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## VISIONS OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION The Role of Irenicism in Czech Christian Thought and Literature

*Comenius was acutely aware of the tension between the law and ethics, which is evident in his understanding of a just war. While he did not reject the possibility of armed conflict in extreme circumstances (e.g., in cases of defense against oppression), he emphasized that every conflict should also be judged from an ethical perspective. His vision of education for peace was not simply about the absence of conflict but about actively creating a harmonious society based on education, dialogue, and mutual respect.*

In recent years, irenicism has once again attracted scholarly attention across a variety of disciplines. In political philosophy and international relations, Fulvia Giachetti<sup>1</sup> has examined “marginalist” irenicism—the belief in peace through market mechanisms—in the context of ongoing global conflicts, while Costas M. Constantinou<sup>2</sup> has explored the idea of making peace with nature as part of a broader ecological diplomacy. Historical studies have also revisited the early modern roots of the concept, such as David H. Sacks’s<sup>3</sup> analysis of Francis Bacon’s apocalyptic irenicism and Mariusz Ptasiński’s<sup>4</sup> work on the Sandomierz Consensus as an expression of confessional compromise. In theology and ecumenical studies, authors like Innocent Smith,<sup>5</sup> Viorel Coman,<sup>6</sup> and Jeremy

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<sup>1</sup> See Fulvia Giachetti, “The Global Market and the War: Origins, Development, and Effectiveness of Marginalist Irenicism,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 51, no. 4 (2025): 648–57.

<sup>2</sup> See Costas Constantinou and Eleni Christodoulou, “On Making Peace with Nature: Visions and Challenges towards an Ecological Diplomacy,” *Review of International Studies* 50, no. 3 (2024): 579–99.

<sup>3</sup> See David H. Sacks, “On Mending the Peace of the World: Sir Francis Bacon’s Apocalyptic Irenicism,” *New Global Studies* 16 no. 2 (2022): 193–214.

<sup>4</sup> See Mariusz Ptasiński, “Was a Confessional Agreement in Early Modern Europe Possible? The Sandomierz Consensus (1570) as a Case of Polish-Lithuanian Irenicism,” *Religions* 13, no. 3 (2022): article number 994.

<sup>5</sup> See Innocent Smith, “Liturgical Irenicism and the Unity of the Church,” *New Blackfriars* 96, no. 1061 (2024): 3–11.

<sup>6</sup> See Viorel Coman, “Receptive Ecumenism as a Way Forward: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): article number 1297.

Morris<sup>7</sup> have developed new practical approaches—ranging from liturgical irenicism to receptive ecumenism—while others, such as Étienne Fouilloux,<sup>8</sup> have examined the historical criticism of “imprudent” irenicism by the Catholic Church. Even within the history of philosophy, new readings of John Locke by Yasuhiko Tomida<sup>9</sup> consider and cover the ways in which irenic priorities shaped theological and political thought. This growing body of literature underlines that irenicism, while historically rooted, continues to function as a dynamic category for analyzing peace-related discourse in both religious and secular contexts.<sup>10</sup>

The introductory section of this study focuses on the general issues of irenicism: the pursuit of reconciliation and harmony among individuals, nations, and religious groups. Discussions about irenicism tend to resurface with urgency in times when people are directly threatened by violence, war, or other forms of conflict. Although there are dozens of ongoing conflicts worldwide, people usually engage only with those that personally affect them or take place in their immediate surroundings. Historically, conflicts have not only been resolved but also reflected upon and depicted in artistic expression, especially in literature. This demonstrates that what is considered legitimate within traditions, law, and jurisdiction is not always in alignment with widely accepted ethical values or broader principles of justice and humanism.

Following this introduction, which aims to highlight the non-obviousness of irenicism, the study focuses on two specific historical examples of peace efforts. The first example comes from the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, when faith in human reason, the capacity for knowledge, and self-understanding in relation to nature was growing. The second example comes from the Baroque age of acute Catholic–Protestant conflict, when the questions of interconfessional reunion and tolerance came to the fore, as attested to by the irenic projects Jan Amos Comenius; however, importantly, these remained not more than mere projects for centuries.

Both cases inspire deeper insights and encourage broader conclusion, among them that in times of war and conflict, which naturally spread violence, the humanistic aspirations and the ethical dimension of the public debate must never be abandoned. The study of irenicism allows us to better understand that

<sup>7</sup> See Jeremy Morris, “Imaginative Ecumenism: Rethinking the Paradigm from an English Anglican Perspective,” *Religions* 14, no. 10 (2023): article number 1410.

<sup>8</sup> See Étienne Fouilloux, “The Holy Office’s File on the Encyclical *Humani Generis*,” *Journal of Modern and Contemporary Christianity* 3, no. 1 (2024): 115–32.

<sup>9</sup> See Yasuhiko Tomida, *Locke, Berkeley, Kant: From a Naturalistic Point of View*, (Baden-Baden: Georg Olms Verlag, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Even this selective overview shows that a wide range of disciplines, such as geopolitics, history, the history of mentalities, theology, and philosophy, recently engaged with the concept of irenicism.

the pursuit of peace is not a given, but a conscious and often difficult a choice; in fact, it is a choice that requires not only moral integrity, but also an ability to overcome deeply ingrained differences between peoples and cultures.

#### ON THE ISSUES OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PROGRESS, PEACE, AND CONFLICT

The philosophical path of irenicism, which seeks to unite divergent points of view in a manner of reason, has a long and winding history. The meaning and worth of irenicism are relative to the time and place in which such ideas are created. Most works of art and literature portray violence rather than peace, making us reevaluate our social ideals and call into question the enduring notion of “progress,” especially considering today’s global problems.

