

## From Organic Growth to Liturgico-Plasticity: Reconceptualizing the Process of Liturgical Reform

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### Abstract

Vatican II introduced the principle of “organic growth” to describe its preferred postconciliar liturgical reform process. Botanical interpretations have dominated scholarly readings of this analogy and restricted the emergence of richer analogies for understanding liturgical change. This article interprets “organic growth” in the liturgy via the analogy of neuroplasticity both to explore historic and prognostic considerations of liturgical changes undertaken in response to internal and external change agents and to advance a fresh perspective on the process of liturgical reform.

### Keywords

analogy, liturgy, liturgical reform, neuroplasticity, plasticity, organic growth, Second Vatican Council, Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council instigated the most thorough reform and renewal of Roman Catholic liturgical worship ever undertaken. Five decades later scholars maintain differing perspectives on whether the changes represent continuity or discontinuity with preconciliar liturgical forms and their expression of the central

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truths of the faith, and whether the changes represent “organic growth” or a radical departure from “objective liturgical tradition.”<sup>1</sup>

The Council Fathers proposed the principle of “organic growth”<sup>2</sup> to describe the historical process of liturgical change and to outline their expectations for how liturgical change would occur following *Sacrosanctum concilium*’s call to revise and update the liturgy.<sup>3</sup> Despite its lack of official definition, this principle has served as a chief measure for determining the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the postconciliar liturgical reforms. Whether the reforms are seen as legitimate or not is no small matter. Prior to the council, Yves Congar pointed out, “The liturgy raises questions for the supreme authority of the church, doubtless because it is so tightly linked to questions of doctrine and to the structure of the church itself.”<sup>4</sup> SC articulated a clear link between ecclesiology and liturgical expression, teaching that the “real nature of the true church” is to be found in its liturgical action, especially the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> More recently, in *Liturgiam authenticam* of 2001, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the

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1. John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008) 52. Baldovin queries the notion of an “objective liturgical tradition” promoted by Alcuin Reid, who describes the liturgy as “a living reality—an organism” that “has represented an objective tradition” in which authentic changes occur only gradually and carefully (ibid. 54). See Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy: The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (Farnborough: St. Michael’s Abbey, 2004) 12–13.
  2. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (hereafter SC) no. 23, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html). All URLs cited herein were accessed September 1, 2014. In much writing on the topic of Vatican II’s liturgical reform, the term “liturgy” remains undefined, but in general it refers to the celebration of the Eucharist/the Mass, unless specified otherwise. “Liturgy” defined broadly refers to all official, public worship of the church governed and celebrated according to the rules, rubrics, and prayer-forms of the Catholic Church’s officially published ritual books.
  3. SC no. 4: “The Council also desires that, where necessary, the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet the circumstances and needs of modern times.”
  4. Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011) 26. The volume’s introductory essay was written in 1950. Massimo Faggioli has recently highlighted the need for “a hermeneutics of Vatican II once again centered on *Sacrosanctum Concilium*” because only a “hermeneutic based on the liturgy and the Eucharist, as developed in the constitution on the liturgy, can preserve the riches of the overall ecclesiology of Vatican II” (Massimo Faggioli, “*Sacrosanctum concilium* and the Meaning of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 71 [2010] 437–52, at 450–51).
  5. SC no. 2 states, “For the liturgy, ‘through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,’ most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”

Discipline of the Sacraments clarified that the Roman Rite is understood to be “a manifestation of the theological realities of ecclesial communion and unity.”<sup>6</sup>

Some have interpreted the liturgical reforms of Vatican II as “inorganic,” introducing great “novelty” into the Catholic Church’s praxis and hence deviating from the “unchanging” nature of its doctrinal expression.<sup>7</sup> Neil Ormerod explains that “in its efforts to remain faithful to the unique saving act of God in Jesus Christ, the Church has tended to view novelty as deviation from its founding saving truth. To claim rupture or discontinuity is to suggest a departure from God’s saving message.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than being merely cosmetic, Vatican II’s changes to established worship patterns instigated a profound “rethinking of ecclesiology,”<sup>9</sup> which has proven problematic to those intent on emphasizing the unchanging nature of the Christian tradition and its liturgy.<sup>10</sup> Liturgical scholarship from the mid-19th century onward has systematically unraveled the notion that an unchanging liturgical form ever existed<sup>11</sup>

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6. Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, “Fifth Instruction ‘For the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Following Vatican II,’” *Liturgiam authenticam* (hereafter LA): “On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy” no. 5, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20010507\\_liturgiam-authenticam\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20010507_liturgiam-authenticam_en.html).
  7. See, e.g., Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 146–48; and Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord: Faith in Christ and Liturgy Today*, trans. Martha M. Matesich (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 166–69.
  8. Neil Ormerod, “Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity? Toward an Ontology of Meaning,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 609–36, at 613.
  9. Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012) 17. See also Faggioli, “*Sacrosanctum concilium* and the Meaning of Vatican II” 441–43, 445.
  10. Erroneous understandings of the nature of the liturgy as “unchanging” emerge when descriptions of the liturgy are advanced as “cosmic,” as something that “transcends the boundaries of places and times in order to gather all into the hour of Christ that is anticipated in the liturgy,” and as “an objective form of the corporate prayer of the Church” (Ratzinger, *A New Song for the Lord* 135, 132; see also 127).
  11. Following in the wake of Anton Baumstark’s pioneering work, *Comparative Liturgy* (Belgium: Chevetogne, 1940), prominent liturgical historians Joseph Jungmann and Theodore Klauser, among others, chronicled the historical development of the liturgy demonstrating conclusively the fallacy of an “unchanging liturgical form.” See Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (*Missarum sollemnia*), 2 vols., trans. Francis A. Brunner (New York: Benzinger, 1950); Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy*, 2nd ed., trans. John Halliburton (New York: Oxford University, 1979). More contemporary scholars such as Paul F. Bradshaw have deconstructed further the myth of the pristine or fixed liturgical form being passed on through the generations. See Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University, 2002); and *Reconstructing Early Christian Worship* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2010).

or is necessary for the expression of the eternal truths of the Christian faith throughout history.<sup>12</sup>

While the question of organic growth of the liturgy can be (and has been) addressed using the methods of comparative liturgiology and historical-critical approaches,<sup>13</sup> this article uses the tools of analogical theology to explore the process of liturgical change as described analogically in SC no. 23. Taking an analogical approach to this topic does not discount or overlook any aspect of the historical development of the liturgy. Rather it provides a hermeneutic for understanding the process underlying the historical development and evident textual/ritual changes in the liturgy. The complexity of liturgical change necessitates using an analogy rich enough to encompass the intricacies of contextualized historical developments while still asserting theological continuity and consistency.<sup>14</sup>

According to David Tracy, theological discourse is by nature analogical, and human beings come to an understanding of one another largely via analogy.<sup>15</sup> Tracy defines analogy as “a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference. The order among the relationships is constituted by the distinct but similar relationships of each analogue to some primary focal meaning, some prime analogue” according to which reality is interpreted.<sup>16</sup> Theological analogies emerge when theologians reflect on, participate in, and critique a proposition,<sup>17</sup> articulating interactions between its primary focal meaning and the range of possible analogies that can generate varying interpretations of aspects of that primary focal meaning.

The practical instructions of SC no. 23 use analogical language to describe the anticipated process of liturgical reform (the primary focal meaning) to be undertaken following the council’s admonition: “Care must be taken that any new forms

12. Faggioli comments, “The *ressourcement* of the liturgical movement went as far as it took to rediscover—beyond the much asserted uniqueness and singleness of the Roman Rite in modern Catholicism—a forgotten ‘liturgical pluralism’” (*True Reform* 26).

13. Examples of this approach to investigating the historical development of the liturgy can be found in the writings of scholars such as Maxwell E. Johnson, “From Three Weeks to Forty Days: Baptismal Preparation and the Origins of Lent,” *Studia liturgica* 20 (1990) 185–200; and Dominic Serra, “Syrian Prebaptismal Anointing and Western Postbaptismal Chrismation,” *Worship* 79 (2005) 328–41.

