



The Bishops of Hispania and Pope Innocent I (401-417)

ALBERTO FERREIRO
SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

The topic that I am laying out in this brief essay is related to my forthcoming monograph, currently in its final stages, titled: *Epistolas Plenas: The Correspondence of the Bishops of Hispania with the Bishops of Rome: Third through Seventh Centuries*. There is a growing interest in the extant letters that were exchanged between the bishops of Hispania and the See of Rome from the third to the seventh centuries. In many books and scholarly articles, they have often been mentioned, but almost always in passing and without in-depth analysis of their content. This essay focuses on one example from among eleven letters involving the bishops of Hispania and the See of Rome.

ESSAY

Pope Innocent I (401-417) and Priscillianism in Hispania

Pope Innocent I flourished when the barbarian tribes breached the western part of the Roman Empire. There are extant a total of thirty-six of Innocent's letters, which collectively allow an up-close glimpse of his pastoral interventions in the provinces of Gallia, Thessalonica, Illyricum, North Africa, Italy, and Hispania. Here I focus on a letter directed to the bishops of Hispania, which reveals that the pope became involved in the Priscillianist crisis that was still there unfolding.



At this time, the early fifth century, the church in Hispania was potentially on the verge of a schism over the question of what conditions to impose on Priscillianists who had requested permission to re-enter the Church. In 400, bishops who met at the First Council of Toledo (I Toledo) to condemn the heresy solicited Innocent's views on their teachings and requested advice on how to handle the matter. He also was asked to intervene in various cases to correct irregularities in the ordination of clergy. J. N. D. Kelly has assessed Innocent's view of the primacy in this way: "No previous pope had so clearly enunciated the view that the apostolic see possesses supreme teaching authority."¹ As such, Innocent exercised his conception of papal authority on the controversies in a distinct way, one which benefitted the bishops who had asked for his intervention.

A clear rejection of Priscillianism at I Toledo, fifteen years after Priscillian's execution in Trier (385), did not diminish the movement. On the contrary, he was hailed as a martyr by his followers.² Innocent assumed the See of Peter one year after the council met. He was asked for guidance about what to do with repentant Priscillianists seeking re-entry into the Catholic Church. As contentious, complex, and impassioned as this problem became, it was hardly *terra incognita* in the experience of the Church.³

¹ J. N. D. Kelly and Michael J. Walsh, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 37-38. His famous letter external to Hispania to Decentius of Gubbio (410) is where he clearly laid out claim to the jurisdiction of the Roman See in the western provinces, *Epistola* 25.2, *Patrologia Latina* (PL) 20, 552.

² It was forbidden at the First Council of Toledo to invoke Priscillian in the liturgy: "Se a recitatione eorum, quae dicebant martyres recessisse (José Vives, et al., *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos* [Barcelona, Madrid: CSIC, 1963], 30)." See also Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 107-08. A supporter named Herenas proclaimed at I Toledo that Priscillian was a martyr and a Catholic: "Herenas clericos suos sequi maluerat, qui sponte, nec interrogati Priscillianum catholicum sanctumque martyrem clamassent atque ipse usque ad finem caotholicum esse dixisset, persecutionem ab episcopis passum (Vives, et al., *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, 31)."

³ Innocent I, *Epistola* 3, PL 20, 485-93; Angel Custodio Vega, "El primado romano y la iglesia española en los siete primeros siglos," *La Ciudad de Dios* 154 (1942): 45-48; Roland Minnerath, "La tradition doctrinale de la primauté pétrinienne au premier millénaire," in *Il Primato del Successore di Pietro*, Atti del Simposio Teologico, Roma, 2-4 Dicembre 1996, Atti e Documenti (Vatican City:

The peace that I Toledo sought did not materialize; it polarized the two factions. Some bishops were scandalized that repentant Priscillianists were allowed to continue in their clerical positions, fearing that they could continue to propagate heresy. The opposing bishops refused the former Priscillianists communion and gave no credence to their repentance. Innocent's letter, dated 404-405, attempted to restore unity to prevent a schism.

