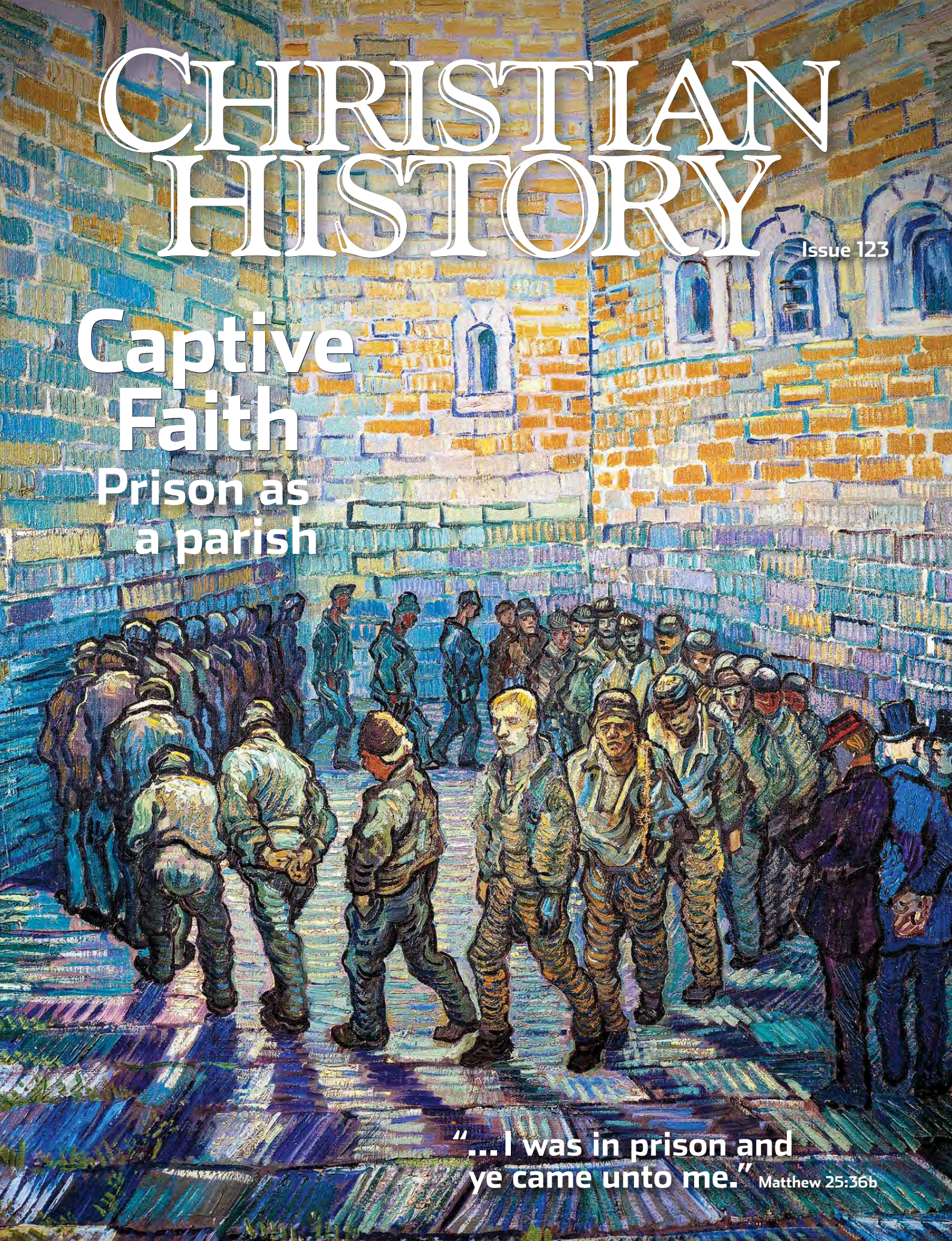


CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 123

Captive Faith

Prison as
a parish



“...I was in prison and
ye came unto me.” Matthew 25:36b



THE ROCK IS A HARD PLACE Now closed, Alcatraz in San Francisco housed some of the United States' most infamous criminals.

- Jeremiah (Jeremiah 37–38) was put away as a political prisoner.
- King Jehoiachin of Judah (2 Kings 24–25, Jeremiah 52) was dethroned and put in prison by the king of Babylon but eventually released.
- John the Baptist (Mark 6), was imprisoned for speaking against King Herod and eventually beheaded.
- Peter (Acts 12) was imprisoned during a persecution of the church by King Herod and released by an angel.
- Paul (Acts 16, 22–28) was put into prison

several times on accusations of blasphemy and disturbing the peace, and eventually beheaded.

And, of course, Jesus himself was arrested, imprisoned, and executed, as all four Gospels tell us. 1 Peter 3:19–21 makes a brief reference to Jesus' "preaching to the spirits in prison" in the underworld between his death and Resurrection. Eastern Christian icons often show Jesus at his Resurrection leading all of humanity out of prison, beginning with Adam and Eve.

Did you know?

PRISONS AND PRISON MINISTRIES FROM THE BIBLE TO THE PRESENT DAY

FROM JOSEPH TO JOHN TO JESUS

Many people in the Bible spent significant time in prison. The biblical record speaks of both their painful imprisonments and their ultimate trust in God. Examples include

- Joseph (Genesis 39–41) was put in prison for the false charge of assaulting Potiphar's wife.
- Samson (Judges 16) was imprisoned by the Philistines for his activities against them.
- King Manasseh of Judah (2 Chronicles 33) was held captive by the Assyrians, an experience that led him to repent his previous policies.



DREAM CATCHER Joseph interprets the dreams of the butler and baker in prison in this 17th-c. print.

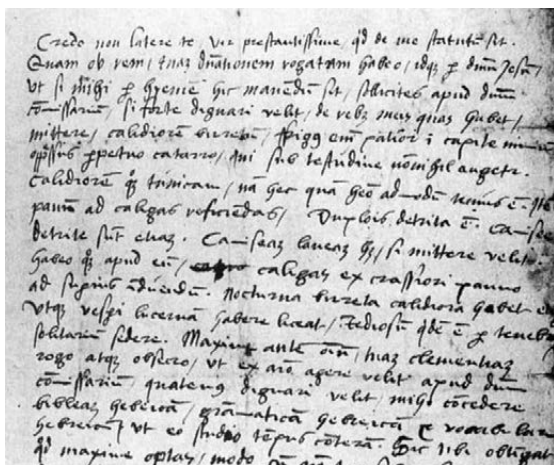
PRISON FIRSTS AND FACTS

- The first document to state that no one can be imprisoned without trial by a jury of his or her peers was the Magna Carta in 1215.
- While upper-class and political prisoners were often imprisoned for long periods of time, common criminals were usually sentenced (or released) on the spot. The only exception to this was imprisonment for debt, though locking poor people up pretty much guaranteed they would never be able to pay. The United States had debtors' prisons until the 1830s.
- Beginning in the 1500s, criminals were sometimes sent to workhouses if convicted of "leading a Roguish or Vagabond's Trade of Life." In 1516 Thomas More's *Utopia* was the first written recommendation of prison as a means of punishment for the average criminal as opposed to common alternatives—death, fines, public shame, and beatings. By 1680 Quakers were advocating the prison system as an alternative to the death penalty.
- You may remember the "A" for "adulterer" that Hester Prynne wears in *A Scarlet Letter*. Other letters used in public shaming of criminals included "B" (blasphemer), "D" (drunk), "F" (fighter), "M" (manslaughterer), "R" (rogue), and "T" (thief).
- The modern penitentiary is based in large part on theories put forth in Cesare Beccaria's *Of Crimes*



INTO THE CART, PLEASE *Left:* French police arrest prostitutes in this 18th-c. engraving. Their punishment might have involved prison, fines, flogging, or public shaming.

MESSAGE TO THE WORLD *Below left:* This letter from prison is the only item we have in William Tyndale's handwriting.



and Punishment (1764). "Penitentiary" comes from the same root as the word *penance*: it was meant to reform criminals by giving them an opportunity to repent their crimes.

- Until the rise of state prisons in the nineteenth century, prisoners had to pay for (or bribe their guards for) bedding, food, and fuel to warm their rooms.

BRINGING LIGHT INTO DARK PLACES

- England's first prison reformer was government official and philanthropist John Howard (1726–1790), who was briefly imprisoned himself for political reasons. He wrote in 1777, "No Prisoner should be subject to any demand of Fees. The Gaoler [jailer] should have a salary in lieu of them; and so should the Turnkeys [guards]."
- Several signers of the US Declaration of Independence, including Thomas

PRISON AND PRAYER Louisiana State Penitentiary, or "Angola," originated a widespread prison revival.


Jefferson (1743–1826) and Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), advanced prison reform in the United States.

- Jailers begged Quaker Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845; see CH 117) not to enter the women's

prison ward, for fear that she would be attacked. But Fry went anyway, saying, "I am come to serve you, if you will allow me." Her calming presence and attention to their physical needs allowed her to share Scripture and prayer, bringing many women to their knees.

A PRAYER FOR PRISONERS

"Lord Jesus, for our sake you were condemned as a criminal: Visit our jails and prisons with your pity and judgment. Remember all prisoners, and bring the guilty to repentance and amendment of life according to your will, and give them hope for their future. When any are held unjustly, bring them release; forgive us, and teach us to improve our justice. Remember those who work in these institutions; keep them humane and compassionate; and save them from becoming brutal or callous. And since what we do for those in prison, O Lord, we do for you, constrain us to improve their lot. All this we ask for your mercy's sake. Amen."

—*Book of Common Prayer* (1979) 



Take a Journey with the

Saints

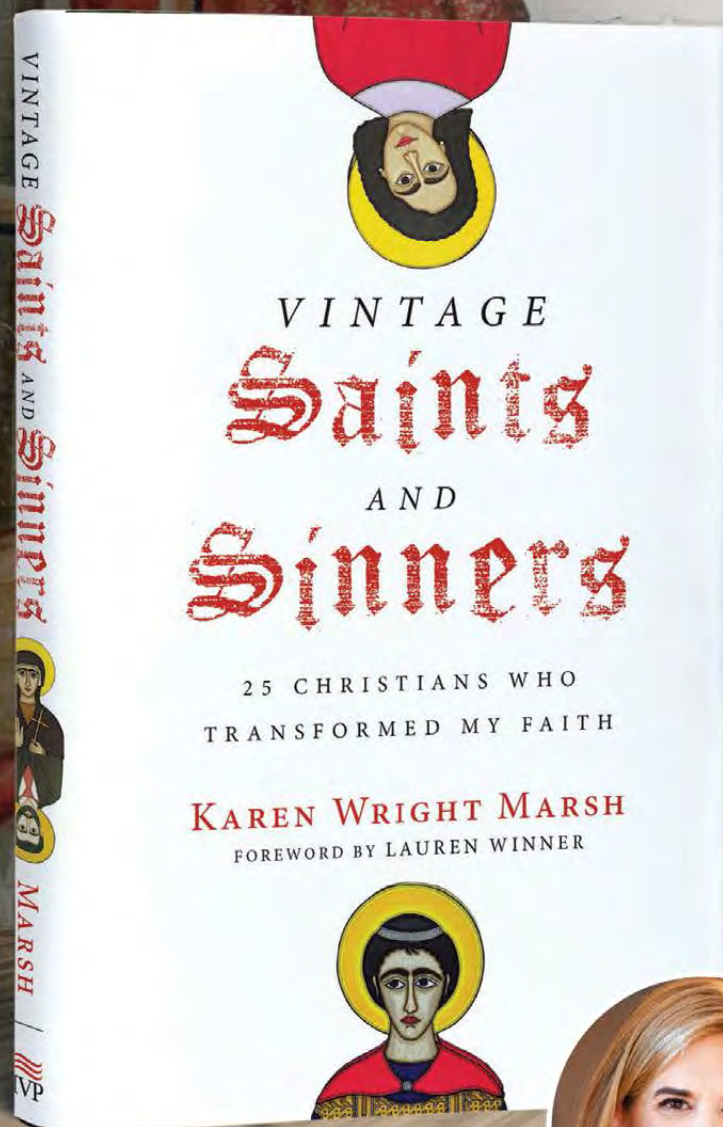
Saints were not simply superstar Christians with otherworldly piety. When we take a closer look at the lives of these spiritual heavyweights, we learn that they're not all that different from you and me.

With humor and vulnerability, Karen Marsh introduces us afresh to twenty-five brothers and sisters who challenge and inspire us with their honest faith, including Augustine, Brother Lawrence, and Saint Francis, as well as Amanda Berry Smith, Søren Kierkegaard, Dorothy Day, Howard Thurman, Flannery O'Connor, and many more.

"At the same time playful and profound, with heart and mind [Marsh] invites us in, opening her deep, rich reading of the 'sainted ones' of the centuries, making them be what they must be: ordinary men and women who lived lives near to God—with every possible heartache and hope. . . .

Vintage Saints and Sinners is a book for the everyman and everywoman, pilgrims across the centuries that we are."

STEVEN GARBER,
principal of the Washington Institute for Faith,
Vocation & Culture, author of *Visions of Vocation*



KAREN WRIGHT MARSH is executive director and cofounder of Theological Horizons, a student-centered ministry that advances theological scholarship at the intersection of faith, thought, and life.

Letters to the editor

Readers in prison respond to *Christian History*

Many incarcerated individuals receive Christian History, and although we have published their letters before, we decided this time to feature their voices exclusively on our letters to the editor page.

ADDING TO THE LIST . . . AGAIN

Dear CH, I am greatly enjoying your series on the Reformation. The extensive timeline pull-outs are a wonderful bonus. Please keep me on your subscription list! I am an indigent inmate and I am grateful for your generous gift. God be with you. I am curious if you have ever or soon plan to do an issue on the phenomenon of nineteenth and twentieth century Christian cults.

—Wendell Scott, Imperial, CA

We'll certainly add that suggestion to our ever-growing list!

A CORRIE STORY

I was recently blessed to read issue 121 that one of my Christian brothers shared with me. The articles were powerful and amazing. One article which touched my heart was about Corrie ten Boom. I'd first heard her name a few years back from Brother John, one of many Christian volunteers who visited our prison unit. He knew Corrie personally, and told us stories of his younger days when he and Corrie would smuggle Bibles into communist Russia. Back then it was practically a death sentence if you were caught, yet the two of them persisted to spread God's love. I'm currently on my thirty-first year on a life sentence and it's rare to receive spiritual blessings from outside sources. I want to let you know that your magazine was one such blessing. Thank you!—David Dowler, Amarillo, TX

I do enjoy your magazine very much and treasure every copy. The last one on World Wars was the best yet. . . . I am unable to send any money at this time. God willing I will be released late this year. Upon my release I will send you some money to continue getting your wonderful publication as long as I can still read.—Thomas Little, Roshamon, TX

RESOURCES FOR PRISON STUDY

Church history is my favorite area of study, and it was a breath of fresh air discovering your publication. Christian history would have been my major in seminary had I had the opportunity to complete it. What do you all have available that deals with the issue of Tertullian's Receptus? Also, what was the early church fathers' position when it came to holidays like Christmas and Easter?—Nathan Brown, Macon, GA

How We Got Our Bible (#43) and the King James Bible's 400th Anniversary (#100) have a little on your first question,

and Worship in the Early Church (#37) has some information on your second.

I have learned a great deal from the two issues I have received so far, and look forward to many more. Thank you and may God bless your ministry! P.S. Issue 119 briefly mentioned the Bruderhof but I would love to know more about the Bruderhof community.

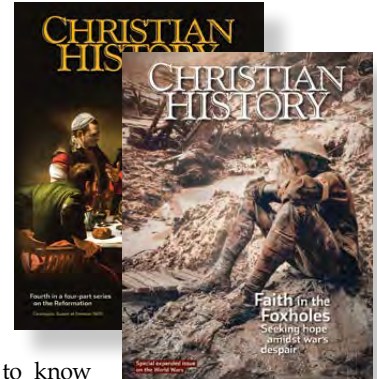
—Rick S. Whitman, Bismarck, ND

The Bruderhof publishes the magazine Plough Quarterly. For books, you might start with Called to Community (2016) edited by Charles Moore and Why We Live in Community (2014) by Eberhard Arnold.

ONLY GOD CAN MAKE US WHOLE

Broken into a thousand pieces is my heart made of glass.
Shattered, with no regard to the pain.
Seared into the leftover fragments.
No one cares or even notices.
This is all I have to offer.
Can you repair the damage that's been done?
Can you mend the pieces that are broken?
Can you put my glass heart back together again?
Loveless for so long.
Hopeless beyond recognition.
Mourning the losses of a lifetime.
Please take my humble offering.
You say it's damaged, but you can fix it.
You say it's broken, but you can make it whole again.
You say it's not much, but it's enough.
Lord, this is all I have to offer.
The pieces of my broken glass heart,
That's been broken, shattered, and trampled on.
That's been without love, hope, or gladness.
I give it all to You, Almighty, powerful King.
So Lord, I'm trusting You again.
Only You can make me whole again.
Only you can mend my brokenness.
Only you can fill me with love and joy!!
—Kenneth Wells, Red Granite, WI

Thanks for sending us your poem, Kenneth.



Editor's note

In 2008, our founder Dr. Ken Curtis (1939–2011) wrote the introduction to a planned book of prison testimonies throughout church history. That book became CHI's website [Captive Faith](#), but Ken's introduction was never published. We could not think of a better way to introduce this issue than by letting Ken do it. We also encourage you to look at Christian History issues 105, 109, and 116 for more about Christians in prison. Our commitment to prisoners continues to this day, as we mail free copies of CH to hundreds of prisoners each quarter.

PRISON IS NOT A PLEASANT SUBJECT, but, to judge by the number of books written and movies made about it, the public finds the topic fascinating. We are curious to see how the accused will handle themselves. Each of us knows in our gut that it could be us next, perhaps involved in a road accident that would put us behind bars for negligent homicide. False arrests and wrongful convictions do happen. And Christians in many parts of the world go to prison for their faith.

From Peter and Paul down to our own day, bearers of the Gospel have spent a lot of time in prison and written about their prison experiences. Jesus taught that the sheep and goats are separated on the basis of how they have treated others, including, "I was in prison and you visited me." Consequently Christians have a long tradition of visiting prisoners, redeeming captives, and attempting to improve prison conditions. But the real reasons for our interest are more personal.

Christian History Institute has made significant accomplishments with a small staff and small budget. Part of its success, we believe, is owing to the prayers of prisoners. We used to issue *Glimpses*, a bulletin insert of people and events from the church across the ages. Some of its most avid readers were men and women who had come to faith in Christ in prison. They sought to ground themselves more in the history of God's people while serving out their sentences, and we would

mail them free copies, asking only for prayers for the institute, its staff, and ministries.

Furthermore one of our institute's good friends, Robert Downing, is a former judge in Louisiana who visited prisoners with the Gospel and worked with their families in his off hours. Through him we became aware of the revival in Angola that saw hundreds of prisoners in one of the toughest institutions in the world transformed by the grace of Christ. Finally Dan Graves, a long-time contributor to Christian History Institute, served as a prison librarian for almost 20 years. (See "Paradoxes of prison," p. 19.)

So we ask, what can we learn from the Christian prison experience? How did God's grace appear to those in prison? How can the experiences of Christian prisoners assist modern prisoners to transcend their circumstances? And how have Christians worked to assist those in prison down through the years?

