

SULPICIUS SEVERUS AND MARTIN OF TOURS:
DEFENDING A MENTOR, SECURING A SAINT

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Martin of Tours has become one of the most famous saints of Western Christendom, yet his life was shrouded in controversy. Martin's initial fame in Aquitaine came from the circulation of Sulpicius Severus' writings in the early fifth century. A pupil of the holy man and lawyer from Aquitaine, Severus used his pen to protect Martin's sanctity from attacks by critics such as Ithacius and other members of the clergy. This thesis will use the three works of Severus, the *Vita Martini*, *Chronicorum*, and *Dialogus* to argue that Severus used a rhetorical strategy throughout his Martinian writings to secure Martin's sanctity and legitimacy as a bishop. Through the successful defense that these documents presented, Martin's sanctity has survived the test of time, despite the fact that his life and Severus' writings about him have been a source of scholastic debate. This thesis consists of five chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter One will place Martin and Severus in their historical context and introduce the historiography of the Martinian works. Chapter Two will explore criticisms of both Martin's life as a soldier and of his lack of the educational and social background prevalent in his fellow bishops. Chapter Three will then explore the early struggles that came from reconciling the responsibilities of the ascetic lifestyle with the communal responsibilities as a bishop. Chapter Four will investigate the criticism over Martin's involvement with Priscillian of Avila, a rebuke which Severus fully engages in a strong defensive posture to protect Martin's reputation from accusations of heresy. Next, Chapter Five will treat charges of hypocrisy contemporary critics brought against Martin. This thesis will not simply highlight these four criticisms that Severus attempted to resolve, but will also explore why these critiques are present in the hagiography and the rhetorical defense used by Severus to secure Martin's sanctity.

CHAPTER 1. NOW FOR THE DEFENSE: SULPICIOUS SEVERUS¹

Martin of Tours has become one of the most famous saints of Western Christendom, yet his life was shrouded in controversy. His popularity rose so high that Bishop Perpetuus, one of Martin's successors to the see of Tours, exhumed the saint's body and constructed a church to shelter the hordes of Aquitanian pilgrims drawn there to honor him.² The saint's fame spread from Aquitaine to the lands conquered by the Franks when Martin became the patron saint of the Merovingians in 507 CE.³ The warriors of the Franks and Anglo-Saxons looked to Martin's earlier years in the Roman Army for inspiration as he was the first bishop and saint who came from a military background.⁴ Martin's initial fame in Aquitaine came, however, from the circulation of Sulpicius Severus' writings in the early fifth century. A pupil of the holy man and lawyer from Aquitaine, Severus used his pen to protect Martin's sanctity from attacks by critics such as Ithacius and other members of the clergy. Like a lawyer, Severus developed a rhetorical argument and presented evidence not only from his own experience with the holy man, but more importantly, from the people of Tours to support his belief that Martin was indeed a saint worthy of honor.⁵ This thesis will use the three works of Severus, the *Vita Martini*, *Chronicorum*, and *Dialogus* to argue that Severus used a rhetorical strategy throughout his Martinian writings to

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Maribel Dietz, Dr. Steve Ross, Dr. Lisi Oliver, for their guidance and assistance in my research and academic development. I would also like to acknowledge and thank George Molchan and Marc Patenaude for their fantastic assistance in editing this thesis.

² Bishop Perpetuus constructed a church 160 feet long by 60 feet wide from 460-470 CE, see Werner Jacobsen, "Saints' Tombs in Frankish Church Architecture," *Speculum*, Vol. 72, No. 4 (Oct., 1997) pp. 1107-1143, p. 1108; and Clare Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1983) p. 361.

³ Clovis conquered Aquitaine in the sixth century and adopted Martin as a patron saint. Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer: History and Miracle in Sulpicius Severus*, pp. 334 and 361.

⁴ John Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Ashgate Publishing: Burlington, VT, 2003) p. 9.

⁵ Stancliffe, p. 84.

secure Martin's sanctity and legitimacy as a bishop. Through the successful defense that these documents presented, Martin's sanctity has survived the test of time, despite the fact that his life and Severus' writings about him have been a source of scholastic debate.

Before exploring Severus' works on Martin of Tours, it is important to delve into the respective backgrounds of these two major men. Unlike previous bishops of fourth-century Gaul, Martin was born to a military family in 336 CE, then forced to follow his father's profession as a soldier, serving in the Roman military from early teens to his twenties. Although Martin was baptized a Christian around 354 CE, he remained a soldier for two more years.⁶ After his discharge in 356 CE, Martin sought to live under Hilary of Poitiers, a bishop and strong anti-Arian confessor who lived as an ascetic monk.⁷ Under the mentorship of Hilary, in 360 CE Martin became an exorcist, a very low position in the early Christian Church, and applied the idea of actively pursuing and confronting evil in his community in a somewhat unique, militarily Christian context.⁸ Despite his past military service and his obvious lack of formal education, the city of Tours appointed Martin bishop in 371 CE over the disapproval of several bishops from the surrounding areas.⁹ As bishop, Martin earned a reputation as a miracle worker, confessor, and holy man through his deeds and appearance.¹⁰ Thus, this famous, charismatic

⁶ Stancliffe, p. 139.

⁷ Ibid, p. 120; and Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, in *Libri qui Supersunt* (Georg Olms Verlag: New York, 1983) 4. All translations for the *Vita Martini* are provided by F. R. Hoare. In *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saint's Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head. (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) pp. 1-29.

⁸ In his request for discharge from the army, Martin referred to himself as a "soldier of Christ." Severus, *Vita Martini*, 4.

⁹ Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1999) p.42.

¹⁰ Stancliffe, p. 156.

man inspired people all over medieval Europe even as an air of controversy surrounded him through his failure to fulfill the “orthodox” ideal of a bishop.

During his years as bishop of Tours, Martin gained many followers, including Sulpicius Severus. Severus was born in Aquitaine to an upper class family that provided him with a strong education.¹¹ He studied the ancient writers of Rome and Greece, such as Cicero, Plutarch, Plato, and Sallust, and became a successful lawyer.¹² Severus’ success secured him both a marriage into a senatorial family and a prestigious future in Aquitaine.¹³ While it is impossible to ascertain for certain whether Severus was pagan or Christian before he met Martin, he did show an interest in Felix of Nola, a saint of Italy, as early as 381 CE.¹⁴ After Martin cured his friend, Paulinus of Nola, of an eye infirmity, Severus became interested in the life and deeds of the holy man, yet it was not until 394 CE that Severus took monastic vows and began to compile the stories that would become the *Vita Martini*.¹⁵

Severus’ writings about Martin are largely concerned with four criticisms levied against the holy man by his contemporaries. These charges deal with Martin’s social position, his life as an ascetic, his relationship with the heretic Priscillian of Avila, and Martin’s hypocrisy in compromising with Emperor Magnus Maximus and allowing himself to be approached by women. In the case of his social standing, Martin was both a prominent figure of the church and a veteran. Following his father, Martin fought on the western frontier of Rome. Clearly, Martin’s

¹¹ Stancliffe, p. 16.

¹² Ibid, p. 56; and Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: the Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2005) p. 181.

¹³ Stancliffe, p. 17.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ There is an extensive correspondence between Sulpicius Severus and Paulinus of Nola that still survives. These letters detail their great admiration and are the source of their continued friendship as the two rarely visited one another; Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer*, p. 17.

involvement in the Roman military is at odds with the Christian doctrine against bloodshed. Not surprisingly, religious leaders struggled with the idea of accepting soldiers as catechumens. Thus, Martin's fellow clergymen in Gaul did not forgive him for remaining in the army after his baptism.¹⁶

Another issue intimately connected to Martin's social status is his relative lack of education in comparison to other bishops of the fourth century. Noting the emphasis fourth-century society placed on education in rhetoric as essential for civic officials to perform their functions adequately, Peter Brown writes, for instance, that those who did not have such training were seen to lack "a more lively intelligence, a more refined speech, and a more harmonious and impressive bearing than anyone else."¹⁷ Because of Martin's connection to a profession which was disapproved of as well as his lack of sufficient training as a public leader, Martin's authority in Christian society was suspect, especially given his position as a bishop. However, even with these perceived deficiencies, the people of Tours appointed him bishop.

Yet another factor that complicated Martin's relationship with his fellow clergy is his devotion to the life of an ascetic. As a pupil of Hilary of Poitiers, Martin lived in poverty and constantly denied his body earthly pleasures through celibacy, fasting, and intense prayer. Moreover, when he was called to Tours to become bishop, Martin did not abandon this ascetic lifestyle but rather brought it with him. Martin went so far as to construct a small cell outside the town in which to remove himself from society. Later, he established a monastic community in Marmoutier.

¹⁶ Stancliffe, p.259; and Severus, *Dialogus III*, in *Libri qui Supersunt* (Georg Olms Verlag: New York, 1983), 15. 4. All translations for the *Dialogus* are provided by Bernard M. Peebles in "Sulpicius Severus Writings," edited by Roy Deferrari, *The Fathers of the Church* (New York, 1949).

¹⁷ Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992) pp. 41 and 43.

In reference to this promotion of the ascetic lifestyle, scholars use the term “monk-bishop” to define a bishop who practiced asceticism even though his status placed him in a lucrative position in society—a definition that well suits Martin.¹⁸ The ascetic movement in Europe garnered support through Athanasius of Alexandria’s *The Life of Saint Antony*, allowing the practice to move westward from Egypt in the fourth century and even to influence famous individuals like Augustine of Hippo. Bishops of the West, however, did not normally subject themselves to the rigors of an ascetic lifestyle. Although some viewed the body as an inferior vessel for the soul, as is suggested by the words of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who stressed “the superiority of the mind [and] ... the primacy of the will,” most Western bishops did not pursue the ascetic discipline developed by the Eastern monastic movement.¹⁹ Martin’s adherence to the ascetic lifestyle even after rising to the position of bishop of Tours thus makes him both an innovative and a controversial figure.

The contempt Martin’s fellow clergymen held for him brought about the later two criticisms that this thesis will focus on: Martin’s association with Priscillian of Avila, a bishop condemned as a heretic and executed for sorcery, and accusations against Martin of hypocrisy. Although the Church accused Priscillian of heresy and members of the clergy acted as accusers for his trial, the emperor, a secular leader, ultimately gave the orders for the execution of Priscillian and several of his followers.²⁰ Severus notes that the accuser Ithacius “even ventured publicly to bring forward a disgraceful charge of heresy against Martin,” thereby associating

¹⁸ Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church* (Harvard University, 2004) p. 6.

¹⁹ Peter Brown, *Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University: New York, 1988) p. 349.

²⁰ Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1976) p. 144. Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (University of California: Berkeley, 1985) p. 89; and Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillian Controversy* (University of California: Berkeley, 1995) p. 2.

Martin with the first heretic executed by the Roman Empire.²¹ Martin, of course, argued against the right of a secular court to impose its will upon an ecclesiastical office, while other bishops, like Ambrose of Milan, and even the pope showed disdain for Priscillian's execution.²² Martin even traveled to Trier to voice his objections to the trial and to personally confront Magnus Maximus. This confrontation ended in a compromise that involved Martin attending a communion against his will, in exchange for Maximus' recalling the troops charged with the duty to root out heresy in Spain.²³ Through these two incidents, one can see the infamous bishop accused of heresy and the beginnings of the controversy that would severely threaten both Martin's legitimacy as a saint and his salvation as an ordinary Christian. Through the successful defense that these documents presented, Martin now remains revered as a patron saint in France.

The three works Severus composed about Martin, the *Vita Martini*, *Chronicorum*, and the *Dialogus*, have been studied and debated by historians for centuries.²⁴ The *Vita Martini*, Severus's hagiography on Martin written between 394-396 CE, tells the life of the saint even though Severus wrote the work before Martin's death.²⁵ In his *Vita*, Severus touches on Martin's early adulthood as a soldier and convert, and swiftly moves into the vast number of miracles that he performed. Severus' *Chronicorum*, written around 402 CE, is a historical piece that begins with the Creation and ends with the events that took place shortly after the trial of Priscillian of

²¹ Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicorum II*, in *Libri qui Supersunt*, (Georg Olms Verlag: New York, 1983), 50. 11-15. "ausus etiam miser est ea tempestate Martino episcopo." All the translations for the *Chronicorum* are provided by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 11 (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan).

²² Stancliffe, p. 278.

²³ Severus, *Dialogus III*, in *Libri qui Supersunt* (Georg Olms Verlag: New York, 1983) 13.

²⁴ Stancliffe, p. 9.

²⁵ According to the chronology that this thesis will use, the "short chronology", Martin died in 397 CE. The two chronologies, the "short" and "long chronologies" can be found in Stancliffe, *Saint Martin and his Hagiographer*, p. 71; Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993) p. 13; and Damon, p. 1.

Avila.²⁶ Finally, the *Dialogus*, written between 405-406 CE, is a conversation between Severus, Gallus, and Postumianus, each of whom had recently returned from Egypt and Jerusalem. The work first describes the monastic practices of the East, and then recounts a detailed conversation between the three men about Martin and asceticism.²⁷ The *Dialogus* also provides named witnesses to Martin's deeds, unlike the *Vita*.²⁸ These works inspired individuals, such as Gregory of Tours, to admire the life of Martin. For modern historians, they have also provided a vast amount of material through which the relationship between Severus and his mentor may be observed, as well as any underlying motives for a pupil to create such pieces.

Whether for historical or entertainment purposes, the heroic, wonder-working saint has lured many scholars to observe and analyze the works of his pupil as a means to study the relationship between Martin and Severus. Such studies go back as far as the sixth century, when Gregory of Tours used Severus' works as a means to establish his own legitimacy as bishop of Tours. Gregory viewed Severus' works as truth, void of any purpose and motivation aside from the promoting of Martin's posterity.²⁹ This interpretation was not challenged until scholars began taking a more skeptical approach to the Martinian writings in the twentieth century. E.C. Babut, a French historian in the early twentieth century, was one of the first to break with

²⁶ Stancliffe, p.80; and Burrus, p.143.

²⁷ The origin for Asceticism is the Greek word *áskēsis*, meaning "to exercise", and in late antiquity literally meant, "to practice." This lifestyle was open to anyone willing to subject themselves to the rigors required to expand spirituality. The practice not only allowed those participants to subdue the body under the spirit, but also to become the successor to the martyrs of the Roman persecutions. Micheal Gaddis, *There is No Crime For Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (University of California Press, 2005) p. 169; Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (University of California: Berkeley, 2005) p. 100; Stancliffe, p. 104; and Burrus, p. 147.

²⁸ Stancliffe, p. 105; Translations for the *Dialogus* are provided by Roy Joseph Deferrair editor, *The Fathers of the Church*, "Writings of Sulpicius Severus," translated by Bernard M. Peebles, vol. 7 (Father of the Church: New York, 1949).

²⁹ Gregory of Tours, *The Miracles of Martin of Tours*, Translated by Raymond Van Dam in *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton University, 1993) p. 200.

tradition in his *Saint Martin de Tours* when he argued that Severus' fanatical adoption of asceticism colored his observations of Martin's life.³⁰ Babut argues that criticisms of Martin's thaumaturgical powers and saintly image could be attributed to the fact that contemporary critics of Martin actually knew him personally. Babut therefore conjectures that Severus fabricated the holy man's miracles and visions merely in order to promote the ascetic lifestyle.³¹ Similarly, in his comments on the *Vita Martini*, Jacques Fontaine examines the philosophies and literature circulating during the time in which Severus composed the *Vita* to provide a critical, psychological interpretation of the radical personality of Severus and to discern why specific visions and miracles are recorded in the hagiography.³² Babut's and Fontaine's analysis of Severus' motives suggests that he was anything but an unbiased witness to Martin's sainthood.

This interpretation has inspired more recent historians such as Clare Stancliffe and Raymond Van Dam to review the relationship between the saint and his hagiographer. In *Saint Martin and His Hagiographer*, Stancliffe, like Fontaine, looks to the circulating literature of the fourth century. But Stancliffe focuses on Severus' education and the cosmological view in fourth-century Gaul in order to determine any possible influences behind the Martinian works.³³ Stancliffe asserts that Severus strove to present a historical Martin.³⁴ Raymond Van Dam looks

³⁰ E.-C. Babut, *Saint Martin de Tours* (Paris, 1912) p. 14. His work has inspired scholastic responses such as H. Delehaye's article "Saint Martin et Sulpice Severe," *Analecta Bollandiana* 38 (1920) that do not view Severus as critically.

³¹ Babut, p. 20.

³² Sulpicius Severus, *Vie de Saint Martin*, edited, translated, and with commentary by Jacques Fontaine (Paris, 1968) p. 54.

