

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 VI

“Marty’s Steakhouse” is a fictional account of an unusual restaurant I found located on the corner of Fantasy Lane and Imagination Avenue. It was my attempt to present the theological mindset of Martin Luther, known as the “Father of Protestant Reformation”. Some say it was more of a “revolution”. The banner under which he and others marched was simple and stark: Faith only! Bible only! Grace only! Simple things are often attractive in complex times. The socio-political-religious world at the beginning of the 16th century was both: simply complex.

The following fictional story makes no attempt to present all the intricacies and dynamics which accompanied the painful period of Church history. While presenting in a somewhat ironic fashion the “either-or” mentality of the reformers, the story also speaks about healing and reconciliation. Most especially since the Second Vatican Council, the deep rifts which defined and delineated churches have been greatly diminished. Theological commissions, assiduous study and honest dialogue among theologians have borne good fruit. However, authentic unity and fruitful cooperation is not the work of professional ecumenists” but everyday believers who choose to let go and let God bring us to a new era in Church history.

As stated in other portions of this book, the author is well aware of the immense good that Christians of all stripes has accomplished throughout history. Despite the division, those separated from the apostolic Church display a wonderful love for the Bible, a penchant for effective preaching, an expansive and enthusiastic evangelism, and an emphasis on personal discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. May we all recognize what is good and godly in one another, so that all might be mutually enriched.

MARTY'S STEAKHOUSE

I've been wearing a Franciscan habit for close to forty years; which means I'm used to sticking out in a crowd. In fact, after looking medieval for so long, I barely even notice when people notice me. My walk through the airport is often accompanied by quick double takes, questioning looks and wide-eyed stares. Yet I must admit I was somewhat surprised when I walked into Marty's Steakhouse. The usual sounds of a restaurant – muffled conversations, occasional coughs, the flurry of laughter, and the clinking of ice cubes and cutlery — everyone and everything went silent.

The restaurant was full and quite busy. Many of the tables were occupied by moms, dads, and kids, which was really great to see. The décor was somewhat understated – not drab, but certainly very simple. No doubt different from Italian restaurants. This place had no large chandeliers, mural of the Bay of Naples, and no crystal bowls overflowing with clusters of purple plastic grapes. While there were no tablecloths, there were placemats neatly arranged at every seat; in the center of each table stood an oversized menu. As no waiter was in sight, I found my way to a table and sat down. The placemat caught my eye as on each a sort of crest emblazoned with cross and unfurled scroll which read: “My meat is to do the will my Father” Jn 4:34 (KLV) .

My first impression was the restaurant was run by the Amish. I was expecting to see a waitress in a bonnet and a modest print dress. “Maybe the Mennonites”, I thought. Either way, I was somewhat excited to be among devout believers. As followers of Saint Francis, our home – called a friary – is also quite plain. Indeed, we too eat on plain wooden tables. I sort of felt right at home. Opening the colorful menu, I was bedazzled by many pictures. The selection was impressive indeed, steaks, ribs, and chops of every conceivable kind, size, and cut. I chuckled, thinking: “Wow, this place is a vegetarian's nightmare”. But to a steak lover like me, it was a dream.

The quiet lifted as quickly as it fell. Evidently the entrance of “the monk” became old news and everyone went back to their meal. I couldn't help but notice some small children looking at me from a nearby table. They were looking at me, pointing and snickering. Being playful, I covered my face with my menu then slowly peeked over its edge with crossed eyes. That hit their funny bone, and they shrieked with laughter. Evidently they never saw a man wearing a gray “dress” before. The parents, a bit embarrassed with their children's behavior, hushed them and told them to turn around. One little guy, however, still giggling, shot a peek over the back of his

chair, to which I responded with another funny face. His squeal of laughter got him in trouble. I hope it didn't cost him his dessert.

