

CLERICAL CONTINENCE IN THE FOURTH CENTURY: THREE PAPAL DECRETALS

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IT IS WELL KNOWN that the early Church ordained married men but did not allow an unmarried man or a widower to marry after ordination. As a result, the first step towards the law of clerical celibacy in the Latin Church was to require married clerics in major orders to refrain completely from conjugal intercourse.¹ The earliest instance known is canon 33 of the Council of Elvira (ca. 306).² About eighty years later the first papal decretals enforcing continence on married clerics were issued, during the episcopate of Pope Siricius (384–399). General observance of ritual purity and evidence that Mass began to be celebrated daily at that time have suggested that Siricius' legislation was simply a logical deduction from these two facts: by the principle of ritual purity intercourse was forbidden the day before a religious rite and, since Mass was said every day, married clerics would obviously, almost automatically, have been bound to total continence.³

¹ The law of celibacy for the Orthodox Church requires only that the bishop be celibate. The selection of bishops from, or their induction into, monastic life assures the observance of this discipline.

² For A. W. W. Dale, *The Synod of Elvira and Christian Life in the Fourth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1882), celibacy was the most effective means by which the hierarchy could establish and maintain its ascendancy over the laity against the increasing power and competition of the ascetics. His position is supported by a minute examination of each word and phrase of the eighty-one canons of the Council made by S. Laeuchli, *Power and Sexuality: The Emergence of Canon Law at the Synod of Elvira* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ., 1972). The value of these books is called into serious question by M. Meigne, "Concile ou collection d'Elvire?" *RHE* 70 (1975) 361–87. Here it is convincingly argued that the canons of Elvira represent a collection of canons from various synods held in the fourth and perhaps the fifth centuries. In particular, canon 33, which has generally been accepted as the first law of clerical continence in spite of its early date and awkward grammar, is associated with the attack on Priscillianism in the 380's and interpreted as forbidding married clerics to adopt a dualistic asceticism which opposed marriage. The weak points of Meigne's dating and interpretation of canon 33 are pointed out by E. Griffe, "Le Concile d'Elvire et les origines du célibat ecclésiastique," *BLE* 77 (1976) 123–27, but without treating the main thesis of Meigne's article in any detail.

³ This is not a novel theory; cf. [H. Wharton,] *A Treatise of the Celibacy of the Clergy Wherein Its Rise and Progress Are Historically Considered* (London: H. Clark, 1688) 23. A more recent and influential exponent is R. Gryson, *Les origines du célibat ecclésiastique du premier au septième siècle* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1970). Despite criticism, he emphatically defends his position in "Sacerdoce et célibat: A propos d'un ouvrage récent," *RHE* 67 (1972) 77, and in "Aux origines du célibat ecclésiastique: La continence cultuelle des clercs majeurs dans l'ancienne église d'Occident," *Corona gratiarum: Miscellanea patristica, historica et liturgica Eligio Dekkers O.S.B. XII lustra complenti oblata* (Bruges: Sint Pietersabdij, 1975) 123–28.

Strong as this argument seems, it requires clarification on several points. First, the meaning of ritual purity and the form of its observance in the fourth century should be determined. Furthermore, it is far from certain that Mass was said every day throughout the West at this time. This alone is enough to call into question the straightforward argument summarized above. Finally, the decretals should be studied, and in their historical setting; this will be the subject of my article. Beyond the statement that sexual intercourse disqualified a person from participation in public worship for one day, I shall not consider the meaning and origins of ritual purity. The question of daily Mass will be discussed only briefly, insofar as it is relevant to the papal decretals. A full treatment of this important topic would require an article in itself, one that I hope to publish.⁴

Pope Siricius is often described as using arguments based on ritual abstinence to impose absolute continence on all major clerics. Three decretals concerning clerical continence were promulgated from Rome during his pontificate and, while they all invoke the demands made by public cult, it would be misleading to ignore other aspects equally important to his conclusions. In fact, each decretal has a distinct approach to the topic of married clerics. *Epistola 1 ad Himerum* shows the influence of asceticism; *Epistola 5 ad episcopos Africae* is almost exclusively ritual in its motivation; and the decretal *Ad Gallos episcopos* seems, perhaps self-consciously, to combine the two.⁵

The form of a decretal places some restriction on its interpretation. Since it is usually a series of decisions on particular cases with a more or less brief explanation, a lengthy treatment of any topic is precluded. A specific question about a particular problem tends to reduce the scope of discussion, with the result that many related factors may be absent.⁶ This makes it important to use all three decretals to formulate Siricius' policy on clerical marriage and also to complement them from contemporary history.

⁴ The best, virtually the only, monograph on cultic purity in antiquity is by E Fehrle, *Die kultische Keuschheit im Altertum* (Giessen Topelmann, 1910) Among modern studies, that by M Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York Praeger, 1966) is noteworthy for providing more than a mere description of the religious aspects of life and worship Daily Mass and clerical celibacy are studied by R Kottje, "Das Aufkommen der taglichen Eucharistiefeyer in der Westkirche und die Zolibatsforderung," *ZKG* 82 (1971) 218-28, but both topics require more space than a short article can provide

⁵ *Epistola 1 ad Himerum*, ed P Coustant, *Epistolae Romanorum pontificum* (Paris Delatour & Coustelier, 1721, Westmead Gregg, 1967) 623-38, reprinted in PL 13, 1131-47, *Epistola 5 ad episcopos Africae* (Coustant 651-58, PL 13, 1155-62), *Epistola 10 ad Gallos episcopos* (Coustant 685-700, PL 13, 1181-93) The authorship of this letter has been debated, see below

⁶ Cf *Ep 1 1* (Coustant 624) " ad singula, prout Dominus adspirare dignatus est, consultationi tuae responsum competens non negamus " *Ep 10 2* (Coustant 688) "Singulis itaque propositionibus suo ordine reddendae sunt traditiones "

CONSECRATED VIRGINITY

Helvidius

The ascetical teaching that virginity was superior to marriage was bound to raise objection. The most famous defender of the married state against this ascetical doctrine was Jovinian, whose more extreme teachings were condemned by councils in Rome and Milan and who was fiercely and one-sidedly attacked by Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*. About ten years earlier,⁷ at the end of the pontificate of Damasus, Rome was the scene of a less notorious incident when a certain Helvidius anticipated Jovinian's thesis that marriage and virginity were of equal merit. He had been provoked to write by a pamphlet of an ascetic, Carterius,⁸ that established the superiority of celibacy from Scripture and the example of the perpetual virginity of Mary.⁹ Our only record of the controversy is Jerome's *Adversus Helvidium*, from which it seems clear that clerical celibacy or continence had not been a point in the debate. Jerome makes no mention of his patron Pope Damasus, nor had he been invited to write by the clergy.

In any case, because of the scandal caused by the success of Helvidius' treatise and at the request of some *fratres*, i.e., ascetics, Jerome reluctantly wrote a reply.¹⁰ He claims that he had delayed doing so, not from the difficulty of answering a clever and erudite opponent, but from the fact that his notice of a worthless work would bestow an unmerited fame on it. Despite his contempt, Jerome's own summary reveals that Helvidius had argued ably and with some success.¹¹ Helvidius restricted his attention to the virginity of Mary and, arguing from Scripture, tradition, and reason, set out to demonstrate that although Mary had been a virgin *ante partum*, the marriage of Joseph and Mary had been normal after the birth of Jesus. Jerome effectively attacks Helvidius' interpretation of the infancy narrative in Matthew. To refute Helvidius' discussion of the *fratres Domini*, Jerome introduces a new interpretation of these passages.

⁷ 383; cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome, His Life, Writings and Controversies* (London: Duckworth, 1975) 104.

⁸ The text of the works of St. Jerome printed in PL is that edited by D. Vallarsi, but with two paginations corresponding to the different editions of PL. Because both of these indicate the pagination used by Vallarsi, I shall refer to the works of St. Jerome by taking the volume number from PL and the page number from Vallarsi. Thus, the reference to Carterius can be found in *Adversus Helvidium* 16 (PL 23, 224: Vall.).

⁹ Cf. *ibid.* 22 (PL 23, 230: Vall.): "Tu [Helvidius] . . . ejusdem vis esse gloriae virgines et maritatas." G. Jouassard, "La personnalité d'Helvidius," *Mélanges J. Saunier* (Lyons: Faculté Catholique des Lettres, 1944) 144.

¹⁰ *Adv. Helv.* 1 (PL 23, 205: Vall.). The only indication that a party had formed around Helvidius is Augustine, *De haeresibus* 84 (PL 42, 46), which mentions "Helvidiani" as heretics who teach that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus. This could refer simply to the reappearance of his teaching.

¹¹ *Adv. Helv.* 1 (PL 23, 205: Vall.). Jouassard, "Helvidius" 150, n. 1.

In the traditional reading Joseph was thought to have been a widower with children from his first marriage. As Jerome wishes to claim Joseph as a prize for virginity, he interprets *fratres* as cousins of Jesus.¹² To understand Jerome's attitude here, one must examine his discussion of Helvidius' argument that the example of the patriarchs proves that marriage is as good as virginity. Jerome answers this by claiming that marriage belongs to the OT, virginity to the NT. The patriarchs were married, but in the development from the old to the new dispensation the prestige of marriage gives way to that of virginity.¹³

Mary is a central figure in the change from OT to NT times, but here Jerome restricts his discussion of her virginity to Helvidius' claim that she bore other children, which he refutes on the grounds that the divine maternity dedicated her completely to God: "Tu [Helvidius] vero templum Dominici corporis succendisti, tu contaminasti sanctuarium Spiritus Sancti, ex quo vis quadrigam fratrum et sororum processisse congeriem."¹⁴ Joseph, *vir justus*, respected this dedication.¹⁵ The question of ritual pollution was not part of the debate. If a fourth-century source for Jerome's thinking is sought, it would be the lives of Christian virgins. It was the value of their dedication that was brought into question by Helvidius and at whose instance Jerome refuted him.¹⁶ Mary is discussed as if she were a consecrated Christian virgin of the fourth century, and absolute virginity is essential to her as a sign of her intimate association with the beginnings of the Christian era.

Bonosus

Helvidius' attack on the virginity of Mary was soon repeated by Bonosus, bishop of Naissus. Information about his teaching comes from *Epistola de causa Bonosi* and Ambrose's *De institutione virginis*, a sermon preached for the consecration of the virgin Ambrosia at Bologna

¹² *Adv Helv* 14-15 (PL 23, 220-23 Vall) Regarding the traditional interpretation, cf., e.g., C W Neumann, *The Virgin Mary in the Works of St Ambrose* (Fribourg Fribourg Univ., 1962) 252-57

¹³ *Adv Helv* 20-21 (PL 23, 227-30 Vall)

¹⁴ *Ibid* 16 (PL 23, 223-24 Vall), cf. sect 2 (PL 23, 206 Vall) "Invocandus est Dominus Jesus, ut sacri ventris hospitium, cujus decem mensibus inhabitator fuit, ab omni concubitus suspicione tueatur"

¹⁵ *Ibid* 8 (PL 23, 212 Vall)

¹⁶ The interesting question of whether Helvidius was a layman or a cleric cannot be settled with certainty. G Grutzmacher, *Hieronymus Eine biographische Studie zur alten Kirchengeschichte* 1 (Leipzig Dieterich, 1901) 270, asserts that he was a layman. He bases his opinion on a phrase in *Adv Helv* 1 (PL 23, 205 Vall) "solus in universo mundo sibi et laicus et sacerdos", cf. Kelly, *Jerome* 104 and 105, n 4. Jouassard, "Helvidius" 141, has observed that the phrase is inconclusive about Helvidius' status, it merely underlines the isolation that his eccentric doctrine produced.

in 393.¹⁷ Judging from Ambrose's comments, Bonosus, like Helvidius, was concerned mainly with the ascetical overemphasis on virginity.¹⁸ In his sermon Ambrose refuted Bonosus by demonstrating that Mary was in every way the model and inspiration of consecrated virgins, that she required and displayed all the strength that only consecrated virginity can bestow, and that Christ chose her for his mother because he knew that she would not abandon her virginity.¹⁹ The treatment of Bonosus by synods and councils suggests another aspect,²⁰ that his heresy was Christological, so that his teaching that Mary had had children after the birth of Jesus was a consequence of a more fundamental error. Section 3 of the *Epistola de causa Bonosi* implies this by associating Bonosus with the Jews who deny the Virgin Birth, i.e., the divinity of Christ. The sect which formed around Bonosus eventually became identified with the doctrine of Photinus.²¹

Of interest here is the council's defense of the perpetual virginity of Mary. It is proved on the basis of Jn 19:26-27.²² The reason given for it is as follows: "Neque enim elegisset Dominus Jesus nasci per virginem, si eam judicasset tam incontinentem fore, ut illud genitale Domini corporis, illam aulam Regis Aeterni, concubitus humani semine conquinaret."²³ Fehrle cites this as an instance of continence resulting from the

¹⁷ *Epistola de causa Bonosi*, printed among the letters of St. Ambrose, between *Eps.* 56 and 57 (PL 16, 1172-74) and as Siricius, *Epistola* 9 (Constant 679-82). It is not certain whether the synod which issued this letter was held at Milan under Ambrose or in Rome under Siricius; cf. E. Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* 1 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1930) 600; Neumann, *The Virgin Mary* 211. See Ambrose, *De institutione virginis* (PL 16, 305-34). Neumann (206 ff.) argues that Bonosus was bishop of Sardica.

¹⁸ Bonosus is not mentioned by name in *De institutione virginis* but the references to him are unmistakable; cf. Neumann, *The Virgin Mary* 212. Ambrose, *op. cit.* 5, 32-6, 43 (PL 16, 313-17), considers six texts of Scripture that have been used by opponents of Mary's perpetual virginity, four of which are found in Helvidius; cf. Neumann 213.

¹⁹ *De inst. virg.* 6, 44-8, 57 (PL 16, 317-20).

²⁰ The Council of Capua, 391/92, considered the case of Bonosus and referred it to the bishops of Illyricum. Ambrose was at this council; cf. *Ep.* 56 4 (PL 16, 1171). Bonosus was deposed by his fellow bishops and appealed for advice to Ambrose. A council in Milan or Rome again referred the case to his neighboring bishops and in its letter *Epistola de causa Bonosi* condemned his error regarding Mary's virginity.

²¹ Regarding the doctrine of Bonosus and the subsequent history of the Bonosians, cf. X. Le Bachelet, "Bonose," *DTC* 2, 1029-31; H. Rahner, "Die Marienkunde in der lateinischen Patristik," *Katholische Marienkunde* 1 (ed. P. Sträter; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1951) 147; H. von Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1929) 120.

²² Sect. 4 (Constant 682). Precisely the same argument occurs in Ambrose, *De inst. virg.* 7, 46-49 (PL 16, 317-19), and constitutes the essential part of the argument in favor of Ambrose's authorship of the *Epistola*. The reference to him in the third person (Sect. 2 [Constant, 681]: "... ad fratrem nostrum Ambrosium") can be accounted for on the basis of a Milanese synod as the issuing body of the letter.

²³ Sect. 3 (Constant 681); cf. *De inst. virg.* 6, 44 (PL 16, 317).

Liebesvereinigung between a god and his client,²⁴ but the case here is somewhat different. The sentence is equivalent to saying that Jesus chose Mary to be his mother because he knew that she intended to remain a virgin, not that she had to remain a virgin because she had become the mother of God. By requiring this intention of Mary before she could be chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the author implies that her virginity is seen as an essential part of the new dispensation. The polluting effects of intercourse here, as for St. Jerome, arise from the idea that Mary is a consecrated virgin. Nevertheless, the exaltation of virginity cast a shadow over even legitimate intercourse, not because this would make a person ritually impure for one day, or because every woman was somehow the bride of Christ, but because it represented a compromise with the world, a continuing among material things that Christians believed were destined to pass away. We shall have occasion to examine this in more detail later. How much of this is Christian, how much philosophic dualism, is a question still very much alive.

If the author was in fact Siricius, he exhibits respect for asceticism in defending the perpetual virginity of Mary and a remarkable dependence on Ambrose for his arguments.

Jovinian

Since none of the writings of the heretic Jovinian are extant, his doctrine has to be reconstructed from the writings of his opponents: a letter from Pope Siricius, *Ad diversos episcopos*, publishing the condemnation of Jovinian by a Roman synod and warning against his doctrine; a reply to this letter from a synod held under Ambrose at Milan which confirmed the Roman decisions; Ambrose, *Epistola 63*, to the Church at Vercelli concerning the incursions of Jovinianist ideas there; and Jerome's long and vituperative *Adversus Jovinianum*.²⁵ Other documents which advert to the heresy are later and so of less value. During the Pelagian controversy the name of Jovinian reappeared, since both heresies are concerned to some degree with the possibility of not sinning after baptism, but Jovinian's condemnation may simply have been a convenient stick with which to beat Pelagians.²⁶ Augustine gained his information about

²⁴ Fehrle, *Keuschheit* 5; he also cites *De inst. virg.* 6, 45 (PL 16, 317).

