

PNEUMATIC PIETY: A SOCIOTHEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE COPTIC
ORTHODOX DIASPORA IN KUWAIT

by

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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5 June 2018

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reveals, describes, and critically analyses the complex and little-studied lifeworld of elite Coptic Orthodox Christians living in Kuwait. As a sociotheological study, it contributes towards a greater understanding of the Coptic Orthodox Church's lived theology and diasporic situation on the Arabian Peninsula. Following a grounded theory, qualitative approach using interdisciplinary methods, the aim of the thesis was to describe Coptic Orthodoxy in Kuwait and then rescript the data to contest, complicate, and construct various sociological and theological theories. Material was gathered from St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church through participant observation, interviews, and literature analysis. The material was situated within the backdrop of the current literature, Coptic history, and the Kuwaiti context described as restrictive clientelism. Selected data were analysed sociologically and theologically. Randall Collins' Interaction Ritual theory was a primary tool. Data on prayer were analysed using a model based on a sociotheological reformulation of the theory of *theosis* grounded in the experienced activity of the Holy Spirit or pneumatic piety. The results of these analyses were placed in conversation with Pentecostalism for contextual, comparative, and dialogical purposes. The manuscript concludes with the contributions of this thesis while noting the future challenges and possibilities for continuing research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without my supervisors: Professor Allan Anderson and Dr Michael Wilkinson. They have insightfully directed and critiqued my work over the last few years from beginning to end. I am also deeply indebted to the Kuwait-Coptic community. Without them, this thesis would not exist. In particular, I am grateful to Monica Matta for her assistance in facilitating interviews, access and travel, translation, and insider insights about my work. Additional thanks go to Dina Al-Qassar, who helped me in the initial stages of my research into the Kuwaiti context. I am also grateful to the English Department of the American University of Kuwait. I have received nothing but support from my colleagues during my postgraduate career. Finally, I am especially grateful to my church community and family who have had to listen to me test out and explore various implications and theories. To Dave Hess, who suggested the Coptic church in the first place. And thanks to my wife, Amy, who has been a paragon of support and encouraged me throughout all the ups and downs of doing a project such as this.

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¹ All figures and models are the author’s own work unless otherwise indicated.

GLOSSARY OF ARABIC AND COPTIC TERMS²

- abaya*: long black head covering and robe for women
- ²*Abūnā*: Respectful, titular term for monks and/or priests; literally, ‘our father’.
- Al^cAṣabīyah*: group feeling or social solidarity among Muslims; associated with Ibn Khaldūn’s work
- Amir*: the ruler, in this case, of Kuwait. Typically a hereditary title
- Arākhina* (Arabic)/*archon* (Coptic/Greek): a lay elder in the Coptic Church, typically privileged, influential, and comparatively wealthy
- al-daff* or *nāqūs*: hand cymbals
- Agpeya* (Coptic): Coptic prayer book similar to the Book of the Hours
- baraka*: roughly, ‘blessing’ and sometimes equated with ‘grace’ but takes a variety of forms and meanings
- baṣīra*: revelatory insight about something hidden or in the future
- deir*: monastery
- dhimmī*: non-Muslim living under Islamic law
- dinar*: Kuwaiti and other Arabic countries’ form of currency. Currently, 1 *dinar* is equal to 2.38 British pounds (as of February 2018)
- dīwānīa*: receiving room for guests in Kuwaiti culture
- dishdāsha*: traditional long white robe worn by Kuwaiti men
- dīwanīa*: a formal room part of Gulf Arab’s homes used for entertaining visitors.
- felāhīn*: the poor, rural working class.
- al-ghūs*: payment and work system managed by pearling captains which engendered a form of indentured servitude similar to the present-day work system of *kafāla*
- haikal*: the altar area
- ḥalāl*: ritualistically ‘clean’ food; similar to Judaism’s concept of *kosher*
- ḥamal*: Eucharistic bread
- ḥanūt*: a blend of spices and oils used to cover the cylindrical reliquary of Coptic saints
- ḥarām*: sinful or forbidden
- ḥāris*: a manager or general care-taker of a property; another name for security guard
- jelābīah*: lower-class Egyptian robe for males
- jihād*: the mandated expansion of Islamic dominance
- kafāla*: sponsorship system in the GCC (Gulf Cooperative Countries)
- kafīl*: sponsor
- al-kāhin*: officiant during the Divine Liturgy
- makfūl*: the sponsored
- Mālikī*: one of the four branches of Islamic jurisprudence. Kuwait draws on this school of thought for its interpretation and application of *shari^ca* law, particularly for family law. It prioritises the *Qur’an* and certain sayings of Muhammad (*hadith*).
- māyrūn* (Coptic): special anointing oil prepared infrequently and used to sacralise icons, churches, altars, etc.
- metania* (Coptic): a formal prostration usually during prayer or petitions
- Miṣr*: Egypt
- muthallath*: metal triangle
- nadi*: sports or other types of clubs
- niqāb*: cloth that covers the most of a woman’s face

² All Arabic words are transliterated and formatted according to the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* word list and transliteration chart. All words are Arabic unless otherwise indicated and proper names are not italicised.

qalansuwa: traditional monk's head covering made up of two black pieces sown together in the middle with 12 white crosses (6 on each hemisphere) embroidered on it.

qurbān: pre-sanctified bread not used for the Eucharist. Often distributed after the service.

Ramaḍān: Islamic holy month of fasting from sunrise to sunset.

rasūl: Christian Arabic for 'apostle'; Islamic Arabic for 'messenger', usually only applied to Muhammad and a few earlier prophets such as Ibrāhīm (Abraham) and Iʿīsa (Jesus).

Ṣaʿīdī: Egyptian Arabic for an uncultured, rural person usually from Upper (Southern) Egypt

ṣalāt: For Muslims, this describes the formal, ritual prayers but simply means 'prayer' of a variety of types for Copts.

salīf: loan

al-shaʿb: the congregation, literally, 'the people'

Shahāda: the Islamic declaration of faith: 'There is no god but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God'.

al-shammāmsa: the choir

shariʿa: Islamic religious, ethical, and social law

shaykh: title of honour used for important males in positions of authority or influence. Also used of a ruler and an Islamic cleric.

Shiʿi: minority branch of Islam

Sunni: majority branch of Islam

suq: market area, usually at the city centre

tailasana: white head covering worn by the priest during the liturgy

taliah: deification or divinisation

umma: Islamic nation or Islamic community

Wahhabi: a puritanical reform movement of Islam begun in the early twentieth century.

wāṣṭa: system of influence and relational connections

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Martyrs, Monks, and Migrants

The Coptic Orthodox calendar does not begin with the birth of Jesus. It begins with the wave of persecution against Christians under Diocletian, 29 August 284 CE.³

Calendars offer a helpful look at identity and telegraph the values and history of the ones who use them. The Coptic Orthodox calendar, measured in terms of persecution, is punctuated with martyrs in nearly every century. These martyrs, men and women, are still celebrated on the various feast days of the Coptic Orthodox Church (hereafter COC). The televised 2015 martyrdom of twenty-one Coptic Christians in Libya by the Islamic State under the heading of ‘Members of the Hostile Egyptian Church’, put the COC into the world’s spotlight.



Figure 1: Coptic Martyrs in Libya⁴

³ Mark Gruber, *Sacrifice in the Desert: A Study of an Egyptian Minority Through the Prism of Coptic Monasticism* (Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 2003), 3.

⁴ Wynton Hall, "ISIS Christian Beheading Video Condemns 'Crusaders'," *Breitbart*, 15 Feb 2015, 18 Dec 2017, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2015/02/15/isis-christian-beheading-video-condemns-crusaders>.



Figure 2: Tony Rezk's Neo-Coptic Icon of the Martyrs in Libya⁵

It is hard to overestimate the legacy and impact martyrdoms, contemporary and ancient, have had on the COC. Coptic anthropologist Anthony Shenoda flatly states: '... Copts today are so steeped in a Late Antique and medieval history of martyrdom that it seems that persecution has become the most important lens through which to view contemporary socio-political life in Egypt'.⁶ It is a legacy kept in front of every Coptic Christian. Martyr narratives made into icons and films invite another generation to identify persecution and perhaps even martyrdom as key markers of what constitutes the Christian experience. Even among Copts who currently live in contexts without persecution, there is a vital consciousness of the sufferings of their co-religionists elsewhere in the world; they often lobby governments on their behalf.

Monasticism, as the narrative goes, began when Christians in Egypt sought out the hard life of suffering in the desert, persecution, as it were, by the elements and the

⁵ Staff, "Charity Appeals for Money for the Children of 21 Coptic Martyrs " Catholic Herald, 27 Feb 2015, 18 Dec 2017, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/02/27/charity-appeals-for-money-for-the-children-of-21-coptic-martyrs>.

⁶ Anthony Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery: Miracles and a Coptic Moral Imaginary" (Harvard, 2010), 14.

devil. Patterning themselves on Jesus' temptations in the wilderness,⁷ these early monastics and hermits birthed an ascetic strain of the Christian faith that continues to influence Christian thought and practice today — especially in the COC through the modern renewal of ascetic religious vocations.⁸ Alongside the martyrs, these monks, nuns, and hermits populate the Coptic *Synaxarium*⁹ and through pilgrimages, hagioptics, liturgies, feasts, and iconography fill up a large part of the Coptic imaginary¹⁰ — members often carry their names. For the Copt, 'The past is never dead. It's not even past'.¹¹

Like other churches, the bulk of the COC is not the hierarchy, monastics, or martyrs but common laypeople. Yet, recently, for the first time in its long history, modernity and globalisation have created a new mode of being Coptic in the world *outside* of Egypt. Like other diasporic groups, there are millions of Coptic Orthodox Christians spread throughout the world¹² and they have carried their faith with them. They are pharmacists, construction workers, doctors, engineers, and teachers. Unlike the saintly martyrs or heroic hermits, these Copts eke out a living in exile and their stories are largely unheard unless in untimely death, their faith frequently relegated to Orientalist exoticism. Yet, if the Coptic martyrs in Libya are in any way emblematic, it is a faith that can withstand the ultimate test. It is a theology that can potentially turn ordinary migrants into saints.

⁷ Matthew 4.1-11, Mark 1.12-13, Luke 4.1-13.

⁸ It should be noted that many Coptic religious are not ordained.

⁹ The *Synaxarium* is the Coptic collection of saints' lives.

¹⁰ For my purposes, imaginary 'may be broadly characterised as the affectively laden patterns/images/forms, by means of which we experience the world, other people and ourselves' but 'we cannot draw a sharp distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, cognition and affect, between what is known and what is imagined'. From Kathleen Lennon, *Imagination and the Imaginary* (Taylor and Francis, 2015), 1.

¹¹ William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage International, 1953), 229.

¹² Actual numbers for Coptic Orthodox populations both in Egypt and outside are notoriously difficult to pin down. In Egypt, the typical estimate is 10% of the population or 8 million. Outside of Egypt, population estimates range from 1-2 million.

As a Majority World, *African* faith, Coptic theology, following the Southern Global trajectory of Christian growth,¹³ provides an alternative way of interpreting the Christian tradition without neo-colonial, Constantinian, and Enlightenment trappings. Additionally, the COC's cruciformed theology that stays close to the reality of suffering and persecution coupled with its sophisticated, patristic Trinitarianism can provide new dimensions and directions for Western theological reflection. Twenty-first century Near Eastern migration is also a growing concern as is the survival of Christianity in the region of its birth. As geo-politics move ever closer to a 'clash of civilisations',¹⁴ the Coptic experience can help Western Christian communities understand their new Muslim neighbours. Copts know all too well that following a crucified Christ may mean discrimination and death, even in their own country.¹⁵ Yet they have not stayed in their own country but are now living out their faith in major cities around the globe. No longer does a researcher have to go to Egypt to come in contact with the COC. It is incumbent, then, for Christian traditions with little to no awareness of Coptic Orthodoxy to seek to understand the 'stranger in their midst'. Finally, the potency of the COC rests in its ability to maintain robust congregations. Even under exilic conditions, the COC is thriving. But how?

¹³ See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ The seminal work along these lines is Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1998).

¹⁵ Aside from the various news reports of church burnings and violence against the Copts in Egypt, another metric for real or perceived discrimination lies in the narratives of Copts applying for religious asylum in Western countries. See Puck De Wit, "Coptic Asylum Seekers in the Netherlands: Current Policy and Counter Arguments," in *Coptic Studies on the Threshold of a New Millennium: Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Coptic Studies*, ed. Mat Immerzeel and Jacques Van Der Vliet (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2004).

1.2 Methodology and Directions

Answering the above question falls within the purview of the ‘sociotheological’ endeavour. As early as 1971, Roland Robertson, coining the phrase, noted a new phase within the sociology of religion: ‘What is *new* is that there now appears to be a much more conscious weaving-together of social-scientific ideas and theological or religious ideas’.¹⁶ More recently, Mark Juergensmeyer writing about the ‘sociotheological turn’, notes:

[T]his . . . means incorporating into social analysis the insider-oriented attempt to understand the reality of a particular worldview. . . . Sociotheology, thus, represents a third way—a path between reductionism (denying that religion can have any “real” importance) and isolationism (delinking religion from its social milieu). Instead, this trend incarnates the analytic approach that Robert Segal calls interactionism—a two-way frame of references through which religion can account for social phenomena and social factors can account for religion (2005).¹⁷

This thesis seeks an ‘insider-oriented attempt to understand the reality’ of the Kuwait-Coptic worldview. Taking a cue from Segal, it also follows an interactionist analytic approach.

Within the sociotheological frame, this work requires a field-tested methodology that holds an insider-orientation with an interactionist approach. Pentecostal-Charismatic (hereafter PC) scholar Mark Cartledge’s methodology from his work, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology*, fulfils this requirement. Cartledge observes ‘that the research process be framed by an oscillation between the ‘lifeworld’ (concrete reality) and ‘system’ (theory or

¹⁶ Roland Robertson, "The Sociology of Religion: Problems and Desiderata," *Religion* 1, no. 2 (1971): 109-10.

¹⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Sociotheological Turn," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81, no. 4 (2013): 944-5.

theological metanarrative)'.¹⁸ The oscillation within the lifeworld-system dialectic creates the process of rescription. The rescription process

seeks to maintain a tension between a revised script that is *both* in continuity with and in discontinuity with the existing script. It seeks to move ordinary theology forward through a deeper analysis of its testimony mode and a broader dialogue with the Christian theological tradition, illuminated by the insights of the social sciences.¹⁹

The lifeworld for this case study is the Kuwaiti context and, more specifically, Kuwait-Coptic religious experience. The theoretical/systematic side of this thesis rescripts the data in terms of psychological, theological, and sociological theorising. 'Ordinary theology', following Jeff Astley, is 'the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind'.²⁰ It appears in the 'testimony mode' or as the 'narrative' that emerges from my fieldwork among the congregation. The 'broader dialogue with the Christian theological tradition' is in reference to the Bible, Coptic Orthodoxy, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the PC movement. The resultant 'revised script' forms the sociotheological metanarratives that make up the bulk of the chapters.

As an empirical *and* theological enterprise, this thesis is necessarily interdisciplinary, involving a conversation between the social sciences, humanities, and theology. André Droogers suggests that '[i]n developing interdisciplinary work, it is necessary to agree on common ground with regard to questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology: what is the nature of what is studied, how are the inquirer and the knowable related, and how should the inquirer go about finding

¹⁸ Mark Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 15.

¹⁹ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 18.

²⁰ Astley qtd. in Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 16.

reliable knowledge?’²¹ Following Droogers’ suggestion, ontologically, I place myself, like my respondents, within a theistic orientation. Although other interdisciplinary studies often chose a methodological atheism or agnosticism for various normative and often essentialist reasons, my *Christian* theist ontology is a *strategic* bias I acknowledge from the outset. In fact, I assume that this strategic bias significantly benefits and advances my investigation in terms of theological sensitivity and emic relationships. At this point in time, I am an outsider to the COC but an insider to PC forms of Christianity. Within this epistemological space, I can afford to be critical (I am not a member) and constructive—especially in terms of theology.

For ‘obtaining reliable knowledge’, I use an interpretive social scientific approach. First and foremost, this is a *qualitative* approach that involves ‘the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds’.²² This approach entails a number of assumptions. One particularly germane for this study is voluntarism, that is, ‘human actions are based on the subjective choices and reasons of individuals’.²³ In short, Egyptians migrate and participate in Coptic practices by choice and on purpose. Moreover, this approach, which uses grounded theory, is inductive,²⁴ moving from direct observations to patterns and hypotheses, to theories. It entails exploration and ‘thick description’.²⁵ Furthermore, I follow the postulate of

²¹ André Droogers, "Essentialist and Normative Approaches," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), Kindle location 786.

²² W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 6th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2006), 88.

²³ Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 90.

²⁴ It is not solely inductive, as grounded theory involves abduction as well. This is covered at length in Chapter Three.

²⁵ Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 91.

adequacy, which means my account must be intelligible to the people it describes.²⁶

Arising from this is the value of both etic and emic approaches that seek to approximate insider validity and accuracy while maintaining critical distance. I also assume a form of intercultural relativism that assumes no one particular viewpoint or value is universally normative. Therefore, the tools and assumptions of an interpretative social scientific approach are highly appropriate for ‘obtaining reliable knowledge’ for my sociotheological ends.²⁷

Briefly, the heart of this thesis is a single-case study²⁸ of St Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church in the Ḥawālī district of Kuwait City, Kuwait, undertaken from October 2015 to February 2017. It is a single-case study because it is ‘bounded’ by time (length of fieldwork) and space (one location). It also uses multiple streams of information to triangulate the data, for example, documentary evidence, field notes, and interviews. Like Cartledge’s study, it is “‘extrinsic-theological’”: ‘This classification refers to studies that consider a congregation in relation to an external concern, such as ‘social capital’ or a desire to hear congregational voices for their distinctive contribution’.²⁹ The ‘external concern’ for this work is the diasporic context. It is also theological since the Copts’ ‘distinctive contribution’ is narrated within theological discourse. To further this end, I targeted St Mark’s members from the diasporic elite or middle-class Copts. I chose this group because, as Shenoda notes, they are ‘the backbone of the church’ and ‘the most active’.³⁰ They are often the ones with the time and leisure to train for service as deacons, lead Sunday School, and organise special interest groups. Secondly, middle-class Copts in Kuwait tend to

²⁶ Smart qtd. in Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 92.

²⁷ More details regarding reflexivity are given in Chapter Three.

²⁸ See Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (London: Sage, 2009). More information regarding the fieldwork is covered in Chapter Three.

²⁹ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 22.

³⁰ Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery," 30.

stay longer and are more invested in negotiating the intricacies of the Kuwaiti migrant sponsorship system for themselves and others. They are culture bearers. Lastly, as the educated and techno-literate population of the Church, they are more heavily involved in media production/consumption and are more comfortable in communicating in English. Therefore, the lifeworld-system methodology within the sociotheological matrix applied through the single case-study design yielded data that are rescripted within various theoretical frames.

1.3 Theoretical Frames³¹ and Thesis Overview

Arriving at theoretical frames for rescription, analysis, and illumination involved using grounded theory. Grounded theory should also include *actual* theory construction and not merely serve as justification for inductive studies. Kathy Charmaz bemoans:

Many researchers identify grounded theory as their analytic approach, but . . . relatively few researchers have taken grounded theory into explicit theory construction despite numerous claims to having done so. . . [G]rounded theory has been invoked to explain conducting qualitative research. . . . Other researchers have treated citing the method as a convenient means of legitimizing their studies.³²

Duly chastened, it is necessary to provide a preliminary sketch of the various theoretical frames of reference that I employ, modify, and construct for rescription.

1.3.1 Theological Frames

Given the fact that I am an American working with Egyptian Copts in Kuwait, this study inherently involves intercultural theological assumptions. Intercultural theology

³¹ This study interacts with more theories than those expressly outlined here, but the ones in this section are used more extensively and fundamentally.

³² Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier Ltd, 2015), 402.

arose out of the ecumenical movement of the 1960s, yet it was not until the late 1970s before Birmingham's Walter Hollenweger articulated his 'five guiding principles'.

Werner Ustorf provides a helpful outline. Intercultural theology:

- 1) is 'that scholarly theological discipline that operates within a particular cultural framework without absolutizing it';
- 2) will select its methods appropriately. Western academic theology is not automatically privileged over others;
- 3) has a duty to look for alternative forms of doing theology (such as non-Western and narrative forms);
- 4) must be tested in social practice and measured by its capacity for bridge-building between diverse groups;
- 5) must not be confused with 'pop-theology' that escapes from self-critical reflection³³

For 1), this study operates within the Coptic cultural framework while recognising its limitations as it informs theory building by an Anglo-American academic (2 and 3).

As a PhD thesis, however, 4) would mean extending my results back into St Mark's congregation at a level beyond the largely descriptive and analytical frames of this study. I am not currently in the position to offer such recommendations to the priests of the church, but this thesis was submitted to one of the diasporic elite of St Mark's for careful review in accordance with the postulate of adequacy.³⁴ Finally, I affirm the fifth guiding principle by on-going reflection through the rescription process.

³³ Werner Ustorf, "The Cultural Origins of 'Intercultural' Theology," in *Intercultural Theology*, ed. Mark Cartledge and David Cheetham (London: SCM Press, 2011), Kindle locations 527-44.

³⁴ I also had numerous off-the-record exchanges with Coptic scholars, researchers, and laity about my research in which I asked for feedback and tested hypotheses. Cartledge, on the other hand, operating under vastly different conditions within his home culture goes on to offer recommendations to the congregation and leaders of his case study. See Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 179-90.

1.3.1.1 Towards a Phenomenology of *Pneuma*: Pneumatic *Kenosis*³⁵

The larger theological frame for this study is Christian theology. Christian theology assumes that God has revealed Himself³⁶ in Christ. This revelation forms the nucleus for Christian theology. Theology and experience cohere in consciousness.

Consciousness suggests agency and awareness in and of one's internal and external worlds. It partly indexes what we mean when we use the term 'person' in normal conversation or 'in the straightforward sense of a being with, at least potentially, a sense of self and an ability to relate to non-self as 'other'.³⁷ Within a Christian theological framework, human persons interact with God through the Spirit of God, sometimes referred to as the 'Spirit of Christ' or the 'Holy Spirit' in the New Testament.³⁸ The latter title differentiates the 'Holy' Spirit from human spirit or an 'unclean' spirit. In this imaginary, 'spirit' or *pneuma*³⁹ in New Testament *Koine* Greek, partially maps onto a complex unseen, but nevertheless perceived, reality.

To articulate the theoretical theological assumptions underwriting this study's data regarding the 'experience-able' qualities of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to construct a short phenomenology of Spirit.⁴⁰ What follows is my own phenomenology of *pneuma* abductively occasioned by both my intercultural fieldwork with the Copts

³⁵ Atkinson underscores his use of the phrase as 'relational'; I speculate that there is also an ontological change *for* relational purposes, see William Atkinson, *Trinity after Pentecost* (Cambridge, U.K.: The Lutterworth Press, 2014), 104.

³⁶ Traditionally, pronouns referencing God are capitalised and masculine. In keeping with the conservatism of the Coptic tradition, I do the same.

³⁷ William Atkinson, "The Kenosis of the Personal Spirit," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 35, no. 2 (2015): 116.

³⁸ Hereafter Holy Spirit or Spirit and in contrast to 'spirit', referring to a dimension of a human person.

³⁹ I have also transliterated other Greek terms that follow, including *kenosis* and *theosis*.

⁴⁰ *À la* Charmaz, this is the first instance of theory construction or, rather, adaptation, that was brought in to help explain the data. In phenomenological fashion, I start with the 'flame of experience' and work backwards towards possible ontological and theological constructs rather than beginning with *a priori* doctrinal and philosophical assumptions about S/spirit and imposing them on the data. Where there were extant other ways of thinking of *pneuma* in the Christian tradition and current scholarship, I employ those for rhetorical and theoretical purchase. Also, I am fully aware of George W.F. Hegel's work of the same name but my use differs significantly.

and my own Pentecostal-Charismatic tradition. I do so at this early stage of the thesis because without such a phenomenology, narratives of spiritual experience are untenable and interview data of the ordinary theology of the laity merely become vulgar (in its original sense) restatements of systematic theology rather than points of departure for new horizons of meaning. From the outset, 'The very appearance of something [in one's consciousness] makes it a phenomenon'.⁴¹ This 'appearance', from a phenomenological point of view, involves perception and 'perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted'.⁴² However, this is not to be taken as a closing off from the environment, a mental prison. Summarising philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Heimbrock writes:

[H]uman perception does not happen in an abstract, intellectualistic way, nor in a causal-mechanistic way, but rather in a situated connection between a finite bodily subject of perception and its environment. The subject lives and perceives the world in a specific spatial situation. Through my body, I understand the other; I become aware of things through my body.⁴³

Here embodiment and environment matter; there is a 'world' out there and it makes a difference in perception. Taken together, a working phenomenology of *pneuma* prioritises bodily and situational perception and sees the 'spiritual' as a phenomenon—one that can be further theorised about, not just swept under a metaphysical rug. As one of my interviewees pointed out:

The church deliberately makes things physical because we are physical human beings. I can't have just a spiritual experience and that's it because I'm a physical human being with physical needs. I need to see, I need to hear, I need to taste, I need to smell. And the church engages all your senses. And that's how the church was meant to be.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (London: Sage, 1994), 49.

⁴² Moustakas, *Phenomenological*, 52.

⁴³ Hans-günter Heimbrock, "From Data to Theory: Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 283.

⁴⁴ Kyrillos, interview by Ben Crace, 30 May 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

My proposed cogent, operative phenomenology of *pneuma* thus involves re-contextualising *pneuma* within its wider Hellenistic understanding and a redeployment of the doctrine of *kenosis*. Both of these trajectories together form what I mean by pneumatic *kenosis*.

Generally speaking, it is often assumed that S/spirit is *de facto* immaterial but still 'real'. Such a view is widespread. Candy Gunther Brown writes, 'Spirits are real entities who act in the material world'⁴⁵ but, quoting Charismatic Catholic writer Francis McNutt, claims, '[S]pirits are by definition, "non-material" beings that cannot be "seen, measured, or placed under a microscope."' ⁴⁶ Such a dualistic ontology (material/immaterial) reframes the mind/body issue into a theological issue: mind/soul or mind/spirit. Such a sharp dualism is not unambiguously 'Biblical' for 'the Bible provides little detail about the precise relationship between body and spirit'⁴⁷. Such a lack of precision has invited speculation. However, given advancements in neurology, there can be an empirical basis for hypotheses. Specifically, Paul and Cahleen Shrier have explored this mind/body issue at length in terms of sanctification and in light of recent neurological discoveries. They conclude:

Sanctification has a very real bottom-up causal chain; as we practice Christian morality and spirituality our physical actions change the shape of our brain. Reshaping our brains and reshaping our souls are somehow the same. . . these brain-soul interconnections indicate that *our soul is somehow physical* [emphasis mine].⁴⁸

Such observations are highly germane to this study. First of all, what I label as pneumatic piety assumes that 'reshaping our brains and reshaping our souls are

⁴⁵ Gunther Brown, 59.

⁴⁶ Gunther Brown, 59.

⁴⁷ Gunther Brown, 60.

⁴⁸ Paul Shrier and Cahleen Shrier, "Wesley's Sanctification Narrative: A Tool for Understanding the Holy Spirit's Work in a More Physical Soul," *Pneuma* 31, no. 2 (2009): 227.

somehow the same' or, in other words, deeds done in the body matter to the spirit.⁴⁹ Further, Shrier and Shrier stop short: 'our soul is somehow physical'. Not only do I posit that it is 'somehow physical' but that it *is* physical and ancient thinkers were on to something that can help resolve various mind/body issues associated with Platonic ontologies. Thus, rather than quickly default to a paradox or mystery based on the immaterial/material split, it is more productive simply to see S/spirit as consisting of a special *type* of material that exists within and without the human body: *pneuma*.

Prior to the New Testament, the term *pneuma* was largely associated with the Greek philosophers. In their usage of the term, they meant an actual substance, akin to fire. It was often linked with the body of the gods:

Scholars and exegetes are more and more coming to the conclusion that it [*pneuma*] did not mean immaterial "spirit." It is more suitably translated by "breath" or "wind." Among ancient philosophers and medical professionals, it was thought of as a corporeal substance, though not a solid, earthly substance like earth and water. It was much more like air. Air, however, was thought to be naturally cold and misty, whereas *pneuma* was hot, fiery, fine, and subtle.⁵⁰

In this schema, when mixed with air, *pneuma* became aether and formed the *substance* of the human soul. Aspects of this Stoic understanding, then, get carried over into the New Testament. In Paul's theology of a pneumatic body from 1 Cor 15.48-9, Litwa argues that 'Paul's pneumatic body is not "flesh and blood," but a finer, purer, subtler substance not subject to decay'⁵¹ –a body infused with *pneuma*. He goes on to argue very persuasively that this is part of becoming Christ-like: '[B]elievers assimilate to the glorious *body* of the divine Christ. In this way they receive an immortal body made up of a fine, ethereal stuff called "*pneuma*".'⁵² This

⁴⁹ This is echoed in the scriptural text that one is judged for 'deeds done in the body', see 2 Cor 5.10. Paul's concern, too, for involvement in prostitution as spiritually detrimental underscores a strong conceptual link between the body-soul, see 1 Cor 6.16.

⁵⁰ M. David Litwa, "We are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology," (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 133-4.

⁵¹ Litwa, "Deification in Paul," 137.

⁵² Litwa, "Deification in Paul," 119.

is not just something that occurs eschatologically or at the end of the world but in the present as well.⁵³

Non-metaphorical, materialist overtones of *pneuma* are not confined to Pauline theology but arguably show up in the Synoptic Transfiguration narratives, too.⁵⁴ There Christ, akin to Moses,⁵⁵ ascends a tall mountain (perhaps even the same one) where He is ‘transfigured’; He glows brightly and His clothes are radiated to the degree that they are completely bleached and start to glow as well. As *pneuma* was considered to be a fiery, glowing substance and the Transfiguration a prelude to the resurrected pneumatic body, a straightforward materialist reading makes the most sense: Peter, James, and John witnessed it, not merely as an internal vision but as visual and aural data confirmed by the presence of multiple witnesses. John, writing later,⁵⁶ says, ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled concerning the Word of life’.⁵⁷ Peter, too, writes,

... but we were eyewitnesses to His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.⁵⁸

⁵³ Litwa, "Deification in Paul," 221. This understanding of observable, luminous *pneuma* pervading material reality shows up in Coptic accounts of glowing saints.

⁵⁴ I am well aware of the hermeneutical difficulties and exegetical problems surrounding my proposition of a quasi-material Spirit. My point is not to say that this is the best way of thinking about *pneuma*, the Biblical way, or even how my interlocutors would have articulated it but it is my theoretical construction that seeks to account for what is going on beneath the data. The Transfiguration is recounted in Matt. 17.1-8, Mark 9.2-8, and Luke 9.28-36.

⁵⁵ Coptic monk-theologian, Ἀβὺνᾶ Μᾶττα Ἀλ-Μεσκῖν, in reference to Moses’ experience of the burning bush flatly asserts: ‘Tradition informs us that the fire in the bush is a realistic expression of the nature of the Godhead’ Matta Al-Meskīn, *Pentecost* (Wadi El Natrun, Egypt: The Monastery of St. Macarius, 2015), Kindle location 88.

⁵⁶ All Biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) because, as my research and interviews indicated, this is the preferred English translation used by Kuwait-Copts. *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982). Spelling has been Anglicised.

⁵⁷ 1 John 1.1-3

⁵⁸ 2 Peter 1.16b-18.

These descriptions are hardly invisible, immaterial, ideal forms existing below the phenomenal, but, rather, deep affirmations of the facticity of embodied experience. Theologian Ivan Popov argues that this '[R]ealist orientation' underlies ancient, and as I argue, popular, modern Oriental Orthodoxy (of which the COC is a part), which sees 'participation in the divine life [as] a consequence of the permeation of the soul and body by the divine powers of the Holy Spirit, which permeation [is] conceived according to the Stoics' schema of the mixing of bodies [material substances]'.⁵⁹ This materialist conception of *pneuma* is a first step towards a phenomenology of Spirit.

Such a concept, though historically grounded and scripturally supported nonetheless 'feels' foreign to contemporary Western Protestant theology and even popularised conceptions of metaphysical reality that has, by and large, followed Platonic and Neoplatonic trajectories in its conceptualisation of the S/spirit, namely, utter immateriality. However, it is not necessary to abandon the concern for transcendence 'safeguarded' by immaterialism by simply accepting substantive immanence. To begin with, if one accepts the Personhood of the Spirit⁶⁰ and activates the doctrine of *kenosis*, usually associated with Christology and the doctrine of the Incarnation, then one can arrive at a Spirit Who 'self-empties' those qualities of transcendence that make interactions with humans impossible, namely an *a priori* immateriality. The doctrine of *kenosis* is based on the passage in Philippians 2.7b that states Jesus 'made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men'. Although the NJKV translates the verb, *ekenosen*, as

⁵⁹ Ivan V. Popov, "The Idea of Deification in the Early Eastern Church," in *Theosis: Volume 2: deification in Christian theology*, ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Cambridge, U. K.: James Clarke & Co., 2012), 62. Popov does not use the term 'Oriental Orthodox' but, rather, monophysite, a traditionally heretical moniker.

⁶⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to focus on inter-Trinitarian relationships. Instead, it looks at the interaction between Spirit and people. The personhood of the Holy Spirit was codified by the ecumenical council First Constantinople in 381 CE. This Council's rulings are accepted by the COC as authoritative.

‘made Himself of no reputation’, other translations utilise ‘emptying’,⁶¹ which, theologically, is taken to mean Jesus divested Himself of certain aspects of divinity in the Incarnation.⁶² This setting aside of His ‘divine privileges’⁶³ was a choice of Christ’s; it is also a decision of the Spirit made in love, typically described in language of descent. This pneumatic condescension into materiality is seen most obviously in Acts 2 during Pentecost where the Spirit descends and flames of fire appear over the heads of the Apostles. The author of Acts suggests that if one were there, one could have seen the flames, clearly identified with the Holy Spirit. Here the Stoic idea of *pneuma* as fire and the kenotic concept of descent in order to interact with humanity come into sharp focus.⁶⁴ Or as Atkinson argues: ‘The Spirit engages with human life in *all* its frailty’ [emphasis mine].⁶⁵ Further, the language of Spirit baptism as a baptism of fire further weds the realist reading to the Biblical text since, analogously, water baptism involves actual water. It is, perhaps, mere prejudice and Western ethnocentrism that sees further abstraction and (Platonic) immateriality as a theological development over the ‘primitive’ pneumatology suggested by these texts. However, as will be seen later in this study, such a Realist orientation⁶⁶ towards the Spirit as *pneuma* goes a lot further in elucidating the data and subsequent models than a sharp Idealistic, Platonic dualism.⁶⁷ Therefore, my usage of the terms

⁶¹ See the English Standard Version, New American Standard, Holman Christian Standard, Douay-Rheims, English Revised Version, and Young’s Literal Translation.

⁶² See Rodolph Yanney, "Salvation in the Coptic Liturgy of St. Gregory the Nazianzen," *Coptic Church Review* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 52.

⁶³ As the New Living Translation states.

⁶⁴ Another scene of Spirit *kenosis* and descent is the dove on Christ during His baptism. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is capable of taking material form. In fact, the Incarnation itself, we are told by Luke’s narrative, is the result of the Holy Spirit ‘overshadowing’ Mary (1.35). It is perhaps more helpful to think of the spiritual as super-material rather than anti-material.

⁶⁵ Atkinson, "The Kenosis of the Personal Spirit," 120.

⁶⁶ For a further discussion on the distinction between the Realist orientation and the Idealist orientation, see Popov, "Idea of Deification."

⁶⁷ I purposefully avoid extensively using the language of sacramentality here because of its long Roman Catholic associations and deeply Aristotelian categories. In focusing on the ordinary theology of the laity, I want to employ Ockham’s razor instead of Scholasticism.

pneuma/pneumatic carries with it these Realist, substantive overtones. This way of understanding *pneuma* is better suited to the data of this study because it maintains the tight body-soul connection assumed in the practices associated with the ascetic-mystical tradition, and it accounts for the substantive language used of and behaviour displayed by the Copts in regard to physical healing, *baraka*, *ḥanūt*, iconography, and the Eucharist, examined later in Chapters Three and Four.⁶⁸

The pneumatic focus of this study falls under the theological sub-discipline of pneumatology. Pneumatology, the study of the Spirit, has received revived interest in theological circles over the last century. One contributing factor to this foregrounding is the rapid growth and development of the PC movement within Christianity.⁶⁹

Although definitions and classifications vary, suffice it to say that the PC movement places a strong emphasis on ‘an ecstatic *experience of the Spirit* and a *tangible practice of spiritual gifts*’.⁷⁰ To be sure, the PC movement is not limited to certain denominations but is descriptive of a global phenomenon that has impacted free churches as well as the older, Apostolic traditions.⁷¹ Allan Anderson underscores its significance:

What may be the fastest expanding religious movement in the world today has contributed to the reconfiguration of the nature of Christianity itself in the twentieth century. Pentecostalism has indeed become globalized in every sense of the word; this has enormous ecumenical implications, and adherents

⁶⁸ These will be discussed at length later. An immaterial reading of spirit/*pneuma* would consequently result in a lesser emphasis on the physicality of spirituality. For now, my underlying logic is that a sacramental realism or physicalist position in regard to the Eucharist ‘bleeds’ into other beliefs and practices. See Stephen J. Davis, “The Copto-Arabic Tradition of *Theosis*: A Eucharistic Reading of John 3:51-57 in Būluṣ al-Būshī’s Treatise *On the Incarnation*,” in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 168.

⁶⁹ For issues with PC Christianity as a global movement, see Joel Robbins, “The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33 (2004).

⁷⁰ Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8. Emphasis in the original.

⁷¹ While there are explicitly Pentecostal congregations such as the Assemblies of God, there is also the Catholic Charismatic Renewal within the Roman Catholic Church as well. Febe Armanios is currently researching the impact of the PC movement on the COC in Egypt.

are often on the cutting edge of encounter with people of other faiths. All this demonstrates how important it is to study these movements.⁷²

Not only has the explosion of PC Christianity energised interest in pneumatology, but the role and place of experience has received greater attention as well. Moreover, the PC movement emphasises the availability of such pneumatic experiences for *everyone everywhere*. Arguably, the PC movement has set the tone for twenty-first-century pneumatological discourse. This discourse is often egalitarian, lay-sensitive and existentially aware. In short, the role of the Spirit in the lives of people is back on the agenda. In turn, these trends reframe the traditional approach to ‘spirituality’⁷³ and demand increased attentiveness to the phenomenal and empirical. Simply speaking, spirituality is life with and in the Spirit. More broadly, I also follow Rodney Stark’s definition of religious experience as ‘some sense of contact with a supernatural agency’,⁷⁴ while more narrowly positing the Holy Spirit as that agent together with others who share the same Spirit.

1.3.1.2 Pneumatic Piety and the Pneumatic Pieties

Having briefly constructed a working theory in regard to the basic, interculturally informed theological assumptions that allow for spiritual experiences to occur (pneumatic *kenosis*), I turn to the next theoretical frame that emerged from data. The core of this study is pneumatic piety, detailed thoroughly in Chapter Four. For now, *the theory of pneumatic piety states that elements of the Coptic Orthodox tradition as*

⁷² Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd edition. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

⁷³ ‘Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith’, Alister McGrath qtd. in Mark Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 18.

⁷⁴ Rodney Stark, *Sociology of Religion: a Rodney Stark Reader* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 12.

*practiced at St Mark's among the diasporic elite are positively correlated to experiences of the Holy Spirit.*⁷⁵ These elements are specific beliefs and practices I label as pneumatic pieties. *Pneumatic pieties are the sets of beliefs and practices that index participation in the mystical theological tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church.*⁷⁶ Specifically, these will be limited to the Eucharistic liturgy, prayer, fasting, experiences of the *charismata* (spiritual gifts) and the quest for *baraka* or blessing. They are 'pneumatic' practices in that they are enacted by the person for the benefit of his/her spirit by the power/energy and presence of the Spirit. These 'pieties' index participation in the *mystical* theological tradition of the COC precisely because they emerge from but are not confined to a monastic-ascetic context, assume the ontological status and accessibility of a hidden dimension of reality (the spiritual), and are part of the wider programme of salvation/redemption.⁷⁷

The pneumatic pieties also provided the general categories around which the interview questions were based. This thesis, concerned with the seemingly intense piety of diasporic Copts,⁷⁸ revolves around two central questions: 1) How do Kuwait-Copts experience the Spirit? and 2) How is that experience shaped and maintained while living in Kuwait? With these questions in mind, I isolated the aforementioned five pneumatic pieties. I chose these five because they are easily observable, form a core part of Coptic piety, involve the Spirit's activity, and take distinctively *Coptic* forms. They are also amenable to different analyses and susceptible to environmental factors (question 2). Another reason for isolating these particular pieties is because

⁷⁵ It is with the eye of faith that the activity of the Holy Spirit is recognised; others may find the described phenomena fully explainable within a strictly materialistic framework. My own assumptions and issues of reflexivity are detailed elsewhere.

⁷⁶ Some of the pneumatic pieties enumerated also signal the potential Pentecostalisation of the diasporic elite's faith.

⁷⁷ Salvation/redemption is intertwined with the doctrine of deification or *theosis* in Orthodox thought and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

⁷⁸ Theologically assuming that the Spirit has something to do with piety.

they contain crucial elements that form a pentecostal spirituality, one that witnesses to the experience of the Holy Spirit. As this study ultimately aims to situate the data gathered and meaning uncovered through analyses within the broader frame of global, PC Christianity, sensitivity to these experiences must be kept upfront. Their perceptual and narratable saliency also allows for the use of qualitative social scientific methods that are part of the sociotheological endeavour.

1.3.2 Sociological Frames

Religious beliefs and practices such as the pneumatic pieties do not happen in a vacuum but are embedded in their surrounding social matrices. Although the larger matrix of globalisation is operative,⁷⁹ I focus mainly on the Kuwaiti context. Thus, I propose the theory of restrictive clientelism, explained below, as a theoretical frame that is part of the rescription process alongside the ongoing theorising about strictness and tension. At the microsociological level in Chapter Five, the study focuses on Randall Collins' Interaction Ritual model applied to the Coptic Eucharistic liturgy.

1.3.2.1 Meso-level Sociological Theories⁸⁰

The main meso-level theoretical socio-political/religious/economic context of this study is restrictive clientelism. I argue that the pneumatic pieties are constantly being re-shaped and re-imagined in unique ways due to the Kuwaiti diasporic context, extensively detailed in Chapter Three. As this term suggests, the contemporary situation retains some of the hierarchical, asymmetrical, and discriminatory

⁷⁹ Situating this case study within globalisation discourse would require longer engagement and more quantitative as well as comparative methods. In short, it would demand a complete redesigning of the study.

⁸⁰ The three levels of sociological analyses, micro, meso, and macro are commonly used in the field. My delineation below was significantly influenced by Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 61.

characteristics of the older Islamic *dhimma* system but is also discontinuous due to its modern mechanisms and benefits. It is, in short, *the beneficial, but also restrictive, hierarchical system of social stratification defined by the patron-client/kafīl-makfūl relationship under contemporary shari‘a law*. Further, this situation for non-Muslims/non-Kuwaitis stimulates the pluralisation of alternative Christianities (PC Christianity being perhaps the biggest) existing horizontally with a non-hegemonic Coptic Orthodoxy. All of these forms are ‘below’ the official state religion of *Sunni* Islam. Paradoxically, restrictive clientelism in Kuwait increases religious competition.⁸¹ The mechanism that self-restricts, stratifies, and pluralises the population is the Kuwaiti sponsorship programme (hereafter *kafāla*⁸²). Restrictive clientelism driven by *kafāla* creates a historically unique context with which Kuwait-Copts must contend. Secondly, again on a meso-level, I argue in Chapter Five that this situation complexifies strictness theory and the concept of tension with the surrounding culture.

1.3.2.2 Microsociological Theory

On a micro level, relevant data are rescripted through Randall Collins’ Interaction Ritual (IR) model.

⁸¹ For a critical look at the religious market model, see Henri Gooren, "The Religious Market Model And Conversion: Towards A New Approach," *Exchange* 35, no. 1 (2006).

⁸² *Kafāla* and restrictive clientelism will be further explored in Chapter Two.

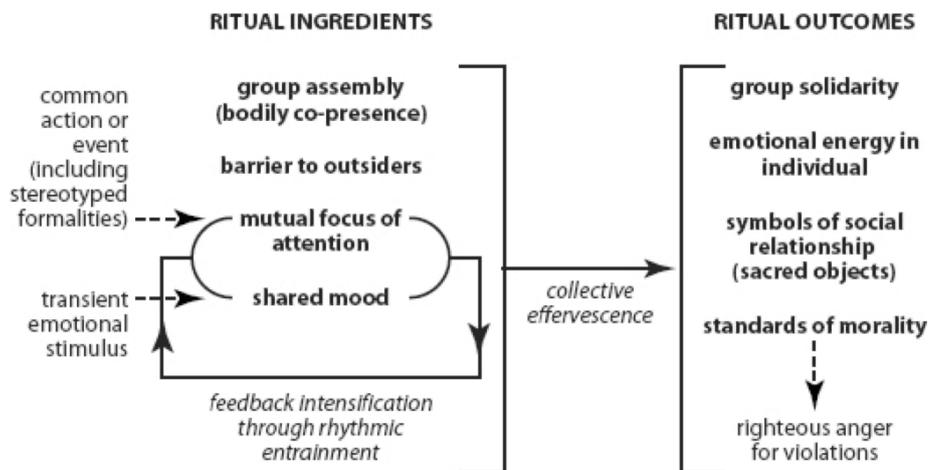


Figure 3: The IR Model⁸³

As part of the theoretical construction project associated with grounded theory, I modify Collins' model to include elements suggested by other scholars and the data. Wilkinson helpfully summarises the basic ideas:

Collins argues that life situations are characterized by social interactions. These interaction rituals (IR) have the capacity to produce emotional energy (EE) in bodies through intense face-to-face situations. IR is a social mechanism in which mutually focused emotion produces a shared reality.⁸⁴

In Chapter Five, I isolate the Coptic Eucharistic liturgy and apply the modified IR model to reveal the micro 'social factors [that] can account for religion', while avoiding the reductionist tendency to claim that social factors can account for *all* of religion/religious experience.

⁸³ Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 68. Used with permission of the author

⁸⁴ Michael Wilkinson, "Pentecostalism, the Body, and Embodiment," in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 19.

1.3.3 Psychological Frames

Just below the micro-sociological and even with the phenomenological level, there also needs to be a psychological account of experience that frames the interview data and allows for the various levels of coding and theorising. In Chapter Four, I thus employ the theories of liminality, Altered States of Awareness, and flow states to shed light on interviewee's narratives. In Chapter Seven, I deepen the psychological categories by operationalising Ralph Hood's work on experiences of transcendence to map overlaps between Coptic Orthodoxy and PC Christianity.

1.3.4 Towards a Sociotheological Theory of Theosis

In Chapter Six, I present the resultant sociotheological theory of this thesis. It is made up of a carefully delineated and reformulated theory of *theosis*⁸⁵ in line with pneumatic kenotic assumptions. Swedish theologian Gösta Hallonsten writes that one way of understanding *theosis* is as 'a comprehensive doctrine that encompasses the whole of the economy of salvation. The whole plan of God and its accomplishment from the creation through the Incarnation, salvation, sanctification and the eschaton are included. . .'.⁸⁶ Unlike Hallonsten, my reformulation of *theosis* is not so grand in scope. It focuses instead on just a segment of the above description. It seeks to describe and analyse the diasporic elites' experiences of sanctification,⁸⁷ in Western theological terms. However, the rather pedestrian term 'sanctification' carries too much Western philosophical/theological baggage, mixed up as it is in longstanding

⁸⁵ I will keep to the Greek term because its English and Arabic equivalents foreground meanings that obscure more than help.

⁸⁶ Gösta Hallonsten, "Theosis in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 287.

⁸⁷ Or *taqdīs* in Arabic. This term was only used once in the interviews.

Catholic-Protestant polemics on justification. Further, ‘sanctification’, for a PC audience, is too entangled with the 19th and early 20th century Holiness movements that arguably birthed and divided early Pentecostalism. Simply translating the Greek, *theosis*, into English is also fraught with difficulties. Terms like ‘divinisation’ and ‘deification’ immediately send up red flags. In Arabic, *taliah*, is too close to ‘becoming Allah’; a phrase that got theologian and monk Matta Al-Meskīn into trouble with then context-sensitive Pope Shenouda. *Theosis*, on the other hand, as a ‘neutral’ Greek term has several advantages. First of all, it is from the same language in which the New Testament is written thereby enjoying linguistic proximity to both the biblical and patristic texts. As noted, it is the root term behind divinisation and *taliah*; thus, using the root instead of the branches. This study’s sociotheological approach hopes to sidestep some of the controversy associated with such translations. Chronologically, *theosis* also precedes English and Arabic equivalents. Further, conceptually, it is broad enough to speak of the entire *telos* of Creation or can be used as a more technical term for the existential elements of divine-human interaction/participation. It is, I suggest, a ‘fuzzy’ concept. But this ‘fuzziness’ leaves room for developments like this present study.

In terms of this study, *theosis* is directly applicable in several ways. First of all, Matta Al-Meskīn, the monk and writer who helped shape modern Coptic spirituality, leaned heavily on Eastern Orthodox sources for his thought. Many of my respondents were either familiar with him and his work or considered him (or his monastery) as their teacher, directly or indirectly. A few of my interviewees, too, knew of the concept in Greek and Arabic, perhaps signalling further penetration of

Al-Meskīn's appropriation and dissemination.⁸⁸ Theosis is also helpful because of its longstanding monastic-ascetic association. This study argues that that tradition is extended into the laity through the pneumatic pieties. As the monastic practices are adapted in the diaspora, it follows that similar, holistic transformation/divine participation occurs: migrants can become mystics.⁸⁹ Therefore, inasmuch as the pneumatic pieties index and extend the monastic-ascetic experience among the diasporic laity, it is, indeed the same *theosis*, albeit laicised.

However, this study is not primarily concerned theologically nuancing *theosis*. Instead, it seeks to describe and analyse at a high resolution what *theosis* looks and feels like, on the ground, so to speak, illuminated by the social sciences. Thus, my sociotheological theory of *theosis* is laicised, sociologically informed, centred around Christ, teleologically oriented towards love of neighbour (*socio*) and God (*theos*), and pneumatically energised. The resultant theory I develop (and its subsequent model, the Diamond Model of *Theosis*) therefore enfolds prior theorising such as the modified IR model and the aforementioned psychological frames to partly synthesise the lifeworld-theoria dialectic. The repopulating and re-ordering of theological categories that occurs also has the potential to corroborate the PC experience of the Spirit with the COC's wider mystical tradition, giving it ecumenical purchase.⁹⁰ Thus, the effects of the on-going project of *theosis* are manifested empirically through the pneumatic pieties to sustain Coptic commitment to Orthodoxy under restrictive clientelism and, at the same time, reflexively sensitise the laity to pentecostalized forms of Christianity in an increasingly pluralised religious market outside of 'Coptic'

⁸⁸ Significantly, those familiar with the language of *theosis* knew of Al-Meskīn and the relevant biblical passages. They also knew that it got him into trouble with Pope Shenouda.

⁸⁹ I am fully aware that, as T.S. Eliot once said, 'Not everyone who has a mystical experience becomes a mystic.'

⁹⁰ Any doctrine that emphasises one's unity with Christ in the Spirit naturally lends itself to unity with other Christians.

Egypt. In short, my theory of *theosis* is derived from and compatible with Coptic ‘ordinary’ theology and coterminous with many existential and sociological emphases. Therefore, I conclude that part of the reason for the COC’s longevity, resilience, and resurgent vibrancy rests in its preservation and performance of means by which its members continually experience the Holy Spirit—even in its Kuwaiti diaspora.

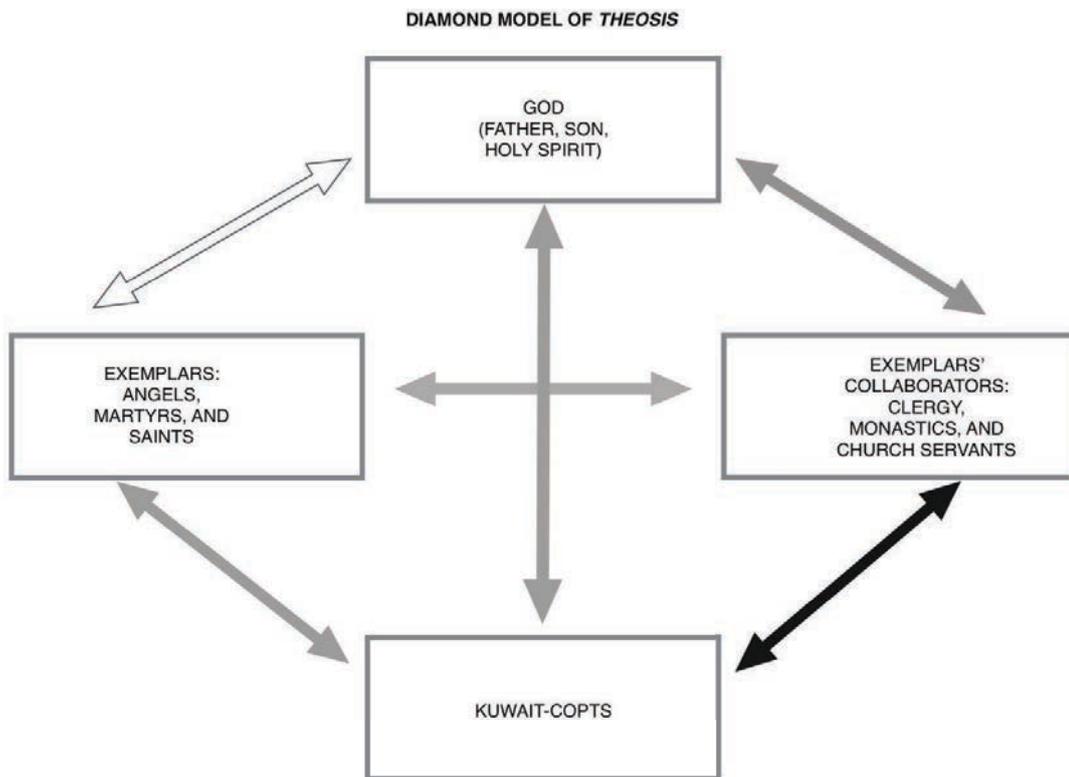


Figure 4: The Diamond Model of *Theosis*

1.4 Conclusion

All of these theoretical frames, sociological and theological, are chosen, developed, and constructed abductively. Charmaz explains:

[G]rounded theorists invoke abductive reasoning to account for surprises, anomalies, or puzzles that they discover in the data. Abduction entails going back and forth between these empirical data and developing theoretical

explanations of them. Abductive reasoning leads researchers to consider and test all conceivable theoretical explanations for the surprising findings.⁹¹

‘Clear’ explanations for things offered by the interviewees or in the literature were also subjected to critical investigation under the guiding rubric of explanatory and synthetic power. I do not claim that the theories and models used in this thesis are complete *and* definitive but helpful and suggestive for explanations and future research. First, however, given the obscurity of Coptic culture and the Coptic Orthodox Church, it is necessary to briefly outline key terms, dates, and figures that serve as a backdrop for the case study.

⁹¹ Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," 403.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDYING THE COPTS

2.1 General History and Contemporary Background

2.1.1 *Origins and Identity*

The word ‘Copt’ is itself a disputed term. Some believe it is derived from the Greek term for Egypt, *Aegyptos*. Others trace it further back to the name of a particular town in Egypt, *Hikuptah* (or ancient Memphis). Regardless of its origin, it generally refers to the non-Arab, non-Muslim indigenous population of Egypt. It is often utilized in a ‘sons of the Pharaohs’ narrative by Coptic apologists who want to maintain Coptic identity as distinct from the Arab ‘invaders’. This ‘separate from the Arabs’ identity is often upheld by the usage of a different calendar and language, though Arabic has more or less replaced the various forms of Coptic that once existed. Prior to the twentieth century, in Egyptian nationalistic discourse, ‘Copt’ meant ‘Christian’. Before the spread of Protestantism through nineteenth-century missionaries, it simply meant a member of the Coptic Orthodox Church, who was, more often than not, ethnically and culturally different from Arab-Muslim compatriots. Today, however, a Copt can be Orthodox, Evangelical, Catholic, atheist, or even Muslim in some cases. Given thousands of years of proximity and with the advent of DNA testing, determining ethnic differences is even more difficult. For the scope and purposes of this work, I will be using the term ‘Copt’ to refer specifically to a self-identifying member of the Coptic Orthodox Church and ‘Coptic’ to relate to anything cultural, linguistic, or theological of the same.⁹²

⁹² This is a variation of John Watson’s: ‘. . .[A] Copt is a Christian of the native Orthodox Church in Alexandria, following those who seceded from the Byzantine Orthodox Church at the Council of Chalcedon and one who is in communion with the Coptic Orthodox Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria’ from John Watson, *Among the Copts* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2000), 10.

The official beginning of the Coptic Orthodox Church starts with St Mark the Evangelist.⁹³ St Mark, as the story goes, was in Alexandria in *circa* 42 CE when his sandal broke. While getting it fixed, the cobbler punctured himself with an awl and oddly muttered ‘God is one’. Seizing the moment, St Mark started a conversation about God, healed the cobbler’s hand, and later baptised the cobbler and his family. Thus, the church was planted in Alexandria and the long line of Coptic popes officially began. Tradition also holds that St Mark was later martyred in Alexandria.⁹⁴ Alexandrian Christianity developed into a significant centre of theological thought to the degree it became one of the two main schools of interpretation recognised by church historians in the ancient world. Often caricaturized by being the allegorical counterpart to its Antiochian literal, grammar-historical sister theological centre, Alexandria nevertheless produced some of the most profound and significant figures in Christian history, among them St Athanasius, St Cyril, and Origen. Despite the sense of discontinuity with this illustrious past often foisted upon the COC’s contemporary narrative by outsiders, the COC sees itself both as a custodian of this tradition and, in some ways, its rightful interpreter.

Within a historical narrative of persecution and oppression and bounded geographically between the fertile land near the Nile and the harsh Sahara, Coptic Christianity was forged in the theological disputes of the first three centuries and lived out to the extremes by the desert dwelling ascetics. Thus, in addition to being

⁹³ This Mark is traditionally held to be the author of the eponymous Gospel and traveling companion of St Paul. Interestingly, Copts use the term *rasūl* for St Mark (see Figure 22) as an Arabic translation for the Greek ‘apostle’; the same term is used by Muslims in the *Shahāda*, their confession of faith, e.g., ‘There is no god but God and Muhammad is the *rasūl* (Prophet/Apostle/Messenger) of God’. Alfred Guillaume’s authoritative English version of *Life of Muhammad*, a translation of Ibn Ishāk’s earlier *Sīrat Rasūl Allah*, also uses the term ‘apostle’ in reference to Muhammad. St Mark, of course, is not recognised by Muslims as a *rasūl*.

⁹⁴ This account is derived from Otto F.A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo, 1999), Kindle locations 641-53. The relics of St Mark were subsequently plundered by the Venetians in the 9th century and not returned until 1968.

patristically informed, Coptic theology carries with it an ascetic flavour sustained by the on-going monastic tradition.⁹⁵ It is not uncommon to hear a Coptic priest today quote St Athanasius or St Chrysostom in one breath and a story from the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* in another. Recent scholarship continues to uncover the deep connections between the desert and city that has gone on largely unbroken for centuries. By combining ascetic monasticism, persecution narratives, and patristics, one can begin to intuit what lies behind Coptic Orthodoxy's resiliency and contemporary potency.

Even before the 'Great Schism' between East and West in 1054 CE, the Coptic Church, along with other non-Chalcedonian traditions now referred to as the Oriental Orthodox, 'split' from the rest of Christendom over Christological and political issues concerning the Council of Chalcedon.⁹⁶ Theologically, this marginalisation largely centres on the idea of monophysitism or, more collegially and precise, miaphysitism.⁹⁷ The split resulting from these Christological disputes caused the Oriental Orthodox Church to be labelled as heterodox by the Eastern Orthodox Church,⁹⁸ and, subsequently, by the Roman and Protestant Churches that adhered to the Chalcedonian definition. Moreover, due to larger historical processes such as the Arab invasion in 642 CE, the COC became increasingly isolated from Western theological developments, disputes, and contact. After the Islamic conquest, the Copts learned to survive and adapt as *dhimmi*s, second-class citizens in their own

⁹⁵ It should be noted here that St Athanasius' *Life of St Antony*, Christianity's first hermit, and his *On the Incarnation* are both key texts for the COC.

⁹⁶ This work focuses mainly on the experienced pneumatology of the COC not its Christology.

⁹⁷ 'In ancient times, Chalcedonians insultingly called their Miaphysite opponents "Monophysites," and that name has stuck'. See Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1500 Years* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), Kindle location 196.

⁹⁸ Commenting on the situation, Jenkins notes: 'The heirs of the very oldest churches, the ones with the most direct and authentic ties to the apostolic age, found their distinctive interpretation of Christ ruled as heretical. Pedigree counted for little in these struggles', Jenkins, *Jesus Wars*, Kindle location 122.

country with limited rights. This relative theological, cultural, and political isolation lasted up until the nineteenth century yet continues to affect the Church up to the present day.

2.1.2 Twentieth-Century and Contemporary Developments

With the rise of modernity and nationalism as a backdrop, this study is situated within the contemporary experience of the COC. Thus, it takes as its historical starting point the 1952 Egyptian Revolution and the initial waves of immigration away from Egypt that began quickly thereafter, especially under the reign of Pope Kyrillos VI,⁹⁹ who established St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait. Concomitant with the diaspora, a key theme within the contemporary Coptic narrative is revival.

Many Copts today believe that their Church is in a period of revival or renaissance. It is not just the Copts who have noticed. In 1976, even *Time* magazine noted:

The current monastic revival—*part of a general spiritual resurgence among Copts*—has generated a broad enthusiasm among lay people. Coptic university students spend holidays in retreats at the monasteries. Some organize themselves into "families" attached to specific monasteries that they periodically join for prayer and work. Even after they leave the university, some young professionals choose the monastic life. The 50 monks of the monastery of St Makarios, for example, include six physicians, five pharmacists and twelve engineers [emphasis mine].¹⁰⁰

Monastic revival and professional renunciation are themes that surface again and again. *À propos* to my argument, it is important to point out that the source of the general (lay) spiritual resurgence originated in the monastic revival. We can, then, expect to see mystical-ascetic strains in lay theology. Additionally, if 'renaissance' is

⁹⁹ Kyrillos is Arabic for the Greek Cyril. Coptic Christianity, being as ancient as it is, maintains part of its history in its use of Greek, Coptic, and Arabic.

¹⁰⁰ "Religion: The Desert Revival," *Time*, 19 Apr 1976.

measured in terms of attendance, media, and growth¹⁰¹ it is difficult not to agree. Inner/subjective appropriation, however, is less obvious but does come out in the interviews. Nevertheless, assuming that there is some measure of validity to self-observation and description, Coptic historians of the twenty-first century trace this renaissance to three twentieth-century developments: ‘the establishment of the Coptic Theological College, the Coptic Sunday School movement, [and] the founding of Coptic Benevolent Societies’.¹⁰²

Like many late modernist narratives, success and growth stem from educational (clerical and lay) and social welfare/community organisation categories.¹⁰³ This paradigm, in turn, sets up a reading of history in which the significance of individuals is determined by how they have contributed in these areas. Sure, their piety and even miraculous deeds become part of the hagiographic material, but their spirituality is often interpreted as a source of energy for their reform efforts. Thus, many of the essential modern biographies of Coptic luminaries highlight the interplay between the above two categories and piety.¹⁰⁴ These biographies source the ideal Church servant/leader archetype that looms large in the Coptic imaginary and reinforce the importance of education in the global and ecclesial *economia*. In short, as the current Pope himself is also a trained pharmacist, this provides a complementarian justification for the relationship between education and spirituality promulgated through Coptic families, which, in turn often launches the diasporic

¹⁰¹ Measuring growth, of course, is problematic. Conversion and de-conversion are briefly discussed in Chapter Eight. Further indications of a renaissance include new schools, monasteries, retreat centres, art forms, Coptic language revival, new dioceses, and so on.

¹⁰² Michael Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, trans. Shaheer Gobran (Sydney: Sunday School Central Committee, 1991), 5.

¹⁰³ This materialist interpretative scheme is itself a product of globalisation trajectories in the Majority World where education is unquestionably a ‘good’ commodity. More specifically, Copts in Kuwait often meet and organise at the Church according to profession.

¹⁰⁴ The most attractive and charismatic types of piety often include reluctance to lead and humility expressed through self-effacement.

endeavour to procure enough capital to pay for that education—believing, too, that a good education can secure some kind of protection against persecution and future instability.¹⁰⁵

2.1.3 Revival Leaders and Luminaries

As further background to this study's 1952 starting point, one of the key figures who initiated these trends is Habib Guirgis¹⁰⁶ (1876-1951). He was educated at the Great Coptic School established by Pope Kyrillos IV, 'the Reformer'. He was later ordained a deacon and worked closely with Pope Kyrillos V, who also wanted to reform the church. Kyrillos V believed that 'the cornerstone of the process was the preparation of a newly educated and enlightened priesthood'.¹⁰⁷ In his service to Kyrillos V, Guirgis raised funds and was part of starting a theological college.¹⁰⁸ Later, he was appointed Master of Scripture and became principal of the same college in 1918. Coptic historian Michael Gibrael describes Guirgis' tenure: 'Habeeb Guirgis turned the college into a new beacon of the orthodox faith and protected it from all foreign influences'.¹⁰⁹ This 'protection from all foreign influences' included blocking students who wanted to study in England and refusing to allow an Anglican priest to teach Greek at the college. Further, in the educational realm, he established a night school that attracted university graduates—including the future Pope Shenouda

¹⁰⁵ This also has community building and identity maintenance functions as well. Thanks to Monica Matta who kindly pointed out this additional function of education for a persecuted minority; education is power.

¹⁰⁶ Since there is no standard transliteration for Arabic to English, Guirgis' name has several variant spellings such as Girgis, Guirgis, and Guirguis—even within the same author. Habeeb, too, gets the same treatment with Habib. In dealing with Arabic/Greek/Coptic transliterations, one must develop an appreciation for ambiguity. Guirgis is currently considered a saint. See Saad Michael Saad, "St Archdeacon Habib Girgis: The Revival of Coptic Patristic Theology," *Watani International*, 25 Aug 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 9.

¹⁰⁸ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 8-10.

¹⁰⁹ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 13.

III.¹¹⁰ However, he is most famous for founding the Coptic Sunday School in 1900, a revitalization movement that sought to educate the laity and clergy in the traditions of the Church and Scripture. This came out of a papal pastoral tour to counter Evangelical missionary efforts. As a result, Guirguis decided to borrow some of their methods such as ‘afternoon spiritual gatherings for adults and Sunday Schools and the use of hymns and individual prayers’.¹¹¹ In 1918, he formed the Central Committee of Sunday Schools, which continues to this day.¹¹² Aside from writing a songbook, *Spiritual Hymns and Songs*, Guirguis also wrote key and influential texts like ‘A Summary of the Origins of Faith’ for the Sunday School curriculum, and thirty books in Arabic such as: *The Seven Sacraments of the Church* and *The Rock of Orthodoxy*.¹¹³ Additionally, he started *Al-Karmah (The Vine)* magazine that ‘was a first that this magazine published translations of patristic literature’.¹¹⁴ This magazine was a significant factor in tying the burgeoning renaissance in general theological education to a patristic recovery and re-appropriation in much the same way the Catholic *ressourcement* theologians did during roughly the same period and into the Vatican II era. In regard to *The Vine*, one commentator remarked: ‘If you read the seventeen volumes of *Al-Karmah* you will find wisdom and philosophy; deep spirituality; science and religion combined together with theology and history; legislation and law; news and comments; all written in a sober palatable style and in a strong pious language’.¹¹⁵ From this, we can see a further development of the appreciative attitude of the complementarian relationship between faith/science,

¹¹⁰ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 14.

¹¹¹ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 19.

¹¹² Rodolph Yanney, "Light in the Darkness: Life of Archdeacon Habib Guirguis (1876-1951)," *Coptic Church Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 49.

¹¹³ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 20; Yanney, "Habib Guirguis," 50.

¹¹⁴ Yanney, "Habib Guirguis," 51.

¹¹⁵ Qtd. in Yanney, "Habib Guirguis," 50.

spirituality/education that plays a dominant key in the contemporary Coptic imaginary.

The results of Guirguis' contributions are wide-ranging and still relevant. Even in life, he was so well respected that '[t]hree times his friends tried to make him a candidate for the Patriarchate and three times they failed'.¹¹⁶ Gibrael, summarising Guirguis' many contributions, argues that he helped found many Coptic associations, established churches, built orphanages, retirement homes, publishing houses, schools hospitals, and libraries.¹¹⁷ Truly he was a highly engaged individual with a formidable amount of energy. Guirguis' importance for this work does not just lie in his exemplary life as a lay leader or his vision for congregation-wide, patristic education. He played a quintessential role in starting the organisational mechanisms that continue to transmit Coptic spirituality. Additionally, he set off the process of inoculation through adaptation of competing religious firms' practices that allows the COC to claim 'whatever is good, noble, and true' as its own. Thus, there is ostensibly no need for *theological* defection from the COC since a 'we already have that' mentality is consistently reinforced.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, even as the lay leader of reform, in 1923, Guirguis himself wrote:

Those who sought reformation differed in their paths. Some thought that it was in education alone. Others asked for it in the Council of Laymen. Others restricted it to something else. All of them forgot that all these are crooked paths which have a long way to go, and that the only short and straight way to proper reformation is the Church.¹¹⁹

Now it is not exactly clear what he meant by the Church being the 'straight and proper way to reformation', but he does recognize that the reductive tendency to attribute renewal and reformation to education and lay involvement alone is misguided. We

¹¹⁶ Yanney, "Habib Guirguis," 51.

¹¹⁷ Gibrael, *Archdeacon Habeeb Guirgis*, 20-1.

¹¹⁸ Determining the success of this inoculation through adaptation is beyond the scope of this work.

¹¹⁹ Qtd. in Yanney, "Habib Guirguis," 48.

could speculate, however, that ‘the Church’ is an inclusive term for hierarchy and laity as well as its deeper mystical and spiritual commitments, namely, its pneumatic pieties that supernaturally energise its members.

