Conclusion

The Knowledge of Faith

This study has foregrounded the development of catechesis in early Latin Christianity as a lens through which to understand core questions related to Christian theological epistemology. By inquiring in this direction, I have emphasized the pedagogical and historically conditioned character of knowledge in catechesis. While in the post-Enlightenment West, theological epistemology has primarily been concerned with ascertaining the right criteria for adjudicating warranted belief in God, by approaching the topic of knowledge in patristic catechesis, we are confronted with the ways in which knowing God involves a complex set of practices oriented toward the transformation of one's being and understanding of the world. Knowledge of God belongs first and foremost within a set of church-based practices framed by baptism and participation in the church. The early Christian catechumenate was a transformative site in which new Christians learned the habits of body and mind that would draw them from foundational faith to beatific knowledge.

SUMMARY AND LIMITATIONS

I began with an overview of the connection between education and pedagogy in classical and Christian antiquity, considering key aspects of teaching within Graeco-Roman and early Christian traditions. By the end of the second century, which is when we first really see the emergence of the catechumenate, the discernment of true versus false knowledge of God had become a pressing and contested issue. Irenaeus, we recall, titled his great treatise not *Against Knowledge* but *Against Knowledge Falsely So-Called*. As Christianity appeared amid a broad range of late antique

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teaching institutions, many leading Christians articulated the intelligibility of basic Christian teaching as a source of true knowledge of God. This concern for ascertaining the conditions of true knowledge of God, I suggest, set a major agenda for early Christian catechesis – spanning the scope of the pre- and post-Constantinian eras. In each of the eight core chapters of the book, we discovered a myriad of ways in which Christian teachers instructed catechumens and new Christians to know the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the pre-Constantinian writings of Irenaeus, Tertullian, the Hippolytan school, and Cyprian, I considered the ways in which catechesis developed during the transition from school Christianity to the monepiscopate. We noted here how the centralization of ecclesial authority facilitated a transposition of the practices of knowledge forged in the second century into a new mode of Christian organization. Irenaeus emphasized, in an anti-Valentinian register, the aesthetic conditions requisite for true knowledge, articulating the Rule of Truth as a means for Christians to perceive the harmony of God's diverse work in creation as the work of the one true God. Tertullian emphasized the importance of ritual and simplicity in knowing God. In the writings of the Hippolytan school, we observed how knowledge of God was shaped by discourses about hiddenness and mystery – balancing the need to restrict access to the church's central mystery with an anti-Valentinian commitment to the public and manifest nature of divine revelation. Cyprian, meanwhile, stressed how the centrality of the church was the necessary social locus in which to obtain true knowledge.

When we turn to post-Constantinian sources, we see many of these same themes. Departing from the standard narrative of a sharp disjuncture between pre- and post-Constantinian catechesis, I have highlighted the continuity of catechesis in this period with earlier traditions. Fundamental convictions about theological knowledge that emerged in the second and third centuries provided significant grounds for articulating knowledge of God in the fourth and fifth centuries, despite many evident changes in ecclesiastical and political life. In Ambrose's catechesis, we noted the focus on training spiritual vision of God – from the Lenten sermons on the patriarchs that oriented baptism eschatologically to Holy Week and Eastertide preaching that taught baptismal candidates and neophytes to perceive God in the "works" of creation and the church's rites of initiation. Elsewhere in Northern Italy, we observed how Zeno of Verona and Gaudentius of Brescia sought to articulate knowing God in terms of a realigned cosmology – undermining pagan views of nature and

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time while juxtaposing them with Christian understandings. Meanwhile, Rufinus of Aquileia and Peter Chrysologus demonstrate the use of apophatic motifs in catechesis. Learning to know God, for these two, involved separating heavenly and earthly knowledge and expressing reserve in understanding divine mysteries. Both authors, however, also found ways of redirecting their hearers toward knowing God in ways that would be more beneficial for genuine advancement.

In the North African catechumenate of the fourth and fifth centuries, we noticed a myriad of ways that catechesis was subject to polemical investigation. In the writings of Augustine, we saw the importance of love in articulating catechetical knowledge. Attentive to both his biblical engagements with Platonic traditions of divine illumination and to his polemical contexts, especially Manichaeism and Donatism, we observed how Augustine's catechesis aimed for a reformation of morals and memory that centered upon the heart as the locus of spiritual knowledge. In *De catechizandis*, Augustine advised Deogratias to focus on love of Christ as the center of Scripture. In credal sermons, Augustine highlighted the importance of memorizing the creed by heart as a practice of gathering the soul from its distention in time. In the writings associated with Quodvultdeus and several anonymous sermons, the influence of Augustine loomed large, even while new historical circumstances such as the Vandal invasions shifted the focus of catechetical knowledge in a more apocalyptic direction.

