

Sent 11/29/06
email

Dear Jessica,

Hi! Great to hear from you! I am not sure your ambitious student is anything to worry about. Anthony was not a mystic (at least in the sense of having left us anything that would indicate this)-- he was an ascetic, the Father of Christian monasticism. It's not Marcarius, but Macarius; it's not Evagrius Dontikus, but Evagrius Ponticus. Gregory Palamas and Hesychasm is fourteenth century. The most important Christian mystic of the 4-8th century is unquestionably Pseudo-Dionysius. His influence on the West is vast, and undoubtedly you have met him through Thomas Aquinas, Luis de Leon. I am not sure if what your student is really interested in is ascetism or mysticism-- maybe he could work on their connection. If he seriously want to study the Christian mystical tradition from its beginnings, a great little introductory book is Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981). In fact, the chapters could serve you as a syllabus of readings, starting with Plato's *Timaeus* and going up to Ps.-Dionysius' works. The latter are conveniently published in a good English translation in Paulist Press, their *Classics of Western Spirituality Series*. Gregory Palamas is also in this series. The only thing you can read about Anthony contemporaneous with him his Athanasius' *life of Anthony*, which is a wonderful text, but not on mysticism. John Cassian is much richer in that direction. His "Conferences" are on prayer. He is also published in the Paulist Press series. You might want to have a look at all the books contained in their *Classics of Western Spirituality Series* at this point-- there are quite a few, and pick out all the ones who lived in the earlier period, like John Climacus, Maximus the Confessor. These editions all have a good introduction, and a brief jacket description that would indicate to you what the author has to say.

Well, that's a start, which I would delight to talk about more with you. Unfortunately, I can't make the talk by Dale Martin, but is there any other time you plan on coming over in this direction before you leave. I'll be in my office most afternoons, except for a few meetings, for the next couple of weeks, if there is any chance you could come by.

P.S. I have loved having Norman Underwood in my class this semester. He rightfully thinks you are brilliant, and has learned a great deal from you. He is quite amazing in his knowledge for one so young!

Best,

Susan