Kyrillos VI (1902-1971; Pope from 1959-1971), also called the Hermit Pope, is now considered a modern saint. His friendship with then president Nasser helped the Coptic Church navigate the troubled waters of modernity and nationalism in Egypt. In addition to being politically savvy, Pope Kyrillos is also credited with performing miracles, feats of what outsiders would call clairvoyance,¹²⁰ and other powerful signs that accompanied and legitimated his position. Despite his charisma, Kyrillos saw large portions of his flock leave Egypt due to political turmoil and economic conditions. These groups, largely made of educated, white-collar workers, typically headed west: to Europe, Canada, and the US.¹²¹ In terms of this study, Pope Kyrillos VI authorised and negotiated the beginnings of St Mark’s in Kuwait and also served as a referent and entry point for my enquiries into the more charismatic aspects of Coptic spirituality such as exorcism and healing.

¹²⁰ Elsewhere I choose to translate *baṣīra* as ‘revelatory insight’ instead of the more contentious term, ‘clairvoyance’, despite the fact it is used in the literature on the Copts. Cf. Rodolph Yanney, "St. Athanasius and Monasticism," *Coptic Church Review* Winter 17, no. 4 (1996); Valerie Hoffman, "The Role of Visions in Contemporary Egyptian Religious Life," *Religion* 27, no. 1 (1997); Christine Chaillot, "The Life and Situation of the Coptic Orthodox Church Today," *Studies in World Christianity* 15, no. 3 (2009); Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery."; Anthony Shenoda, "The Politics of Faith: On Faith, Skepticism, and Miracles among Coptic Christians in Egypt," *Journal of Anthropology* 77, no. 4 (December 2012). It is not the same thing as fortune telling or ESP since it includes the concept of revelation from the Christian God through the Spirit.



Figure 5: Pope Kyrillos VI Receiving Pahor Labib, Director of the Coptic Museum¹²²

After Kyrillos VI's death in 1971, Pope Shenouda III (1923-2012; Pope from 1971-2012), another former monk, was elected to the highest office in the COC. Shenouda was one of the early members and influencers within the Sunday School movement of the 1950s and 60s. He played a crucial role over the next four decades and steered the COC of today to its present course. Shenouda was a reformer, leader, and father to the Copts in diaspora. Church after church, retreat after retreat centre, Shenouda made his way around the globe ordaining and dedicating priests, bishops, and churches. With a vision for the Coptic Church becoming more than merely an Egyptian, ethnic enclave, Shenouda wrote prodigiously, penning dozens of books and tracts explicating the Coptic faith for outsiders and the next generations. In fact, his books still serve as curriculum for Coptic formation and as a primary source for researchers seeking to access Coptic theology. Many of his sermons are available on

¹²² "Pope Cyril VI of Alexandria with Pahor Labib," Wikimedia Commons, 5 December 2015, 12 Oct 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Cyrl_VI_of_Alexandria.jpg.

YouTube, and, on several occasions, his work was used as an authoritative reference for the teaching I witnessed at St Mark's in Kuwait.



Figure 6: Pope Shenouda III¹²³

Another mid-to-late twentieth-century figure who has widely influenced Coptic spirituality and theology, especially among my respondents either directly or indirectly, is Matta Al-Meskīn.¹²⁴ Trained as a pharmacist and owning two pharmacies of his own, Al-Meskīn left it all for the monastic life in 1948. Al-Meskīn established a monastic foundation that has become a powerhouse in the COC, with its own press, website, and retreat centres. Much of Al-Meskīn's work is published

¹²³ Chuck Kennedy, "Member of the Audience Listens to President Barack Obama Deliver a Much Anticipated Speech to the Muslim World from the Conference Hall of Cairo University in Egypt June 4, 2009. Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy," Wikimedia Commons, 23 April 2017, 12 Oct 2017,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Shenouda_III_of_Alexandria_by_Chuck_Kennedy_\(Official_White_House_PhotoStream\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Shenouda_III_of_Alexandria_by_Chuck_Kennedy_(Official_White_House_PhotoStream).jpg).

¹²⁴ Called 'one of Egypt's most influential Coptic clergymen' in Sara C. Medina, "Religion: Egypt's Copts in Crisis," *Time* 1981. Translated, his name is Matthew the Poor. 'The' in Egyptian Arabic is often transliterated as 'el' while in Modern Standard Arabic, it is 'al'. Further, 'poor' is alternatively transliterated as *miskin*, *meskin*, *meskeen*, or *meskīn*. For consistency's sake and in line with the JMES transliteration guide, I will be using Matta Al-Meskīn.

through them. Although Al-Meskīn died in 2006, many of his voluminous writings are available in English. John Watson glowingly refers to *The Communion of Love* as ‘the finest work of Coptic Spirituality available in English’, and *Orthodox Prayer Life* as ‘arguably the most impressive Coptic publication in Arabic’.¹²⁵ The latter’s English-version’s Foreword was written by well-known Catholic priest and spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen. Both of the above, significantly for this work, ground love and prayer at the core of Coptic spirituality. Additionally, as someone uncomfortable with hierarchy and politics (Al-Meskīn refused to be in the running for pope), and situated outside the power plays of the city in his desert monastery, Al-Meskīn also represents an essential link to the ascetic desert spirituality that today characterizes so much of Coptic Orthodoxy. Unfortunately, in regard to wider acceptance of his work, Al-Meskīn was critical of Shenouda¹²⁶ and once commented: ‘Shenouda’s appointment was the beginning of the trouble. The mind replaced inspiration, and planning replaced prayer. For the first years I prayed for him, but I see the church is going from bad to worse because of his behaviour’.¹²⁷ We see here, as in Guirguis, an emphasis on piety as the source of inspiration over and above mere administrative prowess, a recurrent theme in Coptic culture. Subsequently, Al-Meskīn and Shenouda’s relationship was strained and even today some bishops ban Al-Meskīn’s books.¹²⁸ Despite this previous papal antagonism, Al-Meskīn is still highly regarded among the

¹²⁵ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 123.

¹²⁶ It should also be noted that the COC does not have papal infallibility as a doctrine, so criticism of the pope can be severe. In fact, one pope was actually kidnapped by a radical lay group of Copts.

¹²⁷ Medina, "Copts in Crisis." Al-Meskīn may have been on to something; recent hagiographies of Shenouda stress the many ‘hidden’ miracles he performed during his papacy in an effort to recast him as more of a Kyrillos-type wonder-worker model of spirituality.

¹²⁸ One respondent noted that Al-Meskīn’s work is banned from St Mark’s. This is apparently because the Pope Shenouda saw it as theologically suspect. For a longer discussion on the division between Shenouda and Al-Meskīn, see Stephen J. Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2008), 277-8.

laity and one of my informants, who had been his doctor near the end of his life, spoke very warmly of his personality and humility.

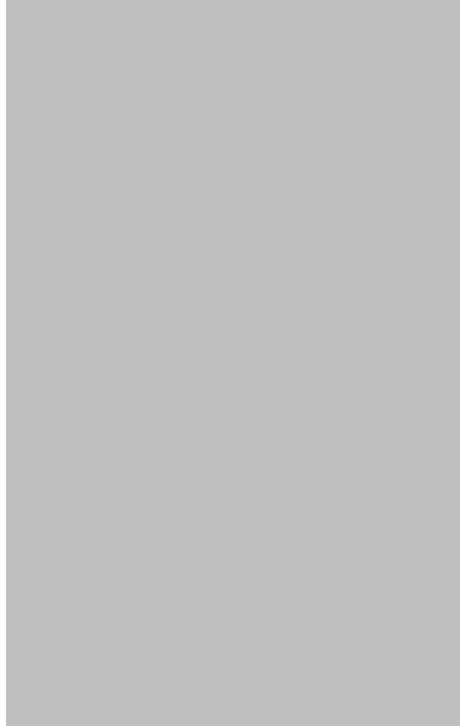


Figure 7: *Abūnā Matta Al-Meskīn*¹²⁹

The current pope, Tawadros II, the 118th patriarch, is another important player in contemporary Coptic life. Pope since 2012, he was born in 1952 in Mansoura, Egypt. He was originally trained as a pharmacist and went into the monastic life in 1986 at the Monastery of St Bishoy, about a two-hour drive northeast of Cairo. Officially appointed as a monk by Shenouda in 1988, he was also ordained a priest in 1989. As a monk, he travelled to Cyprus for ecumenical meetings of the Middle East Council of Churches and, in 1995, to Libya. In 1997, he was consecrated as a bishop. At Shenouda's departure, he was chosen as pope from among 17 other candidates.¹³⁰ Given his short tenure as pope, it remains as yet unseen what he will turn out to be. A

¹²⁹ kyrieeflogison, "Father Matta El Meskin (1919-2006)," Wikimedia Commons, 26 November 2016, 12 Oct 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Matta_el_meskin.jpg.

¹³⁰ "His Holiness Pope Tawadros II," St. Takla Church, 2014, February 8 2016, <http://st-takla.org/Saints/popes/118/en/pope-tawadros-ii.html>.

good omen for the diaspora is that Tawadros recently visited some of the Coptic communities in the US— the first papal visit in fifteen years.¹³¹ He also came to Kuwait in 2017.¹³²



Figure 8: Pope Tawadros II¹³³

2.1.4 Historical Conclusions

From this brief survey, several important themes emerge that directly and indirectly affect the focus of this study. First, contemporary Copts inside and outside of Egypt view themselves as religious minorities. As such, they occupy a liminal space between survival, preservation, renewal, and growth. Secondly, in Egypt, the Coptic community's relationship with the State remains tenuous and uncertain, prompting

¹³¹ Jordan Buie, "Coptic Christian Pope in Nashville on First U.S. Visit," *The Tennessean*, 9 October 2015.

¹³² Unfortunately, I was unable to meet or even see him.

¹³³ Dragan TATIC Österreichische Außenministerium, "Pope Tawadros II," Wikimedia Commons, 10 April 2017, 12 Oct 2017, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tawadros_II_of_Alexandria.jpg.

further migration.¹³⁴ Moreover, Coptic identity continues to evolve in terms of the production of difference. This occurs especially in diasporic communities under various forms of Islam and/or religious pluralism. These encroachments on Coptic identity from Islamic fronts, other forms of Christianity, and globalisation will continue to energise the *ressourcement*¹³⁵ tendencies (which include a recovery of Orthodox ‘distinctives’ like *theosis*) begun in the twentieth century. Lastly, again due to historical processes, long periods of isolation from other branches of Christianity, and a strong survival instinct that fosters a deep conservatism, Coptic Orthodoxy retains many primitive, even apostolic-age, idiosyncrasies that have been further sharpened by its long engagement with Islam and more recent missionary activities.¹³⁶ Thus, in terms of this work, 1) the economic and political history of Egypt created the diaspora, 2) the spiritual revival begun in the last century sustains it in its exile through the activation and mobilisation of its mystical-ascetic tradition, and 3) the Gulf context continues to shape it in unique ways on the ground.

¹³⁴ For example, 52,000 Copts migrated to the U.S. in the seven months after the 2011 revolution, Michael Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus: A Vision for the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America* (Monroe Township, NJ: Saint Cyril of Alexandria Society Press, 2014), 2.

¹³⁵ The term *ressourcement* has its origins in the Catholic recovery of patristic thought leading up to and through the Second Vatican Council. A similar phenomenon has occurred roughly concurrently within the COC, hence my usage of the term.

¹³⁶ Detailing what Coptic practices/theological forms have been shaped by Islam and *vice versa* is a complicated task beyond the scope of this work. A representative example of Coptic practice influencing Islamic is found in the Islamic prayer form that mimics Coptic prostrations or *metania*, the latter clearly predating the former by centuries.

2.2 Studying the Copts: Literature Review¹³⁷

2.2.1 Sociological and Anthropological Literature

One aim of this study is to place the ‘ordinary’ lived theology of the Coptic laity in Kuwait into a larger sociological context. Unfortunately, the bulk of the social scientific literature covers the Coptic experience in Egypt. Long-term observer, academic, and pastor Otto Meinardus (1925-2005) looms large in the field. His extensive engagement and work covers almost every conceivable aspect of Coptic life in Egypt, from saints and pilgrimages, to esoteric rituals, to history, to struggles with modernity. His personal relationship with high-ranking members of the clergy also allowed him access to facets of the Coptic experience that still remain relevant. One can hear echoes of Meinardus in more contemporary studies such as the collection *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture* (2014),¹³⁸ which features many of the current stars of Coptic studies.¹³⁹ Along similar lines, the three volume series, *The Early Coptic Papacy* (2004), *The Coptic Papacy in Islamic Egypt* (2010), and *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy* (2011) represents a growing body of literature and academic interest in the COC. More recently, Mariam Ayad’s edited volume, *Studies in Coptic Culture: Transmission and Interaction* (2016),¹⁴⁰ features various voices from Europe and North America. Unfortunately, it tends to be dominated by historical investigations with only a few contributions looking at the present-day situation. Of the later, Canadian-Copt Helen Moussa’s sociologically-

¹³⁷ General reference works on Coptic language, history, and so on like the voluminous, *Coptic Encyclopaedia* accessible through the Claremont Graduate University, have been left out of this review since the entries tend to be short and broad. Such resources were, of course, consulted and used at different points in this study. Further, the contributors and editors of the *Encyclopaedia* have published longer works that are more germane to my focus.

¹³⁸ Lois M. Farag, *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹³⁹ Such as John Paul Abdelsayed, Mariam Ayad, Lois Farag, Gawdat Gabra, Maged Hanna, Maged Mikhail, Samuel Moawad, Carolyn Ramzy, Saad Michael Saad, and Hany Takla.

¹⁴⁰ *Studies in Coptic Culture: Transmission and Interaction*, (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2016).

informed chapter, “Coptic Icons: Expressions of Social Agency and Coptic Identity” is of note. From an outsider perspective, Muslim female ethnographer, S.S. Hasan’s *Christian Versus Muslim in Modern Egypt* (2008)¹⁴¹ is, perhaps, the most detailed and extensive record of the modern Coptic experience in its undulating political and cultural context. Further, former Benedictine monk Mark Gruber’s theologically rich yet anthropologically rigorous account of life in contemporary Coptic monasteries, *Sacrifice in the Desert* (2003),¹⁴² is *sui generis* and remains a definitive study. In terms of analytical categories and overall approach to mystery and miracle, Coptic anthropologist Anthony Shenoda’s PhD thesis for Harvard “Cultivating Mystery: Miracles and a Coptic Moral Imaginary” (2010), played a vital role in the formulation of this present work. Finally, John Watson’s sympathetic *Among the Copts* (2000) takes a thematic approach to the Coptic experience and alternates mainly between biography, politics, and church history. Aside from these accounts, Watson provides a unique biography of a non-Egyptian Coptic priest ministering in the US and a helpful chapter on Coptic theology that will be discussed shortly. Watson, however, fails to engage with diasporic Copts in non-Western countries.

Outside of Egypt, most of the literature on the Coptic Church centres on the *Western* Coptic diaspora (or the relationship between it and Egypt in a ‘transnational’ framework).¹⁴³ This is typically due to the fact that migration to other Arab countries has been ‘unstable. . . and can generally be described as a male, short-term and labour-driven migration, categorized as “temporary”’.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the literature prefers

¹⁴¹ S.S. Hasan, *Christians Versus Muslims in Modern Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴² Gruber, *Sacrifice in the Desert*.

¹⁴³ The Coptic e-diaspora is an emerging field of study as well. See Donald Westbrook and Saad Saad, "Religious Identity and Borderless Territoriality in the Coptic E-Diaspora," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18, no. 1 (2017); Marta Severo and Eleonora Zuolo, "Egyptian E-diaspora: Migrant Websites Without a Network?," *Social Science Information* 51, no. 4 (2012).

¹⁴⁴ Severo and Zuolo, "Migrant Websites," 523.

the long-term, student and family contexts or ‘permanent migration’.¹⁴⁵ Nora Stene’s important but short “Into the Lands of Immigration” (1997),¹⁴⁶ outlines general issues faced by the COC in diaspora. In the same anthology, Anitra Bingham-Kolenkow’s “The Copts in the United States of America”,¹⁴⁷ at three pages, barely scratches the surface. More helpful is Coptic scholar Saad Michael Saad’s chapter, “Coptic Civilization in the Diaspora” (2014),¹⁴⁸ that provides a partial register of diasporic Coptic seminaries, monasteries, churches, as well as brief descriptions about the development of Coptic iconography, architecture, music, educational and political organizations, and media. He concludes his chapter with a near exhaustive record of Coptic studies programmes and relevant publications. However, despite Saad’s thoroughness—he includes Coptic churches in Fiji and Bolivia—he makes no mention whatsoever of the Coptic Church’s presence elsewhere in the Near East, much less the Gulf region. Representative of North American literature, Eliot Dickinson’s monograph, *Copts in Michigan* (2008),¹⁴⁹ is one of the few extended ethnographic studies that investigates the history of migration as well as the community’s on-going interchange with American culture and its Egyptian roots. On the other side of the world, based on in-depth interviews, fieldwork, and rational choice theory, “*Born with Gold in Your Mouth: Maintaining Identity in Australian Coptic Orthodox Young Adults*” by Richard Rymaz and Marian de Souza, explores

¹⁴⁵ Severo and Zuolo, "Migrant Websites," 523. This study argues that the Gulf context is often overlooked and should also be seen as more or less permanent for the diasporic elite.

¹⁴⁶ Nora Stene, "Into the Lands of Immigration," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Nelly. Van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture 1997).

¹⁴⁷ Anitra Bingham-Kolenkow, "The Copts in the United States of America," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Nelly. Van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture 1997).

¹⁴⁸ Saad Michael Saad, "Coptic Civilization in the Diaspora," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo The American University in Cairo Press, 2014).

¹⁴⁹ Eliot Dickinson, *Copts in Michigan, Discovering the Peoples of Michigan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2008).

ways in which diasporic Coptic communities sustain themselves. They argue that the Coptic Church will continue to be resilient because of its size, metaphysical commitments, and production of difference through distinctive rituals and communal practices like fasting.¹⁵⁰ Their work corroborates some of my own findings though the contexts differ significantly.

There exists only a relatively few studies about Christianity—much less the COC—on the Arabian Peninsula and around the Arabian Gulf. Recently, French archaeologist, Julie Bonnéric has led the Franco-Kuwait Archaeological Mission of Failaka, an island just fourteen miles off the coast. She has excavated and presented on the pre-Islamic, sixth-century Nestorian¹⁵¹ church found there. Lewis Scudder's *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (1998)¹⁵² is a Reformed missionary's account of the growth of the church in the region. Since its focus is on the Evangelical and Protestant church, the COC is virtually absent in its nearly 600 pages. Anglican priest Andrew Thompson's *Christianity in the UAE: Culture and Heritage* (2011)¹⁵³ tells the unfolding story of the church in the Emirates and Oman starting with the ancient Church of the East and winding its way through the mission hospitals and expatriate churches of today. The scant seven pages he includes on the COC indexes the difficulty of finding material concerning the Coptic experience in the Gulf and is limited to specific personages, buildings, and moments of interfaith solidarity with the Islamic majority.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Rymarz and Marian de Souza, "Born with Gold in Your Mouth: Maintaining Identity in Australian Coptic Orthodox Young Adults," in *Cultural Education-Cultural Sustainability: Minority, Diaspora, Indigenous and Ethno-Religious Groups in Multicultural Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 176-7.

¹⁵¹ Nestorians were not considered orthodox by the Coptic Church of the time. In fact, Cyril of Alexandria was a key figure involved in refuting Nestorius.

¹⁵² Lewis Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998).

¹⁵³ Andrew Thompson, *Christianity in the UAE: Culture and Heritage* (Ajman, UAE: Rasid Printers and Stationers, LLC, 2011).

However, in regard to modern Kuwait, Thompson's *The Christian Church in Kuwait: Religious Freedom in the Gulf* (2010) is one of two English-language texts I could locate that provides an extensive treatment of the history and development of Christianity in the country. Like his other book, it is very politically correct and has a slightly sycophantic tone throughout. He also gives two different figures for the number of Copts in the country, 75,000, 'mostly labourers', and 65,000, respectively.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately, most of his references and remarks concerning the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait are perfunctory and short. The COC receives only a handful of comments such as: 'The majority of Copts/Coptics in the world are not Catholics, and elect their own "pope" in Alexandria. They are often lumped together with the Orthodox Church'.¹⁵⁵ Concerning St Mark's, Thompson merely points out that the old building was destroyed to make room for a new road and that a new church building is under development.¹⁵⁶ Thus, despite its promising title, *The Christian Church in Kuwait* is a disappointing near-propaganda, 124-page resource with glossy pages, large font, extensive pixelated cut/pasted pictures, and typographical errors. Damaging, too, is Thompson's obliviousness to the *kafāla* system, which dominates the Kuwait-expat relationship and colours community activities and participation. On the contrary, his narrative follows a trajectory of inclusiveness and cooperative nation-building between Christian expats and Kuwaitis.

The other germane English text¹⁵⁷ is Lebanese Muslim Hamza Olayan's *Christians in Kuwait*. This slender volume, however, does not offer much more data

¹⁵⁴ Andrew Thompson, *The Christian Church in Kuwait: Religious Freedom in the Gulf* (Kuwait: Saeed and Sameer, 2010), 14,16.

¹⁵⁵ Thompson, *Church in Kuwait*, 56.

¹⁵⁶ Thompson, *Church in Kuwait*, 117-8.

¹⁵⁷ I only found the English translation of this text in December 2017—about a year after my research assistant interviewed the author. It was listed as the #12 English best-seller for the That Al-Salsil bookstore in Kuwait.

on the Copts in Kuwait than St Mark's website, various newspaper accounts, and Thompson's book. The COC is only one of eight different Christian communities Olayan explores, and he mainly interviewed the clergy of those communities, not the laity.¹⁵⁸

There are, of course, other non-English resources.¹⁵⁹ There are volumes on the Coptic Church in French. However, to my knowledge, most of these studies are more concerned with the historical COC not the diasporic and modern church. In Egypt, the two main research centres for all things Coptic are the Institute of Coptic Studies and the American University in Cairo (AUC). AUC regularly publishes English-based studies but houses only a handful of Arabic ones in its library.¹⁶⁰ The Institute's library catalogue is not online, so the extent and content of its Arabic literature was not accessible to me.¹⁶¹

There is, then, no extant sociological literature by the Kuwait-Copts themselves or even from diasporic Copts living in the Gulf area. Thus, from a sociological perspective, this thesis seeks to fill several gaps and complexify current narratives. The largest gap is the Kuwaiti-Coptic experience in terms of life under the *kafāla* system in the non-Western, diasporic context. I fill this with the theory of restrictive clientelism. To my awareness, there have not been any attempts to incorporate the variegated religious economy of the Gulf into existing formal theories of religion. To bridge this, I place the Coptic lifeworld within the strictness theory of religious participation. Additionally, to complicate and nuance the Copts in the Gulf

¹⁵⁸ Hamza Olayan, interview by Dina Al Qassar, 13 Apr 2016, Kuwait City, Kuwait. For the Copts, he only interviewed ʿAbūnā Bigol (his real name).

¹⁵⁹ I have relied almost extensively on English-language resources as time and means for acquiring the appropriate levels of French, Arabic, Dutch, and even German proficiency were not available.

¹⁶⁰ The only relevant titles are *Qibṭī fī 'aṣr Masīhī* (*Copt in a Christian Age*), 2003, about Coptic civilisation just before Christianity and up-to the Islamic invasion by Zubaydah Atā. The other text, is a modern political work, *Qibṭī shāhid 'alā al-'aṣr* (*Copt Witness of the Age*), 1992, by Zakī Shanūdah.

¹⁶¹ I did not travel to Cairo during my most recent visit, and my understanding of Arabic is not sufficient to do extensive research in that language.

narrative, I show that the long-term, middle class (*arākhina*, *archons*, or the diasporic elite)¹⁶² makes a significant contribution towards maintaining spiritual and cultural continuity within the transient flows of migration. However, their endeavour is fraught with uncertainties and tension, which are (temporarily, at least) sublimated by a redoubling of spiritual commitment resulting simultaneously in a greater production of difference towards outsiders and solidarity for members. The sites for this redoubling are the pneumatic pieties which spiritually energise the already high-tension¹⁶³ situation generated by restrictive clientelism.

2.2.2 *Theological Literature*

The COC produces massive amounts of popular, religious literature covering the miracles of various saints, teachings, and various other ecclesial materials like Sunday School curriculum. Longer works by luminaries detailed earlier have been translated into English and are widely available. Alongside this, there is quite a bit of nuanced theological reflection available in English in journals like *Coptologia* and *Coptic Church Review*. Many of the articles in these journals are by Coptic monks and theologians along with some of the scholars mentioned earlier. Although illuminating, much of this literature is not necessarily representative of the ‘ordinary’ theology of the average Copt in the Arab Gulf diaspora.

Further, a good quantity of the secondary theological literature beyond the dedicated journals that include Coptic voices revolves around the COC’s historic, pre-Chalcedonian or pre-Arab invasion contributions and often subsumes it within the

¹⁶² Or ‘Coptic lay elites’, cf. Febe Armanios, "The Ottoman Period (1517-1798): Beyond Persecution or Tolerance," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle location 1483.

¹⁶³ Tension with surrounding culture and its relationship to religious practice is taken up in Chapter Four.

broader Orthodox framework.¹⁶⁴ Even though Oriental Orthodoxy (of which the COC is a part) differs significantly from *Eastern* Orthodoxy, such distinctions are often relativized.¹⁶⁵ Many theological accounts of monasticism, asceticism, or mystical theology will necessarily appropriate Coptic sources, but those sources are typically pre-Islamic. Pentecostal scholar Stanley Burgess' pneumatologically focused *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions* follows this pattern and does not reference any Coptic traditions after the fifth century. Eastern Orthodox Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, too, in his widely-read *The Orthodox Way* references St Macarius (fourth century) in his chapter on pneumatology but fails to include subsequent Coptic contributions. If the above authors are representative, it would seem that Protestants and Eastern Orthodox alike assume nothing post-Arab invasion is worth appropriating.

Two exceptions to this trend are John Watson and Yale University's Stephen J. Davis' *Coptic Christology in Practice: Incarnation and Divine Participation in Late Antique and Medieval Egypt*.¹⁶⁶ The former, mentioned earlier, carefully teases out the unique nature of Coptic Orthodox theology as an admixture of Protestantism, Biblical studies, and patristic/ascetic/cataphatic theology within an Islamic context.

He argues:

Yet many aspects of Eastern Orthodoxy are entirely alien to Oriental Orthodoxy. The *apophatic* theology of the churches of the seven ecumenical councils, which is quite fundamental in Eastern Orthodoxy, certainly appears to have very few echoes among the Copts. Against an apophatic tradition which states that our concepts of God cannot properly be affirmed of Him, and where there is an assertion concerning the inadequacy of human understanding, the Coptic inclination is towards a *cataphatic*, affirmative and symbolic theology. It may be that the Protestant inroads into Coptic

¹⁶⁴ Recall Thompson's 'They are often lumped together with the Orthodox Church' remark.

¹⁶⁵ This downplaying of theological differences can be seen in Michael Sorial's work. Cf. Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 6. Formal attempts at rapprochement are ongoing, see Thomas E. FitzGerald, "Toward the Reestablishment of Full Communion: the Orthodox-Orthodox Oriental Dialogue," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 36, no. 2 (1991).

¹⁶⁶ Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice*.

Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century were much greater than previously believed. If the terms Patristic Christian and Orthodox Christian are synonymous, and there is certainly an intellectual movement in Christian Orthodoxy today affirming this, then we may say that the Coptic Orthodox position is better described as a traditional Biblical Christianity in the shadow of Islam. Their closest theological allies are certain Conservative Evangelicals in the USA.¹⁶⁷

Watson's observation helps complicate the 'lumping' of the COC with all other Orthodox churches and unmoors Coptic theology from a bland heterodoxy assumed by many Western theologians and historians. Davis' contribution, although largely focused on historical theology, also discusses the unique qualities of Coptic Orthodoxy in terms of the inter-ecclesial struggles of the mid-to-late twentieth century, specifically between Shenouda and Al-Meskīn. His relatively up-to-date addendum of recent Christological arguments shows how nuanced theological reflection exists uneasily with the pragmatism of living under Islamic hegemony. Watson and Davis, then, are particularly helpful in positing that 'Coptic theology' is not a monolithic entity that stands as a fortress in the sea of globalisation and revitalized Islam but, rather, it is a sensitive and complex tradition that reflects ancient as well as recent history.¹⁶⁸

Another exception to the trend of limiting Coptic studies to the fourteenth century and earlier monastic/patristic theologies is Tharwat Nagib's chapter "Blessed Be Egypt My People: The Neo-Charismatic Movement in Egypt".¹⁶⁹ This chapter perhaps represents the only recently published attempt to update the status of the

¹⁶⁷ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 139-40.

¹⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that Davis' contribution to a volume on deification focuses on a twelfth to thirteenth century theologian, not a modern one, cf. Davis, "The Copto-Arabic Tradition of *Theosis*."

¹⁶⁹ Tharwat Maher Nagib Adly Nagib, "'Blessed Be Egypt My People': The Neo-Charismatic Movement in Egypt," in *Global Renewal Christianity: Spirit-Empowered Movements Past, Present, and Future: Africa* ed. Amos Yong Vinson Synan, and J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2016). Febe Armanios currently has a grant to research this phenomenon more thoroughly but has not published as of the writing of this thesis.

Pentecostalisation¹⁷⁰ of Christianity in the country. In doing so, he identifies key leaders¹⁷¹ and widely-held theological emphases among the non-Orthodox together with limited accounts of Orthodox reactions to PC beliefs and practices. This short chapter clearly shows how much more work there is to be done in this regard, both in Egypt and in the Coptic diaspora. Further, Nagib's work prefigures aspects of this study by taking the process of Pentecostalisation seriously; it is a force to be reckoned with. PC/Coptic encounters thus require sensitivity and constructive theologizing that discerns and expands commonalities while recognising points of disagreement.

Finally, in terms of constructing possible ecumenical, sociotheological models, one aim of this thesis is to place 'ordinary' theology into a larger context and suggest ways in which it 'fits' with the reformulated, sociotheological theory of *theosis* (Chapter Six). The sociotheological theory of *theosis* is a (psycho)social, experiential, and pneumatological theory informed by and in dialogue with trends among Copts and PC Christians.¹⁷² Nagib points out that many of the emerging Neo-Charismatic ecumenical groups in Egypt are already appropriating '[t]he Eastern Orthodox mystical theology that focuses on union with God, or deification' and that it 'is [their] essential source of teaching'.¹⁷³ Al-Meskīn discusses deification, although usually dressed in 'union with Christ' language.¹⁷⁴ Al-Meskīn was also a major

¹⁷⁰ Pentecostalisation refers to the adoption of PC emphases which may include an immediate experience of the Holy Spirit, faith healing, speaking in tongues, the centrality of congregational music in worship services, and a strong sense of a demonic enemy. Several Coptic leaders in Egypt have been criticised for being too 'charismatic' or too 'Pentecostal'. As far as I can tell, aside from theological beliefs, this criticism centres on the way they conduct meetings which may include singing Western-styled worship songs and even group exorcisms.

¹⁷¹ These leaders include the excommunicated monk, ʿAbūnā Daniel, who also makes regular trips to the Gulf. I was not able to procure a meeting with him, unfortunately, during his last visit to Kuwait.

¹⁷² Exploring the ecumenical purchase of *theosis* has not been confined to PC Christians and Copts; Catholics and other Protestants have also been involved in its recovery. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum," *Modern Theology* 25 (2009).

¹⁷³ Nagib, "Blessed Be Egypt My People," 104.

¹⁷⁴ See Al-Meskīn, *Pentecost*; Matta Al-Meskīn, *Be Transformed* (Scetis, Egypt: The Monastery of St Macarius, 2005); Matta Al-Meskīn, *The Communion of Love* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); Matta Al-Meskīn, *Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way*, trans. Edith Diamond Nancy

influence on the founder of the Egyptian mother church for many of my interviewees: St George in Sporting.¹⁷⁵ Although typically associated with Eastern Orthodoxy,¹⁷⁶ scholars are finding traces of the doctrine in the Coptic tradition. Stephen Davis' "Eucharistic reading of John 3 in the Copto-Arabic Tradition" (2004), Bishoy Dawood's "The Doctrine of *Theosis* in Contemporary Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue" (2015), and Donna Rizk's "St Cyril of Alexandria: *Theosis* in Participation of Baptism and Eucharist" (2015) are three outstanding examples.¹⁷⁷

PC theologians, too, are seeking to engage with the doctrine in ways that prefigure my own in their pneumatological emphases. Clark Pinnock's *Flame of Love* (1996) dedicates an entire chapter to this endeavour,¹⁷⁸ while Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (2002) and *One with God* (2004) traces the theme of *theosis* through various traditions and looks at its potential ecumenical purchase.¹⁷⁹ Perhaps the longest and most thorough engagement is Edmund Rybarczyk's *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism* (2006).¹⁸⁰ Frank Macchia's *Baptized*

Hottel-Burkhart, John Waters, and Edward Thomas (Crestwood, NJ: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 103-16. Pope Shenouda vehemently disagreed with his teachings on deification, banning his books and writing two of his own against him, see Pope Shenouda, *Man's Deification !! Part One*, trans. Dr. Wedad Abbas (Cairo: Egyptian Printing Company, 2005); Pope Shenouda, *Man's Deification !! Part II Partakers of the Divine Nature*, trans. Dr. Wedad Abbas (Cairo: Egyptian Printing Company, 2008). For another perspective on the Shenouda/Al-Meskīn debate, see the final chapter in Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice*.

¹⁷⁵ I discuss this linkage in Chapter Four.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Meskīn makes frequent use of the Russian Orthodox tradition, as evinced not only by his bibliographies, but also by the fact the Russian-American Orthodox St Vladimir's Seminary publishes his work.

¹⁷⁷ Davis, "The Copto-Arabic Tradition of *Theosis*."; Ramez Rizkalla, "Bishoy Dawood, "The Doctrine of Theosis in Contemporary Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue", in *St. Mark's Orthodox Fellowship's (SMOF Canada) 10th Annual Orthodox Unity Conference* (YouTube, 2015); Ramez Rizkalla, "Donna Rizk, "St. Cyril of Alexandria: Theosis in Participation of Baptism and Eucharist", in *St. Mark's Orthodox Fellowship's (SMOF Canada) 10th Annual Orthodox Unity Conference* (YouTube, 2015).

¹⁷⁸ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 149-82.

¹⁷⁹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002).

¹⁸⁰ Edmund J. Rybarczyk, *Beyond Salvation: Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism on Becoming Like Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

in the Spirit (2006) briefly mentions the doctrine by name, preferring, however, 'union with' and 'participation in' Christ.¹⁸¹ Steven J. Land argues that Pentecostalism 'is more Eastern than Western in its understanding of spirituality as perfection and participation in the divine life (*theosis*)'.¹⁸² More recently (2012), Michael Thompson makes the case that the doctrine of *theosis* links into Pentecostal eschatology through an expansion and recovery of John Wesley's vision of salvation.¹⁸³ Thus, an awareness of, appreciation for, and appropriation of the of the doctrine exists across the PC and Coptic spectrums, providing precedent and conceptual categories for the theorising of Chapter Six.

However, much of the discourse above remains in a theoretical and strictly theological mode; details of the distance between *theosis*' description and lived experience are few and far between. Hagiography fulfils one side of the equation, but what about the other? What does it look and feel like to be in the process of *theosis* as a lay person in a particular diasporic community? What are the discreet experiences that mark transformation? What are the sociological and societal mechanisms that buttress or repress the individual's journey? These are the directions this study takes. Having outlined, then, a general history of the COC and the various gaps in the literature, it is now necessary to home in on one particular group of Copts in order to illuminate the context for later analysis and rescription.

¹⁸¹ Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

¹⁸² Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), Kindle locations 428-35.

¹⁸³ Michael Thompson, "Eschatology as Soteriology: A Cosmic Perspective," in *Perspectives in Pentecostal Eschatologies: World without End*, ed. Peter Althouse and Robby Waddell (Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke and Co., 2012).

CHAPTER THREE

LIFEWORLD

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide a ‘thick description’ of the lifeworld of my participants. The popularised version of a ‘thick description’ comes from Clifford Geertz’s appropriation of Gilbert Ryle’s notion. In his seminal essay, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture”, Geertz gives an extended example of what he means by the term: an account of a raid in early twentieth-century Morocco.¹⁸⁴ By reading through the example, one gets a sense of what constitutes a ‘thick description’. The account is largely *narrative* and *detailed*: names, locations, timings, immediate historical saliences, quotations, points of view, the actors, and so forth. In some sense, it is *novelistic*. ‘Lifeworld’, a term coined by Edmund Husserl and wedded to the social sciences by Alfred Schutz, is simply ‘the world of everyday life and common-sense realities’.¹⁸⁵ Wedding a ‘thick description’ in the register of the novelistic with Schutz’s ‘lifeworld’ could possibly take on Proustian proportions. For space, then, this chapter first focuses on socio-political history as a necessary precondition for the realised present. I then expound on the work/visa system known as *kafāla* as it is activated through diasporic activity. Moreover, this chapter seeks to outline the wider Islamic context, often labelled as ‘tolerant’. Here I make the claim that the term restrictive clientelism is a helpful summation of the lifeworld. The chapter then moves to recurrent and potent situations in which the experience of particularised physical space and time reflexively structures the interpretation of

¹⁸⁴ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 7-9.

¹⁸⁵ Michael Ryan, "Lifeworld," in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 2.

lifeworld conditions, with a focus on home, commute, and the church—with its art and activities. In terms of the overall thesis, this chapter provides background and context to the following chapters. Assuming that spirituality cannot be divorced from the physical and is therefore developed in concrete situations and locales, the clearer picture one has of those spaces, the clearer the interpretation becomes.



Figure 9: Map of Kuwait¹⁸⁶

3.2 Socio-Political Preconditions for the Realised Present: Setting the Stage

In her recent book, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life*, Farah Al-Nakib borrows Henri Lefebvre's 'regressive-progressive approach'. She writes:

This process takes as its starting point the realities of the present, “which then [act] retroactively upon the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto

¹⁸⁶ "CIA Map of Kuwait," Wikimedia Commons, 7 December 2014, 12 Oct 2017, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ku-map.png>.

uncomprehended.” Moments from the past (such as the discovery of oil) make a certain number of events or outcomes possible in the present or future each time one of these possibilities is realized – that is, every time something occurs in the present that can be traced to an outcome of some event or moment in the past – we are forced to think about that initial event differently. The past is cast in a new light, and therefore the process by which that past became the present must also be reinterpreted.¹⁸⁷

In effect, the present situation is the realisation of past possibilities. Since ‘this’ exists and not ‘that’ means that a certain course of these possibilities was realised and others negated. The past, then, is discoverable through the conditions of the present. The present, in turn, changes the saliency of past events; some events, in light of the present, become charged with meaning, others, emptied. Thus, the following socio-political historical narrative of Kuwait and Egypt uses this same ‘regressive-progressive approach’ as its methodology and heuristic with this single question in mind: Under what conditions did the Copts come to live in Kuwait?

The Coptic story in Kuwait officially begins in the 1950s. The first fifty years of the twentieth century positioned Kuwait as a destination for the Coptic diaspora. The links between Kuwait and Egypt were already established by the 1900s and reinforced through trade, tourism, education, and politics. All of this initially occurred within the matrix of British imperialism but later came to include American hegemonic influences through the oil industry and military.

Records also indicate that Egypt saw its connection to Kuwait as more than simply political but in terms of ‘cultural and. . . economic relations. . . not to speak of the spiritual relations which form a strong bond between Egypt and the rest of the Arab World’.¹⁸⁸ Being connected to Egypt afforded Kuwait a wider network of trade

¹⁸⁷ Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), Kindle location 536. The Alexandrian theologian Origen (d. 254 CE) articulated something similar in his theory of recapitulation.

¹⁸⁸ "Memorandum from Egyptian Embassy 4 Mar 1955," in *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs I* (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 12.

and prestige in the Arab world than the waning British Empire could supply. Sensing this advantage, the British government, the *de facto* foreign affairs mediator for Kuwait, denied the Egyptian request for a consulate in the country in 1955.

Nevertheless, in their request package, the Egyptian government helpfully enumerated reasons why Egypt should have its own consulate. It pointed out that there were more than 200 teachers, Egyptian military officers, finance experts in charge of ‘re-organising the finances of the country’; 25 civil and agricultural engineers, aviation consultants, ‘the Kuwait Cinema Company is being founded and helped to establish its commercial activities by the *Miṣr* Cinema Company, 500 skilled Egyptian workers (carpenters mainly), and six judges’.¹⁸⁹ Significantly, these ties to Egypt, already healthy in the 50s, extend into the modern era in many of the areas outlined by this request. Copts, too, have historically taken advantage of this relationship and are to be found dispersed throughout the same trades and activities outlined above and in education, medicine, and engineering.¹⁹⁰

Perhaps the most germane and prescient observation from the socio-political past to this investigation is the first British ambassador’s comments regarding the newly independent State of Kuwait. Sir John Richmond, writing in 1962, warned that

the restrictive Nationality Law [of 1961], which had effectively closed the door to foreign Arabs wanting to acquire Kuwaiti nationality, *carried considerable dangers for the future stability of Kuwait*. . . It is little comfort for the Kuwaitis to know that they just comprise a majority of the population, when perhaps 40,000 of their number are of Iranian origin, speak Persian, have close ties with Iran, and have no loyalty to Kuwait. . . . Hardly more than 50 of the foreign Arab civil servants have been granted Kuwaiti nationality, and *the foreign Arabs here still feel excluded, jealous, and bitter*. . . . the Arabs of Kuwait are a xenophobic race and hostility will increase unless the Iranians make an effort to Arabize themselves and drop their undisguised and

¹⁸⁹ "Memorandum 1955," 12-13.

¹⁹⁰ Not many Copts, to my knowledge, work in jurisprudence since Kuwait’s juridical system is rooted in Islamic ideology—the *Mālikī* branch specifically, at least for *Sunni* community. The *Shi‘i* population (which makes up as much as 30% of the Kuwaiti population) has recourse to their own courts for family law.

provocative attachment to all things Persian, especially the Persian language [emphasis mine].¹⁹¹

Richmond highlights several important features of Kuwait in the past that are applicable to the Kuwaiti context of today. His insightful commentary, as far as I can tell, is the first to identify salient sources of tension in Kuwait that continue into the present. One potential source of disruption is/was the restrictive nationality law that engenders/ed feelings of ‘exclusion, jealousy, and bitterness’.¹⁹² Another source is/was the large Persian/Persian descent, traditionally *Shi‘i* population—a modern-day powerhouse in politics and trade.¹⁹³ In regard to the Copts, this means that since they neither have an interest in obtaining Kuwaiti nationality nor contribute to *Shi‘a* /*Sunni* tensions,¹⁹⁴ the Kuwaiti government has good reasons to continue to placate them and facilitate their lives in the country as white-collar workers in jobs that are still relatively un-Kuwaitised. Further, given their Christian identity and Western connections, such benevolence on their behalf plays well to Western entities and governments, thus complicating Richmond’s remark about them being ‘xenophobic’. Lastly, Copts as *Egyptians* both stay and contribute to the local economy as well as send remittances home thereby strengthening Egyptian-Kuwaiti economic and cultural bonds. Therefore, the channels and means of migration to Kuwait from Egypt were firmly established and well-travelled by the time St Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church¹⁹⁵ was officially founded.

¹⁹¹ John Richmond, "Letter to the Earl of Home 7 May 1962," in *Arab Gulf Cities* (Wiltshire, England: CPI Anthony, 1994), 698-700.

¹⁹² Interestingly enough, Al-Nakib notes: ‘Over the ensuing decades, rigid legal distinctions between expatriates and citizens “permanently estranged and embittered” the former and made the latter a more insular and, over time, intolerant society’, cf Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 355.

¹⁹³ For example, the influential and wealthy Behbehani family.

¹⁹⁴ One respondent claimed, ‘Here they’re more busy with *Sunni* and *Shi‘a* than they’re busy with between Copts and Muslims.’ Miriam, interview by Ben Crace, 25 Mar 2016, Ḥawālī, Kuwait.

¹⁹⁵ It should be noted that the first Coptic Orthodox Church in a new area always bears the name of St Mark. Coptic Orthodox churches with other names indicate a plurality of congregations in the area/nation.

Even though these channels of migration existed, they were not used extensively until the latter half of the twentieth century. Scholars posit two main periods of migration: the first was during the time of President Nasser (1952-1970). It was his 'nationalization policies [that] led to a number of well-to-do families leaving Egypt and to settle in the West'.¹⁹⁶ This was not limited to Western migration but included the Gulf. These enclaves of wealthy Copts helped set the stage for the second period of migration that began in the 1970s with Sadat's 'open door' policies for those wanting to leave the country.¹⁹⁷ Because of these policies and the oil crisis, Kuwait became an attractive alternative for Copts wanting to stay close to home.

As intimated by the previous narrative, the Coptic Orthodox diaspora in Kuwait has a long and fairly amicable history.¹⁹⁸ It began in the 1950s, under Pope Kyrillos VI, as a group of immigrants 'felt a dire need to practice the sacraments of their religion'.¹⁹⁹ At the time there were only two churches in Kuwait, the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Church. In October of 1959, a small dispatch met with then Bishop Basilius of the Diocese of Jerusalem and the Near East. They asked for his blessing, since they sought to build a church in Kuwait that would be under his jurisdiction. A couple of months later, the bishop delegated Ramzi Zachariaiah Iskander, his secretary, to get things underway. Iskander became the official representative of the Copts in Kuwait and ran many of the logistics. Pope Kyrillos VI, in turn, was made aware of these attempts *via* Iskander *via* Basilius.

¹⁹⁶ Stene, "Into the Lands of Immigration," 254-5.

¹⁹⁷ Stene, "Into the Lands of Immigration," 255.

¹⁹⁸ Most of the following history was taken from St Mark's website: "History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait," St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, 23 Aug 2016 2016, <http://www.stmark-kw.com/2013/index.html#>. And as a *public* document of a guest community, it leans towards propaganda. It is also startling incomplete.

¹⁹⁹ "History of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait".

Then, on 17 March 1960, the Pope sent a letter to the Kuwaiti *Amir*, *Shaykh* °Abdallāh Al Sālem Al Sabāh. In the letter, he diplomatically thanks the *Amir* for ‘receiving the Orthodox Christians in Kuwait with overwhelming care and kindness’. He further requests that the *Amir* issue a permit for the Copts to build a church and financially assist them as well. Kyrillos ends his letter to the *Amir* with the hopes that he can come and bless the ruler personally. Iskandar took the letter to the *Amir*, who replied on 7 April 1960. In his reply, he indicates a very positive disposition towards the Coptic community and that he will take everything into consideration. Three weeks later, the Pope’s secretary, Macarius, sent another letter to the *Amir*’s secretary, Mohammad Al Otābi, thanking him for the reply. He goes on to communicate that the Pope understands the need for further considerations and reflection. However, in the meantime, they asked if the *Amir* could ‘sanction the designation of a private residence that would serve as a temporary Church or place of worship’ and provide ‘entrance permits for clergy in order to conduct the rituals’. Nearly two months later, the *Amir* sent his approval and Iskander and Macarius started to get the proverbial ball rolling. This included renting a space for worship and creating a committee made up of °Abūnā Angelos Al-Muhraqi, Deacon Samir Khair, and Ramzi Zaki Iskander as the treasurer and secretary. Further communication detailed the need for collecting donations and in October of 1960, the committee found a house for 650 rupees per month.²⁰⁰ However, this location did not turn out very well and a better place was found in Qibla, near downtown Kuwait City, across from the Catholic Church and close to the Anglican one.

In the following year, 1961, the first papal envoy (without the Pope, however) arrived in Kuwait. They were greeted by a diverse group consisting of representatives

²⁰⁰ This was before Kuwait was using their own nationalised currency, the *dinar*.

of the other churches such as the Catholic and Evangelical ones as well as the crown prince's representatives. In March of the same year, 5000 Coptic Orthodox Christians in Kuwait signed a petition for Pope Kyrillos seeking his approval and blessing. The Pope then appointed ʿAbūnā Angelos Al-Mahraqi as the overseer of the Coptic Church in Kuwait. On 2 April, *Al-Ahram*, an Egyptian newspaper, reported that ʿAbūnā Angelos would fly to Kuwait and officially open St Mark's. Soon thereafter, the original steering committee was expanded to include Kamal Rezk and Maher Labeeb. A couple of months later, *Kuwait News* reported that St Mark's held a mass to celebrate Kuwait's first Liberation anniversary.

1962 saw the exit of ʿAbūnā Angelos and the arrival of ʿAbūnā Gabriel Kamel as well as a locally elected governing board. The next year, ʿAbūnā Kamel left and ʿAbūnā Timothy Al-Makary became the overseer. Significantly, ʿAbūnā Timothy met the *Amir* and presented another letter from the Pope. Both the *Amir* and Pope mutually affirmed their respective communities and continued communication.

Even in this brief survey of St Mark's founding and initial growth, there are several significant observations to be made. First of all, on a rhetorical level, the website and the newspapers mentioned highlight the cooperative nature of the endeavour, good relations, and the hospitality of the host country, usually metonymically through the Pope and *Amir* and their respective representatives. Many *pro forma* letters were exchanged during this time and to a Western reader seem to be fairly superficial. Nonetheless, Middle Eastern culture values what Western culture would deem relatively unimportant, namely, salutations, greetings, and the like. The superficial is precisely what paves the way for the very important. These hinted at and sometimes quoted letters also point towards both the Pope and *Amir*'s political acumen; they know how to be diplomatic. This history-as-now public narrative

entrenches and extends the social consciousness of the Copts living in a hospitable and tolerant country. That St Mark's celebrated a mass for the very first Liberation Day in 1961 further underwrites the permanence, continuity, and essential nature of the Coptic community as it is tied to Kuwait's nation-state building project; they have been here from the beginning and thus deserve to stay. More recently, the new Archbishop Antonious came to Kuwait and was entertained by the *Amir*.²⁰¹ Further and more regularly, various religious leaders exchange formal salutations and greetings during each other's holidays.²⁰² For the Copts, this partly means having various dignitaries, ambassadors, and *Sunnī* and *Shī'ī* clerics come and sit in the pews at St Mark's.²⁰³ The rhetoric at these events, as expected, is ecumenical²⁰⁴ and formal, focusing on cultural and national similarities rather than difference with an appreciative undertone. For example, at the Easter celebration, *Abūnā* Bigol stated that the *Amir* is a 'humanitarian leader and wise man among the Arabs'.²⁰⁵ While an outsider may be suspicious about the sincerity of such statements, these gestures achieve their aim, namely, lubrication between the State and Church.

Selective reporting of other events in St Mark's timeline underscores common themes that run through the Coptic imaginary in Kuwait. From the beginning, Pope Kyrillos VI recognised the Islamic culture and government; he addresses the *Amir* as a leader of both in a near *dhimmī*²⁰⁶ supplicant fashion. Further, the Pope requested

²⁰¹ Kuwait United News Agency, "Amir Meets Religious Leaders," *Kuwait Times*, 26 October 2016.

²⁰² Cf. Joseph Shagra, "St Mark Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait Hosts 'Ghabqa' to Commemorate the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan," *Kuwait Times*, 04 July 2016.

²⁰³ See the photos in Muhammad Ghanim Al-Seyassah, "Coptic Christians in Kuwait Mark Easter," *Arab Times*, 02 May 2016.

²⁰⁴ Here I use the term to denote intra and interreligious activities.

²⁰⁵ Al-Seyassah, "Coptic Christians in Kuwait Mark Easter."

²⁰⁶ *Dhimmī* is the Arabic term for conquered peoples living under Islamic rule yet maintaining their original religious traditions. A controversial work on dhimmitude is Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, trans. Miriam Kochan and David Littman (Madison, N.J. : London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1996). I will be interacting with her ideas later in this chapter.

entrance permits, a clear indication he understood the host/guest or sponsor/sponsored relationship of the society. The important thing to notice here is that the Pope did not expect a change of the system but a place *within* it, underneath the *Amir*'s patronage. Copts thus, through narratives like this, are encouraged (by no less a figure than Pope Kyrillos VI) to accept the space created through government benevolence, often termed 'quiescence'. Moreover, the constant emphasis on the Pope's role and his delegates accentuate the close connection between St Mark's and the Coptic hierarchy in Egypt. Another dimension to this proximity is the Pope's role as a socio-political mediator, a role well-established in Egypt and now extended to the diaspora. It is interesting that Nasser, the president of Egypt at the time and a personal friend of Kyrillos, is seemingly not involved *at all* with Egyptian interests in an oil-rich country with growing regional influence. Also, not a single woman is named in the entire history, signalling that the patriarchy of the Egyptian context is seamlessly continuous with the patriarchy of the Kuwaiti context. From the Kuwaiti side, the writer of the history indicates an ecumenical ethos; the welcoming committee and location of the first church included other Christian traditions.²⁰⁷ All in all, the self-conscious history seeks to minimise distance and separation from the 'home' church while reinforcing an appreciative attitude towards the host government. Framed as an origin myth, it has a timeless quality to it suggesting contemporary continuity with the benevolent past.

Particularly germane to this study is the fact that St Mark's founding was a *lay-initiated, grassroots project produced from their collective piety*.²⁰⁸ As such, notable lay leaders are included in its 'official' history. Paradoxically, however, what

²⁰⁷ Perhaps the grouping of the church structures together can be accounted for by the Kuwaiti government's need to surveil the Christian minorities easily.

²⁰⁸ Recall the anonymous group of immigrants who 'felt a dire need to practice the sacraments of their religion'.

began largely as a lay-led endeavour, quickly gets alternated²⁰⁹ as a matter between important leaders, that is, the Pope and *Amir*, and/or their immediate intermediaries then local appointees such as the priests or various governmental ministers. This account even fails to mention large lay donors who were obviously essential to the initial project (and, much later, the building of the new cathedral in Ḥawalī). This alternating supports the anonymity of the lay Copt as migrant/immigrant and, while heaping praise on past toleration between Pope/*Amir*, lays the precedential groundwork for maintaining the *status quo*. Curiously enough, either due to the *kafāla* system and/or ecclesial politics,²¹⁰ the hierarchy at St Mark's is practically hobbled due to the sheer differences in number between available priests and the Coptic population, 1: 10,000, conservatively. Thus, what began as a product of lay piety, despite its clericalised history, continues as a lay-supported and networked institution with the middle class, white-collar worker firmly entrenched as its culture bearers and *de facto* spiritual leaders. It would be a mistake, however, to infer that the priests, though overwhelmed, are marginalised. On the contrary, as the law of supply and demand dictates, what is highly sought after yet rare raises in esteem and value; thus, the priests of St Mark's are highly regarded and consulted by leaders and labourers alike.²¹¹ In conclusion, then, the pneumatic pieties of the diasporic Copts in

²⁰⁹ Or 'reimagining the past for the purposes of the present' qtd. in Joshua D. Hendrick, *Gülen: The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 69.

²¹⁰ I have yet been able to ascertain why there are only four priests at St Mark's. Some respondents have indicated it is probably a visa issue while others, a church one. More often, though, the response was simply, 'I don't know'. As of 2 November 2016, however, it was announced that four more priests have been chosen from the congregation to serve the church. While reducing the workload of the clergy, eight ministers for a community of thousands is still difficult.

²¹¹ In fact, so highly regarded and sought after that after a year of trying, this researcher was finally able to interview one.

Kuwait include an ecclesial dimension that extends spirituality beyond self-actualisation to communal and Traditional proclivities.²¹²

Although details of Coptic community life after the 1960s are lacking,²¹³ there are some further, broad historical generalisations that need to be made. It is a truism to say that regional and global events and trends affected the local Coptic population. The Oil Crisis and boom of 1973, Iran-Iraq War, the first Gulf War, various stock market crashes (especially the local, illegal one of 1982), recessions, the Arab Spring, and so on have all contributed to the socio-political tapestry that shapes the migrant project. Perhaps more than any other modern event, however, the Invasion of 1990 has had a lasting legacy on Kuwait. First of all, it complicated matters between migrant workers and the State. This is especially true for the Palestinians who made up a sizeable portion of the population prior to the invasion. Post-liberation Kuwait ousted most of its Palestinian populace (300,000) on the basis of supposed collusion with the Iraqis.²¹⁴ The Palestinians were a major source of white-collar labour and were entrenched in the professional strata of the country. Their expulsion widened opportunities for Copts—doctors, teachers, engineers, and so on—to come to Kuwait to replace this massive brain drain. Yet an atmosphere of distrust still lingers between non-national Arabs (and Copts) and the Kuwaitis. Thus, stricter and tighter rules have been increasingly imposed on migrant workers:

T: The rules here are becoming more harder and tougher for the foreigners. . .

B: So, you were saying that it's gotten harder to be foreigner in Kuwait. In what way? What do you think?

²¹² This internal drive expressed as an external need for community reflects their Trinitarian theology and sacramental worldview that includes the immediate presence of Coptic saints as theotic partners, see Chapter Six.

²¹³ Filling in the blanks would entail an extensive oral history project beyond the scope of this work, which seeks to map out the contemporary lived spirituality of Copts in Kuwait.

²¹⁴ For more on the 'myth' of Kuwait-Palestinian collusion with Iraqis and subsequent expulsion, see Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle locations 4184-97.

T: Rules and regulations. Like um license, working, or your civil ID or your residence. The way that they treat you. This is because actually . . . when I get everything easy I do not [know] the value of anything anymore.²¹⁵

As evident in the above exchange, there is also a sense that the welfare state sustained by oil wealth contributes to this overregulation or a crystallizing of what political scientist ^cAbdūlrēḍa Assiri calls a ‘siege mentality’,²¹⁶ that is, Kuwaitis feel the need to consistently maintain their hegemony as a means of solidifying their identity against intruders, Iraqis and migrants. Other than tighter control, another effect of the Invasion (as well as other contributing factors) has been to shift the supply lines of migrant workers. What began as largely an inter-Arab and Indian affair now is made up of growing numbers of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Finally, another long-lasting effect of the Invasion was to briefly stop Kuwait’s modernist project. With liberation, this project, however, came back with a vengeance in the form of massive building projects such as the Liberation Tower and, later The Avenues Mall, one of the largest in the region outside of Dubai. The ubiquity of cranes in the city skyline today attests to a growing urbanisation in which St Mark’s cathedral became just another construction project among many.

3.3 Diasporic Enculturation and Societal Stratification

Migration has characterized the human condition since the dawn of time.

Archaeologists and historians are constantly revising humanity’s migration paths out of Africa utilizing new evidence and tools from DNA to ground penetrating radar.

Despite the advent of new technologies, nation states, and new religions, the reasons people leave one place and go to another are unsurprisingly not that complicated nor

²¹⁵ Tadros, interview by Ben Crace, 04 Mar 2016, St. Mark’s, Kuwait.

²¹⁶ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 4199.

have they drastically changed throughout the millennia. While some migration occurs due to exile or coercion, by and large, migration for the Copts is a result of efforts to enhance the quality of life for oneself or for one's family. Included in this life-quality enhancement are political, religious, personal growth, and economic benefits.

However, unlike some of the migrations from Europe to the 'New' World, Coptic migration is not marked by the same sense of building something new and separate from the 'old', as it is characterized by the desire to survive in the new context while supporting the homeland. Thus, in effect, many Copts abroad feel a sense of being in exile from Egypt. It is this sense that properly delineates their communities outside of Egypt as a diaspora.

The Greek term 'diaspora' was originally applied to Jews living outside of Palestine during the first century and then, later, to Jews outside of Israel prior to 1948. The noun, diaspora, 'the scattered', is used three times in the New Testament itself.²¹⁷ In each instance, it refers to the Jews outside the region or those living as a minority among Gentile populations. The verb form is even used of Christians from a Hellenistic Jewish background living in minority situations.²¹⁸ The term has also been used to describe Greek communities outside of Greece. In modern academic studies, it has been applied in various ways. Nicholas van Hear's definition is helpful. He writes:

[D]iaspora are populations which satisfy three minimal criteria. . . First, the population is dispersed from a homeland to two or more other territories. Second, the presence abroad is enduring, although exile is not necessarily permanent, but may include movement between homeland and new host. And third, there is some kind of exchange—social, economic, political or cultural—between or among the spatially separated populations comprising the diaspora.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ John 7.35; James 1.1; 1 Peter 1.1

²¹⁸ Narry Santos, "Diaspora Occurrences in the Bible and Their Contexts in Missions," (Lausanna World Pulse Archives, 2009).

²¹⁹ Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodous, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998), 6.

In regard to van Hear's first criterion, Copts are scattered throughout the Gulf area, Europe, Australia, the UK, the US, and other locales. As for the second criterion, the Copts in Kuwait have been here for over sixty years, pre-dating even the founding of the modern nation-state. Moreover, given their geographic proximity to Egypt many Copts travel to and from their hometowns annually, and in some cases, more often. Lastly, as aforementioned, there are many transnational connexions, multiple networks of communication, and economic exchange. Many migrant workers in Kuwait send money back to Egypt and to family in other places. Many stay in touch through modern technologies and social media. The COC retains strong links with the ecclesial hierarchy in Egypt as well through reciprocal visits. Copts in Kuwait, then, satisfy all three of van Hear's criteria for a diaspora.

Van Hear fails to enumerate 'religion' as part of his definition. Perhaps he has it in mind under the rubric of culture but it is not as explicit as it needs to be for this study. It is important to register this in terms of the Coptic *Orthodox* diaspora. Thus, in employing the term, Coptic writers are intentionally evoking continuity with the plight of the Jews (a religious and ethnic label) in the continuing unfolding story of a similarly significant religious narrative.²²⁰ American Coptic priest Michael Sorial's *Incarnational Exodus* is a good example. He writes:

With the political climate in Egypt growing increasingly intolerant towards a Christian minority, long with the anticipations of financial and religious opportunity offered in the West, the latter half of the twentieth century produced an environment that led to a slow exodus of Copts from their homeland. . . [A] once culturally and religiously homogenous community began to face the challenges that come along with being immersed in a multi-cultural and pluralistic society. The result was not unlike the experiences of

²²⁰ Another writer to look at is Samuel Tadros' *Motherland Lost: The Egyptian and Coptic Quest for Modernity*. Further, in one interview, the respondent indicated that he had recently taught a Bible lesson on Ezekiel's exilic condition as similar to the Copts in Kuwait, Shenouda, interview by Ben Crace, 12 Feb 2016, Hawālī, Kuwait.

Adam and Eve, the children of Israel in the Exodus account, and other diaspora communities.²²¹

In this short excerpt, one can see and sense some of the common themes of Coptic identity abroad. Sorial attempts to directly connect the Coptic story with the Biblical narrative, 'Adam and Eve, the children of Israel in the Exodus account'. Using these narratives as his examples, Sorial also evokes a sense of exile and risk. It should be remembered that the Israelites, like the Copts, left Egypt. Further, like Adam and Eve and the Israelites, people in diaspora face a challenge to their identity, another important *leitmotif* of diasporic literature. Thus, in framing Coptic migration in terms of diaspora instead of mere wandering about for freedom or money, Coptic writers seek to impart a sense of destiny tinged with loss as well as anxious and cautious possibility.

Both anxiety and cautious possibility are evident among diasporic Copts because of the aforementioned challenges posed to their identity in pluralistic contexts.²²² Sorial argues that, like other immigrant communities, Copts and the Coptic church are faced with a variety of options on a continuum of enculturation. In his discussion, Sorial, reminiscent of Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, outlines three possible models of enculturation: ethnocentric, ideology-centric, and Christocentric. The ethnocentric model of enculturation for a diasporic church is one in which the church seeks to conserve ethnic identity over and above its Christian mission.²²³ An ideology-centric model 'places emphasis on a specific philosophy which is largely associated with the experience of the community within its prior context [for Sorial, this is specifically persecution]'.²²⁴ His Christocentric model 'places Christ at the

²²¹ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 2.

²²² See also Jennifer Brinkerhoff, "Assimilation and Heritage Identity: Lessons from the Coptic Diaspora," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 17, no. 2 (2016).

²²³ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 7-8.

²²⁴ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 9.

center of the process of self-identification within one's current environment'.²²⁵ In his critique of each model, he argues that the first leads to pride and the second to disconnection from those who have suffered from persecution and those who have not. The Christocentric model of enculturation, he argues, is the best option for the COC, given that the Incarnation itself was highly contextualized and can still inform diasporic approaches to culture. This is the thesis that drives his book. Later, repeating the tension of the COC's 2014 'North American Mission and Evangelism Conference', Sorial, quoting the minutes, writes: '[I]f the Church in North America is able to deal with adaptation, we will survive. Otherwise, the Coptic Church in North America will end with immigrants'.²²⁶ What he calls a 'Christocentric ecclesial model based on the Incarnational theology of Athanasius' is the best way to adapt. For him this means primarily two things: a recovery of Athanasian theology and the continued liturgical practice of the Eucharist, which he says, 'is the greatest expression of the incarnation revealed in the life of the church'.²²⁷ Thus, in Sorial, we see a concern for the Church to thrive in the diaspora through careful and critical enculturation while maintaining its original mission and vision.

In its Kuwaiti diaspora, the COC seems to have adopted all three of Sorial's models of enculturation to some degree or another. The Copts maintain their *ethnic* difference from Kuwaitis as Arabs and the Kuwaitis maintain their difference from non-Kuwaitis *via* the *kafāla* apparatus, as will be discussed later. Oftentimes, Copts do not see themselves as Arabs *per se*, but, rather, as the descendants of original inhabitants of Egypt prior to the Arab conquest or simply as Egyptian citizens.²²⁸ In

²²⁵ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 11.

²²⁶ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 43.

²²⁷ Sorial, *Incarnational Exodus*, 56.

²²⁸ Jacques van Der Vliet, "The Copts: 'Modern Sons of the Pharaohs'?", *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, no. 1 (2009).

terms of the *kafāla* system, space is deliberately given by the State and its citizenry for ethnocentrism to grow.²²⁹ In short, it is in the Kuwaitis' best interest that the COC adapts an ethnocentric model as it maintains Coptic separateness, which, in turn, safeguards Kuwaiti identity on Kuwaiti terms. Copts, too, due in part to the *kafāla* apparatus, also maintain a separate ethnic identity *vis-à-vis* other expatriate groups like Pakistanis, Indians, Sri Lankans, and Filipinos.²³⁰ Secondly, because of its geographic and linguistic proximity to the homeland and its Islamic context, Kuwait's diaspora's ideology-centred enculturated model, framed in terms of persecution, remains fairly stable. Unlike their counterparts in the US, UK, or Australia, Copts in Islamic countries live under the *possibility* of severe consequences for being Christians.²³¹ Finally, the Christocentric model proposed above is being expressed through what I call the pneumatic pieties—with the Eucharistic liturgy at the centre. Full Christocentric enculturation that involves converting the local population is constrained by the partial adaptation of the ideology-centric model within the strict Islamic context and the deep ethnic ties within the COC. Thus, all three of Sorial's models map onto the Kuwait-Copt lifeworld descriptively. In a sense, Sorial's suggested Christocentric model of enculturation prefigures my sociotheological model of Chapter Six. However, on the sociological level, ideological and ethnocentric modes are part and parcel of Kuwait's stratified society.

²²⁹ 'Kuwait's modernization introduced sharp distinctions between citizens—who benefited almost exclusively from the country's welfare system—and foreign-born residents', Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 336.

²³⁰ This was also driven home to me upon my first visit to St Mark's where I was the only non-Copt male in attendance. There was one Filipina who was a nanny for one of the members.

²³¹ Although in the Gulf, unlike North African countries like Libya, the more drastic consequences like beheading are not often realised. Deportation or on-the-job discrimination is more likely, as discussed below. As of 2015, however, the COC in Kuwait has received threats from in-country ISIS sympathizers and, as a result, has stepped up their security on the cathedral's grounds. Given the bombing of a nearby Shi'ī mosque in June of 2015, these threats are very real and possible. Further, in March of 2016, I was banned from the church premises for being a foreigner, ostensibly, for 'security reasons'.

Kuwait-Copts find themselves in a heavily stratified society that has its roots in the past. In general, stratification is a separation into various levels or parts. How this separation occurs in developed and non-developed societies is a matter of argument, as are the various types of classifications. Nonetheless, Ahn Longva, one of the primary modern ethnographers of Kuwait, is helpful:

[P]re-oil Kuwait was also a stratified society: among people of *al hadhar* (the sedentary), asymmetric power relations separated the mainly *Sunni*, Najdi merchant elite and the predominately Shia laborers. Likewise, the hierarchical structure of the tribal world clearly distinguished the noble (*shareef*) camel-herding tribes from the semi-sedentary, sheep-breeding ones.²³²

In post-oil Kuwait, this stratification continues broadly between citizen and expatriate and ‘the bridge linking the two categories is the employer-employee relationship, a central feature of the social organization of the Emirate’.²³³ Longva further differentiates three overarching categorical dichotomies: Kuwaiti-non-Kuwaiti, Arab-non-Arab, and Muslim-non-Muslim. These dichotomies, she contends, ‘were officially acknowledged in the public discourse of social life, universally understood, and in principle, purely descriptive and value neutral. In reality, given the Kuwaiti context, they were loaded with a wide range of connotations. . .’.²³⁴ Within this post-oil profile, informed as it is by pre-oil overtones, Copts externally and superficially fit into the non-Kuwaiti²³⁵ but Arab and Muslim sides of the dichotomies. Here, it must be remembered that ‘identity, especially ethnic identity, is not only self-defined and

²³² Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 24.

²³³ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 13.

²³⁴ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 45.

²³⁵ Although Longva makes a good case that the *dishdāsha* and *abaya* help observers distinguish Kuwaitis from other Arabs, her observations were already dated and in today’s Kuwait, one rarely finds Kuwaitis under thirty wearing the *dishdāsha* unless it is for a special occasion like a wedding or a funeral. Other forms of identity markers are: styles of facial hair, high-fashion clothing, watches, ‘man purses’, and expensive cars. Hang-out places are also key indicators of identity. Some Egyptians have another view of the Egyptian form of the *dishdāsha* known as a *jelābīah*, which differs somewhat from the Kuwaiti dress: “In Egypt, only *fellaheen* (peasants) go around dressed in long robes and headscarves. They are old-fashioned. No one in his right mind would do so if he is educated and has a serious job to do.” Egyptian informant in Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 117.

assumed; it is also ascribed and imputed'.²³⁶ Phenotypically, Copts appear the same as Arab Muslims, hence the 'ascribed and imputed' aspects of their ethnic identity. Aside from the tattooed cross some Copts have on the inside of their right wrists, their ethnic identity is indistinguishable by sight from other Egyptians and most Arabs to the casual, local observer.²³⁷ This blurring of identity is likely more helpful than harmful as it allows them some degree of freedom and equal treatment from Kuwaitis, although amongst their Muslim compatriots, there is undoubtedly still some discrimination and persecution.²³⁸ For the Kuwaitis, though, what matters is primarily the citizen-non-citizen dichotomy 'for what really [gives] citizenship its significance [is] the presence of the disproportionately large non-citizen population'.²³⁹ Whether a large portion of this non-citizen population is Coptic Egyptian or Muslim Egyptian is secondary in regards to efforts at identity construction.

