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# Croatian Philosophers IV: Matija Vlačić Ilirik – Mathias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575)

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**ABSTRACT:** Matija Vlačić Ilirik was one of the pillars of Luther's Reformation. In a special way, he dedicated himself to one of its most important issues – the understanding of the Scriptures, and can, therefore, be considered a significant instigator of the founding of modern hermeneutics. As an excellent connoisseur of classical languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) he recognized the importance and dealt with many issues of language, grammar, logic, and dialectic, as essential prerequisites for understanding everything which exists, and hence of the written text also. In this connection, his skepticism towards philosophy is apparent, since the main source of theological cognition, for him, is revelation, and not the human reason, which was principally destroyed by Original Sin. He found the confirmation of his ideas in the current debates with both proponents and opponents of the Reformation, as well as in his research into church history, wherein he incessantly tried to find the witnesses of the truth, as he perceived it.

**KEY WORDS:** Hermeneutics, language, organism, *scopus*, philosophy, theology, *analogia fidei*, *loci communes*, liberal arts, Original Sin.

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## 1. Biography

Matija Vlačić Ilirik was born March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1520, in Labin, Croatia. He is also known by his Latin name Mathias Flacius Illyricus, which reminds of his writing in Latin and of Illyria, the historical Roman province of his origin, which he left at the age of 19. In Venice, he received humanistic education, under the tutelage of Johannes Baptista Aegnatius. His relative Baldo Lupetina, a Franciscan provincial, introduced him to the Reformation movement.

His restless spirit led him from Augsburg, Basel, and Tübingen, to Wittenberg. He felt that Martin Luther (1483–1546) will understand his spiritual turmoil, and the encounter with the Reformation leader determined the rest of his life in the form of tireless defense of Luther's positions. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), on the other hand, greatly appreciated his knowledge of classical languages, especially Hebrew, which he later taught at university. However, the more Melanchthon distanced himself from Luther, the

more Vlačić distanced himself from Melanchthon. This distancing caused many fierce disagreements and conflicts, since Melanchthon was prepared to come to certain compromise with the Pope's supporters. During this period of the so-called Augsburg and Leipzig "Interim", i.e. the attempt to reconcile different attitudes, he fiercely fought against Melanchthon and Wittenberg professors, from 1557 from Jena, to 1561 from Magdeburg. Vlačić was not ready to renounce his attitudes, which he considered right, so he provoked much opposition and hostility among his own rank and file.

After the Adiaphorist controversy on the necessity or uselessness of mediation between God and man, Vlačić slowly turned to the systematic formulation of his theological, hermeneutical, and even political, positions. In Regensburg, where he planned to establish a university for the dissemination of Protestant ideas in the Slavic countries, he started to write his major work *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* [*Key to Sacred Scripture*], which he finished in Frankfurt, in 1567.

Since Vlačić was always uncompromising, his restless spirit forced him into many a conflict. His opponents often used state enforcement to get rid of the unpleasant critic, whom a German historian Niemller called "quarrelsome Croatian". Therefore, he had to move from one town to another and request a residence permit. He spent some time in Antwerp, Strassbourg, and Frankfurt, where he was often faced with banishment. He died March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1575, in Frankfurt.

## 2. Vlačić's Thought

The very fact that Vlačić wrote some 140 treatises points to a wide range of his intellectual activity. However, the central object of his interest is the understanding of the Scriptures. All other interests spring from this one. He argues that for human happiness, meaning of life and salvation, it is most important to develop an accurate understanding and a true relation to God, who was announced in a special way in the Scriptures. However, he embraced the belief of the Christian tradition that the Scriptures are not only the word of God, but also the word of man. With this, he accepted human reason as a locus of thinking about the entire reality, including divine reality, still not wanting to abandon the reformational principle of human salvation exclusively through faith, grace and the Scriptures (*sola fide, sola gratia, sola Scriptura*). And human reason has to disregard all authorities – at least methodologically – and try to grasp the essence of reality with its own means of acquisition of knowledge. Just because of this, Vlačić, even though primarily preoccupied with the Scriptures and their teaching (namely, with the truth of Christianity and its fundamental guidelines formulated in dogmatics), had to encroach upon other areas of human spirit. This is why his treatises contain considerations from the fields of dogmatics, church history, liturgy, politics, and even anthropogeography and climatology. In considering

