

Comenius, the Angel of Peace and the Netherlands in 1667

tirely reforming society, the *De emendatione rerum humanarum Consultatio catholica* (General Consultation of the Reform of Human Affairs), on which the author worked during the last years of his life in Amsterdam (1656-1670), was left unfinished and was published only last year by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, it is now the highest time to reconsider Comenius' real status in the history of the European thought.

It is my modest endeavour here, to prove that through Comenius' work and life, we may be able to clear up some misunderstandings and weigh three important problems, which are not without importance for the Dutch public: 1) To demonstrate, on the example of Comenius, the greatness of the Dutch revolution of the 16th century and the impact of the Dutch conception of life and society in Central Europe, and thus add something to the knowledge of the "Golden Age" of the Netherlands; 2) to show, in the works of Comenius, not only the conflict between the Dutch and the Spanish "model" of civilisation, but also the character of the emerging English "model"; and, 3) and finally, to analyze more thoroughly what the above mentioned pamphlet "*The Angel of Peace*" meant for the author and his endeavour.

I

John Amos Comenius came to Amsterdam in 1656 at the invitation of Laurens de Geer and he died in a house at the Prinsengracht in November 1670 at the age of 78. In 1657 he dedicated his Complete *Didactic Works* (*Opera Didactica Omnia*) to the city of Amsterdam: "Urbi eminentissimae Amsterdamo, Emporio Orbis celeberrimo, Ejusque sapientissimo senatui", stressing the uniqueness of the city, the "decus Belgii, exultatio Europae, ocellus urbium". These were not merely the polite expressions of gratitude of an old man finding a refuge. Comenius was in Amsterdam when he was a student at Herborn, and he spent several weeks there in 1614 and again in 1643. By his education he belonged to the Protestant-Humanist *intelligentia* which looked to the United Provinces, Geneva and the Huguenot France for its spiritual leadership, and the Netherlands never ceased for him to be the "pattern" of an ideal state and society.

His attitude towards the United Provinces was by no means unique in the Bohemia of the 16th and 17th centuries. Contacts were initiated in the Middle Ages and during the first half of the 16th century; connections were already established in the sphere of politics and even of economics. The Ghent triumph of the Habsburg Charles I, and the persecution of non-Catholics especially in Antwerp, was linked in Czech contemporary pamphlets with the conflict between the Habsburgs and the Bohemian Estates.

From the very beginning of the revolt of the Dutch against the Spanish Habsburgs, the sympathies of the Czech writers and what was then the "public opinion" were on the side of the Dutch people. Spanish policy in the Netherlands had not even the support of all Catholics, its main advocates being the members of the small Spanish court clique. The overwhelming majority of the Estates looked upon the United Provinces at the beginning of the 17th century as an example and pattern. At the Prague court of this period, we can study the clash of the two patterns or models - the "Spanish" and the "Dutch" one.

If anniversaries have any meaning, then they should serve us with an opportunity to review a particular problem, to enable us to assess what we know and what we do not know, and perhaps what should be done in the future. The anniversary of the end of the second Anglo-Dutch war and the treaty of Breda of July, 1667 preceded by the publication of the pamphlet, bearing the slightly Baroque title of "*The Angel of Peace*", sent to appeal to the peace ambassadors of England and the Netherlands in Breda from there to communicate to all the Christians of Europe and thereupon to all the nations throughout the whole world that they should call a halt, and cease to wage war", is, in my opinion worth such reconsideration of several problems of general importance. First of all, it seems to me that the world of the 20th century, the world we live in, should know better than particularly to celebrate battles, victories, and triumphs. Many historians believe today that the French invasion of the Spanish Netherlands in the spring of 1667 was a crucial event for British, Dutch and for European history and that, for this reason, the year 1667 was the year of decision. Until this year, the choice between France and the United Provinces was implicit for England - thereafter it was explicit and unavoidable that the Dutch and the British should go together - although the final decision was not to be made until 1688. The treaties of Breda, although they merely meant the adoption of the status quo of May 21, 1667 by England and the Netherlands, deserve, therefore, at least the same attention as the anniversary of the Four Days Fight of May 1666.

