



The Condemnation of Priscillian's Use of non-Canonical Books and his Defense in *Tractatus III: Liber de Fide et de Apocryphis*

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Abstract: One of the accusations against Priscillian and his followers was their use of non-canonical books in their writings and teachings. This was proof positive for Priscillian's opponents that he and his followers were a sect worthy of condemnation and that their writings were tainted with heresy. These accusations are found in several of the Suevic-Visigothic councils of Hispania. It is fortuitous that we have Priscillian's response to this accusation in his *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de Fide et de Apocryphis*. This study makes generous use of the testimony of the councils, Priscillian's own *Tractatus III* and writers directly involved in the controversy. The use of apocryphal writings was widespread, they appear in many settings and diverse literary genres and art. The example in this study is but one additional example. In this work Priscillian wrote a spirited and convincing defence against his adversaries.

Keywords: Priscillian; Visigothic Councils; I Enoch; Epistle of Jude; Old Testament Apocrypha; *Tractatus III*; *Liber de fide et de Apocryphis*; New Testament Apocrypha

1. Introduction

Marco Conti in his exemplary book on Priscillian divides current Priscillian scholars into two camps: absolutory and accusatory². The former

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² *Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works*, ed. and tr. M. Conti, Oxford Early Christian Texts, Oxford 2010, p. 7-9.

absolving Priscillian of any outright heresy or the latter convinced that he was heterodox to the core. Conti does acknowledge there has been a softening of these two rigid divisions. I fall into the camp of the absolutory, my published work on Priscillian demonstrates that he was on the edges of orthodoxy at times but for the most part was just as orthodox as any mainstream Catholic of the day. I have maintained that many of the charges were the result of personal vendettas, character assassination, jealousy, and outright hatred towards the man. My late good friend and colleague Dr. Msgr. Eugenio Romero Pose, commented to me, “I think you are on a mission to rehabilitate Priscillian, I responded, I did not intend to, but I guess I am”. Maybe one day Priscillian will join Jan Hus and others who have been posthumously rehabilitated. For now, I delve into the question of Priscillian’s alleged use and promotion of dangerous heretical books. His views fortunately are on display in his *Tractatus* III. The words of Henry Chadwick on this tractate are illuminating, Priscillian “skilfully and elegantly defends the right of instructed Christians to read apocryphal texts with discretion”³. I would add to this that of all the tractates this one is among a few that is not written in tortuous and ambiguous language. A magisterial treatment still to this day on Priscillian’s teaching is by Chadwick in his seminal book⁴. What follows is a consideration of the main points that Priscillian put forth to defend his use of apocrypha to refute the charge that he used them irresponsibly to undermine sound orthodox doctrine. Above all, is to let him speak for himself through *Tractatus* III and not just from the voice of his accusers, the latter usually get too much attention.

Some clarification is called for on which extra-canonical books Priscillian was using and allegedly promoting them to be on par with the accepted Canon. The fact is that varieties of genres circulated in what came to be considered Apocrypha with accompanying negative connotations. There is the Greek Septuagint that was rejected by Pharisees and the Sadducees and specifically some books within. Later Protestants will also reject this Greek version of the Old Testament. Then there is the collection of texts associated with Gnostic groups and ideas. Another is the considerable collection of Old Testament apocrypha of books most of which never entered anyone’s Jewish Canon. Altogether different is the collection identified as Christian Apocrypha is voluminous and can be broken down into literary genres: gospels, letters, apocalyptic, acts of apostles – purportedly written

³ H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila. The occult and the charismatic in the early Church*, Oxford 1976, p. 64.

⁴ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 57-110.

by men and women. All allegedly written by apostles or people close to them. One thing to be noted is that in varying degrees, even though not accepted into the canon of both testaments, were considerably influential in shaping Jewish and Christian doctrine. An answer to pursue related to Priscillianists is whether we know which apocryphal books they read, incorporated into their own writings, and promoted as equal to the those in the official Canon.

2. Conciliar evidence

This survey begins with the conciliar accusatory evidence against Priscillian and his followers who were denounced for using dangerous forbidden books that led to the corruption of sound apostolic doctrine. Also included is *Letter 15* of Pope Leo I who became involved in the condemnation as a result of some epistolary exchanges with Turibius of Astorga. We include him in this section on councils because the pontiff's condemnation was appended to the acts First Council of Toledo (400).

Much has been made by some about the assumed condemnation of Priscillian at the Council of Zaragoza (380). Priscillianists were never mentioned in its canons, contrary to the view of some contemporaries and modern scholars. Priscillian denied outright that he was the object of censure at the council. Relevant to this essay, use of apocryphal books was nowhere remarked on⁵. In this first phase it is essential to note that Sulpicius Severus did not in his earliest account of events surrounding the Priscillianist controversy mention the use of any objectionable books among them. Only that Priscillian was erudite through much reading – *multa lectione eruditus*. Later Jerome did not mention them in *Letter 133* to Ctesiphon but Vicent of Lérins in the *Commonitorium* did so, echoing what had become by then a standard accusation against Priscillianism⁶.

⁵ Consult *I Concilio Caesaraugustano MDC Aniversario, Zaragoza, 25-27 Septiembre de 1980*, ed. G. Fatás Cabeza, Zaragoza 1981; J. Orlandis – D. Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios de la España Romana y Visigoda*, Pamplona 1986; A. Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae: The Correspondence of the Bishops of Hispania with the Bishops of Rome: Third through Seventh Centuries*, Medieval and Early Modern Iberia Series 74, Leiden 2020.

⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicorum* II 46, 32-33, ed. K. Halm, CSEL 1, Vienna 1866, p. 99; Hieronymus, *Epistula* 133, 4, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 56, Vienna 1918, p. 247-248, analysis in A. Ferreiro, *Jerome's Polemic Against Priscillian in his Letter to Ctesiphon*

We only have to wait another twenty years after Zaragoza to hear a great deal about Priscillianism at the First Council of Toledo (400). Before condemning the errors one by one, all of the bishops recited the Nicæan Creed – the text has an interpolated reference to the *Filioque* – *sed a Patre Filioque procedens*⁷. The proceedings record a long statement against the Priscillianists from a repentant Bishop Dictinius. He retracted all things related to Priscillian and all that he himself had written earlier. The bishops seemed to have had a compilation of alleged errors mainly from Dictinius that were imputed on Priscillian but not any actual books [tractates] of Priscillian⁸. Not even one was identified by name. The errors condemned for certain do not come directly from the tractates of the Priscillianists. Not one of them is cited as the source of any erroneous doctrine allegedly taught by these heretics. One of these is the heresy that the Son of God could be born. This error is in the list of 18 errors as canon 6, “If anyone says or believes that Christ could not have been born, let them be anathema”⁹. In *Tractatus II* Priscillian defended Jesus’ birth from the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit¹⁰. Telling is that Symphosius admitted that he did not know in which book this error was found¹¹. They remained suspiciously ambiguous as to where one could find such a teaching written down. This false teaching, however, imputed on Priscillian is also not found in Leo I’s *Letter to Turibius of Astorga*¹². Dictinius rhetorically de-

(133,4), REAu 39/2 (1993) p. 309-332 = *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 125, Leiden 2005, p. 83-110, Reprinted in: *Doctrinal Diversity. Varieties of Early Christianity*, ed. E. Ferguson, Garland Series 4, New York 1999; Vincentius Lerinensis, *Commonitorium. Excerpta* 25, 3, 9-12, ed. R. Demeulenaere, CCSL 64, Turnhout 1985, p. 182 (Originally published as A. Ferreiro, *Simon Magus and Priscillian in the Commonitorium of Vincent of Lérins*, VigCh 49/2 (1995) p. 180-188 = A. Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions*, p. 123-132 at p. 128-129).

⁷ See Chadwick for a discussion of the two recensions of this text, *Priscillian*, p. 176-177.

⁸ Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 105-107.

⁹ Concilium Toletanum I 6, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, ed. J. Vives – T. Marín Martínez – G. Martínez Díez, España Cristiana. Textos 1, Barcelona – Madrid 1963 (= hereafter Vives), p. 27: “Si quis dixerit vel crediderit Christum innascibilem esse, anathema”.

¹⁰ *Tractatus II* 49-50, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 70-71.

¹¹ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 29: “Symphosius episcopus dixit: Iuxta id quod paullo ante lectum est in membrana, nescio qua, in qua dicebatur Filius innascibilis, hanc ego doctrinam, quae aut duo principia dicit aut Filium innascibilem cum ipso auctore damno, qui scripsit”.

¹² Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 103-105 for all the errors enumerated in Toledo that are not in Leo’s *Letter XV*.

mandated that a book of Priscillian be given to him so he could condemn him with his own words. This error is alien to the tractates, even if it seems to be extracted from *Tractatus VI*¹³. Chadwick's exposition on the expression *innascibilis nascitur* is most informative, "To Priscillian, or at least the author of the sixth tractate, 'innascibilis' is simply God who is without beginning by definition. [...] The sixth tractate emphasizes that Christ is without either beginning or end. [...] In the 'innascibilis' of the sixth tractate only a hostile inquisitor would seriously find fault with the thought being expressed"¹⁴. The last observation about a 'a hostile inquisitor' is of immense importance to my mind. All of the evidence and statements against anything Priscillianist is heavily prejudiced from the very start by compromised witnesses. Add to this that the ex-Priscillianists in Toledo were under enormous duress, one wonders to what extent their testimony was extracted through threats. We do know that they had fresh in their minds the execution of Priscillian and companions in Trier in 385. At the council there are unmistakable references to anonymous questionable books. Canon 12 warned that "If anyone says or believes that other scriptures ought to have authority or be venerated other than those received by the Catholic Church, be anathemized". Of significance is that the name of a single Priscillianist or apocryphal book is absent¹⁵.

The book that Dictinius asked for to reject his errors was called a *chartulam*¹⁶. This *chartulam* was not from an actual individual book of the heretics. It was a broad compilation of heresies of Priscillianism not from actual tractates as a point of reference. Anything written by any Priscillianist was assumed to reflect the teaching of their founder¹⁷. We must seriously entertain is that the teachings circulated by followers of Priscillian may not reflect the actual teachings of the founder. Priscillian was dead, he could

¹³ See Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 69 and p. 88-89.

¹⁴ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 88-89; Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 116-131 for *Tractatus VI*.

¹⁵ Concilium Toletanum I 12, Vives, p. 27: "Si quis dixerit vel crediderit alias scripturas, praeter quas ecclesia catholca recipit, in auctoritate habendas vel esse venerandas, anathema sit", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 93, note 103.

¹⁶ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 29: "Item dixit: Date mihi chartulam, ipsis verbis condemno. Et cum accepisset chartulam, de scripto recitavit: Omnes libros haeticos, et maxime Priscilliani doctrinam, iuxta quod hodie lectum est, ubi innascibilem Filium scripsisse dicitur, cum ipso auctore damno".

¹⁷ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 28-29: "Sed et omnem praesumptionem meam de scriptis arguo atque condemno. Item dixit: Sic sensi, testis est Deus; si erravit, corrigit. Item dixit: Et paulo ante dixi et nunc iterum repeto; in priori comprehensione mea et in principiis conversionis meae quaecumque conscripsi omnia me toto corde respuere", Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 94-97.

not be at Toledo to defend himself face to face with Dictinius. Is it that hard to imagine that disciples would teach things foreign to that initially taught by the founder? We need look no further than Christ and how things unfolded in the first centuries after his death as heresies proliferated all claiming to be the true message. Priscillianism lasted almost three centuries if we count from the late fourth century up to 561 when the teachings of Priscillianist were still being condemned in the First Council of Braga. The teachings evolved as one would expect, some remaining the same while new ones were introduced by later followers. I have articulated this development elsewhere¹⁸. Our focus is the alleged use of apocryphal books that is a consistent charge at each stage. Related to this issue at Toledo no specific accusation was voiced that Priscillian wanted to add his own writings or other Christian Apocrypha *in toto* to the received Canon.