the Scriptures and its understanding, Vlačić could not circumvent the general principles of understanding reality and text. This led him toward thinking about human thought, language and understanding, but also toward creating a new theory of understanding – or in modern terms: hermeneutics – and toward the problem of philosophy and its relation to theology.

Even though Vlačić's work is significant in numerous ways, we are here primarily interested in his hermeneutics and his understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology.

### 2.1. *Hermeneutics*

The term 'hermeneutics' was first used by Johann Conrad Dannhauer (1603–1666), in his work *Hermeneutica sacra sive methodus exponendarum sacrarum literam* (1654). However, Vlačić's theory of the interpretation of reality and text merits to be called hermeneutics in the modern sense of the word, regardless of what is understood by this theory. His major work in this field is *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* [*Key to Sacred Scripture*], even though his other works are also important. Vlačić's hermeneutics contains several guidelines that today's theories cannot disregard.

Protestant Reformation came to being primarily because of the question of relation of an individual toward Church teachings; namely whether an individual needs the mediation of Church teachers for his understanding of the Scriptures and its doctrine. In this matter, Vlačić followed Luther who claimed the Scriptures are both human and God's word. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Scriptures, therefore the understanding of the same proceeds in the light of the Holy Spirit. Yet, it is clear that there is also a letter, a human letter of the Scriptures which brings about certain vagueness. Only in the light of faith and Gospels it is possible to understand the letter of the Scriptures, which as a word of man is subject to the law as a criterion of human limitations. He maintained that the Holy Scriptures are their own interpreter (*sui ipsius interpres*); its understanding does not require any intermediary of Church teachers. Understanding depends on faith and grace in the light of Gospels mediated by the Holy Spirit.

However, Vlačić was not satisfied with his theological convictions. Since the Holy Scriptures are, like any other text, also a work of man, they are susceptible to every rule of human science of understanding. For this reason, it is imperative to recognize the difficulties that stand in the way of understanding and to set the rules for their eradication. Here, the knowledge of the languages of the Holy Scriptures is of paramount importance, the knowledge of linguistic, historical, and even climatic circumstances in which they were created. This knowledge is possible by addressing the text directly (with its broader and narrower context), the Holy Scriptures in their totality and every of their books individually, which points to the necessity of interaction, mutual permeation of the individual and general, parts and a

whole, which is in modern hermeneutics called *hermeneutical circle* (a concept originating from Greek philosophy).

Vlačić, in his attempt at understanding the Holy Scriptures, faced the necessity of grammatical and linguistic interpretation of the text, although he was confident that the Holy Spirit is both the author and interpreter of the Scriptures. He was thus forced to live a life of contradictory tension between the aspiration for clarity and actual vagueness apparent in many issues which troubled him both as a believer and as an interpreter of important sources of his faith. Therefore, he stressed the necessity of finding the scope (*scopus*) of a text, but also the scope of faith he sought to understand. He did so with the help of the “analogy of faith” as a principle of interpretation. This means: in understanding a text it is not possible to avoid certain (pre)conviction about it, which can be corrected, however, by the text, and *vice versa*. To this matter, Vlačić talked about common places (*loci communes*) as conventional truths which facilitate the understanding of individual textual truths. And yet, despite his efforts, the interpreter is frequently left only with intuition about what might be right – a divination, as many hermeneutic thinkers call it. For Vlačić, the text is not just a dead letter, but a living body with a head and limbs, an organism with a life of its own and with its own history which is effective in the present day. This metaphor, particularly emphasized in the period of German Romanticism, comes from Vlačić, even though it had been known already in the Greek thought. Vlačić’s use of this metaphor reveals his inclination to a practical, lifelike relation to reality, as opposed to an abstract-theoretical approach. Namely, he subscribes to an Aristotelian understanding of ethics, according to which one’s end (*telos*) is not knowledge, but rather activity based on knowledge. Thus, Vlačić calls for a practical relation toward reality, which does not exhausts itself in formalism and abstraction.