Darwinism, with its principles of natural selection and adaptation, preserves its essential theoretical underpinning, though its conception of “progress” is widely questioned. A linear view of progress, critics claim, can cause environmental and societal problems. The Soviet Union acts as an example of how power structures play a role and may misuse irenicism for their own goals. Military interventions in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Afghanistan are all examples of how theoretically “peaceful” rhetoric was used by the Soviet Union as a political tactic and provide an excellent illustration of how irenicism may be perverted for political ends. It is thus indispensable that initiatives for peace and harmony be critically appraised, which might be considered as the fundamental aspect of irenicism in contemporary political and historical contexts.

Conflict resolution and social peace can both benefit from the overarching structure provided by irenic ideals. Such ideas have broad applicability, from the “world,” so to speak, of international politics, to that of personal relationships. Irencism emphasizes the consequence of diplomacy at the level of world politics and promotes social justice and tolerance at the national level. In personal life, irenicism encourages techniques, such as attentive listening, empathy, and open discussion.

Modern ecumenism in turn generally fosters building and expanding interpersonal communication and unity among diverse branches of Christianity and, in some cases, also other faiths. As such, ecumenism is congruent with the irenic concepts that promote mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. However, one needs to note that religious and philosophical interpretations of irenicism face the same challenges of context and historicity as any other tradition does. A recourse to ethics, epistemology, and theology might then be helpful for modern irenicism in its effort to and eliminate irrational elements from its theoretical body.

Due to their inherent ambiguity, philosophical and religious texts can be used in a variety of contexts if irenic principles are applied. One alternative viewpoint comes from literary and artistic criticism, which may examine the effects of promoting peace and concord in different social and political circumstances. Passages on peace and conflict which can be found in texts of ancient cultures and in the Bible often give rise to questions concerning their interpretations.

Culture	Peace and Harmony	War and Conflict
Egyptian	Ma'at symbolizes truth, order, balance, and harmony in the universe.	Wars seen as necessary for maintaining Ma'at. Pharaohs as divine figures upholding Ma'at.
Mesopotamian	Peace associated with fertility and prosperity. Seen as a divine gift.	Wars and conflicts viewed as punishments from gods or as a result of cosmic struggle.
Chinese	Harmony and balance in Confucianism and Taoism. Yin and Yang as symbols of balance.	War seen as inevitable but undesirable. <i>The Art of War</i> by Sun Tzu explores efficient warfare.
Indian	Peace (Shanti) is key in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Dharma and Nirvana as paths to peace.	War and conflict seen as a result of karma. Mahabharata explores ethics in war.
Greek	Harmony as a fundamental principle of the universe. Eudaimonia as the goal of ethical life.	War as a common part of life but also a subject of philosophical inquiry (e.g., in the <i>Iliad</i> ).
Roman	Pax Romana as an ideal. Justitia (justice) and Aequitas (equity) as key values.	War as a means of expansion and maintaining the empire. Works on military strategy (e.g., by Vegetius).
Mediterranean /European	Peace, love, and forgiveness in the Christian tradition.	Concept of a "just war" in Christian theology. War seen as inevitable but undesirable.

For instance, certain conflicts in biblical texts are seen as divine interventions or parts of God's plan. Irenicism then highlights and displays the need for a contextual approach when interpreting such texts. In the New Testament, we find the teachings of Jesus that endorse the notions of peace and justice. This contextual outlook aligns with the modern methods of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, which recommend a critical reading of texts.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion in more general terms, see Libor P a v e r a, "Nesamozřejmost irénismu: K metodologické povaze zkoumaného jevu," *Slavica Litteraria* 26, no. 2 (2023): 7–13.

## THE IMAGE OF TWO PEACE PLANS IN OLD CZECH LITERATURE

Coincidentally, the two peace plans of global and epochal significance are linked to personalities of Czech origin who were constantly “on the move.” In the late 15th century, sir Václav Šašek of Bříkov travelled with an expedition, exploring the western countries of Europe, all the way to the then-known edge of the world, Cape Finisterre (Finis Terrae). In the belief of the era, it truly was the end (edge) of the inhabitable world, at least before the voyages of Columbus and the discovery of new lands.<sup>12</sup>

Also Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), for distinct reasons, was constantly travelling throughout European countries. Comenius, a pioneer in fields such as education, tolerance, and peace promotion, found himself in exile following the expulsion of Protestants from Bohemia in 1626 and, soon after, in 1627, from Moravia. He left his hometown, first staying in the Polish town of Leszno (to where he returned three times), and thereafter traveling to several European nations such as England, Transylvania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, and others. He promoted his ideas on education wherever he went and actively participated in establishing educational policies, not infrequently in particular schools. He pursued what he called a comprehensive reform of Christendom (“panorthosis”), i.e., an irenic program of interconfessional reunion together with the renewal of schools and civic life. During his travels, he both studied local confessional settlements and lobbied rulers and scholars to adopt these reforms. Toward the conclusion of his life, he was able to compile his views into a detailed treatise. Over time, he made the effort so that his book would reach the powers of his day, imploring them to try to better the world in all aspects. His principal focus was a global knowledge project that he felt would eventually bring mankind tolerance, peace, and a life free of destructive conflicts, i.e., one which directly embraced harmony and irenicism.

Even in historical records dating back to the medieval period, we can find examples of voyages that were not only driven by religious, political or educational goals, but also having military and diplomatic motives. Many accounts of such chivalric journeys, as well as brief mentions of foreign lands have been preserved in various sources, such as the St. Vitus fragment of the *Alexandreis* [Staročeská Alexandreida],<sup>13</sup> the Chronicle of the so-called Dalimil [Kronika

<sup>12</sup> For an insightful discussion of 15th century travels from the Czech lands to Western Europe, see Rudolf Urbánek, *Ve službách Jiříka krále: Deníky panoše Jaroslava a Václava Šaška z Bříkova* (Praha: Evropský literární klub, 1940).

