Introduction

Around the year 200, the Latin apologist and theologian Tertullian of Carthage proclaimed – in a line that has since enchanted scholars of early Christianity – that "Christians are made, not born" (*fiunt non nascuntur Christiani*).[1] Becoming Christian, for Tertullian, was not a matter of bloodlines or family ties but of rigorous moral training, intensive biblical instruction, and socialization into a distinctive countercultural community. Elsewhere, he warns that baptism, the pivotal rite of initiation, should not be administered rashly but with a patient concern to foster mature knowledge of Christ:

> The delay of baptism is more profitable in accordance with each person's character, attitude, and even age. . . . So let them come [to baptism] when they are growing up, when they are learning, when they are being taught that to which they are coming. Let them be made Christians when they have become able to know Christ (*fiant christiani cum Christum nosse potuerint*).[2]

For Tertullian, preparation for baptism involved training new Christians in a robust pattern of Christian knowledge (*nosse*), a thoroughgoing process of intellectual, spiritual, and moral formation. It was not to be taken lightly.

Several centuries later, however, it seemed that Christian leaders were taking a different tack. Leading bishops like Augustine of Hippo, for instance, implored non-Christian hearers to hurry to baptism to find

[1] Tertullian, *apol.* 18.4 (CCSL 1:118; FC 10:54).
[2] Tertullian, *bapt.* 18.1, 4, 5 (CCSL 1:293; trans. Ernest Evans, *Tertullian's Treatise on Baptism* [London: SPCK, 1964], 36–39, alt.).

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knowledge of Christ: "Hasten to the font if [you] are in search of enlightenment." "Why do you fear to come?" "Run quickly to grace!"[3] Rather than caution candidates to delay baptism until they were able to know Christ, Christian leaders now seemed to think that baptism itself was the source of divine knowledge.

The formalization of baptismal instruction, what is often now referred to as the catechumenate, was supremely important in early Christianity – arguably the only educational institution unique to Christianity in its first five hundred years.[4] As a formal system for facilitating the process of membership and full initiation, the catechumenate played a major role in the solidification and spread of Christianity. But how should we understand the changing shape of catechesis in these years? How, in other words, do we get from Tertullian's warning to Augustine's plea? At issue in these questions are not simply differing views of baptism or pastoral tactics. We face here perennial Christian questions about the relationship between knowledge, faith, and learning. How does the Christian faith claim to offer true wisdom and virtue? What are the practices that lead to genuine knowledge of God, and how do they lead to spiritual transformation? If faith is a divine gift, can it be taught? Is there a rationale to learning what only comes by grace? Above all, what difference do Christian commitments to understanding Jesus Christ as both divine and human make for Christian modes of knowing?

It might be tempting to overlook the role of theological epistemology in early Christian catechesis. More often, scholars of catechesis have been interested in catechesis to the extent that it provides historical information about the development of creeds, initiation rites, or processes of Christianization. But what opportunities might catechesis afford for reflecting on the way in which knowledge of God is described and taught? I argue in what follows that early Christian catechesis provides a unique window into studying the relationship between knowledge and pedagogy in early Christianity. The catechumenate was a site of formative training for theological cognition – for learning what it means to know and encounter God. And yet precisely what it means to "know God" in these settings is by no means self-explanatory. It requires careful attention to the variations of knowledge-shaping practices across different times and regions. This is not, as will be readily apparent, a work of analytic

[3] Augustine, *en. Ps.* 81.8; *s.* 142.2 app.; *Io. eu. tr.* 44.2.

[4] I discuss the terminology of "catechesis," "catechumen," and "catechumenate" below in the section entitled "A Note on Catechetical Terminology."

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philosophy. It is, rather, a historical–theological study of the ancient catechumenate – ranging from the second century to the fifth century in Roman Italy and North Africa – that seeks to illuminate the varieties of ways of knowing incumbent in introductory Christian education. By observing the myriad ways that early Christians taught new believers the fundamentals of the faith, we learn much about the character of Christian knowledge itself.

For many of the figures in this study, it was understood that some form of divine power was imparted in baptism – usually described in terms of illumination, enlightenment, or the impartation of wisdom. This spiritual power – whether it be identified with Christ, the Holy Spirit, or all three persons of the Trinity working inseparably – was seen as unlocking new, or newly applicable, cognitive powers that enabled participants to know God in ways previously unavailable. In addition, they viewed this kind of knowledge as more than simply learning new information about God. It was a form of union with God – a kind of knowing that involved a sharing or participation in the object known. But if this kind of knowledge was only possible in baptism, why teach anything before baptism? Why teaching anything at all? What should be explained, and what left unsaid? To anticipate the question ultimately animating this study: What conceptions of God and creation are presupposed in Christian practices of knowledge? And how does understanding Jesus Christ as both God and human affect the way we view Christian knowledge – not only its contents and doctrines but also its habits, practices, and forms? The catechumenate affords a perspicacious lens through which to study these questions.

