History of Mediaeval Philosophy

by

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Al mio piccolo alpino, Gerardo

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Preface

This book is, as its title indicates, a synthesis of medieval philosophical thought. It has no other aim than to present an outline of the history of this important period of philosophical production, highlighting above all the main theses and lines of thought proposed within it. It does not, therefore, seek to be exhaustive, since many leading works already fulfil that demand amply. Just like our previous book on the history of ancient philosophy[1], the present work originated as a *dispensa ad usum privatum auditorum* that has since taken the form of a handbook. For that reason, our work owes a great deal to the specialists in the field, especially to Étienne Gilson, Fernand van Steenberghen, Maurice de Wulf, Francisco Canals, Sofia Vanni Rovighi, Mauricio Beuchot, Richard Heinzmann, Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, Battista Mondin, John Marenbon, Claudio Moreschini, among others. This book is, indeed, incalculably indebted to the works of the aforementioned authors. Moreover, in addition to the contributions of these eminent specialists in the medieval period, we have also drawn, in some sections—especially when dealing with patristic philosophy—upon our *Lineamientos de ética en el periodo patrístico*[2], which has served as a preparation for this global synthesis intended for dissemination in undergraduate philosophy courses.

It should be noted that this text does not synthesize the thought of all the great medieval philosophers, but only that of some of them—and, among these, only the most significant parts or those that were the object of the greatest debate. In this way, the book limits itself to

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[1] Buganza, Jacob, *La filosofía antigua en su desarrollo histórico*, IF Press, Rome 2025, 157pp.

[2] Buganza, Jacob, *Lineamientos de ética en el periodo patrístico*, Anáhuac, Mexico 2025, 323pp.

presenting an overview and the main outlines—albeit *grosso modo*—through which medieval philosophy unfolds. Furthermore, for a handbook of this nature, overloading the critical apparatus with an excessive number of bibliographical references would only slow down the reading. For practically all medieval thinkers, with few exceptions, there already exist numerous contributions that address their philosophy and theology, whether from a panoramic perspective or from various specialized angles. We have found it especially useful to summarize the metaphysics, anthropology, and ethics of the authors presented, since the book's intention remains general and introductory: to provide the basic framework necessary to pass the corresponding evaluation in medieval philosophy within the context of an undergraduate philosophy program.

Chapter 1
Origins of Mediaeval Philosophy: Theoretical Contributions of Christianity

Medieval philosophy encompasses two major periods. The first is Patristic philosophy, whose early reflections emerge from the Hellenistic period and, consequently, from Greco-Roman thought. The second is what is usually called Scholastic philosophy, which became consolidated first with the rise of European universities and later extended to other regions.

We believe that medieval Scholastic philosophy can, in turn, be divided into three major stages. The first Scholasticism is the formative stage, where compilations and systematizations—especially of certain positions from Late Antique philosophy—are central. The second Scholasticism is linked to the universities, which experienced significant influence from theories that, although Western in origin (such as Aristotle's metaphysics), had been set aside and were reintroduced to the European scene through Muslim and Jewish philosophers. The third Scholasticism is usually associated with its crisis and eventual decline, represented by authors who followed the *via moderna* of William of Ockham and mysticism as shaped by Meister Eckhart.

However, Scholasticism—though no longer strictly medieval—revived during the Renaissance and Humanism, following mainly the paths traced by Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, and culminated in the most complete construction of its metaphysics, represented by Suárez and his *Disputationes metaphysicae* (even though, as Grabmann has shown, about ten years before the appearance of

Suárez's *Disputationes*, the Dominican Diego Mas published a systematic metaphysics: *Metaphysica disputatio de ente et eius proprietatibus*[1]).

In the various histories of medieval philosophy, the Scholastic period (which in this work is limited to the fourteenth century, that is, up to its third stage) is studied in greater depth. However, it would be unwise to neglect the Patristic stage (in handbooks, the focus is usually almost exclusively on the thought of Saint Augustine), since it lays the foundations for what was to become Christian Scholastic philosophy. Sometimes the Patristic period is regarded as part of medieval philosophy, while at other times it is considered a mere precedent. However, the proper approach is to regard it as part of medieval philosophy, since this thought is, from our perspective, profoundly Christian: theoretical constructions already influenced by Revelation are developed, as reflection already makes use of—or takes into account—the contents of faith, as occurs, for example, in the second Scholasticism (think of the Franciscan tradition, with Saint Bonaventure and Blessed Duns Scotus). Therefore, it is a philosophy distinct from that of antiquity.

