

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

From the Publisher: Jean Amos Comenius

Jan Amos Comenius!

Don't feel bad if you've never heard of him. Many respected church history textbooks don't even mention his name. It's one of the quirks of history to propel some to undeserved fame while ignoring the achievements of some far more significant figures (but, as we know, in the evaluation that counts most there is something about the first being last and vice versa.)

The church has not been as quick as the educational world to recognize the legacy of Comenius. UNESCO openly acknowledges and celebrates the incomparable contribution of the refugee bishop. Jean Piaget heralds Comenius as "the first to conceive a full scale science of education" and then goes on to make the remarkable assertion that "Comenius is thus among the authors who do not need to be corrected or, in reality, contradicted in order to bring them up to date, but merely to be translated and elaborated."

Let me suggest that Comenius is one figure who indisputably belongs to the whole Christian church. He would accept that. (Note his "Bequest of the Dying Mother" referred to in the article by Eve Bock). And he is a gift worth savoring regardless of our particular denominational loyalties.

If Comenius were alive today, how enthralled he would be with computers, audio-visuals, the frontiers of knowledge, the untested possibilities of inter-disciplinary studies. How appalled he would be at what we do with and to our resources, and our children. Perhaps he would be most bewildered by our pride. But imagine his disbelief at our weaponry. Comenius (citing Luther) urged governments to spend 100 times as much on education as they did on preparation for war.

He was the kind of Christian thinker convenient to forget, but not for too long.

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Jan Amos Comenius: Did You Know?

Comenius' map of Moravia remained a standard for over 100 years and went through at least 20 editions.

1620, the same year as the Pilgrims left England on the Mayflower, the Battle of White Mountain took place near Prague. ***This Bohemian Revolt was crushed by Emperor Ferdinand and the Protestants cause was defeated.***

When Comenius led his exiled band from their homeland to Poland in January, 1628, they stopped at the border and Comenius led them in prayer that God would preserve a "hidden seed" of his Brethren, ***a prayer fulfilled in May of 1722 when Count Zinzendorf gave Moravian Brethren refuge in his estate in Herrnhut.*** (see Christian History, Vol. I, No. 1)

At the end of his life, Comenius was the ***last surviving bishop of the Unity of the Brethren Church.*** So he consecrated his son-in-law Peter Jablonsky and one other thereby providing for episcopal succession.

Comenius wrote ***154 books*** in his lifetime.

The noted allegory by Comenius, ***The Labyrinth of the World*** has often been compared to Bunyan's ***Pilgrim's Progress***. The Labyrinth was written in 1623, while Comenius was in hiding, and this was ***five years before John Bunyan was born.***

As the exiles crossed the mountains into Poland they lifted up their voices in song to God. One of the verses:

Naught have we taken with us,
All to destruction is hurled,
We have only our Kralitz Bibles
And our ***Labyrinth of the World.***

The American Puritan Cotton Mather in his ***Magnalia Christi Americana*** said that Comenius was ***invited to become the first president of Harvard College.***

Comenius was ***one of the first to promote continuing education with his insistence that education should extend from the cradle to the grave.***

Comenius wrote ***the first picture book for children Orbis Pictus Sensualium.***

Comenius spent much of his life ***urging European leaders to bring an end to the Thirty Years War.***

Comenius placed strong credence in the prophecies of three men, including his old schoolmate, Nicolas Drabik, that the Brethren would be restored to their homeland. He gathered the prophecies in a 1100 page work title ***Light in Darkness.*** The prophecies were never fulfilled and ***Comenius' grasping at them has been regarded as a tragic scar on his noteworthy career.***

Having been kindly received by both England and Holland, Comenius in his old age was outraged that these two "Christian" nations would go to war with each other over commercial interests. ***He personally went to the peace conference at Breda in May of 1667, three years before he died, to plead for peace. For the occasion he wrote The Angel of Peace.***

The British Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell offered ***Comenius and the Moravian exiles land in Ireland*** which they did not accept as they expected to return to their homeland. ***Cromwell also organized a collection to aid the exiles.***

Comenius died November 4, 1670 in Amsterdam. ***He lived in exile for 42 of his 78 years.*** There is now a Comenius museum in Naarden, Holland, the place of his burial.

The philosopher Leibnitz wrote: "The day will come, Comenius, when the good shall praise thee, thy hopes accomplished and thy prayer fulfilled."

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Seeking a Better Way

The pain and damage of Christian divisions and international warfare affected Comenius and his church both directly and disastrously: His prodigious energy and gifts were obsessively employed to change the way the world and church worked.

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Born March 28, 1592, orphaned early, educated at the universities of Herborn and Heidelberg, Comenius began working as a pastor and parochial school principal in 1618, the year the Thirty Years war began. After the defeat of the Protestant armies in the Battle of White Mountain— one of the most disastrous events in Czech history—he barely escaped with his life while his house was burned down by enemy soldiers. Later, his young wife and two small children died of the plague. For seven years he lived the life of a fugitive in his own land, hiding in deserted huts, in caves, even in hollow trees. Early in 1628 he joined one of the small groups of Protestants who fled their native Moravia to await better times in neighboring Poland. He never saw his homeland again.

For 42 years of his long and sorrowful life he roamed the countries of Europe as a homeless refugee. He was always poor. His second wife died, too, leaving him with four children to care for. The political allies of the Czech nation either died or were killed in the war. The beloved fatherland lay in total desolation. The scattered, impoverished church whose bishop he had become was in danger of disintegrating after years of exile. The Polish city of Leszno, his home for a number of years, was burned to the ground by the enemy. His treasured library and numerous manuscripts— some of them results of decades of work— were totally destroyed in the fire, leaving Comenius, an old man of 64, with virtually nothing but the clothes on his back. Homeless and penniless, he made it to Amsterdam, Holland, where friends took him in and cared for him until his death in 1670.

Such was the life of this great man. And yet, under these adverse circumstances, he never failed to serve his Lord and his fellow men. During his years as a fugitive, he wrote not only a number of small tracts and homilies, but also one of his most famous works, *The Labyrinth of the World*. He pictures in it a pilgrim who seeks peace and happiness in a deceptive world and finds them at last in union with Christ. The book was a great source of comfort to other fugitives, and many of them, fleeing their homeland, took it along as one of their few prized possessions. In exile, Comenius ministered faithfully to the needs of his scattered congregation, supporting it with the proceeds from his writings. Strangely enough, these came mostly from his books on education—a field which he himself considered secondary to his pastoral ministry.

How did Comenius become an authority on education? He was a minister, and later a bishop, of a church commonly known as *Unitas Fratrum* (The Unity of Brethren), which attained great theological, literary and cultural achievements immediately preceding the Thirty Years War. While small in numbers, it spurred the whole Czech nation to great cultural advancement. Not only religious freedom and political independence, but also a rich cultural life perished in the Battle of White Mountain. The exiled Brethren rightfully saw themselves as guardians of Czech spiritual treasures. Hoping that one day they would return home, they were trying to prepare for the great task of rebuilding the land and the society devastated by war, and they knew that education would play a vital part in it. Comenius had this task in mind when he began to write a comprehensive book on education, *Didactica Magna*. He wrote it originally in Czech and kept postponing its publication until the expected return; but as the years passed and the situation did not change, he rewrote it in

Latin so the rest of Europe could read it.

Unity and the Brethren

The idea of Christian unity was a very important part of the Brethren's theology. There were very few churches in those times of religious fanaticism which did not proclaim themselves to be the only true church. Yet the Brethren stated in an official proclamation,

Thus believing according to the Holy Writ in a Holy Church, we do not hold that we alone compose the Holy Catholic Church, or that salvation is obtained only among us, or that we alone shall be saved.

Comenius supported his church's position from the very beginning of his ministry and carried on a crusade for interchurch co-operation and understanding all his life. Faithful to his church's teaching, he stressed purity of life more than theology, and showed a remarkable broadmindedness about the two main matters of dispute among the various Protestant groups of his time—the Lord's Supper and predestination. About the Lord's Supper he wrote,

Whether this sacrament is received by mouth or by faith alone, why do ye quarrel about it? Why do ye wish to discuss that about which the Scriptures are silent? ... Remember that we all know only in part, and especially remember that this mystery was ordained not that the hearts of believers may be torn asunder thereby, but rather that they be bound together into one.

As for predestination, he advocated searching the Scriptures. Since they furnish grounds for both sides, he contended that there must be some truth in both views. He also suggested that all religious communities drop their identification labels—Lutherans, Calvinists, Hussites, Waldensians—and proclaim Christ to be their leader by calling themselves simply Christians.

Comenius not only worked toward Christian unity himself, he also supported the work of other ecumenical workers. He befriended John Dury, son of a Presbyterian minister at Edinburgh, Scotland, who traveled all over Europe in the cause of church unity. Dury was well received in the Unity, which ordered public prayers in all congregations for the good outcome of his work. His cause failed, though, for lack of interest from other denominations. Comenius also supported the work of Georg Calixtus, professor of dogmatic theology at the University of Helmstedt, who even called an ecumenical conference in 1645 for a dialogue between representatives of various Protestant denominations and Roman Catholics. Because of his great tact, patience and gentleness, Comenius was asked to try to bring the Lutherans and Calvinists into a united front in negotiations with the Catholics. He did not succeed. He complained bitterly about some Lutherans, that they "know nothing, but call fire from heaven on both the papists and the Calvinists."

The most moving expression of Comenius's longing for Christian unity is expressed in a small book called ***The Bequest of the Dying Mother, the Unity of Brethren***. He wrote it when the Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years War, put an end to all hopes of returning to the native land and reestablishing the perishing church. He pictures the Unity as a dying mother who, "if the Lord should confirm what men do," must prepare for her last sleep and who therefore bequeaths "the treasures that God entrusted to her" to various nations, churches, or groups. Having distributed most of them to churches in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere where the Brethren were kindly received, she makes the following bequest,

To all Christian churches together I bequeath a lively desire for unanimity of opinion and for reconciliation among themselves, and for union in faith, and love of the unity of spirit. May the

spirit which was given to me from the very beginning by the Father of spirits be shed upon you all, so that you would desire as sincerely as I did the union of all who call upon the name of Christ in truth!

Though Comenius saw his church as a dying mother, he continued to serve her—and to serve mankind—for the rest of his earthly life. Matthew Spinka, the translator of *The Bequest* into English, writes aptly in his introduction to the book,

Having lost his native land,... he became a citizen of the world. His courage and deathless hope for the future proved that a man who believes in God can never despair of the ultimate victory of the forces of righteousness.

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Between Hus and Herrnhut

This article was a collaboration of Bernard Michel, and the editor, working from notes by Eve Bock and Josef Smolik, whose work appears elsewhere in this issue.

Comenius and the Unity of the Brethren

The Reformation started by John Hus (1369–1415) in Bohemia did not die when he was burned at the stake. A number of small communities spun off from the Hussites, each rebelling against Rome in its own ways. The first “Brethren” moved to a remote village called Kunvald in 1457 to live together as the early church did, and follow the law of Christ.

From the start, the Unity of the Brethren, as they became known, had contacts with the Waldensians, a communal group that preserved the teachings of Peter Waldo from the twelfth century, promoting equality of believers and opposing ecclesiastical hierarchy. Significant also for the Unity’s founding was the thought of Peter Chelcicky, who condemned the use of force in matters of faith and the participation of Christians in political power struggles, especially in war. Chelcicky dared to call the Pope and the emperor “whales who have torn the net of true faith,” since they had established the Church as the head of a secular empire.

These ideas, denial of material aspirations and refusal of secular power, as adopted by the Unity, did not sit well with the authorities. The Unity was outlawed and persecuted by secular and religious powers alike, but its numbers grew, new communities were formed, and its influence went far beyond its ranks.

Despite their commitment to Christlike poverty, the Brethren presented the Czech nation with a wealth of spiritual resources. They translated the Scriptures into Czech; they composed hymns that are still sung in Czech churches today; they published a confession of faith praised by Luther, and left an unmistakable mark on the *Confessio Bohemica* (Czech Confession)—the first ecumenical confession the world had seen.

The Exile

Jan Amos Comenius stands as the most notable figure in the Unity, though the church was dying out during his lifetime. The death blow was their banishment from their homeland, Bohemia, after the Battle of White Mountain in 1620.

Leading a group of exiles over the mountains into Poland, Comenius prayed that a “hidden seed” of this faith would grow and bear fruit. But that prospect looked dim in the ensuing years, as the Brethren dispersed throughout Europe. Some fled with Comenius to Poland; some to Transylvania (now part of Hungary); some to Germany. Wherever they went, they found persecution, caught between Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics.

The Hidden Seed Did Grow

By 1650, Comenius had written a treatise entitled “*The Bequest of a Dying Mother, the Unity of Brethren, by which, ceasing to exist in her own nation and her separate individuality, she distributes among her sons, daughters, and heirs the treasures which God entrusted to her.*”

In this bequest for his "dying church," Comenius called for reformation in the Bohemian and Polish Unity, in the "beloved sisters, Protestant communions," and in "our mother who has borne us, thou Church of Rome."

In what sounds like the ecumenical language of today, Comenius wrote: "To all Christians together I bequeath lively desire for unanimity of opinion and for reconciliation among themselves, and for union in faith, and love of the unity of spirit."

In 1660 Comenius published the *Ratio Disciplinae*, a Latin book containing a history of the Brethren's church and the essentials of their faith. He dedicated the book to the Church of England and urged that communion to care for his beloved Unity. "If there is no help from man, there will be help from God," he wrote in hoping against hope for the church's faith to be preserved.