An epistemological approach to studying catechesis has several merits, but two in particular are worth noting at the outset. First, this approach attempts to move beyond the regnant tendency of prioritizing the fourth-century legalization of Christianity as the primary interpretive paradigm for narrating the history of catechesis.[5] It has become all but axiomatic to describe catechetical changes in the fourth century in terms of Christianity's legalization and prioritization. As the story often goes, in

[5] In doing so, it takes up more recent proposals that question the older scholarly narrative about the impact of Constantine. For two examples of this newer scholarship as it pertains particularly to baptismal instruction, see D. H. Williams, "Constantine, Nicaea, and the 'Fall' of the Church," in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998), 117–36; and William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 66 n101.

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the pre-Constantinian days, when Christianity was a beleaguered minority in the Roman Empire, catechesis was lengthy and arduous; it was heavily biblical, involved a large degree of moral and social formation, and was aimed toward making martyrs. But when Christianity became a legal and then the preferred religious expression in the Roman Empire in the fourth century, the purposes of catechesis changed. Now its function was to accommodate a mounting herd of elites who sought the cultural benefits of Christian affiliation but who were not exactly in it to become martyrs. Initiation became more about doctrine and liturgy than biblical or moral formation, and Christian leaders borrowed language from the now defunct mystery cults to heighten the allure. I do not wish to downplay the obviously immense role that Constantine played in early Christianity. The Constantinian dynasty undoubtedly left a lasting mark on the Christian faith, but it did not affect every component in the same way, at the same time, or to the same degree. By observing the interplay of knowledge and pedagogy in early Christian catechesis, we find a more dynamic account of both the continuities and discontinuities that stretch across the pre- and post-Constantinian eras.

Second, this study attempts a different methodological approach to studying the catechumenate than has often been taken. Most studies, as I will outline below, approach catechesis from the perspective of practical theology, liturgical studies, or social history. I have a great appreciation for these disciplines, but I am primarily interested in framing catechesis within the contours of a theological and historical approach that is attentive to the pedagogical shape of catechesis as it emerged within the scope of educational institutions in antiquity. This study is thus primarily occupied with theological questions about the conditions for knowing God and the kinds of practices constitutive of such knowledge, and secondarily with the historical conditions in which such knowledge was formed. One of my aims will be to show how the catechumenate emerged within an existing set of knowledge-shaping traditions and how, as a result, it played an important role in transposing classical education into Christian contexts, even as Christian commitments transformed these traditions in a myriad of ways.

Rowan Williams has famously written that theology as a discipline is "perennially liable to be seduced by the prospect of bypassing the question of how it *learns* its own language."[6] My hope is that this project

[6] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 131 (emphasis original).

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offers a picture of early Christian catechesis that helps us remember, quite literally, how early Christian theology learned its own language. What it means to know God is inseparable from the ways in which such knowledge is experienced; medium and message are tightly linked. In studying early Christian catechesis, we observe how knowing God belongs within a set of ecclesial practices in which the meaning of knowledge and faith are found in – and founded upon – Jesus Christ. Advancing from faith to understanding, from belief in God to the knowledge of eternal wisdom, begins and ends with Christ.

PATRISTIC CATECHESIS AND LATE ANTIQUE LEARNING

Historical studies of catechesis and the catechumenate have mostly proceeded along three lines of inquiry. First are those that study catechesis as a species of practical theology. This approach emerged primarily in the nineteenth century, especially in Germany, with the development of practical theology as a distinct discipline, and it was taken up anew in Roman Catholic circles in the early to mid twentieth century, leading up to Vatican II in the 1960s and the eventual promulgation of the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults in the 1970s.[7] More recently, especially in North America, scholars have turned to patristic catechesis to gain insight into Christian mission in the so-called post-Christendom era. Surveys of patristic catechesis by Michel Dujarier, Alan Kreider, and Everett Ferguson, for example, are especially interested in the ways that catechesis developed in light of the Constantinian era, with an eye toward the

[7] As this approach intersected with New Testament studies, an important impetus was the search for a New Testament "catechism," such as proposed by Alfred Seeberg in *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1903). For a concise historiography of German scholarship, see Matthieu Pignot, *The Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa (4th–6th Centuries): Augustine of Hippo, His Contemporaries and Early Reception* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 10–11. And for a more detailed study of New Testament scholarship related to catechesis, see Benjamin Edsall, "*Kerygma*, Catechesis, and Other Things We Used to Find: Twentieth-Century Research on Early Christian Teaching since Alfred Seeberg (1903)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 3 (2012): 410–41. For key works in Roman Catholic catechetics from this period, see Josef Jungmann, *Die Frohbotschaft und unsere Glaubensverkundigung* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1936); Jean Daniélou, with Regine du Charlat, *La catéchèse aux premiers siècles: Ecole de la Foi* (Paris: Fayard-Mame, 1968); André Turck, *Évangélisation et catéchèse aux deux premiers siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1962); Turck, "Aux origines de catéchuménat," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 48 (1964): 20–31.

