

# BookMarks

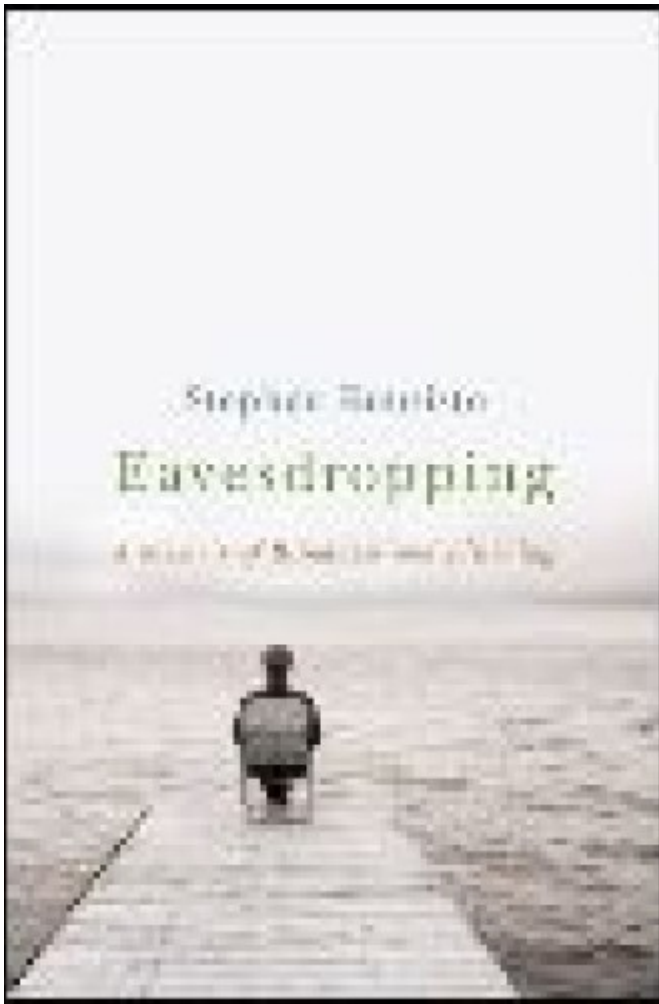
Books in the [August 7, 2007](#) issue

## In Review



## **Chanting with the Psalms: A Practical Guide with Instructional CD**

Cynthia Bourgeault  
New Seeds



## **Eavesdropping: A Memoir of Blindness and Listening**

Stephen Kuusisto

Norton

Many of us seek to block out sound, from cell phone chatter to emergency-vehicle sirens. But for Stephen Kuusisto, blind from birth, it is a matter of both survival and aesthetic pleasure to pay close attention to his aural environment. As a child he loved to listen to Caruso records and to distinguish the various songbirds in the New Hampshire woods near where he grew up. And as an adult, he goes “sightseeing” to cities all over the world and even attends major league baseball games. Once when he gave a talk about his travels, a woman in the audience asked, “Why travel anywhere if you can’t see?” This book, gracefully written, is proof that Kuusisto indeed “sees”—and sees more than most sighted folk. “I am the blind traveler who listens not merely for utility but for sustenance,” he says. He also has a sense of humor. When he visited Safeco Field in Seattle, another fan wondered why he goes

to baseball games since he can't see. He replied: "Oh, it's easy. The dog watches the game."

People who have taken spiritual retreats in monastic settings have been exposed to the centuries-long practice of chanting the psalms. But unlike other monastic practices such as *lectio divina* and praying the divine hours, the chanting of psalms is rarely pursued outside the monastery. With this book and her previous one (*Singing the Psalms*), Cynthia Bourgeault attempts to make this tradition more accessible. The first part of *Chanting the Psalms* provides helpful historical background (and an overly psychologized interpretation of the role of chanting in monasticism); the second part is a practical guide for those who would like to learn to chant. Concluding chapters introduce the music of Taizé and Iona. The singers on the instructional CD are rank amateurs. But Bourgeault, an Episcopal priest, medievalist and musicologist, makes of this limitation a virtue: musical virtuosity is not a requirement for chanting the psalms, she argues.