A reader of Vlačić’s works and a follower of his line of reasoning will notice the clarity of his hermeneutical thought which precisely identifies the problems and suggests their solutions. He uses every accomplishment available from the rich treasury of Greek philosophy and its medieval modifications and humanistic interpretations. He is tireless in his study of the language as a sign, picture, as spectacles through which a reality should be observed. Logic, rhetoric, dialectic, and grammar are his favorite sciences which he tries to understand and apply in the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. On the other hand, he is frequently ignored as the founder of modern hermeneutics, also due to aporia he could not avoid, and which can be formulated in the question: is it possible to advocate religious-theological convictions as undisputable and at the same time to perceive the means of the human mind as indispensable, and to try to understand (linguistically and hermeneutically) the meaning of the Scriptures’ message, which is in dogmatics considered understood and accomplished? In other words: is there a point in struggling to understand the Scriptures, when a believer es-

essentially knows what stands in there? What is the use of interpreting them if they resist any surprise?

In Vlačić's case we may ask a question: if he is certain that only the reformational principles of understanding the Scriptures and the truth of faith are right, is it possible to take his hermeneutical theory seriously, since the Holy Spirit is both the author and the interpreter of the Scriptures? However, these simplified questions can find simple answers: any serious confrontation with reality and with the text as a fixed reality has to be aware of infiniteness and mysteriousness of both reality and texts.

Vlačić wanted to offer his beliefs to his time in such a way as to correct them according to the Scriptures' texts, which for him are not ordinary texts, since they possess their divine dimension which can be understood only partially by human mind. The boundaries of human mind are also boundaries of its knowledge of reality, leaving thus space for beliefs. In order for these beliefs to be lifelike, they need to be tested against the often contradictory reality. At the intersection of these beliefs and this reality, Vlačić and his hermeneutical theory opened up some new horizons for human spirit.

## ***2.2. Philosophy and its Relation to Theology***

In his hermeneutical endeavor, Vlačić could not neglect the issue of relation of philosophy to theology, since human reason is constantly being confronted with its boundaries which faith strives to surpass and to plunge itself into the vastness of eternity. The basic distinction between philosophy and theology lies in the fact that philosophy wants to reach knowledge by means of human mind, while theology relies on God's revelation and on divine reality in human history. In this matter, there is always a danger of one taking over the role of the other, of stepping out of their respective boundaries and possibilities. It seems that throughout history and even nowadays they have developed mutual distrust, despite being aware of mutual dependence. Sometimes this distrust turns into open hostility.

A misconception which frequently occurs is that the period of the Reformation was the period of hostility between philosophy and theology. The idea of hostility between philosophy and theology was indeed advocated by Luther and Vlačić, while Melancthon maintained certain preference for philosophical tradition in considering theological issues, which in turn led to an open conflict with Luther and Vlačić. However, this interpretation is not entirely founded, which is revealed by even superficial reading of some of Vlačić's texts about this issue.

The idea that Vlačić had a negative attitude towards philosophy was probably derived from his claim that neither the interpretation of the Scriptures nor philosophy can heal the man (as "crazy philosophers thought about their philosophy"), while God and his power present in every believer can. However, this opinion, if considered carefully, does not provide a seri-

ous cause for a claim about Vlačić's hostility towards philosophy. As a believer and theologian, all he wanted to say is that the man cannot be saved neither by hermeneutical theories nor philosophical speculations, unless he finds a healing relation with God and salvation in faith. This does not mean that those two sciences are unimportant for human self-understanding, but only that they are not the most important.