Bishop Hilarius and a presbyter Elpidius considered the situation so grave that they journeyed to Rome to speak to the pontiff to gain his intervention.⁴ When Innocent responded, the letter was not addressed to Hilarius or Elpidius; it was directed at all the bishops: "Innocentius universis episcopis in Toletana synodo constituti, dilectissimis fratribus, in Domino salute." Innocent realized that the discord had spread to other provinces. The pope made it clear that it needed to end right away and that he had the medicine – *medicina provideri*.⁵ He succinctly identified the root of the problems: the lack of unity – precipitated in part by Priscillianism, the absence of discipline, the neglect of the Canons of the Fathers, and frequent irregular ordinations. Innocent agreed that it was time for an intervention from Rome to re-establish the concord upon which the faith rested.⁶ To do so, he had to contend with three

Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), 117-46, especially, 128-29. Charles Pietri, *Roma Christiana, Recherches sur l'Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)*. Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 224 (Rome: École Française de Rome, Palais Farnèse, 1976), 1062-67. For a recent study of this letter see Geoffrey D. Dunn, "Innocent I and the First Synod of Rome," in *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, ed. Geoffrey D. Dunn (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 89-107.

⁴ See Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, pp. 1066-67.

⁵ *Epistola* 3.1, *PL* 20, 486: "Saepe me et nimia cum teneret cura sollicitum super dissensione et schismate Ecclesiarum, quod per Hispanias latius in dies serpere, et citatiore gradu incedere fama proloquitur; necessarium tempus emersit, quo non posset emendatio tanta differri, et deberet congrua medicina provideri."

⁶ *Ibid.*: "Nam fratres nostri, coepiscopus Hilarius et Elpidius presbyter, partim unitatis amore permoti, partim qua laborat provincia pernicie, ut oportuit, excitati, ad Sedem Apostolicam commearunt, et in ipso sinu fidei violatam intra provinciam pacem, disciplinae rationem esse confusam, et multa contra canones patrum, contempto ordine, regulisque neglectis, in usurpatione ecclesiarum fuisse commissa, nec concordiam, in qua fidei nostrae stabilitas tota consistit, posse retineri, cum dolore et gemitu persecuti sunt. Quae in consessu presbyterii actorum confectione retinentur, et possunt vobis lectione monstrari."

competing groups on this problem: the Priscillianists, those restored to communion at the council, and those who rejected repentant Priscillianists.

The three groups originated from the provinces of Baetica, Carthagenensis, and Gallaecia. He reproached the bishops of Baetica and Carthagenensis for having broken communion with the Gallaecians – the repentant Priscillianists. It is rather curious that he referred to Priscillianists ethnically as Gallaecians, as if the entire people had converted to the sect. As the rift continued to increase, Innocent spoke with a sense of urgency.⁷ He cited the example of Lucifer of Cagliari and his followers who separated from the Church when the Arians were readmitted. The pope reasoned that bishops unwilling to accept repentant Priscillianists would make it difficult to convert more. It was an attitude lacking grace towards a repentant sinner. Innocent did not offer a new solution; he reminded the bishops that reintegration for repentant Priscillianists was made possible by the council. They shut the door of mercy for the ex-Priscillianists. The pope ordered the recalcitrant bishops to accept the decision reached at Toledo.⁸ Dunn deftly observed that, “Innocent painted the hard-line bishops as opponents of peace, and the bishops at Toledo as promoters of unity.”⁹

Innocent adopted an ecumenical approach to the problem: he exercised his Petrine Primacy indirectly by referring the bishops to the council. Innocent did not by-pass the council to impose anything unilaterally. He joined the voice of Peter to the

⁷ *Epistola* 3.2 *PL* 20, 486: “Quod ad ipsam fidem attinet quod Baetici vel Carthagenenses episcopi, propter Galliciorum communionem a pace omnium discederunt, orta dissensio est: quae non solum non minuitur, verum etiam per dies singulos studio contentionis augetur, cum obtinendi proposito unusquisque quod voluit, aeternum orbem mali, et circulum quemdam de tali animositate fecerunt; cum utique bono cuique in rebus talibus vinci melius sit, quam malo more pravum propositum quod semel placuit obtinere.”

