

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA AND ITS
RELEVANCE TO THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIANS

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ONYEONORO, OBINNA BRIGHT
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ABSTRACT

The church right from the inception has been faced with a lot of challenges both from without and within. But God has not failed in raising men who are up to the task in defending Christianity. One of such men is Athanasius of Alexandria who lived between the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. He was a transitional figure between the early church fathers and the middle Ages. During the time of Athanasius, the major challenge facing the church was a serious persecution from within-Heretical teachings. This essay identifies how Athanasius used his writings and preaching assignment to combat these heresies and save the church from embarrassment. The study adopted the historical and bibliographic approach. Consequently, the researcher made use of books, encyclopedia, commentaries, articles from learned Journals and Internet materials. The resources at the J. C. Pool library of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomosho were of immense assistance for the work. The study reveals that the contemporary theologians and church leaders have a lot to learn from the life of Athanasius. Herein they are exposed to how to stand their ground to rescue the church from the devouring fangs of heresy that are everywhere in the Christian worlds today. However, the study cautions that those who will stand for the church at any point in time must endeavour to stand on the scriptures because one major thing that stands out most in the life of Athanasius of Alexandria is his consistent appeal to Scripture as the sole source and authority for his faith. This is also recommended for the contemporary theologians.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The world seems to move in an unbroken cycle. What is happening today is not really different from the happenings of ages past. Christianity as a faith has experienced no exception to this rule of nature. Persecutions, heresies, and other

challenges facing the Church of this age are not without precedents. Contemporary Christianity is going through a lot of doctrinal crisis. The real truth is on a struggle with numerous heretical inventions of foxes in sheep's clothing's who are out to take advantage of weak Christians. It is however, time for the contemporary theologians to rise to combat our own challenges. All the teachings and writings of Athanasius are nothing but exceptional wisdom to take advantage of ancient wisdom of Church fathers which is highly relevant to the contemporary Church as presented in this project.

Theologians of this age must take a leaf from Athanasius. We must rise up to dig out the knowledge of God's truth to rescue this age from scriptural illiteracy. If we won't, Christianity will soon be taken over by error. It is not that God cannot do it without us, but He has just chosen to use us as a vessel. Should we fail, He will raise up stones for Himself. Knowledge of the scripture can save Christianity from degradation and heresy.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Theologians are custodian of God's truth. Therefore, every theologian should rise up to their duty of teaching the truth of the word of God. Several Christians are illiterate on some basic fundamentals of Christian faith; hence, the theologians should ensure that pure doctrines are upheld.

The contemporary theologians should see reasons for studying theologians of the past. This will make a significant difference in the way they approach theological issues. Studying past theologians will help our contemporary theologians to see the

logic of their doctrinal development and why those certain doctrinal distinctions were important to the faithful defense of the gospel. Also, in studying the “theologizing” of these past theologians, the contemporary theologians will improve on how to theologize without error. The theologians of our contemporary time and the church at large should not merely stand on the shoulders of the past in terms of the doctrinal content we believe, but also in the logic and rationale used to form and shape that timeless content.

One major thing that stands out most in the life of Athanasius of Alexandria is his consistent appeal to Scripture as the sole source and authority for his faith. This is also recommended for the contemporary theologians.

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. The contemporary theologians, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. This will help the contemporary theologians to unfold the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century about which posterity will ask, “But how could the early theologians and apologists have thought that? It lies where we have never suspected it and that is the old books. It is not possible to fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books. Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. Also, the value of old books is not that they have no blind spots, but that they have different blind spots than we do, and therefore are valuable for exposing our