

Books

By Father John S. Kennedy

A new book by Father Louis Evely is no longer a novelty, but it is still an event. His latest publication, "In His Presence" (Herder and Herder, \$4.50), proves this assertion. As always, he writes incisively about the Christian life in today's world, his insight applying equally well to the ancient Gospel and to our present circumstances.

The new book is a collection of 72 short pieces dealing with a variety of subjects: evil, predestination, poverty, atheism, contemplation, bigots, liturgy, the sacraments.

Nothing unusual about those topics, but there is something unusual about the author's approach to each. We may have set, stale ideas about them, but he jostles us into a realization that we didn't know much about them at all, and especially about their application in our own case.

A theme familiar from previous Evely books is inevitably reiterated here: that of love. We facilely say that God is love, but do we know what it is we are saying? Father Evely illuminates this commonplace, showing us its wealth of practical meaning.

He dwells, too, on the love of one another which is the test of our love of God. "That command existed already in the Old Testament," he writes. "The real newness of this evangelical precept consists in the fact that the second commandment is the same as the first."

He speaks of the absence of God which is all too common in contemporary living, even that of nominal Christians. This he attributes to the individualism which shuts us off from other people. "The absence of God in our life is perhaps only the absence of our brethren."

He has some striking things to say about prayer. Why don't we pray? It is not that we don't want to. But "an ungovernable nervous energy drives us on, rushes us into some urgent piece of work, some errand that has to be run, some service that has to be rendered — it doesn't matter what, provided it means movement, action, talking, escape."

"Failure to pray means, incidentally, failure to savor time. "In prayer, time lasts, acquires a character, is tasted . . . in prayer, it acquires a density such that a given instant becomes sufficient to itself; there is no desire for it to pass, one would like only to prolong it. Time is conquered, haste is no more."

How begin to pray? "Is there any thing disrespectful in going to read a book in church?" he asks. "Doesn't the quality of anything we do change completely according to the company in which we do it? I think that, for modern people to be tamed for the Lord, they must be able to share with him at least one of their normal occupations."

Father Evely gives novel answers to important questions. What is maturity? "The art of swiftly returning to that depth at which it is good to be alive to which youth gets down only intermittently."

What is pride? The desire "to be self-sufficient, to cut off all communication and exchange, to stifle in its own solitude, to feed on itself without appetite, to drink itself without thirst . . . The damned soul is the one who has got to the point of total withdrawal, of absolute self-communication."

What is the glory of God? Neither the extension of his power nor the manifestation of his wisdom; it is the revelation loving each other as he has of his love . . . It is in this

What is real religion? "The true religion is one of joy and wonder and never ending thanksgiving for all that God does for us, for the great things that God can do in the lowliness of his servants."

Reading Father Evely can be upsetting, to the extent that

he subverts some of our self-flattering concepts of Christian quality. But he dashes away our tepid pap only in order to feed us with the authentic, nutritive food of basic Christian truth.

The New York Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction

of Leonard Bernstein, went on a brief but busy tour of Europe and Israel in 1968. Evelyn Ames, one of the most fastidious and brilliant stylists now writing, tells about it in "A Wind from the West" (Houghton Mifflin, \$5), a unique and uniquely delightful book.



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