INTRODUCTION

"Why Is Contemporary Scholarship So Enamored of Ancient Heretics?" So runs the title of a paper presented at Oxford's 1979 Eighth International Conference on Patristic Studies.[1] Subsequent years have only intensified this academic infatuation: extending sympathy to the ultimate losers in the debates of the past, Patristic scholars have continued to be drawn to revisionist interpretations of ancient theological controversies. From one perspective, the recent fascination with controversy merely echoes the polemical preoccupations of the ancient texts, which inhabit a rhetorical universe shaped by the pressures of an intensely competitive society. But with the waves of postmodernist cultural theory beginning to lap at the edges even of the highly conservative fields of ancient history and historical theology, other answers to the question of the current lure of the heretical also suggest themselves. A heightened interest in the subaltern and the subversive flourishes in pockets of inquiry dispersed throughout the academy, as scholars seek to uncover the strategies by which men and women have historically resisted the social and discursive disciplines, the "regimes of truth," of which orthodoxies are formed. As the clarity of the monologic becomes suspect, a new appreciation emerges for the complexity of the dialogic, the many-voiced speech of the historical texts.

For scholars of ancient Christianity seeking to develop a postmodern hermeneutic, gnosticism remains a rich resource,[2] both in the seeming exuberance of its early resistance to the emergent Christian orthodoxy and in the unusual fact of the accessibility of those "other" voices once again made audible through the mid-twentieth-century rediscovery of the Nag

Hammadi corpus.[3] At the same time, the multifaceted evolution of orthodoxy and heresy in the Constantinian churches has begun to exert its own fascination in the "heresy-enamored" pockets of Patristic scholarship, giving shape to a distinctive and equally compelling narrative that plays itself out in both local and empirewide arenas. When volumes on Donatism, Arianism, Nestorianism, and, most recently, Origenism have captured the scholarly imagination, there is space for another look at Priscillianism. Wedged into the westernmost corner of the empire and seeming initially to represent just one more idiosyncratic local variant of Manichaeism, Priscillian's geographically and theologically marginal heresy nevertheless demands attention based on its leader's unprecedented execution and the intriguing fluidity of the movement's ambiguous texts, accessible since their 1885 rediscovery in Germany. Stemming from Priscillian's own circle, the so-called Würzburg tractates, like their Nag Hammadi counterparts, offer an insider's view of a heresy, revealing the subtle strategies by which a religious movement both resisted and coopted the late-ancient discourse of orthodoxy in a time of particular social and cultural flux.

Like the gnostics, Priscillian had long been known from the reports of hostile sources, and these continue to shape our understanding of him, providing an unavoidable first context for the interpretation of Priscillianist works.[4] According to Sulpicius Severus' *Chronicle*, the most important of the sources, Priscillian began his career as a lay teacher with particular influence among women. His ascetic disciplines and supposedly gnosticizing doctrines produced controversy and division within the churches of Spain, and in 380 his practices and teachings were attacked by a small group of Spanish and Aquitanian bishops gathered at Saragossa. Soon thereafter Priscillian was consecrated bishop of Avila by other bishops friendly to his cause, but he and his two strongest episcopal supporters were subsequently forced to leave their sees in order to defend themselves against charges of heresy and an illegitimate episcopacy. Priscillian and his colleague Instantius were eventually reinstated, only to be summoned thereafter to appear as defendants before an episcopal council at Bordeaux. When Instantius was deposed by the council, Priscillian appealed his own case to the emperor. This appeal did not have the hoped result: charges of heresy were augmented with accusations of sorcery and sexual immorality, and circa 386 Priscillian and several of his associates, including the Aquitanian noblewoman Euchrotia, were executed at Trier by order of the emperor Magnus Maximus himself.[5] The ascetic's violent end gave rise to continuing conflict. At the beginning of the fifth century, the Gallic churches were still divided over the role played by the bishops who had testified against Priscillian, and a core of supporters in the Gali-

cian province of northwestern Spain continued to honor Priscillian as a martyr for decades, if not longer,[6] while others agreed in condemning him as a heretic. Indeed, the charges against Priscillian were further elaborated after his death, at least partly in an effort to justify his brutal execution. Severus and other fifth-century sources depict the Spanish teacher variously as a gnostic seducer, a Manichaean astrologer, a Sabellian, a Samosatene, and the founder of a new heresy of "Priscillianism."[7]

