The Disorder of Books: Priscillian's Canonical Defense of Apocrypha[*]

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> *Caveat omnia apocrypha.*
> —Jerome

▓ Introduction

Heresy and Apocrypha

Historians of ancient Christianity derive a certain satisfaction from the fact that Athanasius of Alexandria, the fervent architect of Nicene Christianity, should also be the first known ecclesiastical authority to "list precisely the twenty-seven books that eventually formed the generally accepted canon of the New Testament."[1] This intersection of canon and creed abets the notion that Christianity matured and solidified in the latter half of the fourth century;[2] henceforth heresy and

[1]David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*," HTR 87 (1994) 395. More general overviews gloss over the fact that this is the "earliest *extant* Christian document" to produce such a list (Brakke, "Canon Formation," 395, emphasis added); see, for instance, Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 80: "The 39th letter . . . contains the *first list* of New Testament books which exactly corresponds with the twenty-seven later canonized."

[2]The coincidence of credal and scriptural "canons" seems to direct the study of Hans von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (trans. J. A. Baker; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972); see especially his comments on 327–33.

extracanonical reading would together constitute evidence of theological backsliding, or, worse, deliberate and malicious distortion of an agreed-upon truth.[3] If Eusebius at the beginning of the fourth century is frustratingly vague on what is and is not "canonical," his reticence from within a period of dogmatic flux is understandable.[4] In contrast, Athanasius toward the century's end is reassuringly firm, scripturally and doctrinally.[5] From Easter of 367 onward, according to such a narrative, heresy and apocrypha would become coterminous, and a messy chapter of Christian history could be closed.

This tidy narrative is, of course, disrupted by more careful attention to the social contexts of canon formation. As David Brakke has argued persuasively, "Athanasius's disputes with other Egyptian Christians over the biblical canon were not struggles over lists of books alone, but reflected more fundamental conflicts between competing modes of Christian authority, spirituality, and social organization."[6] The canon of the Christian Bible did not coalesce any more naturally than did the "canons" of Christian orthodoxy, and all was not settled by Easter 367.[7] Theological and cultural concerns energized conflicts over a scriptural canon: "authority, spirituality, and social organization" in fourth-century Christianity came to be contested around an "order of books."

Reading and Orthodoxy

Historians of late antiquity have begun recently to attend to the cultural significance of reading, drawing in part on the work of Roger Chartier, in his

[3] For such a representation of heresy pushed back even into the third century, see H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London: Mowbray, 1954) 102–48, representing heretical theology as "dilution," "distortion," "archaism," "truncation," and "evacuation."

[4] See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.1–6 (*SC* 31:133–34), where he attempts to distinguish between ὁμολογούμενα, ἀντιλεγόμενα, νόθα, and αἱρετικά.

[5] The contrast between the two figures is made by C. R. Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907) 269–70: "With this list in hand the simple man can at once settle the dispute with the heretic in favor of orthodoxy. We find in the list [of Athanasius] the whole of our New Testament. The notable advance upon Eusebius is that now not a single one of these books remains as a disputed book." Partially cited by Bart D. Ehrman, "The New Testament Canon of Didymus the Blind," *VC* 37 (1983) 1. See also Ehrman ("New Testament Canon," 19–20, n. 1) on other normative interpretations of Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39.

[6] Brakke, "Canon Formation," 399. On canon formation as an advanced stage in cultural *Listenwissenschaft*, the defining feature of which is closure, see Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in idem, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 47–48; and his recent addendum, "Canons, Catalogues and Classics," in A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization* (Studies in the History of Religions 82; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 295–311, especially 303–9.

[7] See Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (original German ed., 1934; 1971; trans. and eds. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel; reprinted Mifflintown, PA: Sigler,

application of "the sociology of texts" to the function of books and libraries in early modern Europe.[8] Chartier has employed the work of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel de Certeau (among others), all of whom have emphasized the complex interplay of theory and practice, of power and knowledge, in the formation of social structures and cultural identity. They have pointed out how the regulation of practice amounts to an exercise of power, and have helped historians interested in the politics of identity to deconstruct sites where institutional power has attempted to naturalize itself.[9] Chartier's theoretical observations on the complex and culturally determined organization of reading practices can help us, in a social history of canon, to pry apart the often naturalized and uninterrogated "formation" of early Christian reading practices. As Chartier observes in his own work, "By reintroducing variation and difference where the illusion of universality spontaneously springs up, such reflection may help us to get rid of some of our over-sure distinctions and some over-familiar truisms."[10]

One such truism, perhaps caricatured above, is the pairing of heresy and apocrypha, inscribed in Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39.[11] It is quite easy to accept

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1996) esp. 147–228. On the fluidity of the New Testament canon after Athanasius, even in the limited area of Alexandria, see Ehrman, "New Testament Canon," 18–19.

[8]Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (trans. Lydia G. Cochrane; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Chartier's use of "bibliography" as a "sociology of texts" derives principally from D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (The Panizzi Lectures, 1985) (London: The British Library, 1986). See, for instance, Mark Vessey, "The Forging of Orthodoxy in Latin Christian Literature: A Case Study," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996) 495–513 and Kim Haines-Eitzen, "'Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing': Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998) 629–46.

[9]Throughout this essay, I rely especially on conceptions of power, institutionalization, and resistance as formulated by Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Pantheon, 1978), especially 81–97. For Chartier's own debt to these theorists, see Chartier, *Order of Books*, 1–4, 27–32, 58–59, and 98–100.

[10]Chartier, *Order of Books*, xi.

[11]The text of this epistle survives in Greek and Coptic fragments. Greek: Périclès-Pierre Joannou, ed., *Fonti: Discipline générale antique (IVe-IXe s.)*, vol. 2: *Les canons des Pères grecs* (Rome: Grottaferrata, 1963), 71–76; Coptic: L.-Th. Lefort, ed., *S. Athanase: Lettres festales et pastorales en copte* (CSCO 150; Scriptores Coptici 19; Louvain: L. Durbecq, 1955) 15–22, 58–62; R.-G. Coquin, "Les lettres festales d'Athanase (CPG 2102): Un nouveau complément: Le manuscrit IFAO, Copte 25," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 15 (1984) 133–58. Composite English translation found in David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 326–32. Here: Athanasius, *Festal Epistle* 39 (Ioannou 75.26–76.8): "Καὶ ὅμως, ἀγαπητοί, κἀκείνων κανονιζομένων, καὶ τούτων ἀναγινωσκομένων, οὐδαμοῦ τῶν ἀποκρύφων μνήμη, ἀλλὰ αἱρετικῶν ἐστιν ἐπίνοια. . . ." This is not to suggest that Athanasius is the first Christian authority to condemn apocrypha. The harmful nature of the production and dissemination of apocrypha was central to Irenaeus's argument against "the Gnostics": see Alain Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque, IIe-IIIe siècles* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1985) 226–29; and idem, "L'écriture

Athanasius's own bias and assume that where extracanonical reading begins, so too does self-conscious deviation from orthodox norms.[12] Yet, as Chartier reminds us, "We must also keep in mind that reading is always a practice embodied in acts, spaces, and habits."[13] Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* (much like his dogmatic writings on Nicene orthodoxy) attempts a double assertion of power that needs to be recognized: on the one hand, the institution of an order of books that is definitive, authoritative, and closed; on the other hand, the masking of his own agency in the institution of that order. As I shall outline below, Athanasius's own "embodiment" in reading vanishes within his order of books. The orthodox canon as imagined at the end of the fourth century, I suggest, sought the delimitation and control of Christian reading practices (and thus of Christian identity) through gestures of power that, once effective, were simultaneously obscured.

Such gestures of power are most evident at points of resistance; to understand better the institutional deployment of the Christian canon in late antiquity, therefore, I propose taking seriously one such extant resistant text: the *Liber de fide et de apocryphis*, most likely authored by the condemned Spanish heretic, Priscillian.[14] I want, for the moment, to read Priscillian's treatise as the work of a professed "orthodox" Christian of the late fourth century: one who acknowledges an inspired canon of scripture, who fears the same heretics as the other orthodox, who unswervingly follows the creed of the holy and apostolic church, but also—as an orthodox Christian—defends the reading and interpretation of extracanonical texts called apocrypha. I approach Priscillian's defense of apocrypha in this way not in order to provide a defense or justification of Priscillian and his followers; I am not simply "enamored" of an ancient heretic, practicing "historical advocacy" at the expense of "even-handed" history.[15] Rather, I sug-

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comme norme hérésiologique dans les controverses des IIe et IIIe siècles (domaine grec)," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 23 (1996) 66–75. It is Athanasius's fourth-century configuration of exegesis, canon, and heresy, and Priscillian's "orthodox" resistance, that is of note here.

