

FR. GLENN SUDANO, CFR

We Live in a Castle

*Stories, allegories, and commentaries about
the most wonderful religion in the world.*



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About the Book

“Blue collar ecclesiology” or “kitchen table catechesis” is how the Father Glenn Sudano, CFR describes his way of presenting some interesting ideas about what is considered by many to be a little known yet fascinating subject. *We Live in a Castle* is Father’s first book. The title is taken from one of its twelve stories, each of which, like an array of spotlights, illumines its subject from different angles.

The subject of the book? The Church—its nature, history and mission. Father describes his work as “friendly yet provocative.”

He challenges the reader to dig into the Church’s history and discover a valuable treasure which he calls “the most wonderful religion in the world.” He uses modern day parables, some based his real life experience, each with an introduction and spiritual reflection.

We Live in a Castle is well suited for teachers and young students participating in religious education. It will be especially useful for adults who are considering or preparing to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church (RCIA).

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Chapter XII: The Final Voyage

The Book of Revelation, also known by the somewhat foreboding name “The Apocalypse” is the last book of the Christian Bible. For readers with vivid imaginations, this book can seem like an excursion into a mystical, OZ-like Land. Attributed to the evangelist John, the lone surviving apostle, this writing is dramatic indeed. Its popularity is no doubt due to the fantastic creatures and catastrophic events John describes.

Scholars believe the Apocalypse to be a sort of encrypted encyclical—or circular letter—written to console and admonish Christian communities who were bearing the crushing weight of persecution by the Roman State. Written in a style similar to that of the Hebrew Bible Book of Daniel, this apostolic letter has not only inspired believers throughout the centuries but has also confused and even frightened them. Many have attempted to unravel this difficult text. Amateur preachers often abuse the book, treating it like a crystal ball which they try to use to foresee future events—not a good idea. Experienced scholars see the Book of Revelation providing a message of comfort in times of persecution for believers of every age. Indeed, has there been any age or people who have not suffered persecution for standing fast in the Faith? Thus, this extraordinary work is not only about the past or the future, but has much to say to us about today.

We live in an age of diminishing faith. It appears people think less and less about the world to come. If some judge the past as a time preoccupied with sin and divine justice, perhaps we might point out that today both of these are casually dismissed. Oddly enough, it appears that even clergy shy away from such topics. Fifty years ago it was common to hear sermons or read articles in Catholic magazines dealing with what are traditionally called “the four last things”: death, judgment, heaven and hell. Preachers pitch the story differently today, stressing themes of kindness, justice, inclusion, and wholeness.

The Apocalypse has little to do with affirmation and togetherness. What is revealed to Saint John in a mystical manner is as warm and fuzzy as a tow truck. The text takes us on a ride to places we’d rather not go. Its message may be summarized like this: “When everything’s over, is when it all begins.”

“Life is like a flower”, the psalmist sings “which springs up in the morning and withers and dies at night” (Psalm 90:6). Together with everything we see about us, we too have a

beginning and an end. However, while most people have some sense of life after death, few actually allow this truth to shape their lives. Thus, we think and behave as if our daily decisions have no real import in eternity.

The stories in *We Live in a Castle* have been concerned with the Catholic Church—its true nature and mission. We have noted that apostolic, orthodox Christianity is gradually being driven to the margins the growth of secular humanism and those who claim to be “spiritual but not religious”. These seek replace objective reality with subjective experience.

Yet even among Christians, the Church, is no longer a divine instrument of salvation but rather an idea or ideal which inspires and motivates its members to be good despite the mandate of Christ to be great—indeed, to be holy. Simply put, a spiritual fellowship or a supernatural club made up of members who are baptized, claiming to believe in Jesus or to be “born-again” cannot provide the power to bring a person out of sin and into sanctity. What is needed is a material, temporal, touchable reality. This “thing” is not simply spiritual but also “solid”—a mystical body. As the risen Christ said to His Apostles, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have” (Luke 24:39).