²⁵ Siricius, *Ep.* 7 (Coustant 663-68); *Rescriptum Ambrosii aliorumque episcoporum* (Coustant 669-76) = Ambrose, *Ep.* 42 (PL 16, 1123-29); Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 7-45 (PL 16, 1191-1201); Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* (PL 23, 237-384: Vall.). Jerome's *Eps.* 48-50, which comment upon and defend his attack on Jovinian, may also be included here.

²⁶ Cf. H. Belling, "Über Jovinian," *ZKG* 9 (1887-88) 396. A convenient annotated collection of citations from the primary sources about Jovinian can be found in W. Haller, *Jovinianus: Die Fragmente seiner Schriften, die Quellen zu seiner Geschichte, sein Leben und seine Lehre*, TU 2/2. For a critique of Haller and a good discussion of Jovinian's ideas and history, cf. F. Valli, *Gioviniano: Esame delle fonti e dei frammenti* (Urbino: Urbino Univ., 1953).

Jovinian at second hand, and the presence of details about Jovinian not found elsewhere shows that his sources were not restricted to writings still extant.²⁷

Even the date of the appearance and condemnation of Jovinian is a little uncertain. Until recently Baronius' opinion that the synods of Rome and Milan took place in 389–390 was generally followed, but they are now thought to have occurred later, in 392 or 393.²⁸

The obscurity around the events which resulted in Jovinian's condemnation may be somewhat dispersed by a discussion of his doctrine as it is known from the letters of Siricius and Ambrose, and Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*. Jerome refutes Jovinian's arguments at length, but it is not always clear where he is quoting, where paraphrasing, and where distorting the doctrine of his opponent.²⁹ Neither is it clear that Jerome understood quite everything he read in Jovinian's pamphlets; at least it is difficult to form an altogether coherent picture of Jovinian's teaching from Jerome's presentation of it. Furthermore, Jerome was remote from these events. Although he had been sent some of Jovinian's writings, his description of Jovinian's doctrine is incomplete and not always consistent. For these reasons his description of Jovinian will be considered after those of Siricius and Ambrose, who were both in immediate contact with the Jovinianist party.

The first mention of Jovinian occurs in the circular letter issued by the Roman synod that condemned him and some of his companions, to alert other bishops to the danger of his doctrine. The purpose of the letter is more to describe the diabolical nature of the heresy and the shock of finding a heretical wolf concealed among the Roman sheep than to state exactly what the heresy was.³⁰ Nevertheless two, perhaps three, of the errors attributed to Jovinian by Ambrose and Jerome are mentioned here. In the opening section the new doctrine is briefly summarized. Although the devil is the grammatical subject throughout, we may assume that the opinions are Jovinian's: "Pudicitiae adversarius, luxuriae magister, crudelitatibus pascitur; abstinentia puniendus, odit jejunia, ministris suis praedicantibus dum dicit esse superflua, spem non habens de futuris. . . ."³¹ *Pudicitiae adversarius* refers to Jovinian's accusation

²⁷ In *De haeresibus* 82 (PL 42, 45–46) Augustine cites an unnamed author as the source for his information. Items peculiar to Augustine are the short life of the movement, its success among some Roman ascetics who married as a result of Jovinian's propaganda, its lack of success among the clergy, and the reason Jovinian himself never married: "non propter aliquod apud Deum majus meritum in regno vitae perpetuae profuturum, sed propter praesentem prodesse necessitatem, hoc est, ne homo conjugales patiatur molestias."

²⁸ Kelly, *Jerome* 182.

²⁹ Belling, "Über Jovinian" 396, sorts out Jerome's various references to Jovinian.

³⁰ Siricius, *Ep.* 7 (Coustant 663–68).

³¹ Sect. 1 (Coustant 664).

that ascetics debased marriage to praise virginity. This was the heaviest blow Jovinian administered to monasticism, the only one which the synod explicitly refutes elsewhere in the letter.³² Jovinian is also known to have denied the value of fasting (*odit jejunia*). Finally, there is the phrase *spem non habens de futuris*. While the subject of *habens* is still the devil, the sentiment is associated with his ministers, *ministris suis praedican-tibus*, and is likely a reference to Jovinian's thesis that only one reward awaits the blessed in heaven, without differentiation based on good works. This is the sole indication in the synodal letter that Jovinian had formulated a theory which excluded Christian asceticism. Jovinian published his views, supporting them from both OT and NT.³³ His writings were delated to the Pope, who summoned a synod of the Roman clergy to consider them. Their publication may have coincided with Jovinian's personal abandonment of monasticism, since the synod mentions the hypocrisy of the heretics, whose real character was abruptly revealed after their apparent holiness had gained them high respect and position in the Roman Church.³⁴ The synodal letter implies, then, that Jovinian and his party reacted against propaganda in favor of asceticism by giving up the practice of asceticism, and by attacking the necessity and prestige of virginity and fasting, two traits characteristic of monastic spirituality.

After the decision of the Roman synod the Jovinianist party went to Milan.³⁵ This would have been well after the Emperor Theodosius had returned to the East in July 391, but they may have been seeking some sort of imperial protection.³⁶ On the other hand, Jovinian may originally have been a monk at the monastery near Milan; that he had a following there is demonstrated by Ambrose, *Epistola* 63. Whatever brought him to Milan, he found an opponent in Ambrose, who assembled a synod of bishops from the district which confirmed the Roman verdict. Its letter to Siricius³⁷ presents the heretical doctrines more explicitly than the Roman one does: a denial of the grades of chastity, a criticism of fasting,

³² Sect 3 (Coustant 667)

³³ *Ibid* (Coustant 666), cf Jerome, *Adv Jov* 1, 3 (PL 23, 239 Vall)

³⁴ Siricius, *Ep* 7 2 and 3 (Coustant 665-66) That Jovinian had been a monk is reported in Jerome, *Adv Jov* 1, 40 (PL 23, 303 Vall) and in Augustine, *De haer* 82 (PL 42, 45), cf Ambrose, *Ep* 42 6 and *Ep* 63 7-8 (PL 16, 672, 1191), and *Explanatio super psalmum* 36 49 (CSEL 64, 108) Grutzmacher, *Hieronymus* 2, 148, suggests that Jovinian abandoned the new monasticism for traditional Western forms of asceticism and (2, 149) that Helvidius was another traditional ascetic Unfortunately there is no evidence to support these conjectures Haller's statement (*Jovinianus* 123) that Jovinian did not marry because of his monastic vows is rightly criticized by Vall (*Gioviniano* 23) as inconsistent with the fact that there were many married monks and nuns among the Jovinianists

³⁵ *Rescriptum Ambrosu* 8 (Coustant 673-74)

³⁶ The state was regularly resorted to in theological difficulties, the history of Priscillian provides near-contemporary examples

³⁷ *Rescriptum Ambrosu* (Coustant 669-76)

and a denial of a variety of rewards in heaven. Ambrose gives most space to a thorough justification of the doctrine of Mary's virginity *in partu*, which Jovinian had rejected even though he accepted her virginity *ante partum*. The opinion that Mary had other children besides Jesus, which had been recently advanced by Bonosus and Helvidius, is not mentioned here or in any of the documents which concern Jovinian. The length and urgency of Ambrose's discussion has a personal note which could have originated in an appearance of Jovinian before Ambrose or the synod. In fact, Ambrose, the champion of the perpetual virginity of Mary, may have forced Jovinian's hand by a *reductio ad absurdum* argument;³⁸ this would explain the omission of this question in Siricius' letter and in Jerome's writings. However, the lack of detail in the Roman synodal letter and some uncertainty in Jerome's own mind about this doctrine might be sufficient explanation for its absence.³⁹

This rescript indicates some of Jovinian's arguments: the dignity of marriage must be safeguarded, virginity *in partu* is physically impossible and represents a Manichean view of Christ's humanity, and St. Paul proves that fasting is not essential. Ambrose's abundant use of the OT and NT here reflects Jovinian's own style of argument; Siricius and Jerome also mention Jovinian's "perversion" of Scripture.⁴⁰ In *Epistola 63* Ambrose again cites the errors which had been considered and censured by the synods of Rome and Milan,⁴¹ with an additional thesis about the power of baptism, somewhat vaguely presented. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* refers to it in several versions, and later, during the Pelagian controversy, it was this doctrine that was associated in one form or another with Jovinian. Ambrose attributes to the Jovinianists at Vercelli the opinion that sins committed after baptism, however inappropriate, did not alter the relationship of a baptized person to God.⁴²

The errors attributed to Jovinian by Siricius and Ambrose can all be found in Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, except the denial of Mary's virginity *in partu*. In Jerome's presentation, however, Jovinian is not always consistent. In the first thesis which Jerome attributes to him, that the states of virginity, widowhood, and marriage are of equal merit, Jovinian seems to allow for a differentiation on the basis of good works. The third thesis, on the other hand, advances the idea of a single, uniform

³⁸ According to J. Huhn, *Das Geheimnis der Jungfrau-Mutter Maria nach dem Kirchenvater Ambrosius* (Wurzburg: Echter, 1954) 110, Ambrose had taught this doctrine, implicitly at least, since 377; cf. Neumann, *The Virgin Mary* 138-41.

³⁹ Regarding Jerome cf. Valli, *Giovinniano* 125-42; Kelly, *Jerome* 185-86.

⁴⁰ *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 3-5, 7-8 (Coustant 670-73). Regarding Jovinian's misuse of Scripture, cf. n. 33 above.

⁴¹ Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 7, 11, and 33 (PL 16, 1191, 1192, 1198).

⁴² Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 11 and 22 (PL 16, 1192, 1196); cf. Augustine, *De haer.* 82 (PL 42, 45). Jerome's understanding of Jovinian will be examined immediately below.

reward in heaven for all the saved, i.e., there is no difference in merit.⁴³ Questions are also raised by Jerome's discussion of sin after baptism. He has several versions of Jovinian's teaching, all different from that of Ambrose, *Epistola* 63. Jerome claims that Jovinian distinguished between a baptism of water only, and one of water and the Spirit: a person truly baptized cannot be tempted or, elsewhere, cannot be overthrown by the devil. Yet, at the same time, Jovinian seems to have recognized a rite of penance by which sinners were readmitted to full membership in the Church.⁴⁴ Jerome refutes Jovinian's thesis by citing many examples of saints who had sinned, which implies that he thought Jovinian taught that a truly baptized person could not sin.⁴⁵ In point of fact, the quotations from Jovinian in *Adversus Jovinianum* do not require absolute impeccability. Jovinian apparently denied the power of the devil, so that if the devil is thought to be the sole source of temptation or sin (as Jerome himself says⁴⁶ at one point), Jovinian's position is equivalent to impeccability. According to Augustine, Jovinian taught that all sins were equal, i.e., mortal, and that a baptized person could not sin. In the Pelagian discussions it is assumed that Jovinian taught that impeccability was possible, but this version of his doctrine may have arisen from the demands of debate rather than a desire to present Jovinian's thought accurately.⁴⁷

The silence of Siricius in this matter can be accounted for more or less plausibly. The Roman synodal letter does not contain much detail about Jovinian's teaching, being concerned with the attack on virginity and

⁴³ *Adv Jov* 1, 3, (PL 23, 241 Vall) Jovinian's first thesis is given by Jerome as "Virgines, viduas et maritatas, quae semel in Christo lotae sunt, si non discrepent ceteris operibus, eisdem esse meriti" The phrase *si non discrepent ceteris operibus* receives an ingenious interpretation by A. Harnack, "Geschichte der Lehre von der Seligkeit allein durch den Glauben in der alten Kirche," *ZTK* 1 (1891) 149 "Entweder als stammen sie nicht von Jovinian oder sie müssen den Sinn haben, 'wenn sie sich nicht durch ihre Werke als Bose und Gute von einander unterscheiden'" Haller, *Jovinianus* 151, follows Harnack's interpretation. A less complicated explanation is offered by Valli, *Gioviano* 91 "Quel 'ceteris operibus' distingue nettamente coloro che sono di grazie e quelli che non lo sono"

⁴⁴ *Adv Jov* 1, 3, 2, 1 and 37 (PL 23, 241, 321, 382 Vall) Belling, "Über Jovinian" 400, 402, questions Jerome's accuracy here

⁴⁵ *Adv Jov* 2, 3 (PL 23, 323-27 Vall)

⁴⁶ *Ibid* 2, 2 (PL 23, 321 Vall) "existimo quod omne peccatum a diabolo sit" For Belling, "Über Jovinian" 401, Jovinian's second thesis represents a reaction against an overemphasis of the devil's power by ascetics rather than a carefully-thought-out first principle in a theology of grace, see *Adv Jov* 1, 3 (PL 23, 241) "Nisi tunc approbare eos, qui plena fide in baptismate renati sunt, a diabolo non posse subverti"

⁴⁷ Augustine, *De haer* 82 (PL 42, 45), cf Haller, *Jovinianus* 141-42. This part of Jovinian's teaching is quite obscure, cf Grutzmacher, "Jovinianus," *RE* 9, 401, rd, *Hieronimus* 2, 158. The involvement of Pelagius in the Jovinianist controversy from its beginnings (cf Kelly, *Jerome* 187, n 48) raises interesting questions about Jovinian's influence on Pelagius

fasting. These theses no doubt provoked questions about sin, penance, the rewards of heaven, and later about the virginity of Mary. Jerome had received several pamphlets by Jovinian, the purpose of which was presumably to explain and justify his views.⁴⁸ In this way Jovinian may have been brought to realize that his initial attacks on virginity and fasting had implications about sin and the power of baptism, but had been unable to present them with complete consistency. The alternative is to suggest that he had devised a comprehensive theology, the principles of which, despite published explanations, were not grasped by his contemporaries, who took note only of his criticism of asceticism. This has been suggested with great ingenuity and some success, but it fails to give enough weight to the anti-ascetical impulse of his teaching. Given the apparent confusion about these first principles, the preceding account seems more satisfactory.⁴⁹

The anti-ascetical nature of Jovinian's teaching is unmistakable. He denied precisely the things on which asceticism based its particular merit: fasting, the superiority of virginity, the necessity of asceticism for salvation, the perpetual virginity of Mary. The propaganda of Jovinian against monasticism was powerful and successful. The practical effect of equating virginity and marriage was to elevate marriage, and many ascetics of both sexes abandoned celibacy for marriage.⁵⁰ There is no indication that Jovinian criticized clerical continence, which had been recently confirmed by papal decree. Jerome even uses the example of clerical continence and celibacy against Jovinian's teaching about the equality of all states among the baptized. Nevertheless it is somewhat surprising to find that Jovinian's anti-ascetical ideas were emphatically condemned by the whole Roman clergy, from the bishop to the lowest cleric, and that, according to Augustine, Jovinian gained no episcopal support.⁵¹ Jovinian accused the apologists for virginity of a Manichean attitude towards marriage.⁵²

⁴⁸ Jerome mentions *commentarioli* of Jovinian in *Adv. Jov.* 1, 1 (PL 23, 237: Vall.) and *libri ibid.* 1, 1 and 3 (PL 23, 237, 240). In 1, 1 he quotes from "the second book of Jovinian," a work also known to Julian of Eclanum; cf. Augustine, *Opus imperfectum contra Julianum* 1, 98 (PL 45, 1114).

⁴⁹ E.g., Haller, *Jovinianus* 132-58; cf. Grützmacher, "Jovinianus" 400, regarding confessional bias in the assessment of Jovinian.

⁵⁰ Regarding the success of the movement, cf. Siricius, *Ep.* 7 2 and 3 (Coustant 665-66); Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 2, 36 (PL 23, 380: Vall.). The abandonment of monastic life is mentioned by Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 7-8 (PL 16, 1191), and by Augustine, *De haer.* 82 (PL 42, 45-46), and *Retractationes* 2, 49[22] (CSEL 36, 156-57). Regarding the elevation of marriage, cf. Ambrose, *Ep.* 63 10 (PL 16, 1192); Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1, 3 and 4 (PL 23, 239, 241: Vall.).

⁵¹ Jerome, *Ep.* 49 2 (CSEL 54, 352). Siricius, *Ep.* 7 4 (Coustant 668). Augustine, *De haer.* 82 (PL 42, 46), says that Jovinian had no success among the bishops: "nec usque ad deceptionem aliquorum sacerdotum potuit pervenire."

⁵² *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 8 (Coustant 673-74); Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1, 5 (PL 23, 244-45: Vall.).

The Roman clergy apparently felt the need to prove themselves innocent of the charge. They did so by advancing the participation of the clergy in the marriage ceremonies as proof that they believed in the goodness of marriage. Another argument is hinted at here which would turn the tables on Jovinian. It is claimed that marriage has its value from virginity, i.e., that the institution which produces virgins, while not the equal of virginity, cannot be evil: "Sed virgines quas nuptiae creant, Deo devotas majore honorificentia muneramus." This idea is also used, variously altered, by Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine.⁵³ The value of asceticism was the point at issue and the clergy of Rome came down solidly in its favor.