<sup>13</sup> See *Rytířské srdce majíce. Česká rytířská epika 14. století*, eds. Eduard Petrů and Dagmar Marečková (Praha: Odeon, 1984).

tak řečeného Dalimila],<sup>14</sup> as well as in romantically tinged chivalric tales of Dietrich of Bern [Jetřich Berúnský], Ernest [Vévoda Arnošt], Tandarias and Floribella [Tandariáš a Floribella],<sup>15</sup> among others. The quest embarked upon a noble hero was often the central motif and driving force in secular chivalric epics. Whereas journeys to the afterlife (to the “anti-world”) described in eschatological works aimed to strengthen the reader’s faith in life after death, the journeys of medieval knights sought to validate the primary attributes characterizing a knight moral integrity, bravery, loyalty, and a sense of justice). The settings for such heroic legendary expeditions were often Eastern lands, but the travelers usually also traversed unknown and often geographically unspecified territories.

Quite different in nature, though, was the case of a journey undertaken by the delegation led by Antoine Marin of Grenoble and Albrecht Kostka of Postupice. They represented the interests of the “Hussite” king George of Poděbrady (1420–1471), the king of the “dual people” (from 1458), a man of moderate views who sought peaceful coexistence between the Utraquist majority (who demanded Communion “in both kinds,” i.e., *sub utraque speciae*) and the Catholic minority in the Czech lands. As is well known, he was the first king elected by a diet (the assembly of estates including representatives of the Czech nobility and burghers) that was sympathetic to Hussite ideology. The project king George initiated was primarily devised by leading lawyers and diplomats of his era, whom he consulted. The aim was to achieve general peace and cooperation among European countries, involving the Pope and his followers. It was clear that the objective entailed dismantling the existing medieval universalist system: the idea of creating a community of independent and mutually equal European countries was a novelty; the concept found both its proponents and opponents.<sup>16</sup>

Many historians hold that, in proposing in 1462–64 “The Treaty on the Establishment of Peace throughout Christendom,” King George of Poděbrady<sup>17</sup> was centuries ahead of his time: he sought to preserve the unity of Europe by creating a law-based confederation of Christian rulers for arbitration and mu-

<sup>14</sup> See *Staročeská kronika tak řečeného Dalimila: vydání textu a veškerého textového materiálu*, vols. 1–2, eds. Jiří Daňhelka et al. (Praha: Academia, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> See *Alexandreida*, ed. Václav Vážný (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd, 1963).

<sup>16</sup> See František Šmahel, *Husitská revoluce*, vols. 1–4 (Praha: Historický ústav AVČR, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> For King George’s plan (1462–64) and its design (arbitration, common diet, mutual defense against the Turks), see *A Fifteenth-Century Plan for World Peace, 1462–1464: Tractatus pacis toti Christianitati fiendae*, with English translation by Ivo Dvořák, ed. Jiří Kejř (Bloomington: Indiana University); *Max Planck Encyclopedia of International Procedural Law*, s.v. “Treaty on the Establishment of Peace Throughout Christendom (1464)” (by Frederik Dhondt), Oxford Public International Law, <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law-mpeipro/e3721.013.3721/law-mpeipro-e3721>.



tual defense, above all against the mounting Ottoman pressure from the East (a permanent union of Christian states, multilateral agreements as opposed to bilateral ones, resolution of conflicts solely via peaceful methods, international conferences similar to a parliament). In the twentieth century, similar aims were pursued by the Covenant of the League of Nations (1919) and later by the Charter of the United Nations (1945), both of which explicitly commit states to maintaining international peace and security and to developing friendly relations among nations. Already during the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson's "Fourteen Points" supplied the immediate political program that culminated in the League.

The era was not favorable to such projects. On the one hand, there was a lingering perception in Europe that the Hussites were a "boil" on the body of Christendom. On the other hand, George of Poděbrady's project represented anti-systemic changes that might not find their expected, or wished for, understanding from the Pope, the Roman Curia, and certain European rulers and magnates.<sup>18</sup>

The first mission within the project, which began in 1462 and ended in 1464, did not yield significant results. However, George of Poděbrady did not give up. He organized the second journey to Western Europe, led by Jaroslav Lev of Rožmitál, the brother of George's second wife, Johanna of Rožmitál, who came from a Catholic family. The journey in question, which lasted from 1465 to 1467, was described in literary accounts by Václav Šásek of Bířkov<sup>19</sup> and the financier Gabriel Tetzl.<sup>20</sup> Each, however, had different objectives in mind and described the journey differently, their respective education and mental horizons being not without significance.<sup>21</sup>

George of Poděbrady was a discerning man who sought the company of distinguished personages in the fields of religion, European legal science, economics, and diplomacy. Among them was Martin Mayr (Mair), believed to have come from Heidelberg. He was a prominent figure in the fields of legal science and diplomacy during the reign of Emperor Frederick III, for whom he crafted a unification plan for the Holy Roman Empire. Far more significantly associated with the activities of George of Poděbrady was the already-mentioned Antonio Marini from Grenoble.

<sup>18</sup> See P i u s II et al., *Historia Bohemica = Historie česká* (Praha: KLP-Koniasch Latin Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Both travelers left behind descriptions about their journeys to Western Europe; in their time remaining unprinted. These can be found in a modern edition. See *Ve službách Jiříka krále: Deníky panoše Jaroslava a Václava Šáska z Bířkova*, ed. Rudolf Urbánek (Praha: Evropský literární klub, 1940).

<sup>20</sup> *Cestovní deník Lva z Rožmitálu a na Blatné 1465–1467*, ed. Lenka Libalová (Olomouc: Monse, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> For more on the Czech "Hussite" King George of Poděbrady, see Petr Č o r n e j, *Český stát v době jagellonské* (Praha: Paseka, 2012).

