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*The influence of Gnosticism
and Manichaeism on Priscillianist
doctrine, basing on Priscillianist
and anti-Priscillianist sources.*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to discuss how the Priscillian's thought corresponds to Gnostic-Manichaean doctrine. There is no doubt that Priscillian in his writings presents himself as an expert on various heterodox movements of his time. The true sources of Priscillianism need to be sought at the metaphysical level.

KEYWORDS

Priscillianism, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, the fall and the liberation of the soul

Anti-Priscillianist documentary sources identify this religious movement with many other forms of heresy, preceding it or existing simultaneously. Priscillianist historiography claims that the perception of Priscillianist doctrine as being erroneous is hyperbolic and lacks objectivism. Such opinions, like the one of Augustine – “quamvis et ex aliis haeresibus in eos sordes, tanquam in sentinam quamdam horribili confusione confluerint”¹, are unacceptable for the group of Priscillianist historiographers.

Some authors present Priscillian as a “barrier” for heterodoxy, while others identify Priscillianism with two great heterodox movements – Gnosticism and Manichaeism.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRISCILLIANISM AND GNOSTICISM.

The relationship between Priscillianism and Gnosticism was already described by Sulpicius Severus “illa gnosticorum haeresis intra Hispanias deprehensa...”². He also writes in another place: “quo comperto, Gnostici diffisi rebus suis...”³. Reporting the news about the formation of the sect of *abstinentes*, which is considered to be the root of Priscillianism on the peninsula, Philastrius establishes the same parallelism⁴, which is later undertaken by Prosper of Aquitaine⁵, Jerome⁶, Pope Leo the Great⁷, Galician chronicler Hydatius (Idacius)⁸, and many others.

¹ Augustinus, *De haeresibus*, PL 42, c. 70.

² Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* II, PL 20, c. 46.

³ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* II, PL 20, c. 47.

⁴ Filastrius Brixianensis, *De haeresibus*, PL 12, c. 1196: „Sunt in Galliis et Hispaniis et Aquitania veluti abstinentes, qui et Gnosticorum et Manichaeorum particulam perniciosissimam aequae sequuntur”.

⁵ Prosper Aquitanus, *Chronicum*, PL 51, c. 584: „Ea tempestate Priscillianus Episcopus de Gallaetia, ex Manichaeorum et Gnosticorum dogmate haeresim nominis sui condidit”.

⁶ Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus*, 121, PL 23, c. 711–712: „Hic usque hodie a nonnullis Gnosticae, id est Basilidis et Marci, de quibus Ireneus scripsit, haereseos accusatur”.

⁷ Leo I Papa, *Epistola ad Turibium*, 4, PL 84, c. 682: „quod utique ideo faciunt (priscillianistae) ..., sequentes dogma Cerdonis et Marcionis”.

⁸ Idacius Aquae Flaviae, *Chronicum*, PL 51, c. 875: „Priscillianus, declinans in haeresim Gnosticorum”. *The Chronicle* of Spanish bishop Hydatius is a continuation of

There is not enough data to explain how this oriental doctrine arrived at the peninsula. There is no evidence to support the assumption that Priscillian travelled abroad, except for his journey to Rome to Pope Damasus.

Sulpicius Severus, however, provides some clues to this puzzle: “Namque tum primum infamis illa Gnosticorum haeresis intra Hispanias deprehensa, superstitio exitiabilis, arcanis occultata secretis. Origo istius mali Oriens ac Aegyptus. Sed quibus ibi initiis coaluerit, haud facile est disserere. Primus eam intra Hispanias Marcus intulit, Aegypto profectus, Memphi ortus”⁹. Which implies that in all probability Priscillian had only indirect knowledge of Gnosticism.

Nevertheless, it was not his only contact with heresy, since some of the sentences in *Tractatus 1*¹⁰ make us believe that his early readings contributed to more personal contacts with this doctrine: “Tamen cum adhuc in conversatione mundialis stultitiae delectaremur, sapientia saeculari licet adhuc inutiles nobis, haec tamen fidei nostrae adversa cognovimus...”¹¹.