Fontana is absolutely right in saying: "The knowledge of the medievals materializes in Christian philosophy. The philosophy of the Middle Ages is Christian philosophy, not in the sense that all philosophy of this period can or should be considered as such, nor because all medieval philosophers expressed it in the same way and with the same benefit, but in the sense that it was born in the Middle Ages and was structured there with fundamental characteristics, valid also thereafter and forever. In the Middle Ages Christian philosophy was born, assuming the indelible character of the classical world. This

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[1] Grabmann, Martin, *Carácter e importancia de la filosofía española a la luz de su desarrollo histórico,*«Ciencia tomista», 64, (1943), p. 18.

is not a matter of artificially expanding medieval philosophy and, especially, Scholastic philosophy by abstracting it from its historical context; however, it is legitimate to observe that in that historical context lines of thought were established that transcend it."[2]

For this reason, we must obtain—at least—an image that is sufficient, if not entirely clear, one in which the contours of Patristic philosophy can be appreciated. This philosophy basically consists of the reflections developed by the Church Fathers, who, in most cases, recovered the philosophical approaches of their time to explain revealed faith. In this sense, patristic thought makes use of the tools proposed by Greco-Roman thinkers, so that much of the content of faith is expressed in terms and concepts then in use thanks to philosophy.

Indeed, the last major philosophical movement of Late Antiquity is Neoplatonism, and the culminating works of this period are, on the one hand, the *Enneads* of Plotinus and, on the other, Proclus's *Platonic Theology* and *Elements of Theology*. Although Proclus follows in the footsteps of Plotinus, he develops the system in his own way, making it considerably more complex in certain respects. There are certainly channels of communication between Neoplatonic philosophy and Patristic philosophy, but the differences between these two modes of thought are perhaps even greater, despite their chronological overlap. It is true that both exhibit religious elements: the Neoplatonists developed a philosophy of a markedly religious character, in some cases even theurgical and magical (as with Iamblichus and Proclus). Yet medieval philosophy, properly speaking, already makes positive use of the contents revealed fundamentally by Christ, the Apostles, the Apostolic Fathers, and Sacred Scripture. Indeed, Christianity

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[2] Fontana, Stefano, *La sabiduría de los medievales*, Homo Legens, Madrid 2021, p. 11.

contributes several distinctive elements to the Western tradition that are not found so clearly defined in Greco-Roman philosophers. Although many Church Fathers were contemporaries of the Neoplatonic thinkers, their theoretical constructions differ profoundly, even though from the second century onward they employed philosophical concepts to articulate the contents of faith. One can hardly disagree with Josep-Ignasi Saranyana when he writes:

> Christianity, which emerged at a moment of crisis or exhaustion in classical philosophical thought — with the sole exception of the Neoplatonic revival —, is above all the religion revealed by God for the redemption of all humanity. It is, therefore, a doctrine of salvation. Its foundation is faith (*fides qua*) in the supernatural revelation transmitted through Tradition and Holy Scripture (*fides quae*). This supernatural revelation, which demands a response from the believer, contains a considerable number of truths: some strictly supernatural in substance (such as the mystery of the Trinity or the hypostatic union), and others that are natural truths — that is, accessible to unaided reason — which, by being revealed, become supernatural with respect to the mode of their transmission and knowledge. Among the latter we may highlight, by way of example: (a) that there exists one single God; (b) that this one God is simultaneously — without contradiction — one, just, merciful, and provident; (c) that God transcends the cosmological order; (d) that God freely created the world from nothing; (e) that the human being possesses an incorporeal principle of life, that is, a substantial unity composed of soul and body; (f) that the soul is immortal and therefore subsists when separated from the body; (g) that the human being is free. On the basis of these and other natural truths — many of which were ignored or denied in Antiquity — human intelligence, enriched by Christianity, embarked upon a new philosophical path with traits and characteristics quite different

from the philosophy that had arisen among the Greeks prior to Christ.[3]

Now then, the theoretical contents of Christianity also have a practical outcome, namely of a moral and political character. It must be remembered that what is proposed in theory eventually finds expression in the practical realm—specifically in the moral and political spheres—so that the truth of a theory is often verified through the moral consequences to which it gives rise. On many occasions, the moral stance proves more intelligible and accessible than elaborate theoretical speculations. For example, the *Didache* (together with *The Shepherd of Hermas*) is one of the earliest Christian documents we possess. While it certainly contains expository elements of doctrine, the greater part of the text is devoted to moral perfection. The *Didache* does explain certain theoretical elements, such as the Sacraments—especially Baptism—and sets out guidelines on how preachers are to receive remuneration, among other matters. Yet almost the entire work is concerned with moral questions, precisely because it is in this dimension that the difference between a Christian and a pagan becomes most apparent.

