

The Bishop of Calivada

They put me up at the Claremont Colleges Faculty Club, a beautiful facility centrally located. The main business of the Club is lunches, but they have a few rooms to house visitors. The custodian told me that if I wanted breakfast in the morning, just go into the kitchen and tell Reola what I wanted.

I was up at eight and into the kitchen. Reola sat me down in the dining room near the kitchen door and scrambled me some eggs. Across the length of the dining hall, I heard the cheerful, booming voice of a man distributing good mornings to one and all in the dormitory section.

Good morning to the maid.

"Another lovely day, Frances? Another merely lovely day? You might think that California could do better than 'merely lovely'. Why not a transcendental day?"

The voice belonged to a tall and handsome man of

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my own age, wearing a collar, and God had provided him through age and baldness with a silver tonsure.

Good morning to the cook.

"Well, Reola, another lovely day? The cow milked? The coffee bean plucked and wrapped individually?"

"Good morning, Bishop, the usual?"

The Bishop came out of the kitchen bearing tomato juice. He saw that I was the only other breakfaster.

Good morning to me.

"Good morning, sir. May I join you, or are you morose before coffee?"

He joined me.

"I'm Fred Carpenter, Bishop of Calivada."

I introduced myself and asked him

"Episcopalian?"

"Just so. What else ought there to be?"

I feel particularly at home with members of the high-church clergy and I said something about how I, as a mathematician, often thought of myself as a member of the Priesthood of a Numerical Faith.

It took only a few moments of verbal jockeying and I had established that the Bishop had taken his ministerial training at Union Theological Seminary at Broadway and 121st Street, New York City, and since

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I was familiar with the religious seminaries in that area having married into one, so to speak, we compared notes on various worthies that I had met over the years: Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rheinhold Niebuhr, Robert McCracken, Louis Ginsberg, Louis Finkelstein. He summarized his view of each in a mot.

It emerged that the Bishop of Calivada sat on many Committees and Boards, only briefly had he worked at the pastoral level, and that he was in Claremont for a meeting of the Miscellaneous Committee of the Claremont Theological School. Reciprocally, I told him that I was a temporary resident in Salt Lake City and gave him my impressions of the principal Mormon community. The Mormons, I said, seemed to be riding pretty high. They had thousands of missionaries and many converts. If you walk around in downtown Salt Lake, the chances are good that a convert speaking English in an European accent will ask you for directions.

The Bishop took this all in and then said

"Well, I give them ten more years to peak out. History shows that no church built on welfare psychology can last. Of course I know they have more going for them, but their cosmic music is wrong. Wrong eschatology. Wrong escatology!"

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"Would you say that it is a matter of aesthetics?"

"Yes. You might say that."

I observed that there was an Institute for Christianity and Near Eastern Studies on the Claremont campus.

"Oh. Yes. That's Jim Robinson's shop. They've done some marvellous work with the Gnostics and the finds at Dag Hammadi. Or is it Hag Dammadi? We've sunk plenty of money into them."

Who the "we" was, I never found out, for the Bishop consulted his wristwatch.

"I must be off. White Rabbit. Must attend to the three P's: Power, pelf, piety. In the right proportions, of course."

So I said goodbye to this gentleman, praying to God that he grant me as much Certainty about any one thing, that two plus two equals four, for example, as He had granted to Fred Carpenter about most everything.