

REVIEWS

MODERN CATHOLICISM. By Walther von Loewenich, translated by Reginald H. Fuller. (Macmillan; 50s.)

This very able book is difficult to review because it contains so much. The author is a Lutheran scholar and theologian, a professor of the University of Erlangen; a religious liberal in his fundamental presuppositions, but a post-liberal in his deep appreciation of the Catholic Church as a vehicle of the gospel of Christ in the world of today, and a strong bulwark against contemporary secularism. Its abiding attraction for modern man, which Dr Loewenich acknowledges, and in a certain sense fears, is that somehow or other it stands and always has stood for the reality of the supernatural world. He takes pains to stress that it should never be forgotten that the Catholic Church lives on the Gospel; that is what gives it its religious authority, in spite of what he holds to be its radical deviation from evangelical truth. His eulogy of the monastic life is notable. He maintains that 'no intelligent person today should dispute the fact that the Reformation polemic against monasticism was a one-sided affair, and that this powerful manifestation of a heroic faith cannot be dismissed as a religion of works. . . . Monasticism is the fount from which Catholic piety has been constantly renewed. It was monasticism that produced most of the great saints. Their very existence and the veneration in which they are held are a living testimony to the reality of another world beyond this vale of tears, a world worth striving for with all our might' (p. 349).

Yet Dr von Loewenich's critique of modern Catholicism is learned, trenchant and quite fundamental. He regards the Vatican decree on papal infallibility as marking its starting point, because by that decree what he calls the dogmatic absolutism of the Roman Church, which fundamentally distinguishes it from Protestantism, was finally established. Anyone who wishes to understand this book ecumenically should, I think, read its concluding chapter first. The author there sets out, by way of summing up, the positive side of his critique of Catholicism, viz. the fundamental truth of Protestantism as he sees it, in contrast with the fundamental error of Rome. His adverse views of the Catholic Church, which he elaborates, as a rule, with calm impartiality, backed by clearly ardent conviction tinged at times with a certain restrained indignation, are admittedly those of one who sees the Church from outside, not from within the family. His immense and accurate knowledge is book knowledge, not the knowledge of experience.

The key to understanding him is to bear in mind constantly while reading the fundamentally opposing standpoints of critic and criticized. Dr von Loewenich's liberal Lutheranism is founded upon the absolute primacy of Scripture as the source of truth, the Scriptures seen as God's Word mediated to men in human thought forms and language. *Sola fides* in God's Word written brings the absolute conviction of God's supremacy in Christ; Jesus is Lord. The Church plays virtually no part in this; it is no more than the

gathering of believers. Historical criticism has made it quite clear that beyond this single burning affirmation the New Testament contains no dogmas, save useful approximations to truth, formulations, wholly inadequate to the mysteries with which they deal, to be regarded as purely relative and subject to change as the Holy Spirit may lead. Such changes, when they come, are motivated by modern scientific knowledge and critical history, which necessitate a large measure of 'demythologizing' within the New Testament. This Dr Loewenich calls the relativity of dogma which he opposes to the dogmatic absolutism of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic view of the origin of revelation is founded, of course, upon the belief that Christ our Lord confided the Truth he brought to the world to a society, organic and visible, possessing a unity of structure which is divinely guaranteed. Through its government, Christ's Apostles and their successors, this Truth was preserved and proclaimed as the good news and after a time written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the books of the New Covenant being thus added to those of the Old which contained the ancient religious history of the People of God, the Old Israel, upon which the New Israel, the divine Society, was founded. The divine Society indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who makes it the Mystical Body of Christ, is thus guided in interpreting its possession of Christ's Truth. Its *de fide* formulations are human formulations which of their nature cannot exhaust the fullness of Christ's mysteries, but which are secure in representing the truth of Christ human-wise, and thus safeguarding it from corruption. In themselves, these formulations are dead until, under grace and the gifts of the Spirit, they are penetrated into and assimilated by the personal life of the believer within the Mystical Body. In this sense only is defined dogma relative truth. The Church, so Catholics hold, is commissioned authoritatively in the name of Christ to proclaim and preserve his Truth. The company of the believers has from the beginning penetrated, with Spirit-guided insight, into its meaning and implications and this meaning has been continuously clarified by the authoritative definition of the Church's *magisterium* and declared to be an authentic part of the Truth once for all revealed.

Historically it can hardly be doubted that the Catholic standpoint represents the actual way in which things happened. From the first the Apostles taught and defined authoritatively in the name of Christ. 'It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us' (Acts 15-27). The great Councils of the fourth to the sixth centuries safeguarded the Faith by their formulations and were regarded as infallible under the Church's authority. So it has been since the foundation of the Church. Protestantism necessitates the admission that the Church went wrong almost from the first and came into its own on the fundamentals of its faith only in the sixteenth century. The faith of Protestants, a genuine faith but restricted in its extension, is derived from an encounter with Christ in the pages of the New Testament (*sola Scriptura*), pages often sadly mutilated in the interests of the hypotheses of critical scholarship. The faith of Catholics comes to them from the encounter with Christ in his Church, where the certain achievements of critical scholarship

and indeed some of its hypotheses can and do lead to a deeper understanding of God's Word written and spoken, but where the truth of revelation is divinely preserved from error.

In reading *Modern Catholicism* this fundamental difference between the Protestant and Catholic claim should be constantly borne in mind as the scale of reference by which its critique must be judged. Here lies the origin of most of its author's misconceptions, of his fear of authoritative teaching by which men's minds may be guided, of the day-to-day discipline of the Church (admittedly exercised sometimes very humanly), of his misreading of the slow and sometimes painful evolution by which new human knowledge is incorporated into human views of the truths of revelation, almost invariably taken by Dr von Loewenich as the result of a struggle of slightly rebellious enlightenment on the one hand, and on the other the bureaucratic and soulless intransigence of authority, always suspicious of new developments and ready and eager to crush them. (See the strangely unbalanced summing up of the modernist movement, pp. 72, 73.) In his preface Dr von Loewenich commends his book to Catholics on the ground that it is good for us to see ourselves as others see us. It is; and though this book is not for the half-educated or those whose faith is not mature, it will be of considerable value in the promotion of ecumenical understanding, if read and pondered in an ecumenical spirit.

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

ATLAS OF THE CLASSICAL WORLD. Edited by A. A. M. van Der Heyden and H. H. Scullard. (Nelson; 70s.)

This handsome atlas, which should be in every grammar school, college, and university library, and in every reference library, may be said to provide, on novel and unusual lines, the basis of a liberal classical education; and to illustrate most impressively the all-round character of Greek and Roman studies, comprising, as they do, knowledge of a whole civilization—of religion, philosophy, literature, history, geography, law, institutions, economics, sociology, architecture, and art. The text, which covers all these aspects in a very general and elementary way, is, while marred by a number of minor errors and some strange omissions, mainly very up-to-date in content and written in a clear and lively style. It throws into relief most of the salient features of the history and culture of ancient Greece and Rome and is suitable both for the adult general reader with little or no knowledge previously and for the enquiring boy or girl whose 'O.L.' Latin (and Greek) course has set ajar for him or her the door into this wider world.

But the outstanding value of the work lies, as becomes an atlas, in the illustrations and the maps, which make it at once invaluable to learner and teacher alike and even for the seasoned specialist. As regards the pictures, the fruits of air-photography have been lavishly exploited to illuminate such varied topics as Greek landscapes, Etruscan topography, Roman centuriation, and the archaeology of Roman Britain. Most fascinating are the juxtaposed vertical, oblique, and close-up views of Greek and Roman city-sites, taken from the air and from the ground; and the photographs of newly