

FR. GLENN SUDANO, CFR

# We Live in a Castle

*Stories, allegories, and commentaries about  
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# **WE LIVE IN A CASTLE**

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## About the Book

“Blue collar ecclesiology” or “kitchen table catechesis” is how the author describes his methodology in presenting some fresh ideas about what is considered to many, a very stale subject. The title of Father Glenn’s first book, *We Live in a Castle*, is taken from one of twelve stories which, like spotlights, illumine one subject at different angles.

The subject of the book? The Church.

The author describes his work as “friendly yet provocative” as he challenges the reader to dig into history and discover a valuable treasure; which he calls “the most wonderful religion in the world.” Father Glenn utilizes creative stories - both allegorical and personal – each with an introduction and commentary. Questions are also provided for personal reflection and group discussion.

No doubt, this book is most especially suited for teachers and students participating in some form of catechesis, especially those who are considering or preparing to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

## CHAPTER II

*Carrie's Quest* is story about one young girl's desire to dig for the truth. The story also presents a certain disintegration of Christianity. Simply stated, when believers sever themselves from the apostolic roots of the Church, everything begins to unravel. Christianity is essentially a "He centered" reality, yet, when it becomes we-centered, it quickly decomposes. The Church does not exist for my enjoyment or personal enrichment; it exists for my salvation and sanctification. Too many today are only interested in tailor-made Christianity which perfectly suits their emotional and social needs. These want the Church to conform to them; yet, the truth is actually the opposite, we must conform – shrink or stretch ourselves - to fit the Church.

The deep devotion and fidelity to the Church often evidenced in our over eighty elderly is being buried with them. One can only wonder what expression of faith will be evidenced in the lives of their grandchildren. As a society we stand at a crossroad. Is the Christian faith a matter of discovering one's personal path or deciding to walk upon a path cleared by the apostles and made smooth by the feet of countless saints.

Hopefully the following story will engender some good personal reflection and perhaps even an engaging discussion. Let us pray and support all the Carrie's of the world.

## CARRIE'S QUEST

“Devout” isn’t a word Carl would use to describe himself, although he wishes it were. “Committed” is the word he settles on. Although baptized as an infant by his uncle, a Presbyterian minister, nowadays, Carl would describe his church affiliation as “non-denominational.” Not only is this true, but he likes the way it sounds.

Carl remembers the religious environment of his youth warmly. In his family the Bible was not simply “the Good Book” – it was *the* Book. Not just heard preached from the pulpit, but read regularly at home. But that was years ago. Although Carl still prizes the bright blue and gold ribbons he won at Bible camp for wowing the crowds knowing chapter and verse, he admits that “the Word” isn’t often in his hands these days. He maintains, however, that “It’s firmly rooted in my heart” He reasons, “That’s good enough”. And he almost believes it.

Carl loves his wife, Sharon. They met while attending a Christian college and found they shared the same family-centered culture and faith. Nowadays Sharon calls herself “born again,” although she was raised in a conservative Baptist environment. She is proud of the fact that she attended church “most Sundays” in college; in fact, it was at a church function that she met Carl.

Marriage has been a blessing for them; and they know their only child Carrie is a gift from God, the precious fruit of faith and persistent prayer. Both agree she is a special girl – pretty, intelligent, industrious. Neither Carl nor Sharon can believe that their little Carrie is finishing high school and will soon be off to college. Both parents were bursting with pride when their daughter was chosen valedictorian of her class.

When Carrie was born, the question of church affiliation came to the fore. Her parents were determined to raise their daughter in a church community – but which one? Carl and Sharon found it difficult to make a decision, even after many years of “church shopping” and looking for a place to call home. They tried to decide, but pleasing both wasn’t easy – to say the least. On one Sunday, Carl might like the pastor’s preaching, but Sharon hated the music. Often enough, a Pentecostal churches Sharon got excited and spoke of the “spiritual energy” while Carl considered their worship “overly emotional.” They once settled in at a quiet Methodist church for about two years, but they left when Carl decided the church’s pastor and preaching “got too progressive”. After a few years, feeling defeated, they both started to sleep in on Sundays.

