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## THE PEDAGOGICAL IDEAS OF J.A. COMENIUS

### THE BIBLICAL ASPECT

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#### Abstract

A key aspect of the paper is the analysis of John Amos Comenius's pedagogical activities and their Biblical foundation. The analysis of the available works by J.A. Comenius proved that his religious views and pedagogical activities were permeated with the Christian teaching, the foundation of which was the Bible. The paper compares the philosophical and pedagogical heritage of J.A. Comenius with the Holy Bible. We employed a critical comparative analysis to establish the connection between the pedagogical reform by J.A. Comenius and important Biblical ideas. There is much evidence that the famous pedagogue cited the Bible verses to confirm many of his ideas and sincerely believed that the basis of education was the preparation of the student not only for earthly life, but for the eternal one. The issue of his educational heritage has been a much-disputed subject within the field of liberal arts. The main concern of the paper is that J.A. Comenius was not only a humanist but a Christian teacher, as well. Existing research recognizes that he expressed his ideas to prepare people for a meeting with God.

*Keywords:* pedagogical ideas, Biblical principles, Christian views, moral principles, comparative analysis

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#### 1. Introduction

Extensive research has shown that the doctrine created by J.A. Comenius not only accelerated the process of transforming Pedagogy into an independent science, but also determined the prospects for the development of the theory and practice of education and upbringing for subsequent centuries. It has previously been observed that the rich pedagogical heritage by J.A. Comenius highlighted all the most important issues of Pedagogy. It is now well established from a variety of studies that in the 'Great Didactics' he outlined all the requirements

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for the learning process, which are interesting not only from the historical, but also from practical point of view.

According to J.A. Comenius, the conditions for the best progress in learning are as follows.

- Human education begins from childhood. The morning hours are the best for learning and teachers should distribute everything that is subject to study according to the age stages of their students.
- The mind develops earlier than the language. Students don't study any language through grammar, they study languages through the corresponding works of writers. Practically-applied academic subjects precede formal ones, and examples precede rules.
- Teachers should prepare the minds of students for mastering the subject under study. Teachers should eliminate everything that interferes with learning.
- At school, it is necessary to establish the order according to which every day at the same time students should be engaged in the same subject.
- The teacher, firstly, must achieve understanding of things, secondly, develop memory and, thirdly, develop speech and motoric abilities, resorting to all methods of disclosing cognitive abilities and applying them in accordance with circumstances.
- The teacher should distribute teaching material so that the following classes serve as a further development of the acquired knowledge in their parts, just as all the branches of the tree grow from each other. Any language, science and art must first be taught in such a way that the students have a general idea of the whole.
- The teacher should divide the whole total of knowledge into classes in such a way that the preliminary stages always open the way for the next ones. Special work is done so that nothing is missed and distorted.
- Students receive books corresponding to each class. These books deservedly could be called a source of wisdom and piety. They should teach students in school and outside its walls not to tolerate a bad society [1, 2].

Many of these general provisions formulated by J.A. Comenius have become pedagogical axioms, the fundamental principles of learning (continuity, consistency and systematism, the correspondence of learning to the age characteristics of students, visibility, etc.) [3-5].

The existing body of research on J.A. Comenius suggests that he considered the ease and pleasure of the learning process as a necessary condition for the success of the learning process. The pedagogue believed that mastering of wisdom should pass without problems, be comfortable, accessible to all, bring true pleasure. The teacher is called upon to instil in children a craving for knowledge and training. It's bad when children are only forced to learn. It is necessary to use only those methods that reduce learning difficulties so that it does not cause students to feel displeased and disgusted with their studies.

J.A. Comenius showed that for each age there was a need for a special school: for children – a school of maternal care, for adolescents – an elementary school of the native language, for young people – a Latin school (gymnasium), for adults – academy and travel. In mothers' school, special attention should have been paid to the development of external senses; in the school of the native language it was important to train students with the help of executive body instruments – hands, language. In the public school – to try to understand and reflect on the collected sensations, actualize them with the help of the following questions: 'what?' and 'why?' And at the academy, everything was emphasized on freedom. The first two schools should have been mandatory for everyone, and the next – open to all newcomers.

J.A. Comenius demonstrated that it was necessary in the elementary school parallel to studying disciplines to acquaint the students with all the common craft exercises, so that they did not remain ignorant of anything concerning human affairs. The curriculum in the Latin school (preparatory school) included the study of seven free subjects: Theology, Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, Astronomy, and many subjects that met the requirements of modern times - Physics, Geography, Chronology, History, Morality [6].

