# Introduction

On the night of February 8, 356, five thousand soldiers under imperial orders invaded the Alexandrian Church of Theonas and seized Athanasius, the current bishop of Alexandria.[1] Overwhelmed by the situation, Athanasius went into shock and collapsed to the church floor—Athanasius was dead.

This was how the soldiers surrounding Athanasius initially interpreted his collapse. To them, Athanasius's motionless body indicated the absence of life. The reality, however, was quite different. Athanasius was playing dead and planning his escape. At the opportune moment, he arose and fled into the night, beginning his third exile.[2] This story highlights how greatly perception can differ from reality.

This book seeks to fill a gap in current scholarship by exploring the development of Athanasius's early theology of the Holy Spirit, which I regard as the period from Athanasius's election as bishop of Alexandria (328) to the completion of his *Orations against the Arians* (ca. 345).

One of the central claims in the book is that the pneumatology of Athanasius's early works has commonly been misinterpreted.[3]

1. The Church of Theonas, located near the western outskirts of the city, appears to have been Athanasius's church of choice until the centrally located temple, the Caesarion, was donated by Constantius (II) and converted into a cathedral. On the early churches in Alexandria, including the Church of Theonas, see Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 206–12.
2. The account of events here follows the fanciful narrative provided in Athanasius's *History of the Arians* 81, combined with details from *Defense of His Flight* 24.
3. It should be noted that I consider "pneumatology" to encompass all discussions about the Holy

Although this misperception is neither as extreme nor as dramatic as the misperception about Athanasius's body in the Church of Theonas, there are some similarities. Both misperceptions interpret quietness on Athanasius's part as a sign of something negative. To the guards, Athanasius's silence indicated that his body lacked life. Yet Athanasius's body was, of course, completely alive. To many modern readers of Athanasius's works, Athanasius's limited remarks about the Spirit in works before the *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, particularly in his most famous works, *Against the Pagans–On the Incarnation* and the *Life of Antony*, suggest that he essentially lacked a theology of the Holy Spirit before *Serapion* (ca. 359–361). However, in this monograph I argue that, from at least 329 onward, Athanasius's thought was not devoid of pneumatological reflection. Moreover, by the early 340s, Athanasius had developed the core or foundation of the "mature" pneumatology that he would articulate in *Serapion.*

My argument challenges the commonly accepted narrative that Athanasius's understanding of the Holy Spirit did not truly develop until the late 350s, when he was faced with the pneumatological questions raised by the "Tropikoi."[4] The most common form of this narrative suggests that Athanasius previously gave little thought to the Spirit because he, like his contemporaries, was focused on matters related to Christ.[5] This narrative is often accompanied by the assumption that scholarly inquiry into Athanasius's understanding of the Holy Spirit should focus on the question of the Spirit's divinity.

This "late-development narrative" frequently appears in general and specialized studies. Numerous books on Christian history and theology reflect this narrative.[6] Moreover, studies specifically on

Spirit. This goes against the tendency in modern scholarship to delimit "pneumatology" to inquiry into the Spirit's nature and relationship to the Father and Son. Therefore, the book uses the language of "pneumatology" and "theology of the Holy Spirit" interchangeably.

4. On the "Tropikoi" and the context of *Serapion*, see below, <TS>00.
5. A particularly bold example of this occurs in Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1898), 4:112: "The fact that Athanasius did not in the first instance think of the Spirit at all, regarding which also nothing was fixed at Nicaea, is simply a proof of his intense interest in his doctrine of the Son."
6. For example: Myk Habets, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 70; Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon , 1987), 299; Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine:*

Athanasius or early Christian pneumatology, which influence the broader historical monographs, often adopt this narrative.[7] For example, in his monograph on 1 and 2 Corinthians and the pneumatologies of Athanasius and Basil of Caesarea, Michael Haykin contrasts Athanasius and Basil according to their interest in the Spirit. Haykin writes: "For, whereas Athanasius's theology of the Spirit was developed really only towards the end of his life, Basil's career can be described as a life-long preoccupation with the subject and person of the Holy Spirit."[8] The implication of this is clear: Athanasius's understanding of the Spirit did not develop until he was stimulated by the Tropikoi.

The notion of orthodoxy being driven by heresy was championed and nuanced by Maurice Wiles,[9] who advanced a more skeptical version of the late-development narrative of Athanasius's pneumatology. While all scholars would surely agree that Athanasius's pneumatological doctrines in *Serapion* were influenced to some degree or another by the questions raised by the Tropikoi, Wiles contended that Athanasius's doctrines had been determined by his reaction to these "heretics."[10] Consequently, the theology of the Spirit in *Serapion* was not only a late development but also potentially uncharacteristic of Athanasius's previously undeveloped pneumatology.[11]

*From the First Century to the Present*, trans. F. Ernest Stoeffler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 61–62; J. R. Palanque et al., *The Church in the Christian Roman Empire*, trans. Ernest C. Messenger (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1949), 1:321; Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 4:112.

