

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 VIII

You've heard it said that "fact is sometimes stranger than fiction". Well, sometimes it can also be funnier. The following story, which I heard from a reliable source, is true, which for me, is what makes it so humorous. I am using this story, which I entitled "The Big Day" to tackle a topic which is a white hot potato; namely, authority. Now, if you were playing charades how would you attempt to communicate this word to your team? I suspect you might scowl and shake your finger. I would do the same but also fold my arms tightly across my inflated chest. No doubt, these actions do reflect how many of us envision authority. AUTHORITY: the word even feels heavy, like a big burlap bag stuffed with wet cement.

However, is power over others all there is to authority? Let's look at the root of the English word, which is "author". An author is someone who composes or creates something. If you are the parent, you authored life into the world. Thus who but you has authority over your child? I am the author of this book, so I have authority over it. As a reader, you may find its content disagreeable, however, only I – and no one else - have the authority to amend the text. I can, and indeed have delegated that authority to my editor and proofreader. In like manner, a parent, in their absence, can delegate their authority to the grandparent or baby sitter. Therefore, God who is the author of life, delegates that power to us, and we in turn, can share that authority with others.

Concerning Christianity and authority - we must present a few thorny questions. Did Jesus delegate his authority to his apostles? If so, did this apostolic authority disappear with their demise? If not, and it was delegated to others – then, to whom? Finally, is it reasonable to believe that after Christ's ascension, no established structure was secured to adjudicate problems or protect the Church from error?

When it comes to the question of authority, most believers immediately point to the Bible, the inspired and unerring word of God. Yet positing such authority only in the Sacred Writ has evidently not provided unity but proliferation of bodies and beliefs. As Christians are instructed and inspired by the divinely inspired word of God, history underscores the need for an authority to correctly interpret it. While the following story is humorous, the problem it presents is certainly no laughing matter.

THE BIG DAY

Everyone at the seminary had been preparing for the arrival of the bishop for weeks, and that went double for those seminarians who were to be ordained to the holy priesthood. Their big day was quickly approaching, and in order to prepare for it, a lot of work had to be done. The day before the big event all the seminarians were out of their black clerical attire and wearing work clothes. Everyone, including the deacons who were soon to be ordained, was busy inside and out pushing brooms, mopping floors, and washing windows. The sacristans—those who cared for the liturgical appointments—were polishing everything that could give off a luster: gold chalices, silver candlesticks, even the chapel’s ornate brass door knobs. Seminarians assigned to serve the ordination Mass spent hours reviewing their responsibilities and rehearsing their prescribed steps around the sanctuary. Practicing for special liturgies, especially ordinations, is never haphazard: it is lockstep thanks to the well-honed skills of the master of ceremonies. Commonly known as the “M.C.,” he keeps everyone – including the bishop – on time and on target. In short, he’s a liturgical traffic cop. These men don’t walk– they hover – moving here and there in such a way that they seem to be everywhere at once, and they do it with a graceful ease designed to attract as little attention as possible. Their headquarters is the sacristy, a room adjacent to the sanctuary where the clergy vest and where liturgical items are stored. On the big day the M.C. gives the final instructions, makes sure everyone is properly prepared, and gives the signal to begin.

For special liturgies, one of the more experienced seminarians is assigned to act as Master of Ceremonies, but for ordinations, this role is often filled by the bishop’s personal secretary. Also, when a bishop celebrates an ordination liturgy, he is assisted by two other special servers; one holds the crosier - his shepherd’s staff - and the other his miter – the tall linen ceremonial hat that only bishops wear. These are not complicated jobs; the servers simply stand there, hold their items, and wait for their cue from the M.C. For this ordination two seminarians were chosen. One was known by his classmates to be on the ball; the other, however, had the reputation of often fumbling it.

Well, the long awaited day of ordination finally arrived. The weather was sunny and temperature perfect, the seminary chapel was packed with family and friends, and everything from top to bottom glistened and gleamed. The bishop was known to be a kind and spiritual man, but an exacting one. He was also a stickler for time and could sometimes be seen stealing a glance at his

watch. That day his personal secretary, who was expert at making sure the bishop kept to his schedule, served as master of ceremonies, as expected. His first task was to get all the servers and clergy in place and ready to begin the opening procession. He accomplished this not just quickly but with efficiency and finesse. Obviously this was not his first rodeo.

The liturgy began on the dot with the stirring sound of the chapel's majestic pipe organ. The red robed choir standing in the loft began the hymn as the bishop's secretary pointed to the cross bearer to begin the procession down the main aisle. The procession was led by an acolyte swinging a silver censor from which billowed clouds of sweet-smelling incense. The long procession of deacons and then priests clad in white silk vestments preceded the seminarians soon to be ordained. Of course, in the order of procession, the bishop comes last wearing his miter and walking with his crosier. As the bishop made his way down the aisle, his secretary was close at hand with our two seminarian servers in tow. For this solemn occasion they were wearing silk ceremonial shawls and white cotton gloves as they would be holding the symbols of the bishop's office and authority.

