

REVIEWS / CRITIQUES

Luka Ilić, *Teološka biografija Matije Vlačića Ilirika: proces radikalizacije u Flaciusovoj misli*,

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The book *Teološka biografija Matije Vlačića Ilirika: proces radikalizacije u Flaciusovoj misli* written by Luka Ilić is a revised translation of his book *Theologian of Sin and Grace: The Process of Radicalization in the Theology of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* published in the English language in 2014. The aim of this book is, as the author himself says, to contribute to a better understanding of Flacius’s theology. On the other hand, this book also corrects some of the common misconceptions that continue to appear in the secondary literature on Flacius.

This book, published in 2021 by the Faculty of Theology “Matija Vlačić Ilirik” in Zagreb, contains four chapters: “Formativne godine: predradikalizacijska faza, 1536. — 1548.” (“Formative Years: The Pre-Radicalization Phase, 1536 — 1548”), “Prva faza:

oblikovanje Vlačićeve teologije kroz sporove, 1548. — 1557.” (“Phase One: The Shaping of Flacius’s Theology Through Controversy, 1548 — 1557”), “Druga faza: Vlačić u crkvenom i političkom ustroju ernestinske Saske, 1557. — 1562.” (“Phase Two: Flacius Within the Ecclesiastical and Political Establishment in Ernestine Saxony, 1557 — 1562”), and, finally, “Treća faza: Vlačićevi pokušaji rehabilitacije i obrane, 1562. — 1575.” (“Phase Three: Flacius’s Attempts at Rehabilitation and Vindication, 1562 — 1575”). The book also contains Introduction, Preface to the Croatian Edition, List of Figures, Abbreviations, Acknowledgements, Conclusion, Bibliography (Manuscripts, Primary sources, Secondary Literature, Website), Index (Index of Names, Index of Places) and Author’s Biography.

The author begins with the thesis that there are three phases of Flacius’s “radicalization”. By “radicalization” the author means not only Flacius’s approach to theological issues, but also Flacius’s fight against the authorities, ecclesiastical as well as secular. The first chapter deals with the pre-radicalization phase, i.e., Flacius’s formative years from 1536 until 1548. Matthias Flacius was born as Matija Vlačić

in the Istrian town of Labin in 1520, into a catholic family. At that time, Labin was under the Venetian government. Flacius most likely received his first education in Labin, and then continued his schooling in Venice, where he arrived in 1536. His Venetian teacher was Giovanni Battista Egnazio. After Venice he moved to Augsburg, where he arrived in 1539. By recommendation of Lycostenes, Flacius moved from Augsburg to Basel for educational reasons: he enrolled in the University of Basel in 1539. From Basel he moved to Tübingen, where he lived in the house of his fellow countryman Matija Grbac. At the time Grbac was professor of Greek at the University of Tübingen. In Tübingen, Grbac introduced Flacius to many prominent personalities, such as Leonharth Fuchs, Jakob Schegk and Ludwig Grepmp von Freudenstein. After Tübingen Flacius lived in Wittenberg. This change was important for him because Wittenberg was one of the centres of Protestantism at the time. In Wittenberg, he experienced a mental crisis, the consequence of which was strengthening of his faith and completion of his studies. He also received his first teaching position at the University. It is also the place where Flacius met Martin Luther. Flacius recognized Luther as a soulmate: a person full of insecurities and doubts. In these years, he also started to deal seriously with the problem of original sin. In contrast to the relationship with Luther, Flacius had a complex relationship with Philipp Melanchthon. In the beginning, they were friends and colleagues, but later their paths part following some major differences on theological questions (e.g., human salvation and freedom). In this period, Flacius published his

first theological work *De vocabulo fidei* (*About the Word "Faith"*). At that time, he was twenty-nine years old.

The first radicalization phase covers the period 1548–1557. In 1549 he moved to Magdeburg, where he met like-minded theologians. *The Magdeburg years were the most formative for his theological views, but also for his personal character.* Flacius's first step toward a sterner religious radicalization was his critique of those who participated in Augsburg Interim of 1548. He became well known to a wider audience as a Lutheran theologian. At the time, Flacius was also engaged in the so-called Majoristic Controversy over the role of good deeds in salvation. In 1550s, in the so-called *Eucharistic controversy over the meaning of the Lord's Final Supper*, Flacius took the side of Joachim Westphal against Jean Calvin. In the beginning of 1551, Flacius and his family moved temporarily to Köthen. During the time he was staying in Köthen, he started a dispute with the German theologian Andreas Osiander about the nature of God's justification. He also got involved in a written dispute with Caspar Schwenckfeld over interpreting Scripture. In Magdeburg, he started to work on two books: *Catalogus testium veritatis* (*The Catalogue of the Witnesses of the Truth*) and *Ecclesiastica Historia* (*History of the Church*). *Catalogus testium veritatis* was published in Basel in 1556. This book contains short biographies and stories that describe the suffering of the people who tried to keep the faith according to the teachings of the New Testament. The first three volumes of *Historia Ecclesiastica* also known as *Centuriae Magdeburgenses* were published in Basel in 1559.

