

## "VIVAT COMENIUS": A COMMEMORATIVE ESSAY ON JOHANN AMOS COMENIUS, 1592-1670

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*EDITOR'S NOTE. A conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of the birth of Comenius was held in Prague, March 23-27, 1992. The conference focused on "COMENIUS. Heritage and Education of Man for the 21st Century." The relevance of Comenius's ideas for education today and for the 21st century is the subject of this commemorative essay by Bjørg B. Gundem, who attended the Prague conference. It is our hope that this essay will attract renewed attention to Comenius's educational thought and writings and their implications for curriculum and teaching during this quadricentennial year.*

The spring of 1992 in Europe saw celebrations of an unusual kind. The 400th anniversary of the birth of Johann Amos Comenius, an outstanding scholar of Czech cultural history and the first Czech scholar of international reputation, was celebrated in official fora, universities, academies of science, and colleges of education in probably all European countries. The most important event, a conference entitled "COMENIUS. Heritage and Education of Man for the 21st Century," took place in Prague, March 23-27, under the auspices of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, under the patronage of the President of the Republic, Vaclav Havel, and the Director General of UNESCO, Frederico Mayor.<sup>1</sup> More than 2,000 participants took part in the seven sessions of the conference. In a striking way, the titles of the sessions

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<sup>1</sup>Posters with "Vivat Comenius" appeared all over Prague, and a special concert, "Vivat Comenius," was presented, combining human voices, guitar, violin, violincello, and Orff instruments. Hence the title of my article, "Vivat Comenius."

The texts for this celebration were taken from *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* (translated into English as *Universal Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs*), the most important of Comenius's works. The complete manuscript of this work was thought lost but was found in 1935 in the library of the Halle Orphanage near Leipzig. In 1957 the German government donated the manuscript to Czechoslovakia. It was published in Prague in 1966. A Czech translation of the whole manuscript was published as part of the 400th anniversary celebrations. Parts of the manuscript have been recently translated into English by A. M. Dobbie. See J. A. Comenius, *Panpaedia or Universal Education* (Glasgow, Scotland: M. Lett, 1986) and *Panaugia or Universal Light* (Shipston on Stour, England: Drinkwater, 1987).

demonstrate the scope and importance and also the topicality of Comenius's work:

- Education for the 21st Century
- The Rights of the Child and the Development of Its Personality
- Teaching Aids in Context of Information Technology
- Comenius on Pre-School Education and His Heritage
- Comenius and the Significance of Languages and Literary Education
- Comenius' General Consultation as *Instauratio Magna Rerum Humanarum*
- J.A. Comenius as a Theologian

It is impossible in a short article to pay full tribute to the heritage of Comenius and to present his legacy in a way that elucidates its relevance for "the education of man for the 21st century." What I can try to do is to offer a picture of the man and his work that may contribute to an understanding of why Johann Amos Comenius has been characterized as the greatest educationist who ever lived. I will briefly discuss his background and biography, his philosophical thinking as a basis for his educational theory, his conceptions of a system of lifelong education, the principles behind his major textbooks, and the main principles of his theory of teaching and teaching methods as expressed in *The Great Didactic*.<sup>2</sup>

My underlying motives are not only to create a renewed interest in the educational thinking of Comenius but also to dispel certain misunderstandings as to the scope and wholeness of that thinking. There has been a tendency to isolate Comenius's educational thinking from his overarching philosophical ideas, the *pansophy*.<sup>3</sup> I will consequently strive to demonstrate the integration of his thinking, referring frequently to the work in which the relationship between his educational thinking and the pansophy is most clearly expressed, *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica (Universal Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs)*.<sup>4</sup>

#### BACKGROUND AND BIOGRAPHY

Jan Amos Komenský—in Latin, Johann Amos Comenius—lived in a time of wars and disturbances, when the foundations of modern European society

<sup>2</sup>John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, 2 vols (London A & C Black, 1910)

<sup>3</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "Some Fundamental Principles of the Educational Thinking of J. A. Comenius," *Rozprawy CSAV* 87 (no 2 1977) 1–67. K. Schaller, "Didaktik und Pädagogik in Werke des Johann Amos Comenius," *Der Evangelische Erzieher* 92 (No 2 1992). 20–28

