

ANALYZING THE TRENDS, NOT THE HEADLINES

THE FUTURE CHURCH: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church, by John L. Allen, Jr. Doubleday. 469 pp. \$28.

Reviewed by PAT McCLOSKEY, O.F.M., editor of this publication. Between 1986 and 1992 he served as communications director at the international headquarters in Rome of the Order of Friars Minor.

JOHN ALLEN is one of today's most highly respected writers regarding the Catholic Church. Vatican correspondent and Web columnist ("Word From Rome") for *National Catholic Reporter*, he has also served as an analyst for CNN and National Public Radio. Having traveled to 40 countries on all continents and interviewed hundreds of local Church leaders, Allen is frequently invited to address diocesan and national Catholic meetings.

"The aim of this book," he writes, "is to survey the most important currents shaping the Catholic Church today, and to look down the line at how they might play out during the rest of the 21st century." Allen focuses on trends, not on headlines. He devotes separate chapters to each trend. Another chapter explains why he does not see 25 recurring news items as trends.

The 10 trends are a world Church, evangelical Catholicism, Islam, the new demography, expanding lay roles, the biotech revolution, globalization, ecology, multipolarism and Pentecostalism.

Allen describes what is driving each trend and its impact on the Catholic Church. A "What's Happening" section is followed by "What It Means," possible lines of development ranging from near-certain to long shots.

"Anybody hoping for a straight, one-

way line of development in the upside-down Church will be disappointed. Catholicism is too big and too complex not to contain conflicting tendencies. It's not really a question of which way the Church will go, but which ways—and sometimes that movement will be pulling in opposite directions," Allen says.

In 1900, 25 percent of Catholics lived outside Europe and North America ("the North" for Allen). In 2000, 75 percent of Catholics lived in Latin America, Africa and Asia ("the South" for Allen).

Allen cites estimates that there are more Christians than Communists in the People's Republic of China. Christians and Muslims each comprise about 45 percent of Africa's population.

He writes that mainline liberal Christians want to reach a détente with modernity, evangelicals want to convert it and Pentecostals want to set it on fire. Each tendency is represented within Catholicism today.

According to the World Christian Database for 2007, there were 1.6 billion

Muslims worldwide and 2.2 billion Christians. In the *CIA World Factbook*, only three of the top 10 Muslim countries have substantial Arab populations. Population is growing in the South but declining in the North. Not one of the 27 European Union countries has a fertility rate above the replacement level.

Allen sees parish-based nursing programs as a growing trend in the United States. In 2005, roughly 80 percent of the 31,000 lay ecclesial ministers in the United States were women. A Catholic woman may well head a Vatican agency in this century. The exploding field of bioethics seems to be the most popular research area for moral theologians.

"In its literal sense," writes Allen,

"globalization refers to the transformation of local and regional realities into global ones, uniting the people of the world in a single global market and society. Globalization is the 'mother of all mega-trends.'"

Later he writes, "No concept looms larger in Catholic environmentalism than human beings as stewards of creation, meaning caretakers rather than masters." He sees urban agriculture as rising.

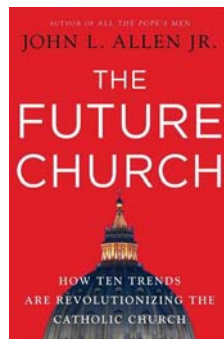
Multipolarism recognizes Brazil, Russia, India and China as important sources of world trends. India's Dalits, or untouchables, comprise 60 to 75 percent of that country's Catholics. Many of Brazil's indigenous people are Catholic. Asia's bishops emphasize the need to dialogue with that continent's great cultures, its great religions and its poor people.

Pentecostalism has a powerful missionary impulse, helping people experience the Spirit's power in their lives. In the North, lukewarm or dissatisfied Catholics tend to become secularized; in the South they become Pentecostals.

In the concluding chapter, Allen writes that if Catholicism is to generate the imagination needed to meet the challenges of these trends, "it is not principally a task for the hierarchy. It should be carried out in communion with the Church's leadership, of course, but it cannot depend upon them." Rejecting Catholicism's both/and "genetic predisposition," tribalism threatens its very communion.