Many affinities between Priscilianist thought and various heretical doctrines of the 4th century can be enumerated, i.e.: dualism at the level of principles, emanationism, process of ideal participations, in which the soul is considered to be a part of the divine multiplying itself, or Trinitarian doctrine of Sabellian origin.

The aforementioned doctrinal aspects are manifested in various practices of Priscillianist sect. The most important of them include: abstaining from flesh meat, ritual consecration ceremonies, rigid asceticism combined with moral excesses, esotericism and lying, deep agonism pervading every proselytic activity, the usage and defence of apocryphal books, differentiating three types of human beings, mass influx of women, and some liturgical forms.

Some examples in this array of connections are just mere similarities. The fact that Priscillian enjoyed great popularity among women, as well as his personal relationship with Procula, reminds us instantly of

The Chronicle of Jerome, which leads up to the year 468. From this year on the work is self-contained.

⁹ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* II, PL 20, c. 46: “The first to bring it (the doctrine) to Spain was Marcus, on his way to Egypt from Memphis. The followers included: Agape, a prominent lady and Helpidius, a rhetorician. Priscillian was chosen by them.”

¹⁰ Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus 1, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, c. 3–33; PLSuppl 2, c. 1413–1434.

¹¹ Priscillianus, *Tractatus 1, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, c. 14; PLSuppl 2, c. 1420.

Simon Magus and Helen, the Donatists and Lucilla, and Montanus and Priscilla.

Doctrinal esotericism acts as a common denominator for heterodox teachings of the period. The uninitiated could only guess at the latent ideological content of a particular sect. The fact that his contemporaries struggled with limited opportunities to study his doctrine openly is probably the most serious charge that Priscillian has to face. It constitutes an argument, however indirect, in favour of the existence of esotericism within the Priscillianist group.

I.I. THE INFLUENCE OF GnosticISM ON TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE.

At the theological level Priscillian's trinitarian doctrine had Sabellian features. As Orosius states: "Trinitatem autem solo verbo loquebatur, nam unionem absque ulla existentia aut proprietate adserens sublato et patrem filium spiritum sanctum hunc esse unum Christum docebat"¹². This statement is repeated by Augustine: "De Christo sabellianam sectam tenent eumden ipsum esse dicentes, non solum Filium, sed etiam Patrem et Spiritum Sanctum"¹³.

Whereas the Rule of Faith decreed by the First Council of Toledo (400) states: „[10] Hanc trinitatem personis distinctam, substantiam unitam, virtute et potestate et maiestate indivisibilem, indifferentem"¹⁴. In canons 2, 3, and 4 of this council a similar standpoint can be found:

“2. Si quis dixerit atque crediderit Deum Patrem eumdem esse Filium vel Paraclitum, anathema sit”¹⁵.

“3. Si quis dixerit vel crediderit Dei filium eumdem esse Patrem vel Paraclitum, anathema sit”¹⁶.

¹² Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, CCL 49, c. 3.

¹³ Augustinus, *De haeresibus*, PL 42, c. 70.

¹⁴ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia ab anno 381 ad annum 431*, compositio et elaboratio A. Baron, H. Pietras, officina editoria <<Wydawnictwo WAM>>, Cracoviae MMX, vol. IV, p. 127: „[10] In this Trinity [we believe], separate persons, but of one unified substance, in essence unified, in power, force and majesty undivided, and combined”.

¹⁵ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. IV, p. 128: “2. If anyone claims or believes that God the Father is tantamount to the Son or the Paraclete, let him be condemned”.

¹⁶ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. IV, p. 128: “3. If anyone says or believes that the Son is tantamount to God the Father or the Paraclete, let him be condemned”.

“4. Si quis dixerit vel crediderit Paraclitum vel Patrem esse vel Filium, anathema sit”¹⁷.

