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Jan Amos Comenius's Trinitarian and Conciliar Vision of a United Europe: Christ as the Universal 'Centre of Security'

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Jan Amos Comenius's vision of a Christian united Europe and its connection to his theological programme of reform. This is manifest first of all in his linguistic projects, in which he sought to break down the language barriers separating Christians both from each other and from the mission field of the New World, but it came to fruition especially in his comprehensive reform project of pansophia, especially as this was represented in his massive *Consultatio catholica*. For it is here that Comenius expands on his dream of a union of nations under one Christian religion. In this, Christ who transcends time and space, uniting in himself all the diverse aspirations of the nations, is revealed as the global 'centre of security.' Importantly, Comenius's expression of this is profoundly indebted to Nicholas of Cusa and the article concludes by highlighting Comenius's own Trinitarian and conciliar vision of Christian Europe.

Keywords: Jan Amos Comenius; Nicholas of Cusa; universal language; Trinity; conciliarism

Introduction

Jan Amos Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský; 1592-1670), the famous seventeenth-century educational pioneer, was a man who experienced the intense pain of dislocation and exile to the full. Forced to flee his native Bohemia by the debacle of the Battle of the White Mountain (1620), he spent the rest of his life wandering through Europe in what was, ultimately, a fruitless attempt to promote educational reform and secure the future of his Church, the Unity

of the Brethren. The hardship of exile cost him the lives of his wife and family and entailed separation from all that he loved and cherished.¹

Yet despite these traumas and disappointments Comenius was able to maintain a remarkable optimism. In his *Centrum Securitatis* [Centre of Security] of 1625 he tells of how, in the midst of despair, he discovered Christ as his true security.² In particular, as Jan Patočka pointed out many years ago, he found great comfort in his reading of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64), the celebrated fifteenth-century philosopher and theologian. For it was the realisation, stimulated especially by his reading of Cusa, of Christ as the centre and circumference of all things, that allowed him to begin to see his own exile and losses in a new perspective, pointing him towards a Christianity that transcended the shifting boundaries of confessionally-divided Europe and setting him on the path of his lifelong pursuit of irenicism and ecumenism.³

In this study I will explore Comenius's vision of a united Europe and its connection to his theological programme of reform. This becomes manifest first of all in his linguistic projects, in which he seeks to break down the language barriers separating Christians both from each other and from the mission field. It came to fruition in his comprehensive reform project of pansophia, or universal wisdom, especially as this was represented in his monumental *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica* [Catholic Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs], which he completed towards the end of his life.⁴ For in this work, which was lost until the early twentieth century, Comenius sought to integrate his pansophia within his wider project of reforming European – and eventually global – philosophy, politics and religion. In doing so he presents us with a vision of a restored Christendom, in which all the nations of the world are able to come together in Christ. Moreover, in line with the Trinitarian metaphysics of his pansophia, this had the lofty goal of enabling all humans, from the highest to the lowest, to reflect God's own triune character in

1. For a biographical portrait of Comenius focussing on his experience of exile see Murphy, *Comenius*, 8-44. A more detailed account of his early experience of exile can be found in Blekastad, *Comenius*, 91-110.

2. Comenius, *Centrum securitatis*, Praefatio, in *Opera omnia* 3, 478-80.

3. Patočka, "Centrum Securitatis und Cusanus," 245-56.

4. A helpful introduction to Comenius's pansophia and its relation to his *Consultatio* can be found in Čapková, "Comenius and his Ideals," 75-92. For a discussion of the complex genesis of the *Consultatio* see Balík and Schifferová, "In Consultationem Catholicam Isagoge Generalis," in *Opera omnia* 19:1, 35-50.

their individual lives, their relationships with one another and their collective and corporate existence. It therefore provided both a Trinitarian and Christological model for the perfect Christian society.⁵

Here, following the pattern of the *Consultatio* itself,⁶ we will first consider language reform as a way of metaphorically and spiritually crossing borders and establishing union between Christians, before turning to Comenius's even more ambitious project of the universal reform of Church and Society. While a great deal has been written on both pansophic reform and Comenius's technical linguistic endeavours, the connection between the two has rarely been explored in depth. Indeed, scholars such as Joseph Subbiondo, Jana Přívratská and Robert Stillman have all pointed to the need for a more integrated conception of his linguistic, philosophical and religious reforms.⁷ As Charles Webster argued many years ago, what united Comenius and other universal reformers of the seventeenth century was their desire for a 'great instauration.' In this the overcoming of Babel – and thus linguistic reform – was central to all their endeavours.⁸ As we shall see, Comenius's own reform thought can only properly be understood on this trajectory from Babel to Eden.⁹

Although Webster and others emphasised the Protestant dimension of this project, subsequent work has sought to nuance this claim and present the universal reformation within a broader intellectual and confessional landscape. In particular, Howard Hotson and Maria

5. For the Trinitarian character of Comenius's pansophia see Kuchlbauer, *Comenius' antisozinianische Schriften*, 197-221.

6. The *Consultatio* has a complex structure corresponding to Comenius's metaphysical understanding of the universe. It is divided into seven principal parts – the *Panegersia*, *Panaugia*, *Pansophia* (which is itself further divided into seven parts), *Pampaedia*, *Panglottia*, *Panorthosia* and *Pannuthesia*. In each of these Comenius explores something he considers to be a fundamental aspect of his reform project. Beginning with general incentives to reform (*Panegersia*), he then proceeds to outline the reform of human epistemology (*Panaugia*), knowledge (*Pansophia*), education (*Pampaedia*), language (*Panglottia*) and society, politics and religion (*Panorthosia*), before bringing his monumental work to a close with another exhortation and a summary of the whole (*Pannuthesia*).

7. See Subbiondo, "From Babel to Eden," 261-73, Přívratská, "On Comenius's Universal Language," 349-55 and Stillman, *New Philosophy*, 29-51.

8. Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 1-110.

9. Subbiondo, "From Babel to Eden," 261-73, helpfully draws attention to this theme but does not examine its implications in depth.

Rosa Antognazza have both emphasised the Lullist-Cusan dimension of this tradition.¹⁰ The profound indebtedness of Comenius, the bishop of a Church with Hussite roots, to Cusa the Roman Catholic cardinal is a case in point. It was Patočka himself who made the provocative claim that Comenius could not be understood outside the context of the fifteenth century.¹¹ Despite this it is surprising how little attention has been given to the connections between Comenius's universal reform and Cusa's fifteenth-century reform platform. By tracing some of the Cusan pathways that Comenius followed from his early *Centrum securitatis* to his late *Consultatio* this paper will hope to reveal something of his own Trinitarian and conciliar vision of Christian society.

