

March/April/May 2023
Volume 33
Number 3

Coming Out Atheist **April Public Meeting**

Greta Christina



Greta Christina at SASHAcon at the University of Missouri in 2014
Photo by: [Mark Schierbecker](#)

Coming out as an atheist is a powerful, liberating act. It makes life better for yourself, for other atheists, and for the world. But telling people you're an atheist can be risky. What are the best ways to do it? And how can we help each other take this step?

Author Greta Christina literally wrote the book on *Coming Out Atheist: How to Do It, How to Help Each Other, and Why*. She joins us for our April public meet-

ing to talk about the insights she gathered for the book and what she's learned since writing it.

Please note, this meeting is a hybrid presentation, online and in-person. Greta will be joining us online.



COMING OUT ATHEIST
How to Do It, How to Help Each Other, and Why

by
GRETA CHRISTINA

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Sunday, April 16, 2023

1:00–1:15 PM: Social
1:15–1:45 PM: Business Meeting
1:45–2:00 PM: Break, Presenter
Set-Up, Social Time
2:00–3:30 PM: Program

Rondo Community Library
461 Dale St N
St Paul, MN 55104

Online:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82344512218?pwd=VWNDclk2b-VUxeWJDnAzU3BhQnNRdz09>

Or call in:
+13092053325,,82344512218#,,,,*676832#



President's Column Remain Vigilant

By Ben Blanchard

Dear Members of Minnesota Atheists,

I am honored to address you as your newly re-elected President. I am eager to continue working with our board and leaders, advancing our mission of building a positive atheist com-

munity that actively promotes secular values.

As we move forward, I believe we must be aware of and actively work against the rise of Christian nationalism. Christian nationalism is a dangerous trend that threatens the principles of secularism that we hold dear, and we need to fight against it by organizing and mobilizing our community. We are currently shielded from many of these attacks by virtue of where we live, but the attacks continue. Currently there are dozens of malicious, "biblically inspired," pieces of legis-

Continued on page 5

Cryptogram

By George Francis Kane

*Ydkvtdv dgt ivgdf jy, gtm K ifktc sjp sht fvgpiy dgt
ivgdf jy, ts qstwvp is qssc gpsjtm zsp krgwktgpb
yjnnspiy, ts qstwvp is ktevti gqqkv y kt ifv ycb, oji
pgifvp is qssc is sjp sht vzzspiy fvpv ovqsh is rgcv
ifky hspqm g zki nqgdv is qkev kt, ktyivgm sz ifv
yspi sz nqgdv ifgi ifv dfjpdfvy kt gqq ifvyv dvtijpkvy
fgev rgmv ki.*

Ovpipgtm Pjyyvqq, "Hfb K Gr Tsi G Dfpkyikgt"



News and Notes

Christian Nationalism; the very vocal minority

By *George Francis Kane*

In February the non-partisan Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and Brookings Institution released the findings of their survey of the attitudes of Americans towards Christian nationalism. The study sought to quantify the support and opposition to Christian nationalism and to see how that breaks down by factors such as religion, political allegiance and education. In early March I watched an Americans United for Separation of Church and State webinar featuring Robert Jones of PRRI, who detailed the findings.

The study began by grouping respondents according to their response to five defining tenets of Christian nationalism:

1. God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.
2. The U.S. Government should declare America a Christian nation.
3. Being a Christian is an important part of being truly American.
4. If the U.S. moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
5. U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.

Based on their answers to these questions, respondents were grouped into four categories:

- **Adherents** (10%) overwhelmingly agree or completely agree with these Christian nationalist statements;
- **Sympathizers** (19%) agree, but are less likely than adherents to *completely* agree;
- **Skeptics** (39%) disagree, but are less likely than rejecters to *completely* disagree; and
- **Rejecters** (29%) *Completely* disagree with all five questions.

These groups do not total 100% because not everyone responded to every question.

The study found that 7 in 10 Americans generally oppose Christian nationalism. Naturally, the breakdown correlates to the religion and race of the respondents. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all Evan-

gelical Christians support it, while nearly 9 in 10 non-Christians oppose it.

