Matthias Flacius’ Theology within
the Sixteenth-Century Polemics

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Matthias Flacius Illyricus never published a systematic account of his
thology or loci as such, and for his understanding of Christian dogmas we
must turn to the many disputations and controversies in which he was
involved during his life spent mostly in Germany. The prevalent theme in
his whole theological corpus is that of evil and the human incapability to do
good without the aid of the grace of God.

As a young man, who left his homeland and the shores of the warm
Adriatic Sea, he found himself in gray and rainy Wittenberg, where he
experienced a great spiritual crisis. It was during his school years in this
Lutheran bastion that his inner formation took place. Flacius’ deep struggle
with sin, which tormented him and caused him depression and even
thoughts of suicide, influenced his way of looking at anthropology. He saw
that the real problem of original sin is connected to man’s personal
relationship with God. August Twesten, follower and successor of Friedrich
Schleiermacher in Berlin, called this experience the key to understanding
Vlačić’s life.\footnote{\textsuperscript{1}} After he received comfort from Luther he felt delivered and
renewed, but throughout the rest of his theological career he kept returning
to this theme, reformulating his own understanding of the doctrine of sin.

Upon finishing his education, Flacius received an academic appointment
as a professor of Hebrew and started settling down in Wittenberg.
However, his quiet family life was disturbed in the spring of 1547, when the
Protestant army lost the battle of Mühlberg and as a result his city
capitulated to the Catholics. Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), who was the
new leader of the Lutheran movement, wanted to spare the country of
further bloodshed and agreed with the emperor that from now on
Evangelicals in Germany would acknowledge the authority of the Pope and
his bishops. He agreed to the laws of the Holy Roman Empire, the
Augsburg and Leipzig Interims, which stated that some Roman practices
and ceremonies will be reintroduced within the Lutheran church. Seeing
the issues that Catholics demanded as \textit{adiaphora} or non-essentials,
Melanchthon was willing to go along making those concessions in order to
satisfy Emperor Charles V. In a letter from December 18, 1548 to one of his
friends in Weimar concerning the Leipzig Interim, Melanchthon stated:
“That we may retain things essential, we are not rigid in regard to things
non-essential, especially since those rites have to a great extent remained in the churches of these parts... We know that much is said against these concessions; but the desolation of the churches, such as it is occurring in Swabia, would be worse.

Flacius and his close friend Nikolaus Gallus (1515-70) strongly disagreed with their beloved teacher Philipp and started writing against the Interims advising preachers not to accept compliances with the Papists. Flacius tried a number of times to convince Melanchthon about his own belief that giving up any part of the truth would have dire consequences for the church, but he did not succeed. Unwillingly, for the first time in his life, Flacius was entered into opposition and thus started the adiaphoristic controversy. In April 1549, Flacius left Wittenberg resigning from his professorship and moved to Magdeburg, which was a free city. There he joined a group of people led by the mature Bishop Nikolaus von Amsdorf of Naumberg (1483-1565), who was calling for resistance to the Interim Law.

In Magdeburg, Flacius began his propaganda publishing tracts, booklets and pamphlets trying to influence the public to oppose the changes that secular authorities were demanding. He strongly advocated the separation of church and state because government was trying to control and, in his opinion, destroy true religion. Without a strong leader as Luther, the church was in danger of making too many compromises and Flacius thought that once a little bit is given to the adversaries, afterwards they will want more. In 1550 Flacius participated with the pastors of Magdeburg in drafting a confession that contained a doctrine of resistance to the superior magistrates. Lowell Zuck states that “The Magdeburg Confession thus was the first formal assertion of a theory of rightful resistance issued by orthodox Protestants,” even though Martin Bucer (1491-1551) had developed this theory in 1530.