³³ Stancliffe, p.8.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

to Severus' education as well, but stresses that his social status in the Western Roman Empire as a successful lawyer influenced Severus' interpretation of Martin.³⁵

Though the various approaches to studies of Martin of Tours and Sulpicius Severus briefly rehearsed above undoubtedly shed light on the relationship between the two men, these investigations also fall into a general pattern of construing Martin and Severus as saint and hagiographer which may have outworn its usefulness. Moreover, the existing scholarship on the two men frequently ignores the legal dimension to Severus's writings on Martin's life. This thesis therefore seeks to reconceptualize Sulpicius Severus' relationship to Martin of Tours in terms of an advocate defending his client. As such, this thesis argues that the works produced by Severus are not merely hagiographies and documents meant to glorify a bishop or even the monks who followed him, but are also a methodical defense systematically constructed to counter specific criticisms of Martin by a fourth- and fifth-century Gallic audience to establish a saint for both Tours and Gaul.

One of the major controversies that Babut and Fontaine emphasize to support their argument that Severus fabricated his account of Martin is the issue of chronology. The controversy arises from the interpretation of the word *septuagenario* used by Severus to describe Martin during his dinner with Emperor Magnus Maximus.³⁶ This word implies that Martin is seventy when he goes to the emperor's banquet in 386 CE. The timeline Babut uses in his argument, referred to as the "long chronology," therefore places Martin's birth in 316 CE to account for Martin's age in 386 CE.³⁷ This chronology reveals a problem, however: a long, twenty-year service with the Roman army for a supposedly good Christian man. Scholars who

³⁵ Raymond Van Dam, *Saints in Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993) p. 14.

³⁶ Stancliffe, p. 113; and Severus, Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 20.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 120-1.

support the “long chronology” stress that Severus fabricated a false chronology to reduce Martin’s tenure in the Roman Army to only two years as an apology.³⁸ This argument views Severus as a follower that conceded to his audience that Martin served in the military, but attempted to lessen the holy man’s guilt by manipulating the chronology to reduce his service to two years. In contrast, scholars such as Stancliffe have introduced another timeline, the so-called “short chronology,” which places Martin’s birth in 336 CE on the grounds that the word *septuagenario* is either an error in transcription or a rhetorical device to signify old age.³⁹ Unlike the opposing view, the short chronology lends support to Severus’ account of Martin’s army service, although it reduces his age to fifty when he dines with the emperor. Regardless of which side of the issues one takes, the argument over chronology is important when looking at Severus’ works as a calculated defense for Martin. The audience who knew Martin and his background would have criticized Severus’s incorrect account of the saint’s time in the army, just as they argued against Martin’s visions.⁴⁰ There is, however, no record of such criticism, and, based on this lack of evidence, the “short chronology” seems the more credible timeline.

The date of authorship for the Martinian works plays an important role in the argument of this thesis. The *Vita*, which dates to around 396 CE; the *Chronicorum*, to around 403 CE; and the *Dialogus*, to around 406 CE; were all written close to Martin’s death in 397 CE.⁴¹ The proximity of the works to Martin’s death implies that Severus may have composed the pieces to

³⁸ Babut, p. 71, and 167.

³⁹ Stancliffe presents several arguments for the probable use of the word *septuagenario* including a marker for an “old man” as well as an over-exaggeration. Stancliffe, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp. 133, and 257.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 71, 80, and 81; Alan D. Booth, “Quelques Dates Hagiographiques: Melanie l’Ancienne, Saint Martin, Melanie la Jeune,” *Phoenix*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1983) p. 148; Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford, 1976) p. 133; and John Damon, *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors: Warfare and Sanctity in the Literature of Early England* (Ashgate Publishing: Burlington, Vermont) p.8.

counter the four major contemporary criticisms levied against Martin before and shortly after his death. These criticisms damaged Martin's legitimacy as a saint, removing the possibility for Tours to have its own patron saint. Severus, still a capable lawyer, used his pen to protect his mentor and secure a favorable memory of Martin.

In addition to the four major criticisms addressed by the Martinian works, there are several issues that the major historical interpretations fail to adequately address. In the first place, a question arises about why a writer schooled in the ancient authors who compared Martin to such ancient icons as Socrates and Hector would go to such great lengths to detail each one of these controversial arguments about his mentor.⁴² Some scholars suggest that, while Severus may have "wanted to perpetuate [Martin's] memory for his community, in the process he modified the saint's image in accordance with his own outlook."⁴³ This answer, however, does not explain the inclusion of such events that would suggest contradictions and heresy in Martin's teachings. If Severus really wanted to perpetuate Martin's memory and portray him as a Christian mirror to the ancient archetypes of Rome and Greece, then any events that could be deemed heretical and, consequently, undermined Martin's chances for salvation would not have been included.

Another issue the major historical interpretations of the Martinian works address is how much material in a hagiography can be considered fact and how much can be considered fiction. Scholars such as Stancliffe, for example, define the miracles associated with Martin—especially the natural miracles such as taming the sea or averting flames from houses—as metaphors and allegories that a fourth-century audience would understand.⁴⁴ Stancliffe also argues that some of

⁴² Severus, *Vita Martini*, 1.

⁴³ Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p. 14.

Martin's miracles such as the healing of Paulinus of Nola's eye might have actually occurred through medical practice rather than via an act of God.⁴⁵ This thesis will focus on the reason behind Severus' including such events, and will treat them as evidence of the defensive strategy employed by Severus to secure Martin's sanctity rather than postulate the plausibility of the miracles performed by the holy man.

Following the position advocated by scholars like Stancliffe, this thesis treats Severus' writings on St. Martin as hagiographies rather than as "history" or "biography" as defined in modern terminology. For hagiographies are inspirational narratives which exhort Christians to lead better lives through glorifying the acts of the pious saint. The hagiographer provides men and women proof that mortal men can live the life of Christ (*Vita Christi*) through the example of his subject. These saints are portrayed as standing tall before the emissaries of the Devil, standing firm against the whims of intolerable kings. Moreover, though they are frequently exiles for such actions, many are rewarded with martyrdom for their deeds. Thus, the stories of these extraordinary and charismatic individuals do not serve so much as historically accurate accounts of their lives so much as they do as examples meant to increase devotion to Christian doctrine and to demonstrate moral certitude.⁴⁶ Hippolyte Delehaye, for instance, argues that hagiography is not intended to serve as a historical source because it produces repeating, abstract figures that society desired and not true historic figures.⁴⁷ Delehaye, however, views Severus and several other Late Antique writers as exceptions to this argument, seeing them as "the last representatives of classical antiquity," and postulating that their works "must not be confused

⁴⁴ Stancliffe, p. 255.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 250.

⁴⁶ Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, Translated by Donald Attwater (Fordam University Press: New York, 1962) p. 3; and Gaddis, p. 262.

⁴⁷ Delehaye, p. 48.

with artificial productions of later epochs which sometimes affect to be inspired by them.”⁴⁸

However, I argue that, in producing literature to defend his mentor, Severus composed these works to meet the expectations of his audience. The intended readers, fellow monks, members of the clergy, as well as the people of Gaul, knew Martin and expected specific criticisms to be resolved by Severus within the hagiography.

With the intended audience playing such a role in the writing of hagiography, historians have identified “society” as a major contributor to these narratives. These hagiographies are not simply the work of a lone scholar, but emanate from the needs of a particular society. Thomas Heffernan for instance, argues that in addition to documenting the appearance of the divine within an individual, these texts were designed to:

...interpret for the community what was only partly understood, mysteriously hidden in the well-known public record, buried in the very ideal of sanctity itself.⁴⁹

These works retain a powerful presence in the community itself, not only reflecting the hagiographer’s ideals and personality, but those of society as well. Each *vita* fulfills a specific need for the population, with hagiographies being created “not in the act of composition but in a complex series of anticipations,” held by society.⁵⁰ Severus, in composing his Martinian works from the accounts given by people of Tours and neighboring parts of Gaul, creates the image of what the society wants in a saint.

Due to the complex nature and origin of hagiographies, historians have debated whether hagiography is even the correct term for these works. Heffernan, for example, moves away from

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biographies: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1988) p. 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 18.

Delehaye's criticism of the repetitive nature of hagiography, and argues that each individual text is unique. In addition, Heffernan refrains from use of the term "hagiography," arguing that labels "can foster misreading of these texts and obscure their originality," and thus refers to the works as "sacred biographies" in an effort to retain the uniqueness of each individual text.⁵¹

All of Severus' works were designed to meet society's specific requirements, showing the characteristics that his audience expected in his *Chronicorum*, *Vita Martini*, and *Dialogus*. Yet the Martinian works at their core emphasize the sanctity of Martin. These works therefore not only meet the requirements of the intended audience, they are also constructed based on accounts given by residents of Tours and the surrounding areas.⁵² Although these works are three separate entities, their purpose in portraying Martin of Tours remains the same: to record the holiness of Martin. These works do record Martin's life, but, due to their argumentative nature, they do not fit the term "biography" as much as they do the term hagiography. For the purpose of this thesis, when referring to Severus' three works in general the terms hagiography or Martinian works will be used, yet specified works will be directly referenced.

Sulpicius Severus was not merely a simple man mesmerized by the charismatic bishop, but a man who willingly attached himself to Martin and his philosophies. As a hagiographer who is therefore committed to recording and expounding upon Martin's teachings as a means of promoting Christian doctrine, Severus must also take it upon himself to defend the bishop against any criticism which necessarily undermines Martin's reputation. Chapter Two will explore criticisms of both Martin's life as a soldier and of his lack of the educational and social background prevalent in his fellow bishops. The chapter will reveal the fourth-century Christian society's complex relationship between the military and religion, as well as the importance of

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 16.

⁵² Stancliffe, p. 83.

social status and education for bishops in the fourth-century Western Roman Empire. Chapter Three will then explore the early struggles that came from reconciling the responsibilities of the ascetic lifestyle with the communal responsibilities as a bishop. Chapter Four will investigate the criticism over Martin's involvement with Priscillian of Avila, a rebuke which Severus fully engages in a strong defensive posture to protect Martin's reputation from accusations of heresy. Next, Chapter Five will treat charges of hypocrisy contemporary critics brought against Martin. These charges arose when Martin deviated from his teachings regarding religious authority and segregation of the sexes by compromising with Emperor Magnus Maximus over the Priscillian crisis and allowing several women, including the empress, to approach him. This thesis will not simply highlight these four criticisms that Severus attempted to resolve, but will also explore why these critiques are present in the hagiography and the rhetorical defense used by Severus to secure Martin's sanctity.

CHAPTER 2. A SOLDIER AND SIMPLETON

Two criticisms which Severus addresses in his hagiographical writing center on Martin's life as a soldier and his educational background. Though early Christians at once feared the possibility of persecution by the Roman army and enjoyed the same army's protection against the invading barbarians, writers like Origen and Tertullian argued strongly against Christians participating in the military.¹ In essence, a soldier's occupation involved killing, swearing an oath to an emperor who claimed divinity, and rallying behind a banner of an idol: all things Christianity stood against.² Not surprisingly then, in their rebuke of Martin's martial background, contemporary critics emphasized the fact that Martin remained in the Roman army after his baptism. For an individual such as Martin, who lived in such an antichristian environment, to rise to the top of religious leadership was unprecedented in the fourth century.

The bishop of the fourth-century Church stood as the chief interpreter of Holy Scripture as well as chief administrator for the secular needs of his community.³ He represented 'the Church' in his bishopric and literally held the key to the populace's knowledge of Scripture, doctrine, sacramental rite and ultimate salvation—clearly not a role for an individual of limited rhetorical and philosophical skill.⁴ The bishop also assumed responsibility for the discipline and appointment of the clergy of his region, and looked after the charities of the community.⁵

Though the office consisted of so many complex responsibilities, the people of Tours elected

¹ Tertullian *Apology*, translated by Rev. C. Dodgson (London, Walter Smith, 1884) 30; and Origen, *Contra Celsum*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge, 1953) 8.73.

² John Helgeland, "Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337," *Church History*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Jun., 1974) p. 156.

³ Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, p. 6.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, p. 23.

Martin to this demanding position over the objections of local bishops.⁶ This chapter, therefore, firstly focuses on the rhetorical strategy that Severus used to rationalize this alternative social and educational status, answering the critiques of contemporaries; and secondly, explores the stereotypes that Martin had to overcome.

Included in the fourth-century accounts of individuals who gave their lives for their religious beliefs was a specific type of victim that Severus connected with Martin's early life: the military martyr. Though they were few in number, military martyrs provided an intense image of both manliness and conviction for later Christian society.⁷ Martyrs, such as Julius the Veteran, Monatnus, and Lucius, fulfilled their legal obligations to the state by serving in the army for policing purposes. But when called to the battlefield or to self-sacrifice on behalf of the imperial cult, they refused the order and suffered death for their beliefs.⁸ Many of these executions, as in the case of Julius the Veteran, who was executed around the beginning of the fourth century, stemmed from the Christian soldier's failure to perform his oath to the emperor—which involved a sacrifice or pious act to a representation of the emperor—rather than from, as may be supposed, dereliction of wartime duties.⁹

The early Christians desired to emphasize their religious differences from ancient Roman traditions while not being regarded as cowards.¹⁰ The military martyr tales that circulated during this time, like the account of Julius the Veteran, stressed their manliness, claiming that they

⁶ Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1985) p. 62.

⁷ Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (University of Chicago, 2001) p. 115.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-6; and John Helgeland, "Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337," pp. 158-60.

⁹ Kuefler, pp. 116-7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

“never hid behind anyone nor [were] the inferior of any man in battle.”¹¹ The fact that Julius suffered the crown of martyrdom excused his past military behavior to the audience: martyrdom remained the highest reward one could gain on earth for a Christian.¹²

The early Christian ecclesiastical leaders showed signs of encouraging military service but remained adamant against killing. For example, the Church leaders in Arles showed their support to the Roman army in a decree in 314 CE declaring, “Those who lay down their arms in peace must abstain from communion.”¹³ Under this canon, military service was necessary to police the peace, and soldiers who abandoned the army without moral justification, such as being called to shed blood or sacrifice to the emperor, could not attend communion. This canon emphasized the Early Church’s devotion to pacifism while relying on the security that the standing Roman army represented. The canon also reflected the growing Christian tolerance of Constantine’s reign as emperor, ultimately removing the threat of execution for Christians serving in the military during the periods of peace.¹⁴ Scholars argue that the Council of Arles wrote this canon to protect the Roman military from significant depopulation.¹⁵ The rising number of converts in the army could possibly shrink the number of soldiers who would leave the military on account of their new found religion. This council, however, does imply that the

¹¹ *Passio Iuli Veterani*, edited and translated by Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1972) 4.3-5.

¹² Damon, p. 15; Gaddis, p. 166; and Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford University, 1999), p.95.

¹³ Although this council was held in Arles in 314 CE the canon provides a concept that very well could have penetrated into Gaul by the 390’s. Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Abingdon Press: New York, 1960) p. 81 (Canon III from Council of Arles 314 CE) “*De his qui arma proiciunt in pace placiunt abstinere eos a communion.*”

¹⁴ Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire. Gaddis, p. 169.

¹⁵ Kuefler, p. 107.

Christian soldier must lay down his arms if called to participate in the bloodshed of war, stressing the image of the Christian as a soldier but not as a warrior: a protector, not a destroyer. At the same time, however, this decree reflected the legalization of Christianity that allowed for soldiers to abstain from traditional imperial sacrifices.

Severus keeps this concept of the military martyr in mind in his description and defense of Martin's early years as a soldier. He carefully remarks that Martin's service as a soldier "was not done of his own free will, for, almost from the earliest years of his holy childhood, this distinguished boy aspired rather to the service of God."¹⁶ The statement shows an early desire by Martin to be a Christian, though he cannot escape the military responsibilities placed on him by his family. In this way, Martin is portrayed more as a victim rather than an active participant in the Roman army. A little further on, Severus describes the pious boy's forced enrollment in the military with horrific imagery:

But since an edict was issued by the rulers of the state that the sons of veterans should be enrolled for military service, his father (who grudged his pious behavior) delivered him up when he was fifteen years old, and he was arrested and put in chains and was bound by the military oath.¹⁷

Referring back to the decree from the Council of Arles, Severus observes that Martin was forced to serve in the Roman army like his father. Moreover, Severus goes beyond simply showing his audience that Martin needed to fulfill his filial obligation, and states that he was "captured and bonded to military service" legally although he desired to live an ascetic life. The imagery of

¹⁶ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2. 6-8. "*non tamen sponte, quia aprimis fere annis diuinam postius seritatem sacra inlustris pueri spirauit infantia.*"

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 2. 14-18. "*sed cum edictum esset a regibus, ut ueteranorum filii ad militiam scriberentur, prodente patre, qui felicibus eius actibus inuidebat, cum esset annorum quindecium, captus et catenatus sacramentis militaribus implicatus est.*"

Martin “chained” to military service vividly recalls the earlier accounts of Monatnus’ and Lucius’ martyrdom, accounts Severus’ audience surely knew.¹⁸

Martin’s behavior after being brought into military service, however, greatly differs from the behavior of military martyrs in earlier accounts. One must recall that Tertullian and Origen argue that military service called for murder and idol worship, and, as a result, Severus must show how Martin lived a Christian life under such conditions.¹⁹ To do this, Severus not only describes the ascetic lifestyle Martin leads during his military tenure, but also relates the *Vita Christi* to Martin’s early years as a soldier.²⁰ Severus likens Martin’s rapport with his servant to the actions of Jesus in showing that the soldier “waited on the servant to such a degree that, for the most part, it was he who pulled off his servant’s boots and he who cleaned them with his hand.”²¹ Just as Christ washed the feet of his apostles, Martin cleaned the boots of his servant and served him at meals. Although, chronologically speaking, Martin had not yet been baptized, Severus emphasizes that during those years “he kept completely free from those vices in which that class of men become too frequently involved.”²² In doing so, Severus defends Martin against the stereotypes of the military defined by Origen and other earlier Church philosophers. Further, Severus points out that Martin lived a life of strict asceticism by taking nothing in abundance and performing many good works for the less fortunate.²³ Thus, by Severus’ account,

¹⁸ John Helgeland, *Christians and the Military the Early Experience* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1985) p. 64; Kuefler, p. 115-6; and Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (Columbia University, 2004) p. 48.