From the travelogue of Václav Šašek of Bírkov, however, the reader learns little or almost nothing about Marini's innovative project. This was due to the personality of Šašek of Bírkov, on the one hand (there are still exciting discussions about that historical figure and his name), but also the intention of King George of Poděbrady, on the other. In those tense times, the king avoided drawing attention to the actual nature of his plans; therefore, he did not send the mission on a diplomatic and political journey but framed it as a knightly journey. Indeed, Šašek describes all European events through the eyes of the lower nobility, from the perspective of a knight. Among other things, his travelogue indicates that knighthood in European society was still alive, or rather, was experiencing the twilight of its prominence. Based on Šašek of Bírkov's travel notes, one can form an idea of his spiritual horizons, essentially the horizons of a late medieval knight in general, and get an insight into the breadth of his education, his interests, his ability to grasp the geopolitical situation of the time, his view of fact and fiction during that transitional period and his ability to distinguish between them.

What his travelogue reflected, on the other hand, is the issue of Czech people in Western Europe and their negative perception by the general West European population. Typically, Czech residents were understood in the spirit of the Latin "sine fide, sine bonis moribus" ("without faith and with no good values"),<sup>22</sup> and they were often physically attacked (in Old Czech, the term "kaceřování" was used). It was the time when King George of Poděbrady not only was involved in disputes with Pope Pius II, who annulled the Compacts (partial gains of the Hussite wars, a unique compromise, of which there was no other example in Europe, where the Council of Basel legitimized the dual faith among people in Bohemia and Moravia, namely Catholics alongside Utraquist Hussites), but also feared the Ottoman Turks as potential enemy and therefore wanted to participate in an anti-Turkish international coalition. He was oriented primarily towards France, where, even before the death of Charles VII, a plan for a league against the Turks was being prepared. The new king, Louis XI, however, was not keen to get involved in the matter and, according to Šašek of Bírkov, he avoided negotiations with the embassy of King George of Poděbrady. Instead of coming to serious diplomatic meetings, the king focused on entertainment: "And only then (in Amiens) were we told where the French king was, because before no one knew anything, and that was because the king never stayed long in one place and preferred to go hunting and hunted etc."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> [Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini], "The Bohemian Chronicle of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini" [Historia Bohemica], in *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum*, vol. 7 (trial unpaginated proof; traditionally cited as FRB VII), ed. Josef Emler (Prague: Nadání Františka Palackého, 62–63).

<sup>23</sup> "Deník panoše Jaroslava," in *Jak staří Čechové poznávali svět: Výbor ze starších českých cestopisů 14.–17. století*, ed. Zdeňka Tichá (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1985), 81. Unless stated otherwise, the translations are mine.



Šašek of Bířkov could only observe what was within the intellectual horizons of a medieval knight. He paid little attention to doctrinal or philosophical questions. Nevertheless, he was already able to write down his experiences and give them a sort-of artistic form. His style is skillful, with a varied pace, alternating between a fast narrative and a slow one, but he typically focuses on detail; it is only occasionally that his narrative speeds up and resembles a news brief. One can only guess that the purpose of his travelogue was precisely the focus on detail: thus, Šašek of Bířkov did not have to address the real reason for the mission. Still, travel writers of later periods, especially those of the Renaissance, such as Bedřich of Donín, who went on his journey to Western Europe over than a hundred years later, were far better at handling artistic time.<sup>24</sup>

The travelogue written by Šašek of Bířkov comes from a time when knighthood, along with tournaments and festivities it involved, was still very much alive in Europe. This is evidenced by his rather lengthy passages on knightly contests, prowess, strength, and combat. Knighthood and the entire culture associated with it were an integral part of the life of the nobility, including its lower ranks. At first sight, one would believe reasoning provided by Šašek for their journey to Western Europe, i.e., a journey of knights solely intending to bring new modes of behavior and more sophisticated cultural patterns to the Czech kingdom and to visit most important pilgrimage sites abroad, even though the era of knights, so to speak, was almost over (soon, they would be subjected to parody and irony from Cervantes in his novel about Don Quijote). Thus, it is very clear that their actual objective was signing the peace charter by King George of Poděbrady.

Unfortunately, the peace project (“tractatus pacis”) was not signed and, obviously, the potential signatories had good reason not to do it. However, this does not change the fact that one of the first peace plans for European countries was conceived during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, in the tumultuous time of the Hussite wars. Those wars preceded further conflicts between different religions in the following centuries, particularly the Thirty Years’ War.

In the latter half of the 17th century, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), the already-mentioned advocate of education, tolerance, and peace, sought to address scholars and, particularly, the world of political representation through the extensive treatise *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica ad genus humanum, ante alios vero ad eruditos, religiosos, potentes Europae*.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See *Cestopis Bedřicha z Donína*, ed. Antonín Grund (Praha: Melantrich, 1940).

<sup>25</sup> See Ioannes Amos Comenius, *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica. Editio princeps. Tomus I: Panegesium, Panaugium, Pansophiam continens*, eds. Jaromír Červenka and Vlasta T. Miškovská-Kozáková (Pragae: Academia, 1966), Ioannes Amos Comenius, *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica. Editio princeps. Tomus II: Pampaediam*,

Comenius began writing the treatise in 1645 and continued his work on it until the end of his life.

Numerous monographs have been published on Comenius: some attribute special significance to the fact that his life was filled with upheavals, while others focus on his interest in didactics (his agenda for the educational policy in various European countries and the concept of pansophy he developed). Still others concentrate instead on his theological views advocating for tolerance not only in religion but also among various ethnicities and nations, leading the concepts that led Comenius in the last period of his creative journey to contemplate irenicism as a path towards world peace. The treatise *De rerum humanarum...* is the best testimony to Comenius's efforts to promote peace. However, Comenius's commitment to the cause of world peace is not universally known, primarily due to the fact that the full text of his treatise has been available to readers for no more than a hundred years.

