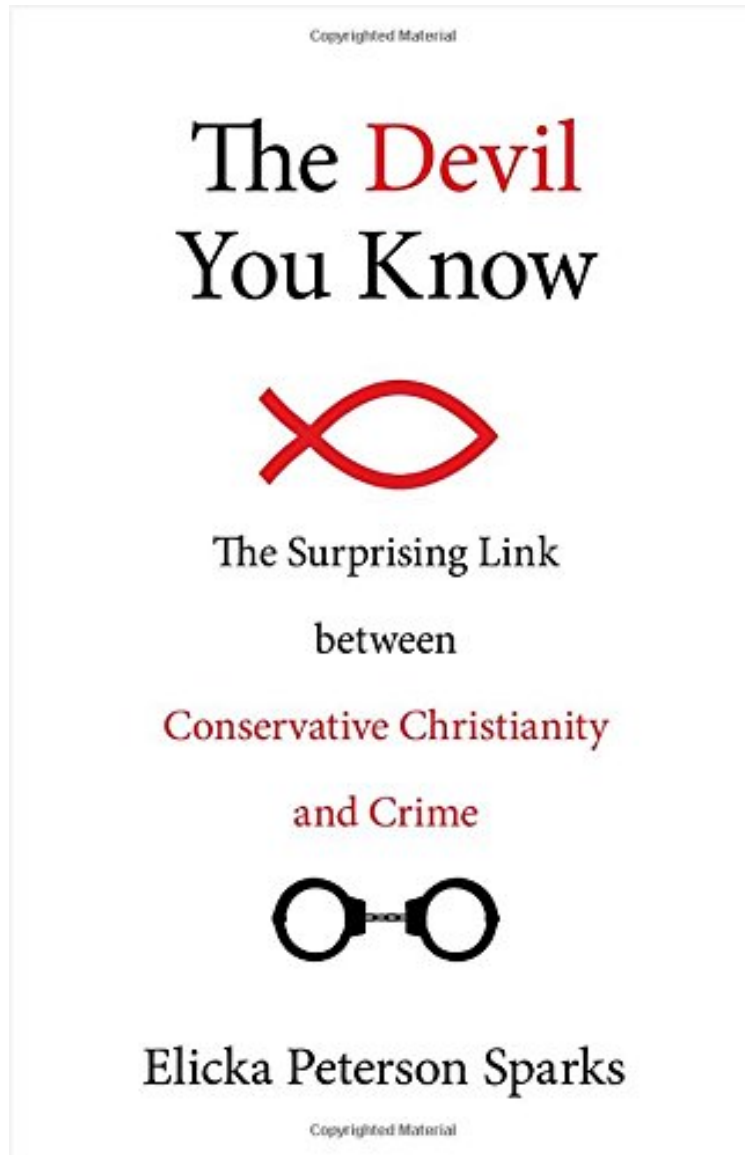


# The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime

*Elicka Peterson Sparks*

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**Elicka Peterson Sparks : The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Devil You Know: The Surprising Link between Conservative Christianity and Crime:

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating studyBy Sharon RobideauxAt first I was skeptical that

Sparks could persuade me of the thesis, which is that fundamentalist (conservative) Christianity actually increases criminality and overly harsh punishment, but by the end of the well-written book, I was convinced. Like many people, I had always heard that Christianity was a crime deterrent. After all, prisons have many religious programs and educational opportunities provided by churches. So surely religion conveyed some benefits for crime prevention. Surely, if nothing else, people who became religious were less likely to commit future crimes. Right? Apparently, the reverse is true. Christianity is actually based on some horrifically violent concepts, and somehow, the God of Love loses out to the punitive War God of the Old Testament more often than not. Conservative Christians are eager to punish anyone who believes differently or lives by other principles. Women, children, gay people, atheists, non-Christians, all are suspect and all suffer condemnation by Conservative Christians. Their faith and their Bible allow them to justify corporal and capital punishment, as well as allowing them to justify child and spouse abuse. This book should be required reading for anyone entering any part of the criminal justice system. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Must Read!!!! By Jody Winkler Awesome book. Everyone in America should read this. A real eye opener. Jody Bargerstock 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By F. Overeem An insightful discussion of the relationship between fundamentalist Christianity and right wing politicians.

In this trenchant examination of Christianity's dark side, a criminologist argues persuasively that high rates of violent crime in the United States can be correlated with Christian conservative attitudes, especially in regard to social mores and politics. Of particular concern is Christian nationalism. Supporters of this movement argue that America was founded as a Christian nation and they work to install their fundamentalist brand of Christianity as the dominant factor in American political and social life. Far from being a fanatic outlier sect, this group is shown to have significant cultural influence, especially in the American South. Not coincidentally, the author suggests, the South also has the highest homicide rates. Noting the violent biblical passages often cited by religious conservatives, their sense of righteousness, their dogmatic mindset that tolerates no dissent, and their support for harshly punitive measures toward sinners, Peterson Sparks shows that their worldview is the ideal seedbed for violence. Not only does this mindset make violent reactions in interpersonal conflicts more likely, the author says, but it exacerbates the problems of the criminal justice system by advocating policies that create high incarceration rates. The author also devotes particular attention to the victimization of women, children, and LGBT people, which follows from this rigid belief system. While not resorting to a blanket condemnation of Christianity or religion as a whole, Peterson Sparks issues a wake-up call regarding conservative Christianity's toxic mixture of fundamentalism, authoritarian politics, patriotism, and retributory justice.

A calm, persuasive, and chilling look at a highly emotional topic. Its reasonable tone stands to be celebrated, particularly given the contentious nature of [this] topic in public discourse.... This book is a critical read for leaders in religion and in social justice who are looking to help uproot crime more effectively. -ForeWord s Rarely does a book come along that startles like *The Devil You Know* does. Elicka Peterson Sparks confronts a touchy subject (religion) and analyzes its impact on criminal behavior and criminal justice in an honest and courageous fashion. This clearly and beautifully written book connects religion and crime through a number of social forces: politics, media, education, the economy, human rights, and the law (notably the US Supreme Court). No matter how surprising the conclusions, this book is recommended reading for all Americans. Bonnie Berry, PhD, director, Social Problems Research Group Why is the United States such a violent nation filled with so much crime? The startling answer proposed by criminologist Peterson Sparks is that it's due to the tremendous impact of the Bible and Christianity on the culture, institutions, and political life of the United States. She specifically indicts Christian theocratic nationalism for this, with its hateful, xenophobic, war-mongering, gun-toting, misogynistic, child-abusing, gay-bashing, get-tough-on-crime, right-wing nuts. This is the devil in disguise we already know, finally exposed for the evil it is. This book is a masterpiece! It should scare the hell out of you. John W. Loftus, author of *Why I Became an Atheist* and editor of *Christianity Is Not Great: How Faith Fails* In *The Devil You Know*, Peterson Sparks bravely, and in delightful prose, asks a crucial question that many other scholars either feared asking or did not know to ask: is religiosity in the United States related to criminality? The argument she poses cannot be ignored and has opened the door for vital future research. Hector A. Garcia, Psy.D., assistant professor, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, and author of *Alpha God* Richard A. Lovett About the Author Elicka Peterson Sparks is associate professor of criminology and director of the honors program in the Department of Government and Justice Studies at Appalachian State University. In addition to scholarly articles and contributions to textbooks in criminology, she is coauthor of the forthcoming book *Intimate Partner Violence: Effective Procedure, Response and Policy* with Kit Gruelle. Her work has been cited in the *New York Times* and she has consulted on several documentaries, including PBS's *Blind Spot: Murder by Women* and HBO's *Private Violence*.