3.4 The *Kafāla* System

The official mechanism by which this societal stratification occurs is the *kafāla* system,²⁴⁰ a system whose origins are difficult to ascertain. According to Longva, the system by which the pearling captains employed their crews and managed their salaries (*al-ghūs*) created a precedent for the modern *kafāla* system as well as seeded attitudes of employers towards employees that are still being reaped.²⁴¹ In the days of

²³⁶ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 114.

²³⁷ Perhaps this is why Longva never mentions the Copts as a separate community. In my discussions with Copts, they claim the ability to be able to tell the difference between Egyptian Muslim and Egyptian Copt from a distance. This ability, they affirm, has something to do with facial features but more to do with spiritual insight. Despite over a decade in the region, this researcher has yet to master this skill.

²³⁸ I have not been able to find any solid evidence on this aside from basic human nature and side glances during interviews.

²³⁹ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 47.

²⁴⁰ In September 2010, the Kuwaiti government announced the abolishment of the *kafāla* system. At the time of this writing, 2017, it remains intact. Such pronouncements are often used for political leverage and have no real substance beyond mere rhetoric.

²⁴¹ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 103-7.

pearl diving, the captain gave a diver's family a loan (*salīf*) to cover their needs while the diver was gone. This secured the diver's labour. If pearling was good, then the captain distributed the profits and the divers could pay off their *salīf*. The season was rarely good so the debts kept adding up and even if the diver died, the family inherited the debt and one of the sons would become a diver. So, the diver and his family were taken care of by the captains/merchants except that he could not change ships without the other captain/merchant paying off his *salīf*. Included in this arrangement, the diver had to pay for his own food and water while working. This added to the *salīf* and basically had him working for free.²⁴² This common practice together with 'the age-old Bedouin custom of granting strangers protection and temporary affiliation to the tribe for specific purposes',²⁴³ helped create the *kafāla* system of today. These origins, however, are disputed.

Andrew Gardner and Peter Lienhardt complicate Longva's pearl-*salīf*/oil-*kafīl* narrative. Aside from the trope of 'Bedouin hospitality' that is so often used as an explanation for idiosyncratic practices in the region, Lienhardt implicates the British as the main agents for creating the system. He argues that the Political Agent found it to be more pragmatic to have foreign visitors stay with a local instead of ending up in the foyer of his building.²⁴⁴ Gardner, linking it to religious commitments, writes that the *kafāla* system is 'a historic arrangement and practice that, while grounded in Islamic Law, was codified through the practice of indentured servitude that typified the pearling mode of production'.²⁴⁵ A more composite, picture, then, is of *kafāla*

²⁴² Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 104-5.

²⁴³ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 78.

²⁴⁴ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 109-10, n. 2.

²⁴⁵ Andrew Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2010), 20.

emerging from an intersection of historical practices, religious orientations, and imperialist intervention.

More broadly and recently, *kafāla* is an important aspect of the lifeworld because it underwrites the work/living situation and provides the framework for being in the country. *Kafāla* modernisation began in the 1950s ‘to benefit the native unskilled workforce. . . Originally, the sponsorship system had the clear objective of providing temporary, rotating labour that could be rapidly brought into the country in economic boom and expelled during less affluent periods’.²⁴⁶ Many countries have something similar. However, what makes the *kafāla* system distinct is the role of the sponsor or *kafīl*. Migrants can only obtain residency (*iqāma*) or a work visa if a government agency, private company, or citizen sponsors them. Thus,

the sponsor-employer is responsible financially and legally for the worker, and signs a document from the Labour of Ministry [*sic*] to that effect. . . The worker is tied to a particular employer, and if the worker breaks the contract, he or she has to leave the country immediately at his or her own expense—otherwise the employer would cover the return fare after the end of the contract.²⁴⁷

This financial and legal responsibility coupled with the population discrepancy between migrants and nationals stresses the guest worker/sponsor relationship. As a system based on good intentions, internal security, and an overly optimistic anthropology, it has failed in its primary objective, that is, cheap, rotating, temporary labour—mainly through non-compliance. Another major flaw is ‘a basic inconsistency between the short-term political and economic objectives of the

²⁴⁶ Martin Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," ed. Governance Kuwait Programme on Development, and Globalisation in the Gulf States at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Kuwait: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of the Sciences, 2011), 36-7.

²⁴⁷ Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 37.

sponsorship system and the structural realities of the labour market'.²⁴⁸ In short, 'market forces proved stronger than state capacity to enforce a complex and costly set of bureaucratic rules and procedures'.²⁴⁹ The system together with its inefficiency and flaws multiplies opportunities for abuse. Nonetheless, adept migrants learn to navigate the official *and* dysfunctional. Additionally, following the 1990 invasion, the 'massive low-cost labour from Asia' has created a 'downward pressure on unskilled, semi-skilled, and even skilled pay rates'.²⁵⁰ Long-term Coptic migrants, then, must remain competitive and in good relationship with the sponsor so as not to get replaced.²⁵¹

Thus, *kafāla* helps to reinforce Kuwaiti ethnocentrism and societal stratification. Given that Kuwaitis only make up 31.3% of the national population,²⁵² such a rigid system is seen as essential to survival; and, as noted, every foreigner must be 'under the sponsorship either of a private citizen or a private or state institution'.²⁵³ Further, the *makfūl* (the sponsored) is completely dependent on the *kafīl* (the sponsor) for work permits and residency. She cannot change sponsors or jobs without the

²⁴⁸ Shaham quoted in Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 37.

²⁴⁹ Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 41.

²⁵⁰ Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 24.

²⁵¹ This includes up-to-date skill training, at least in the medical field. Coptic doctors try hard to keep up their professional certifications and specialties—especially from American and European medical boards. This often entails a lot of international travel that taxes their time at the church.

²⁵² "The World Factbook: Middle East: Kuwait," Central Intelligence Agency, 23 August 2016, 06 Oct 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ku.html>. However, according to a Kuwaiti source, Kuwaitis made up 33.6% of the population in 2013, cf. "Al-Lamhat Al-Ahsaaiya," in *Al-'Aeed Al-watinee Al raaba' wa Al-khemsoon 'Aeed Al-tah'ereer Al raaba' wa al-a'asheroon* (Kuwait: Labor Market Information System and The State of Kuwait Central Statistical Bureau, 2015), 3. It is well worth noting here the nature of statistical data in Kuwait. Baldwin-Edwards notes: 'Although there is a certain amount of literature on the GCC labour markets, historically the poor quality—or even existence—of data has made analysis extremely difficult and in certain respects impossible. Recently this has started to change and rather more data have been published on government internet sites. Even so, these data require extensive re-presentation, calculation, and interpretation, which have not yet appeared anywhere in the literature' Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 1.

²⁵³ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 79.

kafil's permission. In some cases, the *kafil* confiscates the *makfūl*'s passport to prevent mobility. Depending on the *kafil*, sponsored expatriates cannot leave the country without permission. Many contracted workers have to pay their own airfare as well as recruitment company fees *before* they receive their salaries, essentially making their first year or more of labour in the country a form of indentured servanthood. These elements coalesce to create asymmetrical relationships of power and disallow the *makfūl* full recourse to labour laws, which are routinely trumped by stipulations that require the *kafil*'s cooperation. Thus, a *makfūl* in a difficult situation can abscond, be deported, or find some way to make the *kafil* happy.²⁵⁴ Longva notes: '... the expatriates' acceptance of the power asymmetry between themselves and the Kuwaitis arose neither from a false consciousness nor a fatalistic worldview but from the conviction that, given the temporary nature of their stay in Kuwait, submissiveness was the best strategy'.²⁵⁵ If 'submit for temporary advantage' is the strategy often employed by expatriates, for Kuwaitis, the presence of such a large number of foreigners serves to heighten their sense of vulnerability, which, in turn, replenishes their commitment to the asymmetrical system.

The *kafāla* system incidentally or intentionally also renders stratification along ethnic and religious categories. Although some nationalities are able to maintain their original class levels, others often work below their education and training. Salaries are often linked more directly to one's nationality than qualifications. One respondent of mine was trained as a lawyer in Egypt but works construction in Kuwait. Therefore, anecdotally, under the present-day system, expats from the US receive higher salaries than expats from Egypt even though they *are both doing the same job often at the*

²⁵⁴ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 90-100.

²⁵⁵ Longva, *Walls Built on Sand*, 181.

same institution. Such disparities are often justified by the rhetoric of quality, cost of living in the home country, and so forth. Concomitantly, Kuwait, as an officially Islamic nation,²⁵⁶ has seemingly focused primarily on *Islamic* countries and/or populations to supply its supposed ‘temporary’ labour force. Thus, the majority Islamic population is assiduously maintained (76.7%²⁵⁷). Further, in accordance with the Islamic recognition of the status of Christianity as one of the ‘revealed’ religions,²⁵⁸ when labour is solicited from other countries it is secondarily from Christian Majority World nations or from *dhimmi* populations within Islamic nations.²⁵⁹ There are no Hindu or Buddhist temples, and Indians working in the country are often Catholics or Muslims. Further, there are large Bangladeshi and Pakistani populations but smaller Nepali and Sri Lankan populations. It should also be noted, in keeping with Islam’s historic antagonism towards Jews²⁶⁰ exacerbated by the creation of the state of Israel, there are no synagogues in Kuwait, and travellers with Israeli stamps in their passports are not permitted to enter the country.²⁶¹ It is, then, possible to construct the typical expat in Kuwait as a Muslim from the Majority World, or what the Central Statistical Bureau labels as ‘non-Arab Asian’. Obviously, there are exceptions such as the large Filipino, Ethiopian, Lebanese, and American

²⁵⁶ According to Kuwait’s constitution.

²⁵⁷ "The World Factbook: Middle East: Kuwait".

²⁵⁸ ‘People of revealed religions fall into the category of *ahl al-kitāb* or “‘possessors of the Scripture” (or “people of the Book”). This term, in the *Qur’ān* and the resultant Muslim terminology, denotes the Jews and the Christians, repositories of the earlier revealed books, *al-Tawrāt* [*q.v.*] = the Torah, *al-Zabūr* [*q.v.*] — the Psalms, and *al-Indjīl* [*q.v.*] = the Gospel. The use of this term was later extended to the Sabeans (*al-Ṣābi’a* [*q.v.*])—both the genuine Sabeans, mentioned in the *Qur’ān* alongside the Jews and the Christians (= Mandeans), and the spurious Sabeans (star-worshippers of Ḥarrān)—to the Zoroastrians (*Madjiūs* [*q.v.*]), and, in India, even to idolaters’, G. Vaidā, "Ahl al-Kitāb," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Th. Bianquis P. Bearmen, Cr. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (online: Brill Online, 2016).

²⁵⁹ Muslim (official) 76.7%, Christian 17.3% of current residents, which is estimated at 4,183,658 see "The World Factbook: Middle East: Kuwait".

²⁶⁰ The roots of the Islamic world’s antisemitism are complicated and beyond the scope of this study.

²⁶¹ In fact, Kuwait Airways stopped their direct flights to and from the US because one flight originating in the US had an Israeli passenger on it, see Danielle Furfaro, "Jew-Hating Airline Cancels Flight Rather than Allow Israeli Passengers," *New York Post* 2015.

populations, but overwhelmingly the above description applies in terms of population size. Of the 'Arab' non-Kuwaiti population, Egyptians make up the majority and often stay the longest. The government of Kuwait does not differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim in its official statistics. On the ground, however, religious identity is often linked to one's name, so any government official can clearly see one's religious affiliation by simply looking at a passport or civil ID. Thus, despite the fact that, on the surface, the *kafāla* system appears to be an economic or socio-political construction, informed as it is by Islamic sensibilities of religious prioritization (Islam first, revealed faiths, second, 'non-revealed' or 'polytheistic' faiths, last), it nonetheless maintains and extends ethnic and religious categories. In summation, Gardner is even more direct: 'As a system, the *kafāla* has emerged as a fulcrum of abuse to which racial, cultural, gender and religious bigotry cling.' Additionally: 'Currently a variety of informal church organizations, voluntary associations, and other informal institutions function as the primary means by which the foreign communities address this abuse. . .'.²⁶² Thus, the 'fulcrum of abuse', *kafāla*,²⁶³ has paradoxically created the space for Coptic piety expressed as care for the unfortunate to flourish.

There are further implications of the *kafāla* system for the Copts. As noted, the first Copts on record came in the 1950s and have remained within the boundaries of this same system. Thus, every Copt's lifeworld in Kuwait is directly shaped by it; he/she stays or goes based on the word of the *kafīl*. He/she must submit to the Muslim sponsor's authority. His/her work life is measured out by the terms of this contract (directly affecting leisure time, weekends, space for religious observances

²⁶² Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, 69.

²⁶³ Another sector in which *kafāla*'s abuses are most evident is human trafficking. According to the CIA, 'Kuwait does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making sufficient efforts to do so', "The World Factbook: Middle East: Kuwait".

like prayer and fasting, etc.) The family is shaped by this contract as well; wives and children must be approved before residing in the country. Without residency (*iqāma*), one cannot open a bank account, acquire a driving license, rent property, purchase a post-paid internet/mobile plan, enrol children in a school, receive medical benefits, or hold a job. Without an *iqāma*, then, one is an illegal alien. If one is caught without an *iqāma* or an expired one, he/she is likely to be imprisoned for an indefinite amount of time before deportation. Unlike other nation states where the path to citizenship is marked out indiscriminately of religious affiliation, in Kuwait *non-Muslims can never naturalise*.²⁶⁴ To the contrary:

The strict and narrow definition of Kuwaiti nationality as defined by law—which in 1982 restricted naturalization to Muslims only, alienating Kuwait’s Christian community—further homogenized the hybridity of Kuwaiti society by subsuming all other markers of identity to a singular, monovocal national identity.²⁶⁵

Copts, then, can never be citizens of Kuwait and must—regardless of how long they live in the country—stay in the good graces of their Muslim *kafīl*. These conditions may go a long way in explaining why the official rhetoric concerning the Kuwaiti government is so positive. The *makfūl* is a participant in his/her own oppression within Kuwaiti ‘cultural hegemony’.²⁶⁶ Further, this need to maintain friendly relations with one’s *kafīl* quietly discourages political and religious subversive activities like proselytising. The Kuwaiti Constitution can guarantee religious freedom and be showcased as ‘socially progressive’. Yet, at the same time, the *kafāla* system pressures non-citizens to self-censor through the threat of lost income, imprisonment, and deportation. Since most *iqāma* are only good for one

²⁶⁴ That is not to say that Muslims are frequently naturalised. It is relatively rare for anyone not born a Kuwaiti to become one.

²⁶⁵ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 3682.

²⁶⁶ See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

year, the *makfūl* must go annually refresh his/her commitment to the cultural hegemony. Sometimes, however, one's *kafīl* is a company and various levels of bureaucracy or a Human Resources Department manages this service. Like modern nation states, citizenship and residency are carefully managed and navigated. However, unlike other modern nation states, the context is radically different: Kuwaitis are a minority in their own country, do not pay taxes, and benefit from a social welfare system *par excellence*. Further, in country, they receive deferential treatment socially and laws are slanted in their favour. Perhaps nowhere else outside of the Gulf is citizenship simultaneously so materially and socially beneficial without cost to the individual and so tightly restrictive. Outnumbered, beleaguered, and rich, nationals have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo through the *kafāla* system. In 2011, Kuwait actually announced it would abolish the system—its mechanism for maintaining the status quo. Not surprisingly, in the last seven years, there has been little to no headway in that direction. There is, then, no foreseeable end to the system.

The Copts in my case study comprise what Gardner calls the 'diasporic elite'²⁶⁷ and do not often experience the same abuses from their *kafīl* as lower-class workers. For instance, they retain possession of their passports, are not often burdened with insurmountable debt, and often enjoy the company of their families.²⁶⁸ However, this does not exempt them fully from the potential abuses of the system. Gardner, quoting Longva: "Non-Kuwaitis, finally, had no absolute legal autonomy. They were all subordinate to their Kuwait employers/sponsors in what was to them one of the most important aspects of their lives, namely work."²⁶⁹ Gardner continues:

²⁶⁷ It should be noted that this status in the diaspora is often continuous with the *archon* or *arākhina* status in Egypt. This group is made up of influential, often wealthy, lay leaders.

²⁶⁸ Dependents can only be brought to Kuwait only if the *makfūl* meets certain salary criteria.

²⁶⁹ Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, 85.

‘Foreign workers whether laborers or professionals, are bonded labor, and the structural arrangement of the *kafāla* fetters their ability to act as free agents on the labor market or . . . to escape the dominion and exploitation of particular sponsors’.²⁷⁰ Additionally, one danger unique to the diasporic elite is *competition* as a consequence of the other side of *kafāla*: nationalisation.

From the early stages of modernisation, the Gulf states, including Kuwait, adopted a policy known as naturalisation or the ‘policy of reducing dependence on foreign workers and replacing them with indigenous labour power’.²⁷¹ This policy varies from country to country, but in Kuwait it typically requires that every company must employ a quota of nationals. The guiding idea is that eventually Kuwait can wean itself off of imported labour. However, given Kuwaitis’ antipathy towards manual labour and service positions,²⁷² it is nearly impossible to conceive that this will ever happen exempting a catastrophic change in the oil economy. Nonetheless, some vectors of employment are acceptable such as medicine, engineering, teaching (at least for females), and finance. Due to its petro-based economy, there are only so many places left for Kuwaitis. Of course, there are many engineers, but there is also a disproportionate number of Kuwaitis in the government sector and the ones who are in the private, tend towards finance/banking primarily. For now, then, the main areas of competition and possible career jeopardy for my case study participants are in banking, engineering, and medicine. Fortunately for them, despite the laws on Kuwaitisation, they are rarely enforced and imported labour in these areas continues

²⁷⁰ Gardner, *City of Strangers: Gulf Migration and the Indian Community in Bahrain*, 85. Anecdotally, even Americans are not exempt from maltreatment. An American friend of mine, at the time of this writing, has an on-going lawsuit with a previous *kafil* who is trying to block him from changing jobs and sponsors. This former *kafil* even went as far as to try and report him as absconded to the Kuwaiti police.

²⁷¹ Baldwin-Edwards, "Labour Immigration and Labour Markets in the GCC Countries: National Patterns and Trends," 43.

²⁷² This is empirically verifiable given the number of non-Kuwaitis working in these positions.

to flourish. Yet given the structure of the *kafāla* system and naturalisation laws, if it comes down to a Coptic doctor versus a Kuwaiti with little experience, the Kuwaiti wins. As one medical professional recounted: '[A] doctor that has one year experience is now head of the department, on what basis? You don't have no experience. . . A doctor that has been head of department for ten years that forgot how to do surgery. That the only day that he went in, he killed the patient'.²⁷³ Three things to notice here are the themes of quick promotion due to nationality, low expectations regarding attendance to one's duties ('the only day he went in'), and a long-term position in spite of incompetence; he killed a patient apparently without punishment. In other labour markets, these imbalances would be redressed through market forces, but in the world of *kafāla*, such incidents occur with marked frequency.

If, on the other hand, a member of the diasporic elite, this study's middle-class professional Copts or *arākhina*,²⁷⁴ obtains a good *kafīl*, the *kafāla* system paradoxically empowers them in regard to ecclesial and spiritual matters in much the same way it empowers the Kuwaitis in societal and political matters. As previously indicated, the unofficial systems that have evolved to address the *kafāla*'s abuses include churches. Thus, a system of patronage has developed where the poorer Copts become the recipients of the diasporic elite's charitable impulses. In the past, this became such an issue the priest had to step in. One leader, a doctor, recounted:

So, we discussed this issue [helping poorer Copts] with him [the priest]. . . Monthly meeting with him discuss this issue and make sure it is a God work and not anything else. Like, for example, because we're a doctor and pharmacists and so on, many people come to us asking for medicine. No. He says he want to say that this is not a hospital. Take care. This is illegal. We can help by advise, we can help by . . . by any. . . but don't mix.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Miriam, 25 Mar 2016.

²⁷⁴ For this study, I use the term *arākhina* as a sociological description rather than a specific ecclesiological function; it should also be noted that it is not often used by the Copts themselves.

²⁷⁵ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

This clerical correction may have slowed the illegal medical service but did not affect the other means of charity that still take place regularly at the church, including free or cheap food, clothing, and monetary giving. In fact, the courtyard around St Mark's is frequently used for these purposes in addition to an 'illegal' market for mobile covers, booklets, and other odds and ends.²⁷⁶ Perhaps the strongest way in which patronage is utilised by the disempowered²⁷⁷ Copt is through what Arabs call *wāṣṭa*. *Wāṣṭa* simply means connection or influence but it also carries the idea of being well-connected systematically within a variety of networks. It is often spoken of in various degrees: big *wāṣṭa*, little *wāṣṭa*, etc. Some even speak of it metaphorically like a playing card: 'I don't want to use my big *wāṣṭa* for such a small thing' or 'His *wāṣṭa* was bigger than mine, so he won'. Entrenched diasporic elite often have significant *wāṣṭa* with important locals developed over time and can plead the cause of the disenfranchised— if they choose. Undoubtedly, the building of the massive St Mark's Cathedral in the Ḥawalī district away from all of the other church structures and surrounded by official governmental ministry buildings was accomplished by a significant level of *wāṣṭa*.²⁷⁸ Additionally, given the previously mentioned disproportionate ratio of priests to parishioners, the elite have a strong presence in the church and form an integral part of its services. Thus, successful navigation of the

²⁷⁶ I say 'illegal' using Western standards; many products are mainly knock-offs and Chinese imitations.

²⁷⁷ 'Power', for this study, implies the ability to influence broadly speaking, but also the Weberian definition: "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" qtd. in Richard Swedberg and Ola Agevall, "Power (macht)," in *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 205.

²⁷⁸ *Wāṣṭa* takes on almost a magical aura for many and, in the case of the Copts in Kuwait, may have apotropaic qualities as well, that is, no one will touch someone with such connections. It will be significant later on that many Copts speak of their relationship to saints in similar terms, that is, *wāṣṭa* with God *via* intercession.

kafāla system locks in elite domination of religious services,²⁷⁹ church organisations (such as St Luke's for those in the medical field), and creates channels for patronage. *Kafāla*, with naturalization, as a mechanism not only stratifies and entrenches Kuwaiti society at large but also affects the Coptic community in similar ways.

3.5 Restrictive Clientelism

The meso-level sociological description above complicates and underscores the imprecise nature of critiquing particular situations as simply 'Islamic'. Additionally, it belies the notion that non-Muslims living under variegated forms of *shari'c* law²⁸⁰ are simply pawns or victims with no agency or benefits. To the contrary, the Coptic elite's experience in Kuwait is hardly one of subjugation and consistent persecution as non-Muslim life in Islamic countries is frequently depicted by Western media. In fact, as many of my interlocutors indicated, life is better in Kuwait, and the idea of living back in Egypt is undesirable. This study, then, in light of this, suggests a revision to an earlier concept regarding non-Muslims living in Islamic countries: dhimmitude.

The term 'dhimmitude' comes from Bat Ye'or's seminal text *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*.²⁸¹ It is not incidental that dhimmitude can easily be linguistically paired with servitude. Being a *dhimmī*, as she meticulously demonstrates across a vast swath of history, was not the ideal mode of citizenship. Dhimmitude partly consisted of slow and steady pressure exerted by

²⁷⁹ Even during the Eucharistic liturgy, the priests appear to be offering a service more than leading one. They are significantly outnumbered on the stage by the lay choir largely comprised of the diasporic elite.

²⁸⁰ Despite popular political rhetoric, there is no monolithic 'shari'c law'.

²⁸¹ Ye'or, *Decline of Eastern Christianity*. See also Ye'or Bat, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam*, trans. David Maisel and Paul Fenton and David Littman (Rutherford, CA: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1985); Ye'or Bat, *Understanding Dhimmitude* (New York: RVP Press, 2013).

the *umma*²⁸² in order to fragment non-Muslim indigenous communities after Islamic conquest, sporadically interspersed with violent and deliberate persecution. This process, as the title suggests, led to and continues to lead towards, the depopulation of Christians in the Middle East. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *dhimma* (the word on which dhimmitude is based) is ‘the term used to designate the sort of indefinitely renewed contract through which the Muslim community accords hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions, on condition of their acknowledging the domination of Islam’.²⁸³ The overall impression one gets from Ye’or, however, is that dhimmitude was, is not, and cannot be associated with words like ‘hospitality’ and ‘protection’ because of the multitudinous forms ‘acknowledgement of the domination of Islam’ takes. Controversially, she frames almost her entire discussion of *dhimmi* in terms of *jihad* and the necessity to establish Islam as the world’s dominant faith. This study, however, complicates Ye’or’s thesis. Copts in Kuwait are flourishing and even preferring the Kuwaiti ‘tolerant’ context.

Kuwait is frequently referred to as a ‘religiously tolerant’ nation.²⁸⁴ This image is supported by its history. Al-Nakib notes that in pre-oil days: ‘All members of urban society could attend celebrations and ceremonies in al-Safat [the town centre], and all religious groups had the right to worship in Kuwait, but only *Sunnī* rituals were performed in public’.²⁸⁵ Toleration of other religious groups requires that there

²⁸² The Islamic Nation. The dynamics of *umma* consolidation could perhaps be understood through the lens of 14th century Islamic jurist and historian Ibn Khaldūn’s concept of *al-‘aşabīyah* or ‘group-feeling’. *Al-‘aşabīyah*, under a species of Islam, Khaldūn argues, unites Muslims and helps transcend tribal fractions. This process, rooted in ethnicity and religion, would necessarily exclude the Copts and perhaps facilitate dhimmitude. See James V. Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 135-57.

²⁸³ C.L. Cahen, "Dhimma," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. Th. Bianquis P. Bearmen, Cr. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (online: Brill Online, 2016).

²⁸⁴ Mariam Joyce, *Kuwait 1945-1996: An Anglo-American Perspective* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), 47-48.; Olayan, 13 Apr 2016.; Anonymous, interview by Dina Al Qassar, 1 Aug 2016, Kuwait City, Kuwait. Michael S. Casey, *The History of Kuwait*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), 134.

²⁸⁵ Thompson, *Church in Kuwait*.

are actually other religious groups present. Peter Lienhardt, a mid-century ethnographer of the region, notes how Kuwaitis presented him with a liberal and peaceful view of Islam that complicated his earlier experiences of more militant Palestinian Muslims during his time at Cambridge. However, he also elaborates how some practitioners of magic on nearby Fēlka Island were discouraged from their art, showing that there were peripheries to Islamic toleration. Lienhardt, too, sees the ethnic distinction between Persians and Arabs, *Shiʿa/Sunni*, as more of an issue than local Christians, which are not as evident in his record.²⁸⁶ Again, as a place where *Sunni/Shiʿi* tensions have been relatively successfully navigated for years, Kuwait as a tolerant nation narrative has some validity. But what about foreign, religious imports? Does this toleration narration historically and presently extend to them?

In Kuwait's past, even active evangelism was not discouraged. In 1909, American doctor, Arthur Bennett, successfully operated on *Shaykh* Mubārak's daughter. One year later, the *Shaykh* gave Bennett and Dr Van Ess the green light to build mission residencies and a hospital, thus began the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Arabia.²⁸⁷ Since the British were the *de facto* agents for all of Kuwait's foreign affairs, the Arabian Mission also requested and received their consent.²⁸⁸ Recalling *Shaykh* Mubārak's generosity and political astuteness twenty-five years later, another American doctor, C.S. Mylrea called him 'one of the greatest Arabs who ever lived'.²⁸⁹ Also, in 1910, Bennett requested permission to open a Bible shop, which, according to Al-Nakib, became a popular centre for free-speech as an essential

²⁸⁶ Peter Lienhardt, "Disorientations: Part Three," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* XXII, no. 1 (1991).

²⁸⁷ Charles Mylrea, "The Opening of Kuwait," in *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs II*, ed. Alan Rush (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 693.

²⁸⁸ *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs II*, 7 vols., vol. 7, Archive Editions (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 704-5.

²⁸⁹ Mylrea, "Opening," 696.

part of the city's *sugq*-life.²⁹⁰ Despite contemporary interpretations of the Mission's intentions as mainly medical and pastoral and not evangelistic,²⁹¹ Dr Mylrea was perspicuous. In writing about the visit of the Viceroy of India to Kuwait, he proclaims:

This visit undoubtedly marks one more milestone on the road which will lead eventually to the civilization and Christianization of the Arab. . . It is probable that the Turk will no longer have dominion in our part of Arabia, and with his departure disappears one more obstacle to Christian Mission work. . . . The waning crescent of Islam sheds but a little light in this country, all is darkness, gross darkness. May the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings, soon rise, never again to set.²⁹²

Another American missionary, Rev Edwin Calverley, writing in regards to the establishment of schools in Kuwait by the Mission, notes: [W]e will give the youths of Kuwait a satisfactory training for them to earn their livelihood and will at the same time give ourselves our best opportunity for influencing a larger number of Moslems for Christ in their early and impressionable years'.²⁹³ Warily, the Office of the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, highlighting British attitudes towards the eager missionaries, wrote to its Political Agent in Kuwait, W.H. Shakespear:

Our attitude with regard to Missions is, as you say, one of neutrality—as a rule benevolent neutrality—but we don't try and force them on an unwilling *Shaykh*. If *Shaykh* Mubarek invites them it is his own look out, but once the doctor is installed, no doubt others will follow. . . . Once in they will be always with him like the poor. I presume the *Shaykh* realizes all these things.²⁹⁴

Later, Shakespear commented that 'the Mission only employs medical relief as a means towards its real object of religious instruction'.²⁹⁵ *Shaykh* Mubārak, he reported, 'did not raise the least objection'.²⁹⁶ Three years later, more American

²⁹⁰ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 1260.

²⁹¹ Olayan, 13 Apr 2016.

²⁹² Mylrea, "Opening," 712.

²⁹³ *Records 1899-1961*, 7, 727.

²⁹⁴ W.H. Shakespear, "Letter to the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf: 29 Nov 1910," in *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs II*, ed. Alan Rush (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 706.

²⁹⁵ Shakespear, "Letter 1910," 705.

²⁹⁶ Shakespear, "Letter 1910," 705.

missionaries came and were travelling inland, prompting Sir Percy Cox, the Political Resident, to request that the Crown discourage them through diplomacy with the US government or that he be allowed to go directly to the head of the Mission. He writes: ‘[I]t is inconsistent with our interests that members of the Mission should visit Central Arabia from Coast of Gulf and that we are therefore compelled to discourage such an enterprise’.²⁹⁷ That it was British foreign policy that discouraged early, extensive missionary endeavours and not the *Shaykh* suggests a religious liberality in the temperament of the ruling family. Later, in the 1930s, Rev Garrett De Jong continued American missionary activity in Kuwait and is perhaps one of the first to note the presence of the Coptic Christians (though without a church) there. Additionally, he writes: ‘To minister to traditional Christians is challenging and they are in our midst and part of His Church, but the Kuwaitie [sic] the Muslim whose citizenship is outside of Christ’s domain is still the primary person to whom we witness’.²⁹⁸ De Jong clearly saw the other Christians as ‘part of His Church’. Given, too, his vision for planting churches among the Muslim population suggests that the American Mission was not focused on ‘sheep-stealing’ from the traditional churches. Further, the extension of the American Mission’s activities (and land ownership as well) beyond medical assistance and into the realm of education supports the conclusion that Christian missionaries had an official place in Kuwait—despite British reservations. The narrative of the American Mission thus compounds facile dismissals of early twentieth-century official Kuwaiti religious toleration as merely superficial.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Percy Cox, "Telegram to Foreign Office in Dehli 4 Feb 1913," in *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs II*, ed. Alan Rush (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 708.

²⁹⁸ Garrett De Jong, "Kuwait," in *Records of Kuwait 1899-1961: Foreign Affairs II*, ed. Alan Rush (England: Redwood Burns, Ltd, 1989), 734-5.

²⁹⁹ Other Western cases in point in the twenty-first century: Kuwait was also the first Gulf country to ‘establish full diplomatic ties with the Vatican in 2001’ and ‘the first to allow the Bible Society to set

Even for other non-Western Christians, Kuwait has displayed a generosity towards its large, South Asian Christian migrant population. This is especially true of the Marthoma or Syrian Orthodox Church of India. This ancient branch of the Church traces its lineage back to the Apostle Thomas in India. Kuwait was 'the first Arab Gulf country that opened its doors. . . in the late 1940s [to] a small group of members of the Marthoma Syrian Church [which] began to set up worship services in the region'.³⁰⁰ The oil boom of the following decades sped up that migration and the Syrian Church now has a strong presence in Kuwait. Like the Copts, these believers are recognisable by their prominent cross tattoos. Past Keralite Christian migration thus closely parallels Coptic migration to Kuwait. Further still, consistent, long-term migration to Kuwait by both groups underscores Kuwait's tolerant climate,³⁰¹ although the former have not been allowed to build their own church.³⁰²

Legislatively, by the time of Kuwait's independence and first constitution, tolerance changed keys.³⁰³ Re-instituted in 1992, the Constitution of 1962 continues to remain in force to this day. Article 2 states: 'The religion of the State is Islam and Islamic Law shall be a main source of legislation'.³⁰⁴ Article 35 clarifies: 'Freedom of belief is unrestricted. The State shall protect freedom in the observance of religious rites established by custom, provided such observance does not conflict with morals or disturb public order'.³⁰⁵ Juxtaposed, then, it is clear that the early twentieth-

up an office' in Ginu Zacharia Oommen, "Transnational Religious Dynamics of Syrian Christians from Kerala in Kuwait," *South Asia Research* 35, no. 1 (2015): 7.

³⁰⁰ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 2.

³⁰¹ Oommen thinks the post-liberation atmosphere of toleration 'could be due to the strategic dependence of the Kuwaiti regime on the Americans' Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 7.

³⁰² Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 6. This author never observed the Copts and Syrians worshipping together at St Mark's. Cultural and contextual elements sharpened by *kafāla* keep these communities separate.

³⁰³ Of course, laws on the books and laws enforced consistently and fairly are sadly not the same thing.

³⁰⁴ "Constitution of the State of Kuwait," ed. The State of Kuwait (Kuwait: The State of Kuwait, 1962/1992), 3.

³⁰⁵ "Constitution of the State of Kuwait," 7.

century type of evangelism among Muslims is off the table for it is not an ‘observance of religious rites’, ‘conflicts with [Islamic] morals’, and would undoubtedly ‘disturb public order’ among the more conservative Islamic enclaves. Islamic tradition also maintains that conversion to anything other than the Islamic faith (or apostasy) constitutes a grave sin now and in the hereafter, if not a prosecutable crime. Kuwait’s Law Code deals with apostates through personal status laws that ‘strip apostates of their most basic rights, turning them into non-persons and making it impossible for them to lead a normal life in society’.³⁰⁶ These laws centre around marriages, inheritances, and parental rights. Additionally, laws against blasphemy updated in the 2012 National Unity Law are vague enough to be applied to a whole host of infractions from mockery of Muhammad (Article 19) to criticism of the *Amir* (Article 20).³⁰⁷ Punishments generally include fines, imprisonment, and deportation for non-Kuwaitis. Other than a few, recent high-profile cases³⁰⁸ and a 2012 amendment proposal to apply the death penalty for blasphemy,³⁰⁹ statistics of implementation are difficult to come by for the non-Kuwaiti populous. Interestingly, the 2012 National Unity Law also includes a section that prohibits publishing (electronically or in print) anything that infringes ‘on the dignity of the persons or their lives or religious believes [sic], and instigating hatred or disdain of any of the society’s strata. . .’.³¹⁰ In

³⁰⁶ Anh Nga Longva, "The Apostasy Law in Kuwait and the Liberal Predicament," *Cultural Dynamics* 14, no. 3 (2002): 261.

³⁰⁷ "Law No. 8 of 2016 Regarding the Regulation of Electronic Media," *Kuwait Times*, 17 Dec 2016.

³⁰⁸ Sumaya Bakhsh, "#BBCTrending: The Kuwaiti Satirist Arrested for His Tweet," BBC, 2017, 17 Dec 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-28972617>. ; "Kuwaiti Jailed for 10 Years for Twitter 'Blasphemy'," BBC, 4 June 2012, 17 Dec 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18322418> ; "Kuwait Twitter 'Insult' Sentence Condemned ", BBC, 20 Nov 2013, 17 Dec 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25017719> and Sebastian Usher, "Kuwait Academic Charged with Blasphemy Over TV Interview," BBC, 14 April 2016, 17 Dec 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36046706>

³⁰⁹ Habib Toumi, "Kuwait Parliament Endorses Tougher Anti-blasphemy Law," Gulf News, 17 Dec 2017, 17 Dec 2017, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/kuwait-parliament-endorses-tougher-anti-blasphemy-law-1.1007739>

³¹⁰ "Law No. 8."

light of the fact it is the *National Unity* law, it seems to be mainly concerned with preserving Kuwaiti unity and identity amid growing political polarisation, Islamic radicalisation, sectarianism, and against the migrant majority. Due to their Western-Islamic hybrid Constitution, wide-ranging and vague blasphemy/apostasy laws, and a Kuwaiti-centric legislature, Kuwaitis have thus created eddies of toleration within a larger stream of systemic intolerance and discrimination.

Within their particular eddy, and given that the Coptic Church has had survival rather than evangelistic growth foremost on its mind for centuries, Copts in Kuwait have found a space superior in some ways to Egypt. It is no wonder, then, that the Copts of the 1950s felt confident enough to request a church of their own, that the Copts of the 2000s built a new church, and the Copts of today are flourishing.³¹¹

In spring of 2017, the *Amir* even invited current Pope Tawadros to visit Kuwait.

During his visit, the Pope remarked:

Kuwait is characterized by goodness, generosity of its people and its huge interest in issues concerning culture, as well as the care shown by His Highness the *Amir* Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad, the International Humanitarian Leader, towards the church, and all sects and religions living on the beautiful and peace-loving land of Kuwait — the land of peace, harmony and security.³¹²

His comments may be mere political rhetoric towards the larger end-game of survival or even reflective of a naïveté about the Gulf situation. Nonetheless, perception is often stronger than the reality, and, in Kuwait's case, it is, at least by the Pope and the many I interviewed, perceived to be a tolerant context in which to practice their faith

³¹¹ During his November 2016 visit to Kuwait, the Coptic Archbishop praised the atmosphere of religious toleration in Kuwait. See Kuwait News Agency, "Coptic Patriarch Extols Kuwait's Religious Coexistence," *Arab Times*, 13 November 2016.

³¹² Suzanne Nasser Al-Seyassah, "Pope Tawadros II Hails Egyptian-Kuwaiti Ties," *Arab Times*, 19 Sept 2017.

and, like their Keralite counterparts, ‘strengthen[s] their quest for spiritual and religious identity’.³¹³

Kuwait, then, with the aforementioned constitutional provisions, can be sketched as a relatively tolerant,³¹⁴ pluralised society stratified by the ‘politics of exclusion’ through the mechanism of *kafāla* working with the nationalisation imperative. At the ground level, systems of patronage operate on *wasta*. The re-defined cultural values generated primarily by oil wealth together with the ‘siege mentality’, continually block attempts to reform the system. The forces that produce a stratified society also concretise that stratification through urbanisation and urban planning; mosque construction vastly outnumbers church building projects, which are extremely rare as in the case of St Mark’s.³¹⁵ These predetermined zoned areas of worship, living, and working along with the accompanying ideologies are more often than not accepted *de facto* by the migrant participating in Kuwaiti society. Consequently, the middle-class, professional Copts that participated in this study must learn to navigate the intricacies of *kafāla* while maintaining their religious and familial commitments, status within their respective fields and church, and, often, patronage of the more transient members of their church community. Within this lifeworld, then, the modern Copt is free to pursue his/her own spiritual growth through participation in the rituals and life of the congregation of St Mark’s, provided he/she does not engage in active evangelism of the Muslim majority, speak out polemically about the Islamic faith, or criticise the *Amir*. Other types of public religious expressions such as the display of

³¹³ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 2. From an Evangelical perspective, agreeing to not proselytize is the near-equivalent of renouncing one’s faith. This is a significant point of contention for any future ecumenical conversations and a red flag for future Evangelical researchers.

³¹⁴ Relative in the sense of fluctuating throughout its history and in the sense of comparison with its harsher neighbour, Saudi Arabia, and more progressive countries in the West. Relative, too, in the sense that various strata of the society experience laxity and severity at disparate times from the State and surrounding communities.

³¹⁵ Again, not to belabour the point, but Kuwait is an Islamic society and intends to remain one for the foreseeable future.

icons and crosses visible in their cars seemingly goes unchallenged. In fact, in the summer of 2017, I observed a car in a public parking lot that had a sign taped to its back window with the large type message (in Arabic): ‘God is love’. The presence of other Coptic paraphernalia allowed me to identify the owner. Although superficially it is not that shocking of a statement, it is 1) recognisably Christian and 2) in Arabic for Arabic speakers to read, a type of open evangelism. In all of my years in the Gulf, I have never seen such a direct message to Muslims and, to me, it speaks volumes about Kuwait.

The tensions that exist between the complications of the *kafāla* system, the Constitution, the 2012 National Unity Law, and the punctuated zones of toleration demand that uncritical extensions of the *dhimmī* narrative common in Islamophobic media be upended. As tempting as it is to extrapolate Ye’or’s thesis to the present migration crisis in Europe or growing Islamic populations elsewhere, it must be tempered with such exceptions as Kuwait.³¹⁶ As I have suggested, however, all is not roses; the sponsorship system, nationalisation, and Islamic-oriented jurisprudence that privileges some over others continues to enforce a sense of vulnerability among non-Kuwaitis. In some ways, then, vestiges of *dhimma* find new life in this contemporary, restrictive composite. On the other hand, history, official rhetoric, state visits, and elite Coptic experience, not to mention the size and scope of St Mark’s, all hint towards a type of toleration (whatever the source) of Coptic Christians that make it a nearby haven. Altogether, then, the modern situation could be described as restrictive clientelism, *that is, the beneficial, but also restrictive, hierarchical system of social stratification defined by the patron-client/kafīl-makfūl relationship under*

³¹⁶ For another critical view of *dhimmī*, see Youssef and Phillippe Fargues Courbage, *Christians and Jews Under Islam*, ed. Philippe Fargues, trans. Judy Mabro (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997).

contemporary shari'a law. Islam is still the dominant religion and, as mentioned earlier, deportation rather than decapitation awaits Copts who would speak out against it or attempt to proselytise. Penalties and laws with such clear Islamic riders together with anecdotal evidence of subtler forms of religious discrimination all argue that is indeed a restrictive and asymmetrical context in terms of power and agency.³¹⁷

In terms of the lifeworld, this situation shapes the Coptic experience 'on the ground' in specific ways. Broadly speaking, things that are readily accessible in Egypt are not in Kuwait. There are no monasteries. Inasmuch as monastic spirituality is given shape and embodied by the monk-priests, teaching, and even the architecture of St Mark's, there are not functioning monasteries for pilgrimage and the collection of *baraka* (discussed later). Further, the handful of priests restricted by visa regulations means that many needs go unaddressed. Take, for example, demonization; while exorcism is a common occurrence in Egypt, I could only uncover two narratives of it happening in the history of the church in Kuwait. What, then, happens to the demonized? They have to go to Egypt. Such travel consequently engages the *kafāla* mechanism with all of its moving parts: vacation time, beneficence of the sponsor, expense, and so forth. Kuwaiti societal stratification also means that there is a disproportionate number of males to females. This makes finding a mate and building a family very difficult, even for the Coptic elite and especially for the lower class Egyptian worker.³¹⁸ Given that the COC has primarily grown and

³¹⁷ Reforms of *kafāla* are underway. However, the most appalling law, currently under scrutiny and protest, is Article 153 of Kuwait's Penal code. The law, which punishes honour killing with a 225 Kuwaiti *dinar* (540 British Pounds) fine or 3 years in jail, basically opens the door for such misogynistic practices to flourish. See Faten Omar, "Honor Killing Law Under Attack," Kuwait Times, 19 Sept 2017, 19 Sept 2017, <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/honor-killing-law-under-attack/>.

³¹⁸ One single Coptic woman complained about this situation. Many Coptic families resort to match-making through their Egyptian counterparts or send their children to other Coptic diasporic communities where the male to female ratios are better balanced, for example, in the UK.

survived through genetic propagation rather than conversion,³¹⁹ Coptic growth in Kuwait is simultaneously bolstered and weakened by the same market forces driving migration to the region such as oil prices and the contingent strength of the *dinar*. Even if St Mark's were to grow stupendously, it is doubtful more land and materials would be made available for an additional building; toleration has its limits. Since non-Kuwaitis cannot actually own property nor become citizens without converting to Islam, one's transiency often effaces responsibility towards the host culture. There is, then, a tension the long-term, Coptic elite have to maintain: an attitude of graciousness towards their hosts and empathy with their transient compatriots' complaints about various forms of systemic exploitation. Additionally, the prohibition on property ownership and restricted use of other buildings for religious purposes means that the Kuwait-Copts are dependent on the compound of St Mark's for their more structured religious education *via* the Sunday Schools. *Coptic* Christian schools are thus non-existent. This situation requires Kuwait-Copts who want their children to have a Western Christian education to send them to the only Evangelical, PC-leaning, Christian school at a price, a kind of context-forced ecumenism so to speak.³²⁰ The inequity of allowing the Western-aligned Evangelicals to run a full-time educational programme and not allowing the massive Coptic Orthodox populace the same latitude does not go unnoticed.

³¹⁹ I say this with qualification. There are Coptic churches gathering converts in other parts of the world, with particular effectiveness in sub-Saharan Africa. This missional endeavour was launched and spear-headed by the Coptic Bishop for African Affairs Antonius Markos in the 1970s. See John W. De Gruchy, "From Cairo to the Cape: The Significance of Coptic Orthodoxy for African Christianity," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 99 (1997); Antonius Markos, "Developments in Coptic Orthodox Missiology," *Missiology* 17, no. 2 (1989). North American, Australian, and European gains have been marginal and modest, typically recruiting second generation Copts.

³²⁰ Other schools, predominately Indian, with Christian majorities exist in Kuwait and some include Christian religious instruction. However, most diasporic Copts who are able to, do their higher education in the West not India. Here I use ecumenical in the intrareligious sense.

Additionally, in Egypt, the COC is the incumbent, native Christian tradition but in Kuwait, it must accept non-hegemonic status politically and religiously. Paradoxically, the restrictive clientelism of Kuwait has actually broadened the religious marketplace for varieties of Christianity. The sheer multicultural nature of the country brings with it a sharp contrast and liberalizing element distinct from mono-cultural Alexandria. In Kuwait, Copts may encounter, for the first time, Christians from a variety of ethnic and religious traditions. The lack, too, of Coptic enclaves apart from the church compound disperses and dilutes the diasporic elite, weakening ties to the visible institution. In such a situation, other churches have a fairer chance of gaining adherents, and I suspect that attrition rates from the COC are higher in the diaspora than in Egypt.³²¹ But where are they going? Given the rapid spread of the PC movement globally,³²² one can also assume that it is the biggest contender for the pious Kuwait-Copt's allegiance. Thus, the challenge of Pentecostalisation that flourishes underneath restrictive clientelism forms an important part of the Kuwait-Coptic lifeworld.

For the most part, restrictive clientelism runs in the background, a script one becomes accustomed to performing. However, in regard to food, one's inferior position comes to the fore. First of all, during the Islamic holy month of *Ramaḍān*, Kuwaiti society rigidly enforces the prohibition on eating and drinking in public during daylight hours. In an annual email from the US Embassy in Kuwait, even Americans (generally loved by the Kuwaitis) are told:

Ramadan is a time of abstinence from food, drink (including water), and physical pleasure (including smoking) *during daylight hours*. Expectations of conservative public behavior and dress are heightened during Ramadan. The fast is generally held to be obligatory for Muslims, unless they are old, very

³²¹ This would require further research. My thesis only focuses on the ones who have stayed within the tradition. It would also be interesting to compare attrition rates with other diasporic contexts.

³²² Another index of PC encroachment among the Copts is the amount of polemic directed against them in the Coptic media.

young, infirm, traveling, or pregnant. The strictures are observed between dawn and sunset (roughly 0430-1850 hours). . . Non-Muslims are not expected to fast, but it *is against Kuwaiti law for anyone to eat, drink, or smoke in public between sunrise and sunset*. Even children should be instructed not to eat or drink in public, which includes while in a vehicle on, or visible from, the street. Eating, drinking or smoking in public are grounds for arrest [emphasis mine].³²³

Such restrictive language clearly signals Islamic hegemony and its dissemination throughout the lifeworld. Thus, during the disruptive *Ramaḍān* fasting, all non-Muslims feel the pinch of the religiously restrictive context. In a lesser way, Coptic fasting (discussed in detail later), which often involves an adoption of a modified vegan diet, is similarly restricted by the Kuwaiti context. While in other countries, a vegan menu is readily available in many restaurants, only the trendy, expensive ones offer such options in Kuwait. Although really not more than an inconvenience for the Copt, in light of the near obsessive rigidity of *Ramaḍān*, such lack of awareness for others' religious sensibilities in regard to food is quite telling. Coupled with the complete and utter domination of the *halāl* meat industry,³²⁴ Kuwait's food ecology telegraphs that any and all religious practices involving food must be kept *within* their Islamic system;³²⁵ a variety of choices has effectively been removed.

³²³ Ron McNeill, 23 May 2017.

³²⁴ All meat (chicken, lamb, and beef) in Kuwait must be *halāl*. Although this was not investigated in the interviews, some Christians take issue with being forced to eat Islamically consecrated food, citing Biblical injunctions not to eat meat 'sacrificed to idols' (see Acts 15, 1 Cor. 8 and 10). Ethiopian Orthodox, near religious relatives to the Copts, have their own butchers.

³²⁵ Hindu vegetarians, of course, can navigate around the *halāl* issue and stay within the system quite easily. However, given the sharp ethnic stratification in Kuwait and the strong religious sensibilities of the Copts, simply eating at Hindu restaurants in order to keep a vegetarian/vegan fast is simply unheard of.

3.6 Other Material and Time Constituents of the Lifeworld³²⁶

3.6.1 Home

The typical diasporic elite Copt³²⁷ of this study lives either in a rented, two-to-three-bedroom apartment or in a rented floor of a multi-story villa. This apartment generally rents for 500-850KWD and villa spaces for 1000-1500KWD.³²⁸ The rent includes electricity, water, and frequently free Wi-Fi. Many have on-site gyms and pools. One popular area of the city for the Copts of this study is Salwa. Salwa abuts another area known as Rumaithīya, home to a large *Shi^ci* population. In fact, it is perhaps one of the greatest concentrations of *Shi^ca* in the city and is one of the few places where *Shi^ci* observances are openly allowed in the streets under the careful eye of the Kuwaiti police. Salwa is home to various schools such as the British School of Kuwait (BSK), Kuwait English School (KES), and smaller nursery schools, including a Montessori institution. It is a conservative area and its beaches, when the weather permits, are frequently populated with Islamically-bearded men and *abaya* wearing women in sneakers.³²⁹ Further, the area has a ban on high-rises and those who can afford it, live in the same suburban space as middle-class Kuwaitis.³³⁰ Our typical Copt also lives with her immediate family (spouse and children, if married, parents and siblings if not). In some cases, unmarried children too old to be under their

³²⁶ This particular section takes the narrational mode suggested by Geertz mixed with analytical comments common to ethnographers of the region, cf. Peter Lienhardt, "Disorientations: Part Two," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* XXI, no. 3 (1990); Lienhardt, "Disorientations: Part Three."

³²⁷ I am aware of the dangers of typification; the following is based on a composite drawn from interview data.

³²⁸ 1400-2300 British pounds and 2700-4000 British pounds respectively.

³²⁹ Full *niqāb* (face covering) is rare in many parts of Kuwait but can be observed in Salwa from time to time. Definitely more women in Jahra, perhaps the most fundamentalist city in Kuwait, wear them.

³³⁰ Sometimes they even live with the Kuwaitis; the Kuwaiti landlord and family may let out parts of their own home. In recent times, this has become even more and more popular among middle-class Kuwaitis, though most want foreigners instead of Arabs, whom, they claim, 'damage everything'. There are signs around the city on housing advertising 'Foreigners Only'. Anecdotally, a friend's Egyptian Muslim acquaintance was turned down nineteen times for housing on the basis of his nationality. Attitudes among landlords about *Coptic* Egyptians remain unstudied.

parents' sponsorship, have used family and personal connections as well as leveraging their higher education from Egypt, the UK, or the US to obtain long-term professional positions and their own *kafīl*. Nonetheless, these singles, in customary Egyptian fashion, may continue to live at home or near family. She dresses in a contemporary style, yet conservative in regard to pervading Islamic culture.³³¹

3.6.2 *Driving*

Anyone living in Kuwait spends a significant amount in one's car, and it forms an essential part of the lifeworld of the diasporic elite. The typical diasporic elite Copt owns and drives her own car, anything from a new to an older Volvo or Toyota or Mazda. Some may purchase higher-end vehicles like BMW and Mercedes sedans/SUVs, which effectively blends them in with the locals while on the roads.³³² While tinted windows are technically illegal, many car-owners use *wāṣṭa* to keep them dark, thereby hiding their passengers and extending the long tradition of privacy. Such tinting can be seen on the more expensive cars, another marker of status that even the Copts employ, consciously or unconsciously. The modernization project of the Kuwaiti government essentially removed residents from living near their workplaces and created a commute culture. Further, the government's lack of consistent implementation of its city growth plans has created many bottlenecks and problems in the city's traffic flow. This perfect storm of poor traffic circulation, erratic driving, and overloaded infrastructure translates into a *minimum* commute time for someone, say living in Salwa, to 1.5 to 2 hours per day. There is no train system and buses are

³³¹ No headscarves or miniskirts for women and the men typically wear trousers. Women may wear trousers, slacks, longer skirts, or to-the-knees dresses. Oddly enough, despite—or in spite of—Islamic mores, tight clothing for women, tops and the now ubiquitous yoga pant, are widely worn among the middle-class—Copts and locals.

³³² SUVs are popular in Kuwait not only as status symbols and for safety reasons, but the cheap price of non-taxed petro helps maintain their popularity.

considered too 'low class' for professionals. Given the hot weather and lack of a pedestrian culture, people rarely walk anywhere. Thus, our typical Copt spends a significant portion of her time in Kuwait locked in her car. This is significant in several dimensions. The time in the car affords her the space to pray, listen to or watch religious programming from Egypt and around the world, and strengthen her relational ties with her community *via* mobile.³³³ Internet and mobile technologies are also cheaply available in Kuwait, and it is not uncommon for even the poorest migrant worker to stream video on his mobile.

The stratification of the society generated through the *kafāla* system is constantly reinforced through State along-the-road propaganda, the driving practices of the locals,³³⁴ the frequent roadblocks for visa checks by the police, and heavy penalties for traffic violations. The Gulf Road runs the length of Salwa on the East side, along the Arabian Gulf, and the 'Thirty', a dual-carriage way, borders the area on its western perimeter. On the Gulf side, there is one of the *Amir's* palaces and along the walls at one of the major intersections in and out of the area are pictures of Kuwait's martial power. Sitting in one's car at the-longer-than-usual traffic light timings, one can see sun-baked pictures of helicopters, missiles launching, tanks moving, soldiers marching, and Kuwaiti commandoes in tight formation, guarding each other's' backs.³³⁵ Strategically placed images such as these at the ingress/egress of an area largely populated by minority Kuwaitis and many non-Kuwaitis, quietly reinforces the State's presence on a daily basis. These images, too, telegraph that it is

³³³ 'I really love to listen to carols when I'm driving'. Miriam, 25 Mar 2016.

³³⁴ According to Al-Nakib, '[I]t [Kuwait] ranks first in the world in number of deaths and injuries from traffic accidents'. See Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 397.

³³⁵ Prior to the privacy wall with its celebration of Kuwaiti military pride, the area was merely an empty lot of beach that often had a herd of sheep wandering about on it. Now it has the sense of a government no-go area with a large naval vessel anchored periodically less than one kilometre from the shore.

armed and prepared for *any* uprising or battle. The armoured vehicle that sometimes sits in front of the palace together with the always stationed police cars along the *Amir*'s daily commute, do the same thing.

Many Kuwaitis purchase expensive vehicles for status purposes. These they often drive with disregard for other drivers at high speeds, flashing their lights at other drivers for them to defer to their presence.³³⁶ Although there are speed cameras, fines get waived through the *wāṣṭa* system. And although police are stopping more of these reckless drivers than they did a few years ago, it can still be unnerving and alienating. Often, too, in the case of an accident, the non-national has no real recourse to the justice system; offences that are punishable by a fine for Kuwaitis mean deportation for non-Kuwaitis.³³⁷ Such is the situation the typical Copt finds herself in day-in and day-out for her life in Kuwait; she is constantly reminded with every flashing headlight and every roadblock that this is not her home. Similar intimidation, too, occurs through random spot checks for residencies and visas. Presumably, the police are looking for possible terrorist threats, but given the large number of anecdotal stories of single women who are stopped while in a taxi and/or their own vehicles may indicate another dynamic is going on.³³⁸ Finally, in attempts to redress the large numbers of expatriates living in the country, the police use traffic violations as a means of population control. Al-Nakib comments: 'That summer [2013], tens of thousands of expatriates were deported for traffic violations, including minor ones for which Kuwaitis only pay fines'.³³⁹ The psychological effects of the potential loss of

³³⁶ This has a long history in Kuwait. From the very first 'cars belonging to the Al Sabah carried special license plates that identified them as "shaikhs" and they expected to be "given respectful precedence in traffic, but, more importantly, they were on no account to be overtaken."' See Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 2847.

³³⁷ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 4209.

³³⁸ This one is close to home; our house cleaner was stopped and later deported because her visa with her Kuwaiti sponsor had expired.

³³⁹ Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed*, Kindle location 4197.

one's career and home over a minor traffic violation in a country where the traffic laws are routinely flouted by locals cannot be overstated. Such arbitrary rules of law serve to increase stratification and feed the non-citizen, client attitude, a complex mix of resignation and resentment punctuated with moments of begrudging gratitude.³⁴⁰

3.6.3 Church

Diasporic Copts not only spend copious amounts of time at work or in the car, they also spend a lot of time at church. There are other advantages the typical member of the diasporic elite has over her poorer, working class compatriots. She enjoys two-day weekends, Friday and Saturday. As car owners, they are also able to self-segregate and drive to Aḥmadi for mass once a week. Aḥmadi, about a 30-minute drive from Salwa, is an oddity by contextual standards. Having been built by the Kuwait Oil Company for its British and American employees, it has a strong resemblance to a neighbourhood straight out of 1950s Florida, with tree-lined streets and ranch-style houses. In this area, there are two churches used by St Mark's. One is the Catholic Church (Our Lady of Arabia) and the other is a small, Anglican chapel (St Paul's). In the former, once a week, many of the diasporic elite come in their own cars to worship, taking a priest of their own in an essentially private mass. Other meetings occur at St Paul's on Thursdays, with a weekly early mass on Mondays.

If they do not want to drive to Aḥmadi, the Saturday service at St Mark's in Ḥawalī serves roughly the same purpose since lower class Copts only have Fridays off. The church in Ḥawalī is relatively new. Construction began in 2006 and the first services were held in the new church in 2011. A new building was needed due to

³⁴⁰ This attitude was not thoroughly explored in the interviews but comes from personal experiences, numerous unofficial conversations, and living as a neo-dhimmi in Kuwait for over six years.

overcrowding and after the much-needed Ring Road project nearer the city levelled the older Coptic Church.³⁴¹ Upon arrival to the church, one is struck by the fact that there are no outward signs such as crosses to mark it as a church except the shape of the domes over the various chapel sections, and even then, the dome is popular in the architecture in Kuwait anyway.³⁴² Again, despite the fact that St Mark's is the largest Coptic Orthodox church in the world,³⁴³ the prohibition on placing a cross on the outside of the building links back to the religious restricted context.

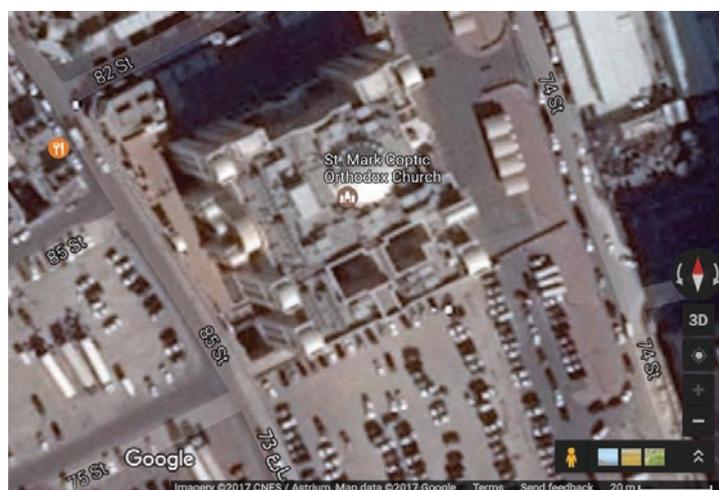


Figure 10: St Mark's Kuwait: 4790 sq. metres³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ The earlier Coptic Church was built in the 1960s and was the first Coptic Orthodox Church built outside of Egypt in the Middle East. It was situated opposite the Catholic Church.

³⁴² Interestingly, a nineteenth-century Western traveller to Egypt noted: 'I determined on attending Divine service on Palm Sunday in the Coptic cathedral, where the patriarch was to officiate. Plunging into the Coptic quarter, I passed through a succession of crooked lanes, and at length arrived at the temple of this ancient people, which was undistinguished by any architectural decoration' in Paul Sedra, *From Mission to Modernity: Evangelicals, Reformers, and Education in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, Library of Middle East History (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 46-7.

³⁴³ I make this claim through Google Maps comparisons with other Coptic churches in Egypt and in the United States. St Mark's Kuwait is by far the largest in terms of building size and, as far as I can ascertain, members. See Figures 10 and 11.

³⁴⁴ "St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church, Kuwait," Google Maps, 17 Sept 2017, 17 Sept 2017, <https://www.google.com.kw/maps/place/St.+Mark+Coptic+Orthodox+Church/@29.3384112,48.0154065,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x3fcf9c8d8ed86673:0xf342465d86737c83!8m2!3d29.3384112!4d48.0175952?hl=en>.



Figure 11: St Mark's Cairo: 3960 sq. metres³⁴⁵

The whole complex is trapezoidal in shape with an area of 6741.8 square metres. The actual church building is about 5000 square metres. The top of the dome stands about 25 metres high. The complex's sand-coloured walls virtually camouflage it in a sea of monochromatic concrete buildings that surround the area. Some of these buildings are planned for the Ministry of Interior and will no doubt interfere with the church's activities due to traffic and parking issues as well as raising awareness of the church's presence in the country.³⁴⁶ There is also another church a short distance away, the Kuwait Evangelical Lutheran Church, but it is indistinguishable from the rest of the buildings. On the south side of the church complex is a large dirt parking lot and a smaller, paved lot adjacent to the dirt that runs the length of the east side.³⁴⁷ This lot is generally chained off on days when there are no services going on. Some parts of this parking lot have covered parking, and it is where the priests have their vehicles, nondescript older models typical of the general Egyptian population. The handful of church buses ('coasters') are parked here as well. They are used for weekend outings

³⁴⁵ "St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, Cairo, Egypt," Google Maps, 17 Sept 2017, 17 Sept 2017, <https://www.google.com.kw/maps/place/St.+Mark's+Coptic+Orthodox+Cathedral/@30.071546,31.2724026,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x14583f9adf8a3ec9:0x56c16c299e2af96c!8m2!3d30.071546!4d31.2745913?hl=en>.

³⁴⁶ The Kuwaitis I have asked do not even know there is a church at all in Hawali.

³⁴⁷ After my fieldwork ended, I returned to St Mark's and found this large dirt lot marked off for a construction project.

and for picking up members with no transport. No one is allowed to park too close to the church, however, waist-high concrete, yellow and black construction barriers daisy-chained around the entire complex prevent it. This is in addition to the four-metre-high wall with a spiked, wrought iron topping and security cameras on each corner (Figures 12 and 13). There are at least three gates into the complex but only one is ever used on the east side. In spring of 2016, a small, new concrete security booth with air conditioning was added on the northeast corner. This is in addition to the security booth built into the complex's wall; the new one, though, is rarely manned. On some occasions, a Kuwaiti police car is parked on the street that runs along the north side of the complex, and security demands that the church can only be open during certain times, not all the time for prayer as churches are in Egypt.³⁴⁸ Such restrictions force the Kuwait-Copt to manage her spirituality outside of the physical spaces that normally supply the charged symbols so necessary for piety. Generally, there is only one guard, a man in his fifties who congenially interrogates anyone he does not know. For the larger services, there may be an additional couple of guards manning the entrance/exit. None of these 'guards' wear uniforms or have any identifying symbols. To my knowledge, one of them, at least, is actually sponsored by the church through some kind of religious visa arrangement. He is not only security but the *hāris* (building manager) for the complex, although what this role entails beyond guarding the gate is unknown; in fact, he was unable to unlock the door to the sanctuary.

³⁴⁸ This is a common complaint among the Copts who want to use the space for prayer and retreat purposes.



Figure 12: St Mark's Exterior 1³⁴⁹



Figure 13: St Mark's Exterior 2³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Marina Matta, *St Mark's Exterior 1*, 2018. Self.

³⁵⁰ Marina Matta, *St Mark's Exterior 2*, 2018. Self.

Upon entering the complex, there is a large, open-air courtyard that measures 1305 square metres. Within this area, there are three rectangular prefabricated ‘trailers’ that are used as meeting rooms and for selling corn, soup, rice, tea, coffee, and bread at cheap prices. Often, on the north side of this courtyard between the two trailers, there are booths and tables set up to sell both religious items such as small paperbacks, cheap reproductions of icons, religious paraphernalia, DVDs, mobile covers, used electronics and so on. Between and after services, this area is crowded and used as a socialising space. Nearer to the exit, after the liturgy, servants offer *qurbān*,³⁵¹ to worshipers. Sometimes *qurbān* is also distributed in baskets inside the sanctuary, but if one misses it there, it is usually available here. However, on Fridays, when the congregants are largely *felāhīn*,³⁵² getting a piece of the bread can be quite physical as they crowd and push their way to the tables.³⁵³ Middle-class Saturdays are much less crowded and typically include more women, so receiving *qurbān* then is not as physical. Not everyone, however, congregates in this courtyard.



Figure 14: Western Courtyard³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ *Qurbān* is the leftover bread that was not chosen as the Holy Eucharist. It is sanctified but not sacramentalised.

³⁵² This is the Egyptian Arabic term for the poor or lower class.

³⁵³ It is interesting to note that after I mentioned this to one of the *archons* of the church, there appeared barriers in the courtyard to direct the flow of people desiring *qurbān*. The queues are now clearly marked men and women, with six lanes for men, two for women— again, reflecting the male/female ratio of the Kuwait-Coptic diaspora.

³⁵⁴ Marina Matta, *Western Courtyard*, 2018. Self.

There is another, smaller courtyard area (about 915 square metres) on the west side of the compound (above). This one is entered *via* a small gate that is always open. There does not seem to be any pattern to who goes where; most people are simply looking for a place to sit, chat, and eat. Whereas the larger courtyard is flanked by the main, north entrance to the nave and narthex, the smaller courtyard leads to the basement Sunday School rooms, offices, the monks' living quarters, and the church store. The store basically sells the same thing as the booth on the other side of the church, but also includes higher price items like framed prints and carpets of favourite saints and Coptic personalities. These typically include Pope Shenouda, Pope Kyrillos, Mother Irini, St George, and 'Abūnā Faltaous. Apparently, one has to be dead before becoming really marketable. Interestingly, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Last Supper* is also well-represented.³⁵⁵ However, according to Coptic theology,³⁵⁶ only bread and wine were actually present at the meal. In the Coptic appropriation, the table is clear of all other food except the elements, and Jesus is holding the bread in his left hand while making the iconographic hand gesture with his right (Figure 15 cf. Figure 16).³⁵⁷

³⁵⁵ Mat Immerzeel quips: 'If quantity were the standard, Leonardo would be the most popular Coptic painter in the world' in Mat Immerzeel, "Coptic Art," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Nelly van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt (Oslo: The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 2004), 284.

³⁵⁶ Or at least Pope Shenouda. For a discussion about Shenouda's reservations regarding Da Vinci's *Last Supper* see Otto Meinardus, "Pope Shenouda III and the Renaissance Art," *Coptic Church Review* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 58. However, I would like to point out that Meinardus misses Jesus' Orthodox hand gesture that Coptic artists often add.

³⁵⁷ One sees a blend of hand gestures in Coptic Orthodox iconography. Sometimes it is the single index finger raised while the middle finger touches the thumb and at other times, the ring finger touches the thumb while the middle and index fingers are raised.



Figure 15: Coptic Reproduction on Carpet of da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, Bookstore, St Mark's



Figure 16: Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*³⁵⁸

Although the shop does not have many books, it does carry other merchandise like rosaries, keychains,³⁵⁹ and small laminated icon reproductions that diasporic Copts can carry with them as material reminders to stay faithful. Of further significance for this study, the store also sells small crowns that are placed on children after baptism, woollen slippers for the liturgy, and stoles and robes for the choir/deacons. They also have a large supply of handkerchief-sized head coverings for women with Jesus, St Philopater, St George, and others silk-screened on them. Stephen Davis, in his analysis of ancient Coptic ritualised dress, suggests that these

³⁵⁸ "Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495-1498)," Wikimedia, 21 May 2017, 17 Jan 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_Vinci_\(1452-1519\)_-_The_Last_Supper_\(1495-1498\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leonardo_da_Vinci_(1452-1519)_-_The_Last_Supper_(1495-1498).jpg).

