



On Earth As It Is

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2010

## Decomposing Articles of Faith

Melissa Pritchard

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### Recommended Citation

Pritchard, Melissa, "Decomposing Articles of Faith" (2010). *On Earth As It Is*. 47.  
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# on earth as it is

*prayer as story, story as prayer*

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*photo by matthew simmons*

## *Decomposing Articles of Faith*

*Melissa Pritchard*

In which Sister Pritchard, Scribbler Pritchard, Goody Pritchard holds forth:

*Praise God*

That God both does and does not uphold our Neighborhood Watch.

That God both is and is not a projection of our innermost desires and fears.

That God is a handyman, our prayers to Him a honey-do.

*From Whom All Blessings Flow...*

A golden arabesque

An opium scheme.

*I believe in God the Father Almighty*

Karma: man's howl for justice indefinitely extended.

Reincarnation: man's fixed quest for immortality, a variant of fear.

Man's/woman's wish, the peoples' wish – gender induces hobbled language.

*Maker of Heaven and Earth*

Samuel Beckett remembered his mother's womb, even its color.

I recall being hanged on some medieval gallows.

I met a soul mate in Prague last summer—a Pakistani diplomat who claimed his hands had been cut off in a former life, and that he had known me for lifetimes. I insisted my head had been cut off in a former life with the result that in this life, it has made me afraid to speak up for years, and has given me an hysteric's loathing of necklaces and neck scarves. Perhaps in one of our lifetimes together, she quipped drily, you lacked your hands and I was minus my head. Oh yes, most definitely, said the kindly, if not kingly, Pakistani man, lubriciously rubbing together his attached hands.

We believe what makes us happy. I am happiest believing in God, not so much the

Singular deity, the divinely molded One, but a permeable, porous, timeless, palpable outside-the-law essence informing all things high and low. God as: good vibration.

#### *And Of All That Is Seen and Unseen*

Swimming in the pool yesterday morning, I came upon a small sickle shaped eucalyptus leaf, floating on the water's turquoise surface. The leaf was blackened with hundreds of ants, the leaf their life raft. I picked the leaf out of the pool, laid it on the ledge and studied its miniature horrorscape—the ants on the bottom layers were clearly deceased, the ones at the top, a few, not many, were still alive. Survivors. How had this tragedy unfolded, how did hundreds of ants—and were they of the same tribal declension?—wind up on a eucalyptus leaf pale and hooked as a nail paring, and what of me, their Deity, come upon them, rescuing those still alive—would they tell stories of me, of the great wet-head, chlorine scented deity who saved them? Will religions and sub-religions be built around their extinguished memory of me? Is that how God looks down upon us We Willie Winkees on earth, ants heaped on a curving leaf in various stages of fornication, a-sup, a-reveling, a-death and a-dying?

#### *God from God*

I deplore the lack of universal compassion in our species. I issue from a draconian line of philosophers that says if one suffers, we all suffer; if one fails, it is the fault of all.

I am as culpable as the rest, my veneer spit-shined and shallow, my intentions on the level of a Sufi master's. Pill and pearl. Twee of divine.

Look how my articles of faith are disheveled, disorderly, squalling, nailed to no door, unrecitable, in bloody flux, forgettable.

#### *Light from Light*

Yet I believe them, my faith's restless articles.

It seems I have passed through compassion fatigue into Al Qaeda/Taliban fatigue, into The Secret fatigue, mantra fatigue, gospel fatigue, chatter and twitter fatigue, silence fatigue, God fatigue, gratitude fatigue, high-minded fatigue, porn and news fatigue. Beyond fatigue, I am full of great, good thanks to be, however long my spark lasts, alive.

#### *True God from True God*

My dog most certainly is god spelled backwards. He is sublimely present. No fatigue. He loves. He licks. He chases and wags. Eats, shits, leaps like a dolphin for his Frisbee. Sleeps and guards. Snorts in his sleep and awake begs for morsels of cheese, smackerels of beef-crumb. A belly rub, an ear massage.

I have seen miracles happen. It is true, I "manifest" people, events, money. It may be that I want to be superior in a moral yet humble way that others will admire.

The self: unredeemable, worthy of parsed, parsnip worship.

#### *Begotten, Not Made*

Vexing! So many articles of faith that do not cohere. They are infinite, these articles of faith, yet now I have article fatigue and must stop creating them.

Hear this: I believe in God and have moments of sublimity, of visionary migraine halo, most often during Sunday 5 o'clock Mass at Mt. Carmel Church when I sit among the lame, the halt, the blind, those who are homeless, those on their ventilators, beside the mentally ill man who rushes up to be first to receive the host, always wearing his red suspenders, knees quaking. O Holy is their Queen.

The priest is pro-life and drives me nuts-o with his fiery complacency about things.

I wonder if he dreams of being a lover, a husband, a chef, a toy maker, a defender of auto-da-fe.

*Hail Mary Full of Grace*

The figure hanging above his head is what matters. No one listened then. No one listens now. Soren Kierkegaard said no one can truly follow the word of Jesus. It is too hard, he said. The people are not willing.

*The Lord Is With Thee*

We send up our saints like Venetian fireworks, then plough them under mud and offal. We hate and worship them because they are not us. They are the goody two-shoes in third grade we loved to torment but in our beds, alone at night, envied.

*Blessed Art Thou Among Women*

I once knelt beside Mother Teresa's marble tomb in Calcutta. A force field clamped onto me, I swooned, lost all sense of time and space. I was "caught up" in something greater than myself. I longed to stay there until I died but didn't want to be thought of or discovered as, mad. I was afraid of this power I encountered.

*And Blessed Is the Fruit of Thy Womb, Jesus*

I once met a nun who ran Mother Teresa's home for the dying. She lived inside an egg-shaped aura, a glow, a holy substance that everyone grew tame and pie-mouthed around.

I once met a Buddhist saint, a former jazz singer and beauty who levitated, laughed airily, and had just spent hours in Thailand with the Dalai Lama. She explained the history of the relics I was studying in the Tibet House. This was in New Delhi. Bald, wrapped in white, she called herself the "humble messenger," and in the gift shop, bought a calendar for a friend.

*Holy Mary, Mother of God*

There is a God who is a cloud of unknowing.

*Pray for Us Sinners*

On my knees, I behave. Am better. Quieter.

*Now*

Take me.

*And At the Hour of Our Death*

I am hard-wired for Paradise.

I ask to go there alone. Naked.

*Amen.*

Melissa Pritchard is a novelist, short story writer, essayist and journalist. Author of six published books of fiction and one biography, she recently completed a fourth collection of short stories, *The Odditorium*. Her awards include The Flannery O'Connor and Carl Sandburg Awards, and fellowships from the NEA, the Howard and the Hawthornden Foundations. Her work has been both included and cited in The Pushcart Prize, the O'Henry Awards, Best of the West, Best American Short Stories and other anthologies. Her feature article, "Finding Ashton," appeared in the May issue of O! The Oprah Magazine. She is at work on a trio of novellas, and

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