

C. Tribute to Pope Shenouda III and condolence message to the Coptic Orthodox Church

To the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Geneva, 18 March 2011

Your Eminences and Graces, Respected members of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great sadness and compassion for the Coptic Church and the people of Egypt that the World Council of Churches (WCC) has received the news of the loss of Pope Shenouda III, a former president of the WCC and spiritual head of the Egyptian Coptic Church since 1971.

Pope Shenouda served the ecumenical movement for many decades. In addition to his leadership role in the WCC, he was a president of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). He was an outspoken champion of the importance of Christian unity and the part that the Coptic Orthodox Church was called to play in the quest for unity.

As a leader he taught us that modesty is the best way to serve Christ. By being present with the people, and demonstrably for the people, he was and will always be the model of a spiritual father to all Egyptians, both Muslims and Christians.

His stands on political issues incarnated his belief in justice and peace. He opposed all forms of social discrimination and called continuously for the peaceful coexistence of all people.

He was a strong believer in Christian-Muslim conviviality and cooperation. His initiatives in the field of interreligious dialogue contributed to the unity of the Egyptian people.

As a poet and a philosopher he brought us closer to God through his reflections on prayer as the bridge between the people and the Almighty.

He stood with the poor, with the sick, with all who needed help.

He believed in the role of young people in the church and offered a special focus for the Christian and civic education of Egyptian youth.

He faithfully worked for democracy and freedom.

He accompanied the Christians of the Middle East in many challenges during critical moments of recent history, and was able with his wisdom to bring the region and the country out from the threat of sectarian conflicts.

He reaffirmed the essence of citizenship and the shared responsibility and rights of all Egyptians through his saying: "Egypt is not a nation we live in; it is a nation that lives within us."

Be assured of the prayers and support of the global fellowship for the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Egyptian people during this time of mourning. Your pain is also our pain, as Saint Paul said, "When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it..." (I Corinthians 12: 26)

May Pope Shenouda's words, witness and memory strengthen the faith of Christians in Egypt and the Middle East; and, may his soul rest in the peace of the Kingdom of God.

Yours in our common Lord,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit

WCC general secretary