



Sapientia



Alchemy, Astrology, Theurgy, Qabalah, Tarot, Ceremonial Magic, Hermeticism & Rosicrucianism

The One Thing Necessary

FRATER ACHER



KNOW • WILL • DARE • KEEP SILENCE

The One Thing Necessary

FRATER ACHER

I. Pansophy's Master

*Mundus vult decipit. The world wants to be deceived.*¹

*I thank my God for making me a man of longing all my life.*²

*Longing is the umbilical cord of higher life.*³

For thousands of years, access to occult knowledge was considered the main key to developing occult capabilities. The kind of knowledge that did not appear to the world as inherently accessible was seen as a necessary threshold to the development of equivalent, i.e., *special* and therefore *elite* skills. Knowledge before ability. And in logical sequence: the more occult the knowledge, the more occult the abilities, the less competition, the greater the chance of proliferating one's benefices, i.e., to claim personal power for the display and use of one's elite skills. What we are confronted with here is the fundamental assumption that occultism is predisposed to *elitism*. A democratization of occult knowledge seems to be a paradox – or is it?

Let us delve into the delta of this far-reaching question using the most striking biographical example available. For none of our modern magical manuals would exist without a man whose name many of us might not have heard of, *Johann Amos Comenius* (1592-1670).⁴ This thoroughly unique man was the central link between the early Rosicrucians and real, lived social reform; he was the modern founder of *pansophy*, and he was someone who, in times that seemed deeply apocalyptic, became the living embodiment of hope, confidence and unshakeable faith in the goodness of man.⁵ More than any other biography I know of, Comenius' lends itself to every magical

1 Old Latin proverb quoted by Comenius at the beginning of his final work, *Unum Necessarium*; Johan Amos Comenius, *Das einzig Notwendige - Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904, p. 17, translated by author

2 Johann Amos Comenius, *Das einzig Notwendige - Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904, p. 181, translated by author

3 Søren Kierkegaard, *Buch des Richters: Seine Tagebücher 1833-1855*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1905, p. 19, translation by author, the original reads: "Sehnsucht ist die Nabelschnur des höheren Lebens."

4 When I speak of modern manuals of practical magic here, I am referring to the tradition of written instruc-

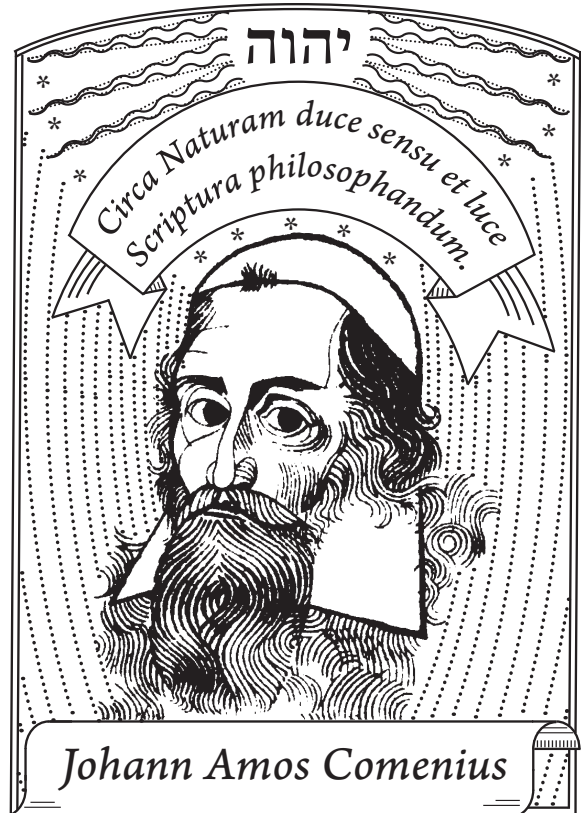
tions that reached its peak at the beginning of the 20th century with authors such as Franz Bardon (1909-958) or Mária Szepes (1908-2007), although these clearly had predecessors in the 18th and 19th centuries. For a more detailed analysis of this point, I refer to my book *Rosicrucian Magic: A Reader on Becoming Alike to the Angelic Mind* (TaDehent, 2021).

5 The following works provide a good introduction to the life and work of Comenius: Veit-Jakobus Dieterich, *Johann Amos Comenius*, Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1991; Walter Nigg, *Heimliche Weisheit*, Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1959, pp. 193-210; Tobias Churton, *The Golden Builders*, Boston: Weiser Books, 2005, pp. 161-171

aspirant to trace it — to humbly measure themselves against the shoulders of this giant.

*That “school of mystical enthusiasts which originated with Agrippa and Paracelsus” found its “noblest and most significant expression [...] in multiple of the writings of the Moravian Bishop of the Brethren, Amos Comenius.”*⁶

*His influence was predominant in religion, in science, in education and in international politics. Komensky represented all the ideas which have successfully triumphed in modern education: he was in favour of the education of women, he was against class distinctions in the school, he wanted to introduce science, music and handwork at the expense of the Latin grammar which was at the time universally learnt by heart, he desired schools to be happy workshops of humanity (in his own words) rather than the torture chambers of youth that they were... He had no fear that true religion and true science would ever conflict.*⁷



CENTRAL ENGRAVED PORTRAIT BY HEINZ SCHILLINGER

Comenius or Komensky still today is often referred to as the *Father of Modern Education*.⁸ In an era of brutal worldly, social and theological upheaval and catastrophe, he emerged as a visionary thinker whose contributions transcended pedagogy to include theology, philosophy and social reform. Born in *Moravia* (now the Czech Republic),

6 Otto Zöckler, *Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft*, Band 1, *Von den Anfängen der christlichen Kirche bis auf Newton und Leibnitz*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1877 p. 593/605

7 Joseph Needham on Comenius, quoted after: Eric Hawkins, *Jan Komensky - The Teacher of Nations*, Inaugural Lecture for the Southampton Comenius Centre 4th December 1993, University of Southampton, 1994, p. 4

8 The influence of Francois Rabelais (died 1553) on Comenius' work should not go unnoticed here. Comenius was well-read and had studied Rabelais books, among them the latter's *traite d'education* within the humanist novel *Gargantua* (1534). Comenius realized that Rabelais had already included several of his own educational demands: "greater visual clarity in teaching, the central aim of education to habituate pupils to independent thinking, as well as training in

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

Comenius lost his wife and child to war and the plague and lived through the turbulent era of the Thirty Years' War with immense personal tragedy. Far from becoming despondent or bitter, however, his profound losses spurred him on to develop his radical belief in education as a tool for peace and universal understanding.

