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Stephen M. Meawad

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Liturgy as Ethicizer: Cultivating Ecological Consciousness through a Coptic Orthodox Liturgical Ethos

1 – Introduction

Eastern Orthodox Christianity's recent expression of its ecological concern has been vast and strong, evidenced by its designation of September 1st as a day of prayer for the "protection of the environment" and also through the scholarly contributions of more than a dozen theologians and religious figures, including Patriarch Bartholomew, Elizabeth Theokritoff, and John Chryssavgis.¹ Much of this witness can and does extend to Oriental Orthodoxy in numerous respects.² Among others, some examples include similarities in the doctrine of creation, proper relation to non-human animals, spiritual degradation as a precursor to ecological degradation, and extending love of neighbor to include all of creation. Yet, analyzing ways that other families of Orthodoxy conceive of the relationship between ecology and theology—a promising endeavor—has remained largely untapped contemporarily.

This project will examine the liturgical ethos of the Coptic Orthodox Church and how this ethos is effective in creating self-sustaining, ecologically aware communities. A more comprehensive version of this project would develop what might be called a *politeia* (behavior or ethos of a given community) of the Coptic Orthodox Church that would include monasticism and asceticism; fasting; agriculture and co-stewardship; and self-sustenance. Each of these elements deserve their own analysis within Coptic Christianity and will be at play in the backdrop of this chapter, yet beginning with the Coptic liturgy is fitting because of the centrality of this practice for Coptic Christians. In effect, the Coptic liturgical ethos is effective 1) through its call to action, 2) through the connections it offers between ecology and theology, and 3) through the frequency of Coptic liturgical prayers. It is an ethos that is accessible to all who desire to embody

a religious way of life that is ecologically minded. After analyzing the Coptic liturgical ethos, I will examine two instantiations of communities that do well to faithfully embody this ethos: the communities of the *Zabbālīn* (“Garbagers”) and the Anaphora Retreat Center.

2 – Liturgical Ethos

2.1 – Liturgical Time & Mindfulness

In his extensive first-hand study on the Coptic Church, John H. Watson writes, “If the outsider knows nothing of Coptic Culture, Theology, Mission, and History but knows the Liturgy then the outsider knows everything that is important.”³ The liturgy is at the heart of Coptic life. All believers are *formed by* participation in liturgy, while simultaneously *forming* the liturgy. “[T]he [Coptic] liturgy is the work of the entire congregation.”⁴ Lay participation in the liturgy allows worshippers to make sense of life *outside* of liturgy as well, not just within the confines of its walls. It is through active engagement within the liturgy that the rest of life begins to make sense. Liturgy is to seep into all realms of one’s life, collapsing the divide between the sacred and the mundane. Daily occupational labor and the toil of asceticism, prevalent in the Coptic Church, become two sides of the same coin within a liturgical worldview. Labor—similar to the function of asceticism—becomes “an uninterrupted praise of the Triune God....”⁵ Understanding daily work in this way reinforces the singularity and unity of life the liturgy is to bring about—a life in which working, praising, and even leisure serve the same purpose—unity with God—albeit in different forms.

One hallmark of this life is liturgical mindfulness—an awareness of oneself and one’s surroundings in the presence of God. Mindfulness is being ever-present to God, open to transformational encounter. This same mindfulness is communicated in front of every Coptic

altar that points its believers to learn from nature. In front of each *iconostasis* (icon screen) found in Coptic churches, hangs a hallowed ostrich egg, as a reminder of mindfulness in worship; the ostrich keeps her eyes fixed on her eggs even from a distance and never forgoes her attention. So too are believers to keep watch in prayer, to keep watch on the sacrifice on the altar, and to keep watch for the return of their Lord and Savior.

