

SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

A Book Review

Presented to

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by

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Sanders, J. Oswald, *Spiritual Leadership*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1994, 189 pp. \$10.97

Introduction

“The late J. Oswald Sanders was a consulting director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship and carried out an international preaching ministry. He was awarded the Order of the British Empire for Christian and theological writing. His many books include *The Incomparable Christ*, *Satan Is No Myth*, and *Enjoying Intimacy with God*.” (Back cover)

Summary

Sander’s book has proven to be one for the ages. Its content is derived from two leadership-training seminars he conducted back in the early 1960’s. This work, like that teaching engagement, set out to both inspire and instruct those interested in committing their lives to the Lord’s work. The author clearly expresses his purpose in the original preface: “to be of help even to younger Christians in whose hearts the Holy Spirit is working to create a holy ambition to place all their powers at the disposal of the Redeemer. If there is something, too, that will rekindle aspiration and crystallize a fresh purpose in the hearts of those further along the road of leadership, the aim of the book will be realized.”(11-12)

With his target defined, Sanders quickly begins to build a very effective and insightful “how to manual” for the community of Christian activists. A point worth noting and one inherent to the author’s underpinning message, the book is for action oriented Christians with a heart, interest or call to leadership. It is not necessarily for the pre-established leader - although such a person will undoubtedly benefit from the work’s spiritually pragmatic wisdom. At the heart of this point is Sander’s primary thesis; leadership can be learned. For those ready, willing

and enabled through the Holy Spirit, this book lays out the comprehensive guidelines to Christian leadership.

Like the old paint-by-numbers kits, Sanders has gone to great lengths to ensure that the reader has all the required ingredients at his fingertips. He has penned the silhouette, and with each distinct chapter, has drawn the lines between the neighboring colors, while simultaneously numbering the corresponding areas. In the end, for the attentive Christian, like the want-to-be Rembrandt, all that is left to do is the “doing.”

As a first semester seminary student, I am not well versed in comparative Christian literature. On the other hand, I am rather well read on the subject of secular leadership. Interestingly, there is a very strong common thread between the two realms. Syntax tells us the connection lies in the generic topic of leadership. Ironically, while the principles of leadership remain constant, the application and responsibility of leaders can diverge to diametrically opposing positions when controlled secularly versus Spiritually. To the extent that I am equipped to compare, Sanders has echoed the truths of timeless, leadership and character building pillars. In the opinion of this writer, the means by which Sanders distinguishes himself and this work from its contemporaries, rests in the book’s all-encompassing, practical and succinct coverage of the subject matter. Many have endeavored to tackle the same topic, some writing more, others taking a different tact, but few have made better use of the words and pages committed to their effort. Sander’s has given us the literary equivalent to one-stop-shopping for those with “leading” on their grocery list.

Typical book reviews call for a section of contemplation and review of the main points by which the author argues his position. The objective therein, is usually to dissect the author’s approach in regards to advancing his purpose and embellishing his thesis. In the case of Sander’s work, one would need to address each chapter independently, applying the process to a multitude of sub-topics. Instead, this writer prefers to acknowledge the author’s effectiveness and accuracy while at the same time applauding his “leadership can be learned” thesis.

Critical Evaluation

Sander's has broken down the topic of Christian leadership into twenty-two insightful chapters. Without exception, this writer concurs with the positions taken and points made on all accounts. While the majority of the information pertaining to the dynamics of leadership was not new to me, the exclusive, Christian orientation created a unique perspective. Not only does Sanders teach novices the things, thoughts and timetables associated with becoming a leader, he also crystallizes the ministerial environment in which a seasoned leader could and should be applied. Moreover, in nearly every case, the under-girding support of the position taken is consistently referenced back to Scripture, thus proving it to be biblically sound.

Theologically, I embrace the message of Sander's work. In short, I hear him telling the world three things. First, God has called each of us to be a Christian leader, the only difference is in regard to the scope and application of our endeavors. Whether one is called to lead a nation, a movement, a congregation, a ministerial department, a team, a family, a spouse, a child or one's self as an example for others – the principles espoused in Sander's work remain the same. Secondly, I hear the author telling the world that learning is critical for Christian leaders. To his credit, Sanders enlightens all readers to the validity of this point. For the person sensing their first stirring of the Holy Spirit, to those seasoned leaders with years of applicable experience, this book contributes, in a measurable way, to the taking of the "next step" in spiritual maturity, character enhancement and Christian leadership.

Another question typically asked in a book review is: "does the author have any overriding perspectives that sway the work and thereby limit its value?" In this case, I count myself fortunate to report that Sanders does in fact have overriding perspectives. He believes whole-heartedly in the power, practices and purposes of God. Furthermore, he holds steadfastly to his belief that the Lord wants more people to realize their potential and thereby impact their world. Sanders is passionate in his desire to alert, convert, equip and prepare people for their calling to Christian leadership. While in many cases, such biases limit the value of an author's

work, on the contrary, the strength of this book is rooted in Sander's unswerving convictions. He is committed to God, biblical principles, a calling that empowers people and an ever-present belief in the willingness of the Holy Spirit to change the world through obedient Christian leaders.

Conclusion

My overall evaluation of the work is consistent with the theme of my review. In short, I applaud Sanders and give his book a five star rating. He has simultaneously accomplished his aforementioned goals while demonstratively adding to the kingdom.

The book has impacted me in a profound way. Not only has it imparted a tremendous amount of knowledge, it has done so in a "real-world" environment. Moreover, Sander's work will remain a foundational part of my library throughout my ministry. While most recommended readings have remnants of edifying nuggets, *Spiritual Leadership* is filled, cover to cover, with what will undoubtedly be shared, teachable examples and refreshing personal reminders for the foreseeable future.