



MEDICINE AND PRAYERS IN THE DEACON ENNODIUS' LETTERS

Abstract

The oeuvre of the late antique Latin author Magnus Felix Ennodius (473/4–521 CE) can provide some insights into several aspects of daily life. The focus of this paper is on medicine as belonging to science and on prayers, particularly intercessory prayers, as an element of faith. After a short introduction I delineate some situations in which Ennodius mentions intercessory prayers. I then examine the image of medicine in his works showing that it proves to be a common and useful phenomenon. Primarily, I present some passages in which Ennodius writes about physical illnesses and the help of both physicians and prayers (in some letters and in the so-called *Eucharisticon*). Comparing the letters to various correspondents it is possible to recognise that Ennodius did not employ the same quantity and the same elements of Christian discourse for everybody, but was obviously well aware of their individual receptiveness and therefore considered what was appropriate (*aptum*) in each case. Moreover, as he was not a bishop when he wrote the letters, but still a deacon, his letters constitute an exceptional voice of someone not holding a top position in the church hierarchy.

Keywords: Ennodius · intercessory prayer · illness · late antiquity · letters.

Medicine and Prayers in the Deacon Ennodius' Letters¹

Magnus Felix Ennodius is a late antique Latin author (473/4–521 CE) who is known today only by a few, and those few are usually specialists of late antique Latin philology or the history of Theodoric's reign.² For this reason, this special thematic volume is a great opportunity to integrate some comments on Ennodius into the varied aspects of 'science, faith, and superstition' over the times and disciplines covered by the Belgrade conference.

1 Many thanks to Constanze Braun for translating my talk at the conference and to Barbara Winkler for reading this paper; all irregularities in the English language of this paper are my own.

2 For the scope of this paper, I only hint at a few basic aspects. Surveys of the few known facts of Ennodius' biography can be found in Kennell (2000: 4-42), Schröder (2007: 20-31).

Regarding the first two aspects 'science' and 'faith', Ennodius provides abundant material which has not been studied yet, referring to situations in which he mentions prayers generally or more specifically in the case of illness. Therefore, this paper takes the overarching topic of the conference as a starting point for further studies which should take into account more evidence and also go more into detail linguistically.

One of the reasons why Ennodius is still little known is the fact that there are only few translations and commentaries.³ His texts are difficult to understand because he deliberately shows off his high language register, combined with a peculiar individual style. Also, his oeuvre is very diverse, both in prose and poetry: It contains ca. 300 letters, two lives of saints, many epigrams about various topics, a prose panegyric on Theodoric the Great, hymns in emulation of those composed by bishop Ambrose of Milan. A funny epithalamium or a biting invective against those who refused to recognise the result of a synod show even more quite different styles and contents.⁴

Ennodius' extant works, all written during his years as a deacon in Milan, reveal that he previously worked as a teacher of rhetoric and also composed literary texts, especially poems. He then entered the church, became deacon in Milan and later bishop in Pavia (before 515). Holding the office of deacon he was mostly occupied with the church finances, e.g., welfare for widows and orphans, and also with supporting those who struggled in law suits. He will have owed his ecclesiastical career largely to his linguistic skills, as he could not only write letters and speeches, but also represent defendants and negotiate in diplomatic matters. It can be deduced from his works that as a deacon he continued to mentor in some way several young relatives who were in Milan for their secular, that is, rhetorical education. There is still a lot to discover about this author, with the current scholarship mostly studying his poetry. In this paper, however, the focus will be on a passage of one of his prose texts and especially on some of the letters.

