



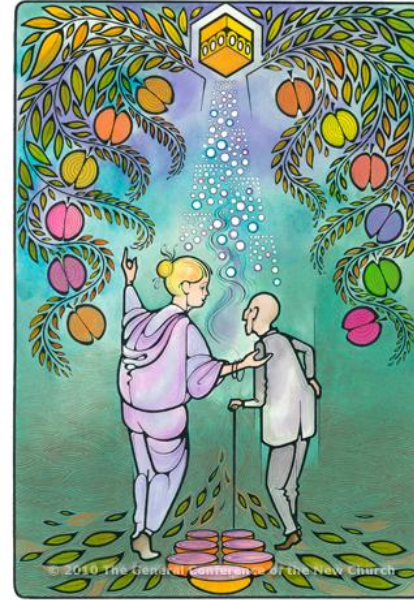
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Lifeline

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Our mission is to express, share and experience with others in life an inclusive, non-judgmental vision of God's kingdom.

O Come, O Come, Immanuel !

Are there times when you feel dissatisfied or unhappy about the current situation, and long for things to change for the better? Over 2000 years ago the people of Palestine felt badly treated, oppressed and painfully exploited by their Roman overlords, and were looking for a saviour - or Messiah, as they called him. And, as they understood from their scriptures, God had certainly promised just that.

In the New Testament, near the beginning of Luke's gospel, we learn of a devout man named Simeon, who was 'looking for the consolation of Israel' - a phrase that was used to mean looking for the saviour figure, or messiah, who had been prophesied to come and save Israel from her enemies. Then, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he came into the Temple in Jerusalem just at that time when Mary and Joseph had brought the eight day's old baby Jesus to be consecrated according to the Jewish custom of the time. On seeing the holy Child he took it up in his arms and praised God saying,

*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation.*
Luke 2:29-30

For Simeon, his wait was over and he felt he could now 'depart', that is die, in peace. However, for most of the Jews at that time, Jesus turned out to be a complete let down as their messiah. Why? - because he didn't save them from their overlord oppressors, the Romans.

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www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Barnado's Big Toddle

On Saturday 21st September, Tuckton New Church gave a very warm and friendly welcome to several new local young families, many of whom attend Tuckton's New Church Parent and Toddler Group who joined the Barnardo's Big Toddle.

There were lots of fun activities for everyone to enjoy. These included face-painting, bouncy castle, track painting, making nursery rhymes hats and modelling clay. At 11am we set off on our big toddle singing nursery rhymes as we went. Starting at the lounge we walked through the church, out through the vestibule, into the church grounds and back into the hall through our balloon arch and then we all went round again. Our toddlers ranged from babies in prams, toddlers, older siblings, parents, grandparents and members of the Church community.

Everyone received rosettes and certificates after the toddle, including our church community members to whom I would like to say an enormous thank you for their support, help and enthusiasm in making the day so wonderful. All the activities were free; however, £22.15 was collected in donations for Barnardo's on the day, and from sponsoring the toddlers we raised £418.35 in total for Barnardo's and disadvantaged children under 5.

If you are interested in starting a Toddler group or know someone who might be please get in touch (jen.pickard@generalconference.org.uk). There are lots of fun activities and events The New Church can offer its young people even the really little ones!

Jen Pickard

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a block turns out very differently from the idea that you had in mind when you started.

As we celebrate Christmas and the Lord's birth, and relate it to his presence in our life, notice the part of journeys in the story and try to start out on your own. You won't know what it will involve but its purpose is to lead you to Bethlehem - 'a house of bread' - to the baby lying in the manger, who later in his life would break bread with 5,000 people and break bread with his disciples in an upper room.

Rev Julian Duckworth

Three Christmas Journeys

The Biblical story of Christmas tells us that there were three journeys made at the time of the Lord's birth: the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a journey that would have taken roughly about six days; the journey of the shepherds from the hillsides around Bethlehem to the place where the baby lay in the manger; and of course the journey of the wise men from the east following the star which led them to the house where the young child was. Three very different journeys.

