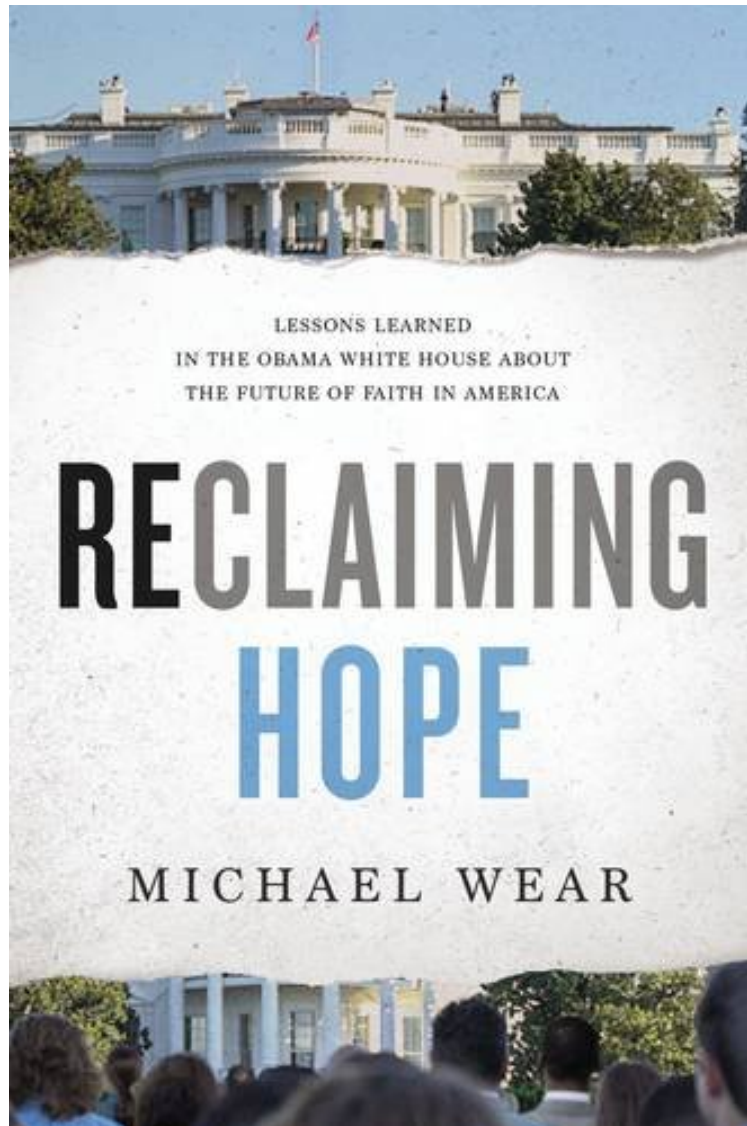


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Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America

Michael R. Wear

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Michael R. Wear : Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America:

18 of 19 people found the following review helpful. "Reclaiming Hope": The perfect book for our political and

cultural moment

By Customer I received an early copy of "Reclaiming Hope," and I'm sure glad I did! This book is, simply put, required reading for anyone concerned about the deterioration of civic engagement or perplexed about the role of faith, hope, and love in the contemporary American political landscape. (Spoiler alert: that should be all of you!) Whether or not you agree with Wear on every ideological jot and tittle, this is one of the most thoughtful explorations of civic engagement I've read. Wear artfully leans on his fascinating experiences as one of the President's top faith advisors without the usual self-aggrandizement or ego found in White House tell-alls, offering instead a wealth of wisdom and an insider's perspective that offer a path forward in a contentious and often ugly political environment. Wear's keen analysis, and his vision for the future of faith and politics in America, is refreshing and practical, but it is not easy. A future defined by cooperation and goodwill may seem idealistic in an age defined by widening chasms, but that's precisely why "Reclaiming Hope" is so necessary. Wear has managed to leave cynicism behind, while maintaining a clear-headed, optimistic vision for navigating the wreckage of a culture gone mad. Wear accomplishes this feat so neatly primarily because he understands that a renewal of hope requires a reframing of our priorities, and that hope comes from a source outside even our most powerful institutions. In short, this is a book well-suited for its' time. Wear has managed to, despite all odds, convey refreshing optimism and impress the critical duty each of us has to commit ourselves to the good of our cities, states, nation, and world. You will be better for having read this book, and so will your neighbors.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Achieves what the last 8 years of journalism, on all sides, could not