A special place in the pedagogical system by J.A. Comenius holds the doctrine of the role of the teacher in the education of the individual. All the work of the school, its successes and failures depend on the teacher. He forms a future person from the child and must be kind, considerate and at the same time strict and exacting. Teacher should not push off children through excessive severity, but rather attract them in a fatherly way. When he lovingly treats students, the more he conquers their hearts, the more pleasant it will be for children to be in school. It is necessary to be able to generate attention, so that students will be more likely to perceive the educational material [7].

The teacher should be able to maintain discipline, be devoted to the cause of teaching and educating children, to love his profession, not to be an employee, and the desire to leave this profession in pursuit of money leads to the fact that he cannot be a 'living model' for students [8]. J.A. Comenius urged teachers to develop the cognitive abilities of students, especially to worry about developing in them the desire for independent active work on the acquisition of knowledge and their application in life. Successful education and training is determined primarily by the comprehensive education of the teacher, his broad erudition and high authority.

Education is an attribute element of human existence in the realization of 'humanity' that accompanies a person from the first steps of his historical existence. Education becomes an essential feature of any organized society, which means that the essential social transformations have always led to rethinking of the traditional forms of social life and its institutions, including those relating to the system of upbringing. Since the process of educating a person is an object of study of a multitude of Social sciences, in particular Pedagogy, Sociology, Political science, Social philosophy, Cultural studies,

Psychology and even History, educator receives in these sciences valuable, though often dissonant, interpretation of social status, content, forms and methods of education.

The problem of the study is that a significant number of researchers of J.A. Comenius, in particular, V.A. Slastenin, I.F. Isaev, A.I. Mishchenko, believed that “the basis of the pedagogical system by J.A. Comenius comprised the principles of materialistic sensationalism” [3], and he himself was called a humanist who could not completely get rid of the Christian worldview, since he lived during the Middle Ages, when the Church was the authority in many issues of society, including the issue of education. In this regard, it will be timely to analyse the literary and pedagogical heritage of the Czech reformer and to explore the main source of his pedagogical ideas and reforms.

This paper argues that there are universal problems of human education which ‘are transferred’ from century to century, from theory to theory, without any solution at the level of general, that is, scientific pedagogical knowledge. The point is that the same problems of upbringing, beginning with antiquity, constantly penetrate all subsequent pedagogical concepts, causing despair and uncertainty among their creators by the complexity of their solution [9]. It seems that the essential pedagogical problems have no positive solution at all. Is it possible to agree with this? Are there any arguments to refute this impression? How permanent are fundamental pedagogical problems? Where are the hidden sources and factors of their long-term existence as insoluble problems? Can the situation in Pedagogical science change with the solution of complex problems of education? J.A. Comenius extrapolated such philosophical foundations of the new philosophical paradigm to an understanding of the essence of man. According to J.A. Comenius, a human being acquires the status of an ‘element of the world’ against the background of a living humanistic tradition about the uniqueness of every particular person. However, the man is lost among other similar physical elements. So, the unique understanding of nature by J.A. Comenius leads him to the pedagogy of management, in which the pupil is regarded only as a formless, passive source material, from which a teacher ‘molds’ a person.

There is much evidence that the idea of nature-oriented education, where the natural approach is an essential element of the dominant philosophical paradigm, intertwines in a consistent way with the ideas of collectivity and universality of education inherited from ancient thought and corrected by the Renaissance and the dynamic entry of Natural science into human existence. J.A. Comenius has no doubt about the fact that education ‘must be comprehensive’, not only referring to its social character, or explaining in a peculiar way the social character of upbringing. For all, a single and equal upbringing is necessary, and care of this upbringing should be common, not private matter [10].

## 2. Methods

The focal point of the paper is to analyse the theory and goals of the paradigm of education by J.A. Comenius and substantiate the idea that the foundation of his pedagogical works is the Bible, and not the philosophical works of ancient philosophers.

During the work, we used general scientific methods of comparing and classifying the pedagogical ideas by J.A. Comenius, given in his work 'Great didactics', where he used with principles indicated in the sense of Biblical verses. We also used specific scientific methods: retrospective analysis to determine the specifics of the formation and development of the pedagogical ideas by J.A. Comenius; system-structural analysis with a view to systematizing the pedagogical ideas by J.A. Comenius.

## 3. Results

Everyone, who has ever read or is familiar with the works by J.A. Comenius, drew attention to the fact that they were permeated with Protestant views. And the ultimate goal of the educational system, according to J.A. Comenius, is the education of children precisely in the Christian spirit and truth, because already here, on earth, the great Czech teacher believes, it is necessary to prepare students for their eternal life. The roots of this view are that J.A. Comenius was a member of the Unity of the Brethren, he held the status of the 'last bishop' of Unity of the Brethren [11]. It is known that the doctrinal principles of Czech brothers have roots both in Jan Hus and in Martin Luther [12].