These differences become even clearer in the Christian period of the Apologies. Indeed, at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second, one can observe a certain confrontation between Christian thought and the various prevailing philosophical schools. This is precisely why the Apologist Fathers emerged: they defended the Christian faith against the dominant positions of the time. In fact, some of the innovative theoretical contents introduced by Christianity into

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[3] Saranyana, Josep-Ignasi, *La filosofía medieval*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2003, pp. 39-40.

Greco-Roman thought—which are not explicitly present in the works
of classical philosophy—are the following.[4]

First, the Christian proposal of creation as *creatio ex nihilo*: "The
concept of creation as *creatio ex nihilo* sums up all the differences and
the fundamental incompatibility between Greek philosophy and
Christian thought."[5] Among Greco-Latin pagan philosophers, there is
no notion of creation comparable to that found in Christianity; instead,
we encounter the common Greek thesis of the eternity of matter, which
is in turn shaped either by the Intelligence or by the Demiurge to form
the sensible and corporeal world. Christianity, by contrast, holds that
matter is not eternal but a creature of God. For the Greeks, the world
is an eternal and divine reality; the cosmos possesses divine traits:
Plotinus, for instance, maintains that the cosmos, being animated by
the universal Soul, participates in the divine. The Christian position
asserts that God produces matter out of nothing—a notion entirely
and absolutely foreign to Greek thought. For the latter, matter exists
ab aeterno and serves as the substrate that enables transformation. For
Christianity, however, matter is created: in this sense, it also carries a
positive connotation, since God created it, and everything created by
God is good. Consequently, matter is not evil in itself, nor is the human
body as such; it becomes problematic only insofar as it leads human
beings to lose sight of their true treasure, which is of a heavenly nature.

In philosophical terms, Christianity holds that being comes forth from
non-being. Moreover, the being of God and the being of the creature
(*esse creatum*) are radically distinct, since the creature does not
participate in God's being itself, lest one fall into pantheism. The
creature, then, participates in being—but in created being (*esse
creatum*). In this regard, Platonism offers rational support by

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[4] Cf. Mondin, Battista, *Storia della metafisica*, vol. II, ESD, Bologna 1998, pp. 8-12.
[5] Heinzmann, Richard, *Filosofía de la edad media*, Herder, Barcelona 1995, p. 23.

emphasizing the transcendence of the Creator in relation to the creature. For Christian philosophy, the cosmos no longer possesses a necessary character; rather, it is conceived as contingent. Consequently, the problem of existence acquires new nuances, only dimly foreshadowed in some Greco-Roman thinkers. In general, for pagan philosophers, being cannot come from non-being; for Christians, however, it can. This does not mean that there is no being at all—since God necessarily *is*—but rather that the cosmos, that which is not God, has a radically finite character because its origin is non-being, nothingness. "By describing it as creation, the whole of reality is contemplated and interpreted in its innermost essence from the idea of God, in a completely new way compared with the Greek worldview."[6] From this follows the affirmation that man, too, is a creature of God. Indeed, Genesis reveals that God created man in his image and likeness; that he took clay and breathed spirit into it. Yet man is created corporeal, even if his body was not subject to decay until after original sin. This, likewise, represents a radically new position, which led Christians to be branded as atheists, since they rejected intermediate gods or pantheons and refused to submit to the official religion.

A second theoretical element introduced by Christianity is the concept of spirit, or πνεῦμα (*pneuma*). Of course, the notion of *pneuma* already existed among the Greeks, but it retained a certain materialistic connotation: it was conceived as a breath, a kind of subtle vapor, so to speak. In Pre-Socratic terms, one might describe it as a mixture of fire and air (or water, in some accounts). In Christianity, however, spirit is in no respect material: it is something that exists in and of itself, entirely independent of and not subject in any way to the material dimension. Consequently, it is wholly free. Christianity adopts this

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[6] Heinzmann, Richard, *Filosofía de la edad media*, cit., p. 23.

term to signify one of the three Persons of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit, who is the creating Spirit—the one who communicates existence to other beings, whether purely material or purely spiritual (as in the case of the angels). The Spirit of God creates other spirits and creates material entities. In this context, man serves as a hinge or mediating creature, possessing both a spiritual and a material element; the latter, insofar as it is animated or spiritualized, is called the body.