14. Liturgical historian Robert Taft reinforces the notion that the focus of historical studies of the liturgy should be multidirectional, i.e., looking back in order to understand the evolution of present practice while bearing in mind the reality of liturgy’s constantly shifting nature: “The purpose of this history is not to recover the past (which is impossible), much less to imitate it (which would be fatuous), but to *understand liturgy*, which, because it has a history, can only be understood in motion, just as the way to understand a top is to spin it” (*Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 2nd rev. ed. [Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 1997] 192).

15. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 454.

16. *Ibid.* 408.

17. *Ibid.* 410.

adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing.” SC no. 23 clearly intends that the reform process described should be in continuity with prior development of the liturgy. To date, the range of possible interpretations of SC no. 23’s prime analogue of “organic growth” of the liturgy generally has been limited to analogies reflecting its most obvious dialectical relationship: botanical growth. Uncritical adoption of this analogy has resulted in little analysis of the effectiveness of its interpretation of the principle of organic growth. This article critiques the limitations of the botanical analogy and proposes that a neurological analogy (plasticity) may provide for a more productive dialectical relationship with the prime analogue of “organic growth” for interpreting the primary focal meaning under consideration here: the process of liturgical change as experienced historically and anticipated prognostically.<sup>18</sup>

My approach aims to provide a way for scholarship to move beyond the hermeneutic categories of continuity/discontinuity that have recently come to prominence in considerations of the Church’s liturgical tradition prior to and following Vatican II, and to advance the discussion beyond purely descriptive analogies to analogies that promote explanation and identify specific processes of change.<sup>19</sup>

After identifying and exploring Pope Benedict XVI’s hermeneutics of discontinuity/rupture and continuity/reform as they apply to liturgical change, I investigate the theory of what I call “liturgico-plasticity” as an analogy for interpreting organic growth. Liturgico-plasticity moves beyond merely describing liturgical change that results from using the analogy, to explaining and justifying the occurrence and sustenance of both modest and radical liturgical change generated from both internal and external agents, in order to promote acceptance of current liturgical forms as authentic representations of Christian tradition and doctrinal expression.

## **Benedict XVI’s Hermeneutics of Continuity/Reform and Discontinuity/Rupture**

In a 2005 address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict XVI introduced a hypothesis to explain the difficulties encountered in implementing Vatican II. He observed that two contrary hermeneutics had been used to interpret the council: one of discontinuity/rupture, which has caused confusion, and one of continuity/reform, which has been fruitful.<sup>20</sup> There has been some uncertainty regarding which of these hermeneutics

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18. According to Tracy, through theological discourse, understanding of the focal meaning itself “is inevitably transformed by its exposure to the full range of the Christian symbols and the full range of questions in the situation” (*Analogical Imagination* 423). He explains further that “any theological focal meaning will find itself transformed . . . as the theologian moves, in honest and necessary critical self-exposure, into the fuller range of the situation” and new productive insights emerge (ibid. 454).

19. See Ormerod, “Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity?” 612.

20. Benedict XVI, “Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia Offering Them His Christmas Greetings” (Thursday, December 22, 2005) (hereafter “Christmas

applies to which end of the liturgico-theological spectrum; contributing to this uncertainty is Benedict's own inconsistent use of terms such as "rupture" or "breach" in his prepapal writings about liturgical reform.<sup>21</sup>

In his "Christmas Address," Benedict used the label "hermeneutic of discontinuity/rupture" to brand progressives whom he claims see the liturgy of Vatican II as making a distinct break with what preceded it, namely, the 400-year-old tradition of the Missal of Pius V. He charges progressives with fostering a split between the preconciliar and postconciliar Church, asserting that for them "the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council" and contain compromises that entailed keeping and reconfirming "many old things that are now pointless." He claims that the progressives, taking their lead from the forward-looking elements of the conciliar texts, felt it was "necessary to go courageously beyond the texts," and that this has led to a basic misunderstanding of the council and the implementation of a far more extensive liturgical reform than that envisaged in SC.<sup>22</sup>

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Address"), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html). It is important to note the legislative status and weight of this papal address in order to understand its place and level of authority within the hierarchy of ecclesiastical documents. In his article, "A Theory of Juridical Documents Based on Canons 29–34," *Studia canonica* 31 (1998) 337–70, John Huels offers guidelines for assessing the weight of ecclesiastical documents that leads to the conclusion that despite the fact that its papal author is the supreme ecclesial legislator (though he was not speaking in this capacity during this address) Benedict XVI's "Christmas Address" to the Curia is nonmagisterial, nonjuridical, and nonbinding, as it does not describe or indicate a canonical norm or custom. Essentially the "Christmas Address" has the status of a commentary, and carries very little weight within the hierarchy of ecclesiastical documents. Though this address has been referenced frequently by those seeking papal approbation for the "reform of the reform" position, given Benedict's February 2013 retirement from office, the personal reflections of the pope expressed in the "Christmas Address" to the Curia carry little if any legislative weight beyond the conclusion of his papacy. See also: Francis Morrissey and Michel Thériault, *Papal and Curial Pronouncements: Their Canonical Significance in Light of the Code of Canon Law* (Ottawa: Faculty of Canon Law, St. Paul University, 1995).

21. For example, in *Milestones* Ratzinger wrote, "The prohibition of the missal that was now decreed, a missal that had known continuous growth over the centuries . . . introduced a breach into the history of the liturgy whose consequences could only be tragic" (146). Mariusz Biliniewicz has noted Ratzinger/Benedict's inconsistency in using the term "rupture": "Sometimes Ratzinger seems to be saying that the rupture with the liturgical tradition was only a 'psychological rupture' (the new Missal was not a rupture in itself but was presented as a rupture, as in *Feast of Faith or Milestones*), but sometimes he seems to be saying that in the new Missal there is a 'real rupture' (as in his foreword to Gamber's book)" (Biliniewicz, *The Liturgical Vision of Pope Benedict XVI: A Theological Inquiry* [Bern: Peter Lang, 2013] 79). See Joseph Ratzinger, "Klaus Gamber: 'L'intrépidité d'un vrai témoin,'" foreword to Klaus Gamber, *La réforme liturgique en question*, trans Simone Wallon (Le Barroux: Sainte-Madeleine, 1992) 6–8, at 7.
22. Ratzinger, *Milestones* 146.

It is likely that the “progressives” referred to obliquely by Benedict in his Christmas address<sup>23</sup> and charged with promoting this discontinuity/rupture hermeneutic include Archbishop Annibale Bugnini,<sup>24</sup> Pope Paul VI, and the members of the Consilium responsible for implementing the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy.<sup>25</sup> Those promoting a “reform of the reform”<sup>26</sup> of the liturgy claim that the missal of Paul VI does not represent organic growth from the 1962 missal of Pius V. Instead, they claim that the postconciliar missal represents a dramatic departure from what would have been expected to occur, had the natural process of organic growth not been interrupted by Vatican II, and had Paul VI, Bugnini, and the Consilium not overstepped their mandate during the implementation process.<sup>27</sup>

Benedict XVI has identified a second hermeneutic for interpreting Vatican II, that of continuity/reform, which he applies to his reading of the postconciliar liturgy. He sees SC as standing in continuity with the preconciliar liturgy, and emphasizes his point with carefully chosen quotes from Pope John XXIII’s opening speech (October 11, 1962) and Pope Paul VI’s closing speech at the council (December 7, 1965). Both speeches express the position that the council’s primary role was to guard the precious treasure of church doctrine and that the Church is to dedicate itself “with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us.”<sup>28</sup> Benedict states that

