

A QUEST
for
ORTHOPRAXY

*Hymns and Prayers
in the Pastoral Programme
of Athanasios of Alexandria*

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is a study of Athanasios of Alexandria's thought and writings—predominantly pastoral—in the context of ecclesial, ascetic, and liturgical developments in fourth-century Christian communities in Egypt. I explore Athanasios' *Festal Letters*, individual correspondence (primarily the *Letter to Markellinos*), and the *Life of Antony* from the perspective of the bishop's concerns about the contemporaneous diversity of devotional and liturgical practices of praying and hymn-singing.

The central argument of this thesis is that Athanasios had a coherent vision of the ideal Christian prayer and hymnody. For Athanasios, 'orthodox' Christians—lay and ascetics, educated devotees and common believers alike—should derive their practices of devotion and liturgy from the Bible—the Psalter and the Biblical odes—rather than other sources.

Athanasios' programme of devotional and liturgical orthopraxy centred around the Biblical ideal is part of his much broader ecclesiological project of bringing unity to the division-riddled church of Egypt. The bishop conceives of the Scripturally-cued shared patters of praying and hymn-singing as one of the means to unify scattered Christian communities. Although his pastoral programme of a uniform Biblical devotion is not as self-consciously and combatively formulated as e.g. his polemic against the 'Arians' or Meletians, it surfaces across his writings with consistency. Targeted against the diversity of modes of prayer and hymn-singing practiced across a variety of doctrinally, ecclesially, and socially different communities, Athanasios' pastoral programme of devotional orthopraxy reflected the trends towards unification in the bishop-led Christian culture of late antiquity and contributed to their further strengthening.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACF — *Annuaire du Collège de France*

AMC — C. Wessley, “Les plus anciens monuments du christianisme écrits sur papyrus (II)”, *Patrologia Orientalis* 18 (1924): 399–512.

AnBoll — *Analecta Bollandiana*

ANF — *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vols. 10. Eds. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, A. C. Coxe, A. Menzies, E. C. Richardson, B. Pick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867–1885).

ANRW — *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972–).

APF — *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und Verwandte Gebiete*

ARG — *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*

BASP — *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*

BKT — *Berliner Klassiker Texte*

CBQ — *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CH — *Church History*

CSCO — *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*

DOP — *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*

DSAM — *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*. 17 vols. Ed. M. Viller (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1937–1955).

EC — *Early Christianity*

GRBS — *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*

HeyJ — *Heythrop Journal*

HTR — Harvard Theological Review

ITQ — Irish Theological Quarterly

JAAR — Journal of the American Academy of Religion

JAC — Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum

JBL — Journal of Biblical Literature

JCS — Journal of Coptic Studies

JEA — Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

J ECS — Journal of Early Christian Studies

JEH — Journal of Ecclesiastical History

JJP — Journal of Juristic Papyrology

JNES — Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JÖB — Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik

JR — Journal of Religion

JRH — Journal of Religious History

JRS — Journal of Roman Studies

JSNT — Journal for the Study of the New Testament

JThS — Journal of Theological Studies

Lampe — *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*. Ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

Mansi — *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*. 55 vols. eds. G. Mansi, L. Petit and J.-B. Martin (Florentiæ; Venetiis; Parisiis; Arnheim & Leipzig, 1759–1962)

NT — Novum Testamentum

NTA — New Testament Apocrypha

NTS — *New Testament Studies*

ODB — *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. 3 vols. Ed. A. Kazhdan (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

OC — *Oriens christianus*

PG — *Patrologia Cursus Completus*. Series Graeca. 161 vols. eds. J.-P. Migne et al., (Paris : Apud J.-P. Migne, 1857–1866).

PGM — *Papyri Magicae Graecae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. 2 vols. ed. K. Preisendanz (Leipzig [etc.]: B.G. Teubner, 1921–1931).

PLRE — *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. 3 vols. eds. A. Jones, J. Martindale, and J. Morris, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992).

RE — *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. eds. G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus, H. Gärtner (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1890–1980).

