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## Author Megan Rahm, *Free to Roam: Poems From a Heathen Mommy* April Public Meeting

Megan Rahm is the author of the blog "From the Ashes of Faith" and has recently published a book through local publisher Freethought House titled *Free to Roam: Poems From a Heathen Mommy*. Megan Rahm lives in Toledo, Ohio with her husband and four-year-old daughter.

Everything about Megan Rahm screams "Midwest Mom" with one big exception—she's a very passionate atheist. While often a source of tension, this juxtaposition in her life is also a source of creativity, and *Free to Roam: Poetry from a Heathen Mommy* is a result. In this debut collection, Rahm passionately explores coming of age, faith and atheism, motherhood, and womanhood. With honesty, poignancy, and humor, Megan Rahm explores life's most exhilarating highs and the heartbreaking lows. Her words are sure to both make you cry and awaken your sense of life's adventure.

Join us in this online presentation to hear from the author herself to learn about her blog and book.

### Sunday, April 18, 2021

1:00–1:15 p.m.: Zoom Opens, join us and work out any tech issues

1:15–1:45 p.m.: Business Meeting

1:45–2:00 p.m.: Break

2:00–3:30 p.m.: Program



### Online

You can join via a desktop browser or on the Zoom app on your smartphone: <https://zoom.us/j/99846973161?pwd=U0dKZDIUQX-FGUy9uQUpKYjFzdHYxdz09>

Passcode: 487362

You can also call in:

Dial: 1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 970 4740 3073

Passcode: 487362

One tap mobile: +13126266799,,970  
47403073#,,,,,0#,,849621#

We hope you can join us!

The meeting will open at 1:00 p.m. to give people time to get connected and test out the sound.

## Letters to the Star Tribune Making Our Voices Heard

*By George Francis Kane*

I believe that over this plague year, Minnesota Atheists has had little visibility in the outside community. I searched for something that I could do to help. To make locals aware of secularism and the atheist viewpoint, it occurred to me that the best vehicle might be letters-to-the-editors of Minnesota’s highest distribution newspapers. The Minneapolis Star Tribune has by far the largest circulation in the state, so I decided to start there.

Years ago, I was active on the Star Tribune’s online discussion board. When the Star Tribune shut them down, they commented that the discussion boards were no longer needed, because they had implemented a new feature in their online edition. Readers could now comment on any article. The paper apparently is only interested in responses to articles that it publishes.

I started reading the paper thoroughly and was disappointed in the paucity of articles on topics of

interest to atheists. I decided that any topic in our wide-ranging public policies document would be fair game. I would in some cases be able to point out that their coverage had overlooked the secularist perspective.

Erica Klein and Erik Riese have joined me in this project. If any of you readers, would like to join us, please let me know. If you would like to work alone, but are interested in writing letters to the editor, have at it! It does not often fit in to mention Minnesota Atheists directly, but we can hope that readers may be motivated to search for local secularist groups. Also, if the Star Tribune starts receiving a lot of atheist/secularist letters, they may recognize us as a significant part of their readership.

The paper printed one of my letters, which can be viewed at <https://www.startribune.com/readers-write-end-of-life-issues-dr-seuss-books-harriet-tubman-on-the-20-bill/600030392/>. The Star Tribune insists that letters submitted to them be exclusive, so I am not providing that one here. The following letters were not printed by them.

Continued on page 5

## Cryptogram

*By George Francis Kane*

Cjn xyoc oiui pn qygcvyunoeno ivn cjon ifymc

xiccnvo io cy rjeqj cjnvn eo gy pyyz nuezngqn

necjnv rit. Hn vonmceyg eo monz eg cjnydypt, gyc

eg ivecjxnceq.

Fncvzigz Vmoondd, “Mghyhmdiv Nooito”



## News and Notes Making the Grade

By *George Francis Kane*

Our 46th president took office on January 20 of this year. This is the first opportunity to grade him on his performance to date from a secularist perspective. His predecessor earned a flaming red “F,” causing enormous damage to the separation of church and state. It is quite early in Joe Biden’s presidency, but so far he has shown uneven promise of repairing much of the damage brought on by Donald Trump.

Biden disappointed secularists the moment he took his oath of office. He certainly knew that the presidential oath, as written at the end of Article II Section 1 of the US Constitution, does not contain the words “so help me God.” As the FFRF’s Andrew Seidel explained (<https://progressive.org/dispatches/god-out-of-presidential-oath-seidel-210119/>) those words were not used in the oath until early in the 20th Century. Since 1917 it has been used in every inauguration except Herbert Hoover’s in 1929.