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23. Other reform-of-the-reform writers do not hesitate to name the progressives specifically. See Eamon Duffy, “Benedict XVI and the Liturgy,” in *The Genius of the Roman Rite: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives on Catholic Liturgy*, ed. Uwe Michael Lang (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2010) 1–21. Duffy writes, “Ratzinger the theologian understands the nature of tradition as an organic cumulative growth, a plant unfolding, not a machine constructed, and possessing an inherent authority and identity deeper than and prior to the exercise of any hierarchical jurisdiction, however much the instincts of Ratzinger the curial official might be thought to be at odds with that perception” (20).
  24. Archbishop Annibale Bugnini served as secretary to the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy from 1964 to 1969.
  25. For detailed explanations of the reform process see Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990); and Piero Marini, *A Challenging Reform: Realizing the Vision of Liturgical Renewal 1963–1975*, ed. Mark R. Francis, John R. Page, and Keith F. Pecklers (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008).
  26. See e.g., Aidan Nichols, *Looking at Liturgy: A Critical View of Its Contemporary Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996); Lang, ed., *Genius of the Roman Rite*; Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000); Thomas Kocik, ed., *The Reform of the Reform? A Liturgical Debate: Reform or Return?* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003); Laszlo Dobszay, *The Restoration and Organic Development of the Roman Rite* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2010).
  27. In Wilhelm Nyssen’s “Testimonial” to Klaus Gamber, published at the front of Gamber’s English version, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy: Its Problems and Background*, trans. Klaus D. Grimm (Harrison, NY: Foundation for Catholic Reform, 1993) xi–xiii, Nyssen quotes Ratzinger’s opinion that Gamber is “‘the one scholar who, among the army of pseudo-liturgists, truly represents the liturgical thinking of the center of the Church’” (xiii).
  28. Benedict XVI, “Christmas Address.”

“wherever this interpretation guided the implementation of the Council, new life developed and new fruit ripened. . . . Today, we see that although the good seed developed slowly, it is nonetheless growing; and our deep gratitude for the work done by the Council is likewise growing.”<sup>29</sup>

What complicates matters is that while Benedict XVI accepts and praises SC, as Joseph Ratzinger he expressed grave concerns with how the SC’s reform of the liturgy was to be implemented. In his opinion, the progressive agenda led the liturgical reform astray from what SC mandated. Thus the liturgy in its present form needs to be brought back to something approximating what should have occurred, had organic growth been permitted to take the 1962 missal of Pius V as its starting point, and only gradually introduced what was stated in SC and nothing more.<sup>30</sup> This implementation then would have resulted in, for example, only limited use of the vernacular, retention of Latin for the majority of the liturgy, preservation of the *ad orientem* posture of the presider, no concelebration, and retention of Gregorian chant as the chief musical idiom. According to this conservative view of SC, anything not mentioned specifically in SC lacks a mandate for change. This view differs from the mainstream perspective that sees SC as offering broad guiding principles for liturgical reform, the details of which would be determined later.

Problems with the conservative view become obvious when placed alongside the perspective of those directly involved in the implementation of SC such as Bernard Botte, O.S.B.,<sup>31</sup> who explained:

The role of the Council fathers was not to approve a completely finished reform that would be presented to them with all the details, but to establish the general principles and orientations for a reform. The practical application of these principles could be done only after the council. We had to avoid getting lost in the concrete details.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Ibid.

30. Ratzinger wrote that while a moderate revision of the 1962 missal could have been expected following Vatican II, and while such a revision might have been more thorough than previous revisions due to the partial introduction of the vernacular, “more than this has now happened. The old building was being demolished, and another was built, to be sure largely using the old building plans.” But, he continued, “setting it as a new construction over against what had grown historically, forbidding the results of that historical growth, thereby makes the liturgy appear to be no longer a living development, but the product of erudite work and juridical authority. This has caused us enormous harm” (*Milestones* 146–48). See also Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986) 86–87.

31. Bernard Botte, a Belgian monk of the monastery of Mont César and a Scripture scholar, was drawn into the work of the liturgical movement through his association with Lambert Beauduin, another Benedictine monk prominent in the Belgian liturgical movement. Botte served as first director of the Institut Supérieur de Liturgie in Paris from 1956 to 1964, and was a member of the Consilium for the Implementation of the Constitution on the Liturgy.

32. Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation: An Insider’s View of Liturgical Renewal*, trans. John Sullivan (Washington: Pastoral, 1988) 119. Faggioli comments, “The history of

John O'Malley's reading of Vatican II supports Botte's view, describing the church as a "conservative society whose essential mission is to pass on by word and deed a message received long ago," and noting that this "message entered the historical process and thus to some extent became subject to change."<sup>33</sup> O'Malley identifies three synonyms for change employed by the Council Fathers: *aggiornamento*, development, and *ressourcement*.<sup>34</sup> Of these, he highlights "development (and its close equivalents like evolution and progress)" as

the least threatening because it inserted change into an unfolding continuity. Yet even amid this continuity change was at its core. The word "change" stuck in the throats of bishops at the council, and it stuck in the throat of Paul VI. Nonetheless, the council frequently employed change-implied words and did so to such a degree that they became part of its most characteristic vocabulary. They suggested that even the final documents of the council were not final in the sense of establishing an end-point beyond which there would be no further movement.<sup>35</sup>

If O'Malley's reading of the broad movements at work within the council is correct and change was at the core of the unfolding continuity envisioned by the Council Fathers, then the liturgy that resulted from the "organic growth" that followed the council was entirely in keeping with the council's overall direction.

In his memoir, Ratzinger wrote that the liturgy is not "made," not even by a pope: "he has the task of a gardener, not that of a technician who builds new machines and throws the old ones on the junk-pile."<sup>36</sup> As pope, Benedict moved definitively by means of his *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* to heal what he considered to be a rupture in continuity of the liturgical tradition: the prohibition of continued use of the 1962 Missal of Pius V. In relation to this development Eamon Duffy comments, "Benedict has now lifted the restrictions on the celebration of the Tridentine liturgy, restrictions which, as we have seen, for him embody a deep and disastrous rupture in the continuity of Catholic tradition, and a scarring of the Church's memory."<sup>37</sup> It is

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the liturgical reform of Vatican II shows clearly that the council fathers opted for a 'development' and not for a 'perfectibility' of liturgy" (*True Reform* 122).

33. John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008) 299.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.* 300.

36. Ratzinger, *Milestones* 146–48. He echoes this analogy elsewhere, including in his preface to Reid, *Organic Development of the Liturgy* 9. Biliniewicz explains: "Ratzinger borrows the expression 'organic growth' from the world of gardening. He compares the development of liturgy to the growth of a plant. It is something that cannot be controlled from the outside but has to take place without any artificial intervention. It has to happen naturally, 'organically.' This means that the authority which is responsible for taking care of the development of the liturgy has to act as a careful gardener who allows the plant to grow according to its own rules in its own time" (*Liturgical Vision of Pope Benedict XVI* 40).

37. Eamon Duffy, "Benedict XVI and the Liturgy," in *Genius of the Roman Rite* 19–20.

possible to interpret Benedict's permission for use of the 1962 edition of the Missal of Pius V as an attempt to create a way for his understanding of "organic growth" of that liturgy still to develop, even if only among a small group.<sup>38</sup> In his letter to bishops accompanying *Summorum Pontificum*, Benedict explains:

The last version of the *Missale Romanum* prior to the Council, which was published with the authority of Pope John XXIII in 1962 and used during the Council, will now be able to be used as a *Forma extraordinaria* of the liturgical celebration. It is not appropriate to speak of these two versions of the Roman Missal as if they were "two Rites." Rather, it is a matter of a twofold use of one and the same rite.<sup>39</sup>

This insistence on a "twofold use" of a single rite has caused some consternation, because the Catholic Church now uses two versions that emanate from quite distinct historical contexts and express different liturgical theologies and ecclesiologies.<sup>40</sup> Benedict continues: "For that matter, the two Forms of the usage of the Roman Rite can be mutually enriching: new Saints and some of the new Prefaces can and should be inserted in the old Missal."<sup>41</sup> This part of the letter provides clear evidence of Benedict's intention to create a set of circumstances wherein his preferred process of "organic growth" could occur: slowly and incrementally, merely adding in the saints