³⁵⁹ My informant's mother bought me a keychain with 'Abūnā Faltāous on it from this shop. It always gets a smile when shown and, more often than not, a kiss for *baraka* (explained later).

types of worn images served an apotropaic and mimetic purpose (to literally ‘put on Christ’,³⁶⁰).³⁶¹ Perhaps these modern veils serve the same function for the female members of St Mark, consciously or not. Biblically, the admonition for women to cover their heads in worship can be linked to Enochian overtones of malicious, supernatural activity or at least to reverence of angelic beings.³⁶² Thus, the sale of such items indexes a long tradition of ritualised dress and Biblical obedience that further shades Coptic interpretation of Scripture. As for the rest of the merchandise in the store, much of it would not look out of place at a Catholic bookshop.

Moving to the church proper, most people enter the sanctuary from the east entrance. Upon entering either or both the complex and/or church, many of the faithful touch the threshold or door and then kiss their fingers to receive a blessing or *baraka* from the holy place. Nearly everyone who enters the church crosses him/herself the Oriental Orthodox way: forehead to chest, left shoulder to right. Some do this movement in an exaggerated fashion, others quickly and with shorter movements. Some do it multiple times at once in quick succession. The sign of the cross, just like in other apostolic traditions, is used frequently during the service, corporately and individually.

The experience of the interior of St Mark’s is in marked contrast to nineteenth-century accounts of Coptic churches in Egypt:

Upon entering the Coptic church, missionaries were immediately struck by the darkness therein—a darkness that reflected in their eyes, the poor state of Coptic spirituality. They could scarcely fathom the lack of pews in the church, particularly given the length of the services, and mocked the staffs upon which parishioners could lean for support. . . The travellers and

³⁶⁰ Romans 13.14; Galatians 3.27.

³⁶¹ Stephen J. Davis, "Fashioning a Divine Body: Coptic Christology and Ritualized Dress," *Harvard Theological Review* 98, no. 3: 361.

³⁶² See specifically I Cor. 11.10-15. Long, female hair in the ancient world was linked to sexuality, cf. Troy W. Martin, "Paul's Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11: 13- 15: A Testicle Instead of a Head Covering," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 1 (2004).

missionaries consistently reported their dismay with the marked lack of decorum and the irreverence of Coptic congregations.³⁶³

To the contrary, St Mark's is bright, has beautifully carved pews (Figure 17), no one uses a staff, and the level of reverence is startling. These changes in space and



Figure 17: Ornate Pews and Aisle

attitude closely align with the seismic shifts in education among the Coptic hierarchy and laity over the past century. What one experiences now inside the church must be seen, literally, in this light. After coming in through the east door, to one's left is the apse. It should be noted here that Orthodox churches are often designed along similar lines as Moses' Tabernacle. Thus, there are zones of holiness, the most holy being the altar where the Eucharist or *hamal* (the Lamb)³⁶⁴ is prepared. Within the apse, there are three different chancels with three altars all built on a raised platform. This area is the sanctuary or *haikal* in Arabic.³⁶⁵ According to Coptic tradition, the altar must fast for nine hours after mass before it can be used again. Accordingly, the 5:30AM

³⁶³ Sedra, *Mission to Modernity*, 48-9.

³⁶⁴ The bread for the *hamal* is baked on-site in a room called 'Bethlehem'. At St Mark's, this is actually in the basement.

³⁶⁵ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 34. *Haikal* also has Hebraic roots and a similar word was used to designate the sanctuary of Solomon's Temple.

service uses the altar on the far left, which has a scene of Jesus coming out of the tomb, worshiped by two angels behind it. The 8AM service, generally the larger one, uses the main, centre altar that has a large painting of Jesus seated on a throne surrounded by the twenty-four elders of Revelation (Figure 18); each bearded elder is dressed in the same liturgical clothes as the priests, singers, and other attendants. It could also be that these are not the elders of Revelation 5, but, rather, the martyrs of Revelation 7. Such ambiguity in a recreated heavenly representation



Figure 18: Central Altar with Iconostasis³⁶⁶

suggests a blurring of liminality and a breakdown of elder/monk/martyr and heaven/earth. When the centre altar is used, the congregation thus joins in with the ongoing Song of the Lamb.³⁶⁷ Two angels at the top of the scene carry a banner that alludes to the Psalm 24: ‘Open up the doors and let the King of Glory Come In’. The

³⁶⁶ Marina Matta, *Central Altar with Iconostasis*, 2018. Self.

³⁶⁷ Revelation 5.9-13.

entire backdrop of the apse is coloured light blue with wisps of white clouds. At the very top is a large white dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit—the pneumatic presence over all (Figure 19). Coupled with incandescent-like bright yellow light, this gives the worshiper an added sense of heaven. Returning briefly to



Figure 19: Ordination Service

the iconostasis,³⁶⁸ it is made of beautiful brown wood imported from Egypt and hand-carved lattice work with various vines and other designs. It has a large arch that follows the same curve as the arch in the building. Along this arch are the twelve

³⁶⁸ In Orthodox churches, the iconostasis is a large wooden screen with various icons on it.

Apostles³⁶⁹ with Jesus at the top. At the base of the arch, there is the Madonna with Child and Joseph flanking the entrance. There is also a large, thick burgundy and gold curtain that hangs from the iconostasis, closing off the main chancel. The side chancels are screened from view when not in use by two unadorned doors. Above the chancel, stage right, is a piece of carved Arabic calligraphy referencing John 6.56: ‘Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in me and I in him’. A neo-Coptic icon of the Triumphal Entry sits above the inscription (Figure 26). The centre of the iconostasis contains a crucifix with icons of the Apostle John and Mary on either side. Further, the chancel, stage left, has another neo-Coptic icon of Pentecost and an Arabic inscription from John 6.55: ‘For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink’. The COC believes in the Real Presence³⁷⁰—something that comes up again and again in the interviews. The choir (*al-shammāmsa*), made up of cantors and deacons,³⁷¹ typically stands on the stage in front of the iconostasis wearing white robes with red stoles and knotted, golden crosses on the backs. Some of the cantors will use hand cymbals (*al-daff* or *nāqūs*) and a small metal triangle (*muthallath*) for keeping time during the musical parts of the liturgy.³⁷² Other than human voices, these are the only instruments allowed.³⁷³ The officiant, *al-kāhin*,³⁷⁴ wears an embroidered amice or *tailasana*,³⁷⁵ a white mitre, and, if a monk, the traditional monastic head covering (*qalansuwa*).³⁷⁶ The sacristies, however, are off to the stage

³⁶⁹ The Twelve do not include Judas Iscariot, but, based on Acts 1.12-26, depict Mathias instead.

³⁷⁰ This is not quite the same as the Roman Catholic doctrine known as transubstantiation. For the Copt, it is a mystery and further definition is a near sacrilege. They simply believe the wine becomes Christ’s blood and the bread, His flesh.

³⁷¹ Carolyn M. Ramzy, "Performing Coptic Expressive Culture," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle location 3992.

³⁷² Ramzy, "Performing Coptic Expressive Culture," Kindle location 4033.

³⁷³ Other Coptic services outside of the liturgical setting use a variety of modern instruments.

³⁷⁴ Ramzy, "Performing Coptic Expressive Culture," Kindle location 3992.

³⁷⁵ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 36.

³⁷⁶ During the liturgy, however, the *qalansuwa* is white instead of the traditional black one with twelve crosses.

right for men and stage left for women. The distribution of the elements, then, is out of sight as are the rooms that house the vestments. Although the whole floor of the sanctuary is done in white stone, most of the platform is covered in burgundy oriental rugs. Rather haphazardly and randomly placed, the bishop's throne sits facing south on the edge of the stage. It is made of dark wood and has carved, almost life-sized lions as the armrests. There is a picture just above the velvet back of the throne of a sentimental and European Jesus petting a lamb (below). Since Copts assiduously follow their liturgical calendar, paintings or pictures of the Coptic hierarchy and

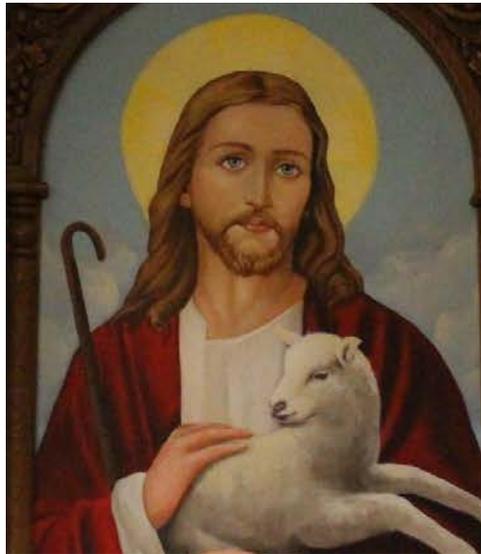


Figure 20: Sentimental Jesus with Lamb (Bishop's Throne)

saints/angels are set up on easels on the stage to commemorate every important date. A candle often accompanies such displays. Typically, too, there are purse-sized burgundy velvet bags that are hung near the stage for offerings and prayer requests.

Moving down the few stairs to the nave, there are six columns of the same, brown wood hand-carved pews with more than twenty rows of pews apiece. The men's side is separated from the women's area by a decorated aisle. On the ground floor alone, there is easily space for more than 1000 congregants or *al-sha'ab*, 'the

people'.³⁷⁷ The nave also has three additional floors on either side as well, with each balcony richly decorated with gold Coptic crosses equally spaced along the edges. However, one interesting feature of the nave area near the sacristies is the reliquary. At St Mark's, both the women and men's side has a 2 metre by 1.5 metre cabinet filled with the relics of saints and martyrs, which reinforce Sorial's persecution ideological enculturation model mentioned earlier. Some of these relics are purportedly of the Apostles, St Stephen the proto-martyr, John the Baptist, the innocents slaughtered by Herod according to Matthew 2.16-18 and other Coptic martyrs. These are wrapped uniformly in the same burgundy velvet and the names are embroidered in gold Arabic stitching. Strategically placed, communicants, then, must walk past these relics every time they receive the elements of the Eucharist. One can also see small slips of paper with prayer requests scribbled on them slipped inside the glass casing near to the relics. Oddly enough, the Coptic martyrs get the most requests; the Apostles in the top right of the cabinet are virtually paper-free. One saint in particular, St Marina, receives lots of requests from couples wanting to have children (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Reliquary with Requests to St Marina

³⁷⁷ I was told by an older man sitting by the door that the capacity of the church was 7000 if you included the four floors and overflow spaces with televisions.

Further, along the lower walls of the nave, there are various icons of saints and angels. These run the length of the nave and are also along the back wall, roughly at the same height as the parishioners. This positioning gives the congregant a sense that the saints are worshiping with her. Underneath each of the side icons are boxes designated for specific financial needs that include: widows, the poor ('the brothers of Jesus'), the church's electric bill, and people with Hepatitis C in particular. Apparently, poor hygiene among Egyptians results in widespread infections. Unique to the diaspora context, there is a box for money relating to the repatriation of bodily remains. While there are cemeteries in Kuwait for non-Kuwaitis, many prefer to be buried back in Egypt. The back area also has a box for tithes (a tenth of one's income) and prayer requests and a large painting of Jesus keeping Peter from sinking into the sea due to lack of faith. Interestingly, the relics of St Mark (Figure 22) are also in the back along the wall³⁷⁸ next to the relics of a child martyr.



Figure 22: Relic of St Mark

On either side of the west wall, there are doors that open to the foyer and exits to the baptistery, a font that is outside the sanctuary proper. During services, there are glasses of water set up in these foyers since communicants have to fast until after

³⁷⁸ I was told that these very important relics were in the back so both men and women could access them inconspicuously.

communion.³⁷⁹ Near the baptistery are also elevators to the other floors that make up the church building and lead to the room for nursing mothers and unruly children that overlooks the whole sanctuary. However, before leaving the nave, it is important to note that the Copts have adopted PowerPoint as a means of engaging worshipers in the liturgy. These slide presentations, and, sometimes up-close videos of the altars, are displayed on large TV and projection screens at various points around the nave.³⁸⁰ These PowerPoints have blue font for when the Coptic has been transliterated into Arabic and black writing is the script for the priests, choir, and congregants (with accompanying directions). Arabic writing can be lengthened at various points in the script to show one is supposed to lengthen the chant. Clearly cognizant of the bulk of the audience, nothing is in English and various generic icons pulled off the Web accompany the text in these slides.

On other floors, there are various rooms and smaller chapels used for Sunday School and the meetings of guild-like associations such as St Luke's. St Luke's is a meeting intended for anyone in the medical profession. It typically meets every Friday and provides networking opportunities as well as lifeworld-specific teaching and spiritual instruction. The chapel where St Luke's meets is cosier than the large sanctuary downstairs, has a wooden iconostasis³⁸¹, but is not regularly used for mass. Another chapel nearby is actually a copy of the typical chapel that is part of a Coptic monastery in Egypt (Figure 23). The latter only has one carving of St George, but the

³⁷⁹ Coptic belief also stipulates that the communicant's mouth is holy for a period of time after receiving communion, so spitting is not allowed.

³⁸⁰ The up-close drama of the altars is often filmed and posted on YouTube, much to the chagrin of some. Monica René bemoans: 'YouTube, a favorite Coptic media platform, contains a staggering amount of video footage about everything Coptic, ranging from mere trivia to the most sacred moments of the Holy Liturgy, accessible to everyone with a computer and exposed to mocking and inappropriate comments' in Monica René, "Contemporary Coptic Art," in *Coptic Civilization: Two Thousand Years of Christianity in Egypt*, ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 282.

³⁸¹ From what I was told, all of the wood is either teak or oak. It was imported from Europe or the US to Egypt where it was carved and assembled and exported to Kuwait.

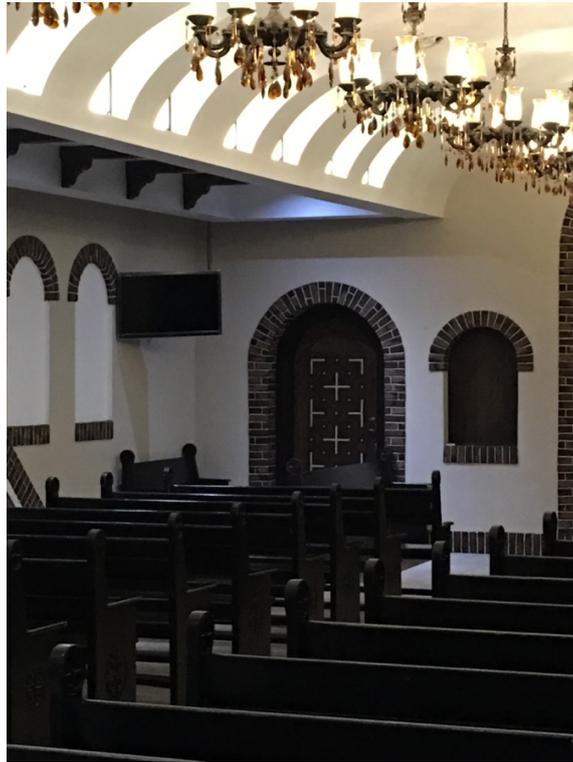


Figure 23: Monastic Chapel Facsimile

former has a picture of the Archangel Michael. Oddly enough, juxtaposed to the majestic Archangel is an overwrought reproduction of a scene where an angel guards two young children crossing a dangerous bridge over a raging river (Figure 24). It is



Figure 24: Sentimental Western Art

odd because it is a reproduction, not of a Coptic or even Eastern Orthodox icon, but a commercial, evangelical pietistic mass production. It reflects a rather uncritical adoption of non-Orthodox forms to promote spirituality. It also represents a type of eclecticism especially prevalent in the diaspora and reminiscent of Guirgis' original project to incorporate other forms. Coptic piety is a piety with a strong liturgical centre but is also inclusive of other forms in relation to the individual and, in its art, the congregation.³⁸²

3.6.4 Sunday School

One of the key areas in which Copts provide service to the church that subsequently keeps them engaged in the pious community is Sunday School. Sunday School, a direct import from evangelical missionaries in the early twentieth century, has wide participation. Attendance is registered, birthdays celebrated, and members recreate outside of the church together. For St Luke's, the programmes are planned out way in advance, approved by the priest, and themed for the demographic. Women as well as men take turns in speaking/teaching, focusing on topics such as marriage, raising children, and being good employees/employers. Many times, the speaker will draw from Pope Shenouda and 'Abūnā Tados Malaty's³⁸³ extensive writings to underscore their points. The Bible also features prominently in these teachings and in the teaching of other Sunday School classes. PowerPoint and projection systems are available in these areas as well and are used to display lyrics for more contemporary hymns/songs and the script for praying through a section of the Coptic *Agpeya*.³⁸⁴

³⁸² More discussion on art below

³⁸³ Malaty currently serves the Coptic community in Spotswood, New Jersey, USA. Both Shenouda and Malaty are conservative in their approaches to Coptic Orthodoxy.

³⁸⁴ This is the Coptic equivalent of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Since there is no /p/ in Arabic, the term is pronounced as /ajbeya/.

Other Sunday School groups are similarly programmed and target specific audiences. For this study, St Luke's and an English-speaking branch of the youth programme for Kuwait-Copts³⁸⁵ are the most significant since my interviewees were drawn from this population. There is also a Sunday School for learning-disabled children that equips them to be more self-sufficient. Other classes feature the teaching of the Coptic language, drama, and choral singing. Computer classes and English are also taught at the church. Like many churches, St Mark's tries to engage the interests and needs of its very wide and diverse congregation, a diversity complicated by the fact St Mark's is the only Coptic Orthodox Church in town.

3.6.5 Religious Art

Although I have already briefly mentioned some of the artwork that is featured at St Mark's, it is important for the aims of this study to describe the elements that contribute to the Kuwait-Coptic imaginary and thus their lifeworld. The imagery experienced at every service in St Mark's undoubtedly affects this imaginary and constitutes a shared focus for the community, a focus that builds into social solidarity and strengthens identity through what David Morgan has called the 'sacred gaze'. The sacred gaze 'designates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance'.³⁸⁶ Spiritual significance for the Copts translates into theologising, which, in turn, colours behaviour. As Stark argues: 'Images of Gods as conscious, powerful, morally

³⁸⁵ Kuwait-Copts are Copts raised in Kuwait, attend(ed) English/American schools and are more comfortable with English than Arabic.

³⁸⁶ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2005), 3.

concerned beings function to sustain the moral order'.³⁸⁷ Stark, here, is mainly speaking conceptually, but it directly applies to iconography; the ways Jesus is portrayed at St Mark's significantly shapes the spirituality of Kuwait-Copts. As seen in Figures 20 and 27 (below), Jesus is warm, welcoming, and yet watching from above. This composite of Christ as Judge and Saviour is reflected in the interview data as a tension between guilt and desire.

Virtually all of the art at St Mark's, with the exception of two mosaics, is the work of two Coptic artists based in Egypt: Ayman William and Michael Jacob. All of the iconography on the iconostasis is done in the Neo-Coptic style, founded by a married layman, Isaac Fanous,³⁸⁸ back in the 1950s. Fanous attempted to combine



Figures 25 and 26: Neo-Coptic Iconography of the Last Supper and Triumphal Entry

'ancient Egyptian and Coptic conventions with contemporary ideas'.³⁸⁹ In this style,

[t]he most common conventions. . . are the significance of the full-face, the use of outlines to depict the features, and the non-realistic proportions of the facial features. Light radiates from Christ, the Holy Virgin Mary and the saints who appear in harmony with the other elements of the scene and the background.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 484.

³⁸⁸ His originals adorn the home church of many of the diasporic elite, St George, Sporting.

³⁸⁹ Gawdat Gabra, "Coptic Art: A Multifaceted Artistic Heritage," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), Kindle location 6276.

³⁹⁰ Gabra, "Coptic Art," Kindle location 6276.

It is more or less a simplification of Byzantine Orthodox iconography. The icons along the lower walls of the nave are reflective of older iconography and are virtually indistinguishable from Eastern Orthodox styles. Remarkably, neither of these styles makes up the majority of the artwork at St Mark's.

Rather, along the dome, the backside of the apse, and on the balcony spaces, the art is remarkably realistically and Western-influenced. Jesus, everywhere other than the iconostasis, is Caucasian, with light brown hair, European features, and blue eyes.³⁹¹ In a reversal of Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, Jesus wears a blue robe and red

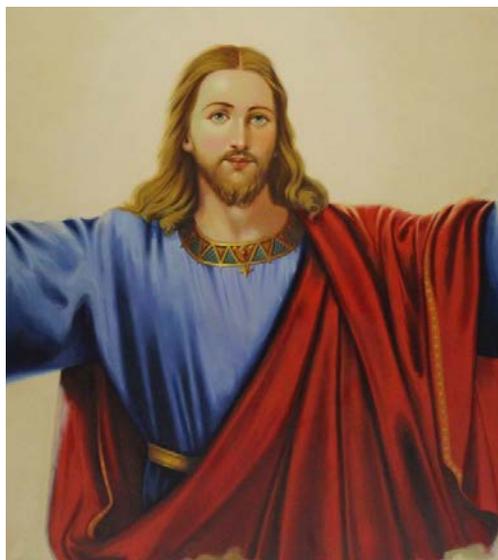


Figure 27: Jesus Pantocrator (Dome)

tunic instead of a red robe and blue tunic; his hair is essentially the same. His face is reminiscent of Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* (Figure 28), perhaps the most widely circulated image of Jesus in modern times. Biblical scenes and characters like the Garden of Eden, the Flood, Moses, and various stories from the life of Christ all have this illustrated Bible appearance,³⁹² a mixture of Sallman and Da Vinci, and cover the ceiling around the nave. Mat Immerzeel notes that 'the images are characterized by

³⁹¹ Or as David Morgan once quipped: 'a Swede with a suntan'.

³⁹² Cf. with the illustrations of Arthur S. Maxwell, *The Bible Story*, 10 vols. (Nashville: The Southern Publishing Association, 1955).

soft colors, as well as sweet, realistic faces and a preference for the dramatic'.³⁹³

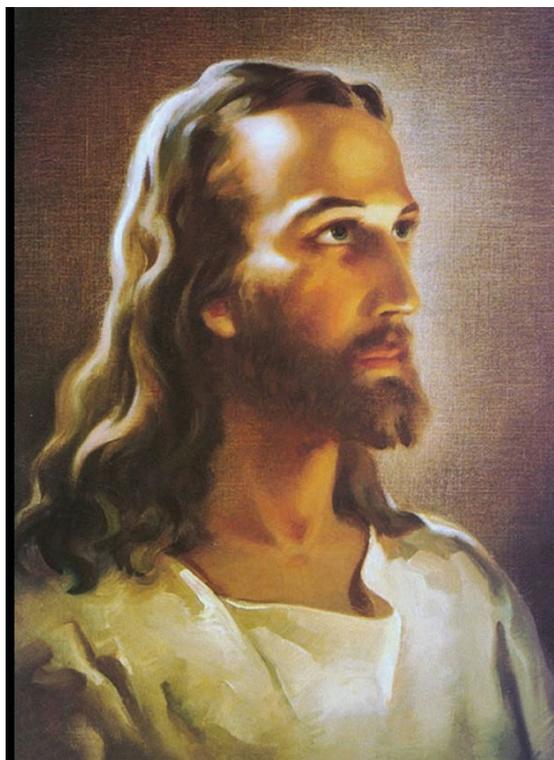


Figure 28: Sallman's *Head of Christ*³⁹⁴

Further, unlike iconographers who do the work as service to God and rarely sign it, the art in St Mark's is autographed by the artists in large letters.³⁹⁵ Both the reproduction of the Western-style of art and the signing of the work indicate a commodification of piety, perhaps even advertising. That this art was commissioned by the middle class who steered the church building committee is especially telling in that even their artistic sensibilities have been shaped by their ecumenical contact, particularly Western evangelicalism. Further, the downplaying of traditional and neo-Coptic styles along with the free embrace of the Western style signals an easiness with eclectic appropriation, a mark of globalisation. And yet Egypt still looms large. In one scene, the Holy Family travels along a road with date palms and the pyramids

³⁹³ Immerzeel, "Coptic Art," 283-4.

³⁹⁴ Warner Sallman, *Head of Christ*, 1941, 1968. © Warner Press, Inc. Used with Permission.

³⁹⁵ Both artists also have Facebook pages and websites.

in the backdrop (Figure 29). In a life-size piece near the back entrance, St Mark greets the worshiper (Figure 30). A lion sits at his feet and the backdrop depicts the ancient Alexandrian seashore and famous lighthouse. The story of St Mark bringing Christianity to Egypt *via* Alexandria is well-known to the Coptic community and through such scenes, home is invoked.



Figure 29: The Holy Family in Egypt



Figure 30: St Mark the Apostle in Alexandria

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the lifeworld of the typical diasporic elite Copt living in Kuwait in the twenty-first century; it is a ‘thick description’ in a novelistic mode with interpretation and commentary laid down alongside detailed observations. This lifeworld, as I have described it, can be summarised by the term restrictive clientelism, with all of its religious, economic, and socio-political overtones. Further, I have focused specifically on those dimensions of the lifeworld that are the most observable, tend towards extrapolation, and intersect readily with the development of the pneumatic pieties. A thicker description would include more about Coptic attitudes towards Islamic hegemony. I have briefly mentioned the *Ramaḍān* and *ḥalāl* meat issues, but more could be said about economic disempowerment through the dominant Islamic banking system/ideology. Furthermore, I could have explored more about the home life of Coptic Orthodox Christians. However, as I have only been invited into two homes, analysis and description is very limited. Lastly, I could have included more on the working environment of the diasporic elite. Here, too, the sheer differences between careers would make generalisations forced and difficult. And, in my interviews, the workplace is not regarded as a primary domain for spiritual development or even as a site for overt *Christian* identity politics or evangelism—especially given the restrictive context of clientelism. On the contrary, it seems as though Copts have taken 1 Thessalonians 4.10b-12 at face value: ‘But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing’. And, in one instance, an interlocutor quoted Jesus’ command to ‘let your

light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'.³⁹⁶ Thus, being a Christian in the workplace translates to good ethical behaviour, fairness, and so forth. Inasmuch as obedience to the Bible within the workplace context reinforces lived spirituality, it contributes to the growth of the pneumatic pieties. Therefore, the latter part of this chapter has focused on those dimensions that create space for the direct stimulation of pietistic sensibilities and socialisation, for example, one's car in traffic, *kafāla*, the church, and the surrounding religious milieu. These elements of the lifeworld are the most salient, relevant, and accessible. They also are directly linked to the interview questions and are therefore supportable by the data gathered through my fieldwork.

Having established the lifeworld of the Kuwait-Copt, the next chapter features the details of the fieldwork, the interview data, and issues of reflexivity. Within the broader methodology of this study, Chapter Four granulates and categorises the data for further rescription in Chapter Five, while proleptically highlighting the central concerns of Chapters Five and Six.

³⁹⁶ Matthew 5.16

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CASE STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a close look at the channels of transmission through which the pneumatic pieties are learned and absorbed by the case study participants. Then, I look closely at the issue of reflexivity and what it means for this case study. Next, this chapter focuses on the grounded theory approach that includes: fieldwork, participant demographics, data collection, and analysis processes. This section culminates with the theory of pneumatic piety. The chapter also includes a brief but necessary section on the psychology of lay mysticism in order to frame the interview data that make up the heart of this chapter. Subsequently, the interview data are categorised under their respective pneumatic piety, here: the Eucharistic liturgy, prayer, fasting, experiences of the *charismata*, and the quest for *baraka*. Alongside the data, I offer some observations and analyses framed by the study's emergent themes and categories and in light of flow states and pneumatic realism— at points foreshadowing engagement with the IR and DMT model of the next chapters.

4.2 Channels of Transmission

As indicated in the previous chapter on the lifeworld, nothing happens without a context. That context is the 'thick description'. Yet, despite its thickness, it is necessary to tie the contextual elements to the pneumatic pieties more explicitly. The pneumatic pieties are not learned or practiced in a vacuum; they are absorbed and enacted in *social* contexts. Chapter Five will explore the socialisation process more thoroughly, but for now it is sufficient to quickly outline the basic channels of transmission indicated by the respondents themselves.

The ‘home’ church in Egypt remains a strong determinant in shaping the Kuwait-Copt’s piety. For many, this church is St George’s in Sporting, Alexandria. It is associated with both *ʿAbūnā* Tadros Malaty and *ʿAbūnā* Bishoy Kamel.³⁹⁷



Figure 31: Author with *ʿAbūnā* Bishoy Kamel’s Widow at his Tomb in Sporting³⁹⁸

It also has its own publishing house and sells many of *ʿAbūnā* Matta Al-Meskīn’s books. Although considered ‘very spiritual’, his work, as noted previously, is banned from being taught in any official capacity.³⁹⁹ The ‘home’ church is frequently the one in which respondents preferred to have their children baptised, sometimes making the trip just for that purpose. When members of the diasporic elite travel to Egypt to avoid the oppressively hot and slow summers of Kuwait, they attend their home churches. Some continue to confess to their priests in Egypt given the busyness of the priests in Kuwait. It was also indicated by one respondent that some churches in Egypt are better than others, that is, their servants⁴⁰⁰ are better trained and more spiritual. Such

³⁹⁷ Kamel’s role and connexions to St Mark’s, Kuwait, will be discussed in Chapter Six.

³⁹⁸ Photo credit: Josh Guzman

³⁹⁹ Mary, interview by Ben Crace, 16 May 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁴⁰⁰ Not servants in the sense of slaves but those who minister or offer service at the church.

rivalries often fall along the lines of cities and/or regions of Egypt, Upper versus Lower Egypt.

Another significant channel are monasteries. Lois Farag notes: ‘. . . [M]onastic spirituality has influenced lay spirituality. . . including fasting, the centrality of the Scripture, the use of the monastic prayers of the hours (*Agpeya*) as the daily prayers of the faithful. . .’⁴⁰¹ On their regular trips ‘home’, Kuwait-Copts indicate that they enjoy traveling and spending the day at monasteries near their home cities. Some maintain relationships with monks who once served in Kuwait. Others keep contact with a monk as a confessor,⁴⁰² and still others visit as a means for *baraka*. Significantly, newly appointed priests from the Kuwait congregation must spend forty days of training at a monastery in Egypt before they can begin their service in Kuwait. Monasteries frequently house sacred relics and attract visitors for this purpose as well.⁴⁰³ Together, the home church and monastic visits refresh the Kuwait-Copt’s sense of connectedness to Egyptian spirituality. Additionally, monastic distinctiveness is maintained through geography and an overriding sense by the laity that such a commitment is a ‘big step’ and requires ‘strong beliefs’.⁴⁰⁴ Monks also are given funeral rites upon entrance to the monastic life, and new priests are given new names, both signifying the discontinuity with lay life.

The mystical aura of Egypt that allows for the production and practice of the pneumatic pieties is also brought near through clerical visits, hagioptics (films about saints), and other material means. Almost a year after the November 2015 passing of Archbishop Abraham of Jerusalem, the newly elected archbishop came to Kuwait and

⁴⁰¹ Lois M. Farag, "Monasticism: Living Scripture and Theological Orthodoxy," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle locations 3171-84.

⁴⁰² cf. Farag, "Monasticism," Kindle location 3184.

⁴⁰³ For more on the inner workings of Coptic monasticism, see Gruber, *Sacrifice in the Desert*.

⁴⁰⁴ Kristina, interview by Ben Crace, 29 Jan 2017, Salmiya, Kuwait.

appointed various deacons, cantors, and priests. These clerical visits occur with a fair amount of regularity. In October of 2016, a famed exorcist visited the church and cast a demon from a man. Such occurrences, rare compared to Egypt, coupled with the frequent hierarchical visits reinforces how St Mark's is a *dependent* extension of the ecclesiastical apparatus of the *Egyptian COC*.⁴⁰⁵ Such wonderworkers' stories, past and present, are widely disseminated through popular hagioptics, icons,⁴⁰⁶ and recordings. YouTube is a popular site for this dissemination as are cheaply purchased DVDs. One interlocutor recalled how she grew up watching these films as part of her family's post-mass ritual. Other respondents indicated how they watch/listen to sermons during their commutes. Finally, as previously noted, a large percentage of the church itself was imported from Egypt: the carved wooden pews, the relics, and other furnishings. The overall effect is to separate the worshiper from the Kuwaiti context.⁴⁰⁷ Significantly, one chapel off of the nave is a precise reproduction of an Egyptian monastic chapel, even down to the carving on its doors.

One of the primary means of transmission of the pneumatic pieties from generation to generation or population to population is Sunday School. Sunday School begins at preschool and continues through secondary school. Graduates from the Sunday School programme (post-secondary school) are then expected to become, after some training and observation, part of the teaching rotation—teaching the material they once learned as children retrenches the tradition. Classes are taught in both English and Arabic, although the English Sunday School classes are fairly new

⁴⁰⁵ Aside from the exorcism that coincided with the exorcist's visit, there has not been, as I have been able to determine, an exorcism by a Kuwait-Copt priest for nearly 20 years.

⁴⁰⁶ Copts, speaking in English, will often use the word 'picture' for icon.

⁴⁰⁷ How effectively St Mark's does this is a matter of debate. Some complained of the gaudy art and the excessive ornamentation of the gypsum carvings and chandeliers, components that would fit well in a Gulf Arab's living room not an Egyptian Coptic church. I have already written extensively about the iconography of St Mark's in the previous chapter.

and still on probation for not being solely in Arabic.⁴⁰⁸ The curricula for several of the classes were written by Pope Shenouda and/or Pope Tawadros. Some respondents who were also Sunday School teachers, admitted to ‘hodgepodging’ the material from Google searches along with various other online Bible study tools. One favourite site is maintained by St Takla’s Coptic Orthodox Church in Alexandria. Interestingly, the English Sunday School uses non-Orthodox, Western Christian pop music to encourage engagement.⁴⁰⁹ With about 150 students, the English Sunday School/Youth Group is the brainchild of ʾAbūnā Mīnā,⁴¹⁰ who presciently saw that children of the diasporic elite who attended English schools needed a class of their own in order to avoid alienating the next generation of St Mark congregants. One interlocutor regretfully recounted how she had felt isolated and disconnected because so many of the other children attended Arabic schools and were less comfortable with things she took for granted like girls and boys being taught together. This alienation led her to drop out of church life for a period of time. Nonetheless, with the development of the English Sunday School, she is now active again and teaching children that are in her previous situation. Kristina, too, recounted how she felt disconnected from the children in the Arabic Sunday Schools and did not want to go that often. On the contrary, the English Sunday School made things more understandable and enjoyable, so she went more frequently. For thorough socialisation and value transmission to take place, frequency of attendance and intelligibility are prerequisite; enjoyment significantly accompanies both as well.

In addition to Sunday School, which only extends to year twelve, there are conferences for students planning on moving back to Egypt to study as well as adult

⁴⁰⁸ Irini, interview by Ben Crace, 12 Feb 2016, Ḥawālī, Kuwait.

⁴⁰⁹ For example, Chris Tomlin

⁴¹⁰ Not his real name

professional associations. The youth conferences often have guest speakers.

Recently, this included a trained psychologist. The point of these conferences is to encourage the ones going back to Egypt that they are not alone. Another conference emphasized love since that 'is the basis of Christianity'.⁴¹¹ Although not all of my participants liked the idea of church-goers dividing up along professional lines, there are weekly meetings for those in the medical and engineering fields. These meetings are a combination of networking and contextualised/topical teachings.

The family is another other significant channel of transmission. The family in Egypt keeps ties to the Egyptian church strong while family in Kuwait provides the quotidian context for pietistic socialisation. Some respondents indicated that they pray together every day as a family, do Bible studies together, fast together, and attend mass together. As Egyptian culture in general is socially and family-oriented anyway, this is no real surprise but helps underscore the familial nature of the church as well where priests are called 'father'. One focus group was a family and it got rather awkward for one of the daughters to answer questions regarding her spiritual practices when they did not align with her father's vision for her life. Spirituality is also transmitted through family narratives. Several respondents could not or would not offer stories of their own spiritual growth and development but related incidents from their parents or other family members. The stories often involve a particular saint with whom one has a personal connection. Generally, these narratives follow the form of need, request to the personage, response, recognition. These responses are more often than not circumstantial, but in some cases, can be personal visitations from the saint him/herself. One respondent recalled a time when her father needed to get to one part of Kuwait City and did not have the means. He prayed for help to

⁴¹¹ Maysoon, interview by Ben Crace, 30 Jan 2017, Salmiya, Kuwait.

Pope Kyrillos and a man wearing clothes from Kyrillos' time appeared, took him by the hand, and instantaneously the father was at his destination—several kilometres from where he had been.⁴¹² This supernatural relocation account has now become family lore and extends the zone of miraculous possibility to Kuwait. The power of such first-hand, authoritarian narratives to catalyse piety cannot be underestimated.⁴¹³ In the pool of respondents for this study, several told of how their parents or close family members were present for the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Zeitoun, Egypt (1968-70). Given, too, the surrounding milieu of belief in the region that the ability to connect to the spiritual is genetic, such narratives help nurse the hope in the next generation of seeing similar miracles. Some respondents, however, see such miracles as unnecessary in Kuwait because of the safety and comfortability of life there. When told, such stories made the speakers come alive in the interviews.

During my fieldwork, there were significant events in the life of St Mark's that ratified the above described channels and opened new possibilities. First of all, as I just mentioned, the Archbishop of the COC responsible for the Gulf region passed away. His passing was mourned for several weeks, and his see in Jerusalem was left vacant. Interestingly, Pope Tawadros travelled to Jerusalem for the funeral. The late Pope Shenouda had previously placed a ban on travel to Israel during his pontificate to show Egyptian solidarity; Tawadros' visit signalled the possibility of the ban being lifted. During this time, too, there was talk that one of the monk-priests of St Mark's was being considered for the Archbishopric. It turns out that this was mainly unsubstantiated rumour. Germane for this discussion is that during this time there was an attentiveness to and emotional connection with the clerical hierarchy of the

⁴¹² Iris, interview by Ben Crace, 08 Nov 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁴¹³ It would be interesting to explore the relationship between second generation piety and the preponderance of supernatural family narratives.

COC that transcended the normal weekly activities. Another high point came a few months later when the new Archbishop arrived in Kuwait and ordained three new priests from out of the congregation. This was the first priestly ordination service ever held in the entire history of the COC in Kuwait. Pope Tawadros' 2017 visit has already been noted.⁴¹⁴ Altogether, these events solidified the congregation's perception that the new Archbishop in Jerusalem and the papal office in Cairo had not forgotten them and considered them to be an authentic branch of the Egyptian COC. Furthermore, since, according to my knowledge, Kuwait is the only country in the Gulf to have had a local ordination ceremony, this sets St Mark's even higher. Therefore, the 'changing of the guard' of the Archbishops, his subsequent visit and ordination of priests from the congregation tie St Mark's into the ages' old traditions of clerical turnover and expansion through official sacerdotal means.

Drama, too, is used at St Mark's as a channel of transmission. Seeing one performance complicated my interpretation of Coptic spirituality and forced me to re-evaluate some initial conclusions. For the first time, I went to the basement of St Mark's to a large auditorium that could seat hundreds of people. From what I could tell, it was directly underneath the sanctuary. The room had a stage with a curtain and the walls were uncharacteristically free from any religious imagery. Instead of the hand-carved wooden pews, there were battered, red-cushioned chairs. The production included cameras, side screens for better viewing, and a spotlight. Tickets were required and concessions were available. The play itself was entitled *You Are Inexcusable*, taken from Romans 1.20.⁴¹⁵ Briefly, it was about a group of six people

⁴¹⁴ See Chapter Three and Teresa Shenouda Nevine Gadallah, Injy Ghali, "Pope Tawadros Consecrates St Mark's in Kuwait," Watani, 19 Sept 2017, 19 Sept 2017, <http://en.wataninet.com/coptic-affairs-coptic-affairs/coptic-affairs/pope-tawadros-consecrates-st-marks-in-kuwait/19926/>.

⁴¹⁵ 'For since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse' (NKJV).

who died and were taken to a holding place in the afterlife. While there, they negotiated with Death to be allowed an additional ten years on the earth to make the necessary changes to enter heaven.⁴¹⁶ All six were allowed a second chance, but regardless of their prior professions, they were placed in different positions within the same company the second time around. The play then moved to the end of the ten years when each of the characters realised that time had passed very quickly, and they had not really made any of the necessary changes; in fact, some of them were morally worse than they were before their first deaths. At various points, a poor person or someone who lost his/her job approached each of the main characters and asked for help.⁴¹⁷ All the characters froze, contemplating the requests, while another cast member clothed in white, Coptic liturgical dress approximating an angel pleaded with them to change and help. Only two out of the six actually did anything; the other four ignored the angel and the needy person to pursue revenge or greed. The play ended with the two who obeyed the admonishment to act mercifully on the stage looking at the beatific vision while the other four, under a red light, stared off in despair in the fear of hell. Interestingly, aside from some Bible passages that were quoted and the dress of the angel, there was nothing overtly Coptic evident. The 'saved' were allowed entrance to heaven based on acts of mercy and the damned were sent to hell based on their selfishness and inflexibility to change. Tellingly, the play highlighted the need to change one's heart, not just one's participation in the church's traditions of prayer, mass, fasting, and other 'spiritual' activities.⁴¹⁸ One also got the sense that

⁴¹⁶ I have not come across anything in Coptic theology similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory; however, Orthodox theology does have levels or 'weigh stations' in the afterlife. These were not represented in the play.

⁴¹⁷ It was not clear to me whether these supplicants were Muslim or Christian.

⁴¹⁸ My conclusion that the heart is the focus for the Copts and not merely the upkeep of a tradition was later ratified by the Pope himself. During his consecration of St Mark's altars, he remarked that people need to consecrate their hearts: 'Each one of us has an altar, but is that altar, the heart, dedicated to God? This can only be achieved through prayer, Bible reading, and deeds of mercy' in Nevine Gadallah, "Pope Tawadros Consecrates St Mark's in Kuwait".

God supplies plenty of opportunities to do good so hell is really one's own fault; you are without excuse. In the diasporic context, a play produced by and acted out by the diasporic elite that exemplifies one's religious duty to lower socio-economic classes sends a very clear message: use your Gulf wealth and prestige to help others or go to hell.⁴¹⁹

This play helpfully locates good works towards others front and centre in the Coptic programme of salvation. They form part of the synergy of salvation and make up what Kyrillos sees as the main thrust of Coptic Orthodoxy: 'I think this one message, if our Coptic church has been able to live one commandment [love], this would be it.'⁴²⁰ In as much as the pneumatic pieties enable and empower love, they should be sought after and practiced. But they should not be enacted simply as ends in themselves—contrary to how some may perceive the monastic existence, that is, people who isolate themselves merely to work on their own private spirituality. In words reminiscent of Sorial's Christocentric model, Kyrillos argues:

The real challenge is being a good witness to Christ in the world. . . A lot of people think I go to church on Sunday and I take holy communion, and that's it, I'm done. Actually, you're getting Christ in you, the power to go out and face the world. And this is where a lot of us fail, honestly, we kind of miss the point. It's not just about me and my own personal spirituality. It's the light of Christ in me that I'm supposed to show the world.⁴²¹

This evangelistic thrust through the good works of the laity inverts the perception of the Coptic hierarchy as a pyramidal structure where the laity supports the clergy; quite the opposite, the hierarchy exists to support lay engagement with the world.

Monastics, as Mark Gruber notes, are still part of the same church, not merely

⁴¹⁹ Tellingly, one of the characters who actually changes is a doctor. Unsurprisingly, the lady playing the doctor who ends up in heaven is married to a doctor in real life.

⁴²⁰ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁴²¹ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

individuals looking out for number one.⁴²² Thus, this play underscored (figuratively and literally since it was held underneath the sanctuary) the centrality of good works towards others as part and parcel of an altruistically-oriented, practical spirituality. It is therefore difficult to fully appreciate the pneumatic pieties without this added layer of meaningful context. Otherwise, one could get the (wrong) impression from the interview data that the participants are mainly worried about their own spiritual condition.

4.3 Reflexivity

According to Swinton and Mowat, '[R]eflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings'.⁴²³ This process involved monitoring, responding, and developing a sensitivity to a number of issues.

One way I monitored reflexive awareness is through the fourth column of my field notes and by re-listening to the interviews. This fourth column, "Subjective State/Pneumatic Awareness" required that I write down my own judgments and emotions alongside three other columns: direct observations, inferences, and theories.⁴²⁴ Reading Malinowski's journals,⁴²⁵ done in a similar fashion, helped me to see the benefits and perils of this practice. Re-listening/transcribing interviews forced me to hear how I engaged with my respondents: what worked to help set them at ease,

⁴²² Mark Gruber, "The Monastery as the Nexus of Coptic Cosmology," in *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Pieterella van Doorn-Harder and Kari Vogt (Oslo: Novus forlag : Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning, 1997).

⁴²³ John and Harriet Mowat Swinton, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2016), Kindle location 1069.

⁴²⁴ The four column field note approach was taken from Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 399.

⁴²⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, "The Diary of an Anthropologist," in *Field Research: A Sourcebook and Field Manual*, ed. Robert Burgess, Contemporary Social Research (London, UK: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1982).

what was offensive, what shut down the dialogue, and what affected the interview in unhelpful ways.

Dialogue also afforded me the opportunity to monitor my contribution to the research process. Informal dialogues with other PhD candidates, off-the-cuff conversations with Kuwait-Copts and Kuwaitis, and my monthly supervisions consistently pushed me to consider my role as a researcher in a restrictive context. At various times, this engendered anxiety, a sense of inadequacy, and even anger as I had to confront strongly-held assumptions and prejudices.

Responding to my contribution to the research process meant apologising in some cases for presuming and assuming too much. I often did not actually understand many things I thought I had and realised that trying to project one's outside interpretations onto others makes for very awkward situations. These experiences during this process helped create the third essential element of reflexivity: sensitivity.

There are a constellation of issues surrounding my engagement as a researcher with the Kuwait-Copt community. First of all, as a white, American, male, academic interviewer, I was in a position of privilege and power over my respondents. In addition to my identity, many of the interviews were done in my office. In effect, I had 'home field advantage' that contributed to the types and quality of responses I received. In qualitative research, the fear of one's respondents simply telling you what they thought you wanted to hear is an ever-present possibility—one I tried to mitigate by not depending solely on interview data for my interpretations and by being as disarming and welcoming as I could. I was also painfully aware at times of the gulf that separated my privileged position as a Western Christian and my

interviewees' lesser status in the client system.⁴²⁶ Interviewing people who have faced and continue to face religious pressure and persecution—when I myself have experienced nothing like it—required a level of genuine listening that was new to me. Another challenge as a qualitative researcher of an oft-persecuted religious minority is not only 'getting their story right' but presuming to speak on their behalf. None of the Kuwait-Copts asked me to tell their story. None of them appointed me as their spokesperson to Western academia. I have attempted to handle their data in a respectful yet critical way, but by no means do I pretend to speak for the subaltern or as one.⁴²⁷ I speak from my own, limited situated-ness and American Christian background. But, perhaps the thing in the forefront of my mind as I engage in critical self-reflection is the impact of my study. What kind of complications could it cause for the Kuwait-Copt community if widely disseminated? I have attempted to blunt this concern by anonymising names, keeping the data secure, and maintaining the highest ethical protocols as delineated by the university. Still, the concern lingers—as it should.

On a deeper epistemological level, reflexivity recognises that the interview itself involves co-creation of a narrative. I had to abandon earlier conceptions of 'mining' my interviewees, as if it were a simple information transaction from one mind to another. On the contrary, embracing a constructivist view, to some degree, of 'truth' allowed me to see that my questioning, posture, identity, location *as well as my interlocutor's* all contributed to the 'product'. Influence and issues of power were not only one-sided; during various interviews, *I was the one* who felt intimidated,

⁴²⁶ I am aware, too, that this very term is my own construction and may or may not accurately reflect any given Kuwait-Copt's own understanding of her situation in Kuwait.

⁴²⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Laura and Patrick Williams Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

vulnerable, and anxious about continuing. This was due to several reasons. Some of my respondents projected a deep confidence in their answers (often theological) that was unsettling in its implications for someone outside the tradition. Sometimes I was told how wrong I was on a point I was sure was right. In some of the earlier interviews, things shifted towards a pastoral/counselling mode with me as the counsellor. I could not simply listen at that point in my research career to another's struggle without offering advice. Self-reflexivity helped me to recognise these things to obtain better data while reserving the advice-giving for when the recorder was not running.

4.4 Case Study Design and the Grounded Theory Approach

The overarching design for my case study was sourced from Robert Yin's *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.⁴²⁸ Part of this single case study design entailed triangulating data from site visits, interviews, and other sources.⁴²⁹ This fieldwork included numerous site visits to St Mark's as well as trips to the churches and monasteries in and around Alexandria at the end of my data collection. Although this is a single case study and not a comparative study, visiting the 'mother' church of most of my interviewees and seeing living Coptic monasticism up close gave me a deeper sense of context and helped add an existential component to much of the interview data. It also allowed me to give something back to my informants, namely *ḥanūt* (discussed later). During these site visits, I participated as much as I could, attending various masses and Sunday School classes. Taking the Eucharist, however,

⁴²⁸ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 5th ed. (London: Sage, 2014).

⁴²⁹ Yin mentions six sources for evidence: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artefacts, Yin, *Case Study Research*, 106. I have included all of these within the site visits, interviews, and other sources to be discussed. For triangulation of data, see Yin, *Case Study Research*, 120.

was not permitted. As part of my site visits, I made field notes following the four column model suggested by Neuman.⁴³⁰ For conducting the interviews, I leaned heavily on Valerie Yow's *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* as well as my oral history training with Rib Davis of the British Library for the Gulf Studies Centre at the American University of Kuwait.⁴³¹ All in all, I completed 22 in-depth interviews and one extended focus group.⁴³² Most interviews (seventeen) were done in my office at the American University of Kuwait. The focus group occurred in the family's home in Salwa, a couple of interviews were done at coffee shops (one in Egalia area, one in Hawālī), two at St Mark's, and one in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. All interviewees were given an information sheet about the project and were asked to sign a consent form. It should also be noted that the timing of the interviews is important as well. The interviews held at the church immediately following the service and those done on days more distant from the mass could be expected to have differing levels of enthusiasm. Individual participants and members of the focus group were all asked the same set of open-ended questions:

- 1) What is your background?
- 2) Can you tell me a bit about where you were born, grew up, and how you came to be in Kuwait?
- 3) Can you tell me about how you came to attend St Mark's?
- 4) Describe your official involvement with St Mark's Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait.
- 5) What is your understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit? At St Mark's, in the liturgy, and in your daily life.
- 6) Tell me what the liturgy means to you.
- 7) Describe your own personal spiritual practices and involvement at St Mark's outside of the services.
- 8) Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or visited a monastery? If so, tell me about it.

⁴³⁰ Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 399.

⁴³¹ Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History : A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London: Sage, 1994); Rib Davis, "Oral History Training Workshop," in *An Introduction to Oral History* (American University of Kuwait 2015).

⁴³² All participants' and clergy's real names have been changed throughout the text unless otherwise indicated. Data saturation was reached after 12 interviews, but I finished 10 more to ensure data reliability and to collect additional narratives.

- 9) What does *baraka* mean to you?
- 10) Tell me what you think about the Jesus Prayer.
- 11) How and when do you fast?
- 12) Finally, is there anything we haven't talked about that you would like to share with me?

All of the interviews were conducted in English, and the individual interviews generated more than 27 hours of data. Individual interviews averaged 01:06:00 in length, whereas the focus group lasted about 02:11:00 and involved four individuals. They were recorded using an iPhone and MacBook Pro's built-in microphones. Relevant data were transcribed by the author using InqScribe and three interviews were fully transcribed by a research assistant due to time constraints. I began coding the transcripts with NVivo software and in Microsoft Word, loosely following Kathy Charmaz's approach as outlined in *Constructing Grounded Theory*. However, NVivo proved to be unwieldy, so I returned to a close reading approach to find themes. Even though the coding categories and themes ('parent nodes' in NVivo) were guided⁴³³ by the interview schedule and grounded theory approach, unexpected, salient themes that emerged from the data are also included in this chapter. Therefore, I offer pneumatic piety as a conservative theory, although it needs to be significantly more abstracted through more quantitative means.

The participants for the interviews and focus group were all chosen from the middle-class, diasporic elite. I chose this demographic specifically for several reasons. First of all, they form, as Antony Shenoda points out, the 'backbone' of the church⁴³⁴, and because 1) they speak English, 2) tend to travel to and from Egypt on a

⁴³³ This is called 'theoretical sampling' or 'sampling to develop, refine, or fill out the properties of tentative theoretical categories. Theoretical sampling makes these categories more robust and precise. What and who the researcher needs to sample cannot be known before the research begins. To engage in theoretical sampling, researchers must have a tentative category or categories. . . . When engaging in theoretical sampling, researchers gather data to answer specific questions about the properties of their theoretical categories.' Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," 406.

⁴³⁴ Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery," 30.

regular basis, 3) are middle to upper class professionals, and 4) have long-term connections to the Church community in Kuwait. They were required to be over 18 years of age for ethical reasons, speak English well, and be/have been active members of St Mark's (mass at least once a month) at some time for an extended period of time. The average age of the interviewee was 30.5 years, the oldest being 61 and the youngest, 18. 64%⁴³⁵ were women and 36% were men. These percentages do not reflect the general population of Copts in Kuwait as there are significantly more men than women. However, it is indicative of 1) the oft-noted higher religiosity of women, and 2) the diasporic elite's higher female to male ratio in comparison to the lower-class Copts in Kuwait. The 40% who were married, lived with his/her spouse/family in Kuwait. The 60% who were single generally lived at home with their families in Kuwait or were studying at a university back in Egypt. Again, this indexes elite status since most expatriate Egyptians (Copt and Muslim alike) in Kuwait are away from their families. 52% of the participants were second generation Kuwait-Copts. Between the first generation and second generation, the average time spent in Kuwait was 19 years, and during that time, they were active members of St Mark's. Here, the shortest amount of time in Kuwait was a mere 3 years and the longest, 28. Keeping in mind that the Iraqi invasion occurred in 1990, almost all of the respondents knew only a post-invasion Kuwait. Further, although half of the interviewees identified as second-generation Kuwait-Copts, they still maintained a 'hometown' in Egypt. Here, again, the percentages are similar: 68% were from Alexandria, 20% from Cairo, and 12% from Upper Egypt. This distribution was expected and mirrors demographic distribution in Egypt itself, Alexandria having the heaviest concentration of Coptic Orthodox Christians. Besides the fact that rural

⁴³⁵ All percentages have been rounded to equal 100%.

Upper Egypt as a whole probably has more Copts, they are spread out among several different cities and would not be expected to make up a significant amount of the diasporic elite as they are generally labourers with less education. Interestingly, occupational demographics of this study's participants mirrors that of Egypt and the Middle East North Africa (hereafter MENA) region where there has been and continues to be a heavy emphasis on the 'respected' occupations of engineering and medicine.⁴³⁶ 36% of my sample were in the medical field, 28% engineering, 28% business, and 8% in education. It should be noted that in Egypt, Medicine and Engineering draw many students at the university level, but there is often a shortage of available positions for graduates, thus stimulating migration. Further, many of the second-generation Kuwait-Copts reported that their parents were doctors and engineers. In contrast, none of the participants worked in the service or heavy labour construction industries, thus reflecting their elite status. Some of them knew each other and/or were blood relatives. All respondents were either university educated or in university at the time of the interviews. The majority reported consistent travel and communication with Egypt with a few outliers remarking that they rarely ever went back to Egypt.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the third level of data triangulation occurred through the analyses of various texts. For my purposes, I use 'texts' in an expanded sense that includes not only written documents but also visual, aural, and material artefacts. During my research, various respondents suggested that I watch a

⁴³⁶ Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineering Jihad: The Curious Connection Between Violent Extremism and Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 42ff. That there are so many Copts who go on to become doctors and engineers is even more remarkable given the accounts of how some Muslim professors will discriminate against them on major exams. Cf. Kyrillos, 30 May 2016. It should also be noted that some respondents spent compulsory time in the Egyptian military but none made it a career. Heavy representation in engineering and the medical field could also be attributed to, as one respondent noted, the fact they are 'honest, noble professions, not like lawyers or politicians', Diana, interview by Ben Crace, 04 Jan 2017, Salwa, Kuwait.

particular YouTube video or explained the complexities of Coptic iconography. Additionally, upon different occasions, a Kuwait-Copt gave me a tour of the church and told me about its architecture and interior design. For assistance with the theoretical framing and analyses of material culture and religious art, I depended on David Morgan's seminal text, *The Sacred Gaze* and Stephen Davis' work on ritualised dress.⁴³⁷ This study would be remiss if it did not include these elements.⁴³⁸

Overall, the interviews formed the bulk of this study's data. On-site visits and textual analyses helped sensitise me to the salient themes in the interviews. Working with the interviews, the field notes and various other texts allowed me to corroborate or contradict my interpretations. This allowed me to uncover various misunderstandings and premature judgements. Whatever ways in which one triangulates the data, the researcher must also recognise that he is also part of the project.

4.4.1 Results and Findings: From Data to Models

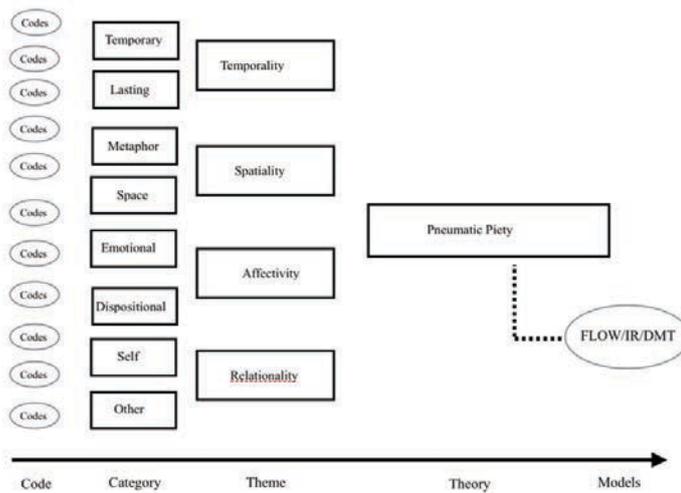


Figure 32: Grounded Theory Process⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*; Davis, "Fashioning a Divine Body."

⁴³⁸ For sources of evidence, see Yin, *Case Study Research*, 106.

⁴³⁹ 'Code' in this model is intentionally left generic as lower levels of specificity would require more time and space. An example of a coding label would be 'guilt language' or 'interaction with saint(s)'.

There are four basic themes forming the existential side of the phenomenology of *pneuma* that emerged from the interviews which link the data to the psychological model below, the sociological model of Chapter Five (IR), and the sociotheological model of Chapter Six (the DMT). Since these themes emerged from the data, they represent the main constituents of the ordinary (experiential) theology of the Kuwait-Coptic laity and reflect the various dimensions of embodied experience. One theme is *temporality*. This theme indicates that one's spirituality requires a time commitment and frequency. In general, the more time spent and how often one engaged in spiritual practices, the more spiritual one is. Temporality is also used to prioritise the present as the contested space to generate spiritual energy through the pneumatic pieties. One's past achievements serve as a reminder of a state lost or a time better left behind.⁴⁴⁰ On the categorical level, this tension was described as: temporary-lasting. The left side of this polarity encapsulates the punctiliar flow state (below) and Durkheimian collective effervescence, which Collins argues is 'not just. . . the excitement that builds up in focused crowds, but [is] any intensification of a shared mood that occurs when certain microprocesses of social interaction take place in everyday life'.⁴⁴¹ The right side holds together the long-term aspects of Collins' emotional energy, eloquently summarised by Wilkinson:

. . . EE is a long- lasting effect that carries over to such an extent that participants are convinced of the experience to such a degree that they act upon the experience. EE is a strong, durable feeling/experience that lasts over extended periods of time, and not just a short-term disruption. EE produces the capacity to initiate and act with resolve to direct social situations. EE is therefore associated with a high level of attunement and potentially long-term consequence.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Talk of an afterlife or heaven or even future 'earthly' plans were not centralised by my respondents.

⁴⁴¹ Randall Collins, "Interaction Ritual Chains and Collective Effervescence," in *Collective Emotions*, ed. Christian von Scheve and Mikko Salmela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 300.

⁴⁴² Wilkinson, "Pentecostalism, the Body, and Embodiment," 20. cf. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 153-5.

Additionally, 'lasting' relates to dispositional changes in the person or affective transformation, often described as a consequence of religious experience. EE, thus, energises agency and provides motivation for further micro-ritual involvements. In this sense, experiences of EE predispose one to seek further experiences. The production of proactivity signals transformation.

Spatiality forms a second emergent theme. Respondents used spatial language for spiritual growth, frequently employing the metaphor of various levels, for example, 'He's at a much higher level than me'.⁴⁴³ Spatiality allows the respondent to situate herself within the progression and movement towards an intended aim or *telos*. There is also a measure of possibility and sense of direction that is engaged in spatializing the spiritual. It may be a long journey, but others are already farther along and willing to help. Place, too, figures into this category. St Mark's is a sacred space with a variety of zones of holiness. Monasteries visited on pilgrimages also function this way, as well as the personal prayer area often modelled off of monastic cells with attendant icons and just enough space for *metanias* (prostrations).⁴⁴⁴ Thus, categories within this theme include the use of spatial metaphor and descriptions of physical locations relative to the embodied self.

A third theme is *affectivity*. This kind of language hints at the flow of emotional energy (EE). For Collins, 'EE exists empirically in one's flow of consciousness and in one's bodily sensations; it is the most important item in one's own everyday experience'.⁴⁴⁵ This empirical quality of EE means the later 'self' can reflectively reconstruct and verbalise (self-report) the intensity, movement, and

⁴⁴³ Respondents did not solely use spatial language; sometimes they spoke in terms of 'advanced' or utilised Biblical language such as the various categories of faith-responses alluded to in the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13.1-3).

⁴⁴⁴ For a brief demonstration of Coptic prostrations, see Владимир Картаев, "How to Do Prostrations?," (YouTube: YouTube, 2016).

⁴⁴⁵ Cf Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 154.

features of that energy generally through emotional terms like ‘feeling’, ‘peace’, ‘comfort’, and so forth. This type of affective language falls roughly into the categories of a short-term emotional experience— emotional in the popular sense of the word associated with a ‘feeling’—and a long-term disposition. Affective language can also indicate objectivity as well, in the sense of having an object of value around which emotions are constructed. Broadly speaking, this is God but is concretised in the instances of affection for one’s personal/favourite saint, monk/nun/priest, monastery, and in a generalised altruism manifested in acts of service. These expressions are sometimes underwritten with virtuous dispositional language such as ‘love’, the *telos* of Coptic spirituality. At other times, disruptive and/or pathological dispositional commentary employs ‘guilt’ or ‘sin’ or many cases of the bewildered usage of ‘should’. Given this objective/subjective nature of affectivity, the final emergent theme follows naturally.

Relationality is the final emergent theme. Diasporic Copts are well aware of the self and the other. This core awareness, to borrow from Martin Buber’s description, is an I-Thou or I-thou relationship.⁴⁴⁶ As mentioned above, a saint’s appearance may generate an emotional state but does so largely to the degree that she/he is perceived as someone else. The same is true for interactions with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit (Thou). In this type of exchange, the individual believes herself to be receiving from/communing with another entity apart from her own consciousness. Taken together, temporality, spatiality, affectivity, and relationality are emergent themes that indicate the Coptic existential, mystical-ascetic tradition at

⁴⁴⁶ Here the capitalisation indicates divinity. For Buber, the ‘T/thou’ is recognised as a separate and distinct ‘I’ in its own right. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, 3rd ed. ed. (Edinburgh: T. Clark, 1970).

work and telegraph a pentecostal spirituality, characterised by on-going and direct contact with the supernatural in embodied experience.

Pneumatic piety thus arose as a theory from the grounded theory process.⁴⁴⁷ As a theory, it seeks to describe the embodied spirituality of the monastic-ascetic tradition as it is practiced by the lay Copt in the diaspora. Simultaneously, it takes seriously the empirical nature of that experience and the theological reality behind it. Simply: *The theory of pneumatic piety states that elements of the Coptic Orthodox tradition as practiced at St Mark's among the diasporic elite are positively correlated to experiences of the Holy Spirit.* As a theory, it 'link[s] some set of concepts [here: elements of the Coptic Orthodox tradition and experiences of the Holy Spirit] and say[s] why and how they are related [there is positive correlation but not necessarily a direct causal relationship]'.⁴⁴⁸ A theory should also predict. In this case, it predicts that deeper involvement with those monastic-ascetic elements of the COC tradition may result in more spiritual experiences, and, conversely, greater participation in those elements.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁷ Technically speaking, it is not sufficiently abstract enough to be a 'theory' but more of a mid-range thesis. However, not wanting to confuse the reader, I have generically applied the term. More abstractly: 'Monastic practices among the laity increase spiritual experiences' or 'Monastic renewal results in lay renewal'. However, this level of abstraction would require more quantitative data.

⁴⁴⁸ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 498. As a qualitative study, I did not use statistical modelling or multiple regression to determine the exact strength of correlation.

⁴⁴⁹ One could go as far to speculate that deeper participation in the pneumatic pieties within the COC frame inoculates the individual from involvement with PC churches. This, of course, would require much more research.

4.5 General Psychological Model: Liminality, ASAs, and Flow⁴⁵⁰

The above themes and resultant theory of pneumatic piety underscore the centrality of experience to the Coptic tradition. Coptic Orthodoxy places a high value on living as a Christian in deep contact with the spiritual realm. Thus, its practices and rituals, in particular, the pneumatic pieties, are directed towards this end. Achieving 'higher levels' of spirituality requires discipline and practice. These specific activities, having been honed and refined through centuries of monastic practice, move the individual forward spiritually through the production of liminality. Liminality is both a precondition for and condition of mystical experience and higher states of consciousness, the essence of the mystical-ascetic tradition, which, for the Copt, is near-synonymous with 'spirituality'. The lack of such experiences denotes a deficient spirituality. According to Edith Turner,

Liminality, "being on a threshold," is the condition that prevails during the inner phase of rites of passage, those rituals performed in many societies to transfer a person from one stage of life to another. Liminality is the experience of being betwixt and between.⁴⁵¹

However, for my purposes, the pneumatic pieties' liminality is not so much a condition during 'the inner phase of rites of passage' as they themselves are the means by which it is ritualistically produced.

Consistent and frequent productions of liminality through the proscribed pneumatic pieties may lead to an Altered State of Awareness (ASA) or a mystical state of consciousness. Traditionally, an ASA has been 'defined as a changed overall pattern of conscious experience, or as the subjective feeling and explicit recognition

⁴⁵⁰ I am not the first to connect flow or states of absorption to spirituality rooted in ethnographic research. See also T. M. Luhrmann, "The Art of Hearing God: Absorption, Dissociation, and Contemporary American Spirituality," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5, no. 2 (2005).

⁴⁵¹ Edith Turner, "Liminality," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillian Reference, 2005), 5460.

that one's subjective experience has changed'.⁴⁵² But as Revonsuo et. al. have argued, such a definition does not significantly explain the difference between 'normal' and 'altered' states. They forcefully argue that a better way to understand ASAs is as a representational notion. It is a:

state in which the neurocognitive background mechanisms of consciousness have an increased tendency to produce misrepresentations such as hallucinations, delusions, and memory distortions.⁴⁵³

Given their positivistic and materialist commitments, it is no surprise that the authors would frame ASAs in such pathological categories, which, undoubtedly many are. But even for positive and desirable higher states of consciousness 'such as flow, cosmic consciousness, and enlightenment', they go on to argue that there are also misrepresentations involved:

In mystical states, there are delusions of special importance and grandeur [sic]; beliefs about a special contact with God or the Universe, special knowledge gained through such mystical subjective channels, and the distortion of the sense of time and the sense of self.⁴⁵⁴

From a theistic point of view, some mystical states engender the 'increased tendency to produce' *not* 'misrepresentations' but *more accurate* representations of the 'informational or representational relationships between consciousness and the world'⁴⁵⁵ precisely because such representations include the spiritual (but hidden) dimension of creation.

Interestingly, the authors above connect 'flow' states with mystical states as ASAs, the former being fairly common but not quotidian, while the latter, much rarer. In keeping with the Coptic tendency to reserve ecstatic mystical states for those primarily in the monastic life, I argue here that, for the Kuwait-Coptic laity, the

⁴⁵² Antti Revonsuo, Sakari Kallio, and Pilleriin Sikka, "What is an Altered State of Consciousness?," *Philosophical Psychology* 22, no. 2 (2009): 187.

⁴⁵³ Revonsuo, Kallio, and Sikka, "Altered State," 187.

⁴⁵⁴ Revonsuo, Kallio, and Sikka, "Altered State," 200.

⁴⁵⁵ Revonsuo, Kallio, and Sikka, "Altered State," 187.

liminality produced by the on-going practice of the pneumatic pieties leads to flow states (a type of ASA) more often than ecstasies. A flow state or flow:

denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. . . . It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present and future.⁴⁵⁶

A flow state, then, with its time dilation and various levels of ego displacement does indeed belong with mystical experiences. Including flow states, then, as a type of mystical experience helps to 1) disabuse the popular notion that mystical states always look and sound like the same as ecstasies coloured by Medieval Catholic saints' accounts popularised in novels and films, and 2) explain how a Kuwait-Copt can genuinely see herself in continuity (though behind a few levels) with the monks and nuns in Egypt; she is having similar spiritual experiences (ASAs), different in degree though not in kind, through similar practices. Including flow states here also answers the objection to the question: How can someone who is not a mystic or a monk be participating in the mystical tradition? Within the context of this study, liminality together with flow as a theoretical, psychological model thus allows for a participative, existential, *lay* mysticism.⁴⁵⁷ I include this model here precisely because it helps get the interview data 'off the ground' so to speak by showing how an individual can narrate a previous, *differentiated* experience. In other words,

⁴⁵⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi qtd. in Mary Jo Neitz, "Steps Toward a Sociology of Religious Experience: the Theories of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Alfred Schutz," *SA. Sociological Analysis* 51, no. 1 (1990): 20.