The "Suggestions for Further Reading" section offers between six and 13 resources for each trend. In places, Allen's book is longer than this reviewer felt was necessary, but overall this book is pure gold.

THEA'S SONG: The Life of Thea Bowman, by Charlene Smith and John Feister. Orbis Books. 360 pp. \$28.



A world Church

Reviewed by CECILIA MOORE, Ph.D., associate director of the Degree Program of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana and assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Dayton.

SISTER THEA BOWMAN, F.S.P.A., remains one of the most beloved and powerful African-American Catholics of all time. Those who knew her personally recall her as friend, teacher, mentor, leader, preacher, activist, singer, founder and champion of the marginalized in society.

Many who did not know her directly feel they did because of the profound influence she had on people who did know her. The opportunities for learning and growth she worked to ensure for generations to come are her legacies at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, and at other schools and colleges at which she taught.

This month marks the 20th anniversary of her death. Her life of holiness and grace still seems to speak to us today. Throughout the United States there are schools, institutes and scholarships named for Sister Thea. Many young women and girls in the African-American community are named Thea after her. Her beauty and compassion inspired books and great works of art.

Given the power Sister Thea still has to move, challenge and inspire, this wonderful new biography will be greeted with great joy and anticipation. The book was written by Charlene Smith, a member of her community, and John Feister, periodicals editor for this publishing house and on the staff of *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine.

The authors of *Thea's Song* took on a massive and important task when they sought to write her biography in a manner that would "sing." Though Sister Thea died at 52, she lived a big life and sang a big song. Getting their hands around the paper trail she left, their arms around the people whose lives she touched and their minds around the personal, religious and cultural significance of this African-American Catholic woman religious was no mean feat.

Smith and Feister mined the tremendous archive of personal and religious papers that Sister Thea left to give stunning and sparkling detail to her incredibly interesting life.

It seems that Thea's parents, Dr. Theon and Mrs. Mary Bowman, had a feeling from the time their daughter was born that she was someone who would do very special things. The records they kept of her earliest years are amazing, as are the caches of letters Thea wrote to them in over 30 years of religious life.

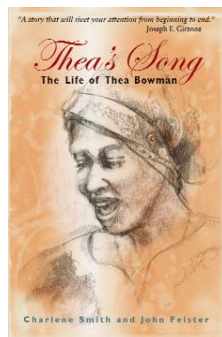
In addition to these sources, Smith and Feister also used the archives of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Margaret Walker Alexander Research Center at Jackson State University in Mississippi. They also conducted extensive personal interviews with friends, teachers and students of Sister Thea.

The book is animated. The authors build wonderful historical platforms on which she returns in her own words. In *Thea's Song*, Smith and Feister wisely

choose to use extensive portions of her letters, articles, essays, prayers and public addresses. A definite spiritual energy comes across in this volume, and the source of that energy is Thea's direct voice.

Another wise choice the authors made was to give considerable space in the biography to develop the important relationships that nurtured and encouraged her throughout her life. She was a person who regarded people as central to her life. To know and appreciate Sister Thea is to know and appreciate her wide and diverse circle of family and friends.

Finally, Smith and Feister centered Sister Thea's life in the grand narrative



Song of unity

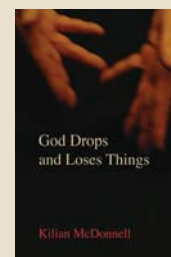
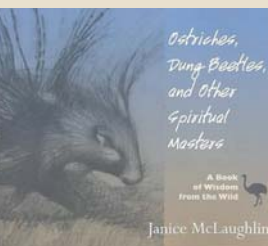
Inspiration for the Taking

Small packages sometimes deliver the best presents. For good Lenten meditation, consider these small treasures.

■ **OSTRICHES, DUNG BEETLES, AND OTHER SPIRITUAL MASTERS: A Book of Wisdom From the Wild**, by Janice McLaughlin (Orbis Books, 148 pp., \$18), is a Maryknoll sister's reflections on African wildlife. After 35 years there, she's learned from the elephant about community and from the hippopotamus, humility and self-acceptance. It includes delightful black-and-white sketches.