This mindfulness was exemplified well in the life of a recent Coptic monk, Abba Yustus al-Anṭūnī, also known as the silent monk. He hardly ever spoke a word, except for three purposes. The first was in reading Scripture aloud, especially liturgically, since weekly and even daily liturgies are regular practices for Coptic monks. The second was to express his constant gratitude to God: “Thanks be to God.” The third reason was seemingly peculiar: he would repeatedly ask, “What time is it now?” which begs the question why a man of such great silence might be so preoccupied with time. Yet, it was not a watch reading with which Abba Yustus was concerned. Instead, his awareness was one of *kairos*—“the first words attributed to Jesus in the synoptic tradition,” when He says, “The time (*kairos*) is fulfilled”⁶—which points to a significant moment in time.⁷ That time for Abba Yustus was always *now*. There was never a moment not to be mindful, watchful, and proactive. To this persistent question, Watson comments that it “troubles our self-satisfied certainty that we are not threatened and that everything continues to remain the same.”⁸ The reality is that we *are* threatened and that we are to remain alert. Among other threats, we are threatened by evil, by selfishness, and by our neglect of God, neighbor, and creation. We are threatened by a temptation to ignore these very threats, choosing instead to turn a blind eye, as though blindness might somehow create a reality altogether devoid of threats. Pope Francis puts it clearly: “As often occurs in periods of deep crisis which require bold decisions, we are tempted to think that what is happening is not entirely clear.”⁹ A life

submerged in the liturgical ethos ought to lead us to the realization of which Abba Yustus was so keenly aware: the time to act is now.

2.2 – *Ecology in Coptic Liturgical Prayers*

Ecologically, the Coptic liturgical ethos is more than a call to action. In two ways the prayers of the liturgy serve to build a keen ecological awareness in those who faithfully participate therein. First, within the liturgical rites are prayers that are explicitly ecological in nature and that manifest the theological significance of non-human creation. Second, the *frequency* of these liturgical daily, weekly, and yearly prayer cycles contributes to the cultivation of a pragmatic, ecological consciousness of believers. Regarding the former, the content of several different prayers used in the Coptic Church elaborate explicitly on theological understandings of the function and responsibility of non-human creation in relation to humanity. These references exist all throughout the various forms of liturgical prayers and rites of the Coptic Church, and volumes can be written on these prayers in relation to ecology, but I will choose to detail just one type of prayer—the Midnight Praise.¹⁰

The Midnight Praise—a nighttime liturgical service in the Coptic daily cycle composed of Biblical and extra-Biblical chants traditionally performed by two alternating choirs and particularly observed in monasteries—should be (and are, at least in all Coptic monasteries) chanted every night, as the name infers, around midnight.¹¹ In practice, it can be prayed anytime after sundown and before sunrise. It is through these texts that monasteries preserved the majority of Coptic theology, and so, much can be learned about explicit Coptic ecology. To begin, the *Wednesday Psali*, prayed once a week on Tuesday night—“the eve of Wednesday”—offers an interesting ecological exegesis of Scripture as a whole when it says, “They teach us in

the Holy Books, the breaths of God, to be merciful to the creation, which He has created.”¹² The breaths of God, the inspired text of the Divine Scripture, command care for creation. While there is not a shortage of potential Biblical references, it is not clear precisely which texts the author of this *Psali* has in mind. Nonetheless, the methodical articulation is convincing on two counts: humans are to be merciful to non-human creation because this is a direct command from God that and because all creation belongs to the same Creator. The *Psali* could have specified “animals” instead of “creation,” but in using the latter, it encompasses all of creation, human and non-human. To be molded by the same Creator implies a sort of familial relation between humans and non-human creation. Further, humans are to express mercy—often synonymous in these hymns with an active display of love and compassion, not a passive posture of indifference—to non-human creation.

More than this, the book of Midnight Praise, referred to as the Holy Psalmody, repeatedly reaffirms the communal activity of all creation praising, rejoicing, and glorifying in unison. The *Sunday Psali* reads, “All creation glorifies Your Name. My Lord Jesus Christ, help me.”¹³ Similarly, the ninth part of the *Monday Theotokia* (Praise of the Virgin), when contemplating the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, exclaims, “You came into the world through Your love for humanity. All creation rejoiced at Your coming.”¹⁴ And in reference to the Virgin Mary, the *Saturday Theotokia*, reads, “All creation rejoices with you, crying out, saying, ‘Hail to you, full of grace,’ and, ‘The Lord is with you.’”¹⁵ These prayers demonstrate a collaboration between humans and non-human creation in the highest and most intimate form of communication with God—prayer. Humans did not celebrate the Annunciation, Incarnation, or any other event in the economy of salvation without the rest of creation.

