



Born-Again Deist

Beth Houston

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Research, philosophy, personal experience, and a dash of creative re-vision season this intelligent spiritual memoir recounting poet Beth Houston's four-decade journey "from being spiritually inclined to born-again Christian to progressive Christian to disillusioned agnostic to delighted Deist." In college Houston adopted quasi-fundamentalist Christianity as her religion of choice and continued to consider herself Christian despite years of grappling with contradictions inherent in any form of fundamentalism. While acknowledging that her Christian born-again experience was spiritually real, she explains how her religious experience was socially constructed. Broadly deconstructing "text worship," including biblical literalism, Houston argues that religious myths, superstitions, and claims of "special revelation" must be transcended by a belief that does not contradict our innate, God-given faculties of reason, conscience, intuition, experience, and aesthetic sensibility, referred to collectively as common sense. She reminds us that belief is belief, not absolute truth. Deism, literally God-ism, a humanist, minimalist religion "of God and only God," protects the believer from presumptuous theology and from the exploitation of religious leaders and spiritual con artists. To underscore her case for democratic religion, on the one hand she cites American revolutionaries like Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams, and on the other hand exposes the dark side of faith with examples ranging from the medieval Inquisition to TV evangelism to the documented connection between religion and crime to the "divine-right Dominionist alliance" of evangelists, rightwing politicians, major corporations, and the neocon. In the end, Houston challenges the reader to experience a similar paradigm shift from anxious blind faith to spiritual delight derived from the integrity of common sense.

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