REByz — *Revue des études byzantines*

RHR — *Revue de l'histoire des religions*

P&P — *Past & Present*

RSBN — *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici*

SEG — *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*

SP — *Studia Patristica*

T&MByz — *Travaux et mémoires du Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation byzantines*

Th&Ph — *Theologie und Philosophie*

TS — *Theological Studies*

van Haelst, *Catalogue* — J. van Haelst (ed.), *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1968).

VChr — *Vigiliae Christianae*

VT — *Vetus Testamentum*

ZAC — *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*

ZKG — *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*

ZNW — *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION OF PERSONAL NAMES

In my thesis, I adopt a system of transliterating most personal Greek names which does not follow the still usual Latinizing framework, where Greek names ending in *-ος* are rendered with *-us* forms. So, for example, the central author of my study is Athanasios (*Ἀθανάσιος*) of Alexandria rather than Athanasius. However, I accept the conventional English usage for such names as e.g. Origen or Basil. In doing so, I largely rely on the principles applied in the *ODB*. My choice is not, however, based on attachment to a framework followed in a specific edition, but arises out of a wish to come one step closer to the original form of the names of the historical personalities which I discuss.

INTRODUCTION

At some point around AD 340, the earth was shaking near the monastery of Pbow, a part of the Pachomian federation. Terrified by the imminent natural disaster, the monk Theodoros heard Pachomios, the leader of the monks, pray for deliverance:

God, who art rich in mercy, who feels remorse because of our depravity, spare the race of men and increase still further your compassion for us. And condemn neither the monks nor the consecrated virgins by demanding an accurate accounting of their vow. Likewise, do not condemn your people for the sake of the good which you enjoined for us and implanted in us. But when you judge us, compare us to the world prior to the advent of your only-begotten. For in that way, you will not come into judgment with us, but will wipe away our sins. For if you did not destroy the former world, how can you not have mercy on your present people? Have mercy on us, Master, having preserved us for yourself, and acquire us, having ceased from your anger and wrath on account of the blood of your only-begotten, through whom we have been redeemed. For if you frequently showed mercy to the Jews on account of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, how much more will you show mercy to us unceasingly on account of the blood of your Christ. We are servants of your only-begotten, who has made us, who are his creatures, your sons.¹

Pachomios' heartfelt and passionate prayer tamed the elements and brought the earthquake to a stop—apparently, the monk's prayer could work mighty wonders. This is at least how the prayer of the famous ascetic and founder of coenobitic monasticism in Egypt is remembered in the *Letter of Ammon*, a text which was composed *ca.* AD 360 and enjoyed wide

¹ *Letter of Ammon* 10. Translation from Goehring 1986b: 164. For a brief discussion of the prayer see Chapter 2 p.105.

circulation in late antique Egypt. The image of a powerful prayer by the prominent ascetic offered in the authoritative narrative, however, would hardly live up to Athanasios of Alexandria's understanding of the ideal Christian prayer—a somewhat counter-intuitive statement that I will seek to substantiate in this thesis.

The vignette above brings together a number of lines of debate around prayerful devotion which, as I will argue, would be important in fourth-century Egypt. How should a perfect monk—and, by extension, the ideal Christian—pray and sing hymns? Should people at prayer, or when addressing hymn to the divine, rely on the urging of their heart in choosing words, as Pachomios above seems to be doing, or rather draw on Biblical phrasing? Do patterns of prayer, as practiced in different ascetic and lay communities, accord with each other or clash in disagreement? Does the patriarch of Alexandria have a say in regulating the variety of devotional practices, and if yes, how does he do it? How do hagiographic texts and other types of pastoral writing produced in Athanasios' Egypt mediate the different ideas about hymnody and prayer?

The present thesis addresses these, as well as related, questions. In my study, I explore how bishop Athanasios of Alexandria, head of the pro-Nicene mainstream church, develops frames of pastoral regulation in the domain of prayerful and hymnic devotion and seeks to disseminate his ideas through a variety of textual means. In my discussion, I try to reveal Athanasios' programme of promoting Bible-centred, uniform prayer and hymnody as a means of establishing a unified 'orthodox' church with shared devotional and liturgical practices. As I will argue, Athanasios disseminates his pastoral ideas about the perfect Christian prayer through various genres of his writing. The focus of this thesis lies therefore in the field of Athanasios' ecclesial regulations and pastoral concerns.

