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Creation Care is a Sacred Task Says Jonathan Merritt in *Green Like God*

Faith & Culture Writer debunks the myth that Christians are not environmentally-friendly

Faith and culture writer Jonathan Merritt, called “The Green Baptist” by *Christianity Today*, became an environmentalist in an unlikely setting: while sitting in seminary class at Southern Baptist Seminary. He had an epiphany in that classroom: “If you love the Creator, you’ll love His creation. If you don’t love His creation, you don’t really love the Creator.” He argues that green living is a sacred task, not just a trendy lifestyle choice, in the new book *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet* (FaithWords/Hachette Book Group, April 21, 2010, \$16.99 hardcover).

Merritt indicts both Christians who ignore the scriptural mandate for creation care, and the American consumer culture that has created a flimsy “pop environmentalism” that lacks a moral foundation. His goal is no less than a movement that addresses environmental crises as biblical and moral issues rather than economic, sociological or political.

“How can you be a Christian and *not* care about the environment?” Merritt asks. He shows just how much the Bible has to say about problems like unclean water, material waste, pollution, caring for animals, and overconsumption, making clear that creation care is an act of obedience to the Creator-God. “In the book of Genesis, God went green and never looked back,” he says.

Criticism from fellow Christians has not deterred him. He’s been the target of vitriolic tirades, and labeled a liberal, a socialist, a tree hugger, and some unprintable names. When he founded the Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative, leaders of other Christian organizations threatened to ruin his reputation.

A growing number of Christians agree with Merritt on the importance of creation care, especially younger evangelicals. But for many conservative Christians, ecological issues are strictly for liberals. Merritt says environmentalism must be depolarized and depoliticized. It’s not a matter of left-right, “but rather a moral-immoral issue that the people of God have been called to address.”

Merritt debunks the misinformation that swirls around green issues in church circles. He examines the facts about global crises, bringing readers face to face with the mind-blowing proportion of problems such as the clean water crisis, air pollution, loss of soil fertility, declines in wildlife populations, deforestation, and mountaintop removal.

“Unlocking God’s plan for our planet releases redemptive power into the world. When we choose to live responsibly and sustainably, we bring hope to those whom our lifestyles affect. When faith enters the environmental conversation, simple issues become inspiring missions. When we become green like God, everything changes,” Merritt says.

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Merritt is candid about his own struggles to live in a way that honors creation. He had not been a friend of the environment, and the lifestyle changes he needed to make were ones he thought were reserved for “granola-eating hippies.” Resisting the siren call of consumerism is especially difficult. Merritt acknowledges that he wrestles with “affluenza” most days. “You’d find some eco-hypocrisy in my life if you looked for it,” he says. “I’m just a regular Joe struggling to live out the whole Christian thing in an increasingly complex and broken world.”

Ultimately, the work of creation care is worship, love, and obedience to the Creator, he says. “In our suburban fortresses, we often forget that God is active in all of creation and that His character is revealed throughout the natural world.”

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About Jonathan Merritt

Jonathan Merritt, 27, is a faith and culture writer who has published over 100 articles in outlets such as *USA Today*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Washington Post*'s “On Faith” blog, *The Huffington Post*, and *Relevant*, *Outreach*, and *Charisma* magazines. He has been interviewed by ABC World News, NPR, PBS Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, the *UK Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. He is a sought-after speaker at colleges, seminaries, churches and conferences on cultural and religious issues. *Green Like God* is his first book.

While in seminary, Merritt founded the Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative. The *Dallas Morning News* said of him: "By broadening evangelicalism's agenda, younger evangelicals like Jonathan Merritt...are doing us a favor."

He earned a Master of Divinity from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Master of Theology from Emory University's Candler School of Theology. He lives outside of Atlanta, where he actively serves and teaches at Cross Pointe Church.

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