His magnum opus, *Didactica Magna* (*The Great Didactic*), laid the foundation for many modern educational principles, but Comenius went beyond advocacy to action.⁹ He was the first to establish a school that welcomed both girls and boys, breaking gender barriers in education. In this Bohemian pilot school, he developed a comprehensive general curriculum designed to serve students of all classes, aiming to provide a universal education that was inclusive and transformative. Comenius's work envisioned a more equitable educational system and demonstrated its feasibility through this groundbreaking institution, setting a precedent for inclusive and child-orientated schooling worldwide.

*May the guiding star and the rudder of our teaching method be the following: to seek out a rule by which teachers teach less and students learn more; where schools have less noise and confusion, but more enjoyment and better progress; where Christendom suffers less from the all-shadowing gloom, discord and disorder, but finds more order, light, peace and calm.*¹⁰

*We envision a shared education for all human beings, teaching them everything there is to know about being human.*¹¹

We must not force the knowledge that people need onto them with authority (because knowledge is a free matter and flows readily into free minds). Still, we must also not offer it to them merely in the form of a description, however precise that may be. Instead, we have to present things themselves, as directly as possible,

practical skills and preparation for life." (Theodor Kertl, *Johann Amos Comenius. Sein Leben, seine pädagogischen Schriften und seine Bedeutung*, 1 Teil, Halle an der Saale: Verlag von Hermann Schroedel, 1904, p. 35, translation by author)

9 Johann Amos Comenius was the schoolmaster of Fulnek, in present-day Czech Republic, from 1618 to 1621. During this time he worked hard to put his ideas of educational reform into practice before he had to leave Fulnek due to the turmoil of the Thirty Years' War and the suppression of the Bohemian Brethren by the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The town was looted and destroyed by imperial troops in 1621, forcing Comenius to flee and later go into exile. In particular, Comenius work in Fulnek focussed on including the principles of language training supported by illustrations, a holistic education that included not only intellectual but also moral, spiritual and practical subjects, an individualized learning method that attempted to adapt to the abilities of each pupil and, perhaps most radically for the time

in which he lived, education in the children's mother tongue and for children of both sexes and all social classes together in a single classroom. He later formulated these approaches in his educational writings, such as the *Didactica Magna* (1633–1638) and the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658), which became milestones in modern pedagogy.

10 Johan Amons Comenius, quoted after: William S. Monroe, *Die Mutterschule des Comenius*, in: *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Zweiter Jahrgang, November und Dezember 1894, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1894, p. 136, translation by author

11 Johan Amons Comenius, quoted after: anonymous, *Die allgemeine Volksschule*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Zweiter Jahrgang, Januar 1894, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1894, p. 1, translation by author

to the senses, so that everyone can behold and really see it, touch and really grasp it, know and really understand it: that each thing really is as it is. For only that is really knowing: knowing what a thing is like in itself, and not just what some say it should be. Knowing something because another person has given reasons for it is not knowing, but believing. Just as 'chewing with someone else's mouth' does not mean that the person concerned is chewing, but that he is watching others eat. I do not taste the cake you eat or the wine you drink. And a blind man does not see an image even if a seeing person tells him that he sees it. If someone tells me about what he has seen, read, and experienced, I do not gain knowledge from it, but I believe him that he has seen, read, and experienced something.

With knowledge that is almost invariably of this nature (based on believing the authority of the teacher and making use of someone else's mind rather than one's own), the world has been content so far (albeit with great reluctance, occasional unrest and a strong yearning to break open the cage of this captivity). For most of the time, such knowledge was handed down from the earlier ages, albeit as dark and confused. But now is the time for us to rise from the unpolished foundations to perfection. We should no longer resemble helplessly adrift boys who have to endure being carried away by the wind of every doctrine. Instead, we must now be wise, as befits adult men. [...] But the time has come for all to lift the veil from their faces and see with their own eyes in Christ (through whom the Father did everything, said everything, inspired everything, and still inspires everything that is done, said, and inspired) the ways and the end points of all paths before them; and that they finally, by contemplating the glow of divine light, walk on the paths of light.¹²

Building on the ideological aspirations of the Rosicrucian manifests and in particular on Johan Valentin Andreae's writings,¹³ a central part of Comenius's philosophy was his belief in *pansophy*. To him, this was the idea that education with unrestricted access should cultivate wisdom in all people by integrating knowledge of nature and the crafts, human society and politics, as well as theology and the divine.¹⁴ What we

12 Johann Amos Comenius, *Der Weg des Lichtes*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1997, p. 119-121

13 In 1656 Comenius mentioned in a letter to a friend that it was Johan Valentin Andreae from whom "I obtained almost the very elements of my pansophic thoughts." (Miss R. H. Syfret, *The Origins of the Royal Society*, in: Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London, April 1948, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 86). Also compare Herrmann Ferdinand von Criegern on Comenius: "We will have to spend the longest time on Andreae because we will find that Comenius experienced a fertilising influ-

ence through Andreae in all directions of his intellectual life, that his didactic and pansophical basic ideas can already be found in Andreae, and that Comenius often quoted Andreae without citing the source, in particular in his *Labyrinth of the World*, which Andreae reproduced verbatim." (quoted after: Ludwig Keller, *Johan Valentin Andreae und Comenius*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Erster Jahrgang, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1892, p.232, translation by author)

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

find in Comenius is a “theosophical natural mysticism”,¹⁵ in its original sense, applied to all aspects of practical and educated life. He sought to create a universal system of education that would break down social and linguistic barriers, fostering unity among all people. His pioneering work *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (*The Visible World in Pictures*) is often regarded as the first illustrated textbook for children, emphasizing sensory learning and the integration of words with images to enhance comprehension. This innovative approach underscored his commitment to making education accessible, engaging, and practical.¹⁶

Although his ideas were revolutionary and downright subversive in an age still dominated by the privileges of the nobility and social classes, Comenius’s reputation and prestige transcended all national boundaries: In the year 1636 as Harvard University was founded, he was invited to become its first president;¹⁷ and his visit to England in 1641-42 is widely regarded as one of the central impulses for the founding of the Royal Society twenty years later in 1660.¹⁸

Comenius’s legacy endures not only in his pedagogical innovations, but also in his unwavering belief in the transformative power of holistic education to heal a divided world. His vision for a universal system of schooling, which he termed to as “universal reform of mankind,” remains the most radical and congenial realization of the Rosicrucian ideas and continues to be a model for global educational initiatives.