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implications that might be drawn for contemporary Christian mission.[8] Even in more strictly historical studies, interest in the effects of Christianity's legalization on catechesis has been hardly marginal.[9] A second line of inquiry occurs within the field of liturgical and ritual studies. Many fine works by scholars like Aidan Kavanaugh, Maxwell Johnson, Paul Bradshaw, Edward Yarnold, Juliette Day, Thomas Finn, Victor Saxer, Alistair Stewart, and others have explored the way catechetical instruction is enfolded within the rituals of Christian initiation.[10] This scholarship sees catechesis as one part of a more general interest in tracing the historical origins of Christian rituals. Finally, a third line of inquiry attends to the catechumenate's role in the social history of Christianity. Influenced by the work of Peter Brown and other historians

[8] Michel Dujarier, *A History of the Catechumenate: The First Six Centuries* (New York: William H. Sadlier Inc., 1979); Everett Ferguson, "Catechesis and Initiation," in *The Early Church at Work and Worship*, vol. 2: *Catechesis, Baptism, Eschatology, and Martyrdom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 18–51; Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

[9] See, for example, Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Histoire du catéchuménat dans l'église ancienne*, trans. F. Lhoest, N. Mojaisky, and A.-M. Gueit (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007); Andy Alexis-Baker, "*Ad Quirinum* Book Three and Cyprian's Catechumenate," *JECS* 17, no. 3 (2009): 357–80; Andrew Louth, "*Fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani*: Conversion, Community, and Christian Identity in Late Antiquity," in *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*, ed. Carol Harrison, Caroline Humfress, and Isabella Sandwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 109–18; Alden Bass, "Fifth-Century Donatist Catechesis: An Introduction to the Vienna Sermon Collection ONB M. Lat. 4147" (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 2014).

[10] Among many works one could cite, see Aidan Kavanaugh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1978); Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Gospel and the Catechumenate in the Third Century," *JTS* n.s. 50, no. 1 (1999): 143–52; Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the RCIA*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006); Thomas M. Finn, "Ritual Process and the Survival of Early Christianity: A Study of the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3, no. 1 (1989): 69–89; Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997); Victor Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle. Esquisse historique et signification d'après leurs principaux témoins* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1988); Alistair Stewart-Sykes, "Catechumenate and Contra-Culture: The Social Process of Catechumenate in Third-Century Africa and Its Development," *SVTQ* 47 no. 3–4 (2003): 289–306; Juliette Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem: 4th and 5th Century Evidence in Jerusalem, Egypt and Syria* (London: Routledge, 2008).

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of late antiquity, these approaches study the catechumenate primarily as it relates to the emergence of a Christian society from the Roman Empire.[11]

My own approach emerges within a different line of inquiry, which attends to the role of institutions and ecclesial practices in early Christianity.[12] Christoph Markschies's *Christian Theology and Its Institutions* is a useful point of departure here.[13] Adapting the notion of "institution" originally developed by Adolph von Harnack, Markschies theorizes institutions as "social arrangements that outwardly and inwardly effectively suggest and bring into force stability and duration."[14] In such arrangements, "the action-guiding and communication-directing foundations of an order are also always symbolically brought to expression."[15] Markschies calls attention here to the dynamics of how social arrangements shape action and attitudes, especially through symbolic representation. These structures provide durability and coherence for communities and serve as "the social basis for the spread of new ideas."[16] Thus conceived, institutions provide the basis for agreement or disagreement across geographical and temporal intervals, and hence the possibility of a "group consciousness" and shared identity.[17] While Markschies does not deploy this concept for analyzing catechesis, his approach has been taken up recently by Benjamin Edsall in a study of the reception of the apostle Paul in the catechumenate.[18]

[11] Daniel Schwartz, *Paideia and Cult: Christian Initiation in Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2013); David Vopřada, *Quodvultdeus: A Bishop Forming Christians in Vandal Africa: A Contextual Analysis of the Pre-baptismal Sermons Attributed to Quodvultdeus of Carthage* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Pignot, *Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa*.

