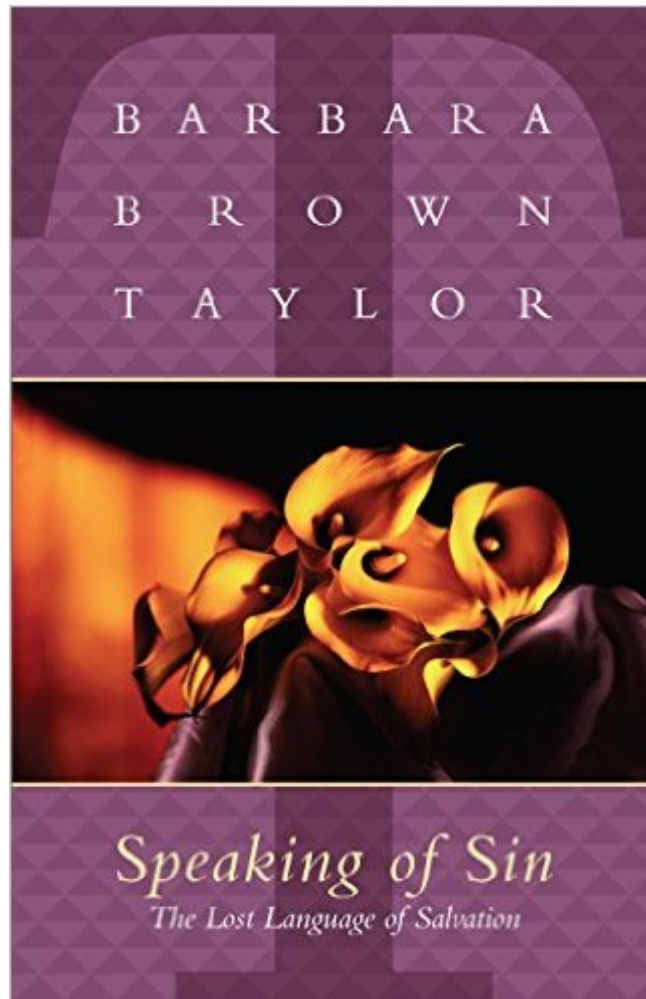


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Speaking Of Sin: The Lost Language Of Salvation



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

When a "liberal" argues for the recovery of the language of "sin" and "salvation", you notice. And when she titles a chapter, "Sin: Our Only Hope," you want to read further if only to find out what her counter-intuitive, contrarian angle is. It turns out that her perspective is a very insightful one. Taylor acknowledges that the popular notion of sin needs to be jettisoned -- it is itself sinful, you might say

-- but not the fundamental concept of something being seriously wrong that needs to be righted and that the righting of it involves not just gradual improvement but a transformation of the human spirit that happens when we are in touch with the transcendent in a way that enables us to acknowledge that we've been out of touch with reality in a serious way. As long as we deny that there's anything wrong (recall John Cleese's "It's only a flesh wound"), then we will never seek or be open to a transformation of our fundamental life orientation (hence "Sin is our only hope"). When "sin" disappears from our vocabulary, then what is wrong gets explained in medical therapeutic terms (a "no fault" approach in which we are victims of external forces) or legal terms (an "all fault" approach in which we freely choose to make harmful decisions). Taylor argues that only a depth understanding of "sin" allows for the paradoxical nature of what we're talking about, for the complicity of ego and will in our refusal to acknowledge that anything is wrong, and for the hope of transformation -- not in any neat and simple sense, but in a deep and real sense nonetheless. If there's nothing wrong with you or your life or people who think like you do -- if it's everyone else in the world who's wrong -- then you can skip this book.

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