Making my selection, I put the menu down and folded my hands indicating that I was ready to order. It was only then that I took note of the music playing in the background – “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”. I spied a waiter standing close by who I know saw me, yet, for some reason he didn't budge. Perhaps he had poor vision I thought. After waiting and hoping to catch his eye, I stood up and waved at him. The waiter saw me, and with what appeared to be a small huff, marched over to my table. Evidently, he was having a bad day as he did little to hide his annoyance. He stopped about four feet from the table, as if I had some infectious disease, then looking just a bit over my eyes asked in an icy tone: “Can I help you?” It was clear this guy was no happy camper, but there's nothing kindness can't kill. “Good evening!” I said with a smile. I was hoping my warm greeting would melt his frozen face. He responded by repeating: “Can I help you?” I thought it best to ignore his attitude and said with a smile: “Definitely! Then scanning the menu I said: “It seems steak is your specialty!” Closing his eyes while tapping his pen on his pad he said: “Sir, our restaurants have been serving steak, indeed, all kinds of meat, for five hundred years. That's great” I replied, stifling a crack about aged meat, which I decided he wasn't likely to appreciate.

He shifted his feet, and now looking well over my head said: “Do you need more time?”

“No, I'm fine, let's see...Okay, I'll have that New York Sirloin - medium rare - smothered with stir-fried mushrooms and onions. I'll also have a baked potato with chives and sour cream and a small salad with just oil and vinegar – and a glass of house wine – red, of course.”

The waiter's face became like stone. Tightening his lips, he rapidly tapped his pen on his pad. Then said: “Sir, *all of our* patrons know that our restaurants serve meat – only meat – no side dishes! He then quickly flipped his pad closed, shoved it into his apron pocket. “So that will be one sirloin,” he said. He turned on his heel and rapidly walked away. I shouted as he headed for the kitchen: “Excuse me - waiter – what about the mushrooms and onions – is that a side dish? I sat there stunned as he disappeared through the swinging kitchen doors. The volume of the music immediately went up a notch or two. I recognized the song: “How Great Thou Art”.

The father of the family sitting at the next table turned in his chair and called out: “Sorry, Padre, it's the tradition here not to serve anything with the meat - no potatoes, vegetables. And yes, onions and mushrooms are considered a side dish. I asked, “Why?” Evidently they don't want anything to compete with their meat. I couldn't help but retort: “What about salt and pepper?” But

he had already turned around and made as if he didn't hear me. I was sitting there wondering whether I should leave when a busboy arrived. While placing a glass of water on the table, he leaned over and quickly whispered in my ear, "Hey Father, I'm Catholic! - and they don't serve wine" Before I could say a word he was heading back into the kitchen.

Well, it took a bit longer than expected, but I must admit, the wait was worth it. The steak not only looked great and smelled great – it tasted great. It was cooked to perfection – char-grilled on the outside, ruby red and soft as butter in the center. However, while I was enjoying the steak, I couldn't help but think how much better it would taste smothered with mushrooms and onions. I tried not to think about the baked potato, sour cream and chives. I also closed my eyes and used my imagination as I sipped my lukewarm water.

After enjoying my steak I was sitting there wondering if this restaurant served coffee, when a man stepped up to my table and, bowing ever so slightly, asked: "Excuse me, are you a Catholic priest?"

"Yes I am"

He then widened his eyes and added: "...and I believe *a Franciscan!*"

With that he smiled from ear to ear, thrust out his hand and said: "Hi! I'm Marty! I'm the owner – and also the chef! Then with a roll of his eyes he chuckled added: "...and sometimes the dishwasher!"

I pointed to the chair opposite me and asked him to join me. He quickly sat down. I thanked him for the fantastic steak and told him it was cooked to perfection. He lowered his eyes and with a slight tilt of his head and smile whispered "Thanks". I instinctively knew I was sitting with a really beautiful human being. I could see my compliment meant very much to him.

He then said: "You know, Father, I'm actually a direct descendant of the man who inspired this chain of restaurants. In fact, I call him "Uncle Martin!" I guess you know he was a priest - and friar too". Then widening his eyes and leaning into me added "...and we *both* know how *that* story ended!" We laughed and I said to myself, I like this guy.

Marty then asked "Hey, let get you a cup of coffee – on the house! Then added, believe it or not we do serve coffee!" As he chuckled I clasped my hands and in pleading gesture begged: "and can I have milk and sugar . . . and maybe even a little dessert? Marty quickly picked up on the joke and putting on a somber face said and wagging finger retorted with a feigned German accent: "You know, zat cood be a zin!" He exploded in laughter as he got up and headed for the kitchen. Within minutes, he reemerged carrying a carafe of coffee; my stone-faced waiter followed

carrying a tray with cups and a coffee cake. After almost slamming the tray on the table, he shot a scowl in my direction and marched back into the kitchen. Marty was obviously embarrassed and with a sigh and shrug said: “Sorry, Father, he’s grandfathered in. Actually, I think he would do better at a different kind of job – like grinding old axes!”