The quest for a universal language

It was through his works on language education that Comenius first came to the attention of Europe. His celebrated *Ianua linguarum reserata* [Gate of Tongues Unlocked] of 1631 went through multiple editions and was translated into many languages, even penetrating into Asia and the New World, and this was soon followed by further textbooks aimed at different levels.¹² Together these were intended to constitute a comprehensive language curriculum, moving from a basic grasp of the language, through an understanding of the most common words and sentences to mastery of style. In this way Comenius sought to compress into one to two years what more conventional methods had failed to achieve in ten.¹³

One of the express aims of these graded Latin textbooks was to allow students to read and imitate Classical texts at an advanced level. In this he saw himself as following in the footsteps of humanists such as Roger Ascham, Juan Luis Vives, Johannes Sturm, Julius Caesar Scaliger and Justus Lipsius.¹⁴ As Daniel Murphy has pointed out, Comenius had many similarities with these Christian humanists. Like them he emphasised the importance of biblical languages for reforming exegesis and theology. He also shared their profound interest

10. See, for example, Hotson, *Johann Heinrich Alsted*, and Antognazza, "Immeatio and Emperichoresis," 41-64.

11.-Patočka, "Comenius und Cusanus," 238-40.

12. For the impressive reception of Comenius's linguistic works see Murphy, *Comenius*, 17, and Bažant, Bažantová and Starn, eds., *Czech Reader*, 85.

13. Comenius, *Great Didactic*, 22.1-26 (pp. 203-10) and *Gate of Tongues*, "The Preface to the Learned Reader." See further Murphy, *Comenius*, 174-212.

14. Comenius, *Gate of Tongues*, Preface.

in the notion of a perfect language.¹⁵ Yet there were also important differences. His interest in the central humanist project of reviving the pure Latin language was largely peripheral. Throughout his life he was also exercised by a deep anxiety about the corrupting effect of pagan literature and poetry on Christian piety and morals, advocating biblical models in their place.¹⁶ Comenius also arguably went beyond many of the humanists in his concern for what we might call the deeper metaphysical – and thereby theological – structure and purpose of language. Refusing to glory in language for its own sake, he was almost ruthlessly utilitarian in subordinating it to philosophy and theology. Ultimately, for him, the goal of learning a language was not an appreciation of words at all, which he described as merely the husk of reality, but rather the proper understanding of things themselves as the very kernel of truth.¹⁷

It is for this reason that the *Ianua linguarum reserata* is itself arranged like an encyclopaedia, beginning with God and the creation, moving through every aspect of the physical world and culminating in a discussion of all human arts and sciences. Indeed, the work itself was clearly intended to teach the ‘rudiments of philosophy and divinity,’ preparing the way for the understanding of the relation of all things to God – the goal of the pansophia.¹⁸ Significantly, underpinning Comenius’s account of the relation between language, the encyclopaedia and theology was the doctrine of the image of God. It is well known that in the Ramistic tradition which he belonged to, the encyclopaedia was viewed as a key means, under grace, of restoring the lost image of God in humanity. As Howard Hotson has demonstrated, this is key to understanding the works of Bartholomäus Keckermann (1572-1609) and especially of Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638), Comenius’s own teacher at the Reformed Herborn Academy in Germany.¹⁹ It is also the central emphasis of Comenius’s *Great Didactic*.²⁰ According to this encyclopaedic approach, each discipline was understood to be oriented to the perfection of a particular faculty of the human soul, and the

15. Murphy, *Comenius*, 62-70.

16. Comenius, *Great Didactic*, 25.1-27 (pp. 231-48); cf. Andreae, *Christianopolis*, II.56 (pp. 212-13).

17. Comenius, *Great Didactic*, 16.15; 19.44 (pp. 115, 177).

18. Comenius, *Gate of Tongues*, 281.

19. Hotson, “Instauration,” 1-21. For Comenius’s links to Alsted and the Ramist tradition see Hotson, “Ramist Roots,” 227-52.

20. Comenius, *Great Didactic*, 4.5-7; 5.4-12; 10.7 (pp. 37-8, 41-6, 72).

reform of language itself was regarded as fundamental to this entire process of sanctification.²¹

For Comenius, even more than for Keckermann or Alsted, the reform of language had a distinctive Trinitarian dimension. In mediating the connection between humanity, the world and God himself he understood language as reflecting the cosmic harmony of all things. The paradigm for this was of course the Trinity and in particular the Father's speaking of the Word through the Spirit in creation. Axiomatic to Comenius was the belief that language could adequately represent the Trinitarian structure of the world, enabling humans to participate in its rich mystery.²² In Paradise Comenius believed that language had been perfect. The language that Adam had spoken had been constructed exactly like the world it represented. It had been comprehensive, expressing the full range of human thoughts, and pleasing to the ear like music. Indeed, this language had associated things with ideas and ideas with words so closely that things could be 'conceived as they really are,' leaving no possibility for any kind of error or sin.²³ As a work like the *Triertium catholicum* [Universal Trivium] demonstrates, this alignment of thought, speech and action constituted for Comenius a vital aspect of the triune image of God in man.²⁴

Tragically, the Fall and Babel sundered this happy state of affairs. In turning away from God the fountain of light the human mind had become darkened. The blessed connection between thought, language and action was now severed, introducing confusion, doubt and sin. Moreover, language which had hitherto been the 'bond of society,' and the greatest expression of human unity, now became the hallmark of human division.²⁵ As he put it in his *Unum necessarium* [One Thing Necessary] of 1668:

21. Hotson, *Commonplace Learning*, 171-82.

22. For the Trinitarian character and dynamic of language see especially Comenius, *Triertium catholicum*.

23. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 3.6; 6.7, 17 (pp. 12, 24-5, 28) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 262-3, 277-8, 282, pp. 158, 165-6, 168]. Page number references are to the Dobbie edition, where all translations are taken from unless stated otherwise. For more on linguistic parallels between Adam and Christ see Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 14.1-20 (pp. 207-15) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 526-33, pp. 294-7]. Comenius's discussion of language closely resembles Keckermann, *Scientiae metaphysicae*, 107-8.

24. Comenius, *Triertium catholicum*, 1.1-4.4 (pp. 17-38); cf. *Great Didactic*, 10.7 (p. 72).

25. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 1.6-8; 6.2-3 (pp. 7-8, 23-4) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 257-8, 276-7, pp. 155-6, 165].