The Coptic Midnight Praise follows a structure in which a number of hymns and praises surround four main canticles, usually referred to as *hos* (ⲉⲟⲥ)—the Coptic word for “praise.” The third of these four canticles, which contains the hymn of the three saintly youth in the extension to the book of Daniel—apocryphal for some, deuterocanonical for others, and canonical for Copts, among others—calls on all possible forms of creation to join in praise of God.¹⁶ In the same vein, the first part of the fourth canticle is a recitation of Psalm 148, which expresses a similar command to the rest of creation to join humanity in this Divine rite.¹⁷ To this, Matthew Massoud’s commentary on the canticle states that “[b]ecause of their [Adam and Eve’s] sin, and because we are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we ask the creation to join us in prayer, that God may restore us to the original state in which He created us, and place us once again into the New Garden of Eden, the Paradise of Joy.”¹⁸ He goes on to explain that the rest of creation, who have not been endowed with the fullness of the cognitive, emotional, and maybe ontological (regarding the possession of bodies, souls, *and* spirits) realities of humans, sometimes does a better job than humans of praising God. Humans disobeyed God and continue to do so, but the rest of creation in fulfilling its duties on earth, effectively glorifies its Creator. Non-human creation joins humans in praise of God and His economy of salvation. But more than that, it is a tutor amidst humanity’s silence in praise. Its example is instructive and edifying as humans navigate their earthly journey and restoration to Paradise.

Receiving instruction in praise from the rest of creation is further expressed in what is called the *Psali Batos* for the three saintly youth. It reads, “Therefore, when we see them, let us say along with all these beings. Bless the Lord, all you birds. Praise Him and exalt Him highly.”¹⁹ We are to observe creation and its ability to praise, we are to join creation in its proper praise, and we are to encourage creation in praise. We are to “[l]ook at the birds of the air” and to

“[c]onsider the lilies of the field,” and “how they grow.”²⁰ It is no small thing the task given non-human creation. It has remained faithful to its purpose on God’s earth and has glorified God in its obedience. When humans begin treating the rest of creation with due respect as co-worshippers and not as commodities of exploitation to suit lavish lifestyles, they too can more fully realize their purpose in God’s will and in proper worship of, and intimacy with, Him.

2.3 – Frequency of Coptic Liturgical Prayers

In the previous section, I focused on prayers that precede the Eucharistic liturgy not because of a lack of ecological prayer in the liturgy itself, but for making my point economically and in order to demonstrate some of the most unique prayers of the Coptic Church. The Midnight Praise, as mentioned, is part of the daily canon of prayers in the Coptic Church. Similarly, the Book of the Hours, or the *Agpeya* (Coptic) or *Horologion* (Greek), containing a multitude of Psalms and other passages and prayers from Scripture, is prayed at least seven times a day in monasteries, but is also used daily by many lay Coptic faithful.²¹ The repetition of these prayers works to transform those who recite them, and one of these avenues of transformation is ecological consciousness. The primary goals of these practices of prayer are not necessarily ecological, nor have they been in the past, but unbeknown to the practitioner, they carry significant potential to create increased ecological awareness. Again, it is a breakdown of the walls that separate the sacred and the mundane. It is a habituation and repetition that becomes part and parcel of the psyche.

But this process of cultivating ecological consciousness is not only accomplished through daily ecological prayers. Weekly and yearly cycles aid in accomplishing this same goal. For example, etched into the ears of all Copts are the words of the weekly Divine Liturgy of St.

Basil—the most commonly used liturgy throughout the year. One place in particular in this liturgy sparks ecological interest, and it is found as the fifth in a series of six litanies or petitions. There are in turn four potential forms of this single litany, each of which is specific to the agricultural season in Egypt at the time. Between June 19 (*Paone* 12, Coptic calendar) and October 19/20 (*Paope* 9), the church prays for the inundation of the Nile or “the rising of the waters.”²² Between October 20/21 (*Paope* 10) and January 18/19 (*Tobe* 10), the church prays the litany for the seeds, herbs, and plants.²³ Between January 19/20 (*Tobe* 11) to June 18 (*Paone* 11), the litany for the winds, fruits, and trees is prayed.²⁴ In the fourth option, all of these requests are combined, and this proves more common in lands outside of Egypt in which the agricultural seasons differ from those of Egypt. This “combined” litany is a recent composition, approved for use outside Egypt by the Holy Synod (the hierarchical governing body of the Church), which shows a certain interest on the part of the Church to ground liturgical expression in the local context of any given worshipping Coptic community. Most notable in all of these prayers is the concluding qualification—reliance on God for their fulfillment. In this prayer, there is an explicit interweaving between the agricultural and liturgical aspects of the Coptic ethos suggested in this project. It is God who brings the seasons to fruition, it is God who controls the waters, winds, crop yield, and fertility of the land, and it is God who brings all of “them to perfection in peace without harm” as a sign of “compassion on His creation which His hands have made.”²⁵

