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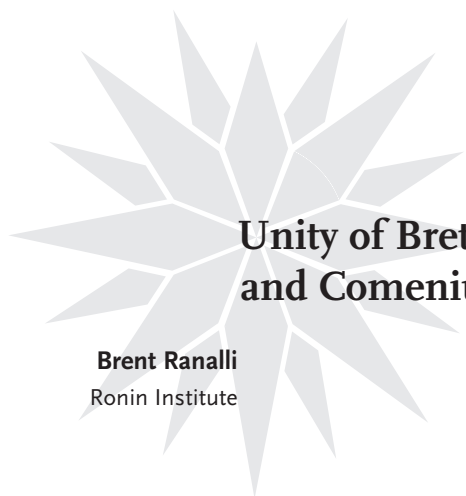
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ABSTRACT: It is well documented that Comenius's (1592–1670) “pansophic” program of intellectual reform was influenced by a variety of European authors (e.g., Andreae, Campanella, Bacon, Patrizi) and trends such as Ramism and German Reformed encyclopedism. This article enumerates some of the debts the pansophic program owes to a source closer to home: the Unity of Brethren, Comenius's own Hussite religious tradition. First, we examine several ways in which Comenius's intellectual-reform goals and methods echo the search for unity and harmony that was characteristic of the Brethren (internally, in the group's decision-making techniques, and externally, in its irenic efforts). Second, we see how the virtues Comenius prescribes for philosophers in his pansophic writings parallel the virtues considered necessary for religious irenics.

KEYWORDS: Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), Unity of Brethren (Jednota bratrská, Unitas Fratrum), pansophy, irenics, virtue ethics

Today, the early modern Czech pastor, pedagogue, and reformer Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius, 1592–1670) is a European icon, a symbol of cosmopolitan continental aspirations. For at least a brief period in his own lifetime as well, in the wake of celebrity as the author of the language textbook *Janua Linguarum*, his ambition to reform intellectual life and establish a

truly universal wisdom (*pansophia*) captured the imagination of progressive thinkers across the continent. He was invited to England, where Parliament nearly put Chelsea College at his disposal. When the outbreak of civil war made this impossible, invitations came in from France and Sweden. The prince of Lithuania offered to devote fully one-fourth of his income to the pansophic project.¹

Competing priorities (ministering to his flock in diaspora, and currying favor with princes and magnates by composing yet more textbooks) prevented Comenius from bringing the pansophic project to fruition. Though he continued to develop it until the end of his long life, it was not until the twentieth century (with the publication of the reassembled *Consultatio Catholica* and, more recently, the systematic study and publication of the papers of Comenius's London-based colleague Samuel Hartlib) that scholars have gotten something like the full picture of Comenius's pansophic ambitions.² And even so, we have not yet plumbed their depths.

When describing his plans for intellectual reform, Comenius explicitly acknowledged debts to Johann Valentin Andreae, Tommaso Campanella, and Francis Bacon.³ Other evident sources of influence and inspiration have been identified, including Nicholas of Cusa and Francesco Patrizi.⁴ Recent scholarship has situated Comenius's pansophy in the context of German Reformed culture, including the encyclopedism of Comenius's mentor Johann Heinrich Alsted and larger currents of Ramist thought (a scholastic reform movement based on the sixteenth-century teaching of Petrus Ramus).⁵

1. For general biographical information, see Matthew Spinka, *John Amos Comenius, That Incomparable Moravian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943); Josef Polišenský, *Jan Amos Komenský. Studie s ukázkami z díla Komenského* (Prague: Svobodné slovo, 1963); and Milada Blekastad, *Comenius: Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

2. Jan Amos Comenius, *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica*, seven books published in two volumes (Prague: Academia, 1966), hereafter referred to as the *Consultatio Catholica*; the Hartlib Papers have

been digitized by researchers at the University of Sheffield (<http://hridigital.shef.ac.uk/hartlib>).

3. Jan Amos Comenius, *A Reformation of Schooles*, trans. Samuel Hartlib (London: Michael Sparke, 1642), 47. This volume comprises the first English translation of Comenius's *Pansophiae prodromus* (published 1637 and 1639) and *Conatuum pansophicorum dilucidatio* (unpublished Latin manuscript).

4. Pavel Floss, "Komenský a Kusánus," *Studia Comeniana et Historica* 1, no. 2 (1971): 9–38; Jan Čížek, "Filosofie Franceska Patriziho a Jana Amose Komenského ve světle jejich vrcholných děl," *Studia Comeniana et Historica* 40 (2010): 83–84.



FIG 1. Jan Amos Komenský (1592–1670) teaching a group of men, engraving, detail from the title page of Johann Amos Comenius, *Eerste deel der school-geleertheyd, genoemt Het portael* (Amstelodami: apud Joannem Ravestinium, 1673). Be 2, Library Collection of the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem.

The German Reformed intellectual tradition could hardly have failed to have influenced Comenius, given the three years he spent completing his education at Herborn and Heidelberg in 1611–14. But by the same token, we must expect that Comenius’s intellectual orientation would also have been shaped by his prior nineteen years of upbringing in his own native Czech Hussite church, the Unity of Brethren (Jednota bratrská, or Unitas Fratrum). Comenius had been born into a family of pillars of the church, and relatives may have included members of the clergy.⁶ His first twelve years were spent in Uherský Brod, a leading center of Unity activity in Moravia, and he spent three formative years at the Brethren’s school in Přerov under the eminent senior (i.e., bishop) Jan Lánecký (Lanecius) before completing

5. Howard Hotson, “The Ramist Roots of Comenian Pansophia,” in *Ramus, Pedagogy and the Liberal Arts: Ramism in Britain and the Wider World*, ed. Steven J. Reid and Emma Annette Wilson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

6. Polišenský, *Jan Amos Komenský*, 29; Rudolf Říčan and Jan Amos Comenius, *Jan Amos Komenský: muž víry, lásky a naděje* (Prague: Kalich, 1971), 15–16.

his education at the German institutions. However closely allied, politically and culturally, were the Unity of Brethren and the German Reformed movement at this time, the Unity of Brethren was a distinct entity in its own right. The curriculum at Přerov centered around scripture and the Brethren's own writings.⁷ With Comenius's enrollment at religious boarding school at age sixteen, having lost his parents several years earlier, the church practically became a foster family. Comenius entered the priesthood as soon as he was eligible and gradually rose through the ranks, taking on greater responsibilities until he eventually became the pre-eminent senior of the Unity. His life centered around his church, and it stood at the core of his identity. I propose that a fuller understanding of Comenius's pansophic aims and methods requires examining them through the lens of the culture and history of the Unity of Brethren.

This thesis, to be sure, is not radical or revolutionary. We should fully expect that Comenius worked from within his native religious tradition. Much biographical writing about Comenius assumes it, at least implicitly. But the influence of the Unity of Brethren tradition on Comenius's pansophic program has yet to be drawn out explicitly and itemized. And the influence is often opaque. As Daniel A. Neval has noted, although Comenius makes use of the work of predecessors such as Petr Chelčický, Brother Lukáš, and Jan Blahoslav, he seldom mentions them by name or quotes them explicitly.⁸

A few words on the parameters of this study: Pansophy means different things to different readers of Comenius's sprawling corpus. The pansophy under investigation in this article is Comenius's program for *reform of intellectual life* as laid out in the canonical pansophic works: the *Prodromus*, the *Delucidatio*, the *Diatyposis*, the *Via lucis*, and the unfinished *Consultatio*. In adhering to this narrow and orthodox definition of pansophy, we will have little to say about other, allied projects like pedagogical reform. When it comes to the Brethren's disposition toward irenicism (the promotion of peace and conciliation among sects), with which we will be juxtaposing Comenius's pansophic project, we will look

7. Říčan and Comenius, *Jan Amos Komenský*, 16–17.