The rescript from Milan conveys some of the excitement and indignation of the debate. A substantial discussion of marriage and virginity and of Mary's virginity *in partu* (sect. 3-5) is followed by a briefer one on the value of fasting (sect. 6-7). The comparison between marriage and virginity is made by a series of antitheses which illustrate the principle that marriage is good, but virginity is better: Scripture blesses marriage, "sed prius est quod nati sumus, quam quod effecti," a form of the argument about marriage producing virgins used by Siricius,⁵⁴ marriage is a remedy, but virginity a mystery; a good wife is praiseworthy, but a virgin is honored by St. Paul; a wife thinks of this world, the virgin of God; one is bound, the other free; one under the law, the other under grace; one for human propagation, the other to inherit the kingdom of heaven; a married woman (Eve) introduced grief into the world, a virgin (Mary) salvation. Ambrose then considers Mary's perpetual virginity, which he sees as the result of Christ's, who would not have denied a grace to his mother which he bestowed freely on others. Ambrose derives and describes Mary's virginity *in partu* from tradition, especially that of the Roman Church, and by a somewhat *recherché* interpretation of both OT and NT texts.⁵⁵ In *Epistola 63* these topics are also discussed, and in almost identical terms. The ideal of virginity is represented as rooted in Christ, realized in Mary and the Church, and elaborated both by St. Paul

⁵³ Siricius, *Ep.* 73 (Coustant 667); cf. Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1, 7, 35 (ed. E. Cazzaniga [Turin: Paravia] 18); Jerome, *Ep.* 22 19-20 (CSEL 54, 168-71); *Adv. Jov.* 1, 12, 26 and 27 (PL 23, 256-57, 278, 281: Vall.); Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* 10, 10 (CSEL 41, 243).

⁵⁴ *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 3 (Coustant 670). This rather odd proof of the superiority of virginity to marriage appears elsewhere, e.g., Jerome, *Ep.* 22 19 (CSEL 54, 169): "Et ut scias virginitatem esse naturae, nuptias post delictum: virgo nascitur caro de nuptiis in fructu reddens, quod in radice perdidit." The difficult sentence which appears in *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 4 (Coustant 670), "Quanta amentia funestorum latratuum, ut iidem dicerent Christum ex virgine non potuisse generari, qui asserunt ex muliere, editis humanorum pignorum partibus, virgines permanere?" seems to me another form of this argument. For other opinions cf. Haller, *Jovinianus* 75, n. 1, and Neumann, *The Virgin Mary* 158.

⁵⁵ *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 3-5 (Coustant 670-72).

(in 1 Cor 7) and by the preaching of the clergy.⁵⁶ The ideal of continence is so important to Ambrose that he compares the union of married couples who altogether disregard St. Paul's advice regarding periodic continence to adultery.⁵⁷ There is nothing, however, which implies that the marriage act effects in itself a pollution, ritual or moral; the topic is simply not mentioned. Jovinian must have argued that the doctrine of Mary's virginity *in partu* produced a Manichean Christology. In the synodal letter Ambrose attempts to turn the charge against his opponents by an ingenious construct, but one which fails to answer the real point of their objection. He argues that their refusal to accept the truth about Christ's birth, i.e., with Mary's virginity untouched, is tantamount to denying the reality of the Incarnation, so that the Christ they preach is not the real Christ, and is in effect, therefore, only the semblance of a man, a Manichean Christ.⁵⁸

The Jovinianists had invoked St. Paul to justify their attack on fasting. This appropriation is countered by the synod from St. Paul's epistles and, briefly, other OT and NT examples. Although the rescript is from a synod of bishops, it is not primarily about clerical matters. Their concern was to preserve ascetical values in the Church and to defend themselves against the charge of compromising Christian truth by so doing. Ambrose's discussion in *Epistola 63* is much longer, but adds nothing beyond variety in the counterexamples.

These points reappear in Jerome's lengthy *Adversus Jovinianum*. His reply, especially to Jovinian's thesis that virginity and marriage do not differ with respect to merit, indicates that Jovinian knew, aside from Scripture, something about pagan religion and philosophy. Jerome adopts the condescending tone that he used to cover his own uncertainties and bolsters his arguments from the writings of the past.⁵⁹ The major premise, however, is unmistakably Jerome's: virginity is the characteristic virtue of the NT era. Hence, Jerome says, its absence among OT figures is not surprising, but even they recognized virginity as the final outcome of God's special favors. Jerome uses examples of ritual purity from the OT to demonstrate that even there an inkling existed of the value of continence, not that these ritual practices were still the norm. This indication of the value of continence and virginity, necessarily limited, had to be completed by the perfect virginity of NT times, especially as exemplified

⁵⁶ *Ep. 63* 10 and 33 (PL 16, 1191–92, 1198).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 32 (PL 16, 1198): "velut quidem adulter."

⁵⁸ *Rescriptum Ambrosii* 8 (Coustant 673–74).

⁵⁹ Jerome used Tertullian freely; cf. F. Schultzen, "Die Benutzung der Schriften Tertullians de monogamia und de ieiunio bei Hieronymus adv. Iovinianum," *Neue Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie* 3 (1894) 485–502.

in Jesus and Mary.⁶⁰

From *Adversus Jovinianum* and *Epistola 49* it is clear that ritual continence was observed both by the laity and clerics before the Eucharist.⁶¹ Jerome cites this limited period of continence merely to show that continence, as part of the preparation to receive Christ's body, must be superior to marriage. When he mentions the absolute continence of major clerics, he does not trace it to the demands of cult except in the most general terms: they are to be always at prayer, always offering sacrifice. The main reason for their continence is simply to imitate the higher state of virginity.⁶² The principle of ritual purity occupies only a secondary, insignificant part of Jerome's argument in these polemical writings. His main concern is to show that virginity is practiced, or at least desired, by all serious Christians, ordained or not.

Priscillian

Priscillianism is a significant element in the study of Church discipline in the West at the end of the fourth century. Priscillian was both an ascetic and bishop of Avila, and he claimed that this combination was common in the movement as a whole.⁶³ In consequence, it provides an instance of the interaction between ascetics and the hierarchy. Furthermore, the date and location of Priscillianism attract our attention with regard to the legislation of clerical continence. The movement was

⁶⁰ The development from the OT as a time of marriage to the NT as a time for virginity is a common theme in *Adversus Jovinianum*; cf. 1, 8, 15–16, 26, 29, 37, and 39 (PL 23, 249, 264–66, 277–78, 283–84, 299, 302: Vall.). For Jerome's use of OT ritual purity, cf. *ibid.* 1, 20 and 34 (PL 23, 269, 291: Vall.). Jerome uses the observance of virginity and continence in pagan religion in a similar way; *ibid.* 1, 11 and 41–42 (PL 23, 254, 306–09: Vall.).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 1, 7, 14 and 34 (PL 23, 247, 264, 291: Vall.); *Ep. 49* 10, 14–15 (CSEL 54, 365, 376–77).

⁶² Jerome, *Ep. 49* 2 (CSEL 54, 352), says that clerics imitate consecrated virgins: "Miror clericos et monachos et continentes id non laudare, quod faciunt. Castrant se ab uxoribus suis, ut imitentur virginum castitatem." In *Adv. Jov.* 1, 34 (PL 23, 291: Vall.) only the bishop is mentioned as bound to continence: "Certe confiteris [Jovinian] non posse esse episcopum, qui in episcopatu filios faciat"; cf. *Ep. 49* 21 (CSEL 54, 387): "Episcopi, presbyteri, diaconi aut virgines eliguntur aut vidui aut certe post sacerdotium in aeternum pudici." *Sacerdotium* was generally restricted to the episcopacy. Cf. R. Gryson, *Le prêtre selon saint Ambroise* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1968) 134, but also F. J. Dölger, "Die Münze im Taufbecken und die Münzen-Funde in Heilquelle der Antike," *Antike und Christentum* 3 (1932) 2.

⁶³ Eleven Priscillianist tracts, the *Canones epistolarum Pauli*, and Orosius' *Commonitorium* have been edited by G. Schepss, *Priscilliani quae supersunt* (CSEL 18). References to any of these will include page and line numbers. The tracts and canons are reprinted in PLSup 2, 1391–1483, with footnotes containing many emendations to Schepss's text; the CSEL pagination is indicated. Regarding the combination of ascetical and clerical vocations, cf. *Tract. 2* (35, 3–6): "... alii nostrum iam in ecclesiis electi deo, alii vita elaborantes ut eligeremur"; *ibid.* (39, 13–14).

popular in Spain when Himerius, bishop of Tarragona, wrote to Pope Damasus and received an extraordinary reply from Siricius, Damasus' newly-elected successor, in January 385, the famous decretal which required continence of all married clerics in major orders and recommended the ordination of monks.⁶⁴ Finally, Priscillianism was not insignificant. By 380 it was of sufficient notoriety to be disciplined by bishops from Spain and Aquitaine at the Council of Saragossa.⁶⁵ Only twelve bishops attended this council, but the small number need not imply that Priscillianism was of no consequence. Both Ambrose and Damasus were consulted; bishops who were involved in or sympathetic to the movement did not attend, perhaps because they thought that the council had gathered with Priscillian's guilt foreordained.⁶⁶ A tendency to secrecy among the Priscillianists may have further restricted the number of bishops at Saragossa to those who knew the movement and were suspicious of it.⁶⁷ The council was inconclusive and bitter feuding continued afterwards between the Priscillianists and their opponents, especially at Merida, where the bishop, Hydatius, tried to halt the growing power of the party.⁶⁸ Eventually he resorted to the state and obtained a rescript from the Emperor Gratian against "false bishops and Manichees" which

⁶⁴ Filastrius, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 61, 5 (CCL 9, 243): "[Manichaei] qui et in Hispania et quinque provinciis latere dicuntur, multosque hac cottidie fallacia captivare." This was written between 385 and 391; it is generally accepted as referring to Priscillianism, which, however, is not named. Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 46 (CSEL 1, 100): "[Priscillianus] iamque paulatim perfidiae istius tabes pleraque Hispaniae pervaserat." Cf. B. Vollmann, *Studien zum Priscillianismus* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1965) 52. This book contains all the ancient sources under various headings, with the briefer ones printed in their entirety, and an exhaustive bibliography up to 1964. More synthetic and with additional bibliography is id., "Priscillianus," PWSup 14 (1974) 485-559. See Siricius, *Ep. 1* (Coustant 623-38).

⁶⁵ The Aquitanian bishops were Phebadius of Agen and Delphinus of Bordeaux. The latter, though a patron of asceticism, remained an opponent of Priscillianism. Bishops Symposius from Astorga in Galicia and Ithacius from Faro in Southern Lusitania were present, the former for only one day, but the absence of bishops from nearby sees is striking; cf. H. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 12-14, 25-29.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, who had been consulted after the council, recommended that the Priscillianists be received back into communion upon renouncement of their errors; cf. *The Priscillianist Professions and the Judgment of the Council of Toledo*, ed. H. Chadwick, *Priscillian*, Appendix 236-37 (Mansi 3, 1005): "... tamen litteris sanctae memoriae Ambrosii, quas post illud concilium [Saragossa] ad nos miserat, ut si condemnassent quae perperam egerant et impleissent conditiones quas praescriptas literae continebant, revertentur ad pacem." Damasus had been consulted before the council; cf. *Tract. 2* (35, 21-24). His ruling that no one should be condemned *in absentia* may have been the reason the Priscillianist bishops stayed away.

⁶⁷ *Tract. 1* (4, 7) implied that an accusation of secrecy had been made against the Priscillianists.

⁶⁸ *Tract. 2* (39, 21-40, 19); Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 47 (CSEL 1, 101): "post multa et foeda certamina."

was applied against Priscillian, by then bishop of Avila, and his followers.⁶⁹ A group of Priscillianists, including two other bishops, Instantius and Salvianus, traveled to Rome and Milan to plead their cause but without success, not even obtaining a hearing from Damasus or Ambrose.⁷⁰ They then bribed a court official at Milan to rescind the rescript, but the appearance of a new emperor, Maximus, who defeated Gratian in 383, ended this brief period of security. Ithacius, bishop of Faro and their bitterest foe, had fled to Trier to avoid trial in Spain for his opposition to Priscillian. He was able to persuade Maximus to summon the principal Priscillianists before a synod at Bordeaux. When this synod began by deposing Instantius, Priscillian unwisely appealed from the council to the emperor.⁷¹ The subsequent trial and execution of prominent members of the sect, however, did not end the division among the bishops, some of whom supported Priscillian, some opposed *both* his doctrine and his execution, and some were out-and-out enemies.⁷² After the defeat of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; *Tract.* 2 (40, 27–41, 5).

⁷⁰ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 48 (CSEL 1, 101). Priscillian's appeal to Damasus was allowed by the rescript of Gratian (378), which gave bishops in the West the right to take their cases to Rome (CSEL 35, 57–58). Damasus may have refused to hear his case because he was dissatisfied with Priscillian's credentials. Priscillian, a layman in 380, had been ordained bishop soon afterwards (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 47 [CSEL 1, 100]), and so without observing any interstices. This matter, perhaps raised by Priscillian's ordination, was one of the questions submitted to Rome by Himerius, and Siricius replied with an elaborate schedule of interstices, of long duration (*Ep.* 1 9, 13 [Cousant 633–34]); earlier practices are described in J. Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* 1 (London: William Straker, 1834) 103–12. Furthermore, Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 47 (CSEL 1, 100), says that base motives lay behind Priscillian's ordination: "Instantius et Salvianus damnati iudicio sacerdotum Priscillianum etiam laicum, sed principem malorum omnium, una secum Caesaraugustana synodo notatum, ad confirmandas vires suas episcopum in Abilensi oppido constituunt, rati nimirum, si hominem acrem et callidum sacerdotali auctoritate armassent, tutiores fore sese." It has been noted that Ambrose was well informed about the sect.

⁷¹ Regarding the bribe cf. *ibid.* 48 (CSEL 1, 101). The choice of Bordeaux for the synod meant that Priscillian had little chance for a sympathetic hearing. Bishop Delphinus had chased away the party of Priscillianists from Bordeaux when they passed by on their way to Rome and Milan. The appeal to the emperor from a synod was not without precedent: Pope Damasus depended on the support of the prefect of Rome to retain his see in 366 during his battle with a rival claimant, Ursinus; cf. M. Rade, *Damasus, Bischof von Rom* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1882) 16–17; Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums* 1, 198–99.

⁷² The supporters of Priscillian were concentrated in Galicia, where the schism continued for over a century and a half; cf. Chadwick, *Priscillian* 184–90. While suspicious of Priscillianism, some bishops opposed the execution at Trier. Martin of Tours, e.g., refused to attend any synod after what he felt had been a compromise of principle when he communicated with the bishops who had brought about Priscillian's downfall at Trier (Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogus* 3, 13 [CSEL 1, 211]). Ambrose and Siricius also broke with the party which had formed around the bishop of Trier, Felix, who had been consecrated at the time of the trial; cf. Ambrose, *Ep.* 24 12; *Ep.* 26 3 (PL 16, 1039, 1042); *De obitu Valentiniani* 25 (CSEL 73, 343); Maximus, *Epistola ad Siricium papam* (CSEL 34, 90–91); see Chadwick, *Priscillian* 164.

Maximus by Theodosius in 388, suppression of the movement by the state ceased; Priscillian was honored as a martyr, while Ithacius and other obstinate enemies of Priscillian were exiled or deposed. The schism resulting from Priscillian's trial occupied the Councils of Nîmes (396), Turin (398/99), Toledo I (400), and Braga (563). It was the subject of a famous correspondence between Pope Leo I and Turibius, bishop of Astorga in Galicia, in 447.⁷³

Some assessment of the doctrine of Priscillian is necessary to sort out the motives which prompted its critics. The difficulty with doing so arises from the difficulty of knowing precisely what he taught.

The relatively recently rediscovered eleven short pieces recognized as authentically Priscillianist if not necessarily by Priscillian⁷⁴ do not give a clear picture of the movement and its history. This is partly due to the purposes for which the tracts were written. The longest are apologies written to allay the suspicions of churchmen; a defense is neither an exposition nor a confession.⁷⁵ Tract 1 was probably produced for the Council of Saragossa. It attempts to establish the orthodoxy of Priscillian and his associates by refuting a series of accusations which must have been brought against them.⁷⁶ Tract 2 is an appeal to Pope Damasus, again a profession of orthodoxy. It purports to give an accurate history of the Priscillianist party. Tract 3 is a defense of the inspiration and use of writings outside the canon of Scripture. The others are all pastoral in character,⁷⁷ but they may also have been included in the collection to demonstrate that Priscillianism was not heterodox. Other writings that can confidently be assigned to Priscillian or his followers of the first

⁷³ Cf. Vollmann, *Studien* 122–38, 142–44; Chadwick, *Priscillian* 208–17.

⁷⁴ The authorship of the tracts has been much discussed. Cf. Vollman, "Priscillianus" 555–58; Chadwick, *Priscillian* 47–51, 65–69. He concludes (69): "It is not unreasonable to think Priscillian himself the principal author of the tractates, the fifth being granted as a likely exception. But in any event all eleven are committed Priscillianist texts, and the state of the evidence simply does not allow us to begin trying to distinguish between Priscillian and the -ism associated with his name." In this article, for convenience, I shall frequently cite the tracts as if Priscillian were the author of them all.