⁸ *Epistola* 3.2 *PL* 20, 487: “Nam quae alia causa et superioribus temporibus illius Luciferi praeter pertinaciam fuit, quae eum retraxit a concordia illorum, qui Arrianorum haeresim prudenti conversione damnarant? Eodem studio, post Priscilliani detestabili secta, omnium merito consensione damnata, receptos in catholicam fidem eos qui consilio saniore, conversi sunt, aegerrime aliquos tulisse cognovimus.”

⁹ Dunn, “Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo,” 100.

decisions reached at Toledo. The pope was not done with the obdurate clergy; from sacred scripture he demonstrated how their hardline posture was pastorally untenable. He wanted the repentant Priscillianists to be fully received by Catholics. He cited three biblical examples of those who fell into grave sin and were restored through repentance. Simon Peter who denied Christ did not lose the privilege of assuming the leadership of the Apostles after repenting. Thomas who expressed serious doubts that the Lord had risen from the dead was restored to faith when Jesus let him see and to touch the wounds. When Thomas cried out, “My Lord and my God,” that showed his repentance and he retained his apostleship. King David, notwithstanding his great fall, did not lose the gift of prophecy. The fall of David was the incident with Uriah and Bathsheba where lust, homicide, and greed were manifest. David repented and did not lose his place in the Messianic line of Jesus.¹⁰ Innocent persuasively made the case that repentant Priscillianists merited the same grace to restore them to communion. The requirement of re-baptism for the ex-Priscillianists was never on the table; repentance and a blessing from the bishop was sufficient. In this way, the unity of the bishops and priests was restored and together they could bring back into the Church the heretics. Obstinate bishops and priests who refused to submit to the rulings of I Toledo – add to that the pope - were complicit in fracturing [*lacerationis*] the body of Christ.¹¹

In the next disciplinary action, Innocent rebuked Bishop Rufinus for ordaining clergy secretly, ignoring the will of his metropolitan, the people, and the disciplinary

¹⁰ *Epistola* 3.3 *PL* 20, 488: “Quod si quos hoc pungit aut stimulat, legant Petrum apostolum post lacrymas hoc fuisse quod fuerat: considerent Thomam post dubitationem illam nihil de prioribus meritis amisisse: denique David prophetam egregium post manifestam confessionem suam prophetiae suae meritis non fuisse privatum.”

¹¹ *Epistola* 3.1, 4 *PL* 20, 488-89: “Quare incumbendum est dilectioni vestrae, et bonis sacerdotibus admitendum, quatenus praeceunte doctrina in unitatem catholicae fidei omnes qui dispersi sunt, congregentur, et esse inexpugnabile unum corpus incipiat, quod si separetur in partes, ad omnes patebit lacerationis injurias, et ex sese pestem patietur internam, quando secum compago ipsa confligit.”

decisions of the council of Toledo. He also ruled against Bishop Minucius for the same offense in Girona and Tarragona.¹² Innocent accused both of violating several canons of the Council of Nicaea (325) that clarified ordination and the rights and privileges of bishops – especially metropolitans – in canons 4, 6, and 16. Innocent, thus, corrected anomalous practices in the provinces by pointing to the Ecumenical Councils as the voice for guidance. He did not unilaterally order anyone in Hispania to do it his way based on his succession from Peter. The weight of his apostolic office – being the successor of Peter – was not lost on the bishops. The bishops who visited him were aware of this; that is why they turned to him in the first place. The bishops of Rome did not have to invoke their succession from Peter every time a query came their way. Let us recall that in all the Ecumenical Councils the voice of Peter from Rome was needed to achieve apostolic ecumenical consensus; it was inconceivable to have it any other way prior to 1054. The bishops of Rome had as one of their agendas to bring the Church in Hispania into full conformity with the dogmas and practices contained in the Ecumenical Councils. At this juncture, the Church in Hispania was out of step in many areas of ecclesial life.

