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Meletius: Sive de iis quae inter christianos conveniunt Epistola

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Whether happily or unhappily, Kavanagh's book represents one more step in the erosion of our traditional views regarding confirmation.

Donald Nevile
Peace Lutheran Church

Meletius, sive De iis quae inter Christianos conveniunt Epistola

Hugo Grotius

Critical edition with translation, commentary and introduction
by Guillaume H.M. Posthumus Meyjes

Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988

xx + 191 pp. U.S. \$42.50

It is hardly a common occurrence when a long-lost work by a famous author is recovered and presented to the scholarly world. The publication of the *Meletius* by Hugo Grotius is just such an event. The existence of the work had been known to modern scholarship since the publication in 1928 of the first volume of Grotius correspondence, but the *Meletius* had never been published and the manuscript was presumed lost. Posthumus Meyjes' introduction recounts not only the origin and purpose of the work but also intrigues the reader with the scholarly detective story of the recovery and identification of the work, which had been preserved under its original title, but without attribution to any author, in a set of Remonstrant documents deposited in the Amsterdam University Library toward the end of the nineteenth century.

The *Meletius*, written at the time of the Remonstrance and before the Synod of Dort, is an irenic document, named after the Greek patriarch, Meletius Pegas (1541-1601), himself an irenicist devoted to the reconciliation of Christians. The work stands as an important document in the life of Grotius and as a valuable introduction to the thought of this scholarly figure, respected by his century for his work on jurisprudence and for his learned annotations on the Greek New Testament, remembered still for his theory of the atonement and for his apologetic treatise *On the Truth of the Christian Religion*.

In many ways, the unpublished *Meletius* can be regarded as a prologue or preparation for the later apologetic. Posthumus Meyjes argues convincingly that Grotius assumed the capacity of human reason for divine truth and, therefore, the possibility of rational agreement concerning the content and substance of the Christian religion. In order to lead his readers toward this conclusion, Grotius discusses first the existence, character, and purpose

of religion and then, echoing the Apologists of the second century, the superiority of Christianity. In its vision of the highest good of the human race, Grotius argues, Christianity preserves the truths known to natural religion, to ancient philosophy and to ancient Israel, while at the same time drawing them together into a higher form. Throughout the work, the reader is impressed by Grotius' grasp not only of the materials of the Christian religion but of classical literature and philosophy as well—and by Grotius' obvious assumption that Christianity cannot be discussed apart from the values and insights that it shared with and in many cases gained from classical antiquity.

Like the Arminian and, indeed, like the Lutheran theologians of his day, Grotius argues that Christianity, as a religion, is essentially practical: it is a form of knowing that tends toward a goal. This argument, however, leads him beyond the polemics of his day to the conclusion that the righteous or ethical life is the center of Christian teaching and not the much-controverted dogmas of then-contemporary debate. This is not to say that Grotius viewed Christianity as lacking doctrine: he identified fundamental doctrinal issues, *decreta*, such as the essence and attributes of God, God's relation to the created order, human nature as created in the image of God, and human nature as now troubled by evil. All of these *decreta* function as the grounds for ethical *officia*: the issue, for Grotius, is to direct his readers toward the fundamental intention of the Christian religion, living rightly in accord with God's will, not disputing fine points of dogma. He concludes his work with a plea for tolerance.

The importance of this volume lies not only in the new and clearer perspective that the *Meletius* itself gives on the life and work of an important thinker of the seventeenth century, but also in the major contribution made by its editor to our understanding of the intellectual life of the Netherlands in Grotius' time. The introduction and commentary are models of scholarship that offer insight into the workings of theology, theological politics, classical study and scholarship in the seventeenth century.

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Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. I, Prolegomena to Theology

Richard A. Muller
Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987
365 pp. \$12.95 U.S.

This volume is the first installment of a planned trilogy analysing the theology of post-Reformation Reformed Scholasticism. The present work