By C P Slayton It is doubtful that when Abraham Vereide founded the National Prayer Breakfast, he intended that it become the litmus test on a president's faith and a central focus of all things religion in politics. In today's politics every speech, invitation and agenda is afforded an overt and hidden meaning, whether intentional or not. Religion in politics is an easy target by some and an overly abused refuge for others. Few authors have been able to balance a description of real hope and faith in politics contrasted by instrumentalized religion. Michael's approach, strong faith, specific office and Democratic Party credentials give him a platform few others can claim. In introduction, Michael Wear reflects on the national prayer breakfast, as do other writers like Jeff Sharlet, author of the "The Family". But where Jeff Sharlet finds conspiracy, corruption and all that's wrong with America, Michael Wear describes unity within diversity. An author applying confirmation bias to a thesis on the pitfalls of religion in politics will always succeed. However, the excitement, discovery, wonder, satisfaction and letdowns of Michael's Wear's early career inside politics, coordinating faith-based policy, is a more genuine, and still critical, description of religion's role in government. Michael Wear tries hard not to alienate a potential reader audience. He ensures we know first his personal faith as the vantage point to then understand his political goals working on President Obama's transition team and directly influencing two campaigns for the White House. The reader is absorbed by the passion and conviction of the young man, faithful to his president's cause. You sense Michael's own euphoria of seeing your drafted debate notes roll off the president's tongue. In addition to knowing the president personally, Wear also assembles something of a history of Obama's policy initiatives influencing religious affairs by dissecting speeches and other publications. This approach is akin to an anatomy of a speech on faith - especially those that transform values into policy. Obama's own speech anatomy as related to policy evolved during his first term in office, to his credit but also to his discredit. Some of Wear's more intriguing reflections involve what Stephen Prothero calls "Religious Literacy". In all political party camps, church attendance has lowered and Biblical wisdom is less and less a known commodity. The White House communications team feared religious language for its unpredictable public response. Wear's speech inputs, using direct quotes from Jesus on compassion and social justice, appeared as gibberish to many of Obama's speech team and editors. At the same time, however, Obama was more comfortable talking about his faith, and doing so in a more educated and meaningful fashion than the republican candidates he ran against. In 2009, it appeared that Obama would not allow any constituent sole claim to him as their president. But that changed. On some of the deepest moral concerns to Christians, as Wear observed, Obama eventually either ignored them altogether or shifted his stance to fit the voter demographic. It was a possible reflection of sham politics on the one hand but also "data-point" campaigning on the other. Statistics (in part encouraged by the electoral college system), charts and intentionally inciting advertisements were meant to supersaturate an agenda in polarizing fashion; a massive challenge to Wear's faith-based support. We all witnessed this once-winning political strategy fail in 2016 (and as an aside restored some dignity to academia's "team qualitative" so frequently roughed up by its rival "team quantitative"). As the book flows from impressions to insights it would appear that the author argues that politics should be central to influencing faith (pg. xxix, 12, 50). The author is most hopeful, offering the best examples of appropriate counterbalance to polarized politics as opposed to culturally poisoning zero-sum games. But as if to clarify his position, the author soundly endorses Augustine's view, as do others like Chuck Colson, in arguing that our hope and faith inform our politics; like a training curriculum for service. International Relations theory grapples with the gray area of "lesser evil" in support of national interest in the assumed global anarchy. The challenge for national politics includes how to support religion without endorsing any brand of believer from atheists to humanists to polytheists, with converts between each. Misperceptions come easy. As Michael points out, too many religious leaders overtly endorsing political platforms receive oversized recognition. The media ascribes them undue influence. At the same time, many pastors and laymen with the largest social influence go unnoticed by politicians and