Another key Christian contribution is the concept of person and the absolute value of the human being. On the one hand, Christianity introduces the notion of person into philosophy; on the other, it affirms the absolute value of each individual. Moreover, man possesses value precisely by virtue of being a person. Although pagan culture developed highly sophisticated systems in the anthropological and moral domains, it does not affirm the absolute value of the human individual as such. Indeed, late-antique philosophy already shows a positive appreciation of the individual—since it is the individual who is saved or attains salvation—but Christianity decisively reinforces the incommunicability and uniqueness of the concrete human being. Furthermore, the idea that every human being possesses absolute value derives from theology: all human beings are children of the same Father; that is, we are all children of God, regardless of any particular circumstance. Every human individual, in this sense, possesses equal dignity, distinct from any moral judgment made about his or her actions. The concept of person itself has a theological origin, primarily through Tertullian, who took up the Latin term *persona* (originally meaning "mask" or "role" in theater) and gave it a new, profound meaning: it now signifies the core of a spiritual nature, an irreducible subsistent reality. The term was first applied systematically to the three Persons of the Trinity: God is one single essence subsisting in three really distinct Persons, each with His own spiritual core. From this theological usage, the concept of person was adopted into

philosophical anthropology, retaining the connotation of an irreducible spiritual core. Just as the Holy Spirit is not reducible to the Father, nor the Son to the Holy Spirit—each preserving His own distinct core—so too each human person is irreducible to any other; every human being maintains his or her incommunicability.

Another fundamental concept introduced by Christianity is freedom. It is grounded in the notions of spirit and person. Precisely because persons are irreducible, what each one does has its source in his or her own subjectivity—in one's own self, one's own interiority. The Greeks had already developed the concept of freedom to some extent, but almost always in relation to political freedom exercised within the *polis*: for the Greco-Romans, it is the city that imposes certain restrictions and, consequently, grants certain liberties. The concept of freedom introduced by Christianity is far more radical: it affirms mastery over oneself, including mastery over one's own salvation or damnation. In a certain sense, the Greek individual remained bound to destiny (*moira*), to nature, and to history; these forces confined him to a predetermined path, even though some seeds of a deeper notion of freedom can already be found in authors such as Aristotle. Nevertheless, the concept remains underdeveloped in classical thought. Ultimately, in Christian anthropology, freedom is regarded as the most characteristic activity of the person: free acts are precisely those that qualify us as persons.

Another Christian innovation is the linear concept of history. For the Greeks, history is a chronological—and often mechanical—sequence of fatal events, frequently destined to repeat themselves over and over, either identically or analogically. Everything returns to its origin. For example, in some Presocratic thinkers we find the view that all things emerge from a single principle, unfold, and inevitably return to unity, from which the process of unfolding begins again indefinitely. This is

the paradigmatic case of Empedocles: everything unites, then separates, and later reunites, only to separate once more. This cyclical pattern is commonly summarized by the expression "eternal return." Christianity, by contrast, introduces a radically new understanding of history through the concept of creation: for the Christian, history is linear. It is not cyclical; nothing can truly repeat itself in the manner of the Greek historical cycles. For the Christian, everything indeed has an origin, but that origin lies in God's free act of creation. At a specific moment in history, God enters it decisively through the Incarnation of Christ, and the eschatological destiny of the cosmos leads not to cyclical repetition but to a definitive end. Hence, in the human sphere, every event or occurrence is unrepeatable and unique.

It can be said that the God of the Greek philosophers remains hidden— a *Deus absconditus*. This is the case, for example, with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover or Plotinus's One: for them, it is an anonymous and ineffable entity. Plotinus's One lies beyond any form of communication and even beyond being itself. By contrast, although the Christian God is also transcendent and beyond all limits, He is someone, not something. The Christian God reveals Himself; He is therefore a God who speaks, who communicates with human beings, who manifests Himself in His threefold countenance (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and who—unlike the God of the Greek philosophers—cares for creation, and especially for the human being created in His image and likeness. This fundamental difference makes it possible to understand that, for Christianity, even while affirming that God is the Good (as maintained by Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic philosophies), He is above all love and charity. It is precisely on this basis that Christianity seeks to establish a new ethical framework.

Chapter 2
Patristic Philosophy

2.1. The Apologists

Because of the conceptual innovations that Christianity defends, its metaphysics—although it rests on a Platonic framework—is in fact distinct. In this sense, Christian metaphysics represents something genuinely new. It is not, of course, entirely opposed to Greek metaphysics, but it introduces concepts that are not fully compatible with traditional pagan thought. Consequently, it is legitimate to speak of medieval philosophy as beginning with the reflections of the Church Fathers. These first philosophical considerations were primarily aimed at defending Christianity against the attacks of other philosophies prevalent in the imperial age. However, there was not necessarily a unity of opinion among Christians in every case: some acknowledged the value of philosophy and actively cultivated it, while others—most notably Tertullian—ultimately rejected it, insisting on relying exclusively on Revelation.