8. Daniel A. Neval, "An Approach to the Legacy of Comenius' Theology," in *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*,

vol. 3, *Papers from the XIXth World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, Bratislava 1998* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Main Library, 2000), 215–28.

to Comenius's own major irenic treatises, the *Haggaeus redivivus* and *Cesta pokoje*, as well as other writings and activities of Comenius and his predecessors.

While this study involves a close reading of Comenius's own pansophic and irenic texts and offers new insights into those writings, it relies mostly on secondary literature to characterize the centuries of Brethren tradition that preceded Comenius (the subject of the next section). The present work is offered in a spirit of Comenian humility: in full awareness that it does not exhaust its subject and that it enters directly into dialogue with only a fraction of the vast, multilingual literature on Comenius and the Brethren, it is put forward in hope that it will be found to have value and that others will take up and carry forward the work.

THE UNITY OF BRETHREN

Following the execution of Jan Hus in 1415 by ecclesiastical authorities, Hussite religious reforms became a popular national cause in Bohemia. Militant Taborites and other Hussite factions repeatedly repulsed foreign armies. In the resulting settlement, two denominations were officially recognized in Czech lands: the Roman church and the Hussite counterestablishment church known as the "Utraquist" (from the Latin *sub utraque specie*, meaning "in both kinds," since the Hussites allowed parishioners not only to eat the communion bread but also to drink the communion wine), or "Calixtine" (from the chalice, in which the wine was served). Some Czech Hussites, however, partly inspired by the radical pacifist teachings of Petr Chelčický, were dissatisfied with both established churches and sought to form a more perfect religious community of their own. These organized themselves as the Unity of Brethren in 1457.⁹ The Unity suffered persecution by both official churches, but over time won adherents from many social classes, including members of the nobility. By the time of Comenius, the sect constituted approximately 2–3 percent of the

9. On the general history of the Unity of Brethren, see Rudolf Řičan, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren: A Protestant Hussite Church in Bohemia and Moravia*, trans. C. Daniel Crews (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church in America, 1992; originally published in 1957 as *Dějiny Jednoty bratrské*); Peter Brock,

The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1957), and Craig D. Atwood, *The Theology of the Czech Brethren from Hus to Comenius* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009).

population of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as a small minority community (under 1%) in Poland.¹⁰

As the church grew, it relaxed some of the strict rules it had earlier followed. For example, prohibitions on swearing of oaths, serving on juries, and performing military service, which had effectively prevented members from participating in civic life and often put them at odds with the state, were revised or set aside. The church also evolved doctrinally as it dealt with internal theological controversies. The German Reformation had a profound effect on Czech religious life as well. While the established Utraquist church adopted Lutheran doctrines and practices, the Unity of Brethren found the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition more congenial and reformulated its doctrines somewhat along those lines.

As Unity tradition metamorphosed in response to internal and external developments, two characteristics remained constant and salient. First, moral discipline was central to religious life.¹¹ The moral life of the individual was the business of the community, and self-reflection was paired with communal accountability. The aim of the Brethren, an early leader explained to Bohemian authorities, was “to live according to the scriptures alone, following the examples of Christ and His holy apostles in quietness, humility, and patience, loving one’s enemies and doing good to them.” In the image of the earliest Christians (as they understood them), the Brethren strove to be “humble, retiring, temperate, magnanimous, long-suffering, loving, full of pity and kindness, meek, pure, modest, peaceable, desirous only of the right, compliant, willing, and ready for good action.” Investigators from Prague University remarked with apparent astonishment that the Brethren sought to achieve salvation “most of all from a virtuous life.”¹² Correspondingly, questions of doctrine and liturgy were of secondary importance to the Brethren. Viewing words as necessarily imperfect vessels for divine truth, they had no compunction about periodically reforming their creed.

10. Josef Polišenský, *Jan Amos Komenský a jeho odkaz dnešku* (Prague: Stni pedagogické nakladatelství, 1987), 8; Řičan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 298–99.

11. See discussion in Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 293ff; also Craig D. Atwood, “Catechism of the Bohemian Brethren,” *Journal of Moravian History*, no. 2 (2007): 91–117, at 92.

Compare Jan Amos Comenius, *The Bequest of the Unity of Brethren*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Chicago: National Union of Czechoslovak Protestants in America, 1940; originally published in 1650 as *Kšaft umírající matky jednoty bratrské*), esp. chaps. 16 and 19.

12. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 86, 87.

Second, as implied even by their name, the Brethren were preoccupied with the pursuit of unity, harmony, and reconciliation.¹³ The Brethren believed that God spoke through the conscience of the community, and in their internal affairs they commonly made decisions by consensus. A high value was placed upon unanimity among the leadership.¹⁴ Thus, the Brethren were committed to and well practiced (if not necessarily always successful) in the arts of reconciling divergent viewpoints and finding a *via media* (a compromise, literally “the middle road”). In external affairs, one of the distinctive characteristics of the Unity of Brethren from its earliest days had been a penchant for interfaith bridge-building. In their efforts to educate themselves and perfect their faith and discipline, the early Brethren sought out connections with the Waldenses of Italy and the Russian and Greek churches and even sent representatives to search for remnants of a purer Christianity in the Holy Land.¹⁵ In the sixteenth century the Brethren sought and received endorsements from Erasmus and Luther and made a lasting alliance with Calvinism. In 1609, while Comenius was a student at Přerov, the Unity of Brethren scored one of its biggest interfaith-cooperation victories by allying with its former persecutors, the Utraquist Church, to win a guarantee of religious liberty in Bohemia from the Catholic king.

As already noted, the Brethren were willing to modulate practices, ceremonies, and doctrines in ways that brought them into harmony with other Protestant denominations. They nevertheless tended to jealously guard their autonomy so as to be able to preserve their unique constitution and their strict moral discipline.

In its outward facing form, the Brethren’s conciliatory spirit took the form of irenicism. Comenius, as corresponding secretary and eventually senior of the Brethren, played an active role in seventeenth-century irenics, seeking to promote interfaith harmony via treatises, personal diplomacy, and correspondence.¹⁶ In the past it was sometimes assumed that his year of study (1613–14) in Heidelberg under David Pareus, a leading German Reformed irenicist, was formative of Comenius’s interest in irenicism and his views on the subject. But as Howard Hotson has shown, this theory is

13. See discussion in Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 306ff.

14. Říčan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 197, 320.

15. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 141–42;

Říčan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 63–64.

16. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1968*, 4th ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 88–91.

not supported by the documentary evidence from Heidelberg. At least in the classroom, Comenius was taught anti-Lutheran polemics, not irenics, by Pareus.¹⁷ To be sure, the mature Comenius could hardly have failed to be familiar with Pareus's 1614 *Irenicum* and the range of German Reformed (and other) irenic literature. But Comenius's irenic notions and disposition stand solidly in Unity of Brethren tradition.¹⁸

The Brethren's strong emphasis of dispute resolution and bridge-building can be interpreted as an expression of the ideal of Christian charity.¹⁹ It can also be understood as a pragmatic response to circumstances. Given the Brethren's marginal legal status, it was important for internal disputes to be settled quietly. Even in secular matters, disputes between members of the church were to be resolved internally by lay leaders or peers rather than in the law courts.²⁰ And the Brethren's outward-looking irenic program is a textbook illustration of the principle laid out by Hotson in his study of (primarily German) irenicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: enthusiasm for irenicism correlates strongly with political weakness. Consistently in a more precarious position than Lutherans, Calvinists, and Utraquists, the Brethren were correspondingly more disposed toward irenicism.²¹

What I intend to show in this article is that Comenius's pansophic program for the reform of intellectual life has deep roots in Unity of Brethren tradition. Broadly, pansophy mirrors both of the general features of the Unity of Brethren discussed above: its irenic spirit and its preoccupation with the moral life of the individual. In what follows, we treat each of those two major features in turn. As a rule, the Unity of Brethren's influence on the pansophic program is mediated by Comenius's own irenic religious work, which forms an organic extension of the community's irenic tradition.²²

17. Howard Hotson, "Irenicism and Dogmatics in the Confessional Age—Pareus and Comenius in Heidelberg, 1614," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46, no. 3 (1995): 432–56.

18. See, e.g., Jana Uhlířová, "Vliv Jednoty Bratrské na Komenského koncept tolerance a intolerance ve výchově," *Studia Comeniana et Historica* 39 (2009): 50–55, as well as Řičan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, and Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*.

19. Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 284–85, 290. Compare Comenius, *Bequest*, esp. chaps. 16 and 18.

20. Řičan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 77, 87; Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 216.

21. Howard Hotson, "Irenicism in the Confessional Age: The Holy Roman Empire, 1563–1648," in *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform, 1415–1648*, ed. Howard P. Louthan and Randall C. Zachman (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004), 228–85.

22. Řičan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*.

THE IRENIC SPIRIT

In the first place, Comenius's pansophic program echoes the Unity of Brethren's emphasis on mediation and reconciliation, an emphasis that took the form of consensus-building in internal affairs and irenics in inter-denominational affairs. These echoes are found both in the overarching aim of the pansophic program and in some of its fine details.

The Motivating Goal of Pansophy: Establishing Consensus

The influence of Unity tradition can be seen, first of all, in the aims of pansophic reform. Whereas René Descartes's idea of reforming intellectual life, for example, was to set knowledge on new and firmer *a priori* foundations, and Francis Bacon's was to establish more reliable methods of discovering empirical truths, Comenius's conception of intellectual reform was first and foremost an interpersonal one: the goal was to resolve disputes and establish consensus, to forge harmony and unity out of the present "chaos of opinions."²³ "An universal harmony is to be sought," he writes in the *Pansophiae Prodromus*, the first major statement of the pansophic program, "that all difference in opinions may be reconciled, and brought to consonancie, by reducing them to the meane and certaine truth."²⁴ And again: "The new philosophy will have as its new ultimate goal the reconciliation of disagreements by discovering, establishing, and bringing to light true ideas of everything."²⁵

That this approach to intellectual reform is drawn from a religious template can be seen from the parallel treatment Comenius gives dysfunction in the religious and intellectual domains in his allegorical *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart*. The squabbles and scuffles observed by the Pilgrim-protagonist in the church, in this story, are practically interchangeable with those that take place in the square of the learned, and the Pilgrim is equally appalled and disheartened by both

23. Jan Amos Comenius, *Panorthosia or Universal Reform: Chapters 1–18 and 27*, trans. A. M. O. Dobbie (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; originally published in 1966 as book 6 of the *Consultatio Catholica*), 176.

24. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 34.

25. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 176.

26. Jan Amos Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart*, trans. Matthew Spinka (Chicago: National Union of Czechoslovak Protestants in America, 1942; first published in 1631 as *Labyrint světa a lusthaus srdce*), 41–43, 72–74. Original-language quotations from *Veškeré spisy Jana Amosa Komenského* (VSJAK) 15 (Brno, 1910).

displays.²⁶ Essentially, Comenius takes the orientation he inherited from Brethren tradition in religious life—treating the central problem as that of striving for harmony—and applies it *mutatis mutandis* to the domain of philosophy.

Best Practices in Mediation: Ensuring That All Voices Are Heard

As we have already discussed, the Brethren had extensive experience in mediating internal disagreements and had theological motivation to do so conscientiously. Various aspects of this tradition can be seen reflected in Comenius's vision of dispute resolution among scholars.

In the first instance, there is the special effort that the Brethren made to ensure that all voices would be heard. Říčan reports that “the more important the action to be taken, the broader the group of representatives called together to deal with it.”²⁷ Our sources inform us that it was a common practice among the Brethren to have the youngest members present speak first, followed by those with more seniority, and the presiding member last; this was meant to ensure that younger members would not be too embarrassed or intimidated to contribute.²⁸ On especially sensitive issues, the Brethren were known to resort to techniques like having each participant write down their opinion on paper for reading aloud before discussion begins.²⁹

In the *Prodromus* Comenius displays equally proactive concern that no voice be excluded from the pansophic reform of intellectual life. Sources to be consulted in the pansophic project will range from the most exalted to the most humble. Even the “very meanest” should “have liberty, if he thinks that he seeth any thing worthy of observation, to point it out.” For: “The more candles, the greater light.”³⁰

The pansophic project will be deliberately and systematically inclusive.

Our maine aime is, that all who have written any thing concerning Piety and good manners, or concerning the Arts and sciences, not respecting whether they be Christians, or Mahumetans, Jewes or Pagans, and of what sect soever, Pythagoreans, Acad[e]mians,

27. Říčan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 52.

28. Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 323; Říčan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 379.

29. Říčan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 62.

30. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 31, 28.

Peripateticks, Stoicks, Esseans, . . . that all I say, be admitted, and heard to see what they will bring in for the compiling of this Philosophicall worke.³¹

More can be said about the distinctive mediation practices of the Brethren. Below we will touch on their skill in the art of finding creative *viae mediae*. But first we turn to the recognition of an objective standard for settling disputes.

The Touchstone

Comenius's vision of how disputes in intellectual life are to be resolved follows a template that the Brethren shared with other Protestants in religious life: appeal to an authoritative text. The religious template is laid out plainly in Comenius's *Labyrinth*, where he presents the allegory of the touchstone (*prubiřský kámen*).

They led me behind a railing into the middle of the extensive church, where I saw a large, round stone suspended on a chain. They said that this was the touchstone. Their foremost men approached the stone, each carrying something in his hand, as for instance an ingot of gold, or silver, or iron, or lead, a handful of sand, or chaff, and so forth.³²

Then each "[rubbed] the object he brought upon the stone" to see whether it "stood the test."

The touchstone, of course, represents holy scripture. Comenius did not invent this symbolism; it appears, for example, in the Lutheran Formula of Concord. But Comenius fully develops it allegorically. Evaluating a doctrine is akin to testing a hypothesis. One articulates a doctrine and then tests its validity by comparing it against scripture. If it has the support of God's Word it "passes the test" and should be accepted. If not, it fails and should be discarded. The touchstone is suspended in a public forum for all to see, as scripture is (in the Protestant ideal) a public document, available and

31. Ibid., 31.

32. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 72.
Where not otherwise specified, original-language quotations in this article are from the

1966 Academia edition of *Consultatio Catholica* or the multivolume *Dílo J. A. Komenského (DJAK)* published in Prague by Academia beginning in 1969.

accessible to all. Different people should be able to agree, by witnessing with their own eyes, whether a doctrine has passed the test or failed it. In this manner, Comenius proposes, any and all doctrinal disputes could be resolved.³³

In conformance with Protestant practice, then, Comenius appeals to scripture as an objective reference point to resolve theological disputes. When we turn to his writings on the reform of intellectual life, we find that he adopts an analogous approach. In fact, in *Pansophiae Prodigium* it can be seen that the principle is applied on multiple levels.