[12] For a sampling of work in this area, see Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler and Marvin Döbler, eds., *Religious Education in Pre-Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Peter Gemeinhardt, Lieve Van Hoof, and Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity: Reflections, Social Contexts and Genres* (London: Routledge, 2016); Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, eds., *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017); Lewis Ayres and H. Clifton Ward, eds., *The Rise of the Early Christian Intellectual* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

[13] Christoph Markschies, *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire: Prolegomena to a History of Early Christian Theology*, trans. Wayne Coppins (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015).

[14] Markschies, *Christian Theology*, 20.

[15] Markschies, *Christian Theology*, 20–21.

[16] Markschies, *Christian Theology*, 24.

[17] Markschies, *Christian Theology*, 24.

[18] Benjamin Edsall, *The Reception of Paul and Early Christian Initiation: History and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

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I follow Edsall in using this institutional framework to situate early Christian catechesis, though my focus is on a different set of questions and figures.

EPISTEMOLOGY, PEDAGOGY, AND WAYS OF KNOWING

A word needs to be said about my use of the language of epistemology. In the wake of Descartes and Kant, epistemology has primarily come to denote the study of knowledge as a theoretical construct concerning how certain beliefs are justified. Key questions include, for example, whether justified knowledge depends on a set of more basic beliefs (foundationalism) or whether it occurs within a web of coherent (but equally foundational) beliefs (coherentism). As a subcategory, epistemology of religion asks whether or to what extent an individual is justified in believing in God or some religious tenet. Does one have sufficient or appropriate evidence to warrant such belief (evidentialism) or does faith operate independently of reason (fideism)? Here, considerations of faith and reason – what they are and how they are related – are paramount, as are adjudications over the proper criteria for believing in God or some other religious tenet.

Increasingly, though, there is a recognition that epistemology of religion must attend not only to questions of belief, warrant, and justification but also to the social and experiential structures of knowledge.[19] Herein lies the import of historical studies of knowledge, where one finds greater attention to issues of embodied practices, rhetorical discourses, and the social conditions entailed in the ordering of knowledge. Historical studies of knowledge are especially attuned to the differences between ancient and modern conceptions of knowledge and the contextualized nature of the questions historical figures are asking.[20] In recent work on "ordering knowledge" in antiquity, one finds a great deal of interest, in a broadly Foucauldian idiom, about the ways in which knowledge is constructed

[19] See, e.g., the approach laid out in William Abraham and Frederick Aquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[20] This impulse can be observed in Lloyd P. Gerson's study of ancient epistemology, in which he argues that ancient epistemology is less a hermeneutical or subjective state of mind but something more like a state of being. See his *Ancient Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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and textualized within particular sociopolitical arrangements.[21] In a much different register, theologians like Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley have led a cadre of scholars to study the spiritual senses traditions in Christian history as an inroad into theological epistemology.[22] Other scholars working at the edges of theology, biblical studies, and philosophy have variously explored how Christian commitments shape the character of Christian knowledge.[23] In certain corners of patristic studies, there has been an effort to understand the formation of theological doctrine within epistemological categories. Scholars, for example, find Augustine concerned not simply with formulating propositions about God but also with guiding readers in a set of cognitive and spiritual exercises that facilitate the Christian's participation into the divine life.[24] In these ways and more, historical and theological studies can provide unique contributions to the field of theological epistemology.

My task in this book is to tease out the relationship between epistemology and pedagogy in early Christian catechesis. Helpful here is Luigi Gioia's use of the category of epistemology to analyze Augustine's

[21] Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh, eds., *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Catherine Chin and Moulie Vidas, eds., *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

[22] Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, eds., *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Coakley's work in particular develops insights from the Christian mystical tradition and feminist epistemology to address issues of religious epistemology in dialogue with the reformed epistemology of Nicholas Wolterstorff and the epistemology of divine perception in William Alston. See Sarah Coakley, "Dark Contemplation and Epistemic Transformation: The Analytic Theologian Re-Meets Teresa of Ávila," in *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 280–312.