In the course of the past century, the long-available sources on Priscillian have been brought into dialogue with the texts found at Würzburg: three apologetic works, seven Lenten homilies, and one prayer, produced within the circle of late-fourth-century Spanish heretics and probably written by Priscillian himself.[8] The second of the Würzburg tractates, a letter to Bishop Damasus of Rome, confirms the basic reliability of Severus' account of events from shortly before the Council of Saragossa to Priscillian's first departure from Spain, during which time the letter was composed. However, in other respects the tractates disrupt the heresiological tradition transmitted by Severus and others: the anticipated indications of blatant gnostic, Manichaean, or monarchian errors are elusive, if not altogether absent. The tractates reveal the thoughts of an ascetic exegete whose "road" (*iter*)[9] or "discipline of life" (*vivendi . . . disciplinam*)[10] is mapped by the traditional baptismal creed[11] and supported by the witness of the canonical scriptures. Priscillian does indeed defend the use of apocryphal writings, some of which he acknowledges to have been corrupted by heretical editors. However, his defense is based solidly on the authority of the canonical scriptures: he urges that the canonical text itself both impels the Christian scholar beyond canonical boundaries and enables the scholar to separate the wheat from the tares of heretical interpolation.[12] Similarly, Priscillian's exegesis of canonical texts does support a mitigated dualism on both anthropological and cosmological fronts. Yet in spite of his ambiguous assessment of temporal and embodied existence, Priscillian distinguishes his understanding of the material cosmos sharply from that of the Manichaeans,[13] insisting not only on the ultimate goodness of the material and temporal creation[14] but also on the potential holiness of the human body as a dwelling place suitable for God.[15] Finally, in a period in which trinitarian orthodoxy eluded even the most acute and well-informed Greek-speaking theologians, the high christology and strong monotheism implicit in Priscillian's repeated references to the "God Christ" do not seem to constitute any significant divergence from the western Nicene mainstream.[16]

Even this brief account should suggest some of the new paths of investigation opened up by the Würzburg tractates. The Priscillianist texts

have first of all challenged the heresiological claim that the opposition to Priscillian derived primarily from his propagation of doctrines widely acknowledged by his contemporaries to be heretical. Church historians have long tended to doctrinalize religious controversy narrowly by utilizing predefined categories of theological deviance to identify the villains in the Christian story. Predictably, then, some scholars have attempted to salvage the portrait of Priscillian as a gnostic, a Manichaean, or a monarchian, claiming either that the tractates are not reliable evidence for Priscillian's secret heretical teachings or that there are hints of heretical beliefs even in the tractates.[17] Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that these categories fail to capture the unorthodoxy of Priscillian's thought, as measured by the doctrinal standards and religious sensibilities of his own time. It consequently becomes necessary to look beyond conventional labels of theological deviance in order to understand the roots of the conflict that brought about the condemnation and execution of Priscillian. Indeed, one of the fascinations of the study of this controversy is that it nudges scholarship off the narrow and well-trodden paths of doctrinal classification, disrupting the false clarity offered by the categories of orthodoxy and heresy—or, for that matter, by their modern sociological counterparts, church and sect. Only by abandoning these paths, it seems, can we comprehend more fully the roots of the deep fear and mistrust that Priscillian, and later "Priscillianism," inspired.

If the Würzburg tractates allow a clearer view of Priscillian, they also reveal much about his opposition. By providing a more accurate impression of Priscillian's thought, the tractates help to clarify the source of his opponents' outrage. Equally important, these documents allow a glimpse into the evolving mechanisms of late-ancient orthodoxy. Used with caution—for Priscillian himself is not always reliable—the tractates offer a standard of comparison against which the rhetorical strategies of Priscillian's detractors can be more clearly understood and appreciated. And insofar as they preserve a contemporary and firsthand account of the early years of the controversy, the tractates expand our knowledge of the accusations Priscillian's opponents actually leveled against him. It becomes possible to explore in some detail the process by which various labels of deviance were crafted and invoked in order to define and strengthen late-fourth-century constructs of orthodoxy.

"Why do I speak about Priscillian, who has been condemned by the secular sword and by the whole world?"[18] Jerome's rhetorical question gives expression to the interest that motivates this study and finally impels it well beyond the Priscillianist tractates themselves. Why and how did Christians of late antiquity "speak about Priscillian" both in the years

prior to his execution and in the decades following his death? The following pages trace the strategies of labeling deployed in the controversy surrounding Priscillian, locating these within the broader history of Christian heresiology. At the same time, looking beyond the particular offenses highlighted in the heresiological sources, this study seeks to identify and analyze the broader underlying cosmological and social conflicts negotiated through the "talk" about Priscillian. Disputes about authority and gender roles frequently surface in the ancient sources documenting the Priscillianist controversy. These, I suggest, point to larger anthropological, ecclesiological, and cosmological debates centering around fundamental questions about the nature of the Christian community and the relation of that community to the surrounding world.