This is further reflected in the second part of the prayer which continues after a unique interjection by the congregation of a thrice-repeated “Lord have mercy.”²⁶ This continuation is an interweaving between agricultural reliance on God for physical sustenance and reliance on God for spiritual sustenance. It is hard to distinguish between the two, and it is not clear whether they are meant to be distinguished. Portions of this prayer read as follows: “Prepare it for sowing

and harvesting. Manage our lives as deemed fit.” “For the eyes of everyone wait upon You, for You give them their food in due season.” “O You who give food to all flesh. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness...”²⁷ The juxtaposition of material and spiritual requests suggests a collapsing between, or at least an intimacy of, the two. It is a “sufficiency in everything always” that grants us the grace to “abound in every good deed.”²⁸ It is God who grants both material and spiritual goods, and each is the cause of the other, with God as their ultimate Cause. It is clear then that Copts’ agricultural experiences are not disconnected from their liturgical ones, and this is evident in a number of other liturgical prayers. In fact, agriculture serves as a root of faith. If there are blessings to the land, it is never considered a reflection of the people but of God who hears the prayers of and cares for His people. As co-stewards with God, believers—through liturgical life and a sort of agricultural asceticism—find agriculture as an opportunity to strengthen faith and for synergistic participation with God in ensuring the health of the land.

Finally, the Lenten liturgical season serves as a component of the yearly Coptic liturgical cycle that effectively cultivates ecological consciousness. Before celebrating the liturgy on a Lenten weekday, and while in complete abstinence from food until late hours of the afternoon and early evening, the faithful complete many prostrations while incanting “Lord have mercy.” Similar to the liturgical prayers, a number of requests are made for all components of agricultural life. One petition even requests “the salvation of men and animals.”²⁹ It is clear that the theology of the Coptic Church does not profess the salvation of animals in the same way the salvation of humans is understood.³⁰ Yet, the petition here at least refers to “salvation” in the sense of safety and preservation.³¹ No utility is implied in this salvation. The Church does not ask for the salvation of animals for an abundance of meat on feast days, for example, or for the successful

fertility and subsequent slaughter of herds. The salvation of animals needs no qualification because it is a good in and of itself, as part of God's creation.

Similar sentiments are conveyed in the evening litanies of Holy Week, or the Week of Suffering as it is referred to by Copts in Arabic, when the priest asks the Lord to "protect Your people from the flood of the sea of this passing world. Lift away from them every hateful thing and likewise also from all the animals. Provide sustenance also to all the birds, for you give nourishment to the cattle and sustenance to the young ravens."³² Dozens of other examples that show the symbiosis of humans and non-human creation can be cited, such as the request to "give joy to the face of the earth, and sustain us, the human race"³³ and "to grant prosperity to His [God's] people and the animals."³⁴ Often believers will demonstrate their faith in God and care for His creation by making very specific environmental requests such as, in one instance, for the blessing of beehives.³⁵ All these examples, while significant in their own right, point to a greater effect. The frequent attendance and participation of the overwhelming majority of Copts at liturgical prayers contribute to the cultivation of an ecological awareness that can often become embedded consciously at times, and sub-consciously at others. If daily prayer becomes an insincere or legalistic habit, the weekly rites are there to disrupt the comfort that leads to complacency. Further, when weekly celebrations risk monotony, the yearly liturgical rites unsettle any deleterious familiarity. In this way, the liturgical ethos of Copts is a fundamental contributor to the ecological character of what would be a Coptic *politeia*. The aim of this liturgical ethos is the formation of communities that are not only ecologically minded but are proactive, able to impact their immediate environment and those of surrounding communities, locally and globally. There are two communities in particular that in embodying this liturgical ethos have proven its efficacy in bringing about real and significant ecological change.

