

## The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime

**Elicka Peterson Sparks**

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*Peterson Sparks addresses a dark but pervasive truth: America has a crime problem that may have its roots in Christianity.*

*The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime*, by Elicka Peterson Sparks, dissects crime, punishment, and faith in the United States.

Peterson Sparks is an expert in the study of crime and its patterns in the United States. Her new book shares a calm, persuasive, and chilling look at a highly emotional topic. Its reasonable tone stands to be celebrated, particularly given the contentious nature of her topic in public discourse.

Peterson Sparks addresses a dark but pervasive truth: the United States has a crime problem, particularly when it comes to murder. Skeptics can check out the book's appendix, "Perspectives on United States Crime Rates." Through meticulous study, she uncovers the roots of the problem in Christian faith, particularly when it's practiced with reliance upon violent scripture or scripture taken out of context.

The book traces the history of crime and faith in the United States through to dominant patterns in today's culture, highlighting current and unprecedented rates of incarceration. It includes powerful examinations of how coercive and oppressive cultural patterns disproportionately affect women, children, and the LGBTQ community. Notably, Peterson Sparks doesn't take issue with the whole of Christianity, but rather with the way certain groups morph their biblical beliefs into nationalism with a focus on authority and punishment.

At the heart of the book is the question of which biblical values should actually translate to for society. Practical advice is left to the last chapter, which presents steps that individuals and communities might take to stop religiously based violence. Such moments counteract otherwise discouraging information. *The Devil You Know* turns into heartening and compelling territory, even while recognizing that the road ahead is daunting.

This book is a critical read for leaders in religion and in social justice who are looking to help uproot crime more effectively. Peterson Sparks presents a challenge to Christians, and even people of other faiths, to truly evaluate the far-reaching effects of their beliefs and practices. The principles and lenses used in her research are valuable for other questions of religion and public life.

*The Devil You Know* gives vital information for continued dialogue on crime and violence in America.

MELISSA WUSKE (Spring 2016)

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