General Church Education

The Ancient Church

Lesson 3

The Five Churches

For ages 11-13

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The Ancient Church

Teacher Background

After the Most Ancient Church fell, the human mind changed. The Lord separated the understanding from the will so people could think before acting. This meant they could develop a conscience by reading a written Word, the Ancient Word, which taught them to love others (see *The Gift of Conscience* at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/5c-the-gift-of-conscience.pdf). While most of this Word was lost, part of it survived in the opening chapters of Genesis. This Word was filled with symbolic meaning or correspondences. These symbols constituted an important part of their life and wor-ship. The church spread to many parts of the world, and remnants of it have survived through the artwork, statuary, fables, religious beliefs and practices of many nations.

Focus Points

- The Ancient Church had a written Word, the Ancient Word, most of which was lost.
- Symbols had an important role in their life of charity and worship.
- The Ancient Church spread to many nations, giving most people knowledge of God.

Readings from the Writings

"In the ancient churches charity was the principal and essential of the church." *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 246

"Charity toward the neighbor involves doing what is right in every task." *Arcana Coelestia* 8121

"Angels of the third heaven have told me that the ancients had a Word among them, written, like our Word, solely in terms of things that correspond, but which has since been lost. They also said that this Word is still preserved among them, and is used by the ancients in that heaven, for whom this was the Word when they lived in the world.... The first seven chapters of Genesis appear in the same Ancient Word so completely that not the least word is missing." *De Verbo* 15

The religious beliefs and practices of many nations were derived from [the Ancient Word]…. In Greece the people used correspondences to create fables, and they turned the attributes of God into so many deities. See *De Verbo* 15.5

When a human being's will part had become wholly corrupt, the Lord miraculously separated his intellectual part from that corrupt proprium of his will part, and in the proprium of his intellectual part He formed a new will, which is conscience. See *Arcana Coelestia* 1023

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Teacher Activity Overview

The student lesson offers the following activity choices:

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

Complete Sentences about the Ancient Church

Choose the best ending to complete each sentence. Then give your opinion about the Ancient Word today.

What Is Conscience?

In most ancient times, people instantly knew if an idea was true or not. All this changed in ancient times when conscience came into being. Learn what conscience is, and then give your conscience a check up!

Additional Project and Activity Choices for Parents and Teachers

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Five Churches

Discover king Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its relation to the Five Churches by cutting out, assembling, and arranging five cubes to illustrate the story. Print on sturdy paper to use throughout these lessons. Online at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/project-nebuchadnezzars-dream-and-the-five-churches-daniel-2-true-christian-religion-760.pdf

A Chart of the Five Churches

Complete a chart showing symbols which represent the five churches. Fill in the chart as you finish each lesson. Available at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/five-churches-chart-daniel-02.pdf

The Five Churches Statue Twist

Create a model of Nebuchadnezzar's dream statue and twist the statue to match each segment with one of the five churches, a major figure in the Word, a time of the day, a season of the year, an age of a person's life, and various metals to which it corresponds. Available at https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-five-churches-statue-twist.pdf

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The Ancient Church

Vocabulary

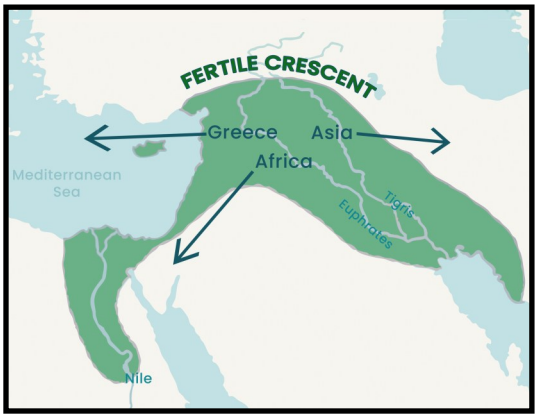
Ancient Word—the first written Word, part of which is in Genesis
correspondence—a connection between spiritual and natural things
polytheism—belief in or worship of more than one god

Introduction

The Writings tell us that the great flood in Genesis is about the end of the Most Ancient Church. The people who survived the flood were those who started a new church, the Ancient Church. The Word calls this church "Noah". Noah and his family stand for the good people who were left at the end of the Most Ancient Church. The Ancient Church was different from the Most Ancient Church in important ways. Whereas the Most Ancients were mainly motivated by loving the Lord, the Ancients were spiritual people. They chiefly loved their neighbor. But their minds were different and they could not immediately tell if an idea was true. As they learned what was true and were willing to follow it, the Lord could build a conscience in their minds. Conscience reminded them to turn away from what was wrong and to do what was right.