Priscillian and his followers seem to have displayed little interest in distinguishing women's roles from those of men, and this very disregard scandalized their opponents. Additionally, the Priscillianist Christians were quick to recognize the informal authority of the exceptional ascetic, exegete, or teacher, while their detractors were more keenly attuned to the official authority wielded by bishops and clergy. These diverging attitudes toward gender and authority provide clues to the issues at the heart of the Priscillianist controversy: namely, the fundamental differences of perspective on the nature and location of the Christian community and its relation to the extra-ecclesial world. Was the church a "political" community in which relationships between individuals were sharply delineated by the hierarchical ranks of office and gender? Or was it a "familiar" social body in which relationships were ordered by the more fluid hierarchies of birth, material resources, experience, education, or personal gifts of insight or eloquence? Should the Christian community accommodate itself to the surrounding culture and society? Or was that community compelled to protest the corrupting influence of the secular arena with its dominant public hierarchies of office and gender? Correspondingly, were Christians fundamentally in harmony with the divinely created cosmos, or were they called to wage battle with the evil forces of a fallen world?

Members of the same late-fourth-century Spanish congregations seem to have answered these questions very differently, and their divergent outlooks derived in part from an ambivalent Christian heritage. The irrepressible authority of the prophet, visionary, confessor, and teacher had long sought an uneasy resting place along the edges of an emergent hierarchy of ecclesiastical office. Moreover, even in times of peace, Christian literature continued to interweave repeated invocations of the radical disjunction of the martyr's death with the strains of an assimilating apologetic. Affirmations of the goodness of the created order were juxtaposed with

profound expressions of the distance separating the fallen material cosmos from its heavenly counterpart—conflicting sensibilities only occasionally brought together coherently within the conceptual framework of a theological genius like Origen. For at least two centuries, accusations of heresy had been used to clarify unsettling ambiguities and conflicts arising out of the varying interpretations of a complex tradition, and the orthodoxy that had emerged was appropriately malleable, constantly reshaped in response to pressures that shifted with time and place.

If the Spanish dispute had its roots in earlier Christian tradition, it also had a peculiarly late antique cast. In a period of social flux, divergent secular social models affected the church both indirectly, by a kind of cultural osmosis, and more directly through the influence of newly converted upper-class men and women who were accustomed to exercising authority within the secular realm. At the same time, on the cosmological front, late-ancient Christians responded variously to dual pressures of transcendence and anti-determinism as they confronted theological problems that seemed to emerge with new clarity in a society reorganizing itself around a simplified and radicalized contrast between the very powerful and the powerless.[19] Tracing these fourth-century influences and pressures, it is possible to identify two strands running through the documents of the Priscillianist controversy: first, the divergence between public and private perspectives and, second, the divergence between culturally accommodating and culturally alienated strategies of social and theological self-definition. One notes finally that the negotiation of the dispute between Priscillian and his opponents took place in the context of an imperial patronage of Christianity that lent new urgency to the old questions of orthodoxy and heresy; the fourth-century constructions of orthodoxy and heresy form the third connective strand of this interpretation.

Mapping the Christian Community: The Shifting Boundaries of Public and Private Spheres

The terms "public" and "private" have the advantage of a certain familiarity and intuitive comprehensibility. Thus, the general editor Georges Duby, in his foreword to the first volume of the *History of Private Life*, can avoid lengthy definitions of the private by simply appealing to the "obvious fact" that "at all times and in all places a clear, commonsensical distinction has been made between the public—that which is open to the community and subject to the authority of its magistrates—and the private."[20] Indeed, as terms of "ordinary discourse" evoking "unreflectively

held notions and concepts" that shape day-to-day lives,[21] "public" and "private" may not appear in need of interpretation at all. But it is doubtful whether the dichotomous categories with which so many operate are in fact either as universal or as transparently "commonsensical" as is sometimes claimed. Indeed, I would suggest that the public-private distinction is most fruitfully applied to the study of the Priscillianist controversy precisely because it is an artifact of the very Mediterranean cultures that shaped the terms of the late-ancient controversy. Having received its classic articulation in the works of Athenian philosophers, it became part of the cultural *koine* of hellenistic Greece and of Rome, whence it has seeped so deeply into Western consciousness that the dichotomous construct seems to reflect some "obvious" aspect of all social life. The public-private distinction remains useful as an analytical tool that resonates not only with our own habits of thought but also with the self-understanding of the late-ancient cultures with which we are concerned. But at the same time it is itself a cultural construct, which must be contextualized and interpreted in its particularity.[22]