It was not only that a change of ceremonies in the Lutheran churches was required by the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims, but there were also very specific theological departures from Luther’s teaching that Flacius saw as the core issue. “Flacius insisted that the controversy was not just over wearing a white surplice, but was doctrinal. Confirmation, he claimed, had been made a means of grace. By the mention of satisfaction in the doctrine of repentance, he said, faith had been ignored. He held that the reintroduction of extreme unction would tempt men to try to perform apostolic miracles. He called for a distinction between Mass and Communion and argued that to have a Corpus Christi celebration is to agree to transubstantiation.” Probably the most disturbing point in the whole Interim for Flacius was the watering down of the bondage of the human will in the process of salvation and the “Pelagian” teaching regarding original sin. Prior to the adiaphoristic debate, some quarter of a century before, Luther had disputed in print with the Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam the topic of the freedom of the will. Since the young Croatian theologian saw his task in defending the truth, which he learned from Luther, for whom “his concept of the bondage of the will was a critical
point of orientation for the whole of his teaching,” he felt that his responsibility was to defend this emphasis. Because of this, he and colleagues in Magdeburg were named Gnesio-Lutherans (from the Greek Ὀνησίος, which means true), a term which was used to describe orthodox followers of Luther. According to Keller, Flacius became the intellectual leader of the group and therefore the nickname Flacianer started being used to describe theologians and pastors who were in the first place opposing Philippists, the followers of the Saxon humanist, Melanchthon.

The Majorist Controversy

One of the signers of the Leipzig Interim of December 1548 was the preacher and professor George Major (1502-74). As public disapproval arose within Protestant Germany concerning the Interim, Major began publishing sermons and writing letters trying “to reassure people that nothing had changed in Wittenberg’s teaching. Convinced that simply attacking Rome and attesting to the purity of one’s own teaching would not suffice, Major also began a systematic attack on Wittenberg’s opponents, especially Matthias Flacius Illyricus.” Wengert corrects a view held by some Reformation scholars that the beginning of the controversy was a publication by Nicholas von Amsdorf in 1551. Wengert states that the start of the long-drawn debate was Major’s personal attack upon Flacius in his work Auslegung des Glaubens published already in 1550. Major disliked Flacius because he was a foreigner and did not possess any ecclesiastical office.

The central issue in the scandalous controversy for Wittenberg, to which Major gave his name, was about the necessity of good works in salvation. In his desire to defend himself for his actions and to prove that he was teaching pure doctrine, Major went beyond Luther’s stand in assigning to the human will the possibility to apply itself to the grace of God. After his dismissal from the position of superintendency in Eisleben by Count Albrecht, Major published another defense in 1552, where he stated: “This I confess: I have previously taught and still teach and want to teach my whole life, that good works are necessary for salvation; and I say openly and with clear and plain words, that no one will be saved through evil works, and no one will be saved without good works. Therefore it is impossible for a man to be saved without good works.”

Major’s emphasis was on Christian good deeds, which he believed must be done out of obedience to God, and which played a role in salvation. Flacius felt that Major was departing from Luther’s teaching and he wrote a book entitling it Wider den Evangelisten des heiligen Chorroks D. Geitz Maior (Against the Evangelist of the Holy Gown, Dr. Miserly Major). Even though Flacius was not a preacher himself, he clearly saw how teaching that good works are needed and in themselves are a cause of salvation, will influence people listening to the sermons in the pews. He thundered: “If
therefore good works are necessary to salvation, and if it is impossible for any one to be saved without them, then tell us, Dr. Major, how a man be saved who all his life till his last breath has led a sinful life, but now, when about to die, desires to apprehend Christ?"\textsuperscript{12}

In the heat of the controversy, Melanchthon distanced himself from Major's theology and refused him permission to publish further in Wittenberg. However, Justus Menius (1499-1558) joined in defending Major's view and found a publisher in Leipzig, so the debate went on with more and more people embroiled in it. A few years later Flacius tried to reconcile with Melanchthon over the adiaphoristic and majoristic battles, but was apparently dumb-founded by Melanchthon's refusal. He wrote in a personal letter to Hubert Languet (1519-82), a Huguenot scholar: "What in the world are we trying to do, or in what does he [Melanchthon] resist us, if not in the condemnation of adiaphorism and of Majorism?"\textsuperscript{13}

While these soteriological polemics were still going on, Flacius began his involvement in another theological quarrel concerning the doctrine of justification by faith. It was against a man he knew and respected that he used his pen this time, namely the Nürnberg reformer Andreas Osiander (1498-1553).