Innocent used canon 4 to teach them the proper protocols when selecting candidates for ordination of a bishop: “It is by all means desirable that a bishop should be appointed by all the bishops of the province. But if this is difficult because of some pressing necessity or the length of the journey involved, let at least three come together and perform the ordination, but only after the absent bishops have taken part in the vote and given their written consent. But in each province the right of

¹² *Epistola* 3.2, 5 *PL* 20, 489-90: “Non enim latere potuit, quod Rufinus atque Minicius episcopi in alienis ecclesiis, contra Nicaenos canones, episcopos usurpaverunt ordinare [...] et iuxta Nicaenos canones ferenda est de tali usurpatione sententia. Illorum etiam episcoporum, qui a Rufino vel a Minicio contra regulas ordinati sunt.” Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, 1066. Dunn, “Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo,” 101.

confirming the proceedings belongs to the metropolitan bishop.”¹³ The bottom line here was to preserve the final authority of the metropolitan to ratify an ordination of a bishop.¹⁴ As much is reaffirmed in canon 6: “And this is to be universally understood, that if anyone be made bishop without the consent of the metropolitan, the great synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop.” It is evident that bishops Rufinus and Municius ignored or worse still usurped [“episcopus usurpaverunt ordinare”] their metropolitan when ordaining bishops.¹⁵

Innocent utilized canon 6 to make known in Hispania important matters about his jurisdiction based on his Petrine authority. In a letter to Bishop Decentius of Gubbio (*Epistola* 25.2) Innocent identified the regions under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome: *Italiam, Gallias, Hispanias, Africam atque Siciliam et insulas*.¹⁶ In light of the content of this letter and canon 6 of Nicaea that Innocent cited he was not claiming universal jurisdiction. The pontiff left no doubt that he had the apostolic authority to rule on matters of discipline and doctrine in their provinces and were obligated to conform to the wishes of the successor of Peter. The letter is identified by Ronald Minnerath as a decisive step for the claim of universal jurisdiction by future bishops of Rome: “From Innocent forward, the popes commonly refer to themselves as the successors of Peter.”¹⁷ Innocent claimed in his response full jurisdiction over the

¹³ *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 7.

¹⁴ *Epistola* 3.2, 5 *PL* 20, 489: “Haec (Nicaen. can, 4, 6 and 16) ne quis sibi audeat vindicare, saltem nunc a nobis est salubriter providendum: ne improba usurpatione dissimulation in deterius conualescat, et fiat de consuetudine regula, quae non veniat ab ipsa quae litteris mandata est disciplina.”

¹⁵ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 8-9.

¹⁶ The *insulas* are likely Sardinia, Corsica, the Balearic Islands, Malta and others.

¹⁷ Minnerath, *Il Primato del Successore di Pietro*, 129: “A partir d’Innocent, les papes se désigneront couramment comme ‘successeurs de Pierre.’” *Epistola* 25.2 *PL* 20, 552: “Quis enim nesciat aut non advertat, id quod a principe Apostolorum Petro Romanae Ecclesiae traditum est, ac nunc usque custoditur, ab omnibus debere servari; nec superduci aut introduci aliquid, quod auctoritatem non habeat, aut aliunde accipere videatur exemplum? praesertim cum sit manifestum, in omnem Italiam, Gallias, Hispanias, Africam atque Siciliam, et insulas interiacentes, nullum instituisse ecclesias, nisi eos quos venerabilis apostolus Petrus aut eius successores constituerint sacerdotes. Aut legant, si in his provinciis alius Apostolorum invenitur, aut legitur docuisse. Qui si non legunt, quia nusquam

western provinces as other bishops did over the eastern provinces, as in canon 6: “since a similar custom exists with reference to the bishop of Rome” after describing the regions under the Bishop of Alexandria. As Minnerath also notes, Innocent’s reference to himself as Peter’s successor and the eminence of Rome – “*principes Apostolorum Petro Romanae Ecclesiae, venerabilis apostolus Petrus aut eius successores, Ecclesia Romana custodit*” – was used subsequently to expand Rome’s authority. I maintain, however, that these affirmations about the See of Rome applied only to the territorial confines explicitly named in the letter and not beyond. On the other hand, when bishops and the Bishop of Rome spoke with one voice at an Ecumenical Council, it then fell on local bishops to implement the canons in their provinces. The bishops in Hispania who appealed to Innocent bolstered their position through the pontiff. It is obvious that bishops Rufinus and Minicius carried out ordinations in violation of what was set down at Nicaea. I think they were ignorant of the canons of Nicaea. Whether they acted out of ignorance or defiance, Innocent was intent on rectifying the practice. He ordered the irregularly ordained bishops, because they lacked the consent of the metropolitan, to step down. Henceforth, all ordinations were to conform to the canons of Nicaea; failure to do so was a grave matter that could result in excommunication.

