

Series: Early Christians Speak
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2016

Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus was a bishop of the church in Antioch, Syria in the mid-second century. He died somewhere between 180-185 A.D. “We gather from his writings that he was born a heathen, not far from the Tigris and Euphrates, and was led to embrace Christianity by studying the Holy Scriptures, especially the prophetic books” (*ad autolytus* 1.14, 2.24) (earlychristianwritings.com).

Theophilus wrote three books *To Autolytus* (ca. 180 A.D.) that “attack pagan idolatry and emperor worship, contrast the pagan descriptions of their gods with sayings from the Old Testament prophets, and compare Christian morality with the immorality of paganism” (*Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson). His object in writing this material was to convince a heathen friend, Autolytus, a man of great learning, of the divine authority of the Christian religion. Eusebius (4th century) later comments on the zeal he and other chief shepherds displayed in driving away the heretics who were attacking the church.

His works show great learning in not only Biblical topics but Greek philosophy and Jewish apologetics. Theophilus has been described as “one of the precursors of that group of writers who, from Irenaeus to Cyprian, not only break the obscurity which rests on the earliest history of the Christian church, but alike in the East and in the West carry it to the front in literary eminence, and distance all their heathen contemporaries” (earlychristianwritings.com).

Jerome, the great scholar and translator of the Scriptures in the fourth century, notes that Theophilus composed a Gospel harmony, which work has been lost. Eusebius also references several works of the bishop of Antioch which are no longer extant. These include *Against the Heresy of Homogenes* and *Against Marcion*. It is also noted that Theophilus is the first to use the word *triad* in reference to God, His Word, and His Wisdom.