2.1.1. Saint Justin Martyr

Among the Greek Apologists, Saint Justin Martyr is usually placed first. He was originally from Shechem (or Nablus, in present-day Palestine), nicknamed "the Philosopher." Born around the year 100, he died in 165. He is the author of two *Apologies*: the first addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius and the second to his successor, Marcus

Aurelius.[1] Among his works we also find the famous *Dialogue with Trypho*—presumably a Jew—in which he explains how he converted to Christianity. In this work, Justin explains that to understand anything of God, one must receive something of His Word, His *λόγος* (Logos), from His Verb. He interprets this concept within the framework of Philonic and Platonic philosophy.[2] "In Justin, as later in Clement of Alexandria and Origen, there is the conviction that Christianity is not a limit imposed on reason, but rather an enrichment of what reason itself can attain. From this comes an attitude of trust, an openness to philosophy, and at the same time the persuasion of its insufficiency and its limits (not imposed from the outside but derived from its very nature)."[3] It is clear that Justin diligently searched for answers. Before becoming a Christian, he passed through various philosophical schools, including Stoicism, Peripateticism, and Pythagoreanism, until finally arriving at Platonism. This last step proved crucial, for—as he himself affirms—Platonism satisfied him to a greater degree than the others, which helps explain the certain preference for Platonic philosophy evident in his thought.

Within Christianity, Saint Justin affirms the necessity for man to receive something of the Word in order to understand something of God—and this Word rightfully belongs to the *λόγος*. As Saint John the Evangelist declares, every man who comes into this world carries with him something of the *λόγος*, which means that God Himself has established an immediate and direct communication with each of His rational creatures. From the very beginning, God endows man with

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[1] Beuchot, Mauricio, *Manual de historia de la filosofía medieval*, cit., p. 10; cf. García, Francisco, *Justino de Rome, el primer filósofo católico*, «Teología y vida», LII, (2011), pp. 11-34.

[2] Cf. Canals, Francisco, *Historia de la filosofía medieval*, Herder, Barcelona 1992, p. 16.

[3] Vanni Rovighi, Sofia, *Storia della filosofia medievale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2006, p. 5.

something of His own, something that ultimately enables him to rise and enter into a more authentic relationship with Him—a relationship whose culmination is found in the incarnate λόγος, who is Christ Himself. The Greek philosophers, of course, also share in this communication, since all are creatures of God and came into the world bearing something of the λόγος. Thus, the reflections of some of them provide a rational bridge toward penetrating Revelation. Nevertheless, they still lack knowledge of Christ, the incarnate λόγος. As Sofia Vanni Rovighi aptly explains: "The philosophical concept that offers Justin the greatest theological openness is the Stoic logos: there is an eternal reason, identical with God (and this is already an original element with respect to contemporary philosophies, which tended to make the logos an intermediate between God and the world), and this reason is incarnate in Christ. There is also a 'seed' of reason, which is a participation in the divine Logos, though distinct from Him, and this has been scattered in every human being. By virtue of this, men—even before Christianity, and especially philosophers, Socrates in particular—were able to know some truths that would later be more fully revealed by the divine Logos, incarnate in Christ. Everything that is beautiful and true in poets and philosophers is, by right, Christian."[4]

Saint Justin also holds—a view shared as a kind of prejudice by several early Christian thinkers—that some Greek philosophers drew teachings from the Old Testament without explicitly acknowledging their source in their writings. These appropriations from the Old Testament would explain the many points of connection between philosophy and Christian Revelation. "Indeed, insofar as each of them, by virtue of his participation in the divine seminal Word, contemplated that with which he had affinity, he spoke well; but it is

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[4] Vanni Rovighi, Sofia, *Storia della filosofia medievale*, cit., p. 5

evident that those who, on very essential points, contradicted one another, did not attain infallible science nor irrefutable knowledge. Therefore, whatever good has been said among them belongs to us Christians."[5] Here also germinate certain interpretations of Socrates as a defender of some of these teachings. In fact, Justin's list is even broader: he affirms that the λόγος has always accompanied mankind, even before becoming incarnate. "We have been taught that Christ is the firstborn of God, and we have previously stated that He is the Word, in whom the whole human race has shared. Thus, those who lived in accordance with the Word are Christians, even though they were considered atheists—as happened among the Greeks with Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them, and among the barbarians with Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, and many others whose deeds and names we omit for now, as it would take too long to enumerate them. Therefore, those who formerly lived without the Word were wicked, enemies of Christ, and murderers of those who live with the Word; but those who have lived and continue to live with the Word are Christians and know neither fear nor bewilderment."[6]