⁷⁵ Of the eleven pieces, the first three are not *tractatus* strictly speaking, but apologies for the orthodoxy of the movement (1 and 2) or for the use of the apocrypha (3). Tracts 4–10 are homilies on Scripture. Tract 11 consists of an extended blessing over the people. The apologetic character of the first three tracts may explain the purpose of the whole collection. Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 121–23 (TU 14/1, 53), was aware of an accusation of Gnosticism but, on the basis of the writings he knew, could not commit himself to any opinion. Chadwick, *Priscillian* 152, is certain that Jerome had read Tract 1 and had ascribed it to Priscillian, a detail which he overlooks in his discussion of the authorship of the tracts. The vehemence of this tract may explain Jerome's caution about Priscillian's doctrine. Many such apologies were produced by the sect; cf. *Tract. 1* (3, 7–9): "quamvis frequentibus libellis locuti fidem nostram hereticorum omnium dogmata damnaverimus. . ."

⁷⁶ The setting of Tract 1 has been much debated; cf. Chadwick, *Priscillian* 47–51. He concludes that Saragossa is the most probable occasion for its composition.

⁷⁷ Cf. n. 75 above.

generation are the canons on the epistles of St. Paul, a tract on the Trinity, and the monarchian prologues to the four Gospels.⁷⁸ The canons, produced as a handbook against heresy, are rearrangements of St. Paul's epistles; a later editing by a certain Peregrinus to expunge any traces of heresy does not seem to have been extensive.⁷⁹ The treatise *De trinitate* may have been written to show that the Trinitarian theology of the Priscillianists was not monarchian. If so, it may well have failed in its purpose.⁸⁰ Finally, despite the obscurity in language and content, the monarchian prologues to the four Gospels are rightly recognized as Priscillianist. It is remarkable that in all of these Priscillianist writings they alone openly recommend virginity.⁸¹

Priscillianist asceticism had a twofold purpose: to prepare the mind of the believer for a deeper understanding of and spiritual intercourse with God and to express hatred for the world.⁸² Priscillian, doubtlessly influenced by the apocryphal gospels and acts, recommended virginity and continence.⁸³ He seems to have related them to the unity of God,⁸⁴ which

⁷⁸ *De trinitate catholicae fidei*, ed. G. Morin, *Etudes, textes, découvertes* (Paris: Picard, 1913) 151-204, reprinted in PLSup 2, 1487-1507. Cf. *Monarchian Prologues to the Four Gospels*, ed. P. Corssen (TU 15/1) 5-10, and by J. Chapman, *Notes on the Early History of the Vulgate Gospels* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908) 217-22. Regarding the *Canones* and the tracts, cf. n. 63 above; the canons are the only work ascribed to Priscillian by name, but a Priscillianist source for the treatise on the Trinity and the monarchian prologues has been generally accepted; cf. Vollmann, *Studien* 35 n. 95 and 71 (he is doubtful about both); Chadwick, *Priscillian* 58-62, 100-109. Many other writings have been assigned to Priscillianist or anti-Priscillianist circles, but their claims have been largely disproved; cf. Vollmann, *Studien* 70; Chadwick, *Priscillian* 109-10.

⁷⁹ Peregrinus describes his editing of the canons as follows (CSEL 18, 109): "... correctis his quae pravo sensu posita fuerant alia, ut erant utiliter ordinata, prout oportebat intellegi iuxta sensum fidei catholicae exemplavi." Some authors have felt that this editing renders them useless for any discussion of Priscillian's teaching, e.g., A. Puech, "Les origines du priscillianisme et l'orthodoxie de Priscillien," *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes* 2 (1912) 195, n. 1, and A. d'Alès, *Priscillien et l'Espagne chrétienne à la fin du IV^e siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1936) 121; other authors, more favorable to Priscillian, invoke them freely as completely authentic, e.g., especially, F. Paret, *Priscillianus: Ein Reformator des vierten Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Stuber, 1891) 67. The best policy is to apply to their use the principle which Priscillian himself advocates for apocryphal writings: just as these may be safely used where they agree with the canon (46, 22-25), so the canons on St. Paul may give us a true picture of Priscillian's teaching when they correspond to what we find in the tracts, etc. According to this principle, they have been little altered; cf. Vollmann, "Priscillianus" 551; Chadwick, *Priscillian* 58-61.

⁸⁰ As even this treatise demonstrates, Priscillian's theology was definitely monarchian. So uncongenial a topic must have been chosen to prove his orthodoxy against specific criticism.

⁸¹ Cf. J. Chapman, "Priscillian the Author of the Monarchian Prologues to the Vulgate Gospels," *RBen* 23 (1906) 335-49, reprinted in a slightly expanded form in *Notes on the Early History* 238-53.

⁸² Regarding hatred for the world, cf. 17, 3-25; 57, 4-7; 78, 2; 99, 4-100, 5.

⁸³ Regarding the Encratism of the apocryphal acts, cf. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* 2 (London: SCM, 1963) 172. The clearest statement

for him implied that division was sinful, so that the deeper the division the greater is the sin. As the most obvious and far-reaching division is that between the sexes, Priscillian tended to deny that there was any significant difference between men and women and allowed marriage only for the imperfect.⁸⁵ The externals of Priscillian's asceticism are of a

of this ideal in the Priscillianist writings occurs in the prologue to St. John (TU 15/1, 6-7): "Primum signum ponens quod in nuptiis fecit Deus, ut ostendens quod erat ipse, legentibus demonstraret, quod ubi Dominus invitatur deficere nuptiarum vinum debeat ac veteribus inmutatis nova omnia quae a Christo instituntur appareant." Chadwick, *Priscillian* 105-6, thinks this would have come from the *Acts of John*, since they are drawn upon elsewhere in the prologue. It is remarkable that Priscillian, despite his reputation as an ascetic (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 46 [CSEL 1, 99]) who separated married couples (Filastrius, *Diversarum hereseon liber* 84, 1 [CCL 9, 253]), mentions continence or virginity so rarely and then so obscurely in the tracts; cf. *Tract. 4* (58, 13-59, 8); *Tract. 5* (65, 18-66, 3); *Tract. 6* (72, 15-20; 79, 23-28; 81, 8-16).

⁸⁴ Cf. Paret, *Priscillianus* 143; R. Lorenz, "Die Anfänge des abendländischen Mönchtums in 4. Jahrhundert," *ZKG* 77 (1966) 21.

⁸⁵ That division is the result of sin or vice is a commonplace in the tracts, especially *Tract. 6*: cf. 70, 11-15; 72, 8; 73, 7; 75, 21; 76, 15-22. Christ conquers division, cf. 79, 4-10. God overcomes sexual differences, and this is reflected among Christians (*Tract. 1* [28, 15-24]): "illis enim . . . masculofemina putetur deus: nobis autem et in masculis et in feminis dei spiritus est. . . . fecit eos et benedixit eos; sicut et de ipso apostolus ait: Christus dei virtus et dei sapientia; cuius cum simus viri et ipse vir et caput nostrum, desponsatos nos in fide exhibiturum se apostolus uni viro castam nos virginem repromisit, quia non est masculus neque femina, sed omnes unum sumus in Christo Iesu." Cf. also *Can. 55* (133, 2-4): "Quia non per legem sed per Christi fidem et confessionem salventur ac iustificentur credentes, servitutis iugo et sexuum diversitate carentes." In the *Gospel of Thomas* two of the characteristics of the kingdom are the removal of sexual distinction and the innocent nakedness of men and women. The excellence of unity is also stressed. Cf. *Logia* 22, 30, 37, 106, 114, which, according to Hennecke-Schneemelcher (*New Testament Apocrypha* 1, 299), can be ascribed to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*; cf. also R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: Mowbray, 1960) 29-36. There are two hints that Priscillian knew the *Gospel of Thomas*. *Logion 1* (Hennecke-Schneemelcher 1, 285) identifies Jude and Thomas—Didymus Judas Thomas—like the opening of *Tract. 3* (44, 12). Nevertheless, the source of this phrase is almost certainly the *Acts of Thomas*, in which not only are Judas and Thomas identified but, like Priscillian (*loc. cit.*), Thomas is the twin of the Lord (*Acts of Thomas*, chap. 39 [Hennecke-Schneemelcher 2, 464]; cf. A. F. N. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 5 [Leiden: Brill, 1962] 37, 158-59). The second is the phrase of *Logion 106*, which stresses the power of God to make two into one; cf. *Tract. 6* (79, 6). Also, one of the charges against Priscillian at Trier, ". . . nocturnos etiam turpium feminarum egisse conventus nudumque orare solitum" (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 50 [CSEL 1, 103]) is reminiscent of the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Logion 37*. It is tempting to connect these ideas with the Council of Nîmes (394/396): canon 1 warns against laymen from the East pretending to be clerics, and canon 2 opposes the ordination of women to the diaconate. The first would provide a vehicle for Eastern ideas in a suspicious setting, the second an instance of the equality of women and men. Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17, 4-5 (CCL 1, 291-92), criticizes the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* for recommending that women preach and baptize. Furthermore, Nîmes was attended by anti-Priscillianist bishops. But cf. Chadwick, *Priscillian* 159. Regarding marriage cf. *Can. 57* (134, 1-2) and *Tract. 2* (36, 8).

familiar sort: continence, fasting, vigils, poverty. Any of these observances can easily be derived from various apocryphal writings, but in themselves they neither prove nor disprove a radical dualism; there are plenty of parallels elsewhere in fourth-century Christianity.⁸⁶ Among the Priscillians, however, there are peculiarities about these ascetical practices which hint at a link between them and the sect's concern with secret doctrines, and so with the apocrypha. Both the fasting and the vigils of Priscillian and his followers are part of the special preparations for the feasts of Easter and Christmas. During this period they fasted apart continually, even on Sundays. It was also a time of instruction, apparently for both men and women.⁸⁷ In his public teaching, however, Priscillian accommodates ordinary Christians. With regard to virginity and continence, for example, Priscillian's acceptance of the OT and contacts with traditional Christian asceticism prevented him from teaching that human sexuality was essentially evil or even a result of the Fall.⁸⁸ But, as the OT progresses to the NT, so the state of marriage gives way to that of continence and virginity, at least among the elect.⁸⁹ The perpetual virginity of Mary is not in itself a model for Christians—Priscillian's spirituality is concerned exclusively with *Christus Deus*⁹⁰—but virginity is a neces-

⁸⁶ W. Schatz, *Studien zur Geschichte und Vorstellungswelt des frühen abendländischen Monchtums* (unpublished thesis, Freiburg, 1957) 186–88, provides a useful comparison between Priscillian's spirituality and that of the apocryphal acts and gospels. He thinks that they were used by the Priscillianists only for their ascetical teachings.

⁸⁷ Regarding withdrawal from the community, cf. *Tract 4* (57–61) and Saragossa, can. 2 and 4 (Mansi 3, 634–35). Vigils are mentioned in *Tract 6* (80, 10). The tracts show a concern for suitable instruction for the feasts. This, with the first canon of Saragossa, which forbids women to attend Bible study groups conducted by *alieni*, implies that the instructions before the major feasts were attended by both men and women. Priscillian's teaching about the equality of men and women would require as much. Fasting on Sunday is Manichean and Gnostic, cf. G. Widengren, *Mani and Manichaeism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965) 98, 122 n. 2. It may be remarked that the infancy of Christ and the time after the Resurrection, i.e., Christmas and Easter, attracted the writers of the NT apocrypha as periods open for Gnostic speculation, cf. Hennecke-Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* 1, 401.

⁸⁸ *Tract 5* (63, 18, 65, 25). Like Jerome, *Ep.* 22.19 (CSEL 54, 168–69), Priscillian places the beginning of married life after the Fall. Cf. *Tract 1* (18, 31–21, 20).

⁸⁹ This point is obscurely made in *Tract 5* (65–66) and *Tract 6* (72, 3–20, 81), cf. can. 33 (124, 8–12).

⁹⁰ The formula *Christus Deus* is frequent in the tracts, cf. Schepss's index (CSEL 18, 175) and Chadwick, *Priscillian* 86, n. 2. The same phrase occurs in, e.g., *De confessione verae fidei* 74 (CSEL 35, 27). Its expanded form *Christus Deus Dei filius* (39, 13, 41, 25–26, 49, 4) is like a phrase used by Hilary, *filius Dei Deus* (*In ps.* 68.19, *In evangelium Matthaei* 16, 4, *De trinitate* 4, 33 and 42, 7, 13), by Ambrose (*Ep.* 10.5), and by Augustine (*Sermo* 2, 2 *de Vetere Testamento* [CCL 41, 11]). Chadwick, *Priscillian* 86, nn. 3 and 4, provides examples of similar titles of Christ from Filastrius and Egeria. It is the frequency and setting of their use by Priscillian which supports the charge of monarchianism.

sary attribute of Christ, the perfect man, and it is he who is our model.⁹¹ Priscillian also stresses the voluntary nature of poverty and the right of the wealthy to keep some of their wealth if they fulfil their responsibilities towards the poor by giving alms.⁹² It was Priscillian's asceticism which gained him the sympathy of those of his contemporaries who honored the same ideals.⁹³

There is a disquieting element of excess and contradiction about many aspects of Priscillianism: it could act in a manner compromising enough to leave it open to a charge of magic; it was ascetical to the point of expecting celibacy of all serious Christians; its members retired from the community before the major feasts and cloaked their activity in secrecy; it so stressed the equality of men and women after baptism that questions about the ordination of women may have been raised; its members sought ordination at the same time as the leader of the group was a layman and clerical converts were surrendering the exercise of their orders; it vigorously proclaimed the value of all apocrypha for doctrine but avoided their use in their tracts.

The tolerant canons of the Council of Saragossa prove that the bishops there were not opposed to ascetical practices. Neither was doctrine explicitly considered, although grounds existed even for the exaggerated suspicions of Ithacius and Hydatius. What the council objected to was the secretive and divisive character of the movement, its alteration of disciplines of prayer, fasting, and the ordering of public worship.

After Saragossa, Hydatius was accused of some crime by the Priscillianists, and apparently members of his clergy and congregation tried, unsuccessfully, to depose him from the bishopric of Merida. If Chadwick is correct in suspecting that Hydatius' exercise of the rights of marriage caused the trouble at Merida,⁹⁴ the Priscillianists appear as strong supporters of policies later recommended by Pope Siricius and by the First Council of Toledo, both of which acted against the Priscillianists. This would constitute further evidence that asceticism was not the point at issue, but after Hydatius had appealed to the state against Priscillian the

⁹¹ *Tract. 1* (24, 13): "homo hominum"; *Tract. 6* (72, 12; 77, 12): "perfectus homo." Christ's work of redemption by overcoming the divisive effects of sin is connected with the Virgin Birth in *Tract. 6* (73, 13 ff.). Cf. Schatz, *Studien* 130, n. 1: "Die Geburt Jesu aus der Jungfrau steht symbolhaft für die Askese; die perfectio schliesst jede Betätigung des Geschlechtlichkeit aus." Mary's perpetual virginity is mentioned in *Tract. 6* (74, 23 f.). The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary is found in Hilary, *In evang. Matt.* 1, 3 (PL 9, 921-22), and in Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* 1, 54 [2, 8] (CCL 22, 129). Zeno used the (orthodox) *Protevangelium of James* as his source.

⁹² *Tract. 9* (91, 3-11).

⁹³ Priscillian's asceticism was praised by Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 46 (CSEL 1, 99).

⁹⁴ Chadwick, *Priscillian* 31.

question of asceticism could no longer be independently examined. The consistent coolness of Ambrose towards the Priscillianists, which dated from the Council of Saragossa and was unaltered by his indignation at the trial and execution of Priscillian by a secular court, was not a suspicion of asceticism but of Priscillian's teachings;⁹⁵ Ambrose certainly cannot be accused of antiasceticism. The same conclusion comes out of the attitudes of Popes Damasus and Siricius, who opposed the secular trial of a bishop without denying that Priscillian was in error.⁹⁶ Hence it was not the opposition to or support of Priscillianism, much less asceticism in general, that was the primary question at Saragossa or Priscillian's trial at Trier.

The easy reconciliation for the Priscillianists recommended by Ambrose after Saragossa and offered by the First Council of Toledo is evidence that church discipline rather than doctrinal errors was the main consideration.⁹⁷ Toledo I also shows that many clerics, including bishops, had been affected by Priscillianism—further evidence that ascetical ideals had been accepted by the Spanish clergy and in a form that went unchallenged by the bishops presiding at Toledo. There, only the abjuration of Sabellianism, the apocrypha, and Priscillian's writings was demanded, and clerics who complied were allowed to continue in office.

SIRICIUS, EPISTOLA 1 AD HIMERIUM

Himerius, bishop of Tarragona, had written to Rome to ask the advice of Pope Damasus about various problems that had arisen in Spain. His letter arrived in Rome after Damasus' death and one of the first acts of the new pope, Siricius, was to gather a synod of bishops to answer Himerius.⁹⁸ The reply indicates the topics that Himerius inquired about: the admission of Arians and apostates into the Catholic Church (chaps. 1 and 3), the administration of baptism, marriage, and penance (chaps. 2, 4 and 5), and matters of discipline both monastic (chap. 6) and clerical (chaps. 7-15).

