
UNIT 1 EARLY MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHERS

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we expose the role of the Apologists who defended faith against various heresies in the early history of medieval period and we explore their philosophical contribution to formation of faith. Thus we can learn that:

- faith and reason are not contradictory but complementary in our pursuit
- how reason and faith played an important role in human enrichment without any prejudice
- that early Medieval philosophers were not only Christian saints but also those who contributed a lot to the philosophical foundation
- how Medieval philosophers used the ancient philosophers in their arguments and contributions

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Early Medieval Philosophy begins with the Patristic era which starts immediately after the death of the last Apostle John, which marked the end of the Apostolic era. The term 'patristic philosophy' covers all of these activities by the 'fathers' (patres) of the Church. Obviously this term was at first attributed by some Christians to their bishop and which soon was extended to all bishops. Around 4th cent, the term "Father" began to be applied to men, who, even if they were not bishops, distinguished themselves because of their doctrinal authority. This period refers to any of the great bishops and other eminent Christian teachers of the early centuries whose writings remained as a court of appeal for their successors, especially in reference to controversial points of faith or practice. The early Patristic philosophers are commonly referred to as the apologists because they devoted most of their attention to apologetics, a philosophical defense of the Christian faith against the claims of secular philosophy and gnosticism. An effective defense required the apologists to merge rational philosophy with Christian doctrines based on faith. The early medieval philosophers, thus, struggled to explain their faith in philosophical terms.

1.2 EARLY MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHERS

MARCIANUS ARISTIDES

Marcianus Aristides, a philosopher of Athens', wrote an Apology dated A.D. 140 and is addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius. At the beginning of his work, Aristides declares that he is 'amazed at the arrangement of the world moved by the impulse of another who is more powerful than that which is moved- that mover is God himself'. Aristides identifies the designer and mover of the world with the Christian God who is eternal, perfect, incomprehensible, wise, good.

FLAVIUS JUSTINUS (JUSTIN)

In his dialogue with Trypho Justin declares that philosophy is a most precious gift of God designed to lead human to God. Its true nature and unity have not been recognised by most people, as is clear from the existence of so many philosophical schools. He prized the Platonic doctrine of the immaterial world and of the being beyond essence, which he identified with God who revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ. He was one of the most important of the Greek philosopher-Apologists in the early Christian church. His writings represent the first positive encounter of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy and laid the basis for a theology of history.

Of the works bearing Justin's authorship and still deemed genuine are two Apologies. In the first part of the First Apology, he defends his fellow Christians against the charges of atheism and hostility to the Roman state. He then goes on to express the core of his Christian philosophy: the highest aspiration of both Christianity and Platonic philosophy is a transcendent and unchangeable God; consequently, an intellectual articulation of the Christian faith would demonstrate its harmony with reason. Such a convergence is rooted in the relationship between human reason and the divine mind, both identified by the same term, *logos* (Greek: "intellect," "word"), which enables man to understand basic truths regarding the world, time, creation, freedom, the human soul's affinity with the divine spirit, and the recognition of good and evil.

TATIAN

Very little is known of Tatian's life, and even less of his death (ca. A.D. 165/175). He was by birth a Syrian, born into paganism. His wanderings brought him to Rome, where he was a pupil of Justin. **Work:** *Diatessaron; Address to the Greeks*. Tatian declares that we know God from his works. He holds a doctrine of the *Logos*, distinguishes soul from spirit, teaches creation in time and insists on free-will. He recognised the human mind's ability to prove God's existence from creatures by using philosophical notions and categories, as when he maintains that the Word, proceeding from the simple essence of God, does not fall into the void as human words do, but remains in its subsistence and is the divine instrument of creation. "By His simply willing it, the Word springs forth: and the Word, not proceeding in vain, becomes the first begotten work of the Father. We know Him to be the beginning of the World".

ATHENAGORAS

Athenagoras (- 180) was a Christian philosopher of Athens. He had a very attractive style of Greek. **Work:** *Supplication for the Christians*. Athenagoras argues that there cannot be a multitude of material gods. God, who forms matter, must transcend

matter. Matter is one thing and God another, and that there is a great difference between them. The cause of perishable things must be imperishable and spiritual.

THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

Theophilus (–ca. 185/191) was the seventh bishop of Antioch, the sixth successor of Peter. Little is known of him. He was born near the Euphrates, and was converted from paganism to Christianity as an adult. He died between the years 185 and 191 A.D. **Work:** *To Autolycus*. After emphasising the fact that moral purity is necessary for anyone who would know God, Theophilus further speaks of the divine attributes such as incomprehensibility, power, wisdom, eternity, immutability. As the invisible soul of human is perceived through the movements of the body, so the invisible God is known through his providence and works.

IRENÆUS

Irenaeus (ca. 140-202) was the second bishop of Lyons. He was a native Asia Minor, of Smyrna, where he was a pupil of Polycarp. **Work:** *Adversus hereticorum*. Irenaeus, writing against the Gnostics (Gnosticism professed to substitute knowledge (*gnosis*) for faith, offered a doctrine of God, creation, the origin of evil, salvation, to those who liked to look upon themselves as superior persons in comparison with the ordinary Christians.) in his *Adversus Hereticorum*, affirms that there is one God, the Creator of heaven and earth. He appeals to the arguments from design and universal consent. God freely created the world out of nothing without any previously existing matter. Though the human mind can know God through reason and revelation, it cannot comprehend God who transcends the human intelligence. To pretend to know the ineffable mysteries of God and to go beyond humble faith and love is mere conceit and pride.

MINUCIUS FELIX

Biographical details of Minucius Felix (ca. 218/235) are utterly lacking. We can say of him only that he was a Christian, a layman, a Roman, and a rather distinguished member of the legal profession in that city. **Work:** *Octavius*. Arguing that God's existence can be known with certainty from the cosmic order and the design involved in the organism, particularly in the human body, Minucius affirmed that Greek philosophers, too, recognised these truths. While Aristotle recognised one Godhead and the Stoics had a doctrine of divine providence, Plato spoke in almost Christian terms of the Maker and Father of the universe.

TERTULLIAN

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (ca. 155/160-240/250) was born in Carthage of pagan parents between the years 155 and 160. He was a lawyer of considerable repute. Within the span of nearly twenty-five years, his numerous writings fall into three fairly distinct periods: his Catholic period, semi-Montanist period, and Montanist period. **Work:** *Apology; The Shows; The Demurrer against the Heretics; Prayer; Patience; Baptism; Repentance; To My Wife; Against the Jews; Against Hermogenes; The Veiling of Virgins; Against Marcion*.

Tertullian was the first outstanding Christian Latin writer whose works contained contempt for pagan philosophy. However, in spite of his contempt for it, he himself developed philosophical themes influenced by the Stoics. He holds that the existence of God is known with certainty from his works. Everything, including God, is corporeal, bodily.

ARNOBIUS

Arnobius of Sicca (-ca. 327) was born a pagan and was for many years a vigorous opponent of Christianity. Finally, warned in his dreams, he was converted to Christianity. **Work:** *Against the Pagans*. Arnobius makes some curious observations concerning the soul. Although he affirms creationism, he makes the creating agent a being inferior to God. He also asserts the *gratuitous* character of the soul's immortality, denying a natural immortality. He also asserts the experiential origin of all our ideas with one exception of the idea of God. For example, a child brought up in solitude, silence and ignorance would know nothing by 'reminiscence,' as thought by Plato.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement was born around 150 A.D. of a pagan family, either in Athens or Alexandria. He received an excellent education in Greek literature and philosophy. He was a student of Pantenus, the famous doctor who taught at the Alexandrian catechetical school. With the spell of his eloquence and the fervor of his piety, Clement's teaching attracted many students. When the persecution of Septimus Severus broke out, Clement took refuge in Cappadocia where he continued his priestly ministry. He died in exile around the year 215. **Work:** *Quis dives salvetur?*; *Protrepticus*; *Paedagogus*; *Stromata*.