At the end of the proceedings ex-Priscillianists bishops Symphosius of Astorga, his son Dictinius, and the presbyter Comasius made their final abjuration of all teachings of Priscillianism and its founder. This was before what is called the ‘Definitive Sentence’ – *Exemplar definitivae sententiae translatae de gestis*¹⁹. Symphosius was the first to denounce author and books written by Priscillian or anyone else²⁰. Dictinius followed by saying he was in full agreement but added that he too condemned all the things that Priscillian taught perversely or wrote badly²¹. The last comment about ‘badly written’ – *male scripsit* – could it be not just a reference to errors that he wrote but maybe a reference also to the sometimes tortured, complex, ambiguous expression and style of Priscillian’s writings that made them difficult to understand and lent themselves to be easily misunderstood. In the final words of the bishops prohibited books – apocryphal and Priscillianist – were censured one last time. Towards the end Symphosius confessed that he was no longer associated with apocryphal books or the new doctrines of Priscillian²². Dictinius who almost fell into error because of some letters – *epistolis* – was in full accord with Symphosius’ condemna-

¹⁸ Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 73-116.

¹⁹ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 30 and 31. Analysis in Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 105-108.

²⁰ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 30: “Symphosius episcopus dixit: Si quos male condidit libros cum ipso auctore condemno”.

²¹ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 30: “Et iccirco omnia quae Priscillianus aut male docuit aut male scripsit cum ipso auctore condemno”.

²² Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 30-31: “Nullis libris apocryphis aut novis scientiis, quas Priscillianus composuerat involutum”.

tion. This is the first we have heard of some letters. The works of Ambrose of Milan were given credit for helping them escape the errors of Priscillian. Paternus of Braga was said to be the first bishop in Gallaecia to confess that he was a Priscillianist, but through a reading of Ambrose's books he separated himself from the sect²³. Which books of the bishop of Milan were read was not detailed.

The second most important conciliar evidence is found in the canons of the First Council of Braga (561) where Martin of Braga attended as bishop only. In the opening remarks they accuse Priscillian of deception through some apocryphal scriptures – *scribaturin deceptus apocryfis*. Apocryphal books are mentioned in this late phase of Priscillianism in two separate canons 17 and 12 found in two distinct lists²⁴. Canon 17 is part of seventeen canons decreed to censure Priscillian and Dictinius and their books once again. The bishops spoke of anonymous works of Priscillian, those of Dictinius before his conversion, and other books of the heretics that are defended under the name of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, all were declared anathema. The last statement signals Old Testament and Christian apocryphal works. Priscillian admitted and it is evident in *Tractatus* III that he made use of such works and encouraged their reading by those of mature faith. There is nothing heretical to see here, this approach was quite normative among the Church Fathers who did the same. Priscillian, moreover, at no time advocated adding them to the established Canon. The bishops chastised them for reading and giving them validity²⁵.

We do know the name of one of Dictinius' books called *Libra* that was not mentioned at the councils. It appears that the bishops did not have a copy in hand to refer to directly in Toledo or Braga. This book written by Bishop Dictinius represented the latter stages of Priscillianism. We only know of it through Augustine who gives us its name, *Libra*. Of greater

²³ Concilium Toletanum I, Vives, p. 31: "Ex quibus ordinatus est Paternus Baracensis ecclesiae episcopus. In hanc vocem confessionis primus erupit, et sectam Priscilliani se scisse, sed, factum episcopum, liberatum se ab ea, lectione librorum sancti Ambrosii esse iuraret".

²⁴ Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 108-113. Concilium Bracarense I, Vives p. 66 and for canon 17, Concilium Bracarense I 17, Vives, p. 69; Orlandis and Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 143 and p. 148-149, especially note 52.

²⁵ Concilium Bracarense I 17, Vives, p. 69: "Si quis scribaturas, quas Priscillianus secundum suum depravarit errorem vel tractatos Dictinii quos ipse Dictinius antequam converteretur [scripsit vel quaequumque haeticum] scribita sub nomine patriarcharum; profetarum vel apostolorum suo errori consona confixerunt, leget et inopia eorum figmenta sequitur aut defendet, anathema sit".

significance is that Augustine did not have an actual copy to scrutinize first-hand. He relied entirely on what others told him. Chadwick cautioned us that, “Our knowledge of Dictinius’ book is derived entirely from the hostile account of its arguments given by Augustine in his *Contra mendacium*” and that “There is no evidence that Augustine had before him a copy of Dictinius’ *Libra*”²⁶. I have been arguing for a long time that most of the major opponents outside Hispania relied on information given to them second-hand by hostile clerics. They had no direct encounter with Priscillianists or their works. It casts serious doubts on their assessment of Priscillianism. Augustine, as Chadwick revealed was a compromised actor who relied heavily on skewed information. The bishop of Hippo did not have any tractates in from of him, especially *Tractatus* III. Jacobs in his otherwise fine study gives Augustine too much credibility²⁷. Rather amazing in this interesting study is that the issue is engaged completely divorced from its peninsular context, the rich evidence from the councils of Hispania are absent. There hardly any recourse to *Tractatus* III. The evidence against Priscillian is shabby at best, in an honest court of law the case would be dismissed as hearsay. Did Dictinius advocate their inclusion in the NT, was any fundamental teaching of the Church changed by Dictinius? None of these charges were levelled at him. It is important to remember that was a disciple of Priscillianism. Did Dictinius represent what Priscillian originally taught? The norm is that disciples oftentimes go their own way and stray from the teachings of the founder.

Canon 12 is found in the second list of canons within the Braga council. This canon was dedicated what type of songs were permitted for the liturgy. While this canon was not intended to single out Priscillianists, it highlights that the received canonical Old and New Testament was the only acceptable source for any hymns. The Psalms above all were to be the only source for hymns²⁸. In the censures against Priscillianism the provenance

²⁶ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 154-155; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 94-97.

²⁷ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 155-157; A.S. Jacobs, *The Disordered Books: Priscillian’s Canonical Defense of Apocrypha*, HTR 93 (2000) p. 154-158.

²⁸ There were canons prohibiting profane songs in the liturgy: Concilium Bracaraensis I 12, Vives, p. 73: “De canonicis scripturis. [Quod] extra auctoritatem veteris et novi testamenti nihil poeticum sit in ecclesia decantandum. Item placuit, ut extra psalmos vel canonicarum scribaturarum novi et veteris Testamenti nihil poetice compositum in ecclesia psallatur, sicut et sancti praecipunt canones”. Other canons attended to the same issue, Concilium Toletanum III 22, Vives, p. 132-133; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 148-149.

of hymns permitted to sing in the liturgy never surfaced. Canon 40 in Priscillian's *Canons on the Letters of the Apostle Paul Revised by the Bishop Peregrinus* gives a hint on his view, "Why we must take part in psalms, hymns, and songs, both for us mutually and kings and all men" followed by eight references from Paul's letters. This echoes what the council in Braga ordered, in the end it is a solid Priscillianist orthodox statement²⁹.