It is evident from this epistle that a crisis in the observance of continence and virginity had arisen in Spain. Chapter 6, 7 refers to monks and nuns marrying, secretly at first, but eventually quite openly. In chapter 7, 8 it is reported that many priests and levites, after a long time in orders, had resumed conjugal relations, some even begetting children

⁹⁵ *Ep. 24* 12 (PL 16, 1039): "deuios licet a fide."

⁹⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 2, 50 (CSEL 1, 103); *Dialogus* 3, 11-12 (CSEL 1, 209-10).

⁹⁷ E.g., the charge of Sabellianism was reduced to the abjuration of the word *innascibilis* (used by Priscillian of Christ in *Tract. 6* [74, 13]). Cf. *The Priscillianist Professions* (Chadwick 235; Mansi 3, 1005).

⁹⁸ Damasus died December 11, 384; cf. Rade, *Damasus* 159. Siricius' *Ep. 1* was written February 11, 385; cf. sect. 20 (Coustant 638).

de turpi coitu.⁹⁹ As these clerics are described as *calcatos atque confusos*, there may have been some agent behind these abrupt changes.¹⁰⁰ To justify their behavior, the clerics cite the example of the OT priests, who had the right to have families. This interpretation of the OT reappears in chapter 7, 11, with some indication that there was a belief in the reliance on its effectiveness.¹⁰¹ Finally, chapter 8, 12 describes the freedom with which digamists were ordained in Spain despite clear prohibitions against it in both the OT and the NT, “*quae omnia ita a vestrarum regionum despiciuntur episcopis, quasi in contrarium magis fuerint constituta.*”¹⁰² This practice had been widely discussed and prohibited by councils and synods.¹⁰³ There is no reason for thinking that canons about ordaining digamists were unknown in Spain,¹⁰⁴ so that these ordinations may represent further evidence of a breakdown in the restraints on clerical marriages.

It is impossible not to think of Priscillianism here, and the silence about the movement in this decretal and by implication in Himerius' letter invites comment. The absence of Himerius from the Council of Saragossa and his concern for asceticism, in particular for consecrated virginity and clerical continence, suggest that he was influenced by Priscillianism. If so, his silence can be readily accounted for. His letter to Pope Damasus would have been written late in 384, by which time it was

⁹⁹ The phrase is “*post longa consecrationis suae tempora*” (Coustant 630) It suggests that marital intercourse had been resumed long after ordination The phrase “*etiam de turpi coitu,*” used to describe other clerics as numerous as the former, suggests that some unmarried priests had married after ordination The alternative is to imagine that priests who had children in adultery or fornication were continuing to exercise their ministry in Spain, as J. Langen, *Geschichte der römischen Kirche* 1 (Bonn: M. Cohen, 1881) 614, says “*dass Priester und Diakonen lange nach ihrer Weihe sowohl mit ihren eigenen Frauen als ausserehelich Kinder geseugt hatten*” But, as the marriage of major clerics was forbidden after ordination (cf. Bingham, *Antiquities* 6, 516–17) which, according to Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1, 11, represented the ancient custom of the Church, a cleric in major orders who married after ordination might have been accused of begetting children *de turpi coitu*

¹⁰⁰ Notwithstanding the similarity of some of these ideas to those of Jovinian, especially with regard to the OT, his sudden appearance in Rome ca. 389 (Siricius, *Ep* 72 [Coustant 665]) precludes any direct influence on Spain in 384. On the other hand, the Spanish clergy may have been reacting against Priscillianism. Himerius, influenced by Priscillianism, may have encouraged his clergy to continence, cf. Chadwick, *Priscillian* 29–30

¹⁰¹ Coustant 631

¹⁰² Coustant 632–33

¹⁰³ Cf. Bingham, *Antiquities* 1, 381–82

¹⁰⁴ Siricius rebukes their ignorance of the canons forbidding rebaptism that had been promulgated by Pope Liberius, cf. chap. 1, 2 (Coustant 625). The debate about the classification of men whose first marriage had been before their baptism had extended to Spain, cf. Jerome, *Ep* 69. Jerome's point, that such a man should not be classified as a digamist with regard to ordination, proves that the legislation against ordaining digamists was known, cf. Kelly, *Jerome* 214

clear that the Priscillianist party had lost its influence at the imperial court. Emperor Gratian was defeated in the summer of 383 by Maximus, who assumed the title of emperor and possession of the palace at Trier. The political situation and perhaps his own sentiments prompted him to reverse Gratian's policy, and the events that led to Priscillian's execution and the dispersal of the movement were in motion before Himerius' letter had been written. Whatever his view of Priscillianism, he would not have referred to it at this time, especially in a letter addressed to Damasus, who was known to oppose the movement.

On the other hand, Himerius, like, e.g., Ambrose and Martin of Tours, could have been committed to asceticism without being altogether in favor of Priscillianist ideas about the extent and form of its demands. Furthermore, if our interpretation of the phrase *post longa consecrationis suae tempora* is correct, there had been a long-standing observance of clerical continence by the Spanish clergy. While its abandonment in some cases may have been the result of a reaction against asceticism following the decline of Priscillian's prestige, Himerius' intention need not have been more than to preserve the traditional practice in this matter. As Damasus was of Spanish descent and to some extent a patron of asceticism,¹⁰⁵ Himerius could have wanted only the authoritative support of the bishop of Rome for his own decisions.

Virginity as a Christian Ideal

High esteem for the state of consecrated virginity for both men and women is expressed in chapter 6, 7, by describing it as *propositum sanctitatis*, and in chapter 13, 17, as *institutio sancta*. Because of this sanctity, its abandonment is a sacrilege: "abjecto proposito sanctitatis . . . illicita ac sacrilega miscuerint."¹⁰⁶ After acknowledging the sanctity of consecrated virginity, Siricius examines the clerical state (chap. 7, 8-11), which he calls *sacratissimus* (chap. 7, 8).

In section 9 Siricius begins his reply to the argument which the incontinent clergy of Spain had advanced from the OT, by quoting Lev 20:7: "Sancti estote, quia et ego sanctus sum Dominus Deus vester." Having qualified the state of virginity as holy immediately before, he now applies the same notion to the priests of the OT. Unless they are holy, their sacrifices are unacceptable to God, and part of this holiness is the continence which they observe during their year-long turn of duty spent apart from their wives in the Temple.

¹⁰⁵ Pope Damasus is described by Jerome, *Ep.* 49 18 (CSEL 54, 382), as "vir egregius et eruditus in scripturis et virgo ecclesiae virginis doctor," but his role seems to have been more that of patron than practitioner of asceticism. He was of Spanish descent, "natione Spanus"; cf. L. Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis* 1 (Paris: E. Thorin, 1886) 212.

¹⁰⁶ Coustant 629.

This abstinence is clearly ritual, but not exclusively so, and in fact Siricius does some violence to the OT to construct a picture of its ministry in which ritual elements are avoided. There is no foundation in Scripture for his idea that the OT priests were in the Temple for a year at a time, during which they were perfectly continent,¹⁰⁷ and abstinence for a whole year is more like dedicated continence than ritual purity. Siricius even describes their continence by the word *integritas*, which elsewhere is applied to the celibacy of virgins and widows. Furthermore, he does not mention that the sacrifices in the Temple were performed every day, which would have clinched a ritual argument for continence. None of the standard ritual sections of the OT are invoked: there is no mention of the continence of the Israelites for three days at Sinai (Exod 19:15), nor of that demanded of David and his men before they were allowed to eat the loaves of proposition (1 Sam 21:5), nor of that required of soldiers (2 Sam 11:11), nor of the regulation of cultic abstinence from Lev 15, which occur in the writings of Ambrose and Jerome.¹⁰⁸

The same attitude is shown by Siricius' description of the marriage of the priests of the OT. According to him, they exercised their marital rights at home, not because their absence from the Temple relieved them from the obligations of ritual purity, but because the tribe of Levi had to be continued. In other words, his argument is that, whether or not the priests were officiating, absolute continence was the ideal as the mark of the integrity which God required of priests. Marriage was used solely for the generation of children, and that because only Levites were eligible for the OT priesthood. The result is that this section implies the priests of the OT would have been continent most of the time. In fact, it is more accurate to say that Siricius is more interested in opposing clerical marriage than in defending ritual abstinence. He finds the opinion that the rights of marriage were freely exercised among the "clergy" of the OT untenable: "Si aestimat, quia in lege Moysi passim sacris ordinibus a Domino laxata sunt frena luxuriae, cur eos quibus committebantur sancta sanctorum praemonet dicens: *Sancti estote, quia et ego sanctus sum Dominus Deus vester?*"¹⁰⁹ Siricius does not object to the premise that the OT is of significance for Christians, but he interprets it in a way which does not jar with any Christian ideals. Hence his words about the OT

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Kottje, "Das Aufkommen der taglichen Eucharistiefeyer" 225, n. 45: "... gibt es jedoch weder im AT noch in der Mischna einen Anhaltspunkt dafür, dass die jüdischen Priester in der Zeit des Tempeldienstes keine eheliche Gemeinschaft haben durften oder gar dass dies der Grund für ihr Leben ausserhalb der Familie, nämlich im Tempel gewesen wäre." Ambrosiaster, *Ad Timotheum prima* 3, 13, 2 (CSEL 81/3, 269), refers to the OT Temple service without making this error. It reappears in *Ep. 10*, however; see below.

¹⁰⁸ E.g., Ambrose, *De officis* 1, 50, 249 (ed. J. G. Krabinger [Tubingen: Laupp, 1857] 118); Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1, 20 and 34 (PL 23, 269, 291: Vall.).

¹⁰⁹ Chap. 7, 9 (Coustant 630).

priests may be taken as describing the practices he knew or wanted among the clergy of his time.¹¹⁰

In chapter 7, 10 the continence of major clerics is discussed. The proposition that the OT is completed and perfected by the NT is advanced. Siricius' argument, however, is not logically arranged and the exact link between the OT and the NT is not explicitly described. He does not, for example, employ the obvious extension to his conclusions by which the priests of the NT would be free to observe absolute continence since its priesthood is not restricted to a tribe or family. Nor does he seem aware of the possibility that the OT could have prescribed that Levites have families before being allowed to officiate at the Temple worship as minor clerics could before the reception of major orders.¹¹¹ Siricius begins by quoting Mt 5:17, where Jesus says that he has come to fulfil the Old Law, not to abolish it, which Siricius applies, in eschatological language, to the Church, the chaste spouse of Christ (Eph 5:27). He continues: "For this reason we priests are constrained to continence from the day of our ordination," thus connecting the foregoing description of the chastity of the spouse of Christ to that of her ministers.¹¹² This is the chastity (*pudicitia*) which is required of those who must be holy so that their daily sacrifices will be pleasing to God and which fulfils St. Paul's admonition to be in the Spirit, not in the flesh (Rom 8:8-9). This argument presumes that perfect continence is an essential aspect of the NT which had been anticipated by the occasional continence of the OT priests.¹¹³ Chapter 7, 10 also contains an echo of St. Paul's advice to the Christian virgins of Corinth to remain unmarried so that they may be altogether committed to the things of God (1 Cor 7:32). To Siricius,

¹¹⁰ An illuminating parallel to the passage under discussion can be found in Siricius, *Ep. 10* 2, 12, where he is explaining the Jewish customs of levirate and polygamy. Resort to the OT as an authority for Christian regulations was a usage of long standing; cf. A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* 1 (New York: Dover, 1961) 291, n. 2.

¹¹¹ Siricius, *Ep. 1* 9, 13, provides for the marriage of acolytes and subdeacons.

¹¹² The consecrated virgin was considered the spouse of Christ (cf. *Ep. 10* 1, 3), a very common idea in Ambrose and Jerome. Here it is to be noted that Siricius' use of Eph 5:27 provides a link between the continence of the clergy and the virginity of the ascetics, a connection which reappears below.

¹¹³ Siricius describes the Church as the *forma castitatis*. Since this letter is concerned with married clergy, there would be no purpose to mentioning the passages of Scripture which describe the Church as the virgin spouse of Christ. *Castitas* is the equivalent here of celibacy or continence; cf. *Ep. 10* 2, 5, where *castissimos* means *continentiam corporalem*. The significance of the term *sanctus* will be discussed below. The extension of St. Paul's antithesis between the flesh and the Spirit (Rom 8:8-9) to marriage and celibacy comes from asceticism; cf. R. Cantalamessa, "Bilancio di una ricerca," *Etica sessuale et matrimonio nel cristianesimo delle origini* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1976) 435. Siricius' quotation of this text here is therefore more likely an instance of ascetical influence than the introduction of the principle of ritual purity.

ordination implies a mind and body totally and exclusively subjected to what God wants of his clergy: "et corda nostra mancipemus et corpora."¹¹⁴

Ritual Elements in the Letter

The above discussion may give the impression that little or no use was made of the principle of ritual purity. This is far from the case, but the argument from cultic abstinence has some features which suggest that it is not the only or even the primary reason for demanding absolute continence from major clerics.

Chapter 8, 10 provides a clear statement of the principle of ritual purity for the NT priesthood:

Quarum sanctionum omnes sacerdotes atque levitae insolubili lege constringimur, ut a die ordinationis nostrae, sobrietati ac pudicitiae et corda nostra mancipemus et corpora, dummodo per omnia Deo nostro in his, quae quotidie offerimus, sacrificiis placeamus. *Qui autem in carne sunt, dicente electionis vase, Deo placere non possunt. Vos autem jam non estis in carne, sed in spiritu, si tamen spiritus Dei habitat in vobis* (Rom 8:8-9). Et ubi poterit, nisi in corporibus, sicut legimus, sanctis, Dei spiritus habitare?¹¹⁵

Four ritual aspects of this argument call for comment: (1) Continence is imposed at ordination and applies only to major clerics, i.e., to those immediately involved in the liturgical action. (2) Continence is connected here with the practice of a daily Eucharist in Rome and Spain. (3) It says that God will be pleased only by sacrifice offered by ministers with (ritually) pure bodies (*corporibus sanctis*). (4) No distinction is made between legitimate marital intercourse and fornication or adultery. This is a characteristic of ritual purity, in which the fact rather than the circumstances of sexual relations disqualifies a man or woman from public worship. The same idea is more explicitly stated in chapter 7, 8:

Plurimos enim sacerdotes Christi atque levitas, post longa consecrationis suae tempora, tam de conjugibus propriis, quam etiam de turpi coitu sobolem didicimus procreasse, et crimen suum hac praescriptione defendere, quia in veteri Testamento sacerdotibus ac ministris generandi facultas legitur attributa.¹¹⁶

1) Chapter 7, 8 and 11 also mention a law of absolute continence from the time of ordination, but there are two reasons for thinking that the ritual aspects of this legislation may not have been primary. The first reason for questioning the importance of cult here arises from chapter 9, 13, where the rule of continence is applied to clerics in major orders. Siricius expects that a candidate for the diaconate will demonstrate his

¹¹⁴ Coustant 630.

¹¹⁶ Coustant 630.

¹¹⁵ Coustant 630-31.

worthiness for this honor by anticipating the observance of continence for an unspecified time before ordination: "si se ipse primitus continentia praeunte dignum probarit, accedat."¹¹⁷ In this the main justification for absolute continence cannot be narrowly ritual; nor is there much confidence in the power of the principle of ritual continence. The second reason is similar to the first. It concerns the observance of ritual abstinence by minor clerics. According to canon 5 of the First Council of Toledo (400), all clerics were obliged to attend daily Mass.¹¹⁸ At Rome lay people who joined in any public worship apparently felt obliged to abstain from intercourse on the preceding night.¹¹⁹ There is no indication that longer periods of cultic abstinence were expected of major clerics than from others, as Siricius' stress on the daily ministry demonstrates.¹²⁰ Hence, even though ritual purity would have been a more serious matter for major clerics because of their prominence in worship, this demand of cultic abstinence would have been identical for all Christians. It seems, then, that a principle of ritual purity which demanded total abstinence from clerics in major orders would make the same demand on those in minor orders. Hence, on exclusively and narrowly ritual grounds, it is difficult to see why canon 1 of Toledo demands continence only of deacons and priests.

On the other hand, clerical continence can be derived in part from the conviction that virginity or continence is characteristic of the NT, and therefore required of major clerics who hold an official and prominent position in a Church which honors these states. The principle that the clergy should embody in themselves the virtues they recommend to others would encourage a celibate or continent priesthood in local churches where there was a considerable number of men and women who had consecrated their virginity to God. This idea is found in Siricius' *Epistola 10* and in contemporary writings.¹²¹ Here its use is restricted to the prohibition against ordaining penitents (chap. 14, 18): "post poeni-

¹¹⁷ Coustant 633-34.

¹¹⁸ Mansi 3, 999: "Presbyter, vel diaconus, vel subdiaconus, vel quilibet ecclesiae deputatus clericus, si intra civitatem fuerit, vel in loco quo ecclesia aut castello, aut vico, aut villa, et ad ecclesiam ad sacrificium quotidianum non accesserit, clericus non habeatur . . ." It may be noted that provision is made here, at least indirectly, for clerics who would have been unable to attend daily Mass, i.e., who would not be bound by a law of continence based exclusively on ritual principles. A different reading of this canon is suggested in the next section.