At any rate, many of Vlačić's positive claims about the role of philosophy contradict the common view, even if we do not take into account the fact that the Protestant turn to the individual who establishes relation to God on his own, at the same time leads to Kantian Copernican revolution in which subjective consciousness forms a measure of cognition.

The philosopher, according to Vlačić, distinguishes between knowledge as the subjective side and things as the objective side of the process of cognition. Things can be known easily, yet the ideas and principles, as well as the content of the Scriptures, are not easily understood. The knowledge of the later cannot be gained through the senses, but only allegorically, i.e. figuratively.

In his philosophical considerations, Vlačić often refers to Plato and Aristotle. Even though for him, the source of truth is above all the Scriptures, he believes that the Greeks did say some truthful things, because "the truth everywhere, and especially in theology, is a source of good, as Plato claims. False beliefs and lies are the source of evil." Thus, we can say that Vlačić gives philosophy the role of knowing the truth to an extent to which human mind can know the truth. Although man had been destroyed in his substance by the Original Sin, it is evident that Vlačić does not negate his ability of knowing the truth.

Vlačić endeavors to investigate that which falls out of scope of philosophy. According to him, the Scriptures provide answers to many questions about the beginning and end, about genesis and purpose of the world and the man. Philosophy also has something to say about this matter, yet, due to the multitude of its answers, it creates an unobligatory impression. Philosophical reflection makes sense in many areas, but as soon as it claims to be unmistakably obligatory or as soon as it dares to encroach upon the field of theology, it loses its legitimacy, since theological matters, according to Vlačić, cannot be stated and expressed in philosophical terms. Nevertheless, he considers fanatics all those who negate the meaning of human cognition, particularly the necessity of possessing the knowledge of linguistics, but also the necessity of being acquainted with speculative philosophy in general.

When Vlačić talks about healthy philosophy, it is not always simple to determine what is implied by this term, but it is probably Aristotelian philosophy, of which he had profound knowledge, since he published some of Aristotle's works in Basel. Aristotle's idea of the four causes is of special importance to him, primarily the first cause which is eternal and by which everything was created. Many assertions of this philosophy are in accordance

with the biblical history of Creation. Even though its considerations tend to be curtailed by the limitations of human mind, they cannot be in opposition to Moses' history of creation, which is all about the first and eternal cause. For the knowledge of the world and things in their totality, it is necessary to investigate the thing, the world, and their linguistic expression from the point of view of the four causes. The thing that is the subject of investigation is susceptible to causal as well as intellectual investigation. This applies also when we are talking about the Scriptures, which lie in front of us as a text. Thus, the interpretative approach to the content of the Scriptures need not rely only on grace and visions. It draws its justification from the human mind and its judgments, even though this approach is not the only source of knowledge in this field. The cognition of things is possible via efficient, material, formal, and final causes. For Vlačić, Aristotle's categories represent relations of the being, but at the same time, they are also the highest categories of linguistically formed thoughts.

For Vlačić, philosophy is necessary for the knowledge of reality, but, just like theological reflection, it defies experimental manifestness, wherein theological thought acquires a dimension which surpasses human reason. Here, both philosophy and theology, if they want to be a "remedy for the soul", have to become aware of their own boundaries and turn to the practice of the spiritual, moral, and religious living. Here, Vlačić follows Aristotelian idea of ethics and morality and applies it to the fields of philosophy and theology. This, in turn, has certain repercussions on his idea of hermeneutics, according to which, the reality of the text cannot be understood completely objectively, but a subjective and historical framework of the text should be also taken into account.

