

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 V

It wasn't until the increased availability of air travel after the Second World War which made crossing the ocean comparatively quick and easy. My grandparents arrived in America from Italy at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, Ellis Island is quite close to Manhattan Island where I reside today. Classic novels like Moby Dick and Hollywood films like The Titanic have provided us with an education on the dangers and challenges of crossing the ocean. Our imagination is certainly well stocked with images of classic seafaring vessels, old ships or schooners. No need to visit a museum, one only has to close one's eyes and immediately we can see a Viking vessel with colorful shields and long oars. Better yet, what about a pirate ship with a black skull and crossbones flag. In this story, entitled "This Old Boat", I want you to think of a boat but not a modern luxury liner. Imagine a wooden boat crowned with scores of multi-shaped sails. See the deck filled with sailors and passengers bristling with activity.

The Bible has given us the story of a very big boat built by Noah. Over the years, saints and scholars would reflect upon the ark and see in it a "type" or a symbol of another vessel saving mankind from extinction, namely, the Church. They would also note that Jesus' foremost apostle, Peter, worked on a boat in which Jesus sat to teach the crowds gathered at the shore. This biblical image says something about human frailty and divine power. "The ocean is wide and my boat is small", a verse taken from a popular hymn, denotes our need for divine protection and providence during life's long journey. Thus, God gives us something safe, secure, and unsinkable.

Like a boat, the Church tilts and leans, creaks and leaks, and subject to unexpected storms. Old, battered and barnacled, the boat provided by God often lacks creature comforts. Both crew members and passengers can often be odd, nevertheless, it could be worse – we can be alone. So, slip on your life vest and step on board. Yes, it is crowded, but there's always room for one more.

THIS OLD BOAT

I grew up on a boat. No, I wasn't born on board, but carried on as an infant. In fact, my parents, grandparents, and their grandparents were also raised on this boat. This tells you this boat is old – over two thousand years old! Now it's not only old but big. In fact, some say, "Too big!"

When I was a boy, from what I remember most everyone onboard appeared to be happy. Maybe they were just content. However, as the years went on, the sea became very stormy and plenty of people said they were seasick. In the past fifty years, a good number of my relatives and good friends decided to leave the boat. Some opted to join others in other modes of travel while others appear happy just to float along by themselves. Curiously, for my part I have never even considered leaving even when life on board was far from ideal. Quite frankly, even if the captain ordered me off, I wouldn't leave. You see, I can't swim. If I'm not on board - I'm sunk.

Although my parents spent their whole lives on board, even they would admit ignorance not knowing much about the boat's history or heritage. As a child I felt privileged to be a passenger, although I don't know why. When I was a child, people had great respect for the uniformed men and women who made up the crew. Back then, crew members seemed to be set apart living in a world much different than the rest. As I was educated by members of the crew, I recognized many of them as quite human. I remember many of them as quite kind and generous, although at times, you might meet one odd or crabby.

Also, when I was young, it was considered something special to have a family member who worked for the captain. As of recent memory, I'm the first in my family to become a crew member. While my parents never encouraged me to work on board, they certainly didn't discourage me. I believe they were proud I was accepted to the academy. Nowadays, working on the boat is no longer as prestigious as it once was. In fact, sadly, some parents discourage their children to join the crew. This is quite unfortunate not only because the captain can use the help but studies show crew members are happier and more personally fulfilled than plenty of people on board.

Not unlike many of my generation, my schooling – grade and high school – was done on board. I must say, if it weren't for the efforts of the full-time uniformed crew members, I would not be half the man I am today. Yet despite the sterling education the boat provides, many people, after establishing solid and successful careers, decide to leave the boat. Why is this? Well, reasons may vary and I have two of my own. First, I believe too many passengers don't fully understand

either the purpose or the nature of the boat. Secondly, they don't appreciate the treasure in the hold. Unaware of these realities, when these passengers experience any discomfort or don't receive the quality service – they decide to jump ship and slowly drift away.