¹¹⁹ Jerome, *Ep.* 49 15 (CSEL 54, 376f).

¹²⁰ See n. 61 above.

¹²¹ *Ep.* 1 6, 7 implies that male and female ascetics were part of the local community. The argument that the clergy should be exemplars of virtue appears in *Ep.* 10 2, 5, and will be considered when that letter is discussed. It is an idea found in Ambrose and Jerome.

tudinem ac reconciliationem nulli umquam laico liceat honorem clericatus adipisci: quia quamvis sint omnium peccatorum contagione mundati, nulla tamen debent gerendorum sacramentorum instrumenta suscipere, qui dudum fuerint vasa vitiorum."¹²² Something like it occurs in chapter 13, 17, where the ordination of monks is recommended, not because their celibate state would eliminate any problem about the law of continence, but because they possess the requisite holiness ("vitae ac fidei institutio sancta commendat"), a sanctity which cannot be immediately derived from cultic abstinence.¹²³

2) Even the reference to a daily Eucharist need not necessarily be associated with ritual purity. In the first place, it does not read *quia quotidie offerimus* but *quae quotidie offerimus*.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the word *quotidie* need not mean "each and every day," and here it could be translated "frequently" without disrupting the sense.¹²⁵ There is evidence that Mass was not said daily at Rome at this time. Ambrosiaster, who wrote during the episcopate of Siricius' predecessor, Damasus (366–384), justifies celibacy for major clerics by a strongly ritualistic argument, one which the practice of daily Mass would immensely strengthen, but he merely observes that in some places Mass was offered several times a week.¹²⁶ Siricius himself, as we shall see, mentions the demands of a daily *ministry* in two other decretals in a way which suggests that Mass was not offered every day.¹²⁷ From Innocent I (402–17) we learn that Mass was not offered in Rome on Fridays or Saturdays, and that the Roman observance was to be the universal model.¹²⁸ The next reference to daily

¹²² Coustant 636.

¹²³ See below.

¹²⁴ The words *quia* and *quae* had similar, sometimes identical, abbreviations in manuscripts; cf. A. Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane* (6th ed.; Milan: Hoepli, 1967) 301–5. Here, however, emphasis is on the overall holiness of life that should characterize major clerics, and the parenthetical nature of the phrase is better served by maintaining Coustant's reading than by altering it. For an example of the use of *quia* in a similar context, cf. Innocent I, *Ep.* 2 9, 12 (Coustant 752).

¹²⁵ "cottidie," "cottidianum," *Thesaurus linguae latinae* 4 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906–9) 1089–93. For *cottidie* used as "weekday," cf. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 2, 21 (CCL 1, 499); cf. also *Itinerarium Egeriae* 24, 7 (CCL 175, 69).

¹²⁶ The text is uncertain: "omni enim hebdomada offerendum est, etiam, si non quotidie, peregrinis in locis tamen vel bis in hebdomada" (*Ad Timotheum prima* 3, 13, 4 [CSEL 81/3, 269]). It is accepted that Ambrosiaster wrote during the episcopate of Damasus; cf. CSEL 81/1, xv. Ambrose, *De officiis* 1, 50, 249 (Krabinger, 118), indicates that Mass was not said every day in the region around Milan.

¹²⁷ See below.

¹²⁸ Innocent, *Ep.* 25 7 (Coustant 859–60). In sects. 1–2 (cols. 855–56) the Roman practice is presented as the model for the entire Western Church. It is mentioned by Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5, 22 (PG 67, 535), and Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 7, 19 (PG 67, 1477).

Mass in Rome occurs in the correspondence of Gregory I (590–604).¹²⁹ And, according to Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) in a passage drawn from St. Augustine, Mass was said every day in some places but only once or twice a week in others.¹³⁰ Whether he was accepting Augustine's statement as still valid for places about which he had no immediate knowledge or he chose it because he knew personally of a variety in observance is not indicated.

The strong language which Siricius uses in chapter 7, 8 against clerics who beget children (*crimen, facinora, turpi coitu*) is evocative of more than an occasional absence from (daily?) Mass or an infringement of ritual purity, unless this principle was extremely important to all clerics. There is nothing in this decretal which indicates that major clerics observed or did not observe cultic abstinence.¹³¹ In fact, the principle of ritual purity is nowhere stated, much less applied to the Christian clergy in the letter; that is, nowhere is it said that major clerics may not have conjugal intercourse for a certain period of time before exercising their ministry. The prohibition is more absolute; the sanctity of the priestly office demands total continence.

We have mentioned canon 5 of Toledo I,¹³² which, when joined to the principle of ritual purity, implies that absolute continence was required of all clerics, even though canon 1 names only those in major orders. The alternatives, then, are either to accept that Mass was said every day but cultic abstinence was not observed (at least not by minor clerics) or to interpret *quotidianus* as "frequently" or "usually." The occasion of the council may support the latter view, since the bishops had gathered to discuss Priscillianism. The Priscillianists used to gather privately, and clergy who were part of the movement may have begun to avoid the public liturgies in favor of these meetings. The canon would have been directed to clerics who started to desert the public, weekday liturgies for the private, Priscillianist assemblies.¹³³ It may be relevant here to note that Siricius ordered that his decretal be circulated throughout Spain and its neighboring provinces: "etiam ad universos Carthaginenses ac Baeti-

¹²⁹ Cf. J. Barker, *Sacrificial Priesthood* (Westminster: Dacre, 1941) 26. The first reference to daily Mass in Gaul dates from the sixth century; cf. H. G. Beck, *The Pastoral Care of Souls in South-East France during the Sixth Century* (Rome: Gregorian Univ., 1950) 132–33.

¹³⁰ Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1, 44, 2 (PL 83, 776–77). Cf. Augustine, *Ep. 54* 2 (CSEL 34, 160); *Tractatus in evangelium Iohannis* 26, 15 (CCL 36, 267).

¹³¹ *Ep. 5* 3 (Coustant 656), however, shows that cultic abstinence was not observed by all Italian clergy. It is possible that the OT was used by the incontinent clergy to justify their disregard of the principle of ritual purity.

¹³² Cf. n. 118 above.

¹³³ Toledo I, canon 1 (Mansi 3, 998); regarding the Priscillianists, cf. Saragossa, canons 2 and 4 (Mansi 3, 634).

cos, Lusitanos atque Gallicios, vel eos, qui vicinis tibi collimitant hinc inde provinciis, haec . . . mittantur . . . quae ad te speciali nomine generaliter scripta sunt, . . . in universorum fratrum nostrorum notitiam perferantur."¹³⁴ It would be rash to conclude from this and Toledo I that Mass must have been said every day throughout all of these regions.

There is a further difficulty in accepting both a daily Eucharist in Spain and general observance of ritual purity. In this case there would have been no need to legislate at all, since absolute continence would have been effected automatically, and not only on those in major orders but on all who participated, clerics or not. Yet it is clear from this letter that many clerics were not observing total continence. There are two cases to consider. Either there was a daily Mass, in which case they were not observing ritual continence, or there was an interval between their duties sufficient to allow them both to have conjugal intercourse and to meet the demands of cult. In the former case, the reliance on a ritual argument is inexplicable; in the latter, it is not fully applicable and, in this case, if ritual purity were the principal concern, the synod would have had no objection to a limited use of marriage.¹³⁵

It must be remembered that the discussion is restricted to married clerics. This may have led Siricius to use an argument which he knew would be effective for them because of a widespread observance of ritual abstinence, but to incorporate it into a more general discussion by establishing that absolute continence for married clerics of the new and perfect law is the outcome of earlier occasional continence in the OT.

3) As a whole, this letter and these sections in particular reveal a careful and thoughtful composition. The choice of words is in no way haphazard, especially the word *sanctus*, which occurs here and in 7, 9, where it is the foundation of Siricius' refutation of the argument based on the marriage of OT priests. *Sanctus* directs our attention away from ritual purity. Although it bore many meanings and shades of meaning, *sanctus* was never associated with ritual continence by either pagan or Christian authors.¹³⁶ In paganism *sanctus* primarily denoted the awe and reverence which the site of a theophany inspired. It developed from that

¹³⁴ Chap. 15, 20 (Coustant 637).

¹³⁵ A third possibility suggests itself. Some clerics may have been absenting themselves from weekday liturgies if they were ritually impure. This would explain Toledo I, canon 5, and re-enforce the opinion that there was a daily Eucharist throughout Spain when Siricius wrote. Perhaps this is the explanation of the phrase "de turpi coitu" which occurs at the beginning of Siricius' letter. There is nothing else in the letter to suggest that this was the case.

¹³⁶ Cf. W. Link, *De vocis "sanctus" usu pagano* (Regensburg: Hortung, 1910); H. Delehay, *Sanctus: Essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1927); A.-J. Festugière, *La sainteté* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1949) passim, esp. 80-83.

to a designation of high moral virtue, often quite apart from religion. It also appears as a vaguely laudatory epithet for dignitaries such as the emperor.¹³⁷ While these pagan meanings continued in Christianity, its significance was much influenced by the Latin version of the Bible, in which *sanctus* appeared as the translation of the *hagios* of the LXX.¹³⁸ At first *sanctus* was used collectively—to describe the Catholic Church, the Christian dead, martyrs, and, at about the time of this decretal, monks, especially in the East. The pilgrim Egeria, for example, calls the local clergy (including deaconesses), martyrs, and monks *sancti*. Neither was the application of *sanctus* to individuals connected with rite. Ambrose and Jerome, among the earliest to use the word in this way, restrict it to particular martyrs, OT personages, holy contemporaries, (fellow) bishops.¹³⁹ These are the associations of the word *sanctus* which is prominent in Siricius' argument here.¹⁴⁰

The opening words of the quotation under discussion refer to what came immediately before: *Quarum sanctionum*. . . . Hence this passage links the sanctity necessary for acceptable cult to that associated with the Church, the chaste spouse of Christ, which is moving towards the perfection it will possess in its entirety on the day of judgment: "Ecclesiae, cujus sponsus est, formam castitatis voluit splendore radiare, ut in die iudicii cum rursus advenerit, sine macula et ruga eam possit, sicut per Apostolum suum instituit, reperire. Quarum sanctionum. . . ." ¹⁴¹ In other words, the passage as a whole is based on the conviction that continence is the characteristic state of the New Law, and that its abandonment, rather than its observance, requires explanation. The absence of the NT description of the Church as the virgin spouse of Christ may be due to the fact that the clerics in question were married men; we may presume that ritual continence would not ordinarily be a problem for unmarried clerics. These details point to the conclusion that the word *sanctus* is used for "holy," and that the holiness being described is primarily that of asceticism, not of ritual purity.

4) The severe criticism of clerics who are not absolutely continent need

¹³⁷ Cf. Link, "*sanctus*" 21, 35, 86–90; Delehaye, *Sanctus* 3–4, 6–7, 10.

¹³⁸ Delehaye, *Sanctus* 24 ff. So Lev 20:7, quoted by Siricius in chap. 7, 9: "Sancti estote, quia et ego sanctus sum Dominus Deus vester."

¹³⁹ These examples and many others are described by Delehaye, *Sanctus* 29 ff. Cf. C. H. Turner, *Ecclesiae occidentalis monumenta iuris antiquissima* 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939) 150, n. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Delehaye, *Sanctus* 59: "Par son concept fondamental *sanctus* s'appliquait naturellement à une classe de personnes aussi séparée du reste des chrétiens, aussi intimement unie à Dieu que les martyrs. Par là il appartient à la catégorie des titres d'honneur et de respect." Hence the use of *sanctus* in these sections presents an ideal of holiness to the clergy which for Siricius includes continence as an integral part.

¹⁴¹ Chap. 7, 10 (Coustant 630).

not be due to offenses against ritual purity. Even without legislation, a person bound to continence would be reprehensible if he resumed the rights of marriage.¹⁴² Moreover, in this decretal words like “contagion” occur outside the context of cult. While the wording of chapter 7, 11, where Siricius returns to those who had used the OT to support the abandonment of clerical continence, denies them the right to handle *veneranda* because they cling to *obscoenis cupiditatibus*, exactly the same words are used for penitents who resume illicit relationships (chap. 5, 6)¹⁴³ and the same sort of vocabulary is applied to monks and nuns who have abandoned their dedicated lives for marriage: “demersos esse [in] lasciviam . . . illicita ac sacrilega se contagione miscuerint” (chap. 6, 7), and to penitents who want to be ordained: “qui dudum fuerint vasa vitiorum” (chap. 14, 18).¹⁴⁴ These are not ritual, since there is no question of the performance of an individual act of religion. They show, rather, that different kinds of sanctity are appropriate to different states.

The case of penitents seeking ordination provides a parallel to Siricius' legislation regarding clerical continence. The ruling about penitents comes from a sensitivity to the external rites of the sacraments. Although a penitent has been freed from every trace of sin, it would be inappropriate for him, as a former sinner, to reconcile other sinners to the Church. Similarly, the minister of the Church's worship must reflect in his life the fact that the Church is the unique spouse of Christ. As with monks and nuns, this is an all-engrossing relationship, and any attempt to make room for another is a sort of adultery.

Concluding Remarks

The arguments for clerical continence are based on the demands of cult but not in a narrow or mechanical way. The purity demanded by right worship is justified on wider grounds. The elaborate construction of chapter 8 compared with the rest of the letter indicates that the question of clerical continence was important to Siricius and that its discussion

¹⁴² The legislation of clerical continence in this epistle is not supported by any reference to previous councils or decrees. Most authors, e.g., Gryson, *Origines* 140, take this as proof that the legislation was entirely novel, and the invocation of earlier precedent in the discussion of the admission of heretics (chap. 1, 2) supports this observation. Unfortunately, as this is the first papal decretal extant, we cannot see for ourselves whether Gryson's opinion is the correct one. Coustant, who was also aware of the problem, has a different view; cf. 630, n.f.: “Ultro igitur fassus, ne Siricium quidem ullum nosse vel decessorum suorum vel conciliorum decretum, quo continentia praedictis gradibus praeciperetur, non immerito existimem, eum non meram consuetudinem sed legem a Deo sancitam, et ab Apostolo traditam, vindicare voluisse.” And H. Getzeny, *Stil und Form der ältesten Papstbriefe bis auf Leo d. Gr.* (Tubingen: Alfons Hug, 1922) passim, shows that from the time of Siricius the popes were more independent in their legislation and sometimes advanced previous legislation on the sole basis of their own authority; cf. n. 146 below.

¹⁴³ Coustant 628–29.

¹⁴⁴ Coustant 629, 636.

was carefully planned. It may be concluded, then, that Siricius fully realized what he was saying and meant what he said, and that the absence of a complete and unambiguous appeal to cultic abstinence was not an oversight but an indication of his basic attitude to the question.

SIRICIUS AD GALLOS EPISCOPOS

Although this Roman decretal to the Gallic bishops is anonymous, it is unmistakably from the late fourth or early fifth century. Some early editors printed it among the letters of Pope Innocent I (402-17), but Coustant's demonstration that it was written during the pontificate of Siricius was generally accepted until the publication in 1904 of *La plus ancienne décrétale* by E.-Ch. Babut. Babut tried to prove that this decretal had been written during the pontificate of Damasus (366-84), Siricius' immediate predecessor, and his thesis has gained almost universal acceptance among scholars. Nevertheless, in a little-known book *Stil und Form der ältesten Papstbriefe bis auf Leo d. Gr.*, H. Getzeny definitively re-established Siricius as the author of the decretal. Babut had only two manuscripts at his disposal when he edited the decretal, but in 1911 C. H. Turner located the manuscript from which those known to Babut had been copied. It is in the collection of the Museum Meermann-Westreenianum in The Hague, and is used here as the text of this letter.¹⁴⁵

There is no explicit clue in the decretal to indicate when it was written, but once it is accepted as Siricius' it may be placed later than *Epistola 1 ad Himerium*, which was one of the first acts of his pontificate. This is borne out both by chapter 2, 5, where it is said that the rule of clerical continence has been frequently promulgated (and frequently ignored), and by chapter 2, 6, which deposes major clerics who do not obey it. In *Epistola 1* a plea of ignorance about the law was accepted, but here ignorance can no longer be used as an excuse: "Quando enim non servatur

¹⁴⁵ Coustant 681-86; E.-Ch. Babut, *La plus ancienne décrétale* (Paris: [no publisher], 1904) 25-29; Getzeny, *Stil und Form* 94-100; C. H. Turner, "Chapters in the History of Latin MSS of Canons," *JTS* 32 (1930-31) 1-11. The manuscript Turner located is *Collectio canonum*, M 10 B 4, listed as number 172 in P. J. H. Vermeeren and A. F. Dekker, *Inventaris Handschriften Museum Meermann-Westreenianum* (The Hague: Staatsdrukkerij, 1960) 57. The two manuscripts available to Babut were Paris lat. 1451 (F. Maassen, *Geschichte der Quellen und der Literatur des canonischen Rechts im Abendland bis zum Ausgang des M.A.* [Graz: Leuschner & Lubensky, 1870] 613) and Vat. Reg. lat. 1172 (Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis* 1, xlix-li). Turner's demonstration that they are independent copies of M 10 B 4 is confirmed by an anomaly in this manuscript. According to Babut (op. cit. 56), a passage from near the end had been interpolated earlier in the text and so appears twice in the later manuscripts. Since these are independent (Babut, loc. cit.), and since exactly the same doubling is found in M 10 B 4, it must be their common ancestor. The earliest manuscript dates from the mid-eighth century (Vermeeren and Dekker, *Inventaris* 58), the later ones from the ninth century (Babut 53).

quod admonetur utiliter, apostolica mandata quasi ignota contempnuntur; iudicium tamen de his quae commiserint non potest inmutari."¹⁴⁶ The discussion in this decretal, more expanded than that of *Epistola 1*, may be another indication that it is the later of the two. The arguments are constructed of the same elements in each letter, but here they are more carefully and more fully presented. A request had come to Rome from some Gallic bishops in which rulings were sought on a list of difficulties. Although the title mentions a synod, Siricius seems to have replied on his own¹⁴⁷ and bases his decisions on the authority of the Apostolic See, the laws of the Church, and the traditions of the Fathers (sections 1-2). His decretal follows the order of their letter.