[12] See the interesting remarks of Liguori G. Müller, *The "De haerisibus" of St. Augustine: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (Patristic Studies 90; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1956): "But with the discoveries of Priscillian's writings, opinion has changed considerably. Some critics are even inclined to acquit him entirely. However, some traces of these heretical tenets can be found in his newly discovered works. *Tractatus* III (CSEL 18.44–56) seems to *confirm the charge* of his reliance on Apocrypha" (199, my emphasis).

[13] Chartier, *Order of Books*, 3.

[14] The text was discovered in a very early (fifth- or sixth-century) manuscript. On authorship, see Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 63–69 (62 on the MS date, 65 on the quality of the Latin ["contorted prose"]); and Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 24; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 166–67, n. 8. For my own purposes, it is enough to determine the approximate date of this text (certainly late fourth century) and the terms under which its debate is being carried forth.

[15] See the concerns expressed by Patrick Henry, "Why Is Contemporary Scholarship So Enamored of Ancient Heretics?" *Studia Patristica* 17 (1982) 125, and the trenchant response of Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*, 1–2.

gest that we can perceive more clearly what was at stake in the demarcation of a definitive and closed canon of scriptures if we accept Priscillian's own terms for his defense of extracanonical reading. We shall find that what is being contested is precisely the double gesture of power that I described in Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39: the masking of individual agency in the interpretation of scripture, through the institutionalization of a fixed and determinative order of books.

I should make it clear from the outset that I do not intend to indict or acquit either Athanasius or Priscillian of the inscription of power through the institution of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Priscillian is not the freethinking liberal, nor is Athanasius the totalitarian dictator, of early Christian history. Both Christians are attempting to delineate how power is made to function in the early Christian world. The world of late antiquity was a world of hierarchies, in which individuals were understood to occupy regulated positions in a vertically structured world.[16] The difference between Athanasius and Priscillian—that point at which canon and apocrypha intervene as meaningful categories of orthodox division—emerges in their own methods of understanding appropriate manifestations of Christian power.

I shall begin, then, by examining the rhetoric of Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39, in order to uncover more closely his strategies for inscribing and masking the power of Christian readers. He links apocrypha to heresy, orthodoxy to canon, and then insists that attempts to establish individual merit in Christian interpretation are misguided and unorthodox. The canon appears, the interpreter vanishes. Next I shall locate Priscillian's attempts to defend particular instances of apocryphal interpretation: I shall show that his defense of apocrypha, while relying on notions of canon and creed not dissimilar from Athanasius's, adds the extra component of individual reading authority and the open display of intellectual and ascetic prowess. Finally, I shall attend to Augustine's later condemnations of the Pricillianists, condemnations that focus on heretical reading practices and can illuminate the reason for Athanasian success and Priscillianist failure in the fifth-century church.

▓ "The True Teacher": Athanasius on the Canon

The Problem of Categories

Ecclesiastical writers in the fourth century found themselves increasingly embroiled in the problem of scriptural categories. For instance, in his repeated defense of his new Latin translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, Jerome promoted his reliance on the *Hebraica veritas* as a means of untangling unclear New Testament passages: specifically, points where the apostles and evangelists remarked that

[16]See, for insance, the essays of Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

something was "found in Scripture" that was not, in fact, to be found in the Septuagint.[17] For Jerome, the answer lay in the confusion of translation efforts carried out over centuries, from Hebrew (*lingua Domini nostri*), to Greek, to (pre-Hieronymian) Latin. By unraveling this linguistic mess, the answers can be found within the canon of scripture since, as Jerome casually remarked, "the church does not recognize apocrypha."[18]

By the last decades of the fourth century, however, the status of "apocrypha" was much less clear than this offhand remark, or than the vitriolic *Festal Epistle* 39 of Athanasius, might suggest.[19] Jerome himself cannot seem to decide from one project to the next whether the label apocrypha, the acknowledgment of noncanonical status, necessarily determines the inutility of the text in question.[20] His contemporary and rival Rufinus describes *libri apocryphi* as those Christian books that were neither canonical, "from which [the Fathers] wish that we derive the assertions of our faith," nor ecclesiastical, "which they wish to be read in churches, however not appealed to as an authority for the confirmation of faith."[21] This taxonomy leaves open the possibility that apocryphal texts are useful and permissible to the Christian reader, although not in specific doctrinal or liturgical contexts. Religious truth is not perceived as confined to the limited number of texts that are canonical (or *kanonizomena*).[22]

Athanasius, too, had recognized that certain books that were "not canonical"

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[17] Including the following New Testament passages: Matt 2:13, 23; John 19:37; 1 Cor 2:9; John 7:38.

[18] "Apocrypha nescit ecclesia": *Praefatio in libro Paralipomenon (iuxta Hebraeos)*. Text in R. Weber et al., eds., *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Würtembergische Bibelanstalt, 1964), here 1:546.21–547.30. The argument appears also in Ep. 57.7–9 (*CSEL* 54:513–14), *Praefatio in Pentateucho*, and *Praefatio in libro Ezrae* (Weber 1:3.11–16, 1:638.22–28). See Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 50–70.

[19] See the summary of Finian D. Taylor, "Augustine of Hippo's Notion and Use of Apocrypha" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1978) 1–68 and 277–83, including the observations that "we can speak about the apocrypha only in so far as we speak about the canon of scripture" (p. 23), and "the apocrypha arose in an environment that was a combination of religious enthusiasm and pious curiosity" (p. 277).

[20] See for instance *De viris illustribus* 6 (*TU* 14.1:11) on the *Epistle of Barnabas*, which, according to Jerome, is "reckoned among the apocryphal scriptures (*apocryphas scripturas*)"; nevertheless, he does not seem to indicate that the writing is a forgery, and accepts that Barnabas wrote it "for the edification of the church."

[21] Rufinus, *Expositio symboli* 36–38 (*CChr ser. lat.* 20:171–72). Rufinus did not see fit to introduce these terms as translations of Eusebius's ὁμολογούμενα, ἀντιλεγόμενα, and νόθα (see above, n. 4), using instead "*a nonnullis dubitatum*," "*ostenditur*," and "*quam maxime dubitatur*" (*GCS* 9.1:251–53).

[22] See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) 165: "The term [apocrypha] originally had an honourable significance as well as a derogatory one, depending on those who made use of the word." By citing such doctors of the church as Jerome and Augustine in a footnote (n. 2), Metzger implicitly (and unnecessarily) suggests that such evaluations might divide along lines of orthodoxy and heresy.

had nonetheless been prescribed "by the fathers for instruction in the discourse of piety."[23] He thus divides Christian literature into three conceptual piles: the books that are "canonized," those that are only "read" (such as Tobit or the *Didache*), and apocrypha.[24] Throughout the argument of the *Epistle*, however, the middle category tends to slip away, leaving a rough equation between those books that are "not canonized" and the "apocrypha." In *Festal Epistle* 39 he is more insistent that those books that he designates as apocrypha are "the conception of heretics," and that they are "filled with myths . . . [and] their voices are empty and polluted."[25] That apocrypha stem ultimately from the disingenuous hands of heretics has prompted Athanasius's careful delimitation of the twenty-two books of the Old Testament (τῆς . . . παλαιᾶς διαθήκης) and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament (τῆς καινῆς διαθήκης):[26] "I have not written these things as if I were teaching. . . . Rather, because I heard that the heretics, particularly the wretched Melitians, were boasting about the books that they call 'apocryphal.'"[27] A precise and fixed order of books thus serves to delimit orthodox Christian groups from heretics; as Chartier has remarked: "a history of reading must identify the mechanisms that distinguish the various communities of readers and traditions of reading."[28]

Not only does Athanasius align a specific category of books (apocrypha) uniquely with communities of heretics (and those whom they "deceive"),[29] he further associates with these books and readers a certain "tradition of reading": Athanasius, in contrast to his noncanonical opponents, does not write "as if teaching."[30] Brakke has astutely noted that it is precisely the conflict between modes of Christian instruction and institutional affiliation that is being waged in this canon-making *Festal Epistle*: "Athanasius's episcopal form of Christianity, situated in the parish church and placing authority in bishops and priests, competed with an academic form of Christianity, situated in the schoolroom and placing authority in charismatic teachers."[31] The

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[23]Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Joannou 75.17–22): "οὐ κανονιζόμενα μέν, τετυπωμένα δὲ παρὰ τῶν πατέρων ἀναγινώσκεσθαι τοῖς ἄρτι προσερχομένοις καὶ βουλομένοις κατηχεῖσθαι τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας λόγον." These texts include the Wisdom of Solomon, the Wisdom of Sirach, Esther, Judith, Tobit, the *Didache,* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (Joannou 75.22–25).