Briefly summarized, the classical elaboration of the public-private distinction rests on the assertion that human society is typically organized into households and political states, social units that can be distinguished by group, function, physical space, and hierarchical relationship to one another. "The household is the community established by nature for all daily needs," writes Aristotle; it includes free men and women, children, slaves, and additional property required for the production of food, clothing, and other necessities of life. The political state, composed of all free male heads of households, provides an overarching structure that both unifies and subordinates these individual households, while serving as the locus of higher culture. Whereas the household supplies basic needs for living, the political state exists "for the sake of living *well*" and thereby constitutes the final cause and goal of all human social organization. It is in this sense that the human being—or more accurately, *man*—can be defined as "a political animal."[23]

The seemingly neutral and descriptive terms of this formulation should not obscure the fact that such a conceptualization of the public-private dichotomy crystallized within a very particular and highly charged context—namely, the fragile democratic polity of classical Athens. Articulated from a public, male perspective, the classical public-private distinction undergirded a political ideology that strained to defend the privileged status of public life by restricting public access to a limited group of male citizens, while at the same time weakening the pull of the private sphere on those men. As part of a publicly centered dis-

course, the public-private dichotomy inevitably constructed the private sphere as the realm of the "other," defined in relation to a public, political "self."

The political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain suggests that "politics is in part an elaborate defense against the tug of the private, against the lure of the familial, against evocations of female power."[24] Her statement illumines certain dynamics of ancient Greek texts, which frequently depict the quintessentially "familiar" and nurturing sphere of the household as paradoxically alien and threatening. Various rhetorical strategies of control and defense were pursued in relation to a private sphere thus construed. One strategy was to depict the private sphere as a microcosm of the political sphere, thereby transferring the explicitly articulated hierarchical relations of the political arena to the private sphere.[25] Such an approach reflected the universalizing impulses of male theorists for whom public life was the only life worth living. Additionally, it constituted an attempt to exert control over an arena in which social relationships could seem disturbingly fluid and vaguely defined in comparison with the articulate social structures of the public sphere. For the domestically centered private sphere did not always closely resemble a miniature patriarchal state. Rather, it constituted a social arena in which distinctions of gender and office carried relatively little weight in and of themselves; authority was calculated instead by a complex and flexible equation in which class, age, wealth, education, personal talent, and influence accrued within the networks of kinship and patronage relationships all factored significantly.

A second common strategy pursued by Greek political theorists was to represent the private sphere as a woman's world, downplaying any male connection.[26] This rhetorical ploy served to feminize and devalue domestic pursuits as trivial and "basic" in the interests of cultivating male loyalty to the state, while also addressing fears of women's power by symbolically compartmentalizing and diminishing its scope. Again, the gap between rhetoric and social experience here appears to widen, for however dim our view of the private sphere may be, it nevertheless seems clear that the household constituted an arena of shared male and female interest and participation.[27] There were, then, dual and somewhat contradictory distorting tendencies toward both the politicization and the feminization of the private sphere in the public discourse of classical antiquity, tendencies that persisted into late antiquity and beyond. The common thread was the insistence on the subordination of the private to the public sphere and of the female to the male, a theoretical move that established the fundamental hierarchies on which the internal ordering of the public sphere was

grounded. Thus the subordination of women to men was closely linked to, and indeed provided the foundation for, the construction of the public hierarchy of office.

This complex classical conceptualization of public and private proved remarkably tenacious. At the same time, the public-private dichotomy was significantly transformed, in rhetorical function at least, when transferred from the speeches of Athenian citizens to the rhetoric of the Latin-speaking provincials of the late Roman empire. By the fourth century of the common era, certain aspects of "private life" were receiving considerably more attention than in classical times,[28] whereas the "public sphere" had contracted into the machinery of a highly centralized and autocratic government, leaving a vast ambiguous social territory stretching between the household and the state. Criss-crossed by the networks of patronage and friendship, this expanse of late-antique social life, however hard to see from the perspective of the idealized public-private distinction, was nonetheless the central stage on which urban landowners, retired imperial officials, Christian ascetics, and bishops jostled for position.[29] The paradoxically liminal centrality of this social space gave particular weight to the implicit negotiations that ensued when speakers and writers invoked the categories of household and state, or private and public spheres. For invoke them they did, and with a rhetorical effect often seemingly enhanced rather than undercut by the imperfect correspondence between the classical formulation of the public-private dichotomy and the actual structures of late-ancient social life.

