

# The essential human condition

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The state of being in the Presence of God, in the Kingdom, is an inborn human capacity. Everyone can pass through the narrow gate of attention and faith – faith in the essential link that exists between humanity and the Divine Reality.

The early Church fathers had no shadow of a doubt that union with the Divine is possible for all, regardless of who you think you are: *“God is the life of all free beings. He is the salvation of all, of believers and unbelievers, of the just or the unjust, of the pious or the impious, of those freed from passions or those caught up in them, of monks or those living in the world, of the educated and the illiterate, of the healthy and the sick, of the young and the old. He is like the outpouring of light, the glimpse of the sun, or the changes of the weather which are the same for everyone.”* (Gregory of Nyssa)

The reason for this is to be found in their theology. The Greek philosophers, in particular Plato, were the first to formulate the idea of our having something essential in common with the Divine. They called it the *‘nous’*, pure intuitive intelligence as distinct from rational intelligence. Having something like the Divine within us allows us to know the Divine, as the prevalent idea in early thought was that only *‘like can know like’*. Our everyday experience also confirms that. We know that for communion between individuals to be possible there has to be likeness; only when we have something substantial in common with another person can we truly relate to them, can we be one in mind and soul.

The early Church Father, Clement of Alexandria, saw the correspondence between the concept of *‘nous’* and the one expressed in *Genesis* of being created in the *‘image of God’*. Following him Origen, the Cappadocian Fathers, Evagrius and even later Meister Eckhart all saw this *‘image of God’* as eternal and originally one with God. To enter this higher level of reality we need contemplative prayer, to which meditation leads. *“It may be true that the Divine principle is present in every being, but not every being is present in him. We ourselves will come to dwell with him if we call on him with very holy prayers and a tranquil mind.”* (Dionysius the Areopagite)

We all know that the journey into silence is not easy, but we are not alone in this venture, as Evagrius, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Desert Father points out: *“The Holy Spirit takes compassion on our weakness, and though we are impure he often comes to visit us. If he should find our spirit praying to him out of love for the truth then he descends upon it and dispels the whole army of thoughts and reasoning that beset it.”*

All we need to do is persevere and in doing so Christ, the life-giving spirit, will help us to access *“the greatest power of human consciousness ...its capacity to transcend its mental operations, to go beyond its greatest thoughts, and so to be spirit.”* (Laurence Freeman) The

result of this is, as Evagrius said, that: *“If you pray in all truth you will come upon a deep sense of confidence. Then the angels will walk with you and enlighten you about the meaning of created things.*

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