Ennodius' letters are of particular interest since they are authentic letters which were actually sent one by one to the correspondents, which means that they are not aiming at publication and a wider readership. Moreover, Ennodius is no church father, usually he does not discuss theological questions (even though exceptions show him apparently knowledgeable in many areas), nor does he show any interest in philosophical questions. But

3 A recent bibliography is provided by Urlacher-Becht (2022).

4 These are only examples to adumbrate the wide range of his works. For an overview of his oeuvre see: Schröder (2007: 31-53). The standard editions are Hartel (1882) and Vogel (1885), Hartel presenting the texts grouped by genres, Vogel following the order transmitted by the manuscripts. When I turn to single texts in the next parts, I always indicate both editions, first the running number in Vogel (V.), followed by the category plus number in Hartel. Given the limited scope of this paper I will mostly only give an English translation, asking to consult additionally the editions for the Latin original, as Vogel's edition is easily accessible online.

while he does not write theological treatises, his texts definitely participate in Christian discourse. He does not theorise about prayers, but he often asks for prayers for himself in his letters. So, the letters present part of his everyday written communication (as far as it is transmitted to us), showing how a deacon with brilliant rhetorical abilities communicated with a wide range of different correspondents.

As all extant texts stem from his time as deacon, after he had given up his secular career as a teacher and poet,⁵ older scholarship criticized that many of his texts did not appear to have been written by a man of the church, as especially his poetry displays greater influences from Virgil, Lucan, and Statius than from the Bible. In short, scholars expected a deacon to be concerned exclusively with theological and pious works. Recent scholarship however emphasizes a more nuanced approach, differentiating between Ennodius' different social roles and activities, the official and the private spheres.⁶ Therefore, it is now highlighted that he wrote some of the texts – especially the hymns, the epigrams about the bishops of Milan, the lives of the saints and also the pamphlet against the opponents of the synod – in his role as deacon, most probably even on behalf of his bishop. Other works, however, originated in a private context and were not meant to be published, e.g., a great part of the epigrams which treat an enormous variety of subjects and therefore originated in different spheres.

The letters constitute a special case as well: Ennodius addresses a large number of individuals (church officials or high state administrators, but also colleagues, relatives, and friends), himself adopting several different roles (as subordinated or equal ranking colleague, as close or distant relative, friend or mentor), without intending a wider audience to read them. When we analyze Ennodius' letters it is important to keep in mind that at the time he wrote them he only held the office of deacon, but certainly didn't want his career to end there. Therefore his letters also were a means of networking and advertising his linguistic and rhetorical faculties. On the whole, the letters show him talking to his female and male correspondents in many different ways, that is, solemnly, critically or witty, severely or in a friendly way. Since the letters were not published by Ennodius himself, we are in a better position to compare them than his contemporaries. As to the contents, we get (mostly only tiny) glimpses of several different aspects of life. Among them, concerns about the well-being of those who are far away and messages about the writer's own health – the most indispensable and therefore 'topical' subject of oral and written communication throughout time – are present in Ennodius' letters as well. In the following, I will study not such passages in which Ennodius only asks about the addressee's health as a standard question

5 Ennodius often alludes to the differences between these two phases of his biography (without giving concrete biographical information), see: Vandone (2001), Schröder (2007: 63-82).

6 On this question see esp. Urlacher-Becht (2014: 29-31).

of letter exchange, but some of those written when either the addressee or Ennodius himself is in bad health.⁷ Since in the case of illness he not only turned to physicians and medicine, but also to prayers, my focus will be on medicine as belonging to science and on prayers, particularly intercessory prayers, as an element of faith.

We will see that for Ennodius, the two areas of medicine and of prayers are closely linked, not creating a tension between them,⁸ but complementing each other in a clear hierarchy. Thus, on a large scale, he constitutes no exception among the late antique Christian authors, as the personal Christian discourse which permeates many of his texts confirms the more official communications by bishops of the time, while especially his letters can contribute some evidence on specific aspects that has hitherto been neglected.⁹

After this brief introduction I will show in the first part in which situations of daily life Ennodius mentions prayers and intercessions. Secondly, I will examine the image of medicine in his works showing that it appears as generally useful. The third and main part combines both aspects asking how Ennodius talks about physical illnesses and the help of both medicine and prayers. As mentioned initially, this article intends to be read as a point of departure for more exhaustive studies.

1. Intercessory prayers

Prayers as a constituent of Christian life in general figure in many of Ennodius' letters as well, especially intercessory prayers for the benefit of fellow Christians.¹⁰ These passages of his letters on the one hand illustrate in a way the treatises and letters on prayer by several Christian authors and the general impression of many texts of the time while on the other hand

7 Kennell only briefly hints at the fact that a great part of the letters is concerned with Ennodius' health or that of his correspondents (2000: 127).