In the Second Council of Braga (572) canon 67 took up the same issue of hymns and apocryphal books but not within a list of alleged Priscillianist deviancies or any other sect³⁰. It seems many priests were also pressing the boundaries as concerns books; it was not just by those labeled heretics. The bishops at this council did not devote any time to Priscillianists. The canon is brief and in two parts. In the first, any songs – calls them psalms – composed by anyone that are used in vulgar settings were prohibited for use in the liturgy. The second banned the reading of any books outside the Canon of the New and Old Testaments³¹. One might ask: Were these residual Priscillianists or were they priests that were influenced by the movement but not identified as members of a surviving cell? The canon does not help us with any possible answer. One thing for sure, it indicates that more than formal Priscillianists were testing the limits in many areas of doctrine and liturgy. I see this legislation as identifying residual Priscillianist practices after the sect was formally gone carried on by individuals that fell under its influence³². Although plausible, it is pure speculation on my part. Still later at the Third Council of Toledo (589) in canon 22 the bishops forbade at funerals any songs other than the Psalms and sung by official cantors³³.

²⁹ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Priscilliani in Pauli Apostoli Epistulas Canones a Peregrino Episcopo Emendati*: "Quia psalmis hymnis et canticis spiritalibus atque orationibus insisteri debeat, tam pro inuicem quam pro regibus atque omnibus hominibus", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 184-185.

³⁰ Concilium Bracarense II 67, Vives, p. 102.

³¹ Concilium Bracarense II 67, Vives, p. 102: "De eo quod non liceat psalmos poeticos in ecclesia dicere vel libros apocryfos legere. Non oportet psalmos compositos et vulgares in ecclesia dicere neque libros qui sunt extra canonem legere nisi solos canonicos novi et veteris Testamenti".

³² See the excellent treatment of residual Priscillianism in Pablo C. Díaz Martínez, *El Reino Suevo (411-585)*, Akal Universitaria. Serie Reinos y dominios en la Historia de España, Madrid 2011, p. 207-215.

³³ Concilium Toletanum III 22, Vives, p. 132-133: "Ut religiosorum corpora saliendo tantum deducantur. Religiosorum omnium corpora qui divina vocatione ab hac vita recedunt cum psalmis tantummodo et sallentium vocibus debere ad sepulchra deferri; nam funebre carmen, quod vulgo defunctis cantare solet". Consult for mourning the dead,

There is the singular case found in canon 17 of the Fourth Council of Toledo (633)³⁴. It has no direct relevance to Priscillian but it does show that questions about the canonicity and authorship of the book of Revelation and its use in the liturgy were challenged.

Pope Leo I's *Letter 15* was a response to an earlier letter to the pontiff by Turibius of Astorga who a great opponent of Priscillianism he was. Turibius wanted the pontiff to pass judgement on what Turibius passed off as the teachings of the heretics. Yet again, Pope Leo I did not have actual copy of Priscillianist works of any kind. He, moreover, never met in person any Priscillianist, he relied entirely on an antagonistic witness. That is why his sixteen condemnations do not contain a single reference to a Priscillianist book or tractate. A word on chronology is called for in view that the letter was written on 21 July 447. Any reference to Pope Leo I at the First Council of Toledo (400) is obviously an interpolation. There are two sections in *Letter 15* that are germane to our topic of Priscillianism, Scriptural Canon, and apocryphal books³⁵. It is in sections 15 and 16 that the anathemas of the pontiff are found.

In section 15 the pope singled out apocryphal scriptures that circulated under the name of Apostles that spread all manner of falsehood. At the outset the pope said that the books that Priscillianists used have been found to be very corrupt, even though they [heretics] consider them canonical – “Et multos corruptissimos eorum codices, qui canonici titularentur, invenimus”. This was referring to the apocryphal books. The books should be taken away and burned – “Apocryphae autem scripturae, quae sub nominibus apostolorum multarum habent seminarium falsitatum, non solum interdicendae, sed etiam penitus auferendae sunt, atque ingibus concremandae”. Any bishop in possession of apocryphal works who read them in church and have been corrupted by Priscillian was pronounced a heretic – “Unde si quis episcoporum, vel apocrypha haberi per domos non

A. Ferreiro, *St. Braulio of Zaragoza's Letters on Mourning*, “Augustinianum” 59 (2019) p. 157-192, at 186-187 and A. Ferreiro, *Sufficit septem diebus: Seven Days Mourning the Dead in the Letters of St. Braulio of Zaragoza*, SP 23/97 (2017) p. 255-264.

³⁴ Concilium Toletanum IV 17, Vives, p. 198: “De Apocalypsis libro omnibus recipiendo”.

³⁵ For a discussion of these lists at the councils and *Letter 15* of alleged Priscillianist teachings see, Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 87-116. On the interpolations see, Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 176-181 and V. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy*, Berkeley 1995, p. 211, note 7. For the passages in Leo's *Letter* and concerns over apocryphal books see, Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 95-97. The *Letter* is at PL 54, 688-699; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 97-100.

prohibuerit, vel sub canonicorum nomine eos codices in Ecclesia permiserit legi, qui Priscilliani adulterina sunt emendatione vitiate, haereticum se noverit iudicandum: quoniam Qui Alios ab errore non revocat, seipsum errare demonstrat”³⁶. These are of the Acts genre that Turibius had brought to Leo’s attention. Within the corpus of Christian apocrypha these are the least threatening to orthodoxy. Section 16 reaffirmed the familiar controversy concerning the books of Dictinius that were still held in reverence by some – “Postremo autem capitulo hoc prodidit iusta querimonia, quod Dictinii tractatus quos secundum Priscilliani dogma conscripsit, a multis cum veneratione legerentur, cum, si aliquid memoriae Dictinii tribuendum putant”³⁷. The completely groundless charge of the alleged Manichaeism of the Priscillianists was voiced again – “Faciunt hoc Priscillianistae, faciunt Manichaei, quorum cum istis tam foederati sunt corda, ut solis nominibus discreti, sacrilegiis autem suis inveninatur uniti: quia etsi vetus Testamentum, quod isti se suscipere simulant, Manichaei refutant, ad unum tamen finem utrorumque tendit intentio, cum quod illi abdicando impugnant, isti recipiendo corrumpunt”³⁸. The accusation of sexual immorality was levelled at them as it was by other opponents, all of it without any foundation – “Quod autem de Manichaeorum foedissimo scelere, hoc etiam de Priscillianistarum incestissima consuetudine olim compertum multumque vulgatum est. Qui enim per omnia sunt impietate sensum pares, non possunt in sacris suis esse disimiles”³⁹. Pope Leo I similar to Augustine relied

