



# Theology Corner

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## “Is it Wrong to be Emotional?”

In Catholic Theology, we talk a lot about the importance of involving reason in our actions. This is because as human beings made in the image of God (*imago Dei*) it is in our nature as rational animals to have the ability to look at things objectively and universally as opposed to being limited to our subjective and particular situations. It belongs to sensitive animals (e.g., a dog or a cat), to act purely on instinct or emotional responses to something. St. Thomas Aquinas often uses the term “passions” when discussing emotions. I think it is important though, to be careful in not falling to the extreme and say that we must not be emotional, but only rational. Likewise, we cannot be purely emotional without being rational either. Obviously, as human beings, we also have emotions. This is something that we share with the lower animals. Being that God created us with emotions, and everything that God made was good, this means that it is also in our nature to put them to good use! But our use of them is a little different from how a dog would emotionally respond to something. Again, this is because of our rational nature. So the question becomes, “How do we respond to things emotionally, but in a rational way?” We just have to make sure that our reason governs over our passions. In other words, before we have an emotional response, we have to deliberately “think” before we “act.”

As Catholics, then, we can understand that when we are using them reasonably, emotions are good! Contrary to popular belief, reason and our emotions are not at odds with each other, but complement each other. There is nothing unreasonable *per se* about anger, sadness, despair, fear, or even hatred. These are only bad when they are unreasonable responses. For example, we see Christ become angry at those buying and selling in the temple and overturned the tables (Matthew 21:12). We also see throughout various parts in scripture that God “hates” (although God himself aside from Christ’s humanity, does not have emotions. What does this mean? Well, our emotions are a response to things that are good and evil. Hatred is a response to evil as such. This is why we hear things like “hate the sin, not the sinner,” and understand fear to be something beneficial to us when there is a situation that we should be careful with, or even despair when we realize that there is no attainable good to be acquired, so we should use our efforts to do something that is actually doable. On a more positive note, there are “happy” emotions too, in terms of being attracted to, or possessing a good. Things like hope helps us to hope for a good which is not yet possessed, but is attainable. We also take joy in having that which is good, and we love that good. While there are more emotions to cover, I think you get the point. So, returning to the question, “is it wrong to be emotional?” The answer to this is that it would be wrong to be emotional if our emotions are not under the guidance of our reason. But if they are, then we are using them how they were intended, by God as the Author of nature, to be used.