One pattern of late-antique appeal to the public-private distinction can be discerned in the rhetorical habits of the fourth-century western aristocrats who routinely wrote of their desire to avoid politics in preference for the life of *otium*, or leisure. This literary convention has often been interpreted as an indication of the moral decadence of the aristocracy; however, it is probably more helpfully read as a sign of the degree to which aristocratic identity and activity had come to be centered on private life, focused above all on the meticulous administration of relationships of patronage or friendship.[30] Such an emphasis by the elite on private life reflected in part the real exclusion of the traditional senatorial aristocracy from the governance of the empire, which under a ruler such as Valentinian I (364–75) was overwhelmingly dominated by a nonaristocratic imperial bureaucracy.[31] However, the rhetorical contrast of *otium* with *officium*, or political office, also created a misleading formal distinction, which masked the large overlap of public and private concerns and the continuing political influence of the aristocracy.[32] From the time of Gratian (375–83), the aristocracy regained significant influence over even the imperial

court, and by the fifth century the western aristocrats had again become the primary bearers of Roman tradition by virtue of an authority grounded, not primarily in political office, but rather in the more enduring private resources of landed wealth and patronage. In this sense, notes John Matthews, "the government of the western empire seems progressively in these years [of the late fourth and early fifth centuries] to fall from public into private hands."[33]

If elite writers of the late fourth century consistently appealed to the public-private distinction in a political situation in which distinctions between the public and the private were not, in fact, easily made, the pressing question becomes how this public-private rhetoric functioned. Indeed, published expressions of reluctance to take up public office often seem to invoke the public-private dichotomy only to further the entanglement of supposedly distinct spheres: ancient authors publicly praise the private life of *otium* precisely in order to demonstrate their peculiar fitness for political office. A privately centered sense of identity, however real and "sincere," functioned paradoxically to enhance the public status and career of one who thereby eluded accusations of a grasping or overweening ambition while presenting himself as superior to less restrained rivals.[34]

We here reach a point of significant contact with the Priscillianist controversy. My proposal is that Priscillian and his supporters, like other members of the western aristocracy to which some of them belonged, grounded their identities and their understandings of community and authority in the private sphere. They did not, however, thereby abandon their claims to status in the public sphere. Indeed, when Priscillian chooses to represent himself as a private person, it is in a rhetorical context shaped by the need to demonstrate his fitness for the office of bishop. At the beginning of his *Apology*, probably written shortly before his ordination to the episcopacy, Priscillian alludes to his former position in the world—a position "not obscure," he assures his readers—only in order to emphasize his rejection of such public "glory"; this renunciation is, however, clearly to be parlayed into still higher status in the Christian community.[35] In the closing lines of this same document, Priscillian hints that his opponents are to be seen as ambitious and grasping in their envious and slanderous attacks, by implied contrast with his own controlled and disinterested behavior. Intriguingly, at this very point he turns the tables and portrays his rivals—the bishops Hydatius and Ithacius—as men who are inappropriately mired in the private sphere, "pursuing domestic enmities [*domesticas inimicitias*] under the name of religious matters."[36] This momentary negative privatizing of his opponents foreshadows Priscillian's subsequent readiness to defend his own claim to the episcopal office,[37]

while still consistently preferring to present himself in the private role of ascetic scholar and exegete.

A rather different strategy was pursued by Priscillian's opponents, who argued that it was precisely Priscillian's "privacy"—including his purported predilection for meeting in household space—that demonstrated the illegitimacy of his public role and indeed unmasked his true identity as a heretic or sorcerer. Here again a glance at patterns of social exchange and rhetorical practice outside the ecclesiastical context may prove suggestive for our understanding of how appeals to the public-private distinction functioned in late-ancient Christian polemics. Peter Brown maps the high incidence of sorcery accusations brought by members of the late-fourth-century imperial bureaucracy against "the holders of ambiguous positions of personal power . . . based largely on skills, such as rhetoric, which, in turn, associated the man of skill with the ill-defined, inherited prestige of the traditional aristocracies."[38] Imperial officials, functioning as members of a highly fractured elite, seem to have attacked rivals outside the bureaucracy by drawing the boundaries of the public sphere in such a way as to delegitimate the social influence exercised by traditionally educated elites. The Antiochene rhetorician Libanius, for example, could be discredited by being represented as a private individual who influenced events in the public sphere only by the illegitimate wresting of power involved in invoking the "magic" of words; by this means, the rhetorician was accused of sorcery.[39] Brown suggests that such sorcery accusations "reach[ed] a peak at a time of maximum uncertainty and conflict in the 'new' society of the mid-fourth century" and subsided when stability was reestablished in subsequent centuries.[40] They can thus be read as indicators of levels of social and political instability.