[23] From the perspective of systematic theology, see Reinhard Hütter's articulation of church practices as constitutive of theological knowledge: "The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practice, Doctrine, and Theology," in *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 43–55. In biblical studies, see Craig Keener's articulation of the role of pneumatology in epistemology: *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). From a philosophical perspective, the work of Esther Lightcap Meek has sought to articulate a "covenant epistemology," which draws on the philosophy of Michael Polanyi within a biblical idiom in which knowing is understood as interpersonal, relational, and transformational. See Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know: Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

[24] Luigi Gioia, *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's 'De Trinitate'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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trinitarian theology. Augustine, he argues, "does not embark on an explicit reflection on the conditions of knowledge of God, but aims at introducing his reader into the *practice* of this knowledge and then, only retrospectively, determines its conditions not critically but theologically or, rather, from a theologically ruled critical point of view."[25] This vision of the relationship between knowledge and theological practice is, I hope to show, especially applicable to early Christian catechesis. An understanding of what it means to know God is inseparable from how one actually comes to know God – or, at least, how one is taught to know God – especially when the object of knowledge is not a mere object among other objects but the transcendent source of human knowledge. By theological epistemology, I will still mean, generally, the conditions of knowledge, whether that be knowledge of God, the world, or oneself, though I am especially concerned with Christian knowledge of God and its attendant beliefs and practices. The language of practice and pedagogy designates the instructional means by which one arrives at knowledge, though it owes more to Alasdair MacIntyre's Aristotelian conception of practices rather than contemporary pedagogy theory.[26] In this parlance, practice is not the counterpoint to doctrine or theory – the practice of fasting, say, as opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, I am construing catechesis itself as a practice of cognitive training, one that entails a conglomeration of beliefs, practices, and social relationships that organize and structure Christian knowledge.

The relationship between epistemology and pedagogy was a key point of contention in Greek and Roman antiquity. In the wake of the Socratic and sophist debates about the orientation and ends of knowledge, philosophical and rhetorical schools took up these issues anew, as did early Christianity more generally and catechesis in particular. I will return, briefly, to the ways in which ancient philosophers approached issues of knowledge and pedagogy in Chapter 1. In the chapters thereafter, I sketch

[25] Gioia, *Theological Epistemology*, 3 (emphasis original).

[26] See his much-cited definition from *After Virtue*: "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 187.

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a variety of "ways of knowing" in early Christian catechesis. In each chapter, I highlight one or two key epistemological themes either distinctive to or illuminative of a particular figure's catechesis. I do this not to claim that such themes were wholly unique to that figure or that the labels I have provided exhaust their approaches to catechesis. In many ways, the themes discussed in one chapter overlap with others. Nevertheless, I have tried to outline a range of idioms for the many ways of knowing in early Christian catechesis – from the aesthetic knowing of Irenaeus to the ritual knowing applied by Tertullian, from concealed knowing in "Hippolytus" to the ecclesial knowing of Cyprian, from the visual knowledge of Ambrose to the knowledge of love characteristic of Augustine, and others as well. In addition, I have tried to highlight several common themes that appear throughout these discourses – for example, attention to sensory versus intellectual knowledge, the difference between Christian and non-Christian knowledge, the role of moral virtue, the church as the social locus of knowledge, and baptismal initiation as the revelation of divine or heavenly wisdom.

The meaning of these terms will become clearer throughout this book. For now, I simply wish to register the somewhat unique way that I am using the language of epistemology compared, for example, to someone approaching the subject from a more analytical perspective. The point of these labels is not to be exhaustive or exclusive but to draw attention to key epistemological themes in early Christian catechesis. I have tried to allow the nuances of particular authors or schools to emerge, even while showing how they belonged to a shared heritage of catechetical formation.

A NOTE ON CATECHETICAL TERMINOLOGY

In this study, I follow a conventional if somewhat anachronistic practice of referring to catechetical terminology. *Catechesis* names simply the instruction or formative education that took place before or shortly after baptism, occurring especially during the liminal space between an initial conversion and the culminating initiation into full membership through the ritual of baptism. Catechesis refers both to the material and formal content of teaching and as a normative-shaping social–intellectual institution. The distinction between pre-baptismal "catechesis" and post-baptismal "mystagogy" is less germane. As Benjamin Edsall notes, "catechesis is, properly speaking, *peri*-baptismal, rather than (restrictively) *pre*-baptismal, even if the latter does often capture its main

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feature."[27] Unless otherwise specified, catechesis can refer to pre-baptismal teaching or immediate post-baptismal teaching. In either case, what is primarily in view is teaching new Christians about the faith in the context of baptism.

The term *catechumen* refers to the role of the learner or hearer in these contexts. While the Greek term appears in Latinized forms as early as the second century, the term is also interchangeable with other terms, such as *audiens*, throughout the fourth century. By then, too, we find new terms, such as *competentes* or *electi*, to distinguish between general catechumens and those who have made a specific decision to enroll for baptism. The newly baptized are also referred to as "neophytes" with varying degrees of formality. The term *catechist* is not employed in this literature, but I occasionally use it here to describe the role of a teacher of catechumens as a general term comprising various ecclesiastical roles. Unlike the term *catechumen*, it is less frequent in early Christian literature, and should not be read as designating an ecclesiastical status. The designation *catechumenate* is the biggest anachronism, a word that does not appear until the seventeenth century.[28] However, it is used in scholarship frequently enough, specifically to designate the structure, process, or period of time of catechetical education – the stage of being a catechumen – that I will continue using the term here.

