

John Amos Comenius in the Journals of Czechoslovak Freemasons during the First Republic Period (1925–1938)

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Abstract:

The aim of the article is to present an interesting part of the second life of J. A. Comenius, namely his relationship to the Czechoslovak Freemasons during the First Republic period. The author analyses the occurrences of the name of the Moravian giant in the periodicals *Svobodný zednář* and *Die drei Ringe*. The main interest of Czechoslovak Masons was to prove the influence of J. A. Comenius's ideas on the establishment of the first Masonic constitutions in 1723. Another thematic line connected with Comenius was the emphasis on the religious dimension of Masons. In addition, the author of the study points to a number of personalities and interesting facts, such as the problem of finding Comenius's grave in Naarden, identification of his remains, and the growing respect of German-speaking Czechoslovak Masons for the character of J. A. Comenius. They finally define him as *Anti-Führer*. At the same time, the article becomes a stone in the mosaic of the history of the relationship between the Czech and German ethnic groups in Czechoslovakia.

Keywords: J. A. Comenius, Freemasons, the first Czechoslovak Republic, Nazism, Sudetenland

There is a great deal of 'guaranteed news' about Freemasons which a critical person must evaluate, based on his studies, not only as 'new Czech legends', but sometimes also as defamation. **Fighting superstitions and slander can certainly be within the competence of a theologian.** This also applies in general to other studies with a similar thematic focus which I would like to point out in this context.¹ Mostly, it should make us sad if such evil comes from the mouths and pens of Catholics, as untruths or half-truths of this kind tarnish the shield of the Church which we have the privilege to belong to.²

1 Cf., for example, Ctirad Václav POSPÍŠIL, Poměr T. G. Masaryka k regulérním svobodným zednářům, *Studia theologica* 1/2020, pp. 197–227; Ctirad Václav POSPÍŠIL and Veronika ŘEHÁKOVÁ, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart a čeští hudebníci v časopisu *Svobodný zednář* (1925–1938), *Theologická Revue* 2/2020, pp. 177–192. Other similarly focused studies are ready for publication in the first periodical mentioned above.

2 Honesty commands us to admit that there are publications that point to a certain mythological occultism among the Masons. Cf., for example, Max HEINDEL, *Svobodné zednářství a katolicismus*, Ostrava: Obec unitářů, 2017. There are a number of branches of Masonry. The one we are discussing now is defined as regular Freemasonry, which is recognised by the Great Lodge of London. The reactions of the current regular Freemasons in our country to the mentioned book are not exactly the most friendly, because it seems to them that their identity is distorted and even ridiculed. It is certainly not the case that all Masons can be defined in exactly the same way. It is also

The choice of **John Amos Segeš Comenius**³ it is not only related to the 350th anniversary of his death, which we celebrated on 15th November 2020, but also to the undeniable fact that this great man was also a theologian.⁴ A healthy ecumenical spirit guides us to see everything good, human, honest, and even sacred in the history of our ecumenical friends with joy and gratitude, because it belongs to the common treasury of Czech Christianity.

I emphasise that this study examines a certain section of the second life of John Amos Comenius. It shows, specifically, how the Czechoslovak Masons using the Czech and German language related to him during the First Republic. Therefore, it is not primarily a question of determining whether certain theses, which appear in the periodicals *Svobodný zednář* and *Die drei Ringe*, correspond to the current state of Comeniological research.⁵ At the same time, this opens an imaginary window into the world of thought of Czechoslovak regular⁶ Freemasons from the time of the First Republic, so that everyone will be able to have their own idea about the matter.

One very good master's thesis by B. Kulihová⁷ is devoted to the same topic, and therefore it is

possible that in some directions or lodges there may be individuals or groups with a fondness for similar stories. A distinction is usually made between cold Freemasonry, which is rational and rejects such matters, and hot Masonry, which finds pleasure in the indicated matters. As we will see below, the periodicals of Freemasons in the First Czechoslovakian Republic speak almost unequivocally of the cold concept of Freemasonry.

3 That was the full signature of the Moravian giant. His grandfather's name was Jan Segeš and he was a reeve in Komňa. His father adopted a surname according to his place of birth which was Komňa. Cf. Amedeo MOLNAR and Noemi REJCHERTOVÁ (eds.), *Komenský o sobě*, Praha: Odeon, 1987, pp. 31 and 335. So it was not John Amos who changed his last name. In 1614, the Moravian giant completed his studies in Heidelberg, then worked as a teacher in Přerov. He received ordination and became a clergyman in the Unity of Brethren in April 1616. The year before, he had written a file about angels that has not survived. In 1618 he was appointed spiritual administrator of the German-speaking community of the Unity of Brethren in Fulnek. In 1624, the monarch's decree on the expulsion of non-Catholic clergy from Bohemia and subsequently from Moravia was issued. From 1628, his main place of stay was Lešno, but he often travelled throughout Central and Western Europe. In Lešno, J. A. Comenius was perhaps appointed a deputy of senior in 1634, and two years later he became the 46th Bishop of the Unity of Brethren. Sometimes it is claimed (not quite accurately) that he was the last bishop of this Christian community. From 1648, he was the only bishop, because the others were no longer alive. Comenius was the last in the line of bishops of the original Unity of Brethren. In 1727, a restored Unity was established in Ochranov thanks to the pious Count Mikuláš Ludvík Zinzendorf. The first bishop of this community was ordained in 1735 by Comenius's grandson Daniel Arnošt Jablonský – the bishop of the Polish branch of the Unity. From our point of view, Comenius's stay in London in 1641 is important. In 1656, Lešno was plundered by Polish Catholic farmers, and Comenius's library and unfinished works burned down. After that, he stayed mainly in Amsterdam. He died in Amsterdam on 15th November and was buried in Naarden on 22nd November. Considering his pedagogical work in Sweden and elsewhere, his personal life as an exile and an unsuccessful political negotiator, his quixotic struggle to reform human affairs, and his family life interwoven with the loss of loved ones, it all seems like one painful tragedy. It is as if his whole life in his pains and failures resembles the crucified Christ. This is also associated with his unprecedented posthumous glory. What a wonder that the scientist Comenius advocated a certain type of evangelical eschatological visionary in the last decades of his earthly journey.

4 It should be noted that Comenius considered himself a theologian, even though he did not compare himself with any current of the reformed theology at that time. Some non-Catholic theologians occasionally questioned his orthodoxy as well. Cf. Amedeo MOLNAR, Trýzeň úkolu změnit svět k lepšímu, in: *Komenský o sobě*, ed. Amedeo MOLNAR and Noemi REJCHERTOVÁ, Praha: Odeon, 1987, pp. 7–23, here p. 9. Conscience was the main source of his decision-making. This also applies to his literary work. There is no doubt that Comenius was a very pious man of fervent prayer. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15. This is evidenced not only by the already mentioned work on angels from 1615, but also by the fact that in 1622 he created a work for his first wife Magdalena called *Přemýšlování o dokonalosti křesťanské*. It should be recalled that in 1659 he defended the Trinity dogma and the deity of Christ (*De questione utrum Dominus Jesus propria virtute a mortuis resurrexit*). In the same year he published *Kancionál*. In 1661 he wrote a catechism for the German-speaking Fulnek community (*De uralte christliche Religion*) and published a polemic against supporters of Socinianism (*De irenoco irenicorum admonitio*). In 1662 he published *Confessio aneb počet z víry* for the Unity of Brethren. There are, of course, more examples of Comenius's theological work. Perhaps it is appropriate to recall his work on the Lord's suffering and glorification: Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Jana Amosa Komenského Harmonie, aneb, Rozjímání o umučení, pohřbu i vzkříšení Pána našeho Ježíše Krista, sebraná ze všech čtyř evangelistů a v jistý pořádek uvedena*, Praha: Vincenc Paseka, 1864. His very unfriendly statements about the Catholic Church are understandable considering the time and should not be applied to the present.

5 Theologians will certainly be interested in at least two titles devoted to the intellectual legacy of J. A. Comenius or the post-White Mountain exile (to which the Moravian giant belongs): Cf. Tomáš HAVELKA, *Skrytý tajemství Božích poklad: Biblické citace v českých spisech Jana Amose Komenského*, Praha: NLN, 2019; Vladimír URBÁNEK, *Eschatologie, vědění a politika: Příspěvek k dějinám myšlení pobělohorského exilu*, České Budějovice: Historický ústav Jihočeské univerzity v Českých Budějovicích, 2008.