Agreement with Christian nationalism is strongly influenced by political party. Adherents and Sympathizers comprise 54% of Republicans, but only 15% of Democrats. Republicans, at 21%, are about four times more likely than Democrats or independents to be “Adherents” of Christian nationalism.

Similarly, attitudes toward former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden are highly correlated with attitudes toward Christian nationalism. Only about a third of Americans hold a favorable view of former President Trump, but more than 7 in 10 Christian nationalist “Adherents” do.

Overall opinion of President Biden is more evenly divided, 47% favorable, 49% unfavorable. Among “Adherents” this is just 17%, and among “Sympathizers” just 24% have favorable feelings toward him.

There is also a wide gap in educational level between Christian nationalist supporters and opponents. Among Americans with no education beyond high school, 60% are “Skeptics” and “Rejecters”; with a college degree that rises to 79%; and with a postgraduate degree, to 84%.

Surprisingly, more than one-third of Americans are not familiar with the term “Christian nationalism.” Those in the “Adherent” and “Sympathizer” classes responded only 54% favorable, because another 38% did not know what it meant. “Rejecters” by 71% hold a very unfavorable view of Christian nationalism, and only 19% are not familiar with it.

Christian nationalism is a political goal held mostly by white Evangelical Christians, but they are well-funded and well-organized. A strong majority of the rest of America opposes it, so it seems unlikely that it can ever be imposed by democratic means. We live, however, in an age of division over “culture wars” issues that inflame the political passions of religious conservatives who perceive themselves as aggrieved victims. In this discussion, the specter of extra-political resolution must be recognized. Supporters of Christian nationalism agree by 40% with the statement that “Because things have gotten so

February Meeting Review

Black Freethinkers: The History of African American Secularism

By *August Berkshire*

Christopher Cameron, Ph.D., is Professor of History and the Interim Chair of Africana Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He is also the co-editor of *Race, Religion, and Black Lives Matter: Essays on a Moment and a Movement*. He was the founding president of the African American Intellectual History Society.

When Dr. Cameron began this work, he did not know any other African American atheists. His investigations led to hundreds of books and documents, culminating in this definitive work on the topic.

As an in-depth overview of the topic, *Black Freethinkers* at a minimum does three things:

First, it talks about some notable people you may have already heard of, in this case, people like Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Baldwin. It tells you about aspects of their lives that you were probably unaware of, in this case, their religious freethinking, agnosticism, or atheism.

Second, it introduces you to some notable people and works you haven't heard of before. For me, it was the Black, freethought, feminist novel *Quicksand* by Nella Larsen, published in 1928. It is an overlooked classic still in print.

Third, it introduces you to some aspects of history that you didn't know before. For me it was the association of African Americans with freethought and the socialist and communist movements.

Black Freethought is divided into five historical periods:

- Slavery and Reconstruction
- The New Negro Renaissance (which includes the Harlem Renaissance)
- Socialism and Communism
- Civil Rights and Black Power
- A brief Afterward that takes us to the present

[The rest of this article is taken verbatim, or nearly so, from the presentation by Dr. Christopher Cameron, who was kind enough to share his PowerPoint presentation with me. —A.B.]

Freethought among slaves usually did not take the form of deism but rather atheism. It was brought about by the hypocritical religion of masters and the inability to conceive of a just and benevolent god amidst the horrors of slavery. Evidence for this comes from slave narratives, travel accounts, interviews with former slaves, and music.

The Harlem Renaissance began in 1919 and represented a watershed moment in the history of Black freethought. It was brought about by an increase in urban life and greater access to educational institutions, both of which undermined religious belief. For participants in the Renaissance — art, literature, theater, and music became substitutes for religion and a means to argue for the inherent equality of Blacks. Prominent freethinkers of this era included Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, James Weldon Johnson, and Zora Neale Hurston.

Since its inception among German and French intellectuals in the 1800s, socialism and communism have been tied to atheism (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, etc.). African Americans were drawn to the revolutionary character of communism and its anti-imperialist politics. They likewise appreciated the support communists gave to struggles for racial justice and civil rights, including the defense of the Scottsboro Boys in the 1930s. Like artists of the Harlem Renaissance, commitment to communism was a replacement for religious belief for many adherents. Prominent Black Communist freethinkers included: Louise Thompson Patterson, Hubert Harrison, Harry Heywood, W.E.B. Du Bois, Elizabeth Hendrickson, Cyril Briggs, and Richard Wright.