Comenius began his professional career in Přerov and Fulnek within the German Brethren congregation, and it was there that he first became aware of the decline in morals among the common people as well as the middle and upper classes; the decline was manifested primarily by religious intolerance. Religious conflicts in question, as is well known, reached their apex during the Thirty Years' War, in which, figuratively speaking, the forces of the Catholic and Protestant worlds of the time clashed. Comenius was a Moravian Brother (even serving as a bishop of the Unity of the Brethren), and thus was a member of the Protestant sector of the religious spectrum. He always strived for harmony and, wherever possible, non-conflictual solutions to problems, which undoubtedly reflected his humanistic education at the excellent German universities of Herborn and Heidelberg. His main authority was the Holy Scripture. He considered himself primarily a theologian, not an educator, as he is usually characterized in contemporary scholarly literature.<sup>26</sup>

In times of heightened conflict, in particular during the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which did not restore the *status quo* of before the Thirty Years' War, as Comenius originally intended, he considered it important to discuss—in a voluminous, synthetically and systematically conceived treatise—the principles of a correct, peaceful functioning of the world. The treatise was preceded by

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*Panglottiam, Panorthosiam, Pannuthesiam necnon Lexicon reale pansophicum continens*, eds. Jaromír Červenka and Vlasta T. Miškovská-Kozáková (Pragae: Academia, 1966). For a complete Czech translation, see: Jan Amos Komenský, *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských*, vols. 1–3, trans. Jan Kalivoda et al. (Prague: Svoboda, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> The literature on Comenius is well summarized in the *Lexikon české literatury*, which contains references to both Czech and foreign works. See *Lexikon české literatury*, s.v. "Jan Amos Komenský" (by Emil Pražák), eds. Vladimír Forst et al., vol. 2, part 2: K–L (Praha: Academia, 1993), 812–20.

his so-called corrective writings. His first apparent attempt to understand the world and its disorders was made in the *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce* (*Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart*).<sup>27</sup> In this work, Comenius, in the guise of a pilgrim, walks through the city (symbolizing the world) and examines its various streets and, in the streets, the different social classes, characterizes the shortcomings and faults of the world at large, and of the representatives of different professions and people, and seeks ways to rectify their conduct. While the *Labyrint*..., written at the time when Comenius, after the tragic death of his wife and children, sought consolation primarily in his own soul, is more of a spiritual nature, his *De rerum humanarum*... reaches outward, towards the world around him.

In *De rerum humanarum*... he appealed to the elites of the world (the emperors, kings, and scholars) to commit themselves to improving its state. He believed that in handing them his elaborate treatise on ways to better the state of human affairs, he gave them a very potent tool to impose order, amend the world, and achieve peace.

The treatise on which Comenius (as he himself tells the reader)<sup>28</sup> worked for the last twenty five years of his life—alongside his other pedagogical, pansophic, and irenic texts—unfortunately burned in the fire of the Polish town of Leszno in 1656. Not only the fair copy of *De rerum humanarum*... was destroyed by the fire, but also other works (e.g., the Czech dictionary *Thesaurus*) awaiting their turn to be published in print.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Comenius succeeded in completing the treatise before his death, and he made his son Daniel and the printer Christian Vladislav Nigrin promise him that the work would be printed. The reasons why, against Comenius's wish the work was not published, and later published in fragments only, were various, not least among them the doctrinal ones (as is known, Comenius succumbed to chiliasm and also believed in numerous prophecies throughout

<sup>27</sup> "The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart" is an allegorical work written in early modern (Baroque) Czech. Comenius completed it in manuscript in 1623 (the earliest title reads "Labyrint světa a lusthauz srdce," with a dedication to Charles the Elder of Žerotín). He then reworked the text several times: the first printed edition appeared in 1631, probably at Pirna, and a second, authorially expanded edition followed in Amsterdam in 1663, among other things augmenting Chapter 9 with a depiction of sea travel based on Comenius's later journey to England.

<sup>28</sup> See Josef B r a m b o r a, *Knižní dílo Jana Amose Komenského. Studie bibliografická* (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1957). See also Zdeněk P o k o r n ý, *Bibliography of Comeniana in Book Form 1945–1990 (with an Outline of Post-War Comeniology)* (Praha: Ústav školských informací, 1992). The latter publication is the most commonly used survey of Comenius's printed oeuvre.

<sup>29</sup> In his letter, usually cited as "Ad Montanum," of December 10, 1661, Comenius recapitulates his works and sets out the plan and scope of his dictionary. See J. Comenius Petro Montano S., in: Jan Amos K o m e n s k ý, *Jana Amosa Komenského korespondence*, ed. Adolf B. Patera (Praha: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa, 1892), 233–45.

his life, e.g., in those of Nicholas Drabik, Christina Poniatowska, etc.). Thus, *De rerum humanarum...* fell into oblivion and the world was reminded of it only in 1935 by the Ukrainian Slavist Dmitro Chyzhevskiy.<sup>30</sup>

Comenius divided the General Consultation into seven books. This choice does not reflect a seven-fold division of “all sciences” by Aristotle; rather, it echoes the medieval prestige of the seven liberal arts (the trivium and the quadrivium), a scheme that crystallized in late antiquity, assembled in Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* and transmitted by Boethius, Cassiodorus (*Institutiones*, II), and Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae*, I–II). Comenius, trained in the humanist-Aristotelian curriculum, also invests three (the Trinity) and seven (completeness) with symbolic meaning, structuring the work as General Consultation—Own System—Specific Initiatives:<sup>31</sup> (1) Panegersia (Universal Awakening), (2) Panaugia (Universal Light), (3) Pansophia (Universal Knowledge), (4) Pampaedia (Universal Education), (5) Panglottia (Universal Language), (6) Panorthosia (Universal Rectification of Affairs), (7) Pannuthesia (Universal Encouragement).

Comenius begins his treatise with the general presumption that human affairs are corrupt but not completely destroyed. He lists numerous examples of how one can approach their amendment. For instance, by using the analogy of malfunctioning clocks, Comenius suggests that they would be fixed only if they became useful to their owners. He employs, as in his other didactic works, the method of analogy (Comenius’s “syncritical method,” not to be confused with the “syncretic” one).<sup>32</sup> According to Comenius, it is worthwhile

<sup>30</sup> See Dmitrij Tschizewskij, “Wie ich die Handschriften der Pansophie fand,” in *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 2, *Bohemica* (München: Fink, 1972), 215–23. The author describes his discovery of the *Consultatio* manuscripts in the library of the Francke Foundations in Halle in 1934–35.

