

Book Review

Lex Orandi by Daniel Graham

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Bookworm



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This short review outlines my impressions of the book "Lex Orandi" ["The Law of Prayer"] by Daniel Graham. The book seeks to present a comparison of the seven sacraments in traditional Catholicism versus the same in Novus Ordo ("New Order") Catholicism.

One of the foremost reasons why the book was attractive to me, was that persons of my generation (I am aged 37) received no real catechesis regarding the sacraments (or much else!) When it came to receiving the sacraments for the first time, mostly the focus was on matters such as what time to arrive at Church, and where to sit and the like.

Worse, when I made my First Holy Communion, it was at the time where Bishops Conferences around the world were directly disobeying the Supreme Pontiff via introducing communion-in-the-hand in illicit fashion. One of my few memories of preparing to receive the sacraments is of our teacher, (I went through the sacraments in school classroom groups), repeatedly emphasising that communion-in-the-hand was (supposedly) "just the same" as receiving in the proper fashion and that "no-one can stop you" receiving like that. Nothing else received such a heavy and repeated emphasis.

Looking back, it seems very clear that the lack of substance here was deliberate and intended as a means of smoothing the path for changes such as communion-in-the-hand. After all, people cannot object if they are ignorant.

And so this new text represented a dual learning opportunity for myself; that is, the chance to learn something about the sacraments in general, as well as gaining a specific understanding of the changes to traditional practice which have resulted in the 'Novus Ordo' sacraments.

The book is well written, using accessible language. There are useful and comprehensive descriptions of the traditional form of the sacraments, for the benefit of those people (like myself) who have not experienced all of the traditional modes. The author uses statistics and comparisons to compare the two rites and is accordingly able to highlight the at times stark differences between the traditional and the modern.

Personally, I found it very shocking to learn how, often, the new rites simply omit large tracts of the traditional texts as they had existed for centuries. The

author is able to explain and demonstrate the reason for this which boils down to the same over-riding motivation which has dominated the Church for decades now – to pander to Protestantism. The reformers at Vatican II had the desire to remove anything from Catholic practice which might be a stumbling block for Protestants. And so they "went to town" with the long knives, with a scant regard – long since obvious - for the substance or coherence of what would remain (as the author ably demonstrates). The massive fall in the uptake of the sacraments – the author provides useful statistics - highlights this.

In particular, I was interested in the chapter on Baptism. This is because my own household currently awaits the arrival of our first child, thanks be to God. The sole Catholic baptism I have attended in recent years was that of my niece and it was a great example of how puerile the liturgy and ceremonies of the modern Church have become. After a Sunday mass where the focus was on welcoming non-Catholics, and where several people were dressed in football shirts and tracksuit bottoms, (and that was just the women), we proceeded with the baptism.

The chief concern of the priest was to entertain the lay people with jokes about clerical celibacy, as he tried to conceal his obvious lack of preparation for the event. Eventually, we "muddled through" but in such a vague fashion that I do not recall anything of particular significance being said or done, beyond the expected dousing the infant with water.

I hope for better for my own child, which is why I will seek the traditional ceremony for him/her and also why this book was so appealing. I learned that the novus ordo rites chop out various parts of baptism which Protestants may disagree with, such as ritual exorcisms, the blessing of salt and indeed the very concept of struggle and spiritual warfare in our religious lives. The only conclusion is that the new rites are barely recognisable as Catholic.

It was interesting to learn that, thanks to the many options the new rite permits, there is a frankly ridiculous number of possible variations in the modern baptismal ceremony. In excess of one million, in fact. One could live a thousand lifetimes and never attend the same ceremony twice. This is so absurd as to be mirth provoking, but less so when one considered the implications for the idea of unity.

Through a detailed comparison of the traditional and modern texts, the author demonstrates that the new baptismal ceremony downplays the candidate's relationship with God, in favour of stressing the importance of being a member of a community. Indeed, the new ceremony spends much of its time addressing this community, (the congregation), instead of the baptismal candidate. The author shows how the new ceremony borrows heavily from Protestant, (specifically Anglican and Lutheran), ceremonies and, overall, it likely has more in common with these than with traditional Catholic practice (the author shows that, at best, perhaps half of the traditional ceremony has some form of equivalent in the modern version).

Armed with the comparisons the author presents in a clear fashion, I can now understand much better the problems the modern sacramental rites face. They are incoherent because they are trying to be Catholic and Protestant at the same time. This is equally as absurd as trying to be hot and cold at the same time, for example. The author gives an

excellent example by showing that what the new rite calls an "exorcism" is in fact only a simple blessing, not an exorcism at all. After all, Protestants do not believe in exorcism, but the term must be included to satisfy the token nod to the Catholic faith.

In the coming months, my wife and I will make preparations for the baptism of our first child. I feel much better prepared for this, having read Mr Graham's book. Thanks to his fine effort, I am now well prepared to explain to questioning parties why we prefer a traditional Catholic ceremony for our child, as opposed to an ambiguous half-way house. I feel I am in good company with my stance, as Cardinal Robert Sarah recently lamented the fact that the Novus Ordo baptism does not even explicitly ask for faith (for the candidate) anywhere in its text.

The chapters on other sacraments are equally engaging and informative, but here I chose to concentrate on baptism thanks to its current relevance to my own family. I will leave readers to glean their own gems from those other chapters.

I heartily recommend this book to all, but especially to people like myself who were raised in the Novus Ordo Church. Such persons will find the book immensely educational and it will go a long way to retrospectively providing them with the useful catechesis they were robbed of, as well as highlighting the reasons behind that "something's not right" feeling which characterises the post-conciliar church. ●



Daniel Graham is an award winning author who lives in Fairfax, Va, USA, with his wife and family.

The cost of the book is \$14.95 US. The e-book version will be \$10.95 US. All proceeds will go to

Traditional Catholic education.

For more information, visit www.lexorandi.net

"Without good books and spiritual reading, it will be morally impossible to save our souls."

St. Alphonsus Liguori