3 – Communal Instantiations of the Coptic Liturgical Ethos

3.1 – *The Zabbālīn and Garbage Dreams*

One such community is located on the Mokkatam Hills of Cairo,³⁶ Africa's largest and fastest growing city, with an estimated and expanding 18 million people.³⁷ Those who belong to this entirely Christian community are known as the *Zabbālīn*, or “garbage people,”³⁸ because more than ninety-five percent of this approximately sixty-thousand person community are responsible for Cairo's garbage collection and recycling.³⁹ These garbagers work everyday to bring Cairo's garbage on trucks and on carts drawn by donkeys, carrying over 4,000 tons of garbage daily to their hometown.⁴⁰ They have achieved the “highest ratio of recycled material in Africa and the Middle East,”⁴¹ and have been cited as “the world's most effective recycling program.”⁴² Eighty percent of all the garbage collected is used as recyclable material, and the other twenty percent is used as fodder for animals. This is while “[w]estern cities would boast of a 30% recycling rate.”⁴³

In fact, and not surprisingly, these efforts have gained international recognition, especially through the efforts of producer, director, and cinematographer Mai Eskander and her documentary “Garbage Dreams,” which brought these realities to the attention of the international community. At the heart of the documentary is the potential imposition of the globalization and modernization of this community's trade, despite having advanced far beyond most modern “green” projects. This threat would render a recycling rate of twenty-percent, leaving the rest to rot in landfills.⁴⁴ The numbers are astounding, and while the documentary does a good job of bringing these ecological threats to the limelight, Eskander is unable to do so without highlighting aspects of the Coptic *politeia* generally and of the Coptic liturgical ethos

specifically. The work of the garbage people is intimately tied to their faith, believing that God sees their sincerity, hard work, physical toil, prayer-filled lives, ecological-mindedness, and liturgical life. God is the one in whose hands they are protected and for which they are cared. They do not see their jobs as a curse but a blessing—an opportunity to give back to God and His creation. They are described by many as a community that is fulfilled and peaceful, despite their seemingly unfortunate circumstances.⁴⁵ They see no divide between their ecological concerns and their religious lives. The *Zabbālīn* embody the prayers mentioned above in which the intimacy between dedicated care for creation and devotion to God are unavoidable. In their spiritual discipline and ecological endeavors, the *Zabbālīn*, in their torn clothes and miasma of garbage, offer the world an aromatic breath of opportunity and a rich tapestry of integrated life that challenges all communities today.

3.2 – *The Anaphora Retreat Center*

Another good example, this time of an *institution* that has embodied the Coptic liturgical ethos among other tenets that would constitute a more comprehensive Coptic *politeia*, is the Anaphora Retreat Center that covers one hundred and twenty acres in Upper Egypt. With a quick look at the center’s website, the intertwining of the center’s liturgical ethos and ecological consciousness becomes obvious:

Anaphora was inspired by the spirituality of the monastic life... Anaphora is a place where people from all over the world come to find inner peace, tranquility, and relaxation. All other areas are illuminated by candles and solar lighting. Anaphora is funded by donations and is an organic farm that aims at self-sufficiency. Visitors can choose to stay in communal housing or individual cells. You can choose to enjoy various activities available including farming, prayer, daily mass, social gatherings around the fire, candle making or choose to experience the quiet solitude of this desert retreat.⁴⁶

Due to the limited published information on this retreat center, I set up an interview with the

visionary behind the creation of Anaphora—Bishop Thomas of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of el-Qusiya and Meir in Upper Egypt. He successfully cultivated a haven that fosters diversity, ecological-awareness, and Christianity never before seen in such a capacity. Each day begins early with the Midnight Praise, discussed in some detail above, followed by the Divine Liturgy. In the church at the Anaphora Center, liturgical services, including the serene and meditative evening prayers from the Book of Hours (*Agpeya*), run only on candlelight, without any electricity. The bishop describes the beginning of each day as a focus on life itself, on the inner person. *Anaphora*, as its name—taken from one of the most critical and recognizable moments of the Christian liturgy—implies, is aimed at the “lifting up” of the person. At this facility, liturgical prayer lies at the center of humanity’s very care for nature. Cultivating true Christian love in the liturgy has a direct effect on the ecological well being of any given land. Bishop Thomas says, “The more tenderness that human beings have toward nature, the more productivity and friendship, and [the more of an] expression of goodness nature will have for us.” The Bishop goes on to assert that plants and animals feel, and we as humans must respect these feelings. Our love impacts animals and plants, and all of nature. It is our duty not only to pray for creation, as we do in liturgy, but also to be proactive in light of these prayers.

