



The Heart of Christian Leadership: Embracing Radical Hospitality as Christ's Love in Action

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Abstract

This scholarly article delves into the multifaceted concept of "Radical Hospitality" within the framework of leadership in Protestant Christianity. Here, 'Radical Hospitality' represents a rediscovery of the essence of the Christian journey, where individuals, having chosen exile and lived as strangers in their relationship with God, His Kingdom, and themselves, find a welcoming home extended by a loving father who spares no expense for their return. It transcends mere friendliness, involving the reception of guests with a warmth, openness, and authenticity that surpasses expectations in a profound manner. Grounded in theological foundations and biblical principles, the paper aims to dissect and illuminate the various manifestations of Christ's love as expressed through radical hospitality within the leadership paradigm. Drawing on scriptural narratives, historical perspectives, and contemporary theological discourse, the article explores how the ethos of radical hospitality can profoundly impact leadership dynamics within Protestant Christian communities. The discussion encompasses the creation of inclusive and welcoming environments, the embodiment of servant leadership principles, and the transformative potential of radical hospitality in the broader mission and evangelistic endeavors of the church. Through a nuanced examination of discernment, boundaries, and the call to emulate Christ's love, this article seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the theological underpinnings and practical implications of radical hospitality in shaping the ethos of leadership within Protestant Christianity.

Keywords: Radical hospitality, leadership paradigm, Protestantism, theological foundations, Christian hospitality.

Introduction

In the narrative found in Luke 19:1-10, Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, desires to catch a glimpse of Jesus. However, being regarded as an outsider in his community due to his profession, he finds himself at a disadvantage due to his short stature. To overcome this obstacle, Zacchaeus climbs a tree to obtain a clearer view of Jesus. Jesus noticed him, and despite societal prejudices and without inhibition, Jesus welcomed his prayers. Such an initiative by Jesus to stay at Zacchaeus' house surprised the crowd. This act stirred controversy as Jesus was associated with a perceived sinner. In response, Zacchaeus joyfully declared repentance, promising to give generously and make amends for any wrongs. Jesus affirmed his transformation, stating that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' household, emphasizing the redemptive and inclusive nature of His mission to seek and save the lost.

Drawing from the narrative in Luke 19:1-10, there exists a profound concept that resonates with and invites exploration of the Protestant leadership paradigm. This exploration entails embracing a transformative approach to leadership and service. While investigating the



ways the principles of radical hospitality inspired by Christ's teachings, manifest in the leadership practices within Protestant Christian communities, the teachings from the New Testament establish the essence of extending hospitality to those who are considered outcasts or are marginalized.

Luke 19:1-10 withstands the story of Zacchaeus as the ground for radical hospitality. About hospitality in the New Testament, Nwaomah referred to the Pauline corpus, added by General Epistles as the sources that withstand the importance of hospitality as a Christian mission and the platform to establish relationships in society (Nwaomah, 2022b). Moreover, the scholar marked that generating a sense of hospitality has been identified as one of the prerequisites established by the ecclesiastical leadership.

On the contrary, in the context of hospitality for Christ's love, Bock identified Luke 9:51–24:53 as close to Christian leadership (1996) In Luke 9:51–24:53, the Parable of the Good Samaritan stands as 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself. These kinds of declarations were noted by Bock as a contrast between the ministry of Jesus and the ideologies held by the Jewish leadership practices, especially in terms of 'humility and openness to all' (Bock, 2011). Rozelle-Stone and Davis sees Simon Weil's thought underpinned this suspension as the route to involve epistemic 'humility and openness to all' kinds of ideas (Rozelle-Stone & Davids, 2021). When it comes to the determination of leadership for radical hospitality among Christian communities, the aforementioned story among the many embodies the call for extending a kind word and sharing one's time and energy.