8 See, e.g., Dörnemann's general observation (2003: 296): "Eine strikte Trennung von Glaube und Wissenschaft ist der christlichen Antike fremd. Der Glaube an die Allmacht, die Güte und Fürsorge Gottes für den Menschen ist für alle christlichen Literaten das Fundament ihres Lebens. Aus dieser Perspektive wird alles, was einem im menschlichen Leben begegnet, gedeutet, auch medizinisch-wissenschaftliche Heilverfahren und Erfahrung von Wunderheilungen."

9 The letters have mostly been studied as testimony of the sophisticated written communication, the application and development of epistolary topics and etiquette, the different occasions for writing letters, the functioning of an élite network, see: Gioanni (2001), Schröder (2007), Di Rienzo (2024). Kennell (2000) presents an overall picture of the various subjects in Ennodius' works, including many letters.

10 On the characteristic aspects of Christian prayer in Late Antiquity see, e.g., the comprehensive articles by Michel (1976), Phillips (2008). On intercessory prayers see also Rapp (2005: 81-85).

Ennodius keeps to his own peculiar style also regarding this detail. In various situations he asks his addressees to pray for him, not only when he is ill (on illness see part 3). Partly these pleadings refer to specific situations, partly he asks for general support which he needs because of his sins. When speaking of his own prayers for others, Ennodius employs particular rhetorical strategies to point at their effectiveness and to understate it at the same time. Just a few summary examples to give an impression of the variety of topics of such letters:¹¹

In a letter to his sister in Gaul whose son lives in Milan to be educated, Ennodius writes: She should piously mollify God with constant prayers for himself and for her son, so that God will make Ennodius' intentions and efforts for the education a success (52 V. / epist. 2,15,6). To a high imperial magistrate he writes about a court trial (as certain trials could be held before the bishop); apparently, Ennodius is pleading the defendant's cause, asking the addressee to support his efforts by pouring out prayers abundantly (64 V. / epist. 2,27,4). Without any hint at a specific situation or problem Ennodius asks a bishop to cleanse him of his many sins by continuous prayers (119 V. / epist. 4,3,3). Often (but not always) the prayers are accompanied by tears: A female correspondent is asked to recommend Ennodius to God with constant prayers and tears, regarding this as a special present to be preferred to everything else (302 V. / epist. 6,35,2). To the Roman presbyter Adeodatus he writes that he does not want to miss the support of an ideal believer (sc. Adeodatus) before God; he is being crushed by heavy burdens of sin and knows that he could receive complete absolution through the help of Adeodatus whom he asks to take vows for him at the places of all the saints (sc. in Rome); he is certain he will then receive benefactions from God (74 V. / epist. 3,7). We cannot know if Ennodius is alluding here to a specific issue which Adeodatus already knows or has just been informed about orally by the letter carrier. (I will come back to the issue of sins in part 3.)

Ennodius loves paradoxical thoughts, rhetorical acuteness being present throughout his work. This can also be true for the topic of prayer, at least when he is speaking of his own prayers for a young man whose education he has overseen as a mentor and who is now starting his (secular) career in Rome. Writing to the same presbyter Adeodatus to whose congregation the young man will now belong Ennodius states to be sad to let him go, being not at all happy about the success of his own prayers for the young man.¹² Thus Ennodius states that he has prayed for his education successfully and now is

11 Further studies will be able to figure out concerning which correspondents and / or topics he employs which aspects of Christian discourse.

12 (460 V. / epist. 9,32,2) "So now I am worrying because of the success of my prayers and have to moan that I achieved what I asked for in this respect, if I may say so with the approval of Christ" (*ecce de precum mearum fruge sollicitor et adeptos nos, si quid in hac parte postulatum est, quod cum Christi pace dici liceat, ingemisco*).

suffering himself from the result, the surprising paradox being a means to stress his affection (1 *caritate*). Moreover, the letter begins with the statement that the present development shows that Adeodatus' prayers can achieve more than his own, leading him to the conclusion that Adeodatus leads a better Christian life.¹³

Already these few examples (taken from many more) show that requests for intercessory prayers are an important part of many letters to diverse correspondents, designed differently in terms of language and ideas, in the last example even kind of playfully.

