

## 2021 School in Theology

The 68th School in Theology gathered in Carronvale House, Larbert, after the hiatus of the previous year. The chief aim of the School is a combination of instruction and fellowship. It is unique in providing spiritual and theological reflection and discussion upon a range of topics over three and one half days. As the Name indicates, it is *not* a conference but a *school*. These papers therefore demonstrated depth of study, thought and careful examination with the aim of producing solid teaching, help and delight.

This year the School opened with a paper on the controversy between Whitefield and the Seceders, the latter of whom have been unfairly portrayed as short-sighted, narrow minded and extremist. This is due to ignorance over the crucial issues involved.

On day two, we were treated to a feast of good things. Rev Aaron Lewis spoke on Revitalising the Diaconal Ministry showing it's necessity and usefulness to others. The Branch passages in Zechariah were ably tackled by Rev William Macleod.

The missionary slot was a zoom link with Rev Shanmugam Partheepan (Sri Lanka) who updated the School on current events regarding covid and lockdown; ministerial challenges; congregational needs and future plans.

The day ended with a thrilling examination on the Presence of God by the Rev Malcolm Watts (Salisbury).

Wednesday began with book reviews where attendees were given surveys of particular publications ranging from biographies (RC Sproul) to sermons (Rev Macsween). Given the huge range of material available it is essential that buyers exercise discernment. Reviews are designed to assist in purchasing the best material. Colin Campbell provided an excellent selection of books for the School, which was appreciated.

Rev Murdo Angus Macleod gave a challenging paper on preaching to the conscience. After defining 'conscience' he proceeded to demonstrate from biblical examples the effectiveness of application. How often application to the soul is absent. With a judicious analysis of Scripture, we saw how and why application was essential.

Rev Iain Smith treated us to a stimulating paper on the New Heavens and New Earth as used in Isaiah, Peter and Revelation. Assumptions and generally understood interpretations were challenged which is often required in order to examine what we really do know and upon what basis. How often a view is simply taken for granted without examination.

The school ended with the Rev David Fraser exhorting us not to lose heart. From Scriptural, personal and historic examples he showed the source of losing heart (pride) the response to losing heart and directives to sustain hope.

In addition, each day began with prayer followed by breakfast. Midday meals and evening tea were provided by Carronvale house. Tea and coffee were in constant supply. Unsurprisingly, the papers given stimulated conversation and discussion well into the small hours for some. Morning devotions and evening worship are tasked to a number who attend thus ensuring that those who are not giving a paper, have an opportunity to contribute as well.

The business meeting on Wednesday followed by the meeting of Committee to plan the school for 2022, promises to be an equally thrilling experience for all who attend. Appreciation was expressed to the Secretary of the School, the Rev Andrew Allan.

Ministers and Elders of the Free Church (Continuing) are to be encouraged to come. Essentially this is an excellent opportunity for in-service training.