

**Volume 10**

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**Jan Amos Comenius (Komensky) –  
Pastor, Ecumenist and Educator**

**Lead: During the European religious wars of the early 1600s, Jan Amos Comenius, a Czech Protestant pastor, forced to flee his homeland, gained international reknown as one of the founders of modern education.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: The Unity of the Brethren was one of the communities that grew from the teachings of early Czech reformer Jan Hus. After Hus' execution for heresy by the Roman**

**Catholic Church in 1415 at the Council of Constance, small groups of the faithful, such as the Brethren, kept alive Hus' teachings until they found wider acceptance in the Lutheran reformation a century later. After initial gains by Protestants in northern Germany, by the 1570s a re-invigorated Roman Church was determined to reverse the course of reform by any means, spiritual or violent. The conflict between Protestants and Catholics came to climax in the horrendous violence of the Thirty Years War that consumed central Europe from 1618-1648. One of the hot spots of fighting was the Bohemian province of Moravia and it was from that sad, beset land, that Bishop Jan Amos Comenius led a**

**small band of Brethren into Poland and what would be for him a life of exile.**

**When the war began, Comenius was a parochial school principal and barely escaped with his life when Imperial troops burned his house. Yet, in exile in various European countries, his powerful writings on the need for Christian unity and educational reform secured for him an international reputation as a creative thinker. He is thought to be one the founders of modern pedagogy in that his theories made a significant break with the current educational practices.**

**At the time students were forced,**

**sometimes violently, into memorization and rote learning. From his observations of the natural world where learning is not forced but occurs in freedom and spontaneity, Comenius said that learning should be treated as pleasure and a game. “Schools should not be places of torture, slaughterhouses of the mind.” Students should be encouraged to teach each other. He recognized that all students did not learn in the same way and advocated teachers shaping their lessons to fit the needs of individual students. He was one of the first to popularize the use of pictures in textbooks, using charts, diagrams, maps and models in his classroom.**

**Eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, said approvingly of Comenius, for him, “Education is not merely the training of the child at school or in the home; it is a process affecting man’s whole life and the countless social adjustments he must make.” Education was a life long exercise, cradle to grave.**

**From the pain of religious persecution came the ability to see the true worth of freedom in life, religion and education.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

**Comenius, Jan Amos. *John Amos Comenius on Education*.  
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**Comenius, Jan Amos. *The Labyrinth of the World*.  
Chicago, IL: National Union of Czechoslovak  
Protestants, 1942.**

**Spinka, Matthew. *John Amos Comenius, That  
Incomparable Moravian*. Chicago, IL: University of  
Chicago Press, 1943.**

<http://www.comeniusfoundation.org/comenius.htm>

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