



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

[Review of] Anthony Bash, Remorse: A Christian Perspective

Citation for published version:

Grumett, D 2021, '[Review of] Anthony Bash, *Remorse: A Christian Perspective*', *Theology*, vol. 124, no. 6, pp. 454-455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X211056801r>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/0040571X211056801r](https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X211056801r)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Theology

Publisher Rights Statement:

The final version of this paper has been published in *Theology*, Vol/Issue, Month/Year by SAGE Publications Ltd, All rights reserved. © David Grumett, year of publication. It is available at: [http:// <Acronym>sagepub.com/](http://<Acronym>sagepub.com/)

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Anthony Bash, *Remorse: A Christian Perspective*, Cascade: Eugene, OR, 2020; 295 pp: 978-1-7252-7234-7, £24 (pbk).

Christians are called not just to ethical living but to a distinctive ethics. Anthony Bash persuasively argues that remorse is fundamental to Christian ethics although frequently overlooked by Christian ethicists.

From the viewpoint of classical ethics, the virtuous person would not act unethically, and if they did the main concern was the inconsistency between their actions and their character rather than the people wronged. A communitarian ethics discouraged apology because this reduced a person's standing in the eyes of their peers. In the Old Testament, in contrast, people were accountable for their misdeeds, which if intentional could not be expiated by sacrifice. The clearest example of a remorseful person there is Saul, on recognizing his error in attempting to kill David (1 Sam. 26.21). David is himself sometimes cited as another, but his recognition that he sinned against the Lord (2 Sam. 12.13, Ps. 51.4), rather than against Bathsheba, Uriah or Joab, falls short of the interpersonal remorse that Bash seeks. Not until the New Testament does classical emotion combine with biblical accountability to produce remorse. Judas displays this on realizing the irreversibility of his betrayal of Jesus (Mt. 27.3), as does Peter, following his ensuing disavowal of Jesus (Mk 14.72), and Paul (1 Cor. 15.9, Eph. 3.8), who remains ashamed of his former persecution of Christians. Probably drawing on this experience, Paul writes of a Corinthian offender feeling remorse (*lype*) and describes the entire community feeling this after hearing his letter read (2 Cor. 2.7, 7.8-11).

In later Christian history, Bash contends, remorse recedes. A penance could expiate a sin, even if performed by a person other than the sinner, who might pay a monastery for prayers or buy indulgences to remit sins and time in purgatory. In any case, whether in Aquinas, German pietism or Scots Presbyterianism, offences were viewed as being against God and the moral order rather than against neighbour. Bash identifies the same tendency in current Roman Catholic and Church of England confessional practices. In the book's second half, he therefore engages secular moral philosophy and psychology, especially where these are concerned with emotion, to try to correct this deficiency. Nevertheless, in a robust chapter on punishment he argues that, in a criminal justice context, remorse should not reduce punishment because this would undermine justice, diminish the deterrent effect of punishment and the impulse for self-reform, and provide an opportunity for manipulation by insincere expressions of remorse. The material in this half of the book, although well researched and presented, may be of less interest to readers in theology and Christian ethics.

Bash makes a strong case for remorse but because this depends on appraisals of consequences it is complicated in practice, as shown by Paul's own vacillation (2 Cor. 7.8). I might feel remorse for an action soon after performing it but recognize later that it was morally neutral or even morally required. People may present themselves as wronged to manipulate others, gain moral power or fend off moral challenge to themselves. For reasons such as these, there may be more in favour of the view that remorse should primarily be a response to wrongs against God than Bash admits.

David Grumett

University of Edinburgh