In the first chapter of Pope Leo's letter to Turibius of Astorga we can find a confirmation of aforementioned opinion: “Quam impie sentiant de Trinitate divina, qui et Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti unam atque eandem asserunt esse personam. Quod blasphemiae genus de Sabelli opinione sumpserunt, cuius discipuli etiam Patripasiani merito nuncupantur”¹⁸. Bachiarius claims that: „Trinitas in subsistentibus personis, unitas in natura atque substantia”¹⁹. Whereas Augustine writes: “Priscillianus sabelianum antiquum dogma restituit, ubi ipse Pater qui Filius, qui et Spiritus Sanctus perhibetur...”²⁰.

Even Priscillian himself tried to defend himself from this accusation. Here follows an extract from *Liber ad Damasum episcopum*: “... baptizantes sicut scriptum est *in nomine Patris et Filiis et Spiritus Sancti*, non dicit autem in nominibus tamquam in multis, sed in uno quia unus deus trina potestate venerabilis *omnia et in omnibus Christus*”²¹.

In this passage Priscillian does not distance himself from the charges of negating the real distinction between the three divine Persons, because it is possible to conclude from this excerpt that he defended the distinction between powers or attributes, not the persons in the Holy Trinity. Moreover, the passage from *Liber ad Damasum episcopum* is considered to be of little credibility, as it was motivated by Priscillian's intention to manifest trinitarian thought before the pope. Here lies the obstacle and the strength of the argument.

Bachiarius was accused of the same mistake. His answer, however, does not allow for any doctrinal doubts due to the lucidity of his style: “Trinitas in subsistentibus personis, unitas in natura atque substantia”²².

On the other hand, when we recall Priscillian's pro-Gnostic attitude, it can be noticed that he is very consistent. It must be brought

¹⁷ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. IV, p. 128: “4. If anyone says or believes that the Paraclete is the Father or the Son, let him be condemned”.

¹⁸ Leo I Papa, *Epistola ad Turibium*, PL 84, c. 680.

¹⁹ Bachiarius, *De fide*, PL 20, c. 1028.

²⁰ Augustinus, *Ad Orosium contra Priscillianistas et Origenistas*, IV, PL 42, c. 671.

²¹ Priscillianus, *Tractatus II, Liber ad Damasum episcopum*, CSEL 18, 37; PLSuppl 2, c. 1437: “We baptize, as it was written *in the name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”. (Matthew) does not say that in many names but in one name, as there is one beloved God of triple power (authority), *Christ* is everything and in everything”.

²² Bachiarius, *De fide*, 8, PL 20, c. 1028.

to attention that both in Gnostic systems and here, trinitarian dogma disappears, as it is irreconcilable with the notion of dualist pantheism and the implication of the entities emitted from the divine substance.

The negation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity does not make Priscillian's thought stand out of other Gnostic movements. This kind of negation is common among all the heretics of this current. The majority of Gnostic doctrines, however, accepts docetism, attributing symbolic and purely figurative meaning to the crucifixion. Priscillian maintains this view, accepting patripassianism, defending the proposition that the Father died on the cross²³.

1.2. THE INFLUENCE OF GNOSTICISM ON PRISCILLIANIST ANTHROPOLOGY.

The originality of Priscillianist doctrine lies in the anthropological aspect. Random development of man, the treaty between the Prince of Good and the Prince of Evil, the vision of man as a full of antagonisms microcosm – these are the elements of Priscillian's thought that stand at the root of the immense popularity which the doctrine enjoyed.

For Priscillian the role of anthropology was significant. Not only did he place in man an explicit framework for the struggle between two axes, which polarize every transcendent action, of Good and Evil, but also used man to explain the phenomena of celestial physics. Paulus Orosius kept for us an interesting note from Priscillian's book *Memoria apostolorum*, which says: "In quo etiam libro de principe humidorum et de principe ignis plurima dicta sunt, vollens intelligi arte, non potentia dei omnia bona agi in hoc mundo. Dicit enim esse virginem quamdam lucem, quam Deus volens dare pluviam hominibus principi humidorum ostendat, qui dum eam adprehendere cupit, commotus consudet et pluviam faciat et destitutus ab eo mugitu suo tronitrua concitet"²⁴. By means of the anthropomorphization of the phenomena of rain and thunder Priscillian reduces the ultimate explanation of physically meaningful events to a myth.