The first journey was probably slow and wearisome, with Mary pregnant, frequent stops, and crowds on the roads all going towards their family's home town according to the Roman census. The second journey was done in great haste over not a great distance and we can think of the shepherds running down the hillside towards the town in a matter of mere minutes. The third journey, by contrast, was very determined, as the wise men set their course by the star going before them, trusting their travel to its onward movement. This would have been the longest journey by far, a journey of many days. Note that while each journey was different, the actual destination was always the same - the place of new birth, of a Divine birth on earth.

It's often said that life itself is a journey, and it's often said too that the journey is more important than the destination. There can't be a more important destination for us than the Lord and our discovery of His presence in our lives, but yes, it will take us on a journey to be able to come to that realisation. The journey is one that we must make within ourselves; sometimes it will be slow and painstaking, like Joseph and Mary travelling, sometimes quick and perceptive like the shepherds, and sometimes we simply follow what we have seen and come to believe is true, like the wise men with the star ahead.

Literally, a journey is the route we take from being in one place to being in another. These days, journeys can be made in a matter of almost no time at all, sometimes giving a false impression of the great distance travelled. A spiritual journey takes us from one state to another, perhaps through doubt into stronger belief, through hardship into hope, or however it is for us. Like today's very fast travel though, it is so easy for us to talk about changing from a negative state to a positive one, and not really think enough about what is involved in making that journey. One of the words that is currently very widespread is the word 'process'. It's a very powerful word and it describes the spiritual area of life very well. A process is usually a kind of journey; sometimes it is a journey that takes you on it as you go, perhaps feeling a bit unsure of where it is taking you and how it will end. People who create art know that the process of painting a picture or carving

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Their error, one easy for any of us to fall into, was to look for an external saviour who would sort things out for their benefit, rather than an 'internal saviour' within one's own heart and mind, effecting an inner change within oneself. Jesus Christ is the true Saviour because that is where he operates - within - to change each of us, rather than to change other people or circumstances for us.

Though naturally we would all welcome having our material or physical circumstances improved, it is salvation from our inner enemies such as self-centred fears, jealousies or pride that we need - especially if we are looking beyond just our welfare in this mortal life. It is knowing and experiencing this inner salvation that enables a person to 'see this salvation of the Lord' and so be able to 'depart in peace'.

The 'salvation' that forms the heart of the Christmas promise comes not in what we may receive from others, but in what we feel released within to give freely to others.

Following Simeon's inspired experience may we as it were hold the beautiful childlike image of perfect love and wisdom in our arms, knowing that herein lies our own true salvation through which we may be inwardly freed to spiritually 'rest in peace' now and always.

Rev Michael Stanley

And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Luke 2:33-38

Malachi 4

Introduction

There is so much in the Word from which to read as we go through the advent season. We could concentrate on the Old Testament and the wonderful prophecies of Jesus' coming or we could pay close attention to the opening chapters of the Gospels and re-visit the stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth and the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary or perhaps think about Joseph's role in the Lord's coming.

But in this article I would like to share with you some readings and thoughts on the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and what it can teach us.

The prophetic books of the Old Testament are divided into the Major prophets and the Minor prophets. Books such as Isaiah and Ezekiel form part of the Major prophets and Micah, Jonah and Malachi are some of the Minors. Unlike many of the other prophets we can learn nothing from the Old Testament about the personal life of Malachi but it is worth putting the book of Malachi into its historical position.

In 587 BC Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and carried the people off into exile in Babylon. Fifty years later when Cyrus captured Babylon he allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem and spurred on by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah they finally rebuilt the temple in around 516 BC.

Over the following years exiles continued to return and the Temple and the religious life of the people returned to something of its former glory. This stage of development is faithfully recorded in the book of Nehemiah at about 440 BC. It seems that the Jewish people once again kept their covenant with God, they helped the poor, shunned mixed marriages, kept the Sabbath and brought their tithes and offerings faithfully. But Nehemiah left the people for a while and they rapidly declined into their former ways. It was at this point that Malachi spoke to the people.

Malachi means 'my messenger' and the book attributed to him commences with the words: *The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi*. It is an unusual book in that it is full of a series of questions and answers asked by both God and his people. Frequently the Lord's statements are followed by sarcastic questions introduced by the words "*But you ask*". At times this makes it quite hard to read.

heredity covered everything that we can ever come across. All the difficulties, all the problems that we can possibly experience.