The fact that the author of this pamphlet, the Czech exile John Amos Comenius, is today known in the Netherlands mostly as a remote picture from the gallery of educationalists, should not change this attitude. Comenius, "Moravian and the guest of Amsterdam" as he styled himself, had a poor press in the last centuries. Many historians and philosophers stress only what divided him from Bacon, Campanella and Descartes and forget what he had in common with them. The high opinion of Leibniz is overshadowed by the criticism of Pierre Bayle. But we should not forget that the life and works of Comenius give us the opportunity to study the problems of the development of European thought in the 17th century. If we see him in this light, he is not only one of the foremost Baconians, but also a man who stood at the foundation of the Royal Society, who shared the chiliastic anguish of the English Puritans and the irrational belief in biblical chronology of a Newton. As his main work, a proposal of en-

During the recent discussion on the „general crisis“ of the 17th century, reprinted lately in the volume entitled *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660*, the two „successful revolutions“ in the Netherlands and England are taken as one possibility of solving exceptionally an economic and political crisis assumed to exist all over western and central Europe. It does not seem, however, that the Dutch revolution automatically started a „general crisis“ of continental dimensions. What it really did create, was a new conception of civilisation in fact. The Prague Imperial court at about 1600 shows us two conceptions of civilisation in conflict. One side of the privileged Estates took Spanish (or better Castilian) monarchy for its model, the other the Dutch republic. From this point of view, the struggle of the Bohemian Estates against the Habsburgs at the beginning of the Thirty Years War, 1618-1620, was far more than merely a constitutional conflict. Up to this time, especially at the beginning of the Twelve Years' Truce, a certain balance between the two orientations existed. Their relation was to be radically changed only during the war - as a consequence of political changes brought about by the outcome of the Bohemian War of 1618-1620 which can be considered, from this point of view, as an abortive attempt to solve the regional, Bohemian, socio-political crisis.

The Bohemian War was, of course, just a beginning of a great European war. The tragedy of the Bohemian Estates' revolt against the Habsburgs lay in the fact that its leaders could not follow the example of their Dutch predecessors and natural allies. The „grand projet“ of a large coalition against the Austrian and Spanish Habsburgs, with the United Provinces and England in the leading position, could not be realized in the initial phases of the conflict because of the inner contradictions in this amorphous body. England and the Netherlands, for their own reasons, were not in a position to help their distant would-be allies, and even later they were not willing to forget their conflicting economic interests.

When the bolder „republican“ plan to establish a confederation between Bohemia, the United Provinces, the Swiss cantons and Venice fell through in 1619, the rebellious Estates of Bohemia had to fall back on traditional methods of defense - including the traditional dynastic policy and therefor in the autumn of 1619 they elected Frederic of the Palatinate, the nephew of Prince Maurits of Nassau and the husband of Elizabeth Stuart, the daughter of James I. They were defeated because their adversaries, afraid of „another Netherlands“ were able to mobilize their resources more quickly. The Dutch were too slow to grasp the chances, the English policy was too feeble to force through a compromise settlement, and the intervention of the King-Elect of Hungary was conditioned by Turkish approval. The Spaniards realized the importance of the Bohemian strategic position and made available their Italian resources and a part of the silver of the American „flota“ for intervention, forced through by the members of the „partido militar“.

Thus, when the Bohemian Estates were defeated in 1620, not only the General Estates lost their allies in Central Europe, just at the termination of the Twelve Years' Truce, but it can even be said that the Spanish „pattern“ triumphed on the Bohemian battle-fields and that the Bohemian „Netherlanders“ were destroyed.

One of them was the young scholar from Herborn and Heidelberg and a youthful visitor of Amsterdam, John Amos Comenius. The tragedy of his life consisted in the fact that he became an exile, that he could not speak for any considerable body of his own people and that his future work was without a sufficient social basis.

His work is now mostly divided into three main periods. The first belongs to the period when he was writing mostly works for the Czech reading public. With a typical Humanist optimism which might seem a little superfluous, the young scholar came home from western Europe with an ambitious plan to prepare for his countrymen an encyclopaedic work of enormous dimensions. Before he could publish the first results of his work, the Bohemian War brought him amidst political struggle. He defended the Palatine government and had to live underground after the battle of the White Mountain in November 1620. There he wrote a series of shorter works which were to bring consolation to himself and his contemporaries. The late Humanism steps back and the influence of typically Mannerist elements (Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart) is clearly visible. Among the last works written with the hope that the return to Bohemia would soon be made possible by the advance of the Swedish armies, is the short treatise called *Basvnye des ghenaden jaer* from 1631, published in Dutch by a countryman of his in Kampen and preserved only in this Dutch version.