The tense rivalry between the fourth-century bishop Hydatius and the ascetic scholar Priscillian echoes the uneasy competition of the imperial bureaucrat with the pagan rhetorician and aristocrat. Within the fourth-century church, as within secular society, both "systems of power"[41] were momentarily held in balance during a period of transition and uncertainty, as church and empire struggled to absorb the impact of the fundamental political, social, spiritual, and cultural shifts traditionally associated with the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine. Confronted by the "disturbing intangibles"[42] of private-sphere authority and the more informally negotiated relationships characteristic of the Priscillianist Christians, the opponents of Priscillian—much like the imperial officials studied by Brown—claimed to have detected an imbalance in the relationship of public and private, thereby justifying the need to reestablish the dominance of the public sphere by asserting their own authority. Their attacks

on Priscillian followed conventions of polemical rhetoric, which in turn reflected the underlying biases and anxieties shaping public attitudes toward the private sphere. They portrayed the Priscillianist Christians as anarchic or rebellious, members of a subversive and immoral secret society who not only disdained the authority of public office but also ignored the fundamental hierarchy of genders. In this manner, Priscillian's opponents implicitly transferred the structures and values of the political sphere to the realm of private life, and by these standards judged the Priscillianists lacking. Depicting Priscillian as a seducer of women, they furthermore exploited threatening images of women's power, while at the same time trivializing the ascetic movement as "effeminate."

Ultimately, such arguments were successful in defining the followers of Priscillian as dangerous deviants. This success in part reflects the effectiveness of the more aggressive rhetorical strategy pursued by Priscillian's opponents; moreover, the polemical campaign drew strength from a faint yet significant correspondence between actual social dynamics and the stereotypes of subversion. Eventually, the progressive overlapping of spheres traced by Matthews in the secular arena contributed to the resolution of the western ecclesiastical conflict in a manner perhaps more in line with the blurred representation of public and private implicitly favored by Priscillian. But the late fourth century was a period of ecclesiastical history characterized more by an awareness of problematic disjunction than by an acknowledgement of the convergence of public and private structures of authority, and a particular rhetoric of opposition was to prevail before the subsequent reassimilation of public and private forms of authority could take place.

The Christian Community and the "World": Strategies of Accommodation and Alienation

If many fourth-century western aristocrats perceived their lives to be centered in the private sphere, some of these same aristocrats were not merely ambivalent about but even outright hostile to political life. That is, the rhetoric of reluctance might take the form of a rhetoric of stark refusal to take up public office, a refusal often literally enough intended. This expressed rejection of political life has been read as an embittered response to the involuntary political marginalization of the traditional aristocracy.[43] But in many cases such language may be interpreted more neutrally as an indication of a shift in the relations of local elites to the imperial adminis-

tration: by presenting themselves as having chosen a privatized role in relation to the imperial administration, provincial notables created flexibility on one front while simultaneously protecting a constancy of power and influence on another, more local front.[44]

More important for our purposes, however, is still another, overlapping function of these late-ancient expressions of political alienation. For the rejection of *officium* in favor of *otium* did not merely support a more localized political involvement; it also bespoke the possibility of what might be designated a more "transcendent" political involvement. Carried to its extreme, the expressed preference for private life might lead to a severing of even those ties of patronage and friendship that linked a person indirectly to the political sphere. And such a drastic paring of relationships and social advantages could in turn result in a paradoxical enhancement of social status and the creation of new social networks, constituting the attainment of a public authority appropriately "ascetic," insofar as it represented the fruits of a disciplined renunciation of the social ties and physical anxieties that were understood to inhibit free speech and the resistance of tyranny. The truly ascetic leader, whose qualities were distilled in the ancient image of the philosopher, "could address the great directly, in terms of a code of decorum and self-restraint that he himself exemplified to the highest degree, because he was uncompromised by political attachments."[45] If this image was for the most part just that—"mainly an image"[46]— by late antiquity, it nevertheless stood as an ideal of a role that might on occasion be seen reflected, with varying degrees of clarity, in the stance of a philosopher, a rhetorician, a bishop, or a monk.[47]