Another argument advanced by Saint Justin, particularly in defending Christianity against the accusation of atheism, is that the Demiurge of the philosophers is none other than the one adored by Christians (a thesis already defended by the Jewish thinker Philo of Alexandria). In this sense, He is the Creator of the cosmos and of mankind. Unlike the Greeks, however, the Christian God—or Demiurge—creates formless matter and then shapes it: He brings it forth in its formless state and gradually forms it throughout the days of creation. Saint Justin in no way accepts pagan polytheism, which he reproaches while bearing in mind, for example, the high virtue of Socrates: "The first proof is that, although we say similar things to the Greeks, we alone are hated for

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[5] Justin Martyr, *II Apol.* 13, 3-4.

[6] Justin Martyr, *I Apol.,* 46, 2-4.

the name of Christ, and without committing any crime, we are put to death as if we were evildoers. Meanwhile, some here and others there give worship to trees, rivers, mice, cats, crocodiles, and a multitude of irrational animals; what is more, not all of them worship the same one, but some are honored in one place, others in another, so that all (their worshipers) are impious in each other's eyes, because they do not adore the same objects. The only thing you can reproach us for is that we do not venerate the same god as you, and that in public rituals we do not offer libations, or the fat of victims, or garlands, or sacrifices. Now then, that the very same animals are regarded by some as gods, by others as wild beasts, and by still others as sacrificial victims, you know perfectly well."[7]

In the field of anthropology, Saint Justin maintains that immortality is not an essential characteristic of the human soul, and in this he decisively opposes the Platonic schools. The Platonists hold that the soul is immortal because it has always existed and is therefore uncreated. For Christians, however, the soul is a creature: it has been produced by the will and power of God; the soul is created, just like the cosmos. In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, he states: "'Nor, by the way, must we say that it [the soul] is immortal, for if it is immortal, it is clearly uncreated.' 'However,' I said to him, 'some people—the so-called Platonists—consider it uncreated and immortal.' 'And do you also,' he said to me, 'consider the world uncreated?' 'There are those who say so, but I am not of that opinion.' 'And you do well. For what reason should a body so solid, resistant, compact, and changeable—which perishes and is born every day—reasonably be thought not to proceed from some principle? Now then, if the world is created, it is necessary that souls also be created and that there be a moment in which they do not exist, for indeed they were made for the sake of

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[7] Justin Martyr, *I Apol.,* 24, 1-3.

human beings and the other living creatures, even if you say that they were created absolutely separate and not together with their own bodies.' 'That seems to be exactly the case.' 'Are they, then, not immortal?' 'No, since the world appeared to us to be created.'"[8] The soul is ultimately not immortal in the absolute Platonic sense because it had a beginning, and—if God so willed—it could cease to be: He could annihilate it. Thus, it subsists only through the continual will of the Creator. In more philosophical terms, the soul does not possess life by its own nature, as the Platonists claim, but possesses life because God grants it: for life is God's property. This is why we have been taught that "only those who live in holiness and virtue close to God attain immortality."[9]

2.1.2. Tatian

Tatian, presumably a disciple of Saint Justin—though not a follower of his balanced vision between philosophy and Christianity—wrote a work entitled *Discourse against the Greeks* (*Oratio ad Graecos*). In it, he maintains that Christianity, as a doctrine, is superior to philosophy, but his words against the philosophers are extremely harsh: "What have they produced, worthy of respect, with their philosophy? Who among those considered the most notable was free from arrogance? Diogenes, who with the boast of his barrel displayed his independence, ate a raw octopus and, stricken with colic, died of immoderation; Aristippus, walking about in his purple cloak, surrendered to dissolution under the guise of gravity; Plato, with all his philosophy, was sold by Dionysius because of his gluttony. And Aristotle, who foolishly placed limits on providence and defined happiness according to the things he liked, against his duty as tutor flattered Alexander, forgetting that he was only a boy; and he,

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[8] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho,* 5, 1-2.
[9] Justin Martyr*, I Apol.,* 21, 6.

