



Radical Optimism: Practical Spirituality in an Uncertain World

By *Beatrice Bruteau*

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Editorial Review

Review

In *Radical Optimism*, Beatrice Bruteau sets forth a deep and shining vision of spirituality, one that guides the reader into the contemplative life and the very root of our being. Dr. Bruteau is a philosopher of great measure whose work should be required reading for all who seek the deepest truth about themselves. (Sue Monk Kidd, author of *When the Heart Waits*)

In the preface to this second edition of *Radical Optimism* (first published in 1993) Beatrice Bruteau notes, 'There are terrorists abroad in the world with dreadful weapons in their reach, and there is a System in place in the world which-almost unnoticed-has gained control of the fundamentals of life; food, jobs, welfare, security, health and safety measures... We need, urgently, to consider all over again what our life is about and what values are important... We need to find our way back to the basic realities, truths, values.'

The book focuses on leisure; stillness; meditation; the finite and the infinite; sin and salvation; the heart of Jesus, root of reality; the communion of saints; and Trinitarian manifestation.

The chapters on leisure, stillness and meditation form the strength of the book and are presented as effective forces that confront evil. She encourages a spirit of optimism, and observes that most of the spiritual life is a matter of relaxing, of being still and open.

Radical Optimism presents deeply religious practices all within the context of ordinary demands of life; for example, if we were to make a list of our activities and then ask ourselves whether we really need to do each of them we might be amazed at what we could strike from the list. We can be peaceful even in the demands of contemporary life, because what is really pressuring us is the insistence of our own demands.

She makes a distinction between wishing and willing. Wishing admits we believe that we cannot change something. It leaves us without energy. Willing commutes us to the belief that a situation can be changed by us. It brings peace and releases energy which is focused on positive energy. *Radical Optimism* shows us who we are and what we can do about the evil and suffering in the world and our own lives.

(Ann Lynch *Catholic Library Review*)

This is a timely reissue of one of the best books by Beatrice Bruteau, Catholic mystic and founder of the Schola Contemplationis. When Dr. Bruteau writes, the wise Theosophist should run to the local bookshop. Having been trained in the contemplative traditions of Catholicism, Advaita Vedanta, and higher mathematics, she offers a potent synthesis, grounded in serious spiritual practice, and appropriate to modern life.

This book is both philosophically serious and practically focused, with lots of suggestions for exercises. Both newcomers to the spiritual path and seasoned veterans of the quest will find food for the journey here. Dr. Bruteau reaches sermonic heights at moments, challenging us to grow past the comfortable:

'But what else is the contemplative life for? It is where the great risks can be faced, where folkloric religion can be outgrown and the naked Reality entered into by naked spirit. In the depths of the contemplative life, there should no longer be any secrets, any euphemisms, any tales told to children, but the way should be clear to find the Real beyond finite descriptions' (93).

Dr. Bruteau also makes a compelling case for the inner life lived fully in the modern world, expressed through compassionate action. By sharing in the unselfish abundance of the Divine, we are transformed, and then begin to live differently.

'Contemplation is not something that is done alongside or before or after our everyday action. It's the doing itself that is contemplation because you yourself are so united with God that you are simply living the divine life; you are God living and doing you in the world. You are God's manifestation' (132).

While some of Dr. Bruteau's fellow Christians may find this 'strong meat' indeed, it is a rich feast of a book, and we should thank her for setting the table.

(John Plummer *The Quest*)

Christian philosopher and founder of a network for contemplatives, Bruteau writes with clarity and insight about true reality, and of our need to see ourselves as we are at that core, rather than looking always at ourselves on the periphery. She puts concerns for leisure or Sabbath-time into the context not only of focusing on essence but also of stilling mind and body so that the type of meditation that sees the biblical stories as our own, the Annunciation as our own annunciation, may flourish. Her meditations on sin, salvation, Jesus, the communion of the saints, and the Trinity are similarly profound and relational. Highly recommended, especially for seminary and public libraries, but for academic ones as well. (*Library Journal*)

'Here comes that dreamer!' Joseph's brothers said with contempt. Yet, the Book of Genesis tells us also how the life of a whole people was saved by this dreamer's dreams. Beatrice Bruteau shows us that the life of a whole world—ours—may depend on learning to dream radical and realistic dreams. At last, a book that offers solid metaphysical underpinnings for contemplation. (Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., senior member of Mount Savior Monastery, active participant in and author of several works on Buddhist-Christian dialogue)

Radical Optimism goes to the root reality required to meet the vast challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Only as we tap into the Great Creative Process of the universe through direct inner knowing, or contemplation, can we be energized by the impulse of evolution itself. Beatrice Bruteau is a vital awakener of our ability to make the effort to move us to the next stage of our evolution. (Barbara Marx Hubbard, author of *Emergence: The Shift from Ego to Essence*)

A gifted philosopher, mathematician, mystical theologian, and practical spiritual teacher with a vigorous mind and open heart presents a vision of cultivating contemplative awareness. Beatrice Bruteau is one of the great writers of our time. (Wayne Teasdale)

Dr. Bruteau's *Radical Optimism* is a spiritual classic. It offers practical contemplative techniques to quiet the mind and a vision for bringing healing to ourselves, others, and our planet, rooted in Western and Eastern religious traditions. A must read for all spiritual seekers. (Lewis D. Solomon)

A deep and luminous vision.

(Robert Granat, author of *The Gift of Lack*)

I know scarcely anybody who goes to the heart of reality as profoundly as Beatrice Bruteau does.

(Bede Griffiths)

I have read this beautiful book with great delight, profit, and edification.

(George Maloney S.J.)

Her voice should be heard far and wide.

(Br. Patrick Hart, author of *The Intimate Merton: His Life from his Journals*)

Rewarding and useful.

(Swami Yogeshananda, author of *Six Lighted Windows*)

Insightful and visionary.

(John Shea)

This book is the tonic we've needed. In a world permeated with talk of war and fear of terrorism, Beatrice Bruteau shows us there is a safe place, where we can be vitally active and have absolute security, while also experiencing life's incredible abundance. Beatrice Bruteau has underscored the astounding Gospel good news that is indeed nothing less than radical optimism, beaming the truths that can joyfully define our lives.

(Antoinette Bosco, author of *Choosing Mercy: A Mother of Murder Victims Pleads to End the Death Penalty*)

Beatrice Bruteau's outstanding gift for articulating the contemplative life is enshrined in this book.

(Thomas Keating)

Original and challenging.

(Douglas Steere, author of *Quaker Spirituality*)

Beatrice Bruteau looks at our life in God with a very creative, deeply learned, and passionate mind and heart. Her grasp of a contemplative way of seeing and embracing reality in God is deep and full of fresh insight.

(Tilden Edwards, author of *Living in the Presence*)

I am deeply impressed once again by the profundity of Dr. Bruteau's insights, by her remarkably poetic communication, and by her balanced evaluation of dualism versus non-dualism.

(Frederick Franck)

About the Author

Dr. Bruteau is a pioneer in the integrated study of science, mathematics, philosophy, and religion. With a background in Vedanta and Catholic Christianity, as well as the natural sciences, she has developed a broad, inclusive vision of human reality in its cosmic and social contexts. Analyzing the systemic and metaphysical roots of our social inequities, she offers an alternative worldview, featuring the incomparable value of each person and the community dynamics of mutual respect and care that follow from that view. This theme is developed as global spirituality, not limited to any particular religious tradition but accessible in direct human terms common to all.

Dr. Bruteau has published twelve books and more than one hundred articles. Her essays have appeared in journals such as *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Cross Currents*, and *Cistercian Studies*.

Users Review

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