The identification of such productive undercurrents of alienation contributes to our understanding of how late-antique Gallic nobles such as Paulinus of Nola and Sulpicius Severus could have abandoned promising political careers in order to embrace lives of Christian asceticism, or how the Spaniard Prudentius could dismiss as "folly" his own two provincial governorships and court appointment.[48] A culturally sustained capacity for political disillusionment left such men not depleted but rather energized for the pursuit of alternative careers within the Christian community, and they were particularly drawn to ascetic movements like that of Priscillian. The routine, even ritual, acts of negation and separation that were fundamental to the ascetic life resonated with their experience of self-chosen political alienation and provided the means to express a new, paradoxically privatized political authority. Thus, in the churches of the late-fourth-century west, these aristocrats discovered—and likewise contributed to—an emerging sense of Christian identity that was, like their

secular identity, not only private but also anti-public. Indeed, for many privately identified Christians, the experience of alienation from the structures and concerns of the public sphere proved crucial for the social and theological self-definition of the church. Men and women like Priscillian were quick to perceive themselves as separate from or even in opposition to the institutions of secular authority—although at the same time they unhesitatingly made use of social networks to influence officials. They also demonstrated considerably less interest than their opponents in the authority of ecclesiastical office or the rituals reinforcing that authority. But it was in their theology that they most freely expressed their sense of self-chosen alienation, drawing upon particular dualistic strains in the cosmological heritage of Christianity in order to articulate an embattled hostility toward the controlling demonic forces that they perceived to dominate their age, and from which they could hope to win liberation only through the power of the fully transcendent Christ.

Significantly, the Priscillianists' alienated cosmology and their ascetic lifestyle struck their opponents as dangerously heretical. Views of the relationship of the Christian community to the larger world it inhabited thus constituted a second major point of divergence between Priscillian and his opponents. While Priscillian's opponents seem to have been generally optimistic about the convergence of Christian and secular society and culture, Priscillian and his followers were driven by a sense of alienation that expressed itself in their asceticism, in their cosmology, and in their relationship to both secular and ecclesiastical political structures.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the ascetic renunciations of such alienated Christians were very differently experienced by men and women. For men, the pursuit of Christian ascesis entailed the rejection of public life and therefore of the hierarchies of office and gender; in this respect, their opponents were not far off the mark when they insinuated that male ascetics were feminized by their rejection of the most basic cultural expressions of male identity. For women, on the other hand, asceticism involved not so much a rejection of public life—from which they were always in theory excluded—as a rejection of the dominant ordering principles of the public sphere—for example, the restriction of women to the private sphere or the intrusion of patriarchal structures of male dominance into the private sphere. A masculinization of the role of the women took place insofar as women resisted subordination and privatization.[49] For both sexes, asceticism initially involved radical withdrawal from the public sphere; ultimately, however, it threatened to subvert the very distinction between public and private and to destabilize the gender roles

and relations supporting that distinction. Thus it is that Priscillian's detractors emphasize the untidy mingling of men and women within the movement, symbolized above all in imagined expressions of unbounded sexuality.

Naming the "Other": The Discourse of Orthodoxy in Late-Fourth-Century Spain

A third and final factor may be figured into the interpretation of the Priscillianist controversy, and that is how the categories of "orthodoxy" and "heresy" controlled the expression and resolution of the social and cosmological conflicts at the heart of the controversy. Brief mention has been made of the function of sorcery accusations in the fourth century, a case that suggests by analogy that heresy charges, like labels of deviance more generally, would have functioned in Christian antiquity as a means of clarifying doctrines, practices, or social relationships in periods of transitional ambiguity. But more needs to be said about the precise constellation of beliefs and social practices that clustered around the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy, defining the content and function of this peculiarly Christian articulation of normativeness and deviance.

The conceptual foundations of the categories of orthodoxy and heresy were laid during the second-century gnostic controversy in the polemical writings of Justin and Irenaeus.[50] Several aspects of the creative and enduring contribution of these first self-consciously orthodox Christian thinkers are here noteworthy. Of primary importance is Justin's doctrinalization of religious controversy through his borrowing of the classic concept of philosophical "succession" from the tradition of hellenistic historiography, also utilized within early rabbinic Judaism. Justin likewise contributed to the demonization of religious dissent: placing the teachers of divergent "heresies" or "schools of thought" within a mythical framework drawn from apocalyptic Judaism, he associated them with the false prophets, who in turn embodied the archetypal apostasy of Satan and the fallen angels.[51] Irenaeus refined Justin's scheme by drawing tighter parallels and contrasts between the single, unchanging, divine succession of truth and the multiple, shifting, demonic successions of error. He also nuanced the portrait of the heretic, who was no longer viewed simply as alien but now acknowledged explicitly as an internal or intimate enemy who either betrayed or dissimulated a shared faith.[52] This Irenaean refinement of the concept of heresy helps explain the ease with which the label

of heresy could be applied to control or expel even influential "insiders" like Priscillian: the claim to have uncovered secret doctrinal deviance hidden behind false appearances of conformity was practically irrefutable.