Canon 16 from Nicaea was used by Innocent to correct irregular ordinations and the illicit movement of deacons and presbyters from their original diocese. This was intended to restore order to the dioceses and dissuade bishops from creating an ethos of tension, competition, and jealousy. Presbyters and deacons could not move at will to another church without the consent of the bishop. They could not ordain a man belonging to another bishopric without the express approval of the bishop. The canon

inveniunt, oportet eos hoc sequi, quod Ecclesia Romana custodit, a qua eos principium accepisse non dubium est, ne dum peregrinis assertionibus student, caput institutionum videantur omittere.”

warned that if “anyone dares to steal away one who belongs to another and to ordain him in his church without the consent of the other’s own bishop among whose clergy he was enrolled before he departed, the ordination is to be null.”¹⁸ The irregularities were a disregard of clerical hierarchy that could lead to factions and schisms. Innocent perceived how this undermined the authority of the metropolitan bishop whose charge was to maintain ecclesial unity and orthodox doctrine in all dioceses.

Crucial to all of this was the backdrop of Priscillianism. Although Priscillian was appointed bishop of Avila, in his mind and of his followers he was a Catholic.¹⁹ They were known, nevertheless, to move freely from diocese to diocese without any regard for the local bishop. Moreover, there were some Catholic priests and a few bishops that joined the movement; they were declared excommunicated. I suggest that this discipline promulgated for Hispania by Innocent was intended to curtail the spread of Priscillianism without ever mentioning the sect specifically. In other words, Rufinus and Municius were not accused of being Priscillianists or of even being in collusion with them, but their activity could encourage much of the same among them. The irregular ordinations that by-passed the metropolitan diminished their authority over the Catholic clergy and heretics.

Innocent also dealt with the problem of Bishop John who readmitted into the Church two repentant Priscillianist bishops that caused division, Simposius and Dictinius, who had at I Toledo rejected Priscillianism.²⁰ After their bishop rejected them, John

¹⁸ Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council*, 13-14.

¹⁹ Even today, in the Cathedral of Avila, Priscillian is listed among the legitimate bishops. See Félix de las Heras Fernández, *Los obispos de Ávila. Su acción pastoral en el ambiente histórico de su tiempo a partir de la predicación apostólica* (Ávila: Gráfica de Ávila, 2004), 17-20, 257.

²⁰ I Toledo: “Symphosius episcopus dixit: Si quos male condidit libros cum ipso auctore condemno. Dictinius episcopus dixit: Sequor sententiam domini mei et patris mei et genitoris et doctoris mei Symphosii. Quaecumque loquutus est, loquor, nam scriptum legimus: ‘Si quis vobis aliter evangelizaverit praeter quam quod evangelizatum est vobis. anathema sit,’ et iccirco omnia quae

and others broke communion with the rehabilitated Priscillianists. Bishop John's reversal was censured by the pope because it went against the rulings of I Toledo.²¹ The pope ordered that any similar cases be investigated fully and to separate from the Catholic faith any who rejected the council. As Pietri argues, "Innocent sanctioned, as a whole, all the decrees of the council to quickly condemn the schismatics of Baetica or Carthaginensis who refused the canons of I Toledo."²² Innocent insisted that the canons of the council be upheld by all bishops. He did not make obedience to his Petrine authority central, at least directly, when he censured Bishop John. He pointed him to I Toledo and its ruling over re-admitted Priscillianists. A council – provincial or ecumenical – represents the voice of episcopal consensus [successors of the apostles] – with Peter as head. Innocent gave his entire support as successor of Peter to the bishops gathered in Toledo; Bishop John was expected to comply.

There was another dispute in Lusitania when bishop Petronius of Mérida died and was succeeded by Gregorius. It was because Petronius consented to the agreement reached at Toledo on the re-integration of ex-Priscillianists into the Church. There was dissent about the succession of Gregorius in Mérida; it was considered invalid by some.²³

Priscillianus aut male docuit aut male scripsit cum ipso auctore condemno." In Vives, et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 28-32 at 30.

²¹ See Dunn, "Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo," 102.

