



# Mass Misunderstandings: The Mixed Legacy of the Vatican II liturgical Reforms

*Kenneth D. Whitehead*

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The first document enacted by the Second Vatican Council was its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and the liturgical reform mandated by that document has probably had a greater impact on the average Catholic than any other action of the Council. That this liturgical reform has not in every respect been the unalloyed success hoped for by the Council Fathers, however, has only been grudgingly recognized. The liturgists and other Church officials responsible for implementing the reforms have had a vested interest in claiming success, even where there was evidence to the contrary. Nevertheless, the many and sometimes abrupt liturgical changes made were bound to affect long-established modes of worship and devotion – not to speak of the drastic move from Latin to the vernacular which came shortly after the Council, and which necessarily entailed radical change in the Church’s worship. In July 2007, Pope Benedict XVI signaled that the liturgical question needed to be revisited when he issued a motu proprio that allowed, some forty-plus years after the end of the Council, a wider celebration of the unreformed pre-Vatican-II Mass in Latin as an “extraordinary” form of the Roman rite. While the pope’s motu proprio was not a repudiation or cancellation of the Vatican II liturgical reforms — as some liturgists feared (and some traditionalists hoped) – it did indicate a sane and sensible papal recognition that liturgy must be developed organically, not “manufactured” by a “committee.” Above all, the pope recognized that the question of the liturgy must be approached realistically in the light of how the reforms have actually worked out, not of how some have imagined that they might or should have worked out. This book by Kenneth D. Whitehead, who has written extensively both on Va



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