

## Citation metadata

Author: Scott D. Seay  
Date: Summer 2003  
From: Journal of Church and State(Vol. 45, Issue 3)  
Publisher: Oxford University Press  
Document Type: Book review  
Length: 745 words

## Main content

Article Preview :

Religion and the Development of the American Penal System. By Andrew Skotnicki. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000. 146 pp. \$57.00.

Histories of American penology always include some discussion of religion because they have to. Colonial criminal law, the penitentiary, and nineteenth-century criminal justice reform all owe their existence to convictions that are fundamentally religious in nature. These histories usually end their discussion of religion around the turn of the twentieth century because thereafter penology became the province of the social sciences. Steadily over the course of the twentieth century, penology was disengaged from, and even grew hostile toward, religious explications of crime and punishment in America.

While most historians treat this "secularization" with indifference, Andrew Skotnicki, O.Carm., argues that this process has caused a serious crisis in our penal system. Indeed, the "aimlessness and cynicism" that characterizes contemporary American penology may be due to the fact that it has lost its emphasis on a "theological understanding of person and society" (p. 3). His study thus intends to show how religious communities historically have helped construct the American penal system by contributing to it "a...

[Access from your library](#)

This is a preview. Get the full text through your school or public library.

## Source Citation

### Source Citation

Seay, Scott D. "Religion and the Development of the American Penal System."*Journal of Church and State*, vol. 45, no. 3, Summer 2003, p. 602+. Accessed 6 Nov. 2020.

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A108792217

## Explore

This is a preview. Get the full text through your school or public library.

[Access from your library](#)

## Footer

- [About](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Accessibility](#)

Religion in the United States is diverse with Christianity being the majority religion, although declining at rapid pace. Various religious faiths have flourished within the United States. Slightly over 50% of Americans report that religion plays a very important role in their lives, a proportion unique among developed countries. Freedom of religion in the United States is guaranteed in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Penal reform was becoming increasingly popular. Religious groups like the Quakers and the Evangelicals

were highly influential in promoting ideas of reform through personal redemption. In 1866, admirers of John Howard founded the Howard Association – which would later be renamed the Howard League for Penal Reform. In the twentieth century the development of the criminal justice system continued. The Church of England Temperance Society and other voluntary societies appointed missionaries to the London Police Courts during the late nineteenth century. From this developed the system of releasing offenders on the condition that they kept in touch with the missionary and accepted guidance. Religion and the development of the American penal system by Andrew Skotnicki; 2 editions; First published in 2000; Subjects: Protestantism, Religious aspects of Imprisonment, Prisons, Religion and social problems, Imprisonment, Religion and justice, History, Religion, Strafvollzug, Protestant churches; Places: United States. March 2002, University Press of America. Hardcover in English. Libraries near you