²² *Epistola* 3.3, 6 *PL* 20, 490: "Ut abdicetur Ioannes, si decreto de recipiendis ad Ecclesiam redeuntibus, cui sunscripserat, repugnare non desinat. De Ioanne quoque episcopo, cuius in synodo Toletana super receptis Symphosio atque Dictinio per legatos consensus accessit, et cui probabilis visa illa correctio, examinentur quae poste aunt secuta. Et prorsus super omnibus, quorum in dubium venit de cessatione communio, plena inquisitio vestigetur, ut secundum decretum synodi Toletanae, vel communionis consortio propter abolendam suspensionem schismatis misceantur, vel si qui fuerint deprehensi qui abnuant concordiam et constituta placitorum, a communione catholicae fidei per dilectionis vestrae sententias abdicentur: ut iam non internum malum, quod tacitum non desinit semper, sed schismaticorum manifesta professione contagioque vitetur." Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, pp. 1065-66: "Innocent sanctionne en bloc toutes les décisions du concile pour condamner plus vite les schismatiques de Bétique ou de Carthaginoise, qui refusent les canons tolédans."

²³ *Epistola* 3.5, 8 *PL* 20, 491: "Gregorii etiam Emeritensis episcopi qui in locum Patruini venerabilis recordationis est ordinatus, querela, si qua est, audiatur: et si contra meritum suum passus est iniuriam, in invidos honoris alterius vindicetur nec posthac in quemquam honorum spiritus factionis insurgat." Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, 1064.

This problem was not limited to Lusitania; it seems to have been widespread.²⁴ Innocent predictably ruled that the appointment of Gregorius was valid.

A distinct challenge that surfaced many times in Hispania was clerical marriage; it was discussed in several councils.²⁵ Clerical marriage was not condemned by Innocent; rather it was the question of a second marriage by clergy and their baptismal status. The position of Innocent on this was clear; if clergy married, the woman had to be a virgin. Bishops could only be married once as the Apostle Paul had required. If they had married before and the woman had been unbaptized it was considered a valid marriage; only sin is removed at baptism not the marriage. The reason for this was so the woman in question could have a clean start. To justify a second marriage clergy argued that a previous marriage to an unbaptized woman did not count as a first marriage, thus leaving open to marry again to a baptized woman. Innocent was asked to offer guidance on this question: if clergy married a woman not baptized, was it a valid marriage? The pope responded that it was, regardless of whether it was before or after baptism. This topic had been addressed at I Toledo in canons 3 and 4. Lectors who married a widow could be promoted at most to the rank of deacon; sub-deacons whose wife died and married were reduced to the rank of Ostiarius or Lector and could never read the gospels or epistles.²⁶

Innocent did not accept the creative arguments to the contrary and exposed it as false with a short catena of scripture. The first was from Genesis 1:28, “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every

²⁴ Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, 1064; Custodio Vega, “El Primado Romano y la Iglesia Española,” 48.

²⁵ The Third Council of Braga is but one example in canon 4 (Vives, et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 375). See Alberto Ferreiro, “The See of Dumium/Braga before and under Visigothic Rule,” *Evphrosyne* 45 (2017): 97-115.

²⁶ Vives, et al., *Concilios Visigóticos*, 20-21.

living thing that moves upon the earth’.” The main point is that Adam was given one woman not several. The one woman was to meet other criteria as directed in Leviticus 21:13, “And he shall take a wife in her virginity.” Another from Proverbs 19:14, taught, “House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.” All these reinforce the idea that married clergy could have only one wife. Innocent also cited Jesus in Matthew 19:6, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder,” an allusion to Adam and Eve. The passage from Paul was more direct; it prescribed the marital status of a bishop in I Timothy 3:2: “Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife.” The last one from Paul, in Titus 1:6, taught, “if any man is blameless, the husband of one wife” to underscore that monogamy was the model for married clergy and lay people.²⁷

In this letter the disciplinary measures concerning men and women were not associated with the Priscillianists. They were accused of all manner of accusations of sexual indiscretions; I consider them false accusations.²⁸ The pontiff’s response, however, was decisive: to bring Roman discipline to all in Hispania. As Charles Pietri notes, “Innocent promptly attached disciplinary measures to the councils and its