Herrnhut

In 1722, a few Moravian pilgrims went across the border from Bohemia and Moravia to the estate of Count Zinzendorf in Silesia, Germany. There they found refuge and encouragement from the Lutheran nobleman. They called their settlement Herrnhut. These new Brethren adopted much of Zinzendorf's pietism, but the legacy of the old Unity remained alive among them.

On August 13, 1727, there was a revival in Herrnhut, a spiritual explosion of sorts which prompted widespread missionary fervor. The Herrnhut community sent missionaries to the Americas, and eventually throughout the world.

The preparation for that August 13th renewal came from the count's reading of a copy of Comenius' *Ratio Disciplinae* at a library in Zittau earlier that year. It helped Zinzendorf understand the depth of the Moravian faith and the reason why the refugees were saying, "God has brought us here so that He might restore our Church." Zinzendorf used the *Ratio Disciplinae* as the basis for a new "Brotherly Agreement" which he developed as the standard for the faith and life of the Herrnhut community. This document (revised many times) continues to be the "Brotherly Agreement" or the "Covenant for Christian Living" for the Moravian Church today.

There was also a personal tie between Comenius and the renewed church. On November 5, 1662, Peter Jablonsky (Comenius's son-in-law) was consecrated a bishop of the Unity. His son, Daniel Ernest Jablonsky, was also consecrated a bishop, and when the renewed Moravian Church sought the consecration of its first bishop, David Nitschmann, in 1735, it was Daniel Ernest Jablonsky who officiated at the service.

The Discipline

A part of the discipline of Bishop Comenius which was bequeathed to the Moravian Church was his hope and prayer that all the world should come to know the saving Word of God. Comenius struggled all his life to educate all people. With his *Janua Linguarum*, he unlocked languages so that the rich and poor could learn to read. He prayed earnestly for the day when "peace would come" to all lands, but he knew that the only true peace came from knowing Jesus Christ, the Savior.

In his *Labyrinth of the World*, Comenius's pilgrim finally is taught to know Christ, and the Christ tells the pilgrim: "Thou hast seen, when among the scholars, how they strive to fathom all things. Let it be summit of thy learning to seek me in all my works, and to see how wondrously I rule thee and everything... But thou must seek all this learning, not that thou mayest please others, but that thou mayest come nearer to me."

In the band of Brethren who came to Herrnhut, Zinzendorf sensed a community dedicated to one

concept: "serving the Savior to save the world." The seed grew in Herrnhut, but it did not stay there. The strength of the church which was renewed came when it reached out from the small Silesian community into the world with the simple gospel message. David Nitschmann and Leonard Dober became the first missionaries to the West Indies. Others followed to Greenland, to Africa, to Asia, to North America. The "hidden seed" came to life and bore fruit for the Savior throughout the world.

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The Unity of the Brethren

John Hus (1369–1415)

The Unity of the Brethren are the spiritual descendants of the martyr John Hus who was condemned by the Council of Constance and was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670)

Comenius provided vital leadership for the Brethren during a most difficult period when they were exiled from their homeland and in danger of extinction as a church.

Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1756)

Zinzendorf provided refuge to the grandchildren of Comenius on his estate at Herrnhut in Germany. From that community the renewed Unity emerged and became the forerunner of the modern Protestant missionary movement.

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Jan Amos Comenius: A Gallery of Figures in the Life and World of Comenius

Jan Amos Comenius was acquainted with scholars, kings, churchmen, businessmen, ordinary and extraordinary men who profoundly influenced his life as he also influenced theirs.

Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna

Comenius placed great confidence in this Swedish leader, confidence that would be disappointed. As chancellor of Sweden (1612–1644), Oxenstierna wielded considerable power. King Gustavus Adolphus II was more of a warrior than an administrator, and generally left domestic affairs in Oxenstierna's able hands. The chancellor was a good organizer and a skilled diplomat. The peace he arranged with Poland in 1629 allowed Gustavus to enter the Thirty Years War in 1630. After Gustavus's death (1632), Oxenstierna was the dominant member of the committee that ruled Sweden until Queen Christina came of age in 1644. In that capacity he accomplished a number of social and economic reforms— among them the invitation to Comenius to develop Swedish schools. But Oxenstierna did not get along with the young queen and his power declined after Christina's accession. He was not directly involved in the negotiations of the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which may explain why his promise to Comenius, to look after the interests of the Brethren, was never fulfilled.

Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden (1594–1632)

The "Lion of the North," Gustavus Adolphus was acknowledged as one of the great military men of his day. When King Gustavus intervened in the Thirty Years War, he embodied the hope of Comenius and his fellow exiles for the re-establishment of their lands and a defeat of the Hapsburg Catholics. In *A Trumpet for the Year of Grace*, Comenius reflected this mood; Gustavus was shown to be a great conqueror in this pamphlet.

Ironically, Gustavus's primary purpose was to strengthen Sweden, not to enter a religious conflict. However sympathetic he may have been to the Moravians, he intended to settle the exiles near the Baltic, not in their former homeland. But Gustavus never got the chance to implement his plan. He died in 1632 of battle wounds.

The Peace of Westphalia materialized in 1648 while Queen Christina, daughter of Gustavus, reigned, and the Westphalian agreement brought to an end the "Bohemian question." If any exiles were to return to Czechoslovakia it would be as Catholics, or not at all. Few Europeans decried these peace conditions after an utterly meaningless and lengthy war. True to his pietistic inclination, Comenius wrote in a 1649 letter, "...it is the beginning of wisdom to look within ourselves and search our own omissions and want of humanity....we must admit that we [Bohemian exiles] have not taken enough thought for ourselves, but always besought others to carry the fight on our behalf."

So, even though Swedish negotiators for the Peace of Westphalia may have entertained special treatment for the Bohemians, the German Protestants desired an end to the war, without regard to the memory of Gustavus Adolphus.

Nicholas Drabik (1588–1671)

A life-long acquaintance of Comenius from the town of Straznice, Nicholas Drabik was a mystic who had prophetic visions after his suspension from the ministry by the Brethren. While Comenius awaited peace negotiations at Osnabruck, Drabik's prophecies included the overthrow of the Hapsburg power and the return of the Brethren to their land. Comenius so accepted the truth of these visions that his faith went

unshaken by their failure to materialize, even as the visions became more elaborate, transformed and eventually retracted.

Comenius collected Drabik's prophecies, as well as those of other mystics, into a book, *Lux in Tenebas*, which was never published but circulated among his friends. Until Comenius's death, he corresponded with this unusual man. His trust in Drabik has generally been considered a tragic mistake by Comenius historians.

Drabik converted to Catholicism after Comenius's death and disavowed his own prophecies. His conversion did not save him; Emperor Leopold I had Drabik's tongue cut out, then had him executed.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626)

Comenius produced a science of education with a distinctive Christian theology through the influence of Francis Bacon's inductive method. Both men were Aristotelian realists, contradicting the classic idealism of Plato.

Apparently, Comenius was quite familiar with Bacon's philosophical work, embodied in such writings as *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), a systematic classification of all branches of knowledge. Whereas Comenius's interest was in both knowledge of the natural world and knowledge of the supernatural, Bacon's was exclusively in the natural.

George Ritschel (1616–1683)

Like Comenius, George Ritschel was a Bohemian. He is considered one of the Oxford philosophers of the 17th century along with such thinkers as Hobbes and Locke.

His association with Comenius was as the latter's literary assistant (1644–1647) on *The Great Didactic* and his pansophic work. However, in the course of the years, Ritschel's elaborate treatment of the philosophy on metaphysics transformed so profoundly from Comenius's simpler and more compressed ideas that his contribution was not considered suitable for popular use. Both men were annoyed with each other over the delay in publishing the great work. Nonetheless, Comenius supported Ritschel during their long association financially and emotionally, even when it was a burden to do so.

Ferdinand II (1578–1637)

Son of a Styrian duke and a Bavarian princess, Ferdinand was chosen to succeed his childless uncle Matthias as Holy Roman Emperor. Trained by the Jesuits, the young duke was a diehard Catholic. He planned to use the imperial throne to reunite Germany as a Catholic nation, to undo the Protestant Reformation. In preparation, Matthias made him king of Bohemia in 1617—a move amazingly ratified by the Protestant nobles of Bohemia. They soon regretted it. Ferdinand's sharp curtailing of Protestant freedom incited a rebellion in Bohemia which eventually became the Thirty Years War.

For Ferdinand it was a holy war. After his uncle's death in 1619, he flung all the resources of the Holy Roman Empire into the conflict, even when Denmark, Sweden, and eventually France joined the opposition. (He did enlist the aid of his cousin Philip, who ruled Spain.) The war went well for Ferdinand early, but it seemed that whenever he was in a position to negotiate peace with substantial gains for his own side, he would do something that would add fuel to the fire of his enemies. The Bohemian revolt might have been bottled up after Ferdinand won the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, but the way he clamped down on the Protestant rebels alarmed other Protestants in Europe. His Edict of Restitution, demanding return of lands to the Roman Church, showed more zeal than tact, and stirred up more opposition. He turned back the Danish army, but also invaded Denmark, which may have convinced

Sweden to go to war. Things looked good for Ferdinand when he stopped the Swedish army in 1634, but then France entered the fray and turned the tide.

Ferdinand II died in 1637, leaving the embattled empire to his son, Ferdinand III (1608–1657). The new emperor was less of a zealot, and apparently not much of a warlord. The Catholic forces saw their fortunes slip away over the next eleven years, culminating in the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, in which Ferdinand III was forced to make many concessions.

Charles of Zerotin (1564–1636)

Count Charles was a powerful friend of the Unity of the Brethren. He first came in contact with Comenius when Comenius was a student at the Unity's Latin school at Prerov. Charles was lord of the city and had a special interest in the school. Having been educated abroad—as a pupil of Beza in Geneva—he was always seeking to upgrade the quality of the Unity's educational system. With the support of Count Charles, Comenius went on to study at the Reformed Gymnasium at Herborn in Nassau. Thus Charles's own respect for foreign schools, his love of education, and his reformed leanings all had an impact on young Comenius.

Throughout his life, Zerotin established friendly relations with leading personalities in Europe. He fought in the armies of Henry IV of France, was a friend of Philip du Plessis-Mornay, and corresponded with Queen Elizabeth and King James I. The count was also an accomplished writer.

In 1608 Charles became the supreme vice-regent of Moravia. But seeing the rise of anti-Protestant sentiment in succeeding years, he withdrew more and more from public life. He stayed out of the Bohemian uprising in 1618, and thus was allowed to keep his estates after the Catholic victory at White Mountain. On his estates, he sheltered a number of Unity leaders, including Comenius, until an imperial mandate made him expel them.

It was during his years at the Zerotin estate that Comenius wrote his first major work, *The Labyrinth of the World*. He dedicated the book to Count Charles.

Ludovicus de Geer of the Netherlands (1587–1652)

Louis de Geer was a wealthy industrialist in steel and war supplies. He received his largest order ever in 1631 from King Gustavus Adolphus to arm the Swedes during the Thirty Years War. It was after this that de Geer became Comenius's patron.

Through the de Geer family's financial support and sometimes overused hospitality, Comenius was supported and introduced to important ties not only in the Netherlands but in other parts of Europe as well.

In the 1640's, when Comenius failed to complete his huge didactical works within a particular time frame for use by Swedish schools, Louis de Geer temporarily cut off financial support. Comenius depended on the de Geers to allow him the freedom to write, minister, teach and continue his relentless quest for a home for the scattered Brethren exiles. Two other benefactors failed to come through with money at this crucial time as well, and in his own defense concerning the length of time needed to produce the pansophical works, Comenius said, "I don't just turn books by the dozen, I write them. I do not bring forth premature miscarriages."

John Milton (1608–1674)

The author of *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Milton and Comenius were linked by a mutual friend and patron, Samuel Hartlib. Milton and Comenius were both educational reformers of their day, though in many important areas, such as the education of girls and women and universal education, Milton tended not to agree with Comenius. Also Milton contemptuously dismissed Comenius's very successful Latin grammar book, *Janua Linguarum Reserata*.

Though Hartlib was more a disciple of Comenius's educational ideas, he nonetheless urged Milton to

write down his educational practices. Milton's pamphlet, *Of Education* was addressed to Hartlib in 1644, and it inspired some parents to enroll their children with Milton. However, Edward Phillips, nephew and former student of Milton's, had this to say about his uncle's educational ideas: "Now persons so far manuducted into the highest paths of literature both divine and human, had they received his documents with the same acuteness of wit and apprehension, the same industry, alacrity, and thirst after knowledge as the instructor was indued with, what prodigies of wit and learning might they have proved!" What recommended Milton's plan, like Comenius's, was a defined curriculum that progressed towards a clear goal in stages and with compassion and discipline. Both Milton and Comenius had a curious characteristic in common—the need for privacy and peaceful quietness. Unlike Comenius, Milton was to gain "a private and quiet life."

Samuel Hartlib (1596[?]-1662)

Prussian-born and Cambridge-educated, Samuel Hartlib was, like Comenius, an enthusiastic school reformer. Hartlib promoted inventions, dabbled in the sciences, published his own and other's manuscripts, tirelessly wrote letters, and associated with Jan Comenius, John Milton, John Dury, Robert Boyle and many other great men of his age, a fact of which he was quite proud.