After breakfast, they gather for a diverse community meeting to discuss international, especially ecological, news. The center offers field programs to teach farming techniques in concert with eco-theology. Bishop Thomas explains that since humans should “live in partnership with nature,” they must cultivate a relationship of love and respect with nature. People “need to nurture the desert,” he says, citing an emphasis on recycling, composting, and permaculture. “This is a responsibility; this is not a luxury. It is the responsibility of every Christian as the image of God.” The bishop goes on to explain that there exists a potentiality in

humans that is expressed theologically as human “likeness to,” in comparison to “image of,” God. Humans are all given the image of God, but the realization of “likeness to God” depends on our actions in concert with God’s grace. In other words, the fulfillment of our transformation as Christians depends on our relationship with all of creation. “We are to be friends with nature, not to consume nature, not to use nature...At Anaphora we are teaching people the importance of eco-theology. It is our responsibility toward nature.” Similar to the ecological consciousness developed in the community of the *Zabbālīn*, Bishop Thomas states that at this center, there is absolutely no garbage. “Garbage,” he asserts, “means that something is not in the right place.”

Before the creation of such retreat centers, the only source of such an environment of solitude, prayer, liturgy, agriculture, and self-sustenance would be monasteries. In as sense, this is a refined version of these monastic prototypes, with a focus on serving laity explicitly. The ecological consciousness developed as part of the Coptic liturgical ethos, as Bishop Thomas emphasized time and again, continues to drive interest in this ecological haven. This interest is evidenced by the estimated sixty thousand people who retreat to the center yearly. The Coptic liturgical ethos is effective in creating communities whose religious concerns are not only tied to their ecological concerns but in fact serve as the ecological fountainhead of these concerns.

4 - Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate briefly ways in which living a life immersed in the Coptic Orthodox liturgy, which I have termed a Coptic liturgical ethos, can create individuals and communities that are ecologically conscious. While I have only hinted at what I would call a broader Coptic *politeia*, admittedly the Coptic liturgical ethos is only one—though potentially the most important—component of this Christian way of life that cultivates

ecological-mindedness. A fuller study of the Coptic *politeia*, which I have avoided replacing with “way of life” to prevent its misinterpretation as a mere set of actions or prescriptions, would present the intertwining of an integrated and God-oriented ethic characteristic of Orthodox Christianity. I have four brief suggestions in addition to the Coptic liturgical ethos for further research on this Coptic Orthodox *politeia*.

The first component of this *politeia* is the centrality of a monastic and ascetic framework, which seamlessly mends action and contemplation, the physical and the spiritual. The second component is a focus on self-sustenance. The efficient work ethic that undergirds this component is grounded in Scripture, especially ideals of poverty and economical labor, both of which prove beneficial ecologically in a community. The third component is an agricultural “climate” that harmonizes faith and agriculture, whose marriage points to a co-stewardship between land and humans. The fourth component is fasting, which brings about detachment and self-realization. This in turn enables one to act in accordance with the ecological actions to which one may either be naïve or for which one may be unable to change her or his ways.

The last component, and the only component presented substantially, though not exhaustively in this chapter, is a liturgical ethos. The Coptic Orthodox liturgy, as I have presented it, consists not only in the celebration of the Eucharist, but also in the daily prayers of the *Agpeya*, or the Book of the Hours, in the Midnight Praise or Holy Psalmody, and in other prayers such as those of Holy Week. At least three different elements of Coptic liturgy work to cultivate ecological awareness. The first is a reminder by the church that time is precious and mindfulness is crucial. The time to respond to the challenges that most urgently confront our world is *now*. Second, this response begins with participation in the liturgy that makes humans aware of their nature as co-worshippers with the rest of creation. The eco-theology presented in

the liturgy convicts participants of their essential place in the safety and salvation of the world. Finally, the repeated daily, weekly, and yearly cycling of these prayers engrains in its adherents an ecological awareness that becomes part and parcel of Christian life.

