

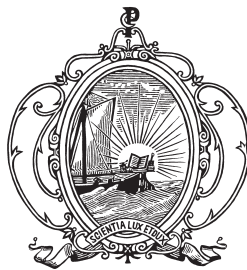
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Clement of Alexandria
The Fourth-Century Debates



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Auxentius of Milan: From Orthodoxy to Heresy

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ABSTRACT

Auxentius of Milan, the predecessor of Ambrose, is still frequently seen through the eyes of Hilary of Poitiers and Athanasius of Alexandria, as a leading member of a minority faction which used the Council of Rimini (359) to impose an unpopular subordinationist doctrine on the west. Much about this picture may be disputed, however. Serious doubts can and have been raised regarding Auxentius' prominence and indeed presence at Rimini, and regarding the closeness of his association with the Illyrian bishops Valens of Mursa and Ursacius of Singidinum. Similarly, the one statement that survives from Auxentius is misleadingly framed by Hilary as part of his polemic *Contra Auxentium*. If we set aside unwarranted speculations, by Hilary and by modern scholars, regarding the private beliefs of Auxentius, we are left with a bishop who publicly adhered to the decisions of the Council of Rimini – not as a challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy in the west but precisely in accordance with it. The compromise which Rimini represented was rejected by Athanasius and Hilary and their allies; but it was accepted as the prevailing orthodoxy not only by Auxentius but also by those who judged Hilary's challenge to his position – including the emperor Valentinian I. That this position would later be overthrown in favour of Hilary's Nicene fundamentalism should not lead us to condemn Auxentius as dishonest, malign, or out of touch with his Christian congregation. We should recognise instead that it was only after his death that his open orthodoxy was officially redefined as surreptitious heresy.

It has always been difficult to gain a clear view of Auxentius of Milan.¹ What few passing references we have are from his contemporary enemies, such as Hilary of Poitiers, Athanasius of Alexandria and, revealing a slightly more complex relationship, Liberius and then Damasus of Rome; or else from later chroniclers who followed their lead, such as Jerome and Sulpicius Severus. However, there are two significant events which may help us establish Auxentius' position in the shifting debate over the definition of orthodoxy as it developed through the 350s and 360s. The first is the Council of Rimini in 359, running in parallel with an eastern council at Seleucia, which had been established by Constantius II as an attempt to resolve the ongoing trinitarian

¹ I would like to thank Richard Flower, Bella Image and Eva-Maria Kuhn for helping in various ways with the preparation of this article. All errors of fact and interpretation remain my own.

controversy.² The second, which we will come to later, is the visit to Milan of Hilary of Poitiers.

The record of the Council of Rimini presented in Athanasius' *De Synodis*, apparently compiled between 359 and 361, names Auxentius of Milan as one of those anathematised in the fractious first session of the council, for promoting a revision of the Nicene creed.³ That he is listed here alongside such active disputants as Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidinum and Germinius of Sirmium has been taken by some as evidence that Auxentius played a prominent role in this council.⁴ And yet this evidence cannot be trusted. The letters which Athanasius claims to reproduce survive in Latin versions among the writings of Hilary of Poitiers, and these versions – which have a stronger claim to reflect the originals – have the same lists, but with Auxentius absent.⁵ And indeed, in

² For this council see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh, 1988), 376-9 (including a list of relevant primary sources); Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 145-8; Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts* (Oxford, 1995), 22-8; Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford, 2004), 160-1. Yves-Marie Duval, 'La "manœuvre frauduleuse" de Rimini: à la recherche du *Liber adversus Ursacium et Valentem*', in *Hilaire et son temps: Actes du colloque de Poitiers, 29 septembre – 3 octobre* (Paris, 1969), 51-103 (repr. in *id.*, *L'extirpation de l'Arianisme en Italie du Nord et en Occident: Rimini [359/60] et Aquilée [381], Hilaire de Poitiers [d. 367/8] et Ambroise de Milan [d. 397]* [Aldershot, 1998], II) focuses on the claims of fraud and coercion at the council, for which see also n. 37 below.

³ Ath., *Syn.* 9-11; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* II 37; see T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (1993), 145; L. Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy* (2004), 161 and *id.*, 'Articulating Identity', in F. Young, L. Ayres and A. Louth (eds), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge, 2004), 414-63, 435. For the date of Athanasius' text, see R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 376¹¹²; T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (1993), 280⁴⁸; and now David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford, 2007), 42-5.