The message as depicted above emphasizes a leadership paradigm, especially as designated by Jesus. It is not only inclusive but actively seeks to uplift and serve those in need. In specifying the context of leadership within various sects of Protestant Christianity, radical hospitality implies leaders going beyond conventional boundaries to welcome and serve others, fostering an environment of acceptance, love, understanding and support as expected by Him. Hereby, the Christian leaders are encouraged to emulate Jesus' example of embracing diversity and reaching out selflessly to those on the fringes of society. This approach challenges leaders to prioritize the well-being of others over their own, echoing the selflessness and sacrificial love demonstrated by Jesus. By incorporating radical hospitality into the leadership paradigm, theologians are expected to create a reflection on the transformative power of Christ's love, promoting unity, compassion, and a genuine concern for the welfare of all individuals in all spheres of life on a daily basis.

This research delves into the intricate concept of 'Radical Hospitality' within the context of leadership in Protestant Christianity. It explores the establishment of inclusive and inviting atmospheres, the embodiment of principles of servant leadership, and the transformative power of radical hospitality within the wider scope of mission and evangelistic efforts.

The definition of Hospitality under spiritual influence has been defined as an art. It is timeless, shared across time and space. It can take many forms, but essentially it involves giving and receiving. At its heart lies 'welcoming presence' and it is this understanding that the author sets out to explore. In doing this in this book, she takes us into a whole new area: the light that hospitality can throw on the practice of spiritual direction (Waal, 2006:). The articulation of hospitality as an art influenced by spirituality offers intriguing insights; however, that thought to blur the boundaries between abstract conceptualization and concrete practice, necessitating a deeper inquiry into the implications and practical applications of this concept within the context of spiritual direction.

The critically evaluated perspective on hospitality under the influence of spirituality is identified by Esther de Waal as the expansion of the traditional understanding of offering



warm welcoming services to guests, especially travellers; and the practice stands beyond any kind of religious implications. However, to focus on the theological foundations of hospitality, it becomes significant to consider hospitality in association with personal growth, the means to establish a human connection, and thereby attain the state of spiritual guidance (Butler, 2013). It is under these conditions that the state of radical hospitality gets rooted as the result of religious teachings and a perspective that is responsible for exploring the universal relevance of hospitality in various interactive domains of humanitarian spiritual development. Russell referred to hospitality as the practice of God's welcome, embodied in our actions as we reach across differences to participate with God in bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis (2009:19).

Russel established that the Holy Bible marks hospitality as an inclusion of unexpected divine presence, which remains in advocacy for the marginalised and offers mutual welcome to them. Russell's assertion underscores a profound theological understanding, wherein hospitality, as depicted in the Holy Bible, signifies more than mere cordiality—it embodies a sacred encounter with the divine, advocating for the marginalized and fostering a reciprocal embrace of all. This theological insight illuminates the transformative potential of hospitality, urging believers to emulate Christ's radical inclusivity and extend compassionate welcome to those on the margins of society. Moreover, Letty remained fond of reminding that in Christian contexts hospitality or the state of philoxenia gets translated as love of stranger (2009:35). Such a sense of radical hospitality foregrounds the provisions to lead the marginalised and pave the way for recognition (Oliver, 2015: 484). Grounded in theological foundations and biblical principles, this article aims to dissect and illuminate the various manifestations of Christ's love as expressed through radical hospitality within the leadership paradigm. Drawing on scriptural narratives, historical perspectives, and contemporary theological discourse, this article concentrates on exploring the ways the ethos of radical hospitality can profoundly impact leadership dynamics within Protestant Christian communities.

Radical Hospitality into the Ethos of Leadership

The concept of Radical hospitality, as illuminated by the narrative in Luke 19:1-10, is not only a subject of debate but also an avenue for exploration into the ethos of leadership within this tradition. Examining the theology for radical hospitality centres on whether it is explicitly rooted in the teachings of Jesus. Wright argued that embracing this approach aligns with fundamental teachings, emphasizing the importance of welcoming strangers and outcasts (2017,;126–129). However, Smith questions whether the actions of Jesus should be universally prescriptive or context-specific. For Smith, the stress that imitating Christ is integral to Christian discipleship, especially as hospitality aligns with broader teachings on inclusivity and love (2009:105–107). When this context of generating leadership towards radical hospitality gets extended to the nature of humanity, then the interrogative statements of referring to everyone with the inherent sense of goodness and radical hospitality appear natural. Highlighting the Christian belief as the inherent value in every individual, as the Bible holds that every human being is created in the image of God, generalises the inclusive approach to Christianity. It is critical that to explain that leadership within the context of radical hospitality and to establish that servant leadership aligns with Jesus' way of perceiving humility and selflessness (Crowther, 2018:87–89). However, the gap remains in understanding the relevance of prioritizing the needs of the community and fostering a welcoming environment by serving others ethically and in an ongoing and virtuous manner devoid of the ethic of self-preservation and narcissism (Nicolaidis, 2020).