2. Medicine, Doctors, and Metaphors

Ennodius does not write about medicine or medical cures as such, but he mentions illnesses and recoveries several times. Before we address this main topic of the paper in the next part, just some brief general remarks. In antiquity and late antiquity, physicians and medicine were a regular part of everyday life,¹⁴ male and female Christians also working as physicians, as grave inscriptions show.¹⁵ The older assumption that physicians and medicine generally suffered from a negative image has long been proved to be wrong.¹⁶ The Greek and the Latin church fathers discuss the issue of medicine as such, thus giving some insights into the daily life of the parishes.¹⁷ Moreover, physicians and aspects of medicine were used metaphorically in Christian contexts.¹⁸ Common metaphors are an interesting and important phenomenon insofar as they illustrate in a special way that doctors and elements of medicine were (or had been earlier) a common part of everyday life.¹⁹ In such cases it is possible to deduce a common area of (present or past) everyday life from the language. Furthermore, the use of metaphors shows that medicine was seen in a positive light, as something helpful.

Ennodius' texts offer many examples which can illustrate this general picture on an individual scale, since he uses words from the sphere of medicine and doctors only partly in the literal sense, that is, in terms of physical illness. In fact, he uses words like *medicina* and *medicus* mostly

13 "The success of your prayers has made clear how far your merits and deeds surpass mine" (§1 *Quantum a me merito, quantum actione sis clarior, orationum tuarum reseravit effectus*).

14 Ferngren and Amundsen (1995), Dörnemann (2003), Schulze (2005).

15 See the monograph by Schulze (2005).

16 Ferngren and Amundsen (1995: 2963-2965), Dörnemann (2003: 291), Marx-Wolf / Upson-Saia (2015).

17 Schulze (2005: 144).

18 See Schulze (2005: 156-161).

19 On the complex necessary knowledge in order to use and understand metaphors see, e.g., Eggs (2001: 1169).

in frequently used and common metaphors, not only in Christian but in various contexts for which I give just a few examples: A *medica manus* can mean support in a matter of justice (400 V./ epist. 8,23). Moreover, Ennodius speaks about *conloquii medicina*: “medicine which consists in conversation (that is, in a letter)” for friends who are separated by long distances (463 V. / epist. 9,34,1). If they had seen each other recently, the memories of mutual conversations can be a cure against longing (459 V. / epist. 9,31,1 *medicinam desiderii*). If Ennodius feels painful longing because there is no reply, he asks for a letter as a cure (224 V. / epist. 5,8,4 *dolorum remedia*). On the other hand, the soul can fall ill because of the medicine (sc. a letter) from the correspondent, because he now worries about him (448 V. / epist. 9,24,1 *de medicina sollicitudinis cura geminetur*). Therefore, one can not only write about one’s own state of health, but the letter itself can be a cure (which can cause new sorrow).

The metaphorical mode of expression also covers a surgery method of ancient medicine that became proverbial, namely the excision of the diseased parts of the body. For example, in one of the lives of the saints, Ennodius puts a speech into a secular ruler’s mouth in which he says that it is important to punish the enemies, that is, to cut the rotten parts out of the state (80 V. / opusc. 3,133). This method is also to be employed in cases of aberration and opposition within the church (117 V. / epist. 4,1,3). Moreover, this metaphor is used in another totally different field, poetry: An acquaintance who composes poems himself cuts the wounds (*secat omne vulnus*) out of a “sick” poem (*carminis aegri*), that is, he corrects his friend’s text (26 V. / carm. 1,7,62-64).

Up to this point we can state that in Ennodius’ texts intercessory prayers play an important role and that medicine is presented as common and in a positive light. Now we come to the main question, namely, how in the case of severe illness he speaks both about doctors and about intercessory prayers.