⁴ E.g. Cesare Alzati, 'Un cappadoce in Occidente durante le dispute trinitarie del IV secolo. Aussenzio di Milano', in *id.*, *Ambrosiana Ecclesia: Studi su la chiesa milanese e l'ecumene cristiana fra tarda antichità e medioevo*, Archivio Ambrosiano 65 (Milan, 1993), 45-95, 76; C. Pietri and L. Pietri (eds), *Prosopographie Chrétienne du Bas-Empire 2: Prosopographie de l'Italie chrétienne (313-604)* (Rome, 1999-2000), 1:238 also have Auxentius as a leader of this faction at Rimini on the evidence of Athanasius, who is here followed by the ecclesiastical historians: thus R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 376¹¹⁴.

⁵ See *Athanasius Werke II 1.9: De Synodis*, ed. Hans-Georg Opitz (Berlin, 1941), 236-7, with Hanns-Christof Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche* (Tübingen, 1988), 27²⁴: the documents may be compared at Hil. Pict., *Coll. Ant. Par.* A.V.1, A.IX.3 (CSEL 65: 78-85, 96-7); the Latin versions are translated in Lionel R. Wickham (tr.), *Hilary of Poitiers: Conflicts of Conscience and Law in the Fourth-Century Church* (Liverpool, 1997), 82-4. The version of the council's letter to Constantius is significantly longer in Athanasius, and in Hilary appears to contain a lacuna; but this cannot easily be connected with the appearance of Auxentius elsewhere in the Greek version of this letter and of the council's anathemas. T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (1993), 145 does not include Auxentius among the condemned, and is followed by Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court*

all the documentation preserved and reproduced by Hilary in particular, there is no evidence which confirms that Auxentius of Milan even attended the Council of Rimini.⁶ His presence there is not in itself implausible; but the silences and inconsistencies of the evidence suggest that he played no prominent role in the council's deliberations.

Certainly we would expect Hilary of Poitiers to make much of it if he had. Hilary was far from a friend of Auxentius, and attacked him whenever he was able. Thus at a Synod in Paris in 360 or 361, shortly after the promulgation of the creed which had resulted from the councils of Rimini-Seleucia, Hilary's renewed influence in the west prompted a reassertion of the Nicene creed, and the condemnation of a group of bishops which once again included Auxentius, Ursacius and Valens.⁷ Others, who are accepted by the Synod as having signed the creed out of ignorance or naivety, are excused for the moment: and so the impression is given that Auxentius was not a mere fellow-traveller but a firm advocate of the Rimini creed. But this is not, I think, a safe assumption. Auxentius' absence from Hilary's version of the anathemas issued at Rimini, and then his presence (along with others apparently absent from Rimini) in the list prepared at Paris, may suggest not that his prominent role at Rimini had unaccountably been missed by those who were there; but rather that the list had been expanded under Hilary's influence to incorporate his private enemies.⁸ That the council went on to reaffirm Hilary's long-standing excommunication of Saturninus of Arles also adds to that impression.

in a Christian Capital (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), 22, and by D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995) 24⁶⁰; but in the latter compare 76³⁴, where Williams includes him in the condemnation but adds: 'Strangely, Auxentius' name does not appear in the council's *damnatio*.'

⁶ D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 24⁶⁰; note too that Damasus, *Ep.* 1 claims that no Roman representative was present at the Council of Rimini. Mark D. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed: Social Environment and Religious Change in Northern Italy, AD 200-400* (Oxford, 1999), 50, places Auxentius at the council, but notes that surprisingly few Italian bishops are attested there.