7. For this narrative in early Christian pneumatology before Athanasius, see H. B. Swete, *On the Early History of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: With Especial Reference to the Controversies of the Fourth Century* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1873), 5–46.
8. Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Spirit of God: The Exegesis of 1 and 2 Corinthians in the Pneumatomachian Controversy of the Fourth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 104.
9. See Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine: A Study in the Principles of Early Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 18–40. On development as a response to the views of the "Arians" and the Tropikoi, see ibid., 31–36.
10. Ibid., 31–33.
11. Sarah Coakley summarizes the viewpoint of Wiles in a similar manner: "The production of these arguments about the Spirit at a comparatively late stage in Athanasius's theological career, and for the purposes of seeing off a new heresy, might again cause someone like Wiles to wonder whether they are truly distinctive of his output: why was the Spirit ignored, indeed mentioned only fleetingly in the doxology of the *On the Incarnation*?" Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137. This quotation occurs in a chapter that revises and builds on Sarah Coakley, "Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Origins of the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles*, eds. Sarah Coakley and David A. Pailin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 29–56.

## Scope and Method

*Serapion* contains by far Athanasius's most sustained discussion of the Holy Spirit, and this, combined with the fact that it was written during Athanasius's mature years, has led many studies to focus almost exclusively on *Serapion*. While the importance of *Serapion* is undeniable, the value of Athanasius's other works for pneumatological studies has been underestimated. When one reads through Athanasius's works as a whole, particularly chronologically, it becomes apparent that the Holy Spirit is mentioned regularly throughout Athanasius's career and in works of various genres. Indeed, my own textual analysis reveals that of Athanasius's seventy-five authentic works, forty-seven works (63 percent) contain at least one reference to the Holy Spirit.[12] Although many of these occurrences are brief, they should not be dismissed too quickly.

In a short article published in 1981, Charles Kannengiesser demonstrated that brief or often overlooked references to the Holy Spirit, such as those found in the *Festal Letters*, can provide new insights into the history and content of Athanasius's pneumatology.[13] Apart from this revealing but dated study, references to the Holy Spirit in Athanasius's pastoral works have received little scholarly attention. No study has yet to seriously examine the pneumatology of these works alongside the rest of Athanasius's corpus. As a result of this omission, current accounts of the development of Athanasius's pneumatology have significant historical gaps in their narratives and an incomplete, if not skewed, description of Athanasius's understanding of the Spirit and the related doctrine of sanctification.[14]

As noted, the aim of this book is to help fill the gap in our knowledge about the content and development of Athanasius's early theology of

12. For a table of references, see appendix A below, <TS>00.
13. Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Holy Spirit Between Nicea I and Constantinople I," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 48, nos. 3–4 (1981): 166–80. Several of Kannengiesser's analyses of the *Festal Letters* assume compositional dates that have since been significantly revised. Further, at the time Kannengiesser denied Athanasian authorship of *Orations* 3—a perspective he would later abandon. These factors skew some of his arguments and warrant a new study.
14. . See below, <TS>00.

the Holy Spirit. Because of this aim, the majority of the book discusses material written between about 329 and 345, which includes Athanasius's early *Festal Letters*, *Pagans–Incarnation*, and *Orations* 1–3. The scope of the present work is therefore intentionally delimited in four main ways.

First, the book gives greater attention to *Orations* 1–2 over 3. This is because of their composition date and theological content. *Orations* 1–2 are the earliest, most likely written around 340, with *Orations* 3 being finished by about 345.[15] Additionally, as we will see, apart from one important development in *Orations* 3,[16] *Orations* 1–2 contain what I regard as "core" tenets about the Holy Spirit. These tenets served as the foundation on which Athanasius developed his pneumatological arguments and propositions in *Serapion*, including his unequivocal confession of the Spirit's divinity and role in creation, which represent the largest pneumatological developments in *Serapion*. Consequently, discussing *Orations* 3 in the same detail as 1–2 is not necessary.

Second, because my focus is on Athanasius's early pneumatology, this study says little about Athanasius's works from the 350s, such as *On the Decrees of Nicaea*, *Defense of Dionysius*, and *On the Synods of Ariminum and Seleuceia*, which contain only incremental developments regarding the Spirit.

Third, the book's discussion of *Serapion* is not intended to be exhaustive. Previous studies of Athanasius's theology of the Holy Spirit have focused on these letters, and thus my treatment of *Serapion* is only intended to show that the pneumatological tenets established in the *Orations* provided the foundation for the pneumatology expressed in *Serapion*.