³⁶ Leo I Magnus, *Ep. 15, ad Turribium Asturicensem episcopum*, PL 54, 688. Consult also B. Neil, *Leo the Great*, The Early Church Fathers Series, London – New York 2009, p. 9; Concilium Bracarense I 17, Vives, p. 69 and the insights of S.J.G. Sánchez, *Priscillien, Un Chrétien non Conformiste*, Théologie Historique 120, Paris 2009, p. 265-307; Orlandis – Ramos-Lissón, *Historia de los Concilios*, p. 143.

³⁷ Leo I Magnus, *Ep. 15, ad Turribium Asturicensem episcopum*, PL 54, 688. Consult Neil, *Leo the Great*, p. 91; Sánchez, *Priscillien*, p. 265-307; Concilium Bracarense I 17, Vives, p. 69.

³⁸ Leo I Magnus, *Ep. 15, ad Turribium Asturicensem episcopum*, PL 54, 689; Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 96, 108-113.

³⁹ Leo I Magnus, *Ep. 15, ad Turribium Asturicensem episcopum*, PL 54, 689. On the topic of sexual depravity, see my refutation of such charges, A. Ferreiro, *Simon Magus, Nicolas of Antioch, and Muhammad*, ChH 72/1 (2003) p. 53-70; A. Ferreiro, *Priscillian and Nicolaitism*, VigCh 52/4 (1998) p. 382-392; Ferreiro, *Jerome’s Polemic Against Priscillian in his Letter to Ctesiphon (133,4)*, p. 309-332; A. Ferreiro, *Sexual depravity, doctrinal error, and character assassination in the fourth century: Jerome against the Priscillianists*, SP 28 (1993) p. 29-38. All but the last one is reproduced in my book, A. Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions*.

entirely on compromised information from opponents similar to Turibius. If that were not enough, he was not acquainted directly with writings of the Priscillianists, and he never met one. This evidence against Priscillianists is thin at best. In the end Turibius was remembered by Bishop Montanus of Toledo at the Second Council of Toledo (527) as the formidable opponent of Priscillianism who dismantled the sect. He asked if Turibius gave thought to the great reward that awaited him for having uprooted the error of idolatry and the disappearance of the detestable and shameful sect of the Priscillianists. This was an ambitious exaggerated accolade, Priscillianism was hardly gone yet⁴⁰.

3. Church Fathers

The Epistle of Jude because of the quote from Enoch became the object of much discussion among the Church Fathers before and after Priscillian. The earliest source on questions of the Canon surrounding Jude is Eusebius. He said, “Those that are disputed, yet familiar to most, include the epistles known as James, Jude, and 2 Peter”⁴¹. The canonicity of the Epistle of Jude canonicity was contested, it had uneven reception in the early Church before eventually getting full acceptance into the Canon of the Latin and Greek churches. Eusebius offered a full list of books that were contested with own opinions. This is the earliest full account about questions of canonicity regarding certain books. In the end, there was not full agreement concerning some books in the Church, East or West. Some Church Fathers who also weighed in on the question about Jude and other non-canonical books that were not clearly Gnostic⁴². The Venerable Bede in his commentary on Jude admitted he did not know the source for the fight between Michael and the devil over Moses’s body. The quote of Enoch in Jude was

⁴⁰ Concilium Toletanum II, Vives, p. 50: “Putasne quanta tibi apud Deum maneat merces, cuius sollertia vel instantia et idolatriae error abscessit et Priscillianistarum detestabilis ac pudibunda secta contabuit”.

⁴¹ Eusebius Pamphilius, *Ecclesiasticae Historiae* III 25; VI 13, PG 20, 270, 547, tr. G.A. Williamson, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, Minneapolis 1965, p. 134-135, 253.

⁴² *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, ed. G. Bray, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 11, Downers Grove 2000, p. 254-255 for the view of various Fathers on this challenging epistle. See also, Hultin, *Jude’s Citation of I Enoch*, p. 113-128, on Priscillian’s appeal to I Enoch, p. 118-119.

easy to identify it was from I Enoch that was known by Jewish and Christian theologians. For Bede the question was whether Enoch was an apocryphal book. Bede believed it was because Enoch did not actually write the book; yet it still had value. Its questionable reference to giants who had angels as fathers undermined sound doctrine. Jude, nevertheless, should be in the Canon because of its author, antiquity, and the quote from Enoch is not apocryphal or dubious⁴³. There are also examples of Church Fathers who availed themselves of apocrypha. Ambrosiaster, for example, promoted views about apocrypha similar to that of Priscillian, "he emphasizes that claims to revelation are not to be rejected without scrutiny, and like Priscillian believes in the principle of reserve in the teaching of advanced truths"⁴⁴. In other words, Priscillian's approach and use of apocrypha was no different than those who were deemed orthodox. In the end, Priscillian was in good company in his approach to Enoch and Jude. He was no different than those who were considered mainstream orthodox.

4. Old Testament evidence

Priscillian dedicated much of his defense by citing examples of Old Testament prophets. There was Tobit who pronounced that they were the children of the prophets Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Priscillian asked: where are the books of these prophets that Tobit read? Who read or taught them that would give them canonical status? Yet these prophecies never made it into the final canon, but most important they were useful to shape the faith⁴⁵. It is here where Priscillian warned that heretics had corrupted certain portions of these texts⁴⁶. Rather than outright reject them as false, he said discernment and maturity was called for when reading them. He compared the

⁴³ Bray, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, p. 252, 255.