This issue gives examples of a wide spectrum of prison experiences from biblical accounts of imprisonment to the twentieth century. Some of the most famous writings of Western civilization took form within prison walls. We believe that the excerpts and accounts that follow will be of interest to all readers and an inspiration to all who desire to know God better. ☐

A. Kenneth Curtis
Founding editor,
Christian History magazine

Note: When Ken visited Angola in 2007, a film crew helped capture the revival there in the one-hour documentary



Blessedness out of Brokenness, which you can view for free at [captivefaith.org](#). Contact us through the form in the center of this issue if you prefer a DVD copy. We are pleased to offer this as our gift to you.
—The Editors

Find *Christian History* on Facebook as Christian History Magazine, or visit our website at [www.christianhistorymagazine.org](#). Don't miss our next issue, *Christianity in the City*, focusing on early Christianity as an urban faith. Visit [www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/today](#) for a daily dose of Christian history.

Readers like you keep *Christian History* in print. Make your annual donation at [www.ChristianHistoryInstitute.org](#), or use the envelope in the center of this magazine.



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Prison as a parish: Christian inmates

CHRISTIANS IN PRISON HAVE SHARED SIMILAR STORIES THROUGH 2,000 YEARS

Roy Stults and Jennifer Woodruff Tait

EVER SINCE JESUS CHRIST was arrested and tried before Pilate, imprisonment has been the experience of many who follow him. Seldom are Christians imprisoned only for religious beliefs. There are often ethnic, social, political, or cultural reasons. And some Christians, sadly, are imprisoned for actual crimes.

WHEN IN ROME...

Ancient Romans believed in gods who oversaw and protected various areas of life. Not showing respect and loyalty to these gods undermined the security of the state; when early Christians proclaimed one God as supreme, they were seen as disloyal and treasonous. Periodic persecutions brought many Christians to prison during the first few centuries of the church. Prison in those days was generally used to hold the accused before trial and the convicted until execution, not as a punishment in its own right.

Polycarp of Smyrna (69–c. 155), like Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35–c. 108), was a disciple of John. Burned

THROWN TO THE LIONS Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of John the apostle, died in the Roman arena under Trajan.

at the stake during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, he prayed, “I give you thanks that you have counted me, worthy of this day and this hour, that I should have a part in the number of your martyrs, in the cup of your Christ, to the resurrection of eternal life.”

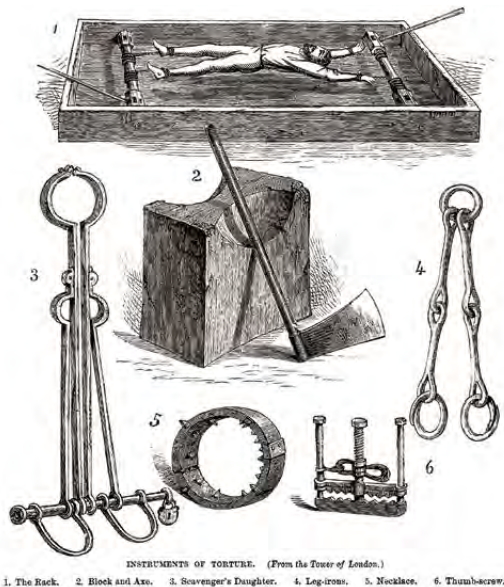
Justin (100–165) was first impressed by the faithfulness and steadfastness of Christian martyrs. Then an old Christian man walking on the seashore convinced him that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Hebrew prophets. Justin opened a school of Christian philosophy in Rome. Arrested for practicing an unauthorized religion, he refused to renounce Christianity and was beheaded along with some of his students.

Origen (185–254) was also raised in the context of persecution. His father was martyred when Origen was just 17 years old. As a young man, he became the



SAY HERE Above left: Soldiers bring Cyprian before Valerian in the late 250s.

CHEERLESS AND COMFORTLESS Above: In a medieval prison, you might have suffered in a cell like this one in Austria and been tortured with instruments like these (left) from the Tower of London.



student of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) and was appointed the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Forced from Alexandria he went to Caesarea and was caught up in persecution. Tortured and released he died of his injuries.

Cyprian (c. 200–258), born to wealthy pagan parents, converted in his forties. Elected bishop of Carthage in 250, he soon went into hiding to escape Emperor Decius's persecution, but could not escape Valerian's persecution a few years later. After banishment and imprisonment, he was executed by the sword in an

open place near the city of Carthage, becoming the first bishop-martyr of Africa.

CHRISTIAN PRISONS?

After Christianity became legal, Christians still ran afoul of their enemies and still committed crimes. Prisons generally served as holding places before execution, the payment of fines or taxes, or public humiliation. Sometimes, though, prisoners would be assigned only to serve time: in medieval England the most common long sentence was a year and a day.

Good treatment was frequently based on whether or not prisoners could pay their jailers. Christians were encouraged to visit and give to prisoners as one of the seven corporal acts of mercy taught by the church in response to Isaiah 58:6–10. Prisons were often modeled on monasteries to encourage contemplation and penitence. In 1298 Pope Boniface VIII published a law stating that the purpose of prison was confinement, not punishment—not that everyone agreed.

As in the early church, the imprisoned medieval Christians we know the most about are those who could write (see “Thinking long thoughts,” pp. 15–17). One exception to this rule was illiterate French peasant girl Joan of Arc (1412–1431). Joan's trial for heresy was extensively documented by notaries: her visions, her donning of male dress to lead troops and avoid assault



by soldiers, and her assistance in crowning the French dauphin as Charles VII. At one point she protested being restrained in irons, and her accusers responded: "You have before, and many times, sought, we are told, to get out of the prison. . . . It is to keep you more surely that it has been ordered to put you in irons."

"It is true I wished to escape," Joan answered, "and so I wish still: is not this lawful for all prisoners?" Faced with execution on May 24, 1431, Joan recanted and was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, "in order that you may bewail your faults, and that you may no more commit [acts] which you shall have to bewail hereafter."

But just four days later, Joan was wearing men's clothes again and claiming visions. She protested the jailers had not kept their end of the bargain: "I would rather die than be in irons! But if I am allowed to go to Mass, and am taken out of irons and put into a gracious prison . . . I will be good, and do as the Church wills . . . I would rather do penance once for all—that is die—than endure any longer the suffering of a prison." The church burned her as a relapsed heretic on May 30. Twenty-five years later, her case was reversed on appeal.

"HE DECLARED THAT DEATH WAS NOTHING"

The Reformation divided Western Christians into competing factions all too ready to persecute one another, and many iconic prison stories date from this era. Martin Luther (1483–1546), ironically, was imprisoned for his own protection, not as punishment. Frederick III had him kidnapped and hidden in Wartburg Castle for 10 months. Luther grew a beard, took the name Junker Jörg, and set about writing (see pp. 15–17).

GRACE UNDER FIRE Joan of Arc (*left*) may have stayed in a cell like the one above. Asked, "Do you know if you are in the grace of God?," she replied, "If I am not, may God place me there; if I am, may God so keep me."

Guido de Brès (1522–1567), a student of John Calvin (1509–1564), authored the *Belgic Confession* (1561)—then threw it over the castle wall of Tournai so the Spanish government would notice it. In 1567 the Spanish Inquisition caught and imprisoned him at a level so low he slept in sewage. An eyewitness account of his martyrdom records: "Exhorting the prisoners to be of good courage, he declared that death was nothing. He quoted a passage of Revelation . . . 'Oh, happy are the dead who die in the Lord! They now rest from their labors.'"

On the Catholic side, Edmund Campion (1540–1581) disguised himself as a jewel merchant to serve as a Jesuit missionary to England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603). He was eventually betrayed and discovered in a "priest hole" (small cupboards in which English Catholic families hid priests from the authorities). Thrown into the Tower of London, he stayed in a small cell called "Little-ease" and was tortured on the rack. Elizabeth feared all Catholic priests were agents of the pope and of Spain's King Charles V; Campion responded that he was not "a traitor to conspire the subversion of my country, but . . . a priest to minister the sacraments, to hear confessions." Convicted of treason, he was hanged, drawn, and quartered.

Not all Reformation-era prisoners were there for religious reasons. Accused of robbery and murder, Jean-Pierre Chambon (d. 1562), chained in irons in Lyon, France, ended up in a cell with Huguenot merchant



Peter Bergier. Chambon found Bergier's constant prayers annoying. But Bergier's kindness won Chambon over, and he was converted. Both were executed.

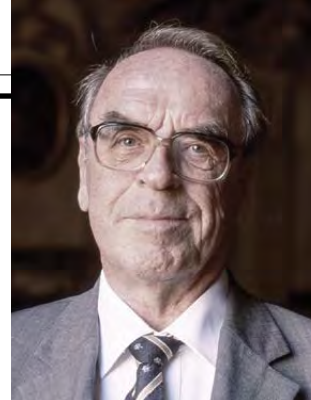
STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

Some prison stories come to us from Eastern Christianity's struggle between church and state. Philip II, metropolitan of Moscow (1507–1569), exacted from his ruler Ivan "the Terrible" (1530–1584), a promise to stop secret police, land confiscation, and executions. But Ivan broke the promise. When Philip refused to bless Ivan at Moscow's Cathedral of the Annunciation, Ivan hauled Philip off to prison where he was tortured, chained, denied food and water, and eventually killed.

A century later Avvakum (1620–1682) refused to accept changes meant to bring Russian Orthodoxy closer to the Greek Orthodox form of worship and to centralize the power of the Russian church's ruling patriarch, Nikon (1605–1681). He suffered brutal reprisals for over 14 years, including imprisonment in a small hut in Siberia, before being executed; during his imprisonment he penned a vivid autobiography, a milestone of modern Russian literature.

Recent Christian prisoners have similar stories to tell. Many center on wartime, such as the well-known story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945). Arrested in April 1943 by the Gestapo, he was imprisoned at Tegel, transferred to a Nazi concentration camp, and executed by hanging as the Nazi regime was collapsing.

Louis Zamperini (1917–2014), an Olympic track star, joined the Army Air Corps, then crashed over the Pacific. Following 47 days at sea, Zamperini was made a POW by the Japanese and repeatedly abused by a




TAKEN AWAY *Left:* While being taken to prison, Philip II of Moscow said, "I am a stranger and a pilgrim on earth; I am ready to suffer for the truth."

BROUGHT HOME *Right:* Jürgen Moltmann (*top*) and Louis Zamperini (*bottom*) both met Christ as prisoners of war.

camp sergeant. Years later at the encouragement of his wife and her Christian friends, Zamperini attended a Billy Graham crusade. There he recalled his prayers during his time on the raft and in prison, and recommitted his life to Christ. As he forgave his captors, his nightmares went away. He became an evangelist.

Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926) was drafted into the German army in 1944 as an 18-year-old and was soon taken prisoner by the British. He felt completely forsaken by God until a British army chaplain visited his camp and distributed Bibles. This was the first Bible Moltmann ever owned. He started reading it without much interest but soon stumbled on the psalms of lament and the story of the Passion. When he read Jesus' death cry, "My God, why have you forsaken me," he knew that Christ, the suffering God, understood him.

Moltmann's story echoes many others through the centuries. As political prisoner Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) remarked after his release: "God, if it is permissible for me to choose a parish, I would choose, as my parish, a prison. And for 14 years my parish was, indeed, a prison. And I must say it has been a very good parish." 

Roy Stults is retired from the Voice of the Martyrs. Jennifer Woodruff Tait is managing editor of Christian History.



REMEMBER MY CHAINS Rembrandt's famous 17th-c. painting imagines Paul composing his prison epistles.

“I am hoping that God will answer your prayers. . . .”

The very first letters we have from an imprisoned Christian are from the apostle Paul, who wrote to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon while under house arrest.

WHEN I THINK OF ALL THIS, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles. . . . fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. (*Ephesians 3:1, 15–18*)

PRAY IN THE SPIRIT AT ALL TIMES and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere. And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike.

I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should. To bring you

up to date, Tychicus will give you a full report about what I am doing and how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper in the Lord's work. I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you. (*Ephesians 6:20–22*)

I AM CERTAIN THAT GOD, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. . . . And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (*Philippians 1:6, 12–14*)

ARISTARCHUS, WHO IS IN PRISON with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. As you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way. Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been! . . . HERE IS MY GREETING IN MY OWN HANDWRITING—PAUL. Remember my chains. May God's grace be with you. (*Colossians 4:10–11, 18*)

THIS LETTER IS FROM PAUL, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. . . . Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus. I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.

Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart. . . . One more thing—please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon (*Philemon verses 2, 8–12, and 22*).

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Christians on trial

ENDURING TESTIMONIES FROM PEOPLE IN TIGHT PLACES

Dwight D. Brautigam

HOW DO CHRISTIANS END UP IN PRISON? In many cases their beliefs are at odds with the prevailing government, they are arrested, and they are put on trial. From the earliest days of the church, followers of the Way were tried before Jewish and Roman authorities: not only Jesus himself, but Stephen, Paul, and others. Peter and Silas escaped their famous imprisonment the night before they were to be tried.

A HYMN TO CHRIST AS TO A GOD

In the early second century, we find one of the first records outside the Bible of Christians on trial before a Roman official. Pliny, the governor of Bithynia et Pontus (in modern Turkey) wrote to Emperor Trajan in the year 112 with concerns about how he should punish Christians who refused to sacrifice to the emperor:

[I]n the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed....

A STONE'S THROW Stephen was one of the first Christians tried and executed, and artists have been depicting him ever since (this is a 16th-c. oil painting on marble).

... They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

Et ainsi les francoys leuerent.
Ledit siege honnorablement.



Comment les anglois

Over the centuries as Christianity was legalized and grew, Christians themselves brought other Christians to trial. By the Middle Ages, an entire system of ecclesiastical courts had evolved alongside of the civil ones. Christians might find themselves in one or the other depending on whether their crimes were theological or practical.

BECOMING PROTESTANT

We can explore the experience of being a Christian on trial by examining one woman's story. Anne Askew (1521–1546) was burned as a heretic in July 1546, late in Henry VIII's reign. She quickly became a martyr in the eyes of English Protestants, earning a place in John Foxe's famous *Actes and Monuments*. But how did a well-connected married Protestant woman and mother end up at the martyr's stake?

Askew grew up in an influential family in Lincolnshire that moved from staunch Roman Catholicism to committed English Protestantism. Her father, William, knighted by Henry VIII in 1513, accompanied Henry to his famous meeting with French king Francis I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, and in 1521 became high sheriff of Lincolnshire and a member of Parliament. One of Anne's brothers was a member of the King's Privy Chamber; another served in Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's household and was cupbearer to the king; and one sister married twice into well-known Protestant families. Suffice it to say, Anne was well bred and well connected.

In the family's home county of Lincolnshire, tensions simmered between Protestants and a significant contingent of conservative Catholics. When Sir William

RECAANT OR DIE Judges tried Joan of Arc in an ecclesiastical court before executing her (left) as a heretic in 1431 (see pp. 7–8).

Askew enforced royal orders to suppress Catholic religious orders, confiscate property, and levy new taxes to support the royal government, things came to a boil. In October of 1536, a widespread Lincolnshire uprising erupted in defense of the Roman church.

Meanwhile, perhaps against Anne's own wishes, she had married her older sister's fiancé, the Catholic Thomas Kyme, after the sister passed away. The couple had two children, but religious differences dogged the marriage. Askew was willing to engage in disputes with Catholic priests, leading Kyme, according to one source, to drive her "violently" away. She never used his name but always signed her writings as "Anne Askew."

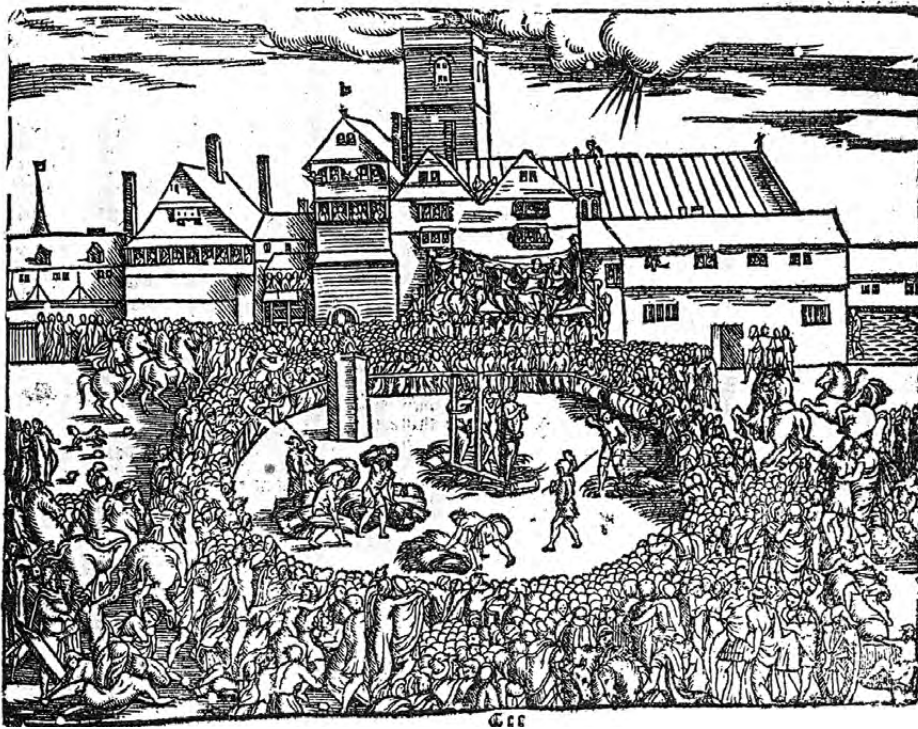
Askew seems to have sued for a divorce, not entirely unreasonable given Henry VIII's own precedent, but radical for a woman. Her pursuit of a divorce brought her to London, where she appears in the authorities' records for preaching about her Protestant beliefs in ways that transgressed the Act of Six Articles. Formally titled "An Act Abolishing Diversity in Opinions," this 1539 act of Parliament reaffirmed traditional Catholic teachings. In March 1545 the London authorities arrested her for the first of three times. Sixteen months later, at 24 years old, Askew was executed at the stake.

By the time she came to the London authorities' attention, the legal machinery was well oiled for dealing with Protestant heretics, but two competing factions were emerging at Henry's court. Both were hoping to gain ultimate influence over the king's heir, the boy Edward, and through that influence to determine the course of the Reformation after Henry's death.

The conservative Catholic faction hoped that eradicating the Protestant threat in London would strengthen its hold on power; pursuing outspoken people like Askew made perfect sense. The Protestant faction regretted persecution but saw her case as an ideal opportunity to encourage Protestant supporters in London by publicizing what they viewed as nefarious Catholic activities.

Askew herself unwittingly aided the Protestant effort by writing detailed accounts of her time in detention. Her writings about her treatment by the authorities show a woman who viewed her struggle as a small part of a greater spiritual battle. But her supporters easily adapted her words for political use. Printed accounts of her writings circulated widely in London and beyond, some appearing shortly after her execution. She captured the imagination of many

The order and manner of the burning of *Anne Askew*, *John Lacels, John Adams, Nicolas Belenian, with certaine of* *the Counsell sitting in Smithfield.*



BURNED ALIVE Anne Askew (*right*) became so significant that some of the realm's most important officials and courtiers viewed her execution (*above*).

sympathetic readers who saw in her the essence of their struggle for the freedom to worship God as they believed they should.


