

Pagans and Theologians: An Examination of the Use of Christian Sources in Niels  
Hemmingsen's *De lege naturae*

In his 1562 work *De lege naturae apodictica methodus*, a treatise on the harmony between the law of nature and the Decalogue, the Danish Lutheran humanist, theologian, and university professor Niels Hemmingsen claims in his conclusion to have eschewed all use of theological sources in order to demonstrate what reason can teach man about God and nature's God: *Quod autem nullas ex Theologia sententias in hoc toto tractatu adduxerim: id ideo a me factum est, ut ostenderem, quousque ratio sine voce Prophetica et Apostolica progredi possit* ("As, however, to the fact that I have adduced no opinions from theology in this entire treatise, I did it for the following reason: so that I might show how far reason is able to progress without the prophetic and apostolic word"). Thus his citation of hundreds of excerpts of Greek and Roman literature in the course of the work is not surprising (Hutchinson 2015). It is more surprising to find two quotations from a work Hemmingsen believes to have been written by Justin Martyr, along with a handful from Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, and Gregory of Nazianzus--theologians all.

This paper will examine his use of these authors and will show that it does not render his disavowal of theological sources misleading. Because most of his quotations from Christian sources are found in a section on the characteristics of God, it might be assumed that Hemmingsen had recourse to them because the ancients were no help. But this is not so: for he employs them precisely as further mediators of the classical tradition. It will be further argued that Hemmingsen, by using Christian authors in precisely this way, adds a subtle and unflagged reminder to his readers that he, far from being unique or idiosyncratic, stands in a long tradition of Christian appropriation of the classical tradition. Just as there is, for Hemmingsen, a harmony

between the natural law and the Decalogue, so there is a broader harmony (though not without limitation) between the classical tradition and the Christian faith. Thus his particular position on the question of law can be read as a synecdoche for his view of how the best of ancient thought coheres with Christian theology more generally.

#### Bibliography

Hutchinson, E.J. "Nature and the Wound of Nature: A Pauline View of the Testimony of the Ancients in Niels Hemmingsen's *De Lege Naturae Apodictica Methodus* (1562)." In *Lutheranism and the Classics III: Lutherans Read History*. Edited by J. Kellerman, J. Hayes, and E.J. Hutchinson. Forthcoming, 2015.