in ethical leadership theories.

Utilizing the inner texture analyses of narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures and argumentative texture, Romans 14:13-23 provides support for ethical leadership reflecting a particular type of conduct toward followers. A sacred texture analysis of human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics provides additional support for leader character as a component of ethical leadership. Taken together, these analyses provide argument and evidence for the distinct connection between conduct and character. In other words, according to the Romans 14:13-23 text, character informs conduct.

While a number of ethical leadership conceptualizations exist, Eisenbeiss (2012) articulated four central orientations to ethical leadership: humane orientation, justice orientation, responsibility and sustainability orientation, and moderation orientation. Romans 14:13-23 provides evidence and support for the moderation orientation as an ethical leadership construct. As well, the pericope presents a sustainable argument that the moderation orientation finds support in Christianity, not just eastern religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam.

The study first presents a historical background of the Romans texts. An inner texture analysis reviewing narrational units, open-middle-closing, and argumentative textures and a sacred texture analysis reviewing human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics are followed by a discussion of current ethical leadership theories. Finally, the study presents a discussion linking the evidence provided by the exegetical analyses to current ethical leadership theories.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ROMANS

The book of Romans, authored by Paul, represents an example of a New Testament epistle (Osbourne, 2010). Paul wrote to the church at Rome around 56 AD (Barclay, 1975). Utilizing typical epistle format, the letter includes a greeting, prayer, thanksgiving, main body, and personal greetings (Barclay, 1975). The Romans 14:13-23 text lies in the main body of the letter.

The purpose of each epistle varies, but often the authors wrote to address specific issues or problems of the recipients (Osbourne, 2010). However, Romans represents a treatise since it was not written to address an immediate need or concern in Rome (Barclay, 1975). Paul wrote for three specific reasons. First, Paul wrote to request prayer for his journey to Jerusalem (Barclay, 1975). Second, Paul did not help start the Roman church, he wrote to introduce himself with the goal of establishing good will (Barclay, 1975). Paul's end goal included using Rome as a base camp for mission work in Spain (Barclay, 1975). Finally, Romans expressed concern that the church at Rome guard against things that send the church astray by providing the true Word as a defense (Barclay, 1975).

Moo, Morris, and Carson (1992) have argued that Romans represents the most theologically significant of all Paul's letters. The letter includes four main sections: (a) the gospel as the righteousness of God by faith (Chapters 1-4), (b) the gospel as the power of God (Chapters 5-8) (c) the gospel and Israel (Chapters 9-11), and (d) the transformation of life (Chapters 12-15) (Moo, Morris, & Carson, 1992, pp. 253-255). Specifically, the focus of Romans 14:13-23 entails Christian responsibility and love and the relationship of these to transformation of life for believers.

### III. INNER TEXTURE ANALYSIS

In order to understand the biblical text, an exegete needs to “get inside the text” (Robbins, 1996, p. 7). The basic structures, purposes, and patterns shed light on a variety of possible meanings, both literary and persuasive (Robbins, 1996). The following inner texture analysis looks at both the narrational units and opening-middle-closing texture along with the argumentative texture of the pericope. Reviewing these textures provides evidence for responsibility in both conduct and character.

#### *Narrational Units and Opening-middle-closing Texture*

Narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures provide evidence of narrational movement within a text (Robbins, 1996). The Romans 14:13-23 text divides into three narrational units with corresponding opening-middle-closing textures. The following table presents both the narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures, along with key themes and explanations of those themes.

Table 1

#### *Narrational Units and Opening-middle-Closing Textures*

Narrational Unit	Corresponding Verses	Key Theme	Explanation
A (Opening)	Verses 13-16	Man and his neighbor’s conscience.	A person must think about how his conduct affects not only themselves but also others who observe or who may be influenced by a person’s actions (Barclay, 1975).
B (Middle)	Verses 17-20	The peril of Christian freedom.	Christian freedom and brotherly love are bound together. Christianity provides freedom from the observance of some things. However, Christian freedom also requires service in love (Barclay, 1975).
C (Closing)	Verses 21-23	Respect for the weaker brother.	A person rich in Christian freedom may need to surrender that freedom in service of those poor in understanding of true