3. Illness and Salvation

Studying the issue of health and illness in the letters, we can look at how Ennodius reacts to the illnesses of his correspondents: When he learns of another’s illness, he feels bad himself, that is, the physical illness of the other person affects his own mental well-being (28 V. / epist. 1,21,2). If he learns of the recovery without having known about the illness beforehand, he is all the happier (25 V. / epist. 1,20,1-2). To the teacher Deuterius who suffered from an eye illness he writes that he of course prayed for him, but that the brilliant letter Deuterius sent him constitutes a contradiction in itself as he complains about his eyes (*lumina*) in language full of light (*lux*) (24 V. / epist. 1,19).²⁰ The letters provide many such various reactions, but I will focus here on the

20 On this striking letter see Schröder (2007: 167-170).

cases where Ennodius reports his own illness, because here he both mentions ‘doctors’ and ‘prayers’ and because there are a number of letters from the phase of one particularly serious illness. In several letters he writes that he was close to death and that his soul already feared the judgment of God but was saved. Moreover, shortly afterwards he also wrote a short prose text called *Eucharisticon*, that is ‘thanksgiving’, in which a serious illness plays a decisive role (V. 438 / opusc. 5)²¹. It is therefore not only possible to compare the letters to different correspondents with each other, but also to include this text. For instance, he compares himself to Lazarus, who had been buried and was brought back to life by Christ, this comparison appearing in only three of the letters, to two women and to the presbyter Adeodatus, but not otherwise.

Furthermore, in the case of his own illness, we often read about two aspects concerning a reason and a meaning of the illness: (1.) When Ennodius is ill himself, he mentions his sins as the reason for the illness.²² The emergence of physical illness is thus explained in religious terms: behavior that is judged as sinful leads to illness. For the most part, Ennodius speaks of *peccata* in general terms, several times he mentions the devil (*diabolus*) as being responsible and in one case he also says specifically which sins these are (I will come to this later on). (2.) But the illness not only has a reason, but also a meaning and an aim, as there is a religiously explained intention behind it, because through the physical weakness God gives the soul the opportunity to grow.²³ Ennodius formulates this with his characteristic sense of paradox, speaking of *medicabilis morbus*: “salutary illness”.

But of course, when others are ill, Ennodius cannot formulate both the reason and the goal of the illness in this way since he can hardly write that the correspondent is afflicted by serious sins and that recovery will improve his soul. He makes another point: In one case, for example, the mother of an addressee is ill and Ennodius writes that the pious woman is suffering because she is showing excessive kindness to an unworthy person like him (323 V. / epist. 7,17,1). So in this case, too, Ennodius, that is, his sinfulness, is recognised as the cause of her illness. But back to Ennodius’ illness and the helpful influence of his acquaintances.

Firstly, a short complete letter to Faustus (a relative and addressee of many letters) may serve as an example: „I would keep silent about my complaints if I did not know that it can bring me relief if you are concerned about me. For as long as you do not know how I suffer from various symptoms of illness, I am often given over to fever because of my sins, and my strength, which seemed to have been restored, diminishes again. Grant me, therefore, the

21 Giannotti (2023) provides a commentary with an Italian translation and an introduction.

22 On Christian explanations of illness and sin (and the devil) in Late Antiquity see Ferngren (2006: 999, 1004).

23 The underlying thought is found in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12,10). Ennodius begins the *Eucharisticon* with a paraphrase of Paul’s dictum.

usual remedies, that is, employ the benefit of your holy way of life for me, so that you may accomplish what human medicine cannot, by pouring out your prayers to our God".²⁴ Here Ennodius explicitly states that human medicine has its limits, but God can do more when being moved by prayer. Faustus' good life as a Christian (*sancta conversatio*) has a benefit that he should use for Ennodius, as Christians can support their fellows in this way. That is, just as the own *peccata* are the cause of sickness, it is helpful if an acquaintance leads a good life and prays for him. Indeed, the hoped-for success comes soon afterwards, as in a subsequent letter Ennodius is, thanks to God's grace, able to tell that he is already better thanks to the support of the saints and Faustus' prayers (396 V. / epist. 8,19,1).²⁵ It is important to highlight that Faustus was an aristocrat who held several high offices, not an ascetic or bishop or otherwise leading a life totally devoted to religion.²⁶