Askew's trial and prison experiences made for dramatic reading. Her Catholic interrogators hoped to provoke her into admissions of collaboration with the Protestant court faction, but instead she steadfastly held to central Protestant beliefs:

First Christopher Dare examined me at Saddlers' Hall . . . and asked if I did not believe that the sacrament hanging over the altar was the very body of Christ really. Then I demanded this question of him: wherefore Saint Stephen was stoned to death. And he said he could not tell. . . . Secondly, he said that . . . I [taught] how God was not in temples made with hands. Then I showed him chapters seven and seventeen of the Acts of the Apostles, what Stephen and Paul had said therein. Whereupon he asked me how I took those sentences. I answered that I would not throw pearls among swine, for acorns were good enough. Thirdly, he asked me wherefore I said that I had rather to read five lines in the Bible, than to hear five masses in the temple. I confessed that I said no less. . . .

Her interrogators, increasingly frustrated with her stubborn refusal to give them what they wanted, grew so desperate that the lord chancellor and another member of the king's council took control of the proceedings. Unable to extract a confession that she was working with the Protestant faction, they took the highly unusual and almost certainly illegal step of torturing her on the rack in the Tower of London. Even this gambit failed.

FLAMING OUT BUT LIVING ON

As things turned out, the Protestants gained ascendancy after Henry died in January 1547, just six months after Askew's execution. Boy-king Edward VI's government adopted as official church teaching the same beliefs Askew had espoused in life and while on trial, and had written about during her incarceration.

Her written accounts proved embarrassing for at least one member of the new royal council who had, in questioning her, demonstrated Catholic leanings. This led to failed attempts to censor Askew's writings. Faithful persistence in the face of adversity by the woman who once wrote, "With this world will I fight, And faith shall be my shield" would continue to frighten and inspire powerful English leaders for years after her death. 

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MARTYRED MOTHER Perpetua's *Passion* is the first writing we have from a Christian woman apart from Mary's "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46–55).

commended my son unto them. I pined because I saw they pined for my sake. Such cares I suffered for many days; and I obtained that the child should abide with me in prison; and straightway I became well and was lightened of my labor and concern for the child; and suddenly the prison was made a palace for me, so that I would sooner be there than anywhere else....

A few days later, the report went abroad that we were to be tried. Also my father returned from the city spent with weariness; and he came up to me to cast down my faith saying:

"Have pity, daughter, on my grey hairs; have pity on your father, if I am worthy to be called father by you; if with these hands I have brought you unto this flower of youth—and I—have preferred you before all your brothers; give me not over to the reproach of men. . . ." This he said fatherly in his love, kissing my hands and groveling at my feet; and with tears he named me, not daughter, but lady. And I was grieved for my father's case....

Another day as we were at meal we were suddenly snatched away to be tried; and we came to the forum. . . . We went up to the tribunal. The others being asked, confessed. So they came to me. And my father appeared there also, with my son, and would draw me from the step, saying: "Perform the Sacrifice; have mercy on the child." And Hilarian the procurator—he that after the death of Minucius Timinian the proconsul had received in his room the right and power of the sword—said: "Spare your father's grey hairs; spare the infancy of the boy. Make sacrifice for the Emperors' prosperity." And I answered: "I am a Christian."

Later she describes one of her visions:

AND THE PEOPLE began to shout, and my helpers began to sing. And I went up to the master of gladiators and received the branch. And he kissed me and said to me: "Daughter, peace be with you." And I began to go with glory to the gate called the Gate of Life. And I awoke; and I understood that I should fight, not with beasts but against the devil; but I knew that mine was the victory. —The *Passion* of Perpetua and Felicity, 3rd century, trans. W. H. Shewring

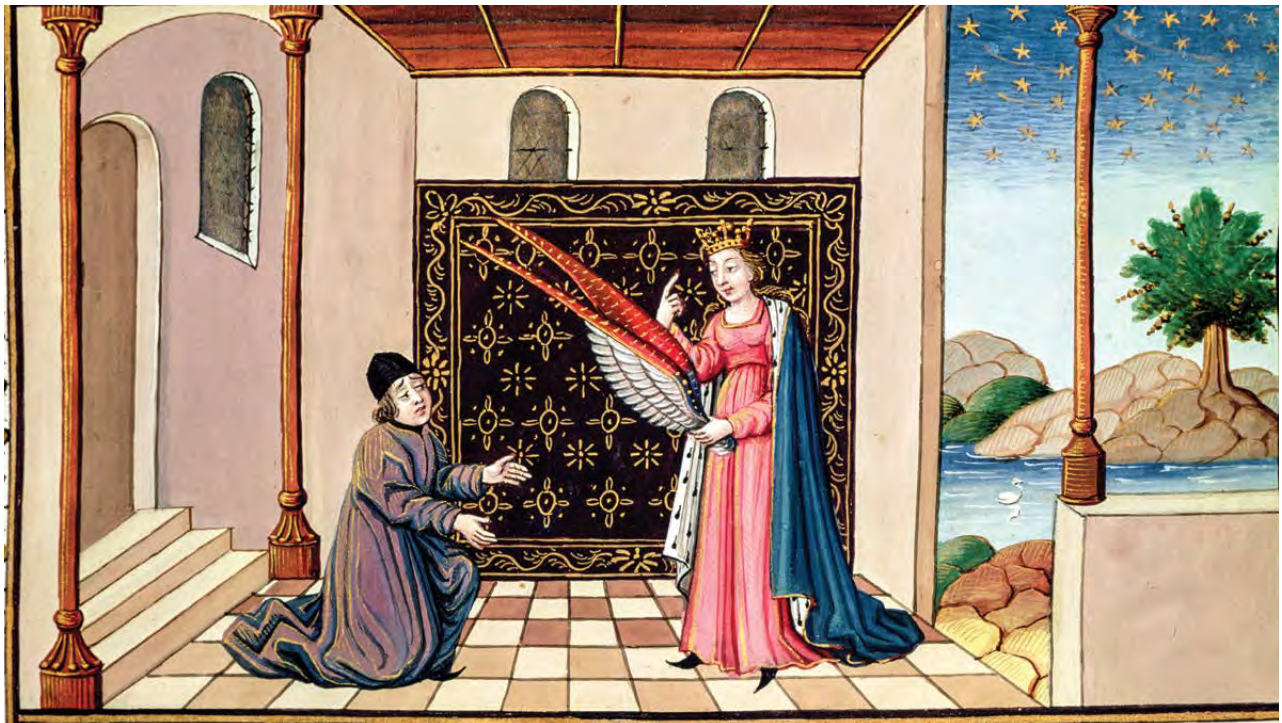
"Mine was the victory"

Perpetua (d. 203), a young, educated, Christian mother, was imprisoned for her faith pending her execution in a public spectacle. She wrote an account of her incarceration and trial up to the day before her execution.

IN THIS SAME SPACE of a few days we were baptized, and the Spirit declared to me, I must pray for nothing else after that water except only endurance of the flesh. After a few days we were taken into prison, and I was much afraid because I had never known such darkness. O bitter day! There was a great heat because of the press, there was cruel handling of the soldiers. Lastly I was tormented there by concern for the child.

Then Tertius and Pomponius, the blessed deacons who ministered to us, obtained with money that for a few hours we should be taken out to a better part of the prison and be refreshed. Then all of them going out from the dungeon took their pleasure; I suckled my child that was now faint with hunger.

And being concerned for him, I spoke to my mother and strengthened my brother and



Thinking long thoughts

FROM PRISON, CHRISTIANS HAVE PRODUCED CLASSIC LITERATURE THAT COMFORTS AND CHALLENGES

Catherine Barnett

“WHAT ELSE CAN ONE DO when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers?”

These words from Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963) might have been penned by any number of imprisoned Christians since the time of the apostle Paul. Innumerable letters, thoughts, prayers, poems, hymns, and novels have been composed under some of the worst conditions possible—many, like King’s letter, becoming classics that continue to exhort, comfort, and inspire readers today.

Perhaps the earliest and most esteemed writings from an imprisoned Christ-follower are Paul’s prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon (p. 10). They exemplify several common themes of Christian prison writings: Paul recorded his own devotional musings, used his situation as a prisoner to establish his spiritual authority, and offered comfort and exhortation. Similar testimonies from prison abound during the period of Roman persecution, perhaps none more famous than the first Christian writing we

UP, UP, AWAY In this illustration for a French translation of Boethius’s famed book, Lady Philosophy offers him wings so that his mind can fly—even in prison.

have by a woman outside the Bible—the “Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas” (p. 14).

TIME TO WRITE LONG BOOKS

Several centuries later Roman philosopher, scholar, and statesman Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480–524) was imprisoned on charges of treason against the Ostrogoth king Theodoric. Against his master Boethius supported the Roman senate; also, Theodoric was an Arian while Boethius believed in the orthodox view of the Trinity. (Theodoric feared Trinitarians would unite against him with orthodox Easterners.)

In the year of imprisonment leading up to his execution in 524, Boethius wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which would become one of the most influential texts in medieval and early modern Europe. Faced with his own dramatic reversal of fortune, Boethius crafted a dialogue in poetry and prose between himself and Lady Philosophy, seeking comfort amid the paradoxes



NOTHING TO DO BUT WRITE AND PRAY These cells, continents and centuries apart, held Martin Luther (left) and Martin Luther King Jr. (above).

of human will, fickle fate, divine providence, and mortal suffering.

Among the many inspired by Boethius was Thomas More (1478–1535). The influence of *Consolation of Philosophy* is apparent in More's own *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1534). Like Boethius Thomas More wrote his *Dialogue* while imprisoned and awaiting execution (in his case in the Tower of London).

More, a staunch Roman Catholic, had refused to placate Henry VIII by signing the Act of Succession when Henry desired to divorce Catherine of Aragon and establish himself as the head of the Church of England. Like Boethius he explored the spiritual benefits of tribulation and found his source of consolation in an eternal perspective. Rather than drawing attention to his imprisonment, however, More created an impression of the commonality of suffering—in prison or out.

One of the most famous prison classics is *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Its author, John Bunyan (1628–1688), was arrested in 1661 for preaching; authorities feared nonconformists like Bunyan were stirring up rebellion against Charles II and cast suspicion on any group gatherings. During the 12 years he spent in a Bedford jail, anxiety for his wife and children and fears about the state of his own soul plagued Bunyan. Taking Paul as his model, he found comfort in the

grace of God and came to regard suffering as an opportunity to identify with Christ, receive spiritual nourishment, and serve as a witness. Bunyan probably wrote the bulk of *The Pilgrim's Progress* while he was in prison, though it was not published until after his release. According to some reckonings, only the Bible has sold more printed copies.

IF THESE WALLS COULD SING

Others crafted poems and music in their cells. One, Theodulph (750–821), bishop of Orleans, was theological adviser to Charlemagne. Deposed in 818 by Charlemagne's son, Louis I the Pious, for suspected conspiracy in a revolt, Theodulph was confined in a monastery in Angers (in western France) until his death. While there he wrote the lyrics to "All Glory, Laud, and Honor," a hymn of praise still widely sung (though now generally in English rather than Latin and with fewer than the original 39 verses).

Centuries later John of the Cross (1542–1591), a mystic theologian, priest, and associate of Teresa of Ávila, was imprisoned for nine months in Toledo in the 1570s by an opposing church faction. Soon after his escape, he composed his now-famous "Cántico Espiritual" ("Spiritual Cantic"), possibly begun in prison.

And only a few decades later, the Tower of London housed poet and Jesuit priest Robert Southwell (c. 1561–1595), who ministered to English Catholics, largely in secret, until he was betrayed and imprisoned in 1592. In the three years before his execution for treason, he was tortured multiple times. Nevertheless he continued to write poetry, including a lyrical expression of Peter's remorse following his denial of Christ. A collection of his poems, *Saint Peter's Complaint, with Other Poems* (1595), was published shortly after his death.

BROKEN INSTRUMENTS Messiaen (*right*) wrote his quartet for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, the only instruments and musicians available in the German prison camp.

Instrumental music, too, came from prison terms. Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) crafted his *Quartet for the End of Time* in 1940, while a prisoner of war in the Stalag VIII-A camp in Görlitz, Germany. The eight movements reflect themes and images from Revelation. He recalled the performance later: “The Stalag was buried in snow. We were 30,000 prisoners (French for the most part, with a few Poles and Belgians). The four musicians played on broken instruments.”

Some significant editions and translations of the Bible also developed in prison. Pamphilus of Caesarea (c. 240–310), a Christian scholar and priest, curated an extensive library and directed a theological school in Caesarea, Palestine. During the persecution of pagan Roman emperor Maximinus, Pamphilus was arrested, tortured, and executed.

During his two years of imprisonment, he continued his work editing the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). His famous library was destroyed in the seventh century, but not before serving as an important source for many scholars.

Over a thousand years later, following his excommunication and refusal to recant at the famous Diet of Worms in May 1521, Martin Luther spent 10 months hiding disguised and under a pseudonym in Castle Wartburg. Frustrated by the imposed solitude and excessive leisure, he suffered physical ills and apparent spiritual attacks. But they seemed to resolve when he began the absorbing work of translating the New Testament in October 1521.

Working from the original Greek, Luther completed it in 11 weeks; it was published in September 1522. Luther’s was not the first German translation of Scripture, but his mastery of the language resulted in a text written for ordinary people. Its popularity shaped the evolution of the German language.

FLOWING WITH JUSTICE AND MERCY

Many prisoners have served as advocates for social reform. Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) of Florence, a Dominican monk, lecturer, student, and ascetic, had established an impressive democratic government, but his abrasive and scathing critiques of Pope Alexander VI and other corrupt clergy earned him political and religious enemies.

Savonarola was arrested, suffered multiple “trials” under torture, and was hanged and burned for schism and heresy in May 1498. A number of prison writings have been inaccurately attributed to him, but one, at least, is almost certainly his: the “Exposition and Meditation on the Psalm ‘Miserere’ [51]” expresses



profound spiritual sorrow at his failings and identifies his sole refuge in God.

William Penn (1644–1718), the eldest son of an English admiral, was raised Anglican. However in his early twenties, he joined the Quakers; his enthusiasm for his newfound faith led to his imprisonment in the Tower of London in 1668. There he wrote *No Cross, No Crown* (1669), eloquently presenting Quaker ideals of self-denial, pacifism, and social reform. Released in 1669 he went on to lead an eventful political and religious life (see *CH* issue 117).

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1951) were compiled from his writings made between 1943 and 1945 (prior to his execution by the Nazi regime for his role in the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler). In them he spoke against the Nazi regime and described the horrors of his imprisonment.

Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001) spent 11 years imprisoned in Romania for refusing to endorse the Communist Party. His wife, Sabina, also suffered in prison. After his ransom by Western churches, Wurmbrand testified before the US Senate, showing his scars as an appeal to the free people of America not to support his oppressors. The Wurmbrands went on to found the Voice of the Martyrs in 1967, the same year Richard released his classic *Tortured for Christ*.

Novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), a Soviet army captain enthusiastic about Communist ideals, was accused of anti-Stalin conspiracy in 1945 and spent the next eight years as a political prisoner. In 1952 he underwent emergency cancer surgery by a doctor who shared his own conversion to Christianity. The

"Much more I rejoiced in the Lord"

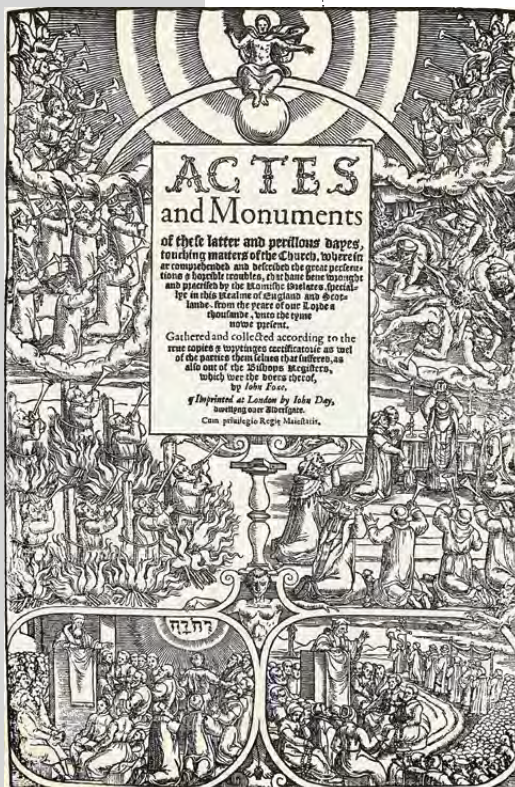
The “Testimony of William Thorpe” from the early 1400s tells the story of a Lollard (follower of John Wycliffe) imprisoned for his beliefs. John Foxe included a version edited by William Tyndale in *Actes and Monuments* (1603). Though some scholars now question whether Thorpe ever existed, it gives an authentic picture of what Lollards believed and suffered.

AND THEN I WAS REBUKED, scorned, and menaced on every side; and yet after this diverse persons cried upon me to kneel down and submit me, but I stood still and spoke no word. . . . Then awhile after the archbishop said to me, "Wilt thou not submit thee to the ordinance of holy church?" And I said, "Sir, I will full gladly submit me, as I have showed you before."

And then the archbishop bade the constable to have me forth thence in haste. And so then I was led forth and brought into a foul dishonest prison where I came never before. But thanked be God when all men were gone forth then from me, and had barred fast the prison door after them . . . [I] busied me to think on God and to thank him [for] his goodness.

And I was then greatly comforted in all my wits, not only because I was then delivered for a time from the sight, from the hearing, from the presence, from the scorning, and from the menacing of mine enemies; but much more I rejoiced in the Lord, because that through his grace he kept me so, both among the flattering and among the menacing of mine adversaries....

Now good God, for thine holy name, and to the praising of thy most blessed name, make us one together if it be thy will, by authority of thy word, that is true perfect charity. . . . And that it may thus be, all that [who] this writing read or hear pray heartily to the Lord God that he for his great goodness that cannot be with tongue expressed, grant to us and to all other[s] . . . to be knit and made one in true faith, in steadfast hope, and in perfect charity. —*“Testimony of William Thorpe”* (1407) as printed in *Actes and Monuments* (1563); spelling modernized.



BOOK OF PRISONERS AND MARTYRS Below: John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* contains many prison tales, including William Thorpe's.

next day, the doctor was mysteriously bludgeoned to death. The experience inspired in Solzhenitsyn a new and deep awareness of God and of life.


Nine years after his 1953 release, Solzhenitsyn published *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), based on his own experiences in the gulag. The bluntly honest book caused an uproar in Russia; his works, though officially banned, were widely circulated. Solzhenitsyn's masterpiece, *The Gulag Archipelago*, critiques the prison camp system and the Soviet Union. Initially circulated clandestinely in manuscript form, it was officially published in 1973, after which Solzhenitsyn was deported. It has since been published in hundreds of editions and dozens of languages.

New Christian Charles Colson, formerly President Nixon's top aide and "hatchet man," experienced a crisis in conscience and spiritual conviction in 1974. Colson voluntarily pleaded guilty to Watergate-related charges and served a seven-month prison term. His memoir, *Born Again* (1976), relates his political experiences and his spiritual rebirth in prison.

MARCHING FROM JAIL

But perhaps no prison work is as well known as a statement for

justice than the letter with which we began. In April 1963 an important desegregation campaign planned for the Easter season was faltering, so Martin Luther King Jr. decided to get himself arrested by ignoring a court directive against holding marches.

While in prison King penned his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in response to eight local clergymen who had called him and his colleagues extremists. In answer to the accusation, King affirmed his commitment to love and justice and aligned himself with other “creative extremists”: Paul, Martin Luther, John Bunyan. He exhorted the church to “recapture the sacrificial spirit” of early Christians who “rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed.” 

Catherine Barnett is adult and young adult services librarian in the Chillicothe Public Library District in Chillicothe, Illinois.