The second radicalization phase lasted from 1557 until 1562. Flacius arrived in Jena in 1557. He worked there as professor at the newly established University. From the beginning, there were some theological disagreements between Flacius and his new colleagues. Overall, the Jena period was the least productive time of his career, regarding his literary output. He was engaged in politics and ecclesiastical affairs and did not have enough time to devote himself to writing. In this period, his religious radicalization reached its peak. He participated in the Religious Colloquy of Worms in autumn 1557. In March 1558, in Frankfurt, the monarchs signed the so-called Rezess. However, Flacius criticized it by calling it “a Samaritan Interim”. In 1559, he published a book called *Konfutationsbuch*, in which he most clearly stated his program and teachings, and most importantly, his stand on the doctrine of free will. In 1560, in Weimar, the dispute about free will continued. Flacius, together with Simon Musaeus, listed their theses. This disputation ended that same year. Not long afterwards, he started a new disagreement in Jena: Balthasar Winter refused to allow Professor Christoph Dürfeld to take part in Communion because of his apparently pagan thesis that theology could be learned from Seneca. In 1561, Duke Johann Friedrich II realized that it was very difficult to control the theologians from Jena. So, the Consistory Order was founded. The aim of the Order was to suppress the power of Flacius and his three colleagues. Flacius was released from his positions at the University of Jena in 1561.

The third radicalization period began in 1562 and ended in 1575. From

1562 until 1566, he lived with his family in Regensburg. Flacius could stay in Regensburg under one condition: he was not allowed to publish anything in the city. However, he planned to establish a new academic institution in Regensburg with the goal to provide ministry training in Slavic languages. This was a way for Lutheranism to be spread in Slavic countries as well, but the project never came to life. Flacius wanted to establish one similar academy in Klagenfurt, where a substantial Slavic minority lived. He also planned to move the Slavic printing house from Urach to Regensburg. He wanted to make Regensburg the intellectual centre of Slavic reformation. During his stay in Regensburg, Flacius finished his work *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (*Key to Sacred Scripture*). This work still today has a reputation of “the first important work of hermeneutics” (Hans-Georg Gadamer). His Regensburg period was academically very fruitful but personally it was very hard. His wife died, and he had to take care of his big family. During the same period, his oldest daughter died, and he himself was also very sick. However, he continued to write. Flacius wrote a short essay against the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 called *Wiederlegung eines kleinen Deuchen Calvinischen Catechismi* (*Refutation of a Small German Calvinist Catechism*). In this period, he was also involved in the so-called Crypto-Calvinistic Controversy. The dispute began in 1562, when Joachim Heller from Nürnberg accused two evangelical preachers of being crypto-Calvinists. *It was a dispute concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper again. Another crypto-Calvinistic dispute took place in Danzig: the two pastors started a public*

debate on the Lord's Supper in 1561. The topic of the discussion were the leftovers of the consecrated bread and wine. In year 1562, the dispute about the Lord's Supper also took place in Königsberg. It was probably Benedict Morgenstern who contacted Flacius seeking his advice in the dispute. As an answer, Flacius dedicated his book on the Eucharist to the mayor Johann Brandes, the city, and the evangelical church of Danzig.

In 1566, Flacius was invited to Antwerp, where he stayed from October 1566 until March 1567. There he became an advisor to the Lutheran movement in ecclesiastical affairs. In Antwerp, Flacius wrote the preface to *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, that was published in Basel in March 1567. From March 1567 until November 1567, he lived in Frankfurt, where he finished the second part of *Clavis*. This part he signed with the name *Albonese*. The next stop in his wandering life was Strasbourg, where he arrived in November 1567. Once again, he attempted to explain his teaching on original sin. So, he published the book *Defensio doctrinae de originali iustitia, aut peccato* (*Sound Doctrine Concerning Original Righteousness and Unrighteousness, or Sin*). His last important work was *Glossa compendiaris*, which was published in Basel in 1570. *Glossa* was the first complete Protestant commentary on the New Testament. In this work he applied his own hermeneutical principles. Furthermore, *Glossa* presents the beginning of scientific biblical criticism. Toward the end of his life, Flacius wrote a catechism for the youth, with the idea that it would be used along Luther's *Small Catechism*. Matthias Flacius died on March

11th, 1575, in Frankfurt am Main. The place of his burial is unknown.

The book *Teološka biografija Matije Vlačića Ilirika: proces radikalizacije u Flaciusovoj misli*, written by Luka Ilić, indeed gives a new perspective on the life and work of the great Croatian theologian and philosopher Matija Vlačić Ilirik. The peculiarity of this book is that it combines Flacius's private life with his academic and religious endeavours. It also gives an overview of the historical events of the time in which Flacius lived and explains the complicated relationships between the protagonists of the Reformation. Luka Ilić has an original approach to Flacius's life and work: by dividing Flacius's life into three periods of his religious radicalization, Ilić gives a complete and more contextualized picture by following in parallel many turmoils of Flacius's private life as well as numberless controversies of his academic career. As I mentioned in the beginning, there are some common misconceptions that this book aims at correcting. The main fallacy that Ilić breaks down is the idea that Flacius was from the beginning in a quarrel with Martin Luther's associate Philipp Melancthon. As the author shows, they were initially friends. This book could also serve as a starting point for new research on Flacius's theology. The book is written in a very nice and not pretentious style, which makes it accessible to a wider audience, i.e., not only students but also anyone interested in the history of Protestantism. Praise goes to the translator Marina Schumann, who did an excellent job. This book has considerably enriched the Croatian scientific community.

Ivana Skuhala Karasman