One of the sources of Priscillian's significance in the history of Galicia can be found in this vision of man. There are many unexplained

²³ Cf. Leo I Papa, *Epistola ad Turibium*, 2, PL 84, c. 681.

²⁴ Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, CCL 49, p. 2.

points left in this systematic analysis. The idea of freedom constitutes the biggest problem.

Documents preserved to the present day emphasize different aspects, such as: astrological doctrine, marriage, asceticism, emanatism, trinitarian dogma, the role of demons. Other topics are not dealt with so explicitly, and sometimes are only alluded to in passing: "...et mathesim praevalere firmabat", as Orosius states²⁵. The fact that Priscillian attached special significance to numbers is not mentioned, which was – seemingly – important, because the Council of Toledo points it out in one of its canons: "15. Si quis astrologiae vel mathesi existimat esse credendum, anathema sit"²⁶.

Despite the inconsistencies, there is some internal logic in Priscillianist thought. Initial dualism is interwoven with emanationistic pantheism, stellar transmigration of souls is the next link, and all the above is put in relation of agonism, which permeates every nook and cranny of the universe. Then comes the immediate victory of the lower beings, the treaty of the Princes and imprisonment of the souls resulting in stellar fatalism, and man is still situated at a high level in the hierarchy of the universe irrespective of all of these.

Dualism, emanationistic pantheism, descending dialectics of souls, anthropology, stellar fatalism, agonism and Sabellianism constitute crucial hallmarks of Priscillianist doctrine.

1.2.1. THE PROBLEM OF THE FALL OF THE SOUL.

The issue of the fall of the soul and its higher nature being the part severed from the divine has been reiterated for a long time, starting from orphism, through Neo-Platonism, hermeticism and gnosis, with elements characteristic for each of these doctrines²⁷.

The information available on this topic is scarce and incomplete, like the one preserved in *Commonitorium* by Orosius.

It is not certain what was the cause of "individualization" of the souls in Priscillianist doctrine, the reason why the divinity multiplied itself. In Orosius's text we are able to find the moment when the emitted

²⁵ Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, CCL 49, p. 2.

²⁶ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. IV, 129: "If anyone claims that one should believe in astrology or numerology, let him be condemned".

²⁷ Cf. C. Tresmontant, *La Méthaphysique du Christianisme et la naissance de la philosophie chrétienne*, Paris 1961, p. 249–369. Here the topic is expounded.

souls descending onto the world fight against matter. However, more specific conclusions can be drawn from this.

In the whole evolution of the process of the soul's descent, until its imprisonment in a material body, where the determining factor is the free decision of the souls whether to take part in this fight²⁸, it can be noticed that Priscillian's doctrine is far from accepting the cosmic error. It was the main sin that made the souls descend onto the world and lock themselves inside a body, until they attain total purification, after which they will be able to return to the original world, as Orphics put it²⁹. It seems that Priscillian did not follow this argument. In all probability, his disciples did so, because in the middle of the 5th century this doctrine was condemned by Pope Leo the Great in his letter to Turibius. In chapter x we can read: „Contra id quod animas in caelestibus peccare credunt, et secundum qualitatem peccati in hoc mundo accipere sortem vel bonam vel malam”³⁰. They do not concur with the father of the sect, as they ascribe the descent of the souls to

²⁸ Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, CCL 49, p. 2: „Nam primum circulum et mittendarum in carne animarum divinum chirographum, angelorum et Dei, et omnium animarum consensibus fabricatum...”.

²⁹ Orphics proclaimed the idea of transmigration of souls. According to their beliefs, the soul exists independently of the body and remains even after its death, incarnating in other bodies. The body holds the soul in bondage. Incarnation is a punishment for sins. The souls is liberated from the body after undergoing a cycle of purifications, giving away its divine part to Dionysus. When all the people undergo the cycle there will be eternal joy and harmony in the world. The pain of living in a body can be alleviated by religious practices (mysteries) and asceticism. Being the supporters of metempsychosis, Orphics abstained from killing animals and eating meat. In a way, Plato was fascinated by Orphism. Orphism also had some influence on his early Christianity. Some historians deny the existence of Orphism, viewing it as a set of various ritual practices associated with the character of Orpheus, which were put together into one religious system by tradition.

