

Reformation Day?

Michael Sean Winters | Apr. 5, 2010 NCR Today

The victims of clergy sexual abuse do not owe anyone an explanation for how or why they choose to respond, protest or otherwise remonstrate with the Catholic Church. They are the victims, not the hierarchs, and it must be unbelievably painful for them to see bishops acting like they are the injured party. If anything is clear, it is clear that the Church's traumas were self-inflicted and that the wounds of the survivors of sexual abuse were not.

Still, it is beyond unfortunate that they have chosen "Reformation Day" for their planned protest at the Vatican. Indeed, it is one of the things that should most cause the Vatican and the hierarchy to be concerned that the large majority of objections to their handling of pedophile clergy are objections that come from Catholics who deeply love their Church. These are not attacks from anti-clericals. The concern for change within the Church is not the work of Communists or others who aimed to destroy the Church. It is the loud and resonant voice of loyal Catholics, of those who love the Church, that has been raised to cry, "No, the Church of Christ should not behave in this way."

Call me old-fashioned, but I still think the Reformation was a mistake. I think Luther was right about many things but he was wrong to leave, which became the most important thing. Tying the legitimate concern to see the Church's hierarchy root out the cancer of clergy sexual abuse and the culture of clericalism that allowed that cancer to grow to Luther's misguided ecclesiology is not a good thing, not least because it will make it easier for the Vatican officials to dismiss the protest. The need to honestly face what was done and to change the culture of the Church so that it does not happen again is an urgent task, but it is a distinctly Catholic task. I suggest they hold the protest on December 13, the anniversary of the opening of the Council of Trent.

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