¹⁹ Tertullian, 30; and Origen, 8.73.

²⁰ Stancliffe, p.323.

²¹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2. 14-17. “*cui tamen uersa uice dominus seruiebat, adeo ut plerumque ei et calciamenta ipse detraheret et ipse detergeret, cibum una caperent, hic tamen saepius ministraret.*”

²² *Ibid*, 2.18-19. “*integer tamen ab iis uitis, quibus illud hominum genus implicari solet*”

²³ *Ibid*, 2.28-29, and 3.

and in keeping with the contemporary philosophies and stereotypes, although Martin wore the clothes of a soldier, he had already begun a life of asceticism and a reflection on the *Vita Christi*.

Beyond these defensive accounts, Severus must also provide evidence that Martin met the essence of the decree from the Council of Arles by fulfilling the “policing” function within the Roman army while simultaneously abstaining from violence. To do so, Severus invokes another similarity to the earlier soldier martyrs in his account. Specifically, he states that when Martin’s legion was called to march against an invading barbarian tribe, he asked to be discharged from service. Interestingly, Severus does not provide any details to argue that Martin successfully avoided combat or show evidence of fighting with God’s approval, but he instead draws upon the traditions recounted in popular martyr tales such as the *Passio Iuli Veterani*, showing a defiant Christian standing before the emperor and refusing to fulfill secular obligations that undermine his spiritual beliefs.²⁴ In Severus’ retelling of this scene, Martin does not wish anyone to believe he is a coward and boldly proclaims:

I will take my stand unarmed before the line of battle tomorrow, and in the name of the Lord Jesus, protected by the sign of the cross, and not by shield or helmet, I will safely penetrate the ranks of the enemy.²⁵

In sum, Martin will enter battle and be either martyred or victorious by the grace of God. A little further on, Severus writes:

Although the good Lord could have preserved his own soldier, even amid the swords and darts of the enemy, yet that his blessed eyes might not be pained by witnessing the death of others, he removed all necessity for fighting.²⁶

²⁴ Castelli, p. 48.

²⁵ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 4. 15-19. “*crastina die ante aciem inermis adstabo et in nomine Domini Iesu, signo cruxis, non clipeo protectus aut galea, hostium cuneos penetrabo secures.*”

²⁶ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 4. 26-29. “*et quamuis pius Dominus seruare militem suum licet inter hostium gladios et tel potuisset, tamen ne uel aliorum mortibus sancti uiolarenture obtutus, exemit pugnae necessitate.*”

The morning of the battle, the barbarians sent emissaries to discuss the terms of their surrender. This scene, therefore, ends in what John Damon refers to as a “bloodless victory”: an unprovoked retreat by the barbarians that shows Martin successfully protecting his fellow soldiers not through the use of force, but through heavenly intervention.²⁷ This “bloodless victory” thus marks Martin’s first miracle as a Christian, even though it did not mark the end of his military service.

In his book *Soldier Saints and Holy Warriors*, Damon conceives of Martin as the Christian anti-hero, as is suggested in Severus’ preface to the *Vita*, which asks, “what benefit has posterity derived from reading of the battle of Hector or the philosophical treatises of Socrates?”²⁸ Crucial to Damon’s argument here is his definition of this anti-hero, which he characterizes as one who “chooses the pious duties and immaterial rewards of sainthood over earthly combat and its material acclaim and attendant booty.”²⁹ Damon’s conception of the anti-hero seems to perfectly describe Martin’s life in the military. To be sure, Severus emphasizes that Martin

...aided those who were in trouble, by giving help to the wretched, by supporting the needy, by clothing the naked, while he reserved nothing for himself from his military pay except what was necessary for his daily sustenance.³⁰

Martin, therefore, embodies the anti-hero not only merely through his ascetic lifestyle and refusal to fight, but also through his drive for heavenly reward by championing Christianity.

²⁷ Damon, p. 19.

²⁸ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 1. 9-10. “*aut quid posteritas emolumentum tulit legendum Hectorem pugnantem aut Socratem philosophantem?*”

²⁹ Damon, p. 5.

³⁰ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2.24-26. “*adsistere scilicet laborantibus, opem ferre miseris, alere egentes, uestire nudos, nihil sibi ex militiae stipendiis praeter cotidianum uictum reseruare.*”

The primary criticism of Martin's military career revolves around the question of why Martin remained in the army after his baptism. The miracle of the "bloodless victory" of the barbarian retreat that occurs after his courageous refusal to engage in worldly combat creates an opportunity for Martin to depart from the army with strong approval from God, yet the *Vita* dwells on the fact that he remained in the army for two more years.³¹ Much of the difficulty Severus must overcome here lies in the simple fact that the hagiographies of military martyrs provide the main figure with the "crown of martyrdom" to absolve his presence in the army.³² Indeed, Severus is exploring uncharted waters "in dealing with an unmartyred saint [not yet dead] who had served in an earthly army."³³ Severus, therefore, cannot rely on the all-acquitting crown of martyrdom to defend Martin's extended presence in the army.

Severus' approach to the conundrum created by Martin's choice to remain in the army for two more years is to defend that decision on the grounds that during the period in question Martin influenced the conversion of a fellow officer. Severus writes that a tribune, having been inspired by Martin's asceticism and charisma, "promised that, after his term of office had expired, he too would retire from the world."³⁴ In a nutshell, Severus argues that Martin's time in the military after his baptism was focused on the salvation of this tribune. Had he left the army without ensuring the salvation of this tribune, Martin's Christian duty to his fellow man would have been unfulfilled. This small addition demonstrates, more than his previous supernatural and ascetic signs, the ideal of the soldier of Christ that Martin embodies in his early life. The scene foreshadows Martin's missionary future work and his willingness to place

³¹ Damon, p. 16.

³² Ibid, pp. 4, and 6.

³³ Ibid, p. 4.

³⁴ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 3. 29-30: "*etenim transact tribunatus sui tempore renuntiaturum se saeculo pollicebatur.*"

himself in peril to convert the masses. By remaining in the army after his baptism, Martin remains in danger of his leaders calling him to battle and the violent results of refusing to fight. Severus' account of Martin remaining in the army for those two years, therefore, serves to strengthen, not weaken, the proclamation of Martin as a soldier of Christ.

Martin not only stands apart from his contemporaries with respect to his military background. He also had little to no education. Men like Ambrose of Milan, Augustine of Hippo, and Martin's own mentor, Hilary of Poitiers, represented some of the greatest minds of late antique society. These men, like many other leaders and patrons of early Western Christianity, came from high social classes, or were highly educated individuals. Evidence of their educational background has survived through either their own works—such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Hilary of Poitiers' first book of his study *On the Trinity*—or through their hagiographers like the hagiography on Ambrose of Milan by Paulinus of Milan. Severus, in contrast to these writers, does not reveal the educational background of Martin, and states, “In terms of worldly dignity, his parents were not of the lowest rank,” meaning that he came from a low military family.³⁵ Martin's social status only afforded him a limited education, possibly involving basic literacy and composition, but it would not have entailed the study of rhetoric and law that was offered to the progeny of wealthy families.³⁶ Because of this discrepancy in Martin's background, Severus states that, after the people of Tours elected Martin as their bishop:

A few impious persons, however, including some of the bishops who had been summoned to appoint the prelate, resisted, asserting strongly that Martin's person

³⁵ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2. 2-3: “parentibus secundum saeculi dignitatem non infimis, gentilibus tamen.”

³⁶ Henry Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, translated by George Lamb (Sheen and Ward: New York, 1956) p. 267.

was contemptible, that he was unworthy of being a bishop, that he was despicable in appearance, his clothing was shabby and his hair disgusting.³⁷

The bishops of Gaul came from the hierarchy of ancient Rome. Thus, similarly to men like Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, and Paulinus of Milan, these bishops were highly educated and presented themselves as nobility—well groomed and garbed in fine clothes.³⁸ Martin, therefore, is viewed by his peers and relative contemporaries not only as a controversial saint, but as a controversial church leader as well.

In addition, the bishops of the Western Roman Empire rose during the fourth century to become the most influential members of the community.³⁹ This newly acquired authority placed the bishops' social station very close to the Western Roman aristocracy, as well as giving them control over the Church's growing wealth to support the poor in their regions.⁴⁰ With this responsibility, bishops of late antiquity also capitalized on an opportunity to “claim to authority over a social void” and, therefore, held their ranks to standards commensurate with those of the aristocracy.⁴¹ Martin, as a ragged exorcist and ex-soldier, was presumed not to hold the same social status nor to have the physical, nor, the mental qualities of a man suited to hold such a significant station.

What made the people of Tours select a man who did not live up to the requisite social status or educational qualifications was their desire for a man to fulfill the most important role

³⁷ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 9. 10-13: “*pauci tamen et nonnulli ex episcopis, qui ad constituendum antistitem fuerant euocati, impie repugnabant, dicentes scilicet, contemptibilem esse personam, indignum esse episcopatu hominem uultu despicabilem, ueste sordidum, crine deformem.*”

³⁸ Stancliffe, 267; and Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 83-84.

³⁹ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 78.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 94.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 91; Rapp, p.100; and Stancliffe, p. 267.

that the people of Gaul expected from a bishop: that of spiritual protector.⁴² Communities in fourth-century Gaul ceaselessly ruminated upon the possibility of demonic threats, invasions, violent weather, physical ailments and abnormalities, all of which they believed were attacks of the Devil and his horde.⁴³ On these grounds, what Martin lacked in formal education he made up for in supernatural ability. As religious leader to the community, his task was to identify and defuse these threats in order to protect his flock. Several scenes in the *Vita Martini* show the saint's supernatural abilities to help and protect his community. The numerous examples of Martin's prodigious skill displayed in the *Vita Martini* include the saint averting a fire started in a pagan temple away from his community's houses, curing the sick, reviving the dead, and exorcizing demons from those under his protection; in sum, standing heroically as a physical and supernatural protector of Tours.⁴⁴

Society carefully monitored this behavior, as people of late antiquity believed that the "spiritual powers" of a religious person or *vir religiosus*, were manifested in their appearance and behavior.⁴⁵ Severus, in his Martinian works, took it upon himself to present evidence from his own personal observations, as well as those of the community that Martin presided over, which showed that the bishop held the characteristics necessary for him to fulfill the functions from his office, though not through formal training. Along this line of rationale, then, the core of Severus' defense of Martin is the saint's commitment to asceticism. Asceticism, a word ultimately derived from Greek *askētikós*, loosely translated as "practice," involved subordinating the body to the spirit through intense prayer, periods of isolation, fasting, and chastity. A text

⁴² Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, p. 60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁴ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 14, 16, and 17.

⁴⁵ Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge University, 1995) p. 61.

which vividly illustrates this rigorous spiritual exercise is Athanasius' famous hagiography, the *Vita Antonii*. Athanasius depicts Antony locked in combat with his desires, which manifest themselves in the forms of women and ferocious animals. Conquering such frailties, the practitioner was granted several gifts from God, including the highly desired gift of *discretio*, the ability of the ascetic to successfully judge feelings, visions, and urges as either good or bad.⁴⁶ An ascetic not only received the power of *discretio* from his intense discipline, but also received healing powers and other thaumaturgical abilities.

Receiving these gifts not only signified the holy man's status, but may have also aided the thaumaturge in filling the void between the high and low classes.⁴⁷ Thus, the ascetic's decision to live austerely in order to acquire spiritual power is not unlike practices among the aristocracy of the Late Roman Empire, who trained themselves to live by these codes of conduct in order to separate themselves from ordinary people.⁴⁸ Indeed, aristocrats were expected to subject themselves to *paideia*, intense training and education associated with the noble classes of late antiquity. Socialites expected one another to be able to quote from the ancient writings with proper rhetorical gestures and pronunciation, as well as to curb their baser emotions, such as laughter, anger, and sexual urges.⁴⁹ In the course of the fourth century, through performing healing and supernatural miracles that presented a visual testament to their religious authority, holy men began to replace the aristocracy by resolving secular disputes as well. The discipline of asceticism allowed an individual not of the aristocracy like Antony of Egypt to receive the gift

⁴⁶ Bernard McGinn, "Asceticism and Mysticism in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University, 1998) p. 65.

⁴⁷ Rapp, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

of wisdom to such a degree as to be able to successfully argue against two Greek philosophers.⁵⁰ Similarly, Severus frequently emphasized Martin's intense dedication to understanding Scripture and remarked that his gift of speech did not suffer from his lack of education.⁵¹ The practitioner of asceticism, therefore, represents a new form of aristocracy or 'spiritual elite' who is not only free of earthly frailties but who also possesses a kind of neoclassical grounding in Scriptural rhetoric.

Martin, through his observance of asceticism and the demands of the crowd to elect him to the most prestigious position in the Church, came to exemplify a standard of self-discipline that the aristocracy followed. Similar to the *paidea* followed by the aristocracy, Martin exercised the proper mental, vocal, and physical discipline that someone in such a powerful, public position was expected to demonstrate. Following this logic, Severus notes that "No one ever saw [Martin] enraged, or excited, or grieving, or laughing, he was always just the same—displaying a kind of heavenly happiness in his expression, he seemed to have surpassed ordinary human nature."⁵² In his *Dialogus*, Severus similarly describes an intense confrontation that Martin had with a group of soldiers on a road. Because of his homely appearance, which frightens their horses, Martin receives a violent thrashing from the soldiers and, as Severus states, "in silence and with incredible patience, submitted his back to them smiting him."⁵³ This account not only parallels Christ's description of a submissive lamb, but also presents an argument to justify the conclusion that Martin exhibits the proper degree of self-restraint that fellow clergy would look

⁵⁰ Athanasius, *The Life of Saint Antony*, Translated by Robert T. Meyer, (Newman Press: New York, 1978), 72.

⁵¹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 25.

⁵² Severus, *Vita Martini*, 27. 1-3: "*Nemo umquam illum uidit iratum, nemo commotum, nemo maerentem, nemo ridentem: unus idemque fuit semper, caelestem quodammodo laetitiam uultu praeferens extra naturam hominis uidebatur.*"

⁵³ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 3. 12.

for in a bishop. Although Martin's actions here are in line with the practice of asceticism that many holy men demonstrated, his control over these emotions also defines and indeed surpasses the same discipline called for in the noble classes or in any public leader.

In a society that viewed outward appearance and behavior as indicators of one's status or education, a person could not simply tell the public that he was holy, educated, or noble and expect society to take him at his word. People communicated everything through the way they dressed, the words they chose, and the emotions they displayed in public. An ascetic, therefore, was required to emphasize his or her spiritual perfection through an unkempt and deprived body, and through often bizarre behavior, such as living on a pillar or retiring to the harsh desert away from the security of the community. In Martin's *Vita*, Severus points out the outward concern that bishops held for the holy man's personal appearance. Paradoxically, then, the same appearance through which an ascetic could be glorified also shocked the bishops of Gaul.⁵⁴

As a lawyer skilled in the ancient writings of Greece and Rome, Severus constructed Martin's *Vita* in a way that distinguished the saint through his unique physical appearance, just as the writings of classical antiquity formed the heroes of old for their readers. Martin's extreme asceticism and odd behavior is referenced in all the Martinian writings. In the *Dialogus* Martin's appearance is so poor and frighteningly odd that he scares horses of the Roman army, and soldiers mistake him for a vagrant.⁵⁵ In the *Chronicorum* Martin's lifestyle places him in the same company as Priscillian of Avila, a man charged with heresy, a subject I will further explore in Chapter four. That Severus focuses on Martin's bizarre appearance as the product of an ascetic lifestyle that deserves praise in the later, more historical works on Martin is in keeping

⁵⁴ Rapp, p. 101.

⁵⁵ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 2.

with Severus' portrayal of him at Tours. Yet Severus' take on Martin's disregard for personal hygiene is at odds with that of the Gallic bishops who criticize Martin along these lines. To complete the puzzle laid in this scene we must conclude with exploring the types of bishops that occupied Gaul.