⁴⁴ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 34-39: "Nos filii prophetarum sumus; Noe profeta fuit et Abraham et Isac et Iacob et omnes patres nostri qui ab initio saeculi profetauerunt. Quando in canone Noe liber lectus est? Quis inter profetas dispositi canonis Abrahae librum legit? Quis quod aliquando Isac profetasset edocuit? Quis profetiam Iacob quod in canone poneretur audiuit?", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 84-85.

⁴⁶ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 52-54: "In quibus tamen omnibus libris non est metus, si qua ab infelicibus hereticis sunt inserta, delere et quae profetis uel euangeliis non inueniuntur consentire respuere", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 84-85.

process to removing the darnel [tares] from the wheat; it is far better to sift them than throwing away the wheat that is present⁴⁷. Priscillian offered the extended Daniel – Susanna section – from the Septuagint who made a statement as coming from God that is not to be found in any book of the Canon. Daniel noted that God professed, “that wickedness would have come out of Babylon from the elders who seem to rule the people (Dan. 13:5)⁴⁸. This is a weak example, however. The Church always accepted the Septuagint that includes this extended Daniel, it was never incorporated into the Jewish canon of scripture. Priscillian is on solid ground when he listed a succession of prophets mentioned in the Old Testament whose prophetic utterances or books did not enter into the Canon. Among them are: prophecies of Nathan, prophecies Achia the Selonite, visions of Ledam, words of Zeu son of Anani, words of Iosaphat, discourses of Roboam, prophet Samea, book of the seer Edom, speeches of Adia, speeches of Amessia, and the speeches of Manasse⁴⁹. This impressive list is not a complete inventory of examples he could have provided. Priscillian already made a persuasive case to justify the reading and value of extant extra-canonical books. One thing not emphasized enough is that Priscillian was not advocating their inclusion into the official Canon of scripture. Even so, he was not done.

There is the notable case of the non-canonical IV Ezra, a work that fills in essential details not found in the Canon. In *Tractatus* III he argues that Ezra was responsible for rewriting the Old Testament that had been burned. The rewriting of it is only found in IV Ezra 14, a book widely known to the Church Fathers⁵⁰. Priscillian’s point was that all agreed that the scriptures were burned, and that Ezra rewrote the entire Old Testament⁵¹. The latter development is not in the Canon of scripture. It is preserved in 4 Ezra IV, an apocryphal book. It was a solid argument that proposed that sometimes

⁴⁷ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus* III: *Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 54-60, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 84-87.

⁴⁸ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus* III: *Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 115-117: “Et Daniel deum locutum fuisse testatur dicens: quoniam exiet iniquitas de Babylone ex presbyteris qui uidebantur regere plebem”, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 88-89.

⁴⁹ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus* III: *Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 130-146, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 90-91.

⁵⁰ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus* III: *Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 173-182, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 92-93.

⁵¹ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus* III: *Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 173-175: “Quae si uere incense et uere credimus fuisse rescripta, quamuis incensum testamentum legatur in canone, rescriptum ab Hesdra in canone non legitur”, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 92-93.

apocryphal books fill in what the canonical books lack. Priscillian, moreover, was not making a case for 4 Ezra to be added to the Canon. Chadwick noted the "irony in Ambrose's dependence on an apocryphon for an attack on Priscillianism"⁵². Ambrose was using 4 Ezra to defend his position. Priscillian ended this section on Ezra by asking how can they be guilty of reading few passages on this literature while at the same time their opponents do not read all that God prophesied? He added that they who love to slander instead of faith say "Look for nothing further! It is sufficient that you read what is written in the canon"⁵³. He also celebrated that over the centuries all had prophesied about Christ⁵⁴. He added that the devil was jealous that Christ was proclaimed by Adam, Sed, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all of the rest of the prophets that he listed earlier⁵⁵. I think his point here is that in the non-canonical books that influenced those that were added to the Canon were all pointing to the coming of Christ.

5. New Testament evidence

Priscillian offered some examples from the New Testament to defend his method of reading extra canonical texts⁵⁶. One is from Luke 11:50-51 about the blood shed from Abel to the blood of Zachariah. Priscillian asked: Who is the prophet Abel and all of the ones in between up until Zachariah?⁵⁷

⁵² Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 183, note 2.

⁵³ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 184-188: "Qualiter, rogo, pauca ex his legentes culpabiles sumus, cum magi sob hoc rei sumus, quod omnia quae de deo sunt profetara non legimus? Non dubito autem quemquam ex his qui calumnias potius quam fidem diligunt esse dicturum: ultra nihil quaeras? sufficit te legere quod in canone scribtum est", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 92-95.

⁵⁴ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 202-203: "Quis enim non delectetur Christum ante saecula non a paucis, sed ab omnibus profetatum?", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 94-95.

⁵⁵ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 229-233: "Cesset inuidia diaboli ab omnibus adnuntiatus est dominus, ab omnibus profetatus est Christus, ab Adam Sed Noe Abrahan Isac Iacob et a ceteris qui ab initio saeculi profetauerunt, et intrepidus dico quod inuidet diabolus: uenturum in carne deum omnibus homo sciuit", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 96-97.

⁵⁶ Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 65-66: "Quis est iste Abel profeta, ex quo sanguinis profetarum sunpsit exordium, cuius principium in Zachariam finit?", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 86-87.

Who were all of the prophets in the middle that were killed? None are named in the accepted Canon, not even the sawing in two of Isaiah⁵⁸. Yet they are reported as fact. Priscillian incorrectly identified as anonymous apocrypha the prophecy that Matthew quoted, “Out of Egypt I have called my Son”, we know it is from Hosea 11:1⁵⁹. Then there is a letter that Paul wrote to the Laodiceans that is not in the canon. It is mentioned by Paul in his *Letter to the Colossians*, “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the Church of Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea” (4:16). This letter that Priscillian referred to is as benign as it gets in apocryphal literature, as J. K. Elliot informs us, “As a document it is a harmless theological forgery”⁶⁰. More evidence was offered by Priscillian, written and oral, that circulated in the apostolic Church that was used but did not make the cut into the Canon. There is a quote that Paul said was from Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), it is not in any Gospel. Priscillian erroneously cited Peter as the author of Colossians rather than Paul⁶¹. The problem Priscillian warned that heretics used these books and corrupted them with false doctrines. Priscillian cautioned as much about not leaving this material to unskilled ears or the spiritually immature who could not discern the heretical falsehoods⁶². The non-canonical writings are not the problem, the heretical interpretations must be rejected. Priscillian was expressing differently what he stated earlier that the prudent approach was to separate the wheat from the darnel [tares], it is foolish to throw away both. The weakness of the opposition at every turn is that most had no direct ac-

⁵⁸ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 66-67, 71-72: “Qui sunt illi medii qui uidentur occisi? [...]. Fortasse enim aliquis exsiliat et dicat Eseciam fuisse dissectum”, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 86-87. See “they were sawn in two” (Hebrews 11:37).