Differences in their religious preferences came to a head when Carrie was born. Carl was raised in a tradition in which infants were baptized, while Sharon had been reared in one which absolutely rejected this practice. She would say: “Carrie has to choose for herself when she’s old enough.” Carl would sharply retort, “We’re not asking her what she wants for dinner, are we?” The fact was that although Carl was not committed to his childhood denomination, he was attached to a sober and traditional expression of Christianity, while Sharon looked for a powerful emotional experience in church. The battle over baptism ended with Carl waving the white flag. Carrie was never carried to the font for baptism, although she was “dedicated”. On Carrie’s tenth birthday, Sharon presented her with a beautiful, leather-bound Bible, which Carrie came to treasure. In fact, Carrie keeps this Bible especially displayed in her room.

Sharon got a spiritual shot in her arm when a new church was forming in their neighborhood. It was a “house church” and she and Carl decided to attend a worship service. The frequent meetings were held in a large house that accommodated well over sixty people. For Sharon it was love at first sight; once again, something rubbed Carl the wrong way. Sharon not only began attending the Sunday services but also Wednesday night Bible study. She went alone while Carl would stay home, reading his devotional in the den. To please Sharon, he did return to the “home church” for a special revival meeting, but left early in a huff. “Over the top” is how he described the whole affair.

As Carrie grew into adolescence, she displayed a strong and searching faith. A Bible camp sponsored by a local Evangelical Lutheran church was her summer staple; beginning as a participant, she eventually became an assistant youth leader. She also attended several teen mission trips to Mexico led by a socially aware Presbyterian church. She was deeply moved by the poverty she encountered and loved helping others. On one mission trip she worked in an orphanage; and another in a medical clinic. Her mother, however, was uncomfortable with some of Carrie’s comments about the need to do “good works” – a phrase which always irked Sharon, as the idea seemed to her to contradict the particular brand of Christian faith that she had been taught. In other words it seemed disturbingly Catholic.

Even as a young girl Carrie had a knack for posing questions that elicited awkward silences and exposed her parents’ conflicting opinions. She always accepted the answers presented to her, although she often saw their deficiencies, while her parents wondered how long they could give their daughter answers they knew to be inadequate. Concerning the question “which church?”

both Carl and Sharon settled into their own respective faith niches, she by faithfully attending the neighborhood “home church” and he by hiding in his den.

That worked until “e worship” hit the scene. Technology has now provided not only clergy but laity with ways to share the faith. Economically, cyberspace provides more spiritual bang for the buck as it literally takes up no space and few financial resources. Why build a building when you can have a viable, powerful outreach through blogs, podcasts, and live-streamed services. Now even self-ordained ministers can reach more people than Billy Graham. When Sharon introduced her husband to a new e-church, he rolled his eyes and said: “What a gimmick.” But, he slowly – slowly – he began to check out the various churches. He once admitted, “It is convenient”. One day Carrie innocently asked her parents if online services fulfilled the biblical mandate to worship on the Lord’s day. Feeling cornered, Carl replied, “Jesus told us we must worship in spirit and truth. He didn’t say anything about a pulpits or pews!” Carrie said nothing, but Carl suspected she didn’t buy it.

Despite Carrie being of the age when immaturity often leads young people off track, her Christian upbringing and involvement in local churches kept her well on track. It was really her parents’ somewhat contradictory beliefs that were her major source of confusion. For example, every Sunday her mother would attend a “Skype-service”, sitting at the kitchen table with her laptop, Bible, and notebook. Still in her pajamas, she wore makeup and a fashionable scarf and broach about her shoulders. She told Carrie, “I have to look presentable in case I’m inspired to give a testimony or offer a prayer request.” Much later in the morning her father would be in the den in his recliner wearing headphones, a laptop perched on his knees. Carl had a wide selection of preachers who offered engaging podcasts and video teachings.

