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## Faith in the Era of President Barack Obama

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# Book Review

## Faith in the Era of President Barack Obama

by Judith MacKeigan

Marvin A. McMickle, editor

*The Audacity of Faith: Christian Leaders Reflect on the Election of Barack Obama*  
(Judson Press, 2009), 173 pp., \$ 17.00.

One would have to be naïve to believe that the election of President Barack Obama signals an end to racism in our country, but millions are confessing to a hope that choosing an African-American to serve as our nation's highest elected official did signal a shift in the paradigm of racism that has haunted our country for so long. The essays in *The Audacity of Faith: Christian Leaders Reflect on the Election of Barack Obama* address both the celebratory and cautionary feelings that many Americans share.

The Rev. Dr. Marvin A. McMickle, editor of the book, asked each of the contributors to consider one of the following questions when framing their essays: In what ways does the election of Barack Obama suggest fulfillment of Dr. Martin Luther King's words, "We as a people will get to the Promised Land?" Does the election of Barack Obama mean the United States has entered a "post racial" era? What are some of the

Biblical/theological concepts used to reflect on the presidency of Barack Obama? And finally, is there a danger of people believing the Obama presidency can or should accomplish things that, according to Scripture, can be accomplished only by God working through the church?

When considering the question of the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream of a promised land for African-Americans, most of the contributors warn that while a man of color has attained the highest office in the land, there are still many places in this land where people are continually judged on their external characteristics, not the content of their characters. The work of Dr. King, they say, is far from over, as many people of all races are mired in poverty and violence. The election of a Harvard educated Black man, does not, and can not negate the fact that far too many young Black men are undereducated and a disproportionate population of our jails and prisons is composed of Black men.

The authors reject the idea that the United States has entered a post-racial era. Some note the mixed racial background of Barack Obama as a significant factor in his election, suggesting that an African-American with less White blood may not have fared as well. People of color face subtle racism and discrimination on a daily basis and blatant hate crimes still permeate our country. Obama's unique background and upbringing put him in a different category from the average African-American. Several of the authors do note, however, that Obama's racial make-up offers a glimpse of the future, a future where the "one drop" rule that has dominated racial thought for so long may finally be put to rest.

While several of the authors in this book see Obama's election as God-given, they are quick to assure the reader that he is not the Messiah, nor should anyone expect him to be. And, although Obama is a Christian, he is not a pastor, theologian, or prophet; he is a politician and emphatically human. Christians, they argue, must put their faith in God, not in any human leader or government.

The authors of *The Audacity of Faith* are theologians and ministers. All are gifted, thoughtful writers, and many are scholars and educators. They are not, however, writing dry, analytical essays. They offer sermons and lessons. While some offer psalms of praise, others offer lamentations of anger or woe. The authors exhort the reader; they caution and warn against the dangers of putting faith in one human being or becoming complacent or naïve. They ask readers

to remember the struggles and sacrifices of those who worked and fought so that the election of an African-American to the highest office in the land became possible. It is beyond the scope of this review to directly quote all of the authors, but it seems appropriate to quote the Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. as his words may best encompass the theme that permeates the entire book. Rev. Moss notes that Dr. King warned against the "twin dangers" of extreme optimism and extreme pessimism. Rev. Moss challenges readers to "see the election of Barack Obama, not through the eyes of extreme optimism or the defeatism of pessimistic inertia, but rather through the eyes of creative realism." ❖