⁷ Hil. Pict., *Coll. Ant. Par.* A.I (CSEL 65: 43-6), tr. in L.R. Wickham, *Hilary of Poitiers* (1997), 93-5: the bishops excommunicated were (in order) Auxentius, Ursacius, Valens, Gaius, Megarius and Justin; the council also reaffirmed Hilary's previous condemnation of Saturninus of Arles. For the problems surrounding the date of Hilary's return to the west, see Yves-Marie Duval, 'Vrai et faux problèmes concernant le retour d'exil d'Hilaire de Poitiers et son action en Italie en 360-363', *Athenaeum* 48 (1970), 251-75 (repr. in *id.*, *L'extirpation* [1998], III), especially 261-6, and Daniel H. Williams, 'The Anti-Arian Campaigns of Hilary of Poitiers and the *Liber contra Auxentium*', *ChHist* 61 (1992), 8-12. Hilary would similarly associate Auxentius with Ursacius and Valens (and also Germinius and Gaius) in his *C. Aux.*, but there again the reference is to a shared and generalised impiety and not to any concerted action: Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 5. Amb., *De Spiritu Sancto* 3.10.59, also draws a broad link between Auxentius, Valens and Ursacius: but this testimony is from the 380s and is clearly influenced not only by Hilary but by Ambrose's own desire to present himself as a champion of Nicene orthodoxy.

⁸ Y.-M. Duval, 'Vrai et faux problèmes' (1970), 266⁶³ suggests that the letter was written either by Hilary or else at his prompting, and D.H. Williams, 'Anti-Arian Campaigns' (1992), 7-22, 14 agrees: 'Hilary's influence over this synod is clearly perceptible.'

Thus the lists provided by Athanasius and the Synod of Paris are not necessarily an accurate reflection of the actions and decisions of the Council of Rimini, but may instead represent a tendentious division of the western bishops into enemies and allies. Auxentius of Milan was already an obvious target for Hilary and Athanasius merely by reason of the position he held: occupying a see from which his predecessor Dionysius had been deposed for his apparently Nicene sympathies.⁹ We do not therefore need to imagine that Auxentius had done anything between the Council of Rimini and the Synod of Paris to provoke such a hostile response: there is no need to suppose, for example, that he tried to force the creed of Rimini on an unwilling congregation in Milan. For all that Athanasius and Hilary and their fellow exiles (and later partisans) were convinced that Auxentius was an illegitimate bishop, we need not assume that this was the case for others in the west, or in the church of Milan itself. If he was present at Rimini he seems to have been accepted without comment; and, after the death of Dionysius in exile, Auxentius was confronted by no rival claimant to the see of Milan.¹⁰

Thus the hostility of Hilary and his allies to Auxentius ought not to be blamed on the victim. Nor should the association consistently made between Auxentius, Ursacius and Valens be taken as an accurate guide to the make-up of a coherent Homoian party or faction. As David Gwynn has argued, such claims are chiefly polemical: the division into two rival factions between whom a choice must be made is a rhetorical ploy rather than a 'reflection of reality'.¹¹ That Hilary and Athanasius lumped together their opponents in this way tells us very little about Auxentius himself, or about any points of agreement with Ursacius and Valens; and we should certainly not take it as proof that they shared a common political-theological programme or an identical set of beliefs.¹² Rowan Williams, in a review of R.P.C. Hanson's *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, pointed to precisely this difficulty: that identifying

⁹ There are versions of the events at Milan in Hil. Pict., *Ad Const.* 8, Ath., *Hist. Ar.* 33-4, Sulp. Sev., *Chron.* 2.39. and Lucif. Cal., *De Ath* II.7 and *De mor.* 11, with Dionysius variously said to have been ready to condemn Athanasius and in fact to have signed an assent to the decrees of the 351 Council of Sirmium, and yet also to have joined Eusebius of Vercelli in an attempt to impose the Nicene creed on the assembled delegates. For reconstructions of these events, see R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 332-3, 511, T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (1993), 117-8 and Carl L. Beckwith, *Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: From De Fide to De Trinitate* (Oxford, 2009), 43-5.

¹⁰ Michel Meslin, *Les Ariens d'Occident, 335-430* (Paris, 1967), 42. Ambrose, *C. Aux.* 18 implicitly presents his predecessor Auxentius as illegitimate in calling Dionysius his predecessor as bishop; but this is easily explained by his rival's claim to be the true successor of Auxentius.

¹¹ D.M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians* (2007), 85-6, adding at 114: 'It is in the *De Synodis* that the degree of distortion inherent in this Athanasian construction of a single "Arian party" is most immediately apparent'.

¹² Contra D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 76, who firmly associates Auxentius with Ursacius, Valens 'and their immediate circle'; a similar line is taken in M. Meslin, *Ariens* (1967), 292.