We have analysed the pedagogical ideas by J. A. Comenius, given in his work 'Great Didactics', in comparison with the principles indicated in the sense of Biblical verses, where the same idea was traced. The results of the analysis are given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The comparison of pedagogical ideas of J.A. Comenius with the principles indicated in the sense of Biblical verses.

| No. | Council, idea, rule proposed by J.A. Comenius ('Great Didactics') [13]  | The contents of the Biblical verse  |
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| 1.  | Turning to parents, J.A. Comenius recommends that in the process of educating children parents must not irritate them and not be nervous. Parent education should be pleasant for children and they will understand that parental teaching is like bitter herbs, children just need to drink them so as not to get sick [13, p. 289]. | Deuteronomy 6.7 (Teach sons everywhere).<br>The Apostle Paul to Ephesians 6.4 (parents do not annoy children ... educate them in the Lord). |
| 2.  | Parents should be exclusively responsible for everything that concerns the upbringing and care of children. On the example of a plant the teacher emphasizes that Christian children  | Relying on Genesis 18, 19 (the command to the sons to walk the way of the Lord), J.A. Comenius  |

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|    | cannot grow like an untreated forest. Why should the parents, not the teachers be responsible? Because, writes J.A. Comenius, children owe their existence to their parents, and they must become the source of a holy, moral, intelligent life for their parents [13, p. 279-280].   | emphasizes that Abraham applied this rule to his children.   |
| 3. | J.A. Comenius emphasizes that education must be compulsory not only for boys, but also for girls. Not only boys, but also girls should study. The pedagogue writes, let no one use against this rule the Paul's words, according to which the girls are not allowed to study (1 Timothy 2.12), or Juvenila's words, "If Matrona is married, she does not need good speech or knowledge of any stories" [13, p. 293-294].  | The pedagogue opposes using Scripture as an argument against teaching girls (Apostle Paul 1 Timothy 2:12). Everybody must learn to see and know God everywhere.                                    |
| 4. | According to J.A. Comenius, good school should be of high quality. And only then will the school fulfil its vocation, when each student will be illuminated by the brilliance of profound wisdom so that he can quickly penetrate the depths of mysteries and understand them. And as a result, the souls will strive for harmony, each heart will be filled with the love of God and, still being on earth, children will learn to live the heavenly life. Briefly, it is essential to teach students in schools everything that is necessary for practical life [13, p. 299-300]. | Based on the Book of Wisdom of Solomon 7.17 sections.  |
| 5. | If students and teachers, or parents complain, then turn it into a search for the best and perfect. Why? Because everything is simple, you cannot regain the past and the lost years, the lost youth cannot be changed, so the only thing that remains for us is to take care of our sons and daughters so that they will not repeat our sinful fate [13, p. 300].  | Because only the Lord can correct our crooked ways and correct our mistakes, so do not consider your shortcomings and shortcomings of others, turn to the Lord and He will help (Ecclesiast 1.15). |
| 6. | Each young man, without exception, needs to be introduced to such qualities as honesty, the desire to achieve harmony, wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage [13, p. 303-304].   | On the example of a house J.A. Comenius writes that if there is a weak base in the house and the details are badly fastened, it will stagger and fall (Matthew 7.28).                              |
| 7. | As each student will spend his future life surrounded by different people, he must learn not to be afraid to communicate, not to be afraid of people and, most importantly, to do his work honestly and qualitatively. So that he does not become a burden in the future for parents and for the land, a parasite, or a dull misanthrope  | The virtue of man is cultivated through deeds, and not through empty conversations (Ecclesiast 9.10, Psalm 36.27).   |

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|     | [13, p. 406].  |  |
| 8.  | It is especially necessary for each student to instil in their minds the idea of justice and the willingness to serve others with greater desire [13, p. 445].   | It is necessary to serve others by using the gift that the Lord bestowed on you (1 Peter 4.10).  |
| 9.  | Everyone needs to understand the purpose of his life. This appointment consists in the fact that we are not born exclusively for ourselves, but for God and for our neighbour, in general, for all mankind. Proceeding from this statement, let everyone remember that it is necessary to teach children from their childhood how to benefit as many people as possible. As a result, happy state of mind and body will come [13, p. 407].   | It is necessary that the desire to serve penetrates the depths of society. People should help each other everywhere, want to do it. They just need to learn this. (Matthew 7.28, Matthew 5-7). |
| 10. | Before the eyes of children always let the examples of the highly moral holy life of teachers, parents, friends, and others shine. Children are like monkeys, they constantly copy someone. Therefore, remember, children learn to copy rather than to study [13, p. 408].   | In this recommendation, the Biblical principle is indicated, which is recorded in the First Epistle to the Corinthians of Saint Paul the Apostle 5.1.  |
| 11. | Use simple, clear examples taken from life in teaching children. These can be life stories, because this approach is best remembered and impresses most of all [13, p. 408].   | In his sermons, Jesus Christ widely used illustrations from the surrounding nature and life. (Luke 18, Mark 4, Luke 15.16).  |
| 12. | For bad behaviour it is necessary to punish more severely than for low scores at school. Why? Because the actions of people are divided into three types: 1. acts that disgrace the greatness of God; 2. acts that disgrace the basis of all virtues, such as humility and obedience; 3. acts that interfere with high quality in training. Therefore, what is against the Lord, we must severely punish – it's an abomination, which must be eradicated, and it costs the very form of punishment. The act that is against people and themselves must be corrected with the help of a severe reprimand. Why is that? Because the violation against God has eternal consequences [13, p. 436]. | According to this poem, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven by the Lord (Mark 3.29).  |
| 13. | The main task of the discipline is that: "in those, whom we bring up to God and the church, we need to constantly strengthen, warm up the feelings that the Lord requires of his children" [13, p. 437].   | Watch yourself for the whole life. Analyse yourself to be saved (Psalm 14.10).   |

