

Pastoral Practice in the Preaching and Correspondence of John Chrysostom by John Sturm

Nathan Eshelman & Phil Pockras, examiners

This review committee, requested by the Candidates and Credentials Committee, read and reviewed a history research paper submitted by student Jonathan Sturm for partial fulfillment of requirements for licensure to preach. We both concur that this paper fits the guidelines of the Candidates and Credentials Committee, and we both recommend that this paper be sustained as fulfilling the requirement.

Please see the following standards by which the examination was judged as well as both the Eshelman and Pockras reviews:

Standards of the Examination

The church history paper examination according to the Student Handbook requires the presbytery: "...to test the student's ability to comprehend and interpret a given aspect of church history in a scholarly way and articulate his understanding in a paper that reflects excellence in research as well as communication skills." (p43)

The expectations by which the paper is examined are outlined on page 45 of the Student Handbook:

- * The paper should be 10-20 pages (not including title page, appendices, and bibliography), double-spaced, 12 point font, with standard margins
- * Students should establish a clear thesis that is within the boundaries established by the given topic, and the paper should affirm that thesis. 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
- * Footnotes should be used rather than endnotes. Footnotes should be in a widely accepted standard format (e.g., Chicago style, SBL, Turabian, etc.) Proper credit is to be given for all quotations
- * Students should use primary and secondary sources as well as general histories
- * The paper should be written in proper English, with good grammar and correct spelling

Following are our individual reviews:

Eshelman Review

Thesis: "In his ministry, John Chrysostom demonstrated a commitment to pastoring well—feeding Christ's sheep—through faithful preaching and, when providentially removed from the pulpit, through faithful written correspondence; in so doing Chrysostom provides the church with an imperfect but faithful model for how to pastor well." (p1)

Positive reflections about the paper

Chrysostom was a good choice for a subject. Often presbytery papers focus on reformation or post-reformation characters and it was refreshing to read interaction with thought from the ancient church—and from the East, no less!

The paper was clear and concise. I asked Mr. Sturm for his thesis and outline and my above outline was similar enough to assure that he wrote clearly from a thesis and a previously constructed outline.

The work was well edited, following the style guide required for historical theological writing. There were very few errors in this area.

The paper generally fits the presbytery requirements for a history paper examination. "Excellence in research" has not been fully demonstrated (as documented below), but Mr. Sturm has shown his abilities to communicate through a research paper and interact critically and applicably with church history.

Negative criticisms about the paper

The thesis is cumbersome and could be tightened up. The over-use of "pastored well" and "faithful" is repetitive and takes away from the precision required in a good thesis. (p1)

Several examples of Chrysostom being "rigorous in his commitment to the creedal formulations of the 4th century" (p4) are left undefended in the paper. This is a major part of the thesis and not one quotation reflects on the creed. This section may be better called "biblical commitment" rather than creedal. Surely C. was creedal in his orthodoxy, but the writer has not demonstrated that through his research.

Almsgiving is the example of Chrysostom being set apart from other ancients as a practical preacher. (p5) I would encourage Mr. Sturm to choose another application as almost universally, almsgiving is a theme preached on by the ancients and medievals.

Connected to the almsgiving, Mr. Sturm argues that Chrysostom was "no moralizer" (p6) in his application towards the requirement to give to the poor. Despite this claim, the block quote on the same page has Chrysostom defending almsgiving "so that you too may become worthy of the same verdict from God." The quotation is moralistic and opposed to what Mr. Sturm is arguing. This has not been thought out well and has been left undefended.

The bottom quarter of page 11 through the top of page 15 should be removed from the paper. Propounding that Chrysostom was "often more abrasive than was advisable" goes against the thesis that he is an example of "how to be faithful and pastor well." This section makes up 20% of the written material and ought not to be in this paper (under the current thesis).

Pockras Review

Mr. Sturm's paper was originally written for his CH 610 class at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The title well sums the content of his paper. It is well-written in a very readable and easy-to-follow style. Spelling and grammatical errors are nearly, or perhaps entirely absent. His annotation with footnotes and his bibliography are all in approved form according to Turabian's Manual. In short, it is evident that Mr. Sturm was conscientious not only in presenting his content, but its form and appearance as well.

Mr. Sturm formed a cogent introduction, supported it well with plenty of primary source material and a wide variety of secondary sources. I was particularly impressed that the bibliography encompassed old and new works, Russian Orthodox citations, a recorded video, and a doctoral dissertation. It seems obvious to me that Mr. Sturm must have been a history major in his undergraduate days and learned well his research skills.

Mr. Sturm is well-balanced in his assessment of John's preaching, teaching, and pastoring. He is neither a "fan-boy" nor a grim revisionistic critic, carping at everything. He brings out John's evident love for Christ and Christ's Bride. I was particularly pleased with how he drew parallels

with John Knox and Samuel Rutherford. At the same time, he does point out, where necessary, John's insufficient understanding of justification, his yielding to asceticism that was so ingrained in Greek culture, and his acerbity in dealing with opponents, whether they be the Empress Eudoxia, Judaizers, or others with whom he was contending. Further, I like how Mr. Sturm did not merely cite his secondary sources, but interacted with them.

At his close, Mr. Sturm brought all together in his conclusion, well rounding out this essay. I do not know the grade that Mr. Sturm received for this paper from Dr. Whitla, but I trust it was read by him with pleasure. I have taught a class in the Seminary Level Training Classes at Second Indianapolis' building, and I would not hesitate to grade this with an "A".

I heartily recommend that this paper be sustained.

Philip H. Pockras

Recommendation

We recommend that Mr. Sturm be sustained in his examination.

Humbly submitted,

Nathan Eshelman
Phil Pockras