

MILAN KOPECKÝ

## COMENIUS AS A BIBLIST

One of the most wide ranging and diverse aspects of J. A. Comenius' work is its encyclopedism. This can even be seen in a project from his youth, the *Theatrum universitatis rerum* (or the *Amphitheatrum*)<sup>1</sup>, which would have been the first encyclopedia in the Czech language. Similarly, Comenius wanted to create a biblical encyclopedia, once again with the popular Renaissance term "theatrum" in the title. This was the *Theatrum scripturae, to jest Divadlo předivných tajemství božích v Písmě vyjevených* [*Theatrum scripturae, being the Theatre of the Wondrous Mysteries of God as Revealed in the Holy Scriptures*]. After a short while, however, he ceased to use this title, probably because the use of the word "theatrum" in connection with the "Book of Books" sounded to him too worldly. He therefore gave the work the title *Manualník aneb Jádro celé biblí svaté* [*The Manual, or the Essence of the Entire Holy Bible*]. He worked on the manuscript for about three years, finishing it in 1623 in Brandýs nad Labem, while hiding from the persecutions which followed the Battle of White Mountain. After emigrating, his hectic pace of activity did not leave him with much time or space to concentrate on the *Manualník*. During his stay in Sweden, other issues called him away from the question of the *Manualník*, including the development of modern pedagogical methods and the widely discussed plan to create a unified Protestant movement. In addition, because the *Manualník* would have been used as a handbook by only one of the Protestant churches, its completion was not a pressing need. It was only after the Peace of Westphalia that Comenius realized the need to provide the dispersed Brethren with a new biblical text, even though it was not possible to issue the entire Bible, but only an abridged version. During his last stay in Leszno (Poland), Comenius was finally able to prepare the now thirty year old text for publication. Comenius gave the local Brethren printing house the manuscript which he had prepared, although it is not clear whether he had given them the entire manuscript or only a portion of it. During this period it was not

---

<sup>1</sup> Comenius worked on his *Theatrum* between 1616 and 1618 and on the *Amphitheatrum* between 1624 and 1627.

uncommon for an author living near the printer to provide the manuscript for his book in sections. This fact is supported by correspondence<sup>2</sup> which indicates that during the great fire in Leszno (April 29 and 30, 1656), the Brethren's printing house was among those structures destroyed. This resulted in the loss of 1000 copies of the *Manualník*, which had been printed up to the Prophecy of Ezekiel the Prophet, which is more than half of the entire text. This is why the text could not be published until 1658 in Amsterdam, a year after the four volume *Opera didactica omnia* and a year before the *Kancionál* [Hymnal]. The latter work was a collection of hymns by Comenius and other hymn writers associated with the Brethren. This event logically brings to a close the circle of his life-long encyclopedic endeavour.

The original manuscript of the *Manualník*, undoubtedly a holograph, and the Amsterdam edition form the two elements for a textual comparison which was first attempted by the editor of the *Manualník*, Jindřich Hrozný.<sup>3</sup> However, because it did not fall within his editorial plans, Hrozný ignored the important factor of Comenius's attitude towards this material. I have in fact devoted several essays to this issue<sup>4</sup> and would like to collect and summarize this information.

First of all, it is necessary to stress that Comenius worked with more sources than just the six-volume Kralice Bible (1579–1594) and both single-volume Kralice bibles (1596 and 1613). He certainly took into account both the Melantrich Bible (he probably owned the last edition, which was printed in 1613) and the Latin text. A consideration of all of these editions, leads to the conclusion that it was primarily the single-volume Kralice Bible from 1613 which he used to resolve the basic challenge of his work, i.e., the abridging of the Bible.

Comenius had to come to terms with the conviction that the text of the Bible, both in its entirety and in its particulars, is something sacred and unalterable. In the foreword to the reader, he expresses his unease, "would it not be daring to want to re-work something given by the Holy Spirit, for it is certain that He said no more and no less in the Holy Scripture than what He wanted people to know".<sup>5</sup> Even he is aware of the threat made in the Apocalypse (Revelations) (Apoc 22:19), that if someone takes something away from the Bible, God will take his part out of the "book of life"<sup>6</sup>, i.e., shorten his life. It was certainly very difficult for Comenius as a superstitious man to come to terms with this threat and only after very careful consideration did he come to the conclusion that something which contributes to human piety cannot be the sinful questioning.