Hartlib was an early disciple of Comenius in educational reform. When Comenius visited England (1642) at Hartlib's urging, he stayed for the duration with Hartlib. Throughout the years, Comenius depended on Hartlib's correspondence and travels for raising funds, although Hartlib himself was not necessarily attentive to his own profit and trusted that God would see to the necessary blessings for reforming schools or whatever. He felt that education ought to promote "exercises of industry" and "advance piety, learning, morality."

Comenius considered Hartlib his special friend, honored and esteemed. Milton also considered Hartlib a friend and praised him highly.

Hartlib was one of the Secretaries of the French and Latin tongues under Oliver Cromwell. It was Hartlib who brought Comenius together with such notables as John Dury and John Pell, a mathematician.

John Dury (1596-1680)

The Scotsman John Dury, like Samuel Hartlib, worked for the Council of State with the Secretary for the Foreign Tongues under Cromwell's government in England. John Dury was given the task of translating into French John Milton's *Eikonoklastes*. At this same time, Dury was librarian at St. James and traveled widely throughout Europe.

Comenius met with Dury on his trip to England in 1642 and they remained in correspondence and friendship during their long lives. Dury, as is true with so many of Comenius's acquaintances, was interested in educational reform and scientific thought. Dury was also an ecumenical who valiantly worked for Protestant union in Germany.

Count Nicolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700-1762)

A pietistic Lutheran all his life, Nicolaus von Zinzendorf was a kindred pietistic spirit to Comenius and these two non-contemporaries were bonded by an ecumenical spirit that worked for the unity of all Christian believers regardless of denominational preferences.

Zinzendorf began his Moravian identity by his act of kindness that allowed Moravian refugees to find sanctuary on his land in 1722. By 1737 he was consecrated as a bishop by Comenius's grandson, Daniel Ernst Jablonsky, in the Renewed Church of the Brethren, Comenius's remnant seed of the *Unitas Fratrum*.

One thread linking Zinzendorf and Comenius was a hymnal. Both were major figures in Moravian hymnology. In 1661, Comenius prepared a hymnal which contained three sections divided by historical content. In Comenius's day the songs went unaccompanied. By Zinzendorf's day, when Comenius's hymnal went through its third printing, congregational singing was accompanied by organ; other changes had also occurred. Zinzendorf said of the new songs he provided for the church, "I invent a new song of which I know nothing before and which will be forgotten as soon as it has served its purpose." He is credited with writing over 2000 hymns.

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Meeting of the Minds

Jan Amos Comenius and Rene Descartes

PAUL HEIDEBRECHT AND THE EDITORS

Rene Descartes (1596–1650), the great philosopher-mathematician from Touraine, France, was Catholic and Jesuit-trained. Like Comenius, he was a realist, but he never integrated the spiritual and the natural; thus he developed his dualistic philosophy. He is generally the first modern rationalist thinker.

In 1642, Descartes met Comenius at Endegeest near Leyden, Holland. The meeting was arranged by Samuel Hartlib, a mutual friend. Comenius was by this time a renowned educationist, Descartes was already a celebrity for his new philosophy. They met, cordially, for four hours, discussing their respective views of reality.

The two were not on the same wavelength. The fact that Descartes was Catholic and Comenius Protestant is not insignificant, but should not be overplayed. It was a conflict of mindsets. Descartes had little use for Comenius's efforts to integrate spiritual realities with the discoveries of science, nor for his dedication to the pansophic ideal of a unified knowledge, nor for his proposal for a universal language.

Comenius, on the other hand, found Descartes's rejection of Biblical authority in the natural sciences quite disturbing. Descartes's use of doubt to arrive at truth and his intellectual arguments for the existence of God were simply foreign to Comenius's way of thinking.

Later, Comenius was to write scathing critiques of Cartesian philosophy. In these, he further showed the great gulf fixed between his own Christian humanism and Descartes's rationalism. It is apparent that Comenius never really understood Descartes's analytical geometry nor his contributions to mechanical physics. What he did understand was that Cartesian philosophy was a clear threat to the unity of knowledge Comenius was striving for in his pansophism, which incorporated spiritual elements with scientific evidence.

Both Descartes and Comenius lived in free-thinking Holland for a time. They also both had significant interactions with Sweden. Earlier, Comenius had been hired to reform the Swedish school system. Later, Descartes was invited to tutor Queen Christina. It is said that Christina developed an aversion to Comenius and refused to study from any of his books. Later in life, possibly through Descartes's influence, she converted to Catholicism, abdicating her throne.

Comenius: A Man of Hope in a Time of Turmoil

JOSEF SMOLIK Christian History Magazine is pleased to present the comments of a Czech scholar, fellow countryman, and student of Comenius. Dr. Josef Smolik, Th.D., is a distinguished professor at the Comenius Evangelical Faculty in Prague. He is an ordained minister in the Czech Brethren Evangelical Church.

The 17th century, in which Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670) spent his adult life, was a time of violent change for the cultural and political life of Europe. The Roman Catholic Church, seriously shaken by the Reformation, hurried to regroup. After a systematic revision of its doctrine at the Council of Trent, the Church launched a deliberate re-catholicization program. Adopting a clever diplomatic strategy, led by the Jesuits, Catholicism tried to regain its monopoly in the courts of Europe and thereby push the Reformation aside. These efforts resulted in confessional wars—Protestant versus Catholic—which severely oppressed the people of Europe for 30 years. The question of faith shifted to the background and into the forefront was pushed the question of power.

The battle front between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation passed through Central Europe, where Comenius lived. The Protestant churches in Bohemia and Moravia were violently liquidated in the aftermath of the Battle of White Mountain (1620). Under the Hapsburg dynasty, Roman Catholicism became the only legal religion in those lands. Protestant nobles were forced into exile and the common people were corralled back into the Roman Church.

As a priest of one Reformation church, the Unity of the Brethren, Comenius experienced this tragic situation in the depths of his faith in Jesus Christ. His 1623 work, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, in which he escapes from the world's chaos to find peace in Christ, testifies to this. In the midst of these disasters he never succumbed to resignation or an ascetic refusal of the world. His reading of the Old Testament prophets helped him to see in these events God's judgment and a call to repentance. Out of this repentance grew an inextinguishable hope.

This hope bore him through a series of tragedies—his exile, the eventual extinction of his church, the loss of two wives, the fire in which he lost a major part of his research. It was a hope drawn from Scripture that looked beyond the historical events to see signs of the approaching Kingdom of God, a kingdom in which violence and evil would be overcome.

A Life of Hopeful Faith

But let us return to the life-story of Comenius and follow the way in which his hopeful faith asserted itself. After the defeat of the Reformation in Bohemia and Moravia, Comenius went into exile, going first to Poland, where the Unity had several congregations. There, in 1632, he was elected their bishop. (At that time the Unity had several bishops, but in the years 1656–1662 Comenius was the last and only bishop of his beloved church.)

From Leszno in Poland, he was a spectator to the Thirty Years War. When the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus entered the fray, Comenius saw him as a champion who would make the world safe for Protestants— or at least negotiate the safe return of the Unity to their homeland. These hopes were shattered by Gustavus's tragic and untimely death in 1632.

Meanwhile, Comenius was building a reputation as a scholar and educator, and 1641 found him in

England, invited by Parliament to organize scientific investigation. There he dealt with the issues that would concern him throughout his life—school reform, religious reform (particularly the reconciliation of the various Protestant groups, an ecumenical cause in which he grew close to the Scotsman John Dury), and universal peace.

Late in life, he presented his blueprint for the reorganization of mankind along these lines, *Via Lucis*, (1668), a “way of light” in which panharmony would reign. He dedicated the book to the London Academy of Sciences.

Many Homes But No Homeland

When civil war broke out in England, the followers of Comenius’s plans were divided into various camps, so Comenius left the country. He received offers to continue his work on pansophism in France and Holland, but he decided to work for Sweden, hoping that he could influence the Swedish chancellor Oxenstierna, after the death of Gustavus Adolphus, to take up the Czech question in his peace deliberations and to help the Czech exiles return home. Comenius lived in Elbing in Prussia 1642–1648 and pressed his cause—unsuccessfully. The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years War with significant gains for the Lutherans and Calvinists, but smaller groups such as the Unity were left out.

His hopes unfulfilled, Comenius returned to Leszno. His duties as bishop then led him to Slovakia and Hungary, where the Unity had members. Into this period of Comenius’s life falls a chapter full of mistakes, as represented by his contacts with the mystic preacher Nicholas Drabik, his classmate. Drabik had visions of a coalition of Protestant rulers in Europe that would defeat the Hapsburgs and return the Reformation churches to their lost position. Comenius believed in Drabik’s visions and shared his conviction that they were a revelation from God. This brought many difficulties, as Comenius relied more and more on Drabik as a political adviser. This sad chapter in the life of Comenius obviously grew out of his strong desire to return to his homeland.

Comenius spent the last years of his trouble-filled life in Amsterdam. Invited there by the rich merchant Lawrence de Geer, he was received with respect as a scholar and pedagogue. The city council saw to the publication of his various pedagogical works (*Opera didactica omnia*, 1657–8). He began to publish introductory volumes of his far-reaching pansophistic work, called *Panergesia and Panaugia*. Although he never completed this work, he committed its publication to his closest colleagues, but it was not published and got lost. It was finally discovered in 1934 in Halle and was published in 1966 by the Academy of Sciences in Prague. Comenius died in 1670 and was buried in Naarden, Holland.

A Teacher’s Teacher

The advances in educational theory for which Comenius was acclaimed were strongly influenced by his involvement with the Unity of the Brethren. The Unity had a highly developed pastoral ministry.

Mutual care and service linked all its members together in productive love. Out of this grew Comenius’s interest in psychology at a time when psychological consideration in education had no place at all. His instructions on how to proceed catechistically with children from the earliest age demonstrated how sensitively he took into account the ontogenesis of the child and how he complied with the levels of mental development. This was in accord with Comenius’s attempt to make learning easier for pupils, particularly the learning of languages, which was for students in the Middle Ages an onerous burden. Comenius discovered the psychological principle that an image—a graphic object— facilitates learning, and so he created an entirely new method of language instruction, which he elaborated in the book known all over the world, *Orbis pictus (The Visable World)*, 1653–54). From the observance of nature, where things do not occur through force but in freedom, spontaneously, Comenius deduced his pedagogical principles, which led to the unforced spontaneous development of the abilities of the child, so that learning became a pleasure and a game (*schola ludus*).

The response of pedagogical opinion throughout the world was enormous. Even today he is hailed as the founder of modern pedagogy.

Pansophy: A Peaceable Kingdom

Comenius was also a great pansophic thinker, as has been discovered by recent Comeniology. For this work as well, he drew his basic inspiration from the Unity of the Brethren. In the Czech reformation, ever since Hussite times, there had existed the vivid notion of the eschatological renewal of the Church and the whole world. Comenius applied this idea to the changes which spread through Europe in the fifteenth century. He believed that these changes would lead to the radical renewal of mankind. After the fall of the Hapsburgs, which he anticipated and which he tried to accomplish along with other European political figures, Comenius expected the possibility of ordering the relationship of the churches, states, and sciences for mutual cooperation and securing peace in an entirely new manner. Comenius had already devoted himself to these ideas while in England and often not even his colleagues in the Unity understood him. Comenius believed that, in the situation about to occur, a universal council of representatives of all the churches and nations and of scientists should gather to create new international institutions which would foster the preservation of peace in the areas of politics, science, and the Church. The question of peace occupied him in particular (*Angelus pacis*, 1667).

Behind this impressive vision of the approaching Kingdom of God was the firm hope that Christ had triumphed, overcome sin, and that his kingdom was continuing to move forward in history. Light is stronger than darkness, peace and justice stronger than violence. Comenius placed his opinions in his book *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica*. However, his ideas met with the opposition of orthodox theologians like Samuel Maresius and politicians like Sweden's chancellor Oxenstierna. They criticized him for underestimating sin and evil. Comenius was aware of the necessity of Christ's sacrifice for sin; however, he believed that the coming of Christ and his kingdom also belong to the fullness of the gospel.

Comenius, man of hope, refused to let his perspective of the future be overshadowed by the dark clouds which appeared over his life and the world of his day. He correctly recognized that the monopoly of Thomistic philosophy was coming to an end and that onto the stage of history were entering, while still with significant difficulties, new currents of thought which were bringing profound changes. Comenius was sensitive to these currents and placed great hope in them, while the institutional church feared them, closed itself up against them and more than once fought against them.

The foremost among these ideas at that time was the concept of ecumenism, of which Comenius was an outspoken pioneer. While not overlooking confessional differences nor minimizing them, he nevertheless looked above all else on what Christians have in common. He pointed out that no one is entirely right, that confessional conceptions and emphases are mutually complementary and not exclusive. (It is moving to read Comenius's portrayal of the death of his church, whose members in dispersion entered the one great universal Church of Christ.) He proposed the establishment of a "Council of Churches" and considered the social responsibilities that it should deal with. Among its primary tasks, as he envisioned it, was the publication and distribution of the Scriptures.

Comenius was open as well to the ideas of the movement which was to have such a decisive influence on the development of modern technological society, the Enlightenment. In 1642 Comenius met the outstanding protagonist of the new philosophy which was to replace Thomism in Europe, Rene Descartes. He did not agree with Descartes's division of truth into the truth of faith and the truth of reason. Comenius anticipated the great danger which could emerge out of a conflict between faith and science. It was a conflict which marked the relation of the churches and scientific investigation for centuries. Science went on to develop autonomously, unbound by ethical norms, and this eventually led to the fateful results of the nuclear age.