14 The oldest pansophic work by Comenius, his *Theatrum Universitatis Rerum*, was believed to be lost but rediscovered in fragments in 1895 as an original manuscript. It consists of 28 books, of which, according to Comenius, the second book already contains 125 chapters. (Joh. V. Novak, *Das älteste pansophische Werk des Comenius*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Vierter Band, September - Oktober 1895, Berlin: Verlag der Comenius- Gesellschaft, 1895, p. 242)

15 Zöckler, 1877 p. 605

16 It is no exaggeration to say that Rudolf Steiner’s work would not have been possible without the broad foundations of Comenius inspiration. Equally, it is obvious that Comenius’ books, even four hundred years after their publication, remain much more readable than Steiner’s endlessly meandering, freely associating lecture transcripts.

17 It is a curious historical footnote that Harvard University offered Comenius the post of principal when it was founded in 1636. He declined, however, as he did

not want to leave his beloved Europe. As has already been mentioned in a related article in 1860, had “Comenius made either Old or New England his permanent residence, it is not too much to suppose that his publications and earnest personal efforts would have introduced the same educational reform which he inaugurated in Germany.” (Albert Matthews, *Comenius and Harvard College*, Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1919 / anonymous, *Harvard College. 1636-1654*, in: *American Journal of Education*, September, Connecticut: F.C. Brownell, 1860, p. 135)

18 Robert Fitzgibbon Young (ed.), *Comenius in England : the visit of Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius), the Czech philosopher and educationist, to London in 1641-1642; its bearing on the origins of the Royal Society, on the development of the encyclopaedia, and on plans for the higher education of the Indians of New England and Virginia, as described in contemporary documents*, London: Oxford University Press, 1932 / also see: Syfret, 1948, p. 87

II. Pansophic Lineage

*Andreas Gryphius, Tears of the Fatherland, 1643*¹⁹

*Full now—yea, more than full—behold our devastation:
The frantic drum beat, and the brazen horde,
The thundering siege gun, and the blood-slick sword
Devour all diligence, and sweat, and careful preparation.*

*The church is overthrown; our mighty men are slain;
The town hall was in dust; our towers burn;
Virgins are raped; and everywhere we turn
Are fire, plague, and death to pierce us—heart and brain.*

*Down walls and through the town runs always fresh-spilled blood
For eighteen summers now, our river's yearly flood
Near-choked with corpses, has pushed slowly, slowly on*

*But nothing will I say of one thing—worse, I know,
Than death, more grim than plague, or fire, or hunger's woe:
Those pillaged souls from whom even hope of heaven is gone.*

To understand Comenius's visionary project, one must first develop a rough appreciation for the conditions in Europe, the full extent of its destruction, brutalization and apocalyptic decline during the Thirty Years' War. His central tenet that "everything flows by itself, may violence be foreign to all things"²⁰ could not form a more radical contrast to the eyewitness accounts we have of those dark years.²¹ It would have been presumptuous already to follow Comenius' vision in one particular area of 17th century life alone — may that be theology, politics, or jurisprudence. With his *universal reform*, however, he had set his eyes towards a much broader horizon: Comenius' idea was to reform man as such. And this seemed to him possible only by reinventing the place where children first were introduced to the idea of learning, as well as to the assimilation to the world of men.²² Such was the fervor that fueled his

19 Translation by Lane Jennings, <https://allpoetry.com/Trnen-des-Vaterlandes>, accessed 27/12/2024

20 Künkel, Hans (ed.); *Das Labyrinth der Welt, Roman des Comenius*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951, p.376, translation by author

21 Geoff Mortimer, *Eyewitness accounts of the Thirty Years War, 1618-48*, New York: Palgrave, 2002

22 The radical nature of Comenius' pansophic project can only be understood if one is at least somewhat familiar with the highly diverse realities of access to schooling in early modern Europe. The following standard work provides a good introduction: R.A. Houston, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2002

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

zeal for *pansophy*. It was not antiquarianism, nor sophistry, nor dogmatism, but the wild courage born of the freedom of having nothing left to lose. Born from a time of torment and war, Comenius' longing to turn practically applied *pansophy* into the cure that could tame the beast in man, to trim its claws, brush its fur, wash its muzzle, and reveal traces of a genuinely good heart underneath.

*Circa Naturam duce sensu et luce Scriptura philosophandum. Philosophizing about Nature guided by the senses and in the light of scripture.*²³

This was the motto Comenius had given himself — to renew direct access to the wonders of nature, which were obstructed by medieval Scholastic traditions and orthodoxy, purely through the power of sensory perception, guided by the divine light. In this way, his work was a direct successor to the life and research of Paracelsus (1493-1541). However, where the great Swiss physician had turned to medicine, magic and chemistry, Comenius was driven into the pedagogical field of education and teaching. What both men share, however, is the genuine protonoetic approach, i.e., the exploration of the world through pure observation and direct mediation of the human senses. Still, Comenius did not embark on his daring undertaking alone, nor without the direct support of his intellectual forebears and contemporaries. The afore-mentioned Johann Valentin Andreae, in a direct exchange of letters between the two men, encouraged Comenius to continue his own reformist work and to set out on his journey courageously.

*Since I wished to be more fully informed on certain points and to expound my own views on some points, I wrote to one or two of the above-mentioned men, but in vain... only one of those men, the learned and excellent Val. Andreae, replied to me in an amiable manner: he passed the torch into my hands (lampada se tradere nobis) and encouraged me to dare something.*²⁴

Andreae himself described the years he had spent in the storm of the Rosicrucian manifestos to Comenius as “empty noise”. Equally, he informed Comenius in writing about the mottos and the brief history of the *Societas Christiana*, the secret society that Andreae had founded later on and in which Comenius had been a member since 1628.²⁵ This maturation in Andreae's life and work had a profound influence on Comenius. The latter was able to build his own work on the foundations laid by

23 Comenius in his *Physicae ad lumen divinum reformatae Synopsis* (1633), quoted after: Zöckler, Band 1, 1877, p. 605

25 For completeness, it should be mentioned that Andreae was also a member of the famous *Akademie des Palmbaums*. (Keller, 1894, p. 23)

24 Comenius quoted after: Keller, 1892, p.234, translation by author

Andreæ, avoiding the price Andreæ had paid in his *apprenticeship-years* with the Rosicrucians. Comenius, thus, immediately set to work with greater composure.

