

The 'schoolboys' have no real authority

Norbert F. Dlabal | Jan. 24, 2012



An altar server holds a copy of the new English translation of the Roman Missal during Mass at St. Joseph's Church in Alexandria, Va., Nov. 27. (CNS/Nancy Phelan Wiechec)

VIEWPOINT

In the very early years of the 20th century, my dad attended primary school in a one-room country grade school on the plains of central Kansas. Conditions were still very rustic on the frontier in those days. They had just the basics. There were no phones, no electric lights and no indoor plumbing. The roads were of dirt, and the law was miles away. One teacher taught all eight grades and had to be a fairly tough and self-sufficient individual.

One day when my dad was a very young child, some of the older boys in the upper grades came to school early. They brought a ladder with them and climbed up onto the roof of the schoolhouse with a .22-caliber rifle and a flask of some kind of beverage. When the teacher arrived, the boys on the roof dared him to try to get them to come down. He did not succeed. The schoolboys, not the teacher, pretty well ran the school that day.

For a young child in the second or third grade it was a bit scary. The experience left an indelible mark on the memory of my dad. For the rest of his life, which spanned nearly the entirety of the 1900s, whenever he encountered something that wasn't quite right, he invoked this incident to explain things: "The schoolboys are running things." Whenever a project came out botched, like a foundation that was not quite level, or a building that was not quite square, or a business that was run with a glaring ineptitude, Dad would invoke this saying, and we knew what he meant.

My dad's words came to mind as I began to use the new English translation of the Roman Missal on the First Sunday of Advent 2011. As I use it more and more, the thought keeps coming back: "Schoolboys are running things" in the church these days, and they are not up to the task. They have usurped authority and have messed things up for the rest of the church.

I am now 76 years old. I have served the church as a priest for the last 40 of those years. I don't think I will live long enough for anyone to convince me that the new translation is so much better, so much more spiritual, so much more pleasing to God, and will make me a so much more holy person to say, as we are now required to say at the beginning of the Second Eucharistic Prayer: "You are indeed Holy, Oh Lord, the fount of all holiness?"

than to say, as we used to say: "Oh Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness." Or how about this? What is so much better about saying, "Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father," as we are now required to say, than to say "Pray, brothers and sisters, that this our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father," as we said until recently?

Making changes for the sake of making changes, not for the sake of improving anything, is a way to let everyone know who is in charge in the church these days.



All the hype that preceded the inaugural use of this new translation, and all

the explanations that were written to justify it and to "explain" how much better it was going to be than the one currently in use were plainly just not true. The proponents were like a used-car salesman trying to talk fast and close the deal before the customer kicked the tires one more time and decided not to buy the car after all.

How are we to apply the measure: *Lex orandi, lex credendi* ("the law of praying is the law of believing")? The way of praying that this new translation offers to the people of God will soon have them believing that "the Lord sits in the heavens and pouts" (to twist Psalm 2 a little) until people grovel before him and employ the "correct" words in the "correct" order in addressing the Lord.

Another, and an even more fundamental, question comes to my mind regarding all of this. Who wrote that dour document, *Liturgiam Authenticam*? It, too, has all the marks of something schoolboys would have written. A person can pick up and read any of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and find that they inspire buoyancy and optimism. They sing of good news and hope for the future. *Liturgiam Authenticam* reads like something the KGB might have written for the citizens of the Soviet Union.

Writing to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 3:1-5), St. Paul lamented that he could only talk to them as infants in Christ and not as spiritually mature, although they should have grown up by then and should have been ready for some solid food.

The church is now 2,000 or so years down the line from its infancy and ought to be exhibiting a capacity for a little more solid food rather than pabulum. The fact is, there are many in the church who are ready for solid food. But they are not "running things" right now. And it seems like some of those who are running things actually want to keep her members in an infantile condition.

"The schoolboys are running things" now, but it won't always be that way, because they have no real authority. It only seems that way. It's an illusion. It's an aberration. It is out of order. And it will not always be like this, simply because "the Lord sits in the heavens and laughs ... then in his anger he speaks to them, he terrifies them in his wrath ... Happy are all who take refuge in him" (Psalm 2:4-5, 12).

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