Yet, there will come a time when the Church with its material structure and sacramental system, its sublime doctrines and dogmas, together with its divine authority and earthly mission—all these—will be set aside forever. That mystical, incorporated reality, which we have likened to an orchestra or vineyard or castle or boat, will be transformed. The Church which began so small and later grew so large will set aside its existence in time in order to be perfected in eternity. Thus, the sufferings and struggle of the Church militant will be subsumed into the glory of a Church triumphant.

Have you ever wondered what it will be like on earth’s last day? What will it be like when the very last grain of sand slips through the hourglass of time? What will it be like when all mankind is ushered into God’s holy presence? No doubt, those who lived in the light will enjoy an even more brilliant existence, while those who loved darkness on earth will enjoy even more in eternity. Any form of Christianity which rejects the apostolic doctrine regarding eternal salvation or perdition must forfeit the name Christian. For Christ Himself has made it quite clear that only one of two destinies awaits every single soul.

Yet, while there will certainly be an end to this world, so too will there be a beginning of the world to come. In that designated moment, the salvific mission of the Messiah and his Church

will be fulfilled. The One who created the world will recreate it assuming everything into a new reality. And everyone will come face to face with the One they either served or scorned.

This is the day when the Book of Life will close and human intention and activity will be silenced. This is the day when every expansive empire, commanding dynasty, and powerful kingdom and government will be but a memory. What was once thought to be invincible and immutable will collapse, for in that time only what is immortal will remain. Those deemed faithful will be welcomed into eternal Light, while the faithless will flee from the Light's painful brilliance.

Just think of it. There will be a time and a place where fear, shame, guilt, greed, anger and anxiety will be no more. Will we discover the inner meaning and final message of life in the blink of an eye or through a slow unveiling over eons? Either swiftly or slowly, the veil draped over our understanding will be removed, revealing both life's major mysteries and our petty everyday problems. The good which we sought on earth will be found in eternity, while the evil which we fought will be forgotten. Divine justice and mercy will give everyone their due as the just and the wicked will receive in full the desire of their hearts.

Unlike John the Evangelist, I did not receive a mystical revelation, but rather, a lively imagination. One of my favorite verses from the Bible tells me: "Eye has not seen nor has ear heard, nor has it even entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him." Well, what my mind cannot conceive my imagination can conjure. So, fresh from somewhere inside my head is "The Final Voyage"—that day when the Church makes her last journey across the tumultuous ocean of earthly life.

I see before my eyes a vast ocean. The water which reaches to the horizon looks like liquid jade, it undulates as if breathing. Far in the distance moves a majestic ship with billowed sails bright in the noonday sun. As the sea surges, it gently lifts the vessel upwards to the powder blue sky, then settles it down again. The ship's sails and rigging are tethered to iron rings by thick hemp ropes. The stern, extending well over the frothy water is both worn smooth and badly battered by countless miles at sea and violent battles. Yet, despite its age, the ship gracefully slices through the jaded and salty water.

From my bird's eye view the boat's deck resembles a floating flowerbed. But a closer look tells me what I see are not colorful plants but people. Yes, there are people packed tight, standing shoulder to shoulder and front to back. Many have children in their arms or straddled on their shoulders. Some stand tippy-toed turning this way and that hoping to catch a glimpse of the snow

white shore in the far distance. I am offered a closer look at the passengers whose faces are beaming with joy. Many are looking intently, others laughing, some singing, and still others pointing to their awaited place of arrival. Indeed: a floating flowerbed overflowing with colors from every continent, country, and culture.

I am now given to see the ship's captain standing at the helm. He is tall and slim wearing a pure white tunic and his hands are firmly gripping a weathered wooden wheel. His silver hair and beard contradicts his youthful stature. He has a royal bearing; his coffee-colored skin and almond shaped eyes give evidence of a mixed heritage. In fact, I am told both Ethiopia and China proudly claim him as their son. His clear amber eyes scan the sea and the sliver of white sand in the distance. He stands surefooted keeping the ship steady. Looking more closely I see a large silver cross hanging from a gleaming chain about his neck.

Now I find myself hovering like an eagle high above the shore. As on the boat, there is a vast assembly of people standing shoulder to shoulder peering at the boat in the distance. These too are bristling with excitement, many waving and others whistling to the vessel as it approaches the shore.