Paradoxes of prison

FOR SOME PRISONERS, THE PLUNGE INTO THE DEPTHS BECAME A STEP HEAVENWARD

Dan Graves

JERRY MCAULEY (1839–1884) committed every crime short of murder. The Irish-born young man caused so much trouble as a teenager that his grandmother (who was raising him) sent him to relatives in New York City, where he became a street fighter and a “river thief.” Eager to get rid of him, residents of New York City’s Fourth Ward swore he had committed a hold-up, though he always maintained his innocence. He was sentenced to 15 years in Sing Sing Prison.

“Punishment never did me a particle of good, it only made me harder,” he wrote in his memoir. His turnaround began when he attended a prison chapel service and was astonished to discover Orville Gardner, formerly a partner in crime, as the speaker. Gardner wept as he pleaded with prisoners to turn to Christ, prompting McAuley to read the Bible. After weeks of inward struggle, he knelt before God:

It seemed as if a hand was laid upon my head, and these words came to me: “My son, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven.” . . . God was more merciful to me than man. His pure eyes had seen all my sin, and yet he pitied and loved me, and stretched out his hand to save me. And his wonderful way

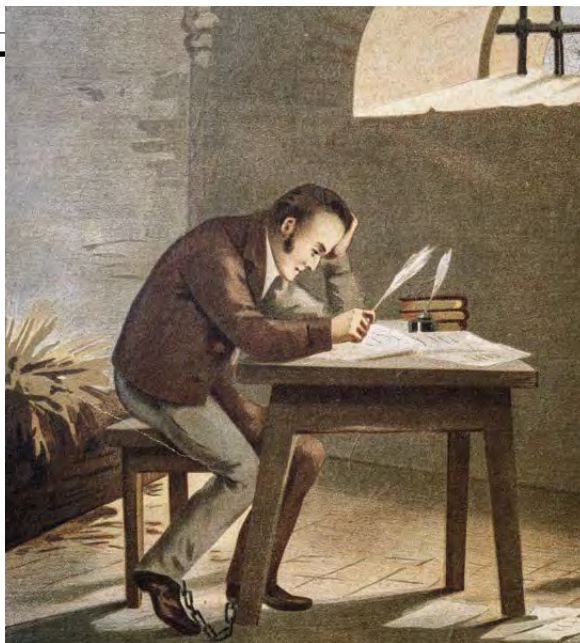
CRIME SCENE Jerry McAuley haunted New York City’s waterfront (shown here 40 years later) looking for opportunities to steal from boats.

of doing it was to shut me up in a cell within those heavy stone walls. There’s many a one beside me who will have cause to thank God for ever and ever that he was shut up in a prison.

McAuley led several fellow prisoners to Christ: “The love of Christ was so abounding, it drowned every trouble. . . . If my comrades abused me, I felt that I could pray for and forgive them.” But when released in 1864, the “wavering, unstable, half-and-half faith” of most Christians he met was no help. He relapsed into drink and theft until a Christian worker latched onto him and helped him turn his life around permanently.

WHAT LOVE IS THIS?

Themes in McAuley’s tale recur in the stories of other prison conversions: amazement at God’s grace, profound transformation, struggles to continue in newfound faith, and dealings with those who doubt converted prisoners’ sincerity.



Another common theme has been the desire to evangelize. During the Napoleonic Wars, a French privateer captured an English brig. Among the prisoners of war was African American evangelist John Jea (b. 1773), who in 18 months led 200 fellow prisoners to Christ.

David Berkowitz (b. 1953) was in prison for his role in New York's Son of Sam murders. Another prisoner provided him with Scripture. Psalm 34:6 shattered his hard shell: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Convinced God accepted him for Christ's sake, he began to do all the good he could for fellow prisoners.

He also corresponded with people outside prison, designated his book profits to help victims of crime, and testified about Christ on national TV and through a website detailing his transformation from "Son of Sam" to "Son of Hope." Out of respect for the families he harmed, Berkowitz has rejected parole. Sounding like McAuley, he wrote, "God actually used our forced confinement in prison to save our lives . . . he had to use extreme measures to save fools from their own folly."

Karla Faye Tucker (1959–1998) exercised a similar evangelistic ministry from prison. Her mother had set an example of drug use and schooled her in prostitution at age 14. During a drug-crazed robbery, Tucker helped kill two acquaintances with a pickaxe. Awaiting trial she was intrigued by the peace she saw in a team of ex-cons ministering in jail. To find out more, she stole a Bible (not realizing it was free) and began reading.

Realization dawned on Tucker "that no matter what I had done I was loved," and it sank in that people were hurting because of her. Tucker became a vibrant death-row evangelist whose prayer ministry and televised testimony reached far beyond her cell. Even relatives of her victims grew close to her and wept on February 3, 1998, when Texas executed her. Among her last words were: "I love all of you very much. I am going to be face to face with Jesus now."



THE MAN IN THE GULAG Above: Solzhenitsyn is pictured here during the imprisonment he later made famous.

NOT GOING ANYWHERE Left: An artist renders the scene of Pellico writing his autobiography in prison, complete with chains and straw bedding.

"BLESS YOU, PRISON"

In showcasing those who triumph over prison, we risk minimizing the misery of incarceration. Yet prison has proven a blessing for many. In *The Gulag Archipelago*, his exposé of Soviet prison camps, Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008) famously wrote,

In the surfeit of power I was a murderer and an oppressor. . . . it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the stirrings of good. . . . And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say. . . . "Bless you, prison!"

After Nicoleta Valeria Bruteanu (1919–1996) was jailed by Romanian Communists for her religious and political convictions, God seemed far away. But one day, "when the cell door closed behind me, I felt another door open within me. . . . I wanted to make peace with myself and God." She held firm under torture and scratched psalms memorized in childhood onto her cell wall. "I never was closer to God than I was in prison," she asserted.

Playwright Silvio Pellico (1789–1854) was imprisoned for revolutionary associations. The experience prompted his gripping, widely read autobiography, *My*



THE MAN FROM WATERGATE *Left:* Colson devoted his later years to Prison Fellowship; he speaks here at a Billy Graham crusade.

THE GIRL FROM TEXAS *Below:* Tucker (pictured here in her original mug shot) converted, but did not escape a controversial execution.



Ten Years Imprisonment (1832): “To awake the first night in a prison is a horrible thing,” he wrote. “Strange this should be the first time I truly felt the power of religion in my heart.” He described in detail the reasoning that soon led him to declare himself “openly a Christian.”

Armando Valladares (b. 1937) was 23 when he went to prison in Cuba for refusing to allow a Communist slogan on his desk. He spent 22 years in cruel conditions that he later described in *Against All Hope* (2001), a powerful exposé of Castro’s brutal regime:

Every night there were firing squads. There came a moment when, seeing those young men full of courage depart to die before the firing squad and shout “Viva Cristo Rey” at the fateful instant, I . . . understood instantly, as though by a sudden revelation, that Christ was indeed there for me. . . . Those cries of the executed patriots—“Long live Christ the King! Down with Communism!” had awakened me to a new life.

CONVERT OR COUNTERFEIT?

Such stirring testimonies raise the question: how real are most prisoner conversions, especially when conversion takes place in a setting where it might ingratiate authorities? A nineteenth-century English report dryly


remarked that requiring religious devotional exercises of prisoners caused them to add hypocrisy to all their other crimes. Sociologist Byron Johnson found that recidivism rates for Florida’s prison converts were no better than for nonconverts. Such outcomes can lead to cynicism.

Acquaintances of “Happy Jack” Burbridge (1937–2015) thought his conversion was faked to gain early release. Drug dealer, pimp, and enforcer, he lost his family following a crime spree. On his way to jail, the words of a Christian policeman brought Burbridge under conviction: “God had to show me His standards in the form of Mr. Lytton before I could see how bad off I was,” he wrote in *The Enforcer* (1980).

After his conversion he admitted his guilt in court as evidence of a newfound commitment to truth, convinced that Christ expected no less. After his release,

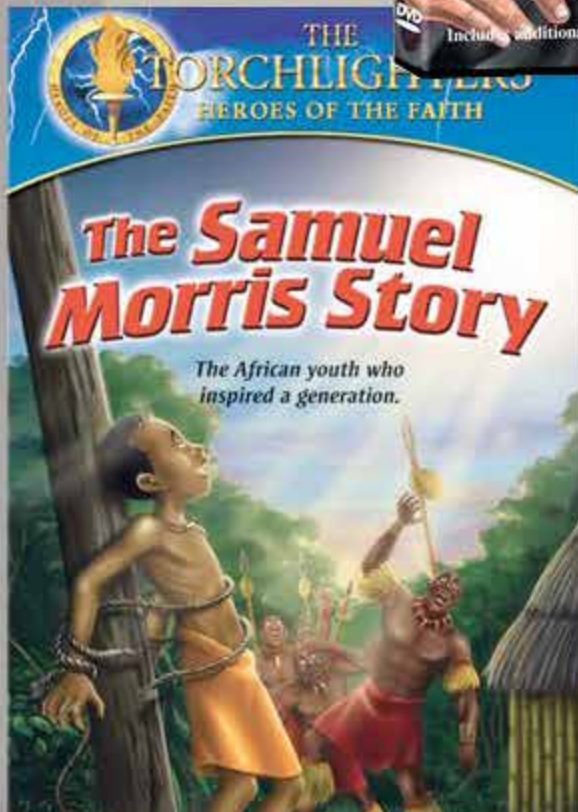
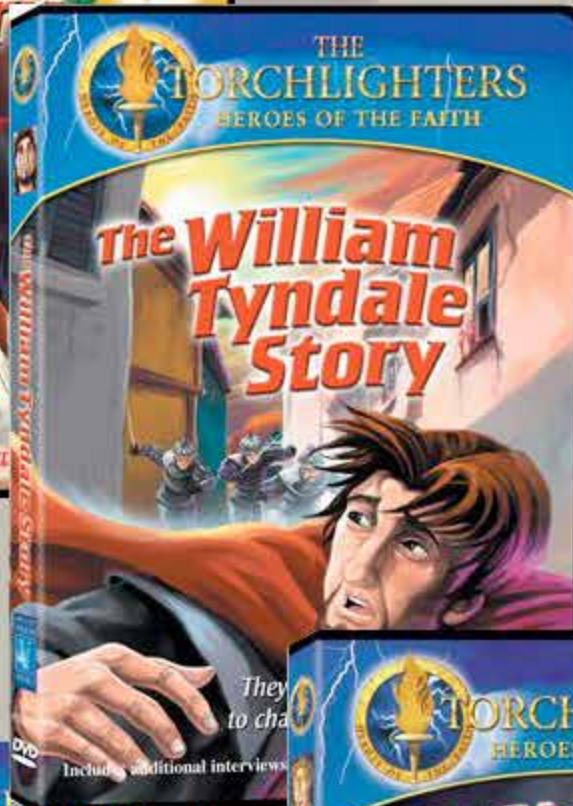
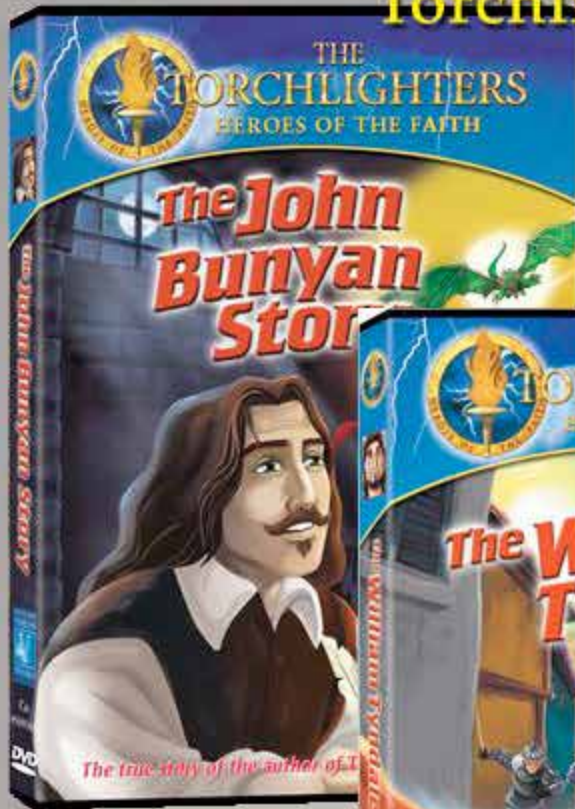
past confederates expected him to revert to crime. When that didn’t happen, they surmised he was waiting for his parole to expire. Instead Burbridge got his family back and returned to prison repeatedly as a soul-winning evangelist for From Crime to Christ Ministries.

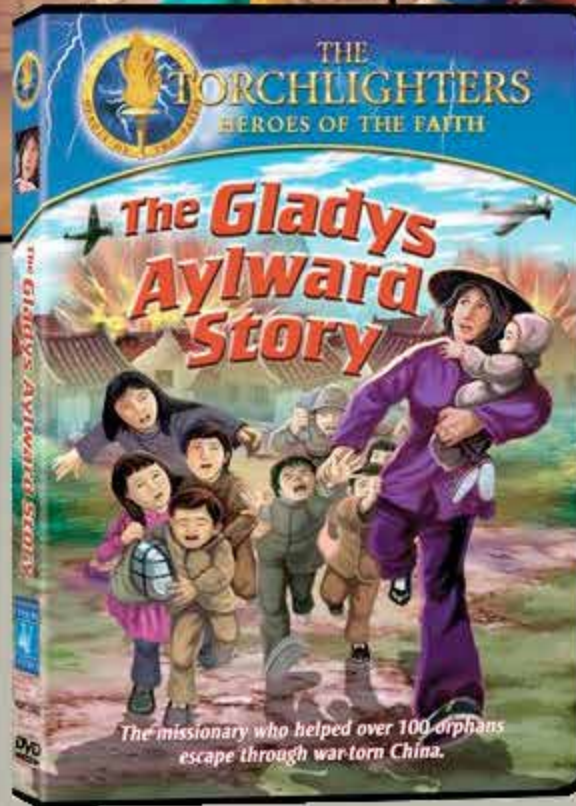
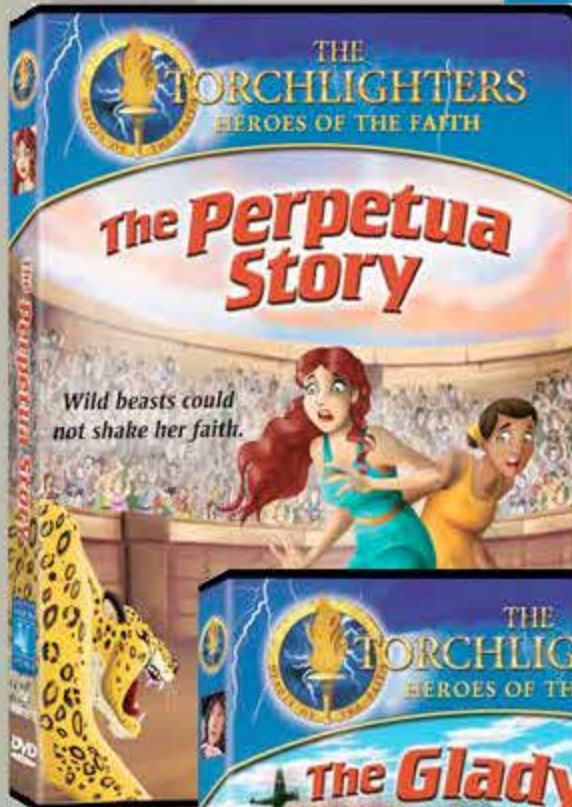
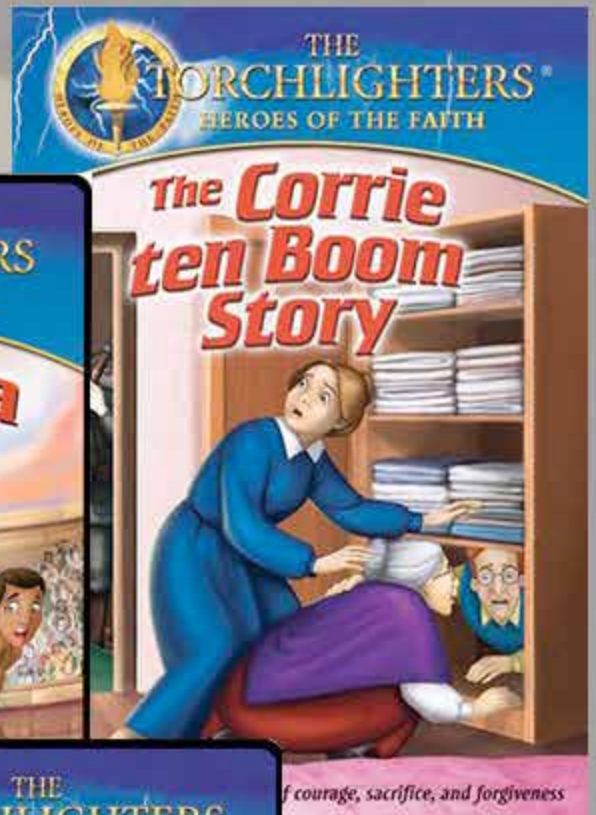
Watergate conspirator Charles Colson (1931–2012) silenced some of his detractors and proved the sincerity of his conversion by founding Prison Fellowship after serving time. “I shudder to think of what I’d been if I had not gone to prison,” he said. Jeb Stuart Magruder (1934–2014), also imprisoned for his role in Watergate, attended divinity school after his release and served for years as a Presbyterian minister.

And in the end, Jerry McAuley’s conversion proved real too. He founded the first city rescue mission in the United States, Water Street Mission, and led a revival in New York that reached into the highest levels of society. When Christ comes alongside a prisoner, he makes possible the paradoxes of prison—the unlovable discovering love, the irredeemable finding redemption, captives becoming transcendentally free. 

Dan Graves is the layout editor for Christian History, writes Christian History Institute’s “This Day in Christian History” feature, and maintains the website [Captive Faith](#).

Torchlighters who were captives





Corrie and Perpetua were prisoners for their faith. Gladys's faith took her into a prison to quell a riot

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT



Paul, 4th-c. fresco

- 600 BC: The earliest prison we know of through archaeological evidence is built, the Mamertine Prison in Rome. It will be the imprisonment site of both Peter and Paul.
- 450 BC: The Law of the 12 Tables of Rome refers to the possibility of imprisonment for debt.
- **399 BC:** Socrates is imprisoned and executed in Athens.
- 30s AD: John the Baptist, Jesus, and various apostles are imprisoned as Christianity is born and spreads.
- Before 313: Christians are imprisoned and executed during times of persecution, most famously under Nero (64), Decius (249–251), Valerian (258–259), and the “Great Persecution” of Diocletian and his successors (303–313).
- 1166: Henry II of England commissions the building of prisons and introduces the concept of trial by jury.
- 1188: Newgate is built in England in response to Henry II’s commission. It is used for over 700 years, closing in 1902.
- 1197: The Fleet Prison is built in London. It is destroyed by riot
- (and, once, fire) and rebuilt a number of times until it closes in 1844.
- **1215:** The Magna Carta establishes the right to trial by a jury of one’s peers.
- 1298: Pope Boniface VIII, in *Liber Sextus*, his collection of canon laws, argues that the purpose of prison is confinement, not punishment.
- c. 1300: *The Mirror of Justices* (England) forbids certain kinds of torture.
- 1351: The “benefit of clergy” (escaping a death sentence by being a clergyperson) is extended to any literate person in England.
- 1516: Thomas More suggests in *Utopia* that imprisonment (rather than death, flogging, or other punishments) is a solution to petty crime as well as more serious offenses.
- **1521:** Martin Luther begins translating the Bible into German while imprisoned.
- 1610s: England begins to use penal transportation to the American colonies as a means of punishment.
- 1624: Women are allowed to plead “benefit of clergy.”
- 1635: One of America’s earliest jails opens in Boston.