[24]Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Joannou 75.26–76.3).

[25]Ibid. (Joannou 76.3–4, Lefort 20.26–28; Brakke, *Athanasius,* 330).

[26]Ibid. (Joannou 72.26–74.26).

[27]Ibid. (Lefort 21.11–14; Brakke, *Athanasius,* 332).

[28]Chartier, *Order of Books,* 4.

[29]Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Joannou 76.7–8).

[30]Ibid. (Lefort 21.11): ⲁⲛ ⲍⲱⲥ ⲉⲓⲧⲥⲃⲱ. It is perhaps an unintended irony on Athanasius's part that this rhetorical strategy closely echoes one employed in the *Epistle of Barnabas* 1.8, where the author speaks "not as a teacher" (οὐχ ὡς διδάσκαλος [*SC* 172:78]); the *Epistle of Barnabas* was very popular in Alexandria, and is *not* mentioned as one of the "useful," noncanonical texts in Athanasius's letter. See James Carleton Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background* (WUNT 2.64; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1994).

[31]Brakke, "Canon Formation," 398. We should note, however, that the Melitians, the only

physical locations of reading contrasted by Athanasius, the church and the school-room, might therefore suggest contrasting authorities of reading: "bishops and priests" versus "charismatic teachers."[32] But while the heretical "teacher" remains the object of Athanasian scorn, he does not choose to establish the ecclesiastically sanctioned bishop in his stead. The authority to interpret scripture, for Athanasius, rests not in individuals ("teachers") but rather in the books of the canon them-selves: "Let us be satisfied with only the Scripture inspired by God to instruct us."[33] At the base, of course, we must recognize that this is a struggle over scrip-tural interpretation; Athanasius is not just picking a fight over lists and incidentals. The claim to authority by an individual interpreter becomes, for Athanasius, an irrelevancy or, worse, a mark of heresy.

The Reader Vanishes

Ironically, Athanasius employs his own act of exegesis in the erasure of his interpretive agency. After pondering several passages on "teachers" in the New Testament,[34] Athanasius draws attention to his own reading and that of the *Festal Epistle*'s recipients:

> While I was examining these things, a thought occurred to me that requires your scrutiny [δοκιμασία]. What I thought is this: The task of the teacher is to teach, and that of the disciple is to learn. But even if these people [i.e., in the New Testament passages] teach, they are still called "disciples," for it is not they who are the originators of what they proclaim; rather, they are at the service of the words of the true Teacher.[35]

Beginning with his own interpretive act and then invoking that of his readers ("your scrutiny"), Athanasius cleverly erases both: bishop and lay person alike are "disciples," that is, passive recipients of the wisdom of God, "the true Teacher." Since scripture is the identifiable and uniquely reliable mode of instruction (as the "Word" of the Teacher), interpretive authority can only be ensured through an

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specific "heresy" named in *Festal Epistle* 39, itself operated through episcopal institutions and not merely in "schoolrooms" and "charismatic teachers."

[32]On the significance of the physicality of reading practices, see Chartier, *Order of Books,* 3–4. Several scholars have noted the correlation between early Christian reading practice and the formal modes of interpretation executed in philosophical schools: see Frances M. Young, "The Rhetorical Schools and Their Influence on Patristic Exegesis," in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 182–99; and eadem, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 77–95.

[33]Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Lefort 21.20–21; Brakke, *Athanasius,* 332).

[34]1 Tim 2:7; Eph 4:11; Jas 3:1; all of which seem to speak of the apostles and clergy as "teachers."

[35]Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Coquin, "Lettres festales," 139–40; Brakke, *Athanasius,* 327).

orthodox and authoritative order of books. Instead of defending his own interpretive authority against that of heretical "teachers"—a strategy that would involve assembling personal criteria such as educational level or individual sanctity—Athanasius constructs a textual institution that is altogether unassailable.

Throughout his writings (and throughout *Festal Epistle* 39),[36] Athanasius engages in complex and aggressive interpretation of scripture; at no point, however, does he need to defend his own method or basis for this interpretive execution. The "teaching" he transmits to his fellow Christians (as often as not against heretical "others") is already "there"; he is merely an exegetical "instrument" in the hands of the "true Teacher."[37] In the end it is precisely the Athanasian vision of God, church, and scripture that acquires normative status through an impersonalized order of books. His exegetical sleight-of-hand is persuasive precisely because he has managed to erase his own interpretive agency: "Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[38] If we understand biblical exegesis as an "exercise of power," we begin to appreciate the efficacy of Athanasius's faceless power as wielded from within a stabilized and normative "order of books."

Brakke points out that "Athanasius's attempt to establish a closed canon of Christian scriptures in fourth-century Egypt . . . was even more a conflict among authoritative persons and the social institutions and practices that surrounded them, which included scripture."[39] As I have suggested, however, it was more specifically the rearticulation of the conflict not as one between "authoritative persons" and their respective "institutions," but between "persons" who merely claim authority and the "institutions" which possess it in fact. Yet we must also note that "Athanasius's *Festal Letter*, far from being the decisive climax, was merely a signal moment in an ongoing process of Christian self-definition."[40] To understand the means by which Athanasius's particular canonical institutionalization of scriptural exegesis might be contested, I now turn to Priscillian of Avila's *Book on Apocrypha*.[41]

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[36]Athanasius begins his demonstration of the unique teaching authority of God with Matt 11:27 and Gal 1:11–12 (*Festal Epistle* 39 [Lefort 59.1–9]); he establishes the closed nature of the scriptural canon with Deut 12:32 (*Festal Epistle* 39 [Joannou 75.5–6 and Lefort 20.10–12]); and proves the heretical origins of apocrypha through 2 Tim 4:3–4 (*Festal Epistle* 39 [Lefort 20.23–26]).

[37]Brakke, *Athanasius*, 68, hints at this effect in other contexts: ". . . the episcopal party [of Athanasius] in fourth-century Alexandria used the rhetoric of anti-intellectualism to render their Arian opponents suspect and their own teaching invisible." The correlation between Athanasius's exegetical and theological models (relying on the ontological gap between "Creator" and "created" and the instrumentality of earthly manifestations of the Godhead) has been noted by Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 29–45.

[38]Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 86.

[39]Brakke, "Canon Formation," 417.

[40]Ibid., 419.

[41]I choose this English version of Priscillian's (or his editor's?) somewhat longer title *Liber de fide et de apocryphis*, although it is worth keeping in mind how integral *fides* is

▓ "The Careful Harvester": Priscillian on Apocrypha

The Problem with Priscillian

It is not my intention to suggest that Priscillian composed his *Liber de fide et de apocryphis* in direct or even indirect response to Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39. The two figures lived at opposite ends of the Roman Empire and were active in their respective churches decades apart: Athanasius died in 373, after a tumultuous episcopal career of exile and conflict; Priscillian was executed *circa* 386, after a much briefer career as ascetic leader and contested bishop of Avila.[42] Nevertheless, their concerns over apocrypha and heresy overlap in significant and illuminating ways. Priscillian and Athanasius both attend to the problems of authority in scriptural interpretation, at the intersection of ecclesiology and exegesis, and both are concerned with issues of interpretive agency. Both insist on hierarchy, on a distinction between canonical and apocryphal, and on a distinction between heresy and orthodoxy. Their respective reading practices, however, describe very different attitudes toward Christian authority.

The sometimes stormy career of Priscillian of Avila has often been interpreted by historians as a clash of ecclesiologies, that is, as the confrontation of the freewheeling ascetic "charismatic" Priscillian and the increasingly "routinized" forces of Theodosian orthodoxy.[43] Priscillian's notorious breach of the restriction on extracanonical reading could potentially find explanation from such a model. As Max Weber theorizes, "Most, though not all, canonical sacred collections became officially closed against secular or religiously undesirable additions as a consequence of a struggle between various competing groups and prophecies for control of the community."[44] Two of Weber's prime examples for this confrontational closure are, naturally, the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament.[45]

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throughout the treatise. Compare Athanasius *Festal Epistle* 39 (Coquin, "Lettres Festales," 144): "So then if we seek after faith (πίστις), the way is for us to discover it through them (that is, the scriptures)."

[42]On the date of Priscillian's execution, see Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*, 187–88, n. 1.