The majority of existing studies of Athanasios have tended to focus on three aspects of his career, personality, and thought. Firstly, it is the intricate entanglements of the bishop with civic powers and his political manoeuvring. E. Schwartz' studies written in the early decades of the twentieth century proved to be seminal and to have shaped subsequent developments in the field.² More recently, the impeccable precision of historical research in T. Barnes' studies has informed the current academic consensus concerning Athanasios in a variety of meaningful ways.³ The important synthesis reached in A. Martin's monumental monograph canvasses a broad picture of Athanasios' ecclesiastic career.⁴ A number of superb contributions in the recent collective study edited by P. Gemeinhardt give useful summation of the research already done as well as make significant strides towards reconsidering many issues around Athanasios' career and engagement with the imperial power.⁵ The second main strand within Athanasian research has been his theological doctrines, primarily the polemical writings produced in the course of the so-called 'Arian controversy'.⁶ Thirdly, Athanasios' many ties with, and influence on, the nascent monasticism in late antique Egypt have attracted much scholarly attention.⁷

² See the collective reprint of relevant works in Schwartz 1959.

³ Key studies are Barnes 1989, Barnes 1993.

⁴ See Martin 1996.

⁵ See the relevant chapters in Gemeinhardt 2011a.

⁶ See Chapter 1 pp.36–42 for an overview and bibliography.

⁷ I discuss the nascent monasticism and Athanasios' connections with it in Chapter 1 p.47 *f.*

The first two strands of research are mutually interconnected in existing studies, as Athanasios is approached as a cunning politician and a bishop who is keen for ecclesial power. The doctrinal clash with the ‘Arians’ is seen in this perspective as fundamentally an outgrowth of Athanasios’ urge for a controlling position in fourth-century church. This academic tradition ultimately stems from Schwartz’ seminal studies, in which Athanasios’ political engagement was thoroughly studied.⁸

In my thesis, I will build on the insights gained into the politically, doctrinally, and ecclesiastically complicated historical situation of the Egyptian church during Athanasios’ career. My primary focus, however, will be on those sides of Athanasios’ activities which, in themselves, lie beyond the field of political manoeuvring and doctrinal strife, although the latter are a natural context for all sorts of developments in fourth-century Christian communities in Egypt. I will address an aspect of Athanasios’ thought and writings which had the aim of shaping the outlook and devotional behaviour of Christians who the bishop perceived as his ‘orthodox’ brethren. Such activities and texts are conventionally referred to as ‘pastoral’, although I would like to claim disengagement with any possible religious implications of the word. More specifically, I will study how much, and in what contexts, prayer and hymn-singing, both congregational and individual, feature on Athanasios’ pastoral agenda, and in what manner he sought to disseminate his views of the perfect Christian prayerful and hymnic devotion through texts addressed to a variety of audiences.

The pastoral side of Athanasios, unlike his eagerness to engage in doctrinal and ecclesial conflicts, has attracted rather little scholarly

⁸ For a critical discussion of the historiography of Athanasios’ political and ecclesial career, see Gemeinhardt 2011b.

attention. If we exclude historic and more recent works that address Athanasios' legacy from explicitly religious standpoints and discuss only those studies which are sufficiently academically rigorous, a rather narrow set of works presents itself. Ch. Kannengiesser has addressed Athanasios' writings which shape Christian attitudes in a number of studies⁹. The Duke thesis by C. M. Badger (unfortunately never published) is a study of Athanasios' soteriology and ecclesiology where valuable insights are gained into his pastoral thought and writings, primarily the *Festal Letters*.¹⁰ Athanasios' regulatory discourse regarding monastic endeavours, which can be considered pastoral, has been mainly covered in studies of his ascetic programme from perspectives where the agenda of ecclesial and civic politics is in the focus. N. Ng's monograph, although enlightening in some respects, is predominantly informed by a rather explicit doctrinal entanglements of the author.¹¹ Alongside a dedicated monograph on the bishop's theology, G. Demacopoulos devotes insightful pages to Athanasios' pastoral activities in his interesting book on types of authority in the early church.¹² The recent synthesis offered in D. Gwynn's highly readable book offers useful a discussion of many of the bishop's pastoral works.¹³ Gwynn's dedicated overview of Athanasios' pastoral works is an important contribution to raising awareness of this aspect of the bishop's *oeuvre*.¹⁴