media, as the vicious cycle of religious misperceptions whirls on. It is this very finding that both confirms and befuddles the conspiracy theorists of religion in politics. Those who pass through the corridors of D.C. politics are claimed to represent religious culture. At the same time, the sample set excludes millions who hope in active service to Jesus Christ. Data points, donations and political interchanges, if that's all there were to religion, would be cause for social concern indeed. Having cleared up the initial confusion on faith and politics Michael Wear then introduces another debate. Some might argue that political parties, while influenced by ethics and values, combine to form an ideology. What the author stresses, however, is that in America's two-party system the "independent" status is not only a waste but a cowardly cop-out. Everyone should join a party and everyone should vote. Additionally, there is no line in the sand as Chuck Colson firmly believed, where religious leaders should ensure their farthest gospel reach by refusing overt political participation. The political veteran turned-repentant Christian, Chuck Colson, produced political insights of matured wisdom, nurtured in the 1970s. An additional comparison, advancing through the decades would include "City of Man" written by George W. Bush assistants Weher and Gerson. Michael Wear's book is the perfect example of young zeal in good purpose (Galatians 4:18). And of course, the book represents the latest on faith in politics for President Obama's administration. All examples above are worth the read. President Obama unified and divided. He both muted and incited the culture wars. In Michael's observations, the transformation evolved more towards the latter, in many social areas, by the president's second term. Reflecting on the political change, Michael Wear provides a truly gripping and masterful discussion of courage, lies and political strategy. While leaving open the possibility for politics to run its intentionally manipulative course, in a brilliant correction to plankeye politics he sites MSNBC's Chris Hayes' truth-to-power revelation. There is something not only powerful, but credible when the "stereotype" of one party is an "ally" for the opposition. What strikes every Christian insider to politics from Colson, to Weher to Gerson and Wear is how difficult it is to show grace to an opponent without conceding an election. Praising an opponent, admitting fault in oneself or simply praying in public for an opponent (at a national convention, as Wear describes) is tantamount to political suicide. "...a commitment to civility is viewed by many politicians and strategists as amounting to unilateral disarmament (pg. 74)." That should not be. Modern news outlets, platforms and strategies around social media are to blame for much of politics' brutish face. That brutish face mixed with promise is why the topic of faith in politics continues to sell books. This book in particular, however, puts into perspective what pundits and journalism could not for the last eight years. It reveals and corrects as the author takes great pains to honor his president, party and faith. In the end, Christians must be more invitational and less territorial about faith and gospel in politics. 16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. An Evangelical in President Obama's White House: Or, A Genuinely Christian Political Memoir By C. C. I. Fenn Political memoirs tend to be one-sided, catty, and full of 'juicy' gossip. That's probably why I don't read many of them. But after noticing several positive reviews of Reclaiming Hope - and seeing the remarks that certain evangelical leaders made about it - I couldn't help myself. The story of an evangelical who worked to get Barack Obama elected - twice - and worked in the White House sounded too appealing to pass by. So I downloaded the Kindle version and got to reading. And boy did it open my eyes. Unlike many political memoirs, one of the big-shots didn't write this one. Michael Wear wasn't an elite decision-maker or a world-class politico. He was barely an adult. He writes in the prelude, "I was twenty years old, it was my first day at a new job, and I was walking toward the Oval Office for a meeting with the president of the United States. I was not calm and collected." But it's this genuineness and matter-of-fact way of writing that endeared me to Wear as I read. He neither blindly defends nor arbitrarily attacks Barack Obama or anyone else. He doesn't rant and rarely complains. It's obvious from the very beginning that his agenda isn't driven by political concerns. But by Christian ones. And that makes sense. Wear is an evangelical who worked in the White House's faith-based initiative during Obama's first term and helped with religious outreach during both campaigns. Now, for some folks that might sound like something of a contradiction. "An evangelical worked to get Barack Obama elected?! That couldn't be!" But that's part of what makes Wear's story so fascinating. He doesn't fit the labels we're so fond of. Though he doesn't spend much time discussing his own political or theological views (until the last part of the book), it doesn't take a genius to figure out that he isn't your typical 'liberal Democrat.' From what I could gather he seemed like he's probably fairly socially conservative and fiscally moderate-liberal. He's also like many millennials who are more sensitive when it comes to issues of race. And let's not forget that in 2008, Barack Obama ran a surprisingly moderate campaign. Probably the best evidence for this is the fact that, at the time, he claimed to be against gay marriage since God is "in the mix." It was only during certain off-the-cuff moments that conservatives could peg him for anything resembling a leftist (remember when he met Joe the Plumber?). Though most conservatives ardently campaigned and hoped against him - he really didn't act like a strong liberal during the campaign. He talked about bringing people together. His lofty rhetoric consistently pointed to the idea that he'd originally brought up in his 2004 DNC speech where he said, "there is not a liberal America and a conservative America there is the United States of America. There is not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America there's the United States of America." It was this sort of rhetoric that drew many moderates to Barack Obama. Unfortunately, as Wear sadly recounts, he didn't always practice what he preached. It's obvious that Wear had - and still has - a great deal of admiration and respect for President Obama. He spends a chapter briefly detailing how he met Obama and describing the president's relationship with religion/religious speech. After