These kinds of theological belief systems challenge the practical implementation of radical hospitality and further encompass physical acts of kindness and social justice initiatives as the derivation of Christianity rather than general humanitarian initiatives. The challenge lies in discerning the most effective and faithful way to embody radical hospitality in the



diverse and complex settings of contemporary life. It is significant to note that the foundational principles for implementing radical hospitality to shape leadership dynamics of leadership demand multifaceted approaches with diversified reflections of theological perspectives and practical methodologies. According to Michale Ayers, the rich tapestry of theological inquiry is the foreground for detecting the absence of integrated theological ideologies for determining the right kind of leadership discourse (2006:170). Land specified that within the theological framework, the essence of leadership remains very much inherent in humans and is closely connected to a state of sinfulness, which stems from the practice of reluctance in the individual, especially in considering the ultimate authoritative position of God (2014:57). At the same time, from the perspective of the biblical way of considering hierarchical authority by offering the highest position to Christ in collaboration with God's ultimate authoritative power, it becomes difficult to establish a state of mutual relationship between leader and disciples. In modern organisational structure, the practice of hierarchy is the way of maintaining leader-led operations (Northouse, 2021:231) as long as the leader is ethical in all that he or she does (Nicolaidis, 2019; 2020). However, developing the grounds for mutual and co-existence status among the organisational leaders and the team, can the scope to generate a transparent and innovative working environment (Lewis, 1996:74). As a result, it is appropriate to establish that the leadership approaches can be further enhanced by establishing a connection between the hospitality values generated from biblical ideologies and implementing them with the ways of developing organisational goals under mutual understanding.

On a critical note, as theological contexts get investigated under the ways to gain insight into the relevance of radical hospitality, it becomes obvious that within the framework of Protestant Christian leadership, there is an effort to delve into the relevance of biblical declarations. The originality of the context related to hospitality is traced to the instance when Abraham welcomed three strangers at the Oak of Mamre. However, the New Testament offer further realisations into the significance and nature of hospitality, the respective Gospels appear as a guide on the practice of theology towards hospitality. An insight into the Synoptic Gospels, hospitality as a humane act has been marked to be a significant way to follow the instructions of Christ. During their missionary endeavours, the Disciples of Christ travelled and relied on the act of hospitality as maintained by the believers.

However, as interpreted by Bediako and Duah though this is not always the case and a humane act that cannot be assured (Matthew 10:5–14; Luke 10:5–7), the teaching of Christ remains static). The provision or the instance of denial of hospitality can be identified with these itinerant disciples and they are responsible for reflecting actions, which can be in favour of God. As noted in Matthew (25:34–46), there is the elucidation that the importance of maintaining hospitality can be the frame to generate an eschatological context, which again can be Christ's response towards the act of saving the lost at His second coming.

It is the attitude to value another individual that makes leadership a designation to establish affirmation and trust among the people or the disciples (Collier & Williams, 2004:177). Specifications can be noted from the Pauline epistles, added by the General Epistles, which focused on the core positioning of hospitality during the early era of Christianity, and instances related to community relationships (Nwaomah, 2022b:122–125). As for Paul, hospitality can become crucial as a virtue in the Roman Church as it urges the believers to practice radical hospitality (Romans 12:13). Further hindrances are noted, as there were specific demands to endorse the act of extending hospitality to Phoebe, a servant of the Lord (Romans 16:1–2). Thus, while establishing the church, the inclination towards hospitality gets deemed for the establishment of an ecclesiastical leadership (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Hereby, Paul stipulated the widows are the ones who abide by the



commitment to maintain hospitality and are marked eligible for enrolling in the welfare activities of the church in Ephesus (1 Timothy 5:10).