**The Osiandrist Controversy**

After the Augsburg Interim took its effect in Bavaria, Osiander left Nürnberg and went to the northern town of Königsberg, where Duke Albrecht of Prussia (1490-1568) offered him the chair in theology at the newly founded university. At his inaugural disputation in 1549 he espoused his views concerning justification and grace, which got him into trouble with both Lutherans and Calvinists alike.\textsuperscript{14} Apparently Osiander disagreed with Luther's concept of forensic justification, where the sinner is pronounced righteous by a just God, but his position had never appeared in print before. It was only when he was given a professorship in theology that he mustered the courage to publicly announce his views. It is believed that he even said: "The lion is dead, now I have to do only with foxes and hares."\textsuperscript{15} However, he misjudged the strength of his opponents. Osiander thought that Gnesio-Lutherans and particularly Flacius would come over to his side because they were also resisting the Philippists and the Interim. Duke Albrecht counted on support from Flacius, too, and made him an offer to come to Prussia and become Bishop of Samland.\textsuperscript{16} Even though the position and security were certainly appealing to Flacius and his ever growing family, he chose freedom to state what he believed, and therefore he wrote against his former friend Osiander.

Flacius' first publication in this controversy came out in March 1552 and it was dedicated to Count Albrecht under the title *Refutation of the well-known Osiander over the justification of the poor sinner through the essential righteousness of the high majesty of God*.\textsuperscript{17} In it he attacked
Osiander’s teaching, namely that justification comes to man by God’s indwelling or infusion instead of imputation, as Lutherans held. Osiander wrote: “Since we are in Christ through faith and he is in us, we also became the righteousness of God in him, just as he became sin for us [2 Cor. 5:21]. That is, he showered us and filled us with his divine righteousness, as we showered him with our sins, so that God himself and all the angels see only righteousness in us on account of the highest, eternal, and infinite righteousness of Christ, which is His Godhead itself dwelling in us.”

He goes on to say, “By the fulfillment of the law and by his suffering and death, Christ merited and acquired from God, his heavenly Father, this great and exalted grace: he has not only forgiven our sin and taken the unbearable burden of the law away from us, but also wishes to justify us through faith in Christ, to infuse justification or righteousness, and, through the working of His Holy Spirit and the death of Christ into which we are incorporated by Baptism, to kill, wipe out, and entirely exterminate sin that, though already forgiven, still dwells in our flesh and clings to us.”

It was obvious to Flacius that Osiander misunderstood what righteousness meant according to Luther, so he began his Refutation with a clear definition of the term: “Our righteousness... is the fulfillment of God’s law, which not we, but Christ, true God and true man, accomplished surpassingly and overwhelmingly through his absolute obedience, both by doing that which the law required of us to do, and suffering that which we because of our sins should have suffered, all of this [what Christ did] is given and accredited to us by God through faith.”

During the following years Flacius wrote somewhere between fifteen to twenty-five works against Osiander, joining together with Joachim Mörlin (1514-71), Melanchthon, Gallus, Amsdorf, John Calvin (1509-64), and a host of other authors against him. In fact, apart from some theologians in Prussia and Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) in Swabia, almost no one else sided with Osiander’s Christology.

The Schwenckfeldian Controversy

Kaspar von Schwenckfeld (1489-1561) was a nobleman from Silesia who claimed spiritual awakening about the same time as Luther. He arrived at a spiritualist interpretation of the Lord’s Supper and criticized the Augsburg Confession on the issues of predestination, infant baptism and free will. Schwenckfeld was also very active as an evangelist and succeeded in winning many people over to his own teachings. Flacius engaged in a debate with him between 1553 and 1559 over the role of the Bible and the preached word.

As a matter of fact, Flacius was asked by the preachers in Silesia and Swabia to write against Schwenckfeld because the number of people following him was growing and his latest book published in 1551 called On the Holy Scriptures was stirring up much trouble. According to a modern-
day Schwenckfeld biographer and editor of his works in a nineteen-volume Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum, “therein he contended that the inner word of the spirit must be differentiated from the external word spoken by the preacher; that the living Word of God is not the Scriptures, but Christ and that the Scriptures must be interpreted spiritually”.

It did not take much convincing for Flacius by others to write a refutation of Schwenckfeld’s theology. After he read his works he completely disliked the spiritualistic approach to the Bible and even made a comment: “Spiritual exegesis fits scripture like a fist fits into an eye.”