<sup>2</sup> Compare B l e k a s t a d . M . : *Comenius*, p. 548. Oslo-Praha, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> *Veškeré spisy Jana Amosa Komenského* 18. Brno 1926.

<sup>4</sup> K o p e c k ý . M . : "Le Manualník de J. A. Comenius". In: *Acta Comeniana* 6, 1985, pp. 137-149. K o p e c k ý . M . : "Nový zákon v Manualníku J. A. Komenského". In: *Filologia e letteratura nei paesi slavi. Studi in onore di Sante Graciotti*, pp. 565-573. Roma, 1990. K o p e c k ý . M . : *Komenský jako umělec slova*, pp. 87-102. Brno, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> *Manualník*, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

In his foreword, Comenius, referring to the various compendia designed to help philosophers, physicians and lawyers quickly orient themselves in regards to various issues, argues that publication of similar biblical “summa” is of great practical importance for ordinary Christians, beginning theologians and all others who for various reasons do not use the entire Bible. He mentions the two extant abridgements of the Bible. The first is the *Pravidlo víry* [The Rule of Faith], which has not survived in its original printed form but may be reconstructed based on three later editions which have survived: the edition published in Lauben in 1731 and those published in Berlin in 1748 and 1770.<sup>7</sup> The second is the *Česká zlatá bibli* [Czech Golden Bible], as shortened by Comenius from the original title *Bibli zlatá Starého a Nového zákona . . .* [The Golden Bible of the Old and New Testaments . . .]. This volume, a translation by Václav Hájek z Libočan of the work *Biblia aurea cum suis historiis nec non exemplis Veteris atque Novi Testamenti*, was published in Prague in 1543. The author of this “Golden Bible” was the Augustinian Antonius de Rampegollis, who, around 1390, was working as a professor of canonical law in Genoa and as a preacher in Padua, Bologna and Naples and was among Jan Hus’s radical opponents at the Council of Constance. It is not certain whether or not Comenius knew this fact, but it is likely that he did not. In citing the book, he primarily wanted to support his demand for the abridgement of the bible because he himself did not follow the methodology of this particular book. A. de Rampegollis selected quotations from the Bible and organized them into chapters based on moral content, whereas Comenius’ selections from the books of the Bible follow their established order.

Further in his foreword, Comenius delineates his method for reducing the biblical text, from which it could be conjectured that Comenius abridged only those more extensive passages. Comenius primarily tried to convey a concise, point-by-point characterization of each chapter, but without marking each axiom with the appropriate verse numbers as the creators of the Kralice Bible had done in their summaries. This had made orienting oneself in the various chapters of this bible quite easy. Comenius also weeds out comments which looked, in the context of the text, to be obvious. Comenius was inconsistent in his marking of the deleted biblical texts, variously using the abbreviation „etc.“, graphically marking them with a hyphen or with a brief characterization of the deleted passage in brackets. In addition to the frequent omission of this information as was mentioned above, Comenius sometimes leaves out what the reader will learn from additional texts, with the specific locations not consistently indicated. In principle, the extent of the abridging of the biblical text in the *Manualník* was dependent on the content and semantic intensity of the chapter, passage or verse in question. This all happened with an explicit regard for the reader, primarily the Czech Brethren of Comenius’s time, i.e., the second half of the 17th century.

<sup>7</sup> H r o z n ý , J . . , editor: *Manualník*. In: V SJAK 18 (see Note 3), p. IX.