<sup>31</sup> Our translation of Comenius’ Latin to English.

<sup>32</sup> By syncritical method (lat. *methodus syncritica*), Comenius meant a method of visual instruction based on observation and comparison. The method consists in the teacher showing the student specific facts from nature which can be related, by way of analogy, to phenomena observable in a human society. It combines sensory and rational cognition and is grounded in the conviction that natural and social phenomena form one, divinely created order. Comenius himself repeatedly compares the beehive to human society in the *Janua linguarum reserata*, and especially in its stage adaptation *Schola ludus*, where the character Apiarius (the Beekeeper) appears and the hive is presented as a model of an organized community (act 2, scene 3) (see Joannes Amos Comenius, *Schola ludens*, in Comenius, *Opera didactica omnia*, vol. 2, parts 3–4 (Amsterdam: Impensis d. Laurentii de Geer, 1657; phototype: Prague: In aedibus Academiae Scientiarum Bohemoslovenicae, 1957), 887–88. The work of different kinds of bees (the workers, the drones, the queen) can be compared to the activities of various groups of people and individuals. Moreover, the shape of the honeycombs can also be used to teach geometric forms and principles. Evidence of Jan Amos Comenius’s interest in bees and apiculture is recorded by the Fulnek burgher and chronicler Felix Jaschke (1756–1831), whose extensive notes survive in manuscript and are used by scholars reconstructing Comenius’s Fulnek years. See Jaroslav Plesköt, *Fulnecké intermezzo Jana Amosa Komenského* (Ostrava: Profil, 1970); Jaroslav Plesköt, *Jan Amos Komenský’s Years in Fulnek* (Prague, Státní Pedagogické Nakladatelství, 1972).

to correct even an individual person. It is essential to understand the purpose of the uncorrupted thing, the reasons why it became corrupted, and the means for its correction.

During Comenius's lifetime, only "Panegersia" (with a preface) and "Pan-augia" were published. However, neither the author's or the printer's name, nor the place or year of publication were mentioned. The preface, beginning with the address "Europae lumina, viri docti, pii, eminentes, salvete" ("Greetings to the lights of Europe, learned, pious, and eminent men"<sup>33</sup>), contains a dedication of this work to the foremost men in Europe, requesting their support in the universal reform work for the religious and moral upliftment of the world. By "the Consultation" Comenius means his General Consultation on the Improvement of All Things Human (*De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica*), a multi-part blueprint for the universal reform of knowledge, education, language, and church and civic life. He presents this undertaking as aiming at the highest good: though beyond human powers, it must nevertheless be attempted out of love for humankind. He intends to accomplish this through a work in seven parts. Comenius then provides an outline of the entire work and elaborates in detail how he intends to achieve his proposed goal. He asks scholars for an impartial assessment of the work and appeals to spiritual and other leaders to help both with their work and morally to achieve the goal of whose general benefit he is firmly convinced.

There is no doubt that Comenius was aware of the peace efforts in utopian literature of the previous era<sup>34</sup> as well as in that of his own time (e.g., David Pareus, Heinrich Alsted or John Dury),<sup>35</sup> and of the peace efforts among his domestic, national predecessors. He was undoubtedly aware that not only the Czech Reformation (e.g., George of Poděbrady) but also the Czech humanist tradition (e.g., Ctibor Tovačovský of Cimburk) was directly intertwined with efforts towards irenicism and also a certain type of ecumenism: efforts to

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Thus, in his view, the syncritical method is a way of leading the student toward understanding the unity of the world, the interconnectedness of nature and society, and moral knowledge.

<sup>33</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, the translations are mine.

<sup>34</sup> See More, Thomas. *Utopia*, translated by Robert M. Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). – Campanella, Tommaso. *The City of the Sun*, translated by James M. Murray. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> The most direct irenic predecessor for Comenius was David Pareus (1548–1622), a theorist of interconfessional rapprochement and author of, e.g. *Irenicum sive de unione et Synodo Evangelicorum concilianda: Liber votivus paci ecclesiae* (Heidelberg: Impensis Jonae Rosae: 1614–1615). For a pansophic and encyclopedic underpinning for irenicism see Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Encyclopaedia, septem tomis distincta* (Herborn: Herbornae Nassoviorum, 1630; From the latter work, Comenius drew the intellectual infrastructure for the idea unifying through ordered knowledge and education. See also John Dury, *Irenicum... de viis quaerendae & constituendae inter Ecclesias Evangelicas religiosae pacis* (London: n.d., 1654).

unite various religions and confessions. Comenius saw religious reconciliation as a kind of precursor to peace and harmony among nations. In those days, the concept of a just war was often associated with peace aspirations during both the Hussite and the humanist periods. During his three stays in Leszno, Poland, which became a center for the Bohemian Brethren in the 17th century, Comenius undoubtedly gained awareness of the ideas of peace developed in the Polish environment in the 16th and 17th centuries. While some thinkers addressed the problem from a political perspective, others viewed peace efforts from legal positions. Comenius, as a social thinker, approached it primarily from the Christian ones.

Being an advocate of the irenic movement does not necessarily mean being a pacifist. The conception of an ideal as seen from today's perspective does not have to be identical with the past conception of an ideal; this is precisely the case with Comenius's view of an ideal world. The theory of a just war has a long and complex history and evolved over time. It assumes that only under certain conditions can war be morally justifiable. This theory takes a middle ground between the realist tradition, which considers morality irrelevant and even dangerous in matters of life and death faced by political communities, and pacifism, which rejects war under any conditions. The just war tradition is a theory of comparative justice applied to considerations of war and intervention. To better understand its complexities and the characteristic form of moral reasoning that enters into the just war tradition, it is important to focus on specific aspects of this theory in a historical overview of the just war tradition and its development over time, highlighting its remarkable longevity. Such an overview also identifies some key elements and questions in the just war theory as a moral theory; such an overview also begs the question of what it means to present the just war theory as "non-ideal."