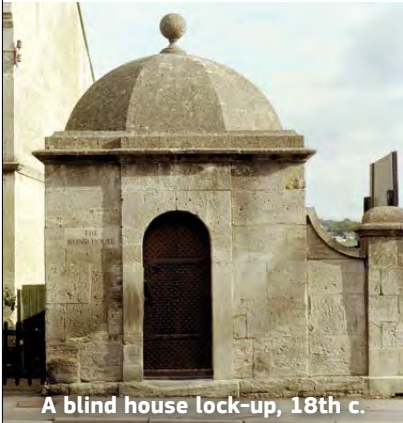
Steel belt worn by Cranmer, 16th c.



A prisoner carving, 1848.

- 1680s: Quakers begin to campaign against the death penalty.
- 1686: Construction begins on the Ospizio di San Michele in Rome. It will house a jail and a hospital.
- 1706: England abolishes the literacy test for avoiding the death penalty.
- 1730: John and Charles Wesley begin visiting prisons along with their friend William Morgan.
- **1745:** John Wesley publishes *A Word to a Condemned Malefactor*.
- 1748: Baron de Montesquieu publishes *Spirit of the Laws*, urging more leniency in punishments.
- 1764: Cesare Beccaria’s *On Crimes and Punishments* condemns torture and the death penalty; it influences the development of the modern penitentiary system.

Prisons, prison ministries, and Christians

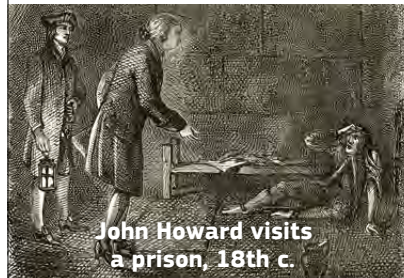


A blind house lock-up, 18th c.

- 1774: The Maison de Force is built in Belgium and is considered a model prison for its time.
- 1776: Jonas Hanway's *Solitude in Imprisonment* recommends solitary confinement as a punishment.
- 1777: Prison reformer John Howard publishes *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales*.
- 1779: The United Kingdom passes the Penitentiary Act.
- 1780s: The United States begins to cease sentencing people to death for any crime other than murder.
- **1787:** England begins to transport prisoners to Australia.
- 1790: Solitary confinement is first used in US prisons.
- 1791: English philosopher Jeremy Bentham designs the "panopticon," a prison layout where all inmates can be watched from one guard post.
- 1813: Elizabeth Fry first visits Newgate. In 1817 she establishes the Association for the Reformation of the Female Prisoners in Newgate.

- 1818: Auburn Prison opens in New York state, using the "Auburn system" of hard labor in groups during the day coupled with solitary confinement at night.
- 1820s: The United States begins to move from the workhouse system to the penitentiary system.
- **1826:** Sing Sing Prison opens in New York state, built by Elam Lynds. It employs solitary confinement and whipping.

- 1829: Eastern State Penitentiary enforces solitary confinement at all times, later called the "Pennsylvania system."
- 1833: Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville publish *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France*.
- 1840s: The idea of parole develops.



John Howard visits a prison, 18th c.

- 1844: Isaac Hopper organizes the New York Prison Association. In 1845 his daughter Abigail Hopper Gibbons organizes the Women's Prison Association.
- 1848: John Luckey publishes *Prison Sketches*.
- 1872: Reformed convict Jerry McAuley founds the Water Street Mission in New York.

- 1873: The Indiana Women's Prison, the first US prison exclusively for females, accepts 17 prisoners.
- 1891: The United States establishes a federal prison system.
- 1934: Alcatraz opens.
- 1971: The Stanford Prison Experiment simulates prison conditions to test the psychology of prisons.
- 1976: Chuck Colson founds Prison Fellowship.
- 1987: David Berkowitz, the "Son of Sam" killer, is converted in prison.
- **1989:** The United States establishes its first "supermax" prison.
- 1995: Burl Cain becomes warden at Louisiana State Penitentiary and establishes faith-based reforms in the prison.
- 1998: Karla Faye Tucker is executed despite widespread protests arguing for the commutation of her sentence.



Southern chain gang, c. 1903



Prison as a parish: Christian responses

HOW CHRISTIANS HAVE TRIED TO REFORM THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND MINISTER TO PRISONERS

Todd V. Cioffi

FROM JOSEPH'S IMPRISONMENT in Genesis to Satan's in Revelation, references to prisons fill the Bible. And Christians have spent considerable effort on how best to respond to crime and punishment, imprisonment and release. They have sought to minister to prisoners; they have tried to influence the justice system; and their input became crucial in the rise of the modern-day prison.

PROCLAIMING FREEDOM

Biblical testimony in general speaks little of verdicts of crime and punishment and more of mercy and fellowship. In Genesis we read of Potiphar imprisoning Joseph and how "the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love" (Gen. 39:21). Psalm 107 depicts those rightly imprisoned for rebelling against God's word, and yet, when "they cried to the Lord in their trouble...he saved them from their distress...and broke their bonds asunder" (vv. 13–14). The prophet

CAPTIVE APOSTLES This altar stands today in the Mamertine Prison, traditional imprisonment site of Peter and Paul.

Isaiah declared that God had called him "to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isa. 61:1).

Jesus echoed Isaiah's words, as recorded in Luke's Gospel, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners" (Luke 4:18). The Book of Hebrews commends us "to remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them" (Heb. 13:3). And in Matthew's Gospel, we discover that to visit the prisoner is in fact to visit Jesus himself (Matt. 25:36).

For its first three centuries, the early church had little influence over Roman law concerning crime and punishment. Things changed, however, by the early

TENNIS ANYONE? *Right:* Prisoners seek amusement in the courtyard of the Fleet Prison in London.

WE SERVE *Below:* The "seven corporal works of mercy" commanded by the church (and illustrated here) include visiting prisoners.

fourth century with Emperor Constantine's legalization of Christianity. Not only did Constantine eliminate persecution of Christians, but in 320 he issued an edict limiting mistreatment of prisoners awaiting their day in court. It literally loosed the chains of the prisoners to eliminate undue pain in their wrists or ankles. Prisoners were to be kept in good health, not tortured or mistreated.

Indeed Christianity seems to have had a significant impact on the Roman Empire's treatment of prisoners. Jailers would often allow imprisoned Christians gifts and even visitors as they awaited trial and sometimes execution. And judges got a first-hand look at prisons every Sunday, when they confirmed the prisoners had enough food and access to bathing. One edict in 367 released a large number of prisoners in honor of Easter.

Such changes were significant for the Roman Empire, whose criminal justice system could be extreme, arbitrary, and unforgiving. In the time of Augustine (354-430), punishments were severe. Some offenders were hauled off and banished from the realm, but others faced beatings, torture, or death. Prisons were used as holding places until judgment or as short-term punishment for lesser crimes. Long-term prison sentences were uncommon, and Christians most often protested the state's use of punishment and not prison sentences.

Augustine took up this cause in his sermons, teaching that criminal punishment should aim for moral and spiritual rehabilitation of the criminal, redirecting the criminal to the true good of society, and ideally to God. He acknowledged that punishment had its place in a just society, but thought a "deserved punishment should always be imposed as gently as possible."

Augustine taught that one of the roles of a bishop is to re-establish the offender as part of the Christian "fellowship of the altar," acting as an intercessor between the criminal, the state, and the church. He personally pleaded with civil authorities to mitigate the punishment of criminals, especially capital punishment. In the end his driving force was Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbor and even one's enemy:

The only person who is fit to punish anyone is the one whose love has overcome the hatred which often rages in us when we desire revenge. . . . The



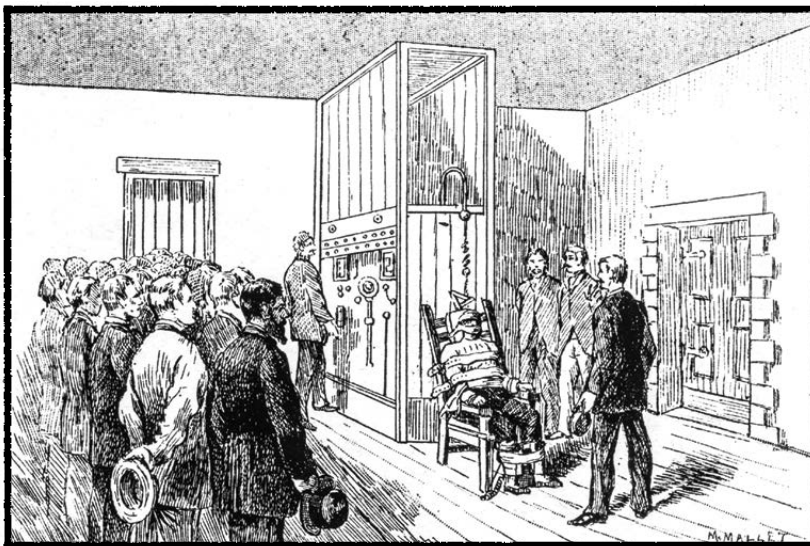
goal in such ideal cases is not to make the wrongdoers miserable through punishment but to bring them happiness through correction.

THE POOR IN CHRIST

In the Middle Ages, religious orders and Christian laypeople took up the cause of the downtrodden in earnest. They established hospitals and organized aid to the poor, the sick, abandoned children, the elderly, and pilgrims. By the twelfth century, they included prisoners, often called "the poor in Christ," in these efforts, and an obligation of charity for the imprisoned became commonplace for Christians.

It wasn't long before church leaders and magistrates brought their case to medieval kings, who in turn granted acts of mercy to prisoners. Influence also came from monasteries. According to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, wayward monks were to be confined, "walled up," and required to do penance for their sins, with a goal of reconciliation with the monastic community. In time the wider society began to use the monastic goal of confinement producing penitence in addition to punishment.

In early modern Europe, severe corporal punishment for crimes lessened and other punishments emerged. The church and the state often shared



VICTORIAN REALITY TV? A 19th-c. audience watches the first man electrocuted at Auburn Prison in the United States (*left*), and a family examines plaster casts of executed prisoners' heads at Newgate (*below*).



jurisdiction over those convicted of crimes. Ecclesiastical judges often gave milder sanctions than did other judicial bodies, such as military courts.

For instance a church judge might require an offender to wear a penitential garment for a period of time or go barefoot while dressed in a sheet through the public square. At times ecclesiastical judges would withhold punishment and simply require a fine. Over time the practices of religious courts spread to the secular realm. Of course early modern European governments still used harsher punishments, such as torture or execution, but the church's influence had a mitigating effect.

For many sixteenth-century reformers, the moral law, sometimes referred to as the natural law, had several so-called uses. First the moral law had a civil use, restraining people from criminal conduct. Second it had a theological use, condemning those who fell short of God's law. Finally the moral law had an educational use, teaching people how to conduct their lives before God and with others.

This understanding of the uses of the moral law can be seen in various legal conceptions of criminal law, especially in England and America. Early modern jurists saw themselves as God's vice-regents in the world, God's authority on earth. As such, penal law was meant to reflect God's moral law—seeking to judge immorality, condemn sinfulness, and educate the offender to rehabilitate, reform, and ultimately rejoin society.

THE STATE OF THE PRISONS

Much agitation for prison reform came from the work of John Howard (1726–1790) in England. High sheriff of Bedfordshire and survivor of a brief imprisonment, he refused to delegate his duties of inspecting the county jail, going there himself. He was so horrified by what he found that he ended up visiting prisons throughout the country and publishing the exposé *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (1777).

There he described the many prisons he had visited, such as this one: "Two dirty day-rooms; and three offensive night-rooms: That for men eight feet square: one of the women's, nine by eight; the other four and a half feet square: the straw, worn to dust, swarmed with vermin: no court: no water accessible to prisoners. The petty offenders were in irons: at my last visit, eight were women." Out of his work came the Penitentiary Act of 1779, which prescribed solitary confinement, religious instruction, hard labor, and the abolishment of jailer's fees. He eventually toured European prisons as well.

American reformers also pushed for a prison discipline that would rehabilitate and not merely punish, but they were not always successful (see "Heaven at last the wrong shall right," pp. 33–35). US penitentiaries were divided between the "Pennsylvania system" and the "Auburn system." The first kept prisoners in solitary confinement at all times, and the second allowed them to work together in silence during the day.

Even as Howard and others were pressing for reform, imprisonment was growing more popular. By 1790 in England, approximately two-thirds of

criminal sentences entailed imprisonment. In 1785 British philosopher Jeremy Bentham designed a prison called a *panopticon* where a central jailer could observe all prisoners. Bentham's design served as the basis for many prisons built thereafter.

By the 1800s it was thought that "idleness and labor" within prison walls could be opportunities for moral reflection, penance, and changed behavior—just as they had been for medieval monks. With the added emphasis on the educative use of the moral law, a combination of forced labor and solitary reflection came to be seen as an opportunity for rehabilitation, not just punishment. In contrast to earlier eras, Christians formed "societies for the reformation of manners" and promoted imprisoning those who had committed low-level offenses.

Quakers like Elizabeth Fry and William Penn were key to the modern prison's development, galvanizing various sectors of society—judicial, religious, and civil—to deal with crime, punishment, and prisons (see *CH* issue 117). Fry's visits to Newgate, where she found appalling conditions, led directly to a new wave of prison reform. Her biographer wrote of the scene: "Nearly three hundred women, with their numerous children, were crowded . . . in rags and dirt, destitute of sufficient clothing (for which there was no provision), sleeping without bedding, on the floor. . . . The prisoners purchased liquors from a regular tap in the prison."

Quakers called for the abolishment of capital punishment and a role for religion in defining the purpose of prison. They denounced bodily punishment, promoted personal contact and influence, and made great effort to organize voluntary groups of Christians and concerned citizens to regularly visit prisoners.

As a result of these reforms, the modern-day prison began to aim at providing something much like the monastic experience of work and solitude as an opportunity for moral and spiritual reform. Prisons are intended to be communities of moral and spiritual fellowship, creating and sustaining social bonds between prison staff, inmates, and even those outside the prison. That is the ideal, at any rate.

MINISTERING INSIDE AND OUT


Modern Christians involved in prison ministry, like their predecessors, try to attend to physical and spiritual needs of prisoners and to work for more just laws and more humane treatment. Prison Fellowship, for example, evangelizes prisoners, but also offers



COWBOYS . . . Top: Prisoners pray before a rodeo at Angola (Louisiana State Penitentiary).

. . . AND NUNS Above: Helen Prejean, the nun made famous by the book and film *Dead Man Walking*, continues to advocate today for the abolishment of the death penalty.

life-skills and re-entry training, trains wardens, works with families, and does legal advocacy. Educational programs, like the long-standing branch of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary inside the Louisiana State Penitentiary, attempt to transform the system from the inside (see "Joys and challenges," pp. 37–40).

Christian influence on crime and punishment in the West has been considerable; perhaps most striking is the Christian insistence on giving criminals opportunities for moral and spiritual rehabilitation. Today the United States leads the world in incarceration rates, including for minor crimes. The question is whether Christians will continue the church's long legacy of showing mercy to "the poor in Christ." 

Todd V. Cioffi is an assistant professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin College and the codirector of the Calvin Prison Initiative.



COME ALONG, SIR This 19th-c. lithograph shows soldiers leading John Hus to his execution.

“Keep my fur cloak in memory of me”

John Hus (c. 1369–1415) cared nothing for talk of reform when it first came to Bohemia, but became impressed with the truth of much that the reformer Wycliffe had written. Following his change of heart, Hus became zealous for Christ. He was invited to the great Council of Constance, which ousted three popes and made a new one. Promised safe conduct to the council by the emperor, he was instead imprisoned and subjected to an unfair trial, then burned as a heretic. These letters are among the last he wrote from prison.

I, MASTER JOHN HUS, in chains and in prison, now standing on the shore of this present life and expecting on the morrow a dreadful death, which will, I hope, purge away my sins, find no heresy in myself, and accept with all my heart any truth whatsoever that is worthy of belief.—*To the University of Prague, June 27, 1415*

THE KINGS OF THIS WORLD do not act thus with their servants. They only care for them so long as they are useful and necessary to them. Not so Christ, the King of glory, Who hath to-day crowned the apostles Peter and Paul—Peter by crucifixion, Paul by beheading—and welcomed them into the kingdom of the heavenly fatherland.

Peter was four times imprisoned and was led forth by an angel. Paul was thrice beaten with rods, once

stoned, twice suffered shipwreck, for two years bound with chains and in divers ways afflicted; who saith in his epistle: *We were pressed out of measure above our strength, so that we were weary even of life.* They have now passed their trials and torments, and there remaineth for them infinite bliss and the life of quietness that knows no suffering.

Now Peter and Paul reign with the King above, now they are with the choirs of angels, now they see the King in His beauty, now are they released from weariness and are full of bliss unspeakable. May those glorious martyrs, thus united with the King of glory, deign to intercede for us, that, strengthened by their help, we may be partakers in their glory, by patiently suffering whatever God Almighty shall ordain in this world for our greater good. Amen. —*To John of Chlum, June 29, 1415 [feast day of Peter and Paul]*

GOD BE WITH YOU! May it please Him to bestow upon you the eternal reward for the many kindnesses you have shown me, and still do show, although perhaps in the body I am already dead. . . . Give thanks in

my name to my gracious mistress the Queen for all the kindnesses she hath conferred on me. Greet your family and the other faithful friends, whose names I may not mention. I entreat you all to pray to God in my behalf; by His help we shall soon meet together in His gracious and holy presence. Amen.

I write this in prison in fetters, which I am wearing, I trust, for the gospel of God, expecting every moment the sentence of death. For God’s sake, I pray you suffer not good priests to be oppressed. . . .

Peter, dearest friend, keep my fur cloak in memory of me. Lord Henry Lefl, live a good life with thy wife. My thanks to thee! God be thy reward! Faithful friend, Master Lideři and Mistress Margaret, Masters Skuoček and Mikešk and others: may God grant you an eternal reward for your toils and the other kindness you have conferred on me. Master Christian, faithful and beloved, God be with thee! Master Martin, my disciple, remember those things which I taught thee. Master Nicolas and Peter, the Queen’s chaplain, and the other masters and priests, be diligent students of God’s word. Priest Gallus, preach the word of God. Finally, I entreat you all to persevere in the truth of God. *[signed]* On the feast day of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, about the time of the evening meal. —*To his friends in Bohemia, June 29, 1415*

These letters were translated by R. Martin Pope.



William Morgan's gift

AN OBSCURE IRISH TEENAGER INSPIRED METHODISTS TO UNDERTAKE
OVER 200 YEARS OF PRISON MINISTRY

Kevin M. Watson

IN 1732 A YOUNG MAN named William Morgan died in Dublin.

The young Irishman had come to Oxford University as a student in 1729. There, amid the usual collegiate crowd more interested in social life than studies, Morgan was two unusual things: a serious student and a serious Christian. He quickly became friends in May 1729 with another young man in the same boat: Charles Wesley (1707–1788).

Charles's older brother, John (1703–1791), was serving in local church ministry in Epworth and Wroot. When he returned to Oxford in the summer of 1729, he promptly joined with Charles and William to encourage one another in their faith.

