

THE ETHICS OF BRAIN SURGERY. Edited by Dom Peter Flood, O.S.B., M.D., M.C.H., J.C.L. (Mercier Press; 5s.)

This short translation from the French in the Cahiers Laënnec series consists of four essays, each under different authorship. The first outlines the basic facts underlying cerebral surgery; the next two deal with the indications for, and effects of, such operations, the last with the moral considerations. The three medical writers are orthodox, and expert in their own fields: the moral questions are handled by a priest. In themselves, all four essays are serious contributions.

Unfortunately, the book as a whole, lacking firm editorial direction, emerges too detailed and overlapping for lay readers, yet too superficial for doctors. There results an impression of uncertainty on the parts of the medical authors whether they were writing for the profession or the laity—a particular pity, as Dr Houdart's factual summary is excellent as a short medical introduction and Professor Prick's researches could usefully be evaluated in the medical press. Dr Bertagna compromises with valueless references to authors but not their works.

The need of the laity, therefore, remains unsatisfied for a short, clear-cut outline of the salient facts about the types of procedure; their indications, their immediate and prolonged effects and the emergent moral issues. Doctors will find an unbalanced play-down of the importance of modern limited techniques in relation to post-operative personality depletion, as against the largely outmoded standard leucotomy.

Père Tesson's otherwise judicial chapter on morality omits the fundamental consideration, whether this form of operation is a mutilation like castration; wrong, therefore, in itself. He omits also to mention the post-operative possibility of foresightlessness leading to unconcern for one's ultimate end.

Misprints are less frequent and the translation a trifle less grim than in earlier publications; but it lacks essential guidance upon the difference of psychiatric terminology in the two languages.

SEYMOUR SPENCER

THEOLOGY LIBRARY. Volume I. Introduction to Theology. Edited by A. M. Henry, O.P. (Mercier Press; 21s.)

Along with the liturgical revival recent years have seen something like an awakening of Catholic theological thinking, of biblical and of patristic scholarship in France. Among its most valuable products has been the four-volume *Initiation théologique*, edited and written by French Dominicans. It is the first volume of this work which is now given us in an English translation.

It may safely be asserted that the writers of these volumes have

attempted, and on the whole successfully, a task which has so far gone by default in the Catholic community. They have tried to present Catholic theology in a serious and systematic way, yet in the language and the thought-forms of contemporary people. They have drawn their inspiration as well as the general plan of the work from the *Summa Theologiae* of St Thomas; but they do not aim at writing either an introduction to or a summary of his work. Still less do they claim to provide a substitute for those scholastic handbooks (*'secundum mentem Sancti Thomae'*) in which theses are proved and objections to them met. Their approach, for all its creative novelty, is much closer to authentic theological thinking as it was practised and described by St Thomas. For him, as for the writers of this book, theology is a discipline in which human minds bring to bear all their equipment to the understanding of the word of God revealed in the Scriptures, taught by the Church and heard in faith. It is an activity in which the mystery revealed by God is ever and again confronted with the human question: 'What do you mean?'; in short, it is the endless quest to understand, as far as men may in their present darkness, what they believe. St Thomas's own work takes shape in the form of 'questions' which arise naturally from a reading of the Bible and from further reflection on the sacred text and its commentaries, and from the Church's proclamation in her credal confessions of the mystery revealed by God.

This first volume of the work, accordingly, has a double function: it describes what theology is, and gives an inventory of the material on which its activity is brought to bear: the Bible, the Church's tradition, liturgy, canon law and so forth. It is characteristic of the authors' approach that they have included a chapter (as it happens, one of the least satisfactory in the book) on the 'echo of tradition in art'. Each of these 'sources' is examined in a separate chapter, its status weighed, its contents and history outlined. Sometimes one has the impression, especially in the middle chapters of the book, that too much has been packed into too little space to be of much value. The potted histories of art, of theological systems or of patristic theology are no more illuminating than the summary accounts of the Church's liturgy and canon law, and might well have been replaced by some more general indication of their relevance and their place in the Church's life.

The translation is on the whole both accurate and readable, though disfigured by occasional lapses, sometimes amounting to simple nonsense. The English text also suffers from a surfeit of capitals, and it is a pity that layout and typography have not been used to better purpose and with more taste. But with all these flaws, the appearance of this English translation must be welcomed as an event of unique

importance. As Père Henry writes on the last page of the volume: 'Ultimately, the strength and quality of theology depends not upon the techniques utilised, but upon the depth and religious vitality of the mind which is at work upon the mystery of God.' And the vitality of the minds here at work will surely not fail to awaken and to nourish a similar vitality in the minds of their readers. R. A. MARKUS

LIFE OF CHRIST. By Giuseppe Ricciotti. (Popular Edition.) (Mercier Press; 21s.)

Those who know about Abbot Ricciotti's work in general will know what to expect when they turn to his *Life of Christ*, and they will not be disappointed with this abridged 'Popular Edition'—at least as regards the narrative. Abbot Ricciotti is a scholar without an ounce of pedantry and well able to use his knowledge to throw an ever-helpful light on the gospel narratives. In this work the gospel narratives are admirably woven together and in great part speak for themselves, or are reverently explained and paraphrased. The actual life of Christ is prefaced by a Critical Introduction covering such subjects as The Place and Time, The Roman Procurators, Jewish Beliefs and Practices, The Sources, etc. The essential notions are compactly and clearly put.

The whole work is thus a very attractive life of Christ which is more manageable than some of the classic 'lives' or studies of modern times, and for that reason alone should appeal to a wider English-speaking public.

Unfortunately Abbot Ricciotti's admirable work has in some aspects been ill-served by this particular edition, which is a photographic reproduction of that published by the Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee (1952). Because it is a photographic edition, it has naturally not been possible to make adaptations for English or Irish readers, who will scarcely be helped by being told that Palestine is the size of Vermont or that 300 denarii is more than 80 dollars. Unfortunate too is some of the language, as e.g., when we are told (p. 254) that Judas 'has become hopelessly calloused', or (p. 322), at the Last Supper 'their positions might be diagrammed as follows'.

Most unfortunate has been the reproduction of the maps and plans (especially pp. 72 and 210). The results are obscure, and, if anything, misleading. In these days when such works as the *Westminster Historical Atlas* are available, it seems a pity that Ricciotti's *Life of Christ* cannot be given clear and helpful illustrations, maps, plans, etc.—all of which should show, as far as possible, the real character of the Holy Land, with its sun and light as well as many stark contrasts.

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.