⁹ See Kannengiesser 1974, as well as later works by Kannengiesser 1991, Kannengiesser 2001.

¹⁰ See Badger 1990.

¹¹ See Ng 2001.

¹² See Demacopoulos 1998, Demacopoulos 2007.

¹³ See Gwynn 2012: 131–58, but also *passim*.

¹⁴ See Gwynn 2014.

While there has not been much research done on Athanasios' pastoral writings proper, studies which discuss his broader ecclesiology—rather than the doctrinal treatises or political engagement—are an important context in which present thesis is placed. They inform my overall understanding of the centrality, in Athanasios' thought and writings, of the concept of a unified church as a constantly looming ideal which drives his ecclesial politics. Many key strands of the bishop's thinking that inform his pastoral texts are directly rooted in his ecclesiology. As I will argue, the idea of a single, unified 'orthodox' church undergirds Athanasios' discourse on prayer and hymnody.

As studies since at least W. Schneemelcher have underlined, Athanasios' ultimate goal consisted not in laying grounds for dogmatically correct theology (academic orthodoxy) but rather belonged to the field of ecclesiology.¹⁵ The bishop acts with the ideal of church unity in mind; the doctrinal cohesion of communities, theological precision of belief, the defeat of heretics, the enlistment of monks and ascetics are all but facets of what Athanasios must have seen as the ultimately spiritual reality of unified Christian communities, primarily in Egypt but eventually across the *oikoumenē* (inhabited land). His political manoeuvring, which quite clearly took place and was both calculated and, at times, cold-bloodedly cynical, was not an end in itself, contrary to his earlier critics. It is true that Athanasios as bishop had a wide-ranging and deep-reaching involvement with contemporary political developments and that the steep turns of Athanasios' turbulent career had much to do with the vicissitudes of his relationships with the imperial power (most importantly Constantine and

¹⁵ See Schneemelcher 1951–2. I rely on the pertinent analysis of the historiography of Athanasios' ecclesial ideology offered in Gemeinhardt 2011b; see also a very readable account in Gwynn 2012: 55–104.

Constantios II). In the final reckoning, however, his aims as bishop and theologian were ecclesial and can best be understood as part of his remit of ensuring a shared doctrinal, spiritual, and devotional identity for Egyptian communities of believers.

The centrality of ecclesiology in Athanasios' thought and activity has been underlined in the works of Kannengiesser.¹⁶ The practical—if mystically cast—emphasis of Athanasios' soteriology, which aims at elaborating the profound link between God as creator and humans as creatures, is also stressed in Badger's and Anatolios' studies.¹⁷ As these scholars have shown, Athanasios' political engagement should not be reductionalistically pushed forward as the only, or the central, drive behind the bishop's actions. Instead, ecclesiology as a perspective allows us a more holistic understanding of Athanasios, in which his doctrinal thinking, ascetic enterprises and other strands of activity are facets of his overarching concern for the unification of the Egyptian church under the leadership of the Alexandrian see.

Ecclesiological concerns also undergird two other strands of Athanasios' activity which are central to my discussion in this thesis—his dealings with early monks and the distinctive scriptural theorizing which the bishop famously develops in his thirty ninth *Festal Letter*. Both in seeking to harmonize the nascent monastic movement with his episcopal aspirations to ecclesial unity and in his attempt to establish a clearly defined canon of the holy Scriptures as a solid kernel for the unified church, Athanasios relied on a range of means of promoting and enforcing his

¹⁶ See Kannengiesser 1974, as well as later works by the same author Kannengiesser 1991, Kannengiesser 2001.