There remain several limitations to this study. The most obvious is that I have left aside many important Greek and Syriac traditions of catechesis, as well as other Latinate catechetical texts. As mentioned in the Introduction, this was simply a matter of restricting the project's scope to a manageable size. Nonetheless, much more work could be done to sharpen and expand the thesis presented here by examining theological knowledge in Alexandrian Christianity, of course, but also in Antioch, Jerusalem, Cappadocia, Syria, and elsewhere. I hope that the present study, despite (or perhaps because of) these shortcomings, spurs such work. A second limitation is that I have not considered the material and archeological evidence of catechesis as much as I would have liked. While I tried to situate the catechetical literature within its sociohistorical milieu, to appreciate more fully the institutional character of catechesis would require a more in-depth analysis of the architectural, financial, social, and otherwise non-literary aspects of early Christian catechesis. Once again, it is hoped that such avenues could be developed in future research.

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH: JESUS CHRIST AS THE CRUX OF CHRISTIAN KNOWING

At the end of this study, we are confronted again with the paradox with which we began. Knowledge of God is at once a divine gift and yet an intellectual and spiritual practice that requires training and effort. This paradox in some ways rhymes the age-old question, going back at least to Socrates, about whether true knowledge and virtue can be learned. The figures studied herein readily emphasize that the divine power attendant in baptism is necessary for true knowledge. Whether emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit or Christ or on the triune God more generally, there is a shared agreement that baptism provides a profound noetic and ontological transformation. And yet without equivocation or irony, these authors repeatedly emphasize the practical training necessary to experience such divine power rightly – often a process that takes many years and a myriad of cognitive and bodily exercises like fasting, exorcism, and prayer. Even a theologian as grace-oriented as Augustine repeatedly emphasizes the moral effort catechumens need to undertake during catechesis to know the triune God truly.

Stepping back, we can see how this study has highlighted the difficulties of imposing modern categories of nature and the supernatural onto early Christianity. It has become all too common in modernity to divide the cosmic order into something called "nature," a space in which which we can make reasoned arguments about God without a shared faith, and "the supernatural," wherein divine grace is substantially and effectually operative. We do, of course, see some early Christians using the language of nature and natural knowledge – such as in Tertullian's treatise *De spectaculis*, where he describes the difference between non-Christians who know something about the creator only through "natural laws" and Christians who know God as adopted children. More often, however, our authors presume that effectual knowledge of God is both possible and, indeed, demanded before and after baptism. This suggests that a fundamental theological presupposition underlying catechesis is that the natural world is always already graced, and that baptismal instruction is itself a participation in the divine pedagogy of God. To understand the character of early Christian catechesis well, we need a robust account of the relationship between the active training required in preparation for spiritual illumination and the divine power operative in such illumination. Such is one of the theological conclusions reached at the end of this largely historical inquiry into the catechumenate.

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What, finally, is meant by the phrase "the knowledge of faith"? I mean by this phrase to signify how catechesis served to guide new members into a way of knowing God in a distinctly Christian register – to perceive and experience the triune God in a way determined by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that is encountered in the church empowered by the Holy Spirit. A consistent feature of patristic catechesis is the concern to shape new Christians' understanding of God and the world in a way that holds together both the transcendent nature of divine being and the possibility of knowing this God in the material and temporal conditions of finite being. Catechetical knowledge, on the one hand, entails upholding the ontological gap between God and creation. God is not like other "things" in the created world and so cannot be known in the same way that other created beings are known. On the other hand, patristic catechesis assumes that genuine knowledge of God is really possible because Jesus Christ is the eternal Word made flesh. This dual emphasis, in turn, entails teaching catechumens what it means for the world to be receptive to divine grace while also appreciating the Christian's radical reorientation within the cosmos that occurs in baptism. Situated between the church and the world – between heaven and earth – catechesis elucidates the alterity of Christian existence in the world without rejecting the world as the product of a malevolent creator. Like the incarnate Christ, catechesis bridges the gap between the divine and the human.

By attending to epistemology in catechesis, in other words, I have tried to explore the implications of the Christian claim that true knowledge of God is found in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The crux of Christian knowledge, simply, is the incarnation. In God's assumption of human flesh, we can know the transcendent God within the world of space and time without collapsing the creator–creature distinction. More than simply a doctrine to be believed, the incarnation constitutes a mode of attending to the world, to oneself, and to God. It is a habit of being aimed at the Christian's total transformation through union with God by participation in the Spirit-formed church. The incarnation entails an epistemology whose contours can be observed in the practices of catechesis explored in this book. Echoing the mediation of God and humanity in the incarnation, the catechumenate invites new ways of knowing the transcendent God from within the conditions of creaturely life.

If we today have lost sight of catechesis as a dynamic education in being – a resounding of the incarnation – it behoves us today to consider catechesis anew. More than a program for facilitating new members into a social group, more than a method for teaching basic doctrine to new

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members, catechesis in the early Christian world involved a transforming vision of reality – a state of being in which everything is reimagined according to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Catechesis is an aspect of the divine pedagogy in which the eternal wisdom of God – in a real but proleptic fashion – is imparted in the elemental teachings of the faith. And yet precisely here, Christians encounter the fullness of God in a way that initiates the ascent to eternal beatitude – an ascent in which both the journey and the goal is union with Christ, true God and true man.

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