Over the course of the following years Flacius wrote nine books against the Silesian enthusiast, the first one being On the Holy Scripture and its Effect with a preface and conclusion by Gallus. This work appeared in three editions, one in Strasbourg, where the preachers of that city published it in order to combat the growing threat from radical followers of Schwenckfeld.

Basically Schwenckfeld was saying that the Bible is not clear, that man cannot use historical and literary approaches in order to understand the Scriptures, but instead the word of God comes to him inwardly and mystically. Schwenckfeld argued that the Ten Commandments cannot be God’s word because they were written on a stone or that the words “This is my beloved Son”, in Matthew’s Gospel are not God’s. Flacius replied that “the word is God’s whether it is on stone, tablets, paper, pergament, or the human memory, registered, composed, written, or spoken by the human voice.”

Schwenckfeld made a differentiation between written word and internal word, the first having being written by man, the second by God himself inside of our hearts. Because of this, the preached word of God has less value and no saving power. Church ceremonies like the Lord’s Supper, which Schwenckfeld refused to receive and practice, is of no use to Christians, he stated. On the other hand, Flacius insisted that God deals with human beings only through His external word and sacraments. It is obvious that they were worlds apart in their hermeneutics and as the debate progressed it was more apparent that their theology differed fundamentally as well.

The Second Sacramentarian Controversy

In 1549 Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75) and Calvin agreed to be of one mind concerning the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper and they signed a statement called Consensus Tigurinus cementing their shared beliefs. This document was published two years later and the already existing enmity between Swiss Reformed churches and Lutherans received a new spark. In 1552 Joachim Westphal (1510-74), a Hamburg pastor, published an attack in Magdeburg on the Consensus and accused Swiss Reformers of “reaffirming the sacramentarianism of Zwingli, and he especially objected to their rejection of the Lutheran explanation of Christ’s presence in the Supper.”
Westphal continued his assault with another book in 1553 to which Calvin responded. By that time, many other pastors and theologians had got involved in writing and defending their understanding of the words “This is my body,” and eventually Flacius joined the controversy, too. Together with other Magdeburg ministers he wrote *The Confession of Faith on the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the Ministers of the Church of Saxony Defend the Presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Supper by Solid Argument of Sacred Scripture in Answer to the Book Dedicated to them by John Calvin*.

After Calvin had repeatedly refuted Westphal’s arguments in print, he grew tired of it and decided to stop, but his new colleague in Geneva, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), took over writing against Westphal in 1559. Prior to moving to Geneva, Beza was in Lausanne during the 1550s when he tried reconciling theological differences between Lutherans and the Swiss and Savoyard churches. In 1557 Beza and Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) represented Swiss churches in an attempt to heal the religious division with their German counterparts at the colloquy in Göppingen. Beza strove to emphasize the points of agreement and pass over debating the objectionable terms like *substantia* and *exhibere*, and in the end he and Farel wrote a confession for the Duke Christopher of Württemberg (1515-68), which pleased Lutherans and created a temporary peace. However, soon after Beza moved to Geneva he became more antagonistic toward Lutherans in Germany and it is interesting to note the change in his attitude. It was with Beza that Flacius engaged in polemical writing after Calvin’s death, when Beza became the leader of the Genevan church. Namely in 1565 Flacius published a hermeneutical and grammatical book which contained thirty reasons why the presence of Christ is distributed through his body and blood at the Eucharist. After the book came out, Bullinger immediately wrote to Beza that he wanted him to reply to Flacius’, which Beza did in the following year when he wrote his refutation of Flacius’ theses. In subsequent years Flacius and Beza kept writing against each other, becoming more and more hostile and it was clear that their differences were irreconcilable.