This multitude of tongues gave birth to a multitude of peoples and then even of religions, so that every people came to hold its own individual rites and ceremonies for worshipping the divine, and thought up its own beliefs, using, for the most part, images and idols. These finally came to be worshipped in the place of God, and they were honoured by the title of gods.²⁶

For Comenius there was therefore a direct connection between the confusion of languages and the beginnings of polytheism and even atheism.

Within this broader context it makes complete sense that language reform should have constituted such a fundamental component of his reform agenda. Moreover, since he viewed languages as lying at the root of national division, and thus of all war and strife, overcoming linguistic barriers became fundamental to his goal of a restored Christendom and a trans-national Christianity. His *Panglottia* [Universal Language] opens with the programmatic remark that the ‘recovery of our shattered society and its reunification in the fullness of light and joy depends upon our restoring the common bond of language.’²⁷ Indeed, Comenius’s reform attempts were directed at nothing less than a restoration of the human race to a pre-Fall and pre-Babel state and for this he believed a universal language to be essential, so that the whole world could become ‘a school of God,’ ‘a kingdom of Christ’ and a ‘temple of God.’²⁸

Quite obviously this was not something that humanity could achieve by its own efforts. In line with his eschatological, Millenarian expectations Comenius therefore awaited eagerly a new Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all humanity. In this Christ himself would institute the long desired universal language and usher in the universal wisdom of pansophia.²⁹ At the same time Comenius believed that humans could work towards this perfect language, approximating it ever more closely. Here the biblical languages, including Latin as sanctified by its inclusion on the *titulus* above the Cross, represented an important starting point. In particular, like Keckermann and earlier Christian Hebraists such as

26. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 2.8-9 (<http://moravianarchives.org>; accessed 1st August 2016).

27. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 6.3 (p. 23) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 276-7, p. 165]: ‘Plenum itaque dilaceratae Societatis humanae remedium, plenaque Humanae Societatis reinglutinatio, lumen, Laetitia, nonnisi a reparato communi vincula Lingua sperari possunt.’

28. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 5.21 (p. 96) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 429-30, pp. 245-6]: ‘Schola Dei ... Regnum Christi ... Templum Dei.’

29. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 14.1-20 (pp. 207-15) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 526-33, pp. 294-7].

Theodore Bibliander (1505-64) and Guillaume Postel (1510-81),³⁰ Comenius viewed Hebrew as a paradigm of the perfect language. He understood it not only as deriving from the antediluvian language but, ultimately, as the mother of all other languages. Indeed, he viewed its clarity in relating words, things and actions as an important reflection of the Trinity, ideally suiting it to be the language in which God first addressed humanity. Coming after Hebrew, Comenius viewed the other sacred languages of Greek and Latin as less perfect in form. Yet at the same time he also recognised that these languages were less ‘raw’ and more polished than Hebrew, and thus better able to express a diversity of things. For this reason God was able to make providential use of them for expressing the full revelation of his truth.³¹

While Hebrew for its antiquity, Greek for its richness and Latin for its beauty represented possible candidates for the universal language, Comenius finally rejected all of them, as well as every other known language. His own preferred route towards what he called ‘linguistic salvation’ was instead to construct an entirely new language. For in this way he believed that all counter-productive competition between existing languages and associated national interests could be avoided. For Comenius language clearly represented national and even spiritual identity at the deepest level. Developing an entirely new language, which also comprehended the best of all existing languages, was therefore an ideal way of transcending national division, giving humanity a new centre around which to unite.³²

In his *Panglottia* Comenius goes into great detail about the construction of this universal language and the best way of enabling the intimate correspondence between words and things. Its grammatical structure, based on Hebrew, was intended to mirror the Trinity, reflecting the pure language prophesied by Zephaniah and first introduced on the day of Pentecost.³³ His eventual goal was that all humans should speak this language and it is clear that he believed that at the Second Coming of Christ it would replace all other existing

30. Keckermann, *Systema logicae*, 10-11. For more on the early modern theory of Hebrew as the primordial language see Eco, *The Search*, 73-85, and Metcalf, *Language Diversity*, 57-64.

31. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 3.3-4; 6.7-9; 9.4 (pp. 11-12, 24-6, 60) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 261-2, 277-9, 316-17, pp. 157-8, 165-6, 185-6].

32. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 2.1-7; 6.15-21 (pp. 10, 27-30) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col.. 260-1, 281-5, pp. 157, 167-9].

33. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 6.7, 17: ‘Novae harmonicae linguae tentamen primum’ (pp. 24, 28, 75, 89) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 277-8, 282, 334, 349, pp. 165-6, 168, 194, 201].

languages. At the same time Comenius did not intend to suppress linguistic or national differences, but rather to resolve them into what Cusa would call a ‘concordance of differences,’ in which every language could be seen as reflecting, to ever closer approximations, different aspects of the triune God and his creation.³⁴ Alongside the universal language he therefore advocated both the construction of four new continental languages as well as the retention and refining of all national languages. He also intended that every Christian, and thus eventually every human, should learn the biblical languages as well as those of their closest neighbour.³⁵

In this his aim was not only to restore the Christian community of nations but to expand it to cover the entire world. He viewed both the universal and individual languages as crucial tools for mission and evangelism. In particular, he held that the civilised, Christian nations of Europe had a duty of care to the supposedly uncivilised nations of Africa, Asia and the New World. In this he held that peoples’ desire for international trade and relations must be ‘matched by their love of God and their passion to win backward nations to salvation.’³⁶ In the *Panglottia* Comenius therefore imagined a circle of nations bound together in which each individual knew both his own language and that of his neighbour. In this way, he argued, everyone would be able to communicate with everyone else, restoring the harmony of nations.³⁷ Augmenting this picture we might say that the universal language of Christ represents the centre and circumference of this circle, into which all languages and peoples would eventually resolve.

Towards universal reform

Significantly, it is precisely this concept of the circle of nations which Comenius takes up and elaborates on in his vision of a restored Christendom in the *Panorthosia* [Universal Reform] the work in which he sets out in detail his plan to promote universal reform by organising an

34. Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, 1.4.19 (p. 15). Cusa here uses the term to refer to the Church as a body politic but it is clearly applicable to other national and political differences as well. For more on Comenius’s use of the notion of ‘concord’ see below.

35. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 5.5-14, 9.4-6 (pp. 20-22, 60-1) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 272-5, 316-18, pp. 163-4, 185-6].

36. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 4.10-11 (pp. 14-15) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 266-7, p. 160]: ‘...si quantus Nummi amor plerosque ad commercia cum barbaris etiam Gentibus trahit, tantus Dei et salutis amor ad Animarum lucra alliceret.’

37. Comenius, *Panglottia*, 4.14 (pp. 16-17) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 268, p 161].

‘ecumenical council’ of the ‘leading lights of the world’ from all nations to discuss democratically and rationally the reform of global philosophy, politics and religion.³⁸ For clearly the very notion of a ‘Catholic consultation’ among peoples of all nations, churches and religions of the world could make little sense without a concerted effort to bridge the linguistic barriers which separate them. It is for this reason that Comenius chose to place the *Panglottia* before the *Panorthosia* in order to emphasise the dependence of universal reform on the reform of language and education. Indeed, as we saw above, for Comenius the overcoming of linguistic differences is itself intimately connected to the overcoming of deeper conceptual and theological differences.³⁹

What exactly Comenius intended by panorthosia, or universal reform, is best expressed in his own words:

We want a complete reformation of the Churches, for such a reformation has not yet occurred. There have been some attempts during the last centuries to reform the Christian Church, but these have only been particular and various for diverse occasions, without a universal idea or without the aim of having one ... Up until now all the past attempts at reformation of the Church (by Wyclif, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Menno, Socinus, and also sometimes by the Pope himself) have been like the first act of the healing of the blind man by Christ. It is now time to demand a perfect and universal reformation which corresponds to the second act of Christ, through which the blind man received back such clear sight, that he could see everything perfectly; or at least reformation should come as close to this as possible, similar to the congregation in Philadelphia, bringing light, peace and health to the whole world, having the keys of David and an open gate to let the Gentiles in – so that the people of the whole world gathered in it could recognise themselves as a common generation of God.⁴⁰

38. Comenius, *Panegersia*, 3.12-13 (p. 8) (*Opera omnia* 19:1, 99).

39. See especially Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 14.1-20 (pp. 207-15) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 526-33, pp. 294-7].

40. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 23.2-3 (pp. 58-9) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 599-600 pp. 330-1]: ‘Plenariam requirimus Ecclesiarum reformationem: quia talis hucusque nulla fuit. Tentatae quidem sunt superioribus seculis; Ecclesiae Christianae reformationes; sed particulariter tantum et varie, pro variis particularibus occasionibus, sine universali Idea, aut ad illam respectu ... Omnes hucusque particulariter tentatae Reformationes Ecclesiae (per Wiclefum, Hussum, Lutherum, Zwinglium, Calvinum, Mennonem, Socinum, Papam ipsum etiam aliquoties) fuerunt ut primus actus sanati a Christo Caeci (Marc. 8 v. 22.23) iam optatur perfecta et Universalis Reformatio, quae respondeat actui Christi secundo, quo Caeco tam clarus reddebatur visus, ut perfectissime videret omnia (v. 24.25) aut saltem debet esse

For Comenius the Reformation had clearly neither gone far enough nor deep enough. It had not gone far enough as it had not yet embraced Jews and Gentiles and all nations and languages of the world. It had not gone deep enough as it had concentrated only on institutions, morals and doctrines and not on reforming the human spirit itself in the image of the triune God.

Comenius's Millenarian convictions led him to believe that the Reformation only marked the beginning of a process which would culminate in the dawn of a new eschatological age of light – a truly Christian vision of Enlightenment. His desire was that the Gospel would sound out in every language of the world, and he believed that not until this was accomplished would Christ return. Comenius's own hope, as we have already seen from the *Panglottia*, was simply the restoration of human affairs to the state promised in the Garden of Eden.⁴¹ Following the template of his linguistic project, Comenius held that all reform relied on tapping into the universal instincts, conceptions and desires shared by all humanity and ultimately rooted in the primordial image of God. It therefore assumed an intimate correspondence between divine and human. As he put it:

Human nature contains deep-seated incentives to reform ... For example, all men seek the good ... Therefore let us point out to them the very sources from which it flows ... All men seek the truth ... Therefore let us show them universal truth ... All men seek the One, fixed, lasting and immovable ... Therefore let us lead them from the perimeters to the centres of things, where there is peace.⁴²

Universal reform was therefore to be patterned on the unity, truth and goodness of God's own nature. For Comenius all nature exists through participating in these divine attributes, which

perfectioni proxima, Philadephicae Ecclesiae habens faciem, toti Mundo ministrans lucem, pacem, salutem; habens Clavem Davidis, ostiumque apertum pro intromittendis Gentibus – in quam congregati Orbis totius populi agnoscant se commune Dei progeniem.' Translation cited from Neval, "An Approach to the Legacy of Comenius's Theology," 215-16.

41. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 2.16 (p. 59) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 377 p. 219].

42. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 2.15 (p. 58) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 377 p. 219]: 'Praesertim cum Humanae naturae divinitus infixi stimuli, meliorum desideria, pertent immote ... Quaerunt enim Omnes Bonum ... Commotremus itaque illis ipsos Boni fontes ... Quaerunt Omnes Verum ... Ostendamus itaque illis Universale Verum ... Quaerunt omnes Unum, fixum, durable, immotum Deducamus igitur eos a Rerum circumferentiis in Rerum centra, ubi quies est: et deductos se illuc vere conspicati, exultabunt.'

were called by the scholastics the transcendentals of being.⁴³ Universal reform thus consists in a transcendental reorientation of all creation back to the ground of its existence.

For Comenius, the ‘universal idea’ of reform that he and others had long been seeking, was therefore nothing other than God himself as the pattern for his creation. Following a longstanding Augustinian and scholastic tradition, he held that this exemplaristic relation between Creator and creation was best expressed in terms of divine ideas, which he conceived of, like Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians, as multiple ways of creatures imitating the unique and simple divine essence.⁴⁴ As Comenius said, ‘we must do everything according to the everlasting ideas that God has impressed on the world and its works and which underlie everything that he does.’⁴⁵ In this, as Daniel Neval and Craig Atwood have pointed out, despite his own claims to novelty, Comenius’s universal idea of Reformation has deep affinities with the Wyclifite and Hussite project of reforming the visible Church according to the true idea of the invisible Church.⁴⁶ Indeed, while Karl Barth insightfully discerned a general ‘Platonism’ operative in the Reformation doctrine of Scripture, Comenius’s explicit alignment of Scripture, Church reform and the doctrine of divine ideas bears a definite late medieval hallmark.⁴⁷

Comenius’s desire for universal reform also, of course, had important precedent in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century revival of Neoplatonism. Indeed, in order to be properly understood the *Consultatio* must undoubtedly be viewed in the trajectory of earlier attempts at the Platonic reform of Church and society, most notably Ficino’s *De Christiana religione*, Pico’s 900 *Theses*, and Erasmus’s *Enchiridion*.⁴⁸ However, it is in Nicholas of Cusa’s

43. For the centrality of the transcendentals to Comenius’s Trinitarian pansophia see Comenius, *De Christianorum uno Deo*, 30-41 and *Pansophiae Prodromus*, 92-3.

44. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 3.1.1-12 [*Consultatio*, t. 1 col. 278-80 pp. 199-200]; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1a 14-15.

45. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 5.28 (p. 98) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 432 p. 247]: ‘Hoc est, non aliud agamus, nec aliter, quam ille ideis aeternis, mundo et omnibus suis Operibus impressis, et secundum quas operatur adhuc, praemonstrat.’

46. See Neval, “An Approach to the Legacy of Comenius’s Theology,” 221-2 and Atwood, *Theology of the Czech Brethren*, 366-97.

47. Barth, *Theology*, 42-6. For the idealistic basis of the Wyclifite reform see Levy, *Wyclif*, and Herold, “Platonic Ideas,” 13-17.

48. See Hankins, *Plato; Edelheit, Ficino, Pico and Savonarola*; Christ-von Wedel, *Erasmus*, 45-55.

metaphysical reform of scholasticism, which Ernst Cassirer famously saw as standing at the fountainhead of Renaissance Neoplatonism, that we find the closest precedent.⁴⁹ For Comenius, like Cusa, the divine ideas must be resolved ultimately into the single divine Idea which enfolds them all. Moreover, Comenius follows Cusa in viewing the divine ideas as an expression of the dynamic unity-in-multiplicity of the triune God.⁵⁰ From his earliest works Comenius articulated this according to Tommaso Campanella's (1568-1639) triad of power, wisdom and love, which he identified not only with the Trinity but, in Scotist fashion, with unity, truth and goodness as the transcendentals of being. In Proclan fashion he held that these transcendentals then exploded into a whole series of further triads structuring the whole of created being according to a Trinitarian pattern.⁵¹ In sharing in the transcendentals every creature can therefore be described as 'a certain wonderful image of the Trinity of the Creator.'⁵² In the *Consultatio* Comenius significantly drew these different Cusan strands together by means of a geometrical example taken straight from the *De docta ignorantia*. According to this the triune God is described as an infinite circle enfolding and pre-containing within himself all the finite forms of creatures which he subsequently unfolds into spatial and temporal existence.⁵³

Ultimately the transcendental reorientation that is the essence of universal reform can therefore be understood as the re-centring of all creatures in the triune God as their origin, form and end.⁵⁴ This is well expressed in the *Unum necessarium*, which was written around the same time as the *Consultatio*. For here Comenius takes up his famous image of the

49. Cassirer, *The Individual*, 7-72.

50. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 3.1.24; 3.9 [*Consultatio*, t. 1 col. 318 pp. 202, 219]. For the dialectic of divine Idea and ideas in an (implicitly) Trinitarian context, see, for example, Cusa, *De Beryllo*, 16-18, in *Opera*, 1.270-2.

51. Comenius, *De Christianorum Uno Deo*, 30-41. Comenius's Scotist account of the transcendentals is highlighted by Scherbaum, *Metaphyikbegriff des Johann Amos Comenius*, 154. His debt to Campanella's metaphysics of the primalities is explored at length in Raffaelli, *Macht, Weisheit, Liebe*.

52. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 4.10 [*Consultatio*, t. I col. 636 p. 398]: 'Omnis Creatura est Creatoris imago triunitate quadam mirabili.' Patočka, "Comenius und Cusanus," 239, also suggests a connection between Comenius's application of the triad of transcendentals and Cusa.

53. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 3.1.24 [*Consultatio*, t. 1 col. 284 p. 202].

54. Cf. Comenius, *Pansophiae Prodromus*, 65.

‘labyrinth of the world,’ which he significantly used in the same work to describe the confusion of languages resulting from Babel,⁵⁵ and reconfigures it in terms of the Cusan imagery of the circle:

Because the whole world has strayed away from its centre, God, and going around the circumferences of things it now wanders through labyrinths without exits, rolls rocks without rest, and grasps for its desires without satisfaction, there remains only one means by which each man may return unto God, by going away from himself and other things, and that is the one thing necessary.⁵⁶

In his *Consultatio* Comenius importantly generalizes this principle to a universal rule, saying of all Christians ‘this, and only this will be the perfect fundamental basis for the perfect reform of himself and his affairs, to leave the perimeter and the sidetracks of things and return to God who is their sole and central basis.’⁵⁷

Christendom re-envisioned

What we now see is that the Cusan principle which was so important to Comenius’s individual salvation and assurance has become the heart of his universal reform attempt. Certainly, as Patočka realised, this was already implicit in the *Centrum Securitatis*, but it becomes fully explicit in the *Consultatio catholica*.⁵⁸ In light of this it is not surprising that we should find Comenius’s views here resonating with some of the principal themes of Cusa’s *De concordantia catholica* [On Catholic Concordance] and *De pace fidei* [On the Peace of Faith], even though, unfortunately, we can have no certainty that he knew these works directly. For neither the *De concordantia catholica* nor the *De pace fidei* are to be found in Ulrich Pinder’s 1510 *Speculum intellectuale felicitatis humanae* [Intellectual Mirror of Human Happiness], the only Cusan source that he cites explicitly.⁵⁹ However, Comenius is not always forthright about his sources and his own link through Alsted and Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld (1605-55) to the Lullist-Cusan tradition makes it quite probable that he knew these

55. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 1.6; 2.8.

56. *Ibid.*, 8.3.

57. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 7.11 (pp. 107-8) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 439 p. 250]: ‘Hoc demum perfectae Emendationis Sui, et Rerum, ima et perfectissima basis erit, A seipso, et Rerum circumferentiis ac ambagibus rediisse in Deum, rerum centrum, basinque unicam.’

58. See Patočka, “*Centrum Securitatis* und Cusanus,” 245-56.

59. From Comenius, *De iterato Sociniana*, 117-18, we know that his source for reading Cusa was Ulrich Pinder’s Cusan anthology which he first read around 1621.

works, at least at second hand.⁶⁰ Regardless of whether or not this is the case, the many correspondences between Comenius's universal reform project and Cusa's political and ecclesiological writings indicate at the very least their shared metaphysical ground.

