

My Unificationist Memoirs Chapter 40

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My father greeted Cardinal Spellman during the Cardinal's visit to Marines in Vieques, Puerto Rico

I have concluded that the burden of living in the Last Days includes enduring the dissolution of the Old World as the New Age emerges from the shadows into the light. Otherwise, how will the New Truth be known? The world prefers stasis and would simply remain comfortable in its assumptions, habits, and orthodoxies. Moreover, as light shines into the dark corners of society and history, it reveals hidden sin, cultural deformation, and the pathologies of the spirit. On MFT, we often witnessed these phenomena up close in homes, businesses, bars, and nightlife. I should never have been surprised to discover them in the Catholic Church.

The Diocese of Santa Rosa had endured repeated clergy scandals since 1999. In fact, the trauma had been ongoing for much longer. The North Bay parishes of the Archdiocese of San Francisco had always been the dumping ground for pedophile priests, long before the Diocese of Santa Rosa was formed from Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, Lake, and Humboldt Counties in 1962. By then, the rot in the North

Bay had become well established. The Diocese of Santa Rosa had survived by virtue of the laity's faith and devotion, and despite the financial and sexual abuse by members of the clergy. This is not to say the diocese was not blessed with a number of exemplary priests. They existed and they served well, Monsignor Gaffey comes to mind. However, their good work was all too often undermined by the misdeeds of a few.

Over the years, the lay organizations such as St. Joseph's Memorial Hospital, Catholic Charities, St. Vincent de Paul, The St. Thomas More Society, The House of Prayer, Ursuline High School, and Cardinal Newman High School had cultivated excellent relations in the greater community by serving the poor, the sick, and the indigent, and by educating generations of young men and women. In particular, in the aftermath of the financial and sexual crisis surrounding Bishop Ziemann and Monsignor Keys, which had demoralized the faithful and scandalized North Bay communities, these lay organizations came to be seen as the redeeming contribution of an otherwise irrelevant institution, run by a corrupt clergy. Priests such as Monsignor Gaffey and Father David Shaw, truly exemplars of faith, said they had become embarrassed to wear their collars in public, such was the state of affairs.

Thus, the laity and the clergy were hoping in the wake of Bishop Walsh's retirement, that we would be blessed with a good shepherd as Bishop of Santa Rosa, a priest who would work with us and continue to build on the residual strengths cultivated over the years by the laity. In particular, we saw the New Millennium as the time to bring to fruition Vatican II's vision of an energized, engaged, and empowered

people as the engine of dramatic spiritual change in the modern world.

When I first met Bishop Robert Vasa, he extended his hand in order for me to kiss his ring, a formal greeting long outdated and abandoned by the American Bishops. In 1958, when my father greeted Cardinal Spellman (a fervent anti-communist) on a visit to the Marines in Vieques, Puerto Rico, the Cardinal told my father he had embarrassed him by kissing his ring. Considering this was the sentiment of Catholics in 1958, imagine my surprise as Vasa's ring rose towards me... I paused momentarily, grasped his hand, and shook it firmly.

Bishop Vasa prefers to operate under a pre-Vatican II, feudal paradigm of the Church, in which the clergy and religious are a kind of nobility, the true owners of the faith and tradition, while the laity work out their salvation through attendance to this superior caste. In his prior dioceses, his flocks actually shrunk. He shares the vision of Gideon, preferring a hard core of faithful as opposed to a "big tent" which only God can sort out. This conceptual conflict extends back to the earliest days of Christianity, when Augustine battled the Donatists. Augustine sought to cast the net of the Church wide and trust in the love and truth of God to raise up the faithful. The Donatist conceived of the Church as a pure remnant, and argued that the sacraments administered by a compromised priest were ineffective. At one point, Bishop Vasa even hinted at his Donatist sympathies. Considering the history of the clergy in Santa Rosa, I can almost understand the appointment of a stern taskmaster for clerical reform. However, that is not how Bishop Vasa's jurisdiction unfolded.

In my parish, St. Eugene's Cathedral, a new pastor was appointed, Father Frank Epperson, who proceeded to discontinue the Youth Mass, fire the Youth Minister, and undermine any initiative that smacked of lay control. Latin began to reappear in liturgies, women began to show up to Mass with veiled heads, and many of the characteristics of the pre-Vatican II Church re-emerged. The spiritual environment became suffocating and dark, as if the forces of the Counter-Reformation had triumphed with a uniquely Catholic vengeance. Of course, these changes appealed to fringe members of the laity who sought salvation through religious formalism. On a personal level, I felt as though my years of investment in a spiritual community had suddenly been erased as the arena for lay involvement began shrinking.

Meanwhile, at Cardinal Newman, Bishop Vasa initiated his relationship with the school by informing us that we had failed in our mission to educate the young men and women in our care because we had not recently produced vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Coming in the wake of years of pedophilia scandal, the resignation in disgrace of one bishop and the threatened criminal prosecution of another, a renegade Vicar General, millions of dollars of parishioner donations missing, and other minor criminal matters along the way, Bishop Vasa's accusation felt a bit rich. Soon thereafter, the community's favorite priest, many years a Newman chaplain and teacher, was transferred and then replaced by an orthodox zealot. To characterize him as a Pharisee would be unfair to Israel. Already demoralized, the faculty at Newman was now shell shocked.

And Bishop Vasa was only beginning.