

Gehenna



testimonies by melanie cole

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for my Papa.

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The Beatitudes

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

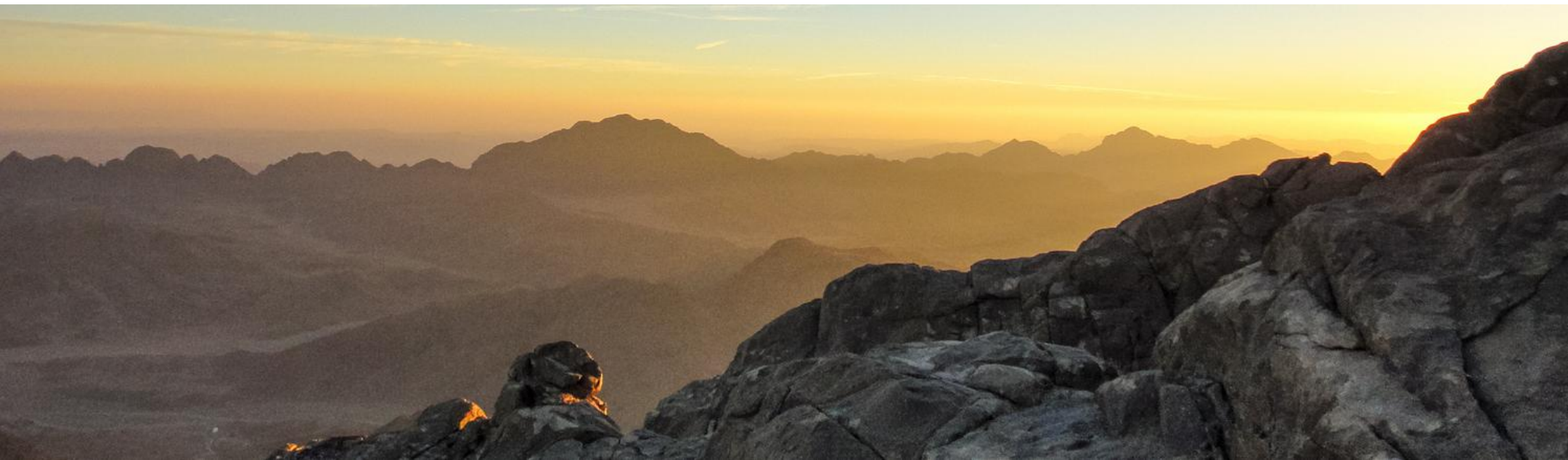
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

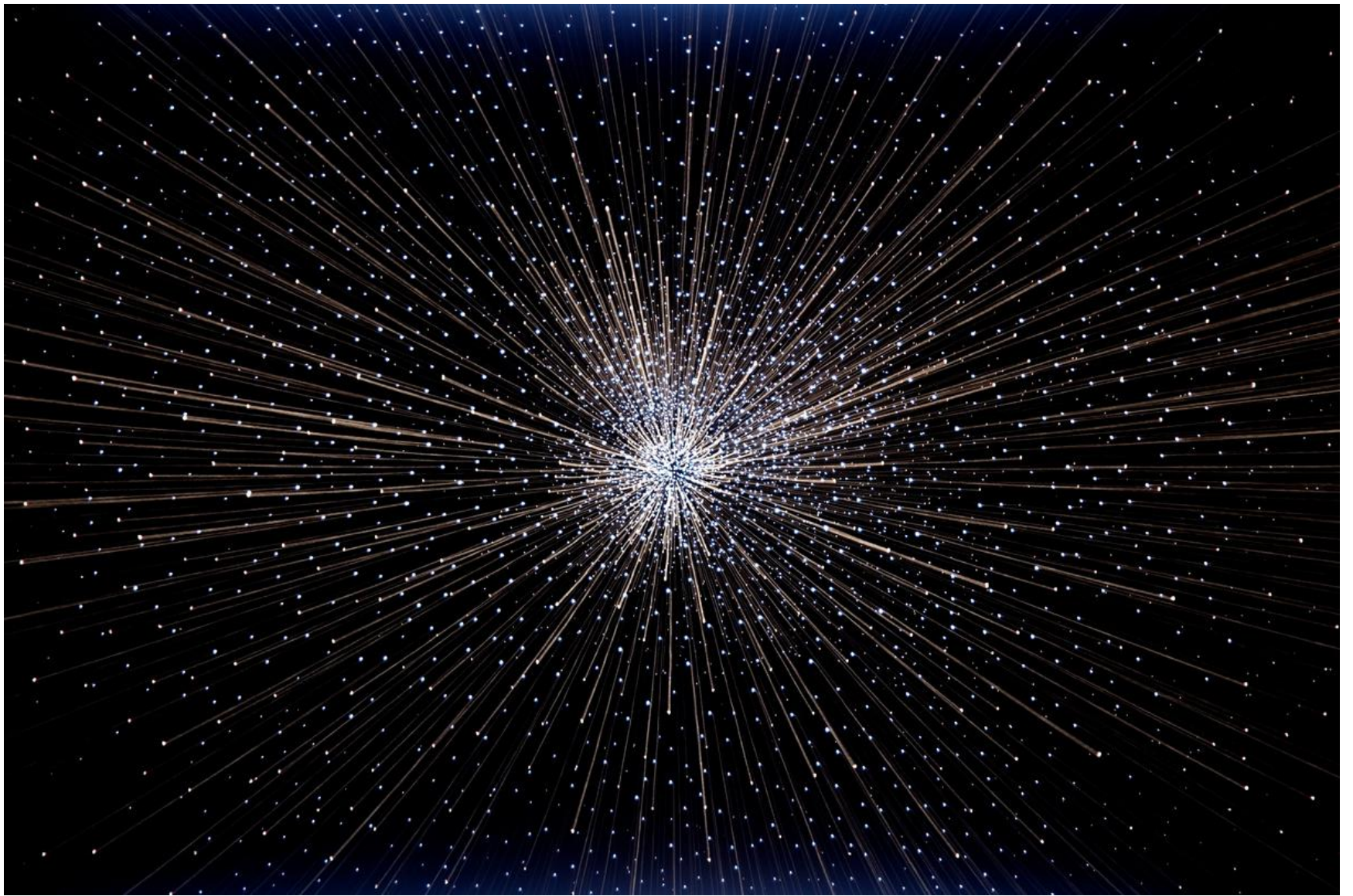
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