Vlačić wants to draw a clear distinction between the scopes of philosophy and theology (knowledge and faith) and to separate their means of cognition one from another. If this is not done, then, according to him, there is a danger that many had not noticed, that of bringing many philosophical, especially Aristotelian meanings of words and things, into the Scriptures, so that its understanding becomes distorted. If the subject matter of philosophy and theology is not known and is not differentiated, and if the knowledge of the language is insufficient, then the different scopes of these fields are not easily discerned. For Vlačić, grace (*gratia*) has special importance for the understanding of reality and the meaning of life, even though the nature and reflection about it are not unimportant. One should be careful not to draw theological conclusions from scientific and philosophical premisses.

Vlačić is aware of the fact that one and the same man can be engaged with both philosophy and theology, but, according to him, theological perception of reality is not the same as philosophical. Theological and biblical understanding as an experience of religious content does not require only the one who understands, but also God's call, which speaks through the



Scriptures. Therefore, faith, according to Vlačić, possesses a greater value than philosophizing.

Neither philosophical nor theological thought cannot be, according to Vlačić, expressed by means of mathematical formulas nor with their certainty. For that reason, he attacked the theologians from the past and from his time for whom theological thoughts were as certain as Euclid thought mathematical to be. They referred to philosophy and particularly to Aristotle, which did not do a good turn neither to philosophy nor to theology.

For Vlačić, one of the biggest errors of patristic tradition was the employment of various philosophical and theological thoughts for the interpretation of the Bible, which filled the biblical text with alien elements. According to him, this practice started with Origen and his allegorical understanding of the Scriptures. After that, an idea about a fourfold meaning of the Scriptures appeared: literal, moral, allegorical, and analogical. With time, the knowledge of the language of the Scriptures got lost, so by the time of Gregory the Great (540–604) the interpretation the Scriptures had relied far more on the tradition than on the Scriptures. More and more, the temptation to interpret it by the means of philosophical categories could not be resisted. In such interpretation there is, according to Vlačić, a great danger of biblical exegesis being based on philosophical principles, which in fact leads to the falsification of the Scriptures. Therefore, Vlačić was convinced that the Reformation and he himself brought an end to such an interpretation and that it was high time to turn to the text as it is, which should be interpreted according to grammatical, dialectical, logical, and rhetorical methods and rules which we should master together with the biblical language. The application of this knowledge for the interpretation is of paramount importance.

Vlačić was aware of the fact that there are always some quarrels among scholars in all fields. However, the quarrels between theologians and philosophers are caused by numerous ambiguities, ignorance, and even fanaticism. On the one hand, some theologians think that philosophy is useless for life and theology. On the other, some philosophers, whom Vlačić mockingly calls philosophers-theologians, think that they can know God and man with their philosophical reflection, while also giving moral and religious instruction.

In order to avoid these misunderstandings it is necessary to discern between profane and sacral concepts and to use them appropriately. Philosophy and the entire human wisdom are concerned with their visible space, which they cannot overstep in order to formulate theological claims, primarily because of the corruption and blindness of human mind. Man can understand that which can be measured and counted, and can philosophize about it, whereas only theology can make judgments about the ultimate efficient and final cause, which announces itself. And theology uses philosophy in order to reach for the divine, so that it would, in Plotinian words, know that

which cannot be known. Every attempt throughout the history of philosophy to say something acceptable and generally understandable about God, was a failure. Vlačić mentions many examples which serve to prove this: Socrates, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Empedocles, Protagoras, Democritus, Simonides, Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Cicero, Seneca, and Augustine. Thus, it seems unreasonable to attempt to develop a theology which strives to be a scientific system with the help of philosophical conclusions or through unproven assertions. According to Vlačić, an utterly coherent and justified reflection on God does not lead to absolutely certain assertions. However, natural intellectual strength and abilities, as well as certain skills and methods constructed with their help, are justifiable and necessary as an assistance to theological reflection.