⁴⁵⁷ There are some serious problems taking flow without modification. Neitz remarks: 'We suggest that transcendent religious experiences differ from flow activities in that they are more apt to be like intercourse with one's beloved than like masturbation. Something happens in religious settings that is "really real" - is not merely cognitive or meaningful. Yet it is not just individual: it is shared, then made meaningful in a social process of interpretation'. Neitz, "Csikszentmihalyi and Schutz," 30.

something happened, namely perceivable shifts in consciousness, at points in the individuals' past that make the following testimonies salient and possible.⁴⁵⁸

4.6 The Pneumatic Pieties

The theory of pneumatic piety is derived from interviews that focused on five areas that, through research, I discovered to have distinctively Coptic/ Kuwait-Coptic dimensions and pneumatic possibilities.⁴⁵⁹ In terms of answering the research question: 'How do Copts in Kuwait experience the Holy Spirit?', these *pneumatic* pieties proved to be the most fruitful and direct line of enquiry to elicit the necessary rich data for a qualitative approach. Each of the following accounts first situates the pneumatic piety within the Coptic tradition and then looks at the language the participants use to describe their experiences. Simultaneously, I offer accompanying analysis according to flow/liminality and categorical descriptions to demonstrate the preponderance of the above themes. Occasionally, I also identify other nodes of connexion that tie in with the next two chapters. Additionally, my analysis teases out the links between the phenomenology of *pneuma* and the pneumatic pieties.

⁴⁵⁸ T.M. Luhrmann refers to flow states as 'absorption' which refers to 'the capacity to become absorbed in inner sensory stimuli and to lose some awareness of external sensory stimuli. All of us go into a lightly absorbed state when we settle into a book and let the story carry us away. There are no known bodily markers of absorption (or for trance, meditation, and prayer, for that matter), but as the absorption grows deeper, the person becomes more difficult to distract, and his sense of time and agency begins to shift. He lives within his imagination more, whether that be simple mindfulness or elaborate fantasy, and he feels that the experience happens to him, that he is a bystander to his own awareness, more himself than ever before, or perhaps absent, but in any case, different' in Luhrmann, "Hearing God," 142.

⁴⁵⁹ My MA dissertation covered much of the preliminary research needed for this study.

4.6.1 The Eucharistic Liturgy⁴⁶⁰

At the centre of Coptic worship is the Eucharist: ‘ [t]he Divine Liturgy of the Eucharist is understood in the Coptic Orthodox Church as the “mystery of mysteries,” the great “mystery of godliness,” or simply, “the great mystery”’.⁴⁶¹ In this sense, it is ground of all true mysticism. The liturgy itself is preparation for the Eucharist and is perhaps the longest one in practice, lasting 2.5-3 hours.⁴⁶² Being prepared is a mental, physical, and emotional process which allows the worshipper to enter into a type of liminal zone of consciousness leaning towards the sacred. One physically prepares for the liturgy by fasting, generally no food or water from midnight before the ritual.⁴⁶³ The mental and emotional preparation also occurs through the drama of the rite, which includes physical movements, music, communal responses, incense, the sanctuary itself, and verbal content. Contrary to some misperceptions,

[t]he laity are not bystanders or observers of the liturgy. The whole congregation, young and old, are active participants in the sung liturgy and participate in all liturgical responses. If there are no laity present, the priest cannot offer the liturgy. There is no “Private mass” in the Coptic Orthodox Church, for the priest is there to serve the people in their service to God.⁴⁶⁴

The Eucharist, then, is the source and heartbeat of Coptic spirituality, the canon for measuring one’s spirituality.

⁴⁶⁰ I am aware of both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox monastic, ascetic-mystical and sacramental traditions. There is a significant level of overlap with Coptic Orthodox spirituality, but this study is descriptive not comparative. Additionally, the Eucharistic liturgy will be looked at more closely in the next chapter, so the time and space devoted here is mainly introductory and illustrative.

⁴⁶¹ John Paul Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle location 3648.

⁴⁶² Roman Catholic monk and anthropologist Mark Gruber tells of when he celebrated the Roman Catholic mass with every accoutrement he could think of and afterward: ‘I shall never forget that one of them exclaimed to me how he was just beginning to enter into the spirit of the Mass when it was over! “Such a short Mass,” he said, “that you celebrate in the West.” What an extraordinary idea! The longest possible Mass I could have said was for him a short Mass’, Mark Gruber, *Journey Back to Eden: My Life and Times Among the Desert Fathers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 22.

⁴⁶³ Medieval canons prescribe a minimum of nine hours of abstinence from food and water before partaking of the Eucharistic Mystery. Conjugal continence and corporal purity are stipulated, although such prescriptions vary in duration and degree.’ In Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," Kindle location 3593.

⁴⁶⁴ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3387.

The Eucharist is also the quintessential picture of pneumatic *kenosis*: the Spirit *descends to physically* transform the elements. That this is understood to be a *physical* change and not merely symbolic is underscored by the strict fasting regimen prior to communicating, the sacred zones around the altar,⁴⁶⁵ the prohibition on spitting for up to two hours after receiving, and the custom of kissing the priest's hands because he has handled the Eucharist. Davis refers to this understanding as a 'physicist or realist position', a form of 'sacramental realism' that asserts "a complete physical identity between the bread and the body of Christ. . . and between the wine and the blood of Christ".⁴⁶⁶ Such an understanding then informs the Eucharist's role in holistically transforming the person. As Cyril of Alexandria (fourth to fifth century) noted: 'The Eucharist will transform into its own quality those who partake of it. When it is heated in a pot, water receives the properties of fire. In the same way, by being mixed with true Life, we lose our natural frailty and are transmuted unto life'.⁴⁶⁷ Notice here the analogous 'mixing of bodies according to the Stoic schema' mentioned in Chapter One; the sacralised elements that are physically taken in through eating transmute the person. Noticeably absent or underplayed here is a notion of faith as the mediating condition for the efficacy of the sacrament; it is holy because it has been physically changed pneumatically.⁴⁶⁸ The effects of this transformation are played out in the experience of the communicant/worshiper.

⁴⁶⁵ Women are not permitted to touch or even enter the area around the altar.

⁴⁶⁶ Davis, "The Copto-Arabic Tradition of *Theosis*," 168.

⁴⁶⁷ Qtd. in Popov, "Idea of Deification," 55.

⁴⁶⁸ This understanding is similar to the objective realist belief of Roman Catholicism where the sacrament, once transubstantiated, persists as the Body and Blood regardless. No Kuwait-Copt ever used the term 'transubstantiation' in my interviews. However, Pope Shenouda does and argues: 'The transubstantiation of the holy mysteries takes place when the Holy Spirit descends, not before', Pope Shenouda III, *So Many Years with the Problems of People*, trans. Mrs Glynis Younan, 4 vols., vol. IV: Dogmatic and Ritual Problems (Cairo, Egypt: Dar El-Tebaa El Kawmia, 1997), 68.

The Holy Spirit (often, 'it')⁴⁶⁹ is experienced as a presence (Thou) that, through communicating, shifts emotional states and creates a temporary liminality.

Kyrillos offered this insight:

And sometimes when you're standing there in front of the altar during the liturgy and you can feel like, wow, this is heaven. And, not because the church looks so beautiful. . . but there's something inside there. Sometimes you get these. . . visitations, ok? And these visitations of the Spirit. Some people they invest in them, and some people enjoy it while it lasts then they fall back. And this is the story of everyone's struggle. . . the more you experience the synergy between your own personal effort and the Spirit of God, because you can't have one without the other.⁴⁷⁰

'This is heaven', 'visitations', and 'synergy' in the above indicate a conscious shift in the flow of experience. For Kristina, this shift was registered in cathartic terms of I-Thou:

K: All I know is that if I go to the mass and the communion stuff, there's something that has to do with the Holy Spirit that you feel good and relaxed and they usually say that after the blood and stuff that you feel like clean and you're good after that. That's where I believe the Holy Spirit part comes in.

B: How long does that last?

K: Usually after the mass, maybe that day.⁴⁷¹

She reports feelings of relaxation, goodness, and purity following the mass. She also feels the dispersion of that energy/those positive feelings over the course of the day. Later, she links this loss to her inability to maintain good behaviour, particularly in what she says: 'So, I stay good and don't say anything rude or anything. . . So, I stay ok that day and then after that it just goes'.⁴⁷² Interestingly, Mayssoon also reports a similar experience of loss (temporality), of something missing as she links up her

⁴⁶⁹ In English, many of the participants used 'it' instead of 'he' to refer to the Holy Spirit. This is probably more emblematic of an overcorrection of Arabic's lack of a neutral pronoun than it is a sign of a deficient, personal pneumatology. Nonetheless, modalistic and impersonal tendencies do occur: 'I feel it's [Holy Spirit] a part of God in you. It's not a person or like . . . like you need it inside of you anyways. It's just a part of God. He's trying to lead you to the right way' Piama, interview by Ben Crace, 30 Jan 2017, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁴⁷⁰ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁴⁷¹ Kristina, 29 Jan 2017.

⁴⁷² Kristina, 29 Jan 2017.

experience of the Holy Spirit with the Eucharist. Notice how she connects her emotional state, 'always in a bad mood', to communion, her conscience, and the voice of the Other/Holy Spirit:

I know that He controls my conscience. I know that . . . that's the voice in my head all the time. If there's a space where I'm not going to church or I'm just leaving. . . they say that when you. . . when you go to church, when you go to mass and they give you [the Eucharist]. If I stay away from it for a really long time, it's just that my conscience kind of goes. It's like you feel like you always feel like there's something missing. Like, you, I just know that that's why I'm always in a bad mood. I'm always. . . there's something going on in there. But then, when you go, you always feel the difference. You know there's a difference. I always feel like He's part of me. He goes in.

Paradoxically, she reports that 'I always feel like He's a part of me' yet she feels a disconnect in the I-Thou relationship if she stays away from communion too long.

This blending of emotion, conscience, and participation in the Eucharist reveals the deep interconnectedness between internal states, one's spirituality, and ritual. She also explained that they were taught what each part of the mass means but attached special significance to the parts that indicated the presence of the Holy Spirit:

Everything has its own part and they taught us at that church. And they told us what each thing means. So, when you're just walking through that phase, you're just waiting, like, 'Ok, God's coming, God's coming, the Holy Spirit is coming [growing more excited] He's going to be here soon!' [laughs] And when they say you can't sit down anymore, you have to stand up because He's here. So, then you know, 'Ok, I'm waiting for this.'⁴⁷³

On the other hand, Piama reported a sense of unworthiness as well as deep spiritual need during the Eucharist: 'And when it comes to the Blood and Body, I feel like I really don't deserve it but I need it more than anything'.⁴⁷⁴ The felt loss indicated by 'need' together with the possibility of a solution intertwines the temporal ebb and flow of consciousness with the affective and relational: only the Thou (Christ's Blood and Body) satisfies.

⁴⁷³ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁴⁷⁴ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

4.6.2 Prayer

My respondents indicated several types of prayer.⁴⁷⁵ The first is prayer as part of the Eucharistic liturgy and various other rites and ceremonies of the Church as it makes its orbit around its ancient and idiosyncratic calendar. The second type of prayer is spontaneous and mixes one's pressing needs with liturgical and/or Biblical language, especially from the Psalms and sometimes prefaced with the 'Our Father', mirroring the liturgy. In a more directed and intentional pattern, Copts also pray the *Agpeya*, or their Book of the Hours.⁴⁷⁶ According to Coptic scholar Ramez Mikhail, '[T]he only commonly practiced form of home or personal prayer in the Coptic tradition is the monastic *Coptic Horologion*'.⁴⁷⁷ Although the following data refute that it is the 'only commonly practiced form', it is definitely widespread among the diasporic Copts. It is meant to be prayed throughout the day: 6 and 9 AM, at noon, 3, 5, 6 PM and at midnight. There are seven canonical hours 'appointed in conformity with Psalm 119:164 ("Seven times a day do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments") and in fulfilment of Christ's commandment that prayers be offered at all times and with unflagging energy (Lk. 18:1).'⁴⁷⁸ Most of the *Agpeya* is made up of the Psalms, with the underlying belief that '. . . the Psalms possess and impart unique spiritual dynamism and cover all the aspects of the relationship between man and God, from the depth of misery to the height of mercy, from the depth of sin to the height of grace'.⁴⁷⁹ It also includes various New Testament readings. The goal is 'to

⁴⁷⁵ These types are my own; for the Copts, *ṣalāt* (prayer) is used for both spontaneous and formalized forms. Muslims use *ṣalāt* to describe their ritualised prayer at certain times of the day.

⁴⁷⁶ *Agpeya* is derived from the Coptic term for 'hour'. Cf *The Agpeya*, (Los Angeles, CA: Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2010), Kindle location 14. This, of course, is similar to other Christian traditions, especially monastic ones.

⁴⁷⁷ Ramez Mikhail, "On Evening Worship in Egypt: A Theological Evaluation of Contemporary Practice in Light of Patristic and Medieval Sources," *Coptica* 12 (2013): 92.

⁴⁷⁸ Archbishop Basilios, "Book of Canonical Hours," in *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz Suryal Atiya (Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate University. School of Religion, 1991), 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Basilios, "Book of Canonical Hours," 4.

contemplate on the Trinity, Christ's salvific act, the work of the Holy Spirit within their daily life, and the life of virtue and righteousness'.⁴⁸⁰ *À propos* to this study, it is important to note that '[t]he highly penitential and contemplative character of the Coptic Orthodox *Horologion* stems from its robust monastic tradition. . . Every Coptic Orthodox is required to keep the hours, but a spiritual guide will direct the number of psalms and hours suitable for each person'.⁴⁸¹ Here we see the monastic tradition (the mystical-ascetic) bleeding into the lives of the laity. This is intensified by the fact that part of the clergy of St Mark's are monks who serve as spiritual directors and confessors.⁴⁸² Note, too, that how a layperson keeps the Hours is differentiated according to 'suitability'. Kuwait-Copts often use the language of 'levels' in reference to progress in spirituality rather than suitability. The monastic is the highest level and keeps all the canonical hours assiduously together with additional hour called 'the Veil'.⁴⁸³ The difference between the two is one of degree of ascetic participation not of kind, as seen in the practice of the *Agpeya*. For the laity, too, praying the designated prayers for the designated hour is a matter of preference. For Iris, 'In the morning, sometimes I pray the morning prayer and sometimes the sixth or the ninth [hour]. I do this so that I don't get bored with the *Agpeya*'.⁴⁸⁴

Further, despite Lois Farag's near hair-splitting assertion that 'Copts do not "pray" to icons or saints; the Copts pray to God and ask the intercession of the saints',⁴⁸⁵ my interlocutors failed to make such a distinction; talking to invisible

⁴⁸⁰ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3332.

⁴⁸¹ Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," Kindle location 3826.

⁴⁸² The new priests, ordained in January 2017, were required to spend 40 days in a monastery in Egypt before returning to Kuwait.

⁴⁸³ *The Agpeya*, Kindle location 14.

⁴⁸⁴ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

⁴⁸⁵ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3404.

personalities, for them, seems to constitute ‘prayer’. But for purposes of categorisation, I will label this type of prayer as intercession.⁴⁸⁶ This intercession, in line with the values of the diasporic elite, are often embedded in narratives of educational success (for example, help on a test), employment, or solutions to workplace issues (‘Sometimes you just feel like things clear up’⁴⁸⁷). A few cases resulted in miraculous healing, physical teleportation, and preternatural protection. For others, they received guidance from saintly intercession. There is, then, a sense of personal agency attributed to one’s favourite saint(s) along with the connotation of deputed providence that constitutes what the respondents call a relationship. However, despite having a fairly robust angelology,⁴⁸⁸ by and large my respondents framed intercession in terms of *human* saints, usually Coptic ones and/or the Virgin Mary.⁴⁸⁹ While the Coptic *Synaxarium*, read during every liturgy, contains many stories of saints and martyrs, for some, the intercessory role of the saints sometimes involves direct contact. Iris reported having a Marian apparition dream, ‘She looked just like the picture’, as well as an encounter with another monk-saint: ‘I saw him once in my dream but then I freaked out and I woke up’. For both encounters, she attributed their appearances to the fact that she was, at those points in time, ‘obsessed’ with them.⁴⁹⁰ For Piama, St George, a wildly popular saint throughout the Middle East, came to her in her dreams as a child: ‘[B]asically the dream was me riding on the horse with him and going somewhere where it is green and we used to go on a

⁴⁸⁶ The linguistic similarities between ‘intercession’ and ‘healing’ in Arabic created some confusion in one interview. Cf. Hannah, interview by Ben Crace, 12 Apr 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁴⁸⁷ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁴⁸⁸ As evidenced by their presence in iconographic and liturgical representations, usually the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

⁴⁸⁹ Pope Kyrillos VI in particular is becoming quite famous for intercession. As with many other churches, the Copts also hold St George in high esteem. Although lacking the developed form of Mariology found in Roman Catholicism, the Virgin’s apparitions in the modern history of the COC have cultivated deeper attachment and veneration for many.

⁴⁹⁰ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

picnic on a hill and used to like. . . for some reason he played the guitar and we used to like sing together in praise'.⁴⁹¹ She later expressed regret that these dreams did not continue, her 'obsession' with the saint having waned over time.

Many respondents also reported a familiarity with the Jesus Prayer,⁴⁹² although some initially confused it with the 'Our Father' until I clarified what I meant. Far from being a strict formula ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner') practised in conjunction with psychosomatic techniques under the close supervision of a spiritual director,⁴⁹³ the Kuwait-Copts also associated the oft-repeated phrase from their Eucharistic liturgy, *kyrie eleison*⁴⁹⁴ as well as short 'arrow prayers' ('Jesus, help!') with 'the Jesus Prayer'.⁴⁹⁵ This reflects an even older tradition: 'Earlier formulas of the Jesus Prayer may have consisted of as few as one or two words (or monologistic phrases) calling on the name of God for mercy and forgiveness (John 16:23)'.⁴⁹⁶ It also has a long monastic tradition as well:

The first documented use of the Jesus Prayer is in the prayer culture of Egyptian monasticism in the fourth century. The sayings of Macarius the Great. . . established the fourth-century practice of using short phrases such as "Our Lord Jesus, have mercy on me," and even "Lord, help!" as unceasing prayers of penance. . . The tradition of the Jesus Prayer has remained within the prayer culture of Egyptian monasticism to the present day (Vogt 1997), preserved through oral tradition and discipleship and later documented in the Egyptian monastic texts.⁴⁹⁷

The current familiarity and, in some instances, regular practice of the Jesus Prayer thus reflects a continuity with the ancient and ascetic monastic traditions. Although

⁴⁹¹ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁴⁹² Only one Kuwait-Copt praying the 'Hail Mary' in French with a rosary because her mom is 'half-Catholic', Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁴⁹³ This is the classic form from Greek Orthodox monastic spirituality preserved in *The Philokalia*. Popularised forms transmitted through translations of the Russian Orthodox spiritual classic, *The Way of the Pilgrim*, do not include breathing and heart-rate synchronisation.

⁴⁹⁴ Greek for 'Lord, have mercy.'

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Kari Vogt, "The Coptic Practice of the Jesus Prayer: A Tradition Revived," *Between Desert and City: The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, no. 97 (1997): 113.

⁴⁹⁶ Patricia Eshagh, "Jesus Prayer," in *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Karen J. Torjesen and Gawdat Gabra (Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate University, 2016), 1.

⁴⁹⁷ Eshagh, "Jesus Prayer," 1.

most of the respondents indicated a familiarity with the practice, few practiced it consistently. Irini, a single woman in her twenties, described how her mother prays it:

I: When she is at work or when she is [inaudible] anything to do, she would actually say it, if she's in the kitchen cooking something, then she would say something like that. This is when she would say that.

B: And where did she learn it?

I: I think from my grandmother.⁴⁹⁸

Irini's description echoes the monastic attempt to 'pray continuously', in keeping with the apostle's injunction in 1 Thess. 5.17. A couple reported Altered States of Awareness (ASA) associated with the practice, underscored by the word 'calm'. Further, a doctor, Tadros, pointed out the Jesus Prayer's use as an effective sleep aid, or, in other terms, a catalyst for ASA or liminal states (sleep or sleepiness being a sign *par excellence* of an altered state):

T: But actually when I practice it, it is very effective one. It make me sleep, very sleepy. [shared laughter again]

B: That's right.

T: Even. . . , I want to tell you something. Sometime by you are eating heavy by night and do something like that, if you get up at 2pm you can't sleep anymore. Use it. You'll sleep very [inaudible] [laughter].⁴⁹⁹

Intriguingly, the doctor recalled learning the Prayer from a book by a Russian monk ('I can't remember his name'), probably *The Way of the Pilgrim*, an anonymous work. Other respondents traced their knowledge of the prayer to Sunday School or parents. However, familiarity does not translate into confidence in the Prayer as a helpful means of spiritual growth or sleep aid:

M: I tried it several times because people talk about the impact it has. But for me, it didn't. I don't know. Again, I think it's because of lack of commitment on my behalf. It just didn't do what people say. You're really supposed to start feeling the voice of God and connecting. That it didn't for me. But one of my

⁴⁹⁸ Irini, 12 Feb 2016.

⁴⁹⁹ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

friends said that he went to a monastery, and he said that the monks of this monastery, this is in the UK, I can't remember where. He said that they lock the monastery doors and all they do is the Jesus Prayer. They don't do any other prayer and he said they do it with the *metania*. You know? He said they do it more than 400 times. And he said that by the time he reached the end, it's like another level of prayer. He said it was really, really enlightening and he enjoyed the prayer so much. So, I think it's one of those things that you need to do really regular and really commit to start hearing that and to start feeling the impact of the words on you. But for me, it's just, really, it's all about my lack of commitment not about the church itself or what it has to offer.

B: So where did you learn about it?

M: My aunt told me about it. Told me about it once. I had insomnia for a while and it was like horrible. I would stay up until 4 in the morning sitting there. And so, she said you know you need to say the Jesus Prayer, it will help you calm down, it will help you go to sleep. So, I tried.

B: Did it work?

M: No.⁵⁰⁰

Significantly, Mary's anecdote about the monks (Coptic ones in the UK) reaching 'another level of prayer' (spatiality) through 400 repetitions accompanied by *metanias* (discussed shortly), and that her friend found it 'really enlightening' and 'enjoyable' contains features of affectivity. Further, her aunt's advice that it will 'calm' her down and help her go to 'sleep' reinforces the Prayer's repetition as a means of inducing an ASA, here, as before, sleepiness. Mary's explanation for why it does not 'work' for her, was a common one for my respondents: lack of commitment. Her reasoning also prefigures the perceived positive correlation between practice and experience. Further, this explanation fits well within a monastic framework in which monks represent the furthest (highest) end on the spectrum of devotion/commitment and laity-out-in-the-world the other but still on the same continuum.

⁵⁰⁰ Mary, 16 May 2016.

Additional monastic indexing occurs when prayer is accompanied by prostrations (*metania*)⁵⁰¹ and the use of icons. In fact, Coptic monastic cells contain inner rooms designed this way for this purpose. Mary recounted:

But honestly *metanias*, they're amazing. During Lent was the first time I started doing *metanias*. I really do feel like it's the first time. I feel like I actually prayed when I do *metanias*. I didn't understand what it was all about until I tried it for myself. . . So, I feel like I'm not praying [if] there's no *metania* in the picture. It's not the same.⁵⁰²

Interestingly, Mary linked her use of *metanias* to a renewed spirituality that occurred during Lent when she and another friend started doing them along with prayer and Bible reading, confirming Lois Farag's claim that 'Copts consider reading Scripture a spiritual activity closely connected to prayer; reading Scripture supports prayer and prayer enlightens the reader to understand the deeper meaning of Scripture'.⁵⁰³ In Mary's case, she began mixing thanksgiving prayer, counting her blessings, intercession for others, and prayers for herself with the physical movements of the *metanias*. Notice the ASA language:

Oh for me, initially I said I would do 20 but then honestly, *once you really get into that mood*, something about *metania* . . . maybe's it really *blocking out the rest of the world*. Or that that the I don't know. I can't explain it in English as well. Something about doing *metania* really helps you *focus on prayer* and so I keep going until sometimes I *was really tired*. . . And honestly once I got started I *feel* like there's something it's like a lot of there's a lot of communication. I really *feel* like I prayed [emphasis mine].⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ A single *metania* consists of 1) bowing at the waist, 2) knuckles on the ground, 3) knees bent to a kneel, 4) forehead to the ground and/or 5) full prostration, face-down and 6) slow reversal of all the above back to a standing position. Interestingly, *metanias* are recommended not only for worship but as a means of reconciliation between offended parties; one bows in prostration as an act of contrition to the other person. None of my interviewees mentioned this usage. See "Prostrations According to the Coptic Orthodox Church," Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles 2016, 5 Feb 2018, <http://lacopts.org/story/prostrations-according-to-the-coptic-orthodox-church-rite/>.

⁵⁰² Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁵⁰³ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3332.

⁵⁰⁴ Mary, 16 May 2016.

‘Mood’, ‘blocking out’, ‘focus’, and ‘tiredness’ (sleepiness) all telegraph some form of liminal state achieved by the psychosomatic, ascetic practice and ‘feel’ indexes the affective component of piety. For Mary, the results were immediate:

And what's funny is that within two weeks I started Lent, my cousin got offered a job at an amazing engineering company in France. And he had been looking for jobs for 6 months. . . And so, he was losing hope and he was moving back and within two weeks of starting prayer, it was almost like I felt like God was waiting for us to really try and get in touch with Him. So, after I had seen that happen, I felt like God is listening. He really wants us to make that effort. He's saying that you come to Me and you will find everything you need.

For Mary, her renewed commitment to the Coptic⁵⁰⁵ ascetic-mystical practice of prayer by *metania* was divinely reinforced by a providential opportunity and subsequently led to her own theological rescription: ‘I felt like God is listening. . . He really wants us to make that effort’.⁵⁰⁶ Thus, for Mary, the practice shifted her disposition as well as her perception of the Thou in the relationship.

Icons help the faithful to focus and act as proxies for others to generate emotional energy (short and long-term) and liminality. Their usage also serves as a marker for materialistic views of *pneuma* that occasioned the development of my theory. Many Kuwait-Copts report reproductions in their homes. Mary remarked: ‘So traditionally, when my mom brought us up, when we pray we have this big icon⁵⁰⁷ of Mother Mary and usually I pray facing that icon or the cross in my room’.⁵⁰⁸ One Copt went even further in describing his relationship to the icon:

S: For me, we have our own icons. These pictures, right? These icons actually, you know, we can say that's not just a picture, you know? We say it's Virgin Mary. I feel that I can see her.

B: So, it's like a doorway or something to them?

⁵⁰⁵ Eastern Orthodoxy also practices *metanias*, but this is not where Mary learned about it.

⁵⁰⁶ Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁵⁰⁷ Most personal icons are reproductions that are not sacralised through anointing.

⁵⁰⁸ Mary, 16 May 2016.

S: Yeah, I think, yeah, I feel the person. It's not just a picture. Because a picture you know is just a paper, right? That's why some people they say oh, it's a picture, it's *ḥarām* [sinful]. It's not *ḥarām*; I'm not dealing with a picture. It's like here you can say it's spiritual thing, right? I feel the spirit thing. I feel that this is Virgin Mary. You know, my mother, God's mother [inaudible] oh she's my mother, I'm just kissing my mother. I'm getting, you know, the blessing, the blessings from her.⁵⁰⁹

Again, the flow of emotional energy is indicated in the icon's presence: 'I feel the spirit thing. I feel that this is Virgin Mary', released through the physical act of kissing, in this case. In short, the icon is the presence/contains the substance of that person. And as a doorway of sorts, it literally acts as a *limen* to a different ('spiritual') reality that is distinct from the individual praying. Another respondent used icons as a means of maintaining focus during prayer:

Normally I like to keep these things [a cross and picture of Pope Kyrillos] in front of me. If they're not in front of you and you're just saying something out loud, you might lose your focus. So, you're just like, looking straight at him.⁵¹⁰

'I'm not dealing with a picture' and 'straight at him' not 'straight at it' indicates the dissolution of the boundary between symbol and meaning as the icon obtains a near avatar-like function. Icons are also carried in wallets, purses, or placed strategically in one's vehicle. There seems to be an apotropaic function to them in addition to prayer aids. Frequently, the smaller icons have *ḥanūt* (discussed later) taped to them as well. Overall, these physical responses to and functions of icons in the Kuwait-Coptic lifeworld suggest that mere mental appropriation or symbolic interaction is not sufficient, as it might be in an idealistic, non-materialistic framework.

Kuwait-Copts practice spontaneous prayer—that widely variegated activity which covers everything from thanksgiving to repentance to mere conversing. Piama recounted how when she prays, she 'just stay[s] there for two or three minutes just

⁵⁰⁹ Shenouda, 12 Feb 2016.

⁵¹⁰ Maysoun, 30 Jan 2017.

talking to the Lord'.⁵¹¹ Ultimately, though, prayer for her is a 'reminder to do that and not that'.⁵¹² Diana noted how she used nature/beautiful surroundings as a reminder to thank God and then carried on from gratitude into intercession for her family but did not spend a lot of time doing it: 'So, it's just a little prayer, a 5 minute thing on the way to class'.⁵¹³ On the other end, in general, Kuwait-Copts do not expect to hear God's voice directly, but, rather, see the answers to their prayers and the unfolding of circumstances as His involvement in their lives. Iris' reply is representative and poignant:

B: Do you hear God's voice directly?

I: Not exactly. Because when I pray, I'm the one talking to Him. What happens in my life is God's voice to me. After that. . . . Anything that happens in life is because of Him. He prepared everything for me, and it's not just coincidence. I know that this happens because He wants it to happen at that time. Even if it's a bad thing, so I know that this bad thing is going to lead to a good thing in the end.⁵¹⁴

Her answer also echoes the Biblical text: 'We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to his purpose'.⁵¹⁵

This is not necessarily to dismiss the more ecstatic forms of divine-human communication but locates God's presence within daily life through Providence. Ongoing recognition of answered prayer reflexively reinforces further prayer.

⁵¹¹ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵¹² Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵¹³ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁵¹⁴ Iris, 08 Nov 2016. The Kuwait-Copts I interviewed had a strong and paradoxical sense of divine sovereignty and individual freedom; God simultaneously 'controls everything' and 'allows' other things such as human free actions. Deeper exploration of Coptic views of sovereignty, while interesting, is beyond the scope of this study.

⁵¹⁵ Romans 8.28, *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Publishers, 2009).

4.6.3 Fasting

Compared to other Christian traditions, the COC fasts *a lot*: ‘A simple tally would total an average of 240 days of fasting per year’.⁵¹⁶ There are three general periods of fasting in their tradition. First, Copts fast food and water from midnight prior to communicating. Secondly, Copts will often fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, usually from animal products. Lastly, Copts fast during calendar periods such as Lent. Again, these fasts are basically vegan and ‘foster discipline, penance, renunciation, and attentiveness to the Spirit’, thus making ‘Coptic spirituality. . . ascetically oriented’.⁵¹⁷ Tadros was quick to defend the vegan diet: ‘Daniel, eat veggies. It is there in the Bible, we did not create this from our mind’ but added that fasting by strict definition means from food.⁵¹⁸

There is a sense in which the individual can modify the proscribed fasts to suit her situation and context. For example, ‘When I moved to Egypt it was harder to cook. If it was 55 days, I reduce it to 3 or 4 weeks.’⁵¹⁹ Maysoon reported that she fasted when she ‘felt like it’ or on days when there was not any food because she had not gone shopping.⁵²⁰ Such wide latitude in keeping the proscribed fasts and even the sheer pragmatic approach to fasting suggests that Copts do not have any more of a surplus of will power than other Christians. However, it also suggests that, for some, the spiritual purpose of fasting is obscured by demands of being in the world. For

⁵¹⁶ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3315. Additionally, the Copts even sing about fasting: ‘The fasting, the fasting holds the soul, / The fasting, the fasting repels the sin, / The fasting, the fasting forgives trespasses/ And saves who are striving and exhausted. / The fasting, the fasting omits iniquities, / And wipe out all the evil thoughts, / Let us then fast brethren with purity, And offer Him a loving sacrifice.’ ‘Jonah’s Fasting’ in "The Holy Liturgy of St. Basil the Great," (Lapworth, Warwickshire, UK: Diocese of the Midlands: St. Mary and St. Mark Coptic Centre, Accessed 15 March 2017), 90.

⁵¹⁷ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3315.

⁵¹⁸ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

⁵¹⁹ Marta, interview by Ben Crace, 29 Jan 2017, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁵²⁰ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

Piama, fasting served as a reminder to go pray.⁵²¹ Kuwait, for Butros, challenged his ideas of fasting as merely a vegan diet, especially after meeting a Hindu:

So, when you, once you start becoming vegan you stop eating fish, you stop eating meat. You stop eating eggs. You stop eating cheese. You stop drinking milk. And you stick to a diet vegan lifestyle. And that was very difficult in Egypt. But when I was in Kuwait, I met Hindu who was vegan all their life. So, come on. They are not with Jesus Christ and they [inaudible] lifestyle so, this ritual does not mean anything. It does not make me go. I fasted all my life. 30 years to become vegan? . . . but now we get to understand that it is becoming vegan because you just go against your will. So, now, if you want to be vegan and become strictly vegan you can go and eat the best [inaudible] food in a vegan restaurant in Kuwait which costs you much . . . more but the truth is you are away from religious. So we start to . . . so I started to fast in a different way. I am a vegan, but if I like an apple during my fast, I'll stay away from it.⁵²²

Thus, the religious plurality of the diasporic context forced Butros to re-evaluate what fasting meant for him. In his case, it was about self-denial that could be accomplished in the present moment by resisting specific appetites, for example, 'if I like an apple during my fast, I'll stay away from it'.

Fasting, like the other pieties, also carries with it the denotation of training. It should be remembered that the word 'ascetic' comes from the Greek word, *ascesis*, to struggle, and was often used to describe the training of athletes. Pope Shenouda linked fasting with training for martyrdom.⁵²³ For the Kuwait-Copt, Iris' explanation is typical:

I: At the beginning, it was extremely difficult, but then I got used to it. I actually find it better.

B: You like it?

M: Yes.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵²² Butros, interview by Ben Crace, 22-3 Jan 2016, Dubai, UAE.

⁵²³ Pope Shenouda III, *The Spirituality of Fasting*, trans. Sobhi Mina Botros (Cairo, Egypt: Dar El Tebaa El Kawmia, 1997), 22-3.

⁵²⁴ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

Thus, one can grow in one's ability to fast and even learn to enjoy it. Non-representatively, however, Butros linked fasting with training for the apocalypse in a Great Tribulation, *Left Behind* scenario⁵²⁵ he admitted was his own creation:

B: The world is getting worse and worse. And there will be time when the persecution starts [inaudible] persecution and you will not find food to eat. If you have money in the bank, you will not have access to it. They won't be able to buy or sell until you confess the Antichrist. So better learn how to fast. Better learn how to survive one week without food. That is the message. Because we are going this direction. The minute the persecution starts. When it becomes universal, you won't have any of this world. And you run to the desert.

B[C]: Is this understanding you're talking about here, is this part of your own kind of study or is this something that the church teaches as well?

B: This is part of my own study.⁵²⁶

Though perhaps an idiosyncratic explanation for learning to fast now, Boutros' 'run to the desert' mentality echoes the early Desert Fathers' motivation for leaving wicked cities in order to contemplate in the wilderness.

But this is not fasting for fasting's sake; it changes the person's long-term disposition. In fact, according to Tadros, fasting is the secret of how Coptic monks manage their sexual appetites, and it even creates happiness:

Fast will make change. And don't ask me how it make change. But it make change. . . Try by yourself, because I know in US and in Europe they go for sex. Those fasting feel no big desire toward sex. . . But by fasting you can do. You can do it. You ask how the monk life like that. They do not feel abnormal. They do not feel ill. They feel like a normal person; they feel relaxed from the inside. Those who tried to fed up by sex whatever they will try they will not fed up [satisfied]. They still need for more. So, fasting give benefit. Fasting give benefit to change people to become smiling like that, to become peace like that. . .⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Coptic eschatology, when it did come up in the interviews, apparently rejects the concept of a Rapture but affirms a futurist understanding of a coming Antichrist and a Great Tribulation. The popular *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins is a fictionalised account of the reign of the Antichrist.

⁵²⁶ Butros, 22-3 Jan 2016.

⁵²⁷ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

However, fasting does not always 'give benefit to change people to become smiling'.

For Mary, breaking her fast was her way of expressing anger towards God:

. . . I was so angry at God during the year because I felt that he wasn't listening or that he wasn't responding to my problems when I was there. That this one time I broke my fast on purpose. You know what God, you're not listening to me, this is too much work. . . It was Lent and I was at the hospital and finding [fasting, that is, vegan] food was very difficult. And I was thinking, "God I'm sacrificing, and I'm struggling, and I'm hungry and la la la. And you're not listening to me, so You know what? I'm breaking this fast."⁵²⁸

Mary's indignant complaint and subsequent breaking of her Lenten fast implies that fasting was not successfully allowing her to enter into a liminal state from which she could perceive Providence working in her life. Nor was it successfully shifting her disposition towards joy in the midst of problems. In terms of flow, as long as she had to struggle with fasting and was self-consciously aware of it as work, liminality eluded her and incited anger and frustration. That she also was not afraid of dire consequences from God or the church community further indicates a significant amount of agency and latitude within Coptic belief and practice.

Fasting also functions as a marker for the materialist conception of *pneuma*. The underlying belief here is that the physical can affect the spiritual and vice versa. Such a close, causal linkage between the two strongly suggests an ontological similarity. Here the Coptic tradition is tapping into what modern science has described. Fasting changes the chemical makeup of the body in ways that are conducive towards experiencing ASAs.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁵²⁹ For physical factors causing trances see Peter B. Clarke and Ioan M. Lewis, *The Social Roots and Meaning of Trance and Possession*, 1 ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 379; William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, "Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models," *Sociological Analysis* 40, no. 4 (1979).

4.6.4 Experiences of the Charismata and Miraculous

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a church of miracles. Stories abound within the Coptic tradition of miraculous interventions, apparitions, provisions, healings, and exorcisms. However, many of these stories are confined to the *Egyptian* context. For several of the Kuwait-Copts I interviewed, it was sufficient that these things happened in Egypt; it was not necessary for them to occur in Kuwait. When pressed to explain why there were more miracles in Egypt than Kuwait, some argued that Egypt needed them more due to its political and economic instability. Or, perhaps, the vestiges of old dhimmitude in Egypt require the miraculous more than the Kuwaiti context. Others claimed that there were just as many miracles in Kuwait as Egypt, but they went unreported for fear of creating chaos and affecting the standing of the church in an Islamic society. Still another offered that Kuwait was not saturated enough with a long-term Christian presence to allow miracles to happen, suggesting again a Realist orientation towards embodiment and supernatural phenomena. Further, extracting personal information regarding the miraculous was difficult given the Coptic church's emphasis on humility and avoidance of pride. Maysoon, in recounting her favourite hagioptic, directed her admiration of ʿAbūnā Faltāous towards his humility rather than his purported supernatural abilities:

I love them. If I'm free, I just watch them. It's not that he does miracles or anything. . . I love his story [ʿAbūnā Faltāous] it's like it's just teaching me to be humble. If anyone asked him something about something he did, he'd just ramble on about something completely different so he could get rid of it.⁵³⁰

In this excerpt, we see the monastic emphasis on humility is transferred to the laity through widely available movies, an emphasis that downplays the spectacular and miraculous in favour for virtue development. This downplaying of the miraculous

⁵³⁰ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

may indicate the desire to assure the Western interviewer that those ‘weird’ things are peripheral to the Coptic faith. It could also indicate a habituated attitude that is expressed in the oft-encountered reticence to speak of one’s spiritual achievements and involvement in the miraculous. Such reticence in speech is connected to avoiding pride. As seen above, Faltāous’ technique for sidestepping pride, ‘rambl[ing] on about something completely different’, provides a template for discourse as re-direction in service to one’s spiritual growth. Such admiration for what otherwise could be called senility or eccentricity, reframed as a means of remaining humble, further distances the workaday world of the laity from the monastic in the sense that the same kind of strategy if employed by a doctor would lead to immediate firing. Nonetheless, the non-monastic can point inquirers towards humility by refraining from speaking or, as Maysoon does above, downplay the miraculous and talk about someone else. This helpfully frames this particular section. Rarely were the accounts of the miraculous personal. When they were, they were qualified with a sense of passivity on the respondent’s part; they did not ‘do’ anything, but, rather simply received, observed, or heard. As seen in Maysoon’s account, the narratives I was able to elicit were often underwritten by the presence of an authority figure, typically a monk and/or priest. This implies that the *charismata* and miraculous are closely attached to the ecclesial hierarchy. Thus, the narratives are frequently foregrounded with the aforementioned sanctioned individuals as touchstones for a reality that adequately exists ‘somewhere’ else for ‘someone’.

4.6.4.1 Revelatory Insight⁵³¹

One of the most common monk-laity/priest-laity interactions involving the miraculous is the experience of revelatory insight, that is, knowing something beyond the normal means or knowledge of the future. Iris told of a time when she went to a monastery and a random monk began talking to her. At some point in the conversation, he told her something she had just been thinking about. She said, ‘It was really creepy’.⁵³² Aside from one-off, ‘creepy’ encounters, these experiences sometimes take place within the sacrament/mystery of confession. Maysoon attributed revelatory insight to her confessor, ²*Abūnā* Antony, although she had not personally experienced it: ‘But I’ve heard of stories of people who were told exactly what was going to happen’.⁵³³ Several respondents acknowledged ²*Abūnā* Mina’s gift for operating in this capacity. In fact, he was frequently cited as ‘the one’ my respondents sought out for confession, partly due to this ability. When I asked him about this, unsurprisingly, he dodged the question. Mary was more forthcoming:

But I talk to him because I believe that with ²*Abūnā* Mina in particular, he’s very spiritual and I do feel like the Holy Spirit speaks through him often. So, whenever I seek his advice on something, over the years, he’s very deep and very wise in that he understands people. So, I feel like he understands me more than I understand myself sometimes. So, and when I talk to him, say about a relationship or whatever, he can read through certain situations and anticipate, like, you know? . . . He’s got a blessing or a talent that God has given him, and because he’s very spiritual, God is really activating. . . And honestly, that’s how I feel I get in touch with the Holy Spirit, through ²*Abūnā* Mina more than my own prayer. So, it’s sad, but it’s how it is.⁵³⁴

Mary attributes this ability to ‘a blessing or a talent’ and as her means of getting ‘in touch with the Holy Spirit’. She went on to tell of a time when he warned her against developing a relationship with a particular man:

⁵³¹ Again, I choose here to translate *baṣīra* as ‘revelatory insight’, see p. 35, n. 117.

⁵³² Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

⁵³³ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵³⁴ Mary, 16 May 2016.

And then later on this guy was in Canada and I discovered all kinds of horrible things about his background. And I was like, how did *ʿAbūnā* know? He can't have, yes, yes people can read others especially when you listen to so many people, you can sort of start to see . . . traits some simple words, but not to that extent. I feel like he can see so much more than he lets on. And sometimes he'll tell me and sometimes he won't . . .⁵³⁵

If 'clairvoyance' (revelatory insight) is 'clear seeing', for Mary, 'he can see so much more than he lets on' hits home: 'How did *ʿAbūnā* know?' She even dismissed the natural ability to recognise patterns of behaviour from sheer practice: 'People can read others especially when you listen to so many people'. It is also significant that *ʿAbūnā* Mina is a monk who carries with him a monastic aura that acts as a proxy for Kuwait-Copts who are unable to simply drive out to any number of the desert monasteries.

4.6.4.2 Exorcism

Exorcism, or the driving out of a demon(s) from an afflicted person, occurs quite frequently in the Coptic Church, but, again, mostly in Egypt. *ʿAbūnā* Makary⁵³⁶ is perhaps the most famous exorcist who currently lives in Cairo. Many of my respondents had heard of him or had seen his videos on YouTube. Some even had stories of their own from when they attended similar mass meetings run by an *ʿAbūnā* Sama^can,⁵³⁷ also in Cairo. Insofar as Kuwait has been a site for exorcisms, there were only two accounts I uncovered in the interviews. One, a long time ago, involved *ʿAbūnā* Antony; the details were unclear. Another person posited that there had been an exorcism as recently as autumn of 2016 while the Archbishop was present. Although infrequent, these accounts are worth mentioning because they 1) underscore the necessity of clerical presence for such events and 2) further distinguish the

⁵³⁵ Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁵³⁶ As a public figure in Egypt, this is his real name.

⁵³⁷ His actual name

diasporic community from the Egyptian; spiritual warfare is simply not as prevalent or obvious in Kuwait. Besides, as Maysoon, commented: 'You don't want to see them [exorcisms] in real life' and 'When someone reaches that spiritual level [to be able to heal or cast out demons], they're going to want to be in a monastery or somewhere near a monastery. We don't have that here [Kuwait]. . . everyone just goes to Egypt'.⁵³⁸

Exorcisms, too, have a viscerally physical dimension. The demons (spiritual entities) are 'embodied' in the possessed and can communicate through vocal cords. Driving them out involves being physically present with the possessed; exorcisms from a distance do not seem to work. Additionally, the exorcist often uses physical means: a pectoral cross and holy water. Again, the way the rite is performed indicates an accessibility and proximity to the spirit world that is best explained in terms of the ancient materialist view of *pneuma* as a form of rarefied matter.

4.6.4.3 Healing

John Paul Abdelsayed argues: 'Contrary to the Western practice, the anointing of the sick is not a prayer of last rites for the terminally ill, but a mystery for physical and spiritual healing'.⁵³⁹ For the Kuwait-Copts, this is often done by the priests as part of their pastoral duties, that is, visits to the sick in hospital. However, in one important case, Marta told of a recent healing (autumn of 2016) that was attributed to the prayers of the congregation:

A very huge miracle happened to him. He's one of the very big inspirations in our church right now. He had a brain tumour and he had to go to do a lot of things. he had to go through a very big operation. But then, two days before his operation, they had to test him out again so that they would know where the brain tumour is so they would know where the process was going and they didn't find the tumour. So, that was a very big miracle.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵³⁹ Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," Kindle location 3792.

⁵⁴⁰ Marta, 29 Jan 2017.

As it turns out, the individual healed was later chosen to become a priest. Another respondent claimed to have seen healing miracles performed by *ʿAbūnā Samaʿan* in Egypt: ‘. . . a lady was on a wheelchair and she got up and walked’.⁵⁴¹ But here, according to Ilizabet, ‘I haven't seen many miracles here. Maybe once but. . . we didn't stay cuz you know like it was kind of an awkward situation’.⁵⁴² In one case, a healing occurred in Kuwait but through sand taken from a holy site in Egypt. The exchange is worth quoting in full:

M: There are lots [of miracles] here. Pope Kyrillos, there is St George. There is a lot. *ʿAbūnā Aʿbd Al-Mesīḥ* with my mom. She has a bacteria infection in her ear that has eaten the ear drum. And we were going to surgery in the next couple of days. And we have the sand from *ʿAbūnā Aʿbd Al-Mesīḥ*.

B: And that was here in Kuwait.

M: Kuwait. . . So, my mom took some of the sand which she has and put water in it and drank it. And when she went to the doctor, he swore that the eardrum is perfect.

B: Recreated

M: Yes. It's no way can happen. No way it can happen.

B: So, this sand was from the cave where . . .

M: *Aʿbd Al-Mesīḥ* lived.

B: Amazing. She had gone there and gotten it while she was in Egypt?

M: Yes.⁵⁴³

Pilgrimage apparently pays off. Interestingly, the mother had procured sand for future use rather than isolate her hope in the efficacy of the spiritual level of the clergy in Kuwait.

⁵⁴¹ Ilizabet, interview by Ben Crace, 03 May 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁵⁴² Ilizabet, 03 May 2016.

⁵⁴³ Miriam, 25 Mar 2016.

Like exorcism, physical healing telegraphs the proximity of the spiritual to the physical. Again, through the use of physical means, oil and sand, something changes in the physical world. This blurring between the two realms suggests a continuity rather than discontinuity between matter and spirit, a continuity described by the ancient view of *pneuma*.

4.6.5 *The Quest for Baraka*

The quest for *baraka* occupies a central place in Coptic piety. Moreover, there seems to be a real tension in my interlocutors' responses between the materialist, near-quantifiable concept and the idealist un-quantifiable concept of the goal, definition, and point of *baraka*. Given Arabic's close association with Islam, the Islamic understanding of *baraka* somewhat elucidates the Coptic. Geertz here is helpful. In his work, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, he writes concerning *baraka*: '[It's] one of those resonant words it is better to talk about than to define, but which for the moment, we can call, inadequately, "supernatural power"' .⁵⁴⁴ Later, Geertz expands:

Literally, "*baraka*" means blessing, in the sense of divine favour. But spreading out from that nuclear meaning, specifying and delimiting it, it encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude, and, the aspect most stressed by Western writers anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, magical power. In broadest terms, "*baraka*" is not, as it has so often been represented, a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity—a view which, though not entirely without basis, simplifies it beyond recognition. . . . [*baraka* is when] the sacred appears most directly in the world as an endowment—a talent and a capacity, a special ability—of particular individuals. Rather than electricity, the best (but still not very good) analogue for "*baraka*" is personal presence, force of character, moral vividness.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 32-3.

⁵⁴⁵ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 44.

It is worth unpacking Geertz's observation. He argues that it is *not* a kind of 'spiritual electricity' with the qualification that such a view is 'not entirely without basis'. Conversely, in one interview, I compared *baraka* to radioactivity—an analogy my respondent affirmed.⁵⁴⁶ Geertz's comment about it being a 'special ability. . . of particular individuals' corroborates the priest/monk/saint/*baraka* linkages, especially to Pope Kyrillos or even *ʿAbūnā* Antony at St Mark's: 'It's like talking to him is going to affect you. Like mentally. I feel like that's it. He's got grace that you just can't achieve yourself that you just see it through him.'⁵⁴⁷ This 'radioactive fallout' from personal interaction with a monk-priest entrenches both the power/aura of monasticism, highlights the I-thou relationship, and further nuances the Realist almost magical conception of *baraka*.

Shenoda, in his work on Copts in Egypt, extends Geertz's definition and argues that *baraka* is mainly taken, not given, and requires bodily contact. He further contrasts *baraka*, a godly force, with '*ḥasad* (envy), an invisible force often tied to the Devil's provocations of humans'.⁵⁴⁸ In the larger Middle Eastern context, envy is believed to be transmitted through the gaze by the evil eye (*aʿyn al-shr* or *aʿyn al-ḥasad*). As a precaution, various amulets and talismans are worn to block such looks. With my respondents, most of whom were from Alexandria and not rural Upper Egypt, the need to block the 'evil eye' was seen as mainly a Muslim problem.

One aspect of *baraka* that my sample noted that neither Geertz nor Shenoda indicate is the impact of education on how it is understood. According to some, the materialistic, physical by touch *baraka* is a 'folk' belief of the uneducated, largely of those from Upper Egypt. For the professional class, the diasporic elite and their

⁵⁴⁶ Hannah, 12 Apr 2016.

⁵⁴⁷ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵⁴⁸ Shenoda, "Cultivating Mystery," 43-4.

children with significant Western influence, *baraka* is by faith; you cannot ‘touch’ it and it is mediated by the ‘spirit’.⁵⁴⁹ Piama flatly stated: ‘It doesn't have to be something you carry or touch’.⁵⁵⁰ Another respondent intimated that *baraka* increased according to how much someone learned about Christianity and gained spiritual discernment. (‘They know a lot so the person is *baraka*’⁵⁵¹) This reflects more of a noetic understanding consonant with a high value on education. Nevertheless, even in the same household I found one member holding a stronger materialist view of *baraka* and another, Diana, a fideistic one: ‘I think the idea of *baraka*, is once again, that of belief. I think that's why I'm saying that even if it's not the presence of God, it's my belief that's comforting. Even though I do believe in God.’⁵⁵² Yet Diana, an architectural engineering student, resorted to the materialistic view to account for the apparent difference between miracles in Kuwait and Egypt:

Nothing happens here. I feel like these place where that happens, they've had so many centuries of *baraka* and it's not just like a few people or a dozen a few dozen people in a giant church, I just feel like there's so much *baraka*. Yeah, in that place, that is just overflows basically. So, people like us, they go there to take a little bit of that *baraka* because it's overflowing. And over here, it's just like that those few people are enough to sustain the church. So, it's not overflowing to the point that there's light shooting out of . . . [people's hands].⁵⁵³

Such a cumulative view of *baraka* situates it within temporal-spatial categories and reifies it as a ‘thing’ one can ‘take a little bit of’. It is important to also highlight that Egypt is seen as place with a lot of *baraka* and Kuwait, a little. This is linked to the presence of monasteries in the homeland.

⁵⁴⁹ It was not clear if it is the Holy Spirit or spirit more loosely, as in the environment of faith.

⁵⁵⁰ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵⁵¹ Marta, 29 Jan 2017.

⁵⁵² Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁵⁵³ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

The quest for *baraka* most explicitly indexes participation in the mystical-ascetic tradition of the COC when taken from monasteries,⁵⁵⁴ icons, and through *hanūt*. *Hanūt* is a blend of spices and oil that is smeared on the wooden cylinders that contain relics. Once covered, the cylinders are then wrapped in a deep burgundy velvet covering with the saint's name embroidered in golden Arabic lettering.⁵⁵⁵ On that particular saint's feast day, the velvet covering is unwrapped and the *hanūt* collected and distributed by using transparent adhesive tape to stick a small amount to the back of a small card with a reproduction of the saint's icon. These icon/*hanūt* combinations are carried in wallets and purses or used as a bookmark in Bibles. It is sometimes used to heal people. The best *hanūt* comes from the monasteries of Egypt; the information desks at each monastery pass it out by the handfuls.⁵⁵⁶ Carrying these blessed items around has an apotropaic function as well; Iris explains:

I: It's something, when you take, it makes you safe from everything, makes you happy. This means *baraka*.

B: So that's what it does for you? It protects you and also increases your emotional happiness?

I: Yes. It's something like that. It's more than that actually. That's what I can explain.⁵⁵⁷

This was as close as any of my interviewees came to explaining the advantage of collecting *baraka*, and it is important to see its protective qualities as well as its ability to charge one emotionally: 'makes you happy'. It is thus a *pleasurable* experience that has, potentially, the bonus benefit of warding off evil. This explanation goes a long way in accounting for my observations of how eagerly people seek it and will drive great distances to take it from a famous monastery.

⁵⁵⁴ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵⁵⁵ In my field work, most of the relics were embroidered with Arabic not Coptic script.

⁵⁵⁶ Upon returning from field work in Egypt, I brought *hanūt* back as a gift to my Coptic friends.

⁵⁵⁷ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

Occasionally, however, God bypasses the monastic/saint/*ḥanūt*/icon conduit and causes a regular image to ooze oil. One respondent told the story of when a young man had been killed in Egypt, a photograph of him in Kuwait began oozing oil as *baraka* for the parents to comfort them.⁵⁵⁸ Again, *baraka* has an affective quality to it, namely, ‘comfort’ and is frequently transmitted materially.

Regardless whether or not the respondent was from cosmopolitan Alexandria or rural Upper Egypt, all understood *baraka* as being closely connected to consecration through prayer and anointing with *māyrūn* or holy oil.⁵⁵⁹ In fact, some of the paintings at the church are not officially consecrated whereas others have a small plaque that certifies their sacredness. Maysoun explained:

M: They pray on the drawings and they put the ointment. . .

B *Māyrūn*?

M: Yes. And it's that bit where you say the Holy Spirit is here and that's God's house. . . . He takes over this place. It feels special when you're at the church. It's not just a building. It's a church.⁵⁶⁰

Prayer and anointing by the clergy thus sacralises an ordinary building with pictures into a church with icons that has different *qualia* in phenomenal reality: ‘It feels special’.

But, this sacralisation is not simply a result of the anointing oil; the on-going presence of the Holy Spirit recognised during each liturgical celebration continues to mediate and replenish accessible *baraka*. One would think, given the materialistic terms associated with *baraka*, that there would be a sense it could wear away,

⁵⁵⁸ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁵⁵⁹ It is believed by many Copts that the *māyrūn* contains particles that go back to the same anointing oil used on Christ's body. Cf. ‘. . . [I]t is from spices from Jesus' body, which is itself *baraka*. So they feel they are touching Jesus’, Matta, interview by Ben Crace, 31 Oct 2016, Salwa, Kuwait. Further, during Pope Tawadros' visit, he (re)consecrated St Mark's altars in the names of the Virgin Mary, St John, St George, and, of course, St Mark. See Nevine Gadallah, "Pope Tawadros Consecrates St Mark's in Kuwait".

⁵⁶⁰ Maysoun, 30 Jan 2017.

dissipate. Not so; just as the presence of the Holy Spirit is imparted to the person through chrismation, so it is also imparted to the Church. One-time and on-going rituals of consecration thus, to some degree, help generate the requisite liminality for sacred experience: 'It feels special when you're at church'. For Diana, however, even different areas of the church had varying degrees of spirituality: 'If you want to get spiritual, that's where you stand [in the small chancel where the Eucharist is received]. You lose focus a little bit when you're in the giant, majestic domes, and golden ornaments and all of that'. For her, the elaborately decorated sanctuary was 'over the top' and a distraction; her spirituality was internalised and less dependent on outside materialities.⁵⁶¹ Further, there seems to be liminal zones of holiness/*baraka* associated with proximity to the Eucharist, the preeminent source of *baraka*.⁵⁶²

4.7 Conclusion

After identifying the essential means by which the pneumatic pieties are inculcated in and disseminated through the Coptic diaspora in Kuwait, I paused to consider my own role as a researcher. Then, I outlined the case study and grounded theory approaches which informed this study. Subsequently, this chapter offered an expanded conceptualisation of mysticism and categorised the interview data according to the Eucharistic liturgy, prayer, fasting, experiences of the *charismata*, and the quest for *baraka*. In the process of presenting the data, I highlighted temporal, spatial, affective, and relational markers that registered liminality, flow, and the movement of emotional energy. Temporal-spatial language is important not just because it indicates liminality, but because it reveals how central embodiment and materiality is to the

⁵⁶¹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017. Later, she indicated it was not just the architecture that was distracting but all the other people, too.

⁵⁶² *Qurban*, too, is a prized source of *baraka*; some will even fight over it. See pp. 224-5.

Coptic experience— a materiality that is linked to the preservation of the ancient view of *pneuma*.⁵⁶³ It is important to note, too, that liminality itself has an affective core— for many, a pleasurable and cathartic one. In short, my sample engaged in the pneumatic pieties as a means of producing liminality, which, in turn, transformed the affections and dispositions. It is precisely here where the monastic-ascetic tradition links up with lay Coptic practice; asceticism is fuelled by the desire for long term, dispositional change, although dealing with sin and guilt are necessarily entailed. However, this desire for dispositional change is not the same as an emotion for that emotion's sake but deeply connected to the I-T/thou experience. Given this, participation in the pneumatic pieties rises or falls according to how successfully they move liminality towards flow and generate emotional energy and/or feelings of proximity to the Divine. For many Kuwait-Copts, this means various strategies of enculturation. Too much accommodation to the Gulf context must be avoided (the comfortable nature of life in the Gulf can be a distraction in terms of time and focus) and strong links to all things Coptic Egyptian (especially the persecuted minority ideology and ethnocentrism under restrictive clientelism) maintained in order to stay in touch with the source of their spirituality. To some degree, this is made easier by the boundaries and restrictions of the *kafāla* system and the benefits of the clientelism context discussed in Chapter Three. The most salient of these links are the pneumatic pieties themselves as understood within the monastic-ecclesial tradition of the COC. These pneumatic pieties are exactly those *elements of the Coptic Orthodox tradition as practiced at St Mark's among the diasporic elite that are positively correlated to experiences of the Holy Spirit*. Or as Luhrmann argues:

⁵⁶³ Orthodox (Coptic and non-Coptic) theology places a greater emphasis on the doctrine of the Incarnation than Evangelicalism typically does. Such an emphasis consequently creates the space for a robust doctrine of iconography and relics. Space and scope do not here permit me to explore how this takes place or the nuanced differences generated by a miaphysite Christology.

There is a great deal of historical and ethnographic evidence to suggest that the skills of meditation and visualization—which are attentional skills to train absorption [flow states/liminality]—have been taught throughout history and across culture, that they are learnable skills, and that mastery of those skills is associated with intense spiritual experience.⁵⁶⁴

I would hasten to add that these ‘learnable skills’ are not limited to individuals practicing intense introspection or mediation, as Luhrmann suggests in the same passage,⁵⁶⁵ but are also acquired and engaged as part of the socialisation process as the next chapter will show.

The centre of worship for the Kuwait-Copts is St Mark’s. The centre of St Mark’s is the apse and ground zero, the altar. However, what makes this the centre is not merely architecture or location but the Divine Liturgy. Participation in the divine liturgy is the ultimate source of lived spirituality for Kuwait-Copts. Chapter Five, then, moves this study further along the other side of the lifeworld-theoria dialectic by applying Randall Collins’ microsociological Interaction Ritual model to the Eucharistic liturgy of St Mark’s. In doing so, it underscores the importance of maintaining the tension between individual and community. Sufficiently modified, it also helps to uncover the social dynamics involved in corporate spirituality.

⁵⁶⁴ Luhrmann, "Hearing God," 143.

⁵⁶⁵ He provides the examples of Asian monasticism and emphasises *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius* (1522-1524), a manual in introspection and visualisation if ever there were one.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KUWAIT-COPTIC EUCHARISTIC LITURGY AS AN INTERACTION RITUAL

5.1 Introduction

Having already outlined some of the theological and contextual underpinnings of the Eucharistic liturgy in Chapter Four, this chapter focuses on ‘reading’ and rescripting the rite as an Interaction Ritual. The IR model, with some modification, illustrates how the themes of the previous chapter weave together in the situation of the liturgy. Time and space considerations limit applying the IR model across all of the pneumatic pieties already discussed. Nonetheless, this chapter provides a model of that application within the Kuwait-Coptic Orthodox frame. For example, Collins himself has already sketched some preliminary remarks about various types of prayer in relation to IR theory.⁵⁶⁶ One could, then, easily re-situate data from this study within that trajectory. I have chosen to use the Eucharistic liturgy mainly because it is so central to the Coptic experience at St Mark’s (and across the Coptic landscape, being celebrated in all the monasteries and churches) and because, abductively,⁵⁶⁷ the IR model fits it well, although with some qualification and modification.

Collins’ IR model also suits this study for several other reasons. First of all, it operates at the microsociological level that I was able to access through my fieldwork. The case study design of this project and its qualitative rather than quantitative nature precluded more extensive forms of data gathering necessary for meso- and macro-

⁵⁶⁶ Randall Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual," in *ARDA Guiding Paper Series* (State College, PA: The Association of Religion Date Archives at The Pennsylvania State University, 2010), 5-6 passim.

⁵⁶⁷ Abduction goes well with the rescripting process of this study. ‘Abduction is an approach to theorizing in which several alternative frameworks are applied to data and theory that are redescribed in each and evaluated’ in Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 98.

level sociological theorising.⁵⁶⁸ Additionally, this microsociological model helps to weaken the essentialist inclination towards categorising piety as a private affair. Kuwait-Copts develop spiritually not simply because they are determined to ‘hang on’ to their faith in the diaspora but because their faith is also communally oriented and sustained. Further, the IR model centralises emotional energy. Given that Coptic Orthodoxy, in general and as filtered through the categories of my pneumatic pieties, is deeply concerned with the transformation of the heart and not just the intellect, a model with common priorities makes logical sense. Finally, although the IR model is sensitive to spatiality, it needs to be granulated more for a religious context that is as sensual as St Mark’s.

Before, however, moving to Collins’ IR reading of the Kuwait-Coptic Eucharistic liturgy, I link up some of the themes in the wider sociological literature with St Mark’s to provide a larger theoretical backdrop for the microsociological rescription. Despite the fact that quantitative data were not acquired in order to up-scale the case study through the meso- and macro- levels, it is still helpful to broadly and suggestively situate my observations of St Mark’s within the relevant sociological conversations pertaining to congregations and their success/failures. Inasmuch as this qualitative study can be tentatively generalizable, it is perhaps precisely at this point. Through my efforts to ‘fill in the gap’ between Collins’ microsociological model and other theories about congregations and denominations in general, I suggest some possible directions future quantitative studies could take while making my own conservative observations.

⁵⁶⁸ The three levels of sociological analyses, micro, meso, and macro are commonly used in the field. My delineation below was significantly influenced by Neuman, *Social Research Methods*, 61.

5.2 Church-Sect, Tension, and Strictness Theories

Within the sociology of religion, one finds repeated references to the church-sect typology, which, according to Laurence Iannaccone is 'useful for classifying denominations'.⁵⁶⁹ The ideal-typical sect might be defined as a religious organization with a highly committed, voluntary, and converted membership, a separatist orientation, an exclusive social structure, a spirit of regeneration, and an attitude of ethical austerity and demanding asceticism. The ideal-typical church, on the other hand, would have its own complex list of attributes: birth-based membership, inclusiveness and universalism, hierarchical structures, an adaptive, compromising stance *vis-à-vis* the larger society, and so forth.⁵⁷⁰

The COC retains elements of both church and sect, but in Kuwait, is closer to the sect-end of the spectrum, what may be labelled, *vis-à-vis* other churches, as *sectarian*. Iannaccone goes on to demonstrate attendance goes up when distinctiveness is high and non-church membership decreases as distinctiveness increases. Additionally, more distinctive congregations have 'stronger members'.⁵⁷¹ St Mark's attendance, membership, and diasporic elite all fall in line with these observations. Its distinctiveness materially, theologically, and culturally within the greater Christian tradition has already been mapped out as has its distinctiveness in its Kuwaiti context, so I will not repeat those characteristics here. However, it is necessary to identify some of St Mark's institutional characteristics that conduce people to assemble together.

⁵⁶⁹ Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Introduction to the Economics of Religion," *Journal of Economic Literature* 36, no. 3 (1998): 1472. The continuum was first proposed by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923).

⁵⁷⁰ Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1192.

⁵⁷¹ Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," 1191-5. Although Iannaccone's data and conclusions are based on American denominations, the pluralistic and globalised marketplace for Christians in Kuwait is close enough to tentatively extrapolate.

One key concept that has enjoyed popularity as a means of explaining the success/endurance of churches is strictness. According to Iannaccone, Dean Kelley seminally argued that

strict churches proclaim an exclusive truth—a closed, comprehensive, and eternal doctrine. They demand adherence to a distinctive faith, morality, and lifestyle. They condemn deviance, shun dissenters, and repudiate the outside world. They frequently embrace "eccentric traits," such as distinctive diet, dress, or speech, that invite ridicule, isolation, and persecution.⁵⁷²

Given the ascetic influences and idiosyncratic practices and beliefs of the COC as a minority population, it is an understatement to call it 'strict'. Just to underscore some of the more obvious indices: fasting (before the Eucharist and throughout the year), cross tattooing, and sectarian naming practices. Iannaccone goes on to streamline Kelley's thesis to 'a single attribute: the degree to which a group limits and thereby increases the *cost* of nongroup activities'.⁵⁷³ Iannaccone argues that strictness so defined helps solve the problem of free-riders, people who take more than they give. He concludes that '[t]he character of the group—its distinctiveness, costliness, or strictness—does more to explain individual rates of religious participation than does any standard, individual-level characteristic, such as age, sex, race, region, income, education, or marital status'.⁵⁷⁴ Fortunately for St Mark's, part of the group's character is shaped by its diasporic context, which, according to the market principles of supply and demand, increase its religious commodities' value.⁵⁷⁵ In other words, the prohibitive nature of restrictive clientelism adds to the institutional strictness in

⁵⁷² Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," 1182.

⁵⁷³ Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," 1182.

⁵⁷⁴ Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," 1200.

⁵⁷⁵ For more on religious market theory, see Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*; Rodney Stark, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* ed. Roger Finke (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 2000); Sims Bainbridge and Stark, "Cult Formation." For an accessible critique of the same, see Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes*, 27-31.

ways that are impossible inside of Egypt due to both religious regulation and horizontal competition from other Christian denominations.

This, within the framework of strictness theory, is regarded as ‘tension’. Tension ‘refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the “outside” world’.⁵⁷⁶ For Kuwait-Copts, this tension is fairly strong, perhaps even stronger than for Egyptian Copts. While this is not a comparative study, a few brief comments are helpful. First of all, they are distinct from Kuwaiti culture in terms of dress, religion, language, and physical characteristics. Since Kuwaiti society is rigidly stratified, these distinctions are consistently maintained through a variety of means, the *kafāla* system being the primary one. And although official, Kuwaiti Islam in general is of a tolerant variety, increased Islamism in the region and among Muslim Egyptian expatriates specifically, is creating further divisions between Christian/Muslim and ‘authentically’ Muslim/nominal. Thus, as corroborated by the beefed-up security around the church,⁵⁷⁷ antagonism is at a high level. On the other hand, Egyptian Copts have the recourse to living ‘Coptic’ in ways that Kuwait-Copts do not, that is, many in Egypt have the option of deeply embedding themselves in their subculture so that the tension with the surrounding culture is somewhat alleviated. Interestingly, this is often done through increased participation in church activities, which are in compounds that afford the Egyptian Copt a protective enclave away from constant Muslim interference.⁵⁷⁸ St Mark’s compound allows this reprieve as well but only under

⁵⁷⁶ Stark and Finke quoted in Joseph O. Baker, "Social Sources of the Spirit: Connecting Rational Choice and Interactive Ritual Theories in the Study of Religion," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 4 (2010): 433.

⁵⁷⁷ And recent knife attack at the Catholic Church here in Kuwait, cf. Aakash Bakaya, "Man 'Armed with Knife' Disrupts Catholic Mass in Kuwait City," *Kuwait Times*, 19 Apr 2017, 19 Apr 2017, <http://news.kuwaittimes.net/website/man-armed-knife-disrupts-catholic-mass>.

⁵⁷⁸ Clubs or *nadī* also apparently play key roles in building communal and even national solidarity in Egypt. These clubs typically have their own property and facilities. They abound everywhere and more research needs to be done on their roles in maintaining Coptic distinctiveness in Egyptian culture.

tightly controlled conditions.⁵⁷⁹ Since many Copts are here for economic opportunities, work and career occupy most of their time leaving only a precious little for religious activities. Thus, it is easier to maintain one's prior religious identity than to 'convert' to another, and theoretically speaking,⁵⁸⁰ de-conversion is rare; however, the Kuwaiti context provides ample opportunities for the amalgamation of spiritualities, pentecostal in particular. In short, then, it is fair to say the Kuwait-Copt lives in a high level of tension with the surrounding culture; thanks to societal stratification, she is an outsider in more dimensions than religion. Therefore, the Coptic Orthodox tradition and restrictive clientelism converge to push St Mark's to the strict sectarian side of the sociological model. That it is also the largest (in terms of population and equivalent building size) Coptic Orthodox church in the world, it seemingly supports the strict and strong correlation.⁵⁸¹

Like all theories, however, the 'strict is strong' theorem is contested by other data. In particular, 'strictness' does not seem to play as important a role in people's choice of church as the above studies assume. In my own interviews, Hannah went out of her way at the end of an interview to disabuse me of the idea. In fact, I had already turned off the recorder when she asked me to turn it on again:

H: I remembered something now. It's about being Orthodox in general. . . So, I mean, you know, when I read about it I mean the word itself: Orthodox, is it is kind of synonymous to restricted or you know very . . . yeah you know what I mean? . . . But I feel that it's the other way around. I feel it's actually very flexible because it promotes uh religion as a way of life and everybody, as I said before, it's up to you what you make out of it, how you follow it. How you do it. So, yeah, that's one thing that I just wanted to add. Because I felt like I was born and raised Orthodox and I didn't really know the

However, in Kuwait, the majority of clubs are primarily for Kuwaitis. Clubs in this sense should not be confused with organisations that could feasibly meet together at any location.