Some of them are easily recognised. Adultery, violence, hatred, drink, greed, miserliness . . . Others are less obvious. Sickness, disease, injury. King Uzziah for example was a leper. Others still are so obscure that it is easy for us to overlook them. The sort of thing that we may dismiss or excuse as mere habit or perhaps just as part of our character makeup.

The Lords spiritual heredity covered them all. This is reinforced in verse 16 where Joseph is described as being "*the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ*". In a positive sense a married pair represent the conjunction of good and truth. In a negative sense, that of evil and falsity.

If it were necessary to give further reinforcement we have it in verse 17 where we are told that the count of the whole of the list is three times fourteen generations. And this does add up to 42. Mankind was on the verge of complete spiritual devastation. Not only did our Lord experience and overcome all that we ever can; He experienced and overcame more. More than we can experience, more than we can imagine. For there are things beyond our temptations which only He could experience: for He is God.

Because He overcame all, He is able to state at the end of Matthew's Gospel that "*All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*" and to say "*I am with you always*".

Knowing this we can confidently take all to Him. We cannot shock Him - nothing is too bad. We cannot annoy Him - nothing is too trivial. He really has seen it all before. He really has experienced it all before.

He is our saviour. His desire is to forgive, to heal, to redeem. To crown you with love and mercy.

Ray Kennion

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all
your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalms 103:1-5 ESV

Verse 5 brings us Boaz who was born to Rahab who had been a prostitute on the edge of Jericho. Boaz took Ruth the Moabite as his wife. And then David the King both finishes off this section and starts the next one.

The name David means beloved. We set up to rule over our lives the principles we best love. We also tend to set up our principles to rule the people around us. We expect them to conform to our ideas of how life should be lived: often in great detail. David the King is just such a beloved principle. However! To be ruled by David is not always as wonderful as we suppose.

This is highlighted at the beginning of the second section where we are told that "*David the King begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah*". It could have simply said that he begot Solomon by Bathsheba; but it does not. This list really does pick out the low points.

This middle section lists kings of Judah. When we read the first and second books of Kings we get to know that they were as much a mixed bunch as were Judah and his brothers. At best they were somewhat erratic in their response to the Lord's word which was addressed to them through the prophets.

The section ends by referring to the carrying away of Babylon. Getting carried away is what the kings did. And it's what we do also. Just as David got carried away when he saw Bathsheba - Uriah's wife. So are we carried away with pride about our own rightness. A pride which blinds us to the errors of our ways. In such a state we are without any control of our spiritual destinies; Just as Judah became a captive people without a king.

The third section of the list, which begins with the carrying away of Babylon, makes no mention of a return from that state. No return to the rule of principle. Only such life as is permitted under the rule of the Persians, Greeks and Romans.

Only the first two persons named in the final section are known in Old Testament records. And while Zerubabel played a significant part in the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem by the returned exiles, the fact that Zerubabel means "Shoot of Babylon" indicates that the pride that is Babylon has taken root in our hearts. Spiritually we are all but dead.

So dead in fact that the remaining names in this list are unknown elsewhere in scripture. Oh there may be plenty of activity in our lives and in our churches but without spiritual life, it counts for nothing. Even Mary and Joseph were unknowns. Two simple honest people whose highest hopes were for a peaceful life together.

This list right at the beginning of Matthew's gospel shows how Jesus' spiritual

But the most important aspect of Malachi is that it closes the Old Testament and no prophetic voice arises until John the Baptist starts to preach in the wilderness some 400 years later. It is thus a book about the end of a phase of life after which the Lord can come.

If you are able to at this point please read the whole of Malachi chapter 4.

Malachi 4 Verse 1

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

What an incredibly powerful picture these words paint! A burning oven - arrogant evil doers - they are all set ablaze - there is nothing left. If you ever wondered where the idea of wicked people being tormented in the fires of hell came from then you don't have to look much further than these words of Malachi. But of course they are not about the literal burning up of evil people but what can burn up in us.

