

BOOK REVIEWS

Matthias Flacius Illyricus. Edited by Irene Dingel, Johannes Hund, and Luka Ilić. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019. 378 pp.

The name Flacius has been lurking in footnotes to the *Book of Concord* for centuries, only dredged up for occasional appearances on seminary exams. During the last thirty years, however, interest in the man behind the name has increased. Oliver K. Olson's *Matthias Flacius and the Survival of Luther's Reform* (2002) marked the beginning of the revival in English, and a series of conferences has stimulated further research overseas. The present volume contains papers from the fourth conference organized by Irene Dingel of the University of Mainz.

Robert Christman provides a helpful article on Flacius' role in the synergistic controversy (103–118) in which he argues that Flacius' doctrine of original sin was not as Manichean as the *Formula of Concord* and subsequent historians have labelled it. He shows that Flacius avoided the Manichean view that, because of sin, the devil had created a new human substance. "Quoting Aristotle, Flacius observed that if anyone is unable to perform the work of a servant, soldier, or judge, he is no longer called a servant, soldier, or judge. So it is with man: his original role of union with God is no longer his objective, so despite the fact that his material substance has not changed, he can be said to have been transformed substantially in the fall into sin" (113). Flacius' opponents did not accept this nuanced view of "substance," but he persisted in defending it because he believed it captured Luther's own view of sin's radical effects.

Timothy Wengert's contribution on Flacius' attacks on Osiander (207–226) provides a sample of Flacius' polemical style as well as a window into the ferment among the followers of Luther after his death. Flacius wrote nine tracts against Osiander in 1552 and probably would have continued the barrage except for Osiander's death in October of that year. Using rhetorical principles he had learned from Melancthon, Flacius meticulously countered every point that

Osiander had raised. In fact, both Melancthon and Flacius, who had opposed each other over the Leipzig Interim, found themselves on the same side in this new controversy over justification. Wengert warns, “. . . the Osiandrian controversy is the best demonstration that, in all the disputes before 1570, historians should use extreme care in using terms like “Philippist” and “Gnesio-Lutheran” to pigeonhole Evangelical theologians. Each dispute called forth different constellations of combatants, in which even Melancthon’s opponents were often beholden to his methods and theological insights” (209). He also concludes that Luther had become “a separate, crucial authority,” along with the Bible, in battles among the second generation of his followers (225).

Although Flacius has been known in Lutheran circles for his numerous battles with other Protestant theologians, he also directed his verbal firepower against Catholic opponents of the Reformation. His major contribution was the thirteen-folio volume *Magdeburg Centuries*, a massive counter-attack to the Catholic charge that the Reformation was introducing novelties in doctrine and practice. Flacius oversaw the fifteen-year project, but at the end was only involved in writing prefaces to each volume. His extensive network among humanist scholars, however, provided the source material for this groundbreaking effort in historiography.

Articles by Robert Kolb and Hans-Peter Großhans explore two of Flacius’ hermeneutical works defending the clarity of scripture against the Council of Trent’s claim that it was incomplete and needed to be interpreted by church authority.

In addition to its focus on Flacius’ literary output, this collection provides essays on his life as an exile, his extensive correspondence, and his efforts to spread the Reformation into the Balkans and Italy. Bibliographic helps include newly-published letters and a list of sixteenth and seventeenth century sources. Robert Kolb has also provided English summaries to the six articles in German.

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