Good

God did not create the world in six days,
He created it in a simple refrain:

And it was good, He said,
And it was good.



The Baptizer

Luke 12:51

Hold Me steady
as I raze the preachers

Drown Me like John
then present Me on a silver platter
all bloody & new

Hypocrites!
Hold Me steady
for you know not what God's love is.



Inside Your Bones

Let me crawl inside your bones
So I can watch your heart beating

through the gap in the rib cage,
where I used to believe that man

had fewer. Let me scoop your
soft marrow and masticate with

my mandible while I murmur how
good it feels to be within you,

How you taste, how your lungs
exaggerate with air, then push it

back out in a spineless caress.
To your liver, I see, scars of

contradiction and your teeth,
polished by fluoride and prolix.

Let me thrive forever, in your
body; bone twenty-four, for

out of Eden, cast we be.

You have created all I am.



Hosanna

Dappled threads of light impale
themselves upon the branches of
a dead fig tree.

Slowly, a serpent, scales of black,
whispers through the inlets of a rural
data center, trapping water vapors with
the tip of its forked tongue.

An orphan and a cancer patient live
on either side of my broken home, and
I don't know what angel wings look
[or sound] like yet.

On Friday morning, I woke up to
a plane flying low and purposefully,
dusting insecticides, like palm leaves
waving, celebratory at the Eastern gate.

Hosanna! We sing.

Deliver us.

Hosanna! Lord,

Deliver us from

ourselves



Matthew 5:4

Today, I hung the Beatitudes
on your wall.

*“Blessed are those who mourn
for they will be comforted*

My mother has hung her
ball gowns in your closet.



Cracked Like Creation

The night you died, the world

**cracked
like
creation**

With the faintest light
And the longest day

The sky was separated from the sea, and it cried for you
And the land I walked on felt unsteady,
like going East, perpetually

And the night was terribly lonely
And the Suns and Moons were missing

— — —

We read at your funeral;
What I found highlighted in your book:
Matthew 22:39
“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Cracked Like Creation

— — —

With the faintest light
And the longest day

The sky was separated from the sea, and it cried for you
And the land I walked on felt unsteady,
Like going East, perpetually

And the night was terribly lonely
And the Suns and Moons were missing

— — —

I have cigarettes and a lighter, and I am
wondering if smoking is a Christlike thing to do,
and the name on the box says “Spirit,” like they’re holy.

Here I am, in a frigid, snowy winter,
The kind written about in Christmas hymns.
I am two hands, snapping together, creating light
from emptiness.

Secular Prisons

God sweats in tents lined along the side of the road,
and doesn't seem to give a damn about salvation anymore.
No manna rains down from heaven here—
There is no rain at all, just sweltering heat,
like crossing the desert to the Promised Land;
if the Promised Land were made of false belief.

God promises salvation if you only believe,
but quiet skies are secular prisons,
privatized for profit and greed.



Mountain Highway

Why do Adam & Eve have belly buttons? I ask myself, as I stare at medieval art portraying the Fall of mankind, where Eve resembles 'The Birth of Venus,' and Adam, a deer rammed through the windshield of a car on a mountain highway.



Gehenna

Hell started as a flaming trash pile on the southwest side of Jerusalem, not unlike the roads behind the bus station in downtown Tacoma. Sometimes I see a person, downtrodden, and think:
“Christ walks in your shadow.”



About the Author



Melanie Cole is a writer and poet from Tacoma, Washington. She has been published in numerous publications, has held residence at Sou'Wester Arts, and, most notably, was nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2025. *Gehenna* is her first long-term collection of poetry.

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so
much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.



Gehenna is a deeply human short poetry collection exploring ideas of faith and doubt. Through human experiences such as grief, devotion, love, and piety, this collection attempts to give readers new ideas related to faith, religion, or the lack thereof.