

Abolition Bibliography:
a bibliography of texts about prison abolition, restorative justice, and theology
collected by Hannah Bowman

Christian theology and prison abolition:

The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives on Prison Abolition by Lee Griffith

Griffith's book is the most comprehensive treatment of the biblical and theological arguments for prison abolition, considering the Hebrew Bible narratives of Exodus, Exile, and the Jubilee/Sabbath years as well as Jesus' identification with prisoners and the imprisonment of the apostles to make a profound call for Christians to proclaim that "the prisons have already fallen."

The Executed God by Mark Lewis Taylor

Taylor's searing summary of mass incarceration, police militarization, and related injustices in the US asks why the church has failed to follow the way of the cross in opposing state terror.

Rethinking Incarceration by Dominique DuBois Gilliard

Gilliard, a Black pastor, presents an overview of the injustice mass incarceration has done to the Black community, and draws on biblical and theological arguments for restorative justice.

Beyond Retribution by Christopher D. Marshall

Marshall's deep analysis of New Testament texts on justice and punishment argues against retribution and that the New Testament expresses a restorative view of justice.

Free on the Inside by Greta Ronningen

Ronningen, a jail chaplain, writes about spiritual practices to engage with God and heal from trauma and broken relationships at the crisis point of incarceration, and offers a theology of human dignity and divine presence even within the brokenness of a jail.

Redemption and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Restorative Justice, ed. Trudy D.

Conway, David Matzko McCarthy, and Vicki Schieber

This edited volume considers different aspects of restorative justice and its relationship to our system of incarceration from a Catholic perspective

Thinking Theologically About Mass Incarceration, ed. Antonios Kireopoulos et al.

This volume commissioned by the National Council of Churches brings a wide variety of Christian perspectives to bear on the theological and biblical questions raised by prisons, racism, and mass incarceration.

Prison abolition:

Are Prisons Obsolete? by Angela Y. Davis

Davis' book is the classic text of prison abolition, developing a vision for a prison-free future.

Locked Down, Locked Out: Why Prison Doesn't Work and How We Can Do Better

by Maya Schenwar

A journalist who studies prisons and whose sister has been incarcerated, Schenwar draws a personal picture of the harms of prison, and especially the ways they destroy family and community relationships essential to rehabilitation and healing, and provides concrete examples of restorative justice alternatives.

Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison by Michel Foucault

Foucault's seminal work of philosophy traces the history of prisons to show how the current system insidiously developed from efforts at "reforming" the way society dealt with criminal offenses to instead construct an ever-more-invasive and cruel state.

Prison policy, conditions, and reform:

Hell is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement, ed. Jean Casella, James Ridgeway, and Sarah Shourd

This anthology of essays about solitary confinement features the writing of those currently locked in solitary – some for decades – providing a harrowing and horrifying look at a practice that is widespread in the US although the UN considers it a form of torture.

The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander

Alexander's book develops the history of mass incarceration over the past 60 years of US history, with a special focus on the way criminalization and incarceration have been used as a system of racial control.

Resistance Behind Bars by Victoria Law

Law focuses on resistance movements in women's prisons in this study of the way female prisoners organize – usually nonviolently – for improvements in their conditions of confinement and the injustices of their cases. This book is striking in its demonstration of the ways that any solidarity among prisoners is seen as a threat by those in power in the carceral system, and in its illustration of the ways those who are incarcerated nevertheless support one another.

Locked In by John Pfaff

Pfaff, a professor at Fordham University, writes about why the 'standard story' about the War on Drugs driving mass incarceration is wrong, and how a renewed focus on prosecutors can help in efforts at decarceration.

Caught by Marie Gottschalk

Gottschalk's book is an extensive academic overview of the forces driving the prison-industrial complex and mass incarceration.

Restorative justice:

Until We Reckon by Danielle Sered

Sered, director of the restorative justice program Common Justice in New York, draws on her extensive experience using restorative justice to respond to violence to make the case for restorative justice as superior to prisons at providing community safety. This is a must-read, with details about what restorative responses to violent harm look like.

Changing Lenses by Howard Zehr

The classic text on restorative justice, which lays out the basics of a restorative framework for addressing harm.

Just Mercy by Bryan Stevenson

Stevenson, the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, draws on his years of experience as a defense lawyer in death-penalty cases to illustrate problems in the system as well as moments of grace he has found accompanying people on death row.

Ambassadors of Reconciliation by Ched Myers and Elaine Enns

Religious scholars Myers and Enns draw on the history of Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as biblical studies to illuminate restorative-justice readings of the New Testament and models of Christian peacemaking.

Violence by James Gilligan

Gilligan, a psychologist in a Massachusetts state prison, explores the psychological roots of the most heinous crimes, concluding that profound shame is the emotion motivating extreme violence and offering ways to combat violence by countering shame.