The relation between philosophy and theology, in Vlačić's opinion, can be labeled as certain tension. On the one hand, he is aware of the fact that methodological and speculative instruments of philosophy, in their broad sense, serve for the knowledge of reality, even the reality which found its expression in the Scriptures. On the other hand, he believes that God, as the first cause of the entire reality, cannot be known through philosophical speculation, and that human reason – which accepts the Revelation and has faith in it – is utterly unable to comprehend it. It is evident that Vlačić is confronted with the problem of the boundary of philosophical speculation, which can be overcome only by theological acceptance of divine reality, and this acceptance, according to Vlačić, is no longer the object of knowledge.

### 3. Some Basic Concepts in Vlačić

#### ANALOGY OF FAITH (ANALOGIA FIDEI)

Vlačić holds that the interpretation of the Scriptures has to be analogous to faith. Analogy here means congruence, non-contradiction, appropriate similarity with the basic tenets of faith. This concept, known from the first centuries of the Christian fathers, implicitly accompanies every attempt at interpreting the texts of various contents. Vlačić sees the concept as appearing at two levels. First of all, the understanding of any text has to be analogous to faith. And this faith is drawn exclusively from the Scriptures. However, both Church history and its dogmatics, i.e. a set of truths, are based on the Scriptures. A question arises: whether the interpretation has to be analogous to the Scriptures or Church dogmatics, or whether dogmatics is based in such a way on the Scriptures that it is analogous to the Scriptures and faith? Vlačić argues that interpretation is analogous to faith which assumes a clear shape due to the the Scriptures, but interpretation cannot avoid dogmatics which wants to review and reduce the matter to certain formulae. His concept of the analogy of faith is hence in a tensed relation between the Scriptures and dogmatics.

## LIBERAL ARTS (ARTES LIBERALES)

At medieval universities, *artes liberales* were taught as introductory disciplines into the study of medicine, law, and theology. In the course of time, these disciplines were divided into the so-called *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) and *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music). However, similar practice had also been known as early as the Hellenistic times (some even believe that it had been established in Plato's *Politeia*). Vlačić believed that grammar and dialectic (which he frequently replaces with logic or even rhetoric) are of paramount importance for the understanding of the Scriptures. This clearly shows that he wanted to use all these insights and incorporate them into true understanding of the Scriptures.

## CAUSES (CAUSAE)

In his philosophical and theological considerations, which serve for a better understanding of the Scriptures, Vlačić adopts Greek, medieval and scholastic principle of causality. All that exists has a cause, a reason of its existence. He formulates Aristotelian-scholastic principle of causality in its 4 forms: *causa efficiens* (efficient cause), *causa materialis* (material cause), *causa formalis* (formal cause), and *causa finalis* (final cause). Yet, since his primary goal is to be a theologian, he is particularly interested in *causa prima* (first cause), which is God. For him, however, this cause cannot be known through philosophy, although philosophers come close to this cause when they talk about *causa prima*, which is exactly the same what the Book of Genesis is all about.

## BODY, HEAD, AND LIMBS (CORPUS, CAPUT ET MEMBRA)

Vlačić adopts many metaphors from ancient rhetoric in order to grasp more easily the essence of understanding of the Scriptures. He is aware of the fact that the biblical language is figurative and that it employs various literary forms, genres and figures of speech. In this regard, he anticipates modern flourishing of (especially) Protestant exegesis. His view of the text as a body with head and limbs is an attempt to perceive the text as a text, together with its context, emphasizing especially the importance of the whole and its parts for understanding of the text. In this connection, Vlačić wants to avoid prejudice and allow the text (as a living organism) to speak by and for itself.