Where am I? And what am I witnessing? What is this boat and who are these anxiously awaiting its arrival?

But before the questions are even asked, an inner voice answers: The majestic vessel I see is the Church. She is completing her very last journey, once again bearing a most precious cargo home to Heaven. Due neither to age, weariness, or defeat, but rather Divine plan, her earthly mission has finally come to an end. Centuries ago she was small boat, big enough for but a handful; however in time she grew large enough to embrace all humanity. Like the Ark of Noah, this boat was built to bring the elect on board lest they sink into the dark waters. Mockery and scorn has accompanied her, as in every age she was dubbed a ship of fools. Yet, in the end, we see that it was the fools who refused to board.

I now find myself standing at the ocean's edge where the warm water gently laps, bubbles, and sinks into the white powder like sand. Standing ankle deep in the water is a young woman of extraordinary beauty. Her modest silken garments colored blue like the sky flutter in the ocean breeze. The beauty of her face is beyond description; her smooth complexion glows with a golden hue. Her brown eyes and ever so slight smile are captivating. There she stands intently watching the ship as it draws closer to the shore.

I see standing beside the magnificent woman a man, older and he too of noble appearance. His bronzed muscular arms are folded across his chest; he is evidently delighted at what he is witnessing. I am then led to see others standing around both the elegant woman and the noble looking man. I see two men; one clutching a set of large golden keys and the wielding a large silver sword. As soon as I asked the question, I was offered the answer. Indeed, whatever individual I was given to see, their identity was supplied. With wonderment I counted the number standing next to these two—ten—and immediately knew their names.

Beside and behind the twelve stood a vast company too many to count—men, women, boys and girls, all of them were wearing pure white linen robes and many holding long leafy palms. Nestled in the green branches and cradled in their arms I see other objects as well—swords, spears, axes or arrows. Yet others held whips, torches, clubs, chains, ropes, and even rifles. I wondered why this was. Immediately, the voice said, “Behold, these were the ones who were cut, crushed, crucified, burned, battered and beaten, torn in two, twisted, tortured, maimed and mauled. Behold! They stand victorious! Grain buried has become like wheat bread which now feeds the world!”

Now soaring and swooping above the vast crowd, I saw others gathered into groups. These were distinguished one from the other by vesture. For example, I saw many men wearing mitres. These, I was told were bishops from every age and place. They stood together with their priests and deacons each easily recognized by their liturgical attire. While these were many, others not distinctively dressed were revealed to me: dedicated catechists, brave confessors, wise apologists, prolific writers, brilliant scholars, fervent preachers, diligent teachers, joyful penitents, tireless missionaries, hidden recluses, solitary hermits, industrious monks and cloistered nuns. Together they constituted a veritable army of men and women consecrated to God. I almost fainted when I beheld the beauty of this assembly as it radiated a golden light and emitted a most exotic scent blending lilies, lavender, and incense.

My flight continued and brought me to an even larger assembly. These wore no distinctive dress but wore the clothing of every nation in every era. Like those already seen, they too were beaming, laughing, singing, dancing, clapping and jumping for joy. This time the voice did not speak but rather made a bold proclamation: “Behold! The faithful and just who quietly lived, diligently labored, silently served, patiently suffered, and selflessly sacrificed for the glory of God and the good of others. Here stands the elect—unknown in their age, looked over in life and forgotten after death, misunderstood by many, subjected to slander, enduring injustice, and

forgiving their enemies. See the royal ranks of those who were once ignored, casually dismissed, duly rejected and quickly forgotten. Look, they live! The falsely accused, wrongly punished, unjustly imprisoned, the abused, enslaved, and abandoned. The scales are now perfectly balanced! Their trials and tears are now gone! Yes! The trampled now triumph!”

It was in this assembly I noticed something which could not be ignored. Everywhere I looked, there were children—so many children. I soon found myself walking among them. These all appeared the same age—six or seven—and they all wore ivory colored robes. Yet every robe was unique, distinguished by a glittering brocade of gems and jewels about their collars, hems and sleeves. The children, while wearing royal-like attire, still acted like little ones—squealing with gleeful laughter as they played tag and ran all about. Stunned at their sheer number, I asked myself: Why are there so many? My question was immediately answered.