Fourth, the present work intentionally avoids discussions about the procession of the Spirit and the *filioque* because Athanasius did not discuss them in his early works. The most relevant material regarding

15. On the provenance of the *Orations*, see below, <TS>00.

16. For our subject, the most important development that occurs in *Orations* 3 regards the distinction between the three persons. On this distinction, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 115–17. I would supplement Ayres's account with *Orations* 3.15, where Athanasius affirms the unity and plurality of the Trinity.

these questions occurs in *Serapion*, but, as others have noted, Athanasius's views are ambiguous and focused on other issues.[17]

In terms of method, I aim to fill the noted gaps in our knowledge by interpreting Athanasius's relevant passages within their historical and literary contexts. This attention to context follows the methodological recommendations that Johan Leemans makes in his bibliographical article on Athanasian scholarship from 1985 to 1998. Leemans's article is the spiritual sequel to Charles Kannengiesser's bibliographical summary of the prior decade, wherein Kannengiesser critiqued theological studies for neglecting literary criticism. Leemans repeats Kannengiesser's message: "I think Kannengiesser's critique is still valid today with regard to much of the literature. Far too often studies give a reconstruction of (part of) Athanasius's theology and buttress it more or less thoroughly with some important texts, mostly from [*Pagans–Incarnation*] or the [*Orations*]."[18]

To avoid this pitfall, Leemans suggests more scholars follow the commentary approach employed Craig Blaising.[19] "Such a careful close reading with attention for the context, both literary and polemical, is an essential prerequisite for an adequate understanding of Athanasius. Otherwise, we risk to understand only our reconstruction of Athanasius."[20] Despite its strengths, Blaising's commentary method cannot be identically repeated here because it would require writing a comprehensive commentary of each work relevant to Athanasius's theology of the Spirit. Nevertheless, I believe the method's merits can be garnered by following Blaising's key insight of recognizing the importance of interpreting Athanasius's statements in light of their literary contexts.

17. Adolf Martin Ritter, "Der Heilige Geist," in *Athanasius Handbuch*, ed. Peter Gemeinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 316–17. For an example of the ambiguity in *Serapion*, compare Xavier Morales, "La préhistoire de la controverse filioquiste," *ZAC* 8, no. 2 (2004): 325–31, with John R. Meyer, "Clarifying the Filioque Formula Using Athanasius's Doctrine of the Spirit of Christ," *Communio* 27, no. 2 (2000): 386–405.
18. Johan Leemans, "Thirteen Years of Athanasius Research (1985–1998): A Survey and Bibliography," *Sacris Erudiri* 39 (2000): 172.
19. Craig Alan Blaising, "Athanasius of Alexandria: Studies in Theological Contents and Structure of the *Contra Arianos*, with Special Reference to Method" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1987).
20. Leemans, "Thirteen Years," 173.

This emphasis on context requires discussing the elements of Athanasius's thought that shape his pneumatology. For example, Athanasius's statements about the Spirit in the *Orations* cannot be accurately understood outside of their larger christological and polemical context. Likewise, Athanasius's remarks about the Spirit in the *Festal Letters* occur as parts of larger arguments about the proper observation of Easter and the meaning of Passover, the law, and the new covenant. Therefore, these and other contexts are discussed in the process of examining Athanasius's remarks about the Holy Spirit in order to promote contextually faithful interpretations of Athanasius's pneumatology.

## Outline of Chapters

The book is composed of two main parts. Part 1, consisting of Chapters 1–3, focuses on Athanasius's pastoral works. Chapter 1 confronts the "elephant in the room." *Pagans-Incarnation*, often regarded as one of Athanasius's earliest writings, contains over 38,000 words; however, it only refers to the Holy Spirit three times. As mentioned, this fact has frequently been interpreted as a sign that Athanasius lacked a theology of the Holy Spirit when he wrote *Pagans-Incarnation*. However, is this the best interpretation of the data? Chapter 1 argues that Athanasius's relative silence about the Spirit in *Pagans–Incarnation* is better understood in light of his rhetorical purposes for the work. Athanasius wrote the work in order to demonstrate the reasonableness of the "cross," and he omits subjects that are not directly relevant to this demonstration. Consequently, Athanasius's limited references to the Spirit in *Pagans–Incarnation* should not be taken as proof that he lacked a theology of the Spirit. Instead, in order to assess the state of Athanasius's early theology of the Holy Spirit, we must look at what he says about the Spirit in other early works.