Radical Hospitality Roots in Biblical Teachings

There is no denial to the fact that the theological foundations of radical hospitality remain deeply rooted in biblical teachings. However, at the same time, the practical implementation of hospitality in a modern context leaves gaps when restricted to theological boundaries. Significantly, the concern raised by this research refers to the nuanced understanding of Christians in authentically living out the call to radical hospitality in the intricate tapestry of today's world. In this context, it is appropriate to mark the words of Lutheran theologian Henri Nouwen as, "Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place." (1989: 211)

While elaborating on the perceptions of Nouwen, O'Neil and Stephens (2004), identified that the essence of hospitality through biblical notions is subject to creating a welcoming environment for all kinds of people, including strangers. It is this approach that is inclined to embrace the opportunity of transforming adverse situations into friendly negotiations. The core objective of such an initiative is noted to be the core factor of generating effective kinds of leaders through the practice of hospitality within Christianity. As true hospitality is not meant to bring in any change in the people or otherwise to impose anyone's beliefs over others; the inclusion of this feature in leadership can add an adequate amount of acceptance in society.

Theologians, including those within the Protestant tradition, often discuss the concept of hospitality in critical contexts. In regards to 'Radical Hospitality', Boersma (2007) noted that it represents a rediscovery of the essence of the Christian journey, where individuals, having chosen exile and lived as strangers in their relationship with God, His Kingdom, and themselves, find a welcoming home extended by a loving father who spares no expense for their return. It transcends mere friendliness, involving the reception of guests with a warmth, openness, and authenticity that profoundly surpasses expectations. In this context, Gospel of John very well favoured the teachings and actions of Jesus as the root for developing leadership trends towards the establishment of radical hospitality, and here the Christians does not stand as any exception (Nolland, 2015:903). In examining the notion of 'Radical Hospitality' as elucidated by Boersma and the Gospel of John's endorsement of Jesus's teachings, one may discern a profound call for transformative hospitality rooted in the Christian tradition. However, a critical inquiry might question the extent to which such hospitality is practically manifested and inclusive of diverse perspectives within contemporary Christian communities.

Radical Hospitality as the Manifestation of Christ's Love

As specified by Pratt and Homan (2011), one might assert that radical hospitality is the manifestation of Christ's love, and is integral to the leadership paradigm. Further, Christine D. Pohl (1999) interpreted the love of Christ as a base to reject the opulence and extravagance associated with late medieval hospitality, opting for a simpler expression of Christ's love that steered clear of excessive materialism. Jesus expressed that in the act of extending hospitality, individuals find themselves situated between the ideal vision of God's kingdom characterized by abundance, and the harsh practicalities of human existence where doors often remain closed and locked. This assertion highlights the intricate balance between heavenly aspirations and the challenging realities of earthly life. Consequently, Protestants emphasized a deliberate shift towards simplicity, advocating for a rejection of wasteful behaviors and a mindful utilization of resources as a



compassionate approach. Their advocacy promotes a hospitality that rejects discrimination, challenging both the extravagant treatment of the affluent and the indiscriminate assistance given to the less fortunate.

The theological context directed by O'Gorman towards impartiality was underscored by a rejection of preferential treatment based on socio-economic status (2006:52) and Kessel (2008) also emphasised aligning with a return to Christ's model of hospitality focused on caring for the marginalized. In essence, York (2002) stated that the act redefines hospitality by embracing simplicity, impartiality, and a transformative engagement within the Christian community, echoing the principles exemplified in the early Christian church. The convergence of O'Gorman's (2006) emphasis on impartiality, Kessel's call to emulate Christ's hospitality towards the marginalized, and York's redefinition of hospitality underscores a notable theological discourse within Christian scholarship. However, a critical analysis might inquire into the practical implementation of these principles in contemporary contexts, probing the challenges and nuances inherent in translating theological ideals into tangible actions within diverse Christian communities.

