

Ivan Kordić

Reason, Faith and Lack of Knowledge: Matthias Flacius Illyricus and the World of Reformation (*Razum vjera i neznanje. Matija Vlačić Ilirik i svijet reformacije*)

Zagreb, Naklada Jurčić, 2007, pp 287.

Lately, more and more is being researched and written about the most known reformer, Matthias Flacius. This is especially important for the younger generations of Croatian theologians, but also for intellectuals in general, because they are then introduced to one of the most imposing figures of European spiritual, as well as intellectual history, of which they can be rightfully proud and in which they can search for inspiration. For a certain time, the Croat Flacius was a leader of one of the most influential movements in European, or even in world history. Many agree that it was his uncompromising attitude, accompanied by the great influence he had because of his extraordinary scholarship among many Lutherans (and not only them), which was crucial for the survival of the Reformation in Germany after Luther's death (1546). Because of his versatility, scholarship and exceptionally fruitful religious and scientific work, his life and work represent a worthy research topic for scientists of different profiles.

Among the recently completed research on Flacius, a prominent place belongs to the book by Ivan Kordić, *Reason, Faith and Lack of Knowledge: Matthias Flacius Illyricus and the World of Reformation*. The book was printed in 2007, and it can be said that it represents a natural order of research and writing about Flacius. Ivan Kordić began his studies in Sarajevo and finished in Freiburg, Germany, where he attained a Master's and a Doctoral degree in philosophy (his thesis was on Flacius' hermeneutics). Upon his return to Croatia in 1992, he began working at the Institute of Philosophy in Zagreb as a scientific adviser. He has lectured on philosophy of religion at the College of Philosophy (Filozofski fakultet) in Zadar, at the Croatian Studies Department (Hrvatski studiji) of the University of Zagreb, at the University of Zagreb's Philosophical College of the Society of Jesus, as well as at College of Philosophical-humanistic Sciences at the University of Mostar. Besides lecturing at colleges and elsewhere, and writing articles for scientific magazines and almanacs, Kordić has published two books about Flacius: *The Hermeneutics of Matthias Flacius Illyricus* (Zagreb, 1992; doctoral dissertation, originally written in German) and *Tradition and the Truth: Aurelius Augustine – Flacius' Witness for the Truth?* (Zagreb, 2002). By this data, it can be seen that this is a very competent author whose opinion on Flacius and his work should be given fair attention.

The book originated as a result of the author's extensive research of Flacius' works on the original Latin language (*Catalogus testium veritatis, Clavis Scripturae*

sacrae, De Materiis, Disputatio, Gnothi seauton, Paralipomena dialectices, just to mention the shortened titles of some of the most significant works). Its purpose is to deepen the understanding of Flacius' comprehension (interrelation) of philosophy and theology (which, according to Flacius, should be primarily subservient to a correct understanding of the Bible), as well as deliberation of Flacius' comprehension of humans in the context of the biblical-exegetical, theological and philosophical din of his time. In order to remain fully faithful to Flacius' basic hermeneutic principle, that the text and context are the best presupposition for understanding the matter being discussed, the author quotes numerous and ample quotations from Flacius' writings in his translation, thus giving Flacius an opportunity to "speak for himself." As a basic thesis (revealed in the title) of the book, in his *Introduction*, the author asserts the following: "By reason man can explore the world that surrounds him, he can apprehend and comprehend many things by it, but it is the faith that illuminates even the abysses of the reason and the roads of the ignorance in which it is immersed."

The book consists of five major parts (1. Introduction, 2. Philosophy and Theology, 3. Understanding of the Scripture, 4. Anthropology, 5. The World of the Reformation and its responses), along with a list of primary and secondary literature, as well as a note about the author at the end of the book. In the *Introduction*, the author speaks of the relevance and actuality of dealing with Flacius, and he views his research in the context of the former and actual attempts in that course (in Croatia), placing himself in the "new time spam" that began in the 1990's, when, unlike the "photographical establishments and descriptions of the area of his work" up to that time, a research of Flacius' work on a philosophic and theological level began. In the second part of the book, the author deals with Flacius' understanding of (interrelation between) philosophy and theology, where he emphasizes that Flacius emphatically insisted on differentiating between competence and the appliance of certain sciences and virtues. Flacius valued philosophy, but considered its area limited by research of the material and the formal pattern (i.e. temporal world), while he attributed the competence of dealing with the active and finished pattern, exclusively to theology (i.e. God and the supernatural world). In the third part of the book, the author emphasizes that Flacius endeavored to show that understanding the Bible is based on general interpretation principles and rules for understanding any given text, by whose literal application a universally valid understanding can be achieved, while it should be always kept in mind that Christ is the purpose and the meaning, that is, the "scopus" (Engl. scope) of the Scripture. In the fourth part of the book, the author presents Flacius' theological anthropology, the basic stance of which can be best rendered by Flacius' statement: "The original sin is a man's substance." Namely, Flacius considered that the man, who in the beginning