<sup>4</sup>My references and quotations refer to the English translation found in the presentations of the texts published in Marketa Huskova, ed., *Vivat Comenius Selections from "De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica"* Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1990) Other references are J. A. Comenius; *Opera Omnia* (Praha, 1974), *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* (Praha, 1966), and *Didacta Magna*

were being established. He was a commentator on and a contributor to the political and social upheaval of his times, writing more than 250 works. The post-Reformation conditions of 17th-century Europe and the changing structures of education and schooling during that period also influenced his work.<sup>5</sup>

Comenius was born in the southeastern region of Moravia belonging to the Czech kingdom, in 1592. His parents, who were members of the Unity of Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), died early, and he was brought up by relatives and guardians. The congregation sent him to a grammar school to become a clergyman. After attending the secondary school in Pířerov and the universities of Herborn and Heidelberg, Comenius became a clergyman and teacher, first in Pířerov and then in Fulnek, a town in northeastern Moravia.

The Thirty Years' War (1618–48), which was to have a drastic impact on Comenius's life and work, put an end to the freedom of religion and the national independence of Bohemia. Comenius became a political and religious fugitive and lost first his home and library, and later his wife and children. Members of the Unity of Brethren came to Leszno in Poland in 1628, where there had been a Brethren congregation since the second half of the 16th century. There Comenius was first an upper-high school teacher and much later an elected bishop. During the time he spent in Leszno, from 1628 to 1641, Comenius became a prolific writer, producing, among other things, his first Latin textbook, *Janua Linguarum*, and the now famous *Didactica Magna* (*The Great Didactic*). His books made him famous all over Europe, and in 1641 he was invited to England to help establish "an academy of sciences." Political and "ideological" reasons prevented the establishment of the academy.<sup>6</sup> But while in England, Comenius wrote one of his most important books, *Via Lucis* (1641), which foresaw a universal collegium of all the sciences and a world unified in language, culture, science, and education

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<sup>5</sup>David Hamilton, "Comenius and the New World Order" (paper commissioned for the conference COMENIUS: Heritage and Education of Man for the 21st Century, Prague, March 23–27, 1992) David Hamilton underlines that "Comenius's life and work coincided with the emergence of key ideas in western schooling and western political theory" (p. 13). In my article I will not attempt to locate or discuss Comenius in his contemporary context. But I do agree with Hamilton that "educational ideas (often) are dislocated from the historical circumstances that nourish them" (p. 1).

Dagmar Čapková has pointed to two difficulties confronting historians trying to write about Comenius: 1) Refusing to assess the significance of Comenius on account of the topicality of his work, even if they were convinced that his work belonged only to the past, and were afraid of bringing it up-to-date in an unhistorical and unacceptable manner, and 2) uncritically taking some of his ideas out of their context and out of the times in which they were expressed, dressing them out in unnatural topical guise, distorting their real meaning and thus oversimplifying their general interpretation in an unacceptable manner. See Dagmar Čapková, "On the Impact of J. A. Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) to the Theory and Practice of Education," Symposium Comenianum 1982 (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia. Muzeum J.A. Komenského, 1984), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup>For a discussion of the reasons, see K. Schaller, "Didaktik und Pädagogik in Werke des Johann Amos Comenius," *Der Evangelische Erzieher* 92 (No. 2 1992): 20–28.

Invitations were now coming to Comenius from Sweden, France, and Poland. He accepted an invitation from Sweden because he hoped that Sweden, as a Protestant nation at war with the Hapsburgs, would help restore the religious and national independence of Bohemia. Chancellor A. Oxenstierna provided him with a quiet place to work in Elbing in East Prussia, a Swedish protectorate known for its religious tolerance, and there he worked on the reformation of the Swedish school system, staying from 1642 to 1648.

When the Thirty Years' War ended in 1648, Comenius again spent two years in Leszno and then four years in the Hungarian town of Sarospatak. There he wrote *Orbis Pictus*, an illustrated textbook covering in systematic order various subjects such as nature, man, and God. It was revised several times and soon became the best known schoolbook in Europe, with translations appearing in various languages as well as the original Latin.