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Christian freedom (Barclay, 1975)

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Table 1 shows the narrational units correspond with the movement of the opening-middle-closing textures providing the reader with guidance through a narrative thought process. This process moves the reader from the other’s conscience, to the paradox of Christian freedom, and finally to the responsibility to others in light of Christian freedom and faith. In essence, the narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures frame or identify the specific paradoxical nature of Christian freedom. While Christian liberty sets the believer free, Christian love and charity require sacrifice. As such, the stronger abstains from things that may cause the weaker to misunderstand or to be offended (Gaertner, 1950). While the Bible does provide examples of things that do matter and must be followed closely, it must be noted that the Christian freedom discussed in this pericope revolves around adiaphora or matters on which Christians can chose to agree to disagree (Osbourne, 2010).

*Argumentative Texture and Pattern*

The study of argumentative texture provides illumination of a number of different types of reasoning (Robbins, 1996). Syllogism provides a way for argument to present both logical and qualitative reasoning (Robbins, 1996). Logical reasoning presents assertions, supported with reason, and clarifies them with counterarguments (Robbins, 1996). Qualitative reasoning employs images or descriptions that present the reader with a means to imagine or perceive something to be real or true (Robbins, 1996). Analogies, examples, and references to ancient testimony provide possible tools for qualitative reasoning (Robbins, 1996). Romans 14:13-23 utilizes syllogism and deductive reasoning to argue for Christian responsibility.

Romans 14:13-23 evidences two syllogisms, one for the stronger brother and one for the weaker brother. The first syllogism states that the desire to keep others from stumbling, combined with the interplay between brotherly love and Christian freedom, require that those strong in their faith may need to sacrifice their Christian freedom to serve those weaker than themselves. In Table 2, the argument presents as a logical assertion of truth from major premise, minor premise, and conclusion.

Table 2

*Argumentative Syllogism in Romans 14:13-23 for the Stronger Brother*

Premise	Corresponding Verses	Discussion
Major Premise	Verses 13-16	No one wants to make a fellow Christian stumble and fall away from God.
Minor Premise	Verses 17-20	Christian freedom and brotherly love are bound together, but Christian freedom requires service.

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Conclusion	Verses 21-23	Therefore, the strong brother may at times need to sacrifice his Christian freedom on matters of indifference for the love of his weaker brother.
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At its core, the argument to the stronger brother appeals to love and a measure of sacrifice rather than to liberty (Harrison, 1980). In essence, Paul argues the proper relationship between freedom, love, and faith (Edwards, 1992). While the strong enjoy the freedom of Christian liberty, when they do so at the expense of the weaker in faith, they violate Christian charity and love (Edwards, 1992). As such, the proper use of freedom requires its use in service of others (Edwards, 1992).

The second argumentative syllogism in Romans 14:13-23 uses qualitative progressions to lead the weaker brother through the argument (see Table 3). Qualitative progressions often help the author to move the reader through an argument that they might logically resist (Robbins, 1996). Paul begins by using the example of clean and unclean foods as matters of adiaphora or indifference (Gaertner, 1950). The minor premise argues that these issues of indifference should not cause disunity in the church. As such, the weaker brother should use his own conscience in determining right or wrong in matters of adiaphora or indifference.

Table 3

*Argumentative Syllogism in Romans 14:13-23 for the Younger Brother*

Premise	Corresponding Verse	Discussion
Major Premise	Verses 13-16	The author uses food to indicate that many things are not bad or sinful in and of themselves, but bad because of attitudes toward it.
Minor Premise	Verses 17-20	Matters of indifference (ex. food) should not cause disunity in the church.
Conclusion	Verses 21-23	Each person should determine his own conscience in matters of indifference.

Both syllogisms lead the reader, whether strong or weak, to the same conclusion, Christian love over disunity and judgment (Barclay, 1975). While the argument speaks to both groups, the author placed his emphasis throughout the remainder of the pericope toward the stronger brother (Gaertner, 1950). As such, the remaining exegetical analysis will focus on particulars related to the stronger brother’s perspective.

