

SYNESIUS (c. 370-c. 414)

The bishop of Ptolemais. Born at Cyrene in the Pentapolis to a wealthy pagan family, he was brought up as a pagan and sent by his parents to complete his higher education in Alexandria under HYPATIA, the famous Neoplatonist Greek philosopher, to whom he became attached and remained loyal despite the growing hostility of the Christian hierarchy to Hypatia, culminating in her murder in 415. In 403 Synesius married a Christian and became closely acquainted with Archbishop Theophilus (385-412), under whose influence he was converted to Christianity and led a successful embassy to the imperial court at Constantinople. In 410 his fame spread over his native country, where his Christian coreligionists selected him to succeed the deceased bishop of Ptolemais; the choice was submitted to Theophilus, who decided to accept his nomination in spite of certain irregularities: Synesius was a married man, and although a convert, he was not yet formally baptized.

Since Synesius was a Neoplatonist follower of Hypatia, most of his principal writings before his conversion were philosophical but imbued with spirituality. They included a set of Egyptian tales entitled *De providentia*, *De regno*, and *De dona astrolabii*. Most of his letters, sermons, and a collection of Christian hymns belong to his episcopal period.

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