Comenius returned again to Leszno in 1654 but had to leave in 1656, when Polish soldiers destroyed and burned down the town during a war between Sweden and Poland. He lived the last years of his life in Amsterdam, where in 1657 he published his collected pansophic-educational works, *Opera Didactica Omnia*, and elaborated his greatest work, the *Universal Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs*.

#### THE FUNDAMENTAL PHILOSOPHY OF COMENIUS

When Comenius came to Amsterdam he was deeply shaken by the fact that part of his manuscript for the *Universal Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs* had been destroyed in the Leszno fire. He did not, however, give up working on it. He was troubled until his death by the fact that the manuscript was not ready for publication, and he urged his son and a friend to prepare it for the press. They never did, and although part of the manuscript was published during Comenius's lifetime in 1667, the whole manuscript later disappeared and was thought to be lost.

The discovery in 1935 of the complete manuscript for the *Universal Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs* was the most important event connected to research on Comenius (the so-called "comeniology") after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup> It has been the most important source for a reappraisal and renaissance of the educational ideas of Comenius in Europe. This important work consists of seven parts, each aiming at the same goal—to better the conditions of humanity and the world through a universal reform of man. The seven parts are as follows:

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Marketa Huskova, ed., *Vivat Comenius. Selections from "De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica"*. Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek, (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1990), p. 11.

<sup>8</sup>Important institutions for comeniology are three in Czechoslovakia: the Comenius Institute of Education in Prague, the Comenius Museum in Píseň, and the Comenius Museum in Uherský Brod, the Comenius Institute in Münster, Germany, and the Institut für Pädagogik der Ruhr Universität in Bochum, Germany.

- Part 1. Panergersia—Universal Awakening
- Part 2. Panaugia—Universal Enlightening
- Part 3. Pansophia—Universal Wisdom
- Part 4. Pampaedia—Universal Education
- Part 5. Panglottia—Universal Language
- Part 6. Panorthesia—Universal Reform
- Part 7. Pannuthesia—Universal Warning (Admonishing)

This work illuminates the wholeness and completeness of Comenius's works, in the light of his overarching philosophy, the pansophy. The unity of the ideas is central to Comenius. He brings together the elements of methodological, philosophical, pedagogical, theological, political, and social reform all over the world into one whole by stressing their interconnections and inner coherence. This becomes evident when one examines his views from two perspectives. First, the general conclusions he formed about the world and about man's relationship to this world in light of his vision of a "universal reform", and second, how he applied this to his educational thinking.

Comenius saw the evolution of the world as a series of steps towards unity and harmony. His basic premise was the idea of the panharmony of the universe between nature, man, and the divine world. He had at the same time a dialectical view. Nothing happened in the world without a struggle between opposites. Between, for example, the sensual and the moral, the rational and the spiritual. Important for the path to harmony was knowledge and human creativity in working for humanization, leading to a reformed life for all men and for the world as a whole. As Dagmar Čapková, one of the best known Comenius researchers today, expresses it:

Man's relation to the world thus conditions his relations to everything human and everything he comes in contact with. . . In order to know ourselves, we must know the world.<sup>9</sup>

The elaboration of these relationships leads to a realization that reality is a complex and highly structured unity, be it the whole world, human society, or the individual human being. And it all concerns us all—as expressed in the words of Comenius himself. "We shall all be seated in the great theatre of the world. Every action here affects us all."<sup>10</sup>

In greeting the "leading lights of Europe, its scholars, churchmen, and statesmen," Comenius stated:

<sup>9</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "J. A. Comenius—Initiator of a Complex System of Education," *Acta Comeniana* (Praha, Academia) 5 (No.29 1983). 39.

<sup>10</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, "Unum Necessarium 10 6," in *Vivat Comenius Selections from De Rebus Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica*, ed Marketa Huskova. Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia. Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1990), p 29

You see we are undertaking to engage in a general consultation about the reform of human affairs . . . dealing with reform more universally and solemnly than ever before. There is nothing new about the subject matter, but our method will be entirely original. Never in all history have the minds of men been so dumbfounded that good-hearted people of every age and nation and estate sincerely regret their failures and long for an improvement within their power. But never before have the whole population conspired to rid themselves of every form of corruption, and that is the process which I am recommending for the good of the world.<sup>11</sup>

The general reform of Comenius entails all aspects of human life. In his own words:

Therefore our whole aim and object must be to secure the return of philosophical freedom, religious freedom, and political freedom to the human race. I emphasize freedom which is man's most exquisite good, created with him and inseparable from him.<sup>12</sup>

Other important aspects of the "universal reform" are unity and peace, achievable through contemplation and conference under universal laws:

Everyone must look to the welfare of the whole. Common goods are a common joy. Therefore common dangers . . . must be matters of common concern.<sup>13</sup>

Comenius is worried, because we do not know how to rule or how to be ruled. That is why there are wars, violence, imprisonment, and execution. We must learn to rule ourselves and remember that we are God's creatures.