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38. This papal decision constitutes one of the means by which Benedict sought to foster reconciliation with the followers of the excommunicated Swiss Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, whose traditionalist Society of Saint Pius X (founded in 1970) rejects Vatican II and its liturgical reforms. In 2009 Benedict lifted the excommunication of the four bishops ordained by Lefebvre, but declared that the Society has no canonical status and its members exercise no legitimate ministry in the Catholic Church. See "Letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Catholic Church concerning the Remission of the Excommunication of the Four Bishops Consecrated by Archbishop Lefebvre" (March 10, 2009), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2009/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20090310\\_remissione-scomunica\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20090310_remissione-scomunica_en.html).
39. Benedict XVI, "Letter to the Bishops on the Occasion of the Publication of the Apostolic Letter '*Moto Proprio Data: Summorum Pontificum*—On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970'" (July 7, 2007), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_let\\_20070707\\_lettera-vescovi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/letters/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20070707_lettera-vescovi_en.html). Several important critiques of the *motu proprio* and its accompanying letter provide helpful interpretations of this development: John F. Baldovin, "Reflections on *Summorum Pontificum*," *Worship* 83 (2009) 98–112; Chad J. Glendinning, "Was the 1962 *Missale Romanum* Abrogated? A Canonical Analysis in Light of *Summorum Pontificum*," *Worship* 85 (January 2011) 15–37; and especially Andrea Grillo, "Paolo VI, Pio V e la realtà virtuale: A proposito del *Motu Proprio 'Summorum Pontificum'*," [www.statusecclesiae.net](http://www.statusecclesiae.net) and Andrea Grillo, *Beyond Pius V: Conflicting Interpretations of the Liturgical Reform*, trans. Barry Hudock (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2013).
40. In practice, particularly for non-Latin speakers, the 1962 and 1969 rites are as experientially different as liturgical celebrations conducted according to the Syro-Malabar rite and the Missal of Paul VI.
41. Benedict XVI, "Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970."

canonized since 1962 and “some” of the new prefaces, and leaving the rite largely unchanged in the process.<sup>42</sup> Benedict’s intention to preserve and promote his understanding of the principle of organic growth is obvious when he claims:

There is no contradiction between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behooves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church’s faith and prayer, and to give them proper place.<sup>43</sup>

Supporters of the progressive view contend that SC represents a legitimate form of organic growth in the Church’s thought on the liturgy because the Constitution was produced by an ecumenical council and was informed by decades of theological research and judicious pastoral experimentation carried out by well-respected scholars of the liturgical movement.<sup>44</sup> That the Council Fathers overwhelmingly favored liturgical change is clear: SC was approved 2,147 votes to 4. Progressives concluded that because SC was implemented by Paul VI and the liturgical experts of the Consilium in accord with the *motu proprio Sacram liturgiam* and subsequent instructions and directives, the resulting liturgy can be understood to have grown organically from what preceded it. As initial steps in the longer process of reform that followed, local episcopal conferences were allowed to request extensions of the vernacular as they saw fit, to adopt the *versus populum* presidential orientation and the free-standing altar that had been tested prior to the council,<sup>45</sup> to promote concelebration, and to employ more vernacular hymnody.

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42. This interpretation certainly seems to find resonance in the writing of Lang, who comments on the call for the inclusion of new prefaces and celebrations for some new saints in the 1962 Missal, noting that “such a development as envisaged by Benedict XVI would be another step toward normality” (introduction to *Genius of the Roman Rite* x). See Baldwin’s critique of this development, “Reflections on *Summorum Pontificum*” 110. “Normality” for reform-of-the-reform proponents is clearly understood as what ought to have occurred within the “normal” process of organic development of the 1962 liturgy, had the reforms of Vatican II not occurred. It is worth noting that the phrase “reform of the reform,” while having gained a level of currency in the work of some liturgical scholars, has achieved no official recognition from the Catholic Church and does not appear in any church documents or curial statements on the liturgy. In the absence of a recognizable alternative, I will continue to use this phrase here.

43. Benedict XVI, *Summorum Pontificum*.

44. In *Mediator Dei* (1947) nos. 4 and 94, Pope Pius XII praised the scholarly contributions of the liturgical movement.

45. As early as February 17, 1955, English liturgist Clifford Howells, S.J., reported on the return of the ancient *ad orientem* practice witnessed in a recent Mass televised from Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. He explained that the rubrics for Mass permit the bishop to celebrate facing the people and to permit his priests to do likewise, noting that “more and more Bishops nowadays are approving and even encouraging the practice” that “fosters the

## Organic Growth of the Liturgy

The principle of organic growth of the liturgy is a cornerstone of Benedict XVI's view of the continuity/discontinuity of the liturgical reforms of Vatican II in relation to pre-conciliar liturgy, and as such bears further investigation. Finding its basis in SC no. 23, this principle is built on a conservative starting point: "That sound tradition may be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress[,] careful investigation is always to be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised." The addition of the qualifying "sound" to the noun "tradition" implies that not all tradition is sound, and that for legitimate progress to be made in the process of liturgical revision some unsound traditions must be left behind. The council's position is clear: changes to the liturgy can and in some cases should occur.

SC no. 23 contains three main points. First, it calls for careful theological, historical, and pastoral investigation into "each part of the liturgy which is to be revised." Second, it specifies that this investigation is to be done in light of "the general laws governing the structure and meaning of the liturgy and from the experience derived from recent liturgical reforms and indults conceded to various places."<sup>46</sup> Third—and the aspect that deserves attention for my purposes here—is this: "There must be no innovations unless the good of the Church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing."

Many writers arguing for a "reform of the reform" focus on a particular interpretation of the phrase "organic development" in SC no. 23 and contend that this should have resulted in only minor changes to the 1962 Missal. These writers claim that the

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closest union of the celebrant and people, makes the leadership of the priest in the communal sacrifice more apparent, holds the attention of the people, and has a great teaching value and a powerful psychological impact" (Howells, "Mass Facing the People: Ancient Practice Returns," *Catholic Leader* [February 17, 1955] 8). The *Catholic Leader*, official newspaper of the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, is Australia's "longest serving Catholic newspaper, having been published in Brisbane since 1929. Its forebear *The Age* began in 1892," <http://bne.catholic.net.au/asp/index.asp?pgid=11471>. During the 1950s and 1960s *The Catholic Leader* reproduced international articles by significant liturgists and often did not reference the original source publication, as was the case for the Howells article quoted here.

46. It can be presumed that the "recent liturgical reforms" referred to in SC no. 23 are the reform of the liturgical calendar and ranking of saints' feasts, the simplification of the Roman Breviary completed by the Sacred Congregation for Rites in the early 1950s, and the Pian Commission's introduction of the restored Easter Vigil (1951), and the revised rites for Holy Week celebrations (1955). The relevant recent indults mentioned in SC no.23 would have included those granting permission to use vernacular languages in ritual celebrations in various countries from as early as 1941. In his article, "The New German Ritual," *Catholic Leader* (Thursday July 23, 1953) 8, Howells sourced this information from "the seventh volume of the *Enciclopedia Cattolica* . . . [which] contains a stimulating article entitled 'Liturgical Language.'"

postconciliar implementation of SC did not constitute organic development of the liturgy but created a new form of the liturgy from historical fragments and new compositions introduced by the Bugnini-led *Consilium*.<sup>47</sup> “Organic development” is not an accurate translation of the Latin wording: “Innovationes, demum, ne fiant nisi vera et certa utilitas Ecclesiae id exigat, et adhibita cautela ut novae formae ex formis iam exstantibus organice quodammodo crescant.” *Crescant* is more commonly translated as “growth” rather than “development.” Though identifying a clear distinction between these two possible translations is difficult, “development” could be seen to imply outside influence at work in the process of change, whereas “growth” suggests internally generated change. Typically, scholarly discussions of the principle of “organic growth” have used botanical analogies to expand upon its meaning.