The fourth-century Arian controversy, which coincided with the advent of the imperial patronage of Christianity, did not fundamentally alter these foundations but did place the inherited concepts of orthodoxy and heresy in a context that intensified both the oppositional dynamic of the polarity and its significance for Christian identity. The alliance of Christianity with empire resulted in an innovative technology of orthodoxy, as emperors not only facilitated the convening of councils but also used their secular authority to influence and enforce the disciplinary decisions and credal formulations of those councils. It appeared for the first time possible to achieve unity and even uniformity within the church, but in reality those goals remained more elusive than ever, for the high stakes of imperial rewards and punishments intensified rivalry and bitterness: theologically articulated enmities proliferated alongside new alliances. Meanwhile, the churches became increasingly concerned with the issue of Christian self-identity, as they confronted the rapid and sometimes very incomplete conversion of former pagans, as well as inherited internal differences, which were made more visible and problematic by the new political process. This concern with Christian self-identity heightened interest in defining a single catholic orthodoxy and, correspondingly, heresy was problematized through the multiplication and elaboration of heresiological categories, which functioned as negative boundary markers for orthodoxy. Finally, the polarity of orthodoxy and heresy received a gender "charge" in the face of both the new politicization (and consequent masculinization) of the church's self-image and the need to combat the disturbing emergence of alienated movements that undermined the traditional hierarchy of genders and were therefore perceived as not only rebellious but also effeminate.[53]

Spain had a distinctive role to play in the fourth-century struggle to define a monolithic orthodoxy, and indeed it seems possible to speak of an identifiably Spanish ethos of orthodoxy emerging in the period prior to the outbreak of the Priscillianist controversy. In most of the west, the theological issues at stake in the Arian controversy were crudely grasped, at best; nevertheless, an instinctive preference for the more unitive theology of the Nicene party, combined with adamant support for the controversial Alexandrian bishop Athanasius, led to the formation of an intensely loyal pro-Nicene faction. Loyalty evolved into near fanaticism in the context of the emperor Constantius' attempt to force the westerners to repudiate the

troublesome Athanasius and accept credal compromise at the councils of Arles (353) and Milan (355).[54] The most extreme wing of the western pro-Nicene party was led by the Sardinian bishop Lucifer of Calaris, one of several westerners exiled for his refusal to cooperate with Constantius' efforts to enforce ecclesial unity. After Lucifer's death circa 370, the Spaniard Gregory of Elvira was considered the preeminent representative of the "Luciferian" faction,[55] whose purist adherents complained that "the church had become a brothel."[56] But Gregory was not the first Spanish advocate of an intensely pro-Nicene orthodoxy. When in 357 Ossius, the aged bishop of Cordoba, finally capitulated to imperial pressure and signed the so-called "Arian" Second Creed of Sirmium, not only he but also all who continued to communicate with him were excommunicated by more rigorist fellow bishops in Spain.[57] A letter sent to the emperor Theodosius by two Luciferian presbyters reports several instances of divine miracles punishing lenient or Arianizing bishops in Spain. Florentius of Merida was said to have been hurled down and seized with fits of trembling when he twice attempted to seat himself on his episcopal throne; the third time, he was struck dead. The letter notes somewhat menacingly that Florentius suffered this fate, not because he subscribed to any impiety, but merely since he had knowingly communicated with those who did.[58]

The convergence of zeal for orthodoxy with anti-imperial sentiments influenced Spanish Christian culture long after the death of Constantius and the accession first of more religiously neutral and finally of actively pro-Nicene emperors. Indeed, the idealized role of the "martyr for orthodoxy" seems to have shaped the self-understanding even of the Spanish emperors Magnus Maximus (383–88), under whom Priscillian was executed, and Theodosius (379–95), generally regarded as the architect of imperial orthodoxy.[59] Here the tradition of orthodox witness was aligned with the most public of figures, but its impact on more private expressions of Christianity is evidenced, not only in the works of Priscillian himself,[60] but also in the self-consciously orthodox writings of the late-fourth-century Spanish poet Prudentius, who composed a series of hymns in praise of martyrs, which have recently been identified as "devotional reading-matter for a cultured audience outside a church context."[61] Thus, in fourth-century Spain, the discourse of orthodoxy within which the conflicts over community and cosmology in the Priscillianist controversy were articulated was highly charged indeed. In this context, it is not altogether surprising that the tension in the portrayal of the heretic as an intimate enemy was eventually resolved in favor of a more purely alien rep-