#### IV. SACRED TEXTURE ANALYSIS

Sacred texture allows the exegete to seek the divine in biblical text or how the text speaks about God or religious life (Robbins, 1996). Robbins (1996) postulated eight different types of sacred textures, including (a) God present in the action or background, (b) holy person or people who have divine powers or special relationships to God, (c) the presence of a spirit being, (d) power that directs history or events, (e) human redemption, (f) human commitment, (g) religious community, and (h) ethics (pp. 120-129). Romans 14:13-23 provides examples of four sacred textures: human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics.

##### *Human Redemption as Sacred Texture*

Robbins (1996) argued that human redemption as a sacred texture provides the transmission of benefits from the divine to humans. In particular, individuals experience liberation from practices that once would provide destruction and guilt (Robbins, 1996). The Romans 14:13-23 text provides sacred texture as a means of argumentation. Specifically, Paul invokes the example of clean and unclean foods. Paul indicates that in Jesus nothing is unclean itself (Romans 14:14). As such, neither clean nor unclean in itself, food holds the place of a matter of indifference (Gaertner, 1950). The redemption Christians receive in Christ's sacrifice on the cross allows the liberation from the laws of clean and unclean foods or matters of indifference.

Moreover, Paul indicates that the redemption secured by the sacrifice of Christ provides for more than eating and drinking (Romans 14:17). More specifically, while the sacrifice of Christ and the subsequent human redemption granted believers the Christian liberty and freedom from restrictions on many things, the ultimate gift lies in righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The sacred texture of human redemption frees the reader from the constraints of judgment concerning matters that Paul deemed ultimately insignificant to the life of a believing Christian.

##### *Human Commitment as Sacred Texture*

Robbins (1996) articulated human commitment as including faith and loyalty to God, as well as people who help to reveal the ways of God to others. This may be referred to as discipleship in Christian texts, but always includes a human response in practice (Robbins, 1996). The text in question provides an argument for human commitment.

As shown in the discussion of human redemption, the Christian experiences freedom from adiaphora when they have a true understanding of Christian liberty. However, Romans 14:13-23 argues for the stronger brother to forego his own Christian liberty out of brotherly love for the weaker brother. The text indicates that the Christian should not engage in behaviors that may make other Christians stumble in their faith, even if those practices are not sinful (Romans 14: 13, 20-21). In addition, the actions, behaviors, and practices of Christians should encourage peace and edification of brothers and sisters in the faith (Romans 14: 19). Paul's juxtaposition of human

redemption and human commitment allows the reader to see the need for sacrifice of Christian freedom to achieve Christian charity and love.

### *Religious Community as Sacred Texture*

Robbins (1996) described religious community as a sacred texture that helps to form and nurture community within a group of believers. Human commitment often requires participation with others (Robbins, 1996). As such, religious community often concerns the relationship of the community to God, to each other, or to the outside community (Robbins, 1996).

Romans 14:13-23 provides an example of the individual commitment to the divine paralleled with the corporate responsibility to the community of Christ. In particular, the pericope argues for the stronger to forego Christian liberty and judgment and the weaker to forego judgment in effort to build each other up in the community of Christ (Romans 14:19). As Robbins (1996) noted, human commitment and religious community often occur together, as is evidenced in this pericope.

### *Ethics as Sacred Texture*

Robbins (1996) described ethics as a responsibility of people to think and act in special ways, which in the Christian context directly stem from commitment to God. Ethical conduct presents as sets of rules, guidelines, principles, or practices (Robbins, 1996). Romans 14:13-23 provides argument for a guiding principle of restraint and non-judgment for the stronger brother and nonjudgment for the weaker brother.

Paul urges the stronger brother, who in full knowledge of his Christian liberty does not stumble with matters of indifference, to forego his freedom to ensure his actions do not lead the weaker brother to stumble. The strong have the power to destroy, to make the weaker fall by their example (Gaertner, 1950). The weaker brother, without full understanding of Christian liberty, considers things of indifference to be sinful and by doing so engages in sin if they use it or engage in that activity (Gaertner, 1950). If the strong abstain from things that mislead the weak, they engage in Christian charity or love (Gaertner, 1950). However, if the strong willfully forego consideration of the weaker brother their action violates Christian charity and love, the exercise in Christian liberty becomes sinful (Gaertner, 1950).