Without a doubt, the long hours and laborious practice of the seminarians paid off. The liturgy flowed flawlessly as the servers and seminarians gracefully moved about the sanctuary, making their solemn bows with utmost precision. The rite of ordination and the holy communion of the faithful proceeded smoothly, and during them the master of ceremonies surreptitiously kept an eye on his watch. As the liturgy was coming to an end and the bishop was offering some concluding remarks, his secretary unobtrusively slipped out of the sanctuary to coordinate the final procession with the servers. The bishop, who didn't realize he was ahead of schedule, finished his comments and was set to go. He was ready to impart his blessing to the congregation and bring the grand event to a conclusion. On such occasions this is done in a formal fashion, which means he wears his miter and has his crosier in hand. Ordinarily it is the role of the master of ceremonies to take the crosier from the server and hand it to the bishop. He then does the same with the miter, carefully placing it on the bishop's head. However, the bishop was ready to go, but as far as he could see, his secretary was already gone.

So there was the bishop looking a bit lost and searching for some sign of his missing secretary. As patience was not his principle virtue, he turned to the seminarian who was holding the crosier and whispered: "Hand me my staff". Immediately, the sharp seminarian walked over to the bishop, bowed solemnly, handed him the crosier, and returned to his assigned place. Meanwhile, the not-so-sharp seminarian, who was holding the miter, was stone-faced and

immobile. Surely, he had been told at practice to hand the miter to the master of ceremonies who would do the rest, but the master of ceremonies had disappeared. The bishop, now standing with both hands clutching his crosier, turned toward the frozen seminarian and whispered: “Put my miter on”, which made the seminarian stiffen even more. His eyes were frantically glancing right and left but the rest of his body was like a statue. The bishop, attempting not to show any annoyance, leaned forward and said: “MY MITER!” The poor panicked seminarian did nothing but tremble and sweat. Then the bishop lost the little patience he had. Trying not to move his lips, he nearly shouted: “I SAID, PUT MY MITER ON!” So, the seminarian slowly and with great trepidation put the bishop’s miter on – *his own head*.

AS I SEE IT

In our story we saw how a nervous young seminarian got it all wrong and for a minute made himself a bishop. However, what if a person actually did this – bought a miter and staff, hired a secretary, and insisted that he and others address him as “Your Eminence”. The idea that an individual would simply assume their own authority is ludicrous and not laughable at all. Yet, this is done every day in many ways.

As mentioned in our introduction, authority is generally distrusted, sometimes feared, often mismanaged, at times, oppressive, and perhaps easily corrupted. Especially here in America since the sixties our culture associates authority with power and prestige. Therefore, those in the federal government, university presidents, major business executives, and Church leaders – all find themselves in the cross hairs of public criticism. Especially if someone at the top is wealthy, one only has to scratch the surface to discover what everyone expects to find; namely: egoism, avarice and unethical behavior.

As the subject matter of this book is the Church, we turn our attention to briefly examine how these two realities relate.

Perhaps the best place to begin is the beginning. No need to uncover the obvious; that is, authority in the Church begins – and ends – with Jesus Christ. Most times, anyone who begins a company runs the show and calls the shots. Ordinarily, as it grows it becomes evident that one person delegates their authority to others. Jesus did the same – building up his company one person at a time. We are all aware that none of his first “executives” were white collar types – they weren’t even blue collar – they were *no* collar! These twelve were enrolled in a special three year course. Most of them didn’t fare well on their final exam. O failed – miserably.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have chosen not to prove my statements with chapter and verse from the Bible. Nevertheless, the gospels record that before ascending to heaven he mandated them to preach the gospel, baptize, forgive sins, heal and cast out demons. In its early years, the Church understood some of this delegated authority was reserved only to his apostles and their validly ordained successors, while other authority given over to the rest. Among scholars it is an uncontested fact that the Church incrementally grew as a hierarchical structure composed of “clergy” and “laity”. Those who believe that the Church was a hippy-dippy drum circle are reading the wrong books. They’re certainly not reading the New Testament.

Through a simple ritual called “the laying of hands” representatives of the apostles were ordained *episkopoi* – a Greek word which literally means to oversee or supervise. These were assisted by other men – also ordained by the laying of hands – to be *presbyteroi* – translated elders or priests. These men were delegates of the bishops who had authority over the local community and presided over the weekly assembly – the *eucharistos*. Finally, there were *diaconoi* - the deacons - who took care of the temporal needs of the Church, in particular, the poor and needy widows and orphans. These also were responsible to bring the Eucharist to the sick or those imprisoned.

What is my purpose of dragging you into history, authority, and hierarchy?

If we are to be honest in our investigation to uncover the identity and mission of the Church, we must tackle the question of authority. There are some Christians who casually dismiss the subject stating that any authority is not found in any “Church” but only in the Bible and the individual believer. These too often claim that authority of the Church was either, usurped or corrupted by the Emperor Constantine and the Roman State or revoked by God himself. Such reasoning is nothing less than a flight into fantasy. Extant authenticated texts from early writings of the Church Fathers and others offer no evidence of such statements. They’re simply not true.

Whether it is in the pages of the New Testament or the chronicles of the early Church, we witness a definitive form and ongoing succession of the apostolic authority. Clearly, particular men were chosen and delegated to the serve the spiritual and material needs of the community. While particular criteria for the clergy were employed, we know from the very beginning these often times got mixed reviews. But in the end, abuse or misuse of authority does not negate authority. As in any government, corrupt or incompetent people may be pulled out of office, the authority attached to that office remains. For those who reject authority have only one option: anarchy.

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Fr. Glenn Sudano, CFR

Saint Joseph Friary

523 W 142 St.

New York, NY 10031

www.franciscanfriars.com