²⁷ *Epistola* 3.6, 10 *PL* 20, 492-93: “Quales vero eligendi sint in ordine clericorum, evidens forma declarat; id est, qui ab ineunte aetate baptizati fuerint, et lectorum officio sociati: vel si maiores sint, cum fuerint Dei gratiam consecuti, statim se ecclesiasticis ordinibus manciparint. quaerendum si uxorem virginem acceperint quia scriptum est in veteris Testamento [...] Neque qui duas uxorus habuerit quia Paulus apostolus ait. Nec illud debere admitti quod aliquanti pro defensione pravi erroris opponunt et asserunt, quod ante baptismum uxor accepta non debeat imputari quia in baptismo omnia dimittuntur, non intelligentes huiusmodi, quod sola in baptismo peccata dimittuntur nec uxorum numerus aboletur [...] Nullus ergo contra Apostolum tale aliquid sentiat, nec admittat: sed fideliter intelligat, unius uxoris virum [Titus 1:16] sive ante baptismum sive post baptismum esse nominatum. Si enim uxor ante baptismum accepta non ducitur in numerum, nec filii ex eadem suscepti inter filios poterunt numerari.”

²⁸ See Alberto Ferreiro, “Priscillian and Nicolaitism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 382-92; Alberto Ferreiro, “Jerome’s Polemic Against Priscillian in his *Letter to Ctesiphon* (133, 4),” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 39 (1993): 309-32, reprinted in *Doctrinal Diversity. Varieties of Early Christianity*, vol. 4, ed. Everett Ferguson (NY: Garland Publishing, 1999), 137-60; Alberto Ferreiro, “Sexual depravity, doctrinal error, and character assassination in the fourth century: Jerome against the Priscillianists,” *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 29-38.

sentences precise enough to remind leading figures of Roman discipline.”²⁹ Innocent’s approach is revealing: he provided guidance, but it was left to the bishops in Hispania to implement it. They understood that the advice was from the successor of Peter and the Ecumenical Councils. Innocent’s goal throughout was to lead the Church in Hispania into full conformity with the Ecumenical Councils. I concur, for the most part, with Geoffrey Dunn, when he says, “I argue that nowhere did Innocent assert apostolic authority or any notion of Petrine primacy over Spain [...]. Nowhere in it [the letter] does he assert himself as the successor of Peter or make claims about what Petrine authority meant. The most he claimed about Rome was that it was; ‘the bosom of faith’ and an apostolic see.”³⁰ While true, I think further comment is warranted.

What Innocent did not say in his letter to Hispania about the Petrine Primacy of the Bishop of Rome needs to be considered in light of the letter to Decentius; there, Hispania was claimed to be under his direct jurisdiction. I think the bishops of Hispania knew this; there was no reason to state the obvious. Minnerath points out that the expression “a persona beati Petri apostoli episcopatus sumit initium” was also used by Innocent in 404, Pope Sozimus in 418 and Xystus in 422.³¹ The reference to Rome being the “bosom of the faith” has been too easily dismissed and downplayed by Dunn. Innocent had this expression in mind in relation to all bishops, including those in Hispania. In another comment Dunn observes, “What emerges here from all this, I would contend, is not a legislative or executive primacy of the Roman bishop over Spain, but a growing judicial one recognized by Priscillian (here demonstrated

²⁹ Pietri, *Roma Christiana*, 1065: “Aux conseils et aux sentences, Innocent joint un manuel de discipline très rapide, assez précis pour rappeler les grandes orientations de la discipline romaine.”

³⁰ Dunn, “Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo,” 91 and 106.

³¹ Minnerath, *Il Primato del Successore di Pietro*, 131. See also my study on the Petrine Primacy and Caesarius of Arles: Alberto Ferreiro, “Petrine Primacy and Episcopal Authority in Caesarius of Arles,” *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006): 261-67; of relevance too: Alberto Ferreiro, “‘Petrine Primacy’ and Gregory of Tours,” *Francia* 33 (2006): 1-16.

by Damasus's refusal to short circuit the process). Rome was at the apex of an emerging ecclesiastical court system in the West."³² Technically, Dunn is correct, but this emerging so-called "ecclesiastical court" of Rome was inseparable from the Petrine Primacy. It was the latter that gave Rome the full weight of its authority when it pronounced judgement. Dunn and I both agree, though, on an essential point, that the universal claim of jurisdiction was still far down the road.