Bruce (1998) argued that faith alone does not determine actions, but rather all action should include love for fellow humans. Since the weaker brother does not fully comprehend Christian liberty and has not been liberated from works, the strong must guard against irritation, ridicule, and contempt for the weaker (Barclay, 1975). Instead, the strong should instruct the weak, show them love, and build them up (Gaertner, 1950).

## VI. ETHICAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Northouse (2016) articulated ethical theory as providing a system that guides individuals in making right and good decisions. However, the research on leadership ethics remains minimal and provides little in the way of a sound foundation (Northouse,

2016). Moreover, while transformational, authentic, servant, and spiritual leadership theories discuss ethics, they do not specify particular ethical principles (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Current research on ethical leadership theory focuses either on the conduct of ethical leaders or on the character of ethical leaders (Northouse, 2016). Ethical leadership theories focusing on conduct tend to look at specific actions of the leader to determine if they are moral and promote the interests of followers (Northouse, 2016). Character-based articulations of ethical leadership theories focus on who leaders are as individuals, often arguing that virtues and moral abilities comes through practice (Northouse, 2016). Moreover, ethical leadership theories promote the idea that because leaders hold a position of power over followers, they have a responsibility to discern how their leadership affects followers (Northouse, 2016).

Eisenbeiss (2012) argued for an interdisciplinary-integrative approach to ethical leadership. This interdisciplinary-integrative approach argued for four distinct ethical orientations in ethical leadership: humane orientation, justice orientation, responsibility and sustainability orientation, and moderation orientation (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Humane orientation refers to leaders treating others with dignity and respect (Eisenbeiss, 2012, p. 795). Justice orientation refers to a leader's fair and consistent decision making (Eisenbeiss, 2012, p. 796). Responsibility and sustainability orientation refers to a leader's long-term concern and planning for society and the environment (Eisenbeiss, 2012, p. 796). Finally, moderation orientation refers to a leader's ability to practice temperance and humility with balanced behavior (Eisenbeiss, 2012, p. 797). Eisenbeiss argued that current articulations of ethical leadership concentrated heavily on the humane and justice orientations, neglecting responsibility and sustainability, and moderation orientations.

The moderation orientation presents leaders as possessing the ability to restrain emotions and personal desires, the ability to practice humility, and the ability to balance between the organization, stakeholders, and self (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Plato described moderation as self-mastery, self-control, and balance (Eisenbeiss, 2012). Aristotle articulated the "golden mean" or middle point between excess and deficiency as moderation (Eisenbeiss, 2012). In all, the moderation orientation entails balancing self and others in a way that ensures continuity of individual character and support for others.

## VII. DISCUSSION

The inner texture and sacred texture analyses of Romans 14:13-23 provides two specific points that delivers illumination, refinement, and critique for current articulations of ethical leadership theory. First, Northouse (2016) posited that most ethical leadership theories take one of two perspectives, leader conduct or leader character. The chosen pericope provides evidence that from a Christian leadership perspective, ethical leadership requires both proper conduct and character.

More specifically, the inner texture analysis including narrational units and opening-middle-closing textures and argumentative textures highlights proper conduct for leaders. If the stronger brother represents those in leadership, the text presents logical progression and argument for specific conduct in relation to those who are weaker or the followers. Northouse (2016) argued that leaders hold responsibility for



how their actions affect their followers. Similarly, the pericope supported the argument that the stronger have a responsibility for how their actions affect the weaker.

The sacred texture analysis provided evidence for the character of leaders stemming from their place in the Christian community and as children of God. More specifically, human redemption by Christ's sacrifice requires individual commitment to the sacred and to the community of believers. This commitment to God and the community of God, in turn requires ethical conduct, which in this case means moderation or sacrifice of Christian liberty on behalf of the weaker brother. However, this ethical conduct stems from who the stronger is in relation to their Christian faith. Northouse (2016) argued that character approaches to ethical leadership focus on who leaders are as people. The Romans 14:13-23 text provides sacred texture supporting a leader's character as stemming from their identification as a Christian.

