

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 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 IV

*“Are You Saved?”*

*No doubt you saw this question painted it written on the side of a barn while you were driving in the country. If you frequent the city, perhaps you saw it scrawled on a wall or in a subway car. Is there anyone in American who hasn't heard the question offered by a television evangelist – often enough with a sweet southern drawl? Yet, the question is an important question. However, what does the question really mean?*

*When we use the word “salvation” or speak about “being saved”, we must accept the fact that we are dealing with a multi-faceted reality. Theology students are familiar with the word “soteriology”, which is the study of this subject. Over the centuries theologians, mystics, and saints have added their insights concerning salvation. The Latin root of the word “salus” means “health”; yet, as one might imagine, our subject doesn't refer to the health of the body, but rather, the soul. If, a person denies the fact that they possess an invisible and immortal soul, which can “get sick” then all the questions surrounding salvation are reduced to irrelevance.*

*So, in laymen's terms what is salvation? Well, we can answer a number of ways: Salvation is getting right with God after going wrong. Salvation is God's answer to our illness. Salvation is being along lost in the woods and finding not just a well-worn path and a sign which says: “To Home”. Salvation is discovering not only who God is but who we are. Salvation is liberty from fear, anger, anxiety, resentment, self-hatred, self-reliance, and all the effects of sin upon the soul. Salvation is not just looking at life but above it, knowing that even tragedy has a tomorrow. Salvation is knowing that happiness in life is found not in getting more but giving more, and a successful life is a sacrificial one. Salvation is indeed all of these - and even more.*

*The following story is true. It is about a very cool encounter I had on a very hot day. Admittedly our initial encounter was a bit rough, but as you will see it ended up smooth as silk. While some people think bringing the gospel to the streets is fanatical, I think it's fantastic. No doubt, this shattered world needs someone to put all the broken pieces together. And without a doubt, that “someone” is Jesus, whose very name is the message we all need to hear; namely, “God saves”.*

## ARE YOU SAVED?

It wasn't just a hot July afternoon; it was a scorcher, and the blazing sun was baking every brick on Manhattan Island. This was the kind of day when someone somewhere attempts to fry an egg on a tarmac or car hood. In the city the only escape from the heat is in a building or below the ground – which means the subway. Yet even that can be uncertain, for it's not uncommon to walk into a subway car expecting relief only to find yourself in a rolling oven. This day, I was lucky – not only was the car blissfully air-conditioned – but I found a seat. As my stop approached I was dreading the walk as my destination was a good distance from the subway station. This meant a long sweaty stroll through the Big baked Apple.

The train screeched to a halt and the doors slid open. As I trudged off the train with about forty others I wondered if this is what livestock being brought to market on a cattle car felt like. I barely had to walk, as the crowd almost carried me off the train, down the platform and up the stairs that led to the street. Leaving my subterranean world meant abandoning shadows for the blinding sunlight above. I squinted, cupping one hand over my eyes. I'm not a sunglasses guy, but on that day I really regretted not looking more like a movie star.

As a Franciscan friar, I wear clothing not terribly dissimilar to most people in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In the regard, New Yorkers aren't easily taken aback, and see neat way before the hit downtown Dubuque. I bet someone could walk around midtown with a toilet seat around their neck and no one would bat an eye. In fact, in the fashion district that person would probably get a “thumbs up” and a “Hey, nice look!” Well, on that day, I stood out for at least one person who wasn't just from out of town, but overseas. She was English. I suppose that shouldn't have surprised me. What is it they say about mad dogs and Englishmen going out in the noonday sun?

I was walking down the street, in the distance I saw an attractive woman – perhaps in her late twenties – she was handing out some slips of paper to each passersby. On the opposite side of the street a well-dressed young man was doing the same; despite the heat both were smiling. Both cradled a large black book. I immediately recognized who they were and what they were doing - Christians engaging in street evangelization. Actually as our community often enough take to the street to bring the gospel, I was planning to greet them and encourage them in the efforts. Yet as I approached, I saw a definite look of displeasure. I quickly surmised, it wasn't the heat – it was me.

Unfortunately I have seen “that look” before – more than once. Simply put, I'm the guy stuck in the quicksand of religion – and this person is going to pull me out. This wasn't my first

rodeo. So, wiping the sweat from my brow, I went into “stealth mode” and turned on my “happy friar face”. The closer I came, the more nervous she became shooting a quick glance at me every five seconds. She continued handing out her Bible tracts to the few people walking on this sweltering street. If I were directing this scene in a movie, I would slow down the action and work with close-ups. It would look something like a high-noon showdown at the O-K Corral. Here’s a peek at the script.

