THE LOGIC OF THE HEART: 
ANALYZING THE AFFECTIONS IN EARLY REFORMED ORTHODOXY

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INTRODUCTION

While the study of early modern Reformed anthropology, particularly with respect to Calvin and the imago Dei, has lately become a subject of greater focus,\(^1\) the study of the emotions—or “affections” and “passions” as they were known\(^2\)—has been largely neglected by scholars of early modern Reformed theology. Despite the fact that affections played a “prominent role” in the theological anthropology of many Reformed theologians,\(^3\) including Jonathan Edwards,\(^4\) scholarship on the seventeenth-century background has not advanced much beyond Perry Miller’s general observation that Puritans displayed Aristotelian and Thomistic tendencies.\(^5\) By contrast, there is now enough secondary literature on the history of emotions in the medieval period to provide an initial sketch of major schools of thought, and studies on Aquinas and Thomism have grown to

\(\text{\footnotesize{1 See Jason Van Vliet,} Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and His Context (Göttingen: V&R, 2009), 16–18.}

\(\text{\footnotesize{2 Étienne Chauvin,} Lexicon rationale sive thesaurus philosophicus (Rotterdam: Van der Slaart, 1692), s.vv. “affectus,” “passio ethicè.”}


\(\text{\footnotesize{4 See Brad Walton,} Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections and the Puritan Analysis of True Piety, Spiritual Sensation and Heart Religion (Lewiston: Mellen, 2002); and Paul Lewis,} \text{\footnotesize{“The Springs of Motion”: Jonathan Edwards on Emotions, Character, and Agency,} JRE 22.2 (1994): 275–297.}

the point of observing that early modern Thomism was a variegated and in no way homogenous commentary tradition. Likewise, historians of early modern philosophy, although mostly motivated by the desire to understand so-called canonical philosophers (e.g., Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza), have begun to contextualize these philosophers against the background of Thomist and Protestant traditions.

The relative neglect of the affections by scholars of early modern Reformed theology is understandable given that historical theologians tend to focus on systematic and controversial topics from dogmatic theology where discussion of the affections is largely (though not entirely) absent. Even so, affections were an integral part of Reformed theology, appearing in the law and prayer sections of catechisms, which interpreted the commandments as applying beyond outward actions to the soul’s affections. Thus, while affections did not feature prominently in dogmatic loci, they were important for genres of a practical nature.

The present essay will examine the development of Reformed treatments of the affections in the period of early orthodoxy (ca. 1565–1640), during which time extensive treatments of the affections flourished. I will argue that discussion of the affections during this period grew within the broad framework of the Aristotelian psychology and certain polemical concerns initially established by early Reformed theologians. With the

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