One day Carrie had an inspiration. She wanted to discover the historical roots of Christianity. She called it “a personal pilgrimage” – her own “spiritual quest”. She knew there would be a cost involved – not so much in money but time; nevertheless, she thought the effort would be worth it. When she broke the news to her parents, her dad smiled and expressed his support. Her mom, however, became quiet. Sharon thought Carrie should get some guidance. She decided on the pastor of the neighborhood home church even though now she attended it infrequently, as she enjoyed the e-churches on Sundays. That night Sharon called the pastor.

Enthusiastic about her spiritual adventure, Carrie wanted to research all the various churches, including their founding, historical development, creed and traditions. She spent hours in the library and online reading about the origin and development of Christianity beginning in

Jerusalem and spreading north, south, east, and west by the apostles. She wanted to know how the Church developed after the death of the apostles. She carefully examined the writings of the apostles in New Testament and was intent to see if the authority handed to them was handed on to others. This would not be an easy task, but she was convinced it would be very well rewarded.

Carrie followed the growth of the primitive Christian community after the death of the apostles through the era of dynamic faith and dangerous persecution. Curious about ecclesiastical structure and authority after the time of the apostles, she read the Fathers of the Church who were the bishops, theologians and leaders during the early Christian centuries. She was thrilled to discover letters written by those who actually knew the apostles. Fascinated, she read about the spread of both heresy and holiness within the Church together with the birth of monasticism in the years following the Roman Empire's acceptance of the Christian faith. She learned about the growth and development of the Church in the East and West, together with the Great Schism, which divided the Church between Eastern Byzantine and Western Roman traditions. Carrie often excitedly shared some of her discoveries at the dinner table, only her dad dared to ask a polite question or two. Her mom was mum and appeared somewhat anxious, indeed, afraid.

In time, Carrie was able to untangle and understand the beginnings of many denominations: Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Holiness and Reformed churches. She also read about the curious eruptions of American Evangelical revivals and Pentecostal movements.

She painstakingly created a Church history chart, which she taped to her wall. A few times Carrie came home and saw her mother in her room, vacuum in hand, looking at the chart. When Carrie walked in hoping to have an opportunity to explain it, her mother would innocently inquire, "Carrie, are you reading your Bible?"

After a few months of study, Carrie decided it was time to visit some of the churches on her special interest list. So, every Sunday morning for about eight months, she was out of the house. Before leaving she would pass through the kitchen and give a quick goodbye kiss to her mom. Often not even acknowledging Carrie's kiss, Sharon was totally absorbed in her e-church service, staring at the screen, clutching a cup of coffee while tears streamed down her cheeks. One morning Carrie laughed, seeing her mother giving a testimony wearing a fashionable hat and scarf which concealed the top of her bathrobe. Carrie never saw her dad on Sunday mornings. She knew he was sleeping late and would worship in his den later.

Carrie soon created a database entitled “Information and Impressions”, a journal which recorded not only data but also her personal reflections. And she prayed; a prayer simple and direct: “Lord, lead me, guide me, show me the truth; for where there is truth, there You abide.”

As her visits continued, she rearranged her list, moving some churches to the top and setting others aside. She was surprised to note that those on the top of her list were not always the ones with the best music or preaching; nor, she discovered, did the size of the congregation always correspond to depth of doctrine. For example, she made this entry: “This morning I attended Saint Cecilia’s Catholic Church. While no one greeted me, I felt peculiarly at home. The congregation was made up of senior citizens and the singing was non-existent. Everyone appeared to be in his own world, but not in a bad way - the peace was palpable. I must admit the place had a ‘presence’. I will return for another visit”. Carrie was also deeply impressed by a tiny Russian Orthodox congregation who celebrate their elaborate Sunday liturgy in a living-room-sized chapel whose walls were covered with icons. She described the Church as “a hidden jewel box”. In another place in her journal Carrie took note: “This morning I visited a small Ukrainian Catholic church – Byzantine or “Eastern-rite” Catholics who celebrate Mass just like the Orthodox with the same amount of flourish and loads of incense! If I return it will be with a gas mask!”

