Preface and Acknowledgments

The seeds for this project were sown many years ago when I was a graduate student at Regent College in Vancouver, BC. It was then that the now late J. I. Packer – a self-proclaimed "latter-day catechist" – was hailing a call for the renewal of catechesis. I had no idea what that meant at the time, but I have come to see his call as a prescient one. Over the years, I have heard from many thoughtful Christians who agreed with Dr. Packer's assessment that several decades – perhaps a century – of catechetical neglect had left many Christians theologically and spiritually famished. But whereas Packer's interlocuters were English Puritans, I began to take interest in the patristic tradition under the tutelage of another professor at Regent at the time, Dr. Hans Boersma. Hans introduced me to the church fathers and the sacramental ontology that saturated their writings, and I began to wonder if this might have something to do with catechesis.

Whatever fuzzy notions I then brought to doctoral studies at Baylor University were sharpened under the keen supervision of my advisor there, Dr. D. H. Williams. Dr. Williams has written several eloquent invitations for Christians today, especially from evangelical traditions, to recover the patristic tradition as part of their own heritage. But he was convinced, as I have become, that retrieval theology is a difficult labor – a labor of love, to be sure, but a difficult one nonetheless. Good retrieval demands patient attention to difficult and sometimes confusing texts – texts that one may be inclined to dismiss if one is only in search of the quick scintillating insight. Dr. Williams taught me that retrieval theology requires patience, humility, and a willingness to let the fathers speak on their own terms, to ask their own questions, before attempting to make

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grand claims about what we need to recover. I do not pretend to have acquired these virtues, but I have seen them modeled in a way I aspire to imitate.

One will thus be hard-pressed to find in what follows an explicit attempt at retrieving patristic catechesis. I make few normative claims about what Christians today should learn from this history, or how these sources should be understood as speaking to something in our present moment. I have tried, rather, to attend to a particular aspect of patristic catechesis: how Christians learn to know God. While I am convinced that there is much we can draw from this history, this book's argumentation belongs not to practical theology but to patristic and historical theology. I hope, nevertheless, that this project, in its own small laborious way, contributes something to Dr. Packer's call for a renewal of Christian catechesis.

There are many people to thank for seeing this book come to fruition. I am especially grateful for the committee that read the original dissertation that now seems to stand quite a distance removed from what appears before the reader. In addition to Dr. Williams, thanks go to David Wilhite, David Whitford, Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi, and Paul Gavrilyuk for their kind and constructive readings. David Wilhite read each chapter in advance and offered astute feedback. Paul Gavrilyuk provided the impetus to focus on theological epistemology. I am so thankful for this wonderful committee. Since then, I have been warmly welcomed into the generous and generative cadre of scholars at Baylor's Institute for Studies of Religion. I am grateful to my colleagues there, especially Byron Johnson, David Lyle Jeffrey, Philip Jenkins, Jeff Levin, Thomas Kidd, and Matthew Lee Anderson, for providing such an encouraging atmosphere for research and writing. I have also been grateful for the numerous friends – near and far – through the Catechesis Institute. Beth Conkle, Ryan Jones, Greg Peters, Joel Scandrett, and Leslie Thyberg, among others, have provided rewarding companionship in our shared labors. Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press has been a wonderfully gracious editor and did so much to shepherd this book into being. My thanks to her and to the readers she solicited for their incisive comments on earlier drafts.

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time there. In Waco, we have been sustained by the community of Christ Church Waco. Fr. Lee Nelson has been a great champion of catechesis from whom I have learned so much. Thanks also go to Fr. Ryan and Kristi Butler, Gideon and Anne Jeffrey, Paul and Paige Gutacker, Fr. Jonathan Kanary, Christina Lambert, Brittany McComb, Fr. Nicholas and Hannah Norman-Krause, Skylar Ray, Cody and Mary Strecker, and Sam and Cassie Young. It is hard to imagine the work of scholarship without the meals and conversations shared with this exceptional group of people. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Thomas James Breedlove. Thomas offered perceptive commentary on the arguments and stylings of this book, and he always knew when it was time to let a darling go. Brian and Lydia Dant have been the dearest of friends for many years. As our paths have crossed and re-crossed, they have always shown us the light of Christ.

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