[43]See the summary of Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*, 19–21 and 172–74, nn. 67–78. This interpretation derives ultimately from the work of Max Weber; see, for instance, *The Sociology of Religion* (trans. Ephraim Fischoff; 1922; Boston: Beacon, 1993) 46–79. See also the remarks of Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 79: "As a lay teacher Priscillian feels himself called to exercise a prophetic and teaching ministry, the authority of which is found in the immediate grace of Christ his God, not in a mediated commission transmitted through the normal and official authorities of the Church." As will become clear, I find this statement (based, moreover, on the Würzburg tractates) to be a gross caricature, and fairly inaccurate in light of the *Liber de fide et de apocryphis*.

[44]Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 68.

[45]Ibid., 68–69. See M. B. ter Borg, "Canon and Social Control," in van der Kooij and van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization*, 411–23, for a description of canon as the stabilizing mediator between charisma and institution during times of "cultural up-scaling," ultimately producing a desirable form of social constraint.

This sociological explanation suffers, however, under the weight of some of the details of the controversy surrounding Priscillian. The most obvious obstacle is the fact that, before his condemnation (and in the midst of conflict with Spanish bishops), Priscillian accepted ordination as bishop of Avila; in Weberian terms, he moved unproblematically from the position of "prophet" to "priest," without noticeably altering his notions of Christian authority and identity. That is, he was not simply "routinized" by his opponents and made into an institutional mouthpiece.[46] Priscillian did not object to clerical interests; he merely wished to make explicit his own criteria of individual sanctity. More important to our interests here, however, is the fact that Priscillian does not contest the notion of a canon at any time, nor is he attempting to introduce "undesirable additions" into that canon. In fact, his argument for the utility of apocryphal texts is fundamentally undergirded by the existence of a divinely inspired corpus of canonical Christian books.[47] It cannot thus be argued that institutional clerics such as Athanasius were merely "shutting the gates" against the indiscriminate literary tastes of their opponents (even if they themselves did proffer such an argument). Priscillian's defense of apocryphal reading comes out of a context no less cognizant of clerical or canonical authority than Athanasius's condemnation. "What is essential is thus to understand how the same texts can be differently apprehended, manipulated, and comprehended."[48] I have reexamined Athanasius's canon-making attempt as an exercise of power, constraining Christian identity while simultaneously masking the mechanisms of these very constraints. I shall now turn to Priscillian's *Book on Apocrypha*, reading it as an analogous attempt to resist certain regimes of power, while overtly proposing a different understanding of Christian authority in scriptural interpretation.[49]

The Book on Apocrypha *and Canon*

The opening of Priscillian's *Book on Apocrypha* is, unfortunately, no longer intact. What opening lines we possess nonetheless grab the reader's attention:

> . . . would be condemned, since novelty of intellect is the mother of contention, erudition is the author of scandal, fuel of schism, nourishment of heresy, form of mortal sin. Indeed, everything that seems to

[46] Burrus's interpretation of the conflict between Priscillian and his Spanish colleagues as one (in part) centered on "private" and "public" claims to Christian authority (*Making of a Heretic*, 6–12) has the benefit of allowing Priscillian's seemingly world-renouncing rhetoric to be read "in a rhetorical context shaped by the need to demonstrate his fitness for the office of bishop" (p. 10).

[47] As demonstrated by Virginia Burrus, "Canonical References to Extra-Canonical 'Texts': Priscillian's Defense of the Apocrypha," *SBL Seminar Papers* 29 (1990) 60–67; see also below.

[48] Chartier, *Order of Books*, 8.

[49] On multiplicitous and interwoven nodes of "resistance," see Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 95–96.

have been said or done, either by God or by the apostles, so that it might be approved, concerning this it has been written: "Yes is yes, no is no" [Matt 5:37]. Moreover, that which has been found anew by intellects and trickeries is here opposed to the witness of divine virtue, which says, "That which surpasses this is from the Evil one."[50]

Although Virginia Burrus has suggested that these lines should be read as part of Priscillian's own argument,[51] I find it more likely that here, as elsewhere in the tractate, he is caricaturing the position assumed by his opponents.[52] Here we seem to have the gist of the accusation against which Priscillian defends his faith and his reading practice: that the defining feature of the canon is fixity (to this end Matt 5:37 is deployed with some finesse), and breaching this fixed border constitutes arrogance, overweening "erudition," and, in short, heresy. Priscillian's unnamed opponents might as well have cited Athanasius's own *Festal Epistle.*[53] Heresy and apocrypha intersect at that point where the individual interpreter, relying foolishly on his (or her) own "erudition," goes beyond the scriptural norms of ecclesiastical truth.

Priscillian begins his defense from within the limits set by his opponents: "Let us see, therefore, if the apostles of Jesus Christ, master of our conduct and life, did not read from outside the canon."[54] According to those who claim that the gospels themselves speak of a closed canon of ecclesiastical books (as in Matt 5:37), such proof of extracanonical reading would perforce be "approved" (*adprobatum*). Priscillian's star witness here is the apostle Jude, "the twin of the Lord . . . who saw and touched the vestigial marks of the chains and the merits of the divine

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[50]Priscillian *Liber de fide* 44.1–10: ". . . damnet, quoniam novitas ingenii contentionis est mater, eruditio scandali auctor, schismatis alimentum, heresis nutrimentum, delicti forma peccati. Omne enim quod aut a deo aut ab apostolis dictum videtur aut factum vel ut fieret adprobatum, hoc est de quo scriptum est: est est non non; quod autem ex novo ingeniis et calumniis repperitur, hinc testimonium divinae virtutis ostenditur dicentis: quod superabundat ex malo est." References to the tractate are by page and line number of the critical edition of G. Schepss (*CSEL* 18.44–56); all translations of the treatise are my own.

[51]Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*, 76.

[52]Compare Priscillian *Liber de fide* 51.8–12: "Here, on the one hand, as unlearnedness urges insanity and rage drives ignorance to say nothing unless it be Catholic, are you not saying, 'damned what *I* do not know, damned what *I* do not read, damned what I do not seek through the zeal of my sluggish leisure'?" ("Hinc une ex parte indocta urget insania, furor exigit inperitus nihil dicens aliut nisi sint catholica necne quae dicis: damna quae ego nescio, damna quod ego non lego, damna quod studio pigriscentis otii non requiro.")

[53]Again, I do not intend to demonstrate such a direct connection between Athanasius's canonical writing and Priscillian's; I should note, however, that Athanasius was a popular writer in the Latin West (due primarily to his *Vita Antonii*), and Jerome does mention his *Festal Epistles* ("Εορταστικαί *epistulae*") in *De viris illustribus* 87 (*TU* 14.1:45). See also Vessey, "Forging of Orthodoxy." The origin of these accusations, as Burrus, "Canonical References," 60–61, rightly points out, are the Spanish bishop Hydatius and his supporters.

[54]Priscillian, *Liber de fide* 44.10–12: "Videamus ergo, si apostoli Christi Iesu magistri nostrae conversationis et vitae extra canonem nil legerunt."

cross," who cites an eschatological prophecy of Enoch.[55] Priscillian uses this "extracanonical" citation by an apostle—Jesus' twin brother, no less—to invert the charges of his opponents: "If it is not disputed, but is believed among the apostles, that he [Enoch] is a prophet, then why is it called a matter of consideration rather than commotion, counsel rather than temerity, faith rather than falsehood, when a sentence is brought forth for the vengeance of quarrels, and a prophet who preaches God is condemned?"[56] The accusers condemn themselves by disregarding or explaining away (by *consultatio* or *consilium*) the irrefutable evidence of the apostles and scriptures, and in their ignorance and senseless rage condemn Priscillian, who lives honestly by the "apostolic words."[57]

Throughout the treatise Priscillian plays this game with his opponents, pointing out places where the canon itself makes references *extra canonem*.[58] He brings forth the references by Tobit to the "prophets" Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and asks, "Now where in the canon is the book of the prophet Noah read? Who reads the books of Abraham among the prophets of the established canon? Who ever taught that Isaac prophesied? Who has heard the prophecy of Jacob which is laid out in the canon?"[59] Priscillian insists that a rejection of his own reading practices will thus entail a rejection of the Old Testament patriarchs

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[55] Ibid., 44.12–19: "Ait Iuda apostolus clamans ille didymus domini, ille qui deum Christum post passionis insignia cum putatur temptasse plus credidit, ille qui vinculorum pressa vestigia et divinae crucis laudes et vidit et tetigit . . ." followed by a citation of Jude 14–15. Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 77–80, finds in this unique Western conflation of Judas and Thomas/Didymus a demonstration of Priscillian's love of encratitic apocrypha (such as the *Acts of Thomas*). This identification had, however, penetrated into the Greek (and possibly Latin) spheres by the fourth century: see Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 1.13.11 (*SC* 31:43).