One of the many elements that characterize Comenius' books is his radical commitment, his uncompromising, saturnine determination never to lose faith in the inherent goodness of human nature. Instead, for his entire adult life, Comenius attempted to solicit international support and momentum for the sole cause of proving that inherent goodness exists in every child before the corruption by the man-made society. After Comenius had overcome the depressive years following the death of his wife and son, this longing drove him until his death on November 15, 1670, in Amsterdam: to turn faith in the benevolence of man into accepted fact, even under the cruelest of circumstances. To force the societies of an entire continent to take responsibility for human cruelty not as a natural circumstance, but as degeneration and deviation from the originally compassionate nature of the animal called man.

So, you industrious investigators of natural things: when you have worked through all of nature – so that you, together with Solomon, understand the structure of the world and the workings of the elements, the beginning, middle, and end of time, the sequence of solstices and the changing seasons, the cycle of years and the position of the stars, the nature of animals and the ferocity of predators, the power of the spirits and the thoughts of men, the diversity of plants and the powers of the roots, and, moreover, everything that is revealed or hidden - then you must know that you have only mastered the ABC of Divine Wisdom. Or you have merely touched the threshold of the temple of God's wisdom; its forecourt and the sanctuary itself still lie before you. And so that saying of Ecclesiastes will be fulfilled in you: When man has come to the end, he is still at the beginning.²⁶

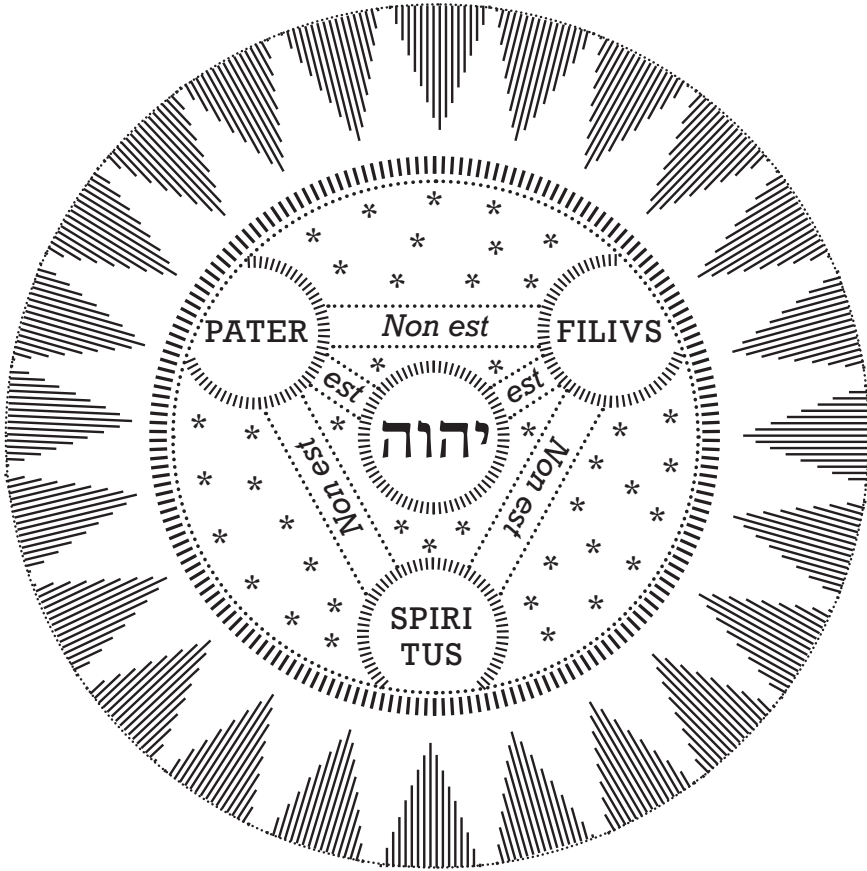
Had You not created us, O Lord, we would not be. But why do You allow those whom You created for life to fall back into ruin? Your eyes shine a thousand times brighter than the sun; they even look down into the depths of the abyss. Why don't You also give us, whom You created in Your image, luminous eyes that see the abyss of their nothingness in themselves, but recognise in You the source of their essence? O Word, which You spoke in the beginning: Let there be light!, now also say to us: Let there be light! - and there will already have been light. An aging world calls out to You, so that You, who illuminated its youth, do not disdain its age, but its bones rejoice and its youth revive like that of an eagle.²⁷

In the face of such an *aging world*, Comenius's hope was focused throughout his

²⁶ Comenius, 1997, p. 14, translation by author

²⁷ Comenius, 1997, p. 190, translation by author

THE ONE THING NECESSARY



BASED ON AN EMBLEM FROM: *ORBIS SENSUALIUM PICTUS* [1705]

life on children and the institutions of their holistic education. He saw the need for a universal reform that would fully embrace language, school, theology, science and crafts, reassembling them into a living pansophic ecology. His advice and teachings for adults are therefore limited, except for his late work *Unum Necessarium*, to which we shall return later. If we still want to inquire whether Comenius believed that growth and moral education were also possible for adults, then it is best to look beyond his literary work and into the early secret societies of the 17th century.

As Ludwig Keller already highlighted in his three-part study of 1895, these societies were essentially modeled on the *Accademia Platonica* of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and the *Accademia Fiorentina* of Cosimo de' Medici, founded in 1540.²⁸

Not only did they serve the free exploration of the sciences and arts, but they also saw it as their duty to be moral reformers. In Keller's words, they were also "the bearers of philosophical and religious ideas in general, and of Christian ideas in particular, for which they fought hard, slowly but victoriously, for the good of the nations, and which they made the common property of public opinion. Not only the idea of tolerance, but above all the idea of union and the desire to reconcile religious and social differences found a systematic expression in these academies, supported by a powerful union."²⁹

At least in spirit, the many societies that spread throughout the German-speaking world in the seventeenth century, were modeled on the Italian academies of the Renaissance. They were envisioned as places of learning, of teaching, of the cultivation of moral tolerance, of fraternal unity across national and class boundaries, and thus of radical social reform.

