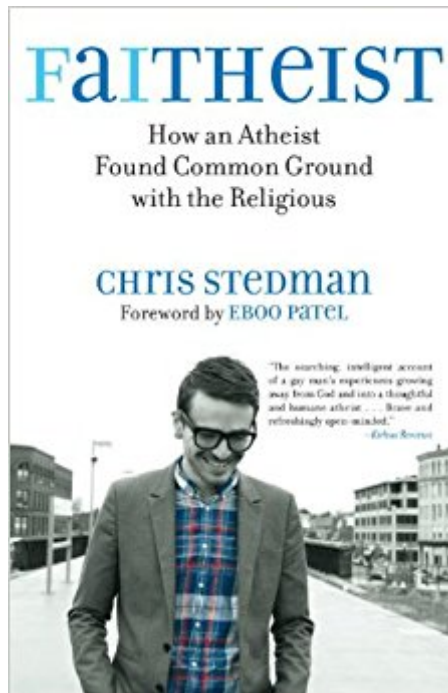




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Faithleist: How An Atheist Found Common Ground With The Religious



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review Current discussions about atheism seem to be defined as much by the caustic and confrontational manner of its proponents as by the actual examination of its characteristics. Enter Stedman, avowed 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. Stedman believes wholeheartedly in storytelling and its power to not only communicate values but also engender action. This book, then, is his attempt to use his own story to highlight the values of fellowship, equality, and “engaged religious diversity,” which he believes can bring about true social change. To that end he paints an intimate and deeply affecting portrait of his own life, one characterized by the sort of staggering dissonances “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. --Taina Lagodzinski --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Christians like me have heard lots of testimonies about 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. *Faithiest* 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 —,cd have a big, big church. Instead, he —,cs a humanist hero, a compelling writer whose efforts to build bridges between non-believers and the faithful will leave a lasting mark. *Faithiest* should be required reading in Sunday schools and Richard Dawkins —,cs 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 — • human 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 Stedman —,cs 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. *Faithiest* reveals that it —,cs 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 —,c 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 —,cs 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, *Faithiest* 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 Reviews "Enter Stedman, avowed 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 dissonances that 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 Review "Faitheist, 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 "From the Hardcover edition.

Chris Stedman has summarized his life experiences into a compassionate meditation on faith and the lack thereof, and how it is possible to live a moral life without the help of a deity. His caring reflections on his believing friends and theists in general are a welcome change from the usual vitriol spewed by both believers and atheists. It's been a long time since I've read a book in a single sitting, but Stedman held my interest from beginning to end.

Chris did a good job explaining why atheists should get involved in interfaith operatives. As a person who loves interfaith and understands its value while also identifying as an atheist, it was really refreshing to see someone - anyone who would challenge the dominating voices of the new atheists. Chris opens up a new dialogue for non-theists to participate in which diversified the image of us to be more full and more accurate.

Stedman is a skilled storyteller of high Emotional Intelligence. The first section of this book, in which he tells his own story of being a young gay man growing up in a mostly loving but homophobic congregation was moving. The great leadership he is ready to exercise at a remarkably young age shows in the second part of his story, as he reveals his process of growing beyond dismissive

impatience with religion, how he began to understand his need for solidarity in our care for the world, and as he shows practically and specifically how best to do that. I deeply identify with his goals, and am grateful for his gifts.

I bought this book not really knowing what to expect; I am not an atheist but I respect their views and believe that we can all learn from each other. Chris has written a book that is much needed today to bridge the gap between theists and nontheists. We all share this one home and we must work together to save it; Chris has put forward a book to help us to do just that, and I thank him. Also, it is a book about Chris's journey and his identity about being gay; it is an open, honest and emotional journey that he shares with us all. Great book!

I read this book since the author was going to be a moderator at an event I am planning to attend. I did not expect his message would change my outlook. In my opinion every American should adopt the inclusive message of this book. I highly recommend reading this book. I am a retired Baptist minister.

It is easy to get caught up in our own beliefs and in defending them without taking the time to realize that understanding others is more important than most anything else. This book brought this to this forefront for me. Well done.

While I agree with the substance of Dawkins, Hitchens, and Harris, I find that they are too antagonistic towards moderate and progressive religious people. Religion is not going away, so being antagonistic works against agnostics and atheists. The approach that Chris Stedman takes is, to me, a much more intelligent and realistic approach to dealing with religion. Atheists and progressive religious folks have a lot in common, particularly a desire to combat religious fundamentalism, so why not be respectful and work together?

An excellent read. Whether you agree with the author or not you can tell he's coming from an honest place in himself and that alone is worthwhile.

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