Previous scholars have acknowledged Martin as the prime motivator of Gaul's conversion to Christianity.⁵⁶ The holy man worked within traditional Gallic ideologies, such as replacing a pagan physician by performing healing miracles, and redefined classical constructs in the community in spite of any mistrust due to his foreign background.⁵⁷ As a result of its rural location and lack of a flourishing Christian population, the Church would send an administrative bishop rather than one exhibiting the marks of asceticism in order to convert the population with charity, not through example.⁵⁸ As an administrator, the bishop would then regulate the community's resources a task which made the position more desirable to people of noble and curial backgrounds seeking to rise up the social ladder in a community.⁵⁹ Bishops of such background of wealth and education would, therefore, first be concerned with a foreign ascetic such as Martin assuming such authority in their neighboring community, and then be shocked to see such a ragged man when he arrived. The picture that Severus paints here, therefore, not only shows a possible response to the poorly dressed vagrant strolling into Tours, but also provides great insight to the type of bishop that occupied Gaul in Martin's time.

The disjunction between Martin's physical appearance and his position as a Church leader requires Severus, firstly, to compare Martin's overall behavior to other public leaders and,

⁵⁶ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 120.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 116, 122, and 133.

⁵⁸ Rapp, p. 115.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.183 and 188.

secondly, to emphasize the fact that, despite outward signs to the contrary, Martin possessed strong rhetorical powers. Severus does not reveal the literature that Martin studied, or the educational background that Martin may have received in his youth, though it would be safe to assume that he studied scripture and other Christian works. Severus does provide, however, descriptions of Martin's rhetorical abilities, claiming, "I never heard from any other such knowledge and cleverness, or such purity of speech."⁶⁰ Martin's powers of speech, therefore, come from his conviction and intensely prayerful life, not from an education in the ancient writers of Rome and Greece. Severus emphasizes Martin's deep conviction and eloquence to both justify Martin as a bishop and to acknowledge the need to address the bishop's educational background.

What Martin lacked in formal education, he certainly exceeded in both his disciplined ascetic lifestyle and his generosity. As stated before, the bishop of Late Antiquity rose as a secular authority by tending to the poor and managing the property of the bishopric. In several accounts in the Martinian writings, Severus displays Martin to be possessed of an extreme generosity at an early stage of his life. Severus notes, for instance, that, before he had even left the army Martin tended to the poor, as revealed in the scene where he shares his garment with a beggar and waits on his servants.⁶¹ It is in Severus' *Dialogus*, however, that an interesting episode occurs. Severus recounts a scene in which a poor man approaches Martin's archdeacon for clothes but is turned away and goes to Martin, who gives him his own under-tunic. Martin then asks his archdeacon to purchase a tunic so that he may celebrate mass, and receives a crude

⁶⁰ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 25.22-3. "ex nullius umquam ore tantum scientiae, tantum [ingenii] boni et tam puri sermonis audisse."

⁶¹ Ibid, 3.

garment only costing “five pieces of silver.”⁶² The importance of this account does not simply lie in Martin’s generous gift of his own tunic to the beggar, but also in the conscious lack of ostentation in the new tunic he receives. The *Dialogus* further reveals the lack of luxury that Martin provided for himself, in one instance stating that “when sitting in his retirement, he never used a chair,” and in another declaring that Martin did not provide for himself a decorative chair in his church, but rather a simple tripod.⁶³ Through his great generosity and vigorous self-denial of expensive luxuries, Martin therefore furnishes Severus with evidence not only to defend the saint’s position as a good bishop, but also with criticism he can direct at bishops who may have granted themselves some worldly luxuries through abusing funds which they managed.

In conclusion, the details that Severus provides for Martin’s social and educational status are not simply biographical accounts that exhibit the personal traits of the saint. They also expose the preconceived qualities that fellow clergy expected in a bishop through Martin’s exceptional status. In the chapters describing his life in the army, Severus is careful to emphasize details that show Martin not as a simple soldier, but as a man almost predestined for ecclesiastical service. Martin’s ascetic characteristics not only display virtues seen in holy men; they also counterbalance his lack of education. Through Severus’s descriptions, Martin, though not a learned man, shows intense, rhetorical skill normally seen only in the highly educated elite and clergy. In short, Severus knew both his subject and the characteristics that society determined as markers for its leaders and attempted to address those criticisms in his writings about a very controversial saint and bishop of fourth-century Gaul.

⁶² Severus, *Dialogus II*, 1. 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 1.12.

CHAPTER 3. A MAN OF TWO HEADS: MARTIN AS BISHOP AND MONK

Chapter Two explored the social and intellectual characteristics that made Martin different from contemporary bishops. His lack of formal education and his life as a soldier led to great opposition to his appointment as bishop of Tours among fellow clergy. Severus' arguments about Martin's qualifications nonetheless emphasize the importance of rhetoric, education, and social status for a bishop in fourth-century Gaul. This chapter will continue to explore the striking differences between the ascetic lifestyle that Martin lived in the fourth century and the practical responsibilities required of the position of bishop, revealing the important 'balancing act' that Martin employed to live, and thrive, in both. The monastic society's belief that wealth and political power could corrupt a bishop greatly influenced Severus' account of Martin's life as a bishop.¹ In the Martinian works, one can see a detailed study of Egyptian and Eastern monasticism that, firstly, provides extensive evidence of the unique lifestyles and societies rising from the desert; and, secondly, associates Martin with these eastern holy men.² Through detailed study of Martin's way of life, Severus emphasizes several specific attributes that arise as a result of the holy man's combination of monastic and episcopal responsibilities: his unearthly patience, his tremendous generosity, and his ability to both protect his community and himself from physical and spiritual threats. This chapter will highlight the conflict that Martin's positions as monastic leader and as ecclesiastical leader created, and explore the important traits that Martin's contemporaries expected from each position.

The fourth century saw the beginning of the conflict between the ecclesiastical leaders of the Church and the leaders of ascetic and early monastic groups. During the early years of the

¹ Gaddis, p. 247.

² Stancliffe, p.83; and Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority and the Priscillianist Controversy* (University of California Press: Berkeley) p. 142.

Church, its ecclesiastical officials struggled to defend their authority over their religious communities from wandering ascetics, especially in the Eastern Roman Empire.³ These holy men, in addition to performing faith-healings and miracles that presented a visual testament to their religious authority, began to replace the aristocracy by resolving secular disputes as well.⁴ In response to these ascetic holy men, bishops were then forced to either choose to support and associate themselves with them, such as in the relationship between Antony of Egypt and Athanasius of Alexandria, or to pressure their congregation to ostracize these mendicants from the community. Contemporary accounts such as that of Hilary of Poitiers suggest that the spiritual leaders in late antiquity lost themselves in a struggle for secular superiority rather than devoted themselves to tending to their flocks.⁵ The leaders of the ascetic groups offered an alternative religious path from the Church, but did not have the same spiritual authority that the bishops claimed from their monopoly over the sacraments.⁶ Severus provides a detailed account of the practices of this alternative lifestyle in his *Dialogus*. The story involves Postumianus, a comrade and fellow student of Martin who traveled to the eastern provinces of the decaying Roman Empire for three years and later discussed with Severus the monastic practices he observed.⁷ In brief, Postumianus observed ascetic hermits that carved out a spiritual livelihood

³ Peter Brown, "Rise and Function of the Holy Man", *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 61 (1971) p.81.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford University, 1978) p. 84; and Gaddis, p. 261.

⁶ Maribel Dietz provides a detailed examination of the different monastic models and their relation to society in *Wandering Monks, Virgins, and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World A.D. 300-800* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

⁷ Postumianus traveled in the areas of Nitria, Alexandria, Bethlehem, Memphis, Aswan (Syene), and other monasteries surrounding the Nile river and across the Red Sea on Mount Sinai. It is debatable whether or not Postumianus actually existed, or is a simple rhetorical character used by Severus in his account of Martin's sanctity. Scholars note that a man named Postumianus acted as carrier for the letters between Severus and Paulinus of Nola, and a traveler such as he may have made a journey described by Severus. Though he does act as a rhetorical device

in the harsh physical environment of the African and Middle Eastern deserts and mountains, performing many miracles, and described the complex monastic communities that clung to the Nile.

The people whom Postumianus visited varied as widely as the terrain in which they sought seclusion, but all remained Christian, and some were even priests of the Church.⁸ While many fourth-century monasteries were small and loosely organized, Severus recorded that Postumianus observed some along the Nile that numbered as many as three thousand.⁹ Of course this number is questionable, but other accounts, such as that of the Coptic historian Palladius, also record that some monastic communities near the Nile may have supported a surprisingly large number of monks.¹⁰ Moreover, these tales reveal that the abbot, the lead monk of the community, wielded an enormous amount of power and demanded strict obedience to his commands, and was particular in selecting who joined his community.¹¹ For example, Severus detailed one bizarre task that the abbot charged to gain acceptance into his community: the prospective monk was required to mimic the life-threatening trial associated with the Old Testament's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by entering a bread oven.¹² The abbot similarly

in some cases, such as when he corrects Severus about Martin losing his powers, this thesis will view him as an actual person capable of the conversation in the *Dialogus*; see Severus, *Dialogus I*, 3. 4-7, 8.1-3, 10. 1; Babut, p.49 n.2; Stancliffe, p. 49.

⁸ Postumianus does encounter one man in the Egyptian desert who was also a priest of a small church. We do not know, however, the precise location of the church as Postumianus was vague in his location—as he often did not know exactly where he was; see Severus, *Dialogus I*, 5.9.

⁹ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 17; and Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority*, p. 34.

¹⁰ Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, Translated by Robert Meyer (Newman Press, 1991) 32; and Derwas Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1966) p. 24, 25.

¹¹ Gaddis, pp. 237, and 239.

¹² Daniel, 3:13-27. In this bible passage, King Nebuchadnezzar threw three brothers, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into a furnace after they refused to worship his gods. To the king's astonishment, the three brothers

maintained his control over his community by determining when a member could engage in the ascetic practice of entering into seclusion.¹³ One can see that, by controlling and permitting members to enter into solitude and deciding who could administer to those in seclusion, the abbot held almost absolute power over the monks in his community.

Postumianus also remarks that clashes between local clergy and monks occurred in Alexandria over issues of orthodoxy: primarily over the teachings of Origen.¹⁴ Postumianus specifies that the conflict centered on Origen's argument that just as Christ

...had come in the flesh for the redemption of mankind, and suffering upon the cross for the salvation of man, had tasted death to procure eternal life for the human race, so he was, by the same course of suffering, even to render the devil a partaker of redemption.¹⁵

The conflict became so fierce that the bishop of Alexandria began to persecute those who did not condemn Origen's works. Postumianus, who agreed with Origen's argument, became disgusted with the persecution and left Alexandria.¹⁶ This account, therefore, shows both the possibility of violence that rose from disagreements over orthodoxy between monks and clergy, and the independence asserted by the monastic community in Egypt.

Though the monastic community of Alexandria practiced autonomy by open, and even violent, resistance to the bishops' conclusions about Origen, one must also keep in mind the Church's desire to establish jurisdiction over the monks. Evidence of this desire crops up as

survived the fires unscathed. The task that the abbot gives to the prospective monk mimics this passage, sending the young man into a lit oven.

¹³ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 17.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 6; Gaddis, pp. 220, 253; and Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, p. 65.

¹⁵ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 7, 4-6, "*sicut pro redemptione hominis in carne uenisset et crucem pro hominis salute peressus mortem pro hominis aeternitate gustasset, ita esset eodem ordine passioinis etiam diabolus redempturus.*" Severus noted that Martin supported Origen's argument regarding the possibility of salvation for the Devil, see *Vita Martini*, 22.

¹⁶ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 7.

early as Athanasius of Alexandria's hagiography on Antony of Egypt. Athanasius' *Life of Saint Antony* describes a special relationship between himself and Antony in order to absorb any possible "threat" Antony posed to his authority. To that end, Athanasius' and Antony's relationship foregrounds the possibility of a bishop using a famous holy man to solidify his spiritual authority.

The main "threat" posed by both Antony and Martin to the authority of the ecclesiastic community is manifest through their alleged power to both discern spirits and perform miracles, a trait known as *discretio*. *Discretio*, an ability developed through a strict lifestyle of fasting, prayer, and self-reflection, allowed an ascetic to understand signs and identify evil entities.¹⁷ This spirituality imbued the holy man with the ability to perform faith-healing, exorcisms and other amazing acts that impressed the crowds of people who intruded upon his solitude.¹⁸ By achieving this ability outside the confines of the Church, these ascetic monks were able to show visual proof of God's favor, manifestations which undermined the authority of the bishops of late antiquity over their religious communities.¹⁹ Notably, Postumianus makes a peculiar assertion to Severus that suggests Martin's miracles were associated not with his election as bishop, but rather with his monastic and ascetic practices:

Martin was accustomed to say to you [Severus], that such an abundance of power was by no means granted him while he was a bishop, as he remembered to have possessed before he obtained that office.²⁰

¹⁷ Edith Scholl, "The Mother of Virtues: Discretio," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*; 2001, Vol. 36 Issue 3, p. 392; Sterk, p. 19; and Gaddis, p. 207.

¹⁸ Sterk, p. 205.

¹⁹ Rapp, p.137

²⁰ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 4.1-3. "*Illud autem animaduerti saepe, Sulpici, Martinum tibi dicere solitum, nequaquam sibi in episcoatu eam uirtutum gratiam suppetisse, quam prius se habuisse meminisset.*"

Postumianus' words here demonstrate that he and Severus agree Martin's holiness and sanctity come not from his station as bishop, but rather from his lifestyle as an ascetic.

As a writer whose audience consisted of monks, priests, and bishops, Severus carefully attempts to show, on the one hand, that aspects of Martin's ascetic lifestyle did not overpower those aspects of Martin as a churchman; and, on the other, that his position as bishop did not corrupt his spiritual authority. In short, Severus strives to articulate a balance between these facets of the saint's seemingly conflicting social obligations. Severus' Martin, therefore, stands as a paradox within himself: at once as a product of public election and of private asceticism.²¹ Unlike his contemporary, Augustine of Hippo, Martin did not leave the "desert" environment of his monastery when called to serve by society, but brought his ascetic lifestyle with him. While Augustine left the ascetic lifestyle, Martin constructed a monastery, Marmoutier, away from the community, so he could continue to live in seclusion while serving the larger community. Severus remarks that the bishop even isolated himself in his own church, keeping "in his own seclusion up to the hour at which custom required that the sacred rites should be dispensed to the people."²²

The desire for solitude held special significance for these holy men, as is shown in an extreme example in a story told to Postumianus during his journey to Mount Sinai. Postumianus tells us he heard an account that a hermit

...had cut himself off from the human intercourse some fifty years before. He used no clothing. Covered only by the hairs of his own body, he was enabled by divine grace to ignore his nakedness. Whenever pious men tried to visit him, he ran to some inaccessible place and thus avoided human contact. It was said that

²¹ The concept of public election also strengthens Severus' description of a perfect bishop; showing a man who had the office forced on him and, therefore, deserves the power of that position. See Gaddis, p. 262.

²² Severus, *Dialogus II*, 1.

he had let himself be interviewed only once [...] it is said he replied that whoever receives visits from men cannot receive visits from angels.²³

This account reveals the distinct desire of the individuals of fourth-century Eastern monasticism to completely remove themselves from society.²⁴ Though they attempt to completely remove themselves from society, hermits often find themselves visited by individuals seeking their guidance.

In addition to using the ascetic principle of solitude to buttress his defense of his client, Severus is also compelled to show that Martin possessed monastic characteristics throughout his entire life in order to quell possible criticisms from the monastic community. During this period, the monastic community held reservations about their members entering into clerical offices.²⁵ The growing power and wealth of the ecclesiastical office drew distrust among the monks of late antiquity who believed that such worldly power would ultimately corrupt the person granted it.²⁶ To overcome this difficulty, Severus seeks to show, therefore, that Martin remained uncorrupted by his office through emphasizing the strict ascetic practices that he continued to live under as bishop. Thus, to counter the charge that becoming a bishop changed Martin, Severus emphasizes two characteristics that Martin retained as he entered into the Church: patience and humility. Patience and personal restraint were virtues of the utmost importance to the Roman aristocrat who attempted to uphold his reputation. In a similar way, patience played an important role in

²³Severus, *Dialogus I*, 17.6-11, and 13-15. "qui fere iam ante quinquaginta annos a consuersatione humana remotus nollo uestis usu, saetis corporis sui tectus, nuditatem suam diuino munere nesciebat. His quotiens eum religiosi uiri adire uoluerunt, cursu auia petens occursum uitabat humanum. Uni tantummodo ferebatur se ante quinquennium praebuisse [...] respondisse perhibetur, eum, qui ab hominibus frequentaretur, non posse ab angelis frequentari."

²⁴ Dietz, p. 73.