■ **CELTIC WISDOM: Treasures From Ireland**, by Cindy Thomson (Kregel Publications, P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI, 96 pp., \$12.95). This gem, originally published in Oxford, England, is a collection of Celtic sayings, stories and prayers, augmented by beautiful photos of the Emerald Isle. It starts with short chapters on Sts. Patrick and Brigid and "the Twelve Apostles of Erin."

■ **GOD DROPS AND LOSES THINGS**, by Kilian McDonnell (St. John's University Press, Collegeville, MN, 70 pp., \$11.95), is the third collection of poetry by this monk/theologian. He imagines what Jesus thought when he handed the wine-soaked bread to Judas at the Last Supper and what the apostles thought when the Risen Jesus dropped in for dinner. And Father Kilian ponders his own and other brothers' aging.



—B.B.

of African-American life in the 20th century. She was both shaped by and a shaper of African-American religion, culture and history. *Thea's Song* captures this very well.

This is a book for anyone who wants to know how the life and faith of one person can help transform and enrich a universal Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and inspire hope and determination in future generations. If you did not know Sister Thea or anyone who knew her personally, read this

ANSWERS TO PETE AND REPEAT

1. The hair on Pete's forehead is more full.
2. Sis is wearing a white shirt under her sweater.
3. Sis's headband is gone.
4. Book has a picture.
5. Time has changed on the clock.
6. Grandpa has a turtleneck under his shirt.
7. Grandpa's shirt has an extra button.
8. There's a line missing from a brick under Grandpa's foot.

So that his work
might continue...



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book and you will be on your way to knowing and loving her.

BREAKFAST WITH BENEDICT: Daily Readings, by Pope Benedict XVI, edited by Bert Ghezzi. Our Sunday Visitor. 208 pp. \$15.95.

Reviewed by ELIZABETH YANK, an avid reader, homeschool mother and freelance writer from South Milwaukee.

LET'S FACE IT: We're all busy. We may have good intentions of setting aside time for spiritual reading, but that doesn't always happen. But in *Breakfast With Benedict: Daily Readings*, popular author Bert Ghezzi has compiled a series of short meditations from Pope Benedict XVI that cover a wide variety of topics, such as "the beauty of the liturgy, comforter of the afflicted, the mission of youth" and more.

We too easily get caught up in the world and forget what life is all about. Reading Benedict XVI restores our focus on Christ, the good gifts God has given us, the purpose of our existence. Drawing on his homilies, speeches, encyclicals and many books, Ghezzi introduces us to Pope Benedict on a level to which we can all relate. Ultimately, Pope Benedict challenges us to live more deeply and authentically the words of Christ.

This book is ideal for setting the tone for the day or for refocusing our attention on the higher things during the day, or for lifting our minds to God's goodness and grace at the close of the day, so that our last thoughts may be peaceful and holy.

One motif Pope Benedict brings up over and over again is God's merciful love for us. Many of the pope's reflections touch on the theme of love or mention some aspect of love, God's love for us, our vocation to love, our need to love God and those around us. The pope challenges us to love more as

God has loved us—"in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know."

He begs us to open our hearts to God's love: "Let no heart be closed to the omnipotence of [God's] redeeming love." He pleads with us that God's love is for us all: "Jesus Christ died and rose for all; he is our hope—true hope for every human being."

He asks us to rest secure in God's love, and to "remain in his love." To those who are searching for love, he says, "We were created as social beings

who find fulfillment only in love—for God and for our neighbor."

While Pope Benedict's message of love is constant, the topics he covers are many: the Holy Spirit, evangelization, Catholic social conscience, interpreting Scripture, Mary, the poor, the sacraments and more.

Through it all, Pope Benedict's approach nev-

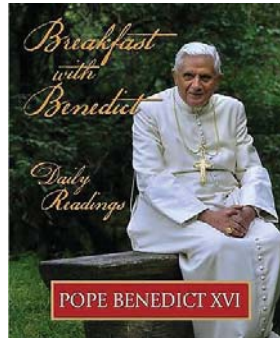
er varies. He is kind, gentle and loving, inviting us all to love God as God loves us.

In addition to the numerous meditations, *Breakfast With Benedict* includes a brief overview of the pope's life, a short summary of the themes he touches on in his many works and a list of the subjects he addressed during his visit to the United States in April 2008. The book closes with a simple prayer for the pope.