## COMMON PLACES (LOCI COMMUNES)

Understanding aims at what is important and general, so that with the help of and in the light of the important the unimportant can be discerned. Every interpreter seeks or implicitly presupposes certain common concepts, common places, which are, in humanistic sciences and especially in theological circles, called *loci communes*. In this respect, for example, the existence of

God is for a believer and theologian a *locus communis* which cannot be questioned actually, but only methodologically. Otherwise, the entire building of faith would collapse. For Vlačić, *locus communis* of God's existence and his revelation in the historical and spiritual forms of the Old-Testament Law and the New-Testament Gospels is an important prerequisite for the understanding of the Scriptures. However, this prerequisite should always be oriented toward the actual text of the Scriptures and its outer word, so that we could understand, i.e. accept through faith, the inner word of the Holy Scriptures that are the only ones which can tread the path toward faith and grace (*sola scriptura* as the source for *sola fide* and *sola gratia*). Thus, *loci communes* become the actual places of the analogy of faith. Then again, *loci communes* are not solely a theological concept, but a concept which is usable in all other fields of understanding, since any knowledge becomes impossible without a certain foreknowledge. For this reason, *loci communes* are an old term for Gadamer's contemporary notion of *Vor-Urteil*, i.e. pre-judgements.

ORIGINAL SIN, FREE WILL  
(PECCATUM ORIGINALE, LIBERUM ARBITRIUM)

Original Sin and free will are fundamental issues of theological doctrine of the man, but also issues of the highest philosophical relevance. The idea of the so-called Fall of Man usually turns into a question of evil in the man and in the world, followed by another question: whether the man is at all free to choose between the good or evil or whether he is determined by Original Sin and thus rotten, destroyed, and incapable of goodness. Vlačić wrote many texts and took part in many debates on this issue, especially with Viktor Striegel (1524–1569). For him, the subject was not new, since it had been touched upon in the Bible in numerous ways, and often was discussed by Church fathers (especially St. Augustine). Vlačić was close to the reformational belief in the rottenness of human character since Original Sin and he believed that the man without grace, despite his good deeds, is incapable of choosing goodness by his own will (or in other words, he cannot achieve his salvation).

WITNESSES OF THE TRUTH (TESTES VERITATIS)

With his work *Catalogus Testium Veritatis* (1556), Vlačić wanted to find some witnesses from the history of Church, who would vouch for the truth and truthfulness of Luther's and his own faith and its understanding, as opposed to those of the Roman pope and his primate. He was also engaged in the team working on the compilation of the Church history, the so-called *Magdeburg Centuries*. In his search for the witnesses of the truth, Vlačić does not restrict himself only to theological matters, but he thoroughly discusses the relation between philosophy and theology, and finds in them both the evi-

dence which prove that his understanding of faith, theology and truth is correct, that everything had been forgotten and falsified due to the continuous and persistent layers of tradition and mistreatments of philosophy and Church authorities. He finds his evidence from Augustine to Occam and Thomas Aquinas.

#### 4. Vlačić's Influence and his Contemporary Appraisal

Vlačić is by many considered to be “the last creative mind among the Reformers”, while some tend to claim that without his perceptiveness, good judgment, and uncompromising views, Luther's reformation would fall apart. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that Vlačić profoundly influenced many generations of Protestant thinkers. However, as the time passed, Vlačić was quoted less and less, so that even Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), one of the greatest hermeneutical thinkers of the 19th century, does not mention him. An yet, Vlačić's hermeneutical, theological and philosophical thoughts left some indelible marks on many authors from this area.

In modern times, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) has been the one to draw attention to Matija Vlačić's hermeneutical contribution, instigating thus a new interest in Vlačić and his work. According to Dilthey, Vlačić's hermeneutical work was “the first scientific system of biblical interpretation since the day of dispute between Alexandrian and Antiochan theologians.” Even though Vlačić sometimes gets lost in his dogmatic beliefs, Dilthey is convinced that the formation of hermeneutics can be attributed to the Croatian Reformer and his biblical interpretation. For that matter, Dilthey finds a germ of a modern theory of interpretation in the second part of the Vlačić's *Clavis*, which turns out to be extremely significant for the solid foundation of knowledge in the fields of philology and humanistic sciences. In this theory, Dilthey sees two elements which greatly influenced the development of hermeneutics: the Protestant and the Humanistic element. Besides that, Dilthey is the first author interested in Vlačić from the philological and hermeneutical point of view; namely, all previous attempts had been directed towards biblical and theological dimension of Vlačić's work, which is not wrong, but certainly not enough, since Vlačić had many more universal interests.