²⁵ Gaddis, p. 273.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 271-2.

the lives of monastic members and hermits of the East.²⁷ Athanasius, for example, remarked that Antony never became angry with a person and always gave assistance to those in need.²⁸ Similarly, the abbot of the large monastic community by the Nile that Postumianus visited gave difficult tasks to prospective members of his community that were designed to both conquer the man's impatience and prove his complete submission to the abbot.²⁹ This concept of patience, therefore, did not necessarily reflect a desire for monks and ascetics to control emotion, but rather to remove vice and frailty—to blot it from their conscience.³⁰

As the result of another of these qualities; namely, humility, Martin was consigned to the very low office of exorcist. The position of exorcist, established by Pope Cornelius in the mid-third century, was not afforded the same level of prestige as the orders of deacons, priests or bishops, but, rather, represented one of the minor orders. Tellingly, Severus notes that when Hilary appointed Martin as an exorcist, Martin “did not refuse this appointment, for he did not want to appear to look down on it because it was somewhat humble.”³¹ Moreover, the Church did not hold a monopoly over the practice of exorcism, as many holy men could perform this miracle. For example, many people sought out Antony of Egypt and his pupil Paul the Simple, as well as any local holy man known to perform miracles, to exorcise demons from themselves or loved ones. The position of exorcist, though, fit perfectly into Martin's concept of

²⁷ Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks* (University of California: Berkeley, 2002) p. 104-105.

²⁸ Athanasius, 4.1-5 and 55.1-3.

²⁹ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 17.

³⁰ Peter Brown, *Body and Society*, p.31; and Severus, *Dialogus I*, 12.19.

³¹ Severus, *Dialogus I*, 5.11-12, “*quam ille ordinationem, ne despexisse tamquam humilirem uideretur, non repudiauit.*”

Christianity as a constant struggle or battle against the Devil, especially in light of the risk that the exorcist might become possessed if weakened by pride.³²

Severus waits to expound on Martin's qualities that "surpassed ordinary human nature," qualities that show Martin has gone beyond vice, until the last chapter of Martin's *Vita*.³³ By doing so, Severus can show his audience that Martin had not undergone a transformation to holy man to accomplish the miracles throughout the *Vita*, but rather was one throughout his life. In a typical move for an accomplished writer of Latin, instead of repeatedly extolling Martin's virtues throughout the *Vita*, Severus places the assertion that Martin "was always just the same—displaying a kind of heavenly happiness in his expression" towards the end of the hagiography as an argumentative device to condense his catalogue of Martin's virtues to one statement.³⁴ Severus, therefore, makes a conscious effort to argue that Martin displayed specific emotional characteristics throughout his life and strategically places his evidence in the last chapter for the greatest impact in his argument.

In contrast to using a single statement to argue Martin's almost supernatural patience in the final chapter of the *Vita*, Severus mentions the saint's fasting and prayer throughout the piece. This shift in rhetorical strategy makes sense when one considers that an audience of the fourth century expected to see a holy individual living an extraordinary life emphasized by constant communication with the divine (prayer) and by denying himself the very essence of life (food).³⁵ Therefore, Severus writes that:

³² Stancliffe, p.228; and Severus, *Dialogus I*, 20.

³³ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 27.3.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 27.2-3. "unus idemque fuit swmper, caelestem quodammodo laetitiam uultu praeferens extra naturam hominis uidebatur."

³⁵ Gillian Clark, "Women and Asceticism: the Refusal of Status and Gender," *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 41.

No one can adequately make known his perseverance and self-mastery in abstinence and fasting, or his power in watching and prayers, along with the nights, as well as days, which were spent by him, while not a moment was separated from the service of God, either for indulging in ease, or engaging in business.³⁶

Essentially, Severus' argument here is that denying oneself food made the body sufficiently supple to be able to yield to the spirit.³⁷ In a society where real magic, miracles, and demons and angels were witnessed on a daily basis, a monk needed weapons to protect himself.³⁸ Therefore, prayer and fasting allowed Martin to remain in communion with Heaven, and to literally starve the cravings of the flesh out of his mortal body.

Martin's hagiography is unique in the fact that Severus must not only show evidence of the saint's perfection of asceticism and the monastic qualities of the fourth century, but also how Martin behaved as a bishop. Fourth-century society looked to bishops as social leaders and administrators. The bishop represented the highest spiritual authority in his bishopric and was responsible for the soul of each member of the community.³⁹

To show how Martin conducted himself perfectly as a bishop, Severus expounds on Martin's ability to protect his community at Tours. As was recounted in chapter two, the bishop's main responsibility in Gaul during the fourth century involved protecting his flock from barbarians and demons.⁴⁰ On these grounds, Severus paints several scenes that describe Martin's unsurpassed prowess in dealing with neighboring Germanic tribes. In chapter twelve of Martin's

³⁶ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 26.6-8. "*illam scilicet perseurantium et temperamentum in abstinentia et in ieiuniis, potentiam in uigiliis et orationibus, noctesque ab eo perinde ac dies actas nullumque uacuum ab opera Dei tempus, quo uel otio indulserit uel negotio.*"

³⁷ Kallistos Ware, "The way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?" *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford University Press, 1998) p.10.

³⁸ Sterk, p. 185.

³⁹ Rapp, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 62.

Vita, for instance, Severus depicts an amazing image of the bishop imposing his will on a group of barbarians. In brief, during his wanderings, Martin stumbled on a funerary procession and chose to investigate. Martin believed:

...that some profane rites of sacrifice were being performed. This thought occurred to him, because it was the custom of the Gallic rustics in their wretched folly to carry about through the fields the images of demons veiled with a white covering.⁴¹

Accordingly, Martin approached this perceived pagan sacrificial ceremony as a soldier of Christ.

Martin is determined to stop the rite and:

Lifting up, therefore, the sign of the cross opposite to them, he commanded the crowd not to move from the place in which they were, and to set down the burden. Upon this, the miserable creatures might have been seen at first to become stiff like rocks. [...] when the saintly man discovered that they were simply a band of peasants celebrating funeral rites, and not sacrifices to the gods, again raising his hand, he gave them the power of going away, and of lifting up the body. Thus, he both compelled them to stand when he pleased, and permitted them to depart when he thought good.⁴²

The group froze in place and stood mystified before the holy man until he fully understood their intent and released them from his spell. As such, Martin's power to literally control the pagans in the funeral procession provides a strong case for his qualifications as a bishop to protect his community from any non-Christian influence. The funeral, perceived by Martin as idolatry, presents a threat to his community, and he acts accordingly to protect his bishopric from any hostile pagan display. Coupled with his concern for Tours, his power in wielding the sign of the Cross shows both the expansion of Christianity into Gaul as a dominant religion and the almost supernatural power that Martin possesses through wielding these Christian symbols. Severus

⁴¹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 12.7-11. "*profanes sacrificiorum ritus agi credit: quia essest heac Gallorum rustics consentod, simulacra deamonum candido tecta uelamine misera per argos suos cicumferre dementia.*"

⁴² Severus, *Vita Martini*, 12.10-11, and 16-20. "*leuto ergo in aduersos signo crucis imperat turbae no moueri loco onusque deponere. hic uero mirum in modum uideres miseros primum uelut saxa riguisse. [...] cum beatus uir conperisset exequiarum esse illam frequentiam, non sacrorum, eleuata rursus manu dat eis abeundi et tollendi corporis potestatem. Ita eos et cum uoluit, stare compulit, et cum libuit, abire permisit.*"

does stress that the power of the Sign of the Cross, not Martin himself, suddenly paralyzes the rustics, and that the holy man simply acts as the mediator of such power. Yet Martin's ability to wield such power clearly characterizes what Gaul needed in a bishop.

Martin's supernatural powers also protect both his community and himself from physical threats. Chapter Fourteen of the *Vita* in particular narrates a heroic scene in which Martin can be seen climbing to the roof of a building to defend it from a raging fire:

...a certain village set fire to a very ancient and celebrated temple, the circle of flames was carried by the action of the wind upon a house which was very close to, yea, connected with, the temple. When Martin perceived this, he climbed by rapid ascent to the roof of the house, presenting himself in front of the advancing flames. Then indeed might the fire have been seen thrust back in a wonderful manner against the force of the wind, so that there appeared a sort of conflict of the two elements fighting together. Thus, by the influence of Martin, the fire only acted in the place where it was ordered to do so.⁴³

In a world where physical threats are encoded with supernatural content, a fire could be seen as a demonic presence, especially the fire mentioned in the chapter that emerged from a neighboring temple. The community could therefore interpret this physical threat from multiple perspectives. From a secular perspective, the community would be afraid of the damage that a fire could cause, while from a spiritual perspective, the fear of the actual power that a demon from the temple could impose on the village would be made manifest.⁴⁴ Martin, therefore, stood and protected his community against both possible dangers.

⁴³ Ibid, 14.6-7. "*nam cum in uico quodam fano antiquissimo et celeberrimo ignem inmisisset, in proximam, immo adhaerentem domum agente uento flammaram globi ferebantur. quod ubi Martinus aduertit, rapido cursu tectum domus scandit, obuium se aduenientibus flammis inferens. tum uero mirum in modum cerneret contra uim uenti ignem retorqueri, ut compugnantium inter se elementorum quidam conflictus uideretur. ita uirtute Martini ibi tantum ignis est operatus ubi iussus est.*"

⁴⁴ The concept of "threat" defined a demonic presence in Christian society, therefore invading armies, disruptive members of society, or anything that negatively affected the status quo was thought to be the Devil's making. Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 61.

Martin's grace through God not only protects his community, but also the holy man himself from physical threats. Specifically, two chapters in the *Vita* show how this shroud of security surrounding the bishop allows him to move freely in a hostile pagan environment. In Chapter Thirteen of the *Vita*, Severus demonstrates how Martin's powers pave the way for missionary work in other regions of Gaul. Approaching a group of rustics, Martin demanded that they remove a sacred oak, to which they agreed on condition that he stood where the tree would fall. Defying the loggers' skill as well as the law of gravity, the tree does not fall on Martin, but spins to the other side, almost killing bystanders and causing a massive conversion in the region: "For there was hardly one of that huge crowd of pagans who did not long for the laying on of hands and abandoning their impious errors."⁴⁵ Another scene in Chapter Fifteen of the *Vita* further demonstrates the protection Martin seemingly has against aggressive actions towards his own person. As Martin enters a temple to destroy the idol therein, a worshiper attacks him with a sword, only to fall to the ground "overwhelmed by the fear of God."⁴⁶ These scenes argue that Martin's blessings under God allow for the miracles that occur for the community's benefit, for if he repelled the tree and fire from some demonic power or for his own glory, God would not have protected the holy man from personal attacks.

As a monastic leader, Martin must also possess protective powers for the monks under his charge who were struggling to hone their own spirituality. Accordingly, Severus reveals that the monks of the monastery often heard confrontations between Martin and demons throughout their cells. Demonic possession and "trickery" constantly threatened a spiritual community such as a monastery of late antiquity, and Martin's position entailed monitoring his monks and

⁴⁵ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 13.19-21. "*nam nemo fere ex inmani illa multitudine gentilium fuit qui non impositione manus desiderata Dominum Iesum, relicto impietatis errore, crediderit.*"

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 15.6. "*consternatusque diuno metu uenium precabatur.*"

discerning any threats that a monk or his vision may have on the community.⁴⁷ To make the argument that the holy man protected his monks against demonic powers, Severus recalls the story of Clarus, a priest who lived as a monk under Martin. The story runs that a young man in the charge of Clarus came into possession of a glorious robe from a vision and became filled with pride. Not knowing if the garment came from an angel or a demon Clarus brought the boy before Martin and the garment vanished. Severus suggests “that the Devil could no longer dissemble or conceal his own deception when it was laid before Martin’s eye.”⁴⁸ The holy man, therefore, stood as the chief advisor and monitor of the monastery, protecting those that society saw as prime targets of the Devil through their immersion in extreme spiritual practices.

After his election as bishop of Tours, Martin also immersed himself in the administrative duties that his position called for. For instance, he met with the emperor of the Western Empire, Maximus, and sat in council with his colleagues to discuss religious practice.⁴⁹ Martin’s spiritual powers not only aided in his combat with the Devil, but also helped fulfill his administrative duties as a bishop. In one case, Severus writes that an angel heralded Martin’s approach to a slave owner, Avitianus, who became so frightened by his vision that he released all his prisoners without Martin having spoken a word.⁵⁰ Avitianus also did not harass Tours, although Gallus, another companion taking part in Severus’ *Dialogus*, comments on how violent the man was. In addition, secular officers sought Martin’s protection from natural plagues such as the Prefect Auspicius, who pleaded for Martin to protect Sens from a yearly hail storm that ruined the

⁴⁷ Gaddis, p. 207.

⁴⁸ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 23.16-17. “*ut fantasium suam diabolus, cum erat Martini oculis ingerenda dissimulare diutius aut tegere non posset.*”

⁴⁹ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 6.

⁵⁰ Severus, *Dialogus III*, 4.

crops.⁵¹ Through Severus' works the audience sees an individual who ministered to his elected position's duties (especially fulfilling the role as guardian of his community) while upholding the monastic traditions which, according to Severus, actually aided him in his administration.

In essence, Martin embodied what scholars define as a "monk-bishop," fulfilling Tours' need for an administrative leader from the privacy of his cell.⁵² His particular practices allowed the monk-bishop to "infuse the increasing institutional authority of the Church office with the spiritual power and appeal of the holy ascetic."⁵³ In Martin's *Vita*, for example, Severus describes a scene that exhibits both Martin's duties as a bishop and his power of *discretio*: his discernment of a thief's tomb that the community incorrectly believed housed the remains of a saint.⁵⁴ While inspecting the tomb of the supposed martyr:

Martin prayed to the Lord that he would reveal, who the man in question was, and what was his character or desert. Next turning to the left-hand side, he sees standing very near a shade of a mean and cruel appearance. Martin commands him to tell his name and character. Upon this, he declares his name, and confesses his guilt. He says that he had been a robber, and that he was beheaded on account of his crimes; that he had been honored simply by an error of the multitude; that he had nothing in common with the martyrs, since glory was their portion, while punishment exacted its penalties from him.⁵⁵

After learning that the interred body was not the remains of a martyr, Martin ordered the shrine to be demolished and the robber's veneration to be brought to an end. Martin's responsibility for the community's spiritual well being drove him to examine the tomb to discover the truth about

⁵¹ Ibid, 7.

⁵² Sterk, p. 7.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid. "*dehinc super sepulchrum ipsum adstans orauit ad Dominum, ut quis esset uel cuius meriti esset sepultus ostenderet. Tum conuersus ad laeuam uidet prope adsistere umbram sordidam, trucem: imperat nomen meritumque loqueretur. Nomen edicit, de crimine confitetur: latronem se fuisse, ob scelera percussum, uulgi errore celebratum: sibi nihil cum martyribus esse commune, cum illos gloria, se poena retineret.*"

the remains, and his power of *discretio* allowed Martin to confront the spirit and determine its nature.

In conclusion, Severus presents a detailed argument to show Martin as a perfect bishop and a perfect abbot. He draws on the innate desire for the community of Tours to have an individual to protect them and minister to their needs, and focuses on miracles that exemplify Martin's ability to satisfy such requirements. In his Martinian works, Severus also explores the struggle in early Christianity between monks and bishops. Abbots held control over vast numbers in their monastery, yet the bishops of late antiquity began to blanket large areas with a more administrative approach to Christian society.⁵⁶ Though such a struggle for power occupied the two positions, Severus' arguments for Martin as an abbot and bishop reveal that both positions have similar requirements in monitoring a community's spirituality and behavior and in protecting the community from physical and spiritual threats lurking throughout the lands. Severus, therefore, creates a character to exemplify what true bishops and monks should embody in their office. Severus both defends his mentor in the eyes of those who may question if he truly met the needs of the Christians he led, and sets a precedent for others to follow.

⁵⁶ Gaddis, p. 261.

CHAPTER 4. PRISCILLIAN OF AVILA AND MARTIN OF TOURS: RESOLVING HERESY, PRESERVING SAINTHOOD

Chapter Three focused on Severus' arguments for Martin's perfection in both his episcopal and monastic functions. Severus' works revealed conflict between the monastic and ecclesiastical members in the early Church. Representing both of these figures, Martin had to display the proper characteristics of both offices. In his description of Martin's actions as a monk and bishop, Severus creates an argument of the ideal roles for the two offices. He foregrounds Martin's father-like guardianship over the monks in his monastery, as well as over the community he led as a bishop. This chapter will explore a powerful threat to Martin's sanctity: his association with Priscillian of Avila. Priscillian, a man accused of heresy by the Church and executed for *maleficium* in 385 CE by Emperor Magnus Maximus of the Western Roman Empire, had many qualities similar to Martin that resulted in accusations of heresy being levied against Martin.¹ The following chapter will explore the association between Priscillian of Avila and Martin of Tours, how Severus' audience viewed this relationship, and, most importantly, the rhetorical defense that Severus uses to distance Martin from Priscillian.

Priscillian, a fourth-century Spaniard, served as bishop of Avila from 381 to 385 CE. A very educated man of noble ancestry, Priscillian brought a powerful intellect to the bishopric of Avila. This intellect brought concepts of asceticism, eschatology, and apocrypha to both men and women in his bishopric. A trained and skilled rhetorician, Priscillian wrote extensively during his short administration to defend himself and express his ideals.² On this front, scholars have recently argued that manuscripts discovered in Laon and Wurzburg are surviving

¹ Magnus Maximus ruled as emperor of the Western Roman Empire from 383-388 CE and executed Priscillian and several of his followers for studying astrology as a form of divination. It is also argued that Maximus desired the vast lands that the wealthy followers of Priscillian owned. Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1991) p. 97.