Animated by the attitude which was later summed up in the formula, *Credo ut intelligam*, Clement sought to develop the systematic presentation of the Christian wisdom. He looks upon the Greek philosophers' work as a preparation for Christianity, an education of the Hellenic world for the revealed religion, than as a folly and delusion. Given that the divine Logos has always illuminated souls, he believed that just as the Jews had been enlightened by Moses and the Prophets so had been the Greeks by their philosophers. Thus philosophy was to the Greeks what the Law was to the Hebrews.

He was a Christian Apologist, missionary theologian to the Hellenistic (Greek cultural) world, and second known leader and teacher of the catechetical school of Alexandria. In a series of allusive writings, he presented a Hellenized Christianity along with the philosophical syncretism of his age: Stoic ethics, Aristotelian logic and especially Platonic metaphysics. Just as Paul saw the Hebrew prophets and law as a preparation for the Gospel, Clement saw Christianity as making possible a confluence of Plato and the Old Testament, both offering anticipations of Jesus' teaching. Clement's fusion of Platonism and Christianity vehemently opposed the dualism and determinism of Gnostic theosophy, and stressed free choice and responsibility as fundamental to moral values. Central to his writing is the vindication of faith as the foundation for growth in religious knowledge by philosophical contemplation and biblical study.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain briefly the core of Justin's Christian philosophy.

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2) What is Gnosticism? How did Irenaeus fight against the Gnostics?

ORIGEN

Origen was born around 185, probably in Alexandria, of a Christian father, Leonid. In order to complete his education, his father placed him in Clement's catechetical school at Alexandria. He also studied philosophy under Ammonius Saccas, the greatest representative of Platonism at that time. Meanwhile began Origen's first battles with his bishop Demetrius, who condemned Origen at a synod of Egyptian bishops and priests. The church of Rome ratified the condemnation. During the persecution of Decius (250) Origen was arrested and tortured. This led to his reconciliation with the Bishop of Alexandria, who rehabilitated Origen and accepted his return to the diocese of Alexandria. Soon after (about 253) Origen died. **Work:** *The exapla; De principiis; Contra Celsum.*

Attempting to defend theological beliefs which had hitherto been accepted through faith alone, Origen asserted the rational argument that God, as pure spiritual essence (in perfect unity and absolute changelessness), is not only above everything else in the universe (and all beings) but also the eternal creator of all things. Matter is changeable and perishable, but the unchangeable God is everlasting. Although human reason cannot encompass or truly comprehend God's attributes, it can discern certain divine characteristics such as the absolute causality of God's will, or, in other words, God's eternal creativity. God's creativity must be regarded as eternal because as the eternal God he has forever been (and will continue forever to be) ceaselessly active. He disagreed sharply with the Greek philosophers (for example, Plato and Aristotle) who claimed that God is the architect that formed the world out of eternally existing matter. Origen insisted that God created matter itself, that he willed the universe into being and pre-determined its nature. Not matter, then, but creativity is co-eternal with God. Owing to God's unchangeableness, and to the changeability and perishability of matter, God himself does not directly make the phenomenal world, but allocates this function to his image, the *Logos*, begotten by God. However, the *Logos* is not the God (God himself), but a subordinate divinity. This second God is the Son of God who participates in creation by bringing into being the transitory and perishable world of matter. The *Logos* is a personal copy of the Father God, though inferior to God himself. The relationship of the *Logos* to God is the same as the relationship which the Holy Spirit (or Holy Ghost) bears to the Son of God; nevertheless, one is not temporally prior to the other, for all are co-eternal. The *Logos* is the world's prototype, the idea or 'blue print' according to which everything is created by edict of the divine will. Eventually all spiritual beings will know God as his Son does, and they will then become sons of God comparable to the *Logos*, his only begotten Son.