this, he discusses the 2008 campaign - a campaign that was a success in Obama's broad appeal and reception. Even from religious people. I love how Wear remembers Obama's meeting with Rick Warren at Saddleback church. He had crafted a memo for the future president, preparing him for the kinds of questions Warren might ask. Wear recounts a particular exchange between Obama and Warren and then writes, "I had written something just days earlier, and now it was informing what the leading candidate for the presidency of the United States was saying in response to a question from one of the most influential evangelical leaders in the country." I can imagine the excitement he must've been feeling in that moment. Though later in the book he laments the idea that his memos and help may have ended up painting a false picture of the president. Especially after he discovered that Obama had been for gay marriage all along and had only said he was against it for political expediency's sake. Wear spends two chapters discussing faith in the White House between 2009 and 2012 in rather general terms. He outlines the big objectives that the faith-based initiative was trying to accomplish. He discusses the Affordable Healthcare Act - along with the religious backlash it received. The prayer breakfasts during those years get some coverage. And he talks about his experience with Barack Obama's personal faith. All of this is very interesting but it's clear that Wear's time in the White House was wearing him down. Hostility toward religion in general - and Christianity in particular - became more and more apparent. In fact, it got so bad that by 2012, when the controversy over Louie Giglio delivering the inauguration prayer blew up (he had - surprise - called homosexual acts sinful in the mid-nineties) a White House staffer told an advisor that they needed a replacement who wasn't a Christian. According to Wear, the staffer said, "Honestly, if it is a Christian, we will find something on him, and we will make him famous." You can learn a lot in four years. And Michael Wear certainly did. He went from being a young, hopeful White House staffer, full of dreams for the possible to...almost sounding cynical. But he never quite gets there. Instead, I think he just became realistic. I could say a lot about the lessons Wear learned and hopes to communicate through his writing. He learned that the nation is more polarized than it's ever been - and is only becoming more so. He learned that a lot of Democrats don't understand religion in general, or Christianity in particular. Likewise, he learned that politicians are politicians and, too often, do things for political and cynical reasons. I could list a dozen more lessons learned. And that may be part of the thing that sets this apart from other political memoirs. Wear isn't writing to settle a score. He's writing to learn - and to teach - valuable lessons about what it means to be a Christian who lives in America. It's a great reminder that neither side of the political aisle is saintly. Someone could almost certainly write a similar book about George W. Bush's time in the White House. So what do we do about it? Do we settle for cynicism and politics as usual? Or retreat like the Amish? Do we throw our hands up in disgust? Wear doesn't end this book in despair. Like I said earlier, he never actually reaches cynicism. Instead, he settles for something resembling Christian realism. He recognizes the brokenness of our nation, our system, and the people who inhabit it. But he doesn't stop there. He points beyond the system, to the redemptive power of the Gospel and Jesus Christ. And that's what makes this memoir stand head and shoulders above any other political memoir out there. It isn't about Michael Wear or Barack Obama or 2008-2012. It's about us learning how, through Christ, to hope in a hopeless world. Because if we can get our eyes off of our political 'enemies' - and off of ourselves - we might just be able to focus on Jesus. And I'm just as confident as Michael Wear is that through Christ, we can reclaim hope. May we settle for nothing less.

