

Review of the Church History Paper by Edwin Allen H. Blackwood II

Having reviewed the Church History paper *Calvin's Geneva and her Refugees* by Edwin Allen H. Blackwood II (dated February 12, 2021) we would make the following initial observations:

1. It met the requirements for length and layout, being 14 double-spaced pages (excluding the title page and bibliography)
2. It contained a fairly extensive bibliography (showing a reasonable effort at research) and properly cited references in footnotes.

Unfortunately, we also noted the following:

1. The paper did not include a clearly stated thesis (i.e., a statement that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved) nor did it “prove” a thesis. Rather, it only surveyed the historical situation in Geneva and described how the city and Calvin were concerned for refugees (especially the poor) coming into the city. The Student Handbook specifically requires that, “Students should establish a clear thesis that is within the boundaries established by the given topic, and the paper should affirm that thesis.” (An example of a thesis might have been “Geneva’s and Calvin’s methods of dealing with poor refugees became a pattern that was taken by some of those refugees back to their homelands and implemented” and then evidence that that was in fact the case could be brought forward.) In the paper Mr. Blackwood writes, “Thus, it is not at all surprising that care for the poor, and specifically, care for the foreigner or refugee, would be one of the focuses in Geneva during and after Calvin’s time there.” But then he fails to demonstrate how that was the case after Calvin’s time in Geneva. Later in the paper he states regarding many of the refugees that, “...they returned to their home lands and attempted to bring home Reformation like they had witnessed in Geneva.” But no real evidence of that is presented.
2. While the paper had been previously submitted to the Seminary, as is recommended by the Handbook, and revised based on feedback received then, we still feel that there was not a clear thesis and proof of one as required by the Handbook.
3. In addition the Handbook says, “The student should also provide some indication as to the implications for the church today which arise from understanding this history and the thesis he has established.” Since there was no stated thesis, nor was one established, only a general observation that churches should have concern for refugees was put forward in the paper. (Given the example thesis in the point above an application to the church today would be to indicate specific practices and procedures that could be adopted.)
4. Another concern is that almost all of the citations are from secondary sources (a few quotations from Calvin and Beza are exceptions).
5. While perhaps a minor point, there were a few obvious spelling and grammatical errors which could easily have been corrected. For example:
 - a. In the title of the paper the word “her” should be capitalized.
 - b. The word “Shory” should be “Shortly”.

- c. The sentence that reads, “However, Geneva was unique in the degree **they** took to reform...” should be, “However, Geneva was unique in the degree **it** took to reform...”
 - d. The sentence that reads, “... the city leaders demanded **that** this group of ‘newly-arrived refugees to make plans to leave town’” should be “... the city leaders demanded this group of ‘newly-arrived refugees to make plans to leave town’”.
6. In the conclusion of the paper Mr. Blackwood states, “In many cases, the church in the West today, and perhaps the reformed church particularly, seems to have lost much of the desire for caring for the needy and the refugee, instead leaving this ministry in the hands of governing authorities and para-church organizations.” This leaves the reader with the impression that the church has the principal obligation to care for the needy and refugees. But the very purpose of the paper was to demonstrate that the governing authorities (as in Geneva) have an equal share in those obligations with the Church and with true reformation, they can jointly fulfil those obligations.

We reviewed our concerns with Mr. Blackwood with the possibility of the paper being revised and re-reviewed before this meeting of Presbytery, but that was not possible in the short time frame available.

As a result of our concerns, our recommendation is that the paper be returned to the author for revision and then resubmitted to Presbytery at a later date.

Dr. Frank Smith
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