While referring to the principle of radical hospitality Mittelstadt stated that it is profound in laying impact on the dynamics of leadership among the Protestants (2023:134). Checking dates back to the early spread of Christianity, it gets very predominant to mark the inspirations led by Jesus and the embracement of hospitality being the significant source for community unity. It also gets recognised as a way to advance the scriptural narratives and resist societal norms for the attainment of transformative power to the perception of hospitality. The Christian community remains in favour of the hospitality ideology of Jesus and focuses on welcoming everyone without any trace of discrimination. As in Acts 10:23-24, we have Peter who invites Gentiles to his home, and in Acts 16:14-15, we find Lydia extending her hospitality to Paul and his companions. Further, there are Acts 16:33-34, Acts 18:1-3 and Acts 28:7-8, where the Philippian jailer offers hospitality to both Paul and Silas, Paul accepts the request of Aquila and Priscilla and stays in their home, and Publius is found to be host Paul and his companions in the Islands of Malta, respectively.

Radical Hospitality and Christian Leadership Duties

On a more critical note, Lashley considered that there could be a strong emphasis on the Christian duty to extend unwavering love and welcome to all (2008:173). Pratt and Homan argued that through embracing Radical Hospitality, leaders embody the teachings of Jesus and foster a community reflective of the inclusive and selfless nature of Christ's love (2011). The concept of leadership in this matter can defy the theological call for following the path of God (Northouse, 2021). There is also the confirmation that the determined traits of understanding leadership can be tricky, as it's observed a lot but not fully understood. As interpreted by Ayer, "*leadership is knowing what needs to be done . . . and getting it done*", (2006:178) which refers to a state being a good leader, means just getting important things done. On the other hand, scholars like Lewis (1996) and Douglas (2012) emphasised that leadership is identified as the usage of social skills, which are effective in terms of influencing people to achieve determined goals. The relevance gets counted in terms of generating emotional intelligence, which is the key to developing effective influence of the leader over the behaviour of the people around him/her (Maulding et al., 2012:38).

It is here that the inclusion of transformational leadership gets justified as the individual attempts to integrate the theological sense of hospitality in the implementation of leadership activities. As explained by Bass and Riggio (2005) it is the behaviour of the leader that determines the effectiveness of his leadership and thus for a leader the act of thinking right about a conflict or situation, carrying a clear vision, being creative, and adding reliable communicative grounds to other people are highly important. All these aspects



can be gained as the individual adapts the psychology of being humble to accept a mutual position and develop a sense of welcoming hospitality for fellow men.

In a way, by surrounding the manifestations of Christ's love through radical hospitality within the leadership paradigm, there is a way to address the key concerns led by the metaphorical versus literal identification significance. There emerges the need for a balanced understanding of the biblical narrative and the navigation of hospitality in situations requiring discernment. In this context, theological discussions on hospitality attain a foundation in biblical teachings (See Matthew 25:35-36).

In this verse Jesus uses the imagery of a shepherd separating sheep from goats to illustrate the ways individuals get judged by the Almighty. Jesus teaches about the final judgment. He describes a scene where people are separated based on their actions. Those who showed compassion by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming strangers, clothing the needy, caring for the sick, and visiting prisoners are commended and welcomed into the kingdom. Conversely, those who neglect these acts of kindness are condemned. Thus, the righteous, represented by the sheep, are commended for their acts of compassion and kindness, especially toward those in need. The unrighteous, represented by the goats, are condemned for neglecting to show such compassion. The emphasis is on practical expressions of love and care for others, which Jesus identifies as equivalent to showing love to God.

The concern raised is about the growing needs of those on the margins of society and the question of where they can find refuge in a time of unwelcomeness and hostility. In this reference, to the importance of vulnerability in practicing radical hospitality, Jeffress noted this vulnerability as an essential element for the church to fulfil its role of being radically hospitable and welcoming, aligning with the model of Jesus (2017:450). On the contrary, Ross demonstrated Jesus as an existence of powerlessness and vulnerability by becoming a guest in our world¹. These kinds of perceptions are not considered relevant as they are against the core ideology of Biblical leadership trait, whereby the leader is not identified as King but as a servant (See Matthew 20:26-28)