The first Czech version of the *Didactic* completed by 1630, and the practical works based upon it, led to the formation of the pansophic idea, characteristic for the second period of his works. According to Comenius, pansophy, i.e. universal knowledge, the whole of human knowledge, became the indispensable prerequisite to the formation of a consistent and integral content of education. The principal ideals of pansophy, i.e. the necessity of an integral education, and the effort to arrive from individual items to a synthesis of knowledge, to a consistent and complete image of the world, become at the same time instrumental in forming a complete system of education. The first benefactors from this pansophic scheme should be the members of the *Corpus Evangelicorum*, the anti-Habsburg coalition of the thirties, above all Sweden. But it was England, then on the threshold of the Civil War and revolution, that in the years 1641-1642 showed to Comenius the political appeal of his ideas. The idea of a new type of education, open to all, appealed to the leaders of the Parliamentary opposition, and John Pym became one of the most prominent English „comenians“. What was even more important, his effort to teach all things to all people led Comenius to the need for a new science that, united in point of method, would be the instrument of socially desirable action. Thus already in the forties Comenius proceeded to attempt the reformation of society as a whole.

After the treaties of Muenster and Osnabrueck, and the following second period of crisis, Comenius became convinced, that after the failure of the *Corpus Evangelicorum*, his country could only have a better future in a new human society. He became convinced that it was necessary to unite all mankind, and that the improvement of education and science was part of a reform of society as a whole. In order that education and knowledge might be improved and a new society thus reached, it was necessary to abo-

lish wars, and to create international organizations entrusted with the betterment of education and knowledge, and hence with the improvement of society. The educated European public was acquainted with these by Comenius in his writing *Via Lucis* (The Way of Light), in which he admonished all people in a Conference on how to reform human affairs. All the nations of the world should participate in this conference. The problem of reforming the entire society is the leading idea of Comenius till the very end of his life, and when he died within the shadow of the *Westerkerk*, his *General Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs* was still unfinished in the manuscript.

III

Angelus Pacis, or the Angel of the Peace was published in May 1667 and Comenius brought some copies of it to Breda in that month, when the actual peace negotiations were nearing their end. We do not know, up to now, what impression his plea to end the war for supremacy at sea between England and the Netherlands really made. It is not too important. If Comenius urged both parties - "natural brethren", surrounded by common enemies on all sides - to peace, giving at the same time a wider scope to his ideas regarding problems of war and peace, he was not writing a treatise of merely ephemeral importance. His words on the destruction that war brings to both contesting sides have acquired, I am afraid, an even greater significance than they had at his time. Especially the war story quoted by Comenius of two brethren who both perished in a quarrel.

In his view, the war between England and the Netherlands was waged for maritime supremacy and represents one of the struggles over colonies. Comenius is an impartial observer, but in fact, he is completely on the side of the Dutch. They had bravely waged wars against the Spaniard, as the English had done in the glorious reigns of Elizabeth and James I. If the English and the Dutch stand together, nobody can beat them. Together with France and Sweden, the two countries are virtual warrantors of the Common Weal. Together they can defeat the intrigues of the Babel (the Habsburgs), together they can for ever banish the Turkish danger. There is virtually no difference between their social and political systems - on the other hand, there is a gulf between them and the Spanish system of centralized monarchy - but again, the Dutch blend of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy is the ideal.

Comenius is strongly against the exploitation of subdued territories across the oceans. His words are moderate, since it would hardly have been possible to expect the two contending parties to listen to them, nevertheless they are unequivocal. Comenius is analyzing the results of the voyages of discovery, and perceives clearly the futility of the American silver. He even goes as far as to speculate on the results of what we call today the Price Revolution of the 16th century. He is aware of the fact that the English and the Dutch are concerned with acquiring material wealth, but he tries to show that this entails new responsibilities, especially on the part of the Dutch, who have a better right to overseas expansion than their English contenders, because their country is not rich and they are accomplished sea-farers. Certainly, some of the organizers of colonisatory ventures (he must have remembered his friends from the pre-revolutionary Providence Island Company as well as his benefactor Luis de Geer) had

given much to the charity. But the main results of the trade with overseas countries should be a securing of peace and prosperity in Europe, and the well-being of the newly discovered lands. He even begins to perceive that it is not merely the spreading of Christianity that matters, but the elevation of their cultural standards, the programme of acculturation being considered as the part of the process of enlightenment, the Way of the Light.

