

**Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec****JAN AMOS KOMENSKY—THE FATHER OF MODERN EDUCATION-Part 2 of 2**

By Robert R. Boehlke

“Another writing project had to do with his (Komensky’s) dream of compiling a series of volumes summarizing all human knowledge which he called *Pansophia*. His prospectus caught the attention of admirers in England who urged him to come there to explain his plan. However, this became another disappointment. Instead of finding the English government ready to help finance the plan, he found England involved in a civil war with neither financial resources nor political will to underwrite such a novel and ambitious project. Even so, he was pressed to move to England but his wife pleaded with him not to do so. Feeling he had accomplished nothing in England, he returned to his home in Hungary.

He returned home to resume his responsibility as a bishop and to complete the writing of *The Great Didactic*, a pioneering volume on both the theory and practice of education, an accomplishment which has caused later scholars to name him the “Father of Modern Education”. He set out his aim as follows:

“To seek and find a method of instruction, by which teachers may teach less, but learners may learn more; by which schools may be the scene of less noise, aversion, and useless labor, but of more leisure, enjoyment and solid progress; and through which the Christian community may have less darkness, perplexity, and dissension, but on the other hand more light, orderliness, peace, and rest.”

A reader is amazed by the truth of his principles in spite of the fact that these were obtained from analogies drawn from nature. Trees put out buds before flowers and fruit. Therefore, there must be simple steps in teaching before dealing with more complex subjects. He had the principles largely correct based on non-scientific evidence. Even so his educational theory and practice were the most advanced of any produced before and which took years to become operational in most places.

The schools of his time were limited to boys who were taught Latin by rote without understanding, accompanied by much physical punishment. He wanted school opportunities for both boys and girls. His school system proposal anticipated the division now followed in most countries, including a kind of “Head Start” which he called the *School of Infancy*. There followed something similar to our elementary (using the national language, Czech in his case), junior and senior high divisions which were devoted to gaining fluency in reading and writing Latin (which was as necessary then as computer fluency is now). But he also wanted to teach children and youth knowledge and skills of more immediate use. New knowledge should be attained in harmony with the interest and abilities associated with the learners’ age-level development. Teaching should use the five senses as natural allies. Therefore, he introduced objects themselves rather than to merely talk about them. To help make learning Latin more

attractive and easier, he write a book entitled, *Orbis Pictus*, or *The World in Pictures* using woodcuts to tell a simple story pointing to an object in English and then its equivalent in Latin. Today his effort seems more quaint than attractive but in his day it was the proverbial “breath of fresh air”. It was translated into all the major languages of Europe and some of Asia. If there had been such an institution as copyrights and royalties, Comenius would have become a wealthy man from the sale of his text books alone!

## Orbis Sensualium Pictus, A World of Things Obvious to the Senses drawn in Pictures.

Invitation.

I.

Invitatio.

*The Master and the Boy.*M. Come, Boy, learn to  
be wise.P. What doth this mean,  
*to be wise?*M. To understand right-  
ly.*Magister & Puer.*M. Veni, Puer, disce sa-  
pere.P. Quid hoc est, *Sapere?*

M. Intelligere recte,

In addition to his goal of educational reform, he proposed institution which would help overcome the disasters which had been so much a part of his life but which he had not caused. Since knowledge is so essential for changing and improving the quality of human life, he wanted to have a kind of World or International University to which scholars from all countries would devote their lives to the advancement of knowledge. Part of his own and his church’s suffering was caused by Christina groups making their perspectives of God and the Church absolute, non-negotiable and to be maintained by force if necessary. He had tried to be an advocate for inter-faith harmony but failed. Therefore, he proposed what has come to be “The World Council of Churches” or “Interfaith Alliances”. He was certain there had to be a better way of solving problems than by destroying property and killing those holding different views. There should be a kind of United Nations which would prevent hostilities between nations.

Figure from [Orbis Pictus](#), by Jan Amos Komensky, C.W. Bardeen, Publisher, 1887, Syracuse, New York (Courtesy of Google Books)

During the Thirty Years War 1618-1648, most of Europe was involved but with most of the destruction wrought in Central Europe, including Bohemia and Moravia. As indicated, the cessation of hostilities continued to be a disaster for him and his Brethren. He was the proverbial “man without a country” far from the land of his birth and love. Now aged, he was offered haven in Amsterdam. He accepted the invitation and moved his family there to resume their lives. Friends helped rebuild his library so he could continue his writing and heavy correspondence in the service of shepherding his scattered Brethren. Amsterdam’s city council offered him a professorship but this was declined because of his need to devote himself to seeing the publication of his writings including his *Great Didactic* at the expense of the city council. He died suddenly on November 4, 1670 and was buried in the church yard of the Naarden Walloon church.

An intriguing footnote of special interest to Americans concerns New England's Cotton Mather's reported offer of the presidency of Harvard to Comenius. But Comenius declined. In summarizing his later description of the invitation and rejection, Mather wrote, "that incomparable Moravian became not an American"! Had he accepted, perhaps the name "Comenius" or "Komensky" would have had a wider familiarity than as a name for a school building more important in Czech memory now than in practice."

## The Great Didactic

Setting forth

The whole Art of Teaching  
All Things to all Men

or

A certain Inducement to found such Schools in all  
the Parishes, Towns, and Villages of every  
Christian Kingdom that the entire  
Youth of both Sexes, none  
Being excepted, shall

Quickly, Pleasantly, & Thoroughly

Become learned in the Sciences, pure in Morals,  
instructed in all things necessary  
For the present and for  
The future life,

in which, with respect to everything that is suggested,  
ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES are set forth from the essential  
nature of the matter,

ITS TRUTH is proved by examples from the several  
mechanical arts,

ITS ORDER is clearly set forth in years, months, days, and  
hours, and, finally,

AN EASY AND SURE METHOD is shown, by which it can  
be pleasantly brought into existence.

- Jan Amos Komensky -

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: [tkadlec@gmail.com](mailto:tkadlec@gmail.com) or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. Děkuji! Tony Kadlec