They attended Communion, studied, prayed, and fasted together. Other undergraduates called them names: the Reforming Club, the Godly Club, the Holy Club, Sacramentarians, Bible Moths, Bible Bigots, Supererogation Men, Enthusiasts—and, because of

A MUCH BIGGER HOLY CLUB John Wesley (in the high pulpit) and Charles (in the low) are shown with over 400 Methodist preachers in a 19th-c. engraving.

their methodical approach to the spiritual life, the name that eventually stuck: Methodists.

"THAT RIDICULOUS SOCIETY"

These young scholars weren't content to merely study together. At Morgan's urging they soon turned their youthful zeal toward action—visiting the poor, the sick, and prisoners. Richard Morgan, William's father, was displeased with his son's actions, writing to him from Ireland in 1732:

You can't conceive what a noise that ridiculous Society which you are engaged in has made here. Besides the particulars of the great follies of it at Oxford, which to my great concern I have often heard repeated, it gave me sensible trouble



APPOINTED TO DIE 18th-c. prisoners were frequently transported to prisons and to executions in carts like these. The Wesleys rode with them and comforted them.

much good if anyone would be at pains of now and then speaking with them. This he so frequently repeated on the 24th of August, 1730, my brother I walked with him to the Castle. were so well satisfied with our conversation there that we agreed to go thither or twice a week; which we had not done before he desired me to go with him to poor woman in the town who was sick. this employment too, when we came to reflect upon it, we believed it would be worth while to spend an hour or two in a week, provided the minister of the par- in which any such person was were not against it.

PREACHING IN PRISON

Before long, John explained to Richard Morgan, visiting prisoners in Oxford became a part of the weekly discipline of John, Charles, William Morgan, and Bob Kirkham, who was the fourth to join with them. John told Morgan's father that the Oxford Methodists had asked for permission from the bishop of Oxford's chaplain to meet with the prisoners who were "condemned to die."

John had also expressed his intention to preach in prison once a month if the bishop approved. They not only received approval for all of this but, John explained to Morgan's father, the bishop had said he "was greatly pleased with the undertaking, and hoped it would have the desired success."

John delivered on those commitments, preaching in the Castle prison at least once a month for the next four and a half years and visiting prisoners multiple times each week. He wrote down his weekly schedule in the front of his 1731 diary, which recorded that he would visit the Bocardo prison on Monday and Friday and the Castle prison on Tuesday and Saturday.

Meeting with prisoners became a central Methodist ministry and a bridge to other acts of mercy, especially to the poor and sick. Morgan had brought together children from the poorest families in Oxford, and at the end of June 1731, John Wesley hired a woman named Mrs. Plat to care for them. In his 1731 diary, John listed Wednesday as a day he would visit with these children; Sunday he set aside to visit with the "poor and elderly."

In 1735, three years after Morgan's death, John and Charles Wesley and others traveled to the colony of Georgia as missionaries, disrupting the stability of the Holy Club. However the influence of William Morgan

to hear that you were noted for your going into the villages about Holt, entering into poor people's houses, calling their children together, teaching them their prayers and catechism, and giving them a shilling at your departure.

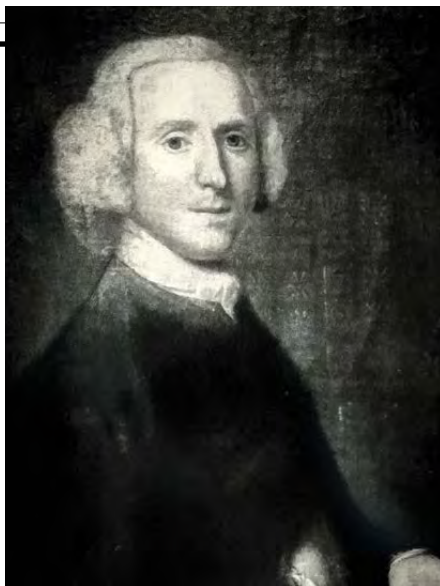
I could not but advise with a wise, pious, and learned clergyman. He told me that he has known the worst of consequences follow from such blind zeal, and plainly satisfied me that it was a thorough mistake of true piety and religion.

Soon William Morgan died—on August 26, 1732—and his father thought the Wesleys' rigorous religious routine, which involved fasting as well as visiting the poor and prisoners, played a role in his death. Richard Morgan wrote to Charles, "The Wesleys he raved of most of all in his sickness."

John Wesley responded. As with most things John wrote, he later published his letter to Richard. It became the first public defense of Methodism, including the prison ministry instituted by William Morgan:

In November 1729, at which time I came to reside at Oxford, your son, my brother, myself, and one more, agreed to spend three or four evenings in a week together. Our design was to read over the classics, which we had before read in private, on common nights, and on Sunday some book in divinity.

In the summer following Mr. M[organ, i.e. William] told me he had called at the jail to see a man who was condemned for killing his wife, and that, from the talk he had with one of the debtors, he verily believed it would do



SHORT LIFE, LONG LEGACY *Left:* Without William Morgan, Methodists might never have developed their worldwide, two-centuries-long commitment to prison ministry.

FROM BROTHER *Below:* John Wesley continued to preach in prisons throughout his life...



and his commitment to the downcast would live on.

When John returned from Georgia in 1738, he continued to preach in the Oxford prisons; Charles also continued prison ministry with those condemned to die. (Given the numerous offenses the English penal code of the time punished with death, there were many of these.)

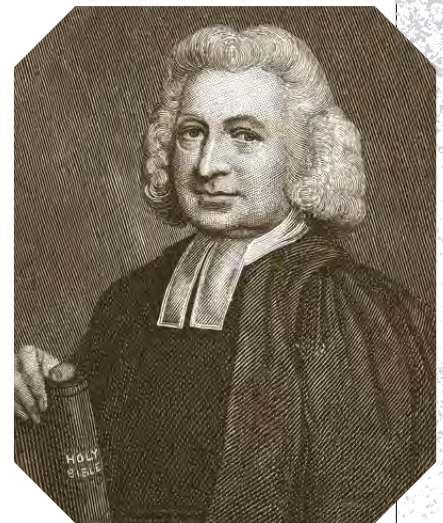
One passage in Charles's journal in 1738 describes how he visited with a group of prisoners during their last hours, offering Holy Communion, singing hymns with them, and accompanying them to the place of execution. In one chilling note, he wrote, "By half-hour past ten we came to Tyburn . . . waited till eleven; then were brought the children appointed to die."

In 1742 Charles published a "Hymn for Condemned Prisoners." Soon John set out three requirements for any person who wanted to continue as a Methodist in his short tract *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* (1743): "doing no harm," "doing good," and "attending upon all the ordinances of God." Among the ways Methodists went about "doing good" was "by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison." Prison ministry, originally Morgan's idea, had become woven into the very fabric of the Methodist understanding of Christian discipleship.

"ALMOST NAKED"

John Wesley continued to preach and minister in prisons throughout his life. In 1748, after preaching in Dublin prisons, he wrote in his journal that "the poor prisoners, both in the Castle and in the city prison, had now none that cared for their souls; none to instruct, advise, comfort, and build them up in the knowledge and love of the Lord Jesus."

In October 1759 (more than 25 years after Morgan's death), John visited French prisoners at Knowles



TO BROTHER *Above:* . . . and Charles Wesley continued to write hymns for the poor and for prisoners.

and found that "a great part of these men are almost naked." He immediately wrote a letter to the editor of *Lloyd's Evening Post* seeking to raise the public's awareness of their condition and exhort people to provide appropriate clothing for the winter months. Just over two weeks later, he wrote the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* describing the collection he had taken for these same prisoners:

On Tuesday, October 16 last, I made a collection at the New Room in Bristol for the French prisoners confined at Knowles. The money contributed then and the next day was about three-and-twenty pounds.

Judged it best to lay this out in shirts and flannel waistcoats, and accordingly bought, of Mr. Zepheniah Fry, in the Castle, check shirts and woollen cloth to the amount of eight pounds ten shillings and sixpence; and of Mrs. Sarah Cole, check linen to the amount of five pounds seventeen shillings.

The money remaining I lodged in the hands of Mr. James Ireland of Horsleydown Street, as he speaks French readily, and Mr. John Salter of Bedminster, who had been with me both at the prison and the hospital. I directed them to give a waistcoat and two shirts to every one who was remanded from the hospital to the prison, and the other half to those they should judge most needy or most deserving.

Similar stories weave throughout John Wesley's journal. Richard Morgan had thought his son and the Wesleys were making a "thorough mistake of true piety and religion." But as long as Methodists followed the

“I shall be patient”

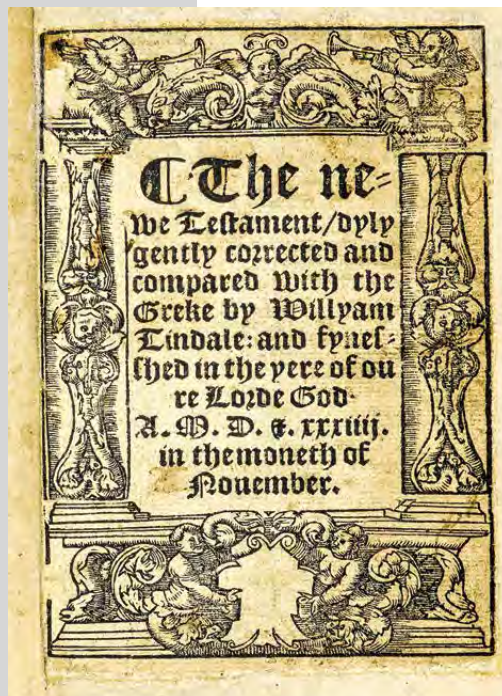
William Tyndale (1494–1536) translated the Bible into English, illegal in England since the days of John Wycliffe. After over a year’s imprisonment, he was tried as a heretic by imperial authorities, found guilty of Protestant beliefs, and executed (though the translation, as such, was not on the list of charges). This letter, from winter 1535, addressed to the governor of Vilvoorde Castle where he was jailed, is the only writing in Tyndale’s hand still extant.

I BELIEVE, right worshipful, that you are not ignorant of what has been determined concerning me [by the Council of Brabant]; therefore I entreat your Lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here [in Vilvoorde] during the winter, you will request the Procurer to be kind enough to send me from my goods, which he has in his possession, a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from cold in the head, being afflicted with a perpetual catarrh, which is considerably increased in the cell.

A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin; also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings: my overcoat has been worn out; my shirts are also worn out. He has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will be kind enough to send it. I have also with him leggings of thicker cloth for the putting on above; he also has warmer caps for wearing at night. I wish also his permission to have a candle in the evening, for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark.

But above all, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procurer that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study. And in return, may you obtain your dearest wish, provided always it be consistent with the salvation of your soul.

But if any other resolutions have been come to concerning me, before the conclusion of the winter, I shall be patient, abiding the will of God to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose spirit, I pray, may ever direct your heart. Amen.—*Translation by Jacob Isidor Mombert, reprinted from CH 16. In our Did you know? (inside front cover), you can view an image of the Latin letter in Tyndale’s own handwriting.*



“GENTLY CORRECTED” Tyndale’s translation (*below*) was controversial because it clearly reflected interpretations of Scripture identified with Luther.

General Rules, they understood “doing good” to include ministry with those in prison.

In 1784, at age 81, John Wesley said of one prison preaching experience in London:

I preached the condemned criminals’ sermon in Newgate. Forty-seven were under sentence of death. While they were coming in, there was something very awful in the clink of their chains.

But no sound was heard, either from them or the crowded audience, after the text was named: “There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, that need not repentance.” The power of the Lord was eminently present, and most of the prisoners were in tears. A few days after, twenty of them died at once, five of whom died in peace.

In 1785, at the age of 78, Charles Wesley published an entire hymnal for prisoners, *Prayers for Condemned Malefactors*, that drew on his continued prison ministry. One of its

final hymns offers grace to sinners, whether in prison or not, with these words:

And let these wretched bodies die,
If thou at last receive
The souls thou didst so dearly buy,
That we with God might live:
Death as the wages of our sin,
Our just desert we claim,
But hope eternal life to win,
Through grace—and Jesu’s name.
Jesus, thou all-redeeming Lord,
Remember Calvary,
And think on sinners self-abhorred,
Who gasp in death to thee:
And while thy mercy’s utmost power
On us is magnified,
O save us at our latest hour
Who hast for felons died! ❏

Kevin M. Watson is assistant professor of Wesleyan and Methodist studies at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, and the author of several books on Wesleyan discipleship and the Wesleyan class meeting.



“Heaven at last the wrong shall right”

ONE MAN’S THWARTED ATTEMPTS TO CHANGE AMERICAN PRISONS

Jennifer Graber

IN 1843 SING SING’S RESIDENT CHAPLAIN, John Luckey (1800–1876), went to New York’s head prison inspector, the lawyer and judge John Edmonds (1799–1874), to plead the case of a suicidal inmate. According to Luckey’s memoir, *Life in Sing Sing State Prison, as Seen in a Twelve Years’ Chaplaincy* (1860), the inmate deliberately tried to provoke a fatal beating, seeking immediate death over the slow one of serving out his sentence.

To the chaplain’s surprise, Edmonds appeared moved, visited the inmate, and stopped the keepers from lashing him. The prisoner became a hard worker in the prison shop. Edmonds then pressed Sing Sing’s prison agent Elam Lynds (1784–1855) to modify his notoriously severe discipline focused on order and profit. When Lynds refused Edmonds called for his removal. In 1844 New York officials relieved Lynds of duty.

The victory, however, was short-lived. In fact Luckey’s enlistment of Edmonds led to a new series of conflicts as Edmonds founded the New York Prison Association (NYPA). The NYPA wanted less severe prison discipline and inmate reformation, just like Luckey. But its main focus was on fostering a civil society, not on spiritual transformation. Only a few years

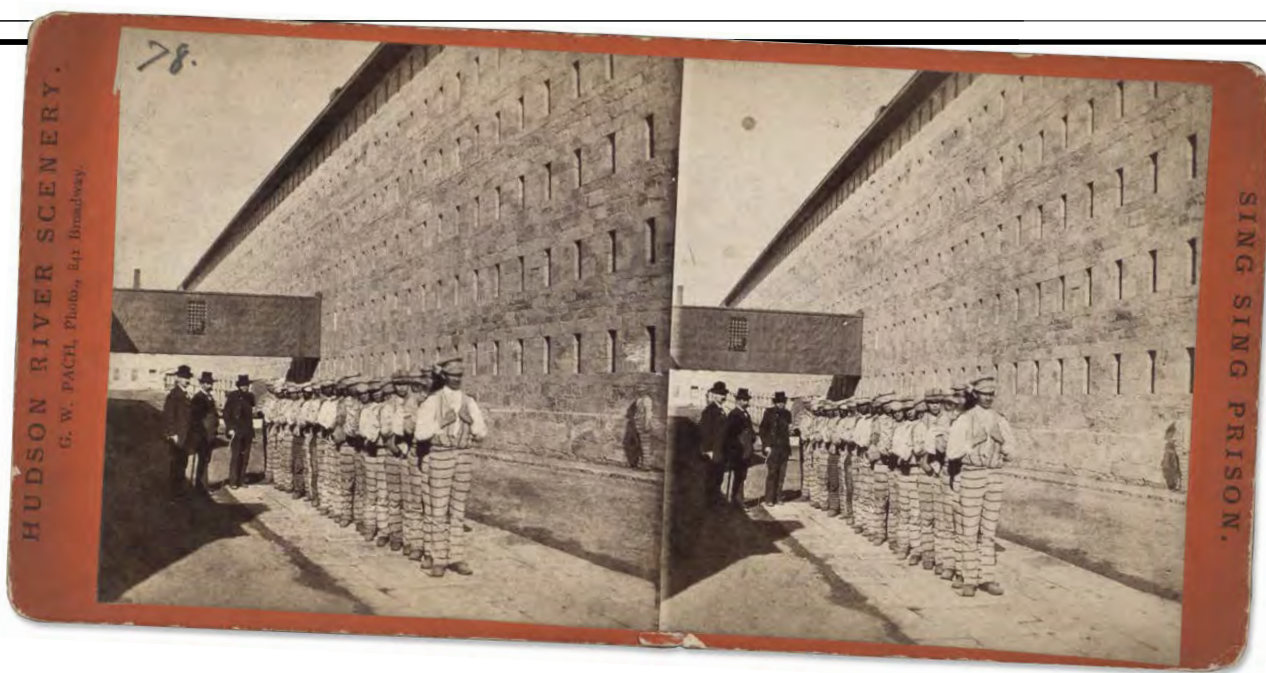
SOLITARY BARS These cells in Sing Sing were photographed only a few decades after Luckey’s time there.

later, Edmonds would help orchestrate Luckey’s dismissal from Sing Sing.

UNABLE TO USE A KNIFE AND FORK

With the backing of Governor William Seward, Luckey had come to Sing Sing in May 1839. He could not have appeared at a more dramatic moment; Seward was investigating cruel warden Robert Wiltse. While he only served under Wiltse a few months, Luckey’s ministry was dominated by the aftermath. For example Luckey dealt with one Irish prisoner, a “used up man,” who had been “absolutely brutalized” by near-weekly floggings. He had forgotten how to use a knife and fork when he was pardoned after 20 years and could not stop himself from prison-lockstepping down New York City sidewalks.

Luckey relished the opportunity to be part of Sing Sing’s fresh start under new agent David Seymour, who replaced Wiltse. He appreciated Seymour’s commitment to Sabbath school and the prison library, and was



soon visiting inmate families, bringing in temperance speakers, and assisting inmates in transitioning to post-prison life. But most of all, he relished the “mildness” of the new discipline. Keepers used the lash infrequently. Mentally ill convicts received gentler treatment.

Luckey preached a message of suffering, conversion, and regeneration, emphasizing industriousness, morality, and self-discipline, and drawing on Methodist practices to shape his day-to-day ministry (see “William Morgan’s gift,” pp. 29–31). In fact Luckey functioned like a Methodist class leader inside Sing Sing. He visited prisoners regularly; listened to them to “advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort”; rebuked them; and tried to convince them of their need for prayer.

In Sunday chapel presentations, Luckey read letters from discharged convicts, assuring inmates that their affliction worked for good. Those discharged reported that they had read the Bible, learned new professions, and received the mercies of God. But all these things paled against the hope of heaven “through the merits of a crucified Saviour,” as one letter put it.

In 1840 the *New York Evangelist* attested to significant tract distribution and inmate conversion at Sing Sing. Articles detailed Luckey’s Sunday schedule—his sermon on the prodigal son, prayers with sick inmates, and afternoon visits to individual cells—and included inmate testimonies of thankfulness at having been brought to prison to learn the word of God.

Governor Seward’s reforms, however, lasted only as long as he remained in office. New Yorkers elected a Democratic governor in 1842 who named a new slate of prison inspectors, including Edmonds. Edmonds, in turn, hired Lynds. Lynds had previously served as warden at both Sing Sing and Auburn, where he founded the “Auburn system” of prison discipline. Lynds restored the tough discipline of his earlier terms. The number of floggings soared.

STEP IN TIME Sing Sing prisoners march to work under the watchful eye of guards in the late 1800s.