In antiquity, the aim of physicians was not to preserve the painful life of a seriously ill person for as long as possible. Accordingly, Ennodius reports several times that, faced with his illness and fever, the doctors who had been called in left him saying there was nothing more they could do. These reports do not imply criticism of the physicians' abilities, but are mere statements of a fact and the common practice in view of a lethal illness. Since Ennodius loves paradoxes, he also emphasizes them in this situation, e.g: "the hope of surviving instantly came back to me when the doctor had no more hope".²⁷ Another example: "[...] I can therefore inform you that I was quickly healed by the gift of heaven after the healing art of men had given up. Because the doctors gave up on me, my hope of recovery returned."²⁸

On the occasion of his recovery Ennodius composed the so-called *Eucharisticon* in which he looks back to some trying situations in his life in which God helped him before (438 V. / opusc. 5). The illness he has overcome now has led him to the insight that he had not previously recognized that health was a gift from God, but had considered it to be his possession (§3). For a long time, he had behaved as if he wanted to find out in which way sin is a cause for death (§5). He had turned away from the true wisdom of God (*sapientia*), but was saved from death by the grace of God, which was granted to him through a salutary illness (§7 *gratia dei, medicabilis morbi concessa*

24 (391 V. / epist. 8,14) *tacerem molestias meas, nisi intellexissem, quod sollicitudo vestra me sublevat. nam dum agnoscitis, quam variis morborum fatigor incommodis, pro peccatis meis febribus frequenter addicor et vires, quae videbantur restitutae, franguntur. ergo vos remedia consueta praestate et usum illum sanctae conversationis inpendite, ut quidquid medicina mortalium non valet, fuis ad deum nostrum precibus inpetretis.*

25 §1 *sanctorum suffragiis et vestris precibus.*

26 On Faustus see Martindale / Jones (PLRE II): 454–456. For reasons of space, I skip prosopographical information on the other correspondents.

27 (438 / opusc. 5,13) *ilico mihi spem detulit desperatio curatoris.*

28 (399 V. / epist. 8,22,1) *indico me caelesti beneficio, postquam cessavit humana curatio, mox sanatum. revocavit me ad spem prosperitatis res illa, quod medici destiterunt.*

ministerio). In this text, he does not speak about his sins only in a general way (as often in the letters), but recognises them in a special fact, namely in a discrepancy between his office and his actions: although being a deacon, he still wrote poems and rejoiced in their great success with the audience, thinking to be among the angels when a poem turned out well and when he was praised for it. The sin described here and said to be the reason for the illness is above all the pursuit of recognition by the audience which he was able to achieve through his excellent skills as a poet.

Here in the *Eucharisticon*, Ennodius gives a more detailed account than in the letters of what happened after the doctors had given up on him and left. Only in this text does he also mention Hippocrates and Galen, the two most famous ancient Greek physicians, namely in the moment when their *philosophia* is at an end; medicine is explicitly called ‘secular’ / ‘worldly’; in this situation, when the help of men did not help man any more, support by faith was required.²⁹ Ennodius then prayed to St. Victor,³⁰ whose intercession is strongly emphasized (as well as in one letter which I will come to afterwards). He describes how he turned to the protection of the blessed martyr Victor, which had been experienced often before (§14 *ad beati Victoris martyris praesidia saepe experta*). He prayed for support by this extremely strong man (§14 *opem fortissimi precatus*) and told him in tears what he should say to God. In the following Ennodius writes down the words Victor is asked to deliver (§14b-27); he speaks about the weakness of man in general and reminds God of earlier situations in which he had already supported him individually; thus this text turns into a short retrospective that, in all its brevity, both on the whole and in many details is markedly reminiscent of Augustine’s *Confessiones*.³¹