[56] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 45.9–13: "De quo si non ambigitur et apostolis creditur quod profeta est, qualiter consultatio potius quam tumultus, consilium quam temeritas, fides quam perfidia dicitur, ubi, dum in ultionem simultatum sententia tenditur, praedicans deum propheta damnatur?"

[57] Ibid., 45.17–18: "dicta apostolica." It is unclear (perhaps deliberately so) whether the "praedicans deum propheta" condemned by his opponents is Enoch or Priscillian himself.

[58] Burrus, "Canonical References," 62: "A strong emphasis on canon is crucial to Priscillian's defense of the reading of these apocryphal writings."

[59] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 45.26–46.5, citing Tob 4:13: "Ait: 'nos fili prophetarum sumus; Noe profeta fuit et Abraham et Isac et Iacob et omnes patres nostri qui ab initio saeculi profetaverunt.' Quando in canone profetae Noe liber lectus est? Quis inter profetas dispositi canonis Abrahae librum legit? Quis quod aliquando Isac profetasset edocuit? Quis profetiam Iacob quod in canon poneretur audivit?" Priscillian clearly considers Tobit as part of the orthodox canon: "Quos si Tobia legit et testimonium prophetiae *in canone* promeruit. . . ." (46.5–6). Throughout this period, the Latin church maintained a Septuagintal canon, including what later became Protestant "apocrypha." See the detailed overview in Ralph Hennings, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Augustinus und Hieronymus und ihr Streit um den Kanon des Alten Testaments und die Auslegung von Gal. 2,11–14* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae; vol. 21; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 132–216.

themselves.[60] Likewise the reference of the evangelist Luke to "the prophet Abel" and a host of murdered prophets stretching unto the "blood of Zechariah" (Luke 11:50–51) necessitates reading *extra canonem* since "if everything which is said is sought in the books of the canon, and to read beyond that is to sin, yet we read of no one killed among those who are established as prophets in the canon."[61] Priscillian scoffs at the hypocrisy of those who would bring forth the legend that Isaiah was murdered (an account widely held by early Christian authors but not found in the Hebrew Scriptures):[62] "If he is the sort who would condemn matters like this [that is, reading apocrypha], let him shut his mouth or, confidently offering forth the story of how this happened, let him say that he also believes in painters and poets!"[63] Priscillian would rather rely on common sense, following the dominical command to "search the scriptures" (John 5:39),[64] as in the case of the burning of the Ark of the Covenant:

> Although it may be read in the canon that the covenant was burned, it is not read in the canon that it was rewritten by Ezra. Nevertheless, since after the covenant was burned it could not have been restored unless it was written down, we correctly put faith in that book which claims Ezra as its author. Even if it is not established in the canon, it should be retained for the praise of the restored divine covenant with veneration appropriate to these matters.[65]

"Searching the scriptures" leads the careful reader to seek out the holes and gaps left by the scriptural narrative, filling them in with, if necessary, apocryphal writings.[66] Otherwise, one must reject the literal (textual) and figurative (spiritual) covenant (*testimonium*) of God. Priscillian also points to the repeated references

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[60]Priscillian *Liber de fide* 46.10–22.

[61]Ibid., 47.3–15: "Si enim omne quod dicitur in libris canonis quaeritur et plus legisse peccare est, nullum ab his qui in canone constituti sunt profetam legimus occisum. . . ."

[62]The tradition that Isaiah was dismembered is found in the apocryphal *Ascension of Isaiah* (*CChr ser. apoc. A* 7–8), and seems to have been commonly accepted by fourth-century Christian writers: see, for example, Hilary of Poitiers *Liber contra Constantium* (*PL* 10:581A); Ambrose *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam* 9.25, 10.122 (*CChr ser. lat.* 14:340, 380); and Jerome, *In Esaiam* 15.57.1.2 (*CChr ser. lat.* 73A:17).

[63]Priscillian *Liber de fide* 47.19–21: "si quis ille est inter huiusmodi qui ista damnaverint, os suum claudat aut certa historiam factae rei proferens picturis se dicat credere vel poetis."

[64]Ibid., 51.13.

[65]Ibid., 52.13–18: "quamvis incensum testamentum legatur in canone, rescriptum ab Hesdra in canone non legitur, tamen, quia post incensum testamentum reddi non potuit nisi fuisset scriptum, recte illi libro fidem damus, qui Hesdra auctore prolatus, esti in canone non ponitur, ad elogium redditi divini testamenti digna rerum veneratione retinetur." To be fair to his opponents, the "canonical" accounts of the burning of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:9; 2 Chr 36:19) do not specifically mention that the *testimonium* was burned. The book "claiming" Ezra is 4 Esdras (Vg), and the restoration of the covenant is found at 4 Esd 14.43.

[66]This malleable prooftext could make the exact opposite point for Athanasius, namely, that religious truth can be found only by "searching the scriptures": Athanasius *Festal Epistle*

to noncanonical texts within the canon as authoritative sources for salvation history. He points out the "torrent" of passages in the books of Chronicles, referring to the books of "Nathan the prophet, Ahijah the Selonite, the visions of Iddo, the words of Jehu son of Hanani," and others.[67] Since Priscillian readily grants to his opponents that every word of the canon has been inspired directly by God, in the face of these intracanonical directions to look outside the canon he archly comments, "I must either affirm that the prophet has invented what God has said, or that God has lied."[68] Of course, by reducing the position of his opponents to absurdity, Priscillian leaves a third option open: to stop quibbling, and accept certain apocrypha as legitimate sources of divine truth.[69]

Much of the *Book on Apocrypha* explains how Priscillian can discern which apocryphal writings contain these kernels of extracanonical truth.[70] He is careful throughout to acknowledge the central institutions of the fourth-century church as fixed and irrefutable: canon and creed. He also acknowledges the ways in which both of these institutional structures might be warped by heretical influence. We have already seen how important the criterion of canonicity is to Priscillian, insofar as extracanonical texts are suggested and validated only by reference to canonized scripture: "A book cannot be condemned whose witness fulfills the faith of canonical speech."[71] This safeguard of the canon allows him to acknowledge that not all apocryphal writings are to be used by the faithful, and that "many things have been falsified by heretics":[72]

> It is better to "lift out the tares from the harvest" [compare Matt 13:29] rather than have the hope of a good harvest be destroyed on account of the tares. For on that account the devil inserted his own words into the

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39 (Joannou 75.1–13): "These [the canonical scriptures] are the wells of salvation, such that the one who thirsts may drink his fill from the ideas within them; in these alone the teaching of salvation has been announced, and let no one add to them nor subtract anything from them. Concerning these things the Lord put the Sadducees to shame, saying: 'You err because you do not know the scriptures, nor their power,' and he exhorted the Jews, 'Search the scriptures, for they bear witness to me.'"

[67] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 50.12–51.8, referring to 2 Chr 20:34, 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 25:26, 26:26, and 33:18–19; as Priscillian remarks, "Who therefore would patiently receive such a torrent?" ("Quis ergo huiusmodi fluctuus patienter accipiat"?) (51.7–8).

[68] Ibid., 50.8–9: "ut aut profetam finxisse quod dixerit deus aut deum mentitum fuisse confirmem."

[69] Priscillian enlists other canonical passages that refer *extra canonem*: Matt 2:14–15; Acts 20:34; Sus 3–5; Ezek 38:14, 17; and Col 4:16 (misattributed to Peter rather than Paul; see also 46:15–16, where Priscillian refers to Jacob as the subject of Ex 7:1, instead of Moses) (*Liber de fide* 48.2–9, 49.21–26, 50.5–12, 55.12–22).

[70] See Burrus, "Canonical References," 62: "Priscillian appears . . . to imply . . . that the use of *any* extra-canonical text is potentially legitimate" (emphasis in original).

[71] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 48.12–14: "certe damnari liber non potest cuius testimonium canonicae elocutionis fidem complet."

