

The nature of the Divine

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Early Christian Fathers stressed that we could not know God with our rational mind. No image, concept, or name could ever do justice. In fact, they saw it as blasphemy to attach a name to God, because that would limit the limitlessness or name the unnameable. We can, however, *experience* the Divine Presence, as we have something in common, as we saw explained last week. We can know God intuitively, through our '*nous*', the highest point of our soul, which is also our organ of prayer. We can clearly see how much John Main's theology is in line with this early Christian thought and understand even more clearly his stress on the importance of leaving thoughts and images behind to enter the silence of God. It is interesting to see, how Clement of Alexandria dealt with the impossibility of knowing God through images and thoughts. Bishop Kallistos Ware explains in his chapter of '*Journey to the Heart*':

“In his mystical theology, Clement’s dominant idea, his master scene, is the divine mystery. He is an apophatic theologian, the first great Christian thinker to use negative theology... Apophatic is basically a grand word for negative and kataphatic is a grand word for affirmative. And to illustrate the meanings of kataphatic and apophatic, here are examples from public notices.

Here is a kataphatic sign: you see a level crossing over a railway line, a pole with a box attached and evidently an electric bell in the box, and a notice that says:

‘Danger! Stop, look and listen. When the bell is ringing, do not cross the line. If the bell is not ringing, still stop, look and listen in case the bell is not working.’

So in a kataphatic approach all possibilities are expressed and allowed for.

Here is an apophatic notice from Australia:

‘This road does not lead to either Townsville or Cairns.’

That is exactly the method used by the apophatic mystical theologians. They do not say what God is, because he is mystery beyond our understanding. They say only what he is not.”

If you carry on this approach logically and detract all possible qualities from the idea of God we may have: ‘You are left with the notion of pure being and that is the closest you can come to God...God is not in space, but above both place and time and name and thought. God is without limits, without form, without name.’(Clement)

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