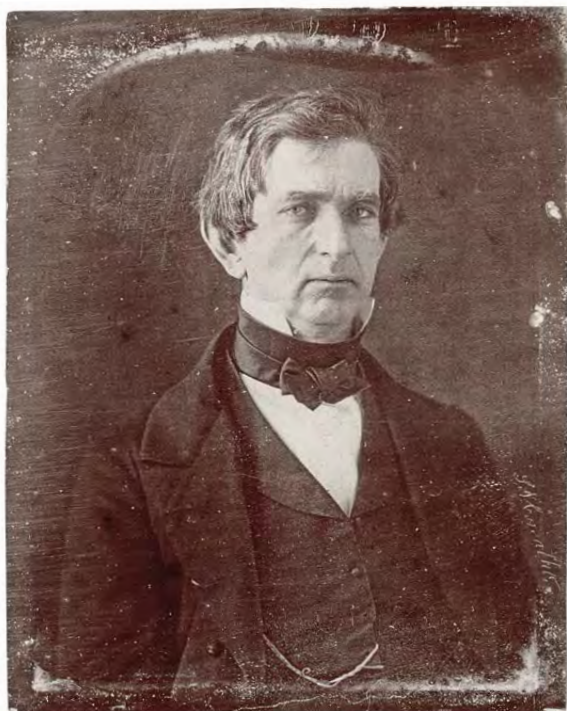
Lynds also ended the privileges of the last few years: family visitation, letters from friends, and singing in worship. He dismantled the prison library, stopped the Sabbath school, and curtailed Luckey’s interaction with prisoners. Despite increasing inmate population, budgets for food, clothing, and hospital supplies shrank. In an 1843 report, Edmonds and other inspectors wrote that “to talk of the power of moral suasion in a company of felons, is to talk nonsense.”

In his memoir Luckey referred to this period as a “bloody time” and a “reign of terror.” Mentally ill inmates suffered. On one occasion Luckey pleaded with Lynds not to flog one. Lynds responded that chaplains were “benevolent dupes.” But Luckey’s experience with the prisoner who tried to get himself killed by a fatal beating proved to be a catalyst for change. For starters it got Lynds fired.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER?

But the conflict was not over. Edmonds’s new NYPA rejected the belief that most prisoners were unredeemable, but its vision focused not on redemptive suffering but on prisoners’ potential for citizenship. Chaplains were not to speak of God’s judgment and mercy, but rather to contribute to the prison’s educational mission.

The NYPA soon named a new matron for Sing Sing’s female inmates, and Eliza Farnham (1815–1864) brought a new psychological approach. She relaxed rules in the women’s quarters, allowing conversation and popular novel reading. She also advocated phrenology and invited an artist to make drawings of inmates’ heads. It was rumored that she argued against preaching only



FAILED REFORMER Governor William Seward (*left*) sent pastor John Luckey (*below*) to Sing Sing as a chaplain twice, but Luckey felt both terms ended in defeat.



Christian theology and stopped an assistant who tried to convert Catholic prisoners to Protestantism.

Chaplain Luckey and his wife, Dinah, took their concerns to the prison inspectors. According to former keepers in the women's wing, Farnham had allowed public reading of Dickens's novels, works by phrenologist George Combe, devotional pieces, travelogues, and her own memoir. This proved maddening to Dinah Luckey: a prisoner who came to the prison "deeply penitent," Dinah claimed, became unconcerned about her eternal soul and captivated by notions of becoming a "fine lady" after three months of novel reading.

The NYPA, though, agreed with Farnham's willingness to enlist a broader reforming arsenal in the interest of producing a virtuous citizenry. She won the battle over inmate education. Luckey lost his job.

Even as he ministered in other places (including New York's notorious Five Points mission), Sing Sing stayed on Luckey's mind. In 1853 he published *Prison Sketches*. The book included some inmate conversions, but they paled in comparison to the number of stories about bad prison staff, politics, insanity, false imprisonment, and despair. Although God's grace was available in prison, many inmates failed to experience it. Convict life was awful, Luckey warned.

"UNEARTHLY GROANS"


In 1855, when a Whig governor was elected, Luckey found a way back into Sing Sing. This time he spent less time trying to make the system better and focused instead on how good Christians could minister in an awful situation. Conditions were deteriorating; punish-

ments ranged from solitary confinement and whipping to showering and yoking. In 1855 the *New York Times* reported on violent episodes at the prison including "the shaking of eight or nine hundred iron doors, and the unearthly groans of the men."

In *Prison Sketches* Luckey told of an insane female inmate found, just weeks after her release, wandering New York with her Bible in one hand and shoes in the other. Luckey tried to find work for another discharged inmate hoping to lead a good life, but he was so impaired by prison beatings that Luckey could not help.

Luckey's stories are classic warnings to the impenitent, but also commentary on the slim possibilities of redemption in Sing Sing as it was then administered. *Prison Sketches* includes only two hopeful stories, where successful outcomes rely on the intervention of benevolent Christians, not on regular prison routines.

Luckey depicted prisoners as fellow human beings who had done wrong, transformed by Sing Sing into subhuman wretches. Rescue from this hell was only available through benevolent Christians offering a tract, a dollar, some food, or a job. At the end of his memoir, the chaplain quoted a former inmate who wrote, "Heaven at last the wrong will right."

Upon retirement Luckey moved to Missouri, but Sing Sing haunted him. When he died in 1876, his wife shipped his remains back to Ossining at his request. His body is buried on Sing Sing's grounds. 

Jennifer Graber is associate professor of religion at the University of Texas at Austin and the author of The Furnace of Affliction.



WORDS FROM WOMEN Evans and Cheevers were encouraged to speak for themselves in a Quaker assembly like this one in London.

“To God alone we cry and weep”

Quakers Katharine Evans (d. 1692) and Sarah Cheevers (d. 1694) were held by the Maltese Inquisition from 1558–1663. These excerpts are from *A True Account of the Great Trials and Cruel Sufferings Undergone by Those Two Faithful Servants of God* (1663), a collection of their papers and letters from prison compiled by Daniel Baker.

From their account of their imprisonment:

NOW IN SHORT TIME after we were taken Prisoners, we were stung with Flies called Muskatoes [mosquitos], in our faces and our heads, as we lay in our Beds, that were swollen as if we had the small-Pox, so that all people were afraid of us, save the English Consul; they thought we had been unclean persons, so that a Friar told Sarah he saw an evil Spirit in her face, which was a great trial . . . we were told, that they had seen them that did pray and preach every day, were burnt for Witches in a short time. . . . And glory be to our God, they cannot lay guilt to our charge, but are made to confess the Truth.

From a letter to some friends:

Though we be the least of God’s Flock, yet we are of the true Fold, whereof Christ Jesus is shepherd; and he hath had as tender a care over us, as he hath had of any of his Lambs which he hath called forth in this the day of his Power; and hath carried us through, and over as great afflictions as most of our Brethren and sufferers for his Name, both in mockings, scoffings, scorning, reproaches, stripes, contradictions, perils at

And from another letter:

And we do believe, that neither principalities, nor powers, nor sufferings, nor imprisonment, nor persecution, nor life nor death, shall be able to separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour, Amen: Dearly beloved Friends, though our bodies are bolted up in the Rocks and Caves of the Earth, yet our spirits (you know) none can limit nor confine to any place.

This poem was written by Katharine:

My love to Truth doth me constrain
In Prison ever to remain;
If it in truth be so that I
Cannot be set at liberty.
My dear Redeemer’s face so bright,
Doth shine upon me day and night;
His Countenance doth exceed all
Captivity and Bondage thrall.

And this poem is by both:

In Prisons strong, and Dungeons deep,
To God alone we cry and weep:
Our sorrows none can learn nor read,
But those that in our path do tread.
But He whose Beauty shineth bright,
Who turneth darkness into Light,
Makes Cedars bow, and Oaks to bend
To him, that’s sent to the same end.
He is a Fountain pure and clear,
His Crystal Streams run far and near,
To cleanse all those that come to him,
For to be healed of their sin.
All them that patiently abide,
And never swerve nor go aside;
The Lord will free them out of all
Captivity, Bondage and Thrall.

—*A True Account* (1663); *spelling modernized*



Joys and challenges

WHAT DOES PRISON MINISTRY LOOK LIKE TODAY? WE INTERVIEWED FIVE INDIVIDUALS ACTIVE IN PRISON MINISTRY TO GET FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS.

JIM FORBES is media director at *Prison Fellowship*.

For more than 40 years, Prison Fellowship has been going into correctional facilities, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those behind bars, and offering the hope of true transformation. Through the use of Bible-based programming and with the help of thousands of committed volunteers, lives are being changed, hope is being restored, and darkness is being replaced with the promise of a future.

At the same time, we also envision a safer, more redemptive society. With the help of our advocacy work, we call for those responsible for crime to be held accountable through a fair system that values their human dignity and potential, and for churches and communities to provide care for victims and restoration for those who have paid their debt to society.

CHRISTIANA DEGROOT is professor of religion at Calvin College and codirector of the *Calvin Prison Initiative* with Todd V. Cioffi (see pp. 24–27). CPI allows prisoners to pursue a BA degree through Calvin.

FREEDOM IN THE WORD Inmates at Darrington Prison in Texas study for ministry degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The Calvin Prison Initiative got started when Calvin Theological Seminary faculty members were inspired by the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, where the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary operates a Bible college inside the prison with over 200 graduates. The seminary partnered with Calvin College to offer a BA at Handlon Prison in Ionia, Michigan.

Every year an entering class of 20 students is drawn from men's prisons all over Michigan. They have to meet certain criteria: having a GED or having finished high school, being free of misconduct tickets for two years, having leadership potential, and being seen as good citizens.

They are recommended by their warden or the chaplain or principal. They are transferred to Handlon and a hold is put on them for five years to keep them from being transferred out. If they succeed to the end, they will earn a Calvin BA in ministry leadership.



These students take Calvin core requirements and courses in the ministry leadership major and then have room for electives; almost all of the courses are taught in the prison by Calvin's seminary and college faculty. I teach the Old Testament survey course.

We welcomed our first cohort in 2015. We find the students to be eager and highly motivated. More than half are lifers. We want to help prisoners succeed when they leave prison, but also want to change the culture in the prison. The lifers can look at prison as a mission field: mentoring other prisoners, being involved in worship services, and being chaplains' assistants.

When lifers are finished, they'll be transferred out of Handlon to different prisons in Michigan. We hope that they can take what they've learned and put it to good use.

There are unique joys. So far everyone who's taught there wants to do it again. I've never taught such keen, thoughtful students. They do their reading twice. They write a paper and revise it. They know they have been handed a gift of unbelievable value and are very grateful. When you come you are always welcome.

There are challenges to working behind bars. There's no access to the Internet. They now have their own computers and can take them to their cells, but when we started, we had

A NEEDLE PULLING THREAD Above: Prisoners learn to knit in a Sing Sing classroom in 1915.

two students to a computer and they could only work on them when the professor was present.

Also some of the officers have not been helpful. Slowly that is changing as we're winning trust and respect, so the guards know that we're not do-gooders being taken advantage of. The unit our students stay in has seen a dramatic decline in misbehavior tickets. They all stay in their cells studying. The students look for opportunities to give back. The prison has started a leader dog program, and students are involved in that. A number of students have also started growing their hair out to donate to Locks of Love.

We're trying to build bridges between what goes on at Handlon and on our main campus. In the long run, we hope it will change the perception of our students here about prison. There is nothing like first-hand experience. We train tutors here that help prisoners write papers and study. Last night some basketball alumni went out to Handlon and played the prison basketball team. A reporter who was there said it felt like a high school basketball game. Everybody was on one level playing field, watching a good game.

JOE ROCHE of *Faith and Family Films* operates a prison lending library.

We send books to inmates. We also provide Christian films. The volunteers who show them say they get very positive feedback. We also lend CDs when prisoners are allowed to have them, in minimum-security prisons or halfway houses. The prisoners also appreciate having Bibles. We've been doing



CONVICTS KNITTING (BTKJGD) — EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO
ABBA FATHER: DADDY'S HOME BY VASHTI VARNADO. PERMISSION GRANTED BY THE ARTIST



BEAUTY FROM PAIN One exhibit of prison-inspired art included a crucifix made from Birmingham prison bars to honor Martin Luther King Jr. (*above*) and a painting called “Daddy’s Home” by the child of a prisoner (*below left*).

this since January of 2007. We’re always looking for pen pals for the inmates (via Outreach Ministries, PO Box 91, Randolph, VT, 05060), although people should be aware that when the inmates get out they often stop writing to their pen pals.

JACK HELLER is associate professor of English at Huntington University, directs the program *Shakespeare at Pendleton*, and consults with the national organization *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, which teaches prisoners to perform Shakespeare.

I became interested in working with incarcerated people after seeing the 2005 documentary film *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. It follows the work of men incarcerated at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in LaGrange, Kentucky, as they spend nine months preparing to perform *The Tempest*. I visited the men in Kentucky, talking with them as a professor about their plays, bringing students, conducting annual week-long seminars, and seeing their performances.

In 2013 I decided to try to facilitate a program myself, so I began Shakespeare at Pendleton at the

Prisons today by the numbers

- Approximate number of people incarcerated in state and federal prisons and in local jails in the United States: 2,200,000 (0.7% of the US population)
 - 93% are male, 7% female.
 - 35% are African-American, 34% Caucasian, 21% Hispanic, 14% of mixed ethnicity.
 - About 75% are serving sentences of 20 years or less.
 - About 75% are between ages 20 and 50; 1% are juveniles.
- Eighteen states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons are at or over their maximum capacity for housing prisoners.
- About 2,900 prisoners are under death sentences, but there is a backlog of executions: fewer than 50 prisoners are generally executed per year.
- 365 juveniles were executed in the United States between 1624 and 2005, when executing minors was declared unconstitutional.
- Since 1973, 158 people have been released from death row when their innocence was proved.
- About half of state prisoners are incarcerated for violent crimes.
- About half of federal prisoners are incarcerated for drug offenses.
- Nearly half of prisoners conditionally released from federal prison and 75% of conditionally released state prisoners are rearrested within five years.
- 5.1 million people in the United States are on parole or probation.
- The United States imprisons more than 700 people for every 100,000 citizens, the highest rate of incarceration in the world.

—Sources: Federal Bureau of Prisons, US Bureau of Justice Statistics, Eastern State Penitentiary, and others.

Pendleton Correctional Facility, near Indianapolis. We completed the first-ever performance of Shakespeare’s Roman tragedy *Coriolanus* in a prison in 2015, and in 2017 presented scenes from *Much Ado about Nothing* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

This program gives the men an opportunity to explore abilities they may not have known that they have. It gives them a chance to break out of the mundane routines of prison life and to learn some things about themselves. The first play we did, *Coriolanus*, is largely about anger, and I think it gave several of the men opportunities to reflect upon their past experiences with uncontrolled anger.

Doing Shakespeare and working with reader groups in prison may seem to have a less than obvious spiritual intention. However in the passage most often used in support of ministries to prisoners, Matthew



NOT AN ACT Rick Cluchey, who turned his life around through prison theater in the 1950s in San Quentin, performs for prisoners in 1970.

We always let them know that we are a Christian organization and tell them it's a safe space, but they don't have to talk about faith if they don't feel comfortable. Our main goal is to show grace and love, because they often think, "Oh, these Christians are coming in, judging us, because they think we are such sinners."

The truth is that all of us are sinners and there is no way that we should ever be looking down on them. We try to show them that there's so much love and so much grace and acceptance and forgiveness.

The kids are typically 12 to 18, but I have seen kids as young as seven. The seven-year-old had committed arson.

The majority are African American and

25, visiting the prisoners is put alongside of feeding the hungry, clothing the destitute, and comforting the sick.

Many Christians envision work with prisoners as providing Bibles and Bible studies. Those are important, and I see these ministries in the prisons I visit. But visiting prisoners involves physical, intellectual, occupational, emotional, and spiritual needs. To believe that only Bibles will meet the needs of prisoners would be akin to believing that Bibles alone will meet the needs of food, clothing, and healing for the hungry, the poor, and the sick. Providing inmates with education, with creative opportunities, and with job training fills out, I think, the meaning of visiting prisoners.

SUSANNAH MOORE is a junior and a student chaplain at Eastern University in Wayne, Pennsylvania, who serves through the college prison ministry.

Eastern University requires all of their freshmen to complete 20 hours of service. I've always been interested in prisons but wasn't old enough before, so I was excited to volunteer through EU's prison ministry. I am now in my third year of volunteering.

Our main focus is Lancaster County Youth Detention Center. We go every other Friday night and spend two hours hanging out with the kids there. We bring games and buy Doritos and chocolate for them. Our goal is to allow them to hang out just as if they're regular kids. I think that is one of the greatest forms of stress release we can give them, a night of hanging out with friends that is also Christ-centered.

Hispanic. There are two sides to the detention center. The detention side is for kids who have committed violent crimes, often drug related. The shelter side houses kids who have not committed violent crimes. Maybe they were caught with drugs, ran away from home, skipped too many days of school, or are waiting to get into foster care and haven't actually done anything wrong.

I met a girl once who was in there because her father had beat her up. She had a really bad concussion, but could only see the nurse at certain days and times. She had to be with the group at other times, sitting up in a room with bright lights, instead of getting the rest and medical care she needed. Here she was coming out of a traumatic situation and was put into another traumatic situation.

Kids are not developing normally because they are stuck in such a rigid and uptight environment, in these small rooms with concrete walls. They can no longer handle change. If there's a change in their schedule, they often have an anxiety attack.

This is incredibly harmful. When they get out into the world and have to make their own schedule, it causes a lot of struggles for them. If we are looking to form these kids into contributing members of society, then we need to be treating them in ways that are going to allow them to re-enter society someday, rather than having mental illness or reverting back to criminal lifestyles.

I have found a passion for prisoners and for reforming the criminal justice system to a more restorative approach. I think the Lord has called me to work with prisoners. I want to spend my life working with prisoners. ☐



DOES HOPE LIVE HERE? A guard opens the door of the chapel at Darlington Prison.

“God is here, deliverance has come, and there is hope”

Eric Dickerson is incarcerated in Pennsylvania and hopes to be released in the fall of 2018. He has been writing to CHI staff for more than a decade.

AS WE LOOK INTO the Scripture we clearly see that once people come into the presence of Jesus, that’s when their lives were transformed forever. They then set about glorifying Christ. . . . The Holy Spirit is comforting me, teaching me, and/or purposing me for something. We shall see. To God be the glory. All that I know is that time spent with Jesus is life transforming. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

Matthew Harper has been in prison since 1999 for murder and arson and is scheduled to be released in 2029. He is studying for the Episcopal priesthood and wrote these reflections for the website [Lecto Carcere: Prison Lectionary](#).

WITH OVER TWO MILLION men and women incarcerated in America today, and millions more under custodial supervision, it is perhaps time to ask ourselves, what’s the point?

us to prison society hopes we will one day return as better people. . . .

Jesus makes the point succinctly [in Luke 12]. There was a rich man, who got even richer, and then died. What did his riches matter? Paul tells the Colossians to leave their past life in the past. Put it to death, bury it in Christ. Set your mind on what is above, move forward, and keep the faith.

That is easier to say than do. Especially in here, where, for both punishment and protection, I am constantly reminded of my past [Colossians 3:1–11]. But there is still a third reason . . . built on repentance and forgiveness. There is punishment and captivity, but it isn’t forever. God is here, deliverance has come, and there is hope.

That hope cannot be found in one of our programs, and it cannot be founded on a twelve-step program. Those things may help build the house, but the foundation must rest on Christ. Our hope, our redemption, our new life, must be built on our relationship with God. That isn’t the only point of prison, but it is the one I will hold on to. It’s the only one that matters.

Recommended resources

HERE ARE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CH EDITORIAL STAFF AND THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANS IN PRISON AND CHRISTIANS MINISTERING TO PRISONERS.