[72] Ibid., 56.7–8: "ab hereticis pleraque falsata sunt." On the commonality and awareness of "forgery" in early Christianity, see Norbert Brox, *Falsche Verfasserangaben zur Erklärung der*

holy words [compare Matt 13:25, 39] in order that, without a careful harvester, the harvest should perish with the tares and the good be made to fall with the worse. A single sentence binds the one who has joined the worst to the good and the one who has destroyed the good to the bad.[73]

As Priscillian has already argued, the rejection of apocrypha merely because they are apocrypha would entail censoring or questioning portions of the canonical scripture.[74] Thus rejecting all apocrypha merely because some writings have been doctored by heretics would make Priscillian's accusers as guilty as the heretical interpolators. Priscillian later asserts outright that, simply because heretics interpret apocrypha, the church is not justified in restricting orthodox reading practice: "For in all heresies they have persuasively made the perverse bases of their miserable sects through the interpretation of all the Scriptures. . . . If we wish to condemn everything they read, certainly we also condemn those books which are set in the canon."[75] This one line deconstructs the naturalized equation of heresy and apocrypha that is one of the driving assumptions of Athanasius's *Festal Epistle* 39. Priscillian's countering assumption is clear: the problem is not in the "order of books," but rather in the agents of their interpretation. "It is better to condemn lethal interpretation and sacrilegious custom rather than divine Scripture, since it is written, 'To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God' [Luke 8:10]."[76] What is needed

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frühchristlichen Pseudepigraphie (SBM 79; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975) especially 120–30; Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 22–24 and 41, nn. 84–89; and Vessey, "Forging of Orthodoxy," 505 and n. 26.

[73]Priscillian *Liber de fide* 46.26–47.3: "meliusque est zezania de frugibus tollere quam spem boni fructus propter zizania perdidisse, quod propterea cum suis inter sancta zabulus [diabolus] inseruit, ut, nisi sub cauto messore, cum zezaniis frux periret et bona faceret occidere cum pessimis, una sententia adstringens eum qui pessima cum bonis iungit quam qui bona cum malis perdit." The devil, too, was responsible for the burning of the covenant rectified by Ezra (see above, n. 65): it is likely that this "diabolical" anti-textuality is meant to reflect back on Priscillian's opponents.

[74]See also ibid., 49.29–50.5: "Indeed, we cannot say that God has not said what the apostle has said he has said, nor that the prophet made no prophecy about which the scripture testifies. And since we correctly believe these things according to faith, we do not look at these texts in the canon and therefore, if everything outside the canon is to be condemned, either the testimony of the condemned is received or else there is no authority in the these things written in the scriptures." ("Non enim possumus dicere deum non dixisse quod eum dixisse apostolus dixit aut non prophetatum fuisse quod scriptura profetas dixisse testatur. Et cum haec recte ad fidem credimus, scribta haec in canonem non videmus et ideo, si extra canonem tota damnanda sunt aut qualiter vel damnatorum testimonium recipitur, vel in his quae scribta sunt scribentis auctoritas non tenetur.")

[75]Ibid., 56.12–20: "nam in omnibus heresibus cunctarum scribturarum interpretatione perversa infelicium sectarum insituta de persuasione fecerunt. . . . Si enim omnia quae legunt damnare volumus, certe quae etiam in canone sunt relata damnamus."

[76]Ibid., 56.20–23: "melius est interpretationem funestam et institionem sacrilegam quam scribturam damnare divinam, quoniam scribtum est: vobis datum est scire mysterium regni dei."

is not so much an institutional reliance on the surety of the ordered canon, but rather a "careful harvester" (*cautus messor*), that is, a perceptive reader.

The unquestioning acceptance of and belief in the orthodox Christian creed seems to be Priscillian's first mark of a "careful harvester" of apocryphal truths. The selection process must be guided by the pure heart formed by the Christian creed, not by insidious argumentation:

> It is not possible for one thing to be selected and another rejected, as if choosing from delicacies at a banquet! Nor is it a question of clever reasoning, whereby someone has assumed that which follows: while they make a pretense of the dialectical work of intellects, they end up making sects through persuasion. The Scripture of God is a solid matter, a true matter, not to be chosen by a person but transmitted to that person by God. . . . From this arise heresies: when each individual serves his own intellect rather than God, and is not disposed to *follow* the creed but rather to *argue* over the creed. . . . Indeed, the creed is the seal [*signatura*] of the true matter, and to schematize [*designare*] the creed is to prefer to argue over the creed rather than to believe in it.[77]

Priscillian thus creates a tight link between scripture (*res vera*) and the creed (*signatura rei verae*): both must be accepted rather than disputed. To value disputation over confession produces dissent and, ultimately, heresy. He follows with his own fairly simple credal formulation, heavily emphasizing apostolic tradition and the dangers of heretical speculation:

> The creed is the work of the Lord, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, faith in one God, from whom Christ God is the Son of God, savior born in the flesh, suffering, who rose up on account of love of humanity; who, handing over the creed to his apostles, taught what he was and he would be, showing in himself and in his creed the Son as the name of the Father and the Father as that of the Son, lest the error of the Binionites should prevail. For he showed to the apostles who inquired that he was everything that he was called yet he wished to be believed in as One and indivisible.[78]

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[77]Ibid., 48.14–49.2: "nec potest tamquam inter aepularum mortalium voluntates aliud eligi et aliud repudiari, nec de sofisticis quaestio est, ubi quod quis adsumpserit sequitur et, dum dialecticum ingeniorum opus volunt, sectas de persuasione fecerunt. Scribtura dei res solida, res vera est nec ab homina electa, sed homini de deo tradita. . . . inde denique heresis, dum singuli quique ingenio suo potius quam deo serviunt et non sequi symbolum, sed de symbolo disputare disponunt. . . . Symbolum enim signatura rei verae est et designare symbolum est disputare de symbolo malle quam credere."

[78]Ibid., 49.2–10: "symbolum opus domini est in nomine patris et fili et spiritus sancti, fides unius dei, ex quo Christus deus dei filius salvator natus in carne passus ressurexit propter hominis amorem; qui apostolis suis symbolum tradens, quod fuit est et futuram erat, in se et in symbolo suo monstrans nomen patris filium itemque fili patrem, ne Binionitarum error valeret, edocuit; nam qui requirentibus apostolis omne id quod nominabatur se esse monstravit,

The inclusion of credal affirmations in apologetic works was not uncommon in this period of Christian controversies.[79] Priscillian's creed, while hardly ranging into theological sophistication,[80] allows him to claim all of those points of doctrinal orthodoxy that his anti-apocryphal enemies might have denied him: affirmation of a unified and apostolic faith centered on the oneness of God and the Trinity, irrespective of reading practices. Yet we also begin to see how Priscillian's understanding of Christian reading practice diverges from Athanasius's: by adding the individual confession (albeit of a communal creed) to absolute canonicity as a criterion for appropriate exegesis, Priscillian has begun to move away from a faceless, nonindividual sphere of interpretive authority into the careful delimitation of personal criteria that make up the fitting Christian exegete, the *cautus messor*. Athanasius, on the other hand, presumed that the scriptures themselves produced doctrinal truth within the orthodox reader by the very nature of their inspired unity.[81]

The Reader Reappears

Perhaps the most significant trait of Priscillian's *cautus messor* is hinted at in the beginning of the treatise, when he describes Jesus Christ as "the master of our conduct and life."[82] In defending his own ability to read apocryphal books, and so implicitly constructing individual authority for the interpretation of scripture and orthodoxy, Priscillian's life conducted according to *apostolica dicta* looms large. When he admits that the devil (through heretics) has inserted non-Christian ideas and phrases into noncanonical texts, he relies on individual sanctity to organize the editorial process: "In all these books [that is, the apocrypha] there is no fear— if some things have been inserted by miserable heretics—in deleting and in agreeing to reject that which is not found in the prophets and evangelists. Indeed, for that very saint of God a lie is not embraced by the truth, nor are sacrilegious and hateful things set before the saints."[83] Canonical correspondence ("the prophets

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unum se credi voluit non divisum." Priscillian seems to have invented the heresiological label "Binionite," to contrast his opponents' hyperdivisional Trinitarian doctrine with his own "unionite" theology; see Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 87–88.

[79] See, for example, Rufinus's brief but poorly-timed *Apologia ad Anastasium*, esp. pp. 2–5, 8 (*CChr ser. lat.* 20:25–27, 28); Ambrose's more in-depth *De fide* (to Gratian) (*CSEL* 78:1–307); and Priscillian's own *Liber apologeticus* (to Damasus) (*CSEL* 18:3–33).

[80] Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 86–89, nevertheless manages to combine this passage with others in the Würzburg tractates to reconstruct a highly complex christology and theology of unity for Priscillian and his followers.

[81] See Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 29–45.

[82] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 44.11: "magister nostrae conversationis et vitae."