It would be completely false to try to turn Comenius into an ideologist of the primary accumulation of capital. His arguments are mostly of traditional character, but he puts new questions and is striving for the answers even if he reaches them only partially and exceptionally. His most frequent contention is that wars between nations and the exploitation of colonies are not in accord with Christian teaching. Nevertheless, the *Angelus Pacis* is one of first voices, however moderate, to be raised in the history of man against wars, against the stripping of foreign territories and against colonization.

It is hardly probable that the *Angel of Peace* had a larger influence than, for example, another political pamphlet of Comenius, a reaction at the Turkish invasion of central Europe of the year 1663, called *Letzte Posann uber Deutschland*::: (1664) sent to the Imperial Diet of Ratisbon. Comenius saw clearly that the final cause of the deterioration in Anglo-Dutch relations was colonial rivalry. He could not take a very clear stand on this issue, since the English interests were represented among others, by Prince Rupert (Ruprecht), the son of Frederick of the Palatinate and Elizabeth Stuart, who was born as the Prince of Lusatia in Prague in the last days of 1619 and to whom he dedicated some of his works. The increased demand for slaves was responsible for the rivalry in West Africa which led through the process of escalation to the second Anglo-Dutch war. There is no doubt about the fact that Comenius rejected slavery and even the theory of the "natural serfdom" of the "barbarians", a theory he associates with the old bogey of the Spanish "universal monarchy".

All the nations that dwell by the ocean have their rights to undertake long voyages but it is necessary to establish some order so that they may not hamper one another. "Especially the Dutch, if one considers their position, are seen to be deserving not of envy but rather of friendship. For God has given them many people but little land; He has added, however, shrewdness in the winning of bread, strong hands for labour and an untiring energy. Moreover, he has placed them on the banks of so many rivers and on the shore of the sea and even of the broad ocean itself so that they are able to export the fruits of their labours and in return import bread; should they be envied for such extreme exertions? Especially when by their laborious voyages in all directions they serve not only themselves, but also numerous other nations...?"

This eloquent plea in favour of the Dutch touches only partially upon the newly arising power of France, which, through the aims, progress and effects of Colbert's work was making the French, rather than the Dutch, the principal naval, commercial and colonial rival of England. For Comenius, but also for some of his contemporaries in his old home, the Netherlands and France, together with England were the models and teachers of the age of mercantilism. This is clearly shown by the diplomatic relations from The Hague, dating from 1667 and preserved in the archives of Bohemian

nobility. The Bohemian nobles, many of them sons of the members of the "Spanish party", victorious in 1620, were no longer partisans of the Spanish policy. They were aware of the fact that, after all, it is Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, which was having to pay for the ambitious Habsburg policy. Thus they were for the energetic policy against the Turks and in Hungary, and a pacific policy elsewhere. Thus the Prime Minister of Emperor Leopold I, Wenceslas Eusebius of Lobkowitz, the receiver of the letters sent from The Hague by the Imperial diplomats Lisola and Goess, were for a peace programme in 1667 and would have been in agreement with the *Angel of Peace*.

Which brings us back to the three original propositions with which we have started this essay.

1) Comenius was a representative of the Czech Protestant-Humanist culture, deeply influenced by the Netherlands. Although we cannot yet clearly show his connection to the Mannerist culture of the Prague circle, we know that he knew the works of its members. His work, grandiose even if uncompleted, gives an indication of what was really lost by the crushing defeat of old Bohemia in 1620.

2) Comenius did not recognize in 1667 that the original antinomy Spain versus the Netherlands had been replaced during the fifties and sixties by the antinomy France versus England. He tried to the end to ensure the cooperation of the Netherlands and England, which, according to him, belonged to his own "grand projet" in 1667 just as in the fateful years of 1618-1620. He could not have seen that England, certainly the weaker partner during the first half of the 17th century, was on equal footing with the Netherlands in 1667 and became the senior-partner after 1688.