6 The term 'regular Freemasons' refers to those who are recognised by the Great Lodge of London and follow the relevant rules. The other numerous groupings that call themselves Masonic are not covered in this study.

7 Cf. Barbora KULIHOVÁ, *Jan Amos Komenský a svobodné zednářství*. Brno, 2009. Master's thesis. Masarykova univerzita Brno. Filozofická fakulta. Thesis advisor: Mgr. Milan Fujda, Ph.D.

necessary to justify why this study is created and how it differs from the mentioned work. In summary, the author of the diploma work focuses on mapping Masonic publications on a given topic, categorising them into certain thematic groups. She omits, though, a number of very important pieces of information available which are placed, for example, in articles published in *Svobodný zednář*. This is not a criticism. I just want to clarify the differences in my approach. I will, though, allow myself to clarify the data present in B. Kulihová's work in some details. Another significant novelty of this study, even with regard to the mentioned diploma thesis, is the extension of the research field by adding the periodical of Czechoslovak Masons who use German language – *Die drei Ringe*.

It would take up a lot of space to present both source periodicals, and therefore I would only like to state that Czechoslovak Masonry in its Czech and, at the same time, in its significantly minority associated Slovak form and also in its German version was organisationally established after 1918.⁸ Each of the two language groups, to which the Hungarian-speaking lodges must be added, had its own Grand Lodge which covered the other organisational units. In 1925, not secret but internal periodicals published by these Grand Lodges saw the light of day.⁹ The activities of both Masonic groups in Czechoslovakia were terminated in 1938, when the last issues of the relevant periodicals were also published. Efforts to restore the activities of the Czech branch after the Second World War encountered insurmountable obstacles. Therefore, official Masonry was put to sleep in our country until 1990, the year of its restoration. The periodical *Svobodný zednář*, revived after 1990, is not the subject of our research interest in this article.

Perhaps it is worth noting that the regular Freemasons were certainly not anti-Christian or anti-Catholic. Membership in the lodge did not fundamentally conflict with Christian and ecclesiastical identities of Protestants. It was a little more difficult for Catholic Masons.¹⁰ On this basis, we can beforehand state that the Masons, who eagerly mentioned J. A. Comenius, were recruited mainly from the Evangelical Church and partly also from the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

After studying many historical materials, I would like to suggest that the relationship between Catholics and regular Freemasons should be on the borderline of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue which excludes any manifestations of hatred and hostility. At the same time, it should not lead the clergy (in particular) towards mixing identities in the form of dual affiliation. According to my opinion, Freemasonry, true to its original ideals, seems to be not only a certain humanitarian and, in a sense, enlightenment society, but also a kind of non-confessional fraternity which, in many respects, resembles lay associations within various churches.

Following these preliminary clarifications, it is necessary to outline the division of the presented study into individual sections. It is quite understandable that I will focus on the periodical *Svobodný zednář* in the first part, while in the second one, I will pay attention to the periodical *Die drei Ringe*. I would like to point out that I refer to the contributions in both source periodicals

8 If you are interested in more detailed information, see: Jana ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři ve XX. století*, Praha: Nakladatelství Libri, 2002.

9 Evidence of this fact is, for example, the availability of a digitised version of the periodical *Svobodný zednář* in the database of the National Library of the Czech Republic. Masonic lodges are not secret societies because they are properly registered. For security reasons, the membership of individuals is mostly covered up (though, not absolutely).

10 'In all lodges we would find individuals who were organized in the Catholic Church, but their relationship to religion was very lukewarm, as with most Czech intellectuals of the time. This does not apply to members of the Protestant churches, for whom Masonry and active faith were not in contradiction. Czech Masonry was certainly not militant anti-Catholic. There was a number of people who were Catholic according to their data in the registry office. If there was a discussion about the Catholic Church, then it was always in a self-defense only.' ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, p. 166. I would like to add that there were also personalities of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, such as Antonín Hartl, whose membership among Freemasonry did not prevent them from experiencing their confessional Christianity in full. Cf. POSPÍŠIL and ŘEHÁKOVÁ, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart a čeští hudebníci ..., pp. 177–192.

by listing the year and the relevant pages in it. This is quite sufficient if one needs to identify the publications.

I. J. A. Comenius on the Pages of *Svobodný zednář*

In this section, I will go through individual years, or I will connect several of them. In summary, there are lots of pieces of information mentioning the Moravian giant, sometimes around seventy occurrences in one issue. Mapping everything would be tiring, and it could also obscure the essentials. For this reason, I will focus almost exclusively on contributions and inspiring reports directly devoted to the figure of J. A. Comenius and his significance for Czechoslovak Freemasons. These, of course, showed their admirable attitude to the world-famous pedagogue and humanist in other publications that are not directly the subject of our research interest.¹¹ The documentary nature of the present article is intended to enable readers to draw their evaluation and interpretative conclusions, on the basis of the submitted factual material, which is different from the ones reached by the author of these lines.

I. 1. *Svobodný zednář* 1925–1926–1927

The first year of the periodical covers three calendar years. Given the continuity of page numbering, though, it is certainly not wrong to talk about the first year. Leaving aside a number of pieces of information about the *Lóže J. A. Komenský* (J. A. Comenius Lodge), which was created at the same time as *Lóže Národ* (the Nation Lodge), we come across the following more coherent texts. The first one informs us about Comenius's life, his death, and the place of burial. Emphasis is placed on Comenius's pedagogy which has a clearly Christian background. Interestingly, there is no mention of the influence of J. A. Comenius's ideas on the first rules of Masonic life in the 1720s which – as we shall see soon – will be more or less dominant topic in *Svobodný zednář*.¹²

Another contribution by the ardent comeniologist Rudolf Jordán Vonka¹³ discusses the history of Freemasonry. The author holds the opinion that Masonry was brought to us by Špork. This idea was unequivocally refuted later. It is interesting to note that older treatises on the history of *royal art*, as freemasons are sometimes defined, do not speak of Comenius. The question of thought connections between the 'Old Rules'¹⁴ and Comenius's ideas were not established until 1810 when the link was made by the German professor Krause.¹⁵ This aroused interest especially among

11 Cf., for example, František MAŠLÁŇ, *Komenský a svobodné zednářství*, Praha: Dědictví Komenského, 1921, 20 pages; František MAŠLÁŇ, *Dějiny svobodného zednářství v Čechách*, Praha: Fr. Mašláš, 1923, 48 pages (2nd. ed. Praha: Kawana, 1993). Considering the very extensive publishing activities of Rudolf Jordán Vonka, I would like to recall this: manuscript plus facsimile, stored in the National Library of the Czech Republic: Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Dokumenty o Komenském*, the place of origin of the work and the year are not specified: R. J. Vonka; Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Komenský a Naarden: Hrob Komenského v Nizozemí*, Praha: Dědictví Komenského, 1927, 140 pages.; Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Komenský a Masaryk*, Praha: R. J. Vonka, 1927, 15 pages.; Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Čerpá Anderson z díla Komenského?*, Praha: R. J. Vonka, 1931; Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Běžec s pochodní. Myšlenky J. A. Komenského*, Praha: Pokrok, 1940, 63 pages. Among the Masons, there is also a prominent expert on Comenius: Jan Václav NOVÁK, *Jan Amos Komenský: pracovník o budoucí dobro člověčenstva*, Praha: F. Topič, 1920; Jan Václav NOVÁK, *Jan Amos Komenský: jeho život a dílo*, Praha: Dědictví Komenského, 1920, 722 pages.

12 Cf. J. T., Jan Amos Komenský, zakladatel lidové vzdělanosti, *Svobodný zednář* 1/1925–26–27, pp. 10–16. 'The goal of education is set by Comenius in accordance with the Christian assumption saying that the purpose of human life is afterlife bliss with God.' (See p. 12) The author could not be identified.

13 Cf. Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Můstky ke Komenskému*, *Svobodný zednář* 1/1925–26–27, pp. 27–28, 51–53.