showing how well he had learned his master's lessons, put a friend of his in a cage for refusing to worship him, carrying him everywhere like a bear or a leopard. At the very least, he obeyed his master's precepts quite punctually, showing his valour and his virtue at banquets, and pierced through with his spear the most intimate and dearest of his friends, later weeping and refusing food in feigned grief, so as not to incur the hatred of his companions."[10] Moreover, in Tatian the observation of Saint Justin becomes more radical: that the Greeks stole elements from the Old Testament. Indeed, he considers Greek knowledge to be stolen wisdom and affirms that if the Greeks regard themselves as civilized while he is a barbarian, then he glories in his condition as a barbarian in defense of his faith.[11]

He also reacts strongly against Greek cosmology, opposing to it the unique eternity of God and the creation of the cosmos: "Our God has no beginning in time, being Himself alone without beginning and, at the same time, the principle of the entire universe. God is Spirit, but not one who permeates through matter; rather, He is the Creator of material spirits and of the forms of matter itself— invisible and intangible. He is the Father of visible and invisible things. By His creation we know Him, and the invisible things of His power, through His creatures, we understand."[12] God is the sole principle of all that exists; matter, by contrast, has had a beginning and is therefore a creature, produced by the unique creating Principle.

Tatian also maintains certain teachings of Justin regarding the immortality of the soul, asserting that it is not immortal in itself, but admits that the soul may not die, because it rises again with the body at the end of time: "Our soul, O men of Greece, is not immortal in itself,

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[10] Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 2.
[11] Cf. Canals, Francisco, *Historia de la filosofía medieval,* cit., p. 17.
[12] Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 4.

but mortal; yet it is also capable of not dying. For it dies and is dissolved with the body if it does not know the truth; but it rises again with the body at the end of the world, to receive, as punishment, death in immortality. At the same time, it does not die, even if it is dissolved with the body for a time, if it has obtained the knowledge of God. For the soul is darkness, and there is no light in it."[13]

2.1.3. Athenagoras of Athens

Athenagoras of Athens, like Saint Justin, is a philosopher.[14] Among the most notable events in his life is that in the year 177, at a meeting with the emperor of that time, the philosopher Marcus Aurelius (to whom, along with Commodus, his *Plea for the Christians* is addressed), he pleaded in favor of the Christians. With skilled rhetoric he addressed them: "You know this better than anyone, being trained as you are in philosophy and in every form of culture. For this reason, even those who are judged before you, although accused of the greatest crimes, are confident, and, knowing that you examine their lives and do not attack their names if they are empty, nor give heed to accusations if they are false, they receive with the same disposition both acquittal and condemnation."[15] Indeed, he defends Christianity against the accusation of atheism: the Christian is a believer, but one who clearly distinguishes between God and matter. The distinction lies precisely in the fact that the former is uncreated and the latter a creature: "If matter and God are one and the same thing, and it is only a question of two names for a single reality, then in not honouring stones and logs, gold and silver, we commit impiety; but if we distinguish the one from the other, as the craftsman (is distinguished) from the material he works with, why are we accused? For it is as with the potter and

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[13] Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 13.

[14] Cf. Heinzmann, Richard, *Filosofía de la edad media*, cit., p. 45

[15] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 1, 3.

the clay: the clay is the matter, and the potter the artisan; thus, God is the craftsman, and matter that is offered to His work. But just as clay, without the action of the artisan, cannot by itself become objects, neither could matter, capable of every form, without the action of God the craftsman, have received its particular form, or its harmony."[16] He affirms that all of God's creation has its own usefulness, though not for Him, since He requires nothing and has no need of anything. Nor is the accusation of anthropophagy (cannibalism), often levelled against Christians, well-founded: on the contrary, they do not even promote abortion: "We declare that those who attempt abortion commit homicide and will have to give account to God for it. Then, for what reason should we kill anyone? For it cannot be thought at the same time that what the woman carries in her womb is a living being and for this reason God cares for it, and then kill the one who has already advanced in life: to reject the exposure of newborns, since exposing children is equivalent to killing them, and then to take the life of those who have already grown. No, we are in all things and always consistent and in agreement with ourselves, we serve reason and do not violate it."[17] Finally, seeking to maintain a balanced attitude, Athenagoras acknowledges the value of Greek philosophy while at the same time affirming the superiority of Christian doctrine.[18]

2.1.4. Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus of Antioch, bishop of that city, in his work *To Autolycus* (*Ad Autolycum*), emphasizes the transcendence of God in these terms: "The form of God is ineffable and inexpressible, and cannot be seen with carnal eyes. In glory, He is immeasurable; in greatness,

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[16] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians,* 15, 2

[17] Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, 25, 6.