Learn how the seeds of the Trump presidency were sown in the Obama White House. In this unvarnished account of faith inside the world's most powerful office, Michael Wear provides unprecedented insight into the highs and lows of working as a Christian in government. Reclaiming Hope is an insider's view of the most controversial episodes of the Obama administration, from the president's change of position on gay marriage and the transformation of religious freedom into a partisan idea, to the administration's failure to find common ground on abortion and the bitter controversy over who would give the benediction at the 2012 inauguration. The book is also a passionate call for faith in the public square, particularly for Christians to see politics as a means of loving one's neighbor and of pursuing justice for all. Engrossing, illuminating, and at times provocative, Reclaiming Hope changes the way we think about the relationship of politics and faith. "Reclaiming Hope will certainly give you a fresh perspective on politics--but, more importantly, it may also give you a fresh perspective on faith." --Andy Stanley, senior pastor of North Point Ministries "An important and extremely timely book...Get it, read it, and talk to others about it." --Timothy Keller, author of Reason for God "An important contribution in this age of religious and political polarization." --J.D. Vance, author of Hillbilly Elegy "A lifeline for these times." --Ann Voskamp, author of One Thousand Gifts and The Broken Way "We can hope, and this book can help us." --Russell Moore, president of the Ethics Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

From the Inside Flap "This is an important and extremely timely book. It is partly a memoir, partly a reflection on the relationships between faith and governing power, and partly a road map for navigating the unprecedented social and cultural changes we are facing. It's readable and thought-provoking. Get it, read it, and talk to others about it." --TIMOTHY KELLER, AUTHOR OF REASON FOR GOD "Michael Wear is a man of deep faith who clearly brought his love for Jesus to his work in the White House. Reclaiming Hope offers important insight about his time working in the

public square for the legitimate and necessary place of both faith and people of faith in today's political environment, and it deserves serious attention."--HISEMINENCE TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN "This is an important book on many levels: it addresses faith's role in politics and public policy; it reveals Barack Obama's personal faith and beliefs; it calls for Christians to engage in the public square; and it offers hope for America's future. For anyone interested in the intersection of faith and politics, Reclaiming Hope is a must read."--

THE HONORABLE MARK PRYOR, FORMER U.S. SENATOR FROM ARKANSAS "According to my friend Michael Wear, too many of us left the party early! I've known Michael for years and greatly appreciate his commitment to the church and his personal faith in Jesus. Reclaiming Hope will certainly give you a fresh perspective on politics--but, more importantly, it may also give you a fresh perspective on faith."--ANDY STANLEY, SENIOR PASTOR OF NORTH POINT MINISTRIES "Michael Wear makes a powerfully compelling case for engaging the intersection of politics and religion. Drawing from his personal and singular experience in the White House under the Obama administration, Wear writes a lifeline for these times--that despite any personal differences, hope can unite. The pages in your hand could give you hope and lead and guide us forward as a nation. We can all reclaim hope and carry it with us."--ANN VOSKAMP, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ONE THOUSAND GIFTS AND THE BROKEN WAY