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# **Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious**

*Von Chris Stedman*

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## FAITHEIST


How an Atheist  
Found Common Ground  
with the Religious


— III —

CHRIS STEDMAN

Foreword by EBOO PATEL



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**Von Chris Stedman : Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*:

Kundenrezensionen Hilfreichste Kundenrezensionen 1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Finding

Our Common Humanity Von Paul Thibodeau Chris Stedman's *Faithism* is a wonderful story of his deeply sincere journey through sexual self-acceptance, faith, atheism, humanism, and finally the simplistic and easy caricatures of 'the other' that destroy our humanity. I found the most disturbing part of the book to be when PZ Myers was asked when these in-group versus out-group walls would come down, he replied: "The walls will come down when religion is eradicated." (p. 151 Kindle edition) It is precisely this form of bigotry that keeps the cycle of 'us vs. them' going, the very thing so strongly condemned in religion. After his moving story of mutual growth and understanding through shared interfaith experience and dialogue (Chris lives the truth that atheism and humanism can fall under the interfaith umbrella without losing their distinct identities, or being misunderstood to be faiths), his encounter with the new atheism was shocking: "But I was also quickly taken aback by the amount of antireligious rhetoric I heard-- and the degree of negativity directed at me for questioning it. For the most part, the antireligious claims I encountered weren't considered critiques of theology, which I've often relished in both academic and interpersonal contexts; they were based in a willful ignorance of what it actually means to be religious and of the way religious lives are lived, and turned religious people into a cheaply mocked caricature. My first atheist conference, an American Atheists gathering in New Jersey, was packed full of blasphemy sessions and speeches comparing religion to sexually transmitted diseases. It was, for me, a nightmare. Witnessing the sheer vitriol some expressed toward the religious, I actually cried-- hot, angry tears. I called friends of mine back home-- atheists, no less-- and recalled what I'd seen. They were shocked and appalled. One friend said to me: "You see, this is why I don't want to call myself an atheist." I returned to my work in an interfaith context and was relieved to be surrounded by people dedicated to advancing human rights and understanding, not dehumanizing those with different metaphysical beliefs." (p. 145 Kindle edition) Chris recognizes clearly that: "A world absent of religion would not necessarily be a more cooperative or peaceful one; a world absent of fanaticism, totalitarianism, and tribalism would certainly be." (p. 154 Kindle edition) It is easy to forget that self-justifying and intolerant bigotry is the problem, not the solution, no matter how high the ideological rhetoric, or attractive the scapegoat. His goals are spot on: "I work to promote critical thinking, education, religious liberty, compassion, and pluralism, and to fight tribalism, xenophobia, and fanaticism. Many religious people are allies to me and other atheists in these efforts-- and a good number of them cite their religious convictions as the motivating factor behind their work. I am far more concerned about whether people are pluralistic in their worldview--" (p. 153 Kindle edition) In the final chapter Chris gives four arguments for atheist engagement with religion: "we're outnumbered; we want to end religious extremism and other forms of oppression and suffering; we have a lot to learn; and we have a bad reputation and are discriminated against." (p. 165 Kindle edition) I think all but the third (mutual enrichment) don't directly challenge new atheist assumptions and so may be viewed as unpersuasive. However misguided, new atheists view their stance as the principled position that religion is evil, and all we hold dear is tottering on the brink of annihilation because of it. So appeasing a deluded majority, or working with the enemy for pragmatic gains, or compromising on truth to not offend are not viewed as an option. Here Chris' wealth of personal experience, genuine humanism, and honest engagement with the issues are a model for the way forward. I highly recommend reading Chris' personal journey. We have a chance to get this right. Chris is showing us the way. Chris has a Master's in Pastoral Care and Counseling and a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and is currently Assistant Humanist Chaplain at Harvard. Paul Thibodeau *The Call: moving from Science vs Religion to a Better World*

Kurzbeschreibung The story of a former Evangelical Christian turned openly gay atheist who now works to bridge the divide between atheists and the religious The stunning popularity of the New Atheist movement whose most famous spokesmen include Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens speaks to both the growing ranks of atheists and the widespread, vehement disdain for religion among many of them. In *Faithist*, Chris Stedman tells his own story to challenge the orthodoxies of this movement and make a passionate argument that atheists should engage religious diversity respectfully. Becoming aware of injustice, and craving community, Stedman became a born-again Christian in late childhood. The idea of a community bound by God's love a love that was undeserved, unending, and guaranteed captivated him. It was, he writes, a place to belong and a framework for making sense of suffering. But Stedman's religious community did not embody this idea of God's love: they were staunchly homophobic at a time when he was slowly coming to realize that he was gay. The great suffering this caused him might have turned Stedman into a life-long New Atheist. But over time he came to know more open-minded Christians, and his interest in service work brought him into contact with people from a wide variety of religious backgrounds. His own religious beliefs might have fallen away, but his desire to change the world for the better remained. Disdain and hostility toward religion was holding him back from engaging in meaningful work with people of faith. And it was keeping him from full relationships with them the kinds of relationships that break down intolerance and improve the world. In *Faithist*, Stedman draws on his work organizing interfaith and secular communities, his academic study of religion, and his own experiences to argue for the necessity of bridging the growing chasm between atheists and the religious. As someone who has stood on both sides of the divide, Stedman is uniquely positioned to present a way for atheists and the

