

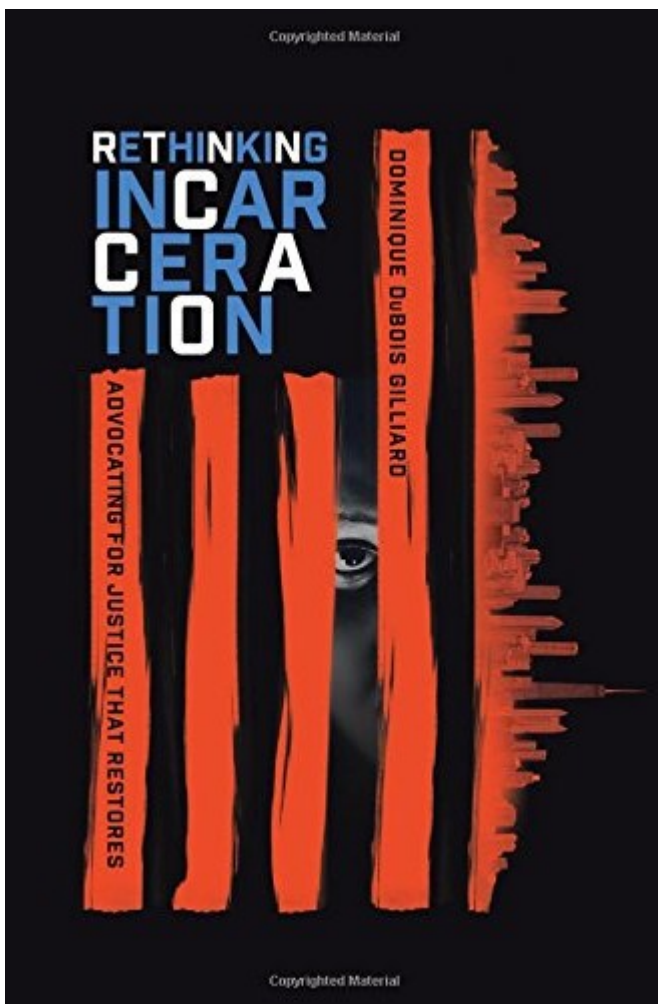
Jesus and punishment

Dominique DuBois Gilliard's *Rethinking Incarceration* is the perfect addition to a larger conversation about mass incarceration.

By [Daniel José Camacho](#)

March 1, 2018

In Review



Rethinking Incarceration

Advocating for Justice That Restores

Dominique DuBois Gilliard

IVP

When Michelle Alexander quit teaching law in 2016, she made a memorable [statement](#) which included the following words: “This is not simply a legal problem, or a political problem, or a policy problem. At its core, America’s journey from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration raises profound moral and spiritual questions about who we are, individually and collectively, who we aim to become, and what we are willing to do now.”

Dominique DuBois Gilliard’s book [Rethinking Incarceration](#) is the perfect addition to a larger conversation sparked by Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*. Beyond addressing the war on drugs, this book tackles the four “pipelines” of the war on immigrants, mental health, private prisons, and the school-to-prison pipeline. From black codes to convict leasing and the language of law and order, Gilliard is meticulous in summarizing the historic and systemic nature of incarceration in the United States.

What distinguishes this book is Gilliard’s exploration of how Christian faith is implicated in the problem of incarceration. He critically examines the legacy of prison chaplaincy and, most importantly, critiques how Christian theologies have fed the origins and explosive growth of mass incarceration.

Doctrines about God’s wrath and Christ’s atonement come under careful scrutiny. Gilliard forcefully argues: “Penal substitution is a reductionist theory that forsakes the embodied life, ministry, and relationships of Jesus, reducing Christ’s body to punitive surrogacy.” There’s a direct link between the logic of mass incarceration and the belief that Christ’s salvation is reducible to his punishment.

Instead, Gilliard proposes constructive alternatives grounded in a biblical understanding of restorative justice and shalom. He writes, “Rather than supporting a system that merely punishes, the church must pursue a justice system that builds community, affirms human dignity, and seeks God’s *shalom*.” In this proposal, as well as throughout the book, Gilliard supports his bold vision with concrete case

studies and examples from his experience in ministry.

Gilliard writes: “Mass incarceration will be halted only by a moral awakening.” While exploring the moral dimension of mass incarceration by showing how Christian theology is linked to incarceration, he also invites Christian readers to understand its historic, sociological, economic, and political nature.

Rethinking Incarceration is definitely the book that I will recommend to any Christian or church wrestling with the problem of incarceration in our society.