‘Homoianism’ is surprisingly difficult, ‘since its adherents don’t appear to realise that they have a distinct set of theological principles to promulgate and safeguard’.¹³ There is little real evidence that Auxentius played any significant role at Rimini, or that he was a proponent of a specifically Homoian programme which aligned him with Ursacius and Valens. That Hilary and Athanasius sought to give that impression should not be enough for us.

But if our evidence for Auxentius’ actions at Rimini is sketchy and unreliable, we do have one significant text which not only gives us a direct account of a particular controversy but preserves the words of Auxentius himself. Our source again is Hilary of Poitiers, who in 364 arrived in Milan to take the fight directly to its bishop – and having failed to make his charges stick, retired to write an account of events from his own perspective. This is Hilary’s treatise *Contra Auxentium*.¹⁴

After a preamble in which Hilary reaffirms the association between Auxentius, Valens and Ursacius on the basis of their ‘Arian’ theology, he turns to relating his specific actions and the progress of the dispute. Hilary places his original accusation at a time ‘[w]hen by a grave edict and under the pretext and desire of unity, the blessed king had ordered the Milanese church to be thrown into confusion’.¹⁵ I am not aware that anyone has identified the specific edict to which he refers, although it must have been issued by Valentinian I and evidently responded to some kind of disturbance.¹⁶ In any case, it need not imply that Auxentius had himself provoked the unrest, or even that the disruption pre-dates Hilary’s arrival in Milan; certainly it would appear that Hilary was already on the spot to respond to the edict ‘by a prompt intervention’, and it is scarcely beyond the bounds of possibility that he had been acting as provocateur.¹⁷ In any case, Hilary interrupted to object formally ‘that Auxentius was a blasphemer and ... that he held different views from the king himself or from those that all others held’.¹⁸ The case was heard, apparently by the civil authorities, and in the presence of ten or so other bishops, but it focused specifically on the doctrinal issue: that Hilary had been an exile from his see was deemed irrelevant.¹⁹

¹³ Rowan Williams, *SJTh* 45 (1992), 101-11, 102.

¹⁴ Latin text in PL 10, 609B-618C.

¹⁵ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux. 7*: ‘Cum edicto graui sanctissimus rex perturbari ecclesiam Mediolanensium ... sub unitatis specie et uoluntate iussisset’.

¹⁶ Neither Constantius nor Julian would be likely to receive the epithet ‘blessed’ from Hilary in 364; and the implication is in any case that the events of 364 followed on directly from this edict. Timothy D. Barnes, ‘Valentinian, Auxentius, and Ambrose’, *Historia* 51 (2002), 227-37, 227-9 provides an eminently sensible reconstruction of events.

¹⁷ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux. 7*: ‘Etiam importuna interpellatione suggesti...’.

¹⁸ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux. 7*: ‘... Auxentium blasphemum esse; ... atque adieci, eum aliter credere, quam rex ipse, aut alii omnes haberent’.

¹⁹ Thus T.D. Barnes, ‘Valentinian, Auxentius, and Ambrose’ (2002), 230-1; an alternative is that the bishops sat with the presiding officials: N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 25.

This much might fit with the claim made by Auxentius – in his response, as appended by Hilary to his treatise – that Hilary was continuing a general campaign of disturbing North Italian churches, in concert with Eusebius of Vercelli.²⁰ It also does little to contradict his claim that Hilary was creating a schism rather than drawing attention to an existing one.²¹ Admittedly in his response Auxentius accepts the possibility of some doctrinal opposition in Milan.²² But if there did exist some separatist Nicene community oppressed by the bishop, we would expect Hilary to play them up – and yet he does nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he goes to great lengths to explain why there is *no* visible opposition to Auxentius in Milan. His explanation blamed in equal parts fraud and naivety: ‘The people of Christ do not die under the priests of the antichrist, because they think that what is spoken is the faith. ... The ears of the people are more blessed than the hearts of the priests.’²³ Thus Hilary’s gambit is a desperate one: he ‘depicts the Milanese people as fully orthodox’, but far from claiming that they are ‘therefore publicly disquieted by Auxentius and his kind’ he presents them as entirely tolerant if not enthusiastically supportive of their bishop.²⁴ As Neil McLynn has pointed out, Hilary’s attack ‘only betrayed his frustration at the strength of their allegiance to Auxentius’.²⁵ It is an obvious testimony to Auxentius’ popularity in Milan.²⁶