Having graduated from the academy over thirty years ago, I have come to know this old boat quite well. No doubt, I have come to understand the human cargo it carries. Indeed, many items should be stamped: “very fragile”. This not only applies to both passengers and crew members alike. Also nowadays there appears to be an unhealthy concern for personal comfort and space. While some of our senior citizens grew up with backhouses, their grandchildren complain if they have to share a bathroom. It's not simply a case of being spoiled, it's being unreasonable. In short, today people expect sea travel also to be smooth sailing. They expect captain and crew to solve every problem, fix every leak, and cushion every uncomfortable corner. Some complain that the boat looks beat up and has barnacles. I say only ships that are seaworthy become smelly, splintered and weathered. Those who want a pretty boy boat should visit a showroom.

Journal entry #1

“One distinctive feature of this ship is its main mast. It's massive and pitted from years of sea travel. The salty wind has long ago whipped the smoothness from its surface. Although it's wood, it's as strong as steel. From where I sit, the mast appears to scrape the sky, while its crossbeam appears like open outstretched arms. What it signifies isn't lost amidst the confusion of thick hemp ropes each of them taut and tightly tethered. Every square foot of the boat gives evidence of some work accomplished either some centuries or hours ago. And for those interested in history, the ship has a log book and registry which everyone can read. The many unflattering entries and ignoble passengers underscore its veracity. The ship's history is epic indeed: its humble beginnings, unexpected storms, daring pirate attacks, many mutinies, numerous defections, stunning victories, and humbling defeats – everything is there for everyone to read.

Journal entry #2

“There is no doubt that one of the distinctive features of the boat is the diversity of the people on board. As I went about the boat this morning, I stopped both passengers and crew and asked each a simple question: “Where are you from?” In a half hour I received sixty-three different answers. Yet, besides the variety of countries and cultures, one encounters an almost endless number of different personalities. Such makes the voyage - let's just say - interesting. From the second century the boat was called “universal” because it had spread everywhere and not noted by one particular color, continent or culture. Some passengers brought on board as babies

grow into the boat's most vicious enemies like Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin. Yet, there are others, who began as enemies, but ended up among the boat's greatest defenders like Saint Paul and Saint Augustine.

When using the term "crew", I'm not limiting myself only to those in uniform, but anyone who works on board or below deck - paid staff or volunteers. This big boat is kept afloat by plenty of people who instruct and assist the passengers, keep things clean, and those who do the daily maintenance like inspecting ropes and mending sails. It is important to remember – because many people forget – that those who work under the captain were once passengers themselves. Everyone - including the captain – is human who have their strengths and weaknesses. Like us, each is a product of their upbringing and environment, education, and experience of life. Thus, as any product, it can get damaged in production or handling. There, those who are work on the boat often enough, need some work themselves. Admittedly, in the past passengers were quick to canonize crew members, today they're quick to criticize them.

Despite the comparatively small number who work for the captain, it is absolutely extraordinary how much good is accomplished through them. It makes sense that less complaining and more compliments just might increase that good.

As in any organization, crew members are trained, some of whom attend a special academy. Here they learn about the boat – its history, purpose and mission. These also are so educated to provide daily nourishment, education, and even provide medicinal assistance. However, training at the academy has some challenges particular to our age. The weakening and fragmentation of the family, the blurring or negation of gender roles, and the general toxicity of the popular culture – all of these must be addressed in order to form the academy's candidates. In the past fifty years in particular, society has changed and shifted. Today we are saying goodbye to the "we centered" generation and hello to the most me-centered generation in history. It appears not only the passengers but also the crew need a very long learning curve; if of course, they even stay on board.

Journal Entry #3

"As I have been on this boat for some time now, it's easy to distinguish different kinds of passengers. Some travel first class; they are kind, thoughtful, and generous beyond belief. When there's a problem, there the first to roll up their sleeves and get to work. These have a great fidelity to the boat despite the seeming lackluster efforts of many on board. While only a minority, they

get a lot of work done and when they encounter “lackluster” they make sure to keep themselves well polished.

