

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

IT IS A MATTER OF PARTICULAR PRIDE at Fortress Press that we offer this compilation of brief portraits composed and presented by Pope Benedict XVI on key figures from Christian history. Over the last several years, week after week, Benedict has devoted most of his public audiences to depicting some of the most important figures of the tradition—theologians and philosophers but also spiritual guides, eremites and monks, abbots and abbesses, popes and bishops, founders and reformers, mystics and missionaries.

The result is a set of seventy expert and reliable yet quite accessible introductions to the key framers of the pre-Reformation tradition, East and West, as useful for personal reading or study as for classroom or congregation. As one might expect of someone who brings decades of his own teaching and research to the task, Benedict's pieces are not only illuminating historical sketches but also often surprisingly personal reflective meditations on the perennial challenges of theology, spirituality, devotion, and corporate religious life—in short, of thinking about and wrestling daily with the mysteries that envelop all our lives and struggles.

The editors of Fortress Press are grateful to the Vatican Library Press for their enthusiasm for the project and willingness to facilitate it by providing lucid and accessible translations.