The Romans 14:13-23 text provides strong evidence that conduct and character remain inextricably linked in ethical leadership theories. The ease of measuring one or the other rather than both may represent why ethical leadership theories focus on one or the other. However, from a Christian perspective, as represented in this text, one cannot be separated from the other. In sum, the character of a person assumed by belief in God as a Christian directly informs and guides that individual's conduct.

Secondly, Eisenbeiss (2012) argued that current articulations of ethical leadership theory neglect the responsibility and sustainability orientation, and the moderation orientation. As well, Eisenbeiss argued that the moderation orientation finds support primarily in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Islam. The Romans 14:13-23 pericope provides further illumination of the moderation orientation as it relates to the leader-follower relationship and provides evidence that Christianity supports moderation as well.

Eisenbeiss (2012) stated that the moderation orientation refers to a leader's ability to practice temperance and humility with balanced behaviors (p. 797). Moreover, the moderation orientation argues that leaders must possess the ability to restrain emotions and personal desires, practice humility, and balance between the organization, stakeholders (including followers), and self (Eisenbeiss, 2012). The Romans 14:13-23 pericope argued for the strong to practice moderation and sacrifice in expressing their full Christian liberty. The strong practice self-sacrifice of personal freedom and humility for the good of the weaker. This easily translates to the leader-follower relationship in that leaders from a position of power give up power to guide and instruct the follower. For example, a leader who has, after years of service, been promoted to a position of authority learns that their position allows for flexible scheduling. However, the leader believes that engaging in a flexible work schedule may encourage resentment among followers and an engagement in lax views toward office hours. Since the office requires specific hours of operation, a lax schedule on the part of all employees would not serve the organization. The leader desires to model and instruct followers appropriately in meeting the organizational needs and goals. As such, the leader decides to keep the same hours as his or her followers. This provides an example of how the leader or stronger brother applies moderation and self-sacrifice of the liberties attained by their position to guide and instruct the follower or weaker brother.

The Romans 14:13-23 pericope also presents evidence against Eisenbeiss' (2012) argument that the moderation orientation finds support primarily in Eastern religious traditions. The inner texture analysis provides progressive argument for moderation and restraint in fully practicing the freedoms associated with Christian liberty. This moderation and restraint stems solely from an unselfish perspective of the effect on others. The old adage, "just because we can, doesn't mean we should", rings true here. While the strong, mature Christian possesses every right to fully embrace their Christian liberty, their place within the community of Christ requires moderation, restraint, and self-sacrifice to ensure the best for those weak in faith. Similarly, the ethical leader may be required to forego or moderate their own behavior to benefit followers.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The socio-rhetorical analysis of Romans 14:13-23 provides evidence supporting the traditional lines of ethical leadership research, that ethical leadership requires both proper conduct and character. However, the pericope illuminates the relationship between character and conduct and presents an argument that the two constructs should be studied in conjunction with each other. As well, the analysis provides evidence supporting Eisenbeiss' (2012) articulation of moderation orientation as a component of ethical leadership. Specifically, the conduct of the stronger brother toward the weaker brother supports the moderation orientation as a construct of ethical leadership. Finally, the pericope critiques Eisenbeiss' assertion that the moderation orientation finds support primarily in Eastern religions. The pericope provides significant evidence of character and conduct associated with moderation orientation to warrant Christian support for the construct.

Further biblical support of these assertions would benefit the theoretical foundations of ethical leadership. In particular, the connection between character and conduct provides a vitally important aspect of ethical leadership theory. From the perspective of Christian leadership, the two, as presented here, cannot be separated. Finally, the construct of moderation orientation and Eisenbeiss' (2012) interdisciplinary-integrative approach to ethical leadership provide an intriguing foundation for further inquiry and require further refinement. As shown, Christianity provides evidence for the moderation orientation and additional biblical support for this orientation would greatly enhance and refine this construct.

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### About the Author

Elizabeth Hunt is an Assistant Professor and Co-Chair of the Department of Communications and Director of Character in Leadership at the University of Jamestown in Jamestown, ND. She is currently working on her Ph.D. in organizational leadership from Regent University. Her research interests include sensemaking, leadership communication, organizational culture and climate, servant leadership, and values and character education.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Elizabeth Hunt at elizhun@mail.regent.edu or lhunt@uj.edu.

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