In Comenius's view, the most important means to reach "universal reform" is through education. Earlier, in the Czech version of *Didactica Magna*, Comenius had elaborated the important principle that the theory of education must be based on a philosophy of man, of his place in the world, and in society as a whole. This philosophical, pedagogical, and social demand is what, some will say, sets Comenius apart from all educational reformers.

Some will also maintain that he stands apart in his insistence on the totality of human education. Memory should not be trained without understanding, speech without reason, the intellect without physical training, and reason without thought for the moral and social consequences.<sup>14</sup>

Comenius was also unique in his view of educational reform as part of a social reconstruction of society. His philosophy required general school attendance of all children, without social or sex discrimination:

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid

<sup>12</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, "Panorthesia 109," in *Vivat Comenius. Selections from "De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica,"* ed. Marketa Huskova. Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uhersky Brod, Czechoslovakia: Muzeum J. A. Komenskeho, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, "Panergesia," in *Vivat Comenius. Selections from "De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica,"* ed. Marketa Huskova. Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uhersky Brod, Czechoslovakia: Muzeum J. A. Komenskeho, 1990), p. 30.

<sup>14</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "Comenius and Universal Education in His Native Country," in W. Frihoff, ed., *The Supply of Schooling* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983), p. 39.

Not only the children of the rich or of the powerful should be sent to school, but all alike, both of noble and low birth, rich and poor, both boys and girls, in all cities, villages and hamlets.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard he surpassed not only his precursors and contemporaries in a period of the transition from feudalism to bourgeoisie, but also educationalists in the following epochs.

Comenius's view of teaching offers further insight into his educational philosophy:

Teaching means leading from the known to the unknown, a kindly and non-violent activity born of love and not hatred. When I wish to lead anyone, I do not push or bully him nor knock him down. Instead of using force I take him by the hand and walk gently beside him, or else I go ahead of him on the open road and beckon him to follow me.<sup>16</sup>

This general picture provides the basis for understanding Comenius's complex system of education, his ingenious textbooks, and the principles of his didactical method.

#### COMENIUS'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION

##### *A System of Schooling. Systematic Learning and Lifelong Education*

Comenius conceived of the life of every individual as a school from cradle to grave. According to him, the secret of long life is never to live in idleness, but to engage in useful work, and learning throughout one's whole life is part of it. He outlined his concept of a systematic lifelong education in the *Pampaedia* as a life cycle following the cycle of the year:

- The Prenatal School, like the beginning of the year and the month of January
- The Infant School, like February and March, nature's months for sending forth tender shoots
- The School of Boyhood, like April, furnishing the plants with blossoms
- The School of Adolescence, like May, when all fruits are beginning to develop
- The School of Early Manhood, like June, ripening the fruits and producing an early crop
- The School of Full Manhood, resembling the months of July to November, harvesting fruits of every kind and operating with a view to the coming winter

<sup>15</sup>Quoted from Johann Amos Comenius, "Didactica Magna, 40 1," by Dagmar Čapková, "Comenius and Universal Education in His Native County," in W. Friehoff, ed., *The Supply of Schooling* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983), p. 141.

<sup>16</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, "Unum Necessarium 10 6," in Marketa Huskova, ed., *Vivat Comenius Selectio* from *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Caebolica* "Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uhersky Brod, Czechoslovakia Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1990), p. 29

• The School of Old Age, similar to December, completing the year's cycle and bringing everything to fulfillment<sup>17</sup>

Comenius's system of schooling distinguishes between formal and informal education. According to Comenius, informal education should take place within the family during the first six years of life, with collective preschool education provided for children at ages 5 and 6. Formal education begins with schooling at the elementary level for children ages 6 through 12 and continues in secondary schools to age 18, and in higher education to age 24. Systematic learning should then continue in the informal "schools of life."