Now we should of course burn or be on fire with love for others but instead we are quite capable of focussing on our own needs exclusively and the love that then burns is self-love - a destructive, all consuming blaze which can burn us up. And what this blaze destroys is everything good and true in us. Not just in the external aspects of our life - the branches - but also the most internal aspects - the roots. The blaze of self-love will leave neither root nor branch.

This is how the words of Malachi can speak to us today and we need to carefully reflect on the powerful message they present. But his words were also words of prophesy speaking of a future time - *Behold, the day is coming* - a time in the future when this state of individual self-love and its destructive effects were so prevalent that there would seem to be no way out for people. But as we know, there would be a way out.

Malachi 4 Verses 2-3

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

What an amazing change in just a few words. From images of burning and destruction we turn to the sun rising and bringing its healing, people leaping about like young calves and the day when the Lord acts.

The words 'sun of righteousness' are unique to this verse of Malachi 4. But we cannot read them without immediately thinking of the Lord and his great love for us and all the goodness that comes to us from that love. And although we would not normally associate wings with the sun we need to think instead of the Lord's wings. Wings are used in flight to raise a bird from one level to a higher level just as truth can raise our understanding upwards towards the light of heaven. So the sun with healing in its wings pictures all the wisdom and truth that flows from the Lord and which can heal us and lift us up.

But Malachi says that for us to experience the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings we need to fear the Lord's name. This is the same fear that the Psalmists frequently speak of, as in Psalm 25:14 - *The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.*

This fear is a holy fear which Emanuel Swedenborg describes in the following way in AC8925:

Regarding holy fear, meant by 'the fear of the Lord' in the Word, it should be recognized that this fear is love. That is, it is the kind of love young children feel towards parents, parents towards young children, married couples for each other, who fear to do whatever is displeasing, thus whatever injures love in any way. A fear like this is installed into a person's love when he is being regenerated. And since this fear accords with his love, and can exist within his love, and does in actual fact exist within or united to his love, it is called holy fear; and it is a fear of sinning or acting contrary to the Commandments, thus contrary to the Lord.

And the result is that we shall go out leaping like calves from the stall or as the Authorised Version says *ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.* Spiritually speaking growing calves describe an increasing affection for what is good and true. And this is what takes place in us when the sun of righteousness rises with healing in its wings.

Malachi 4 Verses 4-6

*Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.
Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.*

The very final words of the Old Testament start with the very clear command: *Remember the law of my Servant Moses.* Malachi's was the last Old Testament voice. It reverberated through 400 years or more of Biblical silence. During these

Elizabeth - God has sworn / God's Oath
Janet - Grace / Favour / Mercy of Jehovah
Matthew - Gift of the Lord
Mary - Bitterness
Joseph - Addition / Increase

Now Joseph is the 40th name in this list. And the quality of the number 40 is one of trial and tribulation. It reflects all the temptations and problems that people can face in life. Consider the use of the number 40 in God's Word.

Flood - 40 days and nights
Children of Israel wandered 40 years in wilderness.
In Deuteronomy 25 the maximum punishment is set at 40 strokes.
Goliath taunted Israel 40 days.
Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days and nights

This means that Jesus' name is the 41st in the list. More than 40 yet not as much as 42. Not complete devastation.

In Revelation 11:2 we read that the Holy City would be trodden underfoot for 42 months. In Revelation 13:5 the beast was given authority for 42 months. In 2 Kings 2, when youths mocked Elisha, 42 of them were mauled by bears. In Daniel 12 tribulation is said to last for a year plus two years plus half a year. This is 42 months.

So the placing of Jesus as the 41st name in the list reflects his coming when we have reached the end of our tether; when we are at the end of all our resistance and hope, and yet, before we are utterly destroyed. It reflects also his inheritance, encompassing all possible evils, and also His submission to none of them.

This list is full of details which help us to understand some aspects of this.

It begins with Abraham; and this reflects our first state. For Abraham was an idolater who was called away from his idolatry just as we are called to turn from a blind reliance on mere outward things.

The first section of the list (which ends with David the King) makes mention of people who appear to be tagged on at the side of the list. In verse 2 we are told that Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. And when we read Genesis from chapter 37 to the end we get the picture of a pretty mixed bunch. An example of this is to be seen in the very next verse where we are told that "*Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar*". Now Tamar was Judah's Daughter-in-law who bore him his fourth and fifth sons after his first two and his Canaanite wife had died.