² Chadwick, p. 57; Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 89; and Burrus, p. 25.

Priscillianist works and offer deep insight into the man's life. These scholars have labeled Priscillian as a heretic, a cult leader, and a pseudo-Manichaean, but also as a reformer.³ For the purposes of this thesis, these criticisms and defenses of Priscillian must be taken into account as they bear on Martin's association with him through the writings of Severus, who recorded Priscillian's trial at Trier in his *Chronicorum*.⁴ Specifically, Severus discusses Martin's disapproval of a secular jurisdiction over a bishop, and the charges brought by Ithacius, the accuser, against Martin at the trial. Associating Martin with Priscillian insinuates that Martin's millennial teachings and ascetic practices are also heretical. Since contemporaries knew that Martin's name was brought up in the trial, Severus must address and defend this major controversy in Martin's life. This chapter will explore how Severus resolves this controversial relationship between Martin and Priscillian for his audience and removes the label "heretic" from his mentor's name.

During his administration, Priscillian stressed ascetic ideals for both the clergy and the lay people of Avila to prepare the whole of society for the end of the world. He encouraged retreats into the neighboring mountains for personal spiritual reflection.⁵ The bishop believed that everyone in the community, men and women, clergy and laypersons, should purify their bodies and spirits in order to make themselves ready for the end of the world. Yet Priscillian was not unique in his eschatological teachings, as Severus comments that Martin and many others also believed in the imminent end of the world:

There was a young man in Spain, who, having by many signs obtained for himself authority among the people, was puffed up to such a pitch that he gave himself out as being Elias. And when multitudes had too readily believed this, he went on

³ Chadwick, p. 9; and Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 90.

⁴ Severus, *Chronicorum*, 47.

⁵ Chadwick, p. 8.

to say that he was actually Christ; and he succeeded so well even in this delusion that a certain bishop named Rufus worshipped him as being the Lord. For so doing, we have seen this bishop at a later date deprived of his office. Many of the brethren have also informed me that at the same time one arose in the East, who boasted that he was John. We may infer from this, since false prophets of such a kind have appeared, that the coming of Antichrist is at hand; for he is already practicing in these persons the mystery of iniquity.⁶

This statement reveals the deep belief that many fourth-century Christians held concerning the coming apocalypse. This theme consistently reoccurs throughout early Christian writing. The sixth century bishop, Gregory of Tours, for example, shared his predecessor's millennial philosophy.⁷ Though many Christians took this view, the concept of millennial thought creates an association between Martin and Priscillian that may have caused Ithacius to accuse Martin of being a Priscillian supporter and a heretic.

Though he preached asceticism to his community, Priscillian did not construct any monasteries under a specific rule.⁸ Also, unlike the carefully regulated way in which Martin disseminated ascetic discipline to his community, Priscillian oversaw mixed gender groups that followed a retreat calendar corresponding to the Church's festival calendar.⁹ This unorganized grouping reflected Priscillian's desire to inspire ascetic reform in both the community of Avila as well as in the other bishoprics of Spain.¹⁰ Even taking into account differing practices of

⁶ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 24.1-11. "*Animaduersum est tamen, eodem fere tempore fuisse in Hispania iuuenem, qui cum sibi multis signis auctoritatem parasuisset, eo usque elatus est, ut se Heliam profiteretur. quod cum plerique temere credidissent, addidit ut se Christum esse diceret: in quo etiam adeo inlusit, ut eum quidam episcopus Rufus nomine ut Deum adoraret: propter quod eum postea ab episcopate deiectum uidimus. plerique etiam ex fratribus nobis rettulerunt, eodem tempore in Oriente quondam extitisse, qui se Iohannem esse iactitauerit. ex quo conicere possumus, istius modi pseudoprofetis existentibus, Antichristi aduentum imminere, qui iam in istis mysterium iniquitatis operatur.*"

⁷ Averil Cameron, "Remaking the Past," *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Post Classical World*, edited by G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Harvard, 2001) p. 15.

⁸ Chadwick, p. 10; and Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 91.

⁹ Chadwick, p. 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

asceticism, fourth-century bishops in Gaul and Spain clearly showed an aggressive attitude to asceticism in general, as is made explicit via their rulings in Saragossa and their accusations against Priscillian.

Priscillian also strongly believed in the ability of his community to learn not only from the orthodox canon established by the Council of Nicea in 325 CE, but also from apocryphal writings.¹¹ Priscillian urged that anyone should be allowed to read any religious text under the proper instruction and supervision of the bishop.¹² The apocryphal works that he preferred included the *Acts of Thomas, Peter, and John* for their emphasis on chastity.¹³ Though some individuals such as Filastrius of Brescia and Ambrosiaster agreed with Priscillian, twelve bishops from Spain and Aquitaine gathered in Saragossa in 380 CE to confront Priscillian and his teachings.¹⁴ The bishops of this synod dealt with two main issues with regard to Priscillian's teachings: the participation of women in religious rites; and the ascetic and mystical practices of Priscillian and his followers.¹⁵

The synod's ban on female participation in bible readings and taking vows of chastity before forty without the presence of a bishop offers a clear picture of how women were perceived as members of the religious community in Early Christian Spanish society. Though women in Early Christian society fulfilled an important role that allowed for new themes and

¹¹ Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, constructed the list of twenty-seven books that compose the New Testament in the mid-fourth century. Robert Grant, "Religion and Politics in the Council of Nicaea," *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 55, no. 1 (January, 1975) p. 2.

¹² Chadwick, p. 38; and Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 91; and Andrew Jacobs, "The Disorder of Books: Priscillian's Canonical Defense of Apocrypha," *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (Apr., 2000) p. 135.

¹³ David Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity* (Oxford University, 2007) p. 139.

¹⁴ Chadwick, p. 24-5. The Acts of the Council of Saragossa can be found in Felix Rodrigues, "Concilio I de Zaragoza: Texta Critico," in *Primero Concilio Caesaraugustano* (Zaragossa, 1981) 9-25.

¹⁵ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 88, and 93.

ideas to enter into religious practice, Christian society also pressured them to be submissive to men and to keep their silence in the presence of men.¹⁶ Furthermore, society consistently linked women to Eve's folly, thus regarding them as the "gateway for the devil:" the temptation of man.¹⁷ At the same time, however, though women could not participate in Bible readings with men, the synod did stress that they should attend the readings and meetings of literate women.¹⁸ The Synod of Saragossa therefore ruled against the mixed gender Biblical studies that Priscillian encouraged, not that women could not participate in any religious study.

The synod's other ruling dealing with women, condemning those who become nuns before forty without following the proper protocol of having a bishop present, was based on practical considerations of society at that time. Susanna Elm emphasizes that the virgins of Spain held a powerful and very public position.¹⁹ Spanish society, therefore, closely monitored their behavior and punished women harshly if they strayed from the synod's commandments.²⁰ The thinking at the time went that, by holding the minimum age for a woman to take the "veil" of chastity to forty, ascetic women would not be threatened by their pre-menopausal passions.²¹ Another possibility is that Spanish society may have viewed the age of forty as an end to a woman's productive years and was no longer seen as an important vessel for society's future members.²² What is more, holding the age to forty also significantly shrank the pool of women

¹⁶ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (Columbia University, 1988) pp.13 and 153-154.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Burrus, p. 34.

¹⁹ Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University, 1994) p. 28.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Burrus, p. 41-2.

of high social status who could be publicly recognized as virgins, thus reducing the opportunity for women to practice independence and spiritual authority, while simultaneously securing the bishop's authority over them.²³ As representative of the highest spiritual authority in his community, the bishop resided over and was responsible for the local women who took the vow of celibacy.²⁴ By specifying that a bishop must be present for a woman to be publicly recognized as a veiled virgin, the synod secured that aspect of the bishop's position in the community. Still, the synod had other practical reasons to write such a canon other than holding women to a submissive position in society. In point of fact, the fate of society lay in its ability to replenish its citizens.²⁵ Abandoning the prospect of marriage obviously threatened the stability of society. In addition, aristocrats could no longer use their daughters for alliances and for the transmitting of wealth.²⁶ Prohibiting a woman from entering into perpetual chastity earlier in her life thus allowed society to absorb her wealth, and having a bishop present to grant her the veil of chastity secured power for the Church. Viewed in the context of the social forces that are at work here then, the Church secured its authority through establishing a canon that clearly defined a woman's position in Christian society.²⁷

In a similar way, denouncing the practice of entering churches with bare feet countered both Priscillian's scriptural interpretation and possible mystical rituals that came from Priscillian's study of magic. Historians suggest that the unshod dress of Priscillian's followers

²² Ibid, p. 41; Soranus, a Greek physician places the years that a woman is fertile between fourteen and forty, *Soranus' Gynecology*, translated by Owsei Temkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991) 1, 4.20.

²³ Ibid, p. 41.

²⁴ Rapp, p. 23.

²⁵ Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 6.

²⁶ Burrus, p. 42; and Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 150.

²⁷ Chadwick, p. 35.

came from the bishop's interpretation of the book of Exodus when the burning bush demanded that Moses remove his shoes.²⁸ This concept of bare feet may also have rustic roots in a practice meant to protect crops that was still maintained in fourth-century Western Europe.²⁹ The orthodox bishops, therefore, looked to the practice as both an improper scriptural interpretation and as a possible revitalization of pagan ritual.

Another odd behavior that the council addressed, not immediately consuming the Eucharist, threatened the power of the Church itself. Removing the Eucharistic celebration from the clergy to the mountains as well as having scriptural studies led by presbyters placed the authority of the sacrament in a non-Church environment. Although transubstantiation does not appear in Church doctrine until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 CE, the Eucharistic rite was still a powerful symbol of authority in the fourth century; by removing it from the management of the clergy, Priscillianists undermined the orthodox ecclesiasts' spiritual power within the community.³⁰ Thus, the council's prohibition of taking the bread away from the Eucharistic celebration not only secured the clergy's position in society. It also further dissuaded individuals from retreating into the mountains and attending scriptural studies. The Church and the clergy, in short, retained the monopoly of the sacrament through these prohibitions.

These canons adopted in the Synod of Saragossa began a five-year debate that led to the eventual execution of Priscillian. Severus provides the earliest account of the events that led to the trial that occurred in Trier, as well as specific details of Priscillian as a person. He describes the bishop as a learned man, one,

²⁸ Chadwick, p. 17; and Burrus, p. 38.

²⁹ Chadwick, pp.18-19.

³⁰ The Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 1, in *Readings in Medieval History*, edited by Patrick Geary (Broadview: Ontario, Canada, 2003) p. 443.

...of noble birth, of great riches, bold, restless, eloquent, learned through much reading, very ready at debate and discussion— in fact, altogether a happy man, if he had not ruined an excellent intellect by wicked studies.³¹

Although Severus admires Priscillian's thrifty use of money in his bishopric, he still denounces his overall vanity, further insinuated by the bishop's early desire to study magic.³² Eventually, the "wicked" tendencies which the synod of Saragossa believed Priscillian possessed led to charges of heresy against him at the synod of Bordeaux, on which the grounds for his execution at Trier were based. Priscillian and two followers, Instantius and Salvianus, sought support from both Pope Damasus and Ambrose of Milan, who did not even allow the accused heretics to approach them.³³ Severus alleges that during this journey to Rome and Milan, Priscillian impregnated a woman, Procula, who aborted the fetus with "the use of certain plants."³⁴ He and his horde came to Trier without the support of two powerful patriarchs.³⁵ In sum, Severus, concludes that the defendants resorted to "bribery and flattery" in order to garner a favorable verdict at trial.³⁶

The usurpation of the throne in the Western Roman Empire by Maximus in 383 CE brought a new vigor to persecuting Priscillian and his followers. The new emperor observed the rulings of the Synod of Bordeaux and ordered the heretics that caused such turmoil to be brought

³¹ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 46.9-12. "*institutes, familia nobilis, praediues opibus, acer, inquires, facundus, multa lectione eruditus, disserendi ac disputandi promptissimus, felix profecto, si no prau studio corrupisset optimum ingenium.*"

³² Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 46.

³³ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 48.

³⁴ Ibid, 48.12. "*partum sibi graminiibus abegisse.*"

³⁵ Burrus, p.33.

³⁶ Severus, *Chronicle II*, 48.

before him to defend themselves. At this motion, Martin came under attack by the accuser Ithacius. Severus declares:

[Ithacius] proceeded even to such a pitch of folly as to charge all those men, however holy, who either took delight in reading, or made it their object to accompany each other in the practice of fasting, with being friends or disciples of Priscillian. The miserable wretch even ventured publicly to bring forward a disgraceful charge of heresy against Martin, who was at that time a bishop, and a man clearly worthy of being compared to the Apostles.³⁷

Severus does not reveal how the rest of the bishops reacted to this charge, but records how Martin actively implored both Ithacius and Maximus not to execute Priscillian and his followers. Martin criticized the idea that a secular officer, such as the emperor, could pass an earthly sentence on an “ecclesiastical cause.”³⁸ Still, Priscillian and several of his followers were put to the sword at Trier.

The controversy of being associated with Priscillian of Avila threatened Martin’s status both as a bishop and as a holy man. As a church leader who walked a different religious path from his contemporary bishops, Martin already drew suspicion. His philosophy, as illustrated in Severus’s account, focused on Origen’s teachings that were declared as heresy in Alexandria.³⁹ Association with a heretic such as Priscillian thus allowed Martin’s position, philosophy, and ultimately his legitimacy to come under scrutiny. The date of Severus’ *Chronicorum*, ca. 403 CE, is very important in respect to the association of Martin with Priscillian. Composing the work after Martin’s death, Severus must create a powerful defense to secure Martin’s right to sainthood and preserve the authenticity of the bishop’s good works.

³⁷ Ibid, 50.10-15. “*hic stultitia eo usque processerat, ut omnes etiam sanctos uiros, quibus aut studium inerat lectionis aut propositum erat ecrtare ieiuniis, tamquam Priscilliani socios aut discipulos in crimen arcesseret. Ausus etiam miser est ea tempestate Martino epsicopo, uiro plane Apostolis conferendo, palam obiectare haeresis infamiam.*”

³⁸ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 105; and Stancliffe, p. 156.

³⁹ This heresy is the belief that the Devil could receive redemption if he wanted.

Before exploring Severus' defense of Martin, we must first examine the striking similarities and differences between the two bishops. In the first case, there are many similarities between the bishop of Tours and the heretic of Avila that caused Ithacius to question Martin's legitimacy. One of the greatest similarities between the two bishops lies in their strict asceticism. Priscillian called for the members of his bishopric to retreat into the mountains for prayer and fasting. His philosophy of celibacy extended even to husbands and wives. Priscillian pushed for all in his flock to fast, to study, and to give their love only to God. One can see these same traits emphasized by Severus in his *Vita Martini*. Martin practiced strict prayer and fasting and gained mystical powers from such observances. Severus clearly addresses Martin's celibacy through a lifestyle that emphasized solitude and reveals that when Magnus Maximus' wife waited on him, "no woman had hitherto touched him."⁴⁰ He further describes the empress as a perfect combination of the Biblical characters Martha and Mary as a method to convey her servitude to Martin and portray a relationship of professor and pupil. Chapter Five will explore this relationship between the empress and Martin more fully, but it is important to briefly acknowledge here the effort that Severus took to emphasize the bishop's celibate lifestyle. With respect to Martin, Priscillian, therefore, brought a similar lifestyle to his community and pushed the practice on everyone in Avila.

Martin and Priscillian also share unique perspectives on Christianity. For instance, in Severus' *Vita Martini*, the saint confronts the Devil and declares that God would even forgive him and welcome him back to Heaven.⁴¹ This concept of atonement that Martin offers to even the Devil, which the Church deemed heretical, originated with Origen in the third century. This philosophy also influenced Martin's doctrine of reconciliation after Baptism—a very radical

⁴⁰ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 6.

⁴¹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 22.

philosophy that allowed people to seek God's forgiveness after a sacrament that the Church taught was finite.⁴² A person after Baptism was held accountable for the sins he committed and would find no redemption on Earth. Finally, the concept of the soldier of Christ comes from this philosophy; inspiring the individual to constantly battle the forces of evil.

Like Martin, Priscillian also held an alternative Christian perspective. His concept that the body literally hinders the spirit emphasizes that individuals must continually struggle against their own evil qualities to find divine favor. Instead of struggling against the Evil-one, the individual houses evil within his or her person and, therefore, proceeds in an internal struggle against personal evils. Individuals such as Severus and the bishops attending the synods of Saragossa and Bordeaux viewed this philosophy as Manichaeism.

One should look, therefore, at the last chapters of Severus' *Chronicle* as a strategic defense for Martin's legitimacy as a bishop, holy man, and saint. The defense Severus employs has five aspects: i) he attacks Priscillian and his followers by highlighting negative characteristics; ii) he emphasizes contrasts between Martin and Priscillian; iii) he attacks Ithacius' character; iv) he stresses the faults of Ithacius' accusation; and v) he associates Martin with unimpeachable saints: the apostles.