Hilary’s Latin is ambiguous here, but these interpretations are to be preferred to Peter Iver Kaufman, ‘Diehard Homoians and the Election of Ambrose’, *JECS* 5 (1997), 421-40, 431-2; and although the charge concerned doctrine specifically, it seems unlikely that the council was ‘ecclesiastical, not civil’ as in D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 78. R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 462 argues that the claim was that Hilary had been formally deposed from his see of Poitiers, and that this was untrue; but it seems that the objection was to his past condemnation by Saturninus, and not to his episcopal status as such. On Hilary’s exile, see Hanns-Christof Brennecke, *Hilarius von Poitiers und die Bischofsopposition gegen Konstantius II: Untersuchungen zur dritten Phase des arianischen Streites (337-361)* (Berlin, 1984), 223-48, with Timothy D. Barnes, ‘Hilary of Poitiers on His Exile’, *VC* 46 (1992), 129-40 and Carl L. Beckwith ‘The Condemnation and Exile of Hilary of Poitiers at the Synod of Béziers (356 C.E.)’, *JECS* 13 (2005), 21-38.

²⁰ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 13; see also Ruf., *Hist. eccl.* X 30-1; D.H. Williams, ‘Anti-Arian Campaigns’ (1992), 16.

²¹ P.I. Kaufman, ‘Diehard Homoians’ (1997), 430.

²² Neil B. McLynn, ‘Diehards: A Response’, *JECS* 5 (1997), 446-50, 448; but *id.*, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 25 struggles with the clear (and presumably falsifiable) statement by Auxentius that any such opponents could only be those who had never had communion with either himself or with Dionysius, meaning that they cannot be identified as Dionysian loyalists, and that it is difficult to see them as anything other than ‘an extremist group quite separate from the mainstream of Milanese Christianity’.

²³ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 6: ‘*Sub antichristi sacerdotibus Christi populus non occidat, dum hoc putant illi fidei esse, quod vocis est ... sanctiores aures plebis, quam corda sunt sacerdotum*’.

²⁴ D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 79.

²⁵ N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 28.

²⁶ Thus R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 852; Christoph J. Marksches, *Ambrosius von Mailand und die Trinitätstheologie: Kirchen- und theologiegeschichtliche Studien zu Antiarianismus*

Given this popularity, some scholars have concluded that the emperor backed Auxentius primarily out of a concern for ‘ecclesiastical and social order, rather than doctrine’.²⁷ Others have explained Hilary’s failure as a result of Valentinian’s ‘concern for correct procedure’, as if the bishop of Milan had survived the attack only on the basis of a technicality.²⁸ But in fact it is clear that Hilary’s accusation of heresy had nothing to back it up. His specific arguments are rather confusing, not to say unconvincing, and seem to centre on two different points: firstly that Auxentius had duplicitously claimed to conform to the Nicene creed; and secondly that the Creed of Rimini, to which he ultimately holds, is self-evidently heretical.

The first point was and is easy to dismiss: Hilary said that ‘Auxentius professed himself to believe that Christ is true God and of one divinity and substance with God the Father’ – which of course is what Hilary believed – but that he had then reneged on this belief.²⁹ It seems Hilary is picking up a certain ambiguity in the formulas Auxentius offers as his own, in which the phrase *deum verum filium*, though hardly an affirmation, does not strictly deny the full and true divinity of the Son.³⁰ But ambiguity is not heresy and, as Neil McLynn points out, none of this was at issue. The claim was not that Auxentius disagreed with Hilary but that he disagreed with the view of the emperor and ‘all other people’. However hard Hilary might try to pretend that the Nicene creed was the appropriate standard, Auxentius was accused of heresy according to the prevailing orthodoxy of the time; and this remained the creed established at Rimini.

Auxentius was thus unashamed in publicising his adherence to the Rimini creed. His statement to Valentinian recommends that the emperor read the transactions of that council; and his opening argument is that ‘the unity of six hundred bishops [at Rimini-Seleucia] after such great labours arising from the controversy of a few men ought not to be torn open’.³¹ The strength of this

und Neunizänismus bei Ambrosius (Tübingen, 1995), 58; M.D. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed* (1999), 167-8.

²⁷ M.D. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed* (1999), 118.