For Comenius there was always only one truth. The light of reason must submit in obedience to the will of God. This is Comenius's fundamental pedagogical and pansophic principle.

In Christ Comenius found the light of his life. In the midst of tumultuous events he sang out his love to Christ in a large number of songs. It was to Christ that he yielded himself. Above all else he bequeathed to his descendants in the Unity the love of the pure truth of God and his Word. Having found his hope in Christ, Comenius drew from him all his life.

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The Thirty Years War

Comenius was only 26 when it started; he was an old man by its end. Europe exploded into war and for 30 long years princes and generals jockeyed for position while the common folk saw their land laid waste. Historians estimate that half of Germany's population was lost in the fighting. War followed Comenius as he moved throughout Europe. It served as a painful backdrop to his life. In some ways the war robbed Comenius of lasting fame; but it also gave his writings an edge of urgency—education would bring understanding, and understanding, peace.

1—The war began in Bohemia, Comenius's homeland. Bohemians, mostly Protestant, were unhappy with Emperor Ferdinand II of Austria. They had enjoyed a measure of independence under Ferdinand's predecessors, but this emperor was cracking down. A devout Catholic, Ferdinand had closed one Protestant church and destroyed another. As a staunch enforcer of the Counter-Reformation, he was determined to make all his lands thoroughly Catholic.

The violence began May 23, 1618, with the Defenestration of Prague— Bohemian rebels stormed the royal palace and threw Ferdinand's governors out the window (they landed in a manure pile and were not killed). The Protestant rebels elected Frederick V as their king.

But Ferdinand was a Hapsburg, part of the dynasty that had held thrones throughout Europe for nearly two centuries (mostly in Austria, Spain, and Germany, known then as the Holy Roman Empire). Ferdinand got help from his Spanish cousins and defeated the Protestants at the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. In typical Hapsburg fashion, Ferdinand was expanding his power. Not only did he reassert his control over Bohemia, but he was also named emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.

2—King Christian IV of Denmark, a Protestant, perhaps fearing such consolidation of power, moved against Ferdinand's empire from the north. But the Catholic forces, led by Wallenstein and Tilly, prevailed and actually invaded Denmark.

Fresh from victory over the Danish, Emperor Ferdinand issued the Edict of Restitution, demanding the return of land seized by Lutherans since 1551. It restated official toleration for Lutherans, but excluded Calvinists and other Protestant groups (more bad news for Comenius and the Brethren).

3—Gustavus Adolphus II of Sweden, a Lutheran stronghold, invaded Germany in 1630. The Swedes won substantial victories in Germany over the next dozen years, even after Gustavus's death in 1632. The tide was turning, and the Hapsburg forces began to seek peace negotiations.

Another force in this conflict was France, a Catholic nation, but heavily populated by Calvinists. Under prime minister Cardinal Richelieu, France substantially funded the Swedish campaign against Ferdinand. The French interest was more nationalistic and dynastic than religious. France was poised to become a major power if Ferdinand's empire weakened. Also, there were still sharp memories of the fighting between the house of Hapsburg and the French house of Valois in the previous century. France's Louis XIII was of the house of Bourbon, but was still wary of the Spanish-Austrian Hapsburg cooperation. The fall of the Hapsburgs would seem sweet.

4—French forces entered the conflict in 1643, invading southern Germany. Fierce battles ensued, but

Ferdinand's power was waning.

Finally, in 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia was negotiated. Imperial power was dismantled as the various German states won sovereignty over most of their affairs. France won some important bits of land. Calvinists won toleration. The Bohemian question— the return of the Brethren to their homeland, which Comenius pressed for—was never touched.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

What Children Owe to Comenius

LOIS LEBAR Dr. Lebar is professor emerita of Christian education at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, where she taught 1945-1975. Along with her twin sister, Mary, she was a pioneer of modern C.E. practices. Her book, *Education That is Christian*, is a popular college text

"Quickly! Pleasantly! Thoroughly!..." called out Comenius to the frustrated teachers of his day. "Schools should not be places of torture, slaughter-houses of the mind!"

Is it possible to teach pleasantly, yet quickly and thoroughly at the same time? Most schools of that day could not have conceived of such an idea. Though not many in the 17th century heard this call for educational reform, today we consider Comenius the first modern educator. We are still trying to implement the basic principles that he set forth in his *Great Didactic*. For he laid the foundations for teaching according to Scripture and according to God's "second book," nature. The young child as God made him actively examine the world around him, using all his senses, eager to learn all he can. Too often in school he has been confined to memorization and meaningless words that dull his interest and initiative.

While educators through the century have tended to go either to the extreme of overemphasizing the disciplines of knowledge or the experience of the learner, Comenius kept these two essentials of teaching in balance. The schools of Comenius's day furnished pupils with classical Latin verbiage, but did not train them to observe or to think. He lacked the advantage of psychological studies, but he drew analogies of growth from nature. (Scripture often compares spiritual growth with natural growth.) "Development comes from within," Comenius observed from watching the processes of nature. "Nature compels nothing to advance that is not driven forward by its own mature strength." He proceeded to work with the processes of nature rather than against them. Teachers and books may help or hinder growth, but the learner must do his own growing. "Outward ceremonies without inward truth are an abomination to God," said Comenius.

If a child is to engage in valuable learning activities, he must have a desire to learn, intrinsic interest, and attention rather than artificial incentives. His whole person must be enlisted. His native curiosity will be directed into constructive channels rather than repressed. Why isn't he encouraged to discover what he can for himself? The classroom can breathe an inductive spirit. Then things and examples would precede pleasantly from the concrete to the abstract, from the easy to the difficult, from the near to the remote. On the foundation of the pupils' firsthand experience, teaching would be imparting and guiding rather than storing the memory, as had been the custom.

Essential knowledge is provided for the learner when he is ready for it, when he sees the need for it, when he can use it for gaining his goals. So the place of teacher and content is not minimized. Comenius's goals of piety, morality and knowledge could not be attained by unguided self-expression. The learner continually needs :new facts and insights to interpret his daily 'experiences and to lead to advanced problems and solutions.

Comenius also sensed the significance of individual differences and individual needs. When he was a student. individual recitation had been the order of the day. Each pupil had to wait his turn to recite to the teacher. "This is a waste of time," thought Comenius as he developed a truly democratic class spirit that was not much appreciated in his day of power politics. "Pupils can work in a group without losing their individuality." In a group they could not only learn new truth, but also practice the character traits

of self-control and concern for the other fellow, rather than simply be exposed to a superficial veneer of morality. Comenius graded the school into four levels, and wrote Latin texts for these levels. He felt that if pupils learned their lessons more quickly and easily, the time saved could be utilized to give a thorough grounding in morality and religion.

It was Comenius who popularized the picture book for educational purposes, who wrote the first textbook to employ pictures as a teaching device. Whenever he could not bring into the classroom the actual object that was to be the subject of discussion, he used pictures, charts, diagrams, maps and models.

What revolutionary ideas! Universal compulsory education for the youth of both sexes! Teaching all things to all people—a truly liberal concept that would broaden perspectives after a narrow Latin curriculum! For the present and for the future life! All this was not just theory, for Comenius practiced it himself in Moravia and in Poland. Today we are still trying to train “teachers to teach less so that learners may learn more.”

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Jan Amos Comenius: Christian History Timeline

Here we place the events of Comenius's life in chronological context with the horrid Thirty Years War on one side and, on the other, the exciting lives and achievements of his contemporaries.

Comenius was a true world Christian. As the selected events listed indicate, he was widely traveled, but not always by his choice. He lived many lives in his 78 years—Bishop, Educator, Refugee, Peacemaker, Author, Futurist.

His life intersected the lives of many notable Europeans. Many pioneers in science, art, philosophy, literature and politics were contemporary with him. It was a time of great cultural and intellectual ferment and Comenius was active in the thick of it all.

Comenius

1592 Born in Eastern Moravia

1604 Orphaned by death of parents at Uhersky Brod

1614 Attends Prerov Latin Schol, Herborn Gymnasium, University of Heidelberg

1616 Ordained a minister in the Unity of the Brethren church at Zeravice

1618 Appointed pastor at Fulnek

1620–1627 Lives in hiding in Bohemia after Hapsburg victory at White Mountain. Writes *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*

1628 Flees Bohemia for Leszno, Poland

1632 Consecrated as bishop in the Unity of the Brethren. Publishes *Janua Linguarum Reserata* for language study

1641 Visits England to set up pansophic college. Publishes *The Way of Light*, a plan for universal education and peace

1642 Forced to leave England due to civil war there, begins work with Sweden. Moves to Elbing, Prussia

1648 Returns to Leszno, where his second wife dies. Becomes senior bishop of the Unity

1650 Moves to Saros-Patak, Hungary, to head Bretheren schools there. Publishes *Lux in Tenebris* on prophetic visions

1655–1656 Returns to Leszno, but is forced to flee; most of his pansophic work is burned; Settles in Amsterdam with De Geer as patron

1657 Complete education works (*Opera Didactica*) published in Holland

1658 Publishes *Orbis Pictus*, first illustrated textbook

1670 Dies in Amsterdam; buried at Naarden, Holland

Other Personalities

1605 William Shakespeare (1564–1616) writes *Macbeth*

1609 Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) builds first refracting telescope

1611 King James I of England (1566–1625) publishes King James Bible

1620 Francis Bacon (1561–1626) writes *Novum Organum*, analysis of knowledge

1621 William Bradford (1590–1657) becomes governor of Plymouth Colony

1623 Jakob Boehme, German mystic (1575–1624) publishes *Mysterium Magnum*

1629 Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642) appointed prime minister of France

1631 Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) settles in Amsterdam as painter-teacher

1637 Rene Descartes (1596–1650) publishes *Discourse a la Methode*

1647 George Fox (1624–1691) founds Society of Friends (Quakers)

1653 Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) declared Lord Protector of England

1665 Isaac Newton (1642–1727) invents differential calculus

1667 John Locke (1632–1704) publishes *An Essay Concerning Toleration*

1667 John Milton (1608–1674) publishes *Paradise Lost*

1678 John Bunyan (1628–1688) publishes *Pilgrim's Progress*

The Thirty Years War (1618-1648)

For three decades this horrible war spread destruction across Europe and was the backdrop that influenced many of the turns in Comenius's life.

1618 War begins with revolt in Prague

1620 Ferdinand defeats Bohemian Protestants at White Mountain

1625 King Christian IV of Denmark enters war against Hapsburgs

1630 King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden enters war

1632 Gustavus dies in battle

1643 France officially enters war

1648 Treaty of Westphalia ends the war

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Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

Learning from Nature

The Educational Legacy of Jan Amos Comenius

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***"To teach all things
to all men
and from
all points of view."***

These are the words that have given Jan Amos Comenius a reputation in the history of educational thought. Hailed as a modern thinker; Comenius is honored by many for his insights into the learning process and methods of teaching that are suitable to it. Yet his contributions can only be analyzed properly within the framework of the 17th century, which has been characterized as an "age of science." Comenius was a man of two worlds. He was medieval in some ways, modern in others; his originality shines in several instances, yet he reflects prevailing opinions, ideals and common sense that can be found in numerous other writers. Comenius was foremost a schoolmaster; his practical efforts in school reform and curriculum development earned him his status and shaped his theorizing on education. The study of this man's educational ideas is a worthy venture, because several centuries of intellectual ferment flow into his thought and pass on to several more centuries of educational innovation.

Comenius stood firmly within the tradition of Renaissance humanism and of the Protestant Reformation, although he, like many others, was disappointed in some of the fruits of these movements. The scientific and literary humanism of the Renaissance was a reaction against the dead orthodoxy of medieval scholasticism. It liberated man's reasoning capacities from the straitjacket of Aristotelian physics and logic, which had been married to Christian doctrine and stifled all exploration of the natural world.

Thus, in education, the humanists gave birth to the classical liberal arts curriculum. Greek and Latin were the primary subjects, and they were read with a new enthusiasm, perceived as the highest expression of the human spirit. Other disciplines were also important, especially mathematics, art, and the study of the natural world, astronomy in particular. Physical training once again found its way into the curriculum of many schools. Such an education would produce a cultured gentleman, a well-rounded person in whom knowledge and virtue would mix perfectly.

But by the 17th century, Renaissance humanism had begun to go the way of medieval scholasticism before it, degenerating into a rigid orthodoxy. Too absorbed with assimilating the learning of the ancients, the humanists could not focus on the proper questions for extending knowledge. The past had become excess baggage that slowed down any intellectual progress. The Protestant Reformation had also lost its driving force of evangelical zeal and dissolved into warring political factions grasping for territory to control and crushing all those within who would not conform.

This demise was reflected in the schools. A few classical authors dominated the curriculum and religious teaching had devolved into sterile catechisms. Luther's initial interest in universal education had withered and any quality education that did exist was reserved for monarchy and aristocrats. The general populace remained largely illiterate.

An important figure in the transition from Renaissance thought to a more scientific perspective, and who

probably influenced Comenius more than anyone else, was Francis Bacon (1561–1626). In many ways, Comenius was a popularizer of Baconian thought in continental Europe. Bacon, like Comenius, was a humanist but one who grasped the need for a fresh look at the universe without the presuppositions of classical thought. This fresh look was obtained by an inductive method of scientific investigation. Observation of the environment would yield reliable ideas about the universe. By studying nature firsthand, man could find that unity of all knowledge and gain a mastery over nature.

