

HIGGINS, Michael W., *The Unquiet Monk: Thomas Merton's Questing Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), pp. 126. ISBN 978-1-62698-112-6 (paper) \$15.00.

Michael W. Higgins is no stranger to those in the world of Merton studies. He is the current president of the International Thomas Merton Society and has published widely on Merton. In addition to numerous academic and popular articles, Higgins is the author of several books on Merton, including *Heretic Blood: The Spiritual Geography of Thomas Merton* (1998) and *Thomas Merton: Faithful Visionary* (2014), as well as co-editing *Thomas Merton: Pilgrim in Process* (1983).

The genesis of Higgins' most recent book, *The Unquiet Monk: Thomas Merton's Questing Faith*, can be found in two events that occurred in 1978 – a symposium on the life and thought of Merton at the Vancouver School of Theology and the creation of a radio documentary entitled *Thomas Merton: Extraordinary Man* which aired on CBC Radio to coincide with the tenth anniversary of Merton's death in Bangkok. Higgins was heavily involved in both the symposium and the radio documentary, with the documentary relying in large part on the scholarship that emerged from the symposium. As Higgins notes in the acknowledgements, *The Unquiet Monk* is structured along the lines of the documentary and draws upon previously unpublished interviews and proceedings from the program itself. At the same time, Higgins also draws upon his own subsequent research as well as upon the waves of Merton scholarship since 1978.

The book contains six chapters, although the sixth is essentially a brief conclusion of two pages (123-24). The first (11-38) is a concise but thorough biography of Merton that incorporates extensive quotations from Merton's books and recordings from his talks to the novices. The narrative is also punctuated by the insights of prominent scholars such as Donald Grayston and Christine Bochen, as well as by friends of Merton such as John Howard Griffin and Br. Paul Quenon. In each of the following chapters, Higgins follows this pattern of supplementing his account with extended quotations from scholars and friends. The second chapter, entitled "Window, Tower and Circle: The Poetic Merton" (39-66), introduces the reader to Merton's autobiographical works and poetry. Given the breadth of Merton's autobiographical writings, and given that Higgins has extensively studied his poetry, it comes as no surprise that this is the longest chapter of the book. The third chapter, "Solitary Critic" (67-86), examines Merton's engagement with the issues of war and racial injustice, paying close attention to the interchange between contemplation and engagement with the world. In the fourth chapter, "Merton's

Religious Imagination” (87-103), Higgins looks at Merton’s spirituality, examining both his understanding of contemplation and how this understanding translated into ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. A more thorough examination of Merton’s interreligious study and dialogue follows in the fifth chapter, “Pilgrim to the East” (104-22). Here the focus is primarily on Merton’s engagement with Eastern religions, specifically Zen Buddhism, and the chapter ends with an account of the significance of Merton’s Asian journey.

Higgins writes beautifully and with the characteristic enthusiasm that he brings to his projects. He also writes accessibly. *The Unquiet Monk* serves as an excellent introduction to the life and thought of Thomas Merton both because it concisely covers the main parameters of his biography and writings, and because it immerses readers in the voices of prominent Merton scholars and friends. As someone who is frequently asked for recommendations for where to start with Merton, I would heartily recommend this book as a jumping-off point towards reading Merton himself. Moreover, for those who teach courses on Merton, each of the book’s chapters provides worthwhile introductions to various facets of Merton’s thought that could be used as a guide prior to engaging the writings themselves. Higgins’ chapter on Merton’s autobiographical writings and his poetry is particularly valuable in this regard, not least because of its clear and concise introduction to Merton’s poetry, arguably the least accessible facet of his corpus. But Higgins’ book is not just for Mertonian beginners. For those already familiar with Merton, *The Unquiet Monk* has the potential to rekindle enthusiasm for a man whose writings continue to inspire and convict.

Gregory K. Hillis

MCGREGOR, Michael N., *Pure Act: The Uncommon Life of Robert Lax* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 472. ISBN 978-0-82326-801-6 (cloth) \$34.95.

In 1985 Michael McGregor journeyed to Europe with questions. He had spent the previous three years traveling the world, writing about the systematic oppression that characterizes the existence of so many on this planet, keeping them impoverished. McGregor had reached a point where he felt he had to respond to such suffering concretely, that he couldn’t just write about it but wanted to devote himself more fully to finding a grand solution that he was young enough to believe possible to find. So he quit his job, sold his car and flew to Europe in search of answers. After six months he made it to Greece, and by this time, having