Secularists of course want the oath returned to its constitutional text. Chief Justice John Roberts may have introduced a minor innovation. Instead of simply appending “so help me God,” for Biden to repeat, he turned it into the question, “so help you God?” I expect that Biden had no hesitancy to answer as Roberts wished, as Biden is a devout Catholic, and it would have been embarrassing for everyone involved to rebuff or ignore the question. The President and chief justice will have to work that out beforehand.

Hours after the inauguration ceremony, Biden’s grade shot up. He signed an executive order overturning Trump’s ban on travel to the US from a list of primarily Muslim nations. Trump had justified the action by claiming that it was needed to protect the United States against foreign terrorism, but it was widely understood as anti-Muslim prejudice. Most travelers from those nations are not terrorists.

At that same session, Biden issued two other executive orders overturning Trump fiats that struck at the civil rights of the LGBTQ community. One of Biden’s orders prohibited federal

agencies to discriminate based on gender identity or sexual orientation. The other overturned a Trump order that forbade federal agencies to conduct diversity and inclusion training.

The same day, Biden canceled Trump’s 1776 Commission. Trump had created this commission to counter the New York Times’ 1619 Project, which traced slavery and racism as foundational to US history to the present day. Trump’s 18-member commission, which contained no historians but many conservative activists, had issued its report two days before Biden’s inauguration. It was mostly a rehash of conservative talking points about American Exceptionalism, and a denunciation of interpretations of US history that dwell on negatives. Its goal was to reframe the teaching of US history to focus on great founding principles, although it portrayed the separation of state and church negatively. The American Historical Association quickly denounced it, noting that “the authors call for a form of government indoctrination of American students, and in the process elevate ignorance about the past to a civic virtue.” The Report of the 1776 Commission was quickly removed from the Whitehouse web site.

Five days later Biden issued another executive order, rescinding Trump’s ban on transgender soldiers in the US military. On January 28, he repealed the global gag rule, that forbade foreign organizations that accept US funding for health programs to provide any information about or referrals for abortion.

All these executive orders, within a few days, boost Biden’s grade for state church separation into the “A” range. A couple of his later actions show, however that he is far from perfect. On February 4 he addressed the National Prayer Breakfast, extolling faith. Appearing at the bipartisan breakfast virtually, he said in prerecorded remarks that “For me, in the darkest moments, faith provides hope and solace, provides clarity and purpose, as well.” Biden was invited to speak because he is the president. He should have skipped the Prayer Breakfast.

Finally, Biden should have dissolved the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships instead of restaffing it. Interim grade: a solid B.

## New Director's Directions Read it Here Folks

By *Mike Trombley*

Hi Everyone. Let me introduce myself. Mike Trombley here, your new librarian (completely unqualified) and new Director at Large #3 (qualified?) Yes, you probably don't know me yet but I'm working on that.

My goal in MNatheists (MNA) is to help "normalize" being an admitted atheist in our society. One specific way to accomplish that is to meet and greet as many other atheists as I can, while helping them connect to each other as well. Knowing that you are not alone with your views is really important to all of us. Some people are more vocal and public and others feel a need to keep to themselves to avoid being ostracized by their family / friends / co-workers / community (and often many of these at the same time, unfortunately).

My first attempt at enhancing our MNA community is by creating a discussion event on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month, which are available via Meetup within the MNatheists group. I'm aiming to keep these meetings focused on a chosen subject, so while it can be a social event, it's really aimed at digging into a topic — like a book club without needing to read a book. All are welcome to join — including anyone new to atheism or MNatheists — no membership required. I know MNA also has a variety of socializing events, now implemented virtually. Enjoy any or all of them. To quote Red Green — "We're all in this together." Might as well enjoy it with friends, even if you don't know them yet.

I've advertised that the "In Depth" discussion group on Tuesdays doesn't require any reading. While this IS true, being the MNA librarian, I'm also going to promote reading anyway — for pleasure or education. We currently have about 180 inches of books available to all MNA members. One benefit of membership is that you get to become smarter with each book you read. While there are other sources of entertainment and education, why not start on a subject dear to your heart (not your soul, that's a different library).

