

THE ANTEDILUVIANS AND THE MOST ANCIENT CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

I have followed, with interest, the flow of ideas in recent issues of *THE NEW PHILOSOPHY* concerning Swedenborg's concept of the Most Ancient Church. I have been interested in this concept for many years and would like to share some of my own views about the Most Ancient Church in relation to early man.

First, I wish to express my appreciation of Erik E. Sandström's paper "Adam, Noah and the Stone Age."¹ Some years ago I encountered a position similar to Sandström's in a small book by John R. Swanton,² a New Church anthropologist. Swanton, like Sandström, maintained that the Neandertal phase of human development marked the terminal era of the Most Ancient Church.

The purpose of this paper is to support the position that the later Neandertals constituted the degenerate stages of the Most Ancient men. In addition, I would like to suggest that "Noah" is not to be identified as Neandertal or Cro-Magnon but in the Proximate Internal sense of the Word refers to a population of intermediate or transitional forms known as "Progressive Neandertal" in the anthropological literature. I will also attempt to clarify the term "Most Ancient."

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MOST ANCIENTS

The human line is divided by Swedenborg into two phases, namely, the Ancients and the Most Ancients. Some of the basic differences between these populations are familiar to students of the Writings. The Most Ancients, as contrasted with the later Ancients and their progeny, were endowed with internal respiration. This trait involved the Eustachian tube and a different

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¹ *THE NEW PHILOSOPHY*, Vol. lxxviii, no. 2 (April-June 1975) p. 211.

² John R. Swanton, *Emanuel Swedenborg, Prophet of the Higher Evolution*. (New York: The New Church Press, 1928).

auditory system (AC 1118). Likewise, there were other neurophysiological differences such as more extensive cerebellar innervation of the face (AC 4326).

We are told in the Writings that these mechanisms formed the basis for an entirely different kind of perception and communication. The Most Ancients communicated by changes in facial expression and also by variations of pressure in the Eustachian tubes, while the Ancients after them developed speech as we know it today.

The respiration of the Most Ancient men was involuntary and varied with their moods and perceptions. Feelings and moods were expressed facially via the motor pathways of the cerebellum. During and after the flood, the cerebrum usurped some of the functions of the cerebellum as men began to exercise voluntary control over previously spontaneous facial expressions. Further, as cerebral control increased, respiration was freed from its high correlation with affective states and became available for use in speech.

We might infer from these principles that the Most Ancients possessed more highly differentiated feeling states. They were able to feel the difference between something that was concordant or discordant with the affections of their will without reasoning about it.

The question, therefore, that concerns us is: Do the fossil remains of early men in any way articulate with the descriptions in the Writings of the Most Ancient people and the changes that occurred in them over the course of time?

CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY FOSSILS

There are three major fossil groups prior to modern man. In chronological order beginning with the oldest, these are: *Australopithecus*, *Homo Erectus*, and *Homo Sapiens Neanderthalensis* or Neandertal man. Since these fossil groups are described in most anthropological textbooks, I will not elaborate on them.

The oldest of these, the *Australopithecenes*, are at least 2 million years old, but their role in Hominid evolution is still unclear. Recent finds in Olduvai Gorge and Laetolil may possibly involve Hominids older than the *Australopithecenes*.

All skulls from the above groups prior to Cro-Magnon share two important features. The first is the presence of a large prognathous face, that is, the face bulges prominently around the lip and jaw region. Secondary—above a great shelf of bone over the eye sockets called the supra-orbital torus—a low, flat, sloping forehead contrasts sharply with the high vertical foreheads and small brows of the Cro-Magnons.

It is well known that the phylogenetically most recent parts of the cerebrum to evolve are the prefrontal lobes, those areas of the brain beneath the forehead. There is good evidence that the elevation or more vertical configuration of the Cro-Magnon foreheads reflects increasing size and elaboration of the frontal and prefrontal lobes. Now the motor speech centers reside in the frontal lobes (Broca's area), and it is likely that frontal lobe elaboration in Cro-Magnon man paralleled the development of speech.

The smaller faces of Cro-Magnon, lacking the severe prognathism found in Neandertal and earlier skulls, suggest that communication may have shifted from visual-facial, as described by Swedenborg, to vocal-verbal as in modern man.

The role of the cerebellum in the nervous system of early man may have been quite different as judging from the extended bun-shaped occiput of the Neandertal skulls. Swedenborg says:

For the most ancient people . . . all the involuntary of the cerebellum was manifest in the face, and they did not at all know how to present anything in the countenance other than exactly as heaven flowed into their involuntary conatus or endeavors and thence into the will . . . I have been instructed that the fibres of the cerebellum have thus changed their efflux into the face, and that instead of them, fibres from the cerebrum have been transferred thither, which now control those which are from the cerebellum, and this from an endeavor to form the expressions of the face according to the behests of man's own will, all of which is from the cerebrum. [AC 4326]

That this is a very respectable analysis and one consistent with modern science can be seen from the following viewpoint:

In fact from the evolutionary history of the cerebellum in vertebrate animals, it looks as though nature started out to make the cerebellum the highest center of the nervous system but then changed its mind and developed the cerebrum instead.³

³ C. Morgan & E. Stellar, *Physiological Psychology* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1950) p. 288.