The Ancient Word

The Lord provided for the development of writing so that people could learn about Him through the written Word, rather than by dreams and speaking with angels, which happened in most ancient times. The first written Word was the Ancient Word. It was revealed through prophets who were inspired by the Lord. It was written in a symbolic language. Each story it contained held a deeper message, and every word had a "correspondence" or special meaning. Once people knew and understood what the words meant, they could grasp the hidden meaning within each story. A small part of this Word exists today. It is the first seven chapters of Genesis which contain the stories of creation, the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood. Most of the four next chapters of Genesis were written in the style of the Ancient Word.



The Writings also say that the Ancient Word was the source of ancient myths about creation and a great flood. These stories are found in many world cultures including Native American tribes and Chinese ethnic groups. Myths helped people understand the relationship between the natural and spiritual worlds, or between people and the Lord.

Practicing Correspondence

The Ancient people's knowledge of correspondence

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played a large part in their life and worship. They made images and statues of things like animals and people to remind them of the symbolic meanings in the Word. They placed these statues in their homes and places of worship. They sang songs and used a variety of musical instruments to worship the Lord. They knew that each instrument corresponded to a specific love. Flutes, for instance, correspond to celestial or heavenly affections, while harps correspond to spiritual affections. It was also due to the correspondence of natural things that they worshiped on mountains, under large trees, or in beautiful gardens. They anointed themselves with oil, burned incense, and did many other things to represent aspects of their spiritual lives, to get closer to heaven and to the Lord.

Social Structure

With the rise of evil after the fall of the Most Ancient Church, people began to band together into nations under kings for protection. They no longer lived apart in families, like the most ancient people, but lived in communities under leaders. Instead of finding happiness in loving the Lord, they found their greatest happiness in loving others. They learned how to be just and fair in all they did from the Word. Like the people of the Most Ancient Church, the first people of the Ancient Church understood marriage to be between one woman and one man. Married couples shared a special love called conjugial love. Each partner loved their husband or wife and wanted their hearts and minds to be joined as one. They also looked to the Lord together and loved their family.

Relationship with the Lord

The people of the Ancient Church thought of God as "Jehovah". They also expressed His many qualities through other names, such as "God Most High", which they used when they thought about the Lord as the source of all love. When they were going through trials, or coming out of them, they called Him "El Shaddai" or God Almighty. Sometimes they called him "Adonai", which means "Lord" or "Master". They also called him "Jehovah Zabaoth", which means "The Lord of Heaven's Armies". The Ancients worshiped the Lord with their hearts and minds as well as their actions, and thought about everything they did. The symbol of the Ancient Church is silver because silver means truth and these people loved true ideas.


Statue of a Lamb

The Heaven of the Silver Age

When Swedenborg visited the heaven of the Ancient Church, he saw statues of animals and people. These statues helped the angels think about moral virtues, such as kindness, honesty and generosity. He also saw horses, which symbolize understanding true ideas. They were pulling chariots carved to look like eagles, whales and unicorns. The chariots symbolize teaching true ideas from the Word.

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The angels worshiped in magnificent temples made from blue gemstones. They lived in a city in beautiful homes. When Swedenborg was invited into a home, he saw decorative artwork on the walls, and small silver statues. These objects helped the angels think about the happiness of marriage. Then suddenly, a flaming rainbow appeared on the wall. It was purple, blue and white. These colors pictured the love the husband and wife brought to their marriage.


Grapes with Leaves of Silver

The Fall of the Ancient Church

The Ancient Church gradually fell away from a strong love of their neighbor and the Lord. With that they lost their ability to understand the Word clearly. For example, they knew sheep and cattle corresponded to good loves given by the Lord, but mistakenly thought the Lord was pleased when they sacrificed animals in worship. The Lord respected their worship when they did this sincerely. But in time people completely lost the understanding of correspondences. They began to worship the statues and images they had made as separate gods, making them idols. Other people of the falling Ancient Church, who did understand correspondences in places such as Egypt and Babylon, used the power of correspondences to do evil. This was a kind of magic.