Flacius was also involved in trying to combat the spread of the Reformed faith in the province of Palatinate, where Frederick III (1515-76) became elector in 1559. When initial strife concerning the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist broke out in Heidelberg between Heshusius, who was a fiery Gnesio-Lutheran and the general superintendent as well as the dean of the faculty, and Wilhelm Klebitz (1533-68), a preacher with Reformed adherences, Frederick decided to dismiss them both. In 1562 Frederick commissioned Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), both newly appointed to the faculty, to write a confession of faith, which later became known as *The Heidelberg Catechism* (HC). As soon as the HC was adopted and published in January 1563, Flacius wrote the “Refutation of a small German Calvinist Catechism,” in which his main arguments were directed against the interpretation of the
Lord’s Supper in the HC. A year later Flacius tried to discredit Olevianus, who by that time had become the main pastor in Heidelberg and published against him a “Refutation of the four sermons preached by the Sacramentarian called Olevianus.” However, Flacius’ attempts were unsuccessful because the HC managed to strengthen the move of the Palatinate to the Reformed camp and became a major confession for the future generations of Reformed Christians in many countries. Thus, the Augsburg Confession to which Flacius adhered, lost.

The Synergist Controversy

One of the cornerstones of the Lutheran church was the doctrine sola fides, that faith alone justifies. Luther wrote in De servo arbitrio in 1525 that even before the fall, the human will is to be compared with a pack animal with either God or Satan as its rider. As a result of Adam’s fall into sin, man in himself is completely unable to do anything in order to save or justify himself towards a pure and righteous God. However, after Luther’s death in 1546, Melanchthon disagreed with this fundamental teaching by revising his systematic theology, Loci Communes in 1548. It was primarily the article on the free will (locus de libero arbitrio) that was changed to the greatest extent. Therein he said, “… free will in man is the faculty to apply himself to grace”. Because this was published in the year of the Interim when there were other issues which theologians were considering, it went almost unnoticed. In 1555, Johann Pfeffinger (1493-1570), professor in Leipzig, stirred up public attention by his work “Five Questions Concerning the Liberty of the Human Will.” He contended together with Melanchthon that man must play his part in conversion. Once again, Flacius took up his pen and wrote the “Refutation of Pfeffinger’s Propositions on Free Will.”

When Flacius wrote this rebuttal he was already living in Jena, where he held the chair in New Testament at the university that was heavily fighting against Wittenberg and Leipzig theologians. The controversy took on a new role, when a fellow professor of Flacius, Victorin Strigel (1524-69) and a city preacher Andreas Hügel (°1499), started supporting Pfeffinger and publicly opposing Flacius from the pulpit and amongst the students in Jena. As a result, Duke John Frederick of Saxony (1529-1595) arrested Strigel and Hügel on March 27, 1559 and kept them in prison until September, when they were ready to amend their doctrinal position on synergism, a term which Flacius had coined for his enemies. Most of the faculty was upset with the Duke’s reaction, and they wanted, together with Flacius, to settle the dispute on a theological level by holding a public disputation, which was granted to them in August of the following year at the ducal court in Weimar. Rules were set and both parties submitted their theses for discussion agreeing that the Word of God should be the final authority and decide who is interpreting the Scriptures in an orthodox manner. It was during this disputation that Flacius marred his reputation and until today is
remembered for the things he said during those few summer days. By defending the passivity of man in conversion and trying to uphold the doctrine of original sin, he stated that sin is a substance of the fallen man. Thus, the Flacian controversy began.

The Flacian Controversy

The Weimar Disputation was an effort by secular authorities to resolve a conflict between two theologians, who were leading intellectuals at the university of Jena and also leaders of two different movements. Many people came to attend the hearings, including many Saxon and Thuringian dukes, students from Jena and Wittenberg, pastors and church superintendents and also Flacius’ friends and supporters from his Magdeburg days. Chancellor Christian Brück was presiding over the colloquy itself, a man who was close to Strigel and was later influential in securing banishment for Flacius.

The language of the disputation was Latin and since the terms to be used were not clarified, Strigel started using Aristotelian philosophical expressions in order to make his point. Flacius objected to the terminology and asked that biblical phrases be used instead. “He appealed chiefly to Luther and the Bible, and charged Strigel with using philosophical distinctions in the doctrine of sin.”

Strigel employed the words substance (substantia) and accident or quality (accidens) and made a great distinction between them. According to him God created desires in human beings and those desires and cravings need to be satisfied. Some of them are fulfilled in good ways and some in evil. The way they are fulfilled is an accident, and that is exactly how he defined original sin. Flacius’ answer was, “Original sin is not a quality (accidens). Scripture calls it the old man, the flesh, the work of the law written in their hearts (Ro 2:15), a foolish heart, an evil heart, not a quality in the heart.”