The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) is often portrayed as a religious one because of the prominence of figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. However, the reality is that most churches of the era were conservative and less than 10% participated in civil rights demonstrations. Many prominent civil rights activists were hostile to religion and based their political activism on a secularist viewpoint. This is probably best seen in the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party. Two early and primary articulators of Black Power were Stokely Carmichael and James Forman, both atheists and both opponents of nonviolence (i.e. pacifism as a response to attacks). The Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, organized programs including health clinics, free breakfasts for children, armed

self-defense, job training, and legal defense. Many members rejected the ethics of Christianity and mainstream civil rights leaders.

The Black Arts Movement (BAM) spanned roughly from 1965 to 1976. It aimed to promote Black cultural nationalism, appreciation of African culture, and anti-respectability politics. Key writers and artists of the BAM, including Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin, were atheists.

Conclusion: Despite views of Blacks as naturally religious, freethought has been a vital and significant component of Black culture and politics since the 19th century. This history is not an obscure one, as sources on Black freethinkers are readily available in print and online (slave narratives on docsouth.unc.edu, poetry, novels, autobiographies). It is vital to understand and teach this history to show Black skeptics today that they are part of a long tradition of prominent Black freethinkers.

President’s Message continued from page 2
 lation being proposed in our state. Even though these bills are unlikely to advance, we must remain vigilant as the people and organizations pushing these bills are gaining strength.

Minnesota Atheists has a crucial role to play in this fight. We have a unique perspective and powerful voices that we can use to push back against the forces of Christian nationalism. As we work together, we must ensure that more members of our community are elevated into organizing positions, to make sure we are sustainable and can continue to be effective for years to come.

By empowering more individuals to take on organizing roles, we can create a strong and effective movement that will protect the separation of church and state, defend the rights of atheists and other non-believers, and promote our mission of secularism. Together, we can build a vibrant and active community of atheists, agnostics, humanists, non-believers, secularists, skeptics, heathens, and nones in Minnesota, and make a real difference in the world.

Thank you for your continued support of Minnesota Atheists. I am excited to continue to work with all of you as we strive to achieve our goals, elevate more members of our community into organizing positions, and make our voices heard.

Sincerely,

Ben Blanchard
 President, Minnesota Atheists

Nationalism continued from page 2
 far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country.” As a whole, 81% of Americans disagree with this assessment. The events of January 6, 2021 prove that political violence cannot, however, be lightly dismissed as a potential factor in our national political development.

It is an unacceptable risk to ignore the threat to secular democracy in America posed by Christian nationalism. Not only is it their goal to impose their version of Christianity on the rest of us, but they may employ violence to achieve it.

Treasury Report December, 2022

By Chris Matthews

General/Visibility Fund Donations

- \$100 Keith Thorkelson
- \$100 Michael Ryan
- \$50 Rajiv Vaidyanathan
- \$50 Ross Meisner
- \$25 Vicky Hagens
- \$25 Steve Petersen
- \$25 Frank Neubecker
- \$25 Chris Matthews
- \$20 Ben Zvan
- \$20 Michelle Tjernagel
- \$15 Laurie Johnson
- \$15 Rabih Nahas
- \$10 Tichie Kumenda
- \$14 PayPal Giving Fund
- \$494 Subtotal**

\$494 Total Donations

Expenses

- \$3,687 Large Social Events
- \$549 Parade, Booth, etc.
- \$175 Misc

\$4,411 Total Expenses

Current Building Fund – \$147,683

Upcoming Monthly Events

Hybrid Freethought Toastmasters Meeting 1st and 3rd Monday of every month from 6:30–8 PM
Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave W, St Paul.
freethought.toastmastersclubs.org.

Hybrid Minnesota Atheists Board Meeting email chair@mnatheists.org for the meeting link.
September Public Meeting — September 17, location and guest speaker to be announced

Freethinking Females

Online 2nd Monday of every month at 7 PM

In Person Last Monday of every month at 5:30 PM, Sweeney's Saloon, 96 North Dale Street, St. Paul.
Shattering the myth that atheist groups are male dominated with a females-only event.