I use the term "catechetical literature" instead of the more common *catechism* to describe writings for or about catechesis. While the Latin term *catechismus* does appear in the patristic period, it is relatively rare and late – appearing only by Augustine's time.[29] Moreover, its primary association with the Reformation-era question-and-answer texts has discouraged me from using it to describe patristic writings. Instead, I use the phrase "catechetical literature," a more fitting but potentially vaguer term. By using this phrase, I want to highlight the contextual purpose of such writing – namely, the instruction of new Christians for or around baptism – rather than, say, a certain kind of genre or rhetorical form. While some scholars have found catechetical literature to be distinct from, say, homiletical literature, based on its mode of presentation – preaching being supposedly more exegetical and parenetic than the more didactic

[27] Edsall, *Reception of Paul*, 22.

[28] Pignot, *Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa*, 1 n3.

[29] For *catechismus*, see Augustine, *f. et op.* 9.14, 13.19, 18.33, 19.35. Ferguson speculates that the reason for this introduction has to do with the shift from understanding catechesis as a process to understanding catechesis as a text or body of information – akin to the Reformation-era catechism. Ferguson, "Catechesis and Initiation," 21.

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character of catechesis – such a distinction remains suspect.[30] Catechetical literature can take a variety of forms and genres: *testimonia* collections, polemical treatises, salvation historical narratives, exegetical commentary, and credal homilies, to name only a few. There is no clear evidence that catechesis was somehow less liturgical than sermons; both emerged from oral, performative contexts in worship settings, and were then textualized for circulation.[31] Whether in preaching or catechesis, the role of the teacher was broadly psychagogic and therapeutic; the goal was to lead the soul to virtue through conformity to a divine ideal.[32]

If we cannot distinguish catechetical writings based on its mode of presentation, it might seem plausible to associate catechesis with certain rhetorical genres – say, with protreptic or epideictic speech. Here again, however, evidence is wanting. Christian teachers knew and appropriated multiple rhetorical genres – forensic, epideictic, deliberative – and put them to new purposes. In the case of catechesis, the primary purpose was, obviously, educating new members for baptism. But that meant something different for authors at various places and times. Yancy Smith has proposed defining catechetical instruction as a kind of "epideictic parenesis," a form of speech that went beyond protreptic, seeking to strengthen community values and deepen the transformation of Christian identity.[33] While emphasizing its therapeutic and practical aims, however, Smith concludes that catechesis is ultimately not a "mode of argumentation or presentation" but a "particular substructure of authority" in which

[30] Wendy Mayer, "Catecheses and Homilies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Paul Blowers and Peter Martens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 243–51.

[31] The origins of the Christian sermon, and thus also catechetical literature, are notoriously difficult to reconstruct. A philosophical or Jewish Midrashic background seems likely, as does the house church context (and specifically, the need to test prophetic messages through Scripture). For the former, see Folker Siegert, "The Sermon as an Invention of Hellenistic Judaism," in *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*, ed. Alexander Deeg, Walter Homolka, and Heinz-Günther Schöttler (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 25–44. For the latter, see Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *From Prophecy to Preaching: A Search for the Origins of the Christian Homily* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

[32] Mayer, "Catecheses and Homilies," 244.

[33] Yancy Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing: Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Contexts* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 236. Smith points to Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus* for evidence of third-century instruction of new converts that uses "protreptic" (ὁ προτρεπτικὸς), "suggestive" (ὁ ὑποθετικός), and "consolatory" (ὁ παραμυθητικός) discourse. Each, as Smith understands them, is intended to address habits, practices, and affections "rather than to teach or to comment on an intellectual life *per se*." Smith, *Mystery of Anointing*, 236.

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teachers were "focused on worldly, daily issues ... blended with other-worldly, apocalyptic themes and the absolute trust in the God of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and God's earthly representatives, who included approved teachers and other community patrons."[34] I will follow Smith's direction here by highlighting the multiplicity of genres and forms deployed, locating their distinctiveness among other types of Christian literature with regard primarily to their baptismal orientation.

Catechetical literature, then, as I will use the term, refers to writings used in teaching those who were soon approaching baptism or had recently been baptized (what is later sometimes referred to as mystagogy). This categorization has the advantage of including a wide variety of literary genres – sermons, letters, *testimonia,* treatises – while not becoming so loosely defined as to include all educational texts. This will provide a delimited but not overly restrictive set of texts in which to pursue the study of theological epistemology in catechesis.