Historically, the adoption in Europe of Comenius's ideas about a complete system of schooling has in many ways depended on political and social conditions of different countries.<sup>18</sup> In modern times, his stress on systematic learning before and after formal schooling has helped further an understanding of the importance of both preschool and adult education.

### *The Brilliant Textbook Writer*

Comenius's textbooks demonstrate how he related theory and practice—with practice viewed as a creative force in daily life, molding the future development of the individual. His textbooks all derive from his pansophy; they are intended to give knowledge of essential matters and induce pupils to grasp the idea of universal harmony through realizing one's place in relation to the world, to the human community, and to the universe.<sup>19</sup> Comenius's notion of certain specific characteristics of teaching and learning, such as the role of sense perception in the learning process, is another underlying principle of his textbook writing.

The relation of content and form in education is essential to Comenius. The framework of content, according to Comenius, is provided by the three books of knowledge, namely, the world, man, and God. The guide to the right methods is the availability of "things" and the relation that exists between things and words.

Pupils should be confronted with the fundamental matters and phenomena of practice—that is, the real world and the realities of life. They should,

<sup>17</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, 'Pampaedia,' in Marketa Huskova, ed., *Vivat Comenius Selections from De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Calbolica*. Texts selected by Alfred Strejcek (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia. Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1990), p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Dagmar Čapková, 'Social and Economic Aspects of Introducing Compulsory Education in the Czech Lands,' in G. Genovesi, ed., *Social-Economic Life and Compulsory Education* (Parma: University of Parma, 1986), pp. 137–146. L. Aase, 'How Johann Amos Comenius' Idea of a Six-Year Elementary School Was Realized in Norway around 1740 through the Seven Years Elementary School for the Countryside' (paper presented at the conference, "COMENIUS' Heritage and Education of Man for the 21st Century," Prague, March 23–27, 1992).

<sup>19</sup>Dagmar Čapková, 'J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* in Its Conception as a Textbook for the Universal Education of Children,' *Pedagogica Historica* (Gent) 10 (no. 1, 1970): 5–7.

however, also achieve formal education through "concise explanations," communicating their applied perspective.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to bear in mind that Comenius's textbooks were intended to teach both factual knowledge and language. Comenius believed that a language could only be mastered if a person fully comprehended reality, and that successful language teaching inevitably would contribute to factual knowledge and real information about nature and the world.

It is also important to bear in mind that Comenius started his didactic experiment with language teaching, but during the same period questions related to general education became pertinent. Comenius saw no reason why the didactic principles applied to language and factual teaching should not apply to education generally, at all levels from preschool through adult education.

The best and probably best known of Comenius's textbooks, *Orbis Pictus*, exemplifies his textbooks for language teaching.<sup>21</sup> What contributed to the popularity of the book more than anything else were the inclusion of pictures and how the pictures were used. No doubt the use of pictures in education precedes Comenius.<sup>22</sup> So for Comenius, this was, we may say, "rediscovered invention."<sup>23</sup> Comenius himself had tried to illustrate some of his earlier textbooks, including *Janua*, the *Vestibulum*, and the *Atrium*.

Through *Orbis Pictus*, a book intended for children up to age six but advocated and used for all ages, Comenius wanted to develop the cognitive powers of children, the powers of reason and communication, and also handicraft skills. Dagmar Čapková expresses the thinking of Comenius in this way:

for education will be adequate and complete only when the powers of reason are developed to provide the wisdom that guides and leads us towards knowledge of how to use things correctly. We need to cultivate language skills in order to communicate our knowledge properly. And finally, the hands must be accustomed to working with the accomplishments of the operations required. Such knowledge will be clear and lasting.<sup>24</sup>

Through pictures, Comenius wanted to arouse children's interest in learning and to motivate them for further schooling. In addition to visible things, *Orbis Pictus* depicts a few abstractions, which are presented either in terms of their manifestations or symbolically. The book organizes its subjects

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 6

<sup>21</sup>Johann Amos Comenius, *The Orbis Pictus* (Syracuse, NY: Bardeen, 1887)

<sup>22</sup>G. H. Turnbull, *Harlib, Dury, and Comenius* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1947), pp. 387–393. Dagmar Čapková, "J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* in Its Conception as a Textbook for the Universal Education of Children," *Pedagogica Historica* (Gent) 10 (no. 1 1970): 7–8.