I have noted another group on board. These travel economy class; and while pleasant people, their stingy people. Here I am not speaking of money but their time and interest. They may stay on board but look and act bored. In economy class, personal goals and interests often supersede those of the captain and crew. While the weekly expected dues are minimal these most always seem to run short of cash. The passengers who travel economy expect first class service from everyone all the time. When the weather turns bad, they blame boat, captain and crew. Then there are those who travel with no class. Who brought *them* on board?”

As mentioned, the ship’s registry includes those from diverse places. This being acknowledged, one must expect not only different accents but even attitudes. For example, German passengers are often reserved, while Africans are quite spirited. Those from southern climates like to process about the boat, those from colder climates stay put and pray. Historically, Europeans and those duly descended once comprised many of the captains and much of the crew. Today, the ship’s manifest indicates these are rapidly being replaced by those who speak Spanish and come from countries in Asia and Africa. While the boat carries a lot of people, it doesn’t demand conformity. On the boat, diversity brings blessings, disunity, however, always brings with it a curse.

The famous French saying, “*vive la difference!*” makes the long journey on the boat quite enriching. Yet, while cultural diversity is good, doctrinal disunity is bad. There are some who only see life through the two lenses politics and power. These see and criticize the boat as tilting too much to the right or to the left. Some make it a point of congregating on either side hoping the boat will bend to their weight and will!

Journal Entry #4

“Addressing the unhealthy dynamic mentioned above, just today the captain stood at the helm and gave all on board a provocative address. He suggested that we shouldn’t spend too much time and energy concerning where the boat is leaning. Rather, all of us should spend time considering where the boat is heading. Walking about I noted both sides criticized his comments.”

When I was growing up the boat had particular antique look about it. Sadly, the medieval décor was too quickly abandoned. This was an era of enthusiasm and emerging technology. Sometimes within weeks, everything old was deemed inadequate, and whatever looked classic was

hauled away. It was the Age of Aquarius which was accompanied by libertarian ideals and self-expression. The boat, as big as it is, was affected - battered by worldly winds and waves. The siren call for self-actualization and personal fulfillment successfully beckoned thousands of crew members to turn in their uniforms. A good number even abandoned ship. Yet, when it appeared that the damage could only increase, an extraordinary captain took the wheel, stood long and hard at the helm, and steadied the ship.

Every generation of passengers has their own challenges; crossing a wide ocean can never be considered easy. The way I see it, those aboard must wake up to reality and understand that the boat doesn't repair itself. Also, there is never a time when we will not see scaffolding – whether we see people working is another story. Keeping the ship on course is ultimately the job of the captain assisted by the crew. However, keeping the decks swabbed, the sails unfurled and ropes tight is everyone's job. As mentioned above, when something breaks, many get angry, while only a few get to work. Such is life.

Journal entry #5

“Today I have noticed that more and more shiny new yachts are traveling parallel to the boat. Increasingly, small sleek speedboats are taxiing passengers from the boat to a few of the nearby yachts. Indeed, there has been a steady flow of passengers disembarking the old boat only to climb aboard a new one. Curious, I asked some of these departing passengers why they were leaving. Honestly, the reasons vary; some say they're just tired of the old boat and felt the need for something new. Others use the words “institutional” or “impersonal”; while others complain about outdated regulations. I noted many having some disagreement, often enough with a crewmember. Some simply shrug their shoulders and say, “Hey, why not?” It appears every hour we hear a brass band in the distance welcoming passengers aboard. It made me think that when people come aboard the old boat for the first time, they receive no reception at all.”

No doubt, the yachts mentioned in my journal entry are impressive. They not only have an attractive design but fully loaded with state-of-the-art equipment. Every window is squeaky clean and railings are perfectly polished. Everything's brand new – because everything is brand new. The crew members not only have sharp uniforms but good manners, and they appear well trained, efficient and friendly. They seem to know what their passenger wants without being asked. Curious, former “old boaters” who were supremely passive and disengaged now appear interested and energized.