14 Shortly after the founding of the first official Masonic Grand Lodge in London on 24th June 1717, James Anderson wrote *Book of Constitutions* which was published as 'Stará pravidla' in 1723. Cf. David STEVENSON, James Anderson: Man & Mason, *Heredom* 10/2002. Czech editions: Rudolf Jordán VONKA (ed.), *Staré povinnosti svobodných zednářů 1723–1796*, Praha: František Richter, 1931. The other editions: Bratislava: CAD Press, 1993 and 2013.

15 Cf. Karl Christian Friedrich KRAUSE, *Die drei ältesten Kunsturkunden die Freimaurereibüderschaft*, Dresden: Arnoldi, 1810. The author

German and Dutch Masons. **It is therefore clear that until the first decade of the 19th century, the influence of J. A. Comenius on the 'Old Rules' was something unknown!** In the second part, Vonka¹⁶ points out the various possible links between Comenius and the nascent Masonry. These are especially humanism, but also the symbols that appear in Comenius's writings. The attempt to connect the Moravian giant of the seventeenth century with Freemasonry as closely as possible raises the question of whether this might be just a wishful thinking.

I. 2. Svobodný zednár 1927–28

In this year, there is an annotation of the book: Rudolf Jordán VONKA, J. A. Komenský a Naarden, Prague: Dědictví Komenského, 1927, which represents comprehensive information about the history of the search for the last resting place of the great teacher and humanist. The process culminates in identifying the remains of the Moravian giant.¹⁷

I. 3. Svobodný zednár 1929

In this year we find two really interesting contributions by Rudolf Jordán Vonka. **The first concerns not only the painful history of the grave search and identification of the remains of John A. Comenius, but also his portrait by the great master Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn.**¹⁸ It can be assumed that the author of the article summarises the content of his monograph on the same topic from 1927, which was discussed above.

According to Vonka, the exact date of death, namely 15th November 1670, is known from letters sent by Comenius's son Daniel, as well as from the Dutch yearbook of 1671. The date of the funeral on 22nd November 1690 in Naarden (specifically in the church of the Walloon Church, which operated there at that time) is confirmed by records of the named Christian community, which were discovered in 1872. In his work *Slávy dcera*, Ján Kollár mentioned the fact that Comenius's tomb should be sought in Naarden.¹⁹ František Palacký also mentions Naarden as the place of Comenius's last rest in the first Czech biography of Comenius from 1829.²⁰ In 1836, Jan Erazim Vocol searched for the Comenius's grave in the named Dutch city. He thought it would be in the main church, so he found nothing. It should be noted that the church of the Walloon Church was abolished in 1829, and its building became a part of the factory and later of the barracks and was

lived from 1781 to 1832. He was a pupil of Schelling and Fichte and worked as an associate professor in Jena. He dealt with philosophy, mathematics, natural sciences, and the history of Freemasonry. In 1805 he entered *Loge Archimedes zu den drei Reissbretern*. B. Kulihová incorrectly states the title of Krause's work; Cf. KULIHOVÁ, *Jan Amos Komenský...*, p. 32, No. 3.

16 Rudolf Jordán Vonka was born on 17th October 1877 in Křinec and died in 1964 in Prague. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, he worked as the chief councillor of unions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague. Vonka spent the years 1920–1925 in the Netherlands where he worked at the Czechoslovak embassy as secretary of the press service, so he probably played a role in issues related to Comenius's tomb, as we will soon see. Vonka spoke English, French, German, Dutch, worked very well with Slavic languages and also with Latvian. In 1950, he even published a Latvian-Czech and then a Czech-Latvian dictionary. For the sake of completeness, we can add that, in addition to works about Comenius and Masaryk, he edited a wide range of historically oriented works: *Mírová myšlenka a smysl českých dějin* (1929); *Z čeho prýští smysl dějin* (1931); *Pět set let od Lipan* (1934); *Probouzení demokracie* (1934); *Z třicetileté války; Žižkův dub na Chotuci* (1932); *Nalezená sestra: balada z třicetileté války* (1932–1933). On 16th September 1932, he completed his extensive novel *Petr Bruegel*. Cf. © LITERÁRNÍ ARCHIV PAMÁTNÍKU NÁRODNÍHO PÍSEMNICTVÍ, *Vonka Rudolf Jordán*, available at: <http://www.badatelna.eu/fond/5342/uvod/>, consulted on 18th December 2020. In the title of the article, at the given address, there is the name 'Jordan', but given the way in which the author signed himself, it is more accurate to use the 'Jordán' version.

17 Cf. Svobodný zednár 2/1927–28, p. 13. Author not specified.

18 Cf. Rudolf Jordán VONKA, *Ostatky Komenského, Svobodný zednár 2/1929*, pp. 44–47. Perhaps it should be mentioned that the publication of Barbora Kulihová *Jan Amos Komenský a svobodné zednářství* does not inform about the content of this extremely interesting article in more detail.

19 Cf. Ján KOLLÁR, *Slávy dcera: jubilejní vydání s úvodem „Sto let Slávy dcery“*, Praha: Alois Wiesner, 1927, sonnets 208–211.

20 Cf. František PALACKÝ, *Život Jana Amose Komenského*, Praha: Adolf Synek, 1929.

used as a warehouse. Further efforts to determine Comenius's tomb, which were finally successful, were made in 1871 by Prague teachers from the Budeč Association.²¹ More than two hundred years later, in Naarden, according to the records from 1670, it was discovered that Comenius was buried in grave number 8.²² After another sixty years, there were subsequently found three male skeletons during the exhumation. The body was recognised in 1927, with the participation of the famous Czech anthropologist Professor Jindřich Matiegka,²³ other professional capacities, and, according to the diction of the presented article, also in the presence of the author R. J. Vonka. Since Comenius was to be the first buried, it could be assumed that his body would be located at the deepest place. Another indication was the well-known fact that Comenius suffered greatly from rheumatism of the joints and vertebrae in the last years of his life. This fact was reflected in bone deformities. Based on the given assumptions, his remains were identified.²⁴ Among other things, we learn that Comenius was supposed to be 168-170 cm tall.²⁵ **Personally, I believe that today's state of science opens up the possibility of confirming the correctness of the conclusions, which were given by those experts, on the basis of genetic tests. The relevant material can be compared with the living descendants of J. A. Comenius.**

The following is a brief list of well-known depictions of Comenius from the time of his life, including Rembrandt's portrait of an old man, which has been exhibited at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence since 1922. As early as 1929, R. J. Vonka considered the matter highly probable.²⁶ It is worth noting that on 6th April 2006, the Czech press reported,²⁷ considering it great news that Professor of Art History Ernst van de Wetering had identified the old man portrayed by Rembrandt in 1655 as John Amos Comenius. As a hypothesis, the given identification of the portrayed old man appeared as early as 1914 and was published in 1915 by the Czech historian Karel Chytil.

The second study **discusses the potential impact of Comenius's ideas on James Anderson and his 'Old Rules'**.²⁸ We already know that the first person to raise this question was Prof. Krause from Jena. He did so in 1810. According to him, Anderson was to draw inspiration from Comenius's *Panegersia*.²⁹ Another expert who came to the same conclusions was the Doctor of Philosophy

21 Cf. ANONYMOUS, Ruch o Komenském v Nizozemsku, *Posel z Budče: týdeník vychovatelský pro učitelstvo národních škol v Čechách, na Moravě, v Slezsku a na Slovensku* 42/1871, p. 354; ANONYMOUS, Hrob Komenského v Naardenu, *Posel z Budče: týdeník vychovatelský pro učitelstvo národních škol v Čechách, na Moravě, v Slezsku a na Slovensku* 46/1871, p. 391.

22 Cf. R. J. VONKA, *Ostatky Komenského, Svobodný zednár* 2/1929, p. 44.

23 Cf. Jindřich MATIEGKA, *J. A. Komenského hrob a československé školství v zahraničí*, Praha: Spolek Komenský, 1935. Profesor Matiegka (1862–1941) graduated from medical school. In 1897, he finished his doctoral degree in physical anthropology. From 1929 to 1930, he was the rector of Charles University. His studies on the skeletal remains of prominent figures in Czech history are well known. Cf. Ctirad V. POSPÍŠIL, *Zápolení o pravdu, naději a lidskou důstojnost. Česká katolická teologie 1850–1950 a výzvy přírodních věd v širším světovém kontextu*, Praha: Karolinum, 2017, p. 234. Among other things, he also examined the remains of the skull found in Čáslav, which many attribute to Jan Žižka. Real experts view this rather sceptically though. Cf. Ctirad V. POSPÍŠIL, *Úvod do husovských dilemat: historie a teologie*, Praha: Karolinum, 2020, pp. 96–97.