<sup>23</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* in Its Conception as a Textbook for the Universal Education of Children," *Pedagogica Historica* (Gent) 10 (no. 1 1970): 7.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 12

into five main categories. (1) God, (2) the World, (3) Terrestrial Nature, (4) Man, (5) Providence and the Last Judgment.<sup>25</sup>

The book's frame of reference is the medieval religious setting. As Comenius progresses through the subject matter of *Orbis Pictus*, his striving for wholeness and completeness is apparent. At the same time, he conveys the content concisely, with a minimum of words and pictures.

Comenius first mentioned the idea of a schoolbook using pictures combined with brief descriptions in *Didactica Magna* (*The Great Didactic*). This book more than anything else is identified with Comenius's theory of teaching and his didactical principles.

### *The Didactical Principles of Didactica Magna*

*Didactica Magna* (1633–1638, 1657), more than any other of Comenius's books, has been misunderstood, attacked, and criticized—including during Comenius's lifetime. Some critics maintained that Comenius was too influenced by the didactical-technical efforts and interests of his own time and that *Didactica Magna* consequently was to be interpreted "als blosses Didaktik"—as nothing but didactics—with no regard for the pansophy.<sup>26</sup> The criticism was one reason why Comenius delayed publication of the Latin version.

The Czech version was not published until the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648. The Czech reformation is consequently an important background factor for understanding the book's message, as are the general methodological interests of the 17th century.<sup>27</sup>

Today most researchers on Comenius probably would agree that *Didactica Magna*, like all the other writings of Comenius, was based on a conviction that all questions and problems related to the educational process, including the problems of method, really concern the entire human life. Both the content and the basic issues of this book are rooted in a philosophy of human

<sup>25</sup>For a full description, see Dagmar Čápková, "J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* in Its Conception as a Textbook for the Universal Education of Children," *Pedagogica Historica* (Gent) 10 (no. 1 1970): 7–17.

<sup>26</sup>Dagmar Čápková, "On the Impact of J. A. Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) to the Theory and Practice of Education," *Symposium Comenianum 1982* (L'erský Brod, Czechoslovakia Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1984), pp. 11–28, K. Schaller, "Didaktik und Pädagogik in Werke des Johann Amos Comenius," *Der Evangelische Erzieher* 92 (No. 2 1992): 20–28.

<sup>27</sup>David Hamilton, "Comenius and the New World Order" (paper commissioned for the conference COMENIUS Heritage and Education of Man for the 21st Century, Prague, March 23–27, 1992). Here, in what Hamilton himself describes as a "speculative article," he states that Comenius's *Didactica Magna* was at the same time an encyclopedic, a "ramist" (referring to Peter Ramus 1515–1572), and a neo-stoicist work. It was encyclopedic because it tried to teach everything to everybody, "ramist" because it was based on the assumption that knowledge could be systematized and reduced to a natural pedagogical order, and neo-stoicist because it was a work of practical politics. What Hamilton underlines is the importance of seeing this book as part of a general development of schooling.

life, which Comenius then extends to his conception of a democratized system of education for all.<sup>28</sup>

The fundamental aims of education generate the basic principle of *Didactica Magna*. *omnis, omnia, omnino*—to teach everything to everybody thoroughly, in the best possible way. Comenius believed that every human being should strive for perfection in all that is fundamental for life and do this as thoroughly as possible. The didactic principles of and the method implied by *Didactica Magna* must be considered in this light.

Comenius expresses the overarching goals of education and consequently the goals that every human being must strive to attain in terms of three main tasks. Every person must strive to become (1) a rational being, (2) a person who can rule nature and him- or herself, and (3) a being mirroring the creator.

One attains these goals through a threefold approach. (1) through education one may learn about everything that is most important for life, (2) through ethical and moral behavior one may learn to rule oneself and the surrounding context in the most proper way, (3) through piety and belief in God one may learn how to look upon oneself and everything else in relation to God. Thus, it becomes important to reach knowledge through intellectual education, to build a strong character through moral education, and to grow in knowledge of God and thus come closer to the ultimate goal of eternity through religious upbringing.