Summary

The letter of Siricius deals with matters familiar from *Epistola 1*: consecrated virgins (chap. 1, 3-4), baptism (chap. 4, 10-11), marriage (chaps. 4, 12; 5, 14) and clerical discipline under the headings of clerical continence (chap. 2, 5-7), preparation for ordination (chap. 5, 13, 15-16), and episcopal jurisdiction (chap. 6, 17-19).

Our main interest is, of course, clerical continence, but here, even more than in *Epistola 1*, the sections about consecrated virgins and widows must be read to understand those which concern the clergy. By her consecration a Christian virgin enters a marriage to Christ that it is adultery to abandon. This is stated both in chapter 1, 3, which discusses the case of a *virgo velata* who breaks her vow, and in section 4, which discusses that of the *virgo non velata*.¹⁴⁸ The honor accorded to consecrated women is clear from the severity of the penalty which is applied in each case. The length of the period of penance is not stated but "it is

¹⁴⁶ Chap. 2, 5 (Coustant 689). Ignorance of the legislation was accepted later by Innocent I (*Ep. 6 1, 4* [Coustant 792]), although these clerics were barred from promotion. Chapter 1, 2 and 4 both mention decretals of Siricius. *Ep. 5* of Siricius is a communication of Roman synodal decisions to Africa. This letter may be typical of others sent throughout the West from Roman synods; cf. Siricius, *Ep. 1 1, 2* (Coustant 625), which mentions legislation of Pope Liberius concerning the admission of Arians into the Catholic Church, legislation which Siricius expects the Spanish Church to know. Jerome, *Ep. 123 10* (CSEL 56, 82), indicates that Pope Damasus was consulted by bishops of East and West: "Ante annos plurimos, quum in chartis ecclesiasticis iuvarem Damasum Romanae urbis episcopum, et Orientis atque Occidentis synodicis consultationibus responderem." *Ep. 1* and *Ep. 10* of Siricius also show the Roman Church being consulted.

¹⁴⁷ The verbs of this letter occur in the first person singular and plural in about equal numbers. As *Ep. 1* and *Ep. 5* both mention that the decisions were taken by synods, the absence here of any such reference may indicate that there was none. The title which describes the letter as the canons of a Roman synod could have been added later; cf. Babut, *La plus ancienne décrétale* 9.

¹⁴⁸ Regarding vows of consecrated virgins, cf. R. d'Izarny, *La virginité selon saint Ambroise* (unpublished thesis, Lyons, 1952) 91-97.

not to be short." Another indication of their prestige is the strong language used to describe their fall. The marriages they attempt are not marriages at all but "adultery," "incest," "prostitution," resulting from blind lust and leading to death. This extreme language is not the product of an opposition to marriage in general; it is the disorder that is reprehensible: *perverso ordine*.¹⁴⁹

A second point of interest for the discussion of clerical continence is the use of the OT in this context. In discussing this adultery, Siricius says that the severity of the Old Law, which punished adultery with death by stoning, has been done away with by the New Law: "Quos Lex lapidari praecepit, et nunc cessante illa vindicta, spiritaliter feriuntur. . . ." ¹⁵⁰ Although Siricius gives this precept of the Old Law a spiritual interpretation, that those who are spiritually dead may not assist at Mass, he does admit that the Old Law has been abolished in this particular case. In the next section he applies the rule of continence demanded of the priests of the OT to those of the NT, but here he says that the Old Law is perfected and completed by the New. One may ask, then, what the criteria are by which one regulation of the OT is known to have been abolished and another to have been subsumed into the new dispensation. The answer must lie in the practice of the Church. When the customs of the Church are parallel to those of the OT, they are to be understood as the final development of earlier usages. Where there is no correspondence, the OT has given way to the NT. Hence the laws in these decretals are not deductions from the OT (or the NT). Rather, it is confidently expected and believed that what the Church is doing will have been prepared for by the OT and described in the NT.

Finally, it is clear from both sections 3 and 4 that consecrated women are under the direction of the bishop.¹⁵¹ It is his privilege to preside over the public taking of the veil (sect. 3) and to judge the suitability of *virgines non velatae* for this honor (sect. 4); it is his duty to draw virgins and widows to consecrate their lives to Christ by his words and to encourage those already consecrated to be faithful. Use is made of this association in the next sections.

Clerical Continence

Chapter 2, 5 states that the matter of clerical continence had been frequently, and often unsuccessfully, a subject of papal decrees, so fre-

¹⁴⁹ Coustant 688-89.

¹⁵⁰ Chap. 1, 4 (Coustant 688-89).

¹⁵¹ This was generally the case: e.g., Councils of Elvira (ca. 306), canon 13; of Valence (374), canon 2; of Carthage III (ca. 390), canons 4, 25, 33; of Hippo (ca. 398), canon 1; of Toledo I (400), canons 6, 9, 16, 19 (Mansi 2, 8; 3, 493, 880, 884, 885, 919, 999, 1000, 1001). Cf. R. Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église romaine* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1954) 86-87, 99; id., "Les vierges chrétiennes en Gaule au IV^e siècle," *Saint Martin et son temps* (Rome: Herder, 1961) 109-32; Jerome, *Ep.* 7 6 (CSEL 54, 30).

quently that ignorance is no longer an excuse for not observing this "apostolic command." The command is then iterated: bishops, priests, and deacons must be continent. The justification for this command is in two sections, chapter 2, 5 and 6. The first concerns the obligations on the clergy which follow from their prominence in the Church, the second, those from their official role in the ministry.

Chapter 2, 5 opens with a general statement of the duty of the clergy to be models of virtue for the laity. Siricius stressed that its primary application is to bishops: ". . . maxime de sacerdotibus, quorum meritum exigit, ut bonorum operum suorum sint plebibus forma."¹⁵² The *meritum* comes from their role in the liturgy, in administering baptism or confecting the Eucharist, and so can be, and is, extended to priests and deacons. This *meritum*, by the authority of the Apostolic See, Scripture, and the Fathers, requires all major clerics to be perfectly chaste.¹⁵³

Up to this point the decretal has said nothing about continence. Since marriage, celibacy, and continence all have their appropriate chastity, there is no reason in theory why the perfect chastity demanded of married clerics should not be the model for married laymen rather than for *continentes*. In chapter 2, 5 Siricius explains why continence is the form of chastity required of married bishops and priests.¹⁵⁴ It comes from their contact with consecrated virgins and widows:

Quo enim pudore viduae aut virgini ausus est episcopus vel presbyter integritatem vel continentiam praedicare, vel suadere castum cubile servare, si ipse saeculo magis institit filios generare, quam Deo? Adam, qui praeceptum non servavit, ejectus foras paradisum, caruit regnum; et praevaricatorem putas posse ad regna caelestia pervenire?¹⁵⁵

This is no ritual argument. Siricius is pointing out the implications, for the preacher, of encouraging virgins and widows to remain unmarried and married couples to practice continence. He claims that clerics must apply the same exhortation to themselves as they give to others and, in the final sentence of the above quotation, gives a sample of the style of exhortation in question: continence and virginity are eschatological, pointing to the completion of the kingdom, to a time when marriage will

¹⁵² Coustant 689.

¹⁵³ The mention of the liturgy and the use of the word *castissimus* give this sentence a strongly ritualistic tone: "De episcopis, presbyteris, et diaconibus, quos sacrificiis divinis necesse est interesse, per quorum manus et gratia baptismatis traditur, et corpus Christi conficitur; quos non solum nos, sed et Scriptura divina compellit esse castissimos, et patres quoque jusserunt continentiam corporalem servare debere."

¹⁵⁴ Deacons are not mentioned, perhaps because they had no access to the houses of virgins and widows; cf. Carthage III (ca. 395), canon 25 (Mansi 3, 884); Toledo I (400), canon 9 (Mansi 3, 1000); Ambrose, *De officiis* 1, 20, 87 (Krabinger 62).

¹⁵⁵ Coustant 690.

be no more (1 Cor 7:29). A priest is duty-bound to proclaim the coming of this kingdom, and if he encourages others to anticipate it here on earth by virginity or continence while not doing so himself, he is a liar and, like Adam, will be cast out of paradise, i.e., the kingdom of heaven, for his prevarication. Siricius then considers St. Paul, who taught Christians to think not of this world (flesh) but of the kingdom (spirit). This is the basis of Siricius' criticism of clergy who preach to virgins and widows while they show their concern for this world by begetting children for it; like soldiers in the imperial army, who were absolutely continent throughout their service, these soldiers, i.e., the teachers in the Church, must be continent during theirs.¹⁵⁶

Section 6 opens with a statement which is unequivocally ritual:

De his itaque tribus gradibus, quos legimus in Scripturis, a ministris Dei munditia praecepta est observari, quibus necessitas semper in promptu est. Aut enim baptisma tradendum est, aut offerenda sunt sacrificia. Numquid immundus ausus erit contaminare quod sanctum est, quando quae sancta sunt sanctis sancta sunt?¹⁵⁷

Ritual abstinence was clearly part of current liturgical practice, but it is not the sole reason or even the primary reason for enforcing clerical continence in this decretal. As used here it makes a weak argument. There is nothing about a daily Eucharist which would have rendered an argument based on cultic abstinence compelling. The mention of both baptism and the Eucharist suggests that neither one was frequent enough or sufficient by itself to ensure absolute continence, even granting that only a cleric ritually pure was allowed to officiate. The use of baptism is particularly unconvincing for an argument based primarily on ritual purity. According to chapter 4, 10 of this letter, baptism was normally administered only at Easter. However many emergency baptisms there may have been, they would not have been so frequent that every bishop and priest would have to have maintained himself prepared to administer

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. The use of Rom 8:9 here is not at all ritual; cf. the citation of this text in *Ep. 1* 7, 10 (Coustant 630-31). Liturgical references are bound to arise in discussions of matters which concern major clerics, and need not inevitably imply that an argument based on ritual purity is being employed.

¹⁵⁷ Coustant 690. The words *in Scripturis* are found in the margin of the manuscript. That they belong to the text is indicated by the fact that they are in the same hand as the rest of the manuscript, that they are quite necessary for the sense of the phrase, and that there are no glosses in this section of the manuscript. The phrase "quae sancta sunt sanctis sancta sunt" refers to a liturgical formula, "sancta sanctis," which the celebrant said in the Roman Mass after the fraction of the bread, and so strengthens the ritual element of this section. Cf. F. Probst, *Die abendlandische Messe vom funften bis achten Jahrhundert* (Munster: Aschendorff, 1896) 207; G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (2d ed.; Westminster: Dacre, 1945) 134-35.

the sacrament at all times. In fact, baptism was the prerogative of the bishop and, again according to chapter 4, 10, its administration was allotted only to certain priests and not at all to deacons.¹⁵⁸

One may wonder further why deacons were included in this law of continence. They were forbidden to visit or preach to virgins and widows, and were not allowed to baptize. While they would have had a prominent role in the celebration of Mass,¹⁵⁹ the discussion above indicates that this alone would have been insufficient to require absolute continence of them. The resolution of this difficulty leads back to the ideas which Siricius presented in chapter 2, 5. In the first place, a reason for associating deacons with bishops and priests is implied by the parenthetical remark which opens chapter 2, 6: "De his itaque tribus gradibus, quos legimus in Scripturis. . . ." Bishop, priest, and deacon are the only three orders mentioned in the NT and so are especially obliged to realize in their lives what it demands. The relevant characteristic of the NT is described in chapter 4, 12, where Siricius is discussing the fact that the OT allowed the patriarchs to have more than one wife: "Numquid qui uxores et concubinas habuerunt? Sed nunc hoc non patitur fieri Testamentum, ubi amplius de integritate tractatur, et castitas Christo docente laudatur, cum dicit, *Non omnes capiunt verbum Dei, sed quibus datur.*"¹⁶⁰ If integrity is the mark of the New Law, then the Christian clergy especially must exhibit it in their lives.

These observations help to clarify the argument of the concluding part of chapter 2, 6. Here three instances of temporary abstinence from the use of marriage are discussed.¹⁶¹ The first is a brief recapitulation of the idea that the OT priests were required to spend a year living in the Temple when it was the turn of their course to officiate at the sacrifices. The reason for this was to ensure that they would be ritually pure: "ut mundi essent." The implication is clear, though not stated, that to this limited continence of the OT priests there corresponds a perfect continence of NT priests.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Deacons sometimes baptized; cf. Coustant 693, n.b. The fact that Siricius forbids them to do so here weakens the ritual element in his arguments; cf. Bingham, *Antiquities* 1, 222-23; 6, 528-29.

¹⁵⁹ Dix, *Liturgy* 757 (index, under "deacon").

¹⁶⁰ Coustant 695.

¹⁶¹ A fourth example might be added, that of the Roman soldiers who are mentioned obliquely in chap. 3, 5: "Qui militat Christo, qui in sede residet magistri, qui militiae disciplinam non potest custodire?" This would be a reference to the custom of not allowing Roman soldiers to marry while serving in the army. This was abolished ca. A.D. 197, but even before, the law did not prevent soldiers from marrying; it denied legal status to the marriage until the time of discharge. Cf. G. L. Cheeseman, *The Auxilia of the Roman Army* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1914) 118-19; R. MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1963) 126-27.

¹⁶² See above.

The second example is surprising: the ritual observances of pagan priests who abstain from sexual commerce and from food during the time of their sacrifices. Here there is no denial of the principle of ritual purity. It is quoted and extended to include Christian priests: "Si commixtio pollutio est, utique sacerdos stare debet ad officium caeleste preparatus, qui pro alienis peccatis est postulaturus; ne ipse inveniatur indignus."¹⁶³ The statement *Si commixtio pollutio est* is not a condemnation of marriage. It is merely an iteration of the principle of ritual purity which pagan priests accept and which evinces a respect for and an appreciation of the value of continence in an unlikely setting. The principle is expanded for Christian priests, however, because the perfection of the worship in which they share demands total continence. Again the context is not narrowly ritual. It is not a matter of being ready for some particular ceremony but of being generally disposed for worship, and apparently any use of marriage would render the Christian minister unfit for this duty. It seems, then, that even if marriage is not condemned in general, by some enlargement of the principle of cultic purity any exercise of its rights disqualifies altogether a major cleric from officiating. This will be returned to shortly. The main point here is that the continence of a pagan priest is occasional, while that of a Christian is absolute.

The third example is that of the laity who, according to 1 Cor 7:5, should be continent for a while to devote themselves totally to prayer. For Siricius, this abstinence is not cultic but proof that the laity ought to be partially, and the clergy entirely, free from a desire for physical progeny. The same extension to absolute continence is made as in the two preceding examples: to the occasional continence of the laity there should correspond an absolute continence of married major clerics. Here, as in section 5, the concern is centered on the result, rather than the act, of intercourse; it is wrong that clergy be interested in offspring, and those who are remain priests in name only.

Section 6 of chapter 2 closes with a criticism of clerics who continue to officiate without surrendering their marriage rights. The language used shows that Siricius considers them ritually impure because of this: "hominibus coinquinatis et infidelibus in quibus sanctitudo corporis per inluviem et incontinentiam videtur esse polluta."¹⁶⁴ Our discussion of *Epistola 1*, and the earlier sections of this letter, show that this cannot be a simple case of ritual purity, in which there would have been no objection if clerics who were not celebrating exercised their right to conjugal intercourse. The language may be that of cult, but a ritual justification is lacking; there is nothing about intervals between sacrifices or their frequency, of rotas of celebration, etc. The ban on the use of marriage is

¹⁶³ Coustant 691.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

absolute, and not based mechanically on so many acts of worship to be attended or performed, nor does it vary from place to place as customs about the frequency of celebrating Mass differ.

If this sort of total continence is to be classified as ritual abstinence, it must be so in some generalized manner. The sexual act is somehow thought to be so polluting that any use of it by a major cleric disqualifies him from officiating altogether. This view is also suggested by the use Siricius makes of the example from paganism where a strictly cultic abstinence is contrasted to the total abstinence of Christian priests. In fact, there were a few instances of total continence or virginity among pagan religions, and it seems that these did not arise from the demands of cult but from cosmology or philosophy. Hence, if Siricius' law is to be compared to their practice, the origins of the perfect continence demanded from Christian priests would derive from asceticism. In this case the emphasis on ritual in all three decretals calls for explanation.

