BOOK REVIEW OF *OVERCOMING THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP:*
HOW TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE LEARDER
BY CONFRONTING POTENTIAL FAILURES

A Book Review

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McIntosh, Gary, and Samuel Rima. Overcoming The Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an
    Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
    Books, 2007.

       Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership, by Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, is a

book written to address the failures of leadership that arise from "the inner urges, compulsions,

and dysfunctions of *the* personality that often go unexamined or remain unknown until *an*

emotional explosion is experienced."[1] The book is divided into three parts. Part one deals with

defining the "dark side" and showing some examples of how it has affected others in leadership.

Part two focuses on identifying the different forms of the "dark side," while part three concludes

by addressing how one can "redeem their dark side." The following review will summarize the

key points of each part, then offer a brief evaluation of the book as a whole.

       Part one, *Understanding Our Dark Side*, contains seven chapters of stories and examples

that help the reader to understand what the "dark side" is and how it has worked to the

destruction of leaders in the past. Chapter one begins with a brief definition of the dark side (see

above) then moves to two personal stories from the authors that trace their own encounters with

their "dark side." In chapter two, the reader encounters the dangers that are commonly associated

with the "dark side" by looking at examples of leaders who appeared to be fine on the outside but

who were actually very disturbed and influenced by their hidden dysfunctions. Chapter three

shows how the "dark side" is no respecter of persons and can eventually lead to the ruin of both

the greatest and smallest leaders. In chapter four, the reader encounters the first substantial usage

of scripture in understanding the origins and the dangers of the "dark side." Chapter five deals

with the development of the "dark side" and places it within the context of the "hierarchy of

needs."[2] This chapter was a bit more technical than the previous chapters, but helpful,

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[1] Pg. 28
[2] Pg. 74

nonetheless, because it implicitly invites the reader to evaluate their own needs and dispositions in light of the dangers of the "dark side." Essentially, this chapter postulates that the pattern of needs is universal even though they may express themselves in different forms of the "dark side." In chapter six, the reader is introduces to the idea of the potential benefits of one's dark side depending on how one responds and understands it. Finally, in conclusion to part one, chapter seven addresses both the failure of two major evangelical leaders (Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert) and the triumph of one major evangelical leader (Billy Graham) as they related to the appropriation of one's ambition.

Part two, *Discovering Our Dark Side*, addresses the dark sides of the compulsive leader, the Narcissistic Leader, the Paranoid Leader, the Codependent Leader, and the Passive-Aggressive Leader. It is doubtful that these five types of "dark sides" were meant to be comprehensive, but rather, they were meant to deal specifically with the dysfunctions that commonly characterize the failures of those in leadership. In chapter eight, the reader meets the compulsive leader. According to the authors, "compulsive in a leadership context describes the need to maintain absolute order."[3] After giving this definition, the book goes on to list some of the attending characteristic of the compulsive leader and closes the chapter with an assessment for the reader if they feel like they exhibit some of the characteristics of the compulsive leader. Following the same chapter format as chapter eight, chapter nine addresses the characteristic of the narcissistic leader who is described as one that is totally self-absorbed. Chapter ten explains paranoid leaders as those who "are desperately afraid of anything or anyone, whether real or imagined, they perceive to have even the remotest potential of undermining their leadership and stealing away the limelight."[4] The Codependent Leader is the topic of chapter eleven, which goes

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[3] Pg. 105
[4] Pgs. 122-123

on to describe these leaders that "obsessively worry about the feelings of others, often to the point of becoming emotionally and physically ill."[5] Essentially, they are attempting to be everything to everyone without offending or confronting anyone. In the final chapter of part two, chapter twelve, the reader encounters the Passive-Aggressive Leader who is typically characterized by "procrastination, dawdling, stubbornness, forgetfulness, and intellectual inefficiency, as well as short outburst of expressing intense emotions such as sadness, anger, and frustration."[6]

Part three, the last section of the body of the book, is entitled *Redeeming Our Dark Side*. This final part begins with chapter thirteen that teaches the reader that "dark side" must be overcome because it can never ultimately be destroyed. Essentially, it must be re-appropriated, sanctified, and redeemed. In chapter fourteen, the reader is presented with the idea of "spiritual composting," which amounts to the re-appropriation and redemption of the dark side by virtue of God's work in and through the leader. The next five chapters, chapters fifteen through nineteen, detail the process of redeeming the dark side. This process can be condensed and restated as beginning with an acknowledgment of one's dark side and other dysfunctional characteristic that leads to a thoroughly redemptive examination of one's past for the purpose of identifying events that have shaped one's worldview and behavior, which is then meet by God-empowered resistance of the things that are "poisonous" to one's life as a Christian leader. Having established these three initial steps, the reader must then continue to pursue a growing understanding of oneself, especially at it relates to the proactive and biblical measures that they take to further the resistance against the dangers of the "dark side." Lastly, this part ends with chapter nineteen, which enumerates the fifth step in the process of redeeming the dark side. Unashamedly, the

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[5] Pg. 135
[6] Pg. 141

authors point the reader to Christ and their identity in Him. After part three, the book concludes with a few appendices that were referred to in the body of the book.

On the positive, the book contains wonderful illustrations that help the reader see the principles at work in the lives of others. It encourages introspection, which is a vital component of leadership development so long as it is biblical rooted introspection. Furthermore, this book is to be commended for its willingness to confront such a pressing issue as leadership. In a culture where leaders are failing left and right, there is a prophetic quality found in this book's willingness to state what needs to be stated. However, on a more negative note, it does appear that the book is more about leadership than biblical leadership. For instance, there is much more space committed to the entertaining stories of other than there is to expounding of scripture, which according to Paul is able to "make a man competent for leadership."[7] One cannot help but wonder if they efforts of these two authors would have been a greater service to the leaders of the church if there had been more of the voice of God on the pages and less of the stories of secular leaders who failed and overcame their dark side.[8] Additionally, it was a shame to see how little discussion there was about sin in the life of the leader. It seems like the "dark side" is just something that a leader has to live with and seek to redeem for gospel purpose, instead of putting it to death by the power of the Holy Spirit working in those who do not live according to the desires of their flesh.[9] So, even though the book had many good things to say and points to be made, it would have been a better book had it been more grounded in the scriptures. Therefore, in terms of an evaluation, this book serves as a helpful guide in the area of leadership, yet it should not be considered the definitive work on these particular matters.

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[7] 2 Timothy 3:15-16
[8] It is granted that the author does refer to several stories of the life of Biblical leaders, but to make use of these stories in a "moral-example" sense is an example of poor hermeneutics.
[9] Romans 8