We sat there enjoying one another’s company. I asked him about his family and he about my community. Turns out he’s a big fan of the pope. The conversation later turned to the sad events that happened so long ago. We agreed that what has come to be called the Protestant Reformation began with good intentions but ended with bad blood. Besides, at a time when religion was so tightly woven into day-to-day life, it was almost inevitable that it would become embroiled with politics and money. As is often the case with social uprisings of many kinds, high motives often slide downward to personal gain. Marty made an astute observation: “Scratch the surface and you’ll discover the battle for the rights of God is often really about the wants of men.” We also both agreed that the Church was at a real low point and not spiritually vigorous enough to deal effectively with serious problems. We spoke about the lack of grace which made everything bone dry, so only a small spark was needed to begin a big barn fire. We also agreed that while people supplied the fuel, the devil happily fanned the flames.

After we finished our second cup, we sat in silence, savoring the moment. Marty placed his elbows on the table and speaking just above a whisper said: “Father, years ago, when Uncle Martin was alive, the world was a very different place. You know, as we know people’s faith was not up to snuff. My namesake thought that the common folk were not growing since they were lacking spiritual protein. He would say: “Spiritual meat! People are malnourished - they need spiritual meat.” Marty continued, “He was certain that at that time there was far too many “side-dishes” in the Christian life – you know - saints, relics, indulgences, devotions. He thought if you got rid of the non-essentials and kept just what was needed – the Bible - the Church would be healthy again.” Then, lowering his voice to a whisper added: “It may have been a good idea, but it went bad. But as they say, the baby went out with the bathwater.”

I didn’t say anything, somewhat in awe of his sincerity and humility. He then picked up the menu. Pointing to the medieval-styled emblem on the cover, he said, “This was designed by one of my ancestors.” I had noticed the cross and the biblical verse but missed what was etched into the cross: “Sola Fide. Sola Scriptura. Sola Carnis” (Only Faith. Only Scripture. Only Meat.)

At this point I noticed his eyes beginning to well with tears. He was evidently shaken and began a long monologue – like a confession - with downcast eyes. He talked about his childhood,

growing up in a dedicated and devout Christian home. But in recent years, he discovered that besides being taught the Bible in his home, he had also been taught to be suspicious of Catholics. He had been taught that they were more pagan than Christian and worshipped statues. For years he learned more and more about the history of the Church and the extraordinary faith and courage of his namesake. He studied to become a minister, but that didn't work out. But when he heard about this steakhouse franchise, he knew it was for him. He knew this chain of restaurants had been created to keep the spirit of the Reformation alive. To serve the Lord by serving food seemed a perfect fit for him – and it was – but no longer.

With a start Marty sat bolt upright and bounced his clenched fists lightly on the edge of the table saying: “Were giving an old message to a new world. Side dishes don't have to compete – they can complement our meat. I'm telling you, Father, if Uncle Martin walked in here today; knowing how things have changed, do you know what he'd say? He'd say to everyone – especially our waiter friend: ‘Give it up guys; the bad ol' days are over!’”

There was little I could say, Marty had said it all. It was then that he drew in his breath and looked straight into my eyes. He said: “Father, we both know the war is over, and we also know some people keep conflicts alive for their own purposes. I'm tired of serving only meat just to keep a useless message alive. I want to open up my own restaurant with great meat - and great side dishes! What do you think? I was thinking and praying about selling the restaurant. Then when I saw you walk in, I knew my prayer was answered.

Marty sat back into his chair and sighed as if relieved of a heavy burden. It was something of a sacred moment, so I just sat back and shared the silence. In the background we could hear the music playing: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...” He raised his head and looked at me, his teary eyes glowing.

I peeked at my watch. I wanted to spend more time with my new friend, but had to leave. To bring a somewhat weighty conversation to its end on a lighter note, I asked: “So, Marty, tell me, what's your secret? How did you get that steak to taste so good? Marty glanced at the waiter who was standing by the kitchen door watching us like a hawk. He leaned in and whispered – “I sauté all my steaks in onions and mushrooms – and with a little red wine!” Both of us burst out laughing. Hearing this, the sourpuss waiter give a loud huff, turned, and stormed through the swinging kitchen doors.