Origen maintained that human's spirit existed prior to one's body, that human became an earth creature as a consequence of one's sins, but also that human and all other spiritual beings, including even Satan, will finally find salvation, a state of divine blessedness in which each partakes of the divine essence. He held that human was made out of (or imprisoned by) material substance as punishment for sin but now has the power to achieve redemption through purification. Human's fall is attributed to misuse of one's freedom of the will. Even after one's fall, human still possesses the freedom to choose between good and evil. The material world is in itself good, for God created it; only human's perverted will causes one to sin and results in chaining one to substance (materiality) so that the soul is incorporated into flesh. Non-human spirits (e.g., angels, stars, and evil demons) occupy their different places or ranks in the material world. Human, though in a fallen state, aspires through use of one's free will to attain salvation, to return to one's divine origin through emancipation from matter. With the assistance of the *Logos*, i.e., the sinless soul of Jesus, human (whose spirit is eternal) may progress through two ascending stages of redemption, namely, faith – whereby one achieves understanding of the sensory world through religious knowledge – and knowledge of the *Logos* until one reaches the highest state of absolute absorption into God, liberated entirely from material existence by virtue of this combination of grace and freedom. All spirits find their perfection in the third stage of redemption. Ultimate reality consists of personalities, together with their interpersonal relationships with one another and with the infinite person, God.

EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

Eusebius (ca. 263-340), a scholar of Church History, was born at Caesarea in Palestine about the year 263. He studied under Pamphilus. In 313 he was made bishop of Caesarea. **Work:** *The Chronicle; History of the Church; Preparation for the Gospel; Proof of the Gospel; Ecclesiastical Theology*.

Plato, for Eusebius, is a prophet of the economy of salvation as he had borrowed the truths from the Old Testament; but at the same time he is willing to admit the possibility of Plato having discovered the truth for himself or of his having been enlightened by God. But Plato did not himself enter into the promised land of truth, though he approached near to it. He stood only on the threshold of truth. It is Christianity alone which is the true philosophy. Plato's philosophy was highly intellectualist, cavier for the multitude, whereas Christianity is for all, so that women and men, poor and rich, unlearned and learned, can be philosophers.

GREGORY OF NYSSA

Gregory, younger brother of Basil, another luminary of eastern Patristics, was born in Nyssa around 335. At the age of sixteen he entered a monastery to dedicate himself to contemplation. When his brother became metropolitan at Caesarea and asked him also guide a diocese, Gregory consented to being consecrated Bishop of Nyssa. Around 380 he was chosen metropolitan of Sebastis, and in the council of 381 he was one of the greatest supporters of orthodoxy. The emperor Theodosius assigned him various official duties in order to win the battle against Arianism, and he brought him to Constantinople to celebrate the funeral of his daughter Pulcheria and his wife Flacilla. Gregory died not long after 394. **Work:** *Contra Eunomium; Oratian Catechtica; De anima et resurrectione; De hominis opificio*.

Gregory of Nyssa realised that the data of revelation are accepted on faith and are not the result of a logical process of reasoning. The mysteries of faith are not

philosophical and scientific conclusions. If they were, then supernatural faith and Greek philosophy would be the same. On the other hand, the Faith has a rational basis. The acceptance of mysteries on authority presupposes the ascertainability by natural reasoning of certain preliminary truths, especially the existence of God, which are capable of philosophical demonstration. While maintaining the superiority of faith, it is only right to invoke the aid of philosophy. Ethics, natural philosophy, logic, mathematics, are not only ornaments in the temple of truth but these also contribute to the life of wisdom and virtue. They are not to be despised or rejected. Nevertheless, divine revelation must be accepted as a touchstone and criterion of truth since human reasoning must be judged by the word of God and not the other way about.

He went on to give reasons for the trinity of persons in the one Godhead. God must have a Logos, a word, a reason, as He cannot be less than human, who also has a Logos, a reason. But the divine Logos has to be eternal, just as it must be living, unlike the fleeting internal word in human. The Logos is one in nature (Being) with the Father since there is but one God. The distinction between the Logos and the Father is a distinction of relation. Similarly, his theory that the word 'human' is primarily applicable to the universal and only secondarily to the individual human was an attempt render the mystery more intelligible, that the word 'God' refers primarily to the divine essence, which is one, and only secondarily to the three divine Persons, so that the believers cannot be rightly accused of tritheism.