24 Cf. Rudolf J. VONKA, *Ostatky Komenského, Svobodný zednár* 2/1929, p. 45.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46.

26 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 47.

27 Cf., for example, *Právo*; *iDnes* from the relevant day.

28 Cf. Rudolf J. VONKA, Čerpá Anderson z díla Komenského?, *Svobodný zednár* 3/1929, pp. 51–55.

29 *Panegersia* – *Kniha o všeobecném probouzení*. This is the first part of the very extensive Comenius's work *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica ad genus humanum, ante alios vero ad eruditos, religiosos, potentes Europae* – *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských. Lidskému pokolení, předně však evropským vzdělcům, duchovním a mocným v Evropě*. The mentioned work was created in the years 1645–1670, i.e., until the very end of Comenius's life. Edition: Jan Amos KOMENIUS, *De rerum humanarum emendatione consultatio catholica*, 1st ed., Praha: Academia, 1966. Czech translation: Jan Amos KOMENSKÝ, *Obecná porada o nápravě věcí lidských*, 1st ed., Praha: Svoboda, 1992. 3 volumes (565 pages; 501 pages; 595 pages). The manuscript of the entire text of *Obecná porada* was not discovered until the 1940s. However, the first part of *Panegersia* was edited during Comenius's lifetime: *Panegersia a Panaugia*, Amsterdam, 1662–1664. Another edition, for example: *Panegersia*, Halle, 1702.

Ludwig Keller³⁰ in 1906.³¹ Dr Keller founded the non-Masonic company *Comenius-Gesellschaft* in 1892, which was later joined by a number of experts from various Masonic lodges. In the Czech environment, Karel Boleslav Štorch (1812–1868) and František Jan Zoubek accepted the thesis about the influence of Comenius's writings on Anderson's constitutions in articles of *Časopis českého museum*.³²

Rudolf Jordán Vonka then defends Krause's justification of the influence of Comenius's ideas on the 'Old Rules'. He also adds a list of English editions of Comenius's writings. According to him, the possibility that the founders of Freemasonry would know these books certainly cannot be completely ruled out.

Regarding the discussion about Comenius's influence on the emergence of the 'Old Rules',³³ it is worth mentioning an article by Josef Wolf. It informs about J. Grégr's letter from 1883, in which the Czech politician calls for an examination of whether Comenius is really the founder of the Masons. Greg refers to a Dutch monograph from 1871, where the relevant statement appears. We would like to note critically that Comenius could not have been the founder of Freemasonry when he died almost forty-seven years before the feast of John the Baptist, the patron saint of Masons, on 24th June 1717, when the Grand Lodge in London was established.³⁴

I. 4. Svobodný zednář 1930

The first information is of a technical nature, as it concerns a change of the editor in chief. This position was attained by the ardent comeniologist Rudolf Jordán Vonka. To mention every occurrence of J. A. Comenius's name³⁵ in this year would certainly not contribute to clarity, and therefore we will focus on articles and reports³⁶ specifically devoted to the character, work, and significance of the Moravian polyhistor only. An interesting report is on a study devoted to Comenius's contacts with the English Parliament in the years 1640–41 during his stay in England. At this time, his work *Via Lucis* was also created, which contains a proposal for the establishment of a college of the enlightened.³⁷ The Masons see this intention as a harbinger of the creation of their own organisation. The third contribution is a brief evaluation of the opinions of Czech members of the Rotary Club, who tried to derive their own focus concerning humanities from

30 He lived from 1849 to 1918. He worked as an archivist in Münster and then in Berlin. In 1897, he became a member of the *Loge zur Eintracht und Standhaftigkeit* in Kassel, and, in 1899, he was affiliated to the *Loge Urania zur Unsterblichkeit* in Berlin. In 1892, he was to be at the founding of the international company *Comenius-Gesellschaft* which had been established in Germany.

31 Cf. Ludwig KELLER, *Die Schriften des Comenius und das Konstitutionbuch*. Nach der Forschung Karl Christian Friedrich Krauses, *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft* 3/1906, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung. It is somewhat surprising that R. J. Vonka does not present another important book on the subject from the same year: cf. Wilhelm BEGEMANN, *Comenius und die Freimaurer*, Berlin: Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1906, reprinted in 2012 in the publishing house Books and Demand.

32 References were taken from J. R. Vonka, some details had to be specified: cf. Karel Boleslav ŠTORCH, *Komenského Panegergie*, *Časopis českého museum*, 1851, pp. 162–188; František Jan ZOUBEK, *Komenského křesťanská akademie světová, královská společnost v Londýně, masonové*, *Časopis českého museum*, 1883, pp. 77–107.

33 Cf. Josef VOLF, Dr. Julius Grégr a zednáři, *Svobodný zednář* 3/1939, pp. 43–44.

34 Although there are a number of publications on the history of Freemasonry at the global level, mostly of an informative nature, it seems appropriate to draw attention to an interesting bachelor's thesis in certain respects: Kateřina ROUTKOVÁ, *Svobodné zednářství v průběhu dějin*. Praha, 2014. Bachelor thesis. Charles University in Prague. Catholic Theological Faculty. Institute of Christian Art History. Thesis supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Jaroslav Čechura, DrSc.

35 Cf., for example, AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Jan Amos Komenský, *Svobodný zednář* 4/1930, pp. 123–124 does not concern the personality of the Czech thinker of the seventeenth century, but only activities of *Lóže J. A. Komenský*.

36 An example is this review: R. J. VONKA, Eugen Lennhoff, *Die Freimaurerei*, 1. ed., Vídeň: Amalthea-Verlag, 1929, *Svobodný zednář* 4/1930, pp. 8–11. Vonka criticises the inaccuracies in data on Comenius and also the author's lack of knowledge of Czech Masonry.

37 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED (R. J. Vonka?), *Komenský a anglický parlament*, *Svobodný zednář* 4/1930, p. 80. A report about Otokar Odložilík's study regarding Comenius's contacts with the English Parliament. Comenius intended to establish a society of enlightened people, which is, at that time, reflected in the work *Cesta světla*. To know more about this work and Comenius's stay in England, see Miroslav SOMR, *Komenského etické vize*, *Littera Scripta* 1/2011, pp. 79–89, here page 86.

J. A. Comenius. According to the author of the report, to prove that the founder of the movement P. Harris, a lawyer from Chicago, consciously based his ideas on Comenius in 1905 would be more than problematic.³⁸ This will be fully in line with the opinion of today's experts.

I. 5. Svobodný zednář 1931

Again, there are many mentions of the name of the Moravian giant in various contexts. We will be interested in two reports only. The first speaks of the Dutch committee created in order to honour the memory of J. A. Comenius and of the active support of this committee by the Dutch Masons. We also learn here that during the conference in The Hague, Dr Beneš visited the last resting place of the great teacher. It is also worth mentioning that the Dutch government donated part of the former church of the Walloon Church to Czechoslovakia, and that our government wanted to build the Comenius Mausoleum there.³⁹

Another report deals with the journey of the Czech Masons L. Schwartz and R. J. Vonka to Paris, where they received the titles of honorary masters of the *Shakespeare Lodge* in Paris.

On this occasion Vonka gave a speech about Comenius and his significance for the emergence of Masonry. It is a proof of the efforts of Czechoslovak Masons to popularise the idea of connecting Masonry with the Moravian giant abroad.⁴⁰

I. 6. Svobodný zednář 1932

As in previous years, we omit a number of mentions of the name Comenius, which document the relationship of Czechoslovak Masons to J.A. Comenius, but they do not have value for us at a more general level. As an example, we present the article 'Učitel – zednář', where the Moravian giant is mentioned and quoted. Foremost, the conformity of his ideas with the duties of a Mason, especially in relation to the younger brothers, is pointed out.⁴¹ It is worth mentioning the review of the Masonic lexicon from 1932, which, by the way, is reprinted to this day (2006). So it is probably not as poor as it might seem from the critical reaction to some headwords in *Svobodný zednář*.⁴² In the editorial report 'Naarden' we learn about **Comenius's monuments in this city, which were erected in 1892 and 1920,**⁴³ i.e., **three hundred years after his birth and two hundred and fifty years after his death.**

In a relatively extensive **article devoted to the piety of leading Masonic figures, a whole page is given to J. A. Comenius.**⁴⁴ **It is strongly recalled that this great thinker was a pure Christian,** that his human principles have their roots in the faith, and that God was the starting point for his thinking. Perhaps it is appropriate to quote at least the following words:

In the Constitution of the English Freemasons are the following Comenius' sentences: 'Unity and the unification based on it is an image of God; for God is one, and yet all things, he is all and yet one' (*Panegersia*). – 'God, who is one, wants everything in him to be one' (*Atrium rerum et*

38 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED (R. J. Vonka?), Rotary a Komenský, *Svobodný zednář* 4/1930, pp. 106–108.

