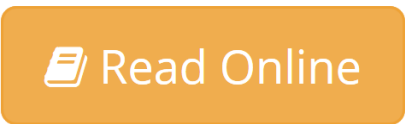


# Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation

By Barbara Taylor



## Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation By Barbara Taylor

In *Speaking of Sin*, Barbara Brown Taylor brings her fresh perspective to a cluster of words that often cause us discomfort and have widely fallen into neglect: sin, damnation, repentance, penance, and salvation. She asks, “Why, then, should we speak of sin anymore? The only reason I can think of is because we believe that God means to redeem the world through us.

“Abandoning the language of sin will not make sin go away. Human beings will continue to experience alienation, deformation, damnation and death no matter what we call them. Abandoning the language will simply leave us speechless before them, and increase our denial of their presence in our lives. Ironically, it will also weaken the language of grace, since the full impact of forgiveness cannot be felt apart from the full impact of what has been forgiven.”

Contrary to the prevailing view, Taylor calls sin “a helpful, hopeful word.” Naming our sins, she contends, enables us to move from “guilt to grace.” In recovering this “lost language of salvation” in our worship and in the fabric of our individual lives, we have an opportunity to “take part in the divine work of redemption.”

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

'In the age just past, nationalism has brought us Hitler, science has brought us the atom bomb, and religion has brought us some really awful television programming.' So quips the inimitable Barbara Brown Taylor in a new book on a topic most of us think we've heard quite enough about already: sin. In the age just past, Brown Taylor gave us a half dozen of the best sermon collections any of us have ever read. I, for one, think of her as Barbara Emerson Fosdick, and seldom preach any gospel lesson without first consulting her. . . . She has given us a wonderful reflection on science as it related to religion (*The Luminous Web*) and now this slim volume on transgression: *Speaking of Sin*. But who needs it? All of us, especially lectionary preachers who are called upon, from time to time, to reflect honestly about a tricky subject to which our Bible is replete with references. . . . Those who look into Brown Taylor's books of sermons with an appreciation for her poetry will not be disappointed. Her section on sin in 'Genesis,' ch. 2, is alone worth the price of the book. . . . The book is an insightful delight. There is plenty here for the preacher to glean from and any Christian concerned in the least about ethics to be instructed by. To buy such a book and not to read it would be well? a sin. (Scott Dalgarno *The Presbyterian Outlook*)

In this provocative book, Taylor offers a substantive argument that some of the great words of our religious tradition cannot be replaced. There are no substitutes for them, and when we try to talk around them, we find our speech diminished. Rather than ignoring or sanitizing such words we need to go diving for the core experiences these words describe. When we do that, we may just discover that an unpopular term like 'sin' may turn out to be the very one we need to reclaim. (Rev. Dr. Wayne A. Holst, the University of Calgary *Western Catholic Reporter*)

Barbara Brown Taylor, noted author, teacher, preacher and priest of the Episcopal Church, has a gift for writing simply and profoundly. In this book she brings those gifts to bear on a subject that unfortunately receives very little balanced treatment from either the study or the pulpit. She argues convincingly that many preachers have adopted, and their listeners accepted with ease, either the 'legal' or the 'medical' model of sin. In so doing, the real intent of Holy Scripture has been impoverished and its more hopeful and life-giving message of pardon and repentance ignored. . . . I highly recommend this slim yet deep volume for any Christian concerned with amendment of life. (Rev. Carlton F. Kelley, priest-in-charge of St. Paul's Church)

#### About the Author

**Barbara Brown Taylor** is an Episcopal priest. She holds the Harry R. Butman Chair in Religion and Philosophy at Piedmont College in northeastern Georgia and serves as adjunct professor of Christian spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur. Recognized as one of the twelve most effective preachers in the English language by Baylor University in 1995, Taylor has published numerous collections of her sermons and theological reflections, including *Mixed Blessings*, *The Preaching Life*, *The Luminous Web*, *The Preaching Life*, *Bread of Angels*, and *Gospel Medicine*.

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#### Molly Edwards:

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