#### **4. Discussion**

The current study found that the pedagogical work ‘Great Didactics’ by J.A. Comenius demonstrated already from the very names of the sections that he was a deeply religious man, a Christian. He believed that it was impossible to achieve good behaviour, discipline, order in the school without the help of the Lord. However, much controversy still exists in the opinion of modern researchers that J.A. Comenius was exclusively a humanist. However, Comenius was the one who believed that it was possible to build a moral society of high human values. And since modern humanism is not completely theistic [14], it does not recognize any God’s power in the development of high moral values, simply speaking a person can develop high moral values without resorting to help from God. And according to the views of J.A. Comenius, the entire school system must pursue a single goal - to remember that earthly life is only a preparation for the eternal [15]. In his works J.A. Comenius consistently repeats that all the best qualities are laid down in man by God, therefore, during human beings’ studies and life they must be actively developed.

The collection of ideas, which was published in 1653 under the title ‘Rules of Conduct for Young Men’ [13, p. 164-173], clearly reflects the Biblical views of J.A. Comenius on the behaviour of young men, as well as the reasons why it is necessary to live by these rules. For example, the basis of the moral criterion for each person J.A. Comenius calls the Word of God. And if we examine his work in detail, we will see that the main source of his pedagogical and moral ideas is the Bible.

J.A. Comenius recommends that people should not swear and their words ‘yes’ or ‘no’ should be meaningful (a parallel from Matthew 5.37) [13, p. 170], they should not justify themselves if a mistake is made, but repent and ask forgiveness from the offended person. The great Czech teacher recommends everyone to have a personal Bible and a book of Psalms [13, p. 170], to observe their thoughts, words, facial expressions, so that in their thoughts there is not what is indecent before the Lord. When the Church sings, one should not be silent. J.A. Comenius asks his listeners to sing with everyone, because “Everyone must turn his heart and mouth into the organs of the glory of God” [13, p. 170].

The main task indicated in his pedagogical works is as follows: to find, explore and develop a methodology by which everyone, who studies, can learn as much as possible and spend less time on useless work, and can have more successes and joys spending leisure time in the right way [16, 17].

Thus, as the results of the study showed, it is not appropriate to call the works by J.A. Comenius completely humanistic, because when he wrote his own textbooks, he quoted Bible verses to confirm this or that thought, rule or advice. Therefore, it would be right to call him a Christian teacher, who wanted each school to instil in the students not only the ability for knowledge, but also the ability to teach everyone reverence for the Lord, the desire to serve others



sincerely, love for the Holy Scripture, and the ability to teach everyone and everywhere to see and understand God.

## **5. Conclusions**

J.A. Comenius wrote more than 250 works devoted to one topic - education and human education - and was deeply convinced that general education, the creation of a new school will help educate people in the spirit of humanism, solidarity, mutual understanding. These thoughts are still relevant, even though a huge time gap separates us from the era of J.A. Comenius.

During the study of the pedagogical heritage of J.A. Comenius and the Biblical aspects of his ideas it was established that many of the principles and rules of education were inherited from the Biblical content. In order to confirm many of his pedagogical ideas J.A. Comenius quoted Biblical verses. He believed that the foundation of education was the preparation of the student not only for the earthly life, but also for the eternal. Already here, on Earth, according to J.A. Comenius, it was necessary to learn how to live as in Heaven. He also noted that the Lord gave him these ideas, and therefore he offered them to everyone and asked that this would be a common achievement and heritage. J.A. Comenius added that if someone invented something better, it should be used for the benefit of the society.

Building a system of school education in accordance with the ideas and principles of the Czech thinker is an ideal example of a successful process of organizing training, from which one should draw and apply the ideas of world Pedagogical science today.

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