While remaining devout in his faith, Bacon separated theological concerns from scientific pursuits. While the two categories would not contradict each other in his judgment, they were not to overlap with each other. Bacon's contribution to science was a method of investigation. His concerns were still very much those of the Renaissance—the compilation of a universal knowledge and the formation of an international community of scientists/ scholars (Bacon wrote his own utopian scheme in *The New Atlantis*). The same is true of Comenius. He did not go much beyond Bacon. What he did, however, was apply Bacon's new method to education.

"Teaching All Things to All Men"

An analysis of Comenius' educational philosophy must begin with the notion of *pansophism*. Widely used by Renaissance thinkers who struggled for a synthesis of religion with philosophy and science, a pansophic system was considered a means to achieving personal virtue and worldwide peace. An understanding of truth so conceived would lead to knowing the good (and God who established the good) and thus doing and seeking the good.

Comenius defines pansophy as "a universal wisdom, i.e. the knowledge of all that is, in the way in which it is in reference to the purpose and the use of it. Three things then are required, viz: that everything is known by its essence, in its external forms and that everything clearly has a useful purpose." (W. Rood, *Comenius and the Low Countries*) The useful purpose of all knowledge, according to Comenius, is to manifest the glory of God and to inspire man to love all that is good. While the scope of this universal knowledge is encyclopaedic, it does not mean knowledge of all data. By the 17th century, people realized that this was humanly impossible. Rather, it implied a way of organizing the facts of knowledge so they would express wisdom and constitute knowledge of practical utility. Both Bacon and Comenius shared this vision of an orderly structure of knowledge and carried the effort to achieve it beyond Renaissance thinkers by placing it upon a scientific foundation (hence the need for societies and colleges devoted to scientific investigation). Clearly, such a pursuit would require the lifetimes of more than one scholar. Comenius spent 40 years compiling his encyclopaedia only to lose most of it in 1656 when his house was burned.

A pansophic unity of all necessary knowledge had certain educational implications for Comenius. Books containing the universal knowledge were necessary. A system of schools which instructed children in this knowledge was essential but could only function with trained teachers. A college where the architects of this universal scheme could do their work was needed (Comenius favored England for the location of this college). Finally, a universal language was required. Comenius had given up on Latin and proposed inventing a new language combining the best of all. Unfortunately, interest in encyclopaedism had waned in Europe. Only the British were interested but they were too absorbed with political strife in the 17th century to give it much attention.

The Great Didactic

Comenius's science of education is spelled out most clearly in *The Great Didactic*. He saw the didactic process as parallel with the growth of natural organisms. Nature refers to the visible physical world that expresses the character of its Creator. On a few occasions, Comenius used a mechanical model to describe nature, but mostly he implied an outward form corresponding to an inner, spiritual reality. In nature, Comenius observed a fundamental order and purpose and from these he deduced a set of universal principles applicable to education: nine of these principles are summarized in "Principles

Comenius Observed in Nature Applicable to Education.”

These principles led to certain conditions for effective teaching. It should begin before the mind is corrupted and establish a proper moral foundation. The mind of the student must be prepared to receive instruction (by stirring up the desire to know) and should move from simple material to the more complex. The senses are the first stage of acquiring knowledge, followed by memory and understanding. The mental energies of pupils should not be dissipated over a wide range of subjects but focused on that which is appropriate to the age, interests and mental ability of the pupil. Children should be constantly helped in their learning, not punished for failing.

How can the teacher be assured that this knowledge which the student gains will endure? Comenius once again follows the footsteps of nature and identifies a host of principles. The subjects must have some practical use and be taught thoroughly, as the teacher points out resemblances between their content. Studying books should not be a substitute for direct observation and demonstration. The content must develop progressively in conjunction with the pupil's abilities. Continual repetition of material that has been learned will give the pupil a sense of mastery.

The organization of schools is also discussed in *The Great Didactic*. Since teaching is developmental by nature, all education should proceed through stages. The first six years of a child's life are spent in the home but may be the most critical years for education. The mother's role is central to the process. She is the best teacher a child can have. Comenius prescribes a broad curriculum of introductory lessons and experiences (in more detail in *The School of Infancy*) for mothers to follow with their children. Morality and piety are uppermost in this curriculum but all the disciplines are represented.

Play activities have educational value. In the home environment, a child can develop proper habits and a right attitude toward authority. Comenius even suggests pre-natal care as part of the child's education and places great emphasis on affection and love for children. To the contemporary parent, most of Comenius's ideas are quite familiar, since they appear in countless numbers of books on parenting. Indeed, Locke, Pestalozzi and Rousseau repeated many of Comenius's suggestions.

The next six years of the child's life are to be spent in a primary school. Comenius urged the use of the native language only. Writing, mathematics, geography, history, music, religious instruction and simple crafts were all elements of the curriculum.

At the age of twelve, a child would enter the Latin school where he would remain for six years. Here he began to learn Greek, Latin and Hebrew using the language-teaching methods Comenius had developed. Other subjects included physics, math, ethics, geometry, music, astronomy, history, rhetoric and theology. Pupils would spend only four hours per day in the classroom and one-hour periods of instruction would be interspersed with physical recreation. Comenius wrote many dramas for his pupils which helped them act out what they had learned (a controversial move at a time when the theater was held in low regard by religious people).

At the age of 18, the industrious brilliant student could continue his education in a university where the entire pansophic system of knowledge would be the curriculum. Students were given complete freedom in their studies and could specialize in any areas of interest to them. The faculty devoted its energies to writing books. Unfortunately, this radical proposal was never implemented by Comenius, although it can be seen why German educators in the 19th century were so impressed with how Comenius had anticipated their program of higher education.

Comenius was one of few to propose educations for girls at all stages. In his judgment, girls were capable of learning everything boys could learn, although their roles in life might be different. Any other position is inconsistent if one places such high value on motherhood, and mothers are the first teachers of their children.

The Impact of Comenian Thought

Perhaps Comenius's greatest contribution was his vision of universal education—teaching all persons all subjects in all ways. Few have thought about education in such broad terms. Although primitive in comparison, Comenius ranks with Dewey in this regard. Education stretches beyond the classroom to encompass all of life, yet it also enriches the classroom with an organized knowledge that includes all elements of the human experience and leads to the development of pupils as human beings.

Comenius lived at the edge of the modern era, and had glimpses into its future which mingled with his many traditional views. Although his own work was largely forgotten until the 1800s, Comenius strongly influenced educational philosopher John Locke, who in turn influenced Rousseau. Thus the Czech master paved the way for many modern educational structures and ideas. One wonders if even today, with the explosion of information and fragmentation of knowledge, the world needs a bit of the pansophy Comenius pushed so hard.

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Principles Comenius Observed in Nature Applicable to Education

1. Nature observes a suitable time.
2. Nature prepares the material, before she begins to give it form.
3. Nature chooses a fit subject to act upon, or first submits one to a suitable treatment in order to make it fit.
4. Nature is not confused in its operations, but in its forward progress advances distinctly from one point to another.
5. In all the operations of nature, development is from within.
6. Nature, in its formative processes, begins with the universal and ends with the particular.
7. Nature makes no leaps, but proceeds step by step.
8. If nature commences anything, it does not leave off until the operation is completed.
9. Nature carefully avoids obstacles and things likely to cause hurt.

The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart

A Synopsis of the Imaginative Work by Comenius

The wit and wisdom of Comenius, also his frustration and his deep spirituality, are seen most clearly in the book he wrote in 1623, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*. He wrote it while in hiding, in the wake of the Battle of White Mountain. The Brethren weren't welcome in Bohemia anymore. Comenius was a stranger in his own land.

His anguish took refuge in allegory. He wrote of a young man trying to find his way in the world—but what a strange world it was. The *Labyrinth* strikes one as a cross between John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Ecclesiastes. Of course, Comenius wrote five years before Bunyan was born. His work is more of a social commentary than Bunyan's, with a cynical edge to it. Comenius's pilgrim finds that all in this world is vanity, until...Well, we're getting ahead of the story.

We quote some excerpts from *The Labyrinth* on succeeding pages, but we were so struck by the cleverness of this allegory that we wanted to give you a plot summary as well. Perhaps, if you're interested, we'll publish a modern version of this classic work, but for now sit back and enjoy this condensed travelogue of Comenius's adventures in a strange world.

The *Labyrinth of the World* strikes the reader as a mixture of *Pilgrim's Progress* and Ecclesiastes. The narrator is a pilgrim, wandering through an allegorical world, and he sees only futility. Tie-ins to Comenius's own life are evident—he wrote this in hiding, after the death of his first wife and their children, as the Hapsburg forces were beginning to run the Protestants out of Bohemia and Moravia.

As a young man, the narrator wonders what to do with his life. He decides to test out all occupations before choosing. With two guides, Searchall and Delusion, he comes upon a walled city, surrounded by a great abyss. This is the earth. Its citizens pass each other in the marketplace, wearing masks, which often make it difficult to see where they are going. There is much stumbling, much arguing. Death, with its sharp scythe, stalks the city, felling some with arrows. Some shriek or weep a bit, but soon life continues as before. At one gate of the city, a continuing stream of people crawl in from the abyss—the children who repopulate the city.

There are six major streets to the city. The first is home to domestic folks. Since people can only enter in pairs, there are large scales at the gate to match men with women. The pilgrim wonders how this scrawny man can balance out with that healthy girl, and is told that the man must have a fat pocketbook "or a hat before which other hats are doffed." Once paired up, the couples are handcuffed together. Much misery follows, as they continually pull in opposite directions and sometimes children are handcuffed to them as well. But when Death strikes one partner, the other is free. This is what happens to the pilgrim, and he proceeds to the second street.

This is where the laborers live and work. The pilgrim sees no job he likes: "Every human occupation is but labor and weariness." Men toil only to feed their mouths; money is earned to be spent, only "it was spent easier than it had been earned." Everywhere he sees envy, ill will, dishonesty, and fraud—and no concern for the soul.

The third street houses the learned class. "Candidates" enter through a gate called Discipline. To be accepted, they must have heads of steel, brains of quicksilver, backs of lead, skin of iron, and purses of

gold. Once inside the gate they are—sometimes painfully— reformed to conform with the others. The pilgrim goes through this process.

In the square are shelves and shelves of “boxes,” though some call them books. People go to the shelves, pull off a box and bite into it. Some gorge themselves, others savor slowly, still others just collect the boxes and never taste. Always there are new boxes being prepared, though some preparers just steal the stuff out of other boxes. And the people always argue over whose boxes are best.

As the pilgrim wanders the rooms of this street, he encounters different disciplines. In one, the people are coloring words to make them more pleasing; in another, he is offered eyeglasses and tries several pairs, but each makes things look different; in another, mathematicians are sorting through a heap of ciphers; in another, geometers are drawing lines; in another, astronomers climb ladders and catch stars; in another, historians walk around with telescopes that look back over their shoulders. He finds doctors so interested in the patient’s anatomy that the patient dies. He finds lawyers studying pictures of fences and devising new ways to take someone else’s property.

The pilgrim moves on to the fourth street, where the clergy reside. After brief stops in a synagogue and mosque, he comes upon a Christian church, where a congregation sits before a picture of the son of God. Some have little pictures of their own, which they wrap up and eat. The pilgrim is pleased at first, but then realizes the people do not live righteously. Worse, the priests don’t either.

He moves to another room where there is a large touchstone in the center (the Bible?), but people are disputing what color it is. In fact, they have divided into two or three adjoining chapels according to their views. There is some fighting here and the pilgrim wants, for a moment, to follow a small, tattered group without a chapel as it flees behind a curtain, but he is already being whisked away by his guides.

The fifth street is the seat of government. The judges bear names like Lovegold, Takebribe, Hearsayjudge, and Atheist. A woman, named Sincerity is hauled in for slander—she called a tippler a drunkard. The prosecutor, Adversary, bribes his way to a victory.

The pilgrim also sees kings. One has a tube to his ear, through which he remotely listens to the complaints of his people. Another is controlled by his advisors, and can’t move without their say-so. Another basks in luxury, and is violently overthrown. Caught up in this, pilgrim supports the new ruler, and must flee when the old one returns to power.

The knights live in the sixth street, always devising new ways to kill people. They are rewarded for how many people they have slain. This too seems like foolishness to the young pilgrim.

He is then taken to the castle of Fortune. People are lined up outside, but Dame Fortune sends her blind servant Chance to select only a few. Her castle has three levels: one for the rich, a dungeon where they count the links on their chains and boast about whose is heaviest; one full of delicacies—leisure, food, recreation, sex—and bored residents; and one for the famous, who sit on high chairs and receive bows from passersby—but the chairs are easily toppled.

Finally the pilgrim is taken to the court of the Queen—she calls herself Wisdom. To the young man’s pleasant surprise, Solomon comes to sit in on the proceedings. The Queen receives complaints that the world isn’t working right, that the culprits are Drunkenness, Greed, Usury, Lust, Pride, and others. She immediately banishes all these characters, but the problem persists, so she appoints a committee to investigate. The committee reports that the culprits have indeed left, that there is one who looks like Drunkenness, but his name is Joviality, one who looks like Greed, but his name is Thrift, etc. The Queen accepts the report, but Solomon whispers that only the names have been changed. The Queen hears a number of other grievances, but her decisions always support the status quo, or make it worse. Finally Solomon rips the veil from the Queen’s face—it isn’t Wisdom at all, but Vanity—and storms out. She sends

three handmaidens, Affability, Craftiness, and Delight, to seduce him. Unfortunately, their seduction succeeds. Discouraged, the pilgrim goes to the realm of death and sees only blackness, at the edge of the abyss.