As indicated above, we see here an unbroken spiritual line of descent leading from Paracelsus (1493–1541) via Johann Arndt (1555–1621), Oswald Croll (circa 1560–1641), Adam Haslmayr (1562–circa 1630), Robert Fludd (1574–1637), Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), Abraham von Franckenberg (1593–1652), Jan Baptist van Helmont (1579–1644), Joachim Jungius (1587–1657) and others to Johan Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) and finally to Johan Amos Comenius (1592–1670). This line has been described by the congenial researcher of the Hermetic Tradition, Carlos Gilly, as the lineage of Early Modern *Theosophy*.³⁰ At the same time, however, we see an increasing waning of the mago-mystical aspects of these teachings and a turn towards

28 Ludwig Keller, *Comenius und die Akademien der Naturphilosophen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: Verlag der Comenius-Gesellschaft, 1895

29 Keller, 1895, no pagination, from the preface, translation by author

30 "From the middle of the 16th until the 18th century *Theosophy* represents the attempt to walk the worldly way

of gnosis (*Gotteserkenntnis*) which has been neglected by theology: the way of exploring nature in order to achieve gnosis of God. At the same time *Theosophy* refers to the application of these insights in order to achieve a more intimate vision of reality and thus to generate new knowledge about nature. The recoinning of this term by more modern movements in the 19th and 20th century should not make us forget that since the publication of Balthasar Flötter's edition of the *philosophia magna*

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

Lineage of Early Modern Theosophy

AS DESCRIBED BY CARLOS GILLY

Paracelsus

(1493–1541)

⋮

Johann Arndt

(1555–1621)

⋮

Oswald Croll

(circa 1560–1641)

⋮

Adam Haslmayr

(1562–circa 1630)

⋮

Robert Fludd

(1574–1637)

⋮

Jakob Böhme

(1575–1624)

⋮

Abraham von Franckenberg

(1593–1652)

⋮

Jan Baptist van Helmont

(1579–1644)

⋮

Joachim Jungius [and others]

(1587–1657)

⋮

Johan Valentin Andreae

(1586–1654)

⋮

Johan Amos Comenius

(1592–1670)

by Paracelsus 1567, the publication of the book *Arbatel* in 1575 and since the emergence of Johann Arndt's *De antiqua philosophia* ca. 1580 'Theosophy' (and not 'Pansophy', 'Cosmosophy' and similar other more recent expressions) had been a highly precise term to characterise a movement that extends from Paracelsus over Weigl, Arndt, Sclei, Crollius, Haslmayr, Nollius, Hirsch, Fludd, Böhme, Franckenberg, van Helmont, Kozák, Comenius all the way to Maul, Welling and Oetinger - while not forgetting the the 'Broth-

erhood of Theosophists of the RosyCross' (*Brüderschaft der Theosophen vom RosenCreutz*) as mentioned by Adam Haslmayr." (Carlos, Gilly, *Khunrath und das Entstehen der frühneuzeitlichen Theosophie*, in: Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae – Schauplatz der ewigen allein wahren Weisheit*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommannholzboog 2014, p. 11, translation by author)

their secular application and integration into social institutions.³¹ If Paracelsus was expelled from every city where he dared to teach, we find the same heretical ideas - abandonment of traditional hierarchies, rejection of scholastic scholarship, emphasis of the necessity of teaching through the human senses, nondenominational and international orientation towards a tolerant ideal of humanity, to name but a few - one hundred years later with Comenius right at the centre of the newly emerging Europe of the modern age.

However, we should not be confused about the fact that, especially in the early years of these secret societies, any scientific or artistic activity was still perceived as divine service.³² The deeply animistic cosmology of Paracelsus is still predominant here, especially in the works of Oswald Croll and Heinrich Nollus (1582-1626), which were widely read at the time. The latter even called his most important work *Naturae Sanctuarium*.³³ It would therefore be deeply misleading to assume a dividing line between the occult and the public, between magical and moral-scientific engagement, especially in the case of Johan Amos Comenius. For him, working with children was divine worship; similarly, he could not speak of the human senses without implying the divine light that fills all life with orientation towards the good. Such saturation of the world with divine light and presence is at the heart of Comenius's pansophy; for, he presents *sophia*, divine wisdom, as the ultimate goal and natural consequence of all *scientia* or science.³⁴

It is the peculiar thing about all the scholars mentioned above that they did not recognize their actual life's work in the accumulation of new knowledge, but in the utilization of knowledge for the human world; knowledge that was incapable of helping or improving people's lives was worthless to them, and in that they strove for living fruits, not dead erudition. They knew themselves in a deep contrast to the Neoscholasticism, as it had become dominant in the theology of the 17th Century

31 Whether this observation can be explained by the fact that we have to assume two parallel streams of tradition - exoteric and esoteric, i.e. directed outwards to society and inwards to occult societies - must remain open at this point. This would, however, seem likely when e.g. we consider Karl Kiesewetter's (1854-1895) extensive estate, which includes his grandfather's holistic collection of manuscripts on ritual magic which today is held in the Bavarian National Library in Munich. In this case, we would be dealing with an extremely successful line of tradition and strategy of transmission: even after 400 years, the occult teachings are still largely unknown to the public, while the social and moral aspects have had a profound influence on modern European culture, particularly through Comenius' work.

32 Keller, 1894, p. 4

33 Heinrich Nollus, *Naturae Sanctuarium: Quod Est, Physica Hermetica. In Studiosorum Sincerioris Philosophiae gratiam, ad promovendam naturalium rerum veritatem, methodo perspicua & admirandorum Secretorum in Naturae abyssu latentium philosophica explicatione decenter in undecim libris tractatae*, Frankfurt: Rosa, 1619

34 Keller, 1894, p. 7; also See: Schaller, Klaus, *Magia et Scientia bei J. A. Comenius*, in: *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 1976 2. QUARTAL, Bd.60, H.2, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976, p. 124

*within both denominations. For the construction of the 'temple' (as they called the idea of the kingdom of God), no science was of use to them that could not be applied to life.*³⁵

III. Pansophy, Magia, Sophia Today

The works of Comenius and in particular his pansophic ideal gives us much to think about, especially today as we enter the area of Generative Artificial Intelligence and stand at the brink of quantum computing. Comenius described his own pansophic encyclopedia as a “substantial and real lexicon”, a “Universal Storage”, with the intent to empower people “with acquiescing in certainties and immovables, [so they] could better know their own good and more truly enjoy their happiness to be blessed with more substantial possession of this good.”³⁶ We see an echo of this hopeful outlook in the exhilarating spirit many of us shared in the 1990s during the early days of the Internet. It took less than a decade for social media to emerge and deal a cruel blow to these hopes. Unlimited access to knowledge, the opening of the door to this *universal storage* did precisely not lead to more shared *certainties and immovables*, but to its opposite: With the pansophic ideal of universal access to information fulfilled, we find ourselves today in a world of polemically charged fragmentation and splintering. A world in which the individual is gravely overburdened with the responsibility of forming opinions and speaking up on everything; a responsibility that in earlier days had been diversified among numerous communal bodies.