Having established this general information, the individual parts of the Bible can now be gone through. In dealing with the Old Testament, Comenius used four methods of adapting the biblical texts in the *Manualnik*, primarily from the Kralice Bible: 1. Taking the texts word-for-word; 2. Abridging the text; 3. The characterization of specific texts, usually an entire chapter; 4. The formulation of a motto or slogan. In some places, small additions can be found, followed by the abbreviation NB (*nota bene*). These are generally more detailed explanations of the text, usually using the detailed hermeneutical devices of the six-volume Kralice Bible. Substantially reduced or completely omitted from the texts of the Books of Law are superstitious passages or those dealing with various customs anchored in the time of the Bible's origin and by Comenius's time incomprehensible and dead, e.g., Leviticus 11 concerning "clean" and "unclean" beasts or the "impurity of man and woman" in chapters 13 through 15 of Leviticus. Comenius's approach to the Paralipomenon (Chronicles) is also of interest. These books are completely omitted in the *Manualnik* and replaced with a reference in the Book of Kings, which has had several passages interpolated into it. Comenius proceeded in the same manner in the document *Janua sive Introductorium in Biblia sacra* (Nuremberg, 1658), which is a Latin analogue of the *Manualnik* for youth, but which includes only the Old Testament. The New Testament analogue is the *Novi Testamenti epitome*, which came out in that same year and location.

The poetic and instructional books of the Old Testament began with the proportional reduction of the Book of Job in such a way that preserved both its plot and educational value. In the following book, Psalms, the obvious effort of Comenius to maintain the artistic quality of the text, even with the necessary abridging, can be seen. The reduction of this chapter cost Comenius a lot of time and spiritual strain, as he truly enjoyed the psalms. He frequently quoted from them and a portion of them, up to the unfinished Psalm 64, he later paraphrased using verse based on syllabic quantity<sup>8</sup>. In contrast to this, the abridging of the Book of Proverbs was in fact a choice based on world opinion and from a moralist's point of view. In the Song of Solomon, Comenius both maintains coherent passages and omits others. This is understandable as a man with a fine artistic sense, who had also successfully paraphrased the Song of Songs in his *Kancionál* (Amsterdam, 1659). Although Comenius was limited by the scope of the book<sup>9</sup>, and by moralizing and instructional concerns, he managed, even in the abridged form, to express the great mystery of the binding of Christ with the Church in the ancient parable of Solomon and the Pharaoh's daughter.

<sup>8</sup> See K o p e c k ý , M . and Š k a r k a , A . , editors: "Žalmy". In: J . A . K o - m e n s k ý , *Opera omnia 4*, pp. 213-290. Praha, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> The book is relatively substantial. It has 24 + 912 pages in small gothic type on duodecimo format paper. The separately paged introductory passages are pages 3 to 24, the text proper is pages 1 to 896, followed by the concluding passages, pages 897 to 912.

Comenius dealt with the Books of the Prophets in basically the same manner as he had with the Book of Laws. The text abridgements can often be explained in a historical context as many of the statements and assertions had through the course of time become anachronistic. Although artistically valuable passages are sometimes lost, Comenius does attempt to preserve the most important parts, e.g., the Weeping of Jeremiah, for the religious Exiles could draw strength from Jeremiah's commitment to faith in the mercy of God. Comenius also left the encouraging picture of the Holy Spirit's gifts to the future church which can be seen in Ezekiel's vision of water in the Temple in chapter 47 of his prophecy. Similarly, during Comenius's time, Daniel's prophecy was alive with its instructional revelations and epic passages and as a result this part was only slightly shortened by Comenius and left for the information and encouragement of the Brethren in exile. Comenius's leaving of these prophetic and comforting passages may be explained by his faith in prophecy and revelation. Comenius limitlessly believed in the contemporary prophets and visionaries Christoph Kotter, Christina Poniatowska and Mikuláš Drabík. This can be seen in his works *Lux in tenebris* (1657), *Lux e tenebris* (1665), and *Historia revelationum* (1659), as prophecies made after the unjust Peace of Westphalia increased his hope for a return to his homeland and for the just resolution of all religious, national, and social wrongs.

Next are the Books of the Apocrypha, in which the greatest shortening of the biblical text can be seen. The reason for this is their special position in the framework of the Bible. According to traditional opinion (which Comenius interprets on page 580), these books were not written with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were therefore valued less than the books of the biblical canon. Comenius did not initially briefly characterize all of the Books of the Apocrypha as he had done with all of the Books of the Prophets, but rather did this with only a minority of them. The method used in the abridging of the Books of the Prophets is most nearly approached in the Book of Tobias, the Prayer of Manasses, the Book of Judith, the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Comenius briefly addresses the contents of Tobias and Judith, which is understandable given their epic nature, often utilized in later epics and dramatizations, as well as the Prayer of Manasses, which has a lyric tone and the possibility of the pastoral use of the analogy between the Babylonian captivity and the current inhospitable exile. The instructional design of the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus could be utilized in the education of children, bringing wisdom to adults and to the bringing forth of virtue and harmony in interpersonal relations. In the other books of the Apocrypha, Comenius only briefly characterizes or states the contents of the chapters. Comenius attempts to maximize the economy of his expression. His text forces the impression that he hurried through the Books of the Apocrypha in order to finish his abridgement of the Old Testament and move on to the New Testament, which he wanted to approach in a different way.