But a voice calls him to "Return!" He retreats to a room inside himself and there he meets Christ, in dazzling light. All else is meaningless, but in Christ there is truth. He is ushered back to the tattered folks who disappeared behind the curtain. There he finds things working as they should, free from pride, greed, and lust—a community committed to its Lord. This is the Paradise of the heart.

A scene from the dramatization of The Labyrinth of the World from the film Jan Amos Comenius

Selection from Laybrinth of the World: The Marketplace of the World

And my guide said to me: "Since you have to see everything, let us first go to the marketplace." And he led me there. And behold, I saw countless multitudes. like a mist. For there were people there from the whole world, of every language and nation, of every age, size, sex, estate, class, and profession. As I first gazed at them, I saw how strangely they swayed to and fro, like the swarming of bees, but far more wondrous.

For some walked, some ran, some rode, some stood, some sat, some got up, some reclined, some turned in various directions; some were alone, others in larger or smaller groups. They varied greatly in dress and appearance. Some were stark naked, and made strange gestures as they talked. When someone met someone else, there was various juggling of the hands, mouth, knees, etc.— saluting, bowing, and other foolish things. And my guide said to me: "Here you have that noble human race, that delightful creation, which has been granted sense and immortality. See how it bears upon it the image of the infinite God, and His likeness, which you will recognize by the variety of their creations. As in a looking-glass, you will see the worth of this, your human race."

I then looked at them more carefully, and saw immediately that everyone in the crowd, when walking among the others, wore a mask on his face; but when he went away, alone or among his peers, he pulled it off. Yet when he had to go among the crowds, he fastened it on again. I asked what this meant.

The guide answered: "That, my dear son, is worldly prudence, so that each man may not show to all what he is. Alone in his home a man may be as he is, but before others it is better to appear affable, and thus he assumes a certain mien."

Then the desire befell me to watch more carefully and see how these people appeared without their dissembling covering. As I looked attentively, I saw that both in their faces and in their bodies all were deformed in various ways....

Therefore I decided to be silent and rather quietly behold these fine things of which I had seen the beginning. I gazed again, and I saw how artfully some handled these masks, quickly removing them and putting them back on, so that they were able to give themselves a different mien, whenever they saw that this was to their advantage. I was already beginning to understand somewhat the course of the world, but I kept silent.

I also observed and heard that they talked among themselves in various languages, so that they mostly did not understand or answer each other, or they gave an answer inappropriate to what had been asked, each one differently. Whenever a large crowd gathered, almost everyone spoke, each one listening to himself and none to the others, although they often grabbed one another to attract attention. Even that didn't work: instead it caused much brawling and scuffling.

I exclaimed: "In the name of God, are we then in Babel? Here each one sings his own song. Could there be any greater confusion?"

Hardly anyone there was idle; all were employed in some kind of work. But these works—and this I never would have believed—were nothing but childish games, or at most useless exertion. Some indeed, collected sweepings and divided them among themselves. Some hurried here and there with timber and stones, or hoisted them up with pulleys and then dropped them. Some dug up earth, and conveyed or carried it from place to place. The others occupied themselves with little bells, mirrors, bellows, rattles, and other playthings. Others also played with their own shadow, measuring it and pursuing it, and catching at it—and all this so vigorously that many were groaning and sweating and some, in fact, even injured themselves. And almost everywhere there were certain officers who ordered and measured out these labors with great heartiness, and with no less heartiness the others obeyed them. Wondering, I said, “Alas! Why does man exist, if he employs the sharpness of his heavenly talents for such vain and evil endeavors?”

“Why vain?” said the interpreter. “Can you not see here, as in a looking-glass, how men use their talents to accomplish everything? One does this, another that.”

“But all,” I said, “work at such useless things, which are unworthy of their glorious eminence.”

“Do not cavil too much,” he said. “They are not yet in heaven, and in the world they must employ themselves with worldly matters. Notice the orderly fashion in which everything is done.”

But as I looked again, I saw that nothing more disorderly could have been imagined: for when one worked at something, exerting himself, another approached and meddled with the matter. Thus there were quarrels, scuffles, fights. Then they reconciled themselves, but after a while they fought again....

I also perceived other disorder, blindness, and folly. The whole marketplace was—as were the streets later—full of holes, pits, and ravines. Timber, stones, and other things lay about in every direction. No one, however, put anything away, repaired it, or put it in the proper order. On the contrary, they walked on unawares, so that first one, then another, knocked against something, fell, and was either killed or knocked down. My heart quivered as I saw this. But among them, no one took notice of this: when anyone fell they laughed at him. Then when I saw a branch, or the trunk of a tree, or a hole into which someone was blindly blundering, I began to caution them, but nobody listened. Some laughed at me, others reviled me, others wanted to beat me.

Some fell and did not get back up. Others got up, only to fall head over heels again. Everyone had plenty of welts and bruises, but no one seemed to care. I had to wonder at their dullness—which counted their own falls and wounds for so little, but if anyone else hurt them, they would immediately rise up in arms and fight.

I also perceived among men great delight in novelties and changes with regard to clothing, building, speech, gait, and other matters. Some, I saw, did nothing but change their attire, wearing sometimes this, sometimes that fashion. Others invented new styles of building, and after a while destroyed it. They would try this kind of work, then that, and then quit—they seemed fickle. If one died because of the burden under which he labored or if he abandoned it, then immediately others would appear and argue, squabble, and fight over it to an incredible degree. No one could ever speak, or do something, or erect an edifice, without others laughing at it, misrepresenting it, destroying it. One fashioned a thing with vast labor and expense, finding in it great pleasure—then someone else, approaching him, overturned, destroyed, and injured it. Nowhere in the world did I see a man make anything without another ruining it. Some, indeed, did not wait for others; they themselves destroyed their own works, so that I wondered at their fickleness and their vain endeavors.

I also saw that many walked on highsoled shoes: others made themselves stilts (so that, raised above everything, they could view it all from above), and thus did they strut about. But the higher one was, the

more easily he was toppled, for others (from jealousy, I presume) tripped up his feet. This happened to many, who became the laughing-stock of others. Of such instances I saw many.

Finally I saw Death stalking everywhere among them, and she carried a sharp scythe, with a bow and arrows. With a loud voice she exhorted all to remember that they were mortal: but none listened to her call. Each one remained just as intent on his folly and his misdeeds. Then, taking her arrows, she shot them at the people in every direction, and struck down this or that one from among them—young or old, poor or rich, learned or unlearned, without distinction—they all fell down.

When someone was stuck down, he screamed, shrieked, and roared: those who were walking nearby ran a little farther off, but soon took no more notice. Some came near and gazed at the wounded man, who was rattling in the throat, and when he contracted his feet and ceased breathing, they called each other together, sang around him, ate, drank, and shouted—although some others mocked this somewhat. Then they seized the dead man and threw him over the boundaries into that gloomy pit which surrounds the world, and when they returned they revelled some more. But no one escaped Death, though they diligently tried not to heed her, even when she brushed closely against them.

Selection from Paradise of the Heart: The Inward Christians (God's Laws are brief.)

Free, indeed, the Lord God wishes His children to be, but not willful. Therefore has He hedged them in by certain regulations in a fashion better and more perfect than anything that I had ever beheld in the world. There, everything was full of disorder, partly because they had no certain rules, partly because, as I saw, even when they had rules they did not heed them. But those who dwelt behind the curtain had most noble rules, and also obeyed them. They have, indeed, laws given by God Himself that are full of justice, and by which it is decreed: 1. That everyone who is devoted to God should acknowledge and know Him as the only God. 2. That he should serve Him in the spirit and in the truth without vainly imagining corporal things. 3. He should use his tongue, not for the purpose of offense, but for the glorification of God's holy name. 4. The times and hours that are ordained for God's service he shall employ for nothing but His inward and outward service. 5. He shall obey his parents and others whom God has placed over him. 6. He shall not injure the life of his fellow-men. 7. He shall preserve the purity of his body. 8. He shall not seize the property of others. 9. He shall beware of falsehood and deceit. 10. And lastly, he shall maintain his mind within barriers and the ordained boundaries.

(A Summing-up in Two Words.)

2. The summa of everything is that everyone should love God above all things that can be named, and that he should sincerely wish well to his fellowmen, as to himself. And this summing-up of the contents of God's Word was, as I heard, greatly praised; indeed, I myself found and felt that it was more valuable than the countless worldly laws, rules, and decrees, for it was a thousand times more perfect.

(The True Christian requires not Copious Laws.)

3. To him who verily loves God with his whole heart, it is not necessary to give many commandments as to when, where, how and how often he should serve God, worship and honor Him; for his hearty union with God, and his readiness to obey Him is the fashion in which he honors God best, and it leads a man to ever and everywhere praise God in his mind, and to strive for His Glory in all his deeds. He also who loves his fellow-men as himself requires not copious commandments as to where, when and wherein he should serve them, how he should avoid to injure them, and return to them what is due to them. This love for his fellow-men will in itself tell him fully, and show him how he should bear himself towards them. It is the sign of the evil man that he always demands rules, and wishes to know only from the books of law what he should do; yet at home in our heart God's finger shows us that it is our duty to do unto our neighbors that which we wish that they should do unto us. But as the world cares not for this inward

testimony of our own conscience, but heeds external laws only, therefore is there no true order in the world; there is but suspicion, distrust, misunderstanding, ill-will, discord, envy, theft, murder, and so forth. Those who are truly subject to God heed but their own conscience; what it forbids them they do not, but they do that which it tells them they may do; of gain, favor, and such things they take no care.

(There is Unanimity among True Christians.)

4. There is therefore equality among them, and great similitude also, as if they had all been cast in one mold; all think the same things, believe the same things, all like and dislike the same things, for all are taught by one and the same spirit.

And it is worthy of wonder that—as I here saw with pleasure—men who had never seen each other, heard each other, and who were separated by the whole world, were quite similar the one to the other: for as if one had been in the body of the other, they spoke alike, saw alike, felt alike. Thus, though there was a great variety in their gifts, just as on a musical instrument the sound of the strings of pipes differs, and is now weaker, now stronger, yet a delightful harmony resounded among them. This is the purpose of the Christian unity, and the foretold of eternity, when everything will be done in one spirit.

(Sympathy among True Christians.)

5. From this equality, sympathy among them arises; thus all rejoiced with those who rejoiced, were sorrowful with those who had sorrow. I had in the world seen a most evil thing that had grieved me not once: if one fared ill, the others rejoiced: if he erred, the others laughed; if he suffered injury, the others sought gain therefrom: indeed, for the sake of their own gain, pleasure, and amusement, they themselves led a fellow-man to his downfall and injury.

But among the holy men I found everything otherwise: for every man strove as bravely and as diligently to avert unhappiness and discomfort from his neighbors as from himself. Could he not avert it, he grieved not otherwise than if the misfortune had befallen himself, and he grieved because all were one heart, one soul. As the iron needles of a compass, when once they have been touched by the magnet-stone, all point to one and the same direction of the world, so the souls of all these men, touched by the spirit of love, all turn to one and the same direction: in case of happiness to joy, in case of unhappiness to sorrow. And here also did I understand that those are false Christians who indeed busy themselves carefully with their own matters, but care not for those of their neighbors. They steadfastly turn aside from the hand of God, and preserving carefully their own nest, they leave the others outside in the wind and rain. But different, far different, I found things here. If one suffered, the others did not rejoice: if one hungered, the others did not feast: if one was warring, the others did not sleep: everything was done in common, and it was delightful to behold this.

(There is Community in all Good Things among the True Christians.)

6. As regards possessions, I saw that, though most of them were poor, had but little of the things the world calls treasures, and cared but little for them, yet almost everyone had something that was his own. But he did not hide this, nor conceal it from the others (as is the world's way): he held it as in common, readily and gladly granting and lending it to him who might require it. Thus they all dealt with their possessions not otherwise than those who sit together at one table deal with the utensils of the table, which all use with equal right. Seeing this, I thought with shame that with us everything befalls in contrary fashion. Some fill and overflow their houses with utensils, clothing, food, gold, and silver, as much as they can: meanwhile others, who are equally servants of God, have hardly wherewith to clothe and feed themselves. But, I must say, I understood that this was by no means the will of God: rather is it the way of the world, the perverse world, that some should go forth in festive attire, others naked: that some should belch from overfilling, while others yawn from hunger: some should laboriously earn silver, some vainly squander it: some make merry, others wail. Thence there sprung up among the one, pride and

contempt of the others: and among these again. fury, hatred, and misdeeds. But here there was nothing such. All were in community with all: indeed, their souls also.

(There is Intimacy among True Christians.)

7. Therefore is there great intimacy among them, openness, and holy companionship: therefore all, however different their gifts and their callings may be, consider and hold themselves as brethren: for they say that we have all sprung from the same blood, have been redeemed and cleansed by the same blood, that we are children of one Father, approach the same table, await the same inheritance in heaven, and so forth. Except as regards non-essential matters, one man hath not more than another. Therefore I saw that they surpassed each other in kindness and modesty, gladly served one another, and each one employed his own powers for the benefit of the others. He who had judgment counseled: he who had learning taught: he who had strength defended the others: he who had power maintained order among them. If one erred in some things, they admonished him: if he sinned, they punished him: and each one gladly accepted admonition and punishment, and was ready to amend everything according to what was told him, and even forfeit his life when it was shown to him that it was not his own.

Everything Is Light and Easy to the Hearts that Are Devoted to God (It is easy to obey God.)