Chapter 2 seeks to determine what we can know about Athanasius's theology of the Holy Spirit from the period before 340. Apart from *Pagans-Incarnation*, Athanasius's early pastoral works are our only witnesses to his pneumatology from this period. The chapter argues

that by 329 Athanasius was developing a soteriology that included roles for the Holy Spirit. After considering these roles and their relationship to Athanasius's theology of Easter and salvation, the chapter also investigates Athanasius's inclusion of the Holy Spirit in his early Trinitarian doxologies. This chapter supports chapter 1's argument by showing that Athanasius did not lack a theology of the Spirit in the 330s (which is when he most likely wrote *Pagans–Incarnation*). Further, it argues that by 340 his theology included the tenet that the Holy Spirit is essential for salvation.

Chapter 3 studies Athanasius's remarks about the Holy Spirit in works written from 340 until Athanasius's death in 373. The chapter argues that throughout Athanasius's lifetime, Athanasius's pastoral works are remarkably consistent in terms of their theology of the Holy Spirit. However, this is not to say the works are entirely without development. In his *Letter to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms*, Athanasius adds new details about the Spirit's role in the inspiration of the Scriptures. Further, there is also an important development in Athanasius's Trinitarian doxologies, which reflects Athanasius's engagement with the Tropikoi.

Part 2 of this study focuses primarily on the *Orations*, with a secondary section devoted to briefly discussing *Serapion* in order to show that the "core" of Athanasius's mature pneumatology was established in the *Orations*. The *Orations* contain both Athanasius's first discussions about the Trinity and also numerous arguments that develop views on the Holy Spirit's relationship to the Father and Son. For this reason alone, they are invaluable for studying the history of Athanasius's pneumatology; however, their significance increases when the pneumatology that Athanasius develops here is compared with the pneumatology in *Serapion*.

Chapter 4 begins by exploring Athanasius's polemical reason for writing the *Orations*. The opening portion of the chapter builds on the work of Sara Parvis and David M. Gwynn, arguing that Athanasius wrote the *Orations* in hopes of regaining his position as bishop of Alexandria by arguing that his exile was the result of his opponents'

conspiring against him so they might promote the heresy of "Arianism." I provide textual support for this perspective by tracing Athanasius's account of the blasphemies of "Arianism." From this analysis, it becomes apparent that Athanasius has expanded the theological focus of "Arianism" and Arius's *Thalia* to include Trinitarian issues that were current in the late 330s and early 340s. The chapter then examines the "new" Trinitarian arguments that Athanasius associates with "Arianism." Here I outline the theology of the Trinity that Athanasius promotes in the course of these arguments, and I discuss its pneumatological significance. I argue that Athanasius's depiction of the Trinitarian "blasphemies" of "Arianism" and Athanasius's polemical Trinitarian arguments imply that the Holy Spirit is eternal, uncreated, united to the Son, and worthy of worship. The remainder of the chapter briefly looks at *Serapion*, and it argues that, with two exceptions, the pneumatological views expressed in *Serapion* repeat, clarify, and make small improvements on the four pneumatological tenets established in the *Orations* and the previous tenet, established in the early pastoral works, that the Spirit is essential for salvation.

Chapters 5–7 supply additional evidence for this argument. Chapter 5 provides an overview of how Athanasius connects the Holy Spirit to salvation, followed by a detailed account of Athanasius's understanding of Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit. I argue that this aspect of Athanasius's soteriology confirms my claim in Chapter 2 that his pneumatology includes the tenet that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation.

Chapter 6 continues my overarching argument that the pneumatology in the *Orations* provides the foundation for *Serapion*. It contributes to this argument by exploring the principles behind Athanasius's understanding of adoption and deification in the *Orations*. As we will see, Athanasius believes humans are adopted and deified through union with the Son. Athanasius uses participation language to describe how human beings receive these gifts. This language and its underlying principles provides the logic behind this aspect of

Athanasius's vision of salvation. These principles and logic not only help us understand Athanasius's soteriology but also have major implications for Athanasius's theology of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 6 argues that these principles, along with Athanasius's understanding of the Spirit's work in salvation, show that Athanasius regards the Holy Spirit as a being who is uncreated, eternal, and deserving of worship.

Chapter 7 completes the project of supplying additional support for the pneumatological argument made at the end of chapter 4, which claimed that Athanasius's Trinitarian arguments in the *Orations* have significant implications for the Holy Spirit. Building on the arguments of chapters 5 and 6, this chapter claims that the other pneumatological implication noted in chapter 4, namely that the Spirit is united to the Son, is in fact a tenet of Athanasius's theology in the *Orations*. To support this claim, the chapter argues that Athanasius's understanding of salvation as a united activity of the Trinity demonstrates that, for Athanasius, the Spirit is eternally and inseparably united to the Son. As we will see, Athanasius understands the economic pattern of the Trinity to be a reflection of the eternal reality. The Trinity's united activity in the economy of salvation originates from and reveals the Trinity's eternal and perfect unity in eternity.