[18] Cf. Canals, Francisco, *Historia de la filosofía medieval*, cit., p. 18.

incomprehensible; in height, inconceivable; in strength, incomparable; in wisdom, He is taught by none; in His goodness, inimitable; in His beneficence, indescribable. If I call Him light, I speak of His work; if I call Him Word, I name His principle; if I call Him intellectual, I name His thought; if I call Him spirit, I name His breath; if I call Him wisdom, I name His generation; if I call Him strength, I name His power; if I call Him might, I name His activity; if I call Him providence, I name His goodness; if I call Him kingdom, I name His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mean Judge; if I call Him Judge, I mean just; if I call Him Father, I mean All; if I call Him fire, I name His wrath."[19] The power of God is sovereign and supreme; He requires nothing to carry out His work—namely, creation—not even the formless or *prima materia* of the Platonic philosophers. Thus, Theophilus declares: "He made all things out of non-being. Nothing was contemporary with God, but, being His own place, having no need of anything and existing before the ages, He willed to make man, that He might be known. For this reason, He prepared the world. For what has been made is also needy, but the Unbegotten has need of nothing."[20] He expressly criticizes the Platonists, such as Alcinous and Plutarch, who affirm the eternity of matter: "They also suppose that both God and matter are ungenerated, and claim that matter is contemporary with God. But if God and matter are both ungenerated, then, according to the Platonists, God is not the maker of all things, nor, indeed, does the monarchy of God appear if we follow them. Moreover, since God, being ungenerated, is also unchangeable, in the same way matter, if ungenerated, would be unchangeable and equal to God. For what is generated is mutable and changeable, and what is ungenerated is immutable and unchangeable."[21]

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[19] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, I, 3, 1-2.
[20] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 10, 1.
[21] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 4, 4-6.

It is important to highlight Theophilus's view on the problem of immortality. In contrast to the Platonic assertion that the soul is immortal by nature—or, one might say, by right—Theophilus counters that man is neither strictly mortal nor altogether immortal, but rather occupies an intermediate state. His words are as follows: "Man was made intermediate, neither wholly mortal nor altogether immortal, capable of both; just as his dwelling, the garden, in its beauty, was made intermediate between the world and heaven. By saying 'to work,' He indicates no other work than that of keeping God's command, so as not to lose himself by disobedience, as indeed he was lost through sin."[22] His position, which does not lack certain Platonic aspects, may be summarized as follows: it depends on the individual himself whether he inclines toward immortality or toward mortality—that is, whether he turns toward immortal things or mortal ones. If he keeps God's commandments and laws, he becomes immortalized, for he receives his due reward: divinization. But if he disobeys the Creator, he brings death upon himself. The anthropological foundation of this view lies in the free will with which man was created, and on this point Theophilus is remarkably clear: "God created man free and master of himself. Thus, what man brought upon himself through negligence and disobedience, God now grants to him through His own philanthropy and mercy, when man obeys Him. Just as by disobeying man drew death upon himself, so likewise by obeying the will of God, whoever may gain for himself eternal life. God has given us the law and holy commandments, and everyone who keeps them may be saved and, having attained the resurrection, inherent incorruption."[23]

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[22] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 24, 7-8.
[23] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 27, 4-7.

It is also interesting to note the way in which Theophilus explains, drawing on Genesis, how rational creatures obey the law of God through analogies with the behavior of other creatures. Indeed, he compares the prophets, the righteous, and the pious to the activity of the planets: "The visible and shining stars are a representation of the prophets; therefore, they remain without deviation and do not change from one place to another. Those who are second in brightness are symbols of the people of the righteous. Those that change and flee from one place to another."[24] Those who act according to inspired knowledge, giving to each his due and rendering reverence to God, act with firmness like the sidereal stars—an unmistakably Platonic reference, since they dwell above man. By contrast, animals act beneath him: "The sea monsters and birds of prey are like the greedy and the transgressors. In the same way, the righteous who keep the law of God do not bite or harm anyone and live holy and dignified lives, while the deceitful, murderers, and atheists resemble the sea monsters, wild beasts, and birds of prey: in their own way they swallow up the weaker ones."[25] In the case of rational beings, it lies within them to follow or not follow the law, so that punishment, for example, comes as a result of failing to keep it. God has given the law to man so that he may keep it and, by his own will, attain incorruptibility.[26]

2.1.5. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon

At that time, Christianity was not yet a unified doctrine in which orthodoxy prevailed with clear visibility; rather, it was a movement in which various interpretations coexisted—interpretations that, although inspired by Christianity, incorporated elements from other

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[24] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 15, 5-6.
[25] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 16, 3.
[26] Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus*, II, 27, 7.