BOOKS

There are many books about the **history of prisons and punishment**. Some of the most helpful include Anthony Babington, *The Power to Silence* (1968); Blake McKelvey, *American Prisons* (1977); Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice* (1990); Richard Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (1999); Mark Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs* (1997); Norval Morris and David Rothman, eds., *The Oxford History of the Prison* (1997); Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some* (1998); Adam Jay Hirsch, *The Rise of the Penitentiary* (1992); Paul Griffiths and Simon Devereaux, eds., *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500–1900* (2004); John Witte Jr., *God's Joust, God's Justice* (2006); Pieter Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience* (2007); Guy Geltner, *The Medieval Prison* (2008); Ralph Pugh, *Imprisonment in Medieval England* (2008); and Edward Marston, *Prison: 500 Years of Life Behind Bars* (2009).

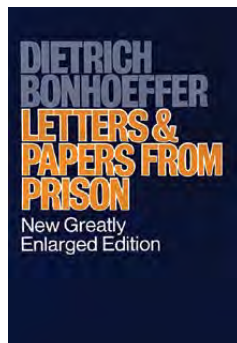
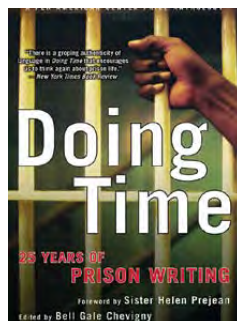
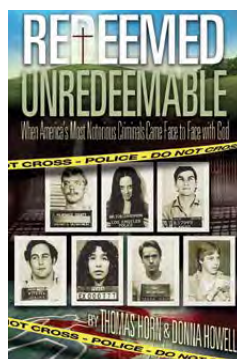
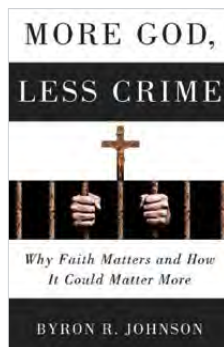
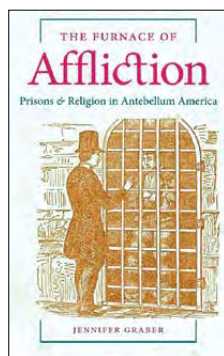
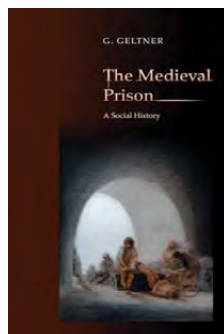
Books on **Christians involved in prison reform and ministry** also abound. Start with Myra Glenn, *Campaigns against Corporal Punishment* (1984); Estelle Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers* (1984); Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity* (1993); Helen Prejean, *Dead Man Walking* (1993); Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers* (1995); Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling* (1994); Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (2000) and *Criminal Justice and the Catholic Church* (2007); James Beckford and Sophie Gilliat, *Religion in Prison* (2005); Dennis Shere, *Cain's Redemption* (2005); Jennifer Graber, *The Furnace of Affliction* (2011); Byron Johnson, *More God, Less Crime* (2011) and coauthor of *The Angola Prison Seminary* (2016); Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (2014); and Daniel Karpowitz, *College in Prison* (2017).

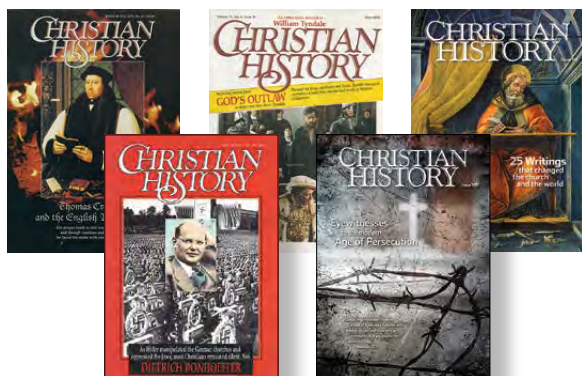
Prisoners as authors figure in H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America* (1989); Daniel Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace* (2006); and William Sherman and

William Sheils, eds., *Prison Writings in Early Modern England* (2009). We've recommended **biographies and autobiographies** of famous imprisoned Christians in previous issues (see the back issue list on the next page). Some not previously mentioned include Robert Offord, Jerry McAuley, *An Apostle to the Lost* (1907); Charles Colson, *Born Again* (1976); Armando Valladares, *Against All Hope* (1987); Linda Strom, *Karla Faye Tucker Set Free* (2000); Stephen Wang, *The Long Road to Freedom* (2000); Thomas Horn and Donna Howell, *Redeemed Unredeemable* (2004); David Berkowitz, *Son of Hope* (2006); and Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place* (2009).

Some **anthologies of prison writings** include Isidore Abramowitz, ed., *The Great Prisoners* (1946); H. Bruce Franklin, ed., *Prison Writings in 20th Century America* (1998); Geoffrey Bould, ed., *Conscience Be My Guide* (2005); and Bell Gale Chevigny, ed., *Doing Time* (2011).

Many **classic books written in prison** are available from libraries, booksellers, and online—among them *The Consolation of Philosophy* (524) by Boethius; “The Spiritual Cantic” (1622) by John of the Cross; *No Cross, No Crown* (1669) by William Penn; *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by John Bunyan; *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1973); *Letters and Papers from Prison* (1951) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer; and “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963) by Martin Luther King Jr.





CHRISTIAN HISTORY ISSUES

Read these past issues of *Christian History* online; some are still available for purchase.

- 16: William Tyndale
- 32: Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- 37: Persecution in the Early Church
- 48: Thomas Cranmer
- 68: Jan Hus
- 69: The Wesleys
- 89: Richard Baxter
- 98: The Church in China
- 109: The Modern Age of Persecution
- 116: 25 Writings
- 117: Quakers



VIDEOS FROM VISION VIDEO

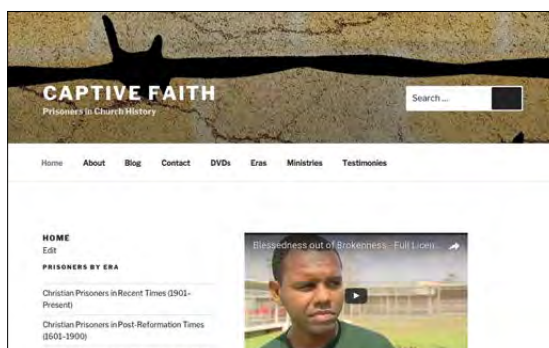
Videos on the theme of this issue include *Agent of Grace*; *Bless You Prison*; *Blessedness out of Brokenness*; *Beyond Torture*; *The Choice Is Yours*; *Corrie ten Boom*; *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*; *Eric Liddell*; *From University to Prison*; *The Hiding Place*; *John Bunyan*; *John Hus*; *Hanged on a Twisted Cross*; *Killing Time*; *Long Road Back*; *Love Is Not a Luxury*; *Mama Luka Comes Home*; *One Killer Too Many*; *Pilgrim's Progress*; *Power of Forgiveness*; *Prisoners of Hope*; *Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand*; *Saving Face*; and *Truth Prevails*. Our Torchlighters series has episodes on Perpetua, John Bunyan, William Tyndale,

Eric Liddell, Corrie ten Boom, Richard Wurmbrand, and Adoniram Judson, all of whom were imprisoned for their faith.

WEBSITES

Christian History Institute has maintained the website [Captive Faith](#) for a number of years, featuring testimonies of imprisoned Christians from seven different eras of church history. Some of the excerpts in this issue were adapted from it. Many prisoners featured in *Captive Faith* have web pages devoted to them at other sites, including [Anne Askew](#) and [Toyohiko Kagawa](#).

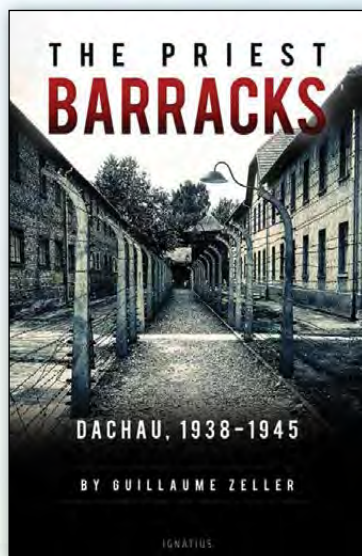
A number of prisoner advocacy organizations maintain historical timelines and information about prisons; you can also find a timeline and pictures at [PrisonHistory.net](#). Access statistics about modern crime and prisons in the United States at the [Bureau of Justice](#) website, and learn about everything having to do with federal prisons at the [Federal Bureau of Prisons](#) website. Similar information for the United Kingdom is found at the [UK Ministry of Justice](#).



The US government does not keep statistics on religion in prisons; one attempt to remedy that omission is a survey of chaplains by the [Pew Research Center](#). Prison chaplain organizations include the [American Correctional Chaplains Association](#), the [Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association](#), and the [International Prison Chaplains Association](#).

Most individual prison ministries mentioned in this issue have websites: the most famous is probably [Prison Fellowship](#). Helen Prejean, the real-life woman behind *Dead Man Walking*, maintains a website at [SisterHelen.org](#). The [Calvin Prison Initiative](#) has a website, and you can read more about the seminary initiative in Angola at the website of [New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary](#). If you're intrigued by the idea of Shakespeare in prison ministry, check out the website of [Shakespeare Behind Bars](#). Finally you may be interested in a Bible curriculum specifically for prisoners at the [Theology of Work Project](#).³¹

POWERFUL NEW BOOKS *from* IGNATIUS PRESS



◆ THE PRIEST BARRACKS *Dachau 1938-1945*—Guillaume Zeller

How many people know that at the Nazi death camp Dachau, clergy permanently occupied three barracks from 1938 to 1945? Some 2,579 priests, monks, and Catholic seminarians from all over Europe were imprisoned there, out of whom 1,034 lost their lives. For eight years, both tragedies and magnificent gestures punctuated the journey of the clergy at Dachau, from the terrifying forced march of “Holy Week,” to the heroic voluntary confinement of priests in the barracks of those dying of typhoid, to the moving clandestine ordination of a young German deacon by a French bishop.

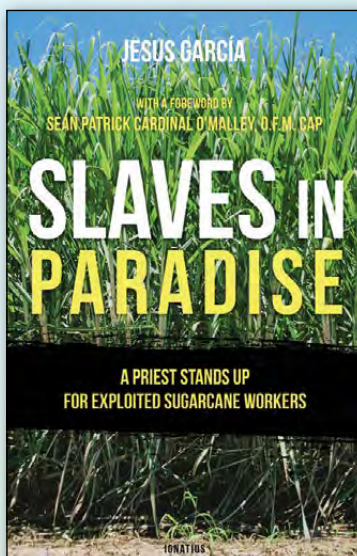
PRB-P . . . 250 pp, Sewn Softcover, \$16.95

“This extraordinary book provides us with a window into both the triumphs and tragedies of the many priests interred in Dachau. I highly recommend it to understand much of the present crisis of secularism in today’s world.”

—Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P.,
Holy Apostles Seminary

“This powerful book reveals the heroic holiness that is proper to the Church in the midst of suffering. It comes at an important time.”

—Fr. Paul Scalia, Author
That Nothing May Be Lost



◆ SLAVES IN PARADISE *A Priest Stands Up for Exploited Sugarcane Workers*—Jesus Garcia

The Dominican Republic is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Caribbean. Yet when missionary priest Fr. Christopher Hartley arrived there in 1997, he discovered another side to this paradise: the deplorable living and working conditions of the people who harvest the country’s sugarcane and the illegal human trafficking that brings them to the plantations as slaves. Inspired by the Gospels and Mother Teresa, Fr. Hartley carried out intense evangelization, applying the social teachings of the Church to fight for the dignity and justice of the sugarcane workers.

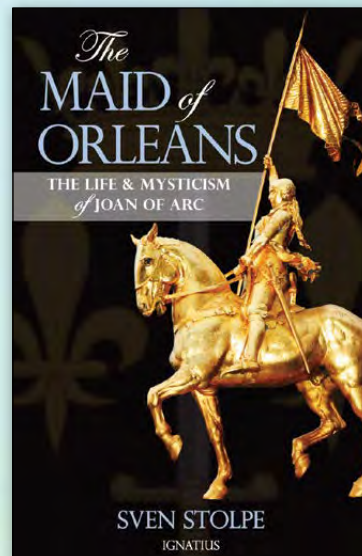
SLP-P . . . 325 pp, 6 x 9 Sewn Softcover, \$18.95

“A favorite son of Mother Teresa, Fr. Hartley shows us the face of Jesus in the people he served. This book, quite simply, should be read by everyone!”

—Fr. Larry Richards, Author, *Be a Man!*

“Fr. Hartley’s mission of love is fueled by his strong prayer life and intimacy with God. I pray this book will inspire us all to a deeper faith in God and love for the poor.”

—Cardinal Seán O’Malley,
Archbishop of Boston



◆ THE MAID OF ORLEANS *The Life and Mysticism of Joan of Arc*—Sven Stolpe

This acclaimed work on the life and mysticism of Joan of Arc is considered by historians as one of the most convincing, well researched and best written accounts of the Maid of Orleans. Stolpe vividly creates the contemporary situation in France during Joan’s time, evaluates the latest research on her life, and arrives at an original and authentic portrait—one that is also a work of literature. Stolpe sees Joan as primarily a mystic, and her supreme achievement and lasting significance not so much in a mission to deliver France, though important, but in her sharing in the Passion of Christ, thus bringing the saint closer to the modern reader.

MO-P . . . 270 pp, Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

“There have been many books about Joan of Arc, but none surpass this study in its recreation of Joan’s milieu, the vividness of its narrative, and its sensitive understanding of the mystery of her life and death.”

—James Hitchcock, Ph. D.
Author, *History of the Catholic Church*



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TRUE STORIES OF HOPE FROM INSIDE PRISON WALLS

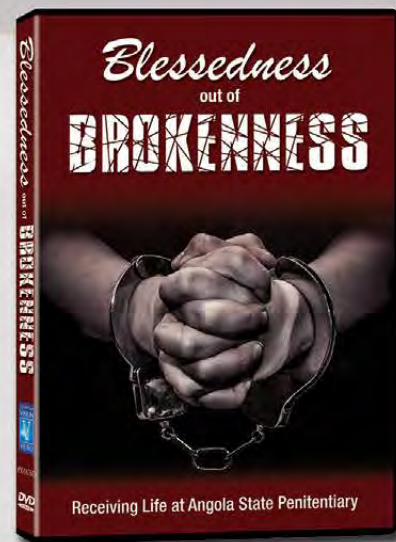
Blessedness out of Brokenness

Louisiana State Penitentiary, often called "Angola," is home to some 5,000 inmates, many of whom are sentenced for life.

Follow along as Ken Curtis, founder of Christian History Institute, visits Angola. As he was reflecting on the Beatitudes in light of his journey with cancer, Ken wanted to learn from people who knew well the brokenness Jesus describes as blessed. This one-hour documentary presents the stories of inmates who bring clarity to Jesus' teaching as they share the blessedness of the Beatitudes in their own lives. Many of these men face life sentences, yet they have found new life and purpose through their faith in Jesus Christ.

Blessedness out of Brokenness demonstrates the power of God to transform the darkest of circumstances into opportunities for mission. 60 minutes.

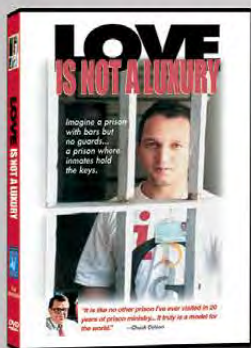
DVD - #501676D, \$9.99



Love Is Not a Luxury

Imagine a prison with bars but no guards...a prison where inmates hold the keys. This Brazilian prison accommodates some of the most notorious inmates; yet peace and good order now prevail. The film, shot by two of the inmates, examines the day-to-day running of the prison and explores the personal development of two prisoners—with respective sentences of 70 and 114 years—who hold substantial responsibility for the harmony and security of the prison. 50 minutes.

DVD - #501149D, \$14.99



Saving Face

Matt Kern was an A student in seventh grade but a year later was stealing cars on the weekends. He eventually landed in prison where, unbeknownst to his parents, he thrived by managing his own business and gambling operation. In solitary confinement he experienced guilt for the first time. This riveting story reveals the details of his crime and time spent in prison, and the providential way in which he received clemency. 80 minutes.

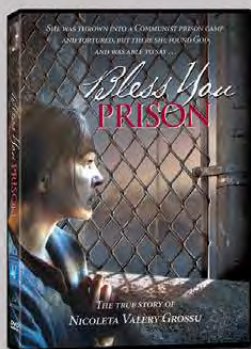
DVD - #501352D, \$9.99



Bless You Prison

This is the true story of Nicoleta Valery Grossu's amazing survival in a Romanian Communist prison camp and how faith in the Lord enabled her to transcend the relentless cruelty. She was thrown in jail without any trial, interrogated night after night, tortured, and separated from other loved ones in prison. She could have betrayed others or she could have died, but she found God in the Communist prison. 86 minutes.

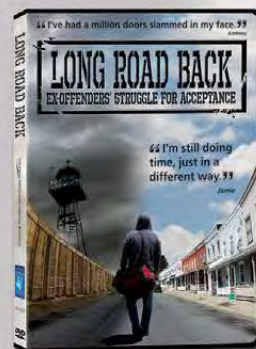
DVD - #4746D, \$9.99



Long Road Back

A prison door clangs shut. The reverberation echoes with immense meaning both for the person locked up and those left on the outside. But the reality is that once offenders have served their terms and leave prison, doors still slam shut. *Long Road Back* seeks to reduce the fear and stigma experienced by those re-entering society after serving terms in prison. 52 minutes.

DVD - #501356D, \$14.99



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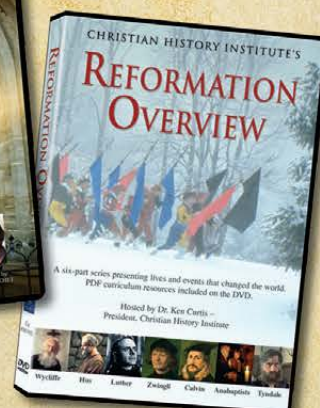
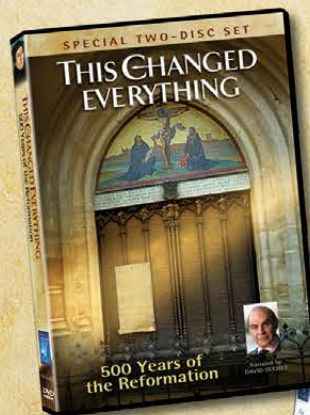
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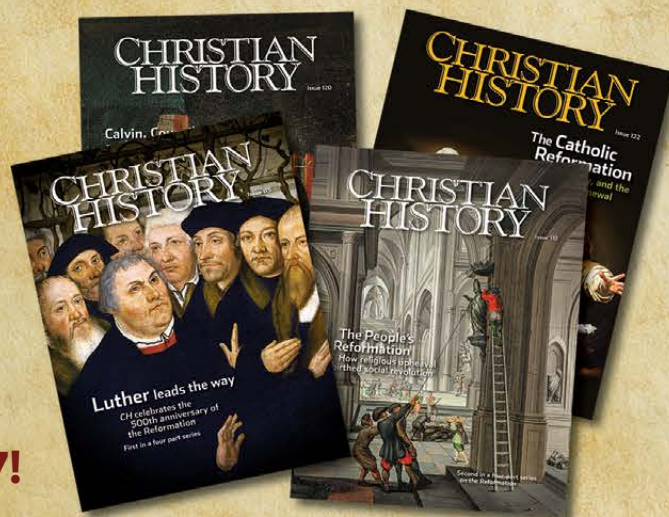
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