These thoughts of Comenius were not new or even outstanding at the time. They were part of the stock and trade of the educationalists of humanism. What was new was the stress on one's responsibility toward nature, one's fellow human beings, and God, the systematic way Comenius treated the "problem areas" of teaching, and the bold conclusions he drew. It is also important to note that although Comenius founded his educational aims in tradition, he tried to integrate, when methods and means are considered, the new knowledge and scientific notions of his time.

One of the new and basic notions that he integrated was the role given to nature. The basic assumption, that to be within the rule of nature you have to obey its laws, became a pillar of his didactic principles. Of course, Comenius distinguished between the nature of a human being and its ultimate realization through unity with God, and the nature of the surrounding world and its physical and "psychological," or moral, laws.

Comenius used examples from the surrounding world, from animals, plants, physics, and so forth, and his method follows a certain framework. First he puts forth his thesis, then he presents examples from nature intended

<sup>28</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "On the Impact of J. A. Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) to the Theory and Practice of Education," *Symposium Comenianum 1982* (L'hersky Brod, Czechoslovakia Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1984), pp. 11–28.

to show how schooling is lacking in this area, and finally he suggests a way of reform.

Comenius included in *Didactica Magna* sets of rules intended to secure what we today would call "effective teaching." He was especially concerned with four "problem areas" of teaching:

- how to make sure that your students have attained knowledge
- how to help pupils learn easily and quickly
- how to secure lasting knowledge
- how to teach big classes

No doubt these lists of rules (often containing from 9 to 10 rules to be adhered to in each set, many isolated from their contexts) could be looked upon as merely technical, leading to a negative view of didactics in general and of *Didactica Magna* in particular.

However, taking a closer look at some of the fundamental conclusions drawn by Comenius in this book, we see that his pedagogy is still valid

- Teaching must be in accordance with the student's stage of development. (Comenius identified four important stages of learning. In the first, senses play an important role, in the second, imagination and memory, in the third, understanding and knowledge, and in the fourth, judgment.)
- All learning happens through the senses. This makes induction, visual means, and experiences important for learning and teaching.
- One should proceed from the specific to the general, from what is easy to the more difficult, from what is known to the unknown.
- Teaching should not cover too many subjects or themes at the same time.
- Teaching should proceed slowly and systematically. Nature makes no jumps.

Throughout the book Comenius demonstrates how the didactic principles may be applied to different subject matter and as part of moral and religious education. In science, for example, experience and object teaching are important. In the arts, theory is not sufficient, one also needs to practice. As to languages, one should start by learning the mother tongue, then the languages of the neighboring countries, and then Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Words and things must be presented together, without factual knowledge and fundamental insight into the reality of nature and things, people are like parrots.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Dagmar Čapková, "J. A. Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* in Its Conception as a Textbook for the Universal Education of Children," *Pedagogica Historica* (Gent) 10 (no. 1 1970) 7-17; Dagmar Čapková, "On the Impact of J. A. Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) to the Theory and Practice of Education," *Symposium Comenianum 1982* (Uherský Brod, Czechoslovakia: Muzeum J. A. Komenského, 1984), pp. 11-28.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even if most educationalists and teachers today were to say that the educational thinking of Comenius is still valid, there may be objections to putting his pedagogy on the agenda in teacher training institutions and other educational settings. One of the objections may be that, in today's schools, his didactics are taken for granted, even if not always attained in practice. This view was recently considered by the Czech philosopher Jan Patocka, whose observations on the contemporary relevance of Comenius include the following:

The practice of Comenius's didactics was partly realized long ago, and his well accepted principles have become trivialities. But what Comenius is all about, education as a way for the human being to become a real human being, is today, as it was during his times and to the same degree, a living problem.<sup>30</sup>

The words of an American educationalist, Maxine Greene, are also pertinent.

My hope is to remind people of what it means to be alive among others, to achieve freedom in dialogue with others for the sake of personal fulfillment and the emergence of a democracy dedicated to life and decency.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>My translation, quoted in K. Schaller, "Didaktik und Pädagogik in Werke des Johann Amos Comenius," *Der Evangelische Erzieher* 92 (No. 2 1992), 20

<sup>31</sup>Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), p. xii  
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