Dilthey's assessment of Vlačić encouraged many other authors to start investigating Vlačić's hermeneutics. (This led to a vast number of claims already known in Dilthey; Lutz Geldsetzer, for instance, claims that Vlačić is a co-founder of modern hermeneutics.) It is no wonder, therefore, that Vlačić was also investigated by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), one of the greatest hermeneutical philosophers, who wants to understand hermeneutics in its universal ontological dimension following the tradition of Heidegger, but also in the context of classical ancient philosophy. Gadamer finds in Vlačić “a central motive of the entire hermeneutics, namely, the surpassing of strangeness and the task of accepting the strange up to its particu-

lar, even unique formation, in relation to which all strangeness of texts, as well as of languages, worldviews and communication forms, are of secondary importance.” For Gadamer, Vlačić is a philologist and humanist close to Reformation, who was aware of the strangeness, alienation, and obscurity of reality, even of the reality manifested in the Scriptures. This reality needed to be investigated and actualized, and to do this, it is necessary to approach the text as a text.

Vlačić’s idea of philosophy and its relation to theology has not been at all appreciated in scholarly literature. Admittedly, Dilthey’s and Gadamer’s investigation of Vlačić has some theological and philosophical implications also, but an open discussion of these problems most probably fell victim to prejudice about the Reformation total opposition to philosophy, due to which he consequently became neglected in philosophical circles. It is true that Vlačić is primarily interested in the Scriptures and its theological-religious dimension. But he is well aware of the necessity of many other considerations for the apprehension of the Scriptures. In this matter, he does not consider philosophy to be a servant of theology, but strives to distinguish them one from another, so that both of them may bear fruit in the human understanding of reality.

### 5. Vlačić’s Works

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- *Clavis Scripturae sacrae, seu De sermone Sacrarum literarum, plurimas generales regulas continens, I*, Basileae 1567.
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- *De materiis metisque scientiarum, et erroribus philosophiae, in rebus divinis*. Fl. Illyrico autore, 1563.
- *Disputatio de originali peccato et libero arbitrio inter Matthiam Flacium Illyricum et Victorinum Strigelium, publice Vinariae per integram hebdomadam... A. 1560 initio mensis augusti, contra Papistarum et Synergistarum corruptelas habita*, 1562.
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**Hrvatski filozofi IV:  
Matija Vlačić Ilirik – Mathias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575)**

**IVAN KORDIĆ**

**SAŽETAK:** Matija Vlačić Ilirik bio je jedan od stupova Lutherove reformacije. On se na osobit način posvetio jednom od njezinih glavnih pitanja, razumijevanju Svetog pisma, pa ga se može smatrati važnim poticateljem utemeljenja suvremene hermeneutike. Kao poznavatelj klasičnih jezika (hebrejskog, grčkog i latinskog) osjetio je važnost i tematizirao mnoga pitanja jezika, gramatike, logike i dijalektike kao bitnih uvjeta razumijevanja svega onoga što jest, pa tako i pisanog teksta. Pritom do izražaja dolazi njegova skepsa prema filozofiji, budući da je za njega glavni izvor teološke spoznaje objava, a ne čovjekov razum, koji je istočnim grijehom supstancijalno razoren. Potvrdu svojih razmišljanja nalazi u aktualnim raspravama sa zastupnicima i protivnicima reformacije, ali i u istraživanjima crkvene povijesti, u kojoj neumorno traži svjedoke onakve istine kakvom je on vidi.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** Hermeneutika, jezik, organizam, *scopus*, filozofija, teologija, *analogia fidei*, *loci communes*, slobodne vještine, istočni grijeh.