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"[Jonathan] Merritt, 29, has become one of the most persuasive articulators and exemplars of a revised form of evangelical engagement with politics." — **USA Today**

"A Faith of Our Own is essential reading in an average year; it is urgent reading in an election year." — **Relevant Magazine**

**New Book by Jonathan Merritt: *A Faith of Our Own*
Young Christians Reject Culture Wars to Follow Jesus on a Nonpartisan Path**

Evangelical voters may loom large this election year, but they're not a monolithic bloc. Many young Christians are moving away from the political stances of their elders, disenchanted with a faith that's aligned with partisan politics. In his new book *A Faith of Our Own: Following Jesus Beyond the Culture Wars* (FaithWords, \$19.99 hardcover, May 8, 2012, foreword by Kirsten Powers of Fox News / *USA Today*), Jonathan Merritt examines the coming of age of a new generation of Christians—including himself—who believe the gospel of Jesus must be lived, not voted. He calls for a move away from a faith that is partisan, polemical, and power-hungry, and toward a Jesus-centered faith that is apolitical, compassionate, and humble.

Merritt, 29, is a keen observer of the religious and political landscape and the new agenda for younger Christians. He was the first person to predict in print that young evangelical Christian voters would support Barack Obama, getting a lot of heat from conservatives for his April 2008 commentary in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, "WWJD? Vote for Obama, more and more young evangelicals say."

Merritt was raised in a family with many ties to the Religious Right. His father is a former President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Rev. Jerry Falwell was a close family friend. Growing up, he thought following Jesus meant defeating liberals, who were were "attempting to chase Jesus out of God-blessed America." His spiritual journey mirrors that of many of his peers, who can't reconcile the Jesus they encounter in the New Testament with the one many Americans claim to follow. "In the Bible, I kept meeting a Jesus who was radical," Merritt says. "But many 'Christians' I knew worshiped a Jesus who hated the same people they hated and voted like they did. I developed a nagging sense that the Bible's Jesus might not care for the Jesus many Americans believed in."

In *A Faith of Our Own*, Merritt weaves personal experience with observations about the changing priorities for young Christians. He discusses:

- a broader agenda: Merritt says rising Christians feel called to attend also to issues such as poverty, nuclear weapons, adoption, sex-trafficking, racial reconciliation, and environmental

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concerns, and have a more nuanced understanding of the perennial culture war topics of abortion and homosexuality.

- increasing support among young Christians for same-sex marriage: “If the polls are right, this debate is over,” Merritt says. “Its demise can be attributed at least partially to Christian’s transformative experiences among their gay friends.”
- his relationship with Jerry Falwell, one of the architects of the Religious Right and a grandfatherly mentor to young Jonathan. Hearing Rev. Falwell talk about “getting our folks to the polls” and “what will happen if liberal Democrats remain in control,” Merritt experienced his first qualms about the politicizing of the gospel.
- the life-changing experience of working in one of Mother Teresa’s homes for the sick and dying in Calcutta, where Merritt learned that following Jesus is hands-on work.
- a recent personal meeting with Rev. Billy Graham in his Montreat home. Graham is a role model for navigating the maze of politics with integrity: speaking with love and mutual respect, and clinging to the Gospel, but not in a way that marginalizes people based on their political affiliations.

Following Jesus doesn’t mean exiting the public square, Merritt says. Christians must ask what it looks like to follow Jesus in a pluralistic post-Christian reality: “For the Christian, politics is not the only or even the primary tool of change, for politics can never change hearts.”

“A new generation must now decide how to go forward. Rather than viewing others as political enemies to destroy, young Christians are attempting to live out their faith in all areas of life and pursue a kingdom that is so vast and comprehensive that Washington could never hope to contain it. These Christians aren’t consumed with a platform or a party,” Merritt says.

In *A Faith of Our Own*, Merritt illuminates the hopeful new spiritual ethos of this generation of believers who engage the world with Christ-centered faith but an unpolarized political perspective.

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About the Author

Jonathan Merritt (www.jonathanmerritt.com) is a faith and culture writer who has published over 300 articles in outlets such as *USA Today*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and CNN.com. He has been interviewed by ABC World News, NPR, Fox News, PBS' Religion and Ethics Newsweekly, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. He is the author of *Green Like God*, which Publisher's Weekly called, “mandatory reading for churchgoers.” Merritt holds an MDiv from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Emory University. He resides outside of Atlanta, GA, where he teaches at Cross Pointe Church.

Book Trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK-8CQFwEeU>

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