

**Series: Early Christians Speak**  
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**Theophilus**

Theophilus was born a pagan near the Euphrates River who was later converted, according to his own testimony, by a careful examination of the Holy Scriptures. He eventually became a bishop of the church in Antioch, Syria. Eusebius calculates that this occurred in the year 168 A.D. during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

Theophilus is known as an “apologist” who wrote in defense of Christianity in about 180 A.D. His surviving work, *Theophilus to Autolycus*, demonstrates that he had a “profound acquaintance with the inspired writings, and he powerfully exhibits their immense superiority in every respect over the heathen poetry and philosophy” (A. Cleveland Coxe, *Introductory Note*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 88). “The whole treatise was well fitted to lead on an intelligent pagan to the cordial acceptance of Christianity.”

Frederick Norris notes that this treatise shows that Theophilus had a command of rhetoric and a knowledge of Greek philosophy that went beyond cursory handbook reference. “He also quotes the *Sibyllene Oracles* as authorities on monotheism and seems to be versed in contemporary Jewish apologetics, the arguments of which he employs.”

Dr. William Sunday describes him 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” (*Studia Biblica*, p. 90; from [EarlyChristianWritings.com](http://EarlyChristianWritings.com)).

Unfortunately, other works of Theophilus have been lost. Eusebius mentions two other treatises of his, *Against the Heresy of Hermogenes* and *Against Marcion*, as well as some catechetical writings. It is noted that in his work *To Autolycus* “Theophilus is the first to use the word *trias* (triad) for God, His Word and Wisdom.”

From Theophilus’ own account of his conversion: “...do not be skeptical, but believe; for I myself also used to disbelieve that this would take place [resurrection of the dead, bl], but now, having taken these things into consideration, I believe. At the same time, I met with the sacred Scriptures of the holy prophets, who also by the Spirit of God foretold the things that have already happened, and the things now occurring as they are now happening, and things future in the order in which they shall be accomplished.”