³⁰ Cf. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and the Greek Religion*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1993; Ph. Borgeaud, *Orphisme et Orphée: en l'honneur de Jean Rudhardt*, Genève 1991; A. Masaracchia, *Orfeo e l'Orfismo*, Atti del Seminario Nazionale (Roma – Perugia 1985–1991), Roma 1993; L. Brisson, *Orphée et l'Orphisme dans l'antiquité gréco-romaine*, Paris 1995; L. Vieillefon, *La figure d'Orphée dans l'antiquité tardive*, Paris 2003; F. Bisconti, *Orfeo*, in: DPAC, 3649–3651; J. Schmidt, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej*, Katowice 1996; M. Gajewska, K. Sobczak, *Edukacja filozoficzna – ścieżka edukacyjna*, Gdynia 2009, 19; A. Świderkówna, *Bogowie zeszli z Olimpu*, PWN 2008.

³⁰ Leo I Papa, *Epistola ad Turibium*, 10, PL 84, c. 684.

some previous sin whereas Priscillian explains it by freedom of will in the cosmic struggle.

The difference between Priscillian doctrine and the Neo-Platonic one resides in voluntarism, which begins the descent of the souls. In the Neo-Platonic doctrine the metaphysics of the descent of the souls is indispensable, eternal, till the last shred of the reality exists. We do not find such attitude in Priscillian.

In gnosis the soul is ontologically divine, as a particle emitted from the very essence of a higher being. It seems that Priscillian acknowledged emanatism, as well. In gnosis the birth is perceived as a genuine catastrophe, and it can be assumed that procreation is a sin as it prolongs and perpetuates the soul's enslavement in the material bodies. Priscillian, with his fear of marriage and fertility, is entirely entangled in the same line of argumentation.

Once again, let us emphasize how stubbornly conciliar canons condemn those aspects of Priscillianist doctrine pertaining to the issues of marriage and fertility³¹.

When it comes to the whole process of the descent of the souls, Priscillian doctrine, in this twofold aspect of the divine nature of the soul and the condemnation of marriage and the act of conception, is very much in accordance with Gnosticism.

1.2.2. IGNORANCE AND THE LIBERATION OF THE SOUL.

Priscillian's attitude towards the problem of the liberation of the soul is typically Gnostic – i.e. through learning.

Priscillian in his *Tractates* emphasizes the necessity to study the Scripture and to search for its hidden meaning. The phrase *scrutate scripturas* and the like constitute essential clues in his writings³². The doctrine on the topic of apocryphal books insists on the existence of this higher intellectual enlightenment, which enables one to distinguish the original from a false content.

³¹ Toletum I (ca. 400), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. IV, 129. See also: *Concilium Bracarense primum*, can. XI, in: Marcin z Bragi, *Dziela*, Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki, Kęty 2008, p. 274–275.

³² Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus I, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 12; PLSuppl 2, c. 1419; CSEL 18, p. 13; PLSuppl 2, c. 1420; CSEL 18, p. 9; PLSuppl 2, c. 1417–1418; *Tractatus III, Liber de fide et apocryphis*, CSEL 18, p. 47; PLSuppl 2, c. 1444; CSEL 18, p. 51; PLSuppl 2, c. 1447.

In Priscillianist doctrine the topic of ignorance is of great significance. According to the Galician heretic, ignorance is closely connected with the process of the soul's descent and results directly from it. The imprisonment of the soul in a body makes it ignorant and oblivious.

Priscillian in his *Tractates* makes numerous references to ignorance, just to mention some of the most meaningful:

1. "... tamen mortalium sensus rerum saecularium familiaritate captiui intra humanae imbecilitatis clauduntur errorem"³³.
2. "Et ideo, dilectissimi in Deo, quia in hoc positi sumus, ut sensus vestros intra angustias humanae imbecillitatis obsessos, tamquam in novam lucem religiosa docendi exhortatione laxemus..."³⁴.
3. "...sed hii omnes, dilectissimi fratrem, ignorantiae tenebris inuoluti..."³⁵.
4. "... et quamvis mens nostra inexplicabilis intelligentiae opus molliens intra humanae imbecillitatis claudatur errore..."³⁶.