39 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED – report, Nizozemská vláda o uctění památky Jana Amose Komenského, *Svobodný zednář* 5/1931, pp. 13–14.

40 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Setkání československých a francouzských zednářů, *Svobodný zednář* 5/1931, pp. 61–62.

41 Cf. B. Hnátek, Učitel – zednář, *Svobodný zednář* 6/1932, pp. 110–111.

42 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED (R. J. Vonka?), Review Lennhoff-Posner, *Internationale Freimaurer-Lexikon*, Wien: Amalthea Verlag, 1932, pp. 121–122. The reviewer criticises the authors of the lexicon for a number of inaccuracies in the headword *J. A. Komenský*, as well as for great shortcomings in the knowledge of Czechoslovak Masonry. The mentioned evaluation follows Vonka's earlier reaction to the earlier publication of the work, cf. note No. 36.

43 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Naarden, *Svobodný zednář* 6/1932, p. 124.

44 Cf. F. D., Zbožnost vůdčích zednářských osobností, *Svobodný zednář* 6/1932, pp. 135–137; pp. 169–171.

linguarum). Furthermore, 'It is regrettable that we do not agree on the most important thing: the worship of one creator of all things' (*Janua linguarum reserata*).⁴⁵

As it can be seen, J. A. Comenius was for Czechoslovak Masons not only someone we can be really proud of as a nation, but also an example of authentic Christian piety. It is worth recalling that this almost official position was not entirely to the taste of all Freemasons in our country at that time.⁴⁶ Recalling Comenius and building on his ideals also brought into play what we could define as the Christian basis for the ideal of *royal art*. It can be stated that the diversity of views on the original Christianity of the Enlightenment type persists in today's Masonry.

I. 7. Svobodný zednář 1933

The editor-in-chief changed this year, as evidenced by the information in the colophon: 'Edited by: R. J. Vonka (No. 1-6) and A. Hartl (No. 7-10).'⁴⁷ This change is related, among other things, to the fact that there have been no longer any of Vonka's contributions in the periodical since that date, not only on Comenius, but also on other topics. It is known that J. R. Vonka did not process this change in the position of editor-in-chief easily.

The article by Josef Ulrich on the atmosphere of the birth of Freemasonry is really interesting. In it, we find this, in a way, confession:

It has been said already that one of the spiritual fathers of Freemasonry was Comenius, and he was a strict believer. The creator of the Masonic Constitution was then priest Anderson. The old Masonic duties and the Masonic Constitution flatly reject any gross atheism. Most Masons have put and still put the Bible on their table – the book of books – as an outward expression of their deism.⁴⁸

We certainly face a contribution, **the author of which, through historical data on Comenius as a believer and Anderson as a clergyman of the Anglican Church, seeks to ensure that Czech Masonry retains a distinctive religious character** with strong roots in the Enlightenment type of biblism, as evidenced by the use of the word deism. On the same page, the author notes that French Masonry is more tolerant and admits both the Bible and atheism. By the way, it is known that this deviation in 1877 was the cause of the schism between the English and French branches of Masonry.⁴⁹

The theologian inevitably asks the question: Is strict deism of the Aristotle type, which would limit the Builder of the world to just the first creative impulse, compatible with a regular Bible reading that is obviously theistic? In my opinion, it is not. Proclaimed deism here is an expression of group identity, an inclination towards rational, in fact very moderate theism, which is sceptical, for example, about the great narratives about miracles in both the Old and New Testaments. However, it cannot, at least, rule out the power of the Lord in the human heart.

45 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 137.

46 Testimony of R. J. Vonka: 'I liked working on Comenius, but I imagined that there would be more of that work leading to knowledge. When I discovered that we were building on Comenius, some older brothers thought it was my mania, and later they objected bringing religious elements into the work, especially the Protestant ones. They wanted me to put them aside ... Brother Wolf agreed with me and was surprised as he had had Comenius's work in his hands many times, and yet he had missed things I came with. We got along well.' ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, p. 178.

47 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, *Zednářské dílo br. R. J. Vonky, Svobodný zednář 7/1933*, pp. 107–109: "Editor of »Svobodný zednář«, brother Rudolf J. Vonka, gave up the management of the first and so far only Czech Masonic periodical, which he ran for three and a half years."

48 Josef ULRICH, *Myšlenkové ovzduší, v němž se zrodilo svobodné zednářství, Svobodný zednář 7/1933*, pp. 41–42, here page 42.

49 Cf. Michael BOROVIČKA, *Dějiny zednářských lóží. Spiklenci proti světu, nebo dobrodinci lidstva*, Praha: Ottovo nakladatelství, 2003, p. 187.

Four more contributions are worth mentioning. The first is a review of an English monograph that details Comenius's stay in England and especially in London in 1641-1642.⁵⁰ The second is a passage from the work by Ernst Denis, in which this French historian, who is very respected in the Czech Republic, argues that Comenius's ideas inspired J. Anderson when he was writing the old Masonic rules.⁵¹ The third summarises the Masonic and therefore comeniological work by J. R. Vonka.⁵² The last is written by Josef Wolf and deals with the *Comenius zur den drei Säulen Lodge* in Wrocław, which was to be established to commemorate the tricentenary of Comenius's birth⁵³ and is connected with the birth of the famous association *Comenius-Gesellschaft*. Among other things, the lodge bravely accepted members of the Jewish nationality from the beginning, which many in German Masonic circles bore quite harshly.⁵⁴

I. 8. Svobodný zednář 1934

This particular year, it is definitely worth mentioning the reprint of the already well-known article by Karel Boleslav Štorch about Comenius, whose author agrees with Krause's assertion that Anderson drew from Comenius when writing the 'Old Rules'.⁵⁵ Another article is again a reprint of an article, this time from 1892, by Jaromír Hanel.⁵⁶ An editorial note on the article can be found on page 65 of the same year. We learn here that the author of the article was a Czech Mason⁵⁷ at that time, and that Austrian schools banned students from participating in the celebrations of the tercentenary of Comenius's birth. The third text I will recall is the editorial report on J. B. Vonka's lecture in Paris about the significance of Comenius for Freemasonry and about the positive response to his speech.⁵⁸ In addition to spreading awareness of Comenius's importance for the emergence of the first Masonic constitutions, it is clear that regular Freemasons were united with London, but this did not prevent them from contacting the French branch of Freemasonry. To be honest, those who know the foreign policy orientation of the First Republic will certainly not be surprised. By the way, the original orientation of the Czech *Lóže J. A. Komenský* (J. A. Comenius Lodge) was towards the French *Grand Orient*, while the parallel *Lóže Národ* (the Nation Lodge) was connected to London via the Italian brethren. After the unification of the two Czech branches of Freemasonry, obedience to London prevailed.

50 Mr. Robert Fitzgibbon YOUNG, *Comenius in England*. Napsal Londýn: Humphrey Milford, 1932. Inscription says: 'Thomae Garrigue Masaryk Moraviae Decori, Patriae Patri Pansopho'. Mr. Young, the author, is a member of Učená společnost in Prague. He collected all possible evidence of Comenius's stay in London (from autumn 1641 to Pentecost 1642). He also examines Comenius's influence on the founding of The Royal Society of London, which was established on June 15, 1662. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Review: *Comenius in England*, *Svobodný zednář* 7/1933, p. 46.

51 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, passages from the work by E. Denis, *Čechy po Bílé hoře I*, p. 426, *Svobodný zednář* 7/1933, p. 81.

52 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED (editorial staff), *Zednářské dílo bratra Vonky*, *Svobodný zednář* 7/1933, pp. 107–109.