AS I SEE IT

What a difference one word can make. With the story, Marty's Steakhouse, as a backdrop, once again we turn our attention to an unfortunate time in the history of Christianity. Already in the introduction, I spoke of the Protestant Reformation and most notably, its principle player, Martin Luther. To some he's a famous liberator, and to others, an infamous troublemaker. Some see him with a halo and others with horns. Nevertheless, let us leave his true identity and eternal destiny to God alone. On my part, I do not feel competent to judge people in the past, but I am confident to judge what I see in the present. In short, the mystical body of Christ is wounded still.

So, what was the one word which made such a big difference? Here's the answer: "Solus". Solus is the Latin word for "only" or "alone".

While the Church in every age is in need of spiritual renewal, we might say at the beginning of the 16th century it was in dire need. It was a German priest, an Augustinian friar, named Martin Luther who attempted to do something about it. Even Lutheran scholars recognize that Luther was a somewhat complicated and often conflicted person. Not unlike many devout people he suffered terribly from guilt and scrupulosity. He had a terrible fear of God's judgment; an affliction which plagued him even in the monastery. Perhaps it was this exaggerated anxiety which ultimately brought him to a sense of awakening and liberation. In short, he realized that his salvation could not be won by mortification or any good deeds. He had a cathartic spiritual experience in which his heavy burden was suddenly lifted. Like a bolt from the blue he recognized His eternal salvation didn't depend on any Church or sacrament or saint or meritorious work – but through faith *alone* and grace *alone*. Thus, one word began a socio-political and ecclesiastical landslide which changed the world – and not for the better.

Before we continue with the subject, do know it is neither my desire nor within my competence to examine all the pieces of the reformation puzzle. Let it be said that many of the pieces had little to do with religion *per se*. Here I'll be clever and blame the ecclesiastical illness on a "bloated can of poisoned peas" - power, prestige, position, property, and possessions. For example, many people who severed their loyalties to the pope did so not for religious but rather financial reasons. German princes, for example, angered over Rome's excessive taxation, saw Luther's separation from the Church as an opportunity to free themselves from their economic oppression. Entire principalities together with their populace literally went from Catholic to Lutheran overnight. Thus, the saying: "As the prince, so the people".

Those readers conversant with *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* would immediately understand the “steak only” metaphor. Luther claimed the Church had deviated from the Bible and claimed that religious customs had replaced Christ. Also, what began with the reformer’s condemnation of some unsavory practices like the selling of church offices and indulgences, ended up with the condemnation of the entire Church. As the list of self-appointed reformers grew longer, the list of grievances grew greater. In time, even Luther himself would be critiqued as being too “Roman”. Followers of John Calvin would confiscate churches for their own use, not without purifying it of its pagan influences. Thus began the systematic desecration of churches with the smashing of altars, stained glass and statuary. Anything religious practice not plainly evidenced in the Bible was understood as an accretion or considered idolatrous.

Sadly, the two greatest treasures of the apostolic faith would, in time, be abandoned the Protestant reformers; namely, the holy sacrifice of the Mass and devotion to Mary and the saints. While Luther himself did not completely sever himself from either, other religious reformers which followed after did. What was deemed unbiblical was deemed unnecessary. As the Protestant mindset both congealed and expanded, the life of the Christian became pared down to what was considered necessary for salvation. Thus, religious customs, sacred relics, sacred art and music, and a whole host of things were expressly verboten. Thus, the “side dishes” in Marty’s Steakhouse competed with the “meat” of the Bible.

It is my opinion, as I suspect with many Lutherans – if their founder was alive today he probably would be back in the monastery saying his prayers. Many of the problems which plagued his time have left us – of course, to be replaced by others! It is also comforting to know that disagreement has been a part of the Church from its earliest years. Even Peter and Paul had their day. That some people point out the deficiencies and inconsistencies of the Church is not always a bad thing. However, here is a task that demands great virtue and patience. Ocean liners don’t turn on a dime, thus large institutions need some time and space to change their course. May I suggest this demands yet another can of “peas” – purity, patience, perseverance, providence, and a peace which only grace can provide. Martin Luther wasn’t the only churchman in his day that lacked these Christ-like qualities. In the meantime, let all those who profess the Christian faith live the Christian faith. Who knows, what begins by sharing a hot cup of coffee just might end with a sharing of Holy Communion.

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