While Carl was somewhat supportive of his daughter’s spiritual journey, Sharon was apprehensive. More than once she found some reason to poke about in Carrie’s room. In fact, it was Sharon’s pastor who suggested that she keep a keen eye out for literature – even religious items that might be “dangerous”. This is why Sharon’s heart skipped a beat when she noticed an icon of the Virgin Mary, a tapered beeswax candle, and some wooden prayer beads on Carrie’s dresser. Sharon immediately went for her phone.

The next day she told her daughter that two friends from the local home church were coming for dinner. She failed to mention it was the pastor and his wife, a fact Carl and Carrie found out when the guests appeared at the front door. Joe, the pastor, was affable and displayed a great sense of humor; his wife, Jean, was pretty, fashionably dressed, and had a slightly nervous smile. The conversation during the meal was pleasant with few references to religion. It was, however when Carrie was serving homemade apple pie and ice cream that the pastor casually stated, “So, I hear you’re on a spiritual quest.” Carrie’s face lit up as the pastor slowly reached into his suit jacket pocket and placed a small Bible next to his coffee cup.

It wasn’t long before the pastor began a monologue of the dangers of false religions. “Questioning is fine” he said, “but you need to square every person, place, and thing you

encounter with the Word of God”. Dessert time became class time as the pastor spoke about idolatry, dependence on good works, ritualism, and traditions. During his presentation, everyone listened intently although Carl was evidently annoyed. Later he complained to Sharon that he was “biblically beating up their daughter”. When he finished, Carrie thanked him for his concern. Then, she spoke with disarming innocence and respect, agreeing with the pastor on the need for caution against elements foreign to biblical teachings. She also quoted Saint Thomas Aquinas who said, “A half truth is a whole lie.” The pastor simply said: “Well, whatever....”

What caught Carrie’s attention was one fact culled from his “testimony”, that is, he was a former Catholic. She knew not to ask the circumstances of why he left his church and quietly wondered if some unresolved anger and resentment might be fueling his faith. Without a hint of annoyance, Carrie claimed that her spiritual quest was an act of obedience to her parents, who – many years ago – actually wanted her to decide her own spiritual path. She told him that to seek the truth is really to seek Christ Who said: “I Am the Truth”.

With utmost simplicity Carrie shared her growing conviction that Christians appear to be quite comfortable with doctrinal division. She said, “Jesus’ prayer to the Father - “that they be one” - was being ignored. She then made a comment which fell on the table with a thud. “One would believe that diversity of belief is the one thing that unites Christians.”

Carrie took note that the pastor appeared uncomfortable about any subject not specifically mentioned in the Bible. For example, she was surprised he had hardly any practical knowledge of the historic ecumenical councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, and Ephesus. When she spoke about the devastating effects of heresies like Gnosticism and Arianism on the early Church he appeared clueless. When the pastor spoke despairingly about the popes, Carrie innocently asked him what encyclicals or apostolic exhortations had disturbed him the most, the pastor remained silent. Carrie spoke with deference and purity of intention that both impressed and intimidated everyone at the table.

Before they left, Carrie handed the pastor an impressive leather-bound book: *An Essay on the Development of Doctrine* by John Cardinal Newman. “It’s a classic. Do you already have a copy?” The pastor, replied disinterested, “No, but I’ve heard of him”. Taking the book, he quickly deposited it in his jacket pocket and added, “And I have a few things for you to read”. “I’ll be happy to take a look” Carrie replied with nod and a smile.

Doing the dishes was a silent affair that evening. Carl was stewing, knowing that Sharon had invited the pastor and his wife to set Carrie straight. Carrie broke the silence by asking her

parents if they noticed that the pastor's wife looked sad. Both Carl and Sharon left the comment alone but later had an animated discussion behind closed doors. Sharon admitted that the pastor's wife is distressed because after they got a mortgage to build their church, a few of the well-to-do members of their small congregation left to begin their own church. Evidently, her husband has a knack for rubbing people the wrong way.

