NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Pope Shenouda III

Maureen Fiedler | Mar. 23, 2012 NCR Today

I had never heard of Pope Shenouda III before I began to prepare an interview for this week's *Interfaith Voices* show on public radio. In fact, I did not know any religious group other than Roman Catholicism called its leader a "Pope." Ah yes! This show is always a learning experience for me, as well as the audience!

Pope Shenouda III was actually a highly significant religious leader in the volatile Middle East -- in Egypt to be specific. He died March 17 at the age of 88. He was the leader of Coptic Christians, who are found mainly in Egypt, but also have significant numbers in the United States.

In an interview with Joe Grieboski, who always amazes me with his knowledge of figures such as this, we learn that Pope Shenouda was a peacemaker, a mediator in the heated religious atmosphere of Egypt. While he stood for the rights of Coptic Christians when they were persecuted, or the victims of violence, he was always careful not to do anything that might provoke backlash. He was sometimes criticized for being too "diplomatic," but his passing puts the Coptic Christians of Egypt at a crossroads.

Interfaith tensions are growing in an Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists share a majority in the new Parliament. Copts are only about 10 percent of the population of Egypt, but they trace their lineage in that country back to the first century CE, and claim that their church was founded by the evangelist, St. Mark.

Coptic Christians now have to choose a new leader, and their system is fascinating. The names of three nominees (often monks) are put in a vessel of some kind, and a child draws the name of the next Pope! Not exactly like a Roman conclave. And the title "Pope?" In both cases, it comes from the Italian for "papa."

This interview is the third in our show this week. First is Bart Ehrman, offering proof that Jesus did indeed exist (contrary to the claims of a growing number of skeptics). Then comes Nina Burleigh, telling the fascinating tale of the "James Ossuary," a box of bones (literally) with the inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Problem is: it's probably a fake ? part of the "relics trade" in the Holy Land. After that, you can hear all about Pope Shenouda III.

Here is the link to the show: http://www.interfaithradio.org/ [1]. Joe Grieboski is the founder of the Institute on Religion and Public Policy.

Source URL (retrieved on *12/17/2014 - 18:43*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/pope-shenouda-iii

Links:
[1] http://www.interfaithradio.org/