¹⁷ See the pertinent analysis in Badger 1990 (Chapters 2 and 3); Anatolios 1998.

vision. For the purposes of my discussion, the creation and circulation of authoritative pastoral texts is most significant.

*Methodological frameworks and concepts:
approaching diversity, church unity, and devotional practices*

My discussion of Athanasios' programme of endorsing a specific set of patterns in individual and congregational prayer and hymnody will hinge on a number of key concepts, which, in their turn, are entangled in overlapping scholarly narratives, both modern and historic.

Although matters of doctrinal developments are not central in the present thesis, when approaching Athanasios' regulatory thinking one cannot avoid engaging in a certain manner with the framework of heresy vs orthodoxy. From the perspective adopted in this study, it is a binary conceptualization which is imposed on the diversity of early Christian doctrine, devotion, and social matrices in course of search for internal stability within the church. I am well aware that an academic paradigm that sees the evolution of late antique Christianity in terms of competing doctrinal frameworks, neither of which is privileged as 'orthodox' in the historical sense of primacy or in the doctrinal sense of verity, is not a default option in itself. It is a scholarly vision of how early Christianity evolved which developed comparatively recently—from the mid-1930-ies on—and is not the only academic lens on the early Christian epoch available. Landmark names within this academic tradition are W. Bauer, J. Robinson and H. Koester, D. Dunn, A. Le Boulluec, Av. Cameron, and É. Rebillard.¹⁸ Within this scholarly perspective, diversity is seen as the

¹⁸ Seminal studies which formed this tradition are Bauer 1934, Robinson, Koester 1971, Dunn 1977, Le Boulluec 1985, Cameron 1991, Ehrman 2003, Iricinschi

natural state of any developing religious matrix, a result of the unforced evolution of various communities scattered across the empire which are also diverse in sociological terms. The advent of a single prevailing ‘orthodoxy’ is seen as a complicated process of militant competition for dominion by a variety of doctrines, backed up by a variety of political actors. This paradigm, although it is admittedly dominant in today’s scholarship on late antique Christianity, is not without its influential critics, who have raised significant arguments for an overriding, universally shared doctrinal and ritual frameworks in pre-Constantine Christianity, which could serve as a sort of ‘proto-orthodoxy’.¹⁹ Still, in my view the diversity paradigm accounts for much more of the social and doctrinal complexity of late antique Christianities, and I embrace it in my study. This choice will ultimately inform my vision of Athanasios’ efforts to seek and establish unifying framework in fourth-century practices of prayer and hymnody as a remedy against what he would perceive as a divisive multiplicity of forms that undermine church unity. As a minor but practically important corollary, I tend to use the word ‘orthodoxy’ and its cognates in quote throughout the thesis in order to highlight its historical changeability.

Derivable from the concept of orthodoxy is that of orthopraxy—a set of patterns of behaviour which is approved within a given framework

2009, Zellentin 2008, Rebillard 2012. A useful overview of discussions (up to late 1990-ies) is McGinn 2000.

¹⁹ Key publications within this tradition include Norris 1976, Robenson 1985, Hurtado 2003—see particularly Chapter 10 ‘Proto-orthodox Devotion’, Köstenberger 2010. See now the stimulating collection in Hartog 2015.

of authority.²⁰ Although I will not use ‘orthopraxy’ in every single analysis which makes up the argument of this thesis, it will constantly loom behind my discussion. The orthopraxy which interests me in this study is the set of practices of praying and hymn-singing which, from Athanasios’ pastoral perspective, should be accepted in ‘orthodox’ communities.

In speaking about liturgical and devotional hymn-singing and praying, both in public and private contexts, I will lay significantly bigger emphasis on practices and rites, as well as their ecclesial and sociological underpinnings, than on the specific terminology applied to them in written sources of the epoch. So far I have used the two key concepts of my study—hymns and prayers—somewhat indiscriminately so far, which may be read as lack of academic rigour. As I suggest below, the distinction between the two, while relevant and useful within other research frameworks, may be superfluous in a study which centres on religious practices and how they relate to their narrative depictions rather than on literary issues of genre and style.