53 Another indication of the origin of the lodge is 1910, as we will see below.

54 Cf. Josef VOLF, *Lóže Comenius zur den drei Säulen* ve Vratislavi, *Svobodný zednář* 7/1933, pp. 132–134.

55 Cf. Karel Boleslav ŠTORCH, *Komenský a Massoni*. Přetisk části článku z roku 1851 z Časopisu Českého Musea, *Svobodný zednář* 8/1934, pp. 10–13. The authors state the title of the periodical incorrectly, however, it is necessary to leave this error in the title of the article.

56 Cf. Jaromír HANEL, Jan Amos Komenský, k 28. březnu 1892, *Svobodný zednář* 8/1934, pp. 48–50. Reprint of the article without specifying the source.

57 In the Austrian lands at that time, however, the existence of official Masonic structures was not possible. Hanel's membership in the association called *Harmony* can be assessed as Freemasonry, but not as the official one. 'In addition, an imperial decree was issued in 1801 banning membership in secret societies for men working in the civil service... This date can be considered a major milestone that broke the Masonic tradition and continuity in Austria and Bohemia for many decades.' ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, p. 49.

58 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Francouzské uznání komeniologické práce br. Vonky, *Svobodný zednář* 8/1934, p. 209. J. R. Vonka is certainly not an author.

I. 9. Svobodný zednář 1935 and 1936

In both years, of course, there are many celebratory mentions of the great Czech thinker, but I did not come across any remarkable contribution.

I. 10. Svobodný zednář 1937 and 1938

Considering mentions about J. A. Comenius, the last two years of the First Republic series of *Svobodný zednář* are the same as the previous two years. The only real attraction is **the report on the opening of the Comenius Mausoleum in the Naarden church of the Walloon Church**, which operated here until 1829.⁵⁹ We are informed in some detail that a joint delegation of 28 Czechoslovak Freemasons using Czech and German languages took part in this celebration. In 1929, the Dutch government made Comenius's last resting place available to the Czechoslovak government so that everything could be put in a dignified state. This effort was completed in 1937, when the mausoleum was ceremoniously opened on 8th May.

Now I would like to go beyond the periodical *Svobodný zednář* and draw attention to the edition of the speech of the Grand Master, Professor of Charles University, Karel Weigner⁶⁰ on the opening of the Comenius Mausoleum on 8th May 1937. The speech was delivered in the Dutch *Loge Royal Union* in the Hague. Weigner's remarkable confession is certainly related to the growing threats posed by Nazi Germany, which directly affected Czechoslovakia and also, although not in such a short time horizon, the Netherlands:

Most of all, however, [Comenius] ascended above human misery through his glorious prophecy: 'I also believe in God. I believe that after the passing of the storms of anger, the government of your affairs will return to you, Oh Czech people.' If this creative optimism represents his deep beliefs in God, we, the Czechoslovak Masons, defend ourselves with this optimism for all struggles.⁶¹

Obviously, Comenius's legacy is now seen primarily as a sign of hope in the coming difficult struggle for freedom: hope, the last root of which is in God himself.

II. J. A Comenius on the Pages of the Periodical *Die drei Ringe*

It should be pointed out briefly that relations between the Czech Freemasons on the one hand and the independently organised German Freemasons in Czechoslovakia on the other hand were very

59 Cf. Otto SEYDEL, Pouť do Nizozemí (8. května 1937), *Svobodný zednář* 11/1937, pp. 53–61.

60 Cf. Jiří SYLLABA, *Karel Weigner 1874–1937*, Praha: Nákladem vlastním, 1938. This is obviously a broad obituary. K. Weigner was born on 10th April 1874 in Batelov, No. 262, and died on 20th November 1937 in Prague. He worked at the Institute of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, Charles University in Prague. He achieved a professorship and was an excellent Czech anatomist. He also achieved a number of academic positions. He was an important Sokol official. He studied the anatomical differences of individual human races and at the same time strongly opposed any form of racism. In addition to a number of professional publications in the field of anatomy, he was also interested in the origin of man. Cf. Karel WEIGNER, *Pokroky v řešení problému původu člověka*, Praha: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1909. He was baptised on 11th April 1874 in the Catholic parish of Batelov near Jihlava as Karel Julius Weigner. The sacrament was administered by a local chaplain – parish cooperator. The father's name was Karel Weigner, the mother's name was Juliána Weignerová. According to the minutes taken on 9th February 1921, the governor's office of Královské Vinohrady, he left the Catholic Church and was registered as a person without a religion. Let us not forget that for hundreds of thousands of people in Czechoslovakia at the time, it was an expression of a break with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, so it may or may not be connected to his Masonry. Cf. MZA, fond E 67 Sbírka matrik, sign. 6192 – *Matrika narozených a pokřtěných Batelov 1871–1905*, p. 55/ dig. 28. Although without religion, he was not a man without faith in God.

61 NÁRODNÍ VELIKÉ LÓŽE ČESKOSLOVENSKA, *Kresba v Lóži Royal Union v Haagu rýsovaná v den otevření mausolea J. A. Komenského ve Valonské kapli naardenské 8. května 1937*, Praha: F. Richter, 1937, p. 3. Stored in the collection of the National Library of the Czech Republic: cnb001506762.

cold until 1925. This situation was followed by a period of rapprochement,⁶² especially in Prague, where both Masonic families existed in close proximity. After the magnificent celebrations of Masaryk's eightieth in March 1930, in which the two mentioned Masonic groups took part in our country together, a period of ever closer cooperation took place, which was also influenced by the rise of Nazism in Germany. At this time, German Masons in Czechoslovakia proved to be ardent adherents of the Czechoslovak state, as its democracy enabled their dignified existence. We should not forget the fact that there were quite a few German-speaking Jewish people in the German lodges in what was then Czechoslovakia. Their number was higher there than in the Czech lodges.⁶³ The internal (not a secret one) periodical *Die drei Ringe* was published by *Grossloge Lessing zu den drei Ringen*, based in Prague, and by the German *Loge Latomia in den Bergen* in Liberec.

If an uninvolved observer compares the two branches of Freemasonry in the First Republic, he must state that the German one could have relied on a longer tradition, following the former affiliation of the founders to lodges in Germany, while the Czech one was, especially in the first years after the establishment of the republic, a 'beginner'. At first glance, the editorial level of the German Masons' periodical is significantly higher than the one which the observer finds when reading *Svobodný zednář*. The following analytical and critical presentation of the occurrences of the name J. A. Comenius in the periodical of the German Masons in the First Czechoslovak Republic will be again aimed only at the most interesting and really typical elements. We already know a lot from *Svobodný zednář*. Due to this reason, it is not possible to avoid a certain repetition.

II. 1. *Die drei Ringe* 1925–1926–1927–1928

Leaving aside the informative mentions of the Czech lodge *Lóže J. A. Komenský*, we do not find many contributions in these years that would confirm any special attention paid to the person of Comenius. This was undoubtedly related to the not very warm relations between Czech and German Masons in the First Czechoslovak Republic.

In the first year, there is the only publication that captured my attention from the point of view of our interest. Namely, it is the **reprint of the text of the great German thinker Johann Gottfried Herder about Comenius from 1795**.⁶⁴ It can sound strange to a researcher when Herder adds the Moravian giant to the German nation, because according to him, Bohemia and Moravia have always belonged to Germany. Herder underscores Comenius's pedagogical efforts and his fight against senseless wars. He identifies him (not quite accurately) as the last bishop of the Unity of the Brethren. However, not a single word about Masonry is mentioned in Herder's text, although the author himself, according to available information, was one of the cultivators of *royal art*.

In the third year, we come across a show of respect coming from German Masons to Comenius, when it is stated that more than three hundred years ago, the star of the great 'Comenius' rose in Moravia.⁶⁵

The following is the German version of the lecture by the Czech Mason B.V. (brother Vonka) from the lodge *Lóže Jan Amos Komenský* called 'Mosty ke Komenskému'.⁶⁶ For the first time, this article

62 Cf. ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, pp. 276 ff.

63 Cf. ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, p. 140.

64 Cf. Comenius. Ein Charakterbild von Johann Gottfried Herder, *Die drei Ringe* 1/1925, pp. 54–57. It should be noted that the German periodical consistently uses the term 'Comenius' to describe the Moravian giant in all cases.

