

Blast from the Past: Donatists and Sex Abuse

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 2, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Blast from the Past: (a daily feature where we take some bedtime reading from history with relevance to a contemporary issue)

A hard-line party emerged in the fourth century, called Donatists after one of their leaders. They believed that any contact with lapsed clergy, including those traditores or traitors who without offering pagan sacrifice had nevertheless handed over books or Church goods, contaminated a church and all its members, and invalidated the sacraments which were administered in it. The Donatists formed a separate pure Church, with their own elders and bishops.

Eamon Duffy, renowned Church historian, on an early controversy after the Decian persecutions. The Donatists did not win the day and the Church affirmed the teaching *ex opere operato*, which holds that the moral worthiness of the minister of a sacrament does not affect the validity of the sacrament. If you think that there are not some Donatists in the contemporary Church, who might use the sex abuse scandal to push their cause, think again. And, like the Donatists, some would turn to Constantine to get their way.

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