

one else, subject to the same bloody flux of rash opinion, just as eager to lose a friend rather than forego a jest'. However, the sad truth is that in our society the writer may be sometimes exalted, sometimes neglected, and not infrequently persecuted; the one thing he will not be treated as is 'just an ordinary fellow like everyone else'.

BERNARD BERGONZI

MODERN LITERATURE AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH, by Martin Turnell ; Darton, Longman and Todd; 12s. 6d.

Three lectures, making a book of 69 pages, scarcely provide sufficient elbow-room for a proper investigation of the formidable problem Mr Turnell has tackled. He travels rapidly over the literature of the last four centuries, and where he pauses—Donne, Crashaw, Hopkins, Patmore, Eliot, Forster, Lawrence, Woolf, Claudel, Greene, Mauriac—the ground is already well-trodden by visitors with more time at their disposal. Mr Turnell's examples never surprise, though his comments occasionally do. Donne, for instance, gets a black mark against his superb sonnet, 'Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse, so bright and clear', because 'there is an element of frivolity in the comparison between the believer and the "adventuring knights" pursuing a reluctant mistress'. Typical examples of Lawrentian abstraction and jargon,—'stability of nullification' and 'homogeneous amorphous sterility' are strangely identified as 'symbols'.

It is not, however, in such minor details alone that Mr Turnell is open to criticism. Beneath his urbane and graceful discourse there is a basic uncertainty of approach, which wavers uneasily between the historical and the evaluative. A sentence on the first page illustrates this well: 'It is a matter of historical fact that in ages of settled belief men have tended to write well, and that in ages of declining belief they have gone out of their way to discover some system of belief, or some philosophy, which would provide them with a framework and give unity and shape to their artistic experience'. Taken separately, both terms of this proposition would be acceptable, but juxtaposed as they are they imply that men do *not* write well in ages of declining belief, which is certainly not acceptable. Shakespeare is the obvious example that comes to mind, and it is significant that Mr Turnell finds an unconvincing excuse for not discussing him, while at the same time insinuating, *via* Santayana, that Shakespeare's work is weakened by its lack of an explicit moral framework. Mr Turnell protests that 'I am not primarily concerned in this work to prove that one kind of literature or one writer is better than another. I simply want to describe the effect on writers of changes of belief which have taken place during the past four hundred years'. The trouble is that in his view these changes have always had a *bad* effect, an assumption that inevitably involves him in evaluations that often seem unfair and irrelevant, e.g. 'the fundamental weakness of (Forster's)

work, as of Mrs Woolf's, is a lack of faith'. And when we close the book we realize that the only author for whom Mr Turnell has unqualified admiration is Chaucer, secure in the medieval synthesis. I yield to no-one in my admiration of Chaucer, but I question the usefulness of supposing that Lawrence, Woolf and Forster would have been better writers, and Mauriac and Greene better Catholic writers, if the Renaissance and the Reformation had not happened. For these events *did* happen, and these writers are among the best we have. The human condition they study is our condition, and it is in assessing the success with which they articulate their insights into this condition, rather than in assessing the orthodoxy of these insights, that the literary critic will be most usefully employed.

DAVID LODGE

FAMILY PLANNING AND MODERN PROBLEMS, by Stanislas de Lestapis, S.J.; translated by R. F. Trevett; Burns and Oates; 30s.

The translation of Fr Lestapis' book has been an eagerly awaited event. He is one of the foremost figures in Catholic circles who have occupied themselves with the study of family issues and is professor of sociology at the *Institut Social de l'Action Populaire* in Paris. The work is divided into four sections. The first surveys the attitude to contraception amongst the main religious communities, the second answers some of the contentions made on its behalf, the third develops the position of the Church and the fourth considers the international implications of the 'population problem'.

The publishers introduce the book as offering the most complete and authoritative statement available of the Catholic position. The range of material, the thorough and wide grasp of the literature and the broad vision of the author certainly give adequate testimony to this claim. Yet in his attempt to destroy the claims and philosophy of contraception in favour of the natural and supernatural case for procreation, some sweeping generalizations are made which detract from and occasionally damage his cause. Thus on page 74 he sets out the changes which in his opinion would result from a contraceptive civilization. Amongst these he includes a premature sclerosis and a decline into spiritual old age of nations, a fixation of the sexual function at its 'adolescent' stage, repression of the maternal instinct, a decreased resistance to 'sexual inversion', a decline of masculinity amongst men and of femininity amongst women, an increasing toleration of homosexuality as well as imputing partial responsibility for the decline in the level of mental health, the failure of parents in their task as educators and the boredom of a civilization entirely preoccupied with a culture based on comfort and sexual satisfaction. The case made for such conclusions falls very much short of any convincing level. Although the principle of multiple causality is acknowledged it is curiously ignored in the development of these themes. Also the frequent excursions in the psychological field are often of very doubtful validity.