### *A Botanical Interpretation of “Organic Growth”*

According to Bugnini, a key architect of postconciliar liturgical reform, the analogy of a living “organism” has been used since at least 1947 to describe liturgical development. Regarding this process following Vatican II, he writes:

This kind of change is vitally necessary for a living organism. The liturgy feeds the Church’s life; it must therefore remain dynamic and not be allowed to stagnate or become petrified. Pius XII said as much in 1947 in this lapidary sentence: “The Liturgy is something lasting and alive.” And John XXIII: “The liturgy must not become a relic in a museum but remain the living prayer of the Church.”<sup>48</sup>

Pope John Paul II, in his 1988 apostolic letter *Vicesimus quintus annus*, fostered the use of the botanical analogy for interpreting the principle of organic growth of the liturgy. Arguing for the need to renew the spirit that inspired the preparation, promulgation, and application of SC, he wrote: “The seed was sown; it has known the rigours of winter, but the seed has sprouted, and become a tree. It is a matter of the organic growth of a tree becoming ever stronger the deeper it sinks its roots into the soil of tradition.”<sup>49</sup>

47. For example, in his critique of Bugnini’s work, Reid writes, “[Bugnini] does not regard the sacred liturgy as an objective organism handed on in tradition and only modified with the profound respect for the tradition according to that principle we term organic development. He regards liturgical tradition as something to be rediscovered through historical scholarship, edited according to current pastoral exigencies and posited juridically by authority regardless of what has been handed down in history” (“*Sacrosanctum Concilium* and the Organic Development of the Liturgy,” in *Genius of the Roman Rite* 198–215, at 212).

48. Bugnini, *Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* 44.

49. Pope John Paul II, “*Vicesimus quintus annus*: On the 25th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the Sacred Liturgy” no. 23, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_04121988\\_vicesimus-quintus-annus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_04121988_vicesimus-quintus-annus_en.html).

Following John Paul's lead, Ratzinger employed the botanical analogy consistently in his writing on the liturgy:

Just as a gardener cares for a living plant as it develops, with due attention to the power of growth and life within the plant and the rules it obeys, so the Church ought to give reverent care to the Liturgy through the ages, distinguishing actions that are helpful and healing from those that are violent and destructive.<sup>50</sup>

Elsewhere, Ratzinger wrote: "After the Council . . . in the place of the liturgy as a fruit of organic development came fabricated liturgy. We abandoned the organic, living process of growth and development over centuries, and replaced it—as in a manufacturing process—with a fabrication, a banal on-the-spot product."<sup>51</sup>

Reid also relies on the botanical analogy in his writing on the organic development of the liturgy: "There may be enrichment, there may be growth, there may even be some prudent pruning, but, the living organism that is the sacred liturgy received from tradition is not to become the cut-and-paste plaything of scholars, pastors or other experts."<sup>52</sup>

Nathan Mitchell uses a variation of the botanical analogy to explore the way the liturgy grows or develops throughout history, in and through its interactions with cultures. In an investigation of postmodern cultures and their effect on the functioning of the liturgy he prefers the analogy of the rhizome (which he defines as "a horizontal network of randomly connected roots") over the modernist analogy of a "vertical, tree-like structure with firm root systems, trunks, and branching extensions."<sup>53</sup> In contrasting postmodernist and modernist understandings of culture, Mitchell describes the former culture as "rhizomatic," resembling "crabgrass more than a grove of majestic maples" (i.e., modernist cultures).<sup>54</sup> He goes on to describe the functioning of liturgy today as "applied rhizomatics," which has a "mazelike, connective, crabgrass condition."<sup>55</sup> While Mitchell's theory offers a more sophisticated application of the basic

50. Ratzinger, preface to *Organic Development of the Liturgy* 9–14, at 9.

51. Ratzinger, "Klaus Gamber: 'L'intrépidité d'un vrai témoin'" 6–8, at 7.

52. Reid, "Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Organic Development of the Liturgy" 208. It is interesting to contrast these descriptions with the perspective of Joseph Jungmann who also employed the botanical analogy to describe liturgical change. In his hands, the botanical analogy became a tool for critiquing conservative approaches to liturgical change as stunting the organic growth process. In 1951 he wrote: "New forms, new inferences are continually being developed. But the inferences are developed only from what is at hand. There is no cutting back to the living roots, no springing forth of new, healthy growths. Scholastic theology produced nothing for the liturgy of the Mass or for a better understanding of it. So the forms appear over-ripe, the growth becomes dry and withered" (*Mass of the Roman Rite* 1:127–28).

53. Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, and Sacraments* (New York: Orbis, 2006) 8.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.* 44.

botanical analogy for understanding the forces of postmodern cultures and the pressure for change they exert on the liturgy, moving from images of majestic trees to rhizomatic crabgrass maintains a botanical interpretation of organic growth, which limits the applicability of this analogy. Substituting one plant analogy for another still leaves us with a botanical analogy with which to understand development and change in what is an anthropological and theological activity (liturgical celebration).

### *A Biological Interpretation of “Organic Growth”*

Other scholars see value in going beyond a botanical analogy to understand better the principle of organic growth of the liturgy using various metaphors. For example, in his exploration of the notion of “organic growth” Gerald O’Collins references John Henry Newman’s observation: “The adult animal has the same make as it had on its birth; young birds do not grow into fishes, nor does the child degenerate into the brute, wild or domestic.”<sup>56</sup> O’Collins comments:

Thus organic growth illustrates classically how, along with many obvious changes in size, in the capacity to do things, and in other regards, animals, birds, and human beings remain the same, identical beings. While passing through radical alterations, a certain correspondence persists between their rudimentary shape and their mature form. An unbroken succession of organic continuity links together the different stages of their lives and maintains their uninterrupted identity. Along with innumerable “alterations,” which we might call “secondary discontinuities,” at no point do they suffer a radical discontinuity, a deep break or “rupture” that would sever the connection with their past and cause them to go out of existence.<sup>57</sup>

The organic continuity of biological species throughout their lifecycles (despite undergoing significant changes) provides a useful analogy for investigating whether the liturgy of Vatican II represents continuity or discontinuity with what preceded it. The biological interpretation of the “organic growth” of the liturgy provides a metaphor that is more closely related to the human condition—developmentally and behaviorally we are more like animals than we are like plants—and it offers the potential for conceptualizing both continuity and change within the one image. However, like the botanical analogy, the Newman/O’Collins analogy continues to function at the level of description. Considering how the liturgical reforms of Vatican II can be seen to be in continuity with what preceded the council, a third analogy may offer a way to move beyond analogies of description and into one that has the capacity to explain the process of the organic growth of the liturgy. The third analogy comes from the field of neurology.

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56. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Doubleday, 1960) 177.

57. Gerald O’Collins, “Does Vatican II Represent Continuity or Discontinuity?,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 768–94, at 775.

## Neuroplasticity

In his book, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, Canadian psychiatrist Dr. Norman Doidge explores research into the phenomenon of neuroplasticity.<sup>58</sup> *Neuro* refers to neurons or the nerve cells in our brains and nervous systems, and *plastic* means changeable, malleable, or modifiable.<sup>59</sup> Because of its neuroplasticity, the brain has the capacity to change and evolve in order to enable the performance of various tasks and functions despite defect, trauma, age, genetics, and learned thought patterns and behaviors. Doidge chronicles experiments from the late 1960s onward, in which neuroscientists demonstrated that the brain “changed its very structure with each different activity it performed, perfecting its circuits so it was better suited to the task at hand. If certain ‘parts’ failed, then other parts could sometimes take over.”<sup>60</sup>

Earlier theories posited that the brain was like a glorious machine, unchanging, hardwired with permanently connected circuits, each located in an identifiable region of the brain, and each designed to perform a specific unchangeable function.<sup>61</sup> According to this view, if a particular part of the brain were damaged, it was assumed that “nothing could be done to replace it,”<sup>62</sup> and the part’s corresponding function would simply be lost. The evolving science of neuroplasticity, however, has demonstrated conclusively that this view is no longer tenable.<sup>63</sup> The brain can change; it can evolve to continue enabling the body to perform necessary functions despite being damaged; and it can continue to build new neural connections throughout one’s life rather than inevitably suffering performance decline with age.