If anything, the ubiquity of digital content seems to be leading to an atrophy of the human senses. Comenius warned against precisely this effect when he wrote, as quoted above, that it is not enough to show, but that one must sense, smell and touch oneself. We simply do not taste the cake in someone else’s mouth, even if Instagram posts and TikTok videos would like to persuade us otherwise. As such, we have transitioned from a world in which education was only available to the privileged — and yet imposed on their children by brute force — to a world of universal availability of knowledge. The richness of supply, however, did not lead to a democratized culture of knowledge and egalitarian education, but to atrophied sensory capabilities and a culture of constant distraction and vicarious satisfaction.

It seems as if our species has a tendency to get stuck – whether that is stuck in adoration of Aristotle and Galen, or in the consumer trance of our phones and social media. It seems we like to be told *what* and *how* to think, or even better just to be entertained. For strange reasons, our species seems to prefer the abstract and regurgi-

36 Comenius in his letter to Montanus, quoted after: University Japan, unpublished paper, sent as printed Teruo Fujita, The Characteristics of Pansophia in Consultatio Catholica in J.A. Comenius’ Thoughts, Seitoku letter to Prof. Dr. Werner Korthaase, dated 22. April 2001, p.6

tated to the real and raw. Perhaps we like to tell us the more distance we place between ourselves and nature, the more sophisticated we have become? So, we find ourselves obsessing over symbols rather than substance, over epistolary rather than experience. Somehow, we like to be *out of touch* – perhaps because it still gives us a sense of aloofness to not work farms and fields. So we have come to believe we need to *read* something for it to be *real*. Comenius encourages us to touch the world again, to step into it fully, to sense it wide awake. We might go one step further and tone down our Apollo a notch, and invoke a little more of Pan’s entourage instead...

Now, here we step onto the bridge that leads us to Comenius’ understanding of *magia* versus *sophia*. We have seen so far that it is not the availability of (occult) knowledge that creates the skilled person. Indeed, knowledge is an indispensable prerequisite for capability, yet, the latter does not necessarily follow from the former. On the contrary, universally available knowledge easily results in nothing but boredom and blindness. Because in a deeply capitalist society, where openly available goods are assumed to be of inferior value, it lacks the stimulus and incentive for acquisition. In a world where we have access to thousands of years of (occult) knowledge, and yet we rather doom-scroll an algorithm-generated feed for hours and days on end, what is it that really separates us from the level of occult artistry that Comenius called *magic*? The answer surely lies not in more books – whether we call them grimoires or Kindles – but in the living relation to our own flesh and its presence in a world full of sensory wonder. It is not the *what* of knowing precisely that we lack, but the *how* of living well.

According to Comenius, *magic* then is the ability to see “wonder spread out in nature”³⁷ – to understand it in all its weaving and swarming diversity and to know the ways through which we can link it reciprocally. In classical language, Comenius calls the wondrous qualities of all objects their “virtues” and the magician is the one who knows them, combines, solves and binds them, and thus achieves the most unusual agency in the world. The realm in which such weaving magic unfolds is one that is thoroughly ensouled, and one that humans share with angels and nature spirits. It is not surprising, thus, that Comenius’s schoolbooks contain a much more one-dimensional condemnation of magic than his later pansophic works. For the Czech, *sophia* not *magia* was the ultimate goal of all longing and exploration into nature.

The art of inducing qualities hidden from the common man to effects unknown to him is called magic. When this happens at a higher level, when wondrous effects unknown to the general public are achieved through hidden and deeper knowledge of natural abilities (virtus), the ancients spoke of magia. To the Persians, this expression meant wisdom, something honourable. However, through the fault of those

37 Schaller, 1976, p. 124

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

*frauds, magic has fallen into disrepute, who wanted to make a name for themselves as scholars - magicians - through vain juggling, through illusions or through research into the hidden with the help of Satan. Magic is nothing more than a secret knowledge of how to link the active with the passive, the affecting with the suffering, whether through the application of means or in some other way. For wonder is spread out in nature. When it is understood and reciprocally linked, it causes the ignorant to suspect miracles and deception. N.B. Cornelius Agrippa divides magic, like the world itself, into the elementary, which is called the natural, the heavenly and the divine. Because it is assumed that God rules the lower elementary world through the stars and the upper through the angels, magic requires a knowledge of physics, mathematics and theology.*³⁸

*Woe to the foolish magicians and witches who surrender themselves to Satan (locked in a circle with conjurations to invoke him), associate with him and fall away from God! For they will receive their reward with him.*³⁹

*The magus is one who probes the nature of hidden things; he works wonders per magiam et artem magicam. But the magia infamis is deception and the pseudomagus an imposter.*⁴⁰

If we want to turn pragmatically from the centre of our own lives to the work of Comenius, if we want to grasp anew the advice he has for us in the here and now, we best do so through the concept of *sapientia*.

In the writings of Comenius we find plenty of instructions for prudent and wise behavior. The magical realm and reality is ever-present as a backdrop to his pansophic elucidations. Yet, the deliberate use of occult powers for personal benefit, perhaps even the artificial coercion for one's own advantage, were diametrically opposed to Comenius' understanding of the task at hand. For him, the path of man does not lie in the modern notion of arriving at one's true self in the sense of individuation, self-realization or self-actualization. Instead, for Comenius *arriving in the world* with divine empowerment was what man was called to accomplish, and all too rarely ever did. Such *arrival in the world* could only be achieved by fully embracing and perfecting the human role as mediator between divinity and the world. In doing so, man had to embrace their passive side as a recipient of divine light as well as their active side as a lamp shining out into the world. *Wisdom*, or *sapientia*, then is the walking in the ways of such light.