In the first place, as a nod to Baconian empiricism, the *Prodromus* is littered with appeals to the unimpeachable authority of “things themselves” (*ipse res* or simply *res*).³⁴ These are objective reference points.

But Comenius does not stop with an endorsement of empiricism. Grafting onto Bacon’s inductive method an elaborate Neoplatonic superstructure, he promises to distill from the data “rules of Truth” that will command assent. These abstracted principles will serve as a “generall key to let us in unto the knowledge of things” and a “touchstone of all opinions” (emphasis added).³⁵

Finally, Comenius promises that the endpoint of the pansophic research effort will be a *Janua Rerum* (“Gate of Things,” implicitly a sequel to *Janua Linguarum*, “Gate of Tongues”). The *Janua Rerum*, as an authoritative text,

33. Two caveats are required here: First, the Brethren did not treat scripture in quite the same way as children of the Second Reformation. For example, they gave less weight to the Old Testament and recognized also, at least secondarily, the authority of early Church fathers (see Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 278–79). Nevertheless, as Řičán (*History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 401) observes, “the first and most basic source of the Brethren’s theology was and always remained Holy Scripture.” Second, later in his career, during what has been called his “panorthotic” period (see Jan Čížek, *The Conception of Man in the Works of John Amos Comenius* [New York: Peter Lang, 2016]), when his irenic vision broadened beyond Protestantism, Comenius naturally appealed to other arguments besides the authority of scripture. Approaches included appealing to reason and nature along with scripture as three books of God (e.g.,

Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 177) and shifting the focus from doctrinal questions to questions of attitude and affect (Hans-Joachim Müller, “The Dimensions of Religious Toleration in the Eirenicism of Jan Amos Comenius [1642–1645],” *Acta Comeniana* 17 [2003]: 99–116; Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 101). It is the earlier writings addressed to the question of Protestant unity, which preceded the pansophic writings, with which we are concerned here.

34. The phrase appears over thirty times in *Prodromus*, and it appears in subsequent pansophical writings as well. In *Diatyposis*, scripture and things themselves are paired up as dual touchstones. Jan Amos Comenius, *A Pattern of Universal Knowledge. In a plain and true Draught: or a Diatyposis*, trans. Jeremy Collier (London, 1651; originally published in 1643 as *Pansophiae diatyposis*), 203.

35. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 41–42.

is directly analogous to scripture as touchstone. Such a text will prevent future controversies from arising in intellectual life by “[recalling] men differing in opinions . . . to a consent.”³⁶

Viewing the *Janua rerum* in this light helps clear up one puzzling aspect of the pansophic project. Why would a pupil of Johann Heinrich Alsted, the great encyclopedist, envision the end product of pansophy as a single “book (or pamphlet)” (*liber [aut libellus]*), containing “the most brief and accurate definitions of things” (*brevissimis accuratisque rerum definitionibus*), rather than a multivolume work on a scale to match the grandiosity of the research project itself?³⁷ The answer is in the touchstone function: the *Janua Rerum* is meant to be a handbook, literally to be “ready at hand” (*quod cui ad manum sit*) as a quick reference to prevent and resolve disputes.³⁸

As already noted, the touchstone function of scripture that found echoes in Comenius’s pansophic program belonged to the Brethren but was not unique to the Brethren; it was the common heritage of all Protestants. How Comenius proposed to apply a touchstone to resolve disputes, on the other hand, reflects the distinctive influence of Unity of Brethren tradition. To this we now turn.

36. Comenius, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 111.

37. Jan Amos Comenius, *Comenius’ Självbiografi: Comenius about Himself*, ed. Stig G. Nordström and Wilhelm Sjöstrand (Uppsala: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 1976; originally published in 1669 as *Continuatio admonitionis fraternae de temperando charitate zelo*), 232. English translation by the author.

38. Comenius, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 28. To be sure, scripture itself does not live up to the ideal of a quick-reference handbook. God’s texts “have their digressions and their various circumlocutions and deep recesses.” Jan Amos Comenius, *Unum Necessarium; The One Thing Necessary*, trans. Vernon Nelson (Winston-Salem, NC: Moravian Archives, 2008; originally published in 1668 as *Unum necessarium*), 51. For this reason, Comenius wished to develop a concordance or epitome of scripture. In the *Pampaedia* he describes the requirements for such a

work, including the laying out of apparently conflicting passages and the means of their resolution in a tabular format, and in the 1667 *Angelus Pacis* he announces that he is engaged in writing the work. Jan Amos Comenius, *Comenius’s Pampaedia or Universal Education*, trans. A. M. O. Dobbie (Dover: Buckland Publications, 1986; originally published in 1666 as book 4 of the *Consultatio Catholica*), 79; Jan Amos Comenius, *The Angel of Peace*, trans. W. A. Morison, ed. Miloš Šafránek (New York: Pantheon, 1945; originally published in 1667 as *Angelus pacis*), 103. Precedents for this effort are found in Alsted’s 1625 encyclopedia of scripture, the *Triumphus Bibliorum*, and in Comenius’s own early attempts to organize scriptural material in an encyclopedic mode. Jaroslav Pleskot, *Jan Amos Komenský’s Years in Fulnek* (Ostrava: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství v Praze, 1972), 24; cf. Hotson, “The Ramist Roots of Comenian Pansophia,” 244.

The Transcendent Compromise

What is perhaps most distinctive about Comenius's approach (and the Unity's) to religious irenics is the teaching that two competing doctrines, both grounded in scripture, can *somehow both be correct*.³⁹ More precisely, Comenius holds that scripture as touchstone can render three sorts of verdicts: it can vindicate one opinion, or multiple opinions, or no opinion at all.

The first type of verdict does not require much comment. Much more interesting are the second and third. Comenius provides examples of these in *Haggaeus redivivus*, his first major irenic treatise (composed in 1632, unpublished in his lifetime). On both points, Comenius echoes the Unity of Brethren's standard teaching.⁴⁰

The controversy over predestination (whether God has preordained who will be saved, or whether salvation depends on our actions) illustrates the second type of resolution. Comenius rehearses the various arguments from scripture: that our salvation is entirely at the mercy of God, but that He wishes the wicked to repent; that "The Lord knows who are His" but "who stands take heed lest he fall." Observing that scripture sanctions teachings on both sides of the controversy, he concludes that in some mysterious way both are correct.⁴¹

The sense in which Christ is present in the ceremonial Eucharist illustrates the third type of resolution. According to Comenius, scripture does not tell us whether the transformation of the bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ is a physical change, as Luther had maintained, or merely a spiritual one brought about by the faith of the recipient, as Calvinists believed.

Whether this sacrament is received by the mouth or by faith alone, why do ye contend about it? Why do ye wish to pronounce upon matters about which the Scripture is silent? . . . If one in the

39. For background on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century irenics, see Rouse and Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*; Howard P. Louthan and Randall C. Zachman, eds., *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform, 1415–1648* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2004).

40. For the Unity's views on predestination see Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 314, and on the eucharist 250, 287–88.