religious to find common ground and work together to make this world the one world we can all agree on a better place. From the Hardcover edition. Pressestimmen Christians like me have heard lots of testimonies how I once was lost but now am found, was blind ... and so on. We've heard how atheists converted to Christianity, how backsliders came back to piety, and how heretics returned to orthodoxy. What we haven't heard enough of is testimonies about how a Christian became an atheist or how an atheist became a faithist or how a gay Evangelical came out of the closet and out of the church. I've never read, heard, or met anyone better suited to this task than Chris Stedman. His beautiful writing voice, his poignant story-telling skill, his clear-eyed insight, his humane and humble empathy uniquely equip him to bear witness to everyone especially Christians like me. Rigid anti-theists and theists alike will be challenged as they read challenged to greater humanity, empathy, and understanding. Wholeheartedly recommended. Brian D. McLaren, author of *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?* Smart. Funny. Heartening. Inspiring. Faithist is the perfect book for those seeking a middle path between the firm, opposing certainties of religious fundamentalism and intolerant atheism. Reza Aslan, author of *No god but God and Beyond Fundamentalism* If Chris Stedman had become a pastor, he'd have a big, big church. Instead, he's a humanist hero, a compelling writer whose efforts to build bridges between non-believers and the faithful will leave a lasting mark. Faithist should be required reading in Sunday schools and Richard Dawkins's house alike. Kevin Roose, author of *The Unlikely Disciple* Agree or disagree with Chris Stedman (and there will be many who do both), no one can deny that he has written a deeply human book in its description of his own pilgrimage and human in its call to theists and non-theists alike to seek out common ground. The world would be a better place with more Chris Stedmans in it and fortunately he has provided us a roadmap to just such a world. The Rev. William F. Schulz, President, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Who can we be together? Chris Stedman asks in this powerful book. Faithist reveals that it's not what we believe that matters, but how our beliefs shape what we do with our lives a timely reminder for both atheists and the religious that the goal should be neither conversion nor the destruction of religion, but rather to make a better world. Sarah Sentilles, author of *Breaking Up with God: A Love Story* Stedman the atheist pays God the ultimate compliment: He provides a vigorous, amusing dissent to the all-too-glib magical thinking both most Americanized big time religion and most so-called New Atheists are selling. Unlike the New Atheist stars and America's blathering religious fundamentalists Stedman lays the groundwork for constructive engagement between all of us no matter what we believe...or don't. Frank Schaeffer, author of *Crazy For God* Chris Stedman's remarkable work has spanned from advocating for LGBTQ rights among Evangelical Christians to, in his current role at Harvard, founding the first-ever atheist-led interfaith initiative -- and he's only twenty-five. Part memoir and part blueprint, Faithist not only recounts his personal journey (which would be a riveting story on its own), but also shows -- sensitively and humorously -- how Humanists can live out our values with both empathy and honesty. This book represents the growing secular movement at its very best. Greg M. Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University, author of *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* The searching, intelligent account of a gay man's experiences growing away from God and into a thoughtful and humane atheist Brave and refreshingly open-minded. Kirkus s Enter Stedman, a vowed atheist, former Fundamentalist Christian, and current interfaith activist whose heartfelt and thought-provoking account of his struggle with God and religion serves as a call to arms for those seeking to bridge the gap between the religious and the secular To that end he paints an intimate and deeply affecting portrait of his own life, one characterized by the sort of staggering dissonance a gay Christian teen, religion-degree-seeking atheist that could cripple a person. But Stedman is nothing if not determined, and his resulting journey toward personal reconciliation through service work and interfaith dialogue is inspiring. Stedman's story is motivational, his thoughts on interreligious dialogue insightful, and in this short memoir, he proves himself an activist in the truest sense and one to watch. Booklist, Starred "Faithist, a new memoir by local author Chris Stedman, promotes a warm, loving, and witty serving of intercultural dialogue." Scott Kearnan, Boston Spirit An enlightening and engaging memoir. Minneapolis Star Tribune "His book about being religious and being secular, together, offers his hope for a better world" Toledo Blade Kurzbeschreibung The story of a former Evangelical Christian turned openly gay atheist who now works to bridge the divide between atheists and the religious The stunning popularity of the New Atheist movement whose most famous spokesmen include Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens speaks to both the growing ranks of atheists and the widespread, vehement disdain for religion among many of them. In Faithist, Chris Stedman tells his own story to challenge the orthodoxies of this movement and make a passionate argument that atheists should engage religious diversity respectfully. Becoming aware of injustice, and craving community, Stedman became a born-again Christian in late childhood. The idea of a community bound by God's love a love that was undeserved, unending, and guaranteed captivated him. 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