[83] Ibid., 46.22–26: "In quibus tamen omnibus libris non est metus, si qua ab infelicibus hereticis sunt inserta, delere et <quae> profetis et evangeliis non inveniuntur consentire et respuere. Nec enim illi ipsi deo sancti mendacium in veris et sacrilega amplectuntur vel detestabilia pro sanctis" (textual emendation by Schepss).

and evangelists") remains the standard of verification, but the personal guarantee of the interpreter's holiness is the most reliable control against heretical interpolations. Furthermore, he points out that the individual sanctity that safeguards his apocryphal reading is not derived from the "novelty of intellect":[84] "I cannot say that which I am compelled to speak, that, in my case, following the apostle was not the learnedness of faith, but rather the trap of one deceived."[85] The "intellect" that his accusers portray as heretical Priscillian defends as eminently apostolic, as *eruditio fidei*; it is their sluggishness, "seeking leisure rather than toil," which should be condemned.[86]

Priscillian's criterion of individual holiness and apostolicity also makes evident the stratification of readers in the Christian community. He admits that not all Christians should read the potentially dangerous texts found outside the canon. When books are "communicated to ignorant ears," the hearers might end up "rushing into the pit of heretical falsehood: for they do not maintain the discipline of apostolic speech to its fullest."[87] Priscillian, an educated Christian of strong ascetic proclivities, imagines that he lives the apostolic life "to its fullest" (*ad plenum*).[88] He is a "servus domini considerans,"[89] a servant of the Lord engaged in contemplation of the mysteries of the Godhead through the interpretation of scripture and the use of various extracanonical texts that might also speak of God.[90] He is willing to take responsibility, to claim agency, in his biblical exegesis:

> We want you to be confident that we have spoken previously out of surety. I have the witness of God, I have that of the apostles, I have that of the prophets; if I seek out that which characterizes the Christian person, if [I seek] that which characterizes the ecclesiastical disposition, if [I seek] that which characterizes God Christ, I find those who preach God, I find those

[84] Ibid., 44.3; see above.

[85] Ibid., 47.26–48.1: "Non possum autem dicere quod loqui cogor, ut mihi apostolum sequi non eruditio fidei fuerit, sed muscipula decepti."

[86] Ibid., 53.6: "quae otium potius quam laborem requirit." See also *Liber de fide* 51.1–12: "damna quod studio pigriscentis otii non requiro" (ironically "citing" his opponents).

[87] Ibid., 56.6–11: "inperitis haec non committenda auribus, ne . . . haereticae falsitatis inruant foveam, dum apostolici sermonis non ad plenum retinent disciplinam."

[88] Besides the repeated hints at a "fuller" apostolic life in the *Liber de fide et de apocryphis*, the strong ascetic message of Priscillian and his followers has been established through other evidence in the Würzburg tractates and the various condemnations against Priscillian and Priscillianists; see Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 77–80; Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*, 14–15, 26–27, and 29.

[89] Priscillian *Liber de fide* 56.25.

[90] Priscillian also seems to be operating under a highly textualized understanding of the transmission of truth that he opposes to the diabolical "antitextuality" of his opponents (see above, n. 73); see ibid., 53.15–18: "Divine speech was indeed not able (since everything it had said belonged to it) when speaking about itself to speak a text about another, but only to report about itself; saying there that 'it is written' necessarily offers a responsible basis for our

who prophesy. It is not fear, it is faith, because we have cherished that
which is better and have rejected that which is worse.[91]

Priscillian's first-person assertions fly in the face of the carefully constructed and
impersonal order of books devised by such ecclesiastical authorities as Athanasius.
The fiction that only such a meticulously guarded order of books can withstand the
brutal assault of the heretics and their apocryphal myths is unmasked and even
inverted by Priscillian's individually sanctioned reading:

> Since through such books (which diligence has kept outside the order
> of canonical books for the task of reading and which are held aside for
> the confirmation of those texts we read in the canon), the greater part
> of heretical sensibilities, waging war against the Catholics, showed
> that they prefer to falsify rather than hold true, in this way we might
> uphold that apostolic sentence by the law that "every spirit that denies
> Jesus is not from God, and every spirit who confesses Jesus Christ is
> from God" [compare 1 John 4:3, 2].[92]

Canonicity remains the tool of the orthodox interpreter, although not (as for
Athanasius) as a bulwark against noncanonical texts which are, by nature, false.
Rather the canon ensures that only those Christians who have demonstrated their
fitness for the "task of reading" (*legendi labor*) will be able to make use of such
potent weapons against the "falsified" interpretations of "heretical sensibilities."
Reading practice now precedes the battle of orthodoxy against heresy; it does not
proceed from it. Canon and apocrypha are not the impersonal badges of communal
institutions, Church and Heresy; rather they are the tools of individually
sanctioned and hierarchically ranked readers within the institutions of the church
who must defend and justify their interpretive practice.

▓ Augustine's Readings of Heresy: "Beware of the Wolves"

Athanasius was regarded by Christian successors in the East and West as the
eminently orthodox defender of the church; Priscillian was repeatedly condemned
throughout the western Empire as an arch-heretic for decades after his execution.

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reading." ("Potuit enim sermo divinus, quoniam ipsius erat omne quod dixerat, tamquam ab
se loquens non scribtum ab alio dicere, sed ex se ipse proferre; dicens autem scribtum esse,
necessario proponens nobis legendi sollicitudinem.")

[91]Ibid., 51.15–22: "Confidentiam iam volumus esse quod dicebamus antea esse cautelam.
Habeo testimonium dei, habeo apostolorum, habeo profetarum: si quaero quod Christiani hominis
est, si quod ecclesiasticae dispositionis, si quod dei Christi est, in his invenio qui deum praedicant,
in his invenio qui profetant. Non est timor, fides est, quod diligimus meliora et deteriora respuimus."

[92]Ibid., 51.23–29: "quoniam in huiusmodi libris, quos extra canonicorum librorum numerum
ad legendi laborem diligentia retentebat adque ad conprobanda ea quae scripta in canone
legimus adsumpti sunt, hereticorum in pleraque sensus invadens pugnam catholicis parans
falsare maluit quam tenere, illam apostolicam feramus iure sententiam omnem spiritum qui
negat Iesum de deo non esse et omnem spiritum qui confitetur Christum Iesum de deo esse."

In their respective attempts to use "texts and their meanings to situate [them-selves] and [their] community with respect to society andculture,"[93] Athanasius's (re)vision of an impersonal order of books enjoyed more success.[94] Since we have seen that a fairly sophisticated set of arguments could be employed to resist this faceless ideal of a Christian interpretive community, it is worth ask-ing what attitudes in the late fourth- and fifth-century church were less than amenable to such forms of resistance. As is the case for so many aspects of late antique Christian cultural formations, the prolific stylus of Augustine of Hippo Regius can open a window into the transformations of fourth- and fifth-cen-tury Christian identity. Augustine, writing some decades after the deaths of Athanasius and Priscillian, does shed some light on how Priscillian's intellec-tually and ascetically constructed resistance could be rearticulated into exegetical "heresy." I do not suggest that Augustine provides us with a disin-terested third-party portrait of Priscillian's followers, but rather that his understanding of their "heretical" nature can give us clues as to how percep-tions of reading practice and orthodoxy came to narrow and harden in decades following the tumultuous fourth century.

Foremost in Augustine's condemnation of Priscillian and his followers stand their "unorthodox" reading practices. Although the vile Manichaeans "accept what they want and reject what they don't want" from the canon of scripture,[95] the Priscillianists are "more cunning [*versutiores*] even than the Manichaeans. For they set aside none of the canonical scriptures, reading them all at the same time with the apocrypha and employing them for authority; but, altering what-ever is in the holy books by allegorizing them into their own meanings, they twist them into their own error."[96] The implication is that Priscillian's followers are more dangerous than the Manichaeans precisely because they pretend to re-spect the boundaries of canon. The foreign element of "apocrypha," however, allows them to twist the properly immutable and fixed nature of scripture into "error," a procedure which, apparently, would not be possible within the strict boundaries of orthodox canonicity. It is Priscillian's very canonical defense of apocrypha that makes him the most dangerous of heresiarchs.

The reading practices of the Priscillianists come under even sharper attack in a letter from Augustine to a Bishop Ceretius, who has confiscated apocryphal hymns from a certain Argirius. "Without a doubt these are Priscillianist Scriptures!"

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[93] David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Ber-keley: University of California Press, 1992) 236.

[94] Adhémer d'Alès, *Priscillien et l'Espagne chrétienne à la fin du IVe siècle* (Paris: Beauschesne, 1936), speaks of "l'hérésie priscillianiste" after 563 as being "frappée à mort" (35).