Chapters Forty-six through Forty-eight underscore the negative characteristics of Priscillian and his followers. For example, Severus stresses the bishop's pride, the most feared sin for a bishop in the early Church, in both his education and his study and religious zeal. He regards Priscillian as "much more puffed up than he ought to have been with the knowledge of mere earthly things."⁴³ In addition Severus portrays Priscillian wooing followers, mostly

⁴² Stancliffe, p. 189.

⁴³ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 46.15-16. "*sed idem uanissimus et plus iusto inflatio profanarum rerum scientia.*"

consisting of women, who, by Severus' argument, "were fond of novelties and of unstable faith."⁴⁴ Further, Severus comments that, when met by opposition, Priscillian and his followers resorted to bribery to achieve their goals. Beyond this, Severus stresses that in Priscillian's travels he impregnated a woman. This last and perhaps most damning accusation follows similar rumors circulating at the time that the bishop participated in and encouraged orgies with his female followers.⁴⁵

The descriptions that Severus uses to characterize Priscillian create a contrast between Martin and the heretic. With the *Chronicorum* composed after the *Vita Martini*, the audience would have already read about Martin's distinct humility. In the areas where Severus highlights Priscillian's pride, he describes Martin's opposite nature. Where Priscillian is "puffed up" in education and debate, Martin is courageous as shown in his conversion of a robber.⁴⁶ Though Severus describes both as exercising a thrifty use of money, he thoroughly describes Martin's behavior with money in choosing a simple tripod for his seat instead of a throne and in wearing poor clothes. However, with Priscillian he follows the compliment up by stating that he was a "vain man."⁴⁷ Moreover, with respect to celibacy, Severus includes the rumor that Priscillian impregnated a woman in his *Chronicorum*, an act that, if true, openly impeaches the bishop's commitment to reform through celibacy. Severus is careful to include an admission that the incident was a rumor and that the evidence of such an affair was lost in Procula's abortion.⁴⁸ However, placing the incident in his *Chronicorum* nonetheless documents the rumor surrounding

⁴⁴ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 46.

⁴⁵ Chadwick, p. 47.

⁴⁶ Ibid; and Severus, *Vita Martini*, 5.

⁴⁷ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 46.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 48.

Priscillian and his followers' sexual promiscuity. The documented incident also creates a strong contrast between Martin and Priscillian, in that Martin never strayed from his practice of celibacy. Severus stresses that the only woman that even touched him was the wife of Maximus, and even then she only waited on him and listened to his teachings.

Another distinct contrast that Severus emphasizes throughout the Martinian works addresses the charge of sorcery levied against the two men. Severus describes Priscillian's early desire to study magic, in contrast to Martin's intense desire to be Christian. In the *Vita Martini* in particular, Severus calls attention to Martin's intense desire to live as a Christian and reject his pagan roots.⁴⁹ Priscillian differs from Martin here in that he desired to exceed earthly knowledge by practicing magic. In addition, Severus distinguishes the miracles that Martin performed from "magic" by pointing out that God acted through him. In sharp contrast, Severus does not recount any of Priscillian's acts, but instead focuses on his rhetorical skills by means of "flattery and bribery."⁵⁰ The absence of any miraculous events in Severus' account of Priscillian, therefore, highlights Martin's legitimacy while simultaneously denouncing Priscillian as a person who studies magic and who is incapable of performing true miracles.

To further bolster his defense of Martin, Severus attacks the character of Ithacius, the accuser who brought charges of heresy against Martin. Severus states that the accuser had "no holiness about him" and did not hold himself to any aspect of humility.⁵¹ In his vice, Severus argues, Ithacius accused Martin of heresy. By attacking Ithacius' character, then, Severus establishes a key defense for Martin who, given the detailed descriptions of him in the other

⁴⁹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2.

⁵⁰ Severus, *Chronicorum II*, 47.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 50.8. "nihil sancti habuisse defino."

Martinian works, has no character flaws.⁵² Thus, through the emphasis he places on Ithacius' faults, Severus removes any culpability for Martin because the accuser lacks the necessary holiness to be able to point out the flaws in Martin in the first place.

Finally, Severus places Martin among the ranks of unimpeachable saints—the Apostles—to solidify his defense of the bishop. To begin to understand Severus's reasoning for doing so here, it should be pointed out that Priscillian's followers referred to him as the “martyr of Trier.”⁵³ To associate Martin with martyrs, therefore, does not offer him a great defense, given that this notion was flourishing throughout Western Europe. The difficulty here can be traced to the fact that the concept of the martyr became topical to those who associated themselves with an individual who died for beliefs similar to the group honoring him. The Apostles, however, were held as saints to all the Christian community. Severus, writing his *Chronicle* around twenty years after Priscillian's execution, must therefore associate Martin with the Apostles instead of the now controversial martyr.

In conclusion, the association with Priscillian was a threat that Severus had to address in his works. An individual who created such great controversy in his community that it caused even the emperor to involve himself posed a great threat to Severus' mentor if Martin became associated with Priscillian. Still, the fact that society did not deem Martin a heretic is a testament to his popularity in Gaul.⁵⁴ Severus, in using the last portions of his historical piece to compose a strategic defense for Martin, or thereby erases any doubt of heresy from Martin's life. Severus emphasizes the contrasting personalities of Priscillian and Martin to distance the bishop of Tours

⁵² Gaddis, p. 207.

⁵³ Van Dam, *Leadership and Community*, p. 105-106.

⁵⁴ Van Dam states that the willingness of the majority of society to follow an individual produces orthodoxy, while heresy threatens the authority of the Church. Therefore, the society of Gaul spares Martin from being labeled a heretic. *Leadership and Community*, p. 106.

from the heretic of Avila. To defend Martin against his accuser, Severus both attacks Ithacius' character and places the bishop of Tours among the Apostles from the Bible, associating him with unimpeachable saints to accentuate his holiness. The incident involving Priscillian, in short, stands as Severus' greatest defensive struggle to secure Martin's sanctity as a holy man and a saint while still highlighting the bishop's individuality.

CHAPTER 5. THE EMPEROR AND THE WOMEN: MARTIN AND THE NARROW PATH

Chapter Four examined how the trial of Priscillian affected society's view of Martin. His millennial views and life as an ascetic placed him among the ranks of those accused by Ithacius. Severus, therefore, responds in the most obvious use of a defensive strategy: separating Martin from Priscillian and discrediting Ithacius. This chapter will explore the relationship between Martin and the Emperor Magnus Maximus. The controversies conjured by Maximus and his wife threatened not only Martin's belief system, but even his salvation. Martin's relationship with Maximus as bishop of Tours and his relationship with the empress as her teacher require Severus to formulate a defense of Martin's spirituality and philosophy against criticism that Martin was a hypocrite who could not uphold his own beliefs. The two key incidents that contemporary critics view as proof of Martin's hypocrisy are: firstly, Martin's compromise with Maximus to attend a communion with Ithacius, the accuser in Priscillian of Avila's trial; and, secondly, the empress serving Martin at a banquet, challenging his belief in the complete segregation of the sexes. In short, Severus must try to resolve his mentor's deviation from the very narrow path of asceticism.

Magnus Maximus seized power of the Western Roman Empire from Gratian in 383 CE and looked to religion to help legitimize his rule.¹ By championing orthodoxy, rooting out heretics, and removing their lands and privileges, Maximus hoped to gain the support of the Church to strengthen his position of authority.² However, his execution of Priscillian of Avila for *maleficium* caused a great uproar among the clergy.³ One bishop, Ambrose of Milan,

¹ Chadwick, p. 111.

² Ibid.

³ Stancliffe, p. 278.

actually excommunicated the emperor after this controversy for usurping the jurisdiction of the Church.⁴ Maximus met his end in 388 CE under Theodosius I, who executed him in Aquileia. Upon his death, the Church denounced Maximus' practices and named him a "usurper."⁵ Severus, in including an account of a meeting between Martin and Maximus in his *Vita* and *Dialogus*, therefore, needs to tread carefully. Severus must show how Martin remained independent of the violent, oppressive man who usurped power in the West, but he also can use the interactions between the two to reflect the later defeat of the emperor.

Though many openly condemned Maximus as a usurper and an evil man, Severus inscribes him with a more complicated nature. Severus' major concern deals with the punishment inflicted on Priscillian and his followers by the empire and the emperor's insistence that Martin must participate in the Eucharist with the group of bishops involved in the trial. Other than these particular issues, Severus regards the emperor as "doubtless a good man," and not the violent usurper excommunicated by the Church and later executed.⁶ These issues, however, are deep controversies that Severus must resolve to uphold Martin as a saint. A holy man who represented the strength of the Church could not fall subject to a secular ruler, corralled by a jurisdiction other than Heaven. Severus resolves the issue by focusing on Martin's influence over the emperor and emphasizes the damage and restoration of spiritual powers Martin underwent after the compromise to hold a synod with the court's bishops.

To illustrate Martin's influence over the emperor, Severus refers to the trial and execution of Priscillian and his followers. In brief, the story goes that, fearing immediate reprisal, the

⁴ Stancliffe, p.283.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Dialogus III*, 11.4. "*alias sane bonus.*"

emperor waited for Martin to leave Trier before carrying out the executions.⁷ Learning of the execution, Martin returned to Trier where the bishops who awaited him “gave themselves over to speechless fear.”⁸ These bishops fall under the category of what Michael Gaddis describes as “tyrant-bishops,” those who sacrifice their spiritual authority for secular power.⁹ The inference made through Severus’ description of the bishops fearing Martin’s approach is that the spiritual authority of Martin, as an uncorrupted bishop, is greater than the secular power they attached themselves to.¹⁰ His presence, however, did not dissuade the bishops from desiring Martin to attend their synod. Indeed, they begged the emperor to press Martin to join them, in response to which Martin and Maximus reached a compromise. In exchange for Martin attending the synod, Maximus agreed to recall the soldiers he sent to Spain to pursue other followers of Priscillian. The two important points that Severus makes involve the argument that Maximus could not order Martin to attend the synod but had to compromise, and that Martin willingly placed his ideology in jeopardy by attending the synod. Still, the event proved spiritually hazardous to Martin.

Severus recounts how Martin felt his powers and virtue diminish after attending that synod and vowed never to attend one again. Severus writes that an angel appeared to Martin, announcing:

You have reason Martin to feel compunction, yet you had no other way out.
Renew your virtue, resume your courage, otherwise, you may incur danger not to
your honor but to your salvation.¹¹

⁷ Maximus promised Martin that while he stayed in Trier, he would not harm Priscillian and his followers. Severus, *Chronicle II*, 50.23-25.

⁸ Severus, *Dialogus III*, 11.24. “*totis animis labefactati mussitare et trepidare coeperunt.*”

⁹ Gaddis, p. 272.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 275.

¹¹ Severus, *Dialogus III*, 13.14-17. “*Martine compungeris merito, sed aliter exire nequisti. Repara uirtutem, resume constantiam, ne iam non periculum gloriae, sed salutis incurras.*”

The holy messenger reveals that Martin had no real choice but to attend the synod in order to protect the people of Spain from secular persecution. Although his deed was virtuous, the angel does disclose that the act threatens Martin's salvation. This is the only place where Severus shows weakness in Martin and an actual threat of his damnation. This controversial scene also presents one of the strongest threats to Martin's legitimacy, as a damned man cannot be a saint. Severus must therefore resolve this problem to restore Martin to sanctity. The resolution comes from Postumianus, who reminds Severus that, "clearly, as we experienced, [Martin] repaired, with manifold interest, his grace, which had been diminished for a time."¹² Postumianus further reinforces this statement by recounting several miracles that Martin accomplished after "an hour in communion with guilty men."¹³ He recalls an occasion when Martin performed a miracle similar to the miracle that Christ performs on the sea of Galilee:

When he was sailing on the Tuscan Sea, following that course which leads to Rome, whirlwinds having suddenly arisen, all on board were in extreme peril of their lives. In this circumstance, a certain Egyptian merchant, who was not yet a Christian, cried out, 'Save us, O God of Martin,' upon which the tempest immediately stilled, and they held their course, while the pacified ocean continued in perfect tranquility.¹⁴

Martin could not have carried out such a powerful miracle had he not regained his grace with God.¹⁵ This restoration of Martin's grace closely follows his ideology of Christianity, which involves the possibility of an individual receiving absolution even after baptism. Martin's

¹² Ibid, 14.1-2. "*Sed plane, ut experti sumus, inminutam ad tempus gratiam multiplicata mercede reparavit.*"

¹³ Ibid, 13.10. "*se uel ad horam noxiae communioni fuisse permixtum.*"

¹⁴ Ibid, 14.3-8. "*cum in Tyrreno mari cursu illo, quo Romam tenditur, nauigaret, subito turbinibus exortis extremum uitae omnium fuisse discrimen. In quo cum quidam Aegyptius negotiator necdum Christianus magna uoce clamauerit 'Deus Martini eripe nos', mox tempestatem fuisse sedatam, seque optatum cursum cum summa placati aequoris quiete tenuisse.*"

¹⁵ Stancliffe, p. 256.

refusal to attend any synod and his return to his ascetic lifestyle, therefore, cleanses his spirit of the stain it suffered in Trier.

Just as the compromise between Maximus and Martin threatened the holy man's salvation and ultimate legitimacy as a saint, Martin jeopardizes his position on several occasions by relaxing his guard towards women, which in turn undermines the authenticity of his teachings. Martin's view of women conforms to a strict ideology of gender separation. In the *Dialogus*, for example, a soldier who converts to Christian asceticism asks to have his wife relocated to be with him, to which Martin replies, "No woman should enter into the camp of men. A battle array of soldiers should hold itself apart. A woman should remain far from them and live by herself, in her own tent."¹⁶ This statement represents the core of Martin's teaching of a Christian as the "soldier of Christ"—just as women did not accompany soldiers on the battlefield, so too must women and men remain separate in the battle against evil. Any deviation from this philosophy would threaten Martin's ideology and teachings on the grounds that he would appear to be a hypocrite.

The difficulty that the above instances present to Severus lay in Martin's role as a bishop and the missionary work he performs. As bishop, Martin must allow his community, both male and female, to have access to his aid and teaching. He cannot completely shut himself away from Tours, nor can he refuse to help someone based on their gender. Further complicating the problem, Severus continually emphasizes Martin's missionary work and his constant movement throughout Gaul. The deeds Severus records often take the form of Martin providing for both men and women in his quest to convert the masses. One such case involves the curing of a pagan woman's child. Pointedly, the woman asks Martin, "We know that you are a friend of

¹⁶ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 11.19-21. "*uirorum castra non adeat, acies militum separate consitat: procul femina in suo degens tabernaculo sit remota.*"

God: restore me my son, who is my only one.”¹⁷ In this scene, a woman who is not even Christian approaches Martin for a miracle. Severus does not fail to mention that the woman’s request is accompanied by the pleas of the crowd gathered about her and the saint. Not surprisingly, then, Martin grants her wish. At the same time, however, Severus stresses that this miracle converted many followers, once again showing Martin’s courage through the risk he takes through being in a woman’s presence to convert followers. In short, the drive to convert outweighs the threat of hypocrisy.

Severus also uses the compulsion of women to approach Martin themselves as a defense for his client. Severus never states that Martin approaches women or directly seeks to engage in contact, but rather calls attention to the intense desire women elicit to be healed by the holy man. This concept also reinforces the *Vita Christi* in the Martinian writings, especially in the miracle that Martin performed on one woman:

A woman, suffering from an issue of blood, when she had touched the garment of Martin, after the example of the woman mentioned in the Gospel, was cured in a moment of time.¹⁸

Severus’ narrative here also portrays an unavoidable interaction with a woman. Indeed, this woman is determined to approach Martin even without his consent. In another case, a father brings his mute daughter to Martin for a cure. Again, Martin is the recipient of a plea, and he performs the desired miracle; yet to absolve him of any inappropriate behavior Severus writes that he:

...orders the crowd of people standing round to be removed, while the bishops only, and the girl’s father, were present, he prostrates himself in prayer, after his usual fashion.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Dialogus II*, 4.16. “*scimus quia amicus Dei es: restitue mihi filium meum, quia unicus mihi est.*”

¹⁸ *Dialogus III*, 9.6-9. “*mulierum profluio sanguinis laborantem, cum Martini uestem exemplo mulieris illius euangelicae constgisset, sub momento temporis fuisse sanatam.*” The Gospel referred to is the Gospel of Luke, when a hemorrhaging woman touched the robe of Christ to heal her affliction. Luke 8: 43-45.

The presence of the father provides a witness to Martin's behavior, ensuring that his actions are appropriate for the health of the young girl. Although Severus thus records several interactions with women, he is careful to note that Martin does not instigate the contact, but provides assistance to individuals who are unavoidably flung in his path.