Thus, by referring to Matthew 25:35-36, there is the mark of a robust foundation for radical hospitality as an embodiment of Kingdom values, which is with tangible acts of compassion, embodying the core principles of Christian disciples. It can be stated that the essence of radical hospitality marked by Matthew 25:35-36 gets established and leads to the need for involving the act of welcoming people into the church and addressing their practical needs, demonstrating love through tangible acts of service in a Christ-like manner. On an extended note, this highlights the importance of welcoming strangers and caring for those in need, which is all about developing leadership practices towards hospitality and inclusivity. In this context, radical hospitality goes beyond merely being polite and it involves actively welcoming and embracing those who may be considered outsiders or strangers, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Further, the mention of visiting those in prison and caring for the sick, emphasises a commitment to caring for the vulnerable and marginalised in society. This perspective reinforces the idea that radical hospitality is a manifestation of the love of Christ in action and as such leads radical hospitality in the Protestant leadership paradigm as a practice for involving leaders and communities actively engaging with and supporting those who are often overlooked or neglected. Thus, leaders are called to lead with love, humility, and a genuine concern for the well-being of those they serve on an ongoing basis.



Christian Leadership Challenges and Mitigations

In this context, Kruschwitz referred to the activities of Christian leaders who are more inclined to grapple with pre-existing challenges in terms of balancing the guidance and instruction as identified among the new believers of Christianity. In simple terms leaders are identified as "The one who leads, with zeal" (Romans 12:8). In concern to the Protestants, there is a way of maintaining multifaceted duties to establish hospitality (Acts 6:1-6), which further can examine the significance of Christian leaders. These leaders are identified within the Protestant tradition, for navigating the delicate balance between guidance and defenses of the faith. As in the case of Justin Martyr, where Justin's acceptance of death for his convictions was identified as a powerful leadership standpoint for establishing faith and dedicated devotion to Christ. Justin inspired generations to come, so his belief system appeared permanent against every attempt to be destroyed by the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (Arterbury, 2007: 23).

Thus, it can be concluded that while investigating and further analysing the theological foundations that underlie the concept of radical hospitality within the context of leadership in protestant Christianity, this research acknowledges the words of Oden, "the astounding range of and depth of evidence tells us that hospitality as a practice and as a virtue held a central place in early Christian life."(Oden, 2001:31). The theological perspective presented underscores the indispensable role of virtuous hospitality in Christian praxis, stemming from a theological interpretation of humanitarian principles. Oden's elucidation on the historical progression of hospitality within early Christianity illuminates how amidst adversarial circumstances, hospitality not only ensured survival but also facilitated the communal embodiment of Christian identity rooted in the shared experience of otherness.

This explains that the centrality of practicing virtuous hospitality within Christian life is a settlement attained from the theological understanding of humanitarian values. Referring to the evolution of hospitality from the early Christian era, Oden explained that amidst a hostile empire, the context to survive for Christianity has always been on the act of hospitality of all those people who believed in Christ. During the emergence of Christianity, the believer always felt alienated and eventually found solace as they started sharing the sense of otherness, the early Christian voices reflect the profound conviction that Christian identity is rooted in otherness. Before one can truly offer hospitality, one must understand one's marginal position (2001:35).

In the process of evaluating and further elucidating the guiding ethos of radical hospitality, this research underpinned that influences in leadership dynamics within Christians were the result of radical hospitality. To conclude, it is appropriate to refer to Jason Foster who asserted that hospitality in the Mediterranean world is very strong in its approach and reflected the essence of radical hospitality as the key towards the establishment of factors responsible for the development of a leader development in any organization (2007:50). In this context, by drawing the theological insight of the Benedictine oblate, Christine Valters Paintner, this research identified the relevance of inner witness in a leader, as the result of calm and non-anxious capability of human existence to deliver radical hospitality (2011:1022–1025) at all times and in all situations.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned critically evaluated contexts, this research paper emphasises radical hospitality as the transformative ground for leaders. It can be marked as a tool for promoting openness, inclusivity, and service-oriented leadership. The relevance of the ethos lies in it contributing towards the development of a theological framework for justice and the balancing of different acts of service. Eventually, while the



guiding ethos of radical hospitality provides a robust theological foundation for leadership in Protestant Christianity, ongoing debates and gaps still persist. The way Christians can authentically align radical hospitality with biblical teachings offers valuable insights into the practical application and shaping of leaders into humble and service-oriented individuals who prioritize inclusivity and community building in their service to others.

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