Comenius reduced the New Testament texts to a much lesser degree than he had done with the Old Testament. This was in keeping with the greater authority of the New Testament in Christian churches and its dogmatic precedence over the Old Testament. From the point of view of the *Manualnik* as a work which tried to comprehend the principles of the sacred text for use in practice, it was necessary to completely respect the text of the New Testament, which, in contrast with the Old Testament, is not encumbered with historical passages and passages closely related to the economic and social conditions of the time in which it originated and which by the time of Comenius were out of date in material and cultural terms.

As the adaptor of the text, Comenius does not have the same relation to all parts of the New Testament. With the Synoptic Gospels, where they thematically conform he could make greater adaptations. As a rule, Comenius would mark such a theme in only one of the Gospels and where it occurred in the other Gospels, he confines himself to a reference or completely passes over the relevant passages. The greatest degree of abridgement takes place in the Gospel of St. Mark (which is the shortest of the Gospels), whereas the specifically targeted Gospel of St. John did not undergo any significant reduction. The reduction of the Epistles mainly related to their outline sections and the text of the Apocalypse is largely left intact. In spite of the various motivations for the text reductions, no part of the informational content of the New Testament has been eliminated. It is in fact here that Comenius most successfully realizes his aim.

The *Manualnik* is one link in the long chain of Czech biblical tradition. It can be followed from the beginning of Czech literature during the Great Moravian era, when under the direction of the Slav apostles Constantine and Methodius, several parts of the Bible were translated into Old Church Slavonic. During the flowering of Czech literature in the 14th century, a complete translation of the Bible was carried out and from this and the following century, several manuscript copies of the Bible have survived. Among the first publications in the Czech Lands, whose inhabitants were among the first Europeans to take up and develop typography and printing (c. 1468), were two bibles, the "Prague" Bible, printed in the printing house of Jan Kamp in 1488, and the "Kutná Hora" Bible, issued by the printing house of Martin z Tišnova in 1489. Although both of these bibles were known to the editors of the "Venice" Bible, they primarily used the "Kutná Hora" Bible. The Venice Bible was published in Venice in 1506 by Peter Lichtenstein. The Severýn Bible, named after the Prague printer Pavel Severýn, has two editions (1529 and 1537), and the Nuremberg Bible of 1540 is named according to the site of its printing. In both cases, the editors had in mind the needs of the whole of Czech society and as a result tried to be neutral on the question of confession even though the largest religious group at that time were the Utraquists. At the same time, followers of Luther began to gain more adherents, whose conception of the Bible shyly shows itself in the five editions of the "Melantrich" Bible. The 1549 edition of this bible is a joint work of the printers Bartoloměj Netolický and a journeyman printer who had graduated from his printing house, Jiří Melantrich

from Aventinum (this edition is sometimes called the Netolický Bible after the owner of the printing house). The editions from 1556–1557, 1560–1561, 1570 and 1577 are, however, products solely of the large Melantrich printing house. In the 1570's, the Brethren established a centre in southwestern Moravia, whose concentrated translation and hermeneutical work resulted in the six-volume *Bibli česká* [Czech Bible]. The volumes, individually issued in 1579, 1580, 1582, 1587, 1588, and 1594, were printed in the illegal printing house run by the Brethren in Kralice nad Oslavou. This text introduced the typographical form called *glosa circumscripta*, i.e., the biblical text is located in the centre of the page and along both sides of and below the text are explanations and other notes. A single-volume bible without the explanatory text was issued twice, in 1596 and 1613. In 1613, Melantrich's grandson, Samuel Adam z Veleslavína, printed a bible which was consistent in both text and typography with the Melantrich Bibles of 1570 and 1577.