Matthew's Genealogy

*Who forgives all your perversities.
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from
corruption.*
Psalm 103:3

To any ordinary person these may seem extravagant claims. For the claim is, that whatever happens to us, He has the answer.

It easy to make blind assertions about the Lord. Yet I wonder. I wonder if some of the difficulties that we have about taking everything to Him are because we find it difficult to accept in our hearts that the Lord really can deal with anything and everything. How could He?

Well! That seemingly bland list of names at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, indeed at the beginning of the New Testament, helps us to appreciate how.

It is, of course, much more than just a list of names. The list appears to record the Lord's heredity. But it's not just His ancestral heredity, It's also His spiritual heredity. This list shows us all the problems that He faced, it shows us all the difficulties that He overcame and it shows us the breadth and depth of the Lord's temptations.

It also shows us the extent of the Lord's thorough preparation in order that He could redeem mankind. It shows us how prepared and able He is to help you and me to overcome absolutely every problem and difficulty that we may face; no matter how great or how small. And its all there in a list of names because names reflect qualities.

Lets look at a few examples of what names mean.



An early 'illuminated manuscript' of the Bible with a traditional 'Jesse Tree' placed at the beginning of Matthew's gospel.

years some of what Malachi said took hold. Led by the Pharisees the Jews became increasingly devoted to keeping the Old Testament Law. Unfortunately they missed Malachi's main point and forgot that the law was not an end in itself. So in Jesus' time there was indeed great respect for the law and its customs and ceremonies but there was no heart in it. It was an empty shell. But Malachi concludes by prophesying the coming of John the Baptist, not named as such, but described as Elijah because both represented the Lord as to the Word.

Swedenborg comments on these final words of the Old Testament in Apocalypse Explained 724:7 –

John the Baptist was sent before to prepare the people for the reception of the Lord by baptism, because baptism represented and signified purification from evils and falsities, and also regeneration by the Lord by means of the Word. Unless this representation had preceded, the Lord could not have manifested Himself and have taught and lived in Judea and in Jerusalem, since the Lord was the God of heaven and earth under a human form, and He could not have been present with a nation that was in mere falsities in respect to doctrine and in mere evils in respect to life; consequently unless that nation had been prepared for the reception of the Lord by a representation of purification from falsities and evils by baptism, it would have been destroyed.

As we progress through Advent towards Christmas and the celebration of God's coming into the world in Jesus Christ, we need to recall that the Lord continually comes to us when we are open to receive him and when we seek his love and goodness in our lives. But like the people of Malachi's time we too can often be walking in darkness and with cold hearts, wrapped up in ourselves with no concern for others. And yet his prophecy is as true for us today as it was then,

"The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings"

Love and understanding can once again come into our lives. We can be saved from our selfishness and we can be forgiven for the wrong we have done. Jesus can be born again in us.

*"O Holy child of Bethlehem descend to us we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today."*

Alan Misson

Apocalypse Exhibition in Scotland

When the Scottish Association of the New Church first discussed the idea of bringing the Apocalypse of John paintings to Paisley it was thought that we would exhibit them in the Church hall. But after recalling feedback from other events here in Scotland, and the difficulties in attracting people to this type of event, it was decided we should find a neutral venue. The conclusion was that the Paisley Museum and Art Gallery with its central location and a regular stream of visitors would be most suitable. It was decided to run the exhibition for 6 days (Tuesday 22nd - Sunday 27th October). We were fortunate enough to secure a booking in the lecture hall which was clearly visible to everyone as they entered the building and our sign outside the lecture hall door with brief details of what was on offer was hard to miss.

Setting up the exhibition was fairly straightforward. After transporting the paintings from Purley Chase Centre, the three wooden crates fitting comfortably into the back of a Vauxhall Zafira, they were briefly stored at Paisley Church before being taken over to the museum which is less than a mile away. Staff at the museum were kind enough to allow Neil Laidlaw and myself access on the Monday to set up the exhibition and time for Angus Macpherson and me to pack them away on the Sunday. The crates containing the paintings are very well made and a number system helped keep things orderly when extracting and hanging the paintings and also when putting them back in the crates. The technical crew at the museum made themselves available for a couple of brief meetings prior to the event to work out floor space, dimensions etc. and the marketing department helped with advertising tips and also displayed our poster at other local authority venues. The local press showed an interest and the local authority web site also helped to promote the event.