SCOPE AND SOURCES

This definition of catechetical literature naturally raises questions about scope and sources. I have focused mainly on writers and writings from Italy and North Africa from the end of the second century to the middle of the fifth century. The exclusion of Alexandrian, Syrian, Antiochene, and even other Latinate regions, such as Illyricum or Spain, are not meant to suggest that catechesis is less deserving of attention in these areas. Anyone familiar with patristic catechesis will appreciate the importance of the catechetical writings of Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. The geographical limitation of this study is meant to rein in the material under question in a way that will allow for both detailed studies of particular figures while still managing to cover a relatively broad period of time. There are many good studies that are narrowly focused on one figure, others that are multi-regional syntheses. While both approaches are useful, my sense is that there is more of a need for an in-between approach – regional studies that provide both depth and breadth.[35] For better or worse, such is the approach taken here.

In terms of chronology, this project begins with a very broad look at educational trends in the first and second centuries, but the main focus begins with the catechetical evidence in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons

[34] Smith, *Mystery of Anointing*, 237–38.
[35] Pignot, *Catechumenate in Late Antique Africa*, 9.

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in the late second century and Tertullian of Carthage in the early third.[36] I conclude in roughly the middle of the fifth century with the writings of Peter Chrysologus in Ravenna and of Quodvultdeus and other anonymous sermons in North Africa. By concluding here, I do not mean to imply, as some have suggested, that catechetical instruction "disappeared" in the Middle Ages – whether due to Christianization or the rise of infant baptism.[37] My aim in limiting the study in this way is to allow for a thorough investigation of the differences in catechesis in the centuries before and after the Constantinian turn of the mid fourth century. The writings surveyed within this scope allow a good indication of the nature and purposes of catechesis in this crucial period.

Especially in terms of pre-Nicene sources, there is much debate about what constitutes catechetical literature. Many would question whether, say, Irenaeus's *Demonstratio* constitutes catechetical literature. This and other texts from the second and third centuries often do not clearly indicate that they were originally addressed to catechumens preparing for baptism, and there is disagreement among scholars about designating them as such. I have taken a fairly inclusive approach here. If there have been reasonable arguments in favor of a work being considered catechetical, I tend to include it, while acknowledging the degree of certainty with which we can consider it a properly catechetical text. Even in cases of limited confidence, though, I try to show how it might still be useful for understanding pedagogy and knowledge in early Christian catechesis.

This issue applies less to post-Nicene works. By the fourth century, greater clarity exists about what counts as catechetical literature. Many texts make explicit their catechetical setting – especially sermons to catechumens "handing over" the creed (Ambrose, Rufinus, Augustine,

[36] Against the view of Daniélou and Dujarier, who argued for a relatively unbroken line of continuity from the New Testament to the second century, see the more qualified position of Gavrilyuk (*Histoire du catéchuménat*, 31) and the even more definitive rejection of a catechumenate before the second century in Turck ("Aux origines," 27) and Edsall (*Reception of Paul*, 24–25).

[37] See, e.g., Milton McC. Gatch, "Basic Christian Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms," in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, ed. John H. Westerhoff, III and O. C. Edwards, Jr. (Wilton, CT: Morehourse-Barlow, 1981), 79–108. This approach draws on the influential account of Peter Göbl, *Geschichte der Katechese im Abendlande vom Verfalle des Katechumenats bis zum Ende des Mittelalters* (Kempten: Kösel'schen Buchhandlung, 1880). For a good recent study of the way that catechesis developed in the early medieval period, see Nathan Ristuccia, *Christianization and Commonwealth in Early Medieval Europe: A Ritual Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 178–209.

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Chrysologus, Quodvultdeus). Others provide deliberate advice or polemical engagement related to catechesis (Augustine's *De catechizandis rudibus* and *De fide et operibus*). Still others are those that seem to have originated in catechetical settings but were then edited for wider publication (e.g., Ambrose's sermons on the patriarchs). It is ultimately a matter of judgment about what constitutes catechetical literature. Hereafter, I will generally not wade too deeply into these waters, though I try to point interested readers in helpful directions.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The core chapters of the book are organized roughly chronologically, rotating between North Africa and Italy. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the main educational institutions of classical antiquity, which offers a kind of prelude to the theme of the interrelation of knowledge and pedagogy that will occupy the rest of the chapters. In surveying knowledge and pedagogy in antiquity, several recurring themes will emerge – for example, the importance of memory, the use of short verbal formulas, and the focus on teacher-school contexts in ancient philosophy and early Christianity. These loci serve as important catalysts for the emergence of the catechumenate and the correlation of knowledge and pedagogy.