Hymns and prayers have loomed large in studies of early Christian spiritual life. A substantial scholarly tradition has evolved in which ‘hymns’ (usually authorial) are seen as quite distinct from ‘prayers’—a more generic and, more importantly, less style-based concept referring to a range of petitionary addresses to God and saints. This terminological watershed is, however, part of the disciplinary convention originating from classical studies, where the difference between the two—and indeed a much finer classification within the two—goes back in time to the Homeric epos with

²⁰ In contrast to orthodoxy, orthopraxy has been less theorized in application to early Christian developments. See e.g. Rebillard 2012, Wood 2012, Zamfir 2013, Neary 2017 as instances of studies where orthopraxy is an important analytical lens.

its gradations between *εὐχή*, *ἄρα*, *λύσση*, *ἱκεσία* etc., as modern studies of the vocabulary of prayer suggest.²¹ The urge to maintain watertight terminological boundaries and to make them directly—and prescriptively—relevant to actual cultic and literary developments was already stronger it seems, among academic theorizers in ancient times than among writers and devotees of hymns and prayers. Plato famously laments the lack of academic rigour in keeping apart ‘hymns’ from dirges, paeans, and dithyrambs.²² Alexandria-based Hellenistic philologists were no less eager to introduce distinctions between sub-types of Pindar’s hymns: paeans, dithyrambs, *prosōdia*, *daphnophōrika*.²³ Menander Rhetor, writing in the second part of the third century AD, discusses different types of hymns and gives detailed instructions about the structure of each.²⁴ Ammonios the Grammarian addresses hymns as opposed to encomia in his *On the Differences of Synonymous Expressions* (later fourth century AD).²⁵ The Neoplatonic philosopher and hymn-writer Proclus (AD 412–485) theorizes on the types of hymns addressed to different gods.²⁶ Early Christian theologians were also keen to envisage fine terminological distinctions as indicative of deep-lying differences in the spiritual

²¹ For a reliable overview of the terminology of hymn-singing in the ancient Greek tradition, as well as of the scholarly distinction between the two, see Furley, Bremer 2001: 8–14. For types of prayers, see Pulleyn 1997: 59–66.

²² Plato, *Laws* 700b.

²³ See Furley 2007.

²⁴ Menander, *Divisions of Epideictic Speeches*, 6–27. For Menander’s theories on hymns, see e.g. Bremer 1995.

²⁵ Ammonios, *On the Difference* 482.

²⁶ On Proclus’ hymns and his literary theories, see Introduction in van den Berg 2001.

experiences and heavenly realities involved in *εὐχή* as distinct from *προσευχή*.²⁷

Early theologians made a significant contribution to thinking in terms of clear-cut devotional categories and brought along their own agendas and emphases by highlighting specific ‘classes’ of prayer as rooted in spiritual realities. The two types of addresses to the divine—‘hymns’ and ‘prayers’—along with any finer distinctions which can be introduced into them, are neatly encapsulated into the reference frame of prayerful devotion, which is much more fitted to my research targets than the stylistic and essentially emic categories of hymns vs prayers. On the level of practical procedures, I do not maintain a consistent distinction between the two, as in many cases speaking in terms of devotional practices makes much more sense. In other cases, however, I use ‘hymns’ and ‘prayers’ as separate categories using them in the widest sense of poetic vs non-poetic addresses, which is sometimes useful heuristically.

My approaches to those parts of Athanasios’ *oeuvre* where prayer and hymn-singing are discussed and to their historical context are therefore driven by a research agenda that prioritizes social and rhetorical analysis over philological discussions of texts. As the ultimate aim of this thesis is to work out an understanding of previously overlooked aspect of Athanasios’ pastoral thinking and its dissemination through texts among fourth-century Christians in Egypt, my study will be situated on an intersection of existing strands of Athanasian research and the church of his time: rhetorical analysis of Athanasios’ pastoral works and narrative texts; historical studies of the ecclesial context in which they were written

²⁷ Origen developed a sophisticated theory of distinction between the two, which was taken over by later writers as well—see Van Deun 1999.

and disseminated; glimpses from liturgical studies and literary history that allow a broader contextualization of Athanasios' programme. The scope of sources which I draw on is informed by thus defined research agenda.