Under the influence of Platonism, Gregory also distinguishes between the ideal human and the earthly human. The ideal human exists only in the divine idea without any sexual determination; whereas the earthly human is a creature of experience, sexually determined by his creative act. Moreover, God freely created the world out of abundance of his goodness and love, in order that the creatures might participate in the same goodness. God created human free - with a soul that is living, simple, spiritual and immortal - permitting one to choose evil if one so wills. Evil is the result of human's free choice, and God is not responsible for it though God, in his foreknowledge, permits it. He knew also that he would in the end bring all humans to himself. He thus accepted the Origenist theory of the 'restoration of all things'.

Contemplating the sensible objects, the human mind can know something of God and his attributes. However, the sensible objects are not fully real. They are mirage and illusion except as symbols or manifestations of immaterial reality towards which human is spiritually drawn. The consequent tension in the soul – as the soul is drawn towards God leaving its natural objects of knowledge behind without being able to see the God to whom it is drawn by love – leads to a state of despair, which is the birth of mysticism. It enters into the darkness or the 'cloud of unknowing.' There are two movements in the soul: that of the indwelling of the triune God and that of the soul's reaching out beyond itself, culminating in 'ecstasy' or ecstatic love which is the summit of the soul's endeavour.

AMBROSE

Born at Treves (ca. 333-397), Ambrose was the son of the Pretorian Prefect of Gaul. His father died young. He was trained both in rhetoric and in the legal profession. About the year 370 he was made Consul of Liguria and Emilia, with his official residence in Milan. He was consecrated bishop of Milan on December 7, 374, just a week after his baptism. He was an exemplary bishop both in his public and in his private life. On a popular level he is best remembered as the author of several liturgical hymns. *Works: Letters; Sermons; Commentaries on Scripture.*

St. Ambrose showed an active interest in practical and ethical matters under the influence of Cicero without much liking for metaphysical speculation. His divisions and treatment of the virtues are infused with the Christian ethos complemented by the final ideal of eternal happiness in God.

JOHN DAMASCENE

John Damascene (ca. 645-749), born at Damascus, was educated by a ceratin Cosmas. With a thorough knowledge of Arabic and Greek and proficient also in Islam, he served the Caliph's government for a time. Later he resigned the job on account of the Caliph's anti-Christian policies and became a priest. **Work** (chief work): *Fount of Wisdom*. John Damascene's chief work is the *Fount of Wisdom*, in the first part of which he gives a sketch of the Aristotelian logic and ontology. In this part, he opines that philosophy and profane science are the instruments or handmaids of theology – the view of Clement of Alexandria, the two Gregories and Philo of Alexandria, the originator of this view.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain briefly Origen's concept of God.

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2) What is the difference between ideal human and earthly human according to Gregory of Nyssa?

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1.3 END OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

After Christianity became a licit religion in the fourth century, philosophical activity among Christians expanded. The task of theological self-articulation became increasingly significant as Christianity grew in the fourth and fifth centuries towards majority status within the Empire, with imperial support. In this later period the range and sophistication of Christian thought increased significantly, due in part to the influence of pagan Neo-Platonism, a movement that included a number of the finest philosophers active since the classical period of Plato and Aristotle.

Later patristic philosophy had a defining influence upon medieval Christian thought through such figures as Boethius and Dionysius, establishing both the conceptual foundations and the authoritative warrant for the scholasticism.

ANICIUS MANLIUS SEVERINUS BOETHIUS (480–525)

He is an aristocratic Roman noble man, a scholar, Christian philosopher, and statesman, author of the celebrated *De consolatione philosophiae* (Consolation of Philosophy), a largely Neo-Platonism work in which the pursuit of wisdom and the love of God are described as the true sources of human happiness.

Boethius' logical works have been the subject of recent studies by scholars, and his theological treatises on the Trinity contain passages of philosophical interest; but throughout history he has been best known for a single work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius' earlier works have been the preserve of more specialized readers, especially concerned with the history of ancient philosophy. His stated original intention was to educate the West by translating all of Plato and Aristotle into Latin and to supply explanatory commentaries on many of their writings.