⁵⁹ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 83, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 86-87.

⁶⁰ J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James*, Oxford 1993, p. 543; Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 24; Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 96-97.

⁶¹ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 113-114, 238-242, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 88-89, 96-97.

⁶² Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 252-256: “In quod illud tamen non recuso nec respuo inperitis haec non committenda auribus, ne, quia ab hereticis pleraque falsata sunt, dum praetitulato nomine prophetarum in uerbis sanctorum diuinum opus quaerunt, haereticae falsitatis inruant foueam, dum apostolici sermonis non ad plenum retinent disciplinam”, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 96-99.

quaintance with Priscillianism, this is especially so of those outside Hispania who received only compromised testimony⁶³.

6. Jude and the Book of I Enoch

Before engaging what apocryphal books the Priscillianists were said to have used, there is another important New Testament text to consider, the Epistle of Jude and his use of the apocryphal I Enoch. Priscillian initiated his apologetic by asking whether any of the Apostles ever read anything outside of the Canon⁶⁴. In Paul's time it would be the Old Testament, of which there were several collections available. That of the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Greek Septuagint. None of these in the end accepted I Enoch as fully canonical. That was not why Priscillian singled out the apostle Jude who availed himself of the book of I Enoch and quoted him (v. 14-15). He also cited Paul for an extra dose of authority who considered Enoch a prophet (Hebrews 11:5) – Pauline authorship of Hebrews was the norm until the eighteenth centuries when it was questioned. The point here is that Paul recognized Enoch as a legitimate prophet, without citing the book named after him. Furthermore, he says that Tertullian in his *On the Dress of Women*⁶⁵, reasoned that Enoch was rejected by the Jews for the same reason they rejected prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. Jude's quote of Enoch gave the book legitimacy, however. Augustine in *The City of God* delved into the question whether Enoch was a prophet. Jude openly called Enoch a legitimate one. Augustine noted that his writings were never accepted as authoritative by Jews or Christians; therefore, it could be a forgery⁶⁶. Taken together

⁶³ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 69-77, Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 86-87; Ferreiro, *Sexual depravity, doctrinal error, and character assassination in the fourth century*, p. 29-38; Ferreiro, *Jerome's Polemic Against Priscillian in his Letter to Ctesiphon (133,4)*, p. 309-332.

⁶⁴ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus III: Priscilliani Liber de fide et de Apocryphis* 6-8: "Uideamus ergo, si apostoli Christi Iesu magistri nostrae conuersationis et uitae extra canonem nil legerunt", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 82-83.

⁶⁵ Tertullianus, *De cultu feminarum, Libri dvo. Liber I 3*, ed. E. Kroymann, CSEL 70, Vienna – Leipzig 1942, p. 63-64, tr. G. Bray, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 11, Downers Grove 2000, p. 254.

⁶⁶ Augustinus, *De civitate Dei* XVIII 38, in: Sancti Avrelii Avgvstini, *De Civitate Dei, Libri XI-XXII*, Avrelii Avgvstini Opera 14/2, CCSL 48, Turnhout 1955, p. 633,

Priscillian opened up with a solid salvo against his opponents who were aghast that he read extra-canonical books.

A crucial point to be made here is that Priscillian was not advocating adding I Enoch *in toto* to the received Canon as some modern scholars have contended. José Freire Camaniel after summarizing Priscillian's defense in *Tractatus* III of reading extra-canonical books, our author dismisses Priscillian's apologetic as, "Este es su débil razonamiento – this is his weak rationale"⁶⁷. Still others hardly consider it weak or superficial, Priscillian made a credible argument. It is difficult to see how Freire Camaniel thought that Priscillian was advocating for an open Canon, "El canon de las Sagradas Escrituras no está cerrado – The canon of the Sacred Scriptures is not closed"⁶⁸. In *Tractatus* III nor anywhere else is their advocacy that any 'apocryphal books should be added to the received Canon including Priscillian's own books. Priscillian was of the view that these books, if read with mature discernment, could be salutary for the faith. Most of his opponents believed the same. Only the most misinformed opponent could accuse Priscillian of advocating for any extra books for the received Canon. Elsewhere in eastern Africa the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church were open to its canonicity that led to its inclusion into their Canon, the only main branches in Christendom to do so⁶⁹.

A body of books that Priscillian was said to have used are those identified as apocryphal Acts allegedly about the Apostles. The use of apocryphal Acts was less problematic for many of the Church Fathers, even though some heretics were attracted to them. In the main they are least dangerous doctrinal; they are not books of theology; most are allegedly the further adventures of the Apostles in their missionary work. Conti seems to think we can identify which apocryphal Acts texts were used by Priscillianists⁷⁰. I am not so sure, not one is identified by name or quoted anywhere in *Tractatus* III. The only mention of any by name is in the *Letter of Turibius to Hydatius and Ceponius*. It is significant that all of them are of the *Acts* genre. Their use by Priscillian was hardly as anomalous as his opponents would have anyone

tr. G. Bray, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, ed. G. Bray, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 11, Downers Grove 2000, p. 254-255.

⁶⁷ J. Freire Camaniel, *Gallaecia. Antigüedad, intensidad y organización de su cristianismo (siglos I-VII)*, Colección Galicia Histórica. Instituto de Estudios Gallegos Padre Sarmiento. A Coruña 2013, p. 365-374 at p. 365.

⁶⁸ Freire Camaniel, *Gallaecia*, p. 367.

⁶⁹ Bray, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, p. 254-255.

