
Shenouda rejects normalization with Israel

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Pope Shenouda III

Leader of Egypt's Coptic Church Pope Shenouda III on Monday stressed his rejection of normalized relations with Israel. "I reject any normalization with Israel in light of the continued occupation imposed on the Palestinians," he said.

He added, however, that many within Egypt's Coptic community -- claiming a desire to visit Jerusalem -- opposed his position.

In an interview on satellite channel ONTV, Shenouda praised late Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, while also criticizing some of his policies.

"He was a great leader and embodied a turning point in Egypt's history from royal to republican governance," the pope said of the late president. "He had a charismatic personality, but his reign was authoritarian -- so there was no democracy, no elections."

Shenouda went on to recount how, during his first meeting with late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1972, the two men had agreed to a national program for the construction of churches. "I agreed with Sadat on the construction of 40 churches that year," he said. "But Sadat wanted to build 50."

The Pope went on to blast the failure of Copts to win seats in parliamentary elections, describing the low percentage of Coptic representation in the People's Assembly as "unacceptable."

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