was in the image of God (that is, a child of God), was substantially so distorted by the original sin, that he became an image of the devil (that is, a child of the devil), and that he needs to be born again (out of nothing) in Christ, in order for God's image to be restored in him. Here also Flacius asserts that philosophy (as well as the theology that alienated from the Bible) cannot understand the core of sin, and consequently cannot perceive the substantiality of evil in man. In respect to the relatively frequent objection that Flacius' anthropology is marked by Manicheanism, Kordić decidedly rejects the bases of such assertions. "What he is really discussing is the man God has created, and not of some new creation in a manichean-dualistic sense of the two principles. Consequently, he didn't make the devil as the creator of a new substance, but the corruptor of the good one." The final, fifth, part of the book functions as a conclusion (that does not explicitly exist) and in it the author encompasses all that was previously written "that Christ as the Savior is the center and the key to Flacius' hermeneutic," and that, according to Flacius, "all endeavors toward the correct understanding of the Holy Scripture should not be focused only on learning, but first of all on practicing in life" (pp. 276).

To the author's knowledge, a review of this book has not yet appeared in any Croatian scientific magazines, showing that the Croatian intellectual public is still closed to themes that are characterized by Protestantism. This is unfortunate. Still, Ivan Dugandžić, a prominent Croatian Roman Catholic theologian and expert on the Bible as well as one of the reviewers of this book, lavishes commendations on Kordić's work. In his comment on the cover of the book, he commends the broadness of the subject of Kordić's research, his extensive and diligent study of Flacius' original writings in Latin, the numerous citation of Flacius' quotations in the text, as well as the quality of his translation of the same into Croatian. He closes his comment by the words: "This is not only another book on Matthias Flacius Illyricus, but a book that will strongly enhance the knowledge about his thought and the role he played in his time, as well as the significance of that thought for our time."

This is a scientific work that, because of its professional terminology, the subject of the research and the approach, is not intended for a broad reading audience, but for students and experts in the areas of philosophy, theology and related sciences.

It is obvious that the author of the book is firstly a philosopher, and only after that a theologian (at least in the approach to this book), so it can be assumed that the representation of the reading audience will follow that logic.

This is a high quality work of writing. The only objections that might be addressed are that it sometime gives the impression that the author repeats things said before, and that in using the direct speech (quotations), he fails to utilize all

the advantages of that language tool. Namely, occasionally in the “announcement” of certain quotations (therefore, in the unquoted part of the sentence with direct speech) one can read almost everything that is cited in the quotation. Besides these objections, the author can be commended, along with the book reviewer, Ivan Dugandžić, for a work well done: on account of the broadness of the subject that has been qualitatively encompassed by this book, for the frequent use of Flacius’ quotations by which the reader attains a chance to communicate (in a way) directly with him, as well as hear the thought of Flacius. Particularly valuable in this work is the author’s preference for and accent on primary sources, as well as the balanced and highly informative use of relevant secondary literature. The author comes to his conclusions in a meaningful, logical and argumentative way, assuring his reader of his understanding of the matters he is writing about.

In conclusion, this book represents a valuable contribution to the study of Flacius’ work and a real raising of the standard for the study of this leading Croatian figure in the reformation provenance on a higher level, a level that requires knowledge of the language he used for writing, as well as a professional sharpness in understanding and deliberating over the many complex philosophical and theological concepts, ideas and strata in which Flacius’ thought abounds. Congratulations to the author, and, in anticipation of similar future works, we deeply recommend this book to all those who want to enhance their knowledge of Flacius, or philosophy and theology in a general sense.

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Translated by *Ljubinka Jambreč*