On the first day the museum seemed quiet but staff commented that this was perhaps due to "the MOD" (a Gaelic festival) having been held in Paisley the week before and which resulted in the town being quieter during this following week. However we did have a few people that day who took a keen interest in the artwork and the short exposition based on Swedenborg's writings. The Scottish Association was delighted and very grateful that Rev Clifford Curry and Rev Mary Duckworth from the Apocalypse Study Group were able to attend the exhibition to help inform people of the origins of the paintings etc., and they managed to cover the Tuesday through to the Saturday between them.

Just inside the entrance to the lecture hall we set up a table with leaflets, postcards and the official Apocalypse of John catalogue. The catalogue is a very attractive book containing all 25 pictures in fine colour as well as the accompanying information allowing the visitor to 'take the exhibition home' for

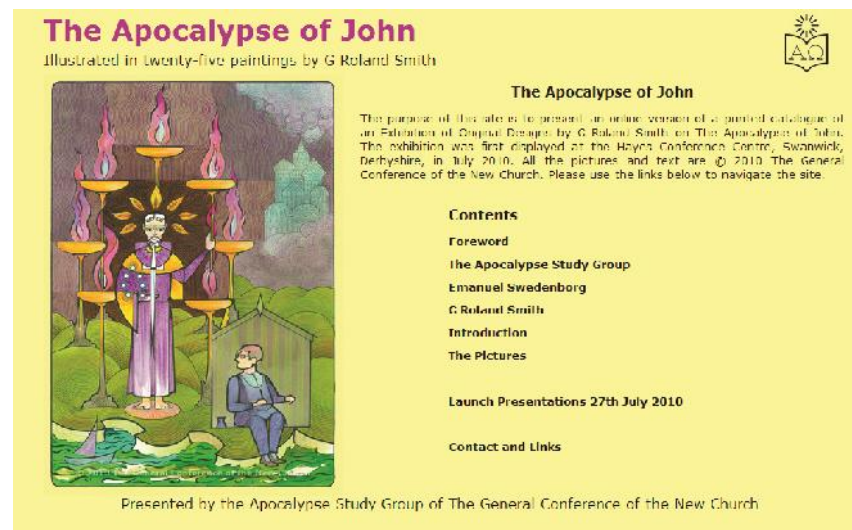
further study. We managed to sell 18 of the catalogues at a reduced price of £1.00. The normal price is good value to begin with at £5.00 but the Scottish Association provided the subsidy to encourage further study.

As the week progressed the visitor numbers picked up and with a total of around 45 serious visitors, the vast majority of whom were from outside our church, we regard the event as a good success. The feedback from those who took the time to appreciate the paintings was very encouraging and many acknowledged, and expressed their gratitude for the dedication and hard work that went into creating the paintings. For some it was the fine art work which inspired them, for others it was their personal identification with the exposition accompanying the paintings and still others showed their appreciation simply by the amount of time they spent examining the paintings and reading the accompanying words.

Our grateful thanks go to David Friend and all members of the Apocalypse of John Study Group for their help and support in allowing us to bring these fabulous pictures to the town of Paisley and the people of Scotland.

Rev Jack Dunion

- on behalf of the Scottish Association of the New Church



The Apocalypse of John
Illustrated in twenty-five paintings by G Roland Smith

The Apocalypse of John

The purpose of this site is to present an online version of a printed catalogue of an Exhibition of Original Designs by G Roland Smith on The Apocalypse of John. The exhibition was first displayed at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, in July 2010. All the pictures and text are © 2010 The General Conference of the New Church. Please use the links below to navigate the site.

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Launch Presentations 27th July 2010

Contact and Links

Presented by the Apocalypse Study Group of The General Conference of the New Church

Don't forget that the full set of paintings with text can be viewed online at:

www.apocalypse-of-john.org.uk