About 520 Boethius put his close study of Aristotle to use in four short treatises in letter form on the ecclesiastical doctrines of the Trinity and the nature of Christ; these are basically an attempt to solve disputes that had resulted from the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ. Using the terminology of the Aristotelian categories, Boethius described the unity of God in terms of substance and the three divine persons in terms of relation. He also tried to solve dilemmas arising from the traditional description of Christ as both human and divine, by deploying precise definitions of “substance,” “nature,” and “person.”

Boethius is able to distinguish between random chance and human choice, but he accepts that free human choice, even if not random, is difficult to reconcile with the existence of God who foresees everything that is to happen. “If God foresees all and cannot in any way be mistaken, then that must necessarily happen which in his providence he foresees will be”. This is called God's foreknowledge that means God's knowing what humans will do or not do. Boethius accepts that a genuinely free action cannot be certainly foreseen, even by God, and he takes refuge in the notion of divine timelessness, saying that God's seeing is not really a foreseeing.

For Boethius, There are two kinds of necessity. a) Plain or straightforward necessity as ‘Necessarily, all men are mortal’ and b) Conditional Necessity as ‘Necessarily, if you know that I am walking, I am walking.’ The future events which God sees as present are not straightforwardly necessary, but only conditionally necessary. Boethius has been called ‘Last of the Romans, first of the scholastics’. Certainly, in his work he links classical philosophy with the technical philosophy of the medieval schools, more even than Augustine does.

PSEUDO-DIONYSIUS (AD 500)

He is probably a Syrian monk who, known only by his pseudonym, wrote a series of Greek treatises and letters for the purpose of uniting Neoplatonic philosophy with Christian theology and mystical experience. These writings established a definite Neoplatonic trend in a large segment of medieval Christian doctrine and spirituality—especially in the Western Latin Church—that has determined facets of its religious

and devotional character to the present time. He presented himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, an Athenian converted by St Paul. This pretence - or literary device - was so convincing that Pseudo-Dionysius acquired something close to apostolic authority, giving his writings tremendous influence throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.

Cardinal points of Pseudo-Dionysius' thought are the transcendence of a first cause of the universe, the immediacy of divine causality in the world and a hierarchically ordered cosmos. The treatises "On the Divine Names," "On Mystical Theology," "On the Celestial Hierarchy," and "On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" comprise the bulk of the Dionysian corpus of writings. Their doctrinal content forms a complete theology, covering the Trinity and angelic world, the incarnation and redemption and provides a symbolic and mystical explanation of all that is. God's transcendence above all rational comprehension and categorical knowledge ultimately reduces any expression of the divinity to polar pairs of contraries: grace and judgment, freedom and necessity, being and nonbeing, time and eternity. The incarnation of the Word or Son of God, in Christ, consequently, was the expression in the universe of the inexpressible, whereby the One enters into the world of multiplicity. Still, the human intellect can apply to God positive, analogous terms or names such as The Good, Unity, Trinity, Beauty, Love, Being, Life, Wisdom, or Intelligence, assuming that these are limited forms of communicating the incommunicable.

With regard to the giving names or attributes to God, the Pseudo-Dionysius provided the classic method of the three ways. There is first the positive way or the way of affirmation (*Via Affirmationis*). It consists of affirming of God all perfections found in creatures which are compatible with his spiritual nature such as goodness or wisdom. Some creaturely perfections which involve materiality, such as height and extension, are obviously incompatible with the spiritual nature of God and so cannot be affirmed of him according to this way. Next we must make use of the negative way, (*Via Negationis*). In this way, we exclude from God all the imperfections that are involved in creatures. Thus he is not Life in the sense of our vegetative and sensitive life which involves certain perfection tied up with matter. Finally we must also use the way of eminence (*Via Eminentiae*) whereby we add that God does not merely possess life or wisdom in a superior degree than we, by that it is of a qualitatively superior kind. Thus we should say that he is super-essential Life or super-essential Wisdom. Careful attention to all this would show that ultimately the Pseudo-Dionysius emphasises what is known as negative theology, that is, he holds that we can more easily say what God is not, rather than what he is.