Severus does include, however, several examples of proper interaction between Martin and women. For example, he records Postumianus' account of a virgin who removed herself from the world, following Martin's teaching. Hearing about her accomplishment in withdrawing from the sight of men, Martin desired to visit her as a bishop to congratulate her on such a deed. Postumianus reveals that, "she did not relax those bonds of a most severe method of life, which she had imposed upon herself, even by allowing herself to see Martin."²⁰ This is the only situation in which Martin attempts to approach a woman; yet he does so not as a mere man but as the head of the Church and leader of such teaching in Gaul. To highlight this fact, Postumianus carefully includes that the woman's resolve does not insult Martin:

Blessed Martin! Who did not consider that repulse as being an insult to him, but, praising with exultant heart her excellence, rejoiced in an example only too rare in that locality.²¹

This statement stresses the uniqueness of the virgin as well as the ideal she represents. To refuse Martin's company emphasizes the proper diligence that Martin's followers seek. Further complicating the situation, however, the virgin sends a gift to Martin after refusing his company. Again, he does not refuse the gift:

¹⁹ Ibid, 2.9-11. "*iubet circumstantis populi multitudinem submoueri: episcopis tantum et puellae patre adsistentibus in orationem suo illo more persternitur.*"

²⁰ *Dialogus II*, chapter 12.

²¹ Ibid 12.16-19. "*o Martinum beatum, qui illam repulsam non ad cotum suam duxit, sed magnificans illius cum exultatione uirtutem inusitato in his dumtaxat regionibus gaudebat exemplo.*"

Martin did what he had never done before (for he accepted a present or gift from nobody), he refused none of those things which the estimable virgin had sent him, declaring that her blessing was by no means to be rejected by a priest, since she was indeed to be placed before many priests.²²

This statement represents the concept in the fourth century that a woman could discard her womanliness through asceticism.²³ By not succumbing to the female role of nurturer and child bearer, the virgin removes her female identity.²⁴ Martin, therefore, could accept the gift. This episode, therefore, represents a lesson of, not a deviation from, Martin's ideology, for other women to follow.

The situation that causes Severus the greatest concern in his hagiographical writings on Martin is the saint's relationship with the empress. The wife of Magnus Maximus had the closest relationship of any woman to Martin. Postumianus states his concern for such a relationship to Severus in the *Dialogus*:

I really fear lest those persons who freely mingle among women should to some extent defend themselves by that example."²⁵

His relationship with the empress stands as one of the greatest threats to Martin's ideology and the strongest argument for hypocrisy. In particular, one must keep in mind that Severus wrote this work in 402 CE, almost twenty years after the trial of Priscillian of Avila where one of the charges was sexual depravity due to his close association with women. Those who witnessed the trial or followed Priscillian of Avila may have used the relationship between Martin and the empress to either absolve the former bishop of Avila or rebuke the followers of Martin.

²² Ibid, 12. 21-24, "*fecitque Martinus, quod ante non fecerat—nullius enim ille umquam exenium, nullius munus accepti—nihil ex his, que uirgo uenerabilis miserat, refutatuít, dicens benedictionem illus a sacerdote minime respuendam.*"

²³ Clark, p. 34.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 38.

²⁵ Severus, *Dialogus II*, 7.5-6. "*uereor ne isto aliquantulum se tueantur exemplo qui libernter feminis inseruntur.*"

Martin's tenuous relationship with the wife of Maximus begins at a dinner that the emperor himself hosted. During this banquet, the empress waits on Martin and listens closely to his teachings. Severus refers to her as having "served like Martha and listened like Mary," creating a Biblical reference to two women who followed Christ but did not have an inappropriate relationship with him.²⁶ Severus also carefully notes that no other woman ever came so close to Martin, and she did so against his will.²⁷ To further illustrate the uniqueness of the situation, Severus emphasizes that the empress:

Asked her husband to join her in prevailing upon Martin to come to dinner which she alone would serve him, dismissing all the servants.²⁸

The removal of other attendants absolves Martin from any other female contact to allow the "blessed woman," as Severus describes her, to be his only contact with the female gender.

Scholars such as Stancliffe regard these episodes of Martin pulling away from his ascetic life as Severus moving away from projecting Martin's principles in order to maintain historical accuracy.²⁹ Stancliffe in particular regards the Priscillian issue as the main source of Martin's reluctance to insult the empress and his allowing her to wait on him.³⁰ Thus, Stancliffe views this event as Martin compromising his values, but he does not look to Severus' method to reconcile such a deviation. Yet one can see an alternative argument for Martin allowing the empress to wait on him: one not of compromise but of triumph. In short, Severus allows the nobility to bend before Martin as a sign of humility and acknowledgement of the Church's

²⁶ Ibid, 7.24. "*ministrauit ut Martha, et audiuit ut Maria.*"

²⁷ Ibid, 6.20

²⁸ Ibid. 6.30-32. "*postremo a uiro suo poscit, dicens Martinum uterque compelant, ut ei remotis omnibus ministries praeberet sola conuiuium.*"

²⁹ Stancliffe, p. 322.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 322.

supremacy. Again, the time at which Severus composed this work is important for this argument. By 388 CE, Ambrose of Milan had excommunicated Maximus for his oppression of Priscillian's followers, and Theodosius I had executed him in Aquileia. By 406 CE, many powerful Church figures had condemned Maximus for his actions and referred to him as a "usurper." Such a political environment allows Severus to place the empress in a servile position and use this relationship as a metaphor for the supremacy of the Church over the rulers of the Western Empire. Still, possible criticisms of this event may have also pressed Severus to explicitly lay out his interpretation of the event, as pointed out in Postumianus' concern that people could use Martin's relationship with the empress to allow themselves to become involved with women. Thus, one cannot simply refer to the situation as an unavoidable, historical event that Severus preserves for literary purposes, but at the same time must view it as a controversy that Severus actively addressed to preserve Martin's sanctity and to emphasize the supremacy of the Church over the secular realm.

Severus also regarded this contact as evidence of Martin's teaching that others should learn from. He sees the empress' attendance on Martin as a powerful statement of Martin's prestige by further stating, "Martin was served and waited upon at his meals, not by a free sort of widow, nor by a wanton virgin, but by a queen."³¹ Through this statement, Severus argues that Martin could even influence the highest of nobility.³² Moreover, Severus puts forward a lesson that the followers of Martin can learn from his relationship with the empress: "let a matron serve you, and not rule you; and let her serve, but not recline along with you; just as Martha, of whom

³¹Ibid. 7.15-18. "*Martino semel tantum in uita no uidau libera, non uirgo lascinuiens, se sub uiro uiuens, ipso uiro partier supplicante, regina seruiuit et ministravit edenti.*"

³²Stancliffe, p. 345; and Gaddis, p. 251.

we read, waited upon the Lord without being called to partake in the feast.”³³ By drawing a lesson from this contact between Martin and the empress, Severus illustrates the proper use of Martin’s view of dealing with women. Martin displays the proper humility by allowing the empress to serve him, but holding to his view of women, Martin does not suffer her as his equal.

In conclusion, the controversies that surrounded Martin’s philosophy and ideology are important threats that Severus must resolve. His compromise with Maximus to attend a synod so that the people of Spain would not suffer a persecution and his acknowledgement that his powers diminished as a result threatened Martin’s sanctity. Along these lines, the vision Martin had of an angel did not absolve him, but rather served as a warning of the threat of damnation. If left unresolved, Severus’ mentor could not be recognized as a saint should the possibility of Martin’s damnation remain. Further complicating the situation, Martin’s accepting of a gift from a virgin and allowing the empress to wait on him threatened the ascetic philosophies he promoted. These controversies, if left unresolved, would allow individuals to charge Martin with hypocrisy. Severus, therefore, is required to provide a theological and rhetorical defense in his *Chronicorum* and *Dialogus* to absolve his mentor and preserve his sanctity. Accordingly, Severus brings to the fore the influence that Martin held over the emperor and his constant struggle to oppose the bad counsel Maximus received from lesser bishops.³⁴ Severus thus regards the compromise as a courageous act on Martin’s part by sacrificing his commitment to his ideals in order to save the people of Spain from the hordes of soldiers sent to confront any heresy. Severus also records Postumianus’ account of Martin regaining his thaumaturgical powers, which can be viewed as a sign that Martin has regained his salvation and favoritism with God. Severus further resolves the

³³Severus, *Dialogus II*, 7.20-21. “*seruiat tibi matrona, non imperet, et seruiat, non recumbat: sicut Martha illa ministravit Domino, nec tamen adscita conuiuio: immo praelata est ministranti, quae uerbum postius audiebat.*”

³⁴Stancliffe, p.190.

controversies with the virgin and the empress as actually enforcing, rather than damaging, Martin's asceticism. Severus' argument here rests on the fact that Martin would be wrong to refuse a gift from an individual who truly lived by his teachings of asceticism and separation of genders. Moreover, his experience with the empress foregrounds the influence Martin and the Church had on the rulers. Finally, Severus points out the uniqueness of the situation with the empress and likens her to powerful, unimpeachable female disciples of Christ. It is, therefore, important to regard these events as key examples of Severus' defense of Martin.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION: THE PRESERVED SAINT: TOURS HAS ITS PATRON

The Martinian works can be viewed as a defensive strategy composed by Sulpicius Severus from evidence accounts from the people of Tours and the surrounding areas to preserve the sanctity of Martin, allowing Tours to have a patron saint. Historians have viewed the works as an attempt to defend Martin, but have consistently argued that the apology was for the monks who followed the holy man instead of taking into account the entire community's desire for Martin to be a saint.¹ Severus, who knew of the criticisms that the clergymen and monks brought against Martin, strove to present an argument for Martin's sainthood by citing not only miracles that he himself witnessed, but the miraculous acts witnessed by the people of Tours as well.² The people regarded Martin as a true bishop who promoted his teachings through constant action and by striving for the highest standard of purity through asceticism. Though he strove for spiritual perfection, Martin had many enemies in the Church who criticized his practices. Severus, using the skills in rhetoric and analyzing literature which he developed in Aquitaine, addressed such criticisms through three circulating documents: the *Vita Martini*, *Chronicorum*, and *Dialogus*. These documents declared Martin as a saint, "soldier of Christ," and holy man, an exemplary Christian who wandered throughout Gaul as a check against the demons torturing the land.

The success of Severus' defense can be seen in the fact that the tradition of Martin's saintly life endures and still garners a flourishing following among Christians of Tours. The popularity he had with the people of Tours and the monks of Marmoutier saved him from

¹ Scholars like Babut, Fontaine, Delehay, and Stancliffe offer great insight into the desire for Severus to portray Martin as a Saint, but do not look to another desire for the people of Tours to have a patron saint. One must remember that many of the miracle accounts come from the people of Tours, and that shortly after his death, pilgrims already began to flock to Tours.

² Stancliffe, p. 81; and Burrus, p. 147.

suffering the ignominy of being branded a heretic like Priscillian. The *memoria* constructed for him shortly after his death could not alone satisfy the horde of pilgrims that flocked to Martin's remains.³ As such, his successor, Perpetuus, constructed a church of over nine thousand square feet to shelter those who desired Martin's intercession.⁴ The Franks took him in as their patron saint in the sixth century and kings, such as Dagobert, adorned his grave with gold and jewels.⁵ Martin still remains a highly venerated saint today.

By examining the years in which Severus composed the documents on Martin's life and deeds, we can see an inherent need for Severus and the community to address criticisms against Martin flowing from the monasteries and churches in Gaul. The *Vita Martini*, completed in 396 CE, precedes the death of Martin whom Severus declares a saint. This document, through its circulation, begins an argument for Martin's legitimacy as a saint by vividly describing the miracles that permeate the holy man's life, as well as by addressing his life as a soldier. The *Chronicorum*, circulated around 403 CE, places Martin in the history of the world and Church, and addresses Ithacius' accusation that Martin is a heretic during the trial of Priscillian. The final document of this trio, the *Dialogus*, completed around 406 CE, strengthens the arguments established in the *Vita Martini* and the *Chronicorum* by bearing witnesses to Martin's miracles, further clarifying the controversy surrounding Priscillian of Avila, and addressing criticisms that Martin deviated from his philosophies. All three of these documents circulated close to the year 397 CE, the earliest possible date for Martin's death. The close proximity to the death of Martin, with one document circulating presumably right before he expired, underscores the need Severus felt to defend his mentor and secure his sanctity.

³ Jacobsen, p. 1108.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, p. 1109; and Stancliffe p. 334 and 361.

The controversy established by Martin's life as a soldier presented a strong argument against both his position as a bishop and the possibility of sainthood. The early Christian community took a convoluted stance towards military service. The community rebuked the use of violence and bloodshed that is a necessary part of military service, but rulings from such bodies as the Council of Arles demanded that Christians remain in the army during times of peace. Still, Martin proved to be one of the first bishops to come from a military background, and though later communities such as the Merovingians would honor him for such services, his fellow bishops did not look admiringly on his past. For this controversy, Severus points out that Martin did not desire to enter the army but was forced to do so against his will.⁶ Severus is also careful to note that Martin lived an ascetic life even before his baptism and continued his practices throughout his military service.⁷ In short, Severus takes great care to show that Martin was not a typical soldier, but a Christian caught in an unavoidable situation.

Another criticism that Severus addressed involved Martin's lack of high education. With most bishops hailing from the educated class and more individuals from the Senatorial class becoming involved in the Church as bishops, an individual without an extensive education in rhetoric and the Classics stood out as an unworthy oddity.⁸ The question of whether an individual with a limited education could have the insight needed to lead a community's understanding of Scripture was put to the test with Martin's appointment. Further compounding the situation, the bishop did not present himself in the manner that people from the educated elite did in Late Antiquity, approaching Tours as a ragged, emaciated man and not in the dignified

⁶ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rapp, p. 47; and Gaddis, p. 261.

manner that society expected of its leaders. Severus addresses this controversy in the *Vita Martini* by describing the spiritual gift of rhetoric given to individuals endowed with the Holy Spirit.⁹

Though he produced works that, for the most part, present Martin in the holy light of spiritual perfection, Severus does feel the need to address and respond to several deviations that Martin makes from his narrow path of ascetic ideology. The inclusion of these instances implies that the audience that Severus wrote for used these specific examples to impeach Martin as a holy man and saint. The question of hypocrisy in particular arose from Martin's acceptance of a gift from a virgin, and his relationship with the empress. To accept a gift of any sort went against Martin's ideology involving personal poverty, and to allow the empress to approach him struck a discordant note with his philosophy that men and women should never be in contact with one another. To address these controversies, Severus uses Biblical references to imbue the queen with characteristics of the ideal Disciples of Christ void of gender, and comments that the gift came not simply from a virgin, but from an individual that had truly embraced Martin's teachings.

Severus also addresses an event that dealt with the Emperor Magnus Maximus that likely presents the greatest threat to Martin's sainthood. In an attempt to spare the people of Spain from a hunt for heretics, Martin compromised by attending a communion against his will. This situation also shows a deviation from Martin's philosophy that no bishop should be under the influence of an emperor. What represents the greatest threat to Martin in this episode is his encounter with an angel who informs the holy man that his salvation was actually threatened by his compromise. This warning literally addresses the criticism that though Martin looked at himself as a bishop independent from the empire, he came under the thumb of Maximus. To

⁹ Severus, *Vita Martini*, 27.

defend Martin in this situation, Severus observes that Martin lived eighteen years afterwards, and his colleague, Postumianus emphasizes that Martin regains his powers in that time. This implies that Martin recovers his grace and salvation when he regains his powers. This testifies that Martin is indeed saved, and not damned, allowing people to recognize him as a saint.

Perhaps the most intense controversy that Severus addresses involves Martin's association with heresy. During the trial of Priscillian of Avila, Ithacius, the accuser, regards Martin as another heretic that the Church must try to execute. The mentioning of his name during the hearing implies that the clergy saw similarities between the heretic Priscillian and Martin. To protect the holy man of Tours, Severus engages in the most obvious defenses of his works. He proceeds in a five part defensive strategy by focusing on Priscillian and his followers' negative characteristics; separating Priscillian from Martin; attacking Ithacius' character; stressing the faults of Ithacius' accusations; and finally associating Martin with unimpeachable saints. Through this rhetorical strategy, Severus shows his true skill as a defense rhetorician for securing Martin as a saint.

In conclusion, though past historians have pursued why and how Severus developed the Martinan writings, they have not addressed him as a lawyer of some skill who seeks to defend Martin's saintly status. Skeptical scholars like Babut have labeled the hagiographer as a fabricator or simple liar wanting to promote the lifestyle he adopted, looking at controversies in chronology of the *Vita Martini* as evidence for such fabrications.¹⁰ Later historians like Raymond Van Dam and Clare Stancliffe usefully yet somewhat problematically have either described the relationship between Martin and Severus as that of a charismatic holy man influencing a writer to create a glorified image of Martin or have focused on how Severus would

¹⁰ Babut, p. 20.

create such descriptions.¹¹ This thesis has offered a new perspective on Severus as an attorney defending Martin and preserving a patron saint for Tours. Severus began securing Martin's sainthood by circulating a hagiography before he actually died. He addressed key controversies that his audience used to impeach the holy man. And he later reinforced his evidence by providing witnesses in his documents for the miracles.¹² In short, Severus did not simply lie or fall under Martin's spell, but used his skills and education to preserve the name of a unique holy man that the society of Tours desired for sainthood.

¹¹ Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p.14; and Stancliffe, p. 8.

¹² Stancliffe, p. 80-83.

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