Doidge explores numerous examples of neuroplasticity that indicate that the brain can be changed directly by outside influences intentionally introducing or withholding stimuli.<sup>64</sup> The brain has a plasticity-based learning cycle—in which stages of learning are followed by periods of consolidation, wherein the newly formed neural pathways are strengthened as “neurons that fire together, wire together.”<sup>65</sup> Doidge contends that the “brain is structured by its constant collaboration with the world,” and that because of its plasticity, the brain continues to change whenever a person has new experiences of the world.<sup>66</sup> Changes in the brain can be slow and incremental, but they can also be actively encouraged, learned intentionally, and embedded through deliberate habit-creating repetition. Alterations can also occur in response to traumatic events (such as a stroke), which can cause a radical shift in the brain’s normal functioning. Some of

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58. Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, rev. ed. (Melbourne: Scribe, 2010).

59. *Ibid.* xv.

60. *Ibid.* xvi–xv.

61. *Ibid.* xvi.

62. *Ibid.* 13.

63. Moriel Zelikowsky et al., “Prefrontal Microcircuit Underlies Contextual Learning after Hippocampal Loss,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 110.24 (April 2013), <http://www.pnas.org/content/110/24/9938.short>.

64. Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself* 51–52.

65. *Ibid.* 63.

66. *Ibid.* 91.

the research Doidge explores demonstrates that when the brain is damaged by trauma, it can “rewire” itself so that it can use completely different parts of its “cortical real estate” to enable certain functions to be performed that normally would have been controlled by the damaged region.<sup>67</sup> The brain requires stimulus to continue growing, Doidge explains, and that without stimulus it atrophies; the principle of “use it or lose it” certainly applies to brain functioning, as “neurons that fire apart, wire apart.”<sup>68</sup> According to Doidge research on neuroplasticity has shown that

every sustained activity ever mapped—including physical activities, sensory activities, learning, thinking, and imagining—changes the brain as well as the mind. Cultural ideas and activities are no exception. Our brains are modified by the cultural activities we do—be they reading, studying music, or learning new languages. We all have what might be called a culturally modified brain, and as cultures evolve, they continually lead to new changes in the brain.<sup>69</sup>

Such changes in the brain in response to outside stimuli or to pathways damaged by trauma or disease provide an analogue both to significant changes undergone by the liturgy historically in response to both internal and external stimuli and to how future changes can be understood as “organic.”

### **Liturgico-Plasticity: A Neurological Interpretation of “Organic Growth”**

Considering the notion that the liturgy has a “plastic” nature similar to the brain’s can provide a way to understand how it can both change radically and also remain integrally and identifiably itself, performing its various functions successfully through all its historical iterations. Over centuries, the liturgy has demonstrated the capacity for considerable—sometimes revolutionary—change due to the impact of external forces such as ecumenical councils, and the influence of the local cultures in which it is celebrated. The liturgy also possesses the capacity to absorb minor changes on account of the effect of internal forces such as varying presiders, or the presence of trained musicians to bring it to full expression. By “liturgico-plasticity,” therefore, I mean the liturgy’s capacity to absorb both major and minor change.

In all its incarnations, the liturgy continues to achieve its primary aims of glorifying God and sanctifying humankind.<sup>70</sup> These two aims are brought about in the liturgy as a work of God that accomplishes our redemption, and as the work of God’s people “serving as the means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”<sup>71</sup> Structurally, the

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67. *Ibid.* 51–52.

68. *Ibid.* 64.

69. *Ibid.* 288.

70. SC no. 10.

71. SC no. 2.

liturgy has an inbuilt plasticity by virtue of the multiple ways it achieves the same outcome depending on circumstances, liturgical season, level of solemnity, and presidential ability. The current liturgy of the Mass, for instance, includes multiple options for the penitential act, collects, prefaces, and Eucharistic prayers, each of which achieves its specific liturgical purpose despite taking a varied path. A eucharistic liturgy still realizes its desired outcomes if the *Gloria* is omitted during Lent, or if it has only a first reading, a psalm response, and a Gospel reading. A weekday Eucharist with no singing fulfills the same function as a solemn Eucharist in which most parts are sung. These several variations attest to the liturgy's internal plasticity.

Viewing the liturgy as "plastic" enables us to appreciate its capacity to grow and develop in response to outside influences that intentionally introduce different elements and stimulate liturgical change—as, for example, Charlemagne's introduction of the papal sacramentary of Hadrian into eighth-century Frankish liturgy.<sup>72</sup> The plastic nature of liturgy is apparent in the manner of its historical development,<sup>73</sup> in which liturgical innovations are followed by periods of consolidation during which newly learned ritual patterns are strengthened and embedded into the worship praxis of local assemblies.<sup>74</sup>

Like the brain, liturgy is structured by its constant collaboration with the world and changes occur in it because of the fact that it is performed by human beings who live in, experience, and interact with their environment. An obvious historical example of this occurred in the third and fourth centuries when cultural and linguistic changes in the Roman Empire resulted in a move from *koiné* Greek ("the spoken language of the people of the Hellenistic world") to Latin ("the public language of the western Roman

72. See Cyril Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. William G. Storey and Neils Krogh Rasmussen (Washington: Pastoral, 1986) 80–82.

73. There are innumerable historical examples of the plasticity of the liturgy such as variations in the Liturgy of the Hours as celebrated in Cathedrals compared with its parish, monastic, and private forms (see Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West: The Origins of the Divine Office and Its Meaning for Today* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1986]); and the concurrent diversity existing within families of rites, which Vogel described as "liturgical anarchy": "Liturgical uniformity did not exist in the Middle Ages, not even within a single ecclesiastical province. Different worship habits—some of them quite remarkable—coexisted within the same family of liturgies, and different liturgical families were often employed within the same country or region" (*Medieval Liturgy* 4). For further detail on major historical reforms of the liturgy that are indicative of its plasticity see: Pierre-Marie Gy, "Les réformes liturgiques et la sociologie historique dans la liturgie," in *Liturgiereformen: Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes*, vol. 1, *Biblische Modelle und Liturgiereformen von der Frühzeit bis zur Aufklärung*, ed. Martin Klöckener and Benedikt Kranemann (Münster: Aschendorff, 2002) 262–72.

74. This was also the case with the introduction of all of the revised rites following Vatican II. Consider how the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, for example, has become an integral part of the rhythm of Catholic parish life since its introduction in 1972 and its revision in 1984.

empire”).<sup>75</sup> Keith Pecklers explains that church leaders “opted for the use of Latin in worship as a practical means of helping people to pray publicly in a language they understood.”<sup>76</sup> The shift from Greek to Latin, Pecklers notes, serves as one of the earliest examples of liturgical inculturation of the Roman Liturgy, wherein the Roman Rite accommodated “particular cultural circumstances and needs, producing a liturgy that exhibits and reflects the cultural ethos of that particular celebrating people.”<sup>77</sup> Liturgico-plasticity enabled this change to occur even as the liturgy remained functional and intact, keeping its identity and achieving its aims despite absorbing the linguistic shift into Latin.

History has shown that the liturgy’s plasticity enables change in a slow and incremental manner, such as with the introduction of the *Gloria*, “which first appeared in the Roman Rite during the pontificate of Pope Symmachus (r. 498–514) on Sundays at Feasts during Masses at which bishops presided—a custom that was later extended to presbyteral liturgies as well.”<sup>78</sup> The liturgy’s plasticity also enables it to sustain the conscious introduction of changes that are learned intentionally and embedded through deliberate habit-creating repetition, such as was the case with the introduction of the English translation of the third edition of the Roman Missal in 2011.

Conceiving of the liturgy as “plastic” accounts not only for gradual liturgical variation but also for how the liturgy can continue to function despite traumatic or radical change. When radical intentional change within the body of the church occurs, plasticity enables the liturgy to be “rewired” so that what appear to be quite different ritual/linguistic processes (when compared with earlier versions of the liturgy) successfully perform the same functions differently. This type of change can be observed, for example, when elements are drawn into the liturgy from indigenous cultures through a process of liturgical inculturation, as occurs when a “smoking ceremony” replaces the penitential act among some native Australians. These new elements are then understood to perform the same function as the more traditional liturgical elements they replace.<sup>79</sup> The outcome of the changed/inculturated ritual action of the smoking

75. Mary Collins, “Language, Liturgical,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink, S.J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990) 653.