41. Jan Amos Comenius, "Haggaeus Redivivus," in VSJAK 17 (Brno, 1912 [written 1632]), 220–22; cf. Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 59.

simplicity of his heart believes more in this matter, and another in the same simplicity believes less, turn ye this to the good of each other, and bear with one another.⁴²

Later writings amplify this distinctive exegetical approach to irenics. In the *Panorthosia*, where he labels his method “both and neither” (*utrumque et neutrum*), he gives no fewer than seven examples, showing how it can resolve many of the great theological disputes that have historically divided Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox.⁴³

Comenius’s *both/neither* approach to religious irenics had its critics. The Dutch Reformed theologian Samuel Desmarets (Maresius), for instance, mocked Comenius for supposing that all dogmas could be affirmed simultaneously.⁴⁴ In fact, Comenius’s approach is more subtle than this. Where scripture provides evidence for apparently contradictory doctrines, Comenius believes they point the way to a more transcendent insight. When that insight has been achieved, it will be clear how in one particular sense or circumstance one doctrine is correct, while in another sense or circumstance another doctrine is correct. So, for example, on the question of justification (what serves to make one righteous in the sight of God?): while Paul’s letters emphasize faith, and James emphasizes works, and John portrays salvation as proceeding from the will of God, Comenius explains, we must recognize that all of these passages are describing the same state of grace, but approaching it from different angles for the needs of particular audiences.⁴⁵ Comenius uses an analogy from astronomy to illustrate and justify this approach in theology. Observers at different points on the globe may differ about the extent and precise timing of an eclipse, and yet they can all be correct.⁴⁶

As noted above, Comenius’s exegesis on the Eucharist and predestination in *Haggaeus Redivivus* follows traditional Unity teaching. Comenius’s *both/neither* approach has other precedents in Unity of Brethren tradition as well. For example: “As a result of their examination of the scriptures,”

42. Comenius, “Haggaeus Redivivus,” 218–19; translation from Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 60.

43. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 129–40.

44. Wilhelmus Rood, *Comenius and the Low Countries: Some Aspects of Life and Work of a*

Czech Exile in the Seventeenth Century (Amsterdam: Van Gendt, 1970), 202.

45. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 133–34.

46. *Ibid.*, 124.

we are told, the Brethren concluded “that ‘God has both disallowed and, at the same time, permitted’ usury.”⁴⁷ And on the nature of the Eucharist, the Brethren insisted in their 1535 Confession that “the words of scripture are sufficient explanation in themselves and that it is dangerous to speculate further.”⁴⁸ These instances exemplify *both* and *neither*, respectively. Perhaps the prototypical example of the Brethren’s genius for finding a *via media* was the successful resolution of a brewing controversy over the doctrine of justification among educated Brethren in the late fifteenth century by Brother Prokop, who proposed “good will” as a compromise between faith and works.⁴⁹

When we turn to Comenius’s pansophic writings on intellectual reform, we see that he adopts the same criteria for resolving disputes. The philosophical touchstone (usually “things themselves,” occasionally the projected *Janua Rerum*) may vindicate one philosophical opinion, or several, or none at all.

The first instance, again, requires little comment. In the second instance, Comenius believes that in many cases competing philosophers and schools each have a piece of the truth, and bringing them together in dialogue may yield new and deeper insight. “The divers opinions of men concerning the nature of things, are like divers glosses on a text, whereof one is more exact in one part, another in another, each helping you to something observable.”⁵⁰ In *Via lucis* he reaffirms this conviction: “As a rule men who are opposed to each other have, every one of them, their own truths to offer in justification of their opinions, and if they would but understand the true relation of these several truths among themselves, they would end their disputes.” And he gives a concrete example: “Aristotle attacks Empedocles for saying that the light of the sun is spread from the east to the west in a moment: Aristotle declares that this is impossible.

47. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 264.

48. Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 287–88. Cf. Martin Wernisch’s analysis of Matěj Červenka’s *Obecné a hlavní artykuli učení křesťanského v Jednotě Bratrské* (Common and principal articles of the Christian teaching in the Unity of Brethren): As a matter of irenic principle and strategy, Červenka “considers it inappropriate to proclaim definite opinions on matters uncertain.” (Martin Wernisch, “A Sixteenth-Century Monument of Brethren

Theology,” trans. Zdeněk V. David, in *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*, vol. 5, pt. 2, ed. Zdeněk David and David Holeton [Prague, 2005], 371–78, at 374.)

49. Brock, *Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren*, 108–9; Řičan, *History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 59.

50. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 31. Comenius attributes the insight to Bacon, but the author was unable to find such a statement in Bacon’s corpus.

Each of these philosophers speaks with some truth, and each correctly, if the problem itself is rightly understood.” The key to the puzzle is that the sun “does not begin to send forth its light to us, when it lifts itself above the horizon in our sight; on the contrary, before it rises its rays are already extended in the air above our heads. As soon, then, as it rises, in that very moment, its rays are lowered and surround us.” Therefore “Empedocles is right when he says that we are surrounded and flooded with light in a moment of time.” And at the same time, “Aristotle is right when he argues in favor of a continuous movement and maintains that the illumination which we experience cannot be wrought in a moment.”⁵¹

In the third instance, there are some philosophical controversies in which neither party is correct. This principle too is articulated and illustrated in *Via lucis*: “Sometimes . . . neither of two conflicting assertions is true. For example: the Peripatetics maintain that fire is the lightest of all things: Huartus [Juan Huarte], on the other hand (in his *Scrutinium Ingeniorum*), says it is the heaviest.” In Comenius’s view, “we must declare that the controversy is idle, since according to the truth of the matter . . . fire is neither light nor heavy.” He explains that “fire is not a part of earthly matter or of the elements, but a power which, acting upon matter, leaves every matter which it touches as it finds it, heavy or light. For a metal when set on fire is neither heavier nor lighter than itself (before it was set on fire).”⁵²

Thus, both in its overall aim of searching for unity and harmony and in specific aspects of how that search is conducted, pansophy follows Unity of Brethren precedents.

THE IRENIC ETHIC

For the success of an irenic enterprise (and, given the extent to which it is modeled after irenicism, the pansophic enterprise), Comenius believes that it is not enough to marshal facts and arguments. This can be seen clearly in the allegory of the *Labyrinth*. Although scripture is held up as a touchstone to resolve religious disputes, it ultimately fails. Neighboring churches

51. Jan Amos Comenius, *The Way of Light*, trans. E.T. Campagnac (London: University Press of Liverpool, 1938; originally

published in 1668 as *Via lucis*), 159–60.

52. *Ibid.*, 160.

enter into discussions about unification, and these discussions too fail. Similarly for intellectual life: the wisest and most learned men throughout history, when gathered together in one place in the *Labyrinth*, are simply unable to resolve their differences.⁵³

The critical final ingredient is a matter of ethics. In affirming this, Comenius stands squarely in Unity of Brethren tradition, which placed heavy emphasis on the moral life of the individual.

Comenius was a virtue ethicist, and his conception of virtue combined classical (Aristotelian) and Christian elements.⁵⁴ In conformity with Unity of Brethren tradition, he placed strong emphasis on the theological virtues of faith, love, and hope and on the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount. The range of virtues that interest Comenius is not all that remarkable in itself; they are mostly standard Christian fare. What is notable is the way in which Comenius treats a particular set of virtues in parallel fashion in his discussions of religious irenics (where he is writing from within the Unity of Brethren tradition) and intellectual reform.

To be even more specific, we can distinguish three vices and four virtues, set in opposition to one another, to which Comenius attached particular importance in both religious irenics and intellectual reform: pride versus humility, prejudice versus charity, and party spirit versus a combination of independent thinking and public-spiritedness. Below, we discuss each of these virtue/vice pairs (or triads) in turn, showing how Comenius applies them in parallel fashion in religious irenics and intellectual reform. In each case we begin with *Labyrinth*. There the clergyman's views on vice and virtue are fully developed in the religious sphere. (As the work was met with approbation by the community, we can fairly conclude that the ethical views presented in the work were not idiosyncratic, but were consonant with or representative of the views of the Unity of Brethren.) Further, in each case we amplify Comenius's views about virtue and vice in religious irenics with writings that he undertook as an official spokesperson for the Brethren: the *Haggaeus redivivus* and the *Cesta pokoje*. That philosophers too are subject to the three vices is equally clear in *Labyrinth*, but we must wait until

53. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 43, 72, 73–74.