⁷⁰ Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 275-276.

believe. The research of Hernán Martín Giudice is of importance here on this point. The offensive texts were, *Acts of Thomas*, *Acts of Andrew*, *Acts of John*, and the *Memories of the Apostles*. Martín Giudice notes that these refer frequently to the New Testament for background. Fundamentally these are not Manichaean or Gnostic texts as Martín Giudice has demonstrated. The use of apocryphal texts can be found in Zeno of Verona, Ambrosiaster, Ambrose, and Potamius of Lisbon⁷¹. There are many others that could be added. Priscillian did not hold to any Manichaean / Gnostic views which explains why he never used their works⁷². In *Tractatus I* Priscillian already noted the differences of the Canon and apocrypha. He did not confer on them equal status, unlike the heretics who did⁷³.

Some apocryphal Acts, more than others, were used to create hybrid accounts from apocryphal and canonical material. The best example of all is the *Actus Petri cum Simone (Acts of Peter)* that record alleged further confrontations between Simon Peter and Simon Magus (the canonical one in Acts 8) culminating in a final fight in the presence of Nero in Rome. This episode known as the 'Flight of Simon Magus' proliferated in the ensuing centuries in all genres of literatures, art, liturgy, and sermons. The canonical and apocryphal stories of Simon Peter and Simon Magus were woven into a seamless story. The Pseudo-Clementines and later versions such as the, *Passio Sanctorum Apostolorum Petri et Pavli* contributed to its popularity⁷⁴. J.K. Elliott gives some guidance here on the five major apocryphal Acts, they "were intended to supplement stories and details about the apostles. To this extent therefore they belong to the apocryphal traditions based on the New Testament. They are part of the literature of

⁷¹ H. Martín Giudice, *Prisciliano y la Biblia*, Roma 2008, p. 70-72.

⁷² A. Ferreiro, *De prohibitione carnis: Meat Abstention and the Priscillianists*, ZACH 11/3 (2007) p. 464-478.

⁷³ Priscillianus Abulensis, *Tractatus I: Priscilliani Liber Apologeticus* 371-372: "Uel ex canonicis scripturis uel ex apocryphis fabricarunt supra e aquae scripta sunt", Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 54-55. My discussion of Turibius's *Letter to Hydatius and Ceponius* touches on these and other points, see *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 77-87.

⁷⁴ The authoritative edition is in *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, v. 1-3, ed. R.A. Lipsius – M. Bonnet, Darmstadt 1959; Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval and Early Modern Traditions*, 'Typological Portraits of Simon Magus in Anti-Gnostic Sources', p. 35-54; Ferreiro, *Simon Peter and Simon Magus in the 'Acts of Peter' and the 'Passion of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul'*, p. 55-81. A full collection of the texts on the martyrdom of Peter and Paul with facing translations to English from the original languages is in D.L. Eastman, *The Ancient Martyrdom Accounts of Peter and Paul*, Society of Biblical Literature, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 39, Atlanta 2015.

popular piety tinged from time to time with Gnostic ideas and teaching, but which as pieces of literature belong to early orthodox Christianity as practiced in various places in the second century”⁷⁵. The Church made no attempt to inform the flock what was canonical or apocryphal even well into the late Middle Ages. Priscillian’s recourse to this literature in the end became mainstream, contrary to what his opponents said. There is no evidence of overreliance over the canonical scriptures. There is nothing to see here, their opponents made much ado about nothing to discredit them. The Latin Fathers more than the Greek Fathers immersed themselves deeply in these texts, above all the various about Peter and Simon Magus that were effectively used to promote the Petrine Primacy of the bishops of Rome.

Another question has been raised: What the attraction was of the apocryphal Acts to Priscillian and his followers? Chadwick and Conti voiced the view that maybe their emphasis on continence, itinerant missionary work, detachment from material things, and celibacy as promoted in the various Acts held an attraction. It needs to be added that the same was true of Church Fathers who read them. They caught the attention not just of the ‘heretics’⁷⁶. The reality is that there is not a single outright quote or even a paraphrase from apocryphal Acts to support Priscillianist asceticism. The broader context, moreover, was the rapidly emerging ascetical movement – monasticism – in which Priscillianism had a place. It was not just Priscillianists or other groups pressing the edges of an emergent orthodoxy. There was still much to be sorted out in Christianity as orthodox and heterodox groups forged their identities, doctrine, sacraments, liturgy, morals, marriage, celibacy or married clergy, and more. Priscillianism was part of larger trends, it was hardly an isolated alternative.

7. Conclusion

Priscillian was not making an argument to add books to the existing received canon such as it was in the fourth century, notwithstanding that some books were still being disputed here and there. Surprisingly this major point is absent in many modern studies, it casts Priscillian’s reading of apocrypha in a very different light. He also did not think it wise to put them in the hands of novices in the faith. He as hardly heretical in any of this, as

⁷⁵ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 229-230.

⁷⁶ Chadwick, *Priscillian*, p. 77-78 and Conti, *Priscillian*, p. 275-276.

it has been shown. In the rich conciliar legislation of Zaragoza (380), Toledo I (400), Braga I (561) and Braga II (572) not a single tractate was named nor the works of any later Priscillianists, they just condemned 'books' generically. Even Pope Leo I in his famous *Letter* in section 15 condemned unidentified books. The tractates of Dictinius got some attention but in broad censures⁷⁷. Much of what they are accused of as regards non-canonical books was also widely practiced by the opposition. Priscillian never put apocrypha on par with canonical texts, nor did he ever advocate expanding the Canon, that is a gross misinterpretation. They were for him, as for many Fathers, useful at times. Most of the apocryphal texts faded into oblivion such as the Gnostic ones, the alleged gospels, and letters. Some of the Acts genre endured for a long time, as we saw above all with those related to Peter to promote the Petrine Primacy. For this reason the Acts related to Peter went mainstream for the entire Middle Ages with no objections whatsoever. Priscillian adopted a judicious approach to the reading of apocryphal texts, there was hardly anything radical about his approach. His enemies were motivated to condemn him by imputing on him all manner suspect activity, in this case the promotion and reading of 'dangerous' books. From beginning to end these were baseless accusations. As regards Priscillianism from the late 570s forward it quickly faded across Gallaecia. How much longer devotion to Priscillian as martyr persisted under the radar of the watchful eye of the hostile bishops, we are unable to ascertain.

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⁷⁷ Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae*, p. 95-97.

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