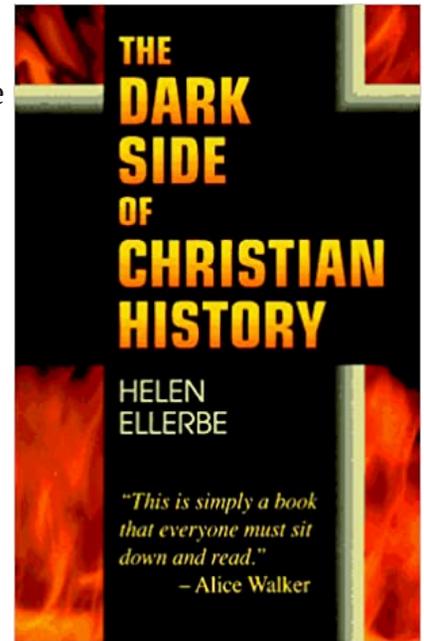
With Covid still hovering around, it's a bit

hard to share the library books. I'm willing to give it the old "non-contact" try if you have a specific book you'd like to pick up. And if any of you still have a book from MNA checked out — and you know who you are — I'm accepting anonymous book returns, no questions asked. Write to me (Mike) at [Library@MNatheists.org](mailto:Library@MNatheists.org)

To pique your literary interest, here are 15 book titles currently available — out of roughly 210 within our library. In case you want to read them all, we have 35 starting with "A"; you better get started. The complete listing should be available at [MNATHEISTS.ORG](http://MNATHEISTS.ORG). I say "should" because we're getting the site updated and not everything goes as planned.

This month's 15 titles:

*A Jefferson Bible for the Twenty-First Century*  
*A Treasury of Philosophy II*  
*The American Age of Reason — Franklin, Jefferson, & Paine*  
*The Conquest of Happiness*  
*The Crimes of Jehovah*  
*Culture Wars — The Threat to Your Family and Your Freedom*  
*The Dark Side of Christian History*  
*Dignitarian Way*  
*Divine Hate — Why It is Not to be Believed*  
*Eugene V. Debs Speaks*  
*The Great Quotations on Religious Freedom (2 of Two Copies)*  
*In Gods We Trust — The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion*  
*The Open Mind*  
*The Trouble With Christmas*  
*Woe to the Women The Bible Tells Me So — The Bible Female Sexuality & The Law*



**Letters** continued from page 2

The following letters were submitted to the Star Tribune but not published.

Most people are shocked by the report in the February 4 Star Tribune online article, “Sitting on billions, Catholic dioceses amassed taxpayer aid.” The Catholic Church was able to secure Paycheck Protection Program grants even though their operation nationally was quite profitable during the Covid-19 lockdown. Despite this widespread condemnation, the Biden administration may find that it cannot avoid repeating this religious subsidy in future pandemic relief and economic stimulus programs.

In last year’s *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* case, the US Supreme Court may have invalidated the no-aid clause in the constitutions of 38 states. It ruled that a grant program that was denied to religious schools demonstrated animosity to religion and could not be resolved by completely ending the grant program. The court required that the grants be made available to religious schools.

The current court may, by the same logic, rule that future Small Business Administration loans and grants cannot be denied to religion, because in the Paycheck Protection Program they were permitted, by suspending SBA regulations. Because Trump allowed the payments, ending them would demonstrate animosity toward religion. Therefore, all later presidents must allow them too.

A nation that compels citizens by the power of taxation to support religions that they do not believe has abandoned all pretense of religious freedom.

George Francis Kane

The article “Some See Christianity, the Nation as One” (Star Tribune, February 7) quotes Rev. Dale Witherington asserting that there is no line between church and state: “That is not in the Constitution. Our nation was founded to glorify God and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Actually, the first clause of the Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion,” and the 14th Amendment extends this restriction to all levels of government. This expressly forbids government to impose the doctrines of any religion with force of law.

The article shows that Christian Nationalists

believe that government that does not reflect their religious values is interfering with their “religious liberties.” It also shows that this reflects the views of many more evangelicals than the armed insurrectionists who laid siege to the Capitol on January 6. Yet these evangelicals demand that the rights of others, such as reproductive rights and nondiscrimination against people on the basis of religion or gender identity be rescinded. They support not a doctrine of religious freedom of all citizens, but rather of their own religious privilege.

If policy demands can only be justified by a certain religious community’s understanding of God’s will, government policy must instead defer to the conscience of each citizen.

George Francis Kane

In his March 6 letter, Michael Tillemans argues with exclusively religious reasons against medical aid in dying. In the next letter on the page, the Rev. Harlan Limpert reaches the opposite conclusion. Religions have differing beliefs on this issue, so government must steer clear of trying to resolve doctrine. The decision of legislators must be based only on the secular effects the End-of-Life Options Act will have.

As my own years advance, I’ve become increasingly convinced that selecting when and how to conclude one’s life is the most intensely personal decision anyone can make. The right to make this decision should not be undermined by law.

