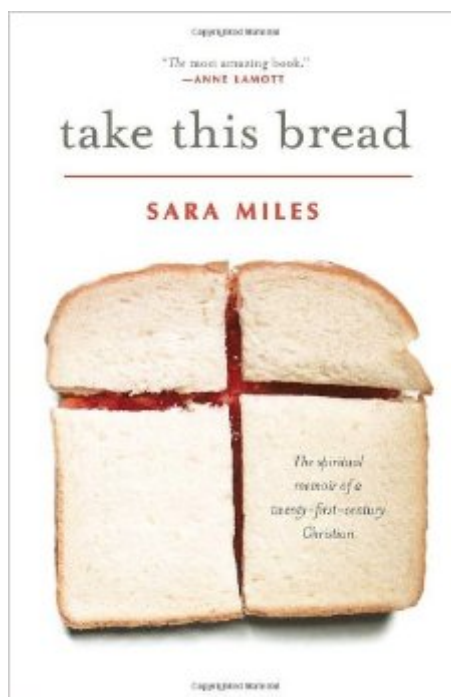


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Take This Bread: A Radical Conversion



Synopsis

Early one morning, for no earthly reason, Sara Miles, raised an atheist, wandered into a church, received communion, and found herself transformedâ “embracing a faith sheâ™d once scorned. A lesbian left-wing journalist whoâ™d covered revolutions around the world, Miles didnâ™t discover a religion that was about angels or good behavior or piety; her faith centered on real hunger, real food, and real bodies. Before long, she turned the bread she ate at communion into tons of groceries, piled on the churchâ™s altar to be given away. Within a few years, she and the people she served had started nearly a dozen food pantries in the poorest parts of their city. Take This Bread is rich with real-life Dickensian charactersâ “church ladies, millionaires, schizophrenics, bishops, and thievesâ “all blown into Milesâ™s life by the relentless force of her newfound calling. Here, in this achingly beautiful, passionate book, is the living communion of Christ.âœThe most amazing book.â• “Anne LamottâœEngaging, funny, and highly entertaining . . . Miles comments, often with great insight, on the ugliness that many people associate with a particular brand of Christianity. Why would any thinking person become a Christian? is one of the questions she addresses, and her answer is also compelling reading.â• “BooklistâœPowerful . . . This book is a gem [and] will remain with you forever.â• “The Decatur DailyâœWhat Miles learns about faith, about herself and about the gift of giving and receiving graciously are wonderful gifts for the reader.â• “National Public Radioâœ[A] joyful memoir . . . advocates big-tent Christianity in the truest sense . . . a story of finding sustenance and passing it on.â• “National Catholic ReporterâœRigorously honest, Take This Bread demonstrates how hardâ “and how necessaryâ “it is to welcome everyone to the table, without exception.â• “San Francisco ChronicleâœMoving, delightful and significant.â• “The Christian CenturyDonâ™t miss the reading group guide in the back of the book.

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Customer Reviews

Sara Miles describes herself as a blue-state, secular intellectual, a lesbian, and a left-wing journalist who developed habits of deep scepticism from covering revolutionary movements in Central America. Her grandparents on both sides were missionaries, but in reaction to that upbringing her parents were actively hostile to religion. So, it's a bit of an understatement that she also describes herself as a "very unlikely convert." But at the age of 46 Miles walked into Saint Gregory's Episcopal Church in San Francisco, partook of the Eucharist, and experienced a radical conversion. She had never heard a Gospel reading, never said the Lord's Prayer, and knew only one person who went to church. Today she is on staff at Saint Gregory's. That was some eight years ago and only the beginning of further conversions. Building upon her life experiences as a chef, her conversion through the Eucharist, passion for the poor, and the founding vision of St. Gregory's, in 2000 Miles started a food pantry at her church that gave away free groceries (not meals) with no questions asked and no forms to fill out. Each week food for about 400 families was placed around the eucharistic altar. Such was the open communion and unconditional acceptance that she experienced at Saint Gregory's and intended to extend to anyone who was hungry. Through connections with the San Francisco Food Bank, and the generosity of unexpected donors, the miracle of the loaves multiplied and Miles went on to jump start nine more food pantries around the city. Mundane food for the body became not only a sign of God's kingdom but, as theologians would say, the actual thing signified. Those who received wanted to give. Care for broken spirits accompanied bread for hungry bodies.

You know, there are those books you read and quickly forget. There are those books that give you an interesting thought or two. And then there are books that get under your skin and completely and forever change the way you look at things. This is one of the third kind. This book is powerful, it is overwhelming. You can not read this book and approach the Lord's Supper the same way again. You can not read this book and think of Christianity the same way. This book will change you. It might also bother you, especially if you are an evangelical. Sara is raw. She's rough. She uses

language and lives a lifestyle that would make many Christians furrow their brow. She throws out statements like this: "You know," Swami Jeff told me once, "God couldn't care less about the church. We don't understand the Eucharist, or that bread and wine live within us, so we ritualize the things that hold the mystery. We focus on the container and formalize the mystery. But you can't do that." Which is, of course, so wrong in so many ways. God does care about the Church. The Church is God at work in the world. The book of Ephesians rightly teaches that the greatest metaphor for Christ and the Church is a husband and wife (and the metaphor goes the other way, as well). And there are many other things about this book that are so bothersome. And offensive. And yet, her voice is necessary, because she gets so much right. She understands the radical, accepting love of Jesus Christ for this world. She gets that love for Jesus demands a love for all his children. She gets that serving Christ is more important than showing up to church and looking pretty. "Doing the Gospel rather than just quoting it was the best way I could find out what God was up to.

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