

Marvin A. McMickle, ed. *The Audacity of Faith: Christian Leaders Reflect on the Election of Barack Obama*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press. 173 pages. \$11.56.

The Audacity of Faith is a wide-ranging collection of sermons and essays from thirty-three scholars that articulates almost as many political and theological stances with regards to the November 4th, 2008 election of President Barack Obama. The volume takes its inspiration from *9.11.01: African American Leaders Respond to an American Tragedy* (Judson Press, ed. Martha Simmons) (ix). And it seeks to cast a wider net in than its predecessor regarding ethnicity, gender, generational, theological and diversity. The authorship is, however, debatably ecumenical, and primarily Baptist - twenty (or more?). One gets the sense that this is a conversation amongst friends.

Though the book features voices evangelical, United Methodist, Episcopalian, Church of God, 'difficult-to-identify,' and others, Reformed, Catholic and Orthodox contributions are noticeably missing. Nearly one third of the reflections are written by women. There is no representation from other gendered and sexual commitments. Inclusion of other races and ethnicities seems token at best. Nevertheless, as an Asian American, I shout out to Ken Fong! Generational difference is demonstrated with attention to the mature in years. Yet Christian leadership apparently does not apply to anyone younger than 20-something [to questions as to whether an adolescent could write sufficient length, even homiletical giants like Gardner C. Taylor are concise at 2 pages.]. Even so, pursuing more comprehensive representation of Christian leadership would have dramatically increased the book's size, and presumably slowed its timely release to coincide with Obama's victory.

Further, McMickle reminds readers that the (un)availability of invited contributors played a role in the final outcome. Therefore, even with the limitations related to demography raised above, McMickle is right to point out that "There are not many places you can turn where Emilie Townes and Tony Campolo, Leslie Callahan and Philip Yancey, Valerie Elverton Dixon, and Dwight Hopkins, and Carolyn Ann Knight and William Willimon are bound together in the same volume" (viii). *The Audacity of Faith* nevertheless rises to the occasion, albeit in its own particular way, in providing a very readable compilation of thought-provoking writings for preachers, pastors, persons of faith, that theologially consider the unprecedented election of an individual whom Hopkins in his essay describes as an "American," "Hawaiian, Polynesian, Indonesian, Asian, White, Kenyan, and black human being" (115).

The essays are subdivided into five sections: I. My Soul Looks Back and Wonders How We Got Over; II. Barack Obama and Martin Luther King Jr.; III. Prophetic Rumbblings for President Barack Obama; IV. Barack Obama and a Postracial America; V. Biblical and Theological Perspectives. Some attention to the array of different authors has already been given. Yet depending upon whether writings choose a sermonic, editorial, or exegetically poetic (as in the case of Townes) form and/or approach, the engagement of biblical texts, African American history, democratic idealism, and theological imagination markedly varies as well. In this way, *The Audacity of Faith* is not like a greatest hits compilation, but instead akin to amethyst stone, with each contribution functioning like facets that refract multiple rays of theological illumination. Turning now to a handful of passages from the collection, I close with one contribution from each section to show the book's diversity and draw interest from the current reader's gaze:

I. My Soul Looks Back and Wonders

‘At Last!’ Leslie D. Callahan, 1-6.

The election of Barack Obama represents an unprecedented achievement of black emancipation, but also a proleptic event that still challenges African-Americans to strive towards freedom and justice for all.

II. Barack Obama and Martin Luther King Jr.

‘Working from the Bottom Up’ Philip Yancey, 52-54.

Meeting an African American baggage handler gives Yancey “a strong clue” as to how important the election of Barack Obama is for African Americans (52).

III. Prophetic Rumbblings for President Barack Obama

‘Preacher-Prophet Obama’ Will Willimon, 81-86.

“We cannot envision the possibility of a new, better world if we are unable to let go of the old world. And that relinquishment will probably entail some tears” (83).

IV. Barack Obama and a Postracial America

‘Barack Obama and the American Civil Religion’ Valerie Elverton Dixon, 105-10.

Barack Obama is “the priest-president of American civil religion” (110).

V. Biblical and Theological Perspectives

‘Where Do We Go from Here’ Otis Moss III, 159-163.

“If God can take a young man who was sitting in this pew, heard a preacher preach from this pulpit, and was stirred in his soul to the point that it set his feet on a path to the presidency, then we cannot know what else God is going to do“ (163).

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