To illustrate this in full would take us far beyond the scope of this article. Yet it is worth noting that both Comenius's connection of the diversity of religious rites to the diversity of nations, and his conviction that all religions have their roots in a universal monotheistic and (implicitly) Trinitarian faith, could have been taken straight out of the *De pace fidei*. Indeed, Cusa's own desire for a 'heavenly council' to establish the peace of faith might easily be seen as a prototype for Comenius's own 'Catholic consultation.'⁶¹ In fact, Comenius outdoes Cusa in his willingness to use Cusa's own method of the coincidence of opposites to reconcile opposing Christian viewpoints. For Cusa the coincidence of opposites expresses God's transcendence of Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, such that in him all opposites are seen to coincide without opposition.⁶² From Comenius's Anti-Socinian works we can see that this logical understanding of the coincidence of opposites played a vital role in structuring his mature Trinitarian theology and Christology.⁶³ In the *Consultatio*, however, he extends its range to argue that differences between Christians are best solved through what he calls the 'method of neither and both' – a term he elsewhere used to express the paradoxical nature of the coincidence of opposites.⁶⁴ While Cusa had seen the unity-in-multiplicity of the Trinity as the paradigmatic model for the 'one religion in the variety of rites' that he was advocating, Comenius arguably goes even further in seeking to resolve conflicting views through the higher synthesis of the coincidence of opposites.⁶⁵

60. For Comenius's links to this tradition see Burton, *The Hallowing of Logic*, 55-63, and Hotson, "Ramist Roots," 227-52.

61. Cusa, *De pace fidei*, 1.1-9, in *Opera*, 2.862-3.

62. For Cusa's coincidence of opposites see Miller, *Reading Cusanus*, 19-23.

63. For an in-depth discussion of this see Kuchlbauer, *Comenius's antisozinianische Schriften*.

64. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 8.45-57 (pp. 128-38) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 458-66, pp. 260-4]. For an example in which the 'method of neither and both' clearly refers to the coincidence of opposites see Comenius, *Pansophia*, 5.7 [*Consultatio*, t. 1 col. 789, p. 481].

65. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 8.45-57 (pp. 128-38) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 458-66, pp. 260-4]; cf. Cusa, *De pace fidei*, 1.6, in *Opera*, 2.863. Decorte, "Tolerance and Trinity," 107-17, points to the centrality of the Trinity in Cusa's account of tolerance. Since Cusa viewed the

If anything the parallels are even more striking between the *De concordantia catholica* and the *Consultatio catholica*. In particular, as we shall now turn to, Comenius's vision of the Christian circle of nations closely resembles the *De Concordantia* in seeking to reconcile authority and freedom in a Trinitarian and conciliar synthesis.⁶⁶ Indeed, the *De Concordantia*'s principal theme of 'concordance' or 'concord' can also be found at the heart of Comenius's own political theology. In his *Unum necessarium* Comenius therefore refers to concord as the 'one thing necessary' for tranquillity in society, calling it 'that glue of minds which keeps all the members of society in unity.' Importantly, echoing Cusa's twin themes of hierarchical authority and free consent, he identifies the fundamental ingredients of this concord as firstly an 'order of persons and actions, so that some men may rule, others submit' and secondly a common liberty, such that no person is constrained against his will and the personal rights of all are protected by law. Perfect concord therefore requires 'equality of freedom, or a 'system of authority and obedience which is just as free.'⁶⁷

At the same time Comenius is quite insistent that both a 'multitude of rulers' and a 'multitude of laws' are not good for the state. While, as we shall see, he gives councils a prominent standing role in government, he is also clear that there must be a centre of unity in a state to prevent factionalism and division. Illustrating this he draws on classic language concerning the body politic, remarking that just as nature gave each living body of many members a single soul so in 'free republics many men are chosen to care for public affairs, yet they are connected by certain laws of concord, so that they are a whole senate of one spirit, under one consul or head.'⁶⁸ Comenius's language admits republics but his 'republicanism' is clearly qualified in a monarchical direction, as becomes even clearer in the *Consultatio*. Indeed, while he admits that democratic, aristocratic and monarchical regimes have all been permitted by God, his own rule is 'one king for one kingdom, just as one head

Trinity as the central example of the mystery of the coincidence of opposites we can detect an important point of convergence with Comenius.

66. For Cusa's complex reconciliation of authority and freedom see Dupré, "Spirit, Mind and Freedom," 207-22. Seibt, "Utopie und Völkerbund," 843-57 rightly emphasises the conciliar nature of Comenius's political thought but downplays its Christian and Trinitarian aspects.

67. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 7.1-2.

68. Ibid., 7.4-5.

is sufficient for one body.’ Indeed, like Cusa and others, he invokes the analogy of the king’s marriage to his kingdom to illustrate this.⁶⁹

For Comenius the supreme law of concord is Scripture. Indeed, he is highly critical of contemporary codes of civil and canon law, arguing for the need to re-establish these on secure biblical principles. In support of this Comenius cites Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) as well as the Protestant jurist, Nicholas Vigelius (1529-1600), yet it is worth noting that the desire for a scriptural reform of the canons was echoed by a number of prominent thinkers within the broader conciliarist tradition, including William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347), Dietrich of Niem (c. 1340-1418) and Jean Gerson (1363-1429).⁷⁰ In this area, however, Comenius went considerably beyond the conservative instincts of Cusa the canon lawyer, whose own theology led him at times to subordinate the claims of the Bible to the strictures of canon law and Church tradition.⁷¹ For Comenius, by contrast, while reason, scripture and tradition will ultimately all be found in harmony, the ‘dominion of Christ’ can only be attained through the subordination of all human institutions and teachings to the divine law of Scripture.⁷² It is in this sense, which is clearly in continuity with the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*, that Comenius can understand the Bible itself as expressing the ‘universal idea’ of reform.

Yet Comenius’s understanding of universal reform is expressed not only in a Protestant centring on Scripture, but also, as already seen above, in an Augustinian and Cusan centring on the soul as the image of the triune God. Indeed, it is only in this dual centring on self and on God that he holds the reform of humanity, and not just of human institutions, according to scriptural principles can truly take place. For when humans have themselves as a centre they also come to see the ‘whole circumference of the human race,’ discovering, in Cusan vein, that they are ‘not other’ from their fellow man. Moreover, since the whole universe is understood to be ‘nothing other’ than what you are, you come to see the ‘whole

69. Ibid., 7.13-14. For a helpful discussion of the analogical use of marriage in later medieval political theory with particular reference to Cusa and conciliarism, see Carroll, *Painting and Politics*, 20-3.

70. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 7.8-9. For a helpful discussion of the relation of late medieval canon law and Scripture see Flanagan, “God’s Divine Law,” 101-21.

71. Izbicki, “Introduction,” ix-x.

72. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 6.24; 7.8-9; *Panorthosia*, 24 (p. 112) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 645-6, pp. 353-4]. For Comenius and the ‘dominion of Christ’ see *Panorthosia*, 23.2-3 (pp. 58-9) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 599-600 pp. 330-1].

sphere of things' within yourself. As he put it succinctly 'you find in yourself the image of God, in the image of God you find God and in God you find all things.'⁷³

That such an understanding has profound consequences for our understanding of society is made clear in the following passage:

If anyone asks for a more detailed method of self-reform, I should say that three conditions are required, namely that such reform should be I. total and full in all respects, II. orderly in all respects, III. true in all respects ... Would you like me to put it more like a formula? You must be fully transformed so that you are Everything, Something and Nothing. Everything in yourself, Something in human society of which you are a part, and Nothing in the presence of God ... For if every individual being is an image of the universe (as we have seen in my pansophia) every member of human society ought also to represent human society as a whole ... But inasmuch as you are the image of God, you must wholly transform yourself for the purpose of representing the very likeness of God in your daily life ... Inasmuch as you are the image of Christ, you must possess him wholly (through faith and obedience and encircling love) so that he in turn may possess you wholly.⁷⁴

As he expressed this elsewhere in the *Consultatio* 'all inferiors have the same as superiors (the lowest man the same with the highest, the peasant with the king, the grain of dust with

73. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 3.1.18 [*Consultatio*, t. 1 col. 281, p. 201]: 'An inventurus in Te sis Imaginem Dei, et in imagine Dei Deum, et in Deo omnia ... Tu es unus ille, qui si te intra te noveris, tamquam e Centro intueri omnes, per totam Humani generis circumferentiam poteris, omnes videns hoc idem esse quod tu es, non aliud. Imo intueri poteris Omnia per totam rerum Sphaeram: quia Mundus nihil aliud est, quam quod Tu es, Factoris sui simulacrum: nisi quod in Te parvus, extra te magnus Mundus est: Et quod summum haberi debet, si teipsum noveris, etiam tuum et Mundi factorem nosse poteris: qui te ad imaginem suam facit. Quid enim est, quod ex imagine sua, si exacta est, cognosci non possit? Deus vero imaginem suam in te formans an exactam effingere nescivit?' For the Cusan principle of the 'not other' see Miller, *Reading Cusanus*, 180-205.

74. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 20.10-16 (pp. 24-6) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 571-2 pp. 316-7]: '10. Particulariorem reformandi sui modum si quis quaerit, dicam, Reformationem requiri I. Totalem ac per omnia plenam, II. Per omnia ordinatam, III. Per omnia veram. ... 12. Vis expressius dicam? Ita Te ad plenum transforma, ut sis Omnia, Aliquid, Nihil. Omnia in Te, Aliqui in Societate humana, cuius pars es, Nihil coram Deo ... 14. Si enim quolibet Ens Universi imago est (ut Pansophicis vidimus), etiam quodlibet Humanae Societatis membrum totam humanam societatem repraesentare debet ... 15. In quantum autem Dei imago es, ad illam ipsam Dei similitudinem vivis actionibus repraesentandam totum Te transforma ... 16. In quantum Christi es, posside illum (per Fidem et Obedientiam, amorisque complexum) totum, ut ille possideat Te totum.'

the universe) the same, I say, but not in the same mode.’ Indeed, he adds that ‘all inferiors desire to be perfected in their superiors’ for they have a nobler being in their superiors.⁷⁵

We are reminded here not only of Cusa’s metaphysics of contraction – echoed elsewhere in Comenius’s statement that ‘all things are found in the lowest being which are in the highest: but in the lowest degree’⁷⁶ – but even of his specific claim that the king’s ‘public person’ enfolds within himself all the powers of his inferior subjects.⁷⁷ Yet for Comenius it is the corollary that the subject contains all the authority of the king, albeit according to a different mode, which is, if anything, even more important. For it allows the hierarchical order of society to be understood in terms of a Cusan ‘concordance of differences’ in which all opposites become united and transcended. Moreover, as in book one of the *De concordantia*,⁷⁸ Comenius sees this concordance as being expressed supremely in the Trinity, which becomes his model for all human relations. Indeed, drawing on Campanella, Comenius connects the political, philosophical and religious structure of society to the triune pattern of power, wisdom and love respectively. Paralleling the Trinitarian multiplication in the metaphysical realm, each of these three spheres is itself subject to further Trinitarian conditioning ensuring that politics can never be conducted without philosophy (education) and religion, thus making it an expression not only of power but also of wisdom and love.⁷⁹ For Comenius this represents a kind of golden mean between the papacy in which the

75. Comenius, *Pansophia*, 4.9.15 [*Consultatio*, t. I col. 622 p. 391]: ‘Inferiora omnia habent idem quod superna (infimus homo idem cum summo, rusticus cum Rege, pulvisculus idem cum Universo) eadem dico, sed non eodem modo. Appetunt tamen omnia inferiora perfici in Superioribus – eoque illa his in pabula ordinavit Creator – (Inferiora habent nobilius Esse in suo Superiori, quod tandem inveniunt in supremo Ente Deo).’

76. Comenius, *A Patterne of Universall Knowledge*, 133.

77. Cusa, *De Beryllo*, 16, in *Opera*, 1.270. For Cusa’s metaphysics of contraction see Miller, *Reading Cusanus*, 41-4.

78. Cusa, *Catholic Concordance*, 1.1.4-10.48 (pp. 5-33).

79. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 1.2-3, 14-15; 2.38; 10.42-5 (pp. 47-50, 66, 169-70) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 360-1, 364-5, 390-1, 494-5, pp. 211, 213, 226, 278]. In *Panorthosia*, 2.38 (p. 66) Comenius cites Campanella explicitly as inspiration for his political theology. For further discussion of this relationship see Raffaelli, *Macht, Weisheit, Liebe*.