Overcome, I fell to my knees and wept, weighed down as under a blanket of lead, crushed under the sheer weight of my grief and sorrow.

Again, the voice: “Cease weeping!” At once, strong invisible hands took me by the shoulders, and set me squarely on my feet. Next, I took to flight again. The voice commanded: “Look!” Now, I could clearly see in the distance what appeared to be an immense walled city made of luminous alabaster. My eyes were directed to its center where I saw what appeared to be a park. It was a perfectly square area covered with what looked like grass but was softer and more brilliant. The landscape was intricately designed with shrubs and trees whose leaves glistened. As I approached, I could actually hear their leaves tinkle as they shimmered in the breeze. Flowerbeds were everywhere filling the air with the fragrance of honeysuckle or magnolia. Throughout the park ran a circuitous translucent ice-blue stream home to fish of every size and color.

What I saw was more than an immense park, it was actually a playground. The children, in their brilliantly brocaded tunics, were not only playing with one another but also with animals. Smooth tan colored ponies, pure white puppies and honey-colored kittens. I was gently informed: The place is called “Eden”, designed by God Himself specifically for children whose lives ended before they saw the light of day. As their earthly existence was ever so brief, it was decreed that their life in eternity should be especially beautiful. I asked “Is this heaven?” The voice immediately gave me to know, “It is *their* heaven.”

Without another word, I find myself viewing the boat which is now anchored a short distance from the shore. Large landing boats are being positioned by cranes as smiling and laughing passengers prepare to disembark. Again the voice: “No one is bringing with them any

belongings—not even a small bag. Where they are going nothing is needed—or desired. Even the boat must be abandoned. Its earthly mission is now complete.” But before I could ask “When?” or “Why?” I heard “Wait!”

As each of the landing boats arrived on shore, the beautiful woman waded into the water to greet them. Disembarking in the shallow water, many fell to their knees as she approached them; some fell weeping into her outstretched arms. I was later told this indeed was her request, that she greets each person and escorts them through the courtyards to the Great King’s City. I will never forget the tone and tenor with which the voice said: “The Queen’s privilege is the King’s pleasure: It is to escort each through the courtyards of the King.”

Hearing this, I ask, “Do you not mean courtyard?” I am offered no response. Yet, in a flash I am hovering over what appears to be large series of concentric circles. I can see the shining city and the playground. Before I can ask, I am told, “These are the courtyards of the King which surround His city. No one enters its gates without journeying through the courtyards. I am informed the first or outer courtyard is the size of an ocean, although they progressively get smaller. The average courtyard, I am told is about the size of Africa. The journey from the outer edge to its center is different for each individual. For a few it is a flash, for some others, slow as centuries. Each courtyard is so illumined as to help the eyes of each soul adjust so they will not be blinded when they enter the city. Thus, the courtyards, I am told, manifest not only the King’s justice but His mercy.

I now find myself looking at the boat moored in the distance. I am immediately brought on board. I clearly see the white-clad captain standing alone at the helm viewing the empty deck. Evidently he is the very last to leave. I see him descend the stairs which lead deep into the hold. The door to the Admiral’s quarters is wide open. He bends down to look in. It’s empty. He quickly ascends the stairs to the deck. He enters into a small landing boat and makes his way to the shore.

The vessel, the once small and fragile boat which became majestic ship, has finally fulfilled its mission. Wind whipped and battered by storms of every sort, it not only survived the centuries but sailed through them. The boat’s illustrious history is now ended, her adventures now over. She has no more battles to fight, no more mutinies to overcome. I am startled as I hear the word, “Watch!” In a most astounding manner the boat, empty of its precious cargo, is quietly drawn below the surface. The massive mast, together with its sails and rigging slowly sinks leaving behind but a frothy slit in the sea.

Then there erupts an immense cheer as the captain approaches the shore. He and the beautiful woman extend their arms towards each other. The solemn procession into the Celestial City can now begin.

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