The significance of the Coptic liturgical ethos, and by inference, of the Coptic *politeia*, is manifested in the communities of the *Zabbālīn* of the Mokattam Hills and by the community of the Anaphora Retreat Center in Upper Egypt. The ability of these centers to establish communities whose ecological impact arguably surpasses those of most modern green projects, eastern or western, speaks to the potential within Coptic Orthodox Christianity to impact contemporary environmental ethics and to establish a theological foundation for ecological awareness. At the core of the ecological success of these communities is a primary focus on relation and unity with God, within community, shaped by Scripture and liturgy, and done in love of others and thereby in emulation of God. In this way, Coptic Orthodoxy offers the world examples by which to transform the ecological face of any land by first transforming the people therein.

Notes

¹ See Bartholomew, and John Chryssavgis. *On Earth as in Heaven : Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*. Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought. 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012); and Elizabeth Theokritoff. *Living in God's Creation : Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology*. Foundations Series. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009).

² The churches that rejected the council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, which now include the Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopian, Malankara Syriac, Syrian, and Eritrean churches, constitute the present day “Oriental” Orthodox churches.

³ John H. Watson. *Among the Copts*. (Brighton, England ; Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶ Mk 1:15 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ Francis. *On Care for Our Common Home : The Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*. (New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), 47.

¹⁰ For explanations on the spirituality of the Coptic Midnight Praise and its interpretation, see Mettaous, H.G. Anba. *The Sprituality of the Praise According to the Rite of the Coptic Orthodox Church*. (Sydney, Australia: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions), 2005.

¹¹ More commonly, this praise is timed to end at the break of dawn when the Divine Liturgy itself begins. For this reason, the Midnight Praise often begins a few hours after midnight. For a description of the Midnight Praise (*tasbihāt niṣf al-layl*), see O.H.E. Khs-Burmester, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church: A Detailed Description of her Liturgical Services and the Rites and Ceremonies Served in the Administration of her Sacraments* (Cairo: Publications de la Société d'Archéologie copte, 1967), 109–111; and Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and its Meaning for Today*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 255–259.

¹² Minā al-Baramūsī, *Kitāb al-Ibṣalmūdiyyah al-Muqaddasah al-Sanawiyah* (Alexandria, 1908), 188–189; my translation.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 103; my translation.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 167–168; my translation.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 249–250; my translation from the Coptic text.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁸ Massoud, Matthew. *The Spirituality of the Holy Psalmody*. (Ontario, CN: St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, 2005), 49-50.

¹⁹ Minā al-Baramūsī, 68; my translation.

²⁰ Mt 6:26, 28 (New Revised Standard Version).

²¹ See O.H.E. Burmester, *The horologion of the Egyptian Church: Coptic and Arabic Text from a Mediaeval Manuscript*, Studia Orientalia Christiana, d Aegyptiaca (Cairo: Edizioni del Centro Francese di Studi Orientali Cristiani, 1973).

²² ‘Abd al-Masīḥ Ṣalīb, ΠΙΧΩΜ ΝΤΕ ΠΙΕΧΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΕΘΟΥΑΒ ΕΤΕ ΦΑΙ ΠΕ ΠΙΧΩΜ ΝΤΕ †ΩΟΜ† ΝΑΝΑΦΟΡΑ ΝΤΕ ΠΑΓΙΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΟΣ ΝΕΜ ΠΑΓΙΟΣ ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΣ ΝΕΜ ΠΑΓΙΟΣ ΚΥΡΙΛΛΟΣ ΝΕΜ ΖΑΝΚΕΕΥΧΗ ΕΥΟΥΑΒ [The book of the Holy Euchologion, which is the book of the three Anaphoras of Saint Basil and Saint Gregory and Saint Cyril, and other holy prayers], (Cairo: ‘Ayn Shams, 1902), 349.

²³ Ibid., 350.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 114, 116; translation from *The Divine Liturgy: The Anaphoras of of Saints Basil, Gregory, and Cyril*. Second ed.: Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, 2007, 205-06.

²⁶ This is one of the few times in the divine liturgies that the phrase “Lord have mercy” is repeated three consecutive times in response to a litany. See ‘Abd al-Masīḥ Ṣalīb, 350.

²⁷ ‘Abd al-Masīḥ Ṣalīb, 116-118; *The Divine Liturgy*, 207.