54. Věra Soudilová, "Drei Bemerkungen zur Ethik Komenskýs," *Acta Comeniana* 8, no. 32 (1989): 33–39; Lucas E. Misseri, "Comenius' Ethics: From the Heart to the World," *Ethics*

and Bioethics (in Central Europe) 7 (2017): 1–2, 13–23; Kateřina Šolcová, "Moral Virtues in J. A. Comenius' *Mundus Moralis*," *Ethics and Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 7 (2017): 3–4, 119–26.

Prodromus and other pansophic writings for Comenius to fully articulate the usefulness of the corresponding virtues—which we might fairly call an “irenec ethic”—in the intellectual domain.

Pride and Humility

The sin of pride looms large in *Labyrinth*, where religious leaders of assorted denominations claim that theirs is the only way. Those in the allegory who would escape the labyrinth of the world and enter the paradise of the heart must submit to a search of head and heart and be cleansed of all worldly vanity, for “who wishes to be wise in God’s sight must become simple in his own.”⁵⁵

Subsequent writings consistently condemn pride and enjoin humility in the quest for salvation. “God ever hateth and punisheth pride”; we must “abandon our concern for . . . our pride and seek nothing but religion in religion.”⁵⁶ In a more Neoplatonic vein, he writes in *Centrum Securitatis* that “God is a wheel, the center of which is everywhere and the periphery of which is nowhere.” We are animated and nourished by the center. Falling away, we find that excessive self-love and the pretense of separateness and independence from God and the order of God’s creation, what Comenius calls *samosvojnost* (literally identity, originality, or independence), are the source of confusion, suffering, and strife. Returning to the center we encounter Christ’s virtues, humility and meekness (*pokora a tichost*).⁵⁷

In *Haggaeus Redivivus* Comenius targets pride—the illusion of self-sufficiency in knowledge and wisdom—as an obstacle to fellowship among Protestant sects. He appeals to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians to argue that in things pertaining to God we think and talk and argue as children.⁵⁸ Our vaunted knowledge is as nothing, certainly no basis to be separated from one another. Borrowing from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he urges Czech Protestants to be humble and meek and

55. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 72–74, 134.

56. Comenius, *Angel of Peace*, 91; Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 124.

57. Jan Amos Comenius, “Centrum Securitatis,” in *DJAK 3* (Prague: Academia, 1978; originally published in 1632 as *Centrum Securitatis*), 487, 498ff., 513. The saying about

center and periphery has been attributed to numerous ancient and medieval philosophers; Comenius does not indicate to which he is alluding. Translation by Spinka (*John Amos Comenius*, 42) and the author.

58. Comenius, “Haggaeus Redivivus,” 332–33.

patient, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Similarly, in *Panorthosia* Comenius warns against being “blinded by pride” in judging others meanly or prematurely: “One should bear in mind that the character of every individual depends on how he appears not in his own eyes but in the eyes of God and that God’s judgment, in fact, is often as different from ours as Heaven from earth.”⁵⁹

Besides theological arguments for religious humility, he offers liberal, rational arguments. In *Panegersia* he asks: “Is it then that I have that soul-saving, one and only true religion? I hope so, but others, too, hope that they are on the right road.” He asserts that we cannot assume that our inherited views are correct, we must test them. “I am prepared to adopt anything better I might find and to do my own way with greater conviction if I don’t find any other better way.”⁶⁰ He approvingly retells the legend of Saint Augustine’s gentle conversion of Faustus the Manichaeon. Augustine “insisted that neither side should claim to monopolize the truth, but each of them should investigate it as an open question and humbly give way when the truth was found and acknowledged.”⁶¹

Enjoiners against pride are also found in Comenius’s writings on philosophical reform. In *Prodromus* he warns readers against “heeding their owne opinions more, then the truth of things,” and he detests “such vanities” as “remov[ing] other mens decrees out of the way, to make room for our own.”⁶² In *Via lucis* he condemns those who hold “obstinate convictions even upon positions which are unsettled or manifestly untrue.”⁶³

The antidote to the problem of pride in philosophy, as in religion, is humility. Even in the domain of philosophy the virtue of humility is closely associated with piety. Among the degenerate philosophers in the allegorical *Labyrinth*, the first glimmer of hope the Pilgrim receives that a superior sort of learning exists is Paul’s warning that he must become a fool if he wishes to be wise; later Christ himself states that among scholars, “my light illumines none but the humble hearts.”⁶⁴

59. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 114.

60. As translated in Rood, *Comenius and the Low Countries*, 168.

61. Jan Amos Comenius, *Panegersia or Universal Awakening*, trans. A. M. O. Dobbie (Shipston-on-Stour: Peter I. Drinkwater, 1990;

originally published in 1966 as book 1 of the *Consultatio Catholica*), xiii.

62. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 55.

63. Comenius, *Way of Light*, 9.

64. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 45, 129.

The *Dilucidatio* enjoins humility on scholars in a similarly religious spirit. "Learning . . . should be stamped with the Character of divine presence, which *comes in a still small voice*, without tumultuous noyse."⁶⁵ In *Via lucis* he emphasizes the importance of a humble and contrite spirit for the success of scholarly institutions. "The light of Pansophia must ever chasten itself so as to become greater and purer." And since "for so great a work human strength is insufficient," the members of a proposed international pansophic college of scholars "must never cease with constant prayers to call down the aid of heaven for themselves. They must put their confidence in the mercy and truth of God."⁶⁶

In *Panorthosia* Comenius remarks that *non liquet*, the Roman legal formula that expresses an admission of uncertainty, is useful to the scholar as a shield of modesty (*modestiae scutum*): there is no shame in admitting one's ignorance and becoming teachable. "Since [Christ] bids those who have fallen into the sin of pride to be converted and become as little children," he writes, "that they may begin to hold themselves in better esteem, which means no esteem, why should this not apply likewise so that those who have fallen into false knowledge are converted to no knowledge?"⁶⁷ When a scholar is cured of "the stiffnesse of his opinions" (*opinionum tenacitatem*) and becomes teachable, "he shall be ready to suffer himself to be led to . . . better and firmer opinions, and shall be glad that he is brought thither, where he shall finde that he is better than before."⁶⁸

Comenius models scholarly humility in his own writing. He modestly acknowledges his own fallibility and limited powers as a scholar, and repeatedly urges others to correct and complete his work.⁶⁹

Prejudice and Charity

Complementary to the problem of pride is the problem of prejudice: intolerance and animosity toward other viewpoints. The Christian virtue needed here is charity: kindness, good will, tolerance.

In *Labyrinth* Comenius teaches gentleness, kindness, and toleration of differences. When Christ speaks, he says "let your religion consist in serving me quietly." The Pilgrim observed of those who followed the true path

65. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 68. Italics in original.

66. Comenius, *Way of Light*, 151, 174.

67. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 116, 128.

