

Review of Joe Smith's History Paper

We reviewed Joe Smith's paper wrote from his Church History 21 class, it received a 99% grade. The title of the paper is "Babies, Bread, and Wine: Paedo-Communion in the First Three Hundred Years of Church History".

The paper met all the technical requirements for the format, style, providing accurate sources of both a primary and secondary nature. No errors found in the grammar or spelling and Mr. Smith's arguments were presently clearly.

The premise of the paper is to look at three early Church Fathers to judge whether the Church in the first three centuries of church history endorsed paedocommunion. "The paper will concentrate on three primary sources from the first 300 years as an attempt to discern the early church's voice on this issue of paedocommunion." The student looked at the writings of Justin Martyr (110-165 AD), Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-219 AD) and Cyprian of Carthage (c. 250 AD).

The student rightly points out Justin emphasized the vital importance for those as adults coming to baptism must believe in order to receive the sacrament. He points out Justin does not touch upon paedocommunion or the specific requirements for communion. Mr. Smith declares Justin "neutral" as far as his writings are concerned on the topic. Here the student shows care not to put words into Justin's argument on baptism for the paedocommunion debate. Clement emphasizes that partakers of communion must examine themselves and that "by faith" sanctification comes from the sacrament. This reasoning follows the argument against paedocommunion, the writer concludes.

The student utilizes Cyprian's account of a child who partook of both a pagan and christian sacraments of bread and wine. Cyprian states a strong disapproval of an infant forced to partake of the bread and wine in a pagan sacrifice service (the child belonged to a christian mother and was captured by civil authorities in a time of persecution) by the order of the civil magistrate. The mother retrieves her infant child and brings it to a church service where the Eucharist is served. Once again the child is forced to partake of the bread and wine with great resistance. The child vomits out the elements, Cyprian comments on the infant previously been polluted by the pagan sacrament and is mysteriously directed by the Lord to reject the Lord's communion due to the prior pollution of the pagan sacrament. Mr. Smith draws a conclusion that Cyprian only criticizes the child's participation in the pagan sacrament and offers no criticism of it partaking in the christian sacrament, thus approving of paedocommunion in the Church.

The student does communicate very clearly and presents the arguments and premise in a straightforward manner. The paper demonstrates a strong balance between the testimony of church history in the early centuries of the New Testament Church and the importance of Scripture to have the final authority to resolve controversies in the Church. The student is correct to state clearly the Church did not seem to practice or teach for paedocommunion before ca. 251.

Recommendation: That presbytery approve Joe Smith's history paper.

Chris Stockwell
Kent Butterfield