65 Report: LOGE ZU DEN WAHREN VEREINIGTEN FREUNDEN, Willkommen in Brünn, *Die drei Ringe* 3/1927, p. 58. Report on the holding of an international meeting of Masons in Brno.

66 Cf. B. V., Brücken zu Comenius, *Die drei Ringe* 3/1927, pp. 131–134.

in the German periodical provides information not only about Comenius's writings and his life, but it also notes that J. Anderson used Comenius's thoughts when writing the 'Old Rules'. We are dealing with two pieces of evidence. The first one is the evidence concerning the beginning of the relationship improvement of the two branches of Freemasonry in our country in 1925–1930. The second one is the evidence of the fact that the recognition of Comenius's importance for Freemasonry among German Masons in Czechoslovakia was initially spread by their Czech brothers.

II. 2. *Die drei Ringe* 1929

The first contribution that deserves mentioning concerns the life and especially the work of the German thinker Karel Christian Friedrich Kraus (* 1781 Eisenberg near Jena, † 1832 Munich). He was the first one who believed that J. Anderson was inspired by Comenius's writings when creating the 'Old Rules'. The author of the article emphasises this fact without evaluating it in any way.⁶⁷ The second publication informs about the existence of Masonic lodges before 1717 and also about the Masons from the Jewish people, which was understandable given the membership base of German Masonry in what was then Czechoslovakia. From the point of view of the topic of this study, it is important to reject clearly the opinion of some Czech Masons that Comenius was supposed to be a Mason during his lifetime and that he used Masonic symbolism.⁶⁸

II. 3. *Die drei Ringe* 1930

Although I do not find a single study on Comenius as such this year, it would be a mistake to omit a few reports. The first concerns Comenius's grave, especially the dispute over the authenticity of Comenius's remains. This has already been questioned by two Dutch professors.

On the other hand, Professors A. J. P. van den Broek and Czech Professor Matiegka have defended it.⁶⁹ In another similar publication, we learn about brother Vonka's two-hour Czech lecture on comeniology in the Prague association *Amicitia*, which was connected with Freemasons.⁷⁰ The third piece of information concerns the professor of pedagogy from Leipzig, Hermann Schneider, who in the second part of his work *Die Kulturleistungen der Menschheit* declared Comenius an overrated personality.⁷¹ The question is whether the significant diminishing of the importance of Comenius in the writing of German professor was not related to the growing influence of Nazi racial ideology.

II. 4. *Die drei Ringe* 1931

One really interesting contribution can be highlighted in this volume. It seems to be a reaction to what appeared in the previous year. The author, whose name remains hidden, accepts Krause's views on the influence of Comenius's ideas on J. Anderson and the 'Old Rules'. However, he would not limit everything to work *Panegersia*. According to him, it is a deep harmony of the original Masonic constitutions with Comenius's faith in God. The faith is defined as theism with Comenius's humanism and his emphasis on the healing power of education, acting according to conscience, fraternal community, subordination to the state, concern for the needs of brothers,

67 Cf. Oskar KRAUS, Ein Völkerbundentwurf aus dem Jahre 1814, *Die drei Ringe* 5/1929, pp. 147–149.

68 Cf. POSNER, Eine Judenloge in Amerika um 1650, *Die drei Ringe* 5/1929, pp. 224–225.

69 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Das Grab des Comenius, *Die drei Ringe* 6/1930, p. 64.

70 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Tätigkeitsbericht der Amicitia, *Die drei Ringe* 6/1930, p. 140.

71 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Comenius, *Die drei Ringe* 6/1930, p. 294.

and so on. The writer is proud of the fact that his Czech fellow countryman Comenius played such an important role in the birth of *royal art*.⁷² Considering the overall message of the article, there is a clear awareness of the deeper affiliation of the German Mason with his Czech brothers and of what I would define as provincial patriotism, typical of the period before 1848.

II. 5. Die drei Ringe 1932

From a theological point of view, Grand Master J. Günthersberger's contribution on Comenius's influence on Anderson's 'Old Rules' is also really interesting.⁷³ Due to the authority of the writer, the article has a certain quality of officiality. The author refers to a study by Dr Ludwig Keller, published in the periodical of Komeniologická společnost (The association for the study of Comenius)⁷⁴ which confirms the influence of Comenius's writings on the authors of the 'Old Duties'.⁷⁵ **The main principles originating in Comenius's writings are derived from the characteristics of the Creator, that is, from God's unity, simplicity, and freedom.** A Mason formed in such way, in the name of the good of humanity, gives less meaning to his language, nation, and religious affiliation, without, of course, giving up all of this. The Grand Master and author of the paper, as a Mason, praises Comenius's great spirit and fully agrees with his principles.

II. 6. Die drei Ringe 1933–1934–1935–1936

Leaving aside the purely celebratory references to the name 'Comenius' and the reports about the individual lectures, there is not much in the volumes in terms of our common interest. An example is the article published on 28th October 1933, where T. G. Masaryk is described as the undisputed successor of J. A. Comenius.⁷⁶ It should be noted that under the influence of the rise of Nazism in Germany, German Freemasons in Czechoslovakia pinned their hopes on Masaryk and subsequently on Beneš as guarantors of freedom. It can be assumed that the most zealous in this regard were German-speaking Masons from the chosen nation.

In the following year, the article on Herder's relationship with Comenius deserves our attention.⁷⁷ As the term 'Komensky' is used here and not 'Comenius', we can assume with a certain degree of probability that it could be a translation from the Czech language. The author's surname indicates his possible Jewish origin. The Moravian thinker is first introduced on the basis of his relationship to the Unity of Brethren. Then there is talk about Comenius's relationship with Masonry. The author speculates about whether Comenius was a Mason himself. The third part is devoted to Herder's Masonry and how this very prominent thinker was influenced by Comenius, especially in the question of humanity. Through Herder, these ideas were to have a powerful impact on the greats of the Czech Revival.

In 1935, a contribution based on a lecture on Comenius's *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* is worth mentioning.⁷⁸ Comenius is characterised as one of the most important geniuses of mankind. The following is an analysis within the title of the mentioned work, of course in terms of Masonic ideals.

72 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Was war die Vorlage der Alten Pflichten?, *Die drei Ringe* 7/1931, pp. 234–237.

73 Cf. J. GÜNTHERBERGER Gr.-Mr., Die Panegiersia des Comenius und die Alten Pflichten, *Die drei Ringe* 8/1932, pp. 197–202. (Gr.-Mr. = Großmeister = Grandmaster).

74 I would like to point out that Keller's study was discussed above. It was to be published in 1906.

75 Anderson's constitutions are referred to in the German version as 'Alte Pflichten'.

76 Cf. O. KRAUS (Loge Heimat), Th. G. Masaryk zum 28. Oktober 1933, *Die drei Ringe* 9/1933, pp. 285–292.

77 Cf. Emil WEINSTEIN (M. Ostrau), Komensky und Herder, *Die drei Ringe* 10/1934, pp. 109–112; pp. 125–128.

78 Cf. Paul EISNER, Labyrinth und Paradies des Johann Amos Comenius. (Vortrag, gehalten am 4. März in der Loge „Freilicht zur Eintracht“), *Die drei Ringe* 11/1935, pp. 73–78.

II. 7. Die drei Ringe 1937–1938

In the penultimate volume of the given internal Masonic periodical, I find a report by the Grand Master on the course of the opening ceremony of the mausoleum above Comenius's tomb on 8th May 1937 in Naarden.⁷⁹ We already know that this celebration was attended by a total of 28 brothers from Czechoslovakia, part of them were Czech and part of them were German. This memorable contribution is also related to the edition of the German version of the ceremonial speech of the Czech Grandmaster Karel Weigner,⁸⁰ which was discussed at the end of the presentation dealing with the presence of the name J. A. Comenius in the periodical *Svobodný zednář*. It is well known that in 1938 it was really hard. The threat to our republic and its democracy also directly affected the Freemasons, especially those of Jewish descent. In the incomplete last year of the periodical we find two remarkable contributions. The first deals with the relationship between nationality and humanity, calling for the unity of Czechs and Germans in the fight against dull totalitarianism. The intellectual legacy of J. A. Comenius is strongly underlined.⁸¹ In short, democracy, Czechoslovakia as an island of freedom in what was then Central Europe, Masaryk, Beneš, and Comenius seemed to merge into a single symbol of humanity, decency, and hope creating an opposition to the barbarism of Hitlerism.