It can be noticed at once, that the author perceives ignorance to be something of a veil, covering everything that is higher in a human, namely the intelligence. In such a way ignorance transforms itself into some kind of a barrier for the soul, into a genuine moral defect.

In his *Tractates*, Priscillian seems to be speaking very openly about his doctrine. It is possible that he chose to do so to defend himself in this work against the charges he had to face during his life.

The soul, crushed blindly by its own ignorance, can neither acknowledge its own nature nor the source from which it comes from. The desire to study the hidden meaning of the Scripture more thoroughly

³³ Priscillianus, *Tractatus IV, Tractatus de Pascha*, CSEL 18, p. 57; PLSuppl 2, c. 1452: "those <people> tightly bound to worldly entities, which pass, however, are enclosed within the error of human weakness".

³⁴ Priscillianus, *Tractatus IV, Tractatus de Pascha*, CSEL 18, p. 58; PLSuppl 2, c. 1452: "And for that reason, dearly-beloved in God, because we were placed there, to lead your senses, constrained in our mortal weakness, into a new light with religious incentive and learning...".

³⁵ Priscillianus, *Tractatus V, Tractatus Genesis*, CSEL 18, p. 64; PLSuppl 2, c. 1456: "But all these, dearly-beloved brothers, entangled in the darkness of ignorance".

³⁶ Priscillianus, *Tractatus XI, Benedictio super fideles*, CSEL 18, p. 104; PLSuppl 2, c. 1482: "And although our mind, toiling over the work of inexplicable intelligence, is locked inside by the error of our mortal weakness...". See also in: *Tractatus VI, Tractatus Exodi*, CSEL 18, p. 69–70; PLSuppl 2, c. 1459–1460; *Tractatus X, Tractatus ad populum II*, CSEL 18, p. 94; PLSuppl 2, c. 1474.

appears at this point, “sensus lectae lectionis”³⁷, until a higher level of wisdom can be reached, “divina sapientia”³⁸, which gives the soul the opportunity to commence a journey back to its original world.

As a result of the above, in order to liberate the soul from the constraints of the body, an obligation to practise asceticism appears in Priscillian’s teachings. It must be noted that this kind of asceticism is at the borderline of the Church’s customs: solitary practice, the ban on certain food products, nightly meetings, rituals of levitation. That is the reason why this kind of asceticism constitutes a charge against Priscillian’s thought.

The dualism of principles in Priscillianist doctrine is the foundation on which the entire philosophical-religious idea is based. It overlaps with the interest areas of other sects from that period, but not with Neo-Platonism, with which, seemingly, Priscillian’s doctrine does not have much in common, because the key notions of both systems are totally opposite. The astral travel of the souls is necessary for Plato, but optional for Priscillian. Whereas the latter acknowledges the existence of a definite influence of stars on the deeds of man, Plato admits that although one can predict the future using the stars, one cannot say that the stars cause the events.

Similarly, the monistic metaphysics of Plato and radical dualism of Priscillian seem to contradict one another. There is a deep agonistic sense in this dualism, unceasing conflict between the forces of Good and Evil. It is also a radical dualism, which does not allow for the two worlds to exist simultaneously. That is the reason why the influence of Manichaeism seems to be decisive at this point.

2. RELATION BETWEEN PRISCILLIANISM AND MANICHAISM.

The relationship between Priscillianism and Manichaeism was described by Philastrius³⁹, Prosper of Aquitaine⁴⁰, Pope Leo I⁴¹ and the Emperor

³⁷ Priscillianus, *Tractatus v, Tractatus Genesis*, CSEL 18, p. 65; PLSuppl 2, c. 1457.

³⁸ Priscillianus, *Tractatus 1, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 16; PLSuppl 2, c. 1422.