Of these two bibles, Comenius used the Kralice Bible of 1613 more often than the Samuel Bible in his work on the *Manualník*. In addition to these he also had at his disposal the single-volume Kralice Bible of 1596, individual volumes of the six-volume Kralice Bible and various other texts. His wording, however, does not always agree with any of the above mentioned texts. It may therefore be assumed that Comenius sometimes adapted biblical texts from memory. This can be seen in some of his other works as well. This is quite understandable coming from a great theologian and philosopher, who had made the Bible his basic professional and artistic source and bottomless well of wisdom and who wanted to present this "Book of Books" to his fellow believers.

Comenius's *Manualník* was not the only work to influence those who were in exile. The various versions of the Kralice Bible were also important, especially the Halle Bible, published in Halle in 1722, 1745, and 1766. Another important text was the Pressburg Bible, published in Pressburg (today Bratislava) in 1787 and 1808. The original Kralice Bible, in both its six-volume and single-volume versions, was also often used, and in fact the language of this bible was the literary language (the so-called Bible language or Slovakized Czech) of the Slovaks in the 17th and 18th centuries and strengthened cultural ties and relations between Czechs and Slovaks. The Kralice Bible was also an influence on the baroque Czech St. Wenceslas Bible, although this is more pronounced in the single-volume text of the New Testament from 1677, than it is in double-volume Old Testament published in 1712 and 1715 (because the Jesuit biblists had more time to prepare it.)

Because of its pervasive influence on many generations of readers (even today) and other works of literature, the Kralice Bible is the most important work in the Czech biblical tradition. Its adaptation in the form of the *Manualník* provided defence, proof, reassurance and consolation for all of the dispersed members of the *Unitas Fratrum*. Comenius, as the last bishop, gave to these outlaws through the word of God in the *Manualník* a useful gift: a shield of faith and the

staff of hope.<sup>10</sup> And with this work he demonstrated what the Bible meant for him: the written revelation of God, the greatest of the three sources of knowledge and the most perfect work of literature.<sup>11</sup>

## KOMENSKÝ JAKO BIBLISTA

Roku 1658 byl v Amsterdamu vytištěn spis J. A. Komenského *Manualník*, který podává promyšlený výtah z bible určený rozptýleným příslušníkům Jednoty bratrské v exilu, kde tehdy nebylo možno vydat bibli jako celek. Rukopis *Manualníku* dokončil Komenský v podstatě už ve vlasti roku 1623, kdy se skrýval před pobělohorskou perzekucí. Autor se zabývá vztahem Komenského k biblickému textu a začleňuje *Manualník* do českého biblismu.

Při své práci na *Manualníku* používal Komenský několika bibli, nejvíce jednoduché Kralické bible z r. 1613. Úplný text buď doslovně přebírá, nebo jej zestručňuje, nebo podává charakteristiku určité pasáže, nebo pouze formuluje záhlavní heslo určité kapitoly. Pokud k textu něco přidává, jde zpravidla o vysvětlivky, které těží z důkladného exegetického aparátu šestidílné Kralické bible. Mezi úpravami jednotlivých biblických knih lze zjistit rozdíly, např. Starý zákon je více zestručňován než Nový zákon. Synoptická evangelia jsou redukována tam, kde zpracovávají stejnou tematiku. Avšak i při úpravách se Komenský snažil zachovávat obsahové jádro a umělecké hodnoty původního celku.

Českou biblickou tradici sleduje autor stručně od jejího vzniku v 9. století až do 18. století. Významné místo v ní zaujímá bratrská Bible kralická, která nejen byla hlavním pramenem Komenského, ale také působila na další bible v exilu, a dokonce i ve vlasti na katolickou Bibli svatováclavskou. Komenský je osobitým pokračovatelem v českém biblickém úsilí a jeho textová úprava „knihy knih“ v *Manualníku* se stala obranou, důkazem, posilou a útěchou českobratrských exulantů.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Nováková, J. and Škarka, A. editors: „Epistula ad Montanum.“ In: J. A. Komenský, *Opera omnia 1*, p. 24. Praha. 1969.

<sup>11</sup> Souček, S.: „Komenský a Bible kralická.“ In: *Bible a český národ*, p. 90. Brno, 1935.