

Stefanie A.H. KENNEL

Ennodius' Libellus: Promoting the Pope, Subduing the Senate

Nothing better exemplifies the distance between Late Antiquity's aesthetic sensibility and that of the present age than the style of Magnus Felix Ennodius. His contemporaries regarded Ennodius' literary productions as an exquisite delight, whereas even those now exploiting them despise them (Relihan, *Ancient Menippean Satire*, 175; Fuhrmann, *Rom in der Spätantike*, 334; Rohr, *Theoderich-Panegyrikus*, 15). Of his major works, the Panegyric of king Theoderic and the Life of Epifanius of Pavia are the most consulted nowadays, but the *Libellus pro Synodo*, to which Ennodius ironically owed much of his contemporary and posthumous success, is less popular. A response to the Laurentian opposition's scandal-mongering pamphlet published after the inconclusive synods of 502, its aim was to vindicate and exalt Pope Symmachus. The *Libellus* begins with a point-by-point refutation of the opposition's charges, punctuated by interrogations, tirades, and praise for Theoderic's conduct, after which speeches by Peter, Paul, and Roma give the piece its assertively positive conclusion.

Though the *Libellus*' affirmation of Roman apostolic unimpeachability has attracted historians' attention, the aesthetic and political implications of Ennodius' extravagantly rhetorical tactics have been little examined and less comprehended (Schanz-Hosius 4.2.136-37; Fontaine RAC 5.399-417; Pietri MEFRA 78 [1966]:123-39; Moorhead Theoderic 121). In all his works, however, Ennodius shows a highly developed sense, completely in accord with the precepts of traditional rhetoric, of the fitting words and style for any given subject and occasion. Here, the *Libellus*' tone and content are just as precisely calibrated, this time for senatorial laymen spurning the decisions of venerable bishops. Ennodius observes the subtleties of confrontational Latin, but his apparently traditional language, studded with Classical references, masks a fundamental change in sensibility. Like Augustine, he converts forms and figures from oratory, satire, and epic to the service of a new aesthetic founded on Christian truth, not traditional, likelihood-based persuasion.