38 Comenius in his *Pansophia*, V. *Mundus artificialis*, quoted after: Schaller, 1976, p. 123/4

39 Comenius in his *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1653-54), quoted after: Schaller, 1976, p. 124

40 Comenius in his *Sylva Latinae Linguae sive Lexicon Januale* (1650), quoted after: Schaller, 1976, p. 124

Man's fundamental potential as a human being is thus opened up through his peculiar, specifically human integration into the whole of the divine world. Only in the midst of it is he master of himself and of the world. His position in the whole also says something about his function for the whole. As the one who stands between God and creation, he is at the same time their mediator. With his empowerment, a goal is set for his power: the completion and pacification of creation.⁴¹

IV. Comenian Practice

After a life of tirelessly pursuing the pansophic ideal while constantly losing everything in cycles, Comenius wrote a rather unexpected final book. He wrote his *Unum Necessarium*, or *The Only Necessary*, in Amsterdam when he was 77 years old, two years before his death. An unusually brief testament after a lifetime of collecting and synthesizing the knowledge of the world. The small booklet's full title translates as:

The Only Necessary. That is, to know what man needs during his life, at his death and after his death. What the aged J.A. Comenius, tired of the vanities of the world and striving for the only necessary thing, presents to the world in the 77th year of his life for consideration.⁴²

The Only Necessary to Comenius here is holding on to the experience of Divinity, whatever the circumstances, whatever the horrors and cruelties we might be confronted with. Of course, such a demand can be read in a hasty manner as nothing besides steadfastness in faith. Yet, as is always with Comenius, we have to ask for the specific and actual to get to the core of his words. *Faith* as such is only an abstract concept. Its specific application for Comenius meant nothing less than retrieving the footsteps of God and the macrocosmic life in everything he perceived, saw, experienced and learned. When Crowley formulated his *Oath of the Abyss*,⁴³ he had certainly read Comenius and the writings of the Rosicrucians in mind. For the tenth statement of oath says just that: *That I will interpret every phenomenon as a special act of God with my soul.* Now, take a slightly less egomaniacal interpretation of the same ideal, and you stand before the essential tenet of Comenius' *Unum Necessarium*, the only necessary thing if one wants to live as a genuine human being: To understand all the world as traces of divine light. Or as *echoes of daimonic presences*, as one might add in goëtic terms.

41 Schaller, 1976, 129-130

42 Comenius, Johan Amos, *Das einzig Notwendige - Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904, translation by author

43 Aleister Crowley (ed.), *The Equinox, Volume I, Number 10: The Equinox of the Gods*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1913, p. 83

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

*Lord, all good comes from Your hand. Every blessing and every grace comes from Your hand. You have written the signs of nature with Your finger, and no one can read them without having learned in Your school...*⁴⁴

This is the beginning of a prayer recorded in the work *Secret Figures of the Rosicrucians* from the 16th and 17th centuries, a teaching, and meditation book published in Altona in 1785. Comenius' thought, work, education, and teaching were directed towards seeing in all things, even the most trivial, divine calligraphy.

The then 77-year-old, bent by life and frugal with words, was much more modest and unpretentious. The conclusion of his *Unum Necessarium*, which sums up the whole idea in a single paragraph, is therefore as plain as necessary to survive in a world filled by violence and adversity.

*Do not burden yourself with things you do not really need in life; be content with a few things for your comfort and praise God. If you cannot have any comfort, then be content with only what you absolutely need. If even that is taken away from you, then think of preserving yourself. If you cannot do that either, then let go of your body; only God you must not lose. He who has God can do without everything. With God, he has the highest good and eternal life, and he has it forever. That is the end of my longing.*⁴⁵

How well would it suit us to use this paragraph today as our own *oath of the abyss*? Which *magical grade* might we gain if we followed Comenius' words in spirit? To give you the opportunity to pursue this question further, I will end this essay with three personal questions for you, dear reader, all of which are deeply rooted in Comenius' work and wisdom. More than magical rituals, degrees and initiations, your further path in life could be determined by the prudent responses you will give yourself.

*We cannot do the necessary because we are keeping ourselves occupied with the unnecessary.*⁴⁶

44 anonymous, *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert*, 2.Band, Altona: Eckhardt, 1788, p. [33], [https:// digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/146844/33](https://digital.slub-dresden.de/werkansicht/dlf/146844/33), accessed 27/12/2024

45 Johan Amos Comenius, *Das einzig Notwendige - Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904, p. 207, translated by author

46 Johan Amos Comenius, *Das einzig Notwendige - Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904, p. 59, translated by author

1. *A Presence of Cordial Care*

Perhaps standing in divine light is to have the following experience: What if all the inner voices that are constantly making *a case against you*, would suddenly turn into voices that make *their case for you*? What if the inner burden of the disparaging comments and cruel accusations were not to shift into complete silence, but in a presence of cordial care? Such a transformation would not insinuate that you suddenly turned flawless und infallible, but exactly the opposite: It would mean that being flawed and fallible is okay and how you were meant to be. Your inner voice would have turned into a shelter of acceptance, encouraging to get up again and to walk your way.

2. *Knowing the One Thing Necessary*

What if standing in divine light meant suddenly having clarity about what is ultimately necessary in your life? In other words, and with greater emphasis on the choice that only you can make, what is it you won't surrender, no matter the circumstances? Look inside yourself. This choice is uniquely yours to make; or maybe you have no choice at all in accepting your own foundation? What is it, that is so deeply rooted, so firmly set into you that not even Saturn with his sickle could sever it? What are you willing to hold on to the end, even if it meant your end? And if you uncovered this truth, what would it change in your life?

3. *Readying for Divine Cooperation*

What if standing in divine light meant experiencing your god as an active partner in joint work? Consider this: What is the cooperation⁴⁷ you are striving for with the spiritual principal of your choice — be it god or goddess, daimon or daemon. What is it you both aim to generate in abundance — and what is your part in this work? How do you turn yourself into the instrument of such cooperation? In Comenius' world view, the prerequisite for active cooperation with the Divine Light was that we as human beings make ourselves transparent, almost glass-like, so that the dross of ego and anxieties no longer darkens the glass of our soul. Do you know what kind of dross withstands your own divine collaboration and how to reduce it in your life?

We are here, all the way to the end, to each find ways of generating hope in a potentially hopeless world. Neither giving in to cynical despair nor burying us under blind naivety are courageous responses to the times we find ourselves in. Preventing

47 To learn more about "*the central concept for Comenius of the 'cooperatio' between God and man*", see: Uwe Voigt, Einleitung, in: Johann Amos Comenius, *Der Weg des Lichtes*, Felix Meiner Verlag, p. XIII

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

our own degrading corruption, the weakening, fraying and dissolution of our faith in the path we ought to follow is our first responsibility. For without meaning — in a world where nothing promises the discovery of virtue — there is no more language and message, but only chaos and noise. To uphold such faith now, is not a unilateral decision we take. Being blessed with good faith is not a heroic flag we raise on the hill of our lives. Rather, it is a constant careful preparation of the ground that we are, so that faith's seed can continue to take root in us. We are soil, not soldiers. And yet, we are asked to prepare ourselves: to consider the nourishment, the heat, and the darkness it will take to turn us into good grounding for divine presence.