Scope of my study

At the centre of this thesis are pastoral texts by Athanasios: the *Festal Letters*, as well as his personally addressed correspondence (most importantly the *Letter to Markellinos* discussed in the context of other letters). At the same time, as I seek to reveal a set of consistently present ideas about the perfect Christian prayer and hymn-singing in Athanasios' writings, I will address a totally different genre as well. The *Life of Antony*, probably the most well-known Athanasian text, will be approached as a narrative which is directly informed by the bishop's programme of unified, Scripture-centred devotion. In order to make my point that in the *Life of Antony* Athanasios engaged in a polemically-oriented dialogue with those ideas about individual prayer which would clash with his vision, I will discuss martyrdom accounts which had currency in fourth-century Egypt (most centrally the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, but also such emblematic accounts as the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* as well as the locally composed *Acts of Phileas*). Other Athanasian texts will also be introduced into the discussion as sources of useful parallels and comparisons. By way of putting my discussion of Athanasios' programme into its historical, literary, and liturgical context, I also provide glimpses of the contemporary variety of hymns and prayers in fourth-century Egypt, as well as of theories about praying, hymn-singing, and Eucharistic liturgies written before and in Athanasios' epoch.

The thesis is organized into three large parts, each consisting of two chapters.

Part One ‘Setting the Scene: Historical, Ecclesial, and Liturgical Contexts’ provides a general backdrop for the subsequent discussion. In Chapter 1, I present a detailed overview of the historical and ecclesial context of Athanasios’ pastoral activity with an emphasis on the state of division and variation in fourth-century church of Egypt as a natural context of the bishop’s efforts to introduce unity of doctrine and devotion. Chapter 2 is an extension of my discussion in Chapter 1 into the field that is more immediately relevant to my argument in this thesis. I discuss the variety of modes of prayer and hymn-singing in Athanasios’ Egypt and contrast it with the trends towards regulation of prayerful and hymnic devotion in pre-Athanasian times—an account I will rely on as a background for Athanasios’ own pastoral programme.

Part Two ‘Congregational and Individual Orthopraxy: Prayer and Hymnody in Athanasios’ Pastoral Discourse’ is an in-depth analysis of Athanasios’ normative ideas about Christian devotional and liturgical prayer. In Chapter 3, I address the *Festal Letters* as a set of texts which reveal Athanasios’ thinking about liturgical (congregational) prayer. In Chapter 4, the *Letter to Markellinos*, but also the *Letters to Virgins* are approached as sources on individual prayerful devotion of urban ascetics.

Part Three ‘Narrating and Negotiating Prayer and Hymnody in Athanasios’ Egypt’ discusses how Athanasios mediates his pastoral ideal of Scripture-based devotion by engaging with hagiographic narratives and entering into an implicit polemic with literary traditions. Chapter 5 analyses the portrayal of prayer in martyrdom accounts read in Athanasios’ Egypt;

I argue that in these narratives, devotional sensibilities which are drastically different from Athanasios' are expressed. In Chapter 6, I propose a reading of the *Life of Antony* as a programmatic text on yet another level. I suggest that the *Life* reflects Athanasios' polemics with the practices of prayer popularized through martyrdom narratives and that it promotes a markedly Athanasian doctrine of Scripture-based devotion.

In the final 'Conclusions', I tie together the various insights which have arisen from individual chapters and present a synthetic vision of Athanasios' ideal of uniform, Bible-rooted prayer and hymnody in the context of his wider ecclesial concerns. I also offer a test-case (focused on the hymns by Synesios of Cyrene) which can throw some light on the impact of Athanasios' pastoral ideas of the perfect Christian devotion in its late antique context.