The Scope of the Ancient Church

The Ancient Church lasted a long time. To begin with it consisted of the people called "Noah" in the Word (Genesis 7). But it gradually spread, together with the Ancient Word. It moved into Africa and into the eastern reaches of Asia. We are told that there are traces of the Ancient Word in China. Though the Ancient Word was understood with great variety, we are told that, in its integrity, the Ancient Church was held together by charity and mutual love.

The widespread and varied nature of the Ancient Church meant there were changes. Eber, in Genesis 11, represents the move animal sacrifice. The ancients knew the representation of each animal so doing this let the Ancient Church continue after it had nearly died. The end of this church is described in a number of stories. These include the destruction of the Tower of Babel, the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the devastation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea.

The Ancient Church and Our Lives

Like the people of the Ancient Church, we are led by the Lord through the written Word. Like them, we can learn how to turn away from evil and love the Lord and other people. We can also use correspondences to understand the Word so that we can tackle life not only with natural purpose, but with spiritual purpose. We can also recognize that the Lord's many names reflect His qualities, and create art that reminds us of spiritual things.

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Activity Overview

Projects and Activities (see back of book for answers)

Choose one or two.

Complete Sentences about the Ancient Church

Choose the best ending to complete each sentence. Then give your opinion about the Ancient Word today.

What Is Conscience?

In most ancient times, people instantly knew if an idea was true or not. All this changed in ancient times when conscience came into being. Learn what conscience is, and then give your conscience a check up!

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Complete Sentences about the Ancient Church

Choose the best ending to complete each sentence. Write the letter in the space provided.

_____ 1. The story of Noah and the ark

a. is about Noah finding an ark to save his family and himself.

b. pictures the end of the Most Ancient Church and the beginning of the next.

_____ 2. The people of the Ancient Church

a. had various names for God to help them think of his many qualities.

b. built arks to survive the flood.

c. loved the Lord more than the neighbor.

_____ 3. The Ancient Word was

a. filled with stories which had a heavenly meaning.

b. perfect for the people of the Ancient Church.

c. all of the above.

_____ 4. The Ancient Word may be found

a. In heaven where it is used by angels who were members of the Most Ancient Church.

b. in the first chapters of the book of Genesis.

c. in Asia.

d. all of the above.

_____ 5. When the Ancient Church fell, people started

a. worshiping many gods.

b. trusting magic to keep them safe instead of looking to the Lord.

c. using correspondences to create myths or stories.

d. all of the above.

Give Your Opinion!

Most of the Ancient Word was lost. However, some parts of it are in the Old Testament. These include the stories of creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the ark, and the tower of Babel.

- Why do you think the Lord made sure that this part of the Ancient Word survived?

- Do you think we will find the rest of the Ancient Word? Why or why not?

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What Is Conscience?

In most ancient times, people instantly knew if an idea was true or not. All this changed when conscience came into being. Learn what conscience is, and then give your conscience a check up!

Our conscience is the voice in our minds that speaks to us when we are thinking of saying or doing something selfish. It helps us think before we act. We may also hear it telling us to apologize if we have said something unkind or treated others unfairly. Conscience is the Lord speaking.

Have you ever wondered if babies have a conscience? Do babies hear a voice in their minds warning them not to grab a toy from another child? No. Babies do have a conscience. In fact, it is essential for adults to teach them to treat others kindly. This begins when a parent or caregiver gently says "no" and helps them give back the toy. Parents and caregivers can teach these lessons when children are young, but we must eventually learn what is right by reading the Word ourselves.

Have you ever been tempted to do something you know is wrong? The Writings tell us that the only way to go to heaven is to freely say "no" when we are tempted. In fact, it is impossible to go to heaven unless we overcome our selfish thoughts and feelings in temptation.

Conscience check-up

I think about how my actions with affect others before choosing what I say or do.



I try to think about how others feel.



I try to put the needs of others before my own needs.



I try to make choices that are best for everyone.



I ask myself, "How can I do better?"



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Answers

Lesson 3

Complete Sentences about the Ancient Church

1. b, 2. a, 3. c, 4. d, 5. d.