⁵⁷⁹ My informants consistently complained about access to the compound as well as to the priests.

⁵⁸⁰ I say 'theoretically' because I do know of a few Copts who have 'defected' to Protestantism. On the other hand, many of the diasporic elite attended the Evangelical-run private school, although, in one case, this was accompanied by parental de-programming. De-conversion to Islam, as far as I can ascertain, is rare. I briefly explore research trajectories along these lines Chapter Eight.

⁵⁸¹ Further quantitative studies would be necessary to confirm this at the meso and macro levels.

meaning of the word until I grew up and, wait, Orthodox actually means rigid and . . . and very strict and but I don't see that at all. So. . .

B: But your experience is quite the opposite.

H: Yeah, it's quite the opposite.⁵⁸²

Hannah had to learn that Orthodox meant rigid, restricted, and inflexible; it was not her experience growing up at St Mark's. Joseph Tamney's findings agree: there are significant other factors for why people congregate together. His study on the growth of conservative Protestantism found that part of the reason those churches are growing is 'because [they] have lessened the degree of tension with contemporary culture'.⁵⁸³ While not conflating St Mark's with American Protestantism, it is interesting to note that the diasporic elite wear Western dress, listen to Western music, watch Western media, and often travel to Europe, the US, and Canada.⁵⁸⁴ Further, the use of theatre to promulgate broader Evangelical themes of the afterlife suggests significant accommodation to global culture. Tamney goes on to show that people are attracted to certain churches in order 'to be loved, to be accepted as they are, to get excited by the working of the Holy Spirit-in short, to feel good. Church going means being with people who do not look down on you, who give you emotional support, and who can be expected to help out materially'.⁵⁸⁵ We thus have come full circle: on one hand, strictness theory⁵⁸⁶ helps to (partly) explain my limited data on a meso-level. On a micro-level, Interaction Ritual helps further granulate the data.

⁵⁸² Hannah, 12 Apr 2016.

⁵⁸³ Joseph B. Tamney, "Does Strictness Explain the Appeal of Working-Class Conservative Protestant Congregations?," *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 3 (2005): 288.

⁵⁸⁴ I should also add here that many of my respondents speak English with an American accent.

⁵⁸⁵ Tamney, "Does Strictness Explain," 299.

⁵⁸⁶ I should add 'optimal' strictness theory since there is a point in which strictness can collapse the correlation.

5.3 The Coptic Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy as an Interaction Ritual in Kuwait

5.3.1 The Kuwait-Coptic Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy

As the central pneumatic piety and the primary ritual that lends itself to Collins' model (with some modifications), I focus on the Eucharistic liturgy as a supreme example of an Interaction Ritual.⁵⁸⁷ However, it must be made clear that there is a sociological distinction ' . . . between formal ceremonial (whether religious, political, etiquette, etc.). . . and interaction ritual (IR) as a broader and more generic model of the solidarity-producing and symbol-sustaining actions of social life'.⁵⁸⁸ Thus, liturgy is nested within the IR model but not coterminous with its broader scope. In fact, Collins himself has already provided a sketch of what his IR model applied to a Roman Catholic Mass renders.⁵⁸⁹ This sketch is short but helpful in laying out the outlines of gearing the model to a formal, religious ritual. Further, as far as can be ascertained, this study is the first to apply the IR model to the Coptic Orthodox liturgy—either in or outside of Egypt.⁵⁹⁰ Moreover, the Eucharistic liturgy combines all the other pneumatic pieties: prayer, fasting, *baraka*, and, occasionally other rites such as exorcism: 'Traditionally, all other mysteries were conducted within the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, and were not considered finalized or "sealed" until the partaking of the Eucharist'.⁵⁹¹ Since, too, it is celebrated at St Mark's, it is an IR in the diasporic context, that is, worship in exile. In accordance to the IR model, I also

⁵⁸⁷ Given that IR is developed from Durkheim's observations of Aboriginal religious ceremonies, there is a natural fit with other religious rituals. See Jonathan Turner and Jan Stets, "Sociological Theories of Human Emotions," *Annual Review of Sociology* 32, no. - (2006): 32 passim.

⁵⁸⁸ Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual," 2.

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual."

⁵⁹⁰ Anne Heider and R. Stephen Warner provide an illuminating application of Collins' model to Sacred Harp Singing that also informs mine. Cf. Anne Heider and R. Stephen Warner, "Bodies in Sync: Interaction Ritual Theory Applied to Sacred Harp Singing," *Sociology of Religion* 71, no. 1 (2010). Another similar application of Collins' work to congregational participation is Jason Wollschleger, "Interaction Ritual Chains and Religious Participation," *Sociological Forum* 27, no. 4 (2012). Unfortunately, Wollschleger's appropriation of the National Congregation Study data-set does not include any Orthodox (Eastern or Oriental) congregations.

⁵⁹¹ Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," Kindle location 3609.

highlight the general structure and flow, how the respondents articulated their emotional states during the liturgy, and the results/outcome. I also want to note the reductionist tendency inherent in the model which, according to the ‘new social science orthodoxy’ sees religion as ‘participation in rites and rituals – *only*’.⁵⁹² Keep in mind the previous definition of religion used in this study: ‘any system of beliefs and practices concerned with ultimate meaning and which assumes the existence of the supernatural’.⁵⁹³ Thus, in addition to all the ingredients and outcomes the IR model posits, the Eucharistic liturgy *also* intends to connect the participant to God—and, vice versa, God to the participant. However, before running the ritual through the IR model, a more detailed history and description is necessary than previously given in Chapters Two and Four.

There are three main liturgies used at St Mark’s: *Ss [Egyptian] Basil*, *Gregory*,⁵⁹⁴ and *Cyril*, depending largely on the priest who is officiating and the time of year. This study mainly references *Egyptian S. Basil* as this was the one I witnessed most frequently and is used most often during Ordinary Time in the Coptic Calendar.⁵⁹⁵ It is generally agreed that the *Egyptian S. Basil* underwent a process of what Dom Gregory Dix calls: ‘Syrianisation’. He explains:

The Egyptian monophysite version of *S. Mark* was heavily revised with borrowings from *S. James* and *S. Basil* in the fifth or sixth century. Later. . . it was replaced altogether. . . by two alternative Syrian liturgies, a version of *S. Basil* (older than the present Byzantine text in some respects), and a liturgy addressed to the Son. . . So the tradition which had come down at Alexandria from the apostolic age through Athanasius and Cyril was laid aside at Alexandria by the Copts.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹² Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 478.

⁵⁹³ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 398.

⁵⁹⁴ For more on the Liturgy of St Gregory, see Yanney, "Salvation in the Coptic Liturgy of St. Gregory the Nazianzen," 48-54.

⁵⁹⁵ Abdelsayed, "Liturgy: Heaven on Earth," Kindle location 3652.

⁵⁹⁶ Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1982), 547.

Given the ancient, miaphysite connections between the ancient Syrian Church and Egypt, it is not surprising that this process occurred.⁵⁹⁷ Cody agrees: ‘The anaphora [the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer of consecration]. . . like that of Saint Gregory, but unlike that of Saint Mark/Saint Cyril, is not of Egyptian but of Syrian origin. . .’⁵⁹⁸ Although a more nuanced analysis of *Egyptian S. Basil* would doubtless yield many miaphysite theological indicators, the more obvious lines of miaphysite solidarity is clearly seen in the litany that includes the Syrian Patriarch Severus of Antioch and ‘our teacher’ Dioscorus of Alexandria.⁵⁹⁹ These names telegraph an anti-Chalcedonian position very clearly for those familiar with their respective stories, which are also recounted in the *Synaxarium* readings at certain points in the liturgical calendar.⁶⁰⁰ Other miaphysite markers occur in the last prayer of the liturgy called the Confessional that occurs just before distribution. In it, the Coptic Christological position that emphasizes the unity of Christ’s human and divine natures is clearly evident as is the doctrine of Real Presence (‘this is the life-giving flesh’):

Amen. Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath, that this is the life-giving flesh that your only-begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ took from our Lady, the Lady of us all, the holy Theotokos Saint Mary. He made it one with his divinity without mingling, without confusion and without alteration. He confessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate. He gave it up for us upon the holy wood of the cross of his own will for us all. Truly, I believe that his divinity parted not from his humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye. Given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of him. I believe, I believe, I believe that this is true. Amen.⁶⁰¹

The phrase ‘He made it one with his divinity without mingling, without confusion,

⁵⁹⁷ There is a famous monastery named after the Syrians in Egypt, Deir Al-Şūrīān. In it, there is even an iconostasis decorated with ancient Syriac writing.

⁵⁹⁸ Aelred Cody, "Anaphora of Saint Basil," in *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz Suryal Atiya (Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate University, 1991).

⁵⁹⁹ "S. Basil," 67.

⁶⁰⁰ See Publishing Committee, *Coptic Synaxarium* (Chicago, IL: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995), 11-12;40-41.

⁶⁰¹ Qtd. in Donna Rizk, "Christology in the Divine Liturgies, Prayers, and Hymns of the Coptic Orthodox Church," in *The Dialogue Between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches*, ed. Christine Chaillot (Volos Press, 2016).

and without alternation’ juxtaposed with ‘his divinity parted not from his humanity for a single moment nor a twinkling of an eye’ prompts Donna Rizk to comment: ‘This confessional prayer not only eradicates the heresies of monophysitism, Nestorianism, Eutychianism, but it also uniquely shows both Christological forms of Orthodoxy – miaphysitism [‘made it one with his divinity’] and dyiaphysitism [‘divinity parted not with his humanity’]’.⁶⁰² As important as these features are for theological and liturgical studies, sociologically speaking, it is sufficient to point out that Rizk’s apologetic stance indicates the continued need for the Coptic community to once and for all lay to rest the tired, heterodoxical moniker ‘monophysite’. Such a rhetorical move belies the complicated status of the Coptic Church; not only are they religious minorities in their homeland, they are also perceived minorities within global, largely Chalcedonian, Christianity.

The general structure of the mass begins with the ritual of the Raising of Incense, and then moves to the Procession of Incense, the Offering of the Lamb, the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Faithful, and concludes with the Distribution. It should be remembered that ‘[t]he laity are not bystanders or observers of the liturgy. The whole congregation, young and old, are active participants in the sung liturgy and participate in all liturgical responses. If there are no laity present, the priest cannot offer the liturgy’.⁶⁰³ Participation varies for individuals, but in terms of the actual text of *Egyptian S Basil*, the congregation (*al-sha^cb*, ‘the people’) are told to ‘stand up for prayer’ or ‘rise’ on nine separate occasions and to ‘stand up in the fear of God’ twice. What all of this generally translates to is that everyone just stands up the whole 2.5 hours with brief sitting during the reading of the Pauline Epistle, the Catholicon, the

⁶⁰² Rizk, "Christology in the Divine Liturgies."

⁶⁰³ Farag, "Spirituality," Kindle location 3387.

Praxis, and Synaxarium. At most of the masses I observed,⁶⁰⁴ the priest skipped the sermon, so the people continued to stand until the Distribution during which some stood and some sat as hymns were sung/chanted with the rhythmic clanging of the cymbals and metal triangle. Further, they are explicitly told to ‘bow’ twice, but as with standing, I observed many bowing and genuflecting⁶⁰⁵ idiosyncratically. Additionally, participation involves the passing of the peace. For the Copts, this means enfolding one’s hands into another’s, pulling them apart, and kissing the finger tips, all done among one’s own gender. At points during the masses, I noted early on in my fieldnotes that ‘there did not seem to be much congregational participation. It did seem the action was all up around the altar’. I think this can be partly explained by the preparatory nature of the liturgy; once one has participated up to a certain point,⁶⁰⁶ the priests and servants are left to do their part until the climax of the mass: receiving communion. This is perhaps, to the casual observer, the most chaotic time of the mass. People leave their shoes under the pews (women on one side, men on the other) and some go forward to communicate, others linger in meditation, still others walk around to pray in front of or take *baraka* from the icons/relics located at various places in the sanctuary.⁶⁰⁷ After some time, the people reassemble, many close in tightly to the pews closest to the centre aisle, in order to receive the final benediction that is followed by the celebrant sprinkling water on everyone within distance as he leaves the church down the middle aisle.

⁶⁰⁴ The 5:30 AM Friday one primarily

⁶⁰⁵ Copts appear to enjoy making the sign of the cross at every available opportunity.

⁶⁰⁶ According to my interviewees, in order to take communion, you have to arrive to the service before the reading of the Gospel. After that, you are disqualified from taking it. There are also other various reasons for disqualification such as recent sexual activity or eating/drinking and various other ones.

⁶⁰⁷ For a more detailed description of the interior of St Mark’s, see Chapter Two.

5.3.2 The Interaction Ritual Model

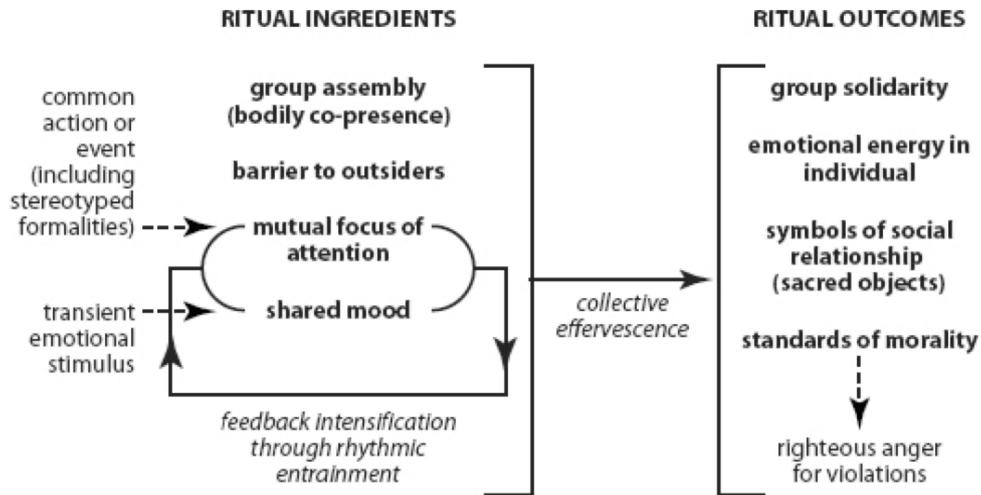


Figure 33: Randall Collins' Interaction Ritual Model⁶⁰⁸

It is important to see that the 'ingredients' in the IR are themselves situationally and contextually determined. In terms of St Mark's, the ingredients are significantly 'flavoured' by the diasporic context. Consequently, the outcomes are also affected by this same process. I have already written at length about the lifeworld context, so I will only draw attention to those elements of the IR directly affected by that context.

5.3.3 Ritual Ingredients

First of all, group assembly/bodily co-presence is the prerequisite to get the IR off the ground. This assembling happens in a particular space at particular times. While my focus here is the congregational mass, it needs to be mentioned that, given Coptic beliefs about the presence of saints and angels mediated through iconographic representations, *hanūt*, and relics, another human being's presence is not always

⁶⁰⁸ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 68., used with permission of the author

required for a successful IR, that is, one that generates emotional energy.⁶⁰⁹ Further, why people assemble at St Mark's in the first place has already been addressed in terms of strictness, affectivity, and ideological and ethnic commitments. Other reasons include: temporary reprieve from the demands of *kafāla*, nostalgia, networking, food, buying of Coptic religious products, and so forth. It is sufficient to point out that the ostensible purpose people assemble at St Mark's is for a *religious* reason: mass.

Secondly, there needs to be a barrier to outsiders. At St Mark's, this occurs in a variety of ways, physically and culturally, and some that are exacerbated by the Kuwaiti security context. There is, as aforementioned, one door into the compound that is closely monitored. At times, all non-Copts have been banned from entering.

Kyrillos explains:

Definitely a foreigner would stand out. And especially with security issues being what they are now. Like once, I was passing by the church and sometimes I do that. Like, you know, I just pass by say a small prayer, leave. And it would be at a time when there wouldn't be any official service going on. But actually be asked to show some ID. What are you doing here? What brings you to the church at this time? And if you're a Copt, it's fine. But if you're not, they'd be asking questions, like what do you want?⁶¹⁰

The structure of the sanctuary itself, with its separate aisles for men and women and boundaries for the laity bars the various levels of what it might mean to be an 'outsider'. There are, as it were, zones of holiness, that only a certain few are permitted to access. Women are not allowed near the altar and Chalcedonian

⁶⁰⁹ Recall the interview data from the previous chapter regarding prayer with *metanias* and icons. Collins argues that thought itself (and prayer as 'conversation') is a form of internalised social dialogue: 'My own analysis. . . is that much internal dialogue is connected to external conversations that have recently taken place, or that one expects to happen in upcoming encounters. Thought is heavily social, because it is embedded in chains of social interaction which it repeats or rehearses. Sometimes internal dialogue adds meta-loops of commentary on itself, whether steering the self beyond previous experience, or being caught up in obsessive or traumatic repetitions' from Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual," 13. See also Randall Collins, "Is the Self Pre-linguistic or Internalized Sociability? Review of Norbert Wiley's *Inner Speech and the Dialogical Self*," (Forthcoming).

⁶¹⁰ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

Christians are forbidden to receive communion.⁶¹¹ Culturally, the use of Coptic, the complexity of the ritual itself, and the lack of any directions aimed at a newcomer/outsider all create a sense of distance and inaccessibility. When I attended the services without my informants, I was not welcomed or ushered or directed in any way, much to my bewilderment. Phenomenologically, then, there is a clear distinction between insider/outsider.

Undoubtedly, the central, mutual focus of attention is the altar where the mass is taking place but should also include the art and iconography. However, here I would like to add an amendment to Collins' theory. In the context of the Eucharistic liturgy in the sanctuary of St Mark's, focus is not as simple as observing for an extended period of time. No, there is a level of focus and seeing during a *religious* ritual that is distinct from, say, the collective focus/viewing of a football match. This type of seeing in a religious ritual context could be labelled as 'sacred gazing'.

According to David Morgan, the sacred gaze

[d]esignates the particular configuration of ideas, attitudes, and customs that informs a religious act of seeing as it occurs within a given cultural and historical setting. A sacred gaze is the manner in which a way of seeing invests an image, a viewer, or an act of viewing with spiritual significance.⁶¹²

In other words, there is no sacred gazing without a socio-historical context transmitted through socialization in space through material means. For the Kuwait-Copt, underneath the giant gaze of Jesus above them at St Mark's, the 'spiritual significance' of sacred gazing is deeply embedded in the Christian doctrine of Incarnation, which, in turn, sacralises materiality as a means of interacting with the divine. The doctrine of the Incarnation states that the transcendent God became a human, divinity took up materiality. Or as John 1.14 states: 'The Word became flesh

⁶¹¹ This is not something readily observable, obviously, nor did I attempt to use a 'breaching experiment' commonly associated with an ethnomethodology.

⁶¹² Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 3.

and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth'.⁶¹³ This doctrine is reinforced through direct teaching in the Sunday Schools, the iconography, and the liturgy itself. Mary explicitly links this connection between ritual, teaching, and a meaningful experience of the liturgy, starting with her own spiritual paucity and moving towards collective effervescence:

M: [F]or me, the liturgy was something like a practice that kind of. . . it's something that I would have to attend and leave. *But I never really used to feel that personal connection with God* or the real. . . I understand on a mental level what it all means. What it means to take in the blood and the body of Christ, but again, on a personal level. . .

B: On a heart level

M: Yeah, on a heart level, it . . . those . . . *it just didn't connect*. Like a lot of people say they feel a lot of things in the liturgy, but for me it wasn't happening. But again, it's because of me not being committed enough. I think that up until recently I'd go to liturgy because it's something I grew up doing every week but I wouldn't really *prepare myself the way that the church has taught us to* [emphasis mine].⁶¹⁴

Mary thus recognises her lack of receiving EE in the liturgy ('it just didn't connect') was her own fault because of not following the teachings of the church regarding proper preparation. Her solution: follow the teachings of the church, learn more, and *focus*:

So I go there and I sit by myself so that I don't look at anyone around me and try my best and read in advance. In advance of the day, I'll read the readings associated. . . and I'll really try to *focus* on what's being said in the Bible and so on. And I've started you know *the more you focus* the more I see the connections that happen between the readings prior to the Bible and the Bible itself. And it really helps me *see just how the more I focus, the more I realize it's amazing* how these Church Fathers put all of these particular readings in place. And definitely this is the work of the Holy Spirit [inaudible] . . . When I sit and I read the everything that's been written by the Church Fathers this week, this year and last year, probably the first years in my life that *I've focused* this much on everything that's being said. . . Wow, the richness that I discovered is on another level. . . *I wasn't focused too much on liturgy or I*

⁶¹³ *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version.*

⁶¹⁴ Mary, 16 May 2016.

*didn't feel anything because there was a lack on my behalf. And now that I'm focusing more and trying to understand more, I . . . it's. . . it's unbelievable [emphasis mine].*⁶¹⁵

There is then, a direct link for Mary, as suggested by Collins, between the degree of EE felt during the ritual and the amount of pre-focusing and focusing (a signal for a flow state as well) that occurs prior to and during the ritual. But this preparation has a distinctive theological content sourced by the Bible and the Church Fathers as well as the content of the liturgy ('everything that's being said'). Therefore, the theology informs the existential and phenomenal; focused attention turns into sacred gazing.⁶¹⁶

Combined with the seeing of the other congregants, the deacons, singers, and celebrant during the various opportunities and pauses, the liturgical situation creates a certain kind of shared mood '[a]s the persons become more tightly focused on their common activity, more aware of each other's awareness, they experience their shared emotion more intensely, as it comes to dominate their awareness. . . . What Durkheim called collective consciousness is this micro-situational production of moments of intersubjectivity'.⁶¹⁷ The moments of intersubjectivity interspersed throughout the shared mood of St Mark's during the Eucharistic liturgy shift over the course of its duration. Obviously, there is a marked degree of differentiation among individuals, but in general, it is possible to characterise the mood as alternating from reverential solemnity to passive waiting, to varying degrees of expectation, to sheer endurance, to relief expressed through exuberant singing after communion. Nonetheless, the dominant mood would have to be reverential solemnity reinforced through the act of sacred gazing, which, as intimated above, means being seen by as well as seeing the

⁶¹⁵ Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁶¹⁶ For Sophia, the focus was more important than the meaning of the words: 'But the problem with me is that I can learn a passage and I'm saying it along, but I might not even know what it means. Like just repeating words, but it helps me stay focused', Sofia, interview by Ben Crace, 04 Jun 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

⁶¹⁷ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 68.

divine. Together, the sacred gaze with the shared mood in a religious context constitutes what is commonly called worship. It is, however, necessary to granulate the mood at St Mark's a little further. The Jesus who looks down on worshipers from above in the main dome of St Mark's (Figure 27) is not a stern judge as one sees in the Sistine Chapel, with one hand raised to strike. No, the Jesus depicted is soft and tender, almost feminine with arms wide open, welcoming. Combined with the paternal associations with the celebrant (*ʿAbūnā* / 'Our father'), this depiction injects the shared mood with familial accents of acceptance, belonging, and reassurance—echoing Tamney's description of what people look for in a congregation. On the other hand, even the kind and benevolent Jesus can be distracting. Diana critiques the over the top nature of the dome and artwork: If you want to get spiritual, that's where you stand [in the chancel off to the side]. You lose focus a little bit when you're in the giant, majestic domes, and golden ornaments and all of that. I focus more when I go into the dark'.⁶¹⁸ 'Getting spiritual', for her, involves separation from the larger congregation, a separation that is itself part of the ritual as communicants retreat to the smaller side chancels to receive the elements.⁶¹⁹

Rhythmic entrainment and bodily synchronisation⁶²⁰ is accomplished in a variety of ways that are innate to the liturgy itself. Kuwait-Copts in worship bow together, stand together, exchange the peace together, read their parts of the liturgy together, cross themselves together, receive the blessing of the priest together, and chant and sing together. At several points in the liturgy, there is abundant repetition, for example, 'Lord, have mercy' is repeated over forty times almost in a row. The

⁶¹⁸ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁶¹⁹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁶²⁰ There is the possibility that the neurological process behind entrainment is linked to recently discovered 'mirror' neurons. For some of the practical theological implications, see Paul Shrier and Cahleen Shrier, "Empathy: Mirror Neurons, Pauline Theology, and the Meaning of Care," *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 18, no. 1 (2008).

liturgy itself could be described to some degree as one large, intentional entrainment process. Together with the hypnotic censer swinging, the intense incense smell everyone shares, and the rhythmic cymbals and triangle compounded with the fatigue of standing for a long period of time with no food or water, the liturgy builds a dramatic tension of liminality that, as time progresses, intensifies and climaxes into collective effervescence. This experience of collective effervescence is itself a liminal/flow experience that dislocates the worshipper in time and space while charging one with emotional energy:

And sometimes when you're standing there in front of the altar during the liturgy and you can feel like, wow, this is heaven. And, not because the church looks so beautiful. . . but there's something inside there. . .⁶²¹

Or as Matta notes: 'You feel like you live in heaven. . . Yes, it's giving you a holy environment. The incense and the prayers and praises and everything together. It brings you to another world'.⁶²² Notice the dislocation 'this is heaven' with the transcendent awareness 'there's something inside there'/'brings you to another world' generated (partly) by the collective effervescence of the ritual situation. This degree of dislocation or experience of transcendence/flow was primarily associated with the mass by my informants rather than personal prayer times or spiritual activities elsewhere; context matters.

5.3.4 Ritual Outcomes

One outcome of a successful IR is group solidarity. This solidarity is expressed in terms of the collective. One of the most commonly used terms in the directions of the liturgy and in the interviews to describe the congregation is simply 'people' (*sha^cb*). This collective identification superseded even the use of 'Copt', which was,

⁶²¹ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁶²² Matta, 31 Oct 2016.

awkwardly used by me more, but not exclusively, in conversations than my Coptic interlocutors. This is perhaps because they see themselves as Egyptian Christians and then Orthodox over and above a sharper ethnic distinction where even Coptic is nearly synonymous with 'Christian'. In any event, in terms of membership, Marta compared her experience at St Mark's with the *nadi* or clubs in Egypt. Notice, too, her repeated use of the word 'community':

A big part of how it is passed down and all of that, and why it continues to live on is because we create a community for ourselves wherever we go and that's what we did in Kuwait. . . [W]herever you take people, specifically, Coptic Egyptians, we create a community for ourselves and that's very important to preserve tradition, our heritage and all of that. And I think and I notice that when I go to Egypt, because our friends who don't have that, who don't have a church, they go to clubs, not clubbing, something we have in Egypt called *nadi*. And they do it to practice sports and stuff. But we would have that at church. We'd have a football field. Because they want us to mingle with mostly other Christian people and mostly only Coptic people. So, they teach you things through that. So, I think it's a bit of isolation. You have to live in the outside world but my community growing up was mostly the church community. I wouldn't go out with my school friends, I would go out with my church friends.⁶²³

Thus, for Marta, her social network is comprised mainly of other church members.

For others, their experience of solidarity is wrapped up in the materiality and refuge-like nature of the church compound: 'I personally think that our church is a very comfy place. I could never get bored with it; it's a safe place for me'.⁶²⁴ Simply arriving to the compound shifts emotional states even without rituals: 'I'm always happy when I get to church'.⁶²⁵ Nonetheless, Ilizabet sees a *disconnect* between the gathering of people and the production of communal strength:

You know in many ways I feel like the church in Egypt is stronger and I don't know the reasons for that. And sometimes I feel like the church here is stronger but like it's just that I don't think there's like an explan—. . . not like a quantitative thing you can measure. But like people here I think you know tend to feel like they're sort of not home. . . sort of like out of their comfort zone and then. if they have been raised a certain way, they would seek out

⁶²³ Marta, 29 Jan 2017.

⁶²⁴ Marta, 29 Jan 2017.

⁶²⁵ Ester, interview by Ben Crace, 23 Aug 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait.

God. And that's why you see that a lot of the times—the church is full. Even though in Egypt, for example, if you go, the church wouldn't be as full. And I also don't know if that's because we only have one church here and over there they have like one in every area. . . [I]n other ways the church is stronger in Egypt because I feel like they have more. . . I don't want to say activities, they have more. . . preaching the message or like getting the message to the people of the church community in a more intensive way. Maybe because they are blessed with the fact that they can meet more often. It's like their church they don't have to rent it out for four hours a week or six hours a week or something. . . [M]aybe it's because most churches are walking distance from people's homes, so if there's a service in the evening. . . I'm just going to walk for 10 min and be at church and spend some more time there or something. Maybe it's because the leadership over there is more intensive.⁶²⁶

For Ilizabet, then, proximity of the church buildings, frequency of the services, and leadership are the contributing factors to what she sees as 'strength', presumably a collective designation about Egyptian congregations' level of energy. Merely having a packed house, for her, is not a sufficient indication of a congregation's robustness. However, it is worth noting her consistent usage of the pronoun 'they' and 'over there'. She sees herself as a member of St Mark's but attributes the high attendance to diasporic desperation and childhood conditioning; Ilizabet is (unsurprisingly) unfamiliar with Collins. Thus, what emerges from the interview data is a sense that it is the peripheral activities of the church that generate a sense of community together with the physical place used for assembling. This solidarity is still present even if perceived spiritual 'strength' is not. Again, in terms of the IR model, the Eucharistic liturgy is the main link in the IR chain of situations that underwrite the above description; Kuwait-Copts built St Mark's to celebrate the Eucharist, come to St Mark's for the liturgy, and then engage in subsequent interaction (micro)rituals that are linked to and associated with the place and central ritual.

Another key outcome of an Interaction Ritual is the production of EE in the individual. Collins speaks of EE in terms of 'full' and 'low'. He writes,

⁶²⁶ Illizabet, 03 May 2016.

Persons who are full of emotional energy feel like good persons; they feel righteous about what they are doing. Persons with low emotional energy feel bad; though they do not necessarily interpret this feeling as guilt of evil (that would depend on the religious or other cultural cognitions available for labelling their feelings), at a minimum they lack the feeling of being morally good persons that comes from enthusiastic participation in group rituals.⁶²⁷

Diana's narrative is illustrative and descriptive. First of all, for her, getting filled with emotional energy— 'feeling better'— is linked to how well one has prepared for the Eucharist:

What I feel when it happens depends on how I prepare for the liturgy. So, if I'm in a very spiritual. . . if I'm going specifically to pray like last Sunday or Monday I can't remember what day it was because. . . I felt the urge to go. That's different than when it's a routine; we're going to go every Saturday . . . And now it's more listening to the words and trying to understand why they said this at this specific moment. Or why they chose to put this at the end. Honestly, everything has meaning, and everything. . . and I believe in every word that is said in the liturgy, even after looking closely at that. So, . . . it's spiritual and I feel, honestly, all the way leading up to communion, it's just sort of prayer and supplication to be accepted for communion. And then after communion, you just feel a lot better. *If you've done it right* [emphasis mine].⁶²⁸

There is, then, a sense of appropriate preparation that is necessary to receive the emotional charge. But at some point, she failed to obtain the emotional satisfaction and was left bereft of EE. This was so distressing that she stopped attending. She continues:

And that's why I kind of stopped going to mass for a while. Because. . . *I didn't have that moment of feeling better after communion so I felt like. . . I quit for a while. For a while, I quit going to church. We're back to the guilt. Felt too guilty. . . . I'm trying to be as helpful while as being as honest as I can. I stopped going to church for a little bit* [emphasis mine].⁶²⁹

Here, just as Collins describes above, Diana has the religious language to describe this feeling of lowness: guilt. Nonetheless, she was still 'magnetically' drawn to the

⁶²⁷ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 129.

⁶²⁸ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁶²⁹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

church and even recognises the socialisation aspect of that feeling ('like conditioning'):

I missed church. I missed going there. I honestly feel so happy whenever I see or whenever I go into the church, even if nothing is happening. I don't know if that's, what's it called? Like conditioning, positive conditioning. I don't know if it's that I've been conditioned to feel better when I go into church. I don't feel like that's the case because honestly the church is crowded and noisy a lot of the time, and I wouldn't be conditioned to feel better when I go there. . . . And you feel happier when you go there, no matter how bad things I had just done. . . . I feel this moment of relief. *Like you're just releasing some sort of negative energy. Like when I walk into church, no matter. Honestly, I love that feeling. So, I would feel that. I've missed that* [emphasis mine].⁶³⁰

In this passage, we see her expressing it in terms of releasing 'some sort of negative energy' as opposed to Collins' gaining of emotional energy. We also see Diana emphasising her addiction to the affective side of her experience. Just being at the church and going through the liturgy was enough for this to occur. However, she does not follow through all the way to communicating:

So, I would go to church, get that feeling, but then I'd take communion. And because communion is. . . the most sacred of sacred things you can do. You're taking God inside you. You're becoming one with God in a way. So, you can't do that, you can't take that lightly. . . That's basically the reason that I stopped. I would feel good when I went to church, but then when I take communion when I feel like I don't deserve that, and I didn't do the proper confessional before that, then it's sort of counterproductive because I just feel so guilty for taking communion when I didn't deserve it. So, I was just like, ok let's stop. So, sometimes I go to church and I don't take communion at the end.⁶³¹

Tellingly, and as predicted by the IR model, Diana is able to obtain enough EE simply from the liturgy and the other ingredients of the ritual without communion at the end, which she describes as 'counterproductive'. In terms of IR, she loses EE when taking communion (a 'repellent situation') so she has decided to avoid it. Notice the intermixing of theological instruction with affectivity; because of the seriousness of

⁶³⁰ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁶³¹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

the Coptic doctrine of the Eucharist, she feels undeserving of receiving. Kristina's experience, although not nearly as nuanced, also moves along the continuum of 'not feeling like it' to 'feel[ing] good':

I'm lazy, I don't feel like going. But then I feel bad if I don't go, so I just go. But then I get there, there's some stuff in the mass I don't understand and I tried to keep up, but something just comes into my mind and I lose focus and I try to focus again. . . After the communion, after we're done, I feel good that I actually went. So, it's worth it. Yes, so that keeps going and coming, every morning I don't feel like and then after that I feel like it. So, that's what happens every time.⁶³²

The payoff of the ritual is sufficient enough to motivate Kristina to overcome her 'laziness' and make the effort to go. She does not seem to have the same hang-up in regard to the communion Diana does. Further, her memory of the process of going from 'not feeling like it' to the recognition that 'it's worth it' serves as an additional link in the IR chain. Ahlam, on the other hand, prefers avoiding the church period, citing that it is a lot of work: 'I don't go to church. . . it's just a lot of work. You have to prepare for it, fasting for 9 hours. It's just. . . I feel really awkward. I can't wake up that early. I don't go as much as I should'.⁶³³ In her account, there are three significant, linked concepts: going is laborious, there are feelings of awkwardness, and an underlying sense of guilt ('should'). These all index a situation in which there is a loss of emotional energy; for Ahlam, mass is an energy drain. In the interviews and in the subsequent analyses, the guilt felt by Kuwait-Copts, unlike popularised forms of Christian guilt mixed with fear of impending judgment, was more of a response to God's *love*. Diana explains:

I don't feel guilty because I don't love God; I feel guilty because of the love He feels towards me. The love he constantly shows me in my life. I've been blessed with so many things. And a lot of people don't have that. . . . I feel guilty because I'm selfish.⁶³⁴

⁶³² Kristina, 29 Jan 2017.

⁶³³ interview by Ben Crace, 31 Oct 2016, Salwa, Kuwait.

⁶³⁴ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

This type of guilt is more appropriately identified as shame. Conversely, for Marta, she is able to transmute shame into simple gratitude, which allows EE to flow and produce a sense of ‘calm’:

I think it's just being grateful. Gratitude and sort of when someone calms you down. Like when you're having a panic attack and you just feel like someone is there watching over you, someone who cares how you feel. Someone who cares whether you live or die whether you're happy or not. And then that presence, just, it's sort of an encompassing feeling, like a hug. . . like someone wraps around you and calms you down and tells you that's it's going to be ok. Maybe that's not God Himself, but my belief in God that calms me down. . .⁶³⁵

Marta deploys a whole battery of positive affective descriptors that follow the ‘presence’ of God: ‘care’, ‘encompassing feeling’ ‘like a hug’, ‘tells you it’s going to be ok’, and so forth. For her, being full of EE feels like the presence of a comforting other.⁶³⁶ Without getting into the theological overtones that even Marta recognises (‘Maybe that’s not God Himself’), it is a constituent part of the IR model that EE arises from the particular situation and moves from the outside in. Marta is able to put language, albeit religiously garbed, to that phenomenon.

This phenomenon of a sense of the presence of another (God) that is manifested *via* the affections in the ebb and flow of EE was also framed in terms of conscience.⁶³⁷ Maysoon explains:

I'm a complete believer that it's God, so like he's in me. I know that he controls my conscience. . . If I stay away from [the Eucharist] for a really long time, it's just that my conscience kind of goes. It's like you feel . . . like there's something missing. . . I just know that that's why I'm always in a bad mood. . . But then, when you go, you always feel the difference. . .⁶³⁸

Maysoon identifies God as the other who ‘controls’ her conscience. This control, however, is variable, decays over time, and depends on the mass for renewal (if I stay

⁶³⁵ Marta, 29 Jan 2017.

⁶³⁶ Recall the necessity of perceiving another’s presence in an I-T/thou encounter.

⁶³⁷ In the interviews with Yousef and Sofia, they both indicated that the Holy Spirit in one’s conscience meant strength to withstand pressure/persecution. Yousef, interview by Ben Crace, 04 Jun 2016, Salmiya, Kuwait; Sofia, 04 Jun 2016.

⁶³⁸ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

away from it for a really long time. . . my conscience kind of goes). In other words, as EE dissipates the other ritual outcome, standards of morality, are also perceived as slipping away. But, when she does in fact attend and really focuses on the meaning of each thing (sacred gazing at its finest with the theological focus: ‘Everything has its own part and they taught us that at church’), there is a growing expectation of an objective encounter; her excitement in the interview mirrors the collective effervescence of the ritual. We see here a possible one-to-one identification of the Presence of God (theologically indicated by Holy Spirit) with the experience of collective effervescence, that, for Maysoon, continues to engender EE days afterward even into her interview. This apparent unity of her conscience/self and God, refreshed by regular attendance at the mass, indexes an interior spirituality that is deeply linked to the ascetic-mystical tradition. Collins is again helpful here: ‘[W]e can note that religions that center on meditation [or, we could add, various forms of prayer] have held that the path to God is through the self, and *that recognizing the spiritual unity of the self with its larger, cosmic analogue is the highest religious experience* [emphasis mine]’.⁶³⁹ Maysoon also indicated that she prayed quite regularly on her own with the *Agpeya*, a rosary, and icons as well as performing regular confession. Perhaps these practices sensitised her to the liturgical ritual situation in ways to allow for such a depth of transcendent experience marked by emotional exuberance and the language of unity: ‘the voice in my head’. In short, her case suggests that people who are pious outside of the church get more out of the ritual inside the church.

⁶³⁹ Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual," 16.

Like Maysoon, Hannah is also able to identify certain intersubjective points in her practice. The first, during the liturgy, is quickly followed by the experience of feeling privileged:

And then throughout the you know the sermon, I can sense like at one point before the Eucharist I feel that it's that the bread actually turns into flesh. And I feel that I'm taking part of something as I felt that I'm privileged. I'm taking part of something . . . much more than anybody else has the opportunity to.⁶⁴⁰

Again, as with Maysoon, Hannah prays frequently outside of the ritual situation.

During her personal prayer time, she also notices an emotional shift:

B: And you feel like God answers you in the conversation?

H: I feel the presence, not in the sense that you know I get direct answer, no. Of course not, but I get some kind of a reassurance if I'm asking about something or I believe things are going to get, well, basically reassurance.⁶⁴¹

Hannah's regular positive experience of 'the presence' in private supports and is supported by her experience of feeling privileged; one IR chain is linked into the other. This shift or change in EE is noticeable and sought for, but when it is consistently absent or replaced by guilt or shame, the individual tends towards avoidance.

The positive experience of EE is heightened even more during certain times of the year, depending on the liturgical season. Regarding the season of Pentecost, Matta recounts why this is his favourite time: 'Because you feel the joy at that time in the church. The curtain is whiteness. You feel the joy, really. Even the prayers, the melody there, what they are saying, it's joyful'.⁶⁴² Matta's account underscores two major points in the IR model. First, IR maintains that rhythms are necessary to produce entrainment. Collins sees this occurring in concrete micro-situations like the chanting during the liturgy. To employ a helpful metaphor: the micro-sociological

⁶⁴⁰ Hannah, 12 Apr 2016.

⁶⁴¹ Hannah, 12 Apr 2016.

⁶⁴² Matta, 31 Oct 2016.

rhythms could be thought of as a short-wave frequency; they occur quickly within a definite period of time, usually seconds, minutes, and perhaps hours. But what Matta draws our attention towards is the possibility that the liturgical calendar itself can entrain participants on a long wave frequency, that is, the same mechanism that allows for entrainment during minute micro-rituals could be the same mechanism that entrains over a long period of time, up to a year. Secondly, perhaps it is not just the seasonal entrainment, but the fact that holidays tend to draw more participants thus adding a depth and richness to the ritual ingredients that correspondingly results in a deeper experience of collective effervescence. It is worth noting, then, that Matta explicitly uses the word 'joy' for this experience during this time.

In terms of the ritual outcome, standards of morality, this links back to the discussion about the experience of the Eucharist, Holy Spirit, and conscience but also reaches forward to the connexion between full EE and a sense of righteousness and low EE, guilt or unworthiness. Diana is perhaps the most explicit:

I haven't been the most spiritual person in the last few years. I'm going to tell some stuff before I turned into a horrible human being and started doing all the horrible things I do. . . Someone is always there. If you fall back, you always feel like there are wings to carry you. . . . It's like a fire and. . . you should allow it to grow. You should feel like when the light is going out, you can feel that. . . When you do something wrong, you don't feel something instantly go off. On the contrary, that's the reminder. If you're doing something wrong even if it's morally right or ethically right, but you feel that strong. That's the voice, that's the Holy Spirit talking to you. Like, you just feel like whatever is happening is not right. . . .It doesn't go off right away, but it is sort of a constant reminder when you do it over and over again. When you stop feeling—not that guilt; it's not equal to guilt—when you stop feeling that nagging sensation, the light just went off.⁶⁴³

Diana's awareness of the interplay between herself and the Spirit is startling and yet further entrenches the Coptic overlap between the Spirit's 'voice' and 'light' and even 'nagging sensation' and one's conscience. She is also clearly aware that losing the

⁶⁴³ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

ability to feel the nagging sensation means that ‘the light just went off’. Within a theological frame, this suggests apostasy or the ‘searing of one’s conscience’.⁶⁴⁴ So, in one sense, the feeling of guilt is a good thing as it suggests that there is still some level of communion between oneself and God. Later, Diana connects a lower level of spirituality with this constant feeling of guilt:

D: That's one thing about the Coptic church and growing up spiritual. The guilt is constant.

B: Why is that?

D: I don't know. But I'm hoping at some point, I mean, I don't see my parents feeling that way. So, I don't know if that's because they got to a certain level that they're actually happy. But it's . . . you're never good enough. Not for what they expect, but for what you expect because you grow hoping and expecting to be this perfect model of a Christian. . .⁶⁴⁵

Given the penitential nature of Coptic Orthodoxy and the monastic ideal, it is not really surprising that there are heavy personal and communal expectations that often set one up existentially for failure and disappointment, manifested by shame and/or guilt. There is also the recognition that constant guilt and shame are characteristic of spiritual immaturity (‘I don't see my parents feeling that way’). Yet in the interviews, the respondents did not see the almost unrealisable expectations as the fault of the church: ‘Not for what they expect, but for what you expect’. One’s own internal spiritual barometer of expectations is putatively the source of guilt, not the hierarchy.

Mary’s account of her confession with ʿAbūnā Mīna is telling:

And with ʿAbūnā Mīna it's more not so much talking about my sins, because he has his own approach *to never make you feel guilty about anything*. [a pretend conversation with ʿAbūnā Mīna begins here] So, I'm pretty sure what I just said is not a good thing. But he's like, “No, God loves you. And the other times I told him, “I don't pray enough”. And he was like, “Don't worry. God's got your back. He loves you whether or not you pray. He's going to take care of you whether or not you do anything. *Prayer is for you to feel better, to feel like God has heard your voice*”. So, when he says stuff like that, obviously

⁶⁴⁴ Cf. I Tim. 4.2

⁶⁴⁵ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

people love him, you know? *There's no guilt*. . . It's all about the loving God that takes care of you [emphasis mine].⁶⁴⁶

Mary's 'to never make you feel guilty' and 'there's no guilt' shows that the clergy of St Mark's is aware of the burden of guilt with which the laity struggle. That *ʿAbūnā Mīna* is also a monk 'on loan' from a monastery in Egypt adds weight to his authority. Further, his therapeutic approach underwritten by the unconditional love of God makes him one of the most sought-after confessors in the church ('So, when he says stuff like that, obviously people love him, you know?'). Such reassurances from a monk adds to his spiritual aura and 'wisdom':

But I talk to him because I believe that with *ʿAbūnā Mīna* in particular, he's very spiritual and I do feel like the Holy Spirit speaks through him often. So, whenever I seek his advice on something, over the years, he's very deep and very wise in that he understands people. So, I feel like he understands me more than I understand myself sometimes. . . And honestly that's *how I feel I get in touch with the Holy Spirit, through ʿAbūnā Mīna more than my own prayer* [emphasis mine]. So, it's sad, but it's how it is.⁶⁴⁷

As indicated in the previous chapter, *ʿAbūnā Mīna*'s charisma has, for some, expanded to a supernatural level associated with revelatory insight. Significantly, Mary feels that she connects with the Holy Spirit through *ʿAbūnā Mīna* 'more than [her] own prayer'. In other words, she receives a significant amount of EE in the micro-ritual of confession apart from the Eucharist. This suggests, then, that although the Eucharist is the centre of Coptic worship, there are channels of entrainment—micro-ritual chains—available within the congregational life of the church for those who fail to 'connect' during the liturgy. Importantly, these micro-rituals, especially confession, are built into the liturgical cycles as backstops against non-participation due to low EE. Theoretically at least, if *ʿAbūnā Mīna* were to add to the guilt of the

⁶⁴⁶ Mary, 16 May 2016.

⁶⁴⁷ Mary, 16 May 2016.

supplicant, it would initiate a feedback loop which would rotate her out of the congregation all together, being repelled by both the micro-ritual and macro-ritual.

In addition to the moral wrestling with guilt and shame or the welling up of gratitude, these micro-rituals and the liturgy also contribute towards the outcome of charging sacred symbols. Collins notes: ‘Persons pumped up with feelings of group solidarity treat symbols with great respect and defend them against the disrespect of outsiders. . .’.⁶⁴⁸ The more obvious symbols that are charged in the ritual of the liturgy are: the Eucharist itself as well as all the other utensils used, the leftover bread or *qūrbān*, and the spaces associated with the ritual such as the altar. Empirically, the removal of shoes, the kneeling to communicate, the solemnity on people’s faces, and so on, all index great respect. As mentioned before, the crowding and pushing that often accompanied obtaining the *qūrbān* and the *baraka* of the priest’s blessing with ‘holy’ water after the service, underscores both the effectiveness of the ritual in emotionally charging symbols and in generating EE. Defence against outsiders was something that regularly occurred in my own experience. When I asked my informants about taking communion, I was firmly warned against it. And when visiting St Mark’s during off-hours to take pictures, I tried to go into the altar area but was quickly stopped at the door by one of the church members. Even my informants’ explanations about my project and sympathy towards the faith did not convince him to allow me access to the most holy zone. Nevertheless, while touring St Mark’s in Alexandria, the tour guide took me right up to the main altar; I even touched it. At that moment, I was strangely affected by the experience—almost to the point of tears. This underscored for me the emotionally charged nature of the space. As someone

⁶⁴⁸ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 68-9.

who had participated in the liturgy ritual numerous times without access to the restricted area, proximity in that moment was numinous.

Perhaps less obvious, however, is the monk/priest as a charged symbol in the IR process. As intimated above from Mary's narrative, *ʿAbūnā Mīna*'s spiritual aura made him famous among my interviewees. Others spoke similarly of *ʿAbūnā Antony*. To say that Copts respect their priests/monks is an understatement. From my direct observations, Copts bow and kiss their hands, lower their voices in their presence, and change their mode of discourse. I, too, experienced this reverential atmosphere when I interviewed *ʿAbūnā Mīna*.⁶⁴⁹ I was ushered into an elaborately decorated visiting area⁶⁵⁰ where we sat on overstuffed couches, drank tea, and went through some of my questions. The lay Copts who were with me took the roles of servants, preparing the tea and making us feel comfortable. I affectively registered the specialness of the occasion,⁶⁵¹ and, synchronised to those around me, sat up straighter, lowered my voice, used the proper titles, over-qualified almost every question, and generally had the experience of being in the presence of a celebrity. Thus, *ʿAbūnā Mīna*'s monastic associations, clairvoyant reputation, and oft-observed proximity to the Eucharist all coalesced to impress and demand respect. His repeated acts of ritualised humility and self-deprecation only served to intensify the encounter.⁶⁵² From a phenomenological perspective, my own encounter with *ʿAbūnā Mīna* reinforced a sense of the sacredness of the clergy of St Mark's. As I left the interview, another one of the priests was just outside the door in the parking lot. My informant offered to introduce me, but, curiously, I felt hesitant and vulnerable from the other interview, so I refused.

⁶⁴⁹ interview by Ben Crace, 14 Dec 2016, Ḥawalī, Kuwait.

⁶⁵⁰ The room was very appropriate for the Kuwaiti context, where it is known as a *dīwānīa*, but it would be somewhat out of place in the Egyptian context.

⁶⁵¹ Part of this was due to the fact that it had taken me over a year to land an interview.

⁶⁵² For more on the performance of ritualized humility and the self-deprecation of Coptic monks, see Gruber, "Monastery as Nexus."

Perhaps it was my outsider status or, as the IR model suggests, my own participation and focus during the liturgy charged him with a level of respect that deference and avoidance were the best options available for me in that situation; in short, it was too common, too pedestrian to talk with this sort of person in a parking lot.

Another way of looking at the possible outcomes of an IR in a religious context is to recapitulate the data in terms of heightened spirituality, an additional outcome that James Wellman et. al. argue needs to be added to Collins' model. They explain:

. . . [T]he ultimate source of EE is often believed to be rooted in the supernatural. Thus, we argue that successful religious rituals can also produce a fifth outcome—heightened spirituality, an “affective experience of the ultimate” or divine (Wellman and Lombardi 2012).⁶⁵³

Heightened spirituality takes the religious content of a ritual seriously as well as the self-report of the interviewees themselves. Like sacred gazing, it recognises that the IR model needs some retooling to better accommodate the nuances associated with distinctively *religious* practices—religious practices that include ‘some sense of contact with a supernatural agency’.⁶⁵⁴ The main supernatural agency, in the Kuwait-Copt context, is the Christian God, or, specifically the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, from the data previously presented in this chapter, has been identified by my interlocutors as the ‘voice’ in their conscience (or ‘nagging sensation’), the presence of God,⁶⁵⁵ and the coordinator of Providence. His presence and movements putatively underwrite the affectivity evident in the narratives above.⁶⁵⁶ In short, an efficacious

⁶⁵³ James K. Wellman, Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk, ““God Is Like a Drug...””: Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches,” *Sociological Forum* 29, no. 3 (2014): 654.

⁶⁵⁴ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 12.

⁶⁵⁵ Somewhat ambiguously, Iris says, ‘I feel someone is there watching me’. Iris, 08 Nov 2016. Whether this was comforting or more like a panopticon, it was not clear.

⁶⁵⁶ Interestingly, Yousef claimed that the Holy Spirit’s guidance is so persistent and ever-present that it is hard to discern if it is there at all. Yousef, 04 Jun 2016.

religious IR results in ‘feeling’ God. Additionally, in the liturgy itself, there is the *epiclesis*, the invocation to the Holy Spirit to come and transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This moment is recalled in Maysoon’s emotional narrative of anticipation mentioned before:

[Y]ou're just waiting, like, ‘Ok, God's coming, God's coming, the Holy Spirit is coming [growing more excited] He's going to be here soon!’ [laughs] And when they say you can't sit down anymore [the part of the liturgy just prior to the *epiclesis*], you have to stand up because He's here. So, then you know, ‘Ok, I'm waiting for this.’⁶⁵⁷

Thus, we have come full circle: the Eucharistic liturgy is not only the quintessential example of an IR, but it is also, given its religious content, the quintessential pneumatic (*Spirit/pneuma*) piety deeply intertwined with the lived spirituality of the Kuwait-Copt. In some sense, genuine ‘spirituality’ is an *affective* condition that has as its object God Himself.⁶⁵⁸ Thus, all the pneumatic pieties function as micro and macro-rituals with this encounter as their main objective.

Collins also notes that another outcome of IRs is righteous anger over violations. This was not directly observed; I did not see any physical manifestations of anger over a violation during my time on the church grounds. However, more obliquely, one could detect a subtle form of righteous anger in some of the interviews. This anger was self-directed and self-afflicted: (‘before I became a horrible person’). It was generated by the perceived violation of non-adherence to the church’s traditions, especially those that precede the liturgy like fasting, confession, and so forth. Moreover, righteous anger was often accompanied by the experience of guilt, or falling short of the ‘Christian’ ideal, namely, the monastic life. Such anger at one’s

⁶⁵⁷ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

⁶⁵⁸ Mark J. Cartledge, "Affective Theological Praxis: Understanding the Direct Object of Practical Theology," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8, no. 1 (2004). See also John 4.24: ‘God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth’ in *Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version*.

own failure to meet high expectations, was, in some cases, generative; the individual used it to retrench herself in the rituals of her faith. Another type of righteous anger that I suppose is unique to the diasporic elite is the anger (albeit it muted) against the perceived violations that the non-elite Copts exhibit in their understanding of *baraka*. Within the liturgical situation, the pushing for the *qūrbān* and the crowding in around the centre aisle to have the priest bestow holy water as he exits are the two main actions that came under fire in the interviews. Here Ilizabet is blunt:

B: Have you noticed what happens at the end [of the service]?

I: What?

B: For the *qūrbān*?

I: Everyone runs to it?

B: Running, shoving. . . pushing.

I: I think they're just hungry. *It's a disgrace to humanity* that something like that is happening to the church in a civilized community [emphasis mine].⁶⁵⁹

In regard to the water blessing processional, Kyrillos also demurs: '[I]f I was standing like in the middle of the pew and the procession, I wouldn't like actually go and fight like the other people'.⁶⁶⁰ Thus, there is a distancing and even a dismissive anger against the rusticity of those who fail to believe the same thing about the same ritually-charged symbols. Such a recoiling against other Copts also recalls Collins: 'Persons pumped up with feelings of group solidarity treat symbols with great respect and defend them against the disrespect of outsiders, and even more, of *renegade insiders* [emphasis mine]'.⁶⁶¹ Over and over again, the diasporic elite suggested that the Eucharist was enough *baraka* one needed and behaving in this fashion for blessed water and *qūrbān* was a species of simplicity and/or backwardness, largely due to the

⁶⁵⁹ Ilizabet, 03 May 2016.

⁶⁶⁰ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁶⁶¹ Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 68-9.

area of Egypt the violators were from.⁶⁶² This also underscores the conglomerate nature of St Mark's, as opposed to the churches of Egypt. At St Mark's the congregation includes people from all sorts of places in Egypt, thus there is a heterogeneity that lends itself to these types of distinctions between groups and practices.

5.4 Conclusion

This analysis focused primarily on the Eucharistic liturgy as an IR *par excellence* while maintaining a sensitivity towards how some of the other pneumatic pieties like confession, Bible reading, and quest for *baraka* act as micro-rituals that enhance and intensify the individual's affective experience in the macro-ritual, the liturgy. Further, since the Eucharistic liturgy is a *religious* ritual, Collins' IR model needs some modification. I suggested that David Morgan's concept of sacred gazing helpfully transmutes Collins' rather bland 'mutual focus of attention' into something much more interesting and accurate, namely, the act of seeing itself is socialised with theological contours. The self-reports and narratives of this type of seeing resulting in affective changes strongly suggests that there is more to the story than mere Durkheimian collective effervescence taking place.

This is precisely where Wellman et. al.'s suggestion to add 'heightened spirituality' to the ritual outcomes is not only helpful but essential, especially since 'spirituality' includes the belief that God is a principle source for EE. This expands the potential of Collins' IR model and suggests that, in the Trinitarian framework of Coptic Orthodoxy together with the doctrine of omnipresence and 'the cloud of

⁶⁶² My line of questioning regarding these issues apparently made it up the chain of command; weeks after the interviews, I noticed barriers were in place to regulate *qūrbān* distribution.

witnesses'⁶⁶³, that is, the saints, the individual is never alone—even outside of the liturgy and the church. Theologically, God and the saints are also participants in the IR process. One could go as far to suggest that the Spirit 'moves' in and through EE. That it requires other people is not surprising; Jesus Himself said, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them'. Thus, the production of EE and the other ritual outcomes of the revised IR model act as pneumatic clues, hints of the Spirit's work.

This rescription also interweaves the themes of the previous chapter. From the data, I showed that affectivity, temporality, relationality, and spatiality were all themes related to my participants' lived spirituality. They are also present in the modified IR model. EE links up with affectivity (dispositions), temporality (long-term), relationality (requires others), and spatiality (situations require concrete places, sacred seeing, space to gather). Other ritual ingredients and outcomes reinforce these themes as well, for example, bodily co-presence (relationality) requires a place for entrainment to occur (spatiality), and a shared mood is a short-term emotional state. Thus, with the modifications, the IR model 'fits' the data well and extends the discussion from the individual to the congregation.

Thus far, this study has explored the theory of pneumatic piety through a psychological model (flow) and theologically-attuned, microsociological one (modified IR) within the conversation concerning strictness and tension with the surrounding culture. For theists, spiritual experiences occur in the consciousness of individuals in concrete situations often involving others, seen or felt. Like other types of experiences, these are narrated in terms of basic themes common to embodied

⁶⁶³ Within a Coptic Orthodox interpretation, the 'cloud of witnesses' is the Bible's way of referring to dead Christians, who watch the activities of the church on Earth, see Hebrews 12.1.

existence: time, space, feelings/emotions, and the I-T/thou duality. But within those themes, the Kuwait-Copt ‘sees’ the God of the Bible and of the Coptic tradition condescending to break into her conscious awareness. This language is inherently theological. But, it is also ordinary; it is the language of the laity not the trained theologian. This study, following the process of rescription, ‘seeks to move ordinary theology forward through a deeper analysis of its testimony mode and a broader dialogue with the Christian theological tradition, illuminated by the insights of the social sciences’.⁶⁶⁴ Therefore, in the next chapter, I propose a model that ‘moves ordinary theology forward through a deeper analysis of its testimony mode’ about prayer and place it into ‘a broader dialogue with the Christian theological tradition’ through a reformulated theory of *theosis* while maintaining the ‘insights of the social sciences’ generated by this and the previous chapters.

⁶⁶⁴ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 18.

CHAPTER SIX

PRAYER AND THE DIAMOND MODEL OF *THEOSIS*: TOWARDS A SOCIOTHEOLOGICAL THEORY

6.1 Introduction

The theory of pneumatic piety asserts that elements of the Coptic tradition are positively correlated with experiences of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, I have identified these elements as pneumatic pieties. Further, within the theological frame of pneumatic *kenosis*, the Holy Spirit condescends to interact with the faithful within the basic, lived dimensions of conscious experience, namely: affectivity, relationality, spatiality, and temporality. These pneumatic experiences, consequently, can be summed up as I-T/thou encounters marked by liminality/flow and/or the presence of EE occurring at specific times and places.⁶⁶⁵ However, what keeps these encounters from collapsing into colourless ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ experiences⁶⁶⁶ are the unique contexts from which they emerge (lifeworld), the distinctive content they manifest (the Kuwait-Copt narratives), and the particular goal they obtain: transformation unto love. Matta Al-Meskīn here is helpful:

A Christian life means a life in the spirit, being reborn from God, occurring and being built on an extremely important process: that of an unending transformation. . . The main influence and element producing that transformation in human nature is God Himself, by the immediate action of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments, and a daily life of love, praise, thanksgiving and testimony.⁶⁶⁷

Al-Meskīn ties together the agent of transformation, the Holy Spirit, and the means: the sacraments, a daily life of love, praise, thanksgiving and testimony. This

⁶⁶⁵ The experience of God in time and space reinforces the spatial metaphors found in the narratives. As embodied humans there are not many other ways of constructing experience.

⁶⁶⁶ I am thinking here of the clichéd ‘mystical’ experience of becoming one with the universe. Such reductionist tendencies are belied by the data on shamans and even LSD users who report encountering other beings during their ‘astral’ travels as well as a variety of other, sometimes unpleasant experiences.

⁶⁶⁷ Al-Meskīn, *Be Transformed*, 3.

transformation ('change' in the interview data) has definite characteristics. Tadros explains (note well the spatial metaphor: 'near from God, near from people'):

This is a change. More you with God, more smile, more humble, more. . . love to people. Opposite to others who say, I know God, but he's not loving . . . people. You have to love people once you know God. Because God is in the centre of area, like that. If you are near from God you are near from people.⁶⁶⁸

Change through the action of the Spirit brings joy ('more smile'), humility, but must also result in love: 'You have to love people once you know God'. This echoes 1 John 4.20: 'If a man says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?'

Kyrillos, too, confirms the centrality of love in the Coptic tradition:

But we're always taught in whatever church, love. . . And I think this message is what sticks with Copts. . . deeply entrenched in the Coptic psyche. . . the general Coptic response is: this is what we expect and we love you anyways. . . I think this one message, if our Coptic church has been able to live one commandment, this would be it.⁶⁶⁹

Taken together one gains a sense that the purpose of the pneumatic pieties is not mere entertainment or experience for the sake of experience; on the contrary, change marked by the virtue of love emerges as the central *telos*. This is not a surprising find in and of itself, the Bible⁶⁷⁰ witnesses to love's centrality over and over, even going as far to state that 'God is love'.⁶⁷¹ It is the commandment that summarises the totality of the Hebrew Bible and gets carried over as the primary command for New Testament believers as well. What is surprising is that such a goal reframes the mystical-ascetic tradition not as a soteriological, works-based attempt to 'get to God' *but as a contextualised and empowered response to and as a result of pneumatic activity* along similar lines as Sorial's Christocentric enculturation. This dynamic,

⁶⁶⁸ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

⁶⁶⁹ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁶⁷⁰ It should be remembered that the Copts in this study are very literate in the Bible.

⁶⁷¹ 1 John 4.8, 16.

relational interaction is perhaps best seen in Coptic prayer with God and with the saints (below).

In terms of theoria-side of rescription, this chapter proposes a sociotheological reformulation of the theory of *theosis* in contrast to a strictly one-sided theological one. It does so by linking the process of pneumatic piety with the twin goals of love of neighbour (socio) and love of God (theo). Such a theory shows that pneumatic piety is interactive, dynamic, and transformative. It thus adds a corollary to my original theory of pneumatic piety. Not only are the monastic-ascetic elements of the Coptic tradition conducive for experiences of the Holy Spirit, *those experiences change the participants*.⁶⁷² This was hinted at in the earlier modification to the IR model in the previous chapter: heightened spirituality. Here I want to specify that the primary ‘standard of morality’ predicted by the IR model as a ritual outcome is love. This love, both as a standard of morality and as part of a heightened spirituality that includes perceived divine participation is inherently sociotheological. For clarity’s sake, the outlined, sociotheologically expanded *theosis* theory is helpfully rendered according to a similar interactive-transformative model. Finally, the model is used to help unpack Coptic prayer. First, however, in terms of the lifeworld-side of the rescription dialectic on a tighter scale, this project of *theosis* is played out against the complex and sometimes polarising backdrop of Coptic renewal.

⁶⁷² It could be argued that for God to be truly relational, He must be responsive, implying mutability. My theory of pneumatic *kenosis* argues that such mutability is part of His self-limitation in order to have genuine relationships. In other words, the Spirit condescends in order to love people. This corollary could also read ‘perceived to change’ the participants, but I have chosen to stay close to the narratives themselves rather than engage in deeper empirical testing of long-term behavioural change among Kuwait-Copts.

6.2 The Coptic Renewal, Pentecostalisation, and St Mark's

One of the background themes that arose from the interviews, fieldwork, and other data is that the Coptic Orthodox church is in the midst of a renewal that began in the monasteries and has fanned out through the laity, and, consequently, into the diaspora. Although this renewal, briefly mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, can also be attributed to various socio-economic conditions and/or other political currents. Theologically, it is partly linked to what Watson calls a 'retrieval of a wider Orthodox consciousness'.⁶⁷³ Together with Pope Kyrillos VI's reforming tendencies, this retrieval was significantly influenced by the work of Matta Al-Meskīn and the monks of St Macarius monastery.⁶⁷⁴ Al-Meskīn helped provide the theological fuel while Kyrillos provided the ecclesiastical charisma. Both are emblematic: Kyrillos was called the Hermit Pope and only reluctantly came out of his solitude. Al-Meskīn set the example of what monastic sacrifice looks like: receive a high education, own and operate a successful business, and then leave it all for the monastery.⁶⁷⁵ It is thus impossible to understand the pietistic impulse of my interlocutors without registering the fact that their spirituality is riding the wave of a greater renewal, one that has steadily increased in the COC over the last few decades.

One theme that signals the presence of this renewal trajectory is the desire for substance along with form, authenticity as it were. This was framed in terms of 'meaning' and 'understanding' by my interviewees. Learning what the various movements and parts of the liturgy meant were key in creating a feedback loop that allowed them to participate more fully in the ritual thereby generating emotional

⁶⁷³ Presumably, this retrieval also involves a further distancing from the Realist orientation discussed elsewhere.

⁶⁷⁴ The monastery also has its own publishing house and bookstore. See <http://www.stmacariusmonastery.org/eabout.htm>.

⁶⁷⁵ It is important to remember that, by and large, monks and nuns are required to have a college degree before joining the monasteries today.

energy to maintain their piety *outside* the liturgical situation. Additionally, there was parallel dissatisfaction with codified piety. Marina here is illustrative:

Agpeya is not a conversation. . . I believe that this paperwork it's not enough at all. Some people maybe they can get through heaven with these Bibles and *Agpeya*— this stuff, but in their real deep spiritual life that's not enough. One time I asked a monk who was very close to us, 'How can we know God better, how can we just reach deeper for God?' He said, 'Talking to God.' So simple, that's it.⁶⁷⁶

Furthermore, those I interviewed who had come under Al-Meskīn's influence carried with them this same type of dissatisfaction with the superficial; theirs is a faith seeking understanding through educated and sometimes difficult forms of theological literacy. Several of my respondents spoke favourably of him and others listened to his sermons and/or read his books or those of his disciples. Significantly, and more concretely, Al-Meskīn mentored Bishoy Kamel, the founder of St George, Sporting, Alexandria, the home church for most of my respondents. Unsurprisingly, too, the one respondent who had the deepest awareness of Al-Meskīn's work frequently travelled to St Macarius monastery.⁶⁷⁷ He also told me directly that '[o]ur father is Bishoy Kamel. This is our father. He's one of the sons of 'Abūnā Matta'.⁶⁷⁸ Tellingly, this man viewed Bishoy Kamel and his Al-Meskīn lineage as his own rather than the priests and monks at St Mark, the majority of whom came from St Bishoy monastery not St Macarius. This sympathetic response of those who knew of Al-Meskīn was representative. Thus, there are concrete links between Al-Meskīn's legacy, St Macarius, St George, Sporting, and my research sample, as I mentioned in Chapter Four. These channels of transmission have allowed the 'retrieval of a wider Orthodox consciousness' to flow through to Kuwait. This linkage confirms that for

⁶⁷⁶ Marina, interview by Ben Crace, 09 Jan 2017, Egalia, Kuwait. Marina had come into contact with the Jesus Prayer and thus Eastern Orthodoxy through *The Way of the Pilgrim*, not Al-Meskīn. She claimed it also enhanced her spiritual life.

⁶⁷⁷ This respondent also arranged my visit there.

⁶⁷⁸ Bishoy, interview by Ben Crace, 08 Jan 2017, Salmiya, Kuwait.

some of the Kuwait-Coptic elite, the Christian life is a form of monastic extrapolation focused on the transformation of the whole person through a variety of means. This ascetically driven, heart-centred impulse to adopt and adapt various forms of spirituality, I argue, is itself generated by the practice of the pneumatic pieties individually/socially and sharpened by the diasporic context.

Simultaneous to the retrieval of a wider Orthodox consciousness, there is an increased Pentecostalisation among the diasporic elite.⁶⁷⁹ Many send their children to the PC-leaning, Christian school (The Lighthouse)⁶⁸⁰ and others have a steady diet of PC preaching and teaching; Joyce Meyer⁶⁸¹, for example, is a favourite. Again, Ester: ‘. . . I do love many people, Evangelists, Protestants, Catholics, Coptic, I love everyone and I love the ideas of everyone’.⁶⁸² This trajectory towards Protestantism and PC Christianity is consistent with Watson’s claims that ‘[i]t may be that the Protestant inroads into Coptic Orthodoxy in the nineteenth century were much greater than previously believed’.⁶⁸³ Coptic Biblicism⁶⁸⁴ alone is perhaps strong enough to provide an explanation as to why they do not see discontinuity between their faith and

⁶⁷⁹ I say Pentecostalisation as opposed to Protestantisation or broader Evangelicalisation because many of the non-Orthodox congregations in Kuwait that Copts are likely to be exposed to are themselves PC influenced and shaped. Deeper links with PC Christianity are explored in Chapter Seven.

⁶⁸⁰ Tuition at The Lighthouse is nearly 5000 British pounds per year, a price only the diasporic elite can manage.

⁶⁸¹ Joyce Meyer is a well-known Bible teacher and appears on internet and satellite TV all over the world. According to her website, she has quite the PC pedigree: an honorary doctorate from famous Pentecostal institution Oral Roberts University. The “What We Believe” page highlights Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts, see “What We Believe,” Joyce Meyer Ministries 14 Jan 2018. .