The similarity between this legislation and that which prevented penitents from receiving orders may help to clarify this question. It is unseemly for penitents to administer forgiveness to others when they have themselves been public sinners. When Siricius discusses the periodic continence of pagan priests, he mentions that the duty of Christian priests to intercede for the sins of others precludes any unworthiness in themselves. This implies that conjugal intercourse at any time would be improper for a major cleric and would, as in the case of a penitent, render him unfit to intercede for sinners. But abstinence which is based on cult is a complicated matter with times and seasons, in which some acts of intercourse prevent a priest from officiating, some do not. The anomaly of these decretals lies in their attempt to derive total continence from the principle of ritual purity in situations where this can justify only occasional abstinence. Our question may thus be phrased in another way. How much of the letter can be accounted for by the principle that virginity and continence are the characteristic states of the NT, i.e., of the Christian era? This avoids the difficulty of explaining why absolute continence is demanded where occasional abstinence would have met the requirements of cult. The strong language applied to virgins who marry is not unlike that applied to incontinent clerics.¹⁶⁵ The general observance of ritual abstinence may have directed parts of Siricius' choice of argument and vocabulary, especially those directed to married clergy, but the principle which demands absolute continence of clerics is more easily derived from his ideas about virginity and continence in the New Law.

Siricius is saying that a cleric, or anyone else, can approach God best,

¹⁶⁵ The word *pudor* is used of priests in *Ep. 5 3* (Coustant 656) and of virgins in *Ep. 10 2* (cols. 687-88); the word *integritas* is used of unmarried clerics in *Ep. 10 3, 8* (col. 691) and of virgins in *Ep. 10 1, 3* (col. 699).

not when he is merely ritually pure, but when he lives in the state of virginity or continence; that this state has been foreshadowed by the OT and even by pagan religions; that it is recommended by St. Paul in his own person and in his desire that laypersons approach as near to it as they can; that, in its own right, it anticipates the perfection of the eschatological kingdom. For these reasons total continence is essential to those who prepare for this kingdom by administering its sacraments, and clerics who do not possess this quality, which they are continually praising and exhorting to in others, cannot function effectively as God's ministers, since their own lives belie their public acts. Siricius accepts both the principle of ritual purity and the perfection of the state of continence or virginity. He is willing to use arguments from either one to convince clerics that absolute continence is required of them, but since the state of celibacy or continence cannot be arrived at by the principle of cultic abstinence, it is better seen as primarily the result of the Christian ascetical ideal of virginity.

SIRICIUS, EPISTOLA 5 AD EPISCOPOS AFRICAE

On January 6, 386, a synod of eighty bishops met in Rome and a letter describing its purpose with a few canons was sent to bishops who were unable to attend because of age or infirmity. The only copy extant is from the documents of a Council of Thelepte or Zella (Africa) which met over thirty years later, in 418.¹⁶⁶ The African bishops approved this letter, but there is nothing in it which indicates that it had been altered to suit their situation and at several points its Italian origin and use are clearly stated.¹⁶⁷ Their acceptance of its contents does not prove or require that the decretal was composed for them. It was originally addressed to Italian bishops not at the synod, and Siricius sent a copy of it to the bishops of Africa to inform them of the decisions taken. Therefore it is to be accepted as representative of the Church in Italy at the beginning of Siricius' reign rather than of the African Church.¹⁶⁸

Summary

The opening section exhorts the absent bishops to the practice of virtue in general. The same ideas appear in arguments used in *Epistola 1* and, especially, *Epistola 10*, to confirm a law of clerical continence. There is an allusion to Eph 5:27, that the Church is to be without spot or wrinkle (cf. *Ep.* 7 10); there is an appeal to tradition, the apostles, the Fathers, and Scripture (cf. *ibid.*; *Ep.* 10 2, 5); only priests free from worldly contamination may enter God's presence with confidence (cf. *Eps.* 1 7, 9-10; 10 2, 6); the clergy are warned that their position and responsibilities

¹⁶⁶ Coustant 651-58; cf. Maassen, *Geschichte der Quellen* 167-69.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Coustant 653, n. a.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. paragraph 8 (Coustant 647).

impose a particular obligation to observe the canons (cf. *Eps.* 10 1 and 2, 5; also, up to a point, *Ep.* 1 10, 14); finally, there is regret that some clerics, in opposition to earlier statutes, violate the chastity of the Church, presumably by exercising their rights of marriage (cf. *Eps.* 1 7, 8; 10 2, 5). In this introduction nothing is said explicitly about continence, but the form of the letter and the application of these ideas to clerical marriages in other decretals would support the opinion that the introduction was written with continence at least an *arrière-pensée*. In fact, if the letter was slightly rearranged, it would very much resemble *Epistola* 10 2. There the discussion of clerical continence was divided into two parts, the first of which is similar to this introduction and the second to section 3, which here follows the canons. If these canons were placed as an appendix, the line of thought would move from the obligations imposed upon priests by their position in the Church and the scandal caused by clerics who violate the chastity of the Church (introduction) to the necessity of absolute continence from the demands of worship (sect. 3).

The body of the letter (sect. 2) consists of eight canons quoted, without comment, from other synods and councils about the jurisdiction of bishops (canons 1, 2, 6, 7), ordination (can. 3), the marriage of clerics (can. 4 and 5), and the reception of heretics (can. 8). A short justification for the requirement of absolute continence from major clerics follows (sect. 3) and the letter closes with an appeal for uniformity in the practice of Church discipline and a list of the benefits which would accrue if these canons were perfectly observed (sect. 4).

The argument in section 3 is in two steps. In the first, absolute continence is derived from the observance of cultic abstinence, and in the second, this abstinence is justified from St. Paul and what might be called "good taste." Section 3 closes with a brief reply to those who condemn a celibate clergy. The argument by which major clerics are exhorted to perpetual abstinence from their wives is exclusively ritual. Continence is necessary for worship to be acceptable to God, and the daily ministry of major clerics, either baptism or the Eucharist, obliges them to observe perfect continence:

Abstinetes vos, ut vacetis orationi (1 Cor 7:5). Si ergo laicis abstinencia imperatur, ut possint deprecantes audiri: quanto magis sacerdos utique omni momento paratus esse debet, munditiae puritate securus, ne aut sacrificium offerat, aut baptizare cogatur? Qui si contaminatus fuerit carnali concupiscentia, quid faciat?¹⁶⁹

Here the idea of being an exemplar to the faithful is subsumed into the argument from the demands of cult. St. Paul's advice that married couples be sometimes continent to devote themselves to prayer is used to

¹⁶⁹ Coustant 655-56.

prove that continence is necessary for any prayer to be acceptable, and since the bishop is always to be ready for his ministry, he has to show the superiority of his state to that of the laity by giving up the rights of marriage.¹⁷⁰ Then ritual purity is defended in itself. Any use of marriage by bishops (priests or deacons) contaminates them by "carnal concupiscence," and the ritual nature of this contamination is underlined by a reference to St. Paul and to pagan religion. It seems that these bishops (and levites) were not observing ritual or any other continence.¹⁷¹

Clerical continence was not a new issue. Apparently married clerics had answered an earlier appeal for continence by quoting 1 Tim 3:2, where it is recommended that bishops be married men. In response, the Roman synod says that this is no proof that continence was not observed by such married clerics, and further that the ordination of unmarried men, recommended elsewhere by St. Paul's words and person, shows that there is no necessity for married clerics in major orders to exercise their rights. The section closes with the quotation of Rom 8:8, familiar from *Epistolae 1* and *10*, about those in the Spirit pleasing God, those in the flesh being unable to do so. In *Epistola 10* it is applied to virgins and widows; in *Epistola 1* it is applied to clerics in the context of the Church as the spouse of Christ. Here it must be understood to mean that conjugal intercourse is opposed to the Spirit for ritual reasons, since it makes married clerics unfit for the exercise of their ministry.¹⁷²

Difficulties in Understanding This Letter

It cannot be denied that the argument is almost solely ritual, but it is exactly this exclusiveness which raises difficulties in understanding the force of this line of reasoning and its choice.

1) The ban is extended to deacons as well as bishops and priests in this decretal, which raises the same problem in understanding the force of

¹⁷⁰ Siricius' extension of 1 Cor 7:5 to absolute continence is based on the argument by which Jerome, *Adv. Jov.* 1, 7 (PL 23, 247: Vall.), tried to establish the superiority of absolute continence to marriage: "Quamdiu impleo mariti officium, non impleo continentis. Jubet idem Apostolus in alio loco, ut semper oremus. Si semper orandum est, numquam ergo conjugio serviendum, quoniam quotiesquumque uxori debitum reddo, orare non possum"; cf. *Ep.* 49 15 (CSEL 54, 376). Jerome copies it from Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis* 10, 2 (CCL 2, 1029-30), where it is used against remarriage. The replacement of the continual prayer of the laity by priestly duties does not alter the character of an argument that is essentially dependent upon placing the married state third on the scale of chastity, below widowhood and virginity.

¹⁷¹ The word *sacerdos* usually means bishop, but sometimes, as seems to be the case here, it includes priests; cf. n. 62 above. Section 3 (Coustant 655) opens with a reference to "sacerdotes et Levitae . . . in ministerio, ministerii quotidianis necessitatibus, occupantur," but the ministry involved is restricted to *sacerdotes* in the discussion.

¹⁷² Titus 1:15, "Omnia munda mundis, coinquinatis autem et infidelibus nihil mundum," is used here in a similar way.

ritual arguments for them as exists in *Epistolae 1* and *10*.

2) It is difficult to see why the arguments are so closely tied to the needs of a daily ministry when there was no daily Mass or baptism throughout Italy. It is clear from this letter, as in *Epistola 1*, that many clerics were not observing total continence, and it is as difficult to understand here why absolute continence was demanded if there was not really a ritual necessity for it. The difficulty is compounded here by the preliminary need to justify cultic abstinence itself.

3) The extension of an occasional continence of the laity to absolute continence on the part of the clergy is not convincing on the grounds of cult without a daily ministry. There is an enormous difference between occasional abstinence, even if fairly frequent, and a total surrender of the right to marital intercourse. Furthermore, absolute continence does not follow logically from cultic abstinence even for a daily ministry, because it is too precarious; many occasions could arise in which the continual demands of public religion would be removed by a variety in custom or some fortuitous event. The real force of this argument, which is used effectively in *Epistola 10*, is based on the value of continence, but here there is no explicit reference to a special value of either continence or virginity.

4) The mention of the suitability of unmarried men for the ministry and the example of St. Paul are not connected to rite. Section 3 implies that the objectors to continence thought that 1 Tim 3:2 required a cleric to be both married and the father of a family. They are countered by St. Paul's example and his wish that all were as he (1 Cor 7:7), which is interpreted on the one hand to mean that clerics do not have to be married, and on the other to support the demand for continence from those who are. This response gives an absolute value to continence, and the use of Rom 8:8 immediately afterwards implies that any use of marriage, even if quite remote from the time of worship, would disqualify God's minister from serving: "Qui autem in carne sunt, Deo placere non possunt. Vos autem iam non estis in carne, sed in spiritu." Again the demand is not simply one of cultic purity.

Perhaps the problem can be resolved by considering the purpose of this letter. Section 3 is directed to answering a specific query. It was written to refute married clerics who refused to give up the rights of marriage and to respond to their claim that all clerics should be married and beget children. This leaves little room for a panegyric on virginity or continence, although the juxtaposition of 1 Cor 7:5 and Rom 8:8 gives the state of virginity a value not only in general but also specifically for clerics. The relatively extended treatment of the topic of clerical marriage alone of all those considered by the synod and the implication that the use of marriage was defended by Christian clerics corroborate the idea

that a crisis in clerical continence had arisen. It seems that there had been no universal law requiring continence, so the recent attack on a widely accepted usage made it difficult for the synod to explain why continence was not merely admirable but necessary. This could account for the use of an argument based on cultic abstinence, which has two advantages over one based on the excellence of virginity: ritual purity was observed, at least by some, and it introduces an element of constraint beyond that of the general merit of virginity or continence. It succinctly answers the question "Why must a married priest be continent?" and it applies to all clerics even where an ascetical influence may have been absent or resented. Since the problem arose only among married clerics, the discussion was restricted to arguments which could convince them.

Another comment may be made. There is a desire for uniformity expressed here and in the other epistles that have been discussed: "The discipline of the Church must be as uniform as its doctrine is, and the Roman usage is normative for both." If clerical continence was observed in Rome, the practice of the Apostolic See, recognized by imperial favor and law, would be of sufficient weight to impose its custom on any local church under its jurisdiction or which consulted it (cf. *Ep. 10* 3, 8).

CONCLUSIONS

The reader of these decretals must remind himself that they were written in the fourth century, for particular people, and in response to particular problems; they are not the abstract product of a philosopher or historian of religion. A close reading of them has revealed that there were celibate clerics and, at least in Spain, some who observed perfect continence in marriage, and that both of these practices had been challenged successfully. Nothing in the letters demands that the opponents of continence were concerned with ritual purity. The fact that monks and nuns had abandoned their state of virginity for marriage is proof to the contrary. The root of the problem faced by Siricius is better identified as ascetical than ritual.

It is suggested above that Siricius used ritual arguments because they were more inclusive, but that his main concern was with other motives for absolute continence. Nevertheless, his confident use of cultic abstinence, despite many incidental difficulties, implies that it must have been an important part of his position. But the great difference between occasional continence, even for relatively protracted periods, and absolute continence calls into question a ritual basis for this legislation. Absolute continence is a trait of asceticism, as the Eastern Church shows by drawing its celibate bishops from monasteries.

The source of the ritual argument attributed to Siricius is usually given as paganism, but to do so begs many questions about paganism, Christi-

anity, and their interaction. According to some authors, paganism was experiencing in the late fourth century an interiorization or spiritualization in which the external practice of religion was recognized as symbolic of deeper religious and moral commitments. The sources of this change have been much discussed and sometimes Christianity is advanced as one, along with Neoplatonism and dualism. Whatever the cause, it cannot be taken for granted that Christianity, under the influence of paganism, adopted (or maintained) ritual purity in its crudest form when paganism, perhaps partly under Christian influence, was approaching a refined spirituality.

By the principle of ritual purity a period of continence is demanded before participation in worship. It does not extend itself to absolute continence very easily, and apparently none of the relatively few pagan priests or priestesses who refused or abandoned marriage did so from narrowly ritual motives. In fact, the complete surrender of the rights of marriage is less likely to arise from the demands of cult than from an ascetical (or philosophical) exaltation of virginity and continence over marriage. In the earliest papal legislation of clerical continence, both ritual and ascetical elements are present. The element of ritual purity seems not to have been primary, since the ban on marital intercourse was absolute even where it would not have offended ritual principles, e.g., where there was no daily ministry. Nor does the use of ritual purity in the writings of Siricius, Ambrose, or Jerome show a direct influence from paganism. References to pagan priests merely indicate that continence was honored in unlikely settings. On the other hand, as the extent and character of ritual abstinence in fourth-century paganism is uncertain, a direct influence cannot be ruled out altogether. The presence of ritual purity in the papal letters and in pagan religions could have been parallel rather than linear, independent instances of a common religious phenomenon. In any case, the enormous difference between occasional, even fairly regular, cultic abstinence and absolute continence draws into question an exclusively ritual motive for the decretals of Siricius, and their analysis bears this out. Siricius' defense of asceticism and the virginity of Mary against Bonosus and Jovinian, his close contact with Ambrose, and the exercise of his episcopal responsibilities towards ascetics also highlight the importance of ascetical ideals in this legislation.

We conclude our study here, but there are fundamental questions waiting to be answered. The first among them is why and to what extent legitimate sexual intercourse constituted a pollution in fourth-century Christianity and earlier. Another puzzling feature is the narrow limits ritual purity seems to have assumed then. In Judaism and paganism the fundamental areas of human life were surrounded by religious safeguards: birth, death, war, farming and hunting, government, and, of course, the

use of sex. Christian attitudes to these, therefore, merit full attention if the law of continence and celibacy is to be understood. The notion that sacred things themselves pollute is also an important aspect of the question. Like conjugal intercourse, handling Sacred Scripture was a pollution, and Jews washed their hands after reading it.¹⁷³ Similarly, even today sacred vessels are said to be purified when particles of the sacred species are removed. Finally, adoption by Christian thinkers of a philosophical dualism that separated body and soul will have left its mark on Christianity. These were all part of Christian life, and research into their significance, rather than a simple equation between daily Mass and absolute continence, must precede an adequate evaluation of clerical celibacy.

¹⁷³ J. M. Ford, *A Trilogy on Wisdom and Celibacy* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1967) 4: "... coition for the Jews was 'unclean' in the sense of 'holy' rather than 'unclean' in the sense of 'polluted.'" Regarding the pollution caused by contact with the sacred text, cf. R. Brown *et al.*, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* 2 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968) 522, 726.