No doubt, a long list of the yachts positive qualities can be quickly composed. In fact, some of these can, in fact, be introduced on the old boat. Yet, a question can be asked and should be answered; namely, “How will they take the high winds, turbulent storms, and deadly pirates? Granted, cleanliness and friendliness are important, but when a sudden tempest turns smooth sailing into rough waters...who do you want at the helm, a well dressed “Captain Happy” or a crusty leather- necked sailor nicknamed Captain Crabby?

Turning our attention from the classy yachts to the old boat, one question emerges: “Despite the fragile human cargo and continual creaks and leaks, how is this thing still sailing?” Perhaps more accurately the question is: *Who* keeps the old boat afloat? And simply floating but sailing? Despite the centuries and human intrigue here we come face to face with a great mystery. Employing the allegorical language, it has been noted: “If the crewmembers can’t bring her down, nobody can. Unlike the beautiful boats in the distance, the ocean can get very ugly. Another saying is sometimes cited about the boat: “She doesn’t defeat her enemies; she simply outlives them.”

Journal Entry #6

“This month an ever-increasing number of speedboats are darting back and forth between the boat and the yachts. The number appears to increase every day. However, after some patient investigation, I’ve noticed something strange. Evidently some passengers have some difficulty finding their “nautical niche”. What first felt like a perfect fit now is either too stiff or saggy. I interviewed a few passengers who actually returned to the old boat. These admitted that the accommodations weren’t what they were expecting, or the food was not nourishing enough. There’s no need to list the complaints, because in the journey of life, when personal preference hops in the front seat, you’re really in for a ride. However, some never return because boat leaving becomes boat shopping. Here one enters an almost endless extravaganza looking for a “perfect fit”. After all, we all have to find *what works for me*.

Unfortunately, as passengers come and go it soon begins to resemble a game of bumper cars. I have noted more than one casualty as the speedboats attempt to skillfully maneuver through a veritable flotilla of large and mid sized yachts. Not only yachts but smaller vessels – like rowboats, paddle boats, and inflatable rafts. Believe it or not, I see an increasing number of individuals hanging on or sitting in inner tubes. Together with those who are swimming back and forth, I can only call this a “feeling frenzy”. I saw one guy floating on his back. With his eyes

closed and hands clasped behind his head, his smile said it all: “I’m floating, I’m happy”. Indeed, he is until, of course, a sharp fin emerges and silently begins to circle and circle.

Some people wonder, considering the less than perfect accommodations and never-ending cast of characters, why would anyone stay on the boat? Here I can only speak for myself. I stay because deep in my heart I know that I don’t deserve to be on board, let alone be called to be a crew member. Reading the register I am astounded seeing the names – men and women with brilliant minds and extraordinary souls. Those who shaped the course of history – not only philosophers and theologians, literary giants, explorers, astronomers, biologists, sculptors, and scientists – they’re all there – with little ‘ol me.

Secondly, I stay because the sea is wide and deep and the boat is designed for durability not for luxury. Noah’s ark was constructed to survive the deluge – it was a floating zoo – only an idiot would leave because of the stench. So, I’ve learned not to take note of the boat’s barnacles and tattered sails. When I reflect upon myself, I realize that I sorely in need of some scraping and mending myself.

Finally, I have yet to find a more reliable mode of transport which provides its passengers with the most delicious daily bread. The boat has a hidden store which can feed more than a billion each day. Like the mysterious manna given by God in the desert, this food satisfies the hungry soul. Although it is as light as a feather, it has been described as the boat’s secret ballast keeping the boat from submerging. While some concern themselves with the right and others with the left, it is in boat’s center where its treasure lies. Well beneath the warped and weathered deck, beneath the feet of over a billion people, directly beneath the tall wooden mast lies the Admiral’s quarters.

These are but three of thirty reasons why I stay on this old boat. Its owner and builder has made a promise. It will bring to me and this big family to the port we seek; and despite the storms, I stay put. Because, when it’s all said and done, I’d much rather be seasick than overboard.

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