‘Church devoured the political systems and the schools’ and the new confessional era in which he fears that ‘politics will devour the Church.’⁸⁰

For Comenius the liberty essential to all human relations in society, and which he saw as fundamental to universal reform,⁸¹ becomes expressed chiefly in the conciliar mode of government which patterns his ideal society. Like the *De concordantia*, his *Consultatio* draws explicitly on the models of Constance and Basel as reform councils, as well as the great councils of the early Church. In particular, it advocates the establishing of a world council of scholars, politicians and churchmen to meet once to establish the universal reform of philosophy, politics and religion – according to only Scripture and reason – and thereafter every ten years to regulate reform – a suggestion reminiscent of the council of Constance’s famous decree of *Frequens* (1417).⁸² Again following the precedent of Constance and other councils, Comenius suggests that this world council should also be summoned by Christian kings. It should also have representatives from all the nations of the world and from the three permanent bodies which he suggests should be established to regulate world philosophy, politics and religion – the college of light, the dicastery [= department] of peace and the ecumenical consistory of the Church. Significantly, this threefold pattern – itself an expression of the Trinity – is mirrored at every level of society, so that each country, region, town and village has its own authority terminating in the individual who is king, priest and teacher in the sovereignty of his own home and conscience.⁸³

According to Comenius this conciliar system of government combines the best of all political systems and subordinates them to the rule of Christ. In particular he describes it as ‘government on the lines of a monarchy, tempered by an aristocracy which should resolve

80. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 24 (p. 112) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 645, p. 353]: “... sicut in Papatu Ecclesia devoravit Politiam, cum administris Scholis – ita apud illos, qui Papatu exierunt Politia Ecclesiam.”

81. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 10.9 (pp. 155-6) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 481-2, pp. 271-2].

82. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 25 (p. 143) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 673, p. 367]. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 1.3 (p. 48) refers explicitly to the examples of the councils of Constance and Basel as forerunners of universal reform. For Cusa’s reliance on these councils see Cusa, *Catholic Concordance*, 2.17.155 (p. 117).

83. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 12.12 (pp. 192-3); 19.15; 25.7 (pp. 15-16, 131, 144-6) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 514, 563-4, 661-2, pp. 288, 312-13, 361-2].

into democracy.⁸⁴ In terms of the Church, Comenius describes an ascending hierarchy of pastors, bishops, archbishops and patriarchs, even leaving open the possibility that the earthly Church might be ruled by a single arch-patriarch or pope – a remarkable claim for a Protestant to make. At the same time he is clear that all of these, including the putative pope, must govern by means of a standing council.⁸⁵ Likewise, following his Hussite heritage, he restricts this rule to a purely spiritual one.⁸⁶ In terms of the state, Comenius envisages a hierarchy of magistrates ruled over by a king but with Christ as the emperor over all – something which accords with his statement that no king should have more than one kingdom. Once again each magistrate, including the king, is constrained to take the advice of representatives from all of Comenius’s three estates – that is philosophers, ecclesiastics and other magistrates.⁸⁷

Comenius does not say so explicitly but it is clear that the councils are so important both in expressing the concord of the individual and the whole – a principle which for him attains metaphysical status in the ancient doctrine of the macrocosm and microcosm – and in bridging the gap between nations. Indeed, his desire to establish local, provincial, national and international standing councils to advise the secular and ecclesiastical hierarchy mirrors Cusa’s own proposals in book three of the *De concordantia catholica*.⁸⁸ Moreover, he clearly reconceives the hierarchical order of society in terms of a Cusan ‘concordance of differences’ in which both the subjection of lower to higher and the free accommodation of higher to lower through the councils becomes an expression of the community’s desire to mirror not only the perfection of the whole universe but even the dynamic mutuality of the Trinity itself.

Finally, while Comenius does not make the connection explicit, it is noteworthy that his Trinitarian and conciliar vision of a reunified Christendom also corresponds closely with

84. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 23 (p. 96) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 632, p. 347]: ‘Omnia argumenta militant pro Monarchico Regimine, temperato Aristocratica quae se resolvat in Democratiam.’ While Comenius is here speaking of Church government, *Panorthosia*, 12.12 (pp. 192-3) reiterates the same principle for government in general.

85. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 23 (p. 96) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 632-3, p. 347].

86. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 23 (pp. 99-100) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 635-6, pp. 348-9]. For Comenius’s relation to Hussite theology see Neval, *Die Macht Gottes*, 103-27, 463-95.

87. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 7.14; *Panorthosia*, 24 (pp. 110-15) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 643-9, pp. 352-5].

88. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 25.1, 4, 10 (pp. 128, 130, 142-3) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 658, 660, 670-3, pp. 360-1, 366-7]; cf. Cusa, *Catholic Concordance*, 3.25.469–40.565 (pp. 283-313).

his account of language reform, with the universal, international and national languages closely paralleling the various grades of council. In fact, one of the main purposes of Comenius's ecumenical world council is to establish a universal language.⁸⁹ It was of course the councils of Constance and Basel which first took up the concept of the 'nations,' well known from university administration, and applied it to the reform of the Church. While imperfectly conceived, and initially intended only as an expedient measure, this did seek to harmonise national interests to those of the universal Church, thus simultaneously holding together the centre and the periphery.⁹⁰ In the same way Comenius was always careful to make sure that his own desire for unity and uniformity – which, as we have seen, even led him to countenance a limited and reformed papacy – did not smother national distinctiveness. Above all, Comenius desired to protect his circle of nations from any kind of assimilation into an earthly Empire – something in which he differed somewhat from Cusa⁹¹ – roundly condemning the desire to rule over and subjugate other nations.⁹²

Conclusion

For Comenius, Christ as sole emperor over all thus shines forth as the only true and enduring global 'centre of security.' Indeed, as we have seen, it was this principle which was his guiding star from his earliest existential reflections through to his latest and most ambitious attempts to set out his comprehensive programme of pansophic reform. In this respect, Patočka's intuition of the centrality of Cusa for understanding Comenius is amply borne out. Even more importantly, following the thread of Cusa's influence through Comenius's linguistic, political and ecclesiological reform has revealed the way in which the theme of

89. Comenius, *Panorthosia*, 25 (pp. 144-5) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 673-4, pp. 367-8].

90. See Loomis, "The Organization by Nations at Constance": 191-210 and Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*, 81-8.

91. Cusa, *Catholic Concordance*, 3.5.340-6.347 (pp. 233-6). For Cusa's complex views on empire see Nederman, *Lineages*, 177-90.

92. Comenius, *Unum necessarium*, 7.14; *Panorthosia*, 12.12 (pp. 192-3) [*Consultatio*, t. 2 col. 514, p. 288].

centrum securitatis functions as the unifying principle of his entire reform thought. In uniting God and man, Creator and creation, centre and periphery, Christ thus becomes the foundation and cornerstone upon which the new Eden is constructed out of the shattered remnants of Babel.

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