³⁹ Cf. Filastrius Brixienis, *De haeresibus*, PL 12, c. 1196–1197.

⁴⁰ Cf. Prosper Aquitanus, *Chronicum*, PL 51, c. 584n.

⁴¹ Leo I Papa, *Epistola ad Turibium*, 16, PL 84, c. 689: „Faciunt hoc priscillianistae, faciunt hoc Manichaei, quorum cum istis tan forderata sunt corda, ut in solis nominibus discreti sacrilegiis autem suis inveniantur uniti”.

Maximus⁴². In some specific cases it can be observed that Priscillianism employs both the Gnostic and Manichean doctrines in such a way that their mutual influences do not cancel but rather complement each other: “Priscillianistae [...] maxime Gnosticorum et Manichaeorum dogmata permixta sectantur”, as Augustine⁴³ says, after Philastrius pointed out that abstinentes: “Gnosticorum et Manichaeorum particulam perniciosissimam aequae secuntur”⁴⁴.

2.1. THE INFLUENCE OF MANICHAISM ON THE LITURGY AND PROPHECYING.

When it comes to liturgical forms, from the little information we have, a special nature of the relationship with Manichaeism appears. For the Manichaeans the sacrament of the Eucharist was meaningless⁴⁵, whereas there are some doubts regarding the attitude of the Priscillians towards this sacrament. Canon III of the Councils of Saragossa (380) makes note of a new custom in Spain of not consuming Holy Communion in the church:

“3. Ut qui eucharistiam in ecclesia accipit et ibi eam non sumit anathematizetur. Item legit: Eucharistiae gratiam si quis probatur acceptam in ecclesia non sumpsisse, anathema sit in perpetuum”⁴⁶.

The external manifestations of Manichaeism include: kissing, greeting, handshakes, prayers, fasting and singing⁴⁷. The last of these customs can also be found in Priscillianism, which is accused of consecrating natural fruits – “magicis praecantationibus”, the charge which Priscillian himself denies in his writings⁴⁸.

⁴² Cf. Maximus Imp., *Ad Siricum Papam*, 4, PL 13, c. 592.

⁴³ Augustinus, *De haeresibus*, PL 42, c. 70.

⁴⁴ Filastrius Brixianus, *De haeresibus*, 84, PL 12, c. 1196–1197.

⁴⁵ Por. E. Puech, *Maniqueísmo. El fundador. La doctrina*, Madrid 1957, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Caesaraugusta (octobris 380), in: *Acta synodalia...*, vol. 1, p. 293: “3. Let him, who receives the Eucharist in the church, and does not take it there, be condemned. He also reads: if any man was proved guilty of not taking the Eucharist in the church, let him be condemned for eternity”.

⁴⁷ Cf. E. Puech, *Maniqueísmo...*, p. 65.

⁴⁸ Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus 1, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 22–23; PLSuppl 2, c. 1427–1428.

The third aspect of this relationship is attributing to the Manichaeans a special interest in teaching and prophesying the doctrine⁴⁹, which is also true of the Priscillianist sect. Priscillian's apostolic sense manifests itself in his *Tractates*⁵⁰, and the way he lived his life. It is worth recalling that during the journey to Rome, they had to stay out of the city, because the bishop Delphinus did not want to accommodate them. Euchrocia, and her daughter Procula, and many others, joined the sect there; in Aquitaine they acted likewise, using the faith of those who had not yet encountered the true face of a new religious movement⁵¹.

2.2. THE INFLUENCE OF MANICHAISM ON THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN NATURE.

Some aspects of Priscillianist thought correspond to agonism, which is a characteristic feature of Manichaeism. In the latter, the soul actually falls victim to the struggle between the Good and Evil.⁵² This statement can be found in the thought of the Galician heretic.

The astral travel of the souls, accepted freely and with optimism, is confronted with the trickery of lower beings and unexpectedly the souls gets entangled in the nets which are spread on the edge of the heavenly circles of the world of Good. It is only the soul that gets imprisoned and the soul alone is the victim of the antagonism of the principles.