68. Comenius, *Patteerne of Universall Knowledge*, 164–65.

69. E.g., Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 22, 55, 68.

that they kept clear of wrangling about religion. "They walked about silently and quietly as if in meditation, looking up to heaven and dealing kindly with all," though they "served as the butt of derision for all the rest." This is in stark contrast to the vicious, combative spirit that dominates many other scenes in the allegory, including those involving churchmen and those involving scholars.⁷⁰

In *Panorthosia* Comenius observes that God made the manna in the wilderness take on a variety of forms to suit every man's taste. "Just as it would have been shameful if the Israelites had chosen to quarrel because no two men prepared the manna for food in the same way, so it would be disgraceful of us to be intolerant if different people have different ways of preparing their soul's delights in accordance with the words of God." He teaches that we should tolerate deviant religious forms like Anabaptism as long as their idiosyncrasies derive from sincere piety and not merely an "itch for contradiction" (*contradicendi pruritu*). He asserts that "no belief held by any Christian is so far beyond pale of faith and reason that it can not be adapted to the general universal truth, if we deal humanely and reasonably with one another."⁷¹ Elsewhere he remarks, quoting passages from scripture on forgiveness and turning the other cheek, that if a rebuke is necessary it should be made frankly, with no malice.⁷²

In his short irenic writings from the 1640s, around the time of the Polish interfaith meeting known as the *Colloquium Charitativum*, Comenius encourages Catholics and Protestants to frankly acknowledge and apologize for past offenses and failings. Since every sect deviates to some extent from the truth and none is completely pure, *tolerantia* should be a guiding principle.⁷³ Similarly, in his *Exhortation* to the quarrelling Protestant sects in England, he declares as his goal "the asswaging of animosities, and the enlarging of good affections."⁷⁴ Comenius observes the irony that persons who profess to defend the gospel should fail to practice its core teaching of charity.⁷⁵

70. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 129, 74, 72, 42.

71. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 124–25, 139, 140.

72. Comenius, *Angel of Peace*, 49–51, 59–61.

73. See Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 101; Müller, "Dimensions of Religious Toleration," 101.

74. Jan Amos Comenius, *An Exhortation of the Churches of Bohemia to the Church of*

England, trans. Joshua Tymarchus (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1661; originally published in 1660 as *De bono unitatis et ordinis*), penultimate page of dedication to Charles II.

75. Jan Amos Comenius, "Cesta pokoje," *VSJAK* 17 (Brno, 1912; originally published in 1637 as *Cesta pokoje*), 479; c.f. Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 61.

Charity, Comenius contends, brings the level-headedness required to resolve religious disputes. In *Cesta pokoje*, an irenic work published in 1637, he encourages his readers to view disputes “dispassionately” (*pokojně*), “paying regard to how one or the other side explains its terms and meaning,” rather than engaging in polemics like those “hot-headed individuals” who “fling about horrible charges against each other.”⁷⁶ In *Haggaeus redivivus*, he urges Christian disputants to tolerate (*snášejte*) sincere differences in doctrinal interpretation.⁷⁷ After all, God created holy mysteries “not that the hearts of believers be thereby alienated [from one another], but rather [that they be] tied and bound together into one.”⁷⁸ In *Panorthosia* he reiterates that the fragmentation of European Christendom will only be healed “provided that we . . . do not bar all the roads to agreement by maintaining an attitude of prejudice.”⁷⁹

Even in the case of pernicious religious error, Comenius advocates a mild and moderate approach—if not quite tolerance, then some more energetic species of charity. When complaining, in a letter to Dutch Reformed colleagues, of the erroneous teachings and belligerent attitude of the Socinian Daniel Zwicker, Comenius advises against suppression of the man or his writings. “Otherwise he will boast of his martyrdom . . . and say that his questions could not be answered. And this will be all the more harmful, because human curiosity goes forth to things more freely according as they are more strictly forbidden.” Giving the error a hearing would provide an opportunity to publicly refute it and even convert its exponent. “It must be possible to convince him of the falseness of his reasoning, of the abuse of the Holy Scripture, of his distortion of tradition. And this should be done in public, in the front of all, believers and non-believers.”⁸⁰

In philosophical disputes, where souls are not at stake, no error is so grave as to preclude tolerance. Comenius urges a charitable, conciliatory spirit as an antidote to the “prejudice and affection” (*praejudicium et affectum*) that characterize too many disputations.⁸¹ In *Prodromus* he writes that “if we be prepossessed with suspicion, or carried away with affection,”

76. Comenius. “Cesta pokoje,” 471; translation from Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 58.

77. Comenius, “Haggaeus Redivivus,” 336.

78. Ibid.; translation from Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 60.

79. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 123–24.

80. Rood, *Comenius and the Low Countries*, 182, quoting Comenius’s correspondence in translation.

81. Comenius, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 34.

we are liable to “fasten errors upon others, which they themselves will not own” and “wrest their expressions, and words contrary to their meaning.”⁸² He condemns Aristotle in this regard, for setting up straw men by misrepresenting other philosophers’ arguments. Such behavior is uncharitable in a sense that has meaning in modern scholarship: students today are taught to give texts a “charitable reading,” construing their arguments in the best possible light before engaging them critically. Comenius proposes that we exercise “the judgment of Charity,” which “presupposeth that none doth erre willingly contrary to his knowledge.” On this account we should be gentle with our adversaries and treat them as reasonable beings susceptible to rational argument. He urges his own readers to lay aside prejudices (“the false glasses of former opinions”) when contemplating the pansophic project. He metaphorically declares pansophy a temple since, like the temple and tabernacle of old, it is intended to “kindle and nourish mutuall concord, and charity among . . . fellow servants of the same God.”⁸³

Party Spirit, Independent Conscience, and Public-Spiritedness

Both pride and prejudice exacerbate a third vice: party spirit, or faction. Comenius aimed to overcome party spirit with two virtues: on one hand, independent conscience and judgment, and on the other, a pious public-spiritedness.

The evils of partisanship are evident in the allegorical *Labyrinth*, where the Pilgrim observed the Christian Church “divided into many chapels ranged around,” each distinguishing itself from the others with petty insignia and prohibitions. It is no surprise that efforts to unite neighboring chapels fail; most groups were prone to violent squabbling, not unlike the bitter rivalries the Pilgrim observed among the famous ancient and modern schools of philosophy.⁸⁴

Factionalism is antithetical to Christ’s message, according to Comenius. “Christ is the lover of all, and will not on account of one hate another party,” he observed.⁸⁵ According to *Labyrinth*, it is spiritual awakening that provides

82. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 34.

83. *Ibid.*, 8, 55, 72–73.

84. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 72, 73, 43.

85. Spinka, *John Amos Comenius*, 120, quoting Comenius’s 1650 *Independentia Aeternarum Confusiorum Origo* in translation.

liberation from the tyranny of petty factions. Comenius speaks of “liberty of hearts” (*svoboda . . . srdci*) and “perfect freedom of mind” (*plná . . . svoboda myslí*) among the reborn. True spiritual Christians “acknowledged no one above themselves but God,” and were “attached neither to friends nor foes, nor to lord or king.” Comenius observes that since liberty is commonly confused with license, people imagine that perfect liberty would lead to hedonism, selfishness, amorality. “The Christian acts far differently; for he, after fortifying well his own heart that it may preserve its freedom in God, employs all else in ministering to the needs of his fellows.” That is, “when-ever he sees an opportunity to be of benefit to his fellows, he hesitates not a moment, dallies not, spares not himself, . . . but whether treated with gratitude or not, quietly and joyfully keeps on serving.”⁸⁶

Here Comenius has identified two qualities of Christians who have overcome partisanship: they have free, independent minds and hearts, and they have a passionate commitment to serve God and their fellow creatures. Later writings amplify these two virtues in religion.