#### SHOOT OUT ON 73RD STREET

Director’s Note: ALL CLOSE-UP SHOTS:

SHE: Eyes squinting and lips tightening as she watches me approaching her from down the block.

Me: Smiling, appearing oblivious to her intended ambush.

She: Slowly going for her Bible.

Me: Close up of my hand sliding downward to my rosary which swings at my side.

She: Fingering her Bible.

Me: Walking with a Clint Eastward swagger, looking dangerous but happy.

Sound: Caws of a crow somewhere in the distance; whistling wind.

Props: A big ball of tumbleweed rolling across the street. (Director’s note: As this is New York City maybe an empty garbage pail as nobody here as ever seen a real tumbleweed)

Extras: Nervous passersby running for protection, some crouching behind parked cars. They know there’s going to be some serious action.

When I’m about fifteen feet away, she stops handing out tracts and looks over her shoulder in my direction like a pitcher before throwing a fastball. I feel the ambush that’s coming. I’m walking. I’m smiling. I’m ready. She evidently has no clue that this is far from my first shootout.

She: (slow motion) Opening her mouth to ask me “the question”.

Me: Drawing first, I fire – asking her “the question” real loud - “Excuse me, Are you saved?” Then I fire a quick second round - “Have you received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?”

If indeed, this had been a Western, I would now be standing over the fallen body of my opponent. I would draw the smoking barrel of my pistol to my lips, give a quick blow, and then slip the gun back into my holster. With an air of solemnity I would then adjust my cowboy hat and slowly walk into the sunset.

Well, minus the main-street shoot-out motif this is what basically occurred as I beat her to the punch. She appeared completely shocked when I asked her “the question”. Then, haltingly she replied: “We-ll, y-yes, in fact, I h-have, but have you??” Still smiling, I replied: “Actually, yes I have, and I try to do so every day.”

She indeed had a proper English accent. I extended my slightly sweaty hand, introducing myself; she shook my hand loosely. The first few minutes of our conversation was a bit clumsy, but I resolved to match her hard face with a big smile. I was soon informed she belonged to a group called “Jews for Jesus”, an organization made of people of Jewish origin who recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Now, being born and bred in Brooklyn, I’m quite comfortable with Jewish culture; in fact, she appeared utterly delighted when I began to sprinkle a little Yiddish into our conversation. Sure enough, as we spoke, her defenses melted away, and soon she called her companion from across the street. We found the only patch of shade on the block and continued our conversation. I offered them some advise in evangelizing – especially Catholics. When they hear the question “Are you saved?” they often get all gummed up. I offered them another option, such as “Are you growing in your faith?” or “Are you growing holy?” I explained why:

“For you it’s a banana, for us, it’s an onion”. I knew the statement would get their attention. “When you eat a banana, you simply peel and eat; it’s a one-shot deal. Not so with an onion; with an onion you peel and peel and peel. It’s an ongoing process. In fact, one thing you get from an onion you never get from a banana – is tears!” That’s when I explained salvation as understood by the apostles and passed on through the Church. Salvation is a lifelong progression – one can even say it begins here on earth, but it even continues into eternity.

The question, “Are you saved?” is important indeed. Yet how one understands it is how one answers it. Our conversation lasted a good half hour, but I did have an appointment to keep. I asked them if they wanted to share a prayer so we held hands and bowed our heads. Like I said, one can see almost anything in mid-town Manhattan! After an enthusiastic “Amen!”, I imparted to them my priestly blessing and a final goodbye. As I walked on I had to admit I was also impressed with them. I asked myself, would I stand in the summer’s heat to bear witness to the gospel? In the end, I was grateful for our unexpected encounter and friendly discussion. Boy, on a hot day like that the very last thing I needed was a heated debate.

## AS I SEE IT

Those readers who are Catholic or others who pray the rosary would be well familiar with this prayer. “O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell, Lead all souls into heaven, especially those most in need of Thy mercy.” Indeed, the teaching of the Church taken from the very words of Jesus and carries on by the apostolic tradition tells us that only two eternal destinies await immortal souls – salvation or perdition; being saved or being lost. As the prayer indicates, we should pray to be saved from the fires of hell. However, a deeper understanding of salvation is not only being saved from something – saved *for* something. Thus, salvation doesn’t only concern the end of our life, but our life to the end.