76. Keith F. Pecklers, S.J., *The Genius of the Roman Rite: On the Reception and Implementation of the New Missal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009) 7–8.

77. *Ibid.* 8.

78. Pecklers, *Reception and Implementation of the New Missal* 9. The *Liber pontificalis*, a collection of books begun in the third century that records information on the bishops of Rome and their key achievements, records that Pope Symmachus was responsible for introducing the *Gloria* into the opening rites of the Mass. See *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis to AD 715)*, trans. Raymond Davis (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1989).

79. Among some groups of indigenous Australians, for example, the penitential act in the liturgy is replaced with a “smoking ceremony”: green eucalyptus leaves are placed on a fire, and participants waft the generated smoke over their bodies in a symbolic gesture of cleansing away what is negative (sin) and allowing the purified to begin anew. See <http://museumvictoria.com.au/bunjilaka/about-us/smoking-ceremony>. This ceremony replaced the first incensing of the introductory rites at the papal Mass of Beatification for Mary

ceremony is the same among indigenous Australian peoples as that achieved by the penitential act for mainstream Catholics, but it takes a distinct form.

While neurological science has demonstrated that every activity of the brain changes it, liturgical theology teaches that every liturgical action changes those who celebrate it.<sup>80</sup> The worshipping assembly (the body of Christ) is willingly constituted to enact the work of the liturgy in openness to the transformative action of God. As such, the worshipping assembly is shaped, directed, inspired, energized, moved, and ultimately changed because of its ritual expression of belief.

Just as the brain requires stimulus to continue growing and ward off deterioration, so the liturgy needs to use its plasticity to interact with the outside stimuli of the real lives and cultures of those who celebrate it, if it is to continue to speak the Christian message. If the official Catholic Church does not permit the liturgy to grow organically in dialogue with contemporary cultures, it risks atrophying and sliding into irrelevance, as numbers of the faithful attending and participating in the liturgy (and the life of the church more generally) continue to decline.

The process of liturgical inculturation constitutes the most obvious example of how organic growth of the liturgy may occur in the future. If the *editiones typicae* of the liturgy are permitted to interact with the genius and talents of local peoples, then a liturgy can be produced “whose shape, language, rites, symbols, and artistic expressions reflect the cultural pattern of the local church.”<sup>81</sup> The process of organic growth understood in terms of liturgical inculturation challenges conservative preferences

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MacKillop celebrated by Pope John Paul II in January 1995 at Randwick Racecourse, Sydney, NSW. See Carmel Pilcher, “The Ceremony of Beatification of Mary MacKillop, Sydney, January 1995,” *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 5 (1996) 197–99. Aboriginal Australians have long understood the antiseptic properties of eucalyptus, which they regularly use for cleansing and healing remedies. With the intentional use of leaves from particular species of eucalyptus in the ritual cleansing/healing of the smoking ceremony/penitential rite in the liturgy, additional layers of meaning emerge from this inculturated ritual action. Details of the medicinal uses of eucalyptus among Australia’s Aboriginal peoples are identified in Christine A. Jones, “The Medicinal Properties and Bush Foods of Eucalypts,” Newsletter of the Australian Food Plants Study Group (February 1997), Australian Plants Online, [http://anpsa.org.au/APOL9/mar98\\_2.html](http://anpsa.org.au/APOL9/mar98_2.html). See also: Erich V. Lassak and Tara McCarthy, *Australian Medicinal Plants* (Sydney, NSW: New Holland, 2001).

80. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992) 73.

81. Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical 1994) 37. Liturgical inculturation was articulated initially as “cultural adaptation of the liturgy” in SC nos. 37–40 and developed subsequently by numerous liturgical scholars, in particular Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B. See his *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist 1982); *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist 1989); *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical 1994); *Worship: Beyond Inculturation* (Washington: Pastoral, 1994); and *Worship: Progress and Tradition* (Beltsville, MD: Pastoral 1995).

for a liturgy that remains largely unchanged regardless of the cultural circumstances within which it is celebrated.<sup>82</sup> Cultural adaptation of the liturgy is and has always been an essential aspect of the liturgy's process of organic growth throughout history.<sup>83</sup> This process is by no means unregulated, as all proposals for liturgical inculturation must receive approval from the Apostolic See, whose authority in this matter is exercised through the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.<sup>84</sup>

Understanding the organic growth of the liturgy through the analogy of the organic growth of the human brain, with plasticity being a shared characteristic of both, can provide a way to see that development of the 1962 rite to the Missal of Paul VI was an instance of organic growth. Viewed in terms of liturgico-plasticity, the postconciliar liturgy can be understood to be fundamentally in continuity with the preconciliar liturgy, despite using different linguistic forms, ritual patterns, musical idioms, presidential orientation, and placement of the altar. The rite is still the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church, performing the same functions and achieving the same outcomes as it did prior to the council.

The theory of liturgico-plasticity offers a way to understand that organic growth of the liturgy has occurred, even if the postconciliar liturgical reform is judged (by reform-of-the-reform writers, for example) to have disrupted the organic growth that might have been expected in the normal course of events, had Vatican II not occurred and had the Consilium not implemented SC as it did. To extend the analogy to an extreme, even if the postconciliar liturgical reform process is viewed as a rupture (analogous to a stroke in the brain),<sup>85</sup> the theory of liturgico-plasticity posits that, given time, practice, and the right intent, the liturgy still has the capacity to perform

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82. Joseph Ratzinger explains that "the Eucharist does not have its origin in the local church and does not end there. . . . The Eucharist always comes from the outside, out of the whole, the one body of Christ coming to us and leading us into the body. . . . The community must receive the Eucharist from the Lord through the mediation of the one Church" ("On the Relation of the Universal Church and the Local Church in Vatican II," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 22, 2000. See also Joseph Ratzinger, "Assessment and Future Prospects," in *Looking Again at the Question of Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger: Proceedings of the July 2001 Fontgombault Liturgical Conference*, ed. Alcuin Reid (Farnborough: Saint Michael's Abbey, 2003) 148.

83. Even Ratzinger acknowledges this point: "Only very slowly and with the greatest of caution did the growing Church take up certain of the external forms of pagan liturgies" (*Feast of Faith* 80). He goes on to admit that what concerns him most is the rapidity, extent, and "mechanical" process of the liturgical changes undertaken following Vatican II. See also Ratzinger, "Assessment and Future Prospects" 147–48.

84. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Fourth Instruction on the Correct Implementation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* nos. 37–40, "Varietates Legitimae: On the Roman Liturgy and Inculturation," *Origins* 23 (1994) 745, 747–56.

85. Doidge describes a stroke as a "sudden calamitous blow" from within that causes "a blood clot or bleed in the brain's arteries (which) cuts off oxygen to the brain's tissues, killing them" (*The Brain That Changes Itself* 135).

the same ritual functions it did prior to the rupture. Naturally different ritual pathways and areas of the liturgical landscape would be used to perform those same functions, but equivalent outcomes would be achieved.

Though perhaps somewhat unexpected within the typical discourse of liturgical studies, the analogy of neuroplasticity is apposite in this context because it explores the same anthropological and human neurological functions that are involved in the act of liturgical celebration. Liturgico-plasticity provides an explanation for how the liturgy, as a complex divine–human ritual interaction, whereby faith in the paschal mystery is expressed and nourished, changes over time in relation to human cultural experience and expression.

### **What Does a New Interpretation of “Organic Growth” of the Liturgy Provide?**

All analogies have their strengths and weaknesses, but as Ormerod suggests, when an analogy functions only descriptively rather than explanatorily and processually, its limitations quickly become apparent.<sup>86</sup> Because the botanical interpretation of the principle of the liturgy’s organic growth functions only descriptively, it is incapable of either revealing the manner in which organic growth of the liturgy has occurred or identifying a process through which future growth can occur.