On this Strigel replied, “Original sin is a loss or corruption in all powers and faculties in man, but particularly in these three: in the mind, in the will, and in the heart. Original sin is not a substance nor anything substantial, nor a quantity, but a quality.”

The difference was that Strigel viewed man as essentially unchanged after his fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. The only thing that changed was that his quality of righteousness has been replaced by a quality of sinfulness. Flacius argued the opposite, namely that sin has depraved and corrupted man so that he has become an enemy of God. The change that took place after the fall was that original sin has become the substance and the very essence of man and because of it man’s ability to know God has been lost.

The debaters kept disagreeing for eight days, often talking past each other. They used the same terminology but apparently meant different things. Schultz thinks that Flacius was trapped into making a statement...
that sin is the substance of human nature but that he was still more faithful to the heritage of Luther. Even if Schultz is right in his opinion that was not what the Duke thought, who dismissed Flacius and his like-minded colleagues from Jena in 1561. During the remaining fourteen years of his life Flacius could not find a job anywhere and he kept moving from city to city (Regensburg, Antwerp, Strasbourg, Frankfurt) hoping for a general church synod where he could defend his views. In those years he published many books, expounding his teaching on original sin. Likewise, many books were published by his Philippist opponents who were joined by some of the formerly most committed Gnesio-Lutherans, including Johannes Wigand (1523-87), Tileman Heshusius (1527-88) and Simon Musaeus (1529-82), in attacking and ridiculing Flacius.

Epilogue

As a result of the Flacian controversy, Flacius lost his leadership in the church and those pastors and theology professors who supported him were persecuted and dismissed from their posts. The price to pay for following in the footsteps of Flacius in those days was sometimes high. Many were excommunicated, imprisoned, and to a number of followers even a Christian funeral was denied. Flacius himself was denied a proper burial in Frankfurt am Main where he died in 1575.

In 1580 the Formula of Concord was published, which was a doctrinal document of the Lutheran church. Its purpose was to bring peace to a heavily divided second generation of Lutherans and to settle theological disputes, which arose after Luther's death. In it both Melanchthon's and Flacius' views were rejected (even though their names were not explicitly mentioned) as the Formula tried to find a middle ground between the two extremes.

Flacius' most lasting contributions to Protestantism lie in his outstanding hermeneutical achievements, for which he has been referred to as one of the pioneers in the field, his work in the area of church history, and his theological opus. In the massive work *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (Key to the Sacred Scriptures) Flacius was the first to establish that any passage of the Bible should be interpreted considering the purpose and the structure of the whole chapter or a given book, as well as the rule that the literal sense of the text should have a priority over allegories and metaphors. While living in Magdeburg, Flacius thought of a grand plan, which was writing a church history consisting of primary sources in order to prove that throughout the ages there had always been a true church which stayed loyal to the original apostolic faith. He organized a group of scholars and a result was a thirteen-volume church history known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*. In 1556 Flacius published *Catalogus testium veritatis* (Catalog of the Witnesses of Truth), which consisted of documents together with the commentary of Flacius describing the plight of people
throughout history who were striving to preserve the New Testament faith and resisted the Antichrist (Rome). Through close to 400 “witnesses” Flacius tried to show that the Reformation was not something which Luther or Zwingli started, but that there had always been people who wanted to be free from central authority and the politics of Rome and who longed to able to read and interpret Scriptures in their own homes and communities instead of being given a set of dogmas from Rome.

As a theologian Flacius tried to stay loyal to Luther and to his emphasis on the slavery of the human will. “Following Luther more than Melanchthon, Flacius was convinced that the correct theological differentiation is not that of the scholastics between “word” and “spirit”, but rather the differentiation of the two voices apparent in both testaments: that of the “law”, which speaks judgment, and the “gospel”, which speaks forgiveness.” A lot of Flacius’ theological writing was done in the context of polemics as he tried to defend and protect what he considered to be the truth. Accordingly, most historians of doctrine do not see Flacius as a heretic, but they all admit that Aristotelian terminology, which he employed, produced theological confusion. Karl Barth says that his “doctrine of original sin, that after the fall of man sin had become man’s very substance, was not so unreasonable and unacceptable as it was represented by its opponents and later in many histories of dogma.” He continues by saying that Flacius rightly rejected the thesis of the synergists that man’s sin is only an accidens, and concludes with the statement: “That Flacius could be so execrated by his Lutheran contemporaries because of this thesis shows how little Luther’s most important insights were understood even within his own Church, and how thoroughly they had been forgotten only two decades after his death.”