[95] Augustine *De haeresibus* 46.15 (*CChr ser. lat.* 46:318): "quod volunt inde accipiant, et quod nolunt reiciant."

[96] Ibid., 70.2 (*CChr ser. lat.* 46:334).

Augustine proclaims, with a mixture of sadness and anger.[97] He again explains how the exegetical practice of Priscillianists is more dangerous than Manichaeans, Marcionites, Montanists, or any other sect that openly rejects part or all of the orthodox canon:[98] "For the Priscillianists accept all of it, both canonical and apocryphal together. But whatever is in opposition to them, they twist by exposition [*expositione*] into their own perverse meaning, sometimes by methods bright and astute, at other times ridiculous and dim." Again, the Priscillianists do not demonstrate *orthodoxy* by their acceptance of the canon, but rather cunning. Nor does he allow for Priscillian's defense of *eruditio fidei*, since their hollow interpretations are as often thick and plodding as clever. Augustine adds a further accusation, one that reveals the vilest danger of Priscillianist reading practice:

> Nor do they believe to be true those very same things which they lay out before those people who are strangers to their sect; *otherwise they might seem to be Catholic, and not far off from the truth, for even in the apocryphal Scripture they discover Catholic meanings, or at least they seem to want to do so.* But when they are among their own they think other things, and among their own they teach and learn things which they do not dare put forth, since they are blasphemous and hateful. Nevertheless they preach to those who honor the Catholic faith that which they do not hold, but under which they hide. Perhaps it is possible to find heretics who are more impure [*immundiores*], but no one compares to them in falsehood [*fallacia*].[99]

Their very proximity to Catholic teaching, ensured by their own "cleverness" and derived from apocryphal scriptures, suggests to Augustine that they must simply be liars: former Priscillianists, "now liberated," recall the oath, "Swear, perjure, but do not hand over the secret."[100] Otherwise, if orthodox truths could be derived from apocrypha, the entire order of books would collapse.

   More important than Augustine's accusation of the inherent falsity of the Priscillianists is his explanation of why they append apocryphal reading to the orthodox canon in the first place. Citing the "Priscillianist" hymn sent to him by Ceretius,[101] Augustine concludes: "Here is their great reason why this hymn of theirs should not be in the canon, since it was to be hidden 'like the mystery of the king' [*sacramentum regis*: compare Tob 12:7] from those who consider things according to the flesh, and not according to the spirit and truth of God."[102] That readers and reading practices should be hierarchalized is a familiar theme from

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[97] Augustine *Ep.* 237.1 (*CSEL* 57:526).

[98] Ibid., 237.2 (*CSEL* 57:526–27).

[99] Ibid., 237.3 (*CSEL* 57:527–28, emphasis added).

[100] The date of this epistle is uncertain, but it seems to have come after Augustine's refutation of a Priscillian doctrine of "lying" in the *Contra mendacium* (*CSEL* 41:467–528).

[101] Apparently portions of the *Acts of John*; see Chadwick, *Priscillian*, 156.

[102] Augustine *Ep.* 237.4 (*CSEL* 57:528).

Priscillian's own *Book on Apocrypha*, but Augustine subtly shifts Priscillian's explicit criteria of individual sanctity and *apostolica dicta* into the vaguely Manichaean disjunction of "flesh" and "spirit." The danger lies in Priscillianist notions of church and hierarchy, in the open display of power through ascetic (and, to the sensitive Augustine, Manichaean) practices that act as meritorious criteria for leadership and clergy. That the Priscillianists go on to use canonical texts in their explanation of the hymn merely proves to Augustine that their reading of the apocrypha is disingenuous in the first place: "It would be very easy to examine the rest [of the hymn] and to see that what they call good and honest matters in their exposition of this hymn is already to be found in the canon. Hence this is not their reason, but their subterfuge. . . . Whence it is to be concluded not unjustifiably that they do not wish to speak through their expositions, but rather to hide what they think."[103] Their stratification of Christians through apocryphal exegesis is a ruse, the goal of which not even Augustine can reveal, since these heretical readers are so imbued with the spirit of lying. He can only assure his fellow-bishop that the Priscillianists, with their shifty extracanonical reading and their crafty splitting of "fleshly" and "spiritual" readers, are up to no good.

The manner in which Augustine incorporates the reading practices of Priscillian and his followers into his more general "vindication of Christian mediocrity"[104] suggests how the resistant exegetical ideal of Priscillian might have failed. An ecclesiastical model privileging the excellence of its leading individuals was giving way to a model of a communal mass constructed and held together by sheer divine will. In terms of scriptural exegesis, such a universalized model favored an impersonal "order of books" over an ascetically stratified order of readers. Such a call for the recognition of individual ability threatened the delicately balanced episcopal institution envisioned by Athanasius or Augustine, and smacked of division, elitism, and the abrogation of divine will.

Jerome, at the beginning of the fifth century, writing on the education of his friend Paula's granddaughter, advised that she "beware of all apocrypha and, if ever she might wish to read it not for the truth of doctrines but for the reverence of miracles, let her know that they were not written by those to whom they are ascribed, and that many vile things have been mixed in and that they require great prudence to find the gold in the filth."[105] Some decades later, disabused of the strict notions of ascetical status and hierarchy so characteristic of Jerome as well as

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[103]*Ep.* 237.9 (*CSEL* 57:532).

[104]The apt phrase of Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 53; see his discussion on 45–61.

[105]Jerome *Ep.* 107.12.3 (*CSEL* 55:103). Although here it seems clear that Jerome is speaking of extracanonical apocrypha such as the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, he is also the first Christian authority in the West to insist on the notion of Old Testament "apocrypha," those LXX texts (such as Tobit and Judith) not found in the Jewish Scriptures; see Hennings, *Briefwechsel*, 189–99.

Priscillian, Augustine advises Ceretius to "beware," not of potentially dangerous texts, but rather of the "wolves" who break in and "wound" his sheep through devious interpretation.[106] The power of Christian interpretation must remain in the books themselves; claims to authority on the part of readers can only signal the wolfish fangs of heresy.

▓ Conclusions

By juxtaposing Athanasius's canon and Priscillian's apocrypha, I have suggested that we are witnessing a contest over the proper ecclesiastical location of scriptural exegesis and the ways in which interpretive practice and theories of power clashed in the constitution of the church in late antiquity. D. F. McKenzie, in his work on the sociology of books, has "contrasted two concepts of 'text.' One is the text as authorially sanctioned, contained, and historically definable. The other is the text as always incomplete, and therefore open, unstable, subject to a perpetual re-making by its readers, performers, or audience."[107] For Athanasius, an irrefutably stabilized order of books, containing unmediated teaching directly from the hand of God, marked out a divinely sanctioned ecclesiastical space in which individual readers are more or less interchangeable. Priscillian, while still recognizing the institutions of the church and the fundamental importance of the canon as an inspired corpus, insisted that the canon itself constantly opened outward; the degree to which an individual reader could follow these perilous textual traces by the intertextual reading of apocrypha must therefore depend upon that reader's own ascetically justified faith and apostolic expertise.[108] Athanasius's vision of the church called upon its members to ignore the role of the exegete (usually Athanasius himself) in defining religious identity. Priscillian's vision of the church demanded that "lesser" members willingly submit to the knowledgeable reading of their religious betters.

I am not trying to paint Priscillian's notion of Christian reading practice as more "open" or liberal than Athanasius's. Both sought to inscribe their own understanding of ecclesiastical power and authority into the institutions of Christian exegesis: canon, clergy, and creed. The difference lies in their respective representations of their own hierarchical power and authority, and the means they leave open to Christian readers to respond to or resist that power. When the entire ecclesiastical body is imagined beneath the aegis of a single divine "Teacher," the open exegesis of one "careful harvester" can only be suspect. The pastoral power

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[106]Augustine *Ep.* 237.9 (CSEL 57:532).

[107]McKenzie, *Bibliography*, 45, emphasis added.

[108]See Chartier, *Order of Books*, 4: "There are equally great differences between the norms and conventions of readers, legitimate uses of the book, ways to read, and the instruments and methods of interpretations." The irreconcilable conflict here, of course, is that two Christian figures are applying radically different "norms and conventions" to the same theoretical community.

deployed in the interpretation of texts has become so veiled by the institutionalized order of books that any attempt to claim and articulate that authority—as by Priscillian, through the canonical defense of apocrypha—can be seen only as mendacity and the dark, unspeakable threat of a heretical wolf in orthodox sheepskins.