George Francis Kane

In a March 6 letter to the editor, Michael Tillemans makes his case that the strongest argument against medical aid in dying is a commandment from his god. What Mr. Tillemans is overlooking is that his god is not everyone’s god, and that the constitution of the United States prohibits law-making based on his religious beliefs. In fact, the First Amendment prohibits government actions that unduly favor one religion over another.

Mr. Tillemans and other writers make other arguments for and against medical aid in dying that bear serious consideration on this important policy issue. While what his god would prefer may drive Mr. Tillemans’ own choices, it cannot be used as a legal argument to force the behavior of other Americans.

Erica Klein



## The Most Hated Woman in America Netflix

By *Kamrin Duncan*

*The Most Hated Woman in America* tells the story of Madalyn

Murray O'Hair, the founder and president of American Atheists. O'Hair was an advocate for the separation of church and state and was responsible for the *Murray v. Curlett* 1963 Supreme Court Case that resulted in the banning of reading the Bible in public schools. Although she is most famous for this case, Murray files many lawsuits in pursuit of separation of church and state. She attempted to have In God we Trust removed from U.S. currency and challenged various religious practices from taking places on government property and during political events. Along with paving the way for atheism in America, O'Hair was also an advocate for woman's rights and anti-racism.

The film itself offers a brief look into O'Hair's life as a single mother, her Supreme Court case, and her role in the founding and running of American Atheists. The movie revolves mostly around the abduction and eventual murder of O'Hair and her family. It might have been my religious upbringing, but I had never heard of Madalyn Murray O'Hair prior to watching this movie. I found the movie to be a little shallow as it is only 90 minutes and glazes over much of what O'Hair accomplished in her life. This is certainly not the best movie I've ever seen, however to see atheism represented in a movie without negative connotations felt worth the watch.



The movie still brings to light some of O'Hair's accomplishments and highlights the challenges of atheism in America and the negative way atheists are seen in modern society. As I watched the movie I was reminded of a study from the UMN back in 2016 that concluded that 40% of Americans disapprove of people who identify as non-religious and are seen as problematic. It is a good reminder of the important work organizations like MNA do to help spread positive atheism, to change the image of atheism, and to fight for the separation of church and state.

(<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4842646/mediaviewer/rm3655872768/>)

## Treasury Report December, 2020, and January and February, 2021

By *Chris Matthews*

### Atheists Talk Fund Donations

\$500 Alice Lesney  
**\$500 Subtotal**

### General/Visibility Fund Donations

\$800 Art Kallenbach  
\$250 Jon & Kristine Strand  
\$200 George Kane  
\$165 David Bicking  
\$150 Ross Meisner  
\$100 Rick Christensen  
\$100 Michael Ryan  
\$60 Ben Zvan  
\$50 Georgia Hancock  
\$50 Geraldine Jensen  
\$50 Erica Klein  
\$25 Vicky Hagens  
\$20 Heather Hegi  
\$15 Peter Holste  
\$37 anonymous (2)  
\$186 Benevity  
\$90 YourCause  
\$39 AmazonSmile  
\$3 PayPal Giving Fund  
**\$2,395 Subtotal**

### Building Fund Donations

\$50 Geraldine Jensen  
\$15 Jim Barri  
**\$65 Subtotal**

**\$2,960 Total Donations**

### Expenses

\$914 Newsletters  
\$780 IT General  
\$492 Misc  
**2,186 Total Expenses**

**Current Building Fund  
\$145,828**

## The “Nones” That You Know

Keira Knightley

By *Milo Grika*

Keira Christina Knightley OBE (born 26 March 1985) is a British actress, particularly noted for her roles in period dramas. Her accolades include two Empire Awards and nominations for two Academy Awards, two British Academy Film Awards, three Golden Globe Awards and one Laurence Olivier Award.

*“If only I wasn’t an atheist; I could get away with anything.”*

— Keira Knightley

## Upcoming Events

All in-person events are canceled until further notice. Virtual get-togethers are encouraged!

## 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Radio Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Just email newsletter    Email address \_\_\_\_\_  
(Required for student memberships and email subscriptions)

## Cryptogram Answer

The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic.

Bertrand Russell, “Unpopular Essays”

## Get Famous (Sort of)

You too can become published by simply submitting something to The Minnesota Atheist newsletter:

Have a blog?

*Let us reprint it.*

Have an opinion?

*Let us hear it.*

Just send your input to [editor@mnatheists.org](mailto:editor@mnatheists.org) and we’ll do the rest.

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

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#### 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

Regular members: 191

Life members: 50

Meetup members: 3,554

#### Minnesota Atheists Honorary Members

Hector Avalos, PhD

Dan Barker

Gerald Erickson, PhD

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Dick Hewetson

Robert M. Price, PhD



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