⁶⁸² Ester, 23 Aug 2016.

⁶⁸³ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 139-40. I briefly touch on the history of Pentecostalism in Egypt in the next chapter.

⁶⁸⁴ Biblicism is, as David Bebbington has defined it, ‘a particular regard for the Bible’ and ‘a devotion’ to it as a result of believing that ‘all spiritual truth is to be found in its pages’ in D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3, 12. Similarly, Al-Meskīn: ‘When you read the Bible as a personal message to you from God, the words find their way to the depths of your conscience and spiritual sensitivity. You read with a spiritual awareness, your heart being open, receptive and ready for obedience and joy. Like living and distinct fingerprints of God’s will and pleasure, they move, form and impress their divine, effective impact. In response, the deadened conscience revives. . .’ quoted in Nelly van Doorn-Harder, “Sacred Text, Revelation and Authority: Remembering and Transmitting the Word,” in *Religious Identity and Renewal in the Twenty-First Century: Christian and Muslim Explorations*, ed. Simone Sinn and Michael Reid Trice (Germany: The Luthern World Federation, 2015), 127.

basic PC/Evangelical⁶⁸⁵ Bible teaching. Further, several interviewees indicated that they do their devotional times and Bible study with the New King James translation, an English version popular among PC/Evangelicals. Interviewees also listened to English PC music and sang Protestant and PC choruses as part of their chapel services outside of the liturgy. Some interlocutors had even attended (or watched on YouTube/Coptic TV) Coptic Orthodox services in Egypt that are reminiscent of PC healing meetings. Diana recounts:

D: I've seen all the, like you know, miracles happen. Where people get off wheelchairs and things like that.

B Where did you see that?

D: Do you know the St Saman Church in Moqattam. That's where they put all the old wheelchairs and canes that they [left behind after being healed] . . . We used to go there every year. And I've seen all the wheelchairs and heard stories from the people that it happened to. So, I know that's, I believe in that 100% so last year I went without family alone with some friends. And I saw the exorcism of some spirits. [March 2016 and went again with her mother in summer of 2016]

B What was that like for you?

D: I didn't like it.

B It was creepy? [trying to interpret her facial expression]

D: Yeah, I don't see why I have to watch that. It was little bit creepy. And I've seen it a lot on TV. . . .⁶⁸⁶

One news report calls these meetings 'charismatic Coptic services' that last three hours and involve thousands of people.⁶⁸⁷ Even a cursory glance at one of these meetings reveals a revivalistic atmosphere replete with enthusiastic singing,

⁶⁸⁵ More precisely, Pentecostal-Charismatics often see themselves as a subset to the larger category of Evangelical rather than a completely different type of Christian. PC Christians would thus affirm all of Bebbington's evangelical markers, perhaps adding baptism of the Holy Spirit as their own distinctive.

⁶⁸⁶ Diana, 04 Jan 2017. This is the same church Ilizabet also witnessed someone getting out of a wheelchair, see Illizibet, 03 May 2016.

⁶⁸⁷ Bob Simon, "The Coptic Christians of Egypt," CBS, 12 Oct 2017, 12 October 2017. To see the service: Chad ForJohnson, "Coptic Christian Night Mass in Egypt," (YouTube, 2015).

preaching, and miracles. Interestingly, according to Diana's account, they keep the old wheelchairs and canes as trophies, a very common PC practice linked to the importance of the healing testimony. The point is clear: the global Pentecostalisation of Christianity is reaching the COC in and out of Egypt.⁶⁸⁸

At St Mark's, renewal trajectories and pietistic impulses literally collide in a church that is frequently crowded. Socially speaking, the *ad hoc*, heterogeneous nature of St Mark's pushes the heady, exploring faith of some of the diasporic elite against the traditional (and perhaps 'folk') faith of the Upper Egyptian; a clash that one can avoid in Sporting or Asyut (in Upper Egypt). For example, Ester relates:

I can see the difference. When in our Sunday school, where some kids they have different language and different types of things, which to some person from Cairo might seem rude. . . They want to go to the bathroom, they would say it in different ways. Where some person might see it as rude, but that's just how they're used to saying in. So, you can have a culture shock within the church, but I'm used to it. And I understand that this is there, but it causes lots of clashes sometimes—especially when we have big masses for Christmas or Easter. And all of those big [holidays] where we get everyone going to church on the same day because usually the days are split. So, for example, Fridays usually people of the lowest class usually go there because they only have Friday off, where middle class can go mostly on Saturdays or any other day as well.⁶⁸⁹

And:

I see the people who are simpler, and they see *baraka* more simply than people like myself. They take blessings from literally anything in church, and they believe it's a true blessing, which is good for them. . . They're very holy in that way. But for me, I don't see it in touching a picture; I do that sometimes but I don't believe that . . .⁶⁹⁰

It is important to see that Ester, without vitriol, clearly sees an us/them dichotomy that permeates language, culture, practice, and belief. Although she sees their simplicity

⁶⁸⁸ PC Christianity is also appealing because of its potential for egalitarianism and female empowerment, especially in the face of a patriarchal clerical system. For Pentecostalism and gender, see Elizabeth Brusco, "Gender and Power," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁶⁸⁹ Ester, 23 Aug 2016.

⁶⁹⁰ Ester, 23 Aug 2016.

as holiness, ‘they’re very holy in that way’, she is also fairly confident that her form of piety is different if not superior to the ‘lowest class’. Pentecostalisation, and the adoption of a wider ‘Orthodox consciousness’, suggests a form of literate globalisation that appears to be increasing the distance between the *Ṣa^cīdī* (the term for the residents of Upper Egypt) and the cosmopolitan Alexandrian/Cairene—a separation made even more apparent in the diaspora. Education, access to various forms of media, travel, and English are essential elements to this process.

In strictly Coptic terms, another way of framing the diasporic tension resulting from a collision of renewal and pietistic impulses in St Mark’s is to see Pope Kyrillos and Al-Meskīn as standing for emblematic types. For the *Ṣa^cīdī*, struggling to survive the vicissitudes of daily existence, he needs an accessible miracle worker and father figure. For the diasporic elite, ensconced in a more or less middle-class lifestyle where *ennui* and spiritual attrition are the greater temptations, she needs the example of another from her class and education who gave it all up for the ascetic lifestyle. This is worked out empirically in Coptic iconography and burial practices. Pope Kyrillos is wildly popular and appears everywhere in icons; his tomb is as big an attraction as any other Coptic tourist destination in Egypt.⁶⁹¹ Al-Meskīn has no icons and his grave is marked by a single cross on a hillside. These differences in representation reinforce the literate, ecumenical,⁶⁹² and globalised versus semi-literate and provincial as previously noted. It is sufficient for the diasporic elite to read the book, hear the sermon, she does not need to touch a picture or talk to the saint and his graveside.

⁶⁹¹ In terms of diasporic elite taste and aesthetics, Pope Kyrillos’ tomb in Egypt is quite touristic. I choose Kyrillos as an emblematic type over and above Shenouda for the simple reason he appears to be more popular among the diasporic elite. In my conversations, several respondents did not hesitate to criticize Shenouda but not a single one had a negative word about Kyrillos. Perhaps time will make all the difference.

⁶⁹² Al-Meskīn had supporters from around the world and in various other Christian communions.

In terms of this study, it is important to point out that the diasporic elite are essentially *inwardly* and renewal focused; heart religion matters: moral/ethical change is ‘the real miracle’.⁶⁹³ The pneumatic pieties, framed now in terms of IR rituals, the diasporic context, and the larger, Coptic renewal tinged with Pentecostalisation, are enacted to ‘grow spiritually’ or change ‘levels’ with the goal and hope that such practices will help them become more loving and Christ-like. Therefore, in offering a theoretical analytical model, I want to be sensitive to the sociological and theological aspects of the renewal among the research sample. Sociologically, my model should be recognisable to my Coptic interlocutors as consistent with their narrated experiences.⁶⁹⁴ Theologically, I want to remain sensitive to the twin renewal impulses to maintain a parallel openness to both a wider Orthodox consciousness and PC trajectories.⁶⁹⁵ One way to accomplish this is by reformulating and expanding the theory of *theosis*.

This reformulation and re-deployment is rooted in the both the general revived interest in *theosis* among Christians and among PC Christians and Copts specifically, as touched upon in Chapter Two. There I pointed out how prominent PC and Coptic theologians are re-engaging with the doctrine. Nagib, as noted, points out that pentecostalised, ecumenical Copts in Egypt are also appropriating the doctrine. Even Reformed Christians see its significance and ecumenical potential. Carl Mosser contends that ‘deification is both a Biblical doctrine and constituent part of our catholic heritage’, and ‘the early patristic vision of salvation should serve as a common starting point [for ecumenical discussions]’. He goes on to argue that

⁶⁹³ Such a focus, one could argue, is itself a reaction to the process of Pentecostalisation.

⁶⁹⁴ And it does. To reiterate, my description and analysis has met the postulate of adequacy; this study was read by a Kuwait-Copt for this very reason.

⁶⁹⁵ Determining influence is tricky. It is sufficient to note here that some Coptic priests have been accused of being too Pentecostal/Charismatic or simply Protestant by others in the hierarchy. This suggests, to me, that Copts are aware of differences that an outsider may not readily discern.

‘paying greater attention to the *telos* of salvation provides resources for the contemporary theological task and helps orient the spiritual life’.⁶⁹⁶ In developing a sociotheological interpretation and model of *theosis*, this study offers a descriptive tool with future ecumenical purchase.⁶⁹⁷

6.3 Towards a Sociotheological Theory and the Diamond Model of *Theosis* (DMT)

6.3.1 Towards a Sociotheological Theory of Theosis

Many recent attempts to revive *theosis* rely heavily upon patristic and Greek sources and often have an Eastern Orthodox, specifically Byzantine/Russian, theological flavour. The resultant theory of *theosis* along these lines I identify as *classical theosis*. For example, Al-Meskīn quotes Vladimir Lossky, St Seraphim of Sarov, and the *Philokalia*. Clark Pinnock, a seminal theologian for PC pneumatological reflection and advocate for *theosis* also engages with the *Philokalia*, Lossky, the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, and Kallistos Ware, a major interpreter of the Eastern Orthodox tradition to the West. This Eastern Orthodox orientation is not unexpected since the general trend in the twentieth century was to isolate *theosis* as a distinctively Eastern Orthodox doctrine; they proudly promoted it as such themselves. Recognising its Eastern provenance, influential German Lutheran theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) severely criticised the doctrine as ‘a prime example of the corrupting influence of Greek philosophy upon Eastern Christianity’.⁶⁹⁸ More recent accounts,

⁶⁹⁶ Carl Mosser, "Deification: A Truly Ecumenical Concept," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought*, no. July/August (2015): 13-4.

⁶⁹⁷ On the other hand, I recognise the limitations of this re-deployment as it aligns with a controversial doctrine and is rescripted for an academic audience rather than the laity. For levels of discourse resulting from the rescription process, see Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 18-21.

⁶⁹⁸ Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (2002): 37.

like Mosser's, have attempted to show that *theosis* is indeed part and parcel of both the East and West's heritage; but he is aware that his is still a minority opinion. However, Mosser and Harnack are on to something. In order for *theosis* to function as an ecumenically viable doctrine that allows for greater lay involvement, it needs to be expanded beyond its typical framework, outlined below.

The attempts to modernise and define *theosis* often follow similar trajectories.⁶⁹⁹ They begin with a Foucauldian-like genealogy of the term itself, tracing its synonyms and usages by the Church Fathers—particularly through their commentaries on the salient theotic Biblical passages; Irenaeus, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and the Cappadocian Fathers⁷⁰⁰ are the mainstays. This is sometimes accompanied by counter-positioning ancient thought patterns over and against contemporary conceptual categories to reveal the inconsistency of discarding the doctrine without really understanding it from the originators' perspectives. This is usually done to counter arguments suggesting that the confusing terminology of deification is blasphemous or really just pantheism or panentheism. From this point, the accounts shift toward its various permutations, usually from within a Byzantine and/or Russian Orthodox monastic context. The legacies of Pseudo-Dionysius (fifth to early sixth century), Mount Athos and Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) feature predominately. Bringing the doctrine into the modern context often includes references to Kallistos Ware and noted theologians such as Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983), Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944) and

⁶⁹⁹ The following description is a composite, but Paul Gavriilyuk's article is for the most part representative as he fails to even mention the Holy Spirit's role in his review and updating of the literature on the doctrine. See Gavriilyuk, "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum."

⁷⁰⁰ The Cappadocian Fathers are Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.

Georges Florovsky (1893-1979). This meta-program of articulating *theosis*—the patristic-Byzantine-Russian narrative—is fraught with a number of difficulties.

One difficulty with this narrative is that it is pneumatologically deficient. Despite the pneumatological concerns of the aforementioned theologians, summary accounts tend to separate the Christological from the pneumatic. A tersely Christological approach to *theosis* mainly focuses on analogous reasoning and reflections on the nature of the Incarnation with its soteriological implications. This focus, in turn, foregrounds the sacraments, the Eucharist in particular, as the primary means of participating in Christ, thereby anchoring *theosis* primarily within the ecclesial hierarchy and church building.⁷⁰¹ Outside of the sacraments housed in a church, *theosis* then is linked to strict monastic lifestyles. This is problematic as it presents geographical issues: the average person is neither in a church or a monastery for most of his/her life.⁷⁰² By way of contrast, an emphasis on the Spirit's presence and role is not confined to particular locales, as indicated by my respondents' narratives on prayer, examined later in this chapter.

Attracted by the large Byzantine theological magnet, writers often assume that there are no justifiable and orthodox dissident positions available in regard to the nature of the Incarnation, which, in turn informs conceptualisations for Spirit/person interaction.⁷⁰³ The Idealist orientation rather than the Realist has won the day. As the Incarnation is foundational for ontological, anthropological, and pneumatological reflection, the regnant Idealist/Platonic view repeated in the literature through these

⁷⁰¹ Lay prayer practices as described by this study contest the sole efficacy of the Eucharist to enable participation in Christ.

⁷⁰² For the Kuwait-Copt this poses a unique problem as well; there are no monasteries, and there is only one church that is not open all the time.

⁷⁰³ For an interesting account of a pneumatically-focused anthropology rooted in the Incarnation, see Norman P. Madsen, "Pneumatological Anthropology: A Proposal for a Theology of the Holy Spirit," *Reformed Review* 37, no. 1 (1983).

summaries suppresses cataphatic experiences of God preferring apophatic emphases.⁷⁰⁴

Watson clarifies:

The *apophatic* theology. . . which is quite fundamental in Eastern Orthodoxy, certainly appears to have very few echoes among the Copts. Against an apophatic tradition which states that our concepts of God cannot properly be affirmed of Him, and where there is an assertion concerning the inadequacy of human understanding, the Coptic inclination is towards a *cataphatic*, affirmative and symbolic theology.⁷⁰⁵

I would add that Watson's 'symbolic' needs further revision in light of a Realist orientation; symbols do not simply 'stand in' for something else, they hypostatize what they 'stand' for.⁷⁰⁶ In light of the ultimate hypostasis, Jesus Christ, many attributes of God can be affirmed as can all of embodied existence as a means of perceiving Him due to pneumatic *kenosis*. On the other hand, 'For theologians of the idealistic orientation, the point where human nature physically touches Divinity is the mind, which deified by the participation in God communicates deification also to the body, over which the mind has mastery'.⁷⁰⁷ This noetic hierarchical emphasis (the mind as mediator and master) leads to a continued denigration through exclusion of popular, 'sensual' piety (through touch, for example) linked to the Realist orientation that still informs the Coptic imaginary as exemplified through the quest for *baraka*.

There is also a strong patriarchal tone in regard to classical articulations of *theosis*. When (re)constructing *theosis*, the modern interpreter consults theologians,

⁷⁰⁴ The two are not mutually exclusive, but more attention is often given to the apophatic emphasis perhaps given its 'exotic' origins and similarities with non-Christian traditions such as Soto-Zen. For apophaticism in the West and its dependency on cataphaticism, see Mark Johnson, "Apophatic Knowledge's Cataphatic Dependencies," *Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 62, no. 4 (1998). For more on the history of the two terms with, as expected, more description of apophaticism, see Andrew Louth, "Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷⁰⁵ Watson, *Among the Copts*, 139-40. Perhaps the cataphatic tendency in the COC makes it more amenable to Pentecostalisation than Eastern Orthodoxy given their shared emphasis on physicality.

⁷⁰⁶ Thus also producing polythetic phenomena, that is, phenomena that 'cannot be grasped all at once, because it has to unfold in time' in Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes*, 198.

⁷⁰⁷ Popov, "Idea of Deification," 62.

priests, and monks—all typically male (and generally long dead). If, indeed, *theosis* involves the whole Body of Christ, lay and female experiences and voices must also be considered even if they do not use the ‘correct’ terminology.⁷⁰⁸ If, too, the broader theme of salvation and *theosis* overlap significantly, a plurality of voices only enriches rather than detracts from it.

Confining *theosis* foremost to the Byzantine tradition and its Russian interpreters also places an undue emphasis on eremitical and hesychastic spirituality.⁷⁰⁹ The ideal hesychast is also a hermit, isolated from others to contemplate God. This vision of isolation and contemplation is simply unrealistic for the vast majority of Christians with vocational and familial responsibilities. Further, it downplays the constitutive social dynamics of Christian development out ‘in the world’. The essence of *theosis*, deep experiences of unity with God, according to this account, only occur after years of arduous effort, preferably in a monastery, or, better, an isolated hermitage.⁷¹⁰ Therefore, a strict patristic-Byzantine-Russian account of *theosis* is potentially more alienating and exclusive than empowering and helpful.⁷¹¹

An expanded, lay revision of *theosis* is not as radical as it may seem at first glance. It should be remembered that Irenaeus is often credited as one of the original architects of the doctrine. Irenaeus, of course, lived and wrote before Christian monasticism existed; his milieu was similar to the Coptic situation in Kuwait—a pastor concerned for his flock in a relatively hostile environment. He did not write as a monk to other monks. Additionally, some of my interviewees knew of and had read

⁷⁰⁸ It should be remembered that the majority of my respondents were lay women, offering a counterbalance to the male-dominated conversation.

⁷⁰⁹ Hesychasm essentially centres around psychosomatic prayer techniques and rigid fasting practices that must be done under close supervision.

⁷¹⁰ Part of the charismatic authority for Pope Kyrillos VI and Al-Meskīn is grounded in their eremitical experiences.

⁷¹¹ Coptic appropriation of the doctrine such as Al-Meskīn’s would appear to be mainly for a monastic audience; here, too, the patristic-Byzantine-Russian narrative further underscores the Coptic eremitical tradition.

the anonymous 19th century work, *The Way of the Pilgrim*.⁷¹² This widely popular work is a Russian Orthodox attempt to laicise the hesychast tradition and provides precedent for my own expansion. In it, a pilgrim, seeks to pray the Jesus Prayer (discussed later) unceasingly as he goes about his daily life. The overall impression of the narrative is that ceaseless prayer is communion/union with God and does not require the monastic apparatus.

The patristic-Byzantine-Russian account of *theosis* is neither rejected nor disregarded in my proposed theory. In fact, it is precisely the lay appropriation of those monastic-ascetic practices which enable experiences with the Holy Spirit to occur among the diasporic elite. However, given the differences in lifeworlds between monks and migrants, the latter's experiences differ in their frequency, intensity, location, and expression.⁷¹³ In light of these differences while seeking to register continuity as well, this study's sociotheological theory of *theosis* expands the classical 'theological' account to include psychological, pneumatological, and social elements indicated by lay report. In more specific terms and as an enlargement of the strict patristic-Byzantine-Russian account, I propose that *theosis is the dynamic, interpersonal process of transformation (movement towards Christ-likeness) on ontological, epistemological (affective and cognitive knowledge) and ethical levels patterned after Jesus Christ that occurs through the pneumatic pieties within corresponding IR chains accompanied by recognisable psychological phenomena.*⁷¹⁴

As one can see, this definition could just as easily apply to a religious as to a

⁷¹² This text is part of the reason my interview schedule includes the question about the Jesus Prayer, which, as it turned out, has Coptic precedents.

⁷¹³ Again, this study is not comparative between monastic piety and migrant piety but inferences can be made. One difference would be the level of theological discourse the former would use to describe his/her experiences. See below, too, ontological transformation differs as well.

⁷¹⁴ Flow states and ASAs specifically but also awareness of another presence, shifts in the emotions, and so forth

layperson, and that is the point. Diasporic Copts do not see themselves as followers of a separate tradition but as participants of the same tradition but to lesser degree. ‘Through the pneumatic pieties’ keeps classical *theosis* while also indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit (‘pneumatic’). This adds a much needed pneumatological element to *theosis* since it is as much about the Spirit condescending to the human experience of space, time, emotion, and personhood as it is about the individual ascending to godhood/godliness. This downward/in movement⁷¹⁵ of the Spirit is often left out in the classical accounts of *theosis*. The model for unity with God is the incarnated and Spirit-anointed Christ. The Incarnation sources the model of kenotic condescension and, as I argued in Chapter One, provides the template for pneumatic *kenosis*.

The Christocentric, Realist nature of Coptic Orthodoxy posits that it is possible for everyone to have manifold experiences of unity with God. This includes a physical union with God; humanity, in Christ, is divinised.⁷¹⁶ An aspect of this impartation of divinity (we become by grace what Christ is by nature) is a *material* (or somatic) change patterned off of the body of Christ. For the average, lay Copt, this is attained primarily through the Eucharist when she ingests ‘the awesome live coal of divinity’⁷¹⁷ but also through the quest for *baraka* and other pneumatic pieties. I thus use ‘ontological’ in this sense, underwritten by my pneumatic *kenosis* theory with substantive *pneuma* undertones and Incarnational accents. One example of this ontological change in the Coptic monastic imaginary is glowing. Light literally

⁷¹⁵ This decent language could rightly be called ‘Pentecostal’.

⁷¹⁶ It would perhaps be more appropriate to call the process Christosis instead of *theosis*. The physical union with God can only occur within a pneuma-as-substance frame. For a wider treatment of Christosis, see Ben Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2 (Heidelberg, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

⁷¹⁷ Al-Meskīn quoted in Davis, *Coptic Christology in Practice*, 276.

emanates from the individual as a sort of spiritual bioluminescence as it did for Christ during his Transfiguration.⁷¹⁸ As part of this material change, too, healing power may flow through the individual out to others.⁷¹⁹ Additionally, the incorruptibility of saints' bodies is a marker for ontological transformation.⁷²⁰ Another less spectacular form of ontological transformation occurs when one becomes a monk; he is required to go through a burial ceremony and, then, cannot shave his beard or cut his hair. This is seen as a return to the Edenic state of humankind and is sometimes even referred to as the 'angelic life', an epigram that recognises the various dimensions of transformation under discussion. Thus, cooperative ontological transformation is no less authentic than the supernatural and is empirically manifested.⁷²¹

Ontological categories for discussing *theosis* must not leave out the epistemological and ethical dimensions, which could be described as unity in terms of having shared feelings, thoughts, and attitudes with God. Epistemologically, transformation occurs on the affective and cognitive levels. Cognitively, one's discernment is sharpened and the individual sees 'deeper meanings' and is able to 'read' experience in ways that are in line with Coptic tradition. It can also mean receiving revelatory insight, thus being able to know things without being told and tell things in advance. Affectively, the individual begins to exhibit traits associated with godliness: humility, patience, gentleness, cheerfulness, joy, humour, faithfulness in trial, and so on. The transformed mind and heart are then able to know the world and one's experience of it in ways previously undisclosed. Ethically, transformation

⁷¹⁸ See Matt. 17.1-8; Mark 9.2-8; Luke 9.28-36.

⁷¹⁹ Jesus, too, could perceive spiritual power leaving His body, apparently without His consent, see Luke 8.46 and Mark 5.30.

⁷²⁰ This characteristic of godliness occurs across Orthodoxy, Eastern and Oriental as well as in the Roman Catholic and even Anglican traditions.

⁷²¹ Monastic habits and clerical clothing also index a material-spiritual continuum, see Davis, "Fashioning a Divine Body."

affects one's behaviour in regard to others. This means doing one's job well, serving in the church, assisting the poor, assisting others in need, and responding appropriately under persecution—in short, becoming a loving person.

According to the Christian tradition, becoming like God means to become love. Biblical love aggregates the various dimensions of *theosis*. Love seeks unity with the Beloved, which, pneumatologically and Eucharistically speaking is more intimate than the marital union. Love also desires experiential, affective knowledge of the Beloved beyond mere mental cognition. Yet, love also demands content, concrete knowledge of the way things are in order to act. Finally, love constitutes the supreme ethic/moral code. A robust Christology with love in mind rounds out the theological dimensions. Christ is 'one with the Father' and is the one Who makes Him known, through teaching (cognition), action, modelling, and direct *pneuma* to *pneuma* contact or revelation. Jesus' own ethic, cemented in the Sermon on the Mount and lived out in His passion, further defines what 'godliness' looks like. Finally, Jesus' resurrected body provides the model *par excellence* for the pneumatic body of the saints or complete transformation. In other words, Jesus Christ cataphatically fills the meaning of God and love. In terms of the Copts, their Christocentric worship exemplified in their art, interview responses, and liturgy, grounds their theology in the prerequisite God of love Who initiates, energises, and maintains *theosis* through the Holy Spirit.

My reformulated, expanded theory includes sociological elements that are often neglected in the hesychastic, 'navel gazing' account of *theosis*. First of all, it recognises that spirituality is subject to the same socialisation processes as everything else. This is underscored by the inclusion of the IR model within inter-personal

interactions and shares some of the same symbolic interactionist assumptions.⁷²² In doing so, my theory also assumes that ‘human beings are endowed with the capacity for thought, the capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction, and in social interaction people learn the meanings and the symbols that allow them to exercise their distinctively human capacity for thought’.⁷²³ The ordinary theology uncovered in the narratives exemplifies this process; as seen in the various narratives, the Coptic imaginary is intensely populated with Coptic symbols and meanings. Additionally, a focus on the ethical dimension locates the theory squarely in the realm of observable behaviour among people in groups.

6.3.2 *Appropriating the Diamond Model of Godly Love*

The Diamond Model of Godly love was originally developed as a theoretical tool to help explain data from a long-term, extensive study (The Godly Love National Survey)⁷²⁴ dealing with Pentecostal Christians and benevolence. In the study, Lee, Poloma et. al define godly love ‘as the dynamic interaction between the divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence’.⁷²⁵ In terms of their study, they employed six benevolence measures: time, money, familial benevolence, benevolence towards friends, co-workers, the community, and the world.⁷²⁶ Their analysis is telling: ‘What surprised us is that the experience of God’s love was the only variable

⁷²² I do not share them all. For instance, I think there is more going on in the rituals than the mere ‘enactment of ideas’, see Spickard, *Alternative Sociologies of Religion: Through Non-Western Eyes*, 221.

⁷²³ George Ritzer and Jeffrey Stepnisky, *Sociological Theory* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2018), 341.

⁷²⁴ Margaret M. Poloma Matthew T. Lee, and Stephen G. Post, *The Heart of Religion: Spiritual Empowerment, Benevolence, and the Experience of God's Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25.

⁷²⁵ Margaret M. Poloma Matthew T. Lee, and Stephen G. Post, "Introduction," in *The Science and Theology of Godly Love*, ed. Matthew T. Lee and Amos Yong (DeKalb, IL: North Illinois University Press, 2012), Kindle location 9.

⁷²⁶ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 197-9.

that significantly predicted all of our dependent variables for benevolence'.⁷²⁷ They thus conclude that 'experiences of a loving God may be driving the benevolent efficacy of religious social networks'.⁷²⁸

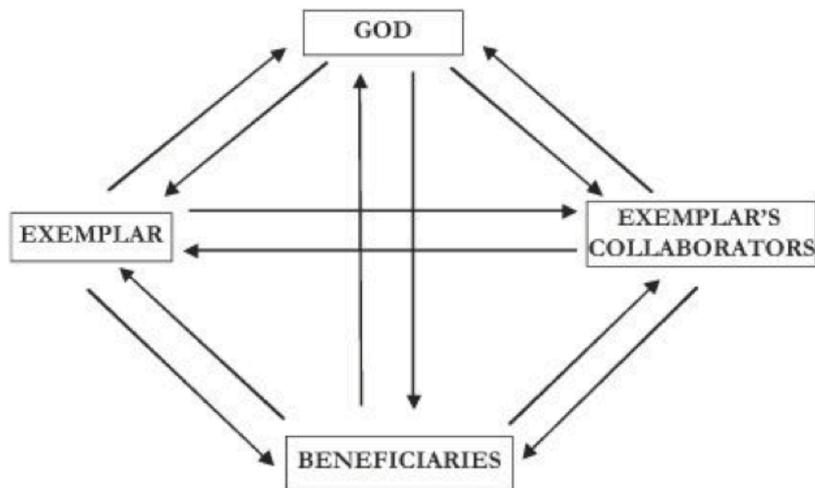


Figure 34: Diamond Model of Godly Love⁷²⁹

However, it is not the project's conclusions that are of significance for this study since my scope and aim differs so drastically. What is of significance is the resultant interactive, relational, and dynamic model above that weaves 'together social-scientific ideas and theological or religious ideas'.⁷³⁰ It is, thus, a sociotheological precedent that with a few adjustments can helpfully illustrate the theory of *theosis* outlined above.

⁷²⁷ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 200.

⁷²⁸ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 193.

⁷²⁹ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 182.

⁷³⁰ Robertson, "Problems," 109-10.

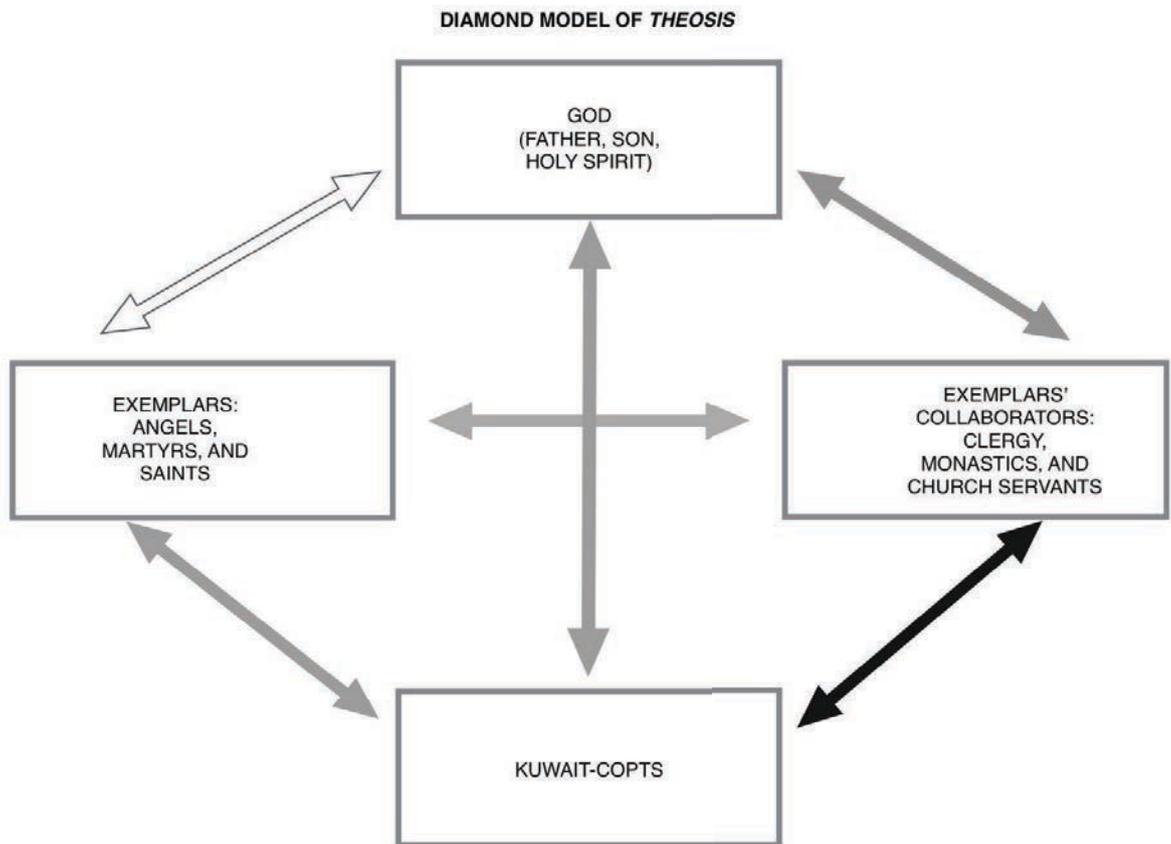


Figure 35: Diamond Model of *Theosis*⁷³¹

6.3.3 *The Diamond Model of Theosis*

Movement towards Christ Incarnate as the centre of worship⁷³² is the process of *theosis*. My expanded definition of *theosis* and model above help granulate what that process/movement looks like ‘on the ground’ as it were. As one can see, this model retains many elements of the Godly Love model. However, given the liminal worldview of the Copt, that is, a belief in the continuity between the visible and invisible realms, exemplars need not be ‘living’ for there to be a transformative

⁷³¹ Distances and spaces represented in the model are virtual and conceptual not necessarily ‘real’.

⁷³² It is important to note that ‘God’ is also defined in relationship to Christ. God is Father to Jesus, the Son; the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. The Trinitarianism of the Councils was produced by Christological and soteriological reflections not the other way around.

relationship occurring; they are, as Anderson argues, ‘relationally real’ and that is sufficient.⁷³³ In several interviews, the respondents spoke of a deep, personal relationship with one or more saints (those ‘close’ to Jesus). However, since these interactions are only verifiable through personal narratives, I have shaded the arrows a light grey. This immediately draws attention to the crossed arrows in the middle. Again, inasmuch as the data about these interactions are confined to non-empirically (strictly speaking) verifiable sources, they are light grey. The empty arrow at the top left is theologically understood to occur frequently and regularly but does not (typically) involve any living persons.⁷³⁴ In short, it is a matter of faith. Lastly, in the above model, there is a strong black arrow between Kuwait-Copts and the Exemplars’ Collaborators. This arrow indicates observable interactions that fall into the domain of sociological investigation and dovetail nicely with the rescription in the previous chapter.

The pneumatic pieties themselves are also easily mapped onto the model. The quest for *baraka* moves along each arrow extending from the Kuwait-Copt and between the Exemplars’ Collaborators and God and across to the Exemplars.⁷³⁵ The Eucharistic liturgy moves along several lines at once as well, registering as interaction with saints, God, Exemplars, and Exemplars’ Collaborators. Fasting psychologically enhances the vertical interaction with God and the experience of the Eucharistic liturgy. The more charismatic/miraculous⁷³⁶ experiences — prophecy, healing, and exorcism—can be seen as movement *from* God/Exemplars/Exemplars’ Collaborators

⁷³³ The exemplars for the Godly Love Project were very much alive. Allan Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 54.

⁷³⁴ Exceptions to this are the fuzzy phenomena of the ‘travellers’, who move from the afterlife into this one with some degree of frequency.

⁷³⁵ The quest for *baraka* obviously includes material objects, but these objects only achieve auratic significance due to their associations with certain personages or contact with *māyūrūn*.

⁷³⁶ One could include the transformation of the Eucharistic elements and answered prayer here as well.

towards the Kuwait-Copt. Finally, prayer, like the liturgy, runs along several of the arrows but also forms the heart of the model.

In terms of aligning the model with the rest of this study, the DMT, beyond providing a conceptual schema for how the pneumatic pieties are deployed, also represents a meso-level sociotheological tool that incorporates the IR model. The IR model, operating at the micro-level, is represented by each arrow and underlies the dialectical movement between the various boxes. For example, one could 'read' the arrows in terms of the various ritual ingredients, bodily co-presence specifically. The black arrow is bodily co-presence needed for entrainment. The grey arrows are mediated⁷³⁷ bodily co-presence through the liturgy, iconography, and/or ASCs/dream encounters. Given their 'relationally real' epistemology, Copts can experience collective effervescence and ritual outcomes through the same ritual ingredients and IR processes when 'alone' as when they are in a group through iconography and various forms of prayer. We need not go as far as Collins suggesting that these effects are merely internalised IR chains between parts of the self: '[I]t is the harmoniously unified self, the smoothly entrained self, that is thus cosmically transcendent'.⁷³⁸ Transcendence, rather paradoxically, is not, for Collins, an experience above and beyond the self, but unity of the self. Such a positivistic view does not fit well with the interview data of my respondents. Thus, while his microsociological mechanism is helpful for some aspects of the DMT, grafting this particular understanding into a *theological* rescription is ultimately untenable. Nevertheless, inasmuch as prayer (the focus of this chapter) is both a private and public activity, the IR model helpfully describes the process by which the pray-er, in

⁷³⁷ By mediated, I mean that the Other is accessed through means other than sitting or standing next to him/her.

⁷³⁸ Collins, "The Micro-sociology of Religion: Religious Practices, Collective and Individual," 15-6.

engaging the various sides of the DMT, undergoes existential transformation. In this construal, *theosis* maps onto the ritual outcomes including ‘heightened spirituality’,⁷³⁹ that produces love. Therefore, the DMT represents the capstone of this study and encapsulates the rescription process. Through it, I ‘[seek] to move ordinary theology forward through a deeper analysis of its testimony mode [the triangulation of fieldwork, Coptic texts, and interview data] and a broader dialogue with the Christian theological tradition [*theosis*/love/Biblical witness], illuminated by the insights of the social sciences [the IR model and the Diamond Model of *Theosis*]’.⁷⁴⁰

6.4 Situating Prayer

Prayer is crucial to transformative piety and is enfolded in even the most mundane activities of the Kuwait-Copt’s life. Lee, Poloma et. al. also note ‘[l]ike spiritual transformation, prayer is more than an act—it can be described [as] a journey toward union with the divine’.⁷⁴¹ The authors further suggest that this journey of transformation through prayer involves three levels:

- 1) Devotional activity: purposive human activity that reaches toward the divine (e.g., thanking or worshipping God; praying for needs of self and others)
- 2) Prophetic Conversation: hearing God in a direct and supernatural way and responding (e.g., receiving revelations from God or sensing a divine call to perform a specific act and then moving in faith to manifest God’s will)
- 3) Mystical Communion: feeling the presence of God or experiencing union with God (e.g., sensing God in a way that words cannot express).⁷⁴²

Although helpful, the above needs some fine-tuning to be more applicable to the present case study. As previously indicated, ‘prayer’ for the Kuwait-Copt is a variegated activity⁷⁴³ that can now be seen to involve the middle and lower left-side

⁷³⁹ Wellman, Corcoran, and Stockly-Meyerdirk, "God is Like a Drug."

⁷⁴⁰ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 18.

⁷⁴¹ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 103.

⁷⁴² Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 103.

⁷⁴³ Although it is often assumed that frequency is the best indicator of piety, studies suggest that ‘. . . the frequency of prayer is less important than how one prays and the experiences one has during

portions of the DMT. Unlike the Godly Love study that focused on unmediated forms of prayer, this study expands prayer to include conversation with all benevolent unseen entities. The intervention or intercession of a saint/angel on behalf of God is not seen as something distinctly separate from God. This blurring of agency in the unseen realm does not seem to bother Copts as much as it might low-church Protestants. With this in mind, we can granulate the above descriptions by simply adding ‘saint/angel’ alongside the references to God. Moreover, alongside these descriptions, I propose each level enacts the various dimensions of *theosis*.

- 1) Prayer as a devotional activity towards God/saints changes the pray-er along ethical and epistemological (cognitively and affectively) lines.
- 2) Prayer as prophetic conversation changes the individual’s epistemic awareness (cognitively and affectively).
- 3) Finally, prayer as mystical communion involves an affective transformation, and, as believed by the Copts, an ontological transfiguration.⁷⁴⁴

Having thus established a more thorough linkage and description of prayer as it pertains to the DMT, it is now possible to ascertain the *theosis* process at work in the interview narratives related to prayer.

6.5 Prayer with God⁷⁴⁵ Narratives and the DMT

The interview data on prayer with God reveal the theotic mechanisms at work, transforming the practitioner through the IR process. This section, then, will focus specifically on the heart of the DMT model:

prayer’ in Michael and Peter Althouse Wilkinson, *Catch the Fire: Soaking Prayer and Charismatic Renewal* (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2014), Kindle location 822.

⁷⁴⁴ Empirically verifiable ontological transfiguration is typically reserved for relics and saints and is rooted in Jesus’ own Transfiguration, often involving light.

⁷⁴⁵ ‘With God’ instead of ‘to God’ better captures the dialogical emphases of the DMT.

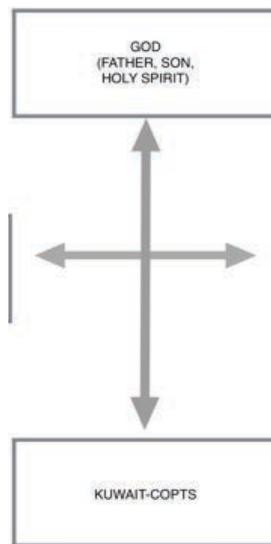


Figure 36: Interacting with the Divine

Piama sees prayer as a conversation and spends just two or three minutes talking to Jesus, thanking him. She wants to work her way up to praying the *Agpeya*. This increased desire for longer and deeper, ascetically influenced and Biblically grounded prayer hints at cognitive and affective transformation. Her reflexive perception of her current state of prayer and knowledge of another level is indicative of an epistemological shift. Kristina usually only prays at night. She sometimes reads the *Agpeya* and tries to do *metanias* from time to time, but finds them 'very tiring'.⁷⁴⁶ Bishoy regularly prays the *Agpeya* and the Lord's Prayer, but feels that 'Free praying is better'.⁷⁴⁷ Mary adds the *metanias* and cannot imagine praying without them. She claims: 'Something about doing *metania* really helps you focus on prayer and so I keep going until sometimes I was really tired. . . And honestly once I got started I feel like there's something it's like. . . there's a lot of communication. I really feel like I prayed'.⁷⁴⁸ Note that the *metanias* allow a sense of two-way communication; prayer,

⁷⁴⁶ Kristina, 29 Jan 2017.

⁷⁴⁷ Bishoy, 08 Jan Jan 2017. He may be on to something here. Other studies on prayer have shown that 'those engaged in ritual prayer are more likely to be sad, depressed, and tense, while colloquial prayer is a predictor of happiness' in Wilkinson, *Catch the Fire*, Kindle location 820.

⁷⁴⁸ Mary, 16 May 2016.

for her, is not just talking to the ceiling. Diana prays every day and specifically before she sleeps. However, she stopped doing it because 'I felt like it was routine and I'm not really connecting'. Now she prays for about five minutes in the morning on the way to class using the sunrise as a reminder.⁷⁴⁹ This flexibility among individuals to change up their prayer styles is noteworthy and is sometimes done under the guidance of a spiritual director and sometimes not. Or as Iris says, 'He [her spiritual director] gives me some advices about how to read the Bible and pray and stuff. But I never listen'.⁷⁵⁰ It is important to note that the reason Diana changed her practice was due to an *affective perception* that had meaningful, cognitive content. Her feeling of routinisation and perception of a lack of connection with God led her to abandon a widespread and widely recommended practice. The renewal impulse and the pneumatic pieties sensitise (and socialise) the individual in just these ways. She seemingly places significant weight on her ability to detect the flow of the Spirit in her private piety. She goes on to indicate that she can *choose to feel* (cognitive/affective transformation) the Spirit's presence:

I think I had my peak of spirituality probably my last year in Kuwait. And first year moving away. . . I relied on God a lot in my life. . . I felt his presence a lot and I still feel his presence constantly. Whenever I choose to be aware of it. . . Yeah, you feel God's presence when you search for it. When you look for it in your life. Because God's presence is always there. It's an ever-present thing. If you just choose to open your eyes and look for it.⁷⁵¹

She goes on to relate the presence of the Holy Spirit with experience reminiscent of mystical union:

B: What other emotion language would you use?

D: For his presence?

B: To identify his presence

⁷⁴⁹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁷⁵⁰ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

⁷⁵¹ Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

D: I think it's just being grateful. Gratitude and sort of when someone calms you down. Like when you're having a panic attack and you just feel like someone is there watching over you, someone who cares how you feel. Someone who cares whether you live or die whether you're happy or not. And then that presence, just, it's sort of an encompassing feeling, like a hug. Like a really. . . like someone wraps around you and calms you down and tells you that's it's going to be ok. . .⁷⁵²

For Diana, then, the Holy Spirit's presence in mystical prayer feels like 'gratitude' and a calming presence. Notice, too, her use of action verbs indexing the Spirit's dynamic interaction: 'like someone wraps around you'. She seems to suggest, too, that part of the choosing, searching for his presence is, in fact, prayer, 'an opening of the eyes to look'. Matta, an older gentleman, starts his devotional prayer early, before 6, and '[a]ll the day we are remembering what God is doing for us. Sometimes reading some Psalms during the breaks. Always I have the *Agpeya* in my office, I have the Bible'.⁷⁵³ Here we have a blurring between the home and workplace. Even though Matta works in a company full of Muslims, he still has his prayer book and Bible there, though perhaps not on public display.⁷⁵⁴ Matta also links devotional prayer up with 'remembering what God is doing for us'. This 'remembering' is the same language Jesus uses for the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, indexing the Biblicism common to Copts.⁷⁵⁵ For Irini, prayer is a family affair, with her father acting as a kind of household priest: '[I pray] with my family, with myself under the guidance of my father. He's the one who told me what to do, what to pray'.⁷⁵⁶ The family at prayer, then, is a microcosm of the Church and reaches toward the family of God within the communion of saints and the Trinity itself.

⁷⁵² Diana, 04 Jan 2017.

⁷⁵³ Matta, 31 Oct 2016.

⁷⁵⁴ Muslims will frequently have an open *Qur'an* on display on a special holder in various rooms and offices.

⁷⁵⁵ If Matta is praying the Psalms and the *Agpeya* at work consistently, their content also reinforces this connection between remembering God and prayer.

⁷⁵⁶ Irini, 12 Feb 2016.

Prayer for the Kuwait-Copts is a movement towards the pneumatic presence of Christ and for the purpose of being more existentially aware of his movement towards them. This raised awareness flowers into transformation. Increased sensitivity thus allows them to pneumatologically rescript personal narratives. Sofia expands the Holy Spirit's affective presence beyond the confines of liturgy or ritualised devotional prayer: 'For us, we know that the Holy Spirit is within us. It's kind of that you have the peace of God with you wherever you go. It's kind of what guides you [inaudible] like your conscious mind'.⁷⁵⁷ This constancy of peaceful presence that acts 'like [the] conscious mind' suggests a deep interconnectedness between the Spirit of God and the Copt, a mystical union untethered to ASCs or momentary 'transcendent' experiences— a form of union so fundamental, only its disruption is noticeable.⁷⁵⁸ Her newlywed husband joined in: 'I feel it's working all the day with us. Because it's happening too much we can't. . . we don't notice it'.⁷⁵⁹ Together with his reified use of 'it' for Spirit, Yousef's idea that the Holy Spirit's activity is so constant that it lies beneath our perception implies that perception needs to be disrupted to see it. For him, this occurred through life circumstances similar to prophetic prayer. He recounts:

The Holy Spirit Jesus He promised us after He goes up in the sky, He would send us like. . . the thing that will be stay in us and that will give us like power and for all ages. The [inaudible] will help them like preach. . . . I think it gives us power . . . we feel like minorities sometimes and at work they tell you, "You're Christian, come convert to Islam" or something like this. "Come pray with us. You don't pray." They don't know anything about us. So, I think it gives us power to withstand these things. . .⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁷ Sofia, 04 Jun 2016.

⁷⁵⁸ The ongoing experience, just beneath the surface, of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Kuwait-Copt's life suggests limitations to the traditional models of mystical experience that box off 'ecstasy' and 'experience of union' into separate, infrequent categories. In the above narrative, the Holy Spirit seems to run parallel with the 'flow' of consciousness. For an interesting model of mystical experience see Ralph Hood, "The Construction and Preliminary Validation of a Measure of Reported Mystical Experience," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 14, no. 1 (1975).

⁷⁵⁹ Yousef, 04 Jun 2016.

⁷⁶⁰ Yousef, 04 Jun 2016.

Again, for Yousef, as he rescripts what is probably a common lifeworld experience, he can detect the Spirit's operations, His voice, as it were, *vis-à-vis* Islamic hegemony. Significant, too, is how he links up his own personal 'persecution' narrative to a very specific pneumatically charged, Biblical narrative, namely, the first chapter of Acts. He is alluding to verse 8 specifically: 'But you shall receive power to be My witnesses (*martyres*)'. This highlights another prophetic and affective understanding of the operations of the Spirit; He strengthens the believer to stay faithful. Sofia adds: 'I feel like a strength within to withstand. I know I'm going a different direction because of something I truly believe in. It's something within me that is giving me the power to do that'.⁷⁶¹ Given the monastic and martyrological focus of the COC, 'Holy Spirit as strength' is not that surprising, but it adds another dimension to prayer; prayer is essential to survival—both one's own and the Church's. This may account for its widespread practice. Thus, under the DMT Coptic orientation, prophetic prayer must include the direct pneumatic impartation of strength to survive in a hostile environment ('Sometimes we feel like minorities'). No wonder so many Copts report doing it.⁷⁶² Lastly, the very fact Sofia and Yousef are able to narrate their experiences of receiving strength directly from God displays the epistemic dimension of theotic transfiguration; they 'read' their lives into the Christian meta-narrative. In other words, testimony results from encounter. These encounters, however, are not restricted to unseen interactions with the Spirit.

One of the most remarkable accounts came from Marina, who claimed a vision of Jesus Himself. Unique among all the interviewees, her narrative is bracketed as 'personal' and transformative: 'since that time everything suddenly changed':

⁷⁶¹ Sofia, 04 Jun 2016.

⁷⁶² Perhaps they are also afraid not to pray, again, an affective motivation. For the role of the fear of God in Coptic Orthodoxy, see Seongkyou Bang, "Rediscovery of the Fear of God: A Study of The Sayings of the Desert Fathers," ed. Roberta C. Bondi (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1999).

M: I don't remember exactly, the one I remember most is Jesus Christ himself.

B: Jesus came himself.

M: But this is personal.

B: Yes, it's personal, I understand.

M: Since that time everything suddenly changed.

B: And what did he look like?

M: He's my friend you know, a very nice friend, a father ...

B: Did he look like the Jesus that's in the dome at St Mark's? Because that Jesus kind of looks like me, and I don't think he looked like me. . .

M: No, I saw two things, three things actually ... [inaudible] one time, it's brown, . . . brown eyes, brown hair, brown beard and he was doing something really weird, a sculpture of man, the clay man, he was wearing a long apron around his waist, naked here, and he was just modelling and just looking. These eyes, I can't explain, very deep brown eyes, and I saw this picture after that I had it in my house in Egypt.

B: So, you had the vision first and then you saw a picture that was like that?

M: I knew that picture before, but it was really detailed it was very deep, and then I was searching for the same photo, I found it. . .⁷⁶³

Even though she had seen the picture before, its re-emergence in 'living' colour with added detail and movement engendered a deeper relational connection to Jesus and a desire to read the Scriptures to 'discover Jesus' personality'.⁷⁶⁴ Marina's visions were not limited to Jesus; she also recounted experiences with Pope Kyrillos, Pope Shenouda, and the Virgin Mary. Fortunately, Marina offered of her own accord the transformative effects of these experiences. She said, '. . . see I do love many people, Evangelists, Protestants, Catholics, Coptic. . . I love everyone and I love the ideas of everyone'.⁷⁶⁵ This expanded love then spilled out into her ministry with prisoners in Egypt and attempts at a prison ministry in Kuwait. Having been blocked from doing

⁷⁶³ Marina, 09 Jan 2017.

⁷⁶⁴ Marina, 09 Jan 2017.

⁷⁶⁵ Marina, 09 Jan 2017.

much prison ministry there, she turned her benevolent energies towards stage productions at St Mark's, productions that emphasised the obligation of altruism. Phenomenologically speaking, my own interactions with her were marked by a deep intensity of purpose.

All the above personal accounts of various forms of prayer point towards participation in the theotic project. However, the ontological layer is noticeably absent, that is, none of my interviewees related personal accounts of physical change like glowing, although some alluded to knowing people who had been healed. This is not surprising since such manifestations are reserved for those closer to the centre and the Coptic insistence on humility requires the interviewee to demur or deflect such topics if part of personal experience. In cognitive and affective terms, the reports underscore an increased sensitivity to spiritual experiences, greater strength to withstand temptation and testing, and a remarkable independence in regard to spiritual growth. This latter development among the diasporic elite is significant since it complexifies ideas of ecclesial authority in the Coptic church;⁷⁶⁶ one's spiritual journey towards transformation is ultimately one's own responsibility. This sense of responsibility and independence is also accompanied by proactive altruistic activity, namely networking and generosity for the common labourer in Kuwait as well as 'service' to the church. This movement outward reinforces the dimension of love essential to the theological linkage between the DMT and Biblical witness of what Christlikeness actually means existentially.

⁷⁶⁶ I would argue that Western Protestants often have a stereotypical view of Orthodoxy (EE and OO) as completely overrun with rampant clericalism and sacerdotal domination.

6.6 Prayer with Saints⁷⁶⁷ Narratives and the DMT

Obviously, prayer, in terms of the theory of pneumatic piety, should facilitate experiences of God. And I have already indicated that Coptic prayer with saints is not viewed as idolatry and is distinct from worship, which belongs only to God.

Although I knew the saints were important to Coptic theology, it was not until one of my later interviewees brought the point home. In response to the question: ‘Is there anything else I should ask?’, Maysoon replied, ‘Focus on the saints’.⁷⁶⁸ Thus chastened, I decided to include them as part of the DMT. Nonetheless, it should be noted that even though the model includes angels as exemplars, the interviewees never mentioned interaction with them in a personal way. However, I have left them within the model because of their significant presence in Coptic iconography, liturgy, and in the Bible. Additionally, the Virgin Mary occupies a lot of real estate in the Coptic imaginary (as the one closest to Christ) and has had numerous public and private visitations over the years. Departed popes, monks, and ancient martyrs still play key roles in the lives of the diasporic elite, oftentimes eclipsing Mary—the more contemporary ones by their sheer dual proximity to the individual and to Christ.

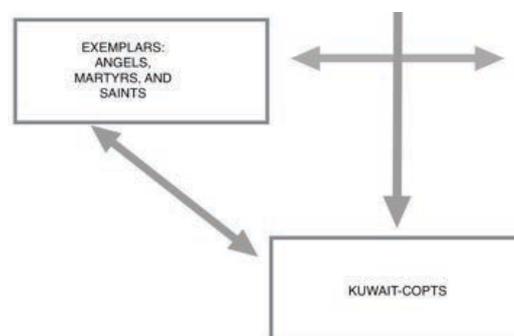


Figure 37: Interacting with the Saints

⁷⁶⁷ Again, ‘with saints’ captures the dialogical and relational emphases of the DMT better than ‘to saints’. It is further in keeping with the Apostolic tradition in the Coptic tradition which confesses the ‘communion of saints’ as part of its creedal identity.

⁷⁶⁸ Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

But where does prayer with the saints fit in, pneumatically speaking? On one level, the relationship is based on intercession, modelled after the *wasta* pattern. In this construal, the supplicant petitions the saint to intercede on her behalf to God, Who then moves through the Spirit to answer the request (influence someone, change circumstances, impart patience, and so forth). The saint thus acts as a go-between in the theotic project, combining the bottom left arrow with the top left and back down the middle in a circuit. This account, though, only covers intercession but does not sufficiently explain visitations. It is perhaps more acceptable to Western Protestant Christians that Jesus appears than someone else who has died. Such visitations smack of necromancy and are explicitly forbidden in the Bible.⁷⁶⁹ However, necromancy involves some sort of conjuring ritual whereas the Coptic accounts are preceded by a simple prayer for help or nothing at all. Perhaps one way of explaining these visitations is to see them as pneumatic avatars, that is, the Spirit takes the form of the saint in order to interact with the individual in a more distinctly personal way. But this might imply that the Spirit deceives people by not presenting Himself as Who He is. Another possibility is that, like Jesus' interview with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, saints are allowed use of their pneumatic bodies to run divine errands. This helps account for the narratives where people interact materially with the saints.⁷⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, such supernatural encounters are transformative and engender a greater sensitivity towards the spiritual.

Mother Mary or St Mary is a significant saint for the Kuwait-Copt, and she ties up several of the theotic and worldview elements. Maysoon always does *None*

⁷⁶⁹ Cf. Lev 19.26; Deut 18.19; Gal 5.19-20; Acts 19.19

⁷⁷⁰ This has Biblical support as well, see Heb 13.2.

prayer from the *Agpeya* and Hail Marys with a rosary in French.⁷⁷¹ Her appropriation of a non-Coptic practice to interact with St Mary on a personal level dovetails with the lower left-hand arrow of the DMT. Bishoy recounted his experience as a boy seeing the Virgin atop a church during the famous Zeytūn apparitions. Obviously, this made an indelible mark on his psyche and strengthened his connection to not just her but all the saints:

We feel that we are in the same body. The body of Christ. You know in Ephesus when he tells that he collects all in heaven and in earth in his. . .so we are only one family. This is a great feeling. Part of our family is in heaven and our body in heaven and we are here to work. . . this is marvellous. Of course, sometimes we say St Mary do this. . . . All of them [saints] are my friends.⁷⁷²

Germane for my purposes is Bishoy's affective description: 'We feel that we are the same body' and '[t]his is a great feeling'. His encounter thus shifted his emotions, transfigured his ability to perceive the unseen through the affections. Shenouda, too, offered this account of seeing a supernatural apparition:

S: One of them actually was in Asyut and I saw it with my own eyes.

B: In Asyut. Ok.

S: One of one of I saw it myself, actually.

B: What was it?

S: it was an appear of Virgin Mary. It was every Saturday night.

B: Kind of like Zeytūn, very regular?

S: Yeah, actually, and it was for more than a year.

B: What did it look like? What did she look like?

S: What I saw actually it was not actually the body; I saw a lot of actually, we can say. . . birds flying.

B: yeah, yeah, the doves.

⁷⁷¹ Maysoon's mixed ethnicity probably plays a role in this practice. I would suggest that Kuwait provides a somewhat freer environment for such individuals than the homogeneous Coptic population in Egypt.

⁷⁷² Bishoy, 08 Jan Jan 2017.

S: And I saw I saw one picture I'm never forget it. That's a lot of birds, you know, small ones, and very huge one and it was not just a bird, it was gold one. And it has like . . . you see here, like some gold ones like some shapes. And it was actually decorated like this.

B: Really?

S: Really. it was very huge one. And you know surrounded by you know, small ones. And it was night. And you can't imagine even the light around it was it was actually amazing. [inaudible]

B: And you saw this with your when you were awake? You saw this with your eyes?

S: Yeah, yeah. I was actually downstairs with you can say [inaudible] of people [inaudible] church. What changed, what changed the lights, actually, And suddenly I saw that shape. Even my friends . .

B: They saw it too, huh?

S: This one was when I was in college actually. [inaudible] 15 years ago Actually, they saw the same thing. and actually you know they were saying, Hey man, you know, St Mary. . [inaudible] it was amazing you know actually.⁷⁷³

Interestingly enough, even though he did not see the Virgin Herself, his friends attributed the vision to her. Subsequently, like Bishoy, Shenouda felt an increased attachment to the Virgin as an adult interacting with her icon:

Yeah, I think, yeah, I feel the person. It's not just a picture. Because a picture you know is just a paper, right? That's why some people they say oh, it's a picture, it's *ḥarām*.⁷⁷⁴ It's not *ḥarām*; I'm not dealing with a picture. It's like here you can say it's spiritual thing, right? I feel the spirit thing. I feel that this is Virgin Mary. You know, my mother, God's mother [inaudible] oh she's my mother, I'm just kissing my mother.

Interaction with Mary thus signifies proximity to the centre (Christ) and underscores the participatory epistemology—knowing as relationship with instead of knowing as understanding causality—reframed in terms of family. Epistemologically, the

⁷⁷³ Shenouda, 12 Feb 2016.

⁷⁷⁴ *ḥarām* is Arabic for sinful and is widely used by Muslims in the Gulf.

interviewees' experience hypostasised Mary, generating reverence, awe, and intimacy.

One rival to Mary, who appeared over and over again in my interlocutors' accounts, is St George. While tender and familial language seems appropriate to Mary, a figure with a well-attested history of maternal leanings, a warrior who is famous in the Coptic and other Christian traditions for killing a dragon does not seem to have the type of personality that would lend itself towards deep personal relationships. Nevertheless, Piama feels differently. For her, St George was a regular feature in her life as a child.

P: He's always there. . . . When I was younger, like, he was always in my dreams. Like I had this specific dream that whenever I slept . . . it was exactly the same dream . . .the dream was me riding on the horse with him and going somewhere where it is green and we used to go on a picnic on a hill and used to like. . . for some reason he played the guitar and we used to like sing together in praise.

B: What would you sing?

P: I can't remember because I was young and I am very disappointed that I'm still not there. I feel like it's my fault. I can't blame anyone else. . . but I feel like if I had kept on like with my spiritual level and kept on getting higher, it would have been more frequent. But I think it's my fault that I'm lacking so it's like not there anymore.⁷⁷⁵

Recurring dreams of picnics with the saints was not a regular narrative among my sample. However, some of the features of Piama's account connect to similar trajectories of other narratives, namely: *one's spirituality is directly linked to supernatural and liminal experiences as signposts on the path towards greater Christlikeness.*⁷⁷⁶ Or as Piama indicates rather bluntly: '. . . but I feel like if I had kept on like with my spiritual level and kept on getting higher, it would have been more

⁷⁷⁵ Piama, 30 Jan 2017.

⁷⁷⁶ Deception is definitely possible, as well-attested by *The Life of St Anthony* and *The Paradise of the Fathers*. However, my interviewees did not focus on Satanic interference with their lives nor did my interview schedule.

frequent'. This, as the DMT shows, is a dialectical process; liminal and/or supernatural experiences are typically expected to transform the person so they have more experiences, a type of mystical feedback loop that advances the individual. Again, assuming these are real interactions with real personalities or at least 'relationally real', one could label such a loop as a mystical or pneumatic form of an IR chain. Interestingly, mystical socialisation can thus occur even when the person is asleep or in a trance-like state, thus further complexifying agency and intentionality. I, breaking the objective researcher frame momentarily, reminded Piama that the dreams came when she was a child, presumably when her 'spiritual level' was not that developed and perhaps it was her simplicity that opened the door for the experiences not her effort.⁷⁷⁷

Aside from Mary and St George, Pope Kyrillos was another figure who appeared to provide succour or help in moments of crisis for the Kuwait-Copt. In one narrative, a request for help on a test resulted in Kyrillos changing the answers for the individual to pass.⁷⁷⁸ In another account, he appeared in his monk attire replete with a foreboding hood to scare off would-be attackers.⁷⁷⁹ In another story, he showed up in response to a prayer in order to teleport my interviewee's father from one side of the city to another. Iris recalls:

After he died [Pope Kyrillos], he came to my dad. Ok, when my dad first came here [Kuwait]. He didn't have a car. He didn't have a driver license. He went somewhere where he got stuck. And it was a rainy day and the cars were moving everywhere. And there was no way he was able to go to the place he wanted to go. So he just said like, Baba Kyrillos, please come and help me or something like that. Then he actually come to him. He found someone coming to him wearing a hat. This red hat is the Egyptian, old traditional clothes they used to wear in the old times [a fez]. . . . Baba Kyrillos used to wear it. So, he found someone really big wearing this hat. And he didn't know who that and from where did even appeared. Taking him. And suddenly he

⁷⁷⁷ I was told by a monk at St Macarius Monastery that the goal is to become child-like. Given Christ's close association and advocacy of children, child-like translates to 'close to Jesus'.

⁷⁷⁸ Miriam, 25 Mar 2016.

⁷⁷⁹ Miriam, 25 Mar 2016.

doesn't even know how he went to the place he wanted to go.⁷⁸⁰ And he looked around and didn't find a person. So, it was him [Kyrillos].

Interestingly, he did not appear to say anything to those involved but acted in some way to change a given circumstance. The narratives of these encounters, situated along the lower left side of the DMT, helpfully illuminate the Kuwait-Coptic expectations of reciprocity. Additionally, these narratives form a part of family lore and help forge St Mark's emerging diasporic mythology. This is especially true of the teleportation narrative. Since it occurred in Kuwait and not in Egypt, it extends the possibility that life in the diaspora is not as untouched by the other end of the arrow as one might assume. If a dead pope can teleport people around Kuwait, then just maybe one can grow in Christlikeness through the pneumatic pieties without the monastic structural apparatus available in Egypt. Hope like this is both a fruit of the Spirit and transformative.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a theoretical model rooted in earlier empirical research and theological trajectories. Empirically, the IR and Godly Love models have proven to be useful tools in the social sciences to help explain and analyse data that are relational, interactive, dynamic, and transformative. Adding the IR dimension links the model to the previous chapter to illuminate the social mechanism behind the dialectic indicated by the DMT's arrows. However, as a practical *theological* rescription, it is not enough to stop there. Thus, I have included a significant theological element to the model, namely the theory of *theosis*. Further, as part of reframing *theosis* within the ongoing Coptic renewal in the diaspora context, I have

⁷⁸⁰ Iris, 08 Nov 2016.

also joined it to the Biblical language of love to fill out the ethical and moral dimensions associated with Christlikeness. *Theosis* thus reconceived reaches towards and contests a wider Orthodox consciousness and, when enfolded in the language of love, extends toward other Christian communions with a Biblical, social, and existential orientation. These sensitivities, again, line up with the diasporic renewal impulse towards an ecumenism unto personal transformation.

After situating the research on prayer, I then showed how the DMT emerged from the data and stands as a theoretical tool. As a theoretical model, it is the culmination and capstone of this study's rescription methodology. As such, it ties the psychological, theological and sociological in a conceptually robust manner. Backing away from the case study, the next chapter situates the COC in dialogue with Pentecostalism, highlighting similarities uncovered through this study as well as challenges. I have chosen Pentecostalism as a dialogue partner because it 'has contributed to the reconfiguration of the nature of Christianity itself. . . and its adherents are often on the cutting edge of encounter with people of other faiths'.⁷⁸¹ Additionally, the pneumatic and existential focus of this study together with the growing evidence for the Pentecostalisation of the diasporic COC makes such a conversation necessary if not urgent.

⁷⁸¹ Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 14.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PNEUMATIC PIETY: A CONVERSATION WITH PENTECOSTALISM⁷⁸²

7.1 Introduction

In the Chapter One, I pointed out that PC Christianity is a global movement focused on the Holy Spirit that must be reckoned with by older denominations, especially those in multi-cultural, diasporic contexts. Thus, in locating the COC in Kuwait within a broader Pentecostalisation narrative, I hope to provide concepts, terms, and perspective that help to encourage extant renewal trajectories within the COC and reduce combativeness against participation in Pentecostal-Charismatic movements that abut Coptic Orthodox congregations in the diaspora. My theory of pneumatic piety asserts that Kuwait-Copts truly experience the Holy Spirit—even by pentecostal standards. Such experiences are, at least Biblically speaking, also ‘Pentecostal’.⁷⁸³ These experiences play into the diasporic Kuwait-Copts’ level of eclecticism and toleration towards other Christian traditions. Though toleration is partly forced/partly chosen by restrictive clientelism, it is already exemplary (from my limited perspective) among the diasporic elite. Given, too, the ‘Pentecostalisation of Christianity’ worldwide,⁷⁸⁴ I point out the places where the Spirit is already at work through the pneumatic pieties among the Copts so that encounters with Pentecostals

⁷⁸² For this conversation, I largely engage with Pentecostal scholarship. Thus, my usage of the term Pentecostalism refers more directly to the theology of the heirs of the Pentecostal revival movement with its roots in early twentieth-century America but also includes the derivative characteristics and emphases of Charismatic Christianity.

⁷⁸³ Related to the descent of the Holy Spirit during the feast of Pentecost, see Acts 2.

⁷⁸⁴ For the spread of PC forms of Christianity in Africa, see Parsitau, “Pentecostalisation.” Parsitau, Damaris Seleina. “From the Periphery to the Center: The Pentecostalization of Mainline Christianity in Kenya.” *Missionalia* 35 (3, Nov. 2007): 83– 111. For Pentecostalisation in Nigeria, see Burgess, Richard. *Nigeria’s Christian Revolution: The Civil War Revival and Its Pentecostal Progeny (1967–2006)*. RStMiss. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008. And Maluleke and Nadar, “Pentecostalisation.” Maluleke, Tinyiko Sam, and Sarojini Nadar. “Guest Editorial: The Pentecostalisation of African Christianity.” *Missionalia* 35 (3, Nov. 2007): 1– 4. Maluleke and Nadar see signs of this process in the adoption of various musical instruments, an increased emphasis on spontaneity and healing, the emergence of mega-churches with elements that seem to be imported from West.

are not seen from the ‘heretical’ or ‘foreign import’ perspective. Conversely, PC Christians, who evince a strong evangelistic mandate, have not had the best track record of gracious ecumenism in their encounters with the Apostolic Churches.

7.2. Similarities and Trajectories

7.2.1 Worldviews and Epistemologies

PC Christianity and Coptic Orthodoxy are, philosophically speaking, not that distant.

There is a significant overlap between Coptic Orthodoxy and what Poloma et al. call a ‘pentecostal worldview’:

Pentecostal reality is a curious blend of premodern miracles, modern technology, and postmodern mysticism in which the natural world is mixed with the supernatural. . . It is an approach to knowing that challenges an overly rational modern empiricist way of thinking with a world of spiritual possibilities.⁷⁸⁵

For Jackie David Johns: ‘[The] Pentecostal paradigm for knowledge and truth springs from an experiential knowledge of God which alters the believer’s approach to reading and interpreting reality’.⁷⁸⁶ This mixing of natural and supernatural is not unnatural for the Copt. In some sense, modern Pentecostal epistemology is an attempt to return to a way of knowing the Copts have preserved, not having been as ravaged by the Enlightenment and Modernist projects.

That is not to say Coptic Orthodoxy and my interlocutors have remained untouched; there is clearly tension among the diasporic elite between their pious commitments and experience, sometimes marked by cognitive dissonance and scepticism. For example, Tadros, a doctor, related a story of an exorcism in Egypt he personally witnessed. In his narrative, a woman brought her daughter to him as a

⁷⁸⁵ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 45.