The theory of a just war is a doctrine of military ethics that seeks to ensure that war is morally justifiable based on a series of criteria, all of which must be met for a war to be considered just. These criteria are divided into two groups: *ius ad bellum* (a right to war) and *ius in bello* (a right in war).<sup>36</sup> The idea of a just war reemerged during the Czech Reformation and continued in the humanist tradition. At that time, the question of whether a Christian could fight in a war without committing a sin was examined, being a topic that significantly influenced the religious and political discourses of the time.

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<sup>36</sup> See Mark Evans, "Moral Theory and the Idea of a Just War," in *Just War Theory: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Mark Evans (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 1–22; Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Third Annual Grotius Lecture: Just War and Humanitarian Intervention," *American University International Law Review* 17, no. 1 (2001–2002): 1–25; Scott A. Silverstone, *Just War Theory*, Oxford Bibliographies, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0050.xml>.



A 15th-century thinker Petr Chelčický, founder of the Czech tradition of peace and tolerance, was entirely against war and, opposing the most radical factions of the Hussite tradition, promoted reconciliation through spiritual struggle. However, from the time of Chelčický to that of Comenius, the views on war were subject to change, both as a result of the discussions about whether the use of the sword was acceptable in the fight against the Antichrist and due to the transformations in the social composition of the Unity of the Brethren (gradually, during the 16th century, the Unity was joined by the bourgeoisie and the nobility, alongside the common people). As a result, the strictly non-violent spirit gave way to active struggle.

The lifetimes of Comenius and Chelčický are separated by almost two centuries. Yet, there is a clear genetic continuity in Comenius's opposition to the Pope and the Emperor, similar to Chelčický's approach. Chelčický viewed the Pope and the Emperor as two great whales tearing the net of the Church of St. Peter. Where Chelčický advocated for spiritual struggle, Comenius did not object to just war against both the Pope and the Habsburg Emperors. According to Comenius, the Pope and the Habsburg representatives allowed his homeland and the Church he represented in exile to be violated.<sup>37</sup>

For Comenius, a just war is a unique category, seemingly without beginning or end, justified only by the struggle against the oppressors of free humanity and the pursuit of a "better future" in a peaceful era. In other words, if weapons are used in defense of law and justice, it is not in contradiction with peaceful efforts and other irenic endeavors.<sup>38</sup>

Comenius's irenic efforts take on a twofold dimension. On the one hand, through his concept of education, essentially that of an individual's learning throughout his or her life from the "informatarium of the mother's school"

<sup>37</sup> Eduard Petrů devoted his entire life to the study of the life, works, and interpretation of Chelčický's writings, and he also compiled a bibliography of Chelčický's works and of the literature about him. His engagement with Chelčický was both editorial (preparing and publishing critical editions of his texts) and interpretative (making in-depth analyses of his thought). See Eduard Petrů, *Soupis díla Petra Chelčického a literatury o něm* (Praha: SPN, 1957).

<sup>38</sup> "According to natural law it is permitted to repel force by force ... and one must, in all things, seek to attain one's end by negotiation rather than by weapons ... In such a case ... an honourable war is to be preferred to a shameful peace." Jan Amos Komenský, *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských* (Praha: Svoboda, 1992), vol. 2, 241: "The purpose of royal government is to maintain nations in peace... yet at times it happens that [peace] cannot be achieved otherwise than by the force of arms." Ibidem, 240. He also advocated the settlement of disputes by orderly judicial process: "The beginning and the end of war are not in the power of the same person" (Ibidem, 240); see Jan Amos Komenský, *Unum necessarium – Jedno nezbytné* (Prague: Kalich, 1999), 131) and called for disarmament and redirecting instruments of war to peaceful uses ("Let guns be used against wild beasts ... let cannon be cast into bells" (Komenský, *Obecná porada*, vol. 3, 406).

(a paraphrased title of Comenius' text)<sup>39</sup> to his idea of the use of knowledge, skills, and other competencies in practical life, he wishes to establish tolerance and worldwide peace on all continents. On the other hand, Comenius was troubled by the present, the times in which he and his fellow believers in the Unity happened to live, and he did not oppose fighting against injustice or those responsible for it.

Until the end of the Thirty Years' War, Comenius focused primarily on humanistic education, seeking for methods to develop the human potential. Later, however, his writings began to shift thematically toward utilizing education for peace. It was an undoubtedly a unique form of education, which, from today's perspective, may seem self-evident, but in Comenius's time, education and aspiration for peace were far from being taken for granted. Comenius's emphasis on educating his contemporaries for peace was undoubtedly influenced by events from his life: he lost his wife, children, his writings, drafts, and sources for planned works. Amidst the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War, he became an undesirable figure in the Catholic Czech lands. He did not perceive the world as a dignified, safe, or harmonious environment for the healthy development and growth of an individual.

While for a large part of his life, Comenius strove to educate *homo pansophicus*—a universal human being—he ultimately arrived at the realization that such an effort would be futile unless the concept in question embraced that of *homo politicus*. He understood that the world was governed by political actors and that public affairs significantly influenced individual human destinies.

## THE RIGHT TO A JUST WAR VERSUS ETHICS

At present, several world leaders are being brought before international criminal tribunals, facing charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes, the crime of aggression, or even genocide. Such acts fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and are prosecuted based on the Rome Statute. Supporting genocide, inciting aggression, or waging war against peace are not merely political actions; under international law, they are classified among the most serious crimes against the global community.