In the interest of producing free, independent minds and hearts, the first of the two virtues, Comenius suggests suppressing markers of partisan difference. With allusions to 1 Corinthians, he urges Czech Protestants in *Haggaeus redivivus* to drop their party names (Lutheran, Calvinist, Hussite) and identify themselves simply as followers of Christ.⁸⁷

In addition, he advocates strongly for religious liberty: “Compulsion in matters of Conscience should be abolished as a mark of antichrist.”⁸⁸ In *Via lucis* he observes that whenever the powerful have attempted to impose uniformity in politics or in religion (no doubt he had his occupied and forcibly Catholicized homeland in mind), they have made the situation more ungovernable. “For there is inborn in human nature a love of liberty . . . and this love can by no means be driven out: so that, wherever and by whatever means it feels that it is being hemmed in and impeded, it cannot but seek a way out and declare its own liberty.”⁸⁹ He declares: “Let us assert the claim of human nature to its full portion of liberty, by setting men free from the yoke of compulsory Dogma, Worship, and Obedience.”⁹⁰

This liberal view he transfers to the classroom as well. “We should learn our religion without any commentary.” That is, each student should

86. Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 138, 139.

87. Comenius, “Haggaeus Redivivus,” 334.

88. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 201.

89. Comenius, *Way of Light*, 18.

90. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 156.

engage directly with God's text; that process of discovery should not be mediated by religious authorities. "We must appoint only one master, that is, Christ, who said of himself, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' And the well-known Greek dictum 'he himself said so' ('ipse dixit') must be replaced by the saying of the prophet, 'Thus saith the Lord.'" ⁹¹

Later writings also highlight the second virtue, the zeal of the nonpartisan Christian to be of service to all humanity. "By promoting the common good of mankind," he wrote in *Panegersia*, "let us be ministers of the goodness of God!" ⁹² When the Brethren, scattered in refugee communities throughout Protestant Europe, formally disbanded, Comenius advised his coreligionists to join any worthy church community and to steer clear of partisan quarrels. "Neither [flatter] one party to the disparagement of the other, nor [allow] yourselves to be used as partisans in factional strife among parties. But rather make it your care that love and concord and all common good reign in the church." To the other Christian sects, Comenius symbolically bequeathed in the name of the Brethren "a lively desire for unanimity of opinion and reconciliation among themselves, and for union in faith and love of the unity of spirit." ⁹³

In philosophy, Comenius calls "partiality, and siding with Sects" a "too fruitful mother of errors." He quotes Galen to the effect that

those who addict themselves to Sects, become both deafe and blind, so that they neither heare, nor see those things, which others easily both heare and see, yea, and dumb also, that they will not speake what is true, but rather oppose those that teach it; like the drunken Lapithae, who with their fists, and kickings, drove away the Chirurgeon, that would have applied remedies to their wounds. ⁹⁴

Attaching oneself to a particular school of thought means closing one's mind to insights from other quarters. For in "rival schools . . . men are hardened in opposition to each other," and "even if . . . a school has for its object what is absolutely good and true," it impoverishes itself by

91. *Ibid.*, 201.

92. Comenius, *Panegersia*, 43.

93. Comenius, *Bequest*, 22, 29.

94. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 20.

95. Comenius, *Way of Light*, 19.

96. Comenius, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 47.

its very exclusivity.⁹⁵ When men have learned true knowledge, party names will vanish; no one will “style himselfe in Philosophy, a Platonist or Aristotelian.”⁹⁶

So scholars must learn to think for themselves (the first of the two virtues). A particularly pernicious practice in philosophy, as in theology, is the “allegd[ing of] authorities.”⁹⁷ Too often scholars “follow . . . the leaden rule of this and that Doctor” or “attach themselves as camp-followers to other thinkers, accepting their every statement as valid.”⁹⁸ Slavishly attaching oneself to Aristotle, or Ramus, or Plato, or any other philosopher can stunt one’s intellectual development. Such authorities are frequently “abused to the hurt and prejudice of the freedome of mens judgements”; revered authors should be cited as witnesses rather than as authorities.⁹⁹ In the preface to his *Physicae synopsis*, Comenius condemns both the Aristotelian maxim *discentem oportet credere* (a learner must believe) and the Pythagorean *ipse dixit*.¹⁰⁰ He pleads for “philosophical liberty” (*Philosophica libertas*) in addition to religious and political liberty.¹⁰¹ Comenius regularly uses the metaphor of spectacles, especially tinted spectacles, for the distortion of perception and judgment caused by slavish adherence to one school or another.¹⁰²

Comenius strenuously emphasizes that in advocating Pansophy his intention is not to found a new school of his own. “We are not of such account, that we should thinke to make Disciples to our selves, yet daring enough to seeke them for Nature, and for God.” Just as he does not want his readers to condemn the project before fully understanding it, he also does not want them to assent to it rashly. He does not wish to “gaine mens assent by stealth or flattery” or to “begge mens assents to this designe, before it be understood.” He wants his plan to be examined “fairely, and by free and impartiall minds.” His desire is that each reader should consult his or her own judgment, so that “affection, and prejudice may not over-sway reason.”¹⁰³

97. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 44.

98. Comenius, *Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 26; Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 145.

99. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 55–56.

100. Jan Amos Comenius, *Naturall Philosophie Reformed by Divine Light, or A Synopsis of Physicks* (London, 1651; originally published in 1633 as *J.A. Comenii Physicae Ad*

Lumen Divinum Reformatae Synopsis), p. 35 of preface.

101. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 156.

102. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 55; Comenius, *Labyrinth of the World*, 46; Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 145.

103. Comenius, *Reformation of Schooles*, 51, 54, 55, 68.

The second of the two virtues, public-spiritedness, is evident in Comenius's declaration in the *Dilucidatio* that "my desires tend to no other end, than for the kindling of an universall light in mens minds." He envisions the pansophic project as "a thing of common benefit."¹⁰⁴ Public-spiritedness plays an even more prominent role in the description of the scientific community laid out in *Via lucis*. This might reflect Samuel Hartlib's influence, as *Via lucis* was written during Comenius's 1641–42 stay in London as the celebrated philanthropist's guest. In *Via lucis* Comenius proposes to entrust the pansophic project to an international "Collegiate Society" of the pious and the learned: "men of quick and industrious temper, of piety, warmly devoted to welfare of the people," who would be "set, as it were, in a watch-tower to look out for the well-being of mankind, and to see every possible way, means or occasion of seeking whatever will be beneficial to all men." He refers to the pansophic project as "a business not of glory and profit, but rather of painstaking goodwill." He states that the antidote for "the passionate rivalry of sects and parties" is "a universal partnership . . . for advancing the common good."¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

While not by any means an exhaustive treatment of either Comenius's debt to Unity of Brethren tradition or the full complexity of his pansophic program, the foregoing shows several respects in which that program was constructed out of materials from that tradition. This study enables us to appreciate the extent to which the traditions and culture of the Unity of Brethren, among the most precarious of small sects in seventeenth-century Europe, contributed substantially to one of the most celebratedly cosmopolitan of intellectual projects in early modern history, pansophy.

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104. *Ibid.*, 67.

105. Comenius, *Way of Light*, 167, 171, 173.

who commented on versions of this essay. Related research outputs, on Comenius's virtue ethics and the origins of modern scientific norms and peer review practices, have appeared in *Spontaneous Generations*, the *Kennedy Institute for Ethics Journal*, *Ethics and Practice in Science Communication* (University of Chicago Press), and proceedings of several Iowa State University Summer Symposia on Science Communication. Mr. Ranalli edits the *Thoreau Society Bulletin*.