Breakfast With Benedict is a book to read and reread, not just for breakfast, but any short pause during the day when you need a little spiritual refreshment.

ANIMAL KINGDOM, by Pavel Chichikov. Kaufmann Publishing. 96 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by PHILIP C. KOLIN, first Charles W. Moorman Alumni Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and a professor of English at the University of Southern Mississippi. He is the author of A Parable of Women, a book of poems.



Refocuses our attention

IT IS SAID that God wrote two books to help us understand him and each other—the Book of Holy Writ and the Book of Nature. With his new volume of deeply evocative and powerfully meditative poems, Pavel Chichikov has opened the second of God's books and found many wonders and abundant instruction there.

As in his earlier three volumes of poetry, beginning with *Lion Sun* in 1999, Chichikov has anchored his work to the Catholic way of seeing things in the natural world. Emulating St. Francis, Chichikov looks for the signs of God's beauty and mystery in his creatures, great and small.

The 76 poems in this collection focus on how various species reflect the glory and order of God's great economy of being and how they shame us who have erringly departed from the natural graces that God instills in his creatures. God "knows what they need, loves what they sing/Feeds them and blesses them all through the winter."

Combining the faith of Noah with the precision of Linnaeus and the artistry of Audubon, Chichikov includes poems on creatures that crawl and swim as well as those that range and soar—the span worm and the insects that look like leaves of beech ("hairy harvestmen"), the caterpillar (a frequent symbol of humanity's own transformation) who "feeds on rue," a hatchery of fish, fox and cats (who receive a lot of his attention), a buzzard "which looks well fed" and birds of many stripes and sizes.

In beautifully graphic and original ways, he describes their world of feathers, claws, wings, webs, fleece, tails and hooves, beaks and bills, "pointy snouts," eggs and bones, "beards and horns," combs and plumes, "dorsal fin[s] of knives" and "broken sticks and shadows."

Awash with color and enticing design, Chichikov's spiritual menagerie offers us no less than the "pageant of creation." We see "chestnut horses," rooks with "dusk blue streaks," other birds with wings like "orange anti-

phons," a "deep rough red fox," grackles who "fall like drops of black blood."

Each animal evokes from the speaker a metaphorical title, such as the mouse-let who is the "eyeless Orpheus" or the centipede who is "the little champion/A warrior for this or any age."

Like all great poets, Chichikov is not afraid to take risks in describing his subjects. In "The Act," he makes us eyewitnesses to "swollen spiders" in "their gripping tryst" with "eightfold...legs together," but after impregnation, the male "takes a silken wire slide to the abyss/ The wonder of an impresario."

But while Chichikov dazzles us with his keen observations, imaginative flights of metaphor and metaphysical wit reminiscent of 17th-century poets John Donne and George Herbert, his poems teach us valuable parables about our place in "this house of creation."

In "Saint Anthony and the Crappie,"

the fish are "sanctified"—"Their eyes are round and lidless, stare,/Their heads are shaken once or twice,/They lash their tails, the sign of prayer,/And who'd deny them paradise?" But while "May-hatched mantids climb through hazel" and "An orb web weaver spins mandalas," "Men unspin their unborn babies."

Accompanying Chichikov's poems are about 20 drawings and photos of animals, a verbal and visual world of splendor calling to mind Renaissance emblem books that delighted the eye and ear as much as they scolded the senses for departing from the natural order of creation. Chichikov's animals "function blindly by the laws/Established, still the universe applauds." Can we say the same? A



Great and small

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Thea's Song

The Life of Thea Bowman

CHARLENE SMITH and JOHN FEISTER

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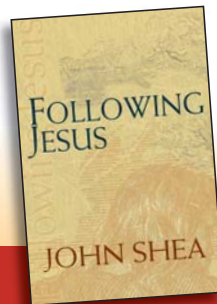
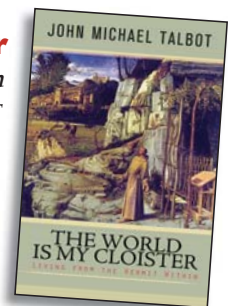
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