²⁸ N.B. McLynn, ‘Diehards: A Response’ (1997), 447.

²⁹ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 7: this phrase has attracted much comment, with R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 597 noting that ‘it is difficult to take this claim seriously’ since it is so ‘out of keeping with his true sentiments’; N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 26 also finds it unlikely and concludes that ‘taken as a whole’, Auxentius’ statement ‘cannot be reconciled with Hilary’s interpretation’. Since Hilary specifies that he had this confession of Nicene loyalty written down, and that he has appended to his text ‘an example of this same document’, it seems most likely that his reference is not to some earlier statement but is a tendentious interpretation of the statement of Auxentius included in the *C. Aux.*

³⁰ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 8.

³¹ Hil. Pict., *C. Aux.* 15: ‘*Ea, quae gesta sunt in concilio Ariminensi, transmissi, et peto ut ea libenter legi praecipiat*’; *ibid.* 13: ‘*Aestimo non oportere sexcentorem episcoporum unitatem post tantos labores ex contentione paucorum hominum refricari*’.

point has, I think, tended to be played down by modern commentators, but the force of such widespread subscription to a single creed is not to be lightly dismissed.³² Auxentius was not retained in his place solely because of Valentinian's concern for law and order; nor even on account of the support he retained even among his (apparently Nicene) congregation; but because he was unquestionably aligned with the most recent and most authoritative settlement on the issue at stake. The six hundred bishops whom Auxentius cites had indeed reached a public consensus on this point – no matter if any number of them had altered their private beliefs in the meantime. It was Hilary who failed to impose his own more restrictive definition in its place; and it was Hilary who advocated a change to the *status quo*, even if it was only a return to the *status quo ante*.

None of this should be taken to constitute an argument over Auxentius' private beliefs.³³ All the historian can be sure of are his public commitments, and here there is no room for doubt: Auxentius was committed to the Rimini creed, and seems never to have wavered from it.³⁴ After all, a sincere commitment to the Rimini creed did not need to be disguised. The creed itself was a compromise; and although those committed to the language of *homoousia* (or *homoiousia*) had been disappointed, its explicit aim was to stop short of the kind of spurious precision – or 'impertinent speculation' – which *ousia* language involved.³⁵ As J.N.D. Kelly said, '[i]t was a mediating manifesto, designed as far as possible to please everybody'; and precisely for this reason, it 'strictly avoided technical terms'.³⁶ And in this regard it was a success: it was indeed signed by the delegates,

³² One recent exception is N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 22, who notes that 'the new homoean creed was the first to which bishops of both halves of the Christian empire had given their combined assent'. The force of this consensus was such that in 371 Damasus was forced to look for technical reasons for dismissing it: Damasus, *Ep.* 1: '*Neque enim praeiudicium aliquod nasci potuit ex numero eorum, qui apud Ariminum conuenerunt...*'; later still, Amb., *De fide* 1.18.121 sought to emphasise the numerological priority of the 318 bishops of Nicaea over the greater numbers present at Rimini-Seleucia.

³³ Auxentius' private beliefs are plausibly set out in M. Durst 'Das Glaubensbekenntnis des Auxentius von Mailand. Historischer Hintergrund – Textüberlieferung – Theologie – Edition', *JAC* 41 (1998), 118-68, who concludes that he was indeed a subordinationist with a typical Homoian emphasis on scriptural authority; but the fact remains that this must be inferred from a public statement which did not commit Auxentius to any such position.

³⁴ Contra P.I. Kaufman, 'Diehard Homoians' (1997), 440, who argues that Auxentius was 'seldom driven to' a public adherence to the creed of Rimini; this point is well addressed by Daniel H. Williams, 'Politically Correct In Milan: A Reply To "Diehard Homoians And The Election Of Ambrose"', *J ECS* 5 (1997), 441-6, 444.

³⁵ R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 560.

