

## The God of Wild Places: Rediscovering the Divine in the Untamed Outdoors

**Tony Jones**

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Tony Jones's meditative memoir *The God of Wild Places* is about leaving the ministry but remaining alive to spirituality through outdoor adventures in Minnesota and further afield.

It was Jones's childhood ambition to become a minister like his Welsh great-grandfather. Though he achieved his goal, his failing marriage and ailing faith drove him away. "I walked out of church and into the woods," he declares: "As my religion ... waned, my love of the wilderness ... waxed." A hunting trip in northern Minnesota cemented his love of the outdoors, while hiking, canoeing, fishing, and shooting became his new spiritual disciplines, bringing peace and encounters with the sublime—as well as with failure and mortality.

Jones takes inspiration from a range of gurus: Minnesota environmentalist Sigurd Olson is his hero, and Annie Dillard is among his favorite nature writers. He also references the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which prizes the idea of "theosis" or union with God, and the Desert Fathers of early Christianity, who found such union through experiences in the wilderness. Even when he got lost while hunting ducks one winter, he felt awe alongside fear. The book notes that nature can be cruel and cites Jones's father's death and his friend Jorge's cancer as further reminders of mortality. "Hunting puts my own death right before me," he admits.

"Vestments" function as a potent metaphor for Jones's transformation: he once wore clerical robes but now dons chaps, camouflage, warm layers, and a hunting vest. The tenets of his "natural theology" include honoring place, opposing dualism, and embracing risk and death. Beloved dogs have been companions, and his relationships with his children and friends deepened on camping trips.

*The God of Wild Places* is a pensive, personalized primer to developing a nature-based theology.

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