⁷⁸⁶ Qtd. in Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, 45-6.

doctor even though the entire village knew she ‘had a spirit’. Tadros did not know what to do, so he took a reproduction of an icon of Abu Sifeen and gave it to the mother. When the picture was raised above the patient, she ‘shout[ed] by another voice, it's very manly voice, “Oh, get away from me!” [in a strained demonic voice]’. A few moments later, the spirit left. The patient, according to Tadros, was subsequently ‘changed’ and eventually worked in his clinic for three years.⁷⁸⁷ As is common among Copts who have witnessed a miracle of some kind, Tadros attributed the exorcism to the saint. Such a narrative is difficult to fit within a Late Modern hermeneutic of suspicion. Even if one accepts the paranormal aspects *prima facie* as part of the narrator’s interpretation, hiring ‘the girl’ after the incident is as equally baffling. Tadros went on to describe how a woman was healed of terminal peritonitis after a visitation of Mother Mary. But, just as he emphasised ‘change’ as the main fruit of the exorcism, he again underscored it in regard to this woman:

I feel this is not the aim of God to give more money, to give a cure, to give uh . . . no, change in people. I saw a change in people. . . In the spirit. . . I feel change in people. This is a miracle of God—not a change in money or a cure. .
⁷⁸⁸

When pressed again about the discontinuity between his (Western) medical training and the exorcism he witnessed, Tadros, replied:

Again, I don't want to talk demon because I am a doctor. And some believe that this is not a demon but this is a . . . psychotherapy. . . a mental disorder. So, I'm not talk about this. I want something which I touch. Like cancer is cancer. Cancer if cured, is cancer cured. I cannot say this is a psycho or a demon. I don't know. No. This is a cancer, this is a lymph node, this is a mass. If this disappear it mean something happened from God. This is. . . I saw, I know, I can swear it is actually present in our church. But, to talk about demon, let . . . No. . . I want to touch. Ok, like, one of the disciples of Jesus asked, I want to touch. . .
⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁷ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

⁷⁸⁸ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

⁷⁸⁹ Tadros, 04 Mar 2016.

Clearly Tadros recognises the tensions between his empirically derived medical training, his own experience, and the role of faith. His strategy to deal with this ‘cognitive dissonance,’ as it were, is to demarcate conceptual boundaries between spirit possession (‘I don’t want to talk demon because I am a doctor’) and healing (‘If this [cancer] disappear, it mean something happened from God’), and to prioritise personal/spiritual transformation (‘change in people’) as more central to God’s plans. Thus, the moral/ethical dimensions take precedent over the manifestation of supernatural phenomena. Such a move, I suggest, underscores the aforementioned tension. The supposed inherent un-believability of such accounts were qualified numerous times by the appeal to unassailable personal experience: ‘This was in front of my eyes’. Perhaps Tadros understood that his American listener would find such accounts ontologically objectionable without such justifications. Perhaps it is also psychologically ‘safer’ to centralise ethical transformation than to inextricably link the veracity of Christianity to idiosyncratic epiphenomena. Further, rather than extolling his hard-nosed empiricism as a kind of modernist virtue, he typologically interprets his own identity within the Biblical narrative: ‘I want to touch. Ok, like, one of the disciples of Jesus [‘doubting’ Thomas] asked, I want to touch’.⁷⁹⁰ Such an interpretative move telegraphs a normative acceptance of the Biblical meta-narrative and rejects the so-called postmodern ‘suspicion of meta-narratives’⁷⁹¹; even a variety of agnosticism is Scripturally grounded.⁷⁹² Tadros’ accounts, framed as they are by Coptic and Biblical horizons, were qualified by personal experience with the critical sense that an American may find such narratives hard to swallow. Along similar

⁷⁹⁰ For the account of Thomas requesting to touch Jesus’ wounds, see John 20.25. Along similar lines, Tadros’ typological hermeneutic as seen in identifying his own personality in that of a Biblical figure, resonates with the ‘this is that’ hermeneutic found among Pentecostals, see Aimee Semple McPherson, *This is That* (Los Angeles, CA: Echo Park Evangelistic Association, Inc. , 1923).

⁷⁹¹ This phrase is attributed to Jean Francois Lyotard.

⁷⁹² For a fuller treatment of the tension between doubt and faith, see Shenoda, "Politics of Faith."

lines, Kyrillos made the same moral/ethical move as Tadros. In discussing the miraculous, he said: ‘When you see how people's lives change because of prayer, and that is the real miracle. It's not the miracle of, you know, things physically moving or defying the laws of nature. It's defying the laws of the old human nature’.⁷⁹³

However, Tadros and Kyrillos’ awareness of the rhetorical situation did not extend to many of my interviewees, who, without batting an eye, related similar stories without heavy qualification.

The lack of penetration by the Modernist project into the deeper levels of Coptic Orthodoxy is exemplified in their bald and even casual accounts of the miraculous that can helpfully be understood through Paul Hiebert’s concept of the ‘excluded middle’. Take, for example, the recurrent story of the miracle of the moving mountain.⁷⁹⁴ Although versions vary, the miracle is that a mountain— a physical, literal mountain— was moved from one place to another through fasting and prayer. This account was further ‘proved’ by reputed geological evidence on my visit to the site. Several of my interviewees alluded to this story and presumably understood it to have historically occurred.⁷⁹⁵ One way of framing these accounts is through Hiebert’s model:

⁷⁹³ Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁷⁹⁴ For full details of this story, see Maged S. A. Mikhail, "The Early Islamic Period (641-1517): From the Arab Conquest through Malmuk Rule," in *The Coptic Christian Heritage: History, Faith, and Culture*, ed. Lois M. Farag (New York: Routledge, 2014), Kindle location 1213.

⁷⁹⁵ For the differences between history as demonstrable and history as narrated, see the German distinction between *historische* and *geschichte* respectively in Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament's Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 359. Boyd takes his cue from Karl Barth’s famous dictum: ‘*Nicht all Geschichte ist historische*’ (Not all history is historical).

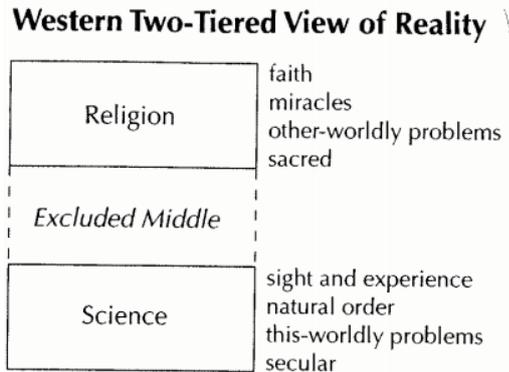


Figure 38: Hiebert's Excluded Middle⁷⁹⁶

A physical mountain moving (scientifically impossible) in response to faith (a religious practice) does not neatly fit into the Western Two-Tiered model and is thus not a veridical account, but rather, a myth or symbol, and so forth. However, for the Copt there is a (though sometimes contested) continuity between the religious and scientific categories. It is important here to move beyond the reductionist tendency to see all epistemologies as causally explanatory. This, too, is part of the Modernist, Western philosophical legacy obsessed with answering 'Why do things happen?' Rather, it is more helpful and coherent to understand the 'middle' as indicative of an entirely different epistemology.

My Coptic interlocutors' ease in relating supernatural events suggests what I labelled earlier as a *participatory* epistemology, that is, an epistemology that knows of a variety of agents, processes, and means to participate and interact with Reality.⁷⁹⁷ This type of epistemology subsumes the causal and thereby extends possible explanations beyond the above, strict dichotomy outlined by Hiebert. It is precisely

⁷⁹⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10, no. 1 (1982): 43.

⁷⁹⁷ This variety would include angels, saints, demons, *baraka*, prayer, and, in some cases, the evil eye and other 'superstitions' and 'magic'. By 'participatory epistemology', I am not wholly endorsing Jorge Ferrer's transpersonal participatory theory. See Jorge Ferrer, "Revisioning Transpersonal Theory: An Epistemic Approach to Transpersonal and Spiritual Phenomena," ed. Lawrence M. Spiro (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1999).

this participatory epistemology that the Copts and Pentecostals share, what Lee, Poloma et. al. label the ‘pentecostal worldview’. This non-Western, African worldview⁷⁹⁸ allows for a broader, more variegated diffusion of transcendent agency throughout phenomenal experience, and, as Anderson argues, is more concerned with issues of ‘*who* is responsible. . . rather than *what* the cause might be’.⁷⁹⁹ In terms of Pentecostalism and Eastern Orthodoxy (but just as applicable to the COC), such a worldview, according to Edmund Rybarczyk, is

pre-modern in character: it is open to the supernatural; it is suspicious about claims concerning the human mind’s capacity to understand sufficiently. Further, it is impelled by the belief that God is active in creation; and it is convinced that God wants us as his representatives to be similarly active.⁸⁰⁰

Coptic and PC pre-modern participatory epistemologies are thus also closely aligned with the apostolic and patristic understanding.

Sensing this deep interconnectedness, Pentecostal scholar Stephen Land links the contours of the Pentecostal approach with the Eastern Christian tradition—an offshoot of which has been successfully maintained through the pneumatic pieties in the COC, although the accompanying *theoria* may be absent in lay speech.⁸⁰¹ His language, for a Pentecostal scholar, is startling:

It [pentecostal spirituality] is more Eastern than Western in its understanding of spirituality as perfection and participation in the divine life (*theosis*). In this regard it has much to learn from persons like Gregory of Nyssa, Macarius the Egyptian, and St Symeon, the New Theologian. It is both ascetic and mystical.⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁸ It is easy to forget that Egypt is in Africa and Coptic Orthodoxy is an African religion. For the African roots of Pentecostalism thesis, see Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1997). For issues with and alternatives to Pentecostal aetiologies see Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*; Augustus Cerillo, "Interpretive Approaches to the History of American Pentecostal Origins," *Pneuma* 19, no. 1 (1997); Cecil M. Robeck, "The International Significance of Azusa Street," *Pneuma* 8, no. 1 (1986); Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007).

⁷⁹⁹ Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism*, 76.

⁸⁰⁰ Edmund J. Rybarczyk, "Spiritualities Old and New: Similarities Between Eastern Orthodoxy & Classical Pentecostalism," *Pneuma* 24, no. 1 (2002): 25.

⁸⁰¹ This is particularly true of *theosis* at St Mark’s. It is more enacted than talked about.

⁸⁰² Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 18.

Like many Western scholars, however, Land assumes the best people to learn from are the scholars of the ancient past. I contend that the living tradition of Coptic monasticism that emanates through the diaspora in the pneumatic pieties is just as informative if not more so since it has struggled with modernity and contemporary issues. He continues, drawing further parallels to the apostolic tradition and pentecostal theology:

This is very much like the theology of the Apostolic Fathers who were “essentially practical, unconcerned with speculative theology”. . . But it is also much like the later patristic-monastic theology in which there was no distinction between prayer and theology. *Up until the twelfth century* theology was not a manner of knowing but a manner of praying. . . The purpose of theology was not to explain God, but to know Him in contemplation, adoration, praise and thanksgiving. If theology was a science, it had to do with affections. This prayer conception of *theology obtained until the first half of the twelfth century* [emphasis mine].⁸⁰³

Twice in this short excerpt Land indicates that this mode of ‘doing’ theology ended in the twelfth century. Pentecostals, however, as Restorationists, believe they have awakened this apostolic, ‘patristic-monastic’ legacy from its hibernation. Aside from making my case for me about the similarities between Coptic spirituality and pentecostal, Land’s ignorance of the Coptic preservation of the patristic-monastic tradition is precisely one of the reasons why I did this study.

7.2.2 *Mystical Experience*

For the COC, the concept of ‘mysticism’ is rooted in the mysteries or the sacraments of the visible and historical church. It does not entail the same kind of ecclesiastical detachment which is common in PC usage. Nonetheless, the lay Copt’s experiences of participating in these mysteries take similar forms as those reported in PC spirituality. In describing pentecostal spirituality, Land asserts: ‘But this journey was

⁸⁰³ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 26-7.

also fundamentally a journey into God: a kind of mystical, ascetical journey which was an ingredient in knowing God and going further, deeper, and higher'.⁸⁰⁴ This easily describes Coptic spirituality as well, mapped out by the DMT. Note, too, the 'journey' metaphor employed by Land. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, spatiality, expressed in levels of distance, and then in Chapter Six, relationality (fellow travellers, that is, the saints) resonate with this description ('further, deeper, and higher'). 'Knowing God' links to Ralph Hood's noetic descriptor below. Hood's work in particular is helpful to further granulate and refine the overlapping categories of subjective-mystical experience between the Copts and Pentecostals.

Hood suggests five operational categories of the experience of transcendence that get underneath more generalised terminology. This study has already touched upon three: the affective quality, the communicable quality, that is, its narratable quality, and the religious quality, 'the extent to which the experience is perceived to be either sacred or profane'.⁸⁰⁵ Hood also brings out two more that have not been explored as in depth as the former: the noetic quality: 'the extent to which the experience is perceived as affirming or revealing fundamental knowledge concerning reality' and ego quality: 'the extent to which perception of the presence or absence of a sense of self is maintained during the experience'.⁸⁰⁶ These five qualities were operationalised by Hood as interview coding categories and could be used to refine the data of this study. However, as I did not focus exclusively on mystical states as commonly understood,⁸⁰⁷ the data are incomplete for full operationalisation.

Nevertheless, by introducing Hood's work here, one can see that, as the DMT

⁸⁰⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 69.

⁸⁰⁵ Ralph Hood, "Religious Orientation and the Experience of Transcendence," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 12, no. 4 (1973): 444-5.

⁸⁰⁶ Hood, "Experience of Transcendence," 445.

⁸⁰⁷ That is, near complete out-of-body experiences or rapture

indicates and the IR model proposes, the pneumatic pieties often induce a loss of self (aligned with Hood's ego quality) in collective effervescence and/or through flow states. This occurs within a relational frame, either with God, saints, other believers, or monks-priests-nuns. Similar accounts of self-transcendence in both congregational and individual settings abound in Pentecostalism, which is grounded in Spirit-awareness above and beyond self-awareness.

Additionally, Hood's noetic descriptor helps tease out further similarities. When one experiences transcendence as a result of the tradition's prescribed rituals (the pneumatic pieties and Pentecostalism's *glossolalia*, for example), the experiencer becomes convinced that that tradition is true. One could extend this to link to my former observation that spiritual transformation changes the way one views the world; the S/spirit(s) are at work where one did not see them before. This, too, is a form of the noetic quality.

This conviction ties in well with Hood's communicable quality. He argues that transcendent experience is 'characterized by ineffability. Statements about the experience are only indicative of the inherent impossibility of adequately communicating its nature'.⁸⁰⁸ And yet both in Pentecostalism and in Coptic Orthodoxy, stories abound of the ineffable in the form of testimonies that, while not exhausting the meaningfulness of the transcendent experience, still communicate *something*. This cataphatic approach between both traditions signals another deep linkage; one can have spiritual experiences and talk about them, often through oral narratives. In fact, it is in talking about them one crystallises their meaning. True, 'pure' ineffability means silence. But what else seems to be going on in Coptic testimonies and in Pentecostal testimonies is a 'I felt something/I witnessed

⁸⁰⁸ Hood, "Experience of Transcendence," 445.

something' awareness. To the degree, then, that the respondent can identify/recount that she experienced something internally ('felt') and/or witnessed (heard, smelled, touched, tasted, saw) something uncanny or important, it stands out against the backdrop of normal, 'non-spiritual' experience. The tradition in which one has been socialised provides the language and context for the subsequent narrative, a translating of the interiority and/or witnessing. For the Copt, this testimony mode is deeply embedded with desert, ascetic and monastic spirituality. For the Pentecostal, the testimony mode is shaded with dramatic changes in behaviour and similar experiences of 'mystical' experiences that I have delineated as ASAs, specifically, flow states to trances.⁸⁰⁹

Within the affective quality, little needs to be said about Pentecostalism. The briefest encounter with this tradition reveals its concern for emotional experiences of God (more on this below). So, too, Copts narrate their experiences of the Divine in emotional terms. While not wanting to fully reduce the 'spiritual' to the 'emotional', I would argue that the emotions are, in fact, part of the apparatus by which the spiritual is perceived; ineffability of transcendent experience, then, is not just the result of the sheer, overwhelming nature of the divine-human interaction, but also the result of an impoverished view and vocabulary of the affections. Here, as in other varieties of Christian theologies, modern Copts⁸¹⁰ and Pentecostals also suffer from an attenuated theology of the emotions.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁹ For a longer discussion on pentecostal mystical experiences as ASAs, see W. Bursey, "The Garden of Encounter: Altered States of Consciousness in Pentecostal Experience," ed. Paul Freston (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012).

⁸¹⁰ I say modern Copts because, for the most part, many are only familiar with the deep psychological explorations of the Desert Fathers by proxy; what matters more is the monastic-ascetic practices not so much their theoretical foundations.

⁸¹¹ There are a few, notable exceptions; Johnathan Edwards and John Wesley both addressed the emotions.

This leads to Hood's fifth quality: the religious. Throughout this study, I have focused on the 'religious' experience of my interviewees. What makes something religiously transcendent, Hood notes, is that '[t]he experience is one of awe and reverence in face of an engulfing mystery. . . [it] is perceived to transcend natural science categories'.⁸¹² I would argue that this links up well to both Coptic and Pentecostal accounts of the miraculous: healing, revelatory insight, exorcisms, apparitions, and the like. Both having pre-modern participatory epistemologies means that explanations of mystical experiences often defy and transcend 'natural science categories', which, one could also argue are rooted in a Humean antagonistic philosophy anyway.⁸¹³

7.2.3 Embodiment and Materiality

Another contribution and overlap between the findings of this study and Pentecostalism is a shared concern for embodiment. Coptic Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism are embodied traditions; what one does in the body matters—*matter* matters. Underlying both is the sense in which affective transformation cannot fully occur without physical participation. Thus, in both traditions, there is a plethora of physical movements or as Land points out: 'The correspondence between Spirit and body is evident in a great variety of psychomotor celebration'.⁸¹⁴ In Pentecostalism, there is singing, dancing, hand-raising, clapping, and, in some forms, sporadic jerking, collapsing onto the ground, swaying, touching, movement around the sanctuary, and intermittent periods of standing. For the Copts, there is also singing, movement

⁸¹² Hood, "Experience of Transcendence," 445.

⁸¹³ Craig Keener makes exactly this case. See C.S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Baker Publishing Group, 2011).

⁸¹⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 108. See also Birgit Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Globalization," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 122.

around the sanctuary, some swaying, lots of genuflecting, *metanias*, and copious amounts of standing, which, when one really examines it, is anything but motionless. A casual visitor to either service would be struck by how much they both move, at some points, quite distractingly so. And the movement is not just momentary. Coptic services tend to last up to three hours, and, in my experience, so do PC services: the longer the better.

The Coptic experience can also contribute to the PC tradition with its emphasis on materiality. While some forms of Pentecostalism allow for the spiritual to be mediated through materials (like a prayer cloth or anointing oil), various other types of PC churches eschew the material world, opting instead for a symbolist view on the Eucharist and a rather diminished aesthetic. While the ‘communion of saints’, though creedal language, is not likely to be interpreted the same way through the use of icons, there is no theological reason why the worship space itself cannot be decorated to facilitate transcendent encounters by engaging all the senses. Anecdotally, my PC friends who have seen St Mark’s or my pictures of it, often remark: ‘Wow, that’s beautiful. It looks nothing like my church. Ours is just a room with chairs’.

But perhaps the main dimensions of embodiment where Pentecostalism and Coptic spirituality correspond are in fasting and the experiences of the *charismata*. In speaking of the early Pentecostals, Land notes:

. . . [P]eriods of fasting were to draw nigh to God with one’s whole being. This bodily dedication was necessary, because spirituality involved the whole person and all of his or her life. Fasting was not a punishment; it was a feeding on the Lord and drinking of the Spirit.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹⁵ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 109.

While the modern (at least Southern, American) caricature of a large, overweight and overdressed Pentecostal preacher does not lend much credence to the importance of fasting in the tradition, the reality actually does. In fact, several large PC organisations and leaders see fasting as essential to the Christian life and the spread of the Kingdom.⁸¹⁶ As I indicated in Chapter Four, Copts fast *a lot*. Only traditions that understand the interconnectedness between the body and S/spirit would place such an emphasis on this difficult discipline.

There are additional similarities concerning 'embodied' or physically mediated spirituality between the COC and PC. In Chapter Four, I explored experiences of the *charismata* and looked at three specifically: revelatory insight, exorcism, and healing. All of my interlocutors had some knowledge of all three. Miracles, especially ones associated with monks and martyrs, form a major part of the Coptic narrative. The same could be said of many PC Christians. While it would be necessary to exchange my use of the term 'revelatory insight' with 'prophecy', many PC Christians could also relate their own accounts (testimonies) of the supernatural 'breaking in'. Thus, both groups have a continuationist rather than cessationist view on the supernatural gifts. However, whereas for the PC Christian, these gifts are available for everyone, the Copts see them as a reward for a life of asceticism, achieved only by an elite, usually monastic, few.⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁶ See "Fasting Guidelines and Information," International House of Prayer, Kansas City, 28 Sept 2017, <https://www.ihopkc.org/about/fasting-guidelines-and-information/>. ; Mahesh Chavda, "The Watch: Fasting Resources," Chavda Ministries, 28 Sept 2017, http://www.chavdaministries.org/Groups/1000068553/Chavda_Ministries_International/The_Watch/Fasting_Resources/Fasting_Resources.aspx. ; Joyce Meyer, "What to Do When You're Waiting on God," Joyce Meyer Ministries 28 Sept 2017, <https://www.joycemeyer.org/everydayanswers/ea-teachings/what-to-do-when-youre-waiting-on-god> ; "Fasting for 40 Days," *Pentecostal Evangel* (2001), http://www.pe.ag.org/conversations2001/4531_bright.cfm; "Seek: Fasting and Prayer," Bethel Redding, 28 Sept 2017, <http://bethelredding.com/seek>.

⁸¹⁷ Such an attitude is reflected in the esteemed and oft-referenced *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*: '[One monk] remained in the desert where he became a man perfect in self-denial. He was held by God to be worthy of the gift of healing those who were possessed of devils, and he knew beforehand the things, which were about to happen, and he made whole the sick' in *The Paradise of the Holy*

7.2.4 Centrality of Affectivity

I have already established the centrality of affectivity in Coptic ordinary theology by highlighting the relevant interview data and by using the IR and DMT models to uncover deeper layers below and between the lines. Pentecostalism, too, is deeply concerned with the affections. In fact, perhaps the most consistent critique of the PC tradition is that it is *too* affective, or ‘happy clappy’ as one Anglican priest confided to me. This is not without merit: a revivalistic tradition that emphasises deep repentance evidenced by weeping and ecstatic states could easily appear to be out of control. On the other hand, the sombre faces of Copts in worship look superficially to be quite the opposite.⁸¹⁸ However, regardless of the different outward expressions, I have already shown that the mystical-ascetic tradition is deeply concerned with transforming them. In vernacular terms, both branches of the faith, then, have a *heart* orientation rather than merely a *head* one.

In Chapter Four, I pointed out that in the ordinary theology of the Kuwait-Copt, affectivity takes one of two main dimensions: emotional and dispositional. Emotion refers to those momentary experiences indexed by feelings and similar language. Dispositions, however, are longer-lasting states that incline one towards certain actions, actions that have objects. They ‘are abiding dispositions which dispose the person toward God and the neighbor in ways appropriate to their source and goal in God’.⁸¹⁹ In this sense, affection is objective. Or as Land also points out: ‘Affections are construals of and concerns for the world’.⁸²⁰ Further, as the DMT

Fathers, trans. E.A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Putty, NSW, Australia: St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery, 2008), Kindle locations 135-52.

⁸¹⁸ One should mistake solemnity for lack of emotion since it is, itself, an emotional state. Further, on some of my visits, I noticed that some of the hymns were sung with quite a bit of gusto and passion. This passion is not necessarily a sign of Pentecostalisation as it is already inherent in the culture and tradition.

⁸¹⁹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 132.

⁸²⁰ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 132.

illustrates, such dispositions are developed in a matrix of relationships. Mutual concern for affectivity suggests the possibility for future fruitful dialogue between PC Christians and the COC. Another area of agreement that arises from this shared centre of vision is the primacy of love.

7.2.5 *Love as Telos*

Part of Rybarczyk's earlier observations deserves reconsideration here. He writes: 'Further, it is impelled by the belief that God is active in creation; and it is convinced that God wants us as his representatives to be similarly active.'⁸²¹ Here 'it' refers to the common worldview held by Pentecostals and the Orthodox. Again, I would extend it to the Coptic Orthodox on the basis of the data presented earlier in this study, particularly the material on love. As I mentioned before, this was poignantly brought home to me during my attendance at a play about loving one's neighbour. Further, in the interview with Kyrillos that introduces the previous chapter, he underscores this goal: 'We're always taught to be tolerant and to love, no matter how bad we're treated. And we know to expect this. But we're always taught in whatever church, love. Answer with love, answer with love. . . I think this one message, if our Coptic church has been able to live one commandment, this would be it'.⁸²² This contests Rybarczyk's interpretation of Eastern Orthodox spirituality *vis-à-vis* Pentecostalism: 'In distinction to Orthodoxy, the goal of Pentecostal spirituality is not transformation for its own sake, as important as that is, but a transformation that facilitates empowerment for Christian service'.⁸²³ Coptic Orthodoxy, and, in

⁸²¹ Rybarczyk, "Similarities Between Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism," 25.

⁸²² Kyrillos, 30 May 2016.

⁸²³ Rybarczyk, "Similarities Between Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism," 10.

particular, the Kuwait-Coptic focus on acts of mercy through giving⁸²⁴ and other types of service⁸²⁵ hardly sees ‘transformation for its own sake’; on the contrary, it is a transformation unto love, the goal of *theosis*, as pointed out in Chapter Six. Mere ontological transformation is not enough; without the ethical, affective, and relational dimensions, one has misunderstood the monastic legacy and heritage.

The same can be said of the PC tradition. It is not a tradition obsessed with experience for its own sake, though that undoubtedly occurs. No, spirit baptism and the *charismata* are intended for, as Rybarczyk points out, ‘empowerment for Christian service’. The quick spread of early Pentecostalism and its growing global influence underscores this other-orientation of the movement. Again, the basis for the DMT of Chapter Six comes from a study on the relationship between Pentecostalism and godly love. The findings of that study show that ‘[t]hose who experience divine love more frequently. . . do report more benevolence towards others’. The authors continue:

It seems that powerful experiences of divine love are an important part of spiritual transformations that are associated with what we have called a pentecostal worldview— a worldview that encourages believers to live in a world of supernatural possibilities. This pentecostal grid helps to move prayer beyond devotional activities to a love affair with God, transforms suffering into joy, and fosters benevolence toward an expanding circle of others.⁸²⁶

Since Pentecostalism’s worldview facilitates experiences of divine love, they are more likely to engage in benevolence. Not to belabour the point yet again, that same ‘pentecostal worldview’ that ‘encourages believers to live in a world of supernatural

⁸²⁴ This is particularised in the many boxes for offerings that line the walls of St Mark’s. There are boxes for repatriation of bodies, for Hepatitis C victims, for orphans, and so forth. I did not do a quantitative analysis of the giving practices of the Copts nor was I able to access the financial records of the church, but I did observe many people contributing to the offering when the velvet bag was passed during the liturgy. The sheer size of the Church building itself is enough to warrant the conclusion that some Kuwait-Copts are generous.

⁸²⁵ The patronage system mentioned previously that goes hand-in-hand with being a member of the diasporic elite, especially Copts from the medical field. Other types of service include teaching Sunday School, being a deacon, and running free computer, business, and ESL courses during the week.

⁸²⁶ Matthew T. Lee, *Heart of Religion*, Kindle location 4453.

possibilities' is the same one operationalised in Coptic Orthodoxy.⁸²⁷ Within the realm of PC Christianity, with its roots in Wesleyan theology,⁸²⁸ it is hardly surprising that love is prioritised on the agenda.⁸²⁹

Again, unremarkably, Land expresses the centrality of love in ways that also cohere with the Coptic experience. He writes:

God as righteous, loving, and powerful is also the *telos* of Christian existence and thus of the affections. . . Christian beliefs and practices shape and express these affections. Christian affections require for their proper genesis and ongoing expression a relationship with God, the church, and the world. This is most obvious in a consideration of that affection which is also the chief theological virtue, love.⁸³⁰

In terms of this study, it is worth unpacking Land's observations. First of all, he remarks on the relationship between beliefs and practice; they 'shape and express these affections'. This is exactly my argument about the nature and function of the pneumatic pieties among Kuwait-Copts. Additionally, he lays out the various and necessary relational dimensions for Christian affectivity: 'God, the church, and the world'. Through the lens of the IR model, one sees how crucial— if not ultimately constitutive— other people really are. The DMT maps the various dynamic directions and forms relationality can take as one engages in the pneumatic pieties. Ultimately, as the direction and force of Land's prose telegraphs, the theotic project of love circumscribes the entire endeavour and prevents it from falling off into solipsistic spirituality.

⁸²⁷ Interestingly, one of the exemplars of godly love in Poloma et al's work, Heidi Baker, has her Coptic counterpart: Mamma Maggie. She is also known as the Coptic Mother Teresa and was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. She is hardly a person who could be accused of the 'transformation for transformation's sake' criticism. See "Who is Mama Maggie?," Stephen's Children, 19 Nov 2017, <http://www.stephenschildren.org/about/founder/>.

⁸²⁸ For Pentecostalism's roots in Wesleyanism, see Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, N.J. : The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1987), 35-62.

⁸²⁹ For a reflection on the role of love in Wesleyanism, see Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

⁸³⁰ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 131.

7.2.6 Apostolicity

Pentecostals and Copts both claim to have apostolic authority to justify their experiences. For the PC Christian, it is a regaining of what was lost, a restoration of the theology of the apostolic era.⁸³¹ For the Copt, it is the preservation of a deposit. The strong emphasis on the Markan narrative⁸³² as the aetiology of Coptic Orthodoxy that comes out in a variety of ways (personal names, the first churches, altar dedications, significant relics iconography, and so forth) entrenches apostolic succession in a strongly ecclesial way.⁸³³ However, apostolic succession in the formal sense is nothing without the apostolic experience, carried on through the monastic-ascetic stream of the Coptic Church and practiced within the lifeworld of the Kuwait-Copts. Their worldview is apostolic and patristic, yes, but so is their spirituality. That the COC is apostolic in both senses of the word (ecclesial and experiential) contests the typification of the institutionalisation and routinisation of the *charismata*.⁸³⁴ Hierarchy and structure do not inevitably lead to their disappearance. In fact, the monastic-centric renewal of Coptic Orthodoxy in the twentieth century suggests that lay spirituality is intricately linked to the vitality of the monasteries, communities of charismatic individuals.

On the other side of the equation, Pentecostals also claim apostolicity. But, their claims are largely on the side of the egalitarian experience of spirit baptism and Pentecost as narrated through the Luke-Acts corpus with the requisite ancillary Pauline material laid alongside for theological justification. Land argues:

⁸³¹ 'Pentecostals referred to themselves as an apostolic faith movement due to their desire to recover for the present age the faith and the power of the apostolic church' in Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 51.

⁸³² Here 'apostolic' does not relate to the original Twelve, of whom Mark was not a member, but the Early Church era, first century C.E. That his eponymous Gospel is the 'original', according to current New Testament studies, further strengthens Coptic claims to apostolicity.

⁸³³ St Mark's in Alexandria has the list of all the Coptic popes starting with Mark.

⁸³⁴ Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 10. Obviously, Weber did not have the Biblical *charismata* in mind, but the analogy still holds.

When one encounters the Holy Spirit in the same apostolic experience, with the same charismatic phenomenology accompanying it, one is then in a better position to come to terms with the apostolic witness in a truly existential manner ... in the sense that a vertical dimension to man's existence is recognized and affirmed. One then stands in 'pneumatic' continuity with the faith community that birthed the Scriptures.⁸³⁵

For Land, and presumably other Pentecostals, 'pneumatic continuity' comes from having personal and corporate experiences that mirror those recorded in Scripture, not from hierarchical, apostolic succession through the line of a papal office. Rare is the PC Christian outside of, perhaps, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) who views apostolic succession (so and so laid hands on so and so) as important. Nonetheless, there is a growing awareness of the need for hierarchy even among non-Apostolic PC Christians who, interestingly enough, may use titles like 'Bishop' and 'Apostle'.⁸³⁶

7.3 Challenges to Pentecostal-Coptic Dialogue

Significant challenges still exist between the PC and Coptic traditions. For one, they have sharply opposing conceptions of authority and the role of the laity. For the Copts, spiritual authority, for the most part, is tied up in the official clerical hierarchy or a long monastic career. The use of the 'spiritual gifts' is limited to individuals who have practiced the ascetic life for a long time; they are only given at high levels of spiritual development. This is in contrast to the PC tradition which believes that spiritual gifts are for everyone (male and female, young and old) and may be exercised at varying points and degrees throughout one's journey. Further, PC concepts of authority roughly follow Protestant theology, that is, the witness of the

⁸³⁵ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 27.

⁸³⁶ In fact, some have called a branch of the PC Church the New Apostolic Reformation or NAR, see Christopher Ross, "The New Apostolic Reformation: An Analysis and Critique" (University of Cape Town, 2005); Margaret Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2003), 199.

Spirit to one's conscience. The Bible is a common source of authority for both traditions and may (actually, has) served as a bridge for dialogue. Future dialogues will want to anchor their conversations in the Biblical text while recognising the importance of Tradition for both hermeneutics.

Another challenge to overcome is the historical antagonism between PC Christianity and Coptic Orthodoxy in Egypt rooted in pentecostal⁸³⁷ missionary work in the Coptic heartland. Given the tight connexions between the diasporic churches and Cairo, such attitudes persist. The first Pentecostals came to Egypt soon after the famed Azusa Street Revival of 1906. The earliest accounts tell of a recently Spirit-baptized Egyptian, Ghali Hana, carrying the pentecostal experience to Asyut, Egypt—a heavily concentrated Coptic Orthodox community with a large monastery nearby.⁸³⁸ He had received his own Pentecostal experience at the hands of a Lucy Leatherman in 1906. Another missionary, Charles Leonard, joined the work in Āsīyūt, in 1911 and Cairo in 1912. Other Pentecostal missionaries came to Egypt as well: George and Lydia Brelsford, Sarah Smith, Frank Moll (1909), Ansel and Henrietta Post, Lillian Thrasher (1910), and Herbert Randall (1912).⁸³⁹ Hana was instrumental in bringing in Pentecostal missionaries, who apparently had some measure of success with Copts. A Pentecostal newspaper reported:

The Lord has been pouring out His Spirit in Assiout, Egypt. Souls have been baptized with the Holy Ghost and the sick healed. A woman that had not walked in seven years was prayed for, and she immediately arose and walked. . . At Cairo, the capital of Egypt, a brother and his wife who are baptized in the Spirit have opened a little mission. Many villages are calling for the Gospel.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³⁷ In Arabic, 'Pentecostal' is Āl-khamsīnā and roughly means 'the fifty-ers', after the Biblical term for Pentecost being celebrated fifty days after Passover. The first pentecostal missionaries in Egypt were what could be described as Classic Pentecostals, that is, participants and heirs to the Azusa Street Revival (1906-15).

⁸³⁸ Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 155. The monastery, Ād-Dīr Āl-Muḥarq, is one of the oldest active monasteries in the world and purportedly dates back to the first century C.E.

⁸³⁹ Anderson, *Spreading Fires*, 155-7.; Nagib, "Blessed Be Egypt My People," 96.

⁸⁴⁰ "EGYPT.," *The Apostolic Faith*, March and April 1910, 5.

Undoubtedly, many in these ‘villages. . . calling for the Gospel’ were Coptic Orthodox. By 1952, Egypt alone of the North African region received any funding from the Assemblies of God (AG), the largest and most prominent pentecostal denomination.⁸⁴¹ However, in Egypt’s case, the AG was ultimately quite successful in establishing self-sustaining congregations that have persisted into the present era. This brief overview is revealing because it shows that simply bringing the pentecostal experience was not enough; Pentecostals, like other Protestant missionaries, also built schools and orphanages. It also reveals that the COC has had as much interaction with Pentecostals as anyone else, almost 111 years’ worth. Other than sheep-stealing,⁸⁴² antagonistic attitudes arise from claims of exclusivity.

Seemingly many Copts and PC Christians are firmly convinced that their take on the Christian faith is the ‘true’ one and may be ignorant of each other’s traditions. Similar to Evangelicals, PC Christians, being born again or what Bebbington calls ‘conversionism’,⁸⁴³ is a core doctrine. Coptic Orthodoxy, with its paedobaptistic practices, appears to be quite misguided; one has to consciously ‘choose’ Christ to become ‘born again’. Thus, in the eyes of the other, conversion either direction smacks of nominalism and/or antinomianism at the very least and heresy and/or apostasy at the most.⁸⁴⁴ To be sure, mutual recognition of each side as ‘Christian’ is a fundamental prerequisite. Now, no Copt has ever told me directly that my soul is in

⁸⁴¹ "Foreign Missions Disbursements," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, March 2 1952, 9.

⁸⁴² This activity apparently is occurring in Kuwait as Charismatic Christians intentionally join or stay in St Mark’s as ‘missionaries’ for renewal. Further research is necessary.

⁸⁴³ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, Kindle location 163.

⁸⁴⁴ One interviewee, who attended the evangelical school, The Lighthouse, growing up, said: ‘Something is missing. I hate cancelling out things. You can’t convince me that Mother Mary is not as full of grace because I know she is full of grace. She has helped me. I know she’s there. She’s not just a random woman. There’s a lot of things they tried to get into my head, but my mom cancelled out completely when I went home’, Maysoon, 30 Jan 2017.

peril for not being Coptic. However, if sectarian theology makes further in-roads among the elite, one may find stricter exclusivist attitudes developing.⁸⁴⁵

Another major challenge for PC Christians and Copts in the Middle East is the expression of the former's core value: open evangelism. Very early, as shown above, Pentecostals sought conversions through healing and other supernatural phenomena. Similar strategies are deployed in the region today by their heirs.⁸⁴⁶ Many of these missionaries are North American and/or European and have recourse to the protection that identity affords. Copts, who have adopted a long-term survival/faithfulness strategy and whose evangelism in Islamic countries is more of a 'come and see' than a 'go and make' may find themselves threatened or constricted as a result of such highly visible activities. Even their privileged status with the Kuwaiti regime may not hold if Islamists in the Parliament become aware of such directly anti-Islamic activities as direct missionary work; they will not carefully delineate between Copts, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Catholics, and so on in their efforts to shut it down.

One central issue that arises from different conceptions of authority, apostolicity, and theology is the value for unity. Like Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Coptic Orthodoxy prioritises unity among its members and eschews schisms. PC Christianity, on the other hand, often speaks of a unity 'in the Spirit' to the belittlement of it in the flesh. Kenneth Hylson-Smith notes:

The whole ethos of Protestantism—its theological basis, the behavioural patterns it inculcates, its attitudinal emphasis and its authority structure—make it inherently liable to schism and fragmentation. . . it encourages individuality, stresses personal faith and promotes distinctive individual or group expressions of faith and practice. Such characteristics ensure a large measure

⁸⁴⁵ It might be the case that the retrieval of a wider Orthodox consciousness includes the exclusivist views of many in the Eastern Orthodox Church. On the other side of the equation, former Coptic Orthodox who have become PC Christians may denounce their former church.

⁸⁴⁶ See David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam: How God is Drawing Muslims Around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2014); *Supernatural Missions: The Impact of the Supernatural on World Missions*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: Apostolic Network of Global Awakening, 2012).

of personal and corporate creativity; but they almost guarantee divisiveness. . . . And what is true of Protestantism as a whole is especially so for those archetypal Protestants, the evangelicals.⁸⁴⁷

I would add that in as much as many PC Christians are Protestant and quintessential Evangelicals, this critique applies even more so. There is one Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait; there are untold numbers of PC ones. Thus, the COC rightly recognises this divisive tendency as a threat its value of unity, visible and invisible. From my data, I would surmise that the Copts I interviewed have an integrative *spirituality* but Coptic Orthodox core *identity* that allows them to stay in ‘unity’ with St Mark’s while exploring and adopting various other expressions.

The most obvious differences between the COC and PC forms of Christianity concern Christian dogma and doctrine.⁸⁴⁸ The importance of the Bible and the Nicene Creed for both suggests⁸⁴⁹ that ‘what brings us together is greater than what separates us’.⁸⁵⁰ Nonetheless, speaking from a PC, phenomenological viewpoint, the Coptic treatment of saints’ relics and popular figures’ tombs is difficult to swallow as consistent with New Testament Christianity. Icons are one thing, elaborately decorated tombs that people kiss, weep over, and put their prayer requests on constitutes a completely different approach to following the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. At St Mark’s, the reliquaries, to an outside observer, are nearly ornamental. Further, there are no tombs at St Mark’s for the faithful to visit. Thus, the visible attachment to the dead that characterises the COC in Egypt is nearly absent and patently subdued in Kuwait. This suggests that Kuwait’s strongly Islamic

⁸⁴⁷ Qtd. in David Hillborn, "Evangelicalism, the Evangelical Alliance and the Toronto Blessing," in *Toronto in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the 1990s*, ed. David Hillborn (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2001), 9.

⁸⁴⁸ Space does not permit a full exposition of these differences, so I focus on the most salient in terms of personal experience as a PC Christian and in terms of Egypt/Kuwait contrast.

⁸⁴⁹ Many PC Christians may, in fact, be ignorant of the Nicene Creed but generally uphold its doctrinal emphases nonetheless.

⁸⁵⁰ For ecumenical possibilities of the Nicene Creed (but, of course, without a Coptic voice), see *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism* ed. Christopher Seitz (2002).

context, paradoxically ‘Protestant-ises’ Coptic expressions thereby making some of the more idiosyncratic theological expressions less so. To speculate further, perhaps Kuwait, then, would be a good site to host future, regional dialogue, as discussed below.

7.4 Progress and Parallels

As one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches in 1948,⁸⁵¹ the COC has a long history of ecumenical contacts that argues against a rigidly sectarian narrative while providing precedent for on-going dialogues with Pentecostals and Charismatics. Of particular significance is the joint dialogue between the Coptic hierarchy and PC Christians that took place in June of 2005 at the St Mark Centre of the COC in Cairo. It

was structured around Bible studies on John 13-17. The members discussed themes such as the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us, the call of Christ to serve each other, the essential place of love in the Christian life and spirituality, and the prayer of Jesus for his disciples about their perseverance in service and unity. In the daily worship, the Group gave witness and thanks for their growth in unity, faith, and commitment. . .⁸⁵²

This description coincides with some of the themes I have already mentioned: the importance of the Bible as a source of authority for both groups, an emphasis on the Holy Spirit, service, and ‘the essential place of love in the Christian life’. More recently (2016), but in the UK diaspora, Copts and Pentecostals met together in what was called an ‘unprecedented’ and ‘historic’ meeting. One attendee, pentecostal Bishop Eric Brown, said:

Today is a historic day, it is the coming together of the Pentecostals and Orthodox in this country, and essentially we are seeking ways in which we can

⁸⁵¹ Norman Goodall, *The Ecumenical Movement: What It is and What It Does* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 235.

⁸⁵² Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Continuing and Building Relationships*, vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 64.

jointly lift up the name of Jesus and to make Him known in a more powerful way in this nation.⁸⁵³

Although, to my knowledge, contact between the clergy of St Mark's and PC leadership in Kuwait is rare, these historical high-level dialogues pave the way. This is especially true in the diasporic, restrictive context where mutual encouragement and support are vital.

Another study that closely parallels the observations of this one concerns the Pentecostalisation of Syrian Christians in Kuwait.⁸⁵⁴ Although Indian in origin, Syrian Orthodox Christians are also exposed to many of the same challenges and benefits as the Copts in the same context. Oommen asserts that “popular” religion in the form of Charismatic Pentecostal groups seems to have attained the upper hand over “official religion”, since the newly popular religion stresses the prosperity gospel.⁸⁵⁵ Oommen's analysis of the attractiveness of PC Christianity for Keralite Christians in Kuwait follows the oft-cited version of PC Christianity as the ‘wealth and health’ prosperity gospel⁸⁵⁶ for the disaffected.⁸⁵⁷ This emphasis on faith and healing allows Pentecostals to ‘operate in this diasporic space of uncertainty and

⁸⁵³ "Unprecedented Meeting of Orthodox and Pentecostal Church Leaders at The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre," The Coptic Orthodox Church UK, 7 June 2016, 19 December 2017, <http://copticcentre.blogspot.co.uk/2016/06/press-release-unprecedented-meeting-of.html>

⁸⁵⁴ Oommen, "Syrian Christians." He estimates that there are nearly 250,000 Keralites (not all Orthodox) in Kuwait.

⁸⁵⁵ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 3.

⁸⁵⁶ This is a reductionist account of Pentecostalism. I agree here with Meyer: ‘We need to resist taking for granted the relation between Pentecostalism and capitalism and acknowledge that a variety of attitudes exist: from an engaged concern with health and poverty to an inclination toward corruption and self-enrichment’ in Meyer, "Pentecostalism and Globalization," 115-6.

⁸⁵⁷ For Pentecostalism as a religion for the deprived and disenfranchised, see Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); d'Epinay Christian Lalive, *Haven of the Masses : A Study of the Pentecostal movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969). For a critique of the deprivation hypothesis, see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 216; Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 235-6; Allan Anderson, "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

instability'.⁸⁵⁸ Further still, this challenges the mainstream churches, which take 'the view that Charismatic groups. . . just exploit the precarious socio-physiological context that prevails in Kuwait'.⁸⁵⁹ In Kerala, becoming Pentecostal is grounds for excommunication from some churches but not so in Kuwait, where people attend both kinds of worship services. Oommen goes on to argue that Pentecostals' use of religious TV programming contributes to their growth and popularity. These programs, social services, and the PC churches in the country are maintained by a consistent emphasis on tithing as a 'mark of thanksgiving for economic success'. He writes: '[C]harity is highlighted as a prime duty of a born-again Christian'.⁸⁶⁰ Finally, he outlines the challenge of the second-generation immigrant: how to maintain loyalty to tradition in the face of a transnational movement with a strong American flavour and English worship services. One interviewee told him that 'the Syrian Church is ritualistic, monotonous, conservative and not updated in accordance with the changing global situation'.⁸⁶¹ Oommen concludes: 'The young generation in search of identity is finding solace in 'Anglicised' prayer groups and indirectly identifies with 'the West' through 'modern' religious practices'.⁸⁶²

Unfortunately, no similar study currently exists for the Coptic Orthodox Church in Kuwait.⁸⁶³ Nevertheless, it is worth remarking on some of the parallels and divergences between Oommen's account and my findings. Unlike the Keralite community, the Copts do have their own (quite large) space, deeper cultural ties to the host country, and a long history of strategies in dealing with Islam, Protestantism, and

⁸⁵⁸ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 12.

⁸⁵⁹ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 13.

⁸⁶⁰ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 14.

⁸⁶¹ Qtd. in Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 16.

⁸⁶² Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 17.

⁸⁶³ Tharwat Nagib's work looks at impact and relationship between the Charismatic Renewal and the COC in Egypt in his short chapter as well, see Nagib, "Blessed Be Egypt My People". A more extensive investigation was beyond the scope of this present study.

Pentecostal encroachments. Furthermore, St Mark's is quite good at providing social services and meeting the spiritual needs of its members through the proliferation of a type of patronage and opportunities for religious participation outside of the liturgy, for example: St Luke's, Bible studies, choir, a market, English classes, plays, and so forth. Like the Syrian Christians, the Copts, too, have instituted an English-speaking Sunday School for the second and even third generations. The Copts also have TV programming with high-production values that rival even those of Western Christian channels. Copts maintain a strong connection to the Cairene hierarchy and one gets the sense that they are well-supported by them. Although Oommen does not go into these types of connections for Keralite Christians, there is definitely something to be said about a continued sense of clerical oversight in terms of attrition from one's traditional faith. Pope Tawadros' recent visit certainly attracted many Copts who might have 'strayed' to the pentecostal periphery.⁸⁶⁴ In short, and in contrast to Oommen's account, St Mark's seems to be successfully navigating the forces that are causing an 'extremely high' attrition rate from mainstream churches,⁸⁶⁵ although it is relatively impotent at preventing influence, as noted in Chapter Six.

But, as this chapter suggests, the relationship between Coptic Orthodoxy and PC Christianity in Kuwait should not primarily be viewed through the lens of rival religious warfare— although there are tensions and friction, such as the exclusivism noted earlier. On the contrary, non-competitive models of cooperation must be explored together with an abandonment of the zero-sum mentality in future analyses. Binaries, as both Oommen and my data suggest, are not helpful: Orthodox *or* Pentecostal. Better, perhaps, is an integrative approach that can discern the good,

⁸⁶⁴ One Coptic woman I spoke with was quite offended, however, at the fact the Pope only took pictures with a select few and not everyone. She thought this was a violation of the Gospel principle of equality and concern for the 'least of these'.

⁸⁶⁵ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 12.

noble, and true in every tradition, while 'speaking the truth in love'.⁸⁶⁶ Ultimately, both traditions are attractive: PC Christians offer egalitarianism and optimism for the conversion of Muslims while the COC offers a depth of tradition and a tempering of ascendant triumphalism with a theology of suffering and martyrdom.

⁸⁶⁶ Ephesians 4.15. This seems to be the strategy of priests Makary and Sama^can in Egypt. In turn, they have come under sharp criticism for leading 'Hillsong-like worship services'. See "Bishops Raphael and Suriel on Charismatic Influence in Mukattam Parish," The St Jacob Baradaeus Orthodox Christian Fellowship, 15 Aug 2015, 19 Nov 2017. Hillsong is a popular PC Christian mega-church in Australia.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary

The central conclusion to this study is that part of the reason for the COC's longevity, resilience, and resurgent vibrancy rests in its preservation and performance of means by which its members experience the Holy Spirit. This is a sociotheological statement, a 'third way' of explanation. Such a conclusion is supported by a 'thick description' and analyses of lay Coptic Orthodox belief and practice in Kuwait. This is a qualitative work based on grounded theory framed by the 'oscillation between the "lifeworld" (concrete reality) and "system" (theory or theological metanarrative)'.⁸⁶⁷

The first section of this thesis explored the lifeworld of the diasporic Copt in Kuwait. I focused on the socio-political history between Kuwait and Egypt as a necessary precondition for the realised present. I went on to outline the pervasiveness of the *kafāla* system and sought to describe the ways in which it affected the diasporic elite in the Islamic Kuwaiti context, often labelled 'tolerant'. I argued that restrictive clientelism is a better descriptor. Further, as part of the 'thick description' project, I provided an examination of the material and time constituents of the lifeworld, with particular attention given to St Mark's compound.

Chapter Four introduced key concepts in terms of liminality and flow. In short, this frame of reference opened up the possibility that the concept of 'mystical' needs deeper revision to be able to carry the experience of the Coptic laity. Also in Chapter Four, the implications of these views were explored in regard to the nature of qualitative research. From there, I laid out the interview data categorised by the five key pneumatic pieties: the Eucharistic liturgy, prayer, fasting, experiences of the

⁸⁶⁷ Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 15.

charismata, and the quest for *baraka*. Here, too, I highlighted the consistent themes of relationality, temporality, spatiality, and affectivity while underscoring Realist implications. I also suggested that materiality and affectivity are key components to Coptic piety, a piety deeply linked to the monastic-ascetic tradition. Such connections are stimulated and maintained by the stratifying tendencies of the *kafāla* system.

The next two chapters of this study deployed two different, but related, models to rescript the interview data regarding the Eucharistic liturgy and prayer. After the requisite sociological situating, the Coptic Orthodox Eucharistic Liturgy at St Mark's was 'read' and 'rescripted' in terms of a modified version of Collins' IR model tuned to spirituality and theological modalities, specifically, pneumatological correspondences. Chapter Six rescripted the interview data on prayer in terms of my proposed Diamond Model of *Theosis*, a model that brought together all the various strands of liminality, Coptic ordinary theological trajectories/themes, the modified IR model, and affective emphases. The DMT thus serves as the capstone to the study by providing a conceptualisation to underwrite the sociotheological endeavour.

Chapter Seven then explored the dis/continuities of Coptic Orthodoxy with PC Christianity, an inevitable dialogue partner with a common existential and pneumatological orientation together with shared geography. The chapter enumerated significant overlaps and points of departure for dialogue between the two traditions while highlighting the fact that diasporic, context-restricted populations are particularly sensitive to issues surrounding religious allegiances.

8.2 Original Theoretical Contributions

In line with the grounded theory approach, I have sought to construct, adapt, and abduct various theories to 'link some set of concepts and say why and how they are

related'.⁸⁶⁸ Because grounded theory is inductive from observation to theory construction, it helpfully produces a plurality of theories that map onto the complexity of reality. Further, since this is a sociotheological study, the theories represent an admixture of elements from both disciplines. The original resultant theories of this study are as follows:⁸⁶⁹

1) Pneumatic piety *states that elements of the Coptic Orthodox tradition as practiced at St Mark's among the diasporic elite are positively correlated to experiences of the Holy Spirit.*

2) The 'elements of the COC tradition' are the pneumatic pieties: *the sets of beliefs and practices that index participation in the mystical theological tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church.*

3) The pneumatic pieties are changed and challenged by restrictive clientelism which includes increased exposure to PC forms of Christianity. Under this system, the relatively tolerant, rigidly stratified, and economically beneficial lifeworld allows religious competition among restricted clients to flourish. For Kuwait-Copts, adaptation means both a retrieval of a wider Orthodox consciousness and a degree of Pentecostalisation. These twin processes are holistically transformative for the individual-in-community.

4) This process of transformation is outlined by my interpretation and expansion of the theory of *theosis*. *Theosis is the dynamic, inter-personal process of transformation (movement towards Christ-likeness) on ontological, epistemological (affective and cognitive knowledge) and ethical levels patterned after Jesus Christ that occurs through the pneumatic pieties within corresponding IR chains accompanied by*

⁸⁶⁸ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 498.

⁸⁶⁹ Here I follow Rodney Stark's example of enumerating theoretical propositions.

recognisable psychological phenomena. Accordingly, my interpretation contests and expands the typical patristic-Byzantine-Russian account of the doctrine, shoring up its pneumatological, social, experiential, and egalitarian deficiencies. It is also sufficiently generalised to be extrapolated to other contexts, thus overcoming a common critique of the single case study model.⁸⁷⁰

5) Underlying the experientially and theological dimensions of the DMT, I propose a phenomenology of *pneuma* rooted in the speculative theological construction of pneumatic *kenosis*. These concepts allow a more robust conceptual bridge between the divine and human.

6) *Coptic spirituality is associated with supernatural and liminal experiences as signposts on the path towards greater Christlikeness*. These experiences are linked to psychologically confirmed flow states, a species of an Altered State of Awareness, which are narratable and provided the testimony or script of this study. Further, a lack of these narratives seems to indicate a slippage in one's spirituality.

8.3 Multi-disciplinary Contributions and Impact

8.3.1 Gulf Studies

As an emerging meta-discipline in its own right, Gulf Studies is exemplified in its flagship publication *Journal of Arabian Studies*. Dating back to 2011, its content extends across discipline borders, touching history, sociology, political science, and economics. What it does not include is an awareness or perspective of Coptic migration as a religious minority. To my knowledge, my presentation of a selection of this material was *sui generis* at the 2017 conference.⁸⁷¹ Of all the gathered scholars

⁸⁷⁰ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 15.

⁸⁷¹ "Mobilities and Materialities of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula," American University of Kuwait, 19 March 2017, 19 Nov 2017, http://www.auk.edu.kw/cgs/gss/gss_2017.jsp

at the fairly representative and inclusive conference, only one Kuwaiti colleague had much of an awareness of the Coptic population literally in his backyard. Therefore, this study begins to fill in a large gap in the literature on Christian minorities in the region by providing a ‘thick’ description of St Mark’s, the largest single Coptic Orthodox Church/congregation on the planet.⁸⁷²

Not only does this study contribute to the Gulf Studies field by offering seminal and original material, it also complexifies *kafāla* as seen through the experiences of the Coptic diasporic elite. Rather than being simply a monolithic system of oppression and ‘modern-day slavery’, *kafāla* affords the diasporic elite with the space, time, atmosphere, and economic means of enacting their spiritual projects, that is, *theosis*. This complex context I dubbed as restrictive clientelism. This study represents the first of its kind to apply such a conceptualisation to the contemporary Kuwaiti situation.

Finally, in terms of globalisation, migration and material culture in the region, this study maps out transnational networks, channels of transmission, and use of space through art and architecture. Again, to my knowledge, this is the only extant record of a description of these mechanisms and means in the Coptic diaspora in the Gulf.

8.3.2 *Sociology of Religion*

This study’s use of a modified version of Collins’ IR model represents the only example of this model applied to Orthodox liturgy, much less *Coptic* Orthodox liturgy. In doing so, my use delineates some of the challenges and deficiencies of the

⁸⁷² See also "11th International Congress of Coptic Studies," International Association for Coptic Studies (IACS), 4 April 2016, 19 Nov 2017, <http://www.copticcongress2016.org/11ICCS2016Panels-Papers.htm>. The panel entitled “The Coptic Diaspora: International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives” mainly focused on the Western diaspora, disregarding the largest Coptic population outside of Egypt in the Middle East. A significant oversight in my estimation.

model. Instead, I suggested that the model could be strengthened and adapted for use in a religious context by adding the 'sacred gaze' concept as a corollary to the 'mutual focus of attention'. This move allows the distinctly sacred way of viewing specifically religious content to contribute to a 'heightened spirituality' in a way the bare IR model does not allow. Other scholars can perhaps extrapolate this for other congregations, even ones that do not ostensibly use iconography.

I have also suggested that the COC in Kuwait is both continuous and discontinuous with models of church-sect, tension with the surrounding culture, and strictness. Again, like many other aspects of this study, this study represents the first and, to my knowledge, only attempt at framing the COC in the Gulf much less Kuwait within contemporary meso-sociological theories.

This study also uniquely situates the Coptic community of Kuwait within the globalisation and secularisation narratives. In mapping out diasporic pathways and cultural channels of transmission, I have shown how the diasporic elite move in and out of the Egyptian and Kuwaiti contexts. Their knowledge of English and often Western education indexes the continued interpenetration of British and American culture in the post-colonial era as well as their appropriation of Western art forms. The continued maintenance and even strengthening of religious sensibilities *contra* and sometimes alongside areligious attitudes belies the secularisation narrative; diasporic Copts may be doctors trained in the UK but many still talk to saints.

On a sociological level, my descriptive engagement with a potentially and sometimes actually persecuted religious minority that is sometimes stressed by the throes of a resurgent militaristic Islam can perhaps assist others in the development of qualitative research methods for other sensitive milieus. I did not do everything right; I had trouble gaining access, getting straight answers, maintaining contact, meeting

expectations, and navigating the various cultural tensions of my own background played out against Egyptian and Kuwaiti presence.

8.3.3 Theology and Ecumenism

In terms of practical theology, this thesis shows that *theosis* is a robust doctrine that can be helpfully deployed to understand a variety of practices and should not be limited to the patristic-Byzantine-Russian frame. The DMT presented in Chapter Six is a unique sociotheological model that may be used for different branches of Christianity to display the necessity of dynamicism, ritual, social context, and relationality in theoretical models derived from qualitative research. At the same time, the DMT is sensitised to the Christian tradition of becoming like Christ with love as *telos*. Such a model could be deployed didactically in a discipleship setting where one wants to illustrate the necessity of Christian community, love, and the transformation of the affections as essential parts of the Christian journey.

8.3.4 Other Concrete Areas of Impact

Besides raising awareness of the Coptic situation in the world today, tying into larger diaspora narratives, and bringing about greater appreciation of the Coptic tradition, there are several communities in which this study could have an impact. One immediate area of impact is within my academic community at the American University of Kuwait. By working with the Centre for Gulf Studies⁸⁷³ and having presented some of my findings at the recent conference, individuals in the field are now more aware of the Coptic presence in their backyard. Additional presentations at

⁸⁷³ "Center for Gulf Studies," American University of Kuwait, 23 May 2017, 19 Nov 2017, <http://www.auk.edu.kw/cgs/>

this venue will continue to impact and complicate this community's understanding of the relationships between Christians and Muslims in the country and region.

Moreover, AUK has helpfully provided grants to accommodate this study. This support adds to the reputation of the institution as one dedicated to the continued liberalisation of Kuwaiti society towards a deeper appreciation of other cultures and religions.

In terms of the University of Birmingham, this thesis overlaps with similar research trajectories within the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies. As one of the first and foremost Centres for PC research in the world, my dual engagement with PC Christianity and Coptic Orthodoxy brings the COC into sharper focus for future dialogue and theological investigation. The riches of Coptic Orthodoxy are still to be found in the living tradition. Again, Coptic Orthodoxy remains relatively unexamined not only by the CPCS but also by the Department of Theology and Religion. This study is ground-breaking for the Department and opens up avenues of research hereto unexplored but nonetheless urgent and necessary. I suggest some of these below.

It is my hope, too, that this study impacted those involved with it, particularly my interviewees. In the course of my interviews, I attempted to remain as impartial and objective as I could but I also am not naïve enough to think my American Christian identity did not disappear. In representing that tradition as one that is inquisitive, sympathetic, and sensitive, I may have been able to shift any latent negative attitudes towards us. To the degree this was successful I cannot be sure.

There are possible negative impacts as well. By highlighting the presence of the Coptic community in Kuwait and the current regime's laxity in enforcing stricter interpretations of Islamic law, this thesis may cause significant problems for both.

For the Copts, who prefer to ‘fly under the radar’, international attention on one of the few Arabic-context ‘havens’, might welcome further aggression. For the progressive segment of Kuwaiti society that seeks greater rights and freedoms, my study represents the distance they still need to traverse in terms of restrictive clientelism and evidence for how far they have moved away from the Islamists’ vision of a Christian-free Arabian Peninsula.

8.4 Modernity and Restrictive Clientelism: Continuing Challenges to St Mark’s

If the migrant project can be described as the attempt to ‘make as much wealth as possible in a limited span of time’,⁸⁷⁴ then this study nuances the relationship between wealth and the diasporic elite. They are not here simply for short-term gain but undertake longer-term projects to empower the next generation both materially and spiritually. Nevertheless, the blatant and often crass materialism of the Kuwaiti context is alluring and, if Jesus is to be believed, dangerous to one’s soul. Although the Coptic liturgy regularly recites ‘Do not love the world nor the things of the world’, the Kuwait-Coptic elite are not immune from signalling status through their possessions and middle-class lifestyles. Success is often defined in economic terms and educational opportunities. Of those I interviewed, the monastic life was not on the agenda.⁸⁷⁵ The second generation of Copts raised in the Gulf seem to be particularly susceptible to the Siren of materialism. There is a steady pressure to wear the latest fashion, drive an expensive car, eat in trendy restaurants and document it all on one’s Instagram account. This pressure, extended through social media and reinforced in various other contexts, often wreaks havoc on the financial future of the

⁸⁷⁴ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 12.

⁸⁷⁵ Will this mean a drying up of monastic vocations in Egypt? Perhaps from the diaspora but probably not from those who stay.

younger generation; heavy debt is a major issue. This suggests that the type of sacrificial giving necessary to sustain the diasporic community will have to come from other sources than those who have the most to give but are focused on other projects. As one interlocutor told me, it was the poor migrant who built St Mark's, not the rich.

The death of secularisation has been greatly exaggerated largely due to the global resurgence of religion.⁸⁷⁶ There are still aspects of secularity that are operative in the midst of this resurgence. As some of my interview data suggest, spiritual and miraculous phenomena are sometimes analysed through popular psychological and medical categories. For some, the cognitive dissonance is difficult. For others, it is a tension they are willing to live with. Further, on the side of secularisation, if Kuwait remains a relatively tolerant haven in the region and the destination for numbers of Copts, then a major challenge will be the generalised *ennui* that characterises so much of the Gulf. Coptic spirituality, historically, has thrived in the midst of struggle – either with persecutors or the desert itself. When that struggle is reduced to overcoming boredom on the road to self-actualisation, what happens? One possibility here is the embracing of PC forms of Christianity – not from a place of relative deprivation but a place of relative dissatisfied *fullness*. Or, as Stark quips: ‘What Marx probably should have said is that “religion often is the opium of the dissatisfied upper classes, the sigh of wealthy creatures depressed by empty materialism.”’⁸⁷⁷

In the frame of the resurgence of religion, growing Islamism in Kuwait and in the region, presents a wide array of challenges for the Coptic community.⁸⁷⁸ Islamists

⁸⁷⁶ For more along these lines, see Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 237-62.

⁸⁷⁷ Stark, *A Rodney Stark Reader*, 125.

⁸⁷⁸ St Mark's continually attempts to maintain ties with willing leaders of Kuwait's Islamic community, *Sunni* and *Shi'a* alike. They are often dignitaries at major celebrations. St Mark's has even gone as far as to host the late-night meal, *ghabqa*, during *Ramaḍān* (see Figure 39 below).

in Kuwait have not sat idly by while Christian communities flourish. In 2012, many unofficial house churches were closed. The same year also saw a member of parliament (MP) calling 'for a halt to the construction of new churches' and one MP went as far to 'tweet' his intention to 'submit a draft law for the removal of all churches in the country'.⁸⁷⁹ At the time of this writing, ISIS forces are only hours away, the Kurds just voted on a referendum about independence, and the Iranian State, only 80 miles away, places Kuwait within striking distance.⁸⁸⁰ In 2015, an ISIS inspired bomber from Saudi Arabia destroyed a prominent *Shi'i* mosque in downtown Kuwait City, hoping to ignite a civil war. Recent bombings in and around Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Churches led to a clamp down in security at St Mark's in Kuwait; only Coptic Christians were allowed to enter the compound. The pacifistic Copts are easy targets and every bomb makes a martyr, the highest honour in the tradition.

⁸⁷⁹ Oommen, "Syrian Christians," 7. Also, the *Amir* often overrules and even dissolves parliament with surprising regularity thereby underscoring the tolerant tension existing below the surface in the country.

⁸⁸⁰ Kuwait sided with Iraq during the Iran-Iraq conflict.



Figure 39: Maintaining Relations⁸⁸¹

Finally, St Mark's faces similar challenges as other immigrant populations but amplified by restrictive clientelism. Increased transiency brings with it short-term relationships and fewer deep social networks for marriage and security benefits. It is also unlikely St Mark's will be able to build another church in the near future. Cultural identity and connectedness to Egypt get diluted more and more as people stay away longer. Eventually, however, the oil will dry up—either physically or the need for it—and the Coptic migration project will have to find other places.

8.5 Possibilities for Future Research

This study raises as many questions as it seeks to answer and opens up a wide variety of possible avenues for future research. Two broad directions intimated but not directly investigated are contemporary Kuwait-Coptic Orthodoxy *vis-à-vis* Islam and

⁸⁸¹ Shagra, "Ghabqa."

other forms of Christianity. Research into Islamic relations with the Kuwait-Coptic community would require a significant amount of tact, Arabic, sensitivity, and *wasta*. It would also entail interviews from a number of participants from all sides: Copt, *Sunnī* leaders, and *Shīʿī* ones as well. Arranging such an investigation would require a high level of access and authorisation. The most interesting aspect of this research, in my opinion, would be to look specifically at conversion to/from Islam/Coptic Orthodoxy. I seriously doubt, however, if anyone would go on record talking about it. Although it had been hinted to me that conversions from Islam had occurred at St Mark's, details and names were understandably lacking. Coptic conversions to Islam in Kuwait, of course, were not mentioned, although there are significant benefits to be gained by lower-class Copts who do, namely escape from any on-the-job discrimination and peer pressure.⁸⁸² Moreover, there is a need for more detailed investigation into the various types of subtle persecution and discrimination. Some of my interviewees observed that *Egyptian* Muslims were the ones who gave them the most trouble. Still one other recounted a form of Islamic bullying at his high school. This line of enquiry also raises the question: Does St Mark's teaching programme include apologetic and polemical material? In informal conversations, some Copts have admitted to liking and watching *ʿAbūnā* Zecharia, a Coptic priest in hiding in California who has made it his life's mission to dismantle Islam by using Islamic sources. Whether or not this type of training occurs formally at St Mark's is unknown.

On the other hand, further research is needed in terms of Kuwait-Coptic relations with other forms of Christianity and on-going Pentecostalisation. I have

⁸⁸² A lesser, but no less real inducement towards conversion would also be more breaks from work for *ṣalāt* and accommodations during Ramaḍān. For many manual labourers in the region who work up to twelve hour days, six days a week, becoming more religious is simply a strategy for survival.

already begun this line of enquiry. Nonetheless, both sides should be interviewed to ascertain mutual perceptions. A good place to start would be with the former Coptic priest turned Charismatic preacher, ²*Abūnā* Daniel, who regularly visits Kuwait. A young Coptic Orthodox woman once told me she was banned by her father from attending his meetings. This, in turn, links to Coptic Orthodox conversions to other forms of Christianity.⁸⁸³ Are they re-baptised? Do they go on to recognise themselves as ‘Coptic’? What other forms of Christianity do they find the most attractive? What about the COC, St Mark’s in particular, do they find distasteful? Does the diasporic context really make people more susceptible, as Oommen suggests, towards PC fellowship?

Aside from inter and intrareligious investigations, more avenues of research from a social science perspective are necessary. Given the stratification of Kuwaiti society, to what degree do the Kuwait-Copts maintain this separation from other diasporic groups and in what ways do they actively seek to overcome it? Although briefly mentioned, this study did not explore the variety and depths of the effects of globalisation. The same is true for the secularisation process: nominal diasporic Copts are a study unto themselves. Lastly, this study excluded the *Ṣaʿīdī* perspective. As a largely separate class, more research is required to uncover their attitudes on all the above and more. For example, would they agree with the diasporic elite’s description of their piety?

In a more theological mode, there is more work to be done on modern-day monastic piety and Coptic pneumatology. This study focused mainly on prayer and the Eucharistic liturgy. The other pneumatic pieties mentioned in Chapter Four could also be looked at through the lens of Collins’ IR model and the DMT. Further, the

⁸⁸³ There are, of course, many nominal Copts who do not participate in any religion.

correlation between monastic reform and renewed lay piety in the Coptic church suggests that there is a vital link— a link I have begun to outline through the practice of the pneumatic pieties in Kuwait. However, more work is needed on the other side of the equation: the monasteries in Egypt. Originally, I had intended to give a systematic account of a Coptic pneumatology but quickly realised that it was beyond the scope of the case study. But the challenge remains. Coptic theology is largely un-systemised and often buried in the narratives of the people who live and die for it.

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEWS

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