About St. Victor’s help Ennodius also writes in a letter to Faustus (401 V. / epist. 8,24,2): When the physician (*medicus*) had gone, Ennodius tearfully turned to the “auxiliaries (i.e. the martyr) of the heavenly physician (i.e. Christ)” (*ad caelestis medici auxilia*) and “armed” his whole body (*armavi*) against the fever with the oil of Victor.³² And soon the commander of the great soldier was there to help him (2 *magni militis imperator*), which means: Christ came at the request of Victor. What Ennodius asked for through the martyr, the witness of Christ, he received without hesitation. The fever soon subsided and at the ninth hour, “as it is written”, it went away completely at Christ’s command (2). In this letter Ennodius not only states that he

29 (438 V. / opusc. 5,10) *illa saecularis pompae philosophia Hippocratis et Galeni contrita subsidiis ad adiutorium fidele se transtulit, aliquando sentiens mundi blandimenta vaneſcere et humanis hominem praesidiis non iuvare*.

30 Victor was a soldier who refused to renounce his Christian faith and died as a martyr in Milan in 303 CE. Ennodius mentions him twice in his entire work, referring to him with several military metaphors (as can be seen in the following).

31 See Giannotti 2023, esp.: 55-68.

32 On the use of holy oil see Kranemann 2006.

recovered through Victor's intercession with Christ, but he also informs Faustus about the oil and about the point in time (which he both leaves out in the *Eucharisticon*). Christians were advised to pray at certain hours, following biblical examples; the ninth hour is one of the hours marked for the daily prayers, this concrete time being mentioned several times in the Old and New Testaments, Elijah, Ezra, Daniel, and Christ praying at the ninth hour in critical situations.³³ In the following Ennodius explains why he has mentioned this detail of the ninth hour, as he writes that he knows at what times Faustus usually prays and that a lot of tears helped the sufferer at that moment. Thus here, unlike in the *Eucharisticon*, the power of Faustus' intercessory prayer is emphasized. Ennodius does not otherwise write about prayers in such detail, and moreover, he mentions Victor's oil only here.³⁴ In letters to other correspondents Ennodius also writes that he recovered, but not to anyone in such detail. For instance, to another aristocrat (who held several high offices) he writes that he recovered thanks to the gift of God, asking him to praise God for this gift, but he does not mention intercessory prayers (399 V. / epist. 8,22). To a noble woman he writes that he was called back to life like Lazarus (§1), asking her to intensify her prayers for him so that thanks to her merits God in his benignity may confirm what he already has bestowed him.³⁵

Conclusion

These observations on some passages about illness and intercessory prayers can lead to first tentative results: We can observe a widespread use of intercessions (not only) in the case of illness among fellow Christians, among them aristocrats who held high state offices. When Ennodius is ill himself, he prays to a martyr to deliver his words to Christ, and in letters he asks fellow Christians to pray for him. As ancient rhetoric aimed at suitability (*aptum*) in every single case of communication, that is, to speak and to write considering not only oneself, but addressee, relationship and topic, we can observe what Ennodius considered to be appropriate for each man or woman.³⁶ So, this one aspect gives us a glimpse of his multifaceted correspondents, as he apparently considered remarks about prayers as suitable for many but not for all of them, while for some, it was fitting that also the religious discourse was shaped rhetorically and not without paradox. Regarding the overarching topic of medicine and faith, we see that physicians were called in to help as far as this human aid went – God's help being stronger. In order to attain

33 On the development of daily prayers at certain hours see Phillips (2008: 29-45).

34 I am preparing a paper on several aspects of piety in the many letters to Faustus.

35 (394 V. / epist. 8,17,2) *ut per meritum vestrum divina clementia dignetur confirmare quod tribuit.*

36 On Ennodius' rhetorical versatility in the letters generally see Schröder 2007, esp.: 284-286.

God's help, another kind of aid by fellow humans and by martyrs was thought to be essential, intercessory prayers. Obviously, Ennodius knew which correspondents were responsive to Christian discourse and prone to pray, even distinguishing who might engage in intercessory prayers and tears or rather join in thanksgiving prayers.

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