Nor is it bitter to them to conform to such orders, rather is it their pleasure and delight, while I had seen in the world that each man did unwillingly what he had to do. Verily, God had deprived these men of their stony hearts, and placed in their bodies fleshly, pliant ones that were obedient to the will of God. The devil, indeed, with his crafty suggestions, the world with its scandalous examples, the body with its innate tardiness on the right path, troubled them much. But this they heeded not. They drove away the devil by the artillery of their prayers: they guarded themselves against the world by the shield of resolute will: they compelled their bodies to obedience by the scourge of discipline. Thus did they joyfully perform their duties, and the spirit of Christ that dwelt with them gave them such strength that they were wanting neither in goodwill nor in good deeds (within the limits of earthly perfection). Here, then, did I truly see that to serve God with your whole heart is not labor, but joy, and I understood that those who lay too much stress on the weakness of man do not understand the strength and value of their new birth, and have, indeed perhaps not attained it. Let them then take heed of this. I saw not that anyone among them claimed absolution from his sins because of the weakness of the flesh, or excused his evil deeds by the frailness of his nature. Rather did I see that if a man had devoted his whole heart to his Creator, who had redeemed him, and consecrated his body as a temple, then following his heart, his other limbs also freely and gradually took that direction to which God willed them. Oh, Christian, whoever and wherever thou art, free thyself from the fetters of flesh! See, know, and understand that the obstacles which thou imaginest in thy mind are far too small that they could impede thy will, if it be but sincere.

2. I saw also that not only to do what God commands, but also to suffer what God imposes, is easy. Here no few were slapped, spat on, whipped by the worldly ones: yet they rejoiced, and lifting their hands heavenward, praised God that He had thought them worthy of suffering somewhat for His sake: for not only did they believe in Him who was crucified, but they also, they said, were crucified for his sake. Some who fared not thus envied the others with holy envy, fearing God's wrath if they received no correction, and separation from Christ if they had no cross. Therefore they kissed the rod and stick of God whenever they touched them, and gratefully took His cross upon them.

3. Now, all this sprang from their complete subjection to the will of God; thus they desired to do nothing, to be nothing, but what God wished. Therefore are they certain that whatever befalls them comes to them from God, according to His prudent consideration. Nothing unexpected can, indeed, befall such men; for they count wounds, prison, torture, and death among God's gifts. To live joyfully or dolefully is indifferent to them, except that they consider the former more dangerous, the latter safer. Therefore they delight in their troubles, wounds and stripes, and are proud of them. In all things they are so hardy in God's faith, that if they suffer not somewhat, they imagine that they are idling and losing time. But let all hold their

hands aloof from these men; the more willingly they offer their back to the stripes, the more difficult it is to strike them; the more similar they are to fools, the more dangerous it is to mock them. For they are not their own masters, but belong to God; and all that is done unto them God considers as done unto Himself.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

Knowledge: The Road to Peace

As Comenius saw it, education was the best way out of the Thirty Years War.

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Comenius remains for our day a prophet of internationalism and ecumenism. His message has a special relevance for the 1980's, as displaced groups in Asia, Latin America, and Africa desperately seek refuge, as did the Brethren more than three centuries ago. Comenius's ecumenical world view, with its emphasis on the sacredness of human life, cries out to be heard in a world plagued by mindless terrorism.

The Need for Order

Comenius lived in a disorderly era. Not only was the Thirty Years War tearing apart the political, religious, and social fabric of Europe, but the theoretical foundations—the theological, philosophical, and political ideas of that age—were also in disarray. Recognizing these needs, Comenius sought to create an orderly but non-authoritarian world view.

Comenius's pansophist philosophy prescribed a system of truth and value which promised that people could acquire the knowledge that led to understanding and peace. Pansophism sought to embrace all knowledge within an integrative system, multi-dimensional in its scope but holistic in its purposes. Comenius asserted that: (1) God's plan of creation was orderly and that human knowledge of the world should also be orderly in its organization; (2) it is possible and desirable for human beings to possess this knowledge of an ordered creation in a systematic fashion and to use this knowledge to create orderliness in their personal lives and social behavior; (3) ordered knowledge would stimulate a love of wisdom that, transcending national boundaries and sectarian divisions, would help humankind to create an orderly and peaceful social order. In such a world order, persons would be free to worship their Creator according to their own liturgical forms but would also engage in an ecumenical dialogue. By reaffirming common humane beliefs and values, Pansophism as a form of international education would enable human beings to overcome the accidental differences of nationality and language that separated them. Although human life was varied in its responses to climate and geography, the themes of a common Creator, a common humanity, and a common knowledge would transcend these differences to create a perspective that would restore order to a contentious people.

The Need for Universality

The Comenian theme of an orderly world view was closely related to the need for universality. If the seeds of world order were to sprout from the common knowledge and values that human beings shared, then Pansophism's message needed to be heard universally by all persons. Pansophism was not to be merely a verbal rendition of philosophical doctrines. It was also to be the instrument of universal reform and renewal.

The universality of Comenius's message was reflected in his *DeRerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica*, or *The General Consultation on the Improvement of All Things Human*. Among the themes of this massive work was the need for a universal awakening and reform of humankind by means of universal wisdom, language, and education. Firmly believing that knowledge has the power to incline human beings to truth and love, Comenius hoped that such universal knowledge would engender international peace.

Comenius's ecumenical vision of international peace was illustrated in his *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*. Although for long historic periods humankind had wandered through the world's maze of deceit, violence, and bigotry, it was possible still to find peace through truth and love. He envisioned a Christian unity that respected differences in prayer and ritual. Christianity, in the Comenian vision, was one great, universal church—an architectonic edifice—comprised of many denominational chapels in which people prayed in their own way to the one God.

Comenius's Pansophist philosophy rested on the premise of the universal Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. From this broad and integrative vision came the Comenian principles that: (1) if human beings possessed universal knowledge as an integrative body of truths, they would come to know God as the Creator of all existence and to understand the commonalities that were universal to humankind; (2) rather than being torn by sectarian disputes, Christians could celebrate a universal faith while peacefully retaining their own unique denomination nationalism; (3) education, made effective and efficient by the method explained in *The Great Didactic*, could bring about universal enlightenment; (4) universal enlightenment, in turn, would foster world unity and peace. Thus, Comenius's universal outlook sought to fashion education for international community and peace.

The Need for Pansophist Education

For Comenius, the instrument for achieving world-wide peace was the peaceful process of education. Pansophist education did not mean that the mind would be stuffed with information in an encyclopaedic fashion; it meant rather that knowledge would be inter-related and integrated into a total view of reality that would lead humankind to universal wisdom. According to *The Great Didactic*, instruction, following the natural laws of human growth and development, would gradually move learners from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract, from the easy to the difficult, and from the specific to the universal. Unlike those who used corporal punishment to coerce children, teachers who followed Comenian principles would respect the dignity of child nature. If children were respected as persons, Comenius reasoned, they would learn to respect each other. Such widening circles of human respect and dignity could be extended to all members of the human race.

As a peaceful and non-violent process that cooperated with Nature, education would actualize human potentiality to its fullest. Cognitive knowledge would be cultivated as well as moral and religious values. Instead of receiving one-dimensional training, those who experienced a Pansophist education would be many-sided, multi-dimensional, totally integrated persons. Reflecting the themes of orderliness and universality, Comenius's Pansophism would educate persons who would manifest these themes in their lives.

During his life, Comenius faced problems of persecution and war. To solve these problems, he prescribed universal knowledge and education. Today, the threat of nuclear war imperils life on our planet; violence and terrorism are still afflictions that block the way to world peace. Comenius's prescriptions remain relevant in a world that needs to find and to accent the common ideas and values that enhance our lives on our common home—the planet earth.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

From the Archives: The School of Infancy

Written in 1631, *The School of Infancy*, was one of Comenius's first works on education and concentrates on the first six years of a child's life and education "at the mother's knee."

We present below his preface and opening observations which offer an insight into Comenius's attitude toward children, parenting, and the family. Readers may find the whole work published by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill in 1956 from which the excerpt is taken and used by permission.

*To Godly Christian Parents, Teachers,
Guardians and all who are charged with
the care of Children*
GREETINGS!

Beloved,

Since it is my purpose to speak to you all about your duty, it is necessary for me to show three things:

- I. The preciousness of the treasures that God bestows on those to whom He entrusts children.
- II. That He has an end and purpose to which He confers them, and a goal to which their education ought to be directed.
- III. That youth demand good education so greatly that if they fail to get it they are of necessity lost.

Having established these three principals, I shall proceed to my purpose and explain in order the areas of your cares in this early age of your charges...Under Thy direction, O Father! by whom every generation in heaven and on earth is ordained.

Jan Amos Comenius

Chapter I

*Children, God's Most Precious Gift,
and an Inestimable Treasure,
Claim Our Most Vigilant Attention*

That children are a priceless treasure God testifies, saying: "Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord: the fruit of the womb His reward; as arrows in the hand, so are children..."

Also, when God speaks of His love towards us, he calls us children as if there were no more excellent name by which to allure us...

The Son of God when manifested in the flesh not only willed to become as a little child, but thought

children a pleasure and a delight. Taking them in His arms as little brethren and sisters, he carried them about and kissed and blessed them. He severely threatened anyone who should offend them, even in the least degree, and commanded that they be respected as Himself.

If one seeks to learn why He is so delighted with little children. one will find many causes. First, if the little ones at present seem unimportant, regard them not as they now are, but as God intends they may and ought to be. You will see them not only as the future inhabitants of the world and possessors of the earth, and God's vicars amongst His creatures when we depart from this life, but also equal participants with us in the heritage of Christ: A royal priesthood, a chosen people, associates of angels, judges of devils, the delight of heaven, the terror of hell... heirs of eternity....

Philip Melanchthon once addressed the scholars assembled in a common school with these words:

"Hail, reverend pastors, doctors, licentiates, superintendents!"

"Hail, most noble, most prudent, most learned lords, consuls, praetors, judges, governors, chancellors, secretaries, magistrates, professors!"

When some of the standers-by smiled, he said, "I am not jesting. My speech is serious. I look on these little boys not as they are now, but as the Divine mind purposes, on which account they are delivered to us for instruction. Assuredly such leaders will come forth from them, though they may be mixture of chaff among them as among wheat."

Why should we not with equal confidence declare a glorious future for children of Christian parents since Christ who revealed the eternal secrets said that "of such is the Kingdom of God."

If we consider even their present state, we see at once why children are priceless to God and ought to be so to parents. They are valuable to God first because being so innocent, except for original sin, they are not yet the defaced image of God and are unable to discern between good and evil, between the right hand and the left.

Secondly, they are the purest and dearly purchased possession of Christ who saves all except those who shut themselves out by unbelief and impenitence. Since children have not yet so repelled Christ. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven..." Having not yet defiled themselves with the allures of sin, they follow the Lamb wherever He goeth. And that they may continue so to follow, they ought to be led, as with the hand, by a pious education.

Finally, God so embraces children with abounding love that they become a special instrument of divine glory. "From the lips of infants and sucklings thou has perfected praise...." Why God's glory receives increase from children is certainly not at once clear to our understanding: but God, the discernor of all things, understands and declares it so.

That children ought to be dearer to parents than gold and silver, than pearls and gems, may be discovered from a comparison between both gifts of God: for:

Gold and silver and like things are inanimate, being only somewhat harder and purer than the clay which we tread beneath our feet; whereas infants are the living images of the living God....

Gold and silver are fleeting and transitory; children an immortal inheritance. Although they yield to death, they neither return to nothing, nor become extinct: they only pass out of a mortal tabernacle into an immortal one. Hence when God restored to Job all his riches and possessions, even to the double of what He had previously taken away, He gave him no more children than he had before, namely seven sons and

three daughters. This, however, was the precise double since the former sons and daughters had not perished but had gone to God.

Gold and silver come forth of the earth, children from our own substance. Being a part of ourselves, they consequently deserve to be loved by us, certainly not less than we love ourselves.... If anyone transfer such affections to gold and silver, God's judgement condemns him of idolatry.

Gold and silver pass from one to another as though they were the property of none, but common to all; whereas children are a peculiar possession of their parents, divinely assigned. No man in the world can deprive them of this right, nor dispossess them of this inheritance. It descends from heaven and cannot be transferred.

Gold and silver are gifts from God, yet they are not among those gifts that he promises angels to guard. Nay, Satan mostly intermingles himself with gold and silver to use them as nets and snares to entangle the unwary—drawing them as with thongs to avarice, pride, and prodigal ways. Whereas the Lord declares that little children are always committed to the guard of angels. Hence he who has infants within his house may be certain that he also has angels. He who takes little children in his arms may be assured that he takes angels. He who surrounded by midnight darkness rests beside an infant has the certain consolation that the spirit of darkness can not enter. What comfort here! What a priceless jewel bringing such gifts!

Gold and silver do not procure for us the love of God, nor, as infants do, defend us from His anger, for God so loves little children that for their sakes he occasionally pardons parents. Nineveh is an example....

A man's life does not consist in abundance of wealth, as Christ says, since without God's blessing neither food nourishes, nor plaster heals, nor garment warms. But for the sake of children His blessing is always present.... Luther has wisely said: "We do not nourish our infants but they nourish us: for because of those innocents God supplies necessaries, and we aged sinners partake with them."

Finally, gold, silver, gems bring us no more instruction than do other created things, namely evidence of wisdom, power and beneficence of God. Yet infants are given us as a mirror in which we may behold humility, gentleness, benign goodness, harmony, and other Christian virtues. The Lord himself declares "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Since God thus wills that children be our preceptors, we owe them the most diligent attention.