During his lifetime Flacius wrote and published about 300 books and pamphlets and had possibly the largest library in the sixteenth century. In 1577, two years after he died, his wife Magdalena married Heinrich Petreus (1546-1615), who is said to have made a fortune by selling Flacius’ library to Duke Heinrich Julius of Braunschweig (1564-1613) in 1592. It was Flacius’ collection of books which led to the creation of one of the largest libraries of that day, started by Duke August (1579-1666). Today the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel is considered to be one of the best libraries in the world for medieval and sixteenth century printed works and manuscripts, and for that Flacius is to be credited.

Notes


15 Oliver Olson, Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther’s Reform (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 286.
16 ibid. 287. See also Preger, Matthias Flacius und seine Zeit, 1: 217.
17 Flacius, Verlegung des Bekennits Osiandri von der Rechtfertigung der armen sünder durch die wesentliche Gerechtigkeit der Hohen Maiestet Gottes allain (Magdeburg: Christian Rödinger, 1552).
19 ibid. 206.
20 Flacius, Verlegung: “Unsere gerechtigkeit... ist die erfullung des gesetzes Gottes, welche nicht wir, sondern Christus, warer Gott und mensch, durch seinen allervolkommensten gehorsam gantz überschwencklich und uberreichlich geleistet hat, beide mit thun desjenigen, so das gesetz von uns zuthun hat erfordert, und mit leiden des, das wir von wegen unser sünden hetten leiden sollen, uns aber durch den glauben von Gott geschenkt und zugerechnet wird.” Quoted in Gerhard Müller and Gottfried Seebahl (eds), Andreas Osiander D. Ä. Gesamtausgabe 10. Schriften und Briefe September 1551 bis Oktober 1552 sowie Posthumes und Nachträge (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1997), 750.
21 Olson, Matthias Flacius and the Survival of the Luther’s Reform, 291.
22 For the detailed view of the debate see Rudolf Keller, Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes bei Matthias Flacius Illyricus (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1984).
23 Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum 12, 362.


26 *Von der h. Schrifft und irer wircung, wider Caspar Schwenckfeld*. Mit einer vermanung Nicolai Galli das ampt Gottlichs worts in ehren zuhaben (Magdeburg: Michael Lotter, 1553).


28 The first Sacramentarian controversy took place between Luther and Zwingli in 1529 at Marburg Castle. Luther continued attacking the Zürich church after Zwingli’s death with accusations that they were heretical concerning the Lord’s Supper. In 1545 the church under Bullinger’s leadership answered Luther with the Zürcher Bekenntnis.


30 Printed in J. Westphal’s *Confessio fidei de Eucharistiae Sacramento in qua ministri Ecclesiarum Saxoniae solidis argumentis sacrarum literarum astraunt corporis et sanguinis Domini nostri Jesu Christi praesentiam in coena sancta, et de libro Calvini ipsis dedicato respondent* (Magdeburg, 1557).


32 *Des Demonstrationes evidentissimae XXX. Praesentiae, distributionisque corporis ac sanguinis Christi in sacra coena hactenus multis minus cognitae* (Oberursel in Prusse, 1565).

33 See Bullinger’s letter to Beza on May 31, 1565 in *Correspondence de Théodore de Beze, Tome VII*, Henri Meylan, Alain Durfour & Alexandre de Hensler (eds), series: Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance (Geneve: Libraire Droz, 1970), 95 and also letter dated June 20, 1565 on page 404.

34 For more on the debate see Wim Janse, “Non-conformist Eucharist Theology: The case of the alleged ‘Zwinglian Polemict’ Wilhelm Klebitz (c. 1533-68),” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 81-1 (2001), 5-25.


47 ibid. 27.