Two more analogies between Priscillianism and Manichaeism can be mentioned at this point. In both doctrines the first stage of the struggle between the Divine Prince and the Prince of Hell ends in an instant victory of one over the other. Then the Divine Prince lets one particle of his substance alienate itself into the matter. However, this treaty is not definite, but only acts as a some kind of warm-up for the final victory, which will take place at the third stage of the fight.

As it has already been mentioned, the Priscillianist sources are not very informative. We are given no details on the first stage of the

⁴⁹ Cf. E. Puech, *Maniqueísmo...*, p. 65.

⁵⁰ Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus 1, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 17; PLSuppl 2, c. 1422–1423; *Tractatus IV, Tractatus de Pascha*, CSEL 18, p. 58; PLSuppl 2, c. 1452–1453; *Tractatus V, Tractatus Genesis*, CSEL 18, p. 64; PLSuppl 2, c. 1456–1457.

⁵¹ Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* II, PL 20, c. 48.

⁵² Por. C. Tresmontant, *La Methaphysique...*, p. 318.

confrontation between these two antagonistic worlds, neither on the third stage, the fundamental victory of Good over the Evil, nor when it comes to the definite severance of these two worlds.

Priscillian's anthropological doctrine concurs with a similar Manichaean scheme. For the Manichaeans the dualism of the human nature imitates cosmic dualism⁵³. For Priscillian, man is only an individual substantiation of the drama that takes place in the universe, between the two antagonistic parties. Priscillian himself speaks about it in the extract preserved for us by Orosius: "Haec prima sapientia est in animarum tipis divinarum virtutum intelligere naturas et corporis dispositionem, in qua obligatum videtur coelum et terra"⁵⁴.

This is how the final result of the universal drama depends on individual decisions of every man. As long as people remain in marriages and keep on reproducing, there will always be new imprisoned souls. Hence the negative evaluation of this sacrament.

SUMMARY

Priscillian's thought in some respects corresponds to Gnostic-Manichaean doctrine. The common topics include: cosmic dualism, the fall of the soul and its return to the divinity, Gnosis as an enlightenment of a higher level and the liberation of the soul, allegoric interpretation of the Scripture or esotericism.

The fact that the documentary sources preserved until this day are incomplete prevents us from explaining precisely how far the influence of heterodox doctrines goes, though it is certain that such influence existed.

Although *Tractates* is not the source that lets us draw all the aforementioned conclusions, there is no doubt that this is the work where Priscillian presents himself as an expert on various heterodox movements of his time. He repeats there well-known claims about the

⁵³ Por. C. Tresmontant, *La Methaphysique...*, p. 308.

⁵⁴ Orosius, *Commonitorium de errore Priscillianistarum et Origenistarum*, CCL 49, p. 2: "The most important skill in differentiating the types (pictures) of souls is the ability to perceive the nature of godly virtues and put the body in order, in which it seems the heaven and earth are reflected"

bisexual God⁵⁵, about the existence of the Fifth Gospel⁵⁶, and presents the names of the beings in Gnostic doctrine⁵⁷. In all probability he only does it to condemn them, as the Church requires in its legal acts.

The true sources of Priscillianism need to be sought at the meta-physical level. Trinitarian doctrine of Sabellianism constitutes its essential points, the fall of the soul and its descent into the matter, dualism of the principles of good and evil, the existence of numerous intermediate beings, the doctrine of higher enlightenment and the myth of eternal wandering.

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⁵⁵ Priscillianus, *Tractatus I, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 28; PLSuppl 2, c. 1430–1431: „...illis enim, sicut ab infelicibus dicitur, masculofemina putetur deus: nobis autem et in masculis et in feminis dei spiritus est”.

⁵⁶ Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus I, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 31; PLSuppl 2, c. 1433.

⁵⁷ Cf. Priscillianus, *Tractatus I, Liber apologeticus*, CSEL 18, p. 17; PLSuppl 2, c. 1422–1423; CSEL 18, p. 21; PLSuppl 2, c. 1426; CSEL 18, p. 29; PLSuppl 2, c. 1431.

