

the eucharistic ecclesiology of SC (71). Faggioli is at his best when spelling out the disastrous consequences of Pope Benedict's *motu proprio*, *Summorum Pontificum* (2007), which liberalized the use of the pre-Vatican II liturgy. *Pace* Pope Benedict, SC represents a new *lex credendi* (rule of believing) for the church, and support for the old liturgy is thus a rejection of the council tout court (91–92, 150). In my estimation Faggioli is correct in assessing the so-called reform of the reform and current attempts to undermine the liturgical reform as the “fruit of a fascination with a world that does not exist anymore” (164).

I cannot recommend this book strongly enough for anyone who is concerned with studying the theological implications of the liturgical reform of the past fifty years. It would probably not be very useful for undergraduates, but it certainly should be considered for graduate seminars on Vatican II. Anyone who teaches liturgy and/or sacraments should have this book on his or her shelf.

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*Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love.* By Elizabeth A. Johnson. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. x + 323 pages. \$32.95.  
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In her latest book, *Ask the Beasts*, renowned theologian Elizabeth Johnson, distinguished professor at Fordham University, seeks to explore the theological meaning of the natural world of life. The book's title, taken from the biblical book of Job (12:7), reveals the starting point and operative approach: ask the beasts and they will teach you. “The invitation to consult the plants and animals harbors the demand for a subtle change of method,” she claims, “stepping outside the usual theological conversation that begins with the human person and placing the ‘other’ (natural world) at the center of attention” (xv). The author pursues what she calls a “turn to the earth,” a new “subjective” focus in theology, with each aspect of the natural world as “subject.” “The result,” she says, “changes not just what one may think about creatures themselves, but sets up a challenging dynamic that reconfigures all of theological interpretation so that it honors their lives” (xv). This is a book with an ambitious aim. The growing area of ecological theology, according to Johnson, demands careful consideration of “the natural world in its own right as an irreplaceable element in the theological project” (xv).

Johnson's book is a rich tapestry of poetic imagery, theological metaphors, and the basics of Darwinian evolution. About a third of the book is a detailed

discussion of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). The richness of the discussion flows from a yearlong Fordham University faculty seminar on Darwin's *Origin of Species* in which the author participated. Johnson is an excellent writer, theologian, and poet. Her work can inspire the most learned of scholars and yet reach the educated layperson in the pew. But does *Ask the Beasts* achieve what it sets out to do—namely, elaborate a new theology of ecology? In my view, it does not, for several reasons. First, ecology is explored solely in the context of Darwinian evolution, even though ecology is much more than species variation and descent. There is no discussion, for example, of systems biology, information theory, thermodynamics, or the complexity of ecosystems. Evolution, too, is narrowly defined, constricted to the world of nature and given a stern reprimand with regard to the human realm: "The fatal flaw lies in transferring a scientific theory about a biological process that happens without conscious intent to the arena of human interaction where causes are intentional, willful, and complex" (103). While I understand the author's concerns about using the concept of evolution to support social Darwinism and eugenics, bracketing evolution around the name "Darwin" means turning a blind eye to the impact of evolution on human culture, economics, and religion. "Evolution" is not a biological word but a word appropriated by Darwin to explain change in the natural world. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who was a practicing scientist, had no qualms about stating that evolution is a precondition for all other thinking, including culture, politics, and socialization. Second, while the most interesting section of the book is the detailed discussion of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, the discussion is more fitting to the history of science than to theological discourse. The detailed exploration of *Origin* does not broaden or deepen a theology of ecology, although it does complement the work of late twentieth-century theologians, including Karl Rahner, Denis Edwards, and Niels Gregersen. Johnson does a fine job of explaining a slightly dated theology of ecology and includes an impassioned argument for Thomas Aquinas' primary and secondary causality. Although ecology involves relationality and process, there is no room for process theology here; that is, there is no true relationality between God and creation. This is a God whose exuberant being has divine tenure and no real need to struggle through to something more. The world of nature contributes nothing to God. Creation is the outflow of sheer divine benevolence. It is disheartening that Johnson omits the work of the most renowned ecotheologian of the twentieth century, Thomas Berry. His name is not even listed in the index! Finally, a "turn to the earth" with a new theology of the subject is not new. Franciscan theology has expounded creation theology since the thirteenth

century, when Francis of Assisi sang of “brother sun and sister moon” and preached to birds and flowers.

Johnson’s book is well crafted, and its aim is noteworthy. “Theology in our ecological era needs to broaden its anthropocentric focus for its own adequacy,” she writes. “It needs to reclaim the natural world as an essential element both theoretically and in practice or risk missing one of the most critical religious issues of our age which will affect all foreseeable ages to come” (3). Restricting evolution to Darwin, however, is problematic. One has only to look at events such as the recent “Global Future 2045: Toward a New Strategy for Human Evolution” congress to realize we are on the cusp of a brave new world. Evolution is not simply about ecological fecundity but the future as well. To “ask the beasts” might have worked in the ancient era; however, it no longer works for us. We are already on our way to something new, and there will be no turning back.

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*Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life.* By Cardinal Walter Kasper. Translated by William Madges. New York: Paulist Press, 2014. xvi + 264 pages. \$29.95 (paper).  
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In recent months, Cardinal Walter Kasper has received a tremendous amount of attention, with commentators from several arenas referring to him as “the pope’s theologian.” In certain ways, the catalyst for the enhanced interest in this longtime theologian and former president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity is his recent volume, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. In Pope Francis’ first Angelus address, the pope singled out this text, noting, “This book has done me such good.” As William Madges remarks in the “Translator’s Preface,” it is not hard to see that “the central themes of this book prefigure key elements in Pope Francis’ vision of the church’s mission and his own pontificate” (ix). Like Francis, Kasper seeks to engage rich and complex theological questions in ways that speak meaningfully to the experience of contemporary men and women.

Readers will soon see why this volume is worthy of all the attention that it has received. Kasper’s treatment of mercy is actually a tour-de-force examination of the doctrine of God from scriptural, philosophical, historical, systematic, and contemporary perspectives. Kasper laments that the Christian tradition has long focused on metaphysical attributes of God (God as Being Itself, all-knowing, all-powerful, etc.) while ignoring God’s mercy as a less definitive attribute, revealed primarily in history. A failure to fully account