The "Divine Names" and "Mystical Theology" treat the nature and effects of contemplative prayer—the disciplined abandonment of senses and intelligible forms to prepare for the immediate experience of "light from the divine darkness" and ecstatic union—in a manner and scope that make them indispensable to the history of Christian theology and piety. His treatises on the hierarchies, wherein he theorized that all that exists—the form of Christian society, the stages of prayer, and the angelic world—is structured as triads that are the images of the eternal Trinity, introduced a new meaning for the term hierarchy. At the end of the fifth century, a collection of writings by Dionysius aroused great interest and exerted a profound influence on medieval thought.

Check Your Progress III

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the two kinds of necessity taught by Boethius.

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1.4 LET US SUM UP

In establishing the fundamental doctrines and the triumph of religious doctrines, there began a period of philosophical construction devoted to the elaboration of a philosophy in which the subject-matter and guiding principles were determined by religious perspectives. This religious outlook – which constitutes the largest part of the philosophy of the early middle ages – had for its aim the exposition, systematization, and demonstration of the religious dogmas and the construction of a theory of the world and of life on that basis. The thinkers who ventured this service were called patristic thinkers, early medieval philosophers. Scholastic philosophy derived its doctrinal commitments from these early medieval philosophers who also in some way inspired the religious thinkers of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, but cast these in a philosophical mould of dialogue which bore the stamp of the methods and concepts of Greek philosophy.

1.5 KEY WORDS

- Evil** : Evil is the privation of perfection due to a being.
- Apology** : An **apology** is a justification or defense of an act or idea.

1.6 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Of the works bearing Justin's authorship and still deemed genuine are two Apologies. In the first part of the First Apology, he defends his fellow Christians against the charges of atheism and hostility to the Roman state. He then goes on to express the core of his Christian philosophy: the highest aspiration of both Christianity and Platonic philosophy is a transcendent and unchangeable God; consequently, an intellectual articulation of the Christian faith would demonstrate its harmony with reason. Such a convergence is rooted in the relationship between human reason and the divine mind, both identified by the same term, *logos* (Greek: "intellect," "word"), which enables man to understand basic truths regarding the world, time, creation, freedom, the human soul's affinity with the divine spirit, and the recognition of good and evil.
- 2) Gnosticism professed to substitute knowledge (*gnosis*) for faith, offered a doctrine of God, creation, the origin of evil, salvation, to those who liked to look upon themselves as superior persons in comparison with the ordinary Christians. Irenaeus, writing against the Gnostics in his *Adversus Hereticorum*, affirms that there is one God, the Creator of heaven and earth. He appeals to the arguments from design and universal consent. God freely created the world out of nothing without any previously existing matter. Though the human mind can know God through reason and revelation, it cannot comprehend God who transcends the human intelligence. To pretend to know the ineffable mysteries of God and to go beyond humble faith and love is mere conceit and pride.

Check Your Progress II

- 1) Origen asserted the rational argument that God, as pure spiritual essence (in perfect unity and absolute changelessness), is not only above everything else in the universe (and all beings) but also the eternal creator of all things. Matter is changeable and perishable, but the unchangeable God is everlasting. Although human reason cannot encompass or truly comprehend God's attributes, it can discern certain divine characteristics such as the absolute causality of God's will, or, in other words, God's eternal creativity. God's creativity must be regarded as eternal because as the eternal God he has forever been (and will continue forever to be) ceaselessly active. He disagreed sharply with the Greek philosophers (for example, Plato and Aristotle) who claimed that God is the architect that formed the world out of eternally existing matter. Origen insisted that God created matter itself, that he willed the universe into being and pre-determined its nature.
- 2) Under the influence of Platonism, Gregory also distinguishes between the ideal human and the earthly human. The ideal human exists only in the divine idea without any sexual determination; whereas the earthly human is a creature of experience, sexually determined by his creative act.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) For Boethius, There are two kinds of necessity: a) Plain or straightforward necessity as 'Necessarily, all men are mortal' and b) Conditional Necessity as 'Necessarily, if you know that I am walking, I am walking.' The future events which God sees as present are not straightforwardly necessary, but only conditionally necessary.