How about Noah and the Progressive Neandertals? In the 1930's several fossils were found in Skühl Cave in Mount Carmel, Palestine. These fossils showed an elaboration of the forehead and reduction in facial size of a magnitude midway between Neandertal and Cro-Magnon. At first these remains were thought to be hybrids between Neandertals and more modern types living side by side. However, isotope dating established that the Skühl Cave people lived about 5,000 years later than the Classical Neandertals. None of the latter were known to exist more recently than 40,000 years ago. In addition, there is no evidence of any modern types of men living at that early date.

The Progressive Neandertals then are most likely transitional stages in Neandertal's direct evolution into Cro-Magnon. The Neandertals are not, as formerly believed, merely an unsuccessful side branch of human evolution, nor the Progressive forms the result of hybridization. Some other causes more probably transformed some of the Neandertals into Cro-Magnon while the rest became extinct.

I tend to identify Noah with the Progressive Neandertals, since Noah was not the Ancient Church but its parent and constituted a bridge between the Most Ancient and Ancient nature of man.

Noah was not the Ancient Church itself, but was as the parent or seed of that Church as before said, "Noah" together with "Shem, Ham, and Japheth," constituted the Ancient Church, which immediately succeeded the Most Ancient. Every man of the church called "Noah" was of the posterity of the Most Ancient Church, and with respect to hereditary evil was therefore in a state nearly like that of the rest of the posterity which perished. . . . [AC 788]

If these constructions are not too far wrong, and the skull features mentioned above reflect an emergence of speech as well as voluntary control over respiration, the adaptive advantages must have been enormous. Here is a possible solution to the "Neandertal Problem."

Anthropology has never offered a satisfactory explanation for the universal disappearance of Neandertal and the sudden emergence of Cro-Magnon. An extremely rapid evolution of Neandertal into Cro-Magnon is called for by the fossil evidence but has no obvious basis.

If we accept Swedenborg's account, then the pressure of natural selection based on superior adaptive skills inherent in language could account for such a rapid transformation.

THE CONCEPT "MOST ANCIENT"

In reviewing various studies dealing with the concept of Most Ancient, I have found a consistent problem of interpretation. A distinction between the Most Ancient Church and the Most Ancient people is frequently absent. It is this ambiguity that appears responsible for most of the difficulties in finding ancient reference populations for these terms.

The Most Ancient Church is a term applicable only to a relatively small part of the earth's population living at some early period for an unknown duration in the geographical area of Canaan (AC 4454). Its decadent posterity perished in the flood.

As a working definition, I would suggest that Swedenborg's term "most ancient" refers to a time period when humanity *as a whole* possessed a perceptive capacity based on internal respiration. While we have no good evidence as to when such men first evolved, it is reasonable to believe that these mental and physiological capacities were lost somewhere between 30-40,000 years ago when the Neandertals became extinct. The term Most Ancient men, therefore, applies to all men prior to the flood during the era of internal respiration and perception.

It is apparent that the Most Ancient Church was but one population of Most Ancient men among many in those early times.

Such did this new church become which is called "Noah," and thus it was of an entirely different nature from the Most Ancient Church. Besides this church, there were other churches also at that time, as that which is called "Enosh," *and others also of which no such mention and description is extant.* [AC 640, italics added]

Although all men possessed internal respiration in the Most Ancient time, all are not to be included in the Canaan population called the Most Ancient Church.

From the contents of this chapter as above explained, it is evident that in the most ancient time there were many doctrines and heresies separate from the church, each one of which had its name, which separate doctrines and heresies were the outcome of much more profound thought than any at the present day, because such was the genius of the men of that time. [AC 422]

The significance of the flood then extends far beyond the consequences for the Most Ancient Church as it was a *world-wide* extinction of all of the Most Ancient men. The Most Ancient Church perished as well as the most ancient nature. I believe therefore that the flood coincides with the extinction of all Neandertal types and the emergence of the Cro-Magnons.

THE FLOOD

I do not think it is feasible to believe that the entire old world was repopulated by a small remnant from the Near East. Instead, it makes greater anthropological sense and is, I believe, consistent with Swedenborg (AC 640) to infer multiple locations for the transformation of the Most Ancient into the Ancient nature. Rather than interpreting all flood legends of various cultures as Near Eastern in origin, such cultures may have had their own flood heroes exactly as their legends maintain. Some ancient eastern religions claim to have descended from flood survivors and may, in fact, be derived from the heresies and doctrines that Swedenborg mentions.

The discovery of Progressive Neandertal fossils near ancient cultural sites, like the Indus Valley, will support this view. After all, according to Swedenborg, the Most Ancient Church was not the only church of antiquity, but the only one mentioned in the Word for representational purposes. It was the loftiest of churches among the Most Ancient men.

The Ancient Church was probably in a similar position, having inherited the high truths and insights of the Most Ancient Church itself. For representational purposes this church was better suited than others in other locations, since its lands were symbolic from the earliest times.

Each point made in the above discussion could be expanded into a volume. Some are hopefully correct, others in error. These are my views for today but are subject to change as new evidence arises and Swedenborg's works are better understood. All man's truths are but approximations. This qualification, however, need not deter us from the attempt to learn all that we can about our natural and spiritual universe from the wealth contained in the Writings.