It has just been stated in the last example of respect shown by Czechoslovak Masons of German nationality towards J. A. Comenius.⁸² The anonymous author deals with the ethics of the great Moravian and underlines his humanity, tolerance and especially his anchorage built on God.⁸³ Comenius is seen as the opposite of the 'Führer'.⁸⁴ In the end, Comenius's kindness and humanity are emphasised as the opposite of barbarism, and it is stated that this great man raises our hearts to God.⁸⁵ In the same manner was also the very eloquent last example of admiration shown by German Masons in Czechoslovakia towards the teacher of the nations.

III. Overall Conclusion

The main interest of the Czech Freemasons in J. A. Comenius was primarily based on the belief that his ideas inspired J. Anderson when writing the 'Old Rules'. This meant a touch of worldliness not only for the Czech nation, but also for the Czech Masonry that was actually born at the time. It is understandable that Czech Masons spread this pride and fame not only at home but also abroad. The second motivation associated with the figure of J. A. Comenius lay in the internal struggle for a specific Christian orientation of the life of Freemasons. The second motive comes

79 Cf. GROSSMEISTER, Die Comenius-Feier in Naarden, *Die drei Ringe* 13/1937, pp. 110–112.

80 Cf. Ansprache des Ehrws. Gr. M. Br. Weigner der N. V. L. Csl. anlässlich der Comeniusfeierlichkeiten in Naarden, *Die drei Ringe* 13/1937, pp. 123–124.

81 J. U., Humanität und Nationalität, *Die drei Ringe* 14/1938, pp. 65–67. The author of the article is an interesting persona, Johannes Urzidil. He was born on 3rd February 1896 in Prague and died on 2nd November 1970 in Rome. He was a German-speaking author, poet, essayist, and historian. He personally came into contact with F. Kafka, M. Brod, F. Werfel, E. E. Kisch, and also with prominent artists such as J. Zrzavý, V. Špála, V. Hofman, R. Kremlíčka. There is no doubt about the fact that J. Urzidil was perfectly bilingual. In 1921 he joined the German Loge Harmonie in Prague, and the same year he started working at the German Embassy in Prague as a press secretary. He was dismissed in 1933, respectively 1934, due to his Jewish origins. In 1922, he married Gertrude Thieberger, the daughter of a Prague rabbi. On 1st July 1939, he fled with his wife from the Protectorate and never returned to his homeland. Cf. Jiří VESELÝ, Hledání harmonie, in: Johannes URZIDIL, *Hry a slzy*, Praha: Odeon, 1985, pp. 7–29; Lubomír SLAVÍČEK (ed.), *Slovník historiků umění, výtvarných kritiků, teoretiků a publicistů v českých zemích a jejich spolupracovníků z příbuzných oborů (asi 1800–2008)*, vol. 2, Praha: Academia, 2016, pp. 1564–1566.

82 Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, Die Ethic des Comenius, *Die drei Ringe* 14/1938, pp. 70–73.

83 Der Gottesglaube des Comenius ist reinste Philosophie des Christentums, *ibid.*, p. 71.

84 Comenius ist niemals ein Führer gewesen, *ibid.*, p. 71.

85 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 72.

to the fore especially in connection with the rise of Nazism and the threats of totalitarianism as a reason for hope, which ultimately proved to be justified. However, this road to new freedom took longer and was much more thorny than anyone could have imagined in 1938. In connection with these hopes, it is also necessary to mention the lodge of exile in Britain having the name of Jan Amos Comenius,⁸⁶ and other lodges, which also bear the name of the Moravian giant.⁸⁷

Among the Czechoslovak Masons who spoke German, the relationship with Comenius developed in parallel with the thawing of their relationship with the Czechoslovak Masons who used Czech and Slovak language. Of course, we see parallel motivations here, i.e., the pride that the compatriot inspired the content of the 'Old Rules'. There are also religious motives that grew in connection with the threat of Nazism. In particular, German-speaking Masons of Jewish nationality linked the ideas of humanity and tolerance presented by J. A. Comenius and confidence in the power of Czechoslovak democracy, which, in their opinion, will eventually stand up in an unequal struggle and will continue to provide an appropriate area of freedom. Comenius is even presented as 'Anti-Führer', similarly to Masaryk in other places of the same periodical.

It is this increasingly fervent relationship with the First Czechoslovak Republic shared by most of our then German-speaking fellow citizens of the Masonic faith, often of Jewish nationality, that should once and for all bury an unjust, ideological and truly nationalist interpretation of history, i.e., that everyone in the late 1930s spoke German in our country, sympathised with Nazism and with the tragic and cruel liquidation of the then Czechoslovakia. Of course, the statement does not only apply to members of the German-speaking Masonic lodges of the then Czechoslovakia, but also to a number of other democratically-minded German fellow citizens of our grandfathers and fathers, such as the Czechoslovak Social Democrat of German nationality Wenzl Jaksch (1896–1966). At the same time, it must be emphasised that this should not be perceived as if all our fellow German citizens at the time were innocent,⁸⁸ many of them really deserved punishment. The injustices that our ancestors committed on those who were not at fault after World War II cannot be removed from history. For example, the already mentioned Wenzl Jaksch, who would have been executed immediately by the Nazis and who therefore lived in exile during the war, was also unwelcome in the restored Czechoslovakia after the war. But we can begin to perceive the past in its unpleasant truthfulness, experience sincere

86 In the years 1938–39, about two hundred Czechoslovak Freemasons fled to France and subsequently to London. After the fall of France, a Czechoslovak lodge was established for our exiles in London called *Lóže Independent Czechoslovak Masonic Association Jan Amos Komenský in Exile*. The first official meeting (according to the Masonic dictionary it was 'ceremonial work') took place on 7th June 1941. Cf. ČECHUROVÁ, *Čeští svobodní zednáři...*, p. 363. Jan Masaryk also belonged to this Masonic group. From the point of view of the presence of the Czechoslovak exile in Britain, this was definitely not an insignificant matter. Let us not forget, for example, that the Freemasons also included the then British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Bon. Mem., and, at least nominally, also the exiled President Edvard Beneš. Although great history was not written in the lodges, it also did not take place without the Masonic brothers.

87 On 26th October 1918, the lodge *Lóže Jan Amos Komenský* was established in Prague. The German-speaking branch of Czechoslovak Masonry included the Hungarian-speaking *Loge Comenius zur Arbeit und zum Frieden*, which was created in 1930. At the initiative of the *Grand Orient of France*, the lodge named *Lóže Comenius 17. listopadu 1989* was established in Prague. These lodges are also worth mentioning: the *Comenius zur drei Säulen Lodge* from 1910 in Wrocław; the *Loge Comenius* from 1888 in Budapest; the Dutch *Loge Jan Amos Comenius 208* in Naaarden (founded in 1956); a mixed lodge for men and women called *Jan Amos Comenius* (founded in Maastricht in 1960 and operating in Roermond since 2012); in 1985, the German mixed lodge *Loge Comenius zur Toleranz und Freundschaft* was founded in Karlsruhe. Cf. AUTHOR NOT SPECIFIED, *Komenský v názvech zednářských lóží, Svobodný zednář 4 4/2020*, p. 9. These facts clearly demonstrate the respect of Czech, German, Dutch, and Hungarian Freemasons for J. A. Comenius.

88 As many as two-thirds of Sudeten Germans in 1935 showed sympathy for Hitler's Germany. Cf. Antoine MAREŠ, *Edvard Beneš: drama mezi Hitlerem a Stalinem*, Praha: Argo, 2016, p. 173. Beneš's warning of the Sudeten Germans against Hitler and the break-up of democracy in 1937 is also well-known. This inevitably turned, according to the then Czechoslovak president, into a huge tragedy for them. Suffice it to say that many of our former fellow citizens died on the Eastern Front. It can never pay off to exchange a democracy, even if it is imperfect, for a dictatorship.

remorse for these facts, subsequently also show respect to those who have been wronged, and especially, in the spirit of Christ, Comenius, and Masaryk (because in the matter of humanity these figures of history match each other wonderfully), to consistently ensure that our nation is never defiled with something like this again.

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