The greatest gift we can take from Comenius' iteration of the Rosicrucian promise is the notion that *divinity needs us, that the daemons need us*. However dark the current room of your existence, there is a call coming from the other side. The work of the Magi, therefore, is not to create more chatter, calls, and chaos, but to respond wisely and in clear faith to the asking, seeking, and knocking that is meant for you.

As we noticed that those three, to KNOW, to WANT, to BE ABLE similarly lie in the human nature of everybody regardless of his/her nation, age or status, we dared to extend the above-mentioned trial to the inquiry of ways and modes how whoever was born as human being could acquire that universal Wisdom. -17

Bibliography

Acher, Frater, *Rosicrucian Magic: A Reader on Becoming Alike to the Angelic Mind*, Exeter: TaDehent, 2021

anonymous, *Die allgemeine Volksschule*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Zweiter Jahrgang, Januar 1894, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1894

anonymous, *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreuzer aus dem 16ten und 17ten Jahrhundert*, 2.Band, Altona: Eckhardt, 1788

anonymous, *Harvard College. 1636–1654*, in: *American Journal of Education*, September, Connecticut: F.C. Brownell, 1860

Blekastad, Milada, *Comenius: Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský*, Prague: Academia, 1969

Churton, Tobias, *The Golden Builders*, Boston: Weiser Books, 2005, pp. 161-171

Čížek, Jan, *The Conception of Man in the Works of John Amos Comenius*, New York: Peter Lang, 2016

Comenius, Johan Amos, *Das einzig Notwendige – Unum necessarium - ein Laien-Brevier*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1904

FRATER ACHER

Comenius, Johann Amos, *Der Weg des Lichtes*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1997

Crowley, Aleister (ed.), *The Equinox, Volume I, Number 10: The Equinox of the Gods*, London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent Co., 1913

Dieterich, Veit-Jakobus, *Johann Amos Comenius*, Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1991

Fitzgibbon Young, Robert (ed.), *Comenius in England*, London: Oxford University Press, 1932

Fujita, Teruo, *The Characteristics of Pansophia in Consultatio Catholica in J.A. Comenius' Thoughts*, Seitoku University Japan, unpublished paper, sent as printed letter to Prof. Dr. Werner Korthaase, dated 22. April 2001

Gilly, Carlos, *Khunrath und das Entstehen der frühneuzeitlichen Theosophie*, in: Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae – Schauplatz der ewigen allein wahren Weisheit*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog 2014

Hawkins, Eric, *Jan Komensky - The Teacher of Nations, Inaugural Lecture for the Southampton Comenius Centre 4th December 1993*, University of Southampton, 1994

Houston, R.A., *Literacy in Early Modern Europe*, London: Routledge, 2002

Keller, Ludwig, *Comenius und die Akademien der Naturphilosophen des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: Verlag der Comenius-Gesellschaft, 1895

Keller, Ludwig, *Johan Valentin Andreae und Comenius*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Erster Jahrgang, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1892

Kerrl, Theodor, *Johann Amos Comenius. Sein Leben, seine pädagogischen Schriften und seine Bedeutung*, 1 Theil, Halle an der Saale: Verlag von Hermann Schroedel, 1904

Künkel, Hans (ed.); *Das Labyrinth der Welt, Roman des Comenius*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1951

Kierkegaard, Søren, *Buch des Richters: Seine Tagebücher 1833-1855*, Leipzig: Eugen Diederichs, 1905

Matthews, Albert, *Comenius and Harvard College*, Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1919

Monroe, William S., *Die Mutterschule des Comenius*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), *Mitteilungen der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, Zweiter Jahrgang, November und Dezember 1894, Leipzig: R. Voigtländer's Verlag, 1894

Mortimer, Geoff, *Eyewitness accounts of the Thirty Years War, 1618-48*, New York: Palgrave, 2002

Nigg, Walter, *Heimliche Weisheit*, Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1959

Nollius, Heinrich, *Naturae Sanctuarium*, Frankfurt: Rosa, 1619

THE ONE THING NECESSARY

Novak, Joh. V., *Das älteste pansophische Werk des Comenius*, in: Ludwig Keller (ed.), Monatshefte der Comenius- Gesellschaft, Vierter Band, September - Oktober 1895, Berlin: Verlag der Comenius-Gesellschaft, 1895

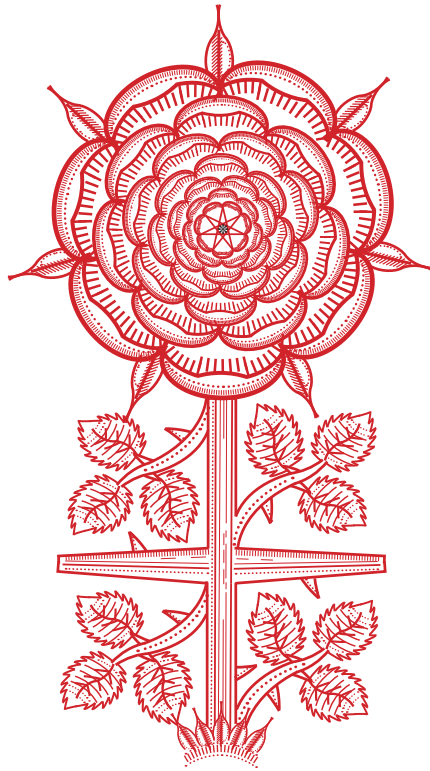
Schaller, Klaus, *Magia et Scientia bei J. A. Comenius*, in: Sudhoffs Archiv, 1976 2. QUARTAL, Bd.60, H.2, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976

Syfret, Miss R.H., *The Origins of the Royal Society*, in: *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, April 1948, Vol.5, No.2, London: Morrison and Gibb, 1948

Zöckler, Otto, *Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Theologie und Naturwissenschaft*, Band 1, Von den Anfängen der christlichen Kirche bis auf Newton und Leibnitz, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1877



THE SOUL AS DEPICTED IN COMENIUS' *Orbis sensualium pictus* [1705]



Sapientia © 2026 Ouroboros Press
The One Thing Necessary © Frater Acher
Design & Graphics; William Kiesel
unless otherwise noted
www.bookarts.org