Although the "Bohemian Netherlands" disappeared after 1620 the Dutch example was still at the uppermost in central Europe after 1648. After 1672, especially, when the United Provinces became an ally of the Austrian Habsburgs, Dutch culture, i.e. paintings, parks, medicine were just as important as they used to be at the beginning of the 17th century. In the world of sciences, the Dutch example was still decisive in the Austria of Maria Theresa, as the names of van Swieten, Jacquin and other alumni of the Leiden university prove.

3) His pamphlet, the *Angel of Peace*, is not an isolated treatise, it has its function and it fits into the pattern of Comenius' works of his Amsterdam period. As in the case of most works which have survived the limits given by time, Comenius' *Angel of Peace* acquires real significance when it goes beyond the situation of the Year 1667. There is surely more than a chance similarity between the political outlook of a Bohemian exile and the members of a new Bohemian ruling class. The work of Comenius stretched beyond the frontiers set by notions of denominational, racial and other supremacies. It reached, even if anonymously, at least some Czech readers, and we find it at the very threshold of the Czech Enlightenment and National Renaissance of the 18th century.

The spectre of a modest political pamphlet does not enable us to assess the greatness of an individual. As far as Comenius is concerned, the task is the more difficult as we have only during the last decade published the two products of his Amsterdam period, the *Opera Didactica Omnia* and the *General Consultation*. Not all the aspects of Comenius' work will be described as modern - but we should not forget, that not only Comenius, but also Bacon, Campanella, William Penn and Isaac Newton were

people of an age of transition and that the boundaries between the old and the modern run across their mind and across their work. Overcoming the necessary limitations, Comenius reached in 1667 at least some conclusions that concern the whole of humanity. These conclusions but also some of the questions which he raised but which he could not answer, still address us across the abyss of three centuries. And for this reason, I believe, we have a good reason to remember today the lonely thinker setting on the journey from the Jordan to the banks of the Aa, the Dutch Lethe, the Dutch river of oblivion- and reconciliation.

Komenský, Anděl míru a Nizozemí roku 1667

Úkolem studie, odpovídající v podstatě přednášce, pronesené na amsterodamské universitě, je 1) ukázat, že Komenský byl roku 1667 a vlastně po celý svůj život představitelem koncepce života a společnosti, jaká vyšla z Nizozemské revoluce 16. století, 2) ukázat, jakými cestami se tento „nizozemský“ model dostal do konkurence s modelem „anglickým“, a 3) konečně ukázat na základě rozboru „Anděla míru“, jaké stanovisko v anglo-nizozemském konfliktu zaujal Komenský.

Předbělohorské Čechy a Morava, vlast Komenského, byly oblastí, na jejichž území se střetaly od věků evropské protiklady. V politice, ale také společenském povědomí převládá na počátku 17. století protiklad Španělsko-Nizozemí, který roku 1618 vedl až ke stavovskému povstání proti Habsburkům, inspirovanému příkladem Nizozemí 16. stol. Komenský patřil svým vzděláním i svými sympatiemi k českým „Nýdrlandrům“, poraženým 1620 na Bílé hoře.

Komenský zůstal od té doby a po celý svůj život stoupencem nizozemské koncepce civilizace. Jeví se to výrazně i na jeho vztahu k revoluční Anglii, jejímž hostem v l. 1641-42 byl a jež pravděpodobně rozhodujícíím způsobem ovlivnila jeho pansofické a všereformní myšlenky.

Válečný konflikt mezi Anglií a Nizozemím považoval proto Komenský za nesmyslnou stášku, a rozbor jeho „Anděla míru“ z r. 1667 ukazuje, že vnitřně stál zcela na straně Nizozemců, které považoval nadále za růžičku le lepší budoucnosti pro Evropu. Jeho politické názory se v podstatě neliší od názorů, hájených švédským agentem v Haagu a Komenského známým Haraldem Appelboodem, a kupodivu se blíží politickým představám habsburských diplomatů, pocházejících z řad české šlechty.

Skutečný význam „Anděla míru“ je však jinde, v obecných pasážích, obsahujících Komenského názory na společnost, dovšující přechod ke kapitalismu. Tam je „Anděl míru“ také blízko Obecné poradě o nápravě věcí lidských.