Innocent, notwithstanding his indirect claims of Petrine primacy, exercised his authority in a collegial and ecumenical way with the bishops in Hispania. One of his main goals was to conform the Church in Hispania to the Ecumenical Councils and the See of Rome. The bishops in Hispania, before and after, when they needed an opinion or intervention turned to the See in Rome. Just as in the East, bishops turned to Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus, and others. I cannot reduce Innocent's intervention, as Dunn has done, to that of: "Such directives were little more than personal opinions."³³ In this situation, with a potential emerging schism, the authority of the See of Peter via Innocent was a crucial and significant intervention.

Conclusion

To conclude, there are several things to keep in mind. We can identify two major phases of this correspondence within the time frame of the third to seventh centuries. From the fourth through the sixth century we find the most intensive correspondence; with the Third Council of Toledo (589) and the pontificate of Gregory the Great as a demarcation line. This is because the church in Hispania was still in a nascent phase as elsewhere in the West. The bishops sought guidance from Rome on a wide array of

³² Dunn, "Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo," 106: "Innocent I and the First Synod of Toledo," 94-95. He adds in another place, "The churches in the West looked to Rome to some extent and in the matter of the deposition of bishops Rome was the point of legal appeal [...]. This does equate a certain degree of primacy held by the Roman bishop over his western colleagues."

³³ *Ibid.*, 107.

issues: liturgical, doctrinal, moral and more. The second phase witnessed a dramatic decline of correspondence between Rome and the bishops of Hispania because recourse to Rome was not as necessary; they had in hand the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, previous papal correspondence, and their own provincial decisions to turn to.

Bibliography

Primary

Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos. Edited by José Vives, Tomás Marín Martínez, Gonzalo Martínez Díez. Barcelona, Madrid: CSIC, 1963.

Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, 2 vols. Edited by Norman P. Tanner. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990.

Patrologia Latina. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, 1841-1855.

Secondary

Custodio Vega, Angel. "El primado romano y la iglesia española en los siete primeros siglos." *La Ciudad de Dios* 154 (1942): 45-48.

Dunn, Geoffrey D. "Innocent I and the First Synod of Rome." In *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*, edited by Geoffrey D. Dunn, 89-107. Surrey: Ashgate, 2015.

Fernández, Félix de las Heras. *Los obispos de Ávila. Su acción pastoral en el ambiente histórico de su tiempo a partir de la predicación apostólica*. Ávila: Gráfica de Ávila, 2004.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "Jerome's Polemic Against Priscillian in his *Letter* to Ctesiphon (133, 4)." *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 39 (1993): 309-32. Reprinted in *Doctrinal Diversity. Varieties of Early Christianity*, vol. 4, edited by Everett Ferguson, 137-60. NY: Garland Publishing, 1999.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "Sexual depravity, doctrinal error, and character assassination in the fourth century: Jerome against the Priscillianists." *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993): 29-38.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "Priscillian and Nicolaitism." *Vigiliae Christianae* 52 (1998): 382-92.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "Petrine Primacy and Episcopal Authority in Caesarius of Arles." *Studia Patristica* 43 (2006): 261-67.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "'Petrine Primacy' and Gregory of Tours." *Francia* 33 (2006): 1-16.

Ferreiro, Alberto. "The See of Dumium/Braga before and under Visigothic Rule." *Evphrosyne* 45 (2017): 97-115.

Kelly, J. N. D. and Michael J. Walsh. *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Minnerath, Roland. "La tradition doctrinale de la primauté pétrinienne au premier millénaire." In *Il Primato del Successore di Pietro*, Atti del Simposio Teologico, Roma, 2-4 Dicembre 1996, Atti e Documenti, 117-46. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998.

Pietri, Charles. *Roma Christiana, Recherches sur l'Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)*. Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 224. Rome: École Française de Rome, Palais Farnèse, 1976.

The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity. Edited by Geoffrey D. Dunn. Surrey: Ashgate, 2015.

Van Dam, Raymond. *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.