²⁸ Abd al-Masīḥ Ṣalīb, 118.

²⁹ Ibid., 524.

³⁰ Massoud, 49-50.

³¹ The liturgy of St. Basil uses this same word, and the most frequently cited publication reads “salvation.” See *The Divine Liturgy*, 202-03. The prayer here is in Coptic, and the word used for salvation is σωτηριας, which is normally translated “salvation” (etymological relation to “soteriology”), but has often been translated “safety” in this particular liturgical instance. See *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil, Including Raising of Incense*. Fourth edition ed. (Sydney: Coptic Orthodox Sunday School, NSW, 1998), 91-92. See also *The Liturgies of the Coptic Orthodox Church*. Edited by Fr. Shenouda Anba Bishoy. Fourth edition ed. (Hindsdale, IL: St. Mark and St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, 1987), 63-64. Lastly, one of the most frequently used sources, especially before the Southern Diocese publication was released, is *The Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil*. (Victaville, CA: St. John the Beloved Publishing House, 1992). All of these sources translate the word as “safety.”

³² The word I have translated here as “nourishment” can also be translated as “livelihood.” This word carries a connotation as a type of divine livelihood, that is, an earned wage whose source is God. Certainly the overarching point is that God provides what animals need, but the implications of using this word is an elevated respect for the animals to which they refer. See Fīlūthāūs al-Maqārī, Barnābā al-Baramūsī, and Mīkhā’īl Ġirġīs, Kitāb dallaāl wa tartīb ġū m‘at alalām wa ‘id al-fish al-magī d ḥasab taqlid wa tartīb al-kaniša al-qibtīyya al-urtūduksiyya [The book of the guide and order of the week of suffering and the glorious feast of pascha according to the tradition and order of the Coptic Orthodox Church] (Cairo, 1920), 100.

³³ Ibid., 101; my translation.

³⁴ This is found in the daytime litanies of Holy Week. The word that I have translated as “prosperity” here for stylistic reasons would be rendered “success” in a more literal translation. The awkwardness of granting “success” to animals, however, bolsters my emphasis on the respect given non-human creation, similar to the note above. See al-Maqārī, et al., 107.

³⁵ Ibid., 102.

³⁶ Historically and according to Coptic tradition, this mountain is so important to Copts that the Advent fast was extended from forty to forty-three days because of a miracle that occurred at the end of the 10th century that saved the lives of the Copts living there.

³⁷ Watson, 31. See also Jeannette Catsoulis. "The Struggles of Cairo's 'Garbage People,' but No Whining." *The New York Times*, Jan. 6, 2010.

³⁸ In the absence of municipal facilities, the more accurate translation of *Zabbālīn* than "garbage collectors" is "garbagers" or "garbage people." The latter is cited by Catsoulis. Additionally, "garbage collectors" conveys a more commercialized, westernized system, whereas the reality remains that the *Zabbālīn* are at odds with such systems. Mai Eskander's documentary presents these infiltrating westernized systems that recycle at a rate of approximately thirty-percent as a threat to the superior system of the *Zabbālīn*.

³⁹ Verena von Pfetten. "Raised in the Trash Trade: Lessons in Recycling from Cairo's Slums." *The Huffington Post*, Mar. 6, 2009.

⁴⁰ Mai Eskander. "Garbage Dreams." <http://garbagedreams.com>.

⁴¹ Watson, 32.

⁴² Catsoulis, "The Struggles of Cairo's 'Garbage People,' but No Whining."

⁴³ Public Broadcasting Service. "PBS, Independent Lens: Garbage Dreams." <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/garbage-dreams/recycling.html>.

⁴⁴ Eskander. "Garbage Dreams."

⁴⁵ See Watson, 32, where he attests to this peace and fulfillment in the community. This same theme runs throughout Mai Eskander's *Garbage Dreams* documentary. Anecdotally, Fr. Moises Bogdady, with whom the author has ministered for nearly two decades at a Coptic Orthodox Church in New Jersey, served in the city of the *Zabbālīn* for more than a decade and repeatedly makes remarkable claims of the deep peace and joy of this inspirational community.

⁴⁶ Thomas, Bishop. "Anaphora Retreat: About Us." Anaphora Retreat Center, <https://bishophthomas.wordpress.com/about-us/>.

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