Chapter II

Why God Gives Children and How Their Education Out to Be Directed

Do you wonder why God did not at once produce these celestial gems in the full number he purposed to have for eternity, as he did angels? He has no other reason than that in doing so he honors us by making us his associates in multiplying creatures: Not only that from this source we may draw pleasure, but that we may exercise zeal in rightly educating and training children for eternity.

Man accustoms the ox to plowing, the hound to hunting, the horse to riding and driving, because for these uses they were created. Man, however, being more noble than all those creatures, ought to be educated for the highest objects, so that he may approach in excellences God whose image he bears. The body being taken from the earth remains earthly, mingles with the earth, and must again be turned into earth. But the soul being inspired by God is from God and ought to remain in God and elevate itself to God.

Parents therefore will not fully perform their duty if they merely teach their offspring to eat, to drink, to walk about, to talk, and to be adorned with clothing. These things serve merely the body which is not the man, but his tabernacle only. The guest (the rational soul) dwells within and rightly claims greater care than its outward tenement. Plutarch correctly condemns those parents who desire beauty, riches, and honors for their children and endeavor to promote them in these while little regarding the adornment of the soul with piety and virtues. As he says, "Those persons value the shoe more than the foot...."

The first care therefore ought to be of the soul, which is the principal part of the man, so that it may become in the highest degree possible beautifully adorned. The next care is for the body that it may be made a habitation fit and worthy of an immortal soul.

Regard that mind rightly instructed which is truly illuminated by God's wisdom, so that man perceiving the presence of the divine image within himself may diligently guard that glory.

There are two parts of celestial wisdom which man ought to seek, and in which he ought to instruct youth:

The one is a clear and true knowledge of God and of all His wonderful works.

The other is prudence to regulate carefully and wisely one's self and all external and internal actions that pertain both to this life and to future life—primarily to the future life, because properly speaking that is life, from which both death and mortality pass into exile.

This present is not so much life as the way to life. Consequently, he who obtains from this life that which prepares him for future life must be judged to have fully performed his duty here.

Nevertheless, God bestows long life upon many, assigns them certain duties, and in the course of their days places them in various situations demanding prudent action. Hence parents must see that their children are exercised not only in faith and godliness but also in the moral sciences, the liberal arts, and in other necessary things. Thereby, when grown up, children may become truly men wisely managing their own affairs in the various functions of life, religious or political, civil or social, that God wills them to fulfill. Thus having wisely and righteously passed through this life they may with greater joy migrate to heaven.

In short, the purpose for which youth ought to be educated is threefold: Faith and Reverence; Uprightness in Morals; Knowledge of Language and Arts. These are to be taken, however, in the precise order in which they here appear, and not inversely....

Whoever has within his house youth proficient in these three matters possesses a garden in which celestial plantlets are sown, watered, bloom, and flourish. That home is a workshop of the Holy Spirit, in which He shapes and polishes those vessels of glory so that in them, as living images of God, the rays of His infinite power, wisdom, and bounty may shine more and more. How inexpressibly blessed are parents in such a paradise!

Chapter III

Youth Imperatively Demand Training and Guidance to Be Rightly Instructed

Children do not train themselves spontaneously, but are shaped only by tireless labor. A young sapling, planned for a tree, must be planted, watered, hedged round for protection, and propped up. A piece of wood designed for a special purpose must be split, planed, carved, polished, and stained. A horse, an ox, an ass, a mule must be trained to perform their services to man.

Indeed, man himself must be trained in such bodily actions as eating, drinking, running, speaking, seizing with the hand, and laboring. How then, I pray, can those duties higher and more remote from the senses such as faith, virtue, wisdom, and knowledge come spontaneously to any one? It is altogether impossible....

God therefore has enjoined this duty on parents: That they should wisely and with all diligence instill into the tender minds of children all things pertaining to the knowledge and fear of Himself: and that parents should talk with them of those things when they sit in the house, and when they walk along the way, or lie down, or get up....

Parents, however, are often incompetent to instruct their children, or unable because of duties or family affairs, or deem instruction of trifling importance. Hence from remote antiquity youth in every state have been properly handed over for instruction to righteous, wise, and good persons. These were called pedagogues (leaders, not drivers of children), masters, teachers, and doctors. And places designed for education were called colleges, gymnasia, and schools (that is, retreats of *ease* or places of literary *amusements*). These very names signified that the action of teaching and learning is in its own nature pleasing and agreeable, a mere amusement and mental delight.

This joyousness however altogether disappeared in subsequent times so that schools were no more places of amusement and delights. They became grinding houses of torment and torture. This was especially true where the teachers were incompetent men uninstructed in piety and the wisdom of God. They had become stupefied through indolence, despicably vile, and afforded the worst example though calling themselves preceptors. They inbued youth not with faith, godliness, and sound morals but with superstitions, impeity, and evil conduct.

Being ignorant of the true method, and thinking to beat in knowledge, they wretchedly tortured children, as shown in such traditional sayings as "He appears to have got a rich vintage of blows on his shoulder blades...."

Although our predecessors somewhat improved this sorry state, yet God has reserved for our age some things to be amended for easier and better instruction to His glory and our comfort....

Now I proceed with the blessing of God to the form of the proposed method of education to be applied in the School of the Mother during the first six years of a child's life.

Chapter IV

In What Things Youth Ought to Be Exercised Gradually from Their Very Birth, so that They May Be Found Expert in Those Things in the Sixth year of Their Age

Every one knows that whatever disposition the branches of an old tree obtain they must necessarily have been so formed from its first growth, for they cannot be otherwise.... Man therefore in the very first formation of body and soul should be moulded so as to be such as he ought to be throughout his whole life.

For although God can make an inveterately bad man useful by completely transforming him, yet in the regular course of nature it scarcely ever happens otherwise than that as a thing has begun to be formed from its origin so it becomes completed, and so it remains. Whatever seed one sows in youth, such fruit he reaps in age, according to the axiom, "The pursuits of youth are the delights of maturity."

Let not parents therefore give the instruction of their children alone to preceptors of schools and ministers of the church, since it is impossible to make the tree straight that has grown crooked.... But they ought themselves to know how to manage their own treasures that these may receive increases of wisdom and grace before God and man.

And inasmuch as everyone ought to be competent to serve God and be useful to men, we maintain that he ought to be instructed in PIETY, in MORALS, in SOUND LEARNING, and in HEALTH. Parents should lay the foundations of these in the very earliest age of their children. During the first six years this training should extend as follows.

PIETY, true and salutary, consists in these three things:

1. Our hearts, should always and everywhere have regard for God and should seek Him in all that we do and say and think.
2. Having discovered the steps of Divine Providence, our hearts should follow God always and everywhere with reverence, love, and ready obedience.
3. Thus always mindful of God, and conversing with God, our hearts joining God realize peace, consolation, and joy.

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Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

From the Archives: The Great Didactic

Comenius's masterwork on education set forth his method for setting up schools and detailed how they should be run. In this chapter he begins to present one theory of instruction based on nature, after showing what's wrong with the education of his day. We include here his third, sixth and seventh principles.

"Let the main object of this, our Didactic, be as follows: to seek and to find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more; by which schools may be the scene of less noise, aversion, and useless labour, but of more leisure, enjoyment, and solid progress; and through which the Christian community may have less darkness, perplexity, and dissention, but on the other hand more light, orderliness, peace, and rest."* [* from The Great Didactic, Chapter 3 "This Life Is but a Preparation for Eternity"]

Chapter XIX

The Principles of Conciseness and Rapidity in Teaching

Third Principle

21. Nature develops everything from beginnings, which, though insignificant in appearance, possess great potential strength.

For instance, the matter out of which a bird is to be formed consists of a few drops, which are contained in a shell, that they may be easily warmed and hatched. But these few drops contain the whole bird potentially, since, later on, the body of the chicken is formed from the vital principle which is concentrated in them.

22. Imitation.—In the same way a tree, no matter how large it may be, is potentially contained in the kernel of its fruit or in the shoot at the end of one of its branches. If one or the other of these be placed in the earth, a whole tree will be produced by the inner force that it contains.

23. Terrible Deviation.—In direct opposition to this Principle a terrible mistake is generally made in school. Most teachers are at pains to place in the earth plants instead of seeds, and trees instead of shoots, since, instead of starting with fundamental principles, they place before their pupils a chaos of diverse conclusions or the complete texts of authors. And yet it is certain that instruction rests on a very small number of principles, just as the earth is composed of four elements (though in diverse forms): and that from these principles (in accordance with the evident limits of their powers of differentiation) an unlimited number of results can be deduced, just as, in the case of a tree, hundreds of branches, and thousands of leaves, blossoms, and fruits are produced from the original shoot. Oh! may God take pity on our age, and open some man's eyes, that he may see aright the true relations in which things stand to one another, and may impart his knowledge to the rest of mankind. With God's assistance I hope, in (though in diverse forms): and that from these principles (in accordance with the evident limits of their powers of differentiation) an unlimited number of results can be deduced, just as, in the case of a tree, hundreds of branches, and thousands of leaves, blossoms, and fruits are produced from the original shoot. Oh! may God take pity on our age, and open some man's eyes, that he may see aright the true relations in which things stand to one another, and may impart his knowledge to the rest of mankind. With God's assistance

I hope, in my Synopsis of Christian Wisdom, to give an earnest of my efforts to do so, in the modest hope that it may be of use to others whom God, in due season, may call to carry on the work.

24. Rectification.—In the meantime we may draw three conclusions:

(i.) Every art must be contained in the shortest and most practical rules.

(ii.) Each rule must be expressed in the shortest and clearest words.

(iii.) Each rule must be accompanied by many examples, in order that the use of the rule may be quite clear when fresh cases arise.

Sixth Principle

31. Nature does not hurry, but advances slowly.

For example, a bird does not place its eggs in the fire, in order to hatch them quickly, but lets them develop slowly under the influence of natural warmth. Neither, later on, does it cram its chickens with food that they may mature quickly (for this would only choke them), but it selects their food with care and gives it to them gradually in the quantities that their weak digestion can support.

32. Imitation.—The builder, too, does not erect the walls on the foundations with undue haste and then straightway put on the roof; since, unless the foundations were given time to dry and become firm, they would sink under the superincumbent weight, and the whole building would tumble down. Large stone buildings, therefore, cannot be finished within one year, but must have a suitable length of time allotted for their construction.

33. Nor does the gardener expect a plant to grow large in the first month, or to bear fruit at the end of the first year. He does not, therefore, tend and water it every day, nor does he warm it with fire or with quicklime, but is content with the moisture that comes from heaven and with the warmth that the sun provides.

34. Deviation.—For the young, therefore, it is torture

(i.) If they are compelled to receive six, seven or eight hours' class instruction daily, and private lessons in addition.

(ii.) If they are overburdened with dictations, with exercises, and with the lessons that they have to commit to memory, until nausea and, in some cases, insanity is produced.

If we take a jar with a narrow mouth (for to this we may compare a boy's intellect) and attempt to pour a quantity of water into it violently, instead of allowing it to trickle in drop by drop, what will be the result? Without doubt the greater part of the liquid will flow over the side, and ultimately the jar will contain less than if the operation had taken place gradually. Quite as foolish is the action of those who try to teach their pupils, not as much as they can assimilate, but as much as they themselves wish, for the faculties need to be supported and not to be overburdened, and the teacher, like the physicians is the servant and not the master of nature.

35. Rectification.—The ease and the pleasantness of study will therefore be increased:

(i.) If the class instruction be curtailed as much as possible, namely to four hours, and if the same length

of time be left for private study.

(ii.) If the pupils be forced to memorize as little as possible, that is to say, only the most important things; of the rest they need only grasp the general meaning.

(iii.) If everything be arranged to suit the capacity of the pupil, which increases naturally with study and age.

Seventh Principle

36. Nature compels nothing to advance that is not driven forward by its own mature strength.

For instance, a chicken is not compelled to quit the egg before its limbs are properly formed and set; is not forced to fly before its feathers have grown; is not thrust from the nest before it is able to fly well, etc.

A tree, too, does not put forth shoots before it is forced to do so by the sap that rises from the roots, nor does it permit fruit to appear before the leaves and blossoms formed by the sap seek further development, nor does it permit the blossoms to fall before the fruit that they contain is protected by a skin, nor the fruit to drop before it is ripe.

37. Deviation.—Now the faculties of the young are forced:

(i.) If the boys are compelled to learn things for which their age and capacity are not yet suited.

(ii.) If they are made to learn by heart or do things that have not first been thoroughly explained and demonstrated to them.

38. Rectification.—From what has been said, it follows

(i.) That nothing should be taught to the young, unless it is not only permitted but actually demanded by their age and mental strength.

(ii.) That nothing should be learned by heart that has not been thoroughly grasped by the understanding. Nor should any feat of memory be demanded unless it is absolutely certain that the boy's strength is equal to it.

(iii.) That nothing should be set boys to do until its nature has been thoroughly explained to them, and rules for procedure have been given.

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From the Archives: A Handwritten Note

A note was written by Comenius in a copy of a manuscript by the astronomer Nicolas Copernicus. He bought it in 1614, just before leaving the University of Heidelberg. As he states here, he bought it with his last remaining funds from the widow of Dean Christmann.

The book, "On the Revolutions of Celestial Bodies," was under a papal ban because it claimed the earth was not the center of the universe, as the Church taught. Throughout his life, Comenius followed and encouraged scientific research.

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Issue 13: Jan Amos Comenius: Father of Modern Education

Jan Amos Comenius: Recommended Resources

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