During the days that followed, there was a palpable heaviness in the house. Simple tasks appeared difficult and ordinary conversation was extraordinarily stilted. Carrie often heard the muffled voices of her parents as they argued behind their bedroom door. Sharon was caught up in the in-house drama and new financial challenges of funding the home church. Meanwhile, Carl appeared to find every reason to work late, and he began to spend weekends hunting with his buddies. Carrie herself couldn't explain why a kind of lethargy kept her from continuing her quest in the way she would like. Then, one Sunday Carrie decided to stay home. The following Sunday, then another - she stayed home and read her Bible on her bed. She spoke to a school counselor and was told she might be suffering from depression, which the counselor defined in stark and simple terms: "Anger turned inward".

Sharon noticed her daughter's Sunday excursions had stopped, but she said nothing. A quick visit to Carrie's room brought with it a breath of relief; the icon, candle, and prayer beads were gone. She hoped to find them in the wastepaper basket but it was empty. She immediately texted the pastor, saying: "I think our prayers are answered – Sharon." Within minutes she received this text: "Praise the Lord!"

Carrie became more quiet and lackluster. She continued to visit the school library listlessly poking around the religion section perhaps hoping to find some direction or inspiration. . This went on until one day she met a young student who reignited her sense of excitement and put her back on her spiritual quest. In fact, this woman became an unexpected guide and mentor. It happened when Carrie was quietly perusing a book filled with pictures of medieval cathedrals. The young woman sat in a chair next to Carrie, leaned over and whispered, "Hi, I'm Mary – mind if I sit here?" While they had never met, Carrie often saw Mary in the library at the far end of the religion section. Mary said: "I've noticed you in the library; I think we have the same interests. Hey, you always looked so happy – but now you look glum - what's up?" That when the tears began to flow and Carrie found herself opening her wounded heart to a perfect stranger.

"An answered prayer" is how Carrie now describes her meeting with Mary. It turns out that Mary was on her own spiritual quest – although she called it a "pilgrimage of faith". Their stories

were startlingly similar. Mary's parents had also journeyed through a series of main-line Christian churches, become part of some home grown churches, but were not spiritually settled in at home enjoying a wide selection of online churches. The girls laughed as both moms worshiping at the kitchen table and their dad's hidden in the den. Mary even told Carrie that one Sunday her mom chided her dad for bringing his laptop into the bathroom. Her mother said "It just isn't right". Her father retorted, "To God, every place is holy." Mary and Carrie both agreed were deeply affected by the culture which places personal preference over objective truth.

Mary began her spiritual pilgrimage well over a year before Carrie. After over a full year of study, she came up with some – "essentials" or what she called "marks of true religion". She read aloud from her notebook, "First, it has to be ancient" adding, " - and I'm not talking about five hundred years". Second, it must have some fundamental and unchanging doctrines which stand strong in the changing winds of the world. Third, it must offer God worship in the way He prescribes; worshiping in a holy place – together - as one family acknowledging one God with one faith. Then Mary looked up, smiled, and said to Carrie, "I looked around for months and months, and just when I thought all my effort was wasted, I found it—the real thing. It's my new spiritual home!" Wide-eyed Carrie grabbed Mary's hands and said excitedly, "Saint Cecilia's? Is it Saint Cecilia's?"

Sharon and Carl couldn't quite put their finger on it but they knew whatever dark cloud had hovered over their daughter was gone. That spring in her step, missing for months was now back. But best of all, Sharon was consoled when she saw her daughter in her room reading intently her Bible. Sharon told her pastor: "Whatever you said must have worked because she's spending a lot of time in her room at her desk studying and taking notes."

It was Saturday, a day Sharon devoted to house-cleaning. Her chores were made easy because her daughter's room was always so neat and organized. It was this reason Sharon immediately noticed from the hallway that Carrie's black sweater was lying near the base of her dresser. Switching off the vacuum she entered her room to hang it in the closet. But when she picked it up she realized it wasn't a sweater at all. It looked like some sort of shawl. She picked it up turning it this way and that. She then recognized it was a head covering worn by Islamic women. Somewhat startled, looked up and didn't see her Bible on her dresser. It was another thick book with Arabic writing on the cover. She quickly opened it. It was not the Bible at all. She spun around, ran to her wastepaper basket – looked down - and gasped.