³⁶ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3rd ed., New York, 1972), 290; compare 295, describing 'its deliberate vagueness ... [which] made it capable of being recited by Christians with very different sets of ideas'; see also T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius* (1993), 144: 'its main feature is an attempt to mediate, to devise a formula which all might accept'.

whatever their doubts, and the later claims of coercion and fraud do not suggest that the text of the creed itself was in any way disguised.³⁷ The objection of Hilary and Athanasius was that it was too open to interpretation, but that of course had been the whole point of the exercise.³⁸ It was only after Rimini that a 'vociferous, pro-Athanasian minority' were able to gain support for their view that a more precise and restrictive doctrinal statement should be imposed upon the church.³⁹

This is not then to make Auxentius a comprehensivist or latitudinarian who did not believe the subordinationist theology to which he officially subscribed.⁴⁰ Instead it is to suggest that he openly subscribed to a creed whose main characteristic was its attempt at diplomacy: a firm commitment to a limited stance. The peace of the church could be maintained most effectively not by the unstinting imposition of a narrow credal definition but by agreeing a formula in which as many bishops as possible could find a satisfactory expression of their views.⁴¹ Rimini provided such a formula: and Auxentius' adherence to that creed aligned him with the agreed orthodoxy of the time. But if indeed he was one of its 'standard-bearers' in the West, it was largely by default, as others around him shifted towards a position which rejected the recent compromise in

³⁷ Sulp. Sev., *Chron.* 2.41; Jerome, *Adv. Lucif.* 17-19: the claims of fraud focus on the ambiguous anathema (against Christ as 'a creature like the other creatures') proposed by Valens of Mursa, which was subsequently discovered to be open to subordinationist interpretation. There are full discussions in Y.-M. Duval, 'La "manœuvre frauduleuse"' (1969) and H.-C. Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer* (1988), 23-40. M. Meslin, *Ariens* (1967), 288 sees the claims of fraud and coercion as a 'manoeuvre apologetique'; N.B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan* (1994), 22 gives them little weight; but D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 29-34 and *id.*, 'Politically Correct in Milan' (1997), 442 is more willing to accept the validity of both complaints.

³⁸ It is thus difficult to see why J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (1972), 295 should call it a 'speciously neutral creed'; Y.-M. Duval, 'La "Manœuvre Frauduleuse"' (1969), 100 in contrast emphasises the genuine ambiguity of the formula. R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 575 follows Kelly in arguing that the text was not a true compromise because it excluded the *ousia* language of Nicaea; but the agreement was merely to remain silent on the matter of *ousia* (Hil. Pict., *Coll. Ant. Par.* A.I [CSEL 65, 44-5]), and it therefore excluded only those who sought to impose it as part of a universal standard. For Jerome, *Adv. Lucif.* 18, such a compromise represented a misguided but not unreasonable position.

³⁹ M.D. Humphries, *Communities of the Blessed* (1999), 50.

⁴⁰ These terms are offered at P.I. Kaufman, 'Diehard Homoians' (1997), 431 and firmly rejected in D.H. Williams, 'Politically Correct in Milan' (1997), 444. Both scholars associate this position with Michel Meslin, but this seems misleading: indeed, D.H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan* (1995), 29 attributes to Meslin the reverse position: that the western Homoian bishops should be seen 'not as unscrupulous schemers but as sincere theologians'.

⁴¹ Jerome, *Adv. Lucif.* 17 is sympathetic to the council's desire to pursue such a compromise. This seems to me to be the implication of the comment at M. Meslin, *Ariens* (1967), 44 that Auxentius 'maintenu une certain conception de la paix religieuse, plus politique que doctrinale'; the point is further refined by John D. Burkhard, 'Les ariens d'occident', *RHPPhR* 51 (1971), 169-74, 172: 'L'objectif *politique* de l'empereur ne pouvait être atteint que par une formule *théologique* acceptable pour tous les évêques'.

favour of a partisan insistence on the full Nicene creed.⁴² In not shifting from his moderate position he was overtaken by the radical changes occurring in the western church – not least of which was the polemical redescription, in both ancient and modern commentators, of this Homoian compromise as Arian heresy.

That Athanasius and Hilary were successful in their campaign to turn back the clock to Nicaea is scarcely proof that Auxentius was a fanatic. Indeed, by any reasonable historical definition – theologically, legally, and by popular assent – Auxentius of Milan was strictly orthodox all his life. It was only after his death that the influence and efforts of Athanasius and Hilary, along with their supporters, allies and heirs, ensured a permanent retreat from the compromise of Rimini and imposed in its place the Nicene creed. Thus it was, in effect, only after his death that Auxentius' stance passed from orthodoxy to heresy.

⁴² R.P.C. Hanson, *Search* (1988), 854.

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