Online Blasphemer's Brunch 2nd Saturday of every month at 10:30 AM

Bowling for Deities Last Saturday of every month at noon,
(usually) at Flaherty's Arden Bowl, 1273 West County Road E, Arden Hills

In-person Trivia Night Every Sunday from 5:30–8 PM
Venn Brewing, 3550 E 46th St
Suite 140, Minneapolis

Online M.A.S.H! (MN Atheists Social Hour!) Every Tuesday (**note the day change**) from 5:30–6:30 PM
RSVP in Meetup and a Zoom link appears in the announcement.

Online In Depth — Discussion and Debate Every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month from 3–4 PM

Upcoming Annual Events

Day of Reason

May 3
Minnesota State Capitol

Freethought Summer Picnics

3rd Sunday of June, July, and August
Locations to be announced

Twin Cities Pride Festival and Parade

June 24–25
Loring Park, Minneapolis

Convergence

July 6–9,
Hyatt Regency, 1300 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis

Details on all Annual Events are subject to change. Watch future newsletters and/or Minnesota Atheists' Meetup event page for updates.

For more events and instructions for connecting to online events, visit:

www.meetup.com/MinnesotaAtheists 



The “Nones” That You Know

Peter Higgs

By *Milo Grika*

Peter Ware Higgs (born 29 May 1929) is a British theoretical physicist, Emeritus Professor in the University of Edinburgh, and Nobel Prize laureate for his work on the mass of subatomic particles.

[Of the so-called God particle] “First of all, I’m an atheist. The second thing is I know that name (started as) a kind of joke and not a very good one. ... It’s so misleading.”

— Peter Higgs

Cryptogram Answer

Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look around for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.

Bertrand Russell, “Why I Am Not A Christian”

Minnesota Atheists Membership and Donations

Membership Levels

- One-year student membership \$10
- One-year individual membership \$35
- Three-year individual membership \$90
- One-year household membership \$45
- Three-year household membership \$115
- One-year sustaining membership \$75
- Three-year sustaining membership \$200
- Life membership \$600

Donation Funds

General Fund \$ _____

Building Fund \$ _____

Atheists Talk Fund \$ _____

I would like my donation(s) to be

- private
- public
- attributed by my name only

for reporting in the Minnesota Atheists newsletter and on the website. (By default, each donation will be considered private.)

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State ZIP _____

Just email newsletter Email address _____

(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

Donations are tax deductible. Membership fees are deductible for the amount beyond their fair market value.

Student memberships include a subscription to the PDF version of *The Minnesota Atheist* delivered by email. All other memberships include a subscription to the printed version delivered by postal mail. If you would prefer the PDF version delivered by email, please check the box and provide your email address.

Please make checks payable to:

Minnesota Atheists.

Students, please enclose a copy of your fee statement or school identification.

Minnesota Atheists
PO Box 120304
New Brighton, MN 55112

8 The Minnesota Atheist

Minnesota Atheists

Positive Atheism in action since 1991

Minnesota Atheists is dedicated to building a positive atheist community that actively promotes secular values through educational programs, social activities, and participation in public affairs.

Minnesota Atheist Board of Directors

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Minnesota Atheists Goals

Minnesota Atheists practices positive, inclusive, active, friendly, neighborhood atheism in order to provide a community for atheists, educate the public about atheism, and promote separation of state and church.

Minnesota Atheists Media

AtheistsWeekly Email (AWE)
Chris Matthews
awe@mnatheists.org

NOTE: The numbers for “Regular memberships” and “Life members” are now based on financial data. These membership numbers undercount actual members, since one household membership could represent more than one member. Future numbers reported in the newsletter will continue to be based on financial data.

Minnesota Atheists Affiliations

Atheist Alliance of America
Atheist Alliance International
American Atheists
The American Humanist Association
Council for Secular Humanism
The International Humanist and Ethical Union
Secular Coalition for America

Minnesota Atheists Membership (as of Dec. 31, 2022)

Regular memberships: 53
Life members: 55
Meetup members: 3,936



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