## AS I SEE IT

Some readers may be surprised not so much by the unexpected discovery of Carrie's mother but a seeming insensitivity of the author. Some might say, "Maybe Carrie found her spiritual home after all. If it's Islam, so what's the problem?" While it is not my style to disrespect any religion, the purpose of the story is not a swipe at Islam but rather, popular Christianity. In fact, Carrie was making her way to find those things endemic to apostolic Christianity - antiquity, fidelity, tradition, and community. She was, however, derailed in her efforts from her parents and a local pastor who personal needs blinded them to a young girl's need for a community of authentic and mature faith. Despite her age she intuitively knew the value of a church which possessed apostolic roots, exhibited an established order and authority, maintained a doctrinal integrity, and worshipped in a manner consistent with the practice of Christians beginning in the first century.

No doubt, we have most recently entered an era which has been utterly transformed by technology. Not only how people communicate but how they think and relate to reality has been affected. Dependence on personal computers now worn on the wrist is creating a society of isolated individuals technologically tethered yet longing for the intimacy of human communion. The rise of individualism and personal preference, the insistence of one's "rights" and self-expression, the desire for comfort and convenience – have not these infected Christianity? The white washed church building with its pointed spire and bells, its pulpit and pews, the pastor with his people – how long can such a reality really last? Why gather weekly when one can virtually go anywhere at any time? Why sit in a church pew dosing through a long-winded sermon when you can be inspired at home right in your easy chair?

It is most evident that the so-called "main line" churches spawned since the 16<sup>th</sup> century will evidently not make the long haul. Possessing no viable authority and viable ability to eliminate unorthodox doctrine and moral incursions contrary to the natural law, many of these traditional denominations will weaken and fade way. While the historical circumstances, personal motives and unconscious intentions of King Henry VIII and Martin Luther were quite different, the results of their choices are the same. Simple stated, the proof is in the pudding, and after five hundred years, we see the pudding has become quite curdled.

The need of revitalizing the apostolic Church throughout the world is obvious and ongoing. As the faith rapidly spreads throughout portions of Asia and Africa, it is literally dying in large

swatches of Europe and the Americas. Those faithful gathered for Sunday worship are getting old and quietly packing for heaven. As the “pillars of the parish” are being buried, their children don’t even know whether even their parish has pillars. Those deceased who faithfully attended daily Mass are quickly cremated and buried without the rites of the Church which they personally desired or justly deserved. Meanwhile, their teenage grandchildren, knowing little or next to nothing about the faith – many without baptism – a Buddhist this month and New Age the next.

A popular culture bent on personal fulfillment, making money, losing weight, and looking young has infected Christianity. The sacred nature of sex, the sanctity of marriage, the mutual roles of men and women, and the immense blessing of children – appear to be subject matter banned not only from popular media but even the pulpit. Meanwhile, even women now cannot resist peeking at porn while the complete silence of some clergy in this regard makes one wonder.

So, what does this have to do with our little Carrie and ecclesiology? Well, everything. Here are some simple but tough questions which must be asked: “Did Jesus Christ establish an incorporated reality which we call “the Church”? Is such an ecclesial entity evidenced in the pages of the New Testament? Do we have extant records which indicate apostolic doctrine, authority, and established structure seamlessly being passed into the successive centuries? Can we determine that the creedal formulas, moral code, and form of worship present in seminal form are evidenced anywhere today? Finally, does this objective and incorporated reality of which we speak bear both natures of its founder; namely, both human and divine?

Friends, how we encounter this questions determines what we will encounter our own quest for truth. Even amateur builders know the necessity of squaring everything off. Any carpenter or contractor who doesn’t use a level or t-square is not just an unprofessional but a criminal. Whether it’s framing walls or covering them with paper, if things are not squared off, everything will be off. If you’re a quarter of an inch off on the bottom, you’re going to be four inches off at the top. If an architect only “eyeballs” his bridge or building, stay clear, one day it’s all coming down.

Our character - Carrie - was on the right track, but due to others she was derailed. At some time we all have to bite the bullet and answer the questions. If we’re not squared off with the facts, our line of thinking will be off – *really off*. Here’s the very reason why our world wobbles.

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