For example, being saved is not being presented with a deed for a heavenly mansion, or a passport that allows you through the pearly gates. Historically, the apostolic Church always understood salvation to be much more expansive than that. It is not only about the hereafter but also about the here and now. Salvation isn’t an entrance ticket into eternity issued at one’s death. Rather, it is more of an invitation presented at the moment of our baptism. Yes, it is an invitation to participate in eternal life, yet like any invitation, one also receives a R.S.V.P. So, salvation is not earned and indeed a free gift, but for our part we must respond. While it can be considered a great honor to be invited to some fancy affair, it also demands that we dress appropriately. Do you remember the parable of the poorly dressed wedding guest? He was quickly shown the door.

All of us have heard the simple saying, “Life is a journey”; but in a religious context, it is more - it is a pilgrimage. Most world religions – Jews and Christians, Muslims and Hindus – each have some practice whereby the devout go on a pilgrimage. The difference between a journey and a pilgrimage is destination. The former is simply a place; the latter is a sacred place. This being said, if heaven is our goal in life, then we are all pilgrims heading from here into heaven.

The apostolic teaching over the centuries based upon the very words of Christ and the practice of the apostles teaches us of the necessity of baptism for salvation. This sacrament, called by the ancient Church “illumination” claims a soul for Christ. By birth we are creatures of God, through the rebirth of baptism we are his sons and daughters. While we know that God is not bound by the sacraments of the Church, nevertheless, the divine mandate entrusted to the apostles’ clearly speaks of this saving sacrament. Traditionally, the phrase “born again” bespeaks of baptism and not a person “accepting Christ in their heart”. As we are told in the Bible God wills all man to be saved, yet this does not mean that all such will be saved. And as God no doubt desires our presence with Him in eternity, our absence is also a possibility. However, does the

reality leave us in a continual state of doubt or dread? No it should not. It should, however, lead us along in a continual state of hope.

Therefore, when speaking of salvation, it would be beneficial for us to consider not a place where one is saved, but a path where one is being saved. In this regard, this reality of the pilgrimage is seen in the classical spiritual literature penned by many holy men and women. It appears a most popular image used is that of a mountain. I suspect most of us have had some experience of walking or hiking up a mountain. We know that this activity is very different than taking a simple stroll in a park. As imagined a good hike exercises the muscles and the lungs. Especially on warm days, we perspire and if the paths are steep we return home with some sore muscles. See how different this image is as compared to getting to the top of the mountain via a cable car! Again, salvation is not getting a free pass for a cable car, but rather receiving a walking stick, flashlight, map, bread, compass and a canteen.

Anyone over sixty is probably well aware that life is far from a cake walk. It's more likened to a hike through a canyon. It is full of unexpected twists and turns, daunting obstacles, and even unexpected storms. While no one is saved from sweating and suffering, one is certainly saved traveling lone and unaided. Perhaps one of the most dangerous maladies of our day is self reliance; sometimes called the "I-can-do-life-all-alone" syndrome. As this statement is ludicrous in the social realm, is it not the same in the spiritual? Indeed, no man is an island; which is why we need *the* Church – and not *a* church. Only the apostolic Church can provide us with the necessary equipment for our pilgrimage home to heaven.

"I will be with you always" Jesus tells us - and he does – through the grace given by means of the sacraments, a proper understanding of the Sacred Scripture, the authority of the hierarchy, the wisdom of spiritual writers, the inspiration and intercession of Mary, the angels and the saints, the friendship and support of a parish community, spiritual counsel through the clergy and the evangelical witness of the religious. Being saved is being accompanied and empowered in the journey called life. "Being saved" doesn't guarantee us good health or financial success but keeps us peaceful and joyful when we lack these and more.

So, the question with which we began is the question by which we conclude – "Are you saved?" Well, have you have been baptized, confessed your faith in Jesus Christ, and repented of your sins? Are you united to his body by receiving the sacraments? Do you pray privately and with others, read and ponder God's word, avoid sin and seek sanctity, keep the Ten Commandments, Eight Beatitudes, and the two greatest commandments? Do you seek to serve

others – especially “the least” – the poor, naked, sick and imprisoned? If you can say, “Yes!” to these, I would say: My friend, it sounds like you’re being saved. However, as they say, “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over”



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Fr. Glenn Sudano, CFR  
Saint Joseph Friary  
523 W 142 St.  
New York, NY 10031

[www.franciscanfriars.com](http://www.franciscanfriars.com)