In Chapter 2, I look at the catechetical evidence in Irenaeus of Lyons, highlighting the emergence of catechesis within the transition from second-century "school Christianity" to the emerging monepiscopate. I explore his use of catechetical terminology, as well as his appeals to the Rule of Truth as evidence of a kind of catechetical instruction focused on the aesthetic character of Christian knowing. Irenaeus's appeals to the Rule of Truth suggest that at least one purpose was to teach Christians how to perceive the diversities of both Scripture and the created world as the artistic product of one divine artist. From there, I turn in Chapter 3 to several writings of Tertullian of Carthage that appear to have catechumens in view. Here, I explore the ways in which Tertullian utilizes a rhetoric of simplicity, especially in Christian ritual practice, as a guide to forming knowledge of God. Against what Tertullian depicts as the complexity and obfuscation of heretical and pagan rituals, Tertullian demonstrates how orthodox practice – not only despite but precisely because of its apparent simplicity – provides the true pathway to knowledge of God.

Chapter 4 returns to Rome to observe the catechumenate in several writings of the so-called Hippolytan School, namely, the *Traditio*

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apostolica, the *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum*, and *De Christo et antichristo*. While any attempt to locate these works to third-century Rome is, to say the least, highly fraught, they are included here as possible sources for understanding early Christian catechesis. Whether one regards them as ultimately of Roman or of pre-Constantinian origin, they shed helpful light on the concept of mystery and the dynamic between hidden and revealed knowledge in baptismal teaching. The Hippolytan works demonstrate especially well the struggles to create a proper sense of enclosed knowledge while also guarding against the kind of secrecy that its authors associate with heretical practice. Chapter 5 finds us back in Carthage with Cyprian, who focuses especially on the role of the church as the primary social locus of ordering knowledge. For Cyprian, we see how debates about ecclesiology and church governance served to shape the practices and visions of Christian knowledge in the third century.

After an approximately century-long gap in the historical record, Chapter 6 picks up the threads in the latter fourth century with Ambrose of Milan. In Ambrose, we find several strategies for inculcating knowledge of God, but especially important is his way of training the spiritual senses – especially vision – for divine knowledge. Through studying his Lenten sermons on the patriarchs, his exposition of the creed, and his mystagogical homilies, we find an overarching unity in his pedagogical method of training catechumens to perceive the invisible God through the visible senses. From Ambrose, we turn in Chapter 7 to several lesser-known figures in Northern Italy: Zeno of Verona, Gaudentius of Brescia, Rufinus of Aquileia, and Peter Chrysologus. These Christian leaders worked at the crossroads of a civilization that was no longer Roman yet not fully Christian. In the struggle to consolidate a Christian culture amid ongoing traditional Roman religious traditions, these bishops and teachers found new ways to present divine knowledge as a recognizable but more excellent form of wisdom. In Zeno and Gaudentius, I explore what I will call cosmological knowledge – an effort to reshape time, the seasons, and the natural world – as a form of catechetical epistemology. In Rufinus and Peter, I highlight their emphasis on apophaticism and deification in shaping knowledge of God.

We return to North Africa for the final two chapters. Augustine, the subject of Chapter 8, is especially interesting because of the way he reflects on the relationship between knowledge and teaching vis-à-vis Platonic theories of illumination. His understanding of the role of the incarnation and of Christ-shaped love, however, has unique implications for his approach to catechesis. He is especially attendant to the ways in which

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divine knowledge is encountered through contact with Christ the "inner teacher," encountered through the narrative of Scripture and in the inscription of the creed in one's memory. The final chapter, Chapter 9, follows the epistemological trajectories in North Africa after Augustine in the writings attributed to Quodvultdeus and several anonymous catechetical sermons from this region. In the aftermath of the Vandal invasions and the resurgence of Arianism, we see another mix of traditional and novel elements. These texts give us a good sense of the enduring legacies of the catechetical correlation of pedagogy and knowledge in the fifth century, an age marked by a greater apocalyptic fervor.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the variety of approaches to shaping knowledge in early Christian catechesis and offer a more dogmatic reflection on the implications of this research. In particular, I argue that early Christian catechesis draws attention to the centrality of Jesus Christ as the crux of Christian practices of knowledge. If teaching practices both inform and are informed by our conception of knowledge, then we cannot avoid asking how Jesus Christ – the wisdom and knowledge of God embodied – reconfigures what it means to know God. This is surely true for all forms of Christian teaching and learning, but it begins in the earliest stages of baptismal preparation, in the time of catechesis during which Christians are both made and born.

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