Substituting a neurological interpretation of “organic growth” for a botanical one makes room for considering different aspects of the process of development within the liturgical organism. Except for the fact of their existence, plants do not intentionally praise God, though their very existence serves *unintentionally* to offer God praise in much the same way that rocks, oceans, animals, and other creatures are said to “praise” God.<sup>87</sup> Lacking the will, intention, imagination, and awareness inherent to humans, plants are unable to engage *consciously* in growth or development and cannot *imagine* or effect a different way of existing in the world. This limits the applicability of the botanical analogy for understanding the intrinsically human process of liturgical reform. The neurological interpretation of “organic growth” of the liturgy with its unique plasticity has numerous conceptual advantages over the botanical analogy, because human brains have the capacity to praise God consciously, engage in intentional activities that result in growth/development, and imagine new existential possibilities, all of which are necessary components of the ongoing process of liturgical reform.

The replicability of neurological structure, operations, and function throughout the human species adds to the reliability and stability of the neurological analogy for describing the liturgy both in its countless contemporary instantiations and as it has functioned throughout history.<sup>88</sup> The functional predictability of the human brain is

86. See Ormerod, “Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity?” 612.

87. See, e.g., Pss 69:34; 98:7–9; 103:22; 148; and Dan 3:57–88 (Canticle) and Lk19:40.

88. Doidge explains that “plasticity has been, after all, a property inherent in the brain since prehistoric times. The brain is a far more open system than we ever imagined, and nature

akin to the functional predictability of the liturgy regardless of linguistic, geographic, or social conditions. Neurological maps of brain function can be seen to operate predictably in all typical human beings,<sup>89</sup> just as accurate enactment of the *editiones typicae* of the liturgy can be seen to operate predictably, achieving the desired outcomes (glorification of God, sanctification of humankind).

Unlike the neurological map or the liturgical *editiones typicae*, individual brains and individual liturgical celebrations necessarily differ due to the conditions within which they operate: internal and external influences impact on their functionality and performance capacity, both historically and proximally; exposure to varying levels of stimulation/education over time shapes each differently; and each harbors unknown potential for change/adaptation/advancement alongside the possibility of nonrealization of anticipated goals/outcomes in practice.

A distinct advantage of the neurological analogy for comprehending the process of liturgical development is that it provides a way to understand the liturgical changes brought about by Vatican II as being in continuity with the preconciliar liturgy. Conceptualizing liturgical continuity (despite change) by this analogy resonates with Benedict XVI's hermeneutic of reform, which finds a "renewal in the continuity of the one subject—Church . . . a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remain[s] the same."<sup>90</sup> Applying a neurological analogy to understand the nature of development in the liturgy in light of its inherent plasticity provides a way for both the continuity and discontinuity perspectives on postconciliar liturgical change to be considered within a single analogy. With the notion of liturgico-plasticity, both continuity and discontinuity can be understood as "organic," and the debate on postconciliar liturgical developments can move beyond its current stalemate to consider more productive criteria, such as "authenticity/unauthenticity."<sup>91</sup> Ormerod observes:

Large-scale social and cultural changes are extremely complex. To attempt to reduce the complexity through a single metaphor such as continuity versus discontinuity is never going to be adequate to that complexity. More importantly, perhaps, the metaphor itself may be misleading. Human communities, particularly international communities such as the Church, are grounded in shared meanings and values. The most important changes in the life of any community are shifts in those meanings and values. But such changes cannot be

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has gone very far to help us perceive and take in the world around us. It has given us a brain that survives in a changing world by changing itself" (*The Brain That Changes Itself* 26).

89. An important point Doidge highlights with regard to the notion of a universally applicable "brain map" is that researchers such as Michael Merzenich have discovered that these maps "are neither immutable within a single brain nor universal but vary in their borders and size from person to person. In a series of brilliant experiments he showed that the shape of our brain maps changes depending upon what we do over the course of our lives" (ibid. 49). This fact does not alter the broad principle that in typical human beings, a map of which parts of the brain effect particular functions is applicable, though the size, interconnection, and development of those areas of the brain differ in individuals.

90. Benedict XVI, "Christmas Address."

91. Ormerod, "Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity?" 613.

measured; meaning has no “metric” that would allow us to measure its changes as continuous or discontinuous over time.<sup>92</sup>

As a way of evaluating liturgical change, the continuity/discontinuity metaphor tends to compare uninterrupted progress with an abrupt change from a previously clear course of direction. In contrast, the authenticity/unauthenticity metaphor focuses on the distillation or reframing of the message within a new context, testing whether the traditional content of the message remains consistent in its new iteration. The authenticity/unauthenticity metaphor seems to be far more in keeping with the stated goals of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>93</sup> According to these productive criteria, determining the authenticity of the postconciliar liturgical reforms necessitates evaluation of successful distillation or reframing of the liturgy’s traditional content within their postconciliar form. Furthermore, judging authenticity entails discovering whether the postconciliar liturgical reforms continue to produce the essential outcomes achieved by the liturgy throughout history (maintaining the substantial unity of the Roman Rite, as SC no. 38 mandates), which are, in the broadest terms, the glorification of God and the sanctification of humankind.

Investigations into the principle of organic growth will likely continue to resort to analogies to define and explain the process of liturgical change.<sup>94</sup> This is due to the dominant and authoritative status of this principle (as introduced by an ecumenical council—see SC no. 23), which forms an analogical touchstone that must be dealt with in all considerations of this process until a new official statement of equivalent authority emerges. The principle of organic growth of the liturgy should be advanced further, however, by using richer and varied analogies that describe how specific processes of liturgical change (both historic and prognostic) exhibit this principle, rather than weaker analogies that describe only the fact of liturgical change.

Understanding the liturgy analogically—in terms of a vital, adaptable, human organ such as the brain—and embracing the notion of its plasticity reduces ecclesial fear of liturgical reform and moderates concerns that the revised liturgy may not perform its intended functions when its appearance, language, or structure changes. To be sure,

92. Ibid. 611–12.

93. In his October 11, 1962, opening address at the council, Pope John XXIII declared: “It is necessary first of all that the Church should never depart from the sacred treasure of truth inherited from the fathers. But at the same time, she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world, which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate. . . . The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another” (“Pope John’s Opening Speech to the Council,” *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. [New York: America, 1966] 710–19, at 714–15).

94. Tracy explains that analogy is a classic theological language, and that analogy inevitably is the hermeneutic tool of choice for theologians seeking to advance theological understanding, as “theologians cannot simply repeat: they must critically interpret the tradition” in light of both history and contemporary contexts and needs (*Analogical Imagination* 405).

some level of discomfort is to be expected when worshipping communities are asked to adjust to new liturgical rituals and texts. Vatican II and, more recently, the introduction of the third revised translation of the Missal of Paul VI each brought about this sort of discomfort. If, however, liturgical change can be understood (via the analogy of liturgico-plasticity) as a natural organic process that occurs under the influence of both internal and external stimuli in both subtle and radical ways, then current and future forms of the liturgy can potentially be seen more clearly as authentic representations of Christian tradition and doctrinal expression. This understanding may ease some of the temporary discomfort caused by liturgical change.

A new explanatory and processual analogy such as the theory of liturgico-plasticity can bring a fresh perspective that can forge a way forward through ideological impassés. The liturgico-plasticity analogy, I have suggested, engages the theological imagination to envision the process of organic growth of the liturgy, providing a salutary way to embrace the positive aspects of both continuity and discontinuity while organic liturgical growth occurs.

### **Author biography**

Clare V. Johnson received her PhD in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame and is now senior lecturer in liturgical studies and sacramental theology at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield, NSW. With four other authors, she has recently published “*Sacrosanctum Concilium* at Fifty: Reports from Five English-Speaking Countries – 1. Australia,” *Worship* 87.6 (2013); “Transcending Text: Liturgy as Medium of Evangelisation 50 years after Vatican II,” *Australian Journal of Liturgy* (2013); “Portals to Transcendence,” in *At the Heart of the Liturgy* (2014); and “Liturgical Intelligibility in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” in *Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy* (2013). In progress are a liturgical biography of Archbishop Guilford Young and an investigation of theological conceptions of the infant as faith subject.