<sup>39</sup> "Informatorium of the Mother School (originally "A Systematic Treatise on the Education of Preschool Children") was written by Jan Amos Comenius in 1632 while in exile at Leszno (Poland). It is the earliest early-modern systematic treatise on the education of children up to six years of age. The manuscript was discovered at Leszno by Antonín Gindely in 1856 and the text was first published in print (in Czech) in 1858.

However, it should become a norm that armed conflicts are not waged, that that humanity no longer follows the path of revolutionary violence but chooses that of social evolution. This idea of a “spiritual struggle”, based on nonviolence and rejecting war as a tool of political resolution, was already advocated by one of the leading figures of Czech Protestant literature, namely, Petr Chelčický.

Chelčický’s pacifism and his concept of resisting evil without a recourse to violence not only influenced the Czech Reformation movement but also had a profound impact on world history. Among those inspired by his ideas was the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, who adopted them and further developed the concept of “resisting evil without violence,” which later became a cornerstones of the global nonviolent resistance movement, which has its apex in Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy.

The idea of a spiritual struggle as an alternative to physical violence remains relevant today as the world continues to face wars, aggression, and human rights violations. Chelčický and his followers remind us that the ethical power of nonviolent resistance can ultimately be stronger than the force of the sword.

Finding the ethical thread in the discussion of a just war and faith-based conflicts reveals a fundamental tension between legal and moral principles.

The right to a just war (*ius ad bellum*) has historically been used as a tool to legitimize conflicts fought for what was considered as “just causes,” often defined as the defense of faith, nation, or justice. In the medieval and early modern periods, including Comenius’s time, waging religious wars was perceived as tantamount to a moral duty to protect the “true faith” against heretics or oppression. However, such a legal framework did not always take into account broader ethical concerns, such as the suffering of the civilians, the long-term consequences of violence, or the availability of peaceful alternatives.

#### THE TENSION BETWEEN ETHICS AND LAW

The law is fundamentally a tool for organizing human relationships through rules and sanctions, while ethics demands that the rules of law adhere to higher moral principles. Even though legal frameworks may in some cases define a war as just (or not illegal), ethical reflection asks deeper questions: Is the war truly necessary? Have all peaceful options been exhausted? What will be its consequences for individuals, communities, and future generations?

Comenius was acutely aware of the tension between the law and ethics, which is evident in his understanding of a just war. While he did not reject the possibility of armed conflict in extreme circumstances (e.g., in cases of defense

against oppression), he emphasized that every conflict should also be judged from an ethical perspective. His vision of education for peace was not simply about the absence of conflict but about actively creating a harmonious society based on education, dialogue, and mutual respect.

From this viewpoint, the right to war is merely a tool, while ethics serves as the compass that guides its use. Comenius's thoughts invite us to continually ask: Are we truly on a path to a better world?

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#### ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Libor PAVERA, Visions of Peace and Reconciliation: The Role of Irenicism in Czech Christian Thought and Literature

DOI 10.12887/38-2025-4-152-19

The study initially focuses on general matters related to irenicism, examining its methodology in relation to harmony and peace on one side, and conflict, dispute, and war on the other. Using two specific examples from older Czech literature, the article shows how irenicism manifested itself in the Czech and European context during two different epochs, which are still in the process of being assessed in both Czech and general history. These periods are still in the process of being evaluated within the scope of both Czech history and broader historical narratives. The first example is the irenic efforts of the Czech "Hussite" King George of Poděbrady, as known from historical sources, but especially from literary ones. Travel writers of the time provided fairly accurate accounts, limited of course by their education and the breadth of their geopolitical and other knowledge about the world at that time. A somewhat unique perspective on the peaceful organization of the world is offered in the legacy of Jan Amos Komenský, a Czech Brethren, who developed programs for education, and advocated tolerance and peace. In his view, the problem of peace must not be perceived solely as a legal matter but should also be considered as an ethical one. While law provides the framework for determining what is permissible, ethics explores the broader moral implications of human actions, ensuring that peace efforts are not reduced to mere legal formalities, but engage deeply with principles of justice, dignity, and respect for humanity.

Keywords: irenicism, ethics, older Czech literature, the Hussite period, George of Poděbrady, Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius)

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Libor PAVERA – Wizje pokoju i pojednania. Rola irenizmu w czeskiej myśli i literaturze chrześcijańskiej

DOI 10.12887/38-2025-4-152-19

W pierwszej części studium skupia się na ogólnych zagadnieniach związanych z irenizmem, oraz z metodologią badania tego zjawiska w odniesieniu do harmonii i pokoju z jednej strony oraz konfliktu, sporu i wojny z drugiej. Następnie na dwóch konkretnych przykładach ze starszej literatury czeskiej pokazuje, jak irenizm objawił się w środowisku czeskim i europejskim w dwóch różnych epokach, które wciąż domagają się oceny w historii Czech i w historii powszechnej. Pierwszym przykładem są ireniczne dążenia czeskiego króla „husyckiego” Jerzego z Podiebradów, które znamy ze źródeł historycznych, ale przede wszystkim literackich. Opisy sporządzone przez podróżników były stosunkowo wierne, oczywiście na miarę swojego wykształcenia i wiedzy geopolitycznej oraz innej wiedzy o ówczesnym świecie. Nieco bardziej oryginalne podejście do pokojowego porządku świata przynosi w swoim przesłaniu czeski brat, autor programów edukacji oraz rzecznik tolerancji i pokoju Jan Ámos Komenský. Jego zdaniem problem pokoju nie może być postrzegany wyłącznie jako kwestia prawna, lecz należy go również uznać za zagadnienie etyczne. Podczas gdy prawo dostarcza ram określających, co jest dozwolone, etyka bada szersze implikacje moralne, zapewniając, że dążenie do pokoju nie sprowadza się jedynie do formalnych aspektów prawnych, lecz obejmuje również głębokie zaangażowanie